3-1-2014

Trinitarian Theorizing and Mystery as a Way Forward: A Critical Examination of the Forms of Trinitarian Hypothesizing, Why They Fail, and Why Mystery is a Way Forward

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This research is a product of the Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS) program at George Fox University. Find out more about the program.

Recommended Citation

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

TRINITARIAN THEORIZING AND MYSTERY AS A WAY FORWARD:

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE FORMS OF TRINITARIAN HYPOTHESIZING,

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX SEMINARY IN

CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

BY

MATTHEW J. CONNIRY

NEWBERG, OREGON

March 2014

GEORGE FOX
EVANGELICAL
SEMINARY

THESIS ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

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Date: March 2014

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Studies.

(R. Larry Shelton)

(Charles J. Conniry, Jr.)

ABSTRACT

Scholarship reveals that there are at least two primary ways of handling the issue incumbent within Trinitarian theorizing. Most theologians resolve the issue by addressing the inconsistencies, finding various ways to make important distinctions to eliminate apparent contradictions. This is no doubt the most popular route. Among these are social Trinitarians and Latin Trinitarians. A rough distinction can be made here, wherein social Trinitarians start with the Threeness of God and reason from that stance that God is one by an inexorable and eternal loving relationship. Oppositely, Latin Trinitarians start with God as one and reason how God can possibly be three. These approaches will be discussed here because they share the foundational quality of wanting to satisfy human reason while remaining orthodox. Lastly, there is Mysterianism, which is considered a meta-theory insofar as it purports to say something about all other theories, but is also a theory in its own right. Mysterianism comes in two distinct forms, positive and negative. Negative forms of Mysterianism maintain that we simply have insufficient intelligible content to determine whether Trinitarian belief is either consistent or inconsistent. That is to say, the information provided is either too scarce or itself too unfathomable to form a theory that can be toiled with and tried by human reason. Conversely, positive Mysterianism asserts that mystery is not the result of too little content, but rather an abundance of it. The human mind can entertain and even understand many divine truths, but sometimes the conjunction of those truths is seemingly rationally inconsistent. As such, it is not the content itself that is unintelligible, but the combination of such content that becomes increasingly unfathomable. The positive Mysterian says that since we have sufficient plantingian-like warrant for believing certain individual propositions about God's nature, we have sufficient warrant for rationally holding them conjointly despite their seeming contradiction.

The benefits of this study are that it takes seriously the call of Peter to have reasons for the hope that is within you and it also gives modern-day Christians recourse to reject many modern-day conclusions that make God bow to reason and not reason to God.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to sincerely express my deepest and most sincere gratitude to my professors Dr. Kent Yinger and Dr. Larry Shelton for their support through the often arduous process of research and writing.

Even more specifically and emphatically, I would like to give special thanks to my father, Dr. Charles Conniry Jr., who was my mentor, guide and special advisor throughout the entire process of this thesis. His continuous support, patience, motivation and immense reservoir of knowledge have been indispensable. Furthermore, this process would be unfathomably bleak were it not for the continuous love and encouragement of my wife, Ashley. I could not have imagined nor hoped for a better and more qualified group of people to guide me in this process.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Long have the bearers of Christendom attempted to discern the deeper mysteries of God. The early church—content as it was to let mystery fill in the gaps of God's unfathomable enormity—left for posterity creeds and canons that contemporary theologians and philosophers now toil to explicate. Perhaps the deepest of all the mysteries passed down through the centuries is that of God's triune nature—God as Trinity.

But as a people we have become increasingly accustomed to unraveling the mysteries of the universe, where we once left mystery to the works of some distant pantheon, we now relish in the precision of the cold and calculated hand of science and reason. Mystery must go the way of Zeus and Jupiter, and make way for an epistemic imperialism that has charted the stars, dissected the atom, and now, as it seems, explained the Trinity. Herein lies the problem. No epistemic formulae are sufficient in providing adequate explications of the Trinity. This thesis intends to address this problem, paying special attention to modern approaches to resolve the incumbent issues of the Trinity, and argue that mystery is the only reliable way beyond the conspicuous absence of formulaic expressions of the Trinity.

In an article published by the *Religious Studies* journal out of Cambridge University Press, Dale Tuggy, a philosopher of religion who teaches at SUNY Fredonia, argues with formidable clarity that the two most distinguished approaches to understanding the Trinity, both Social and Latin Trinitarianism, fail to surmount important logical and biblical conditions. Tuggy

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also sharply criticizes the appeal to "mystery," suggesting that such an appeal in the face of apparent contradiction pushes the boundaries of rational and theological credulity. As such, Tuggy argues that the project of Trinitarian theorizing is unsatisfactorily unfinished.[1]

In order to illustrate the precise shortcomings of any given Trinity theory, Tuggy offers six propositions, any subset of which is used by many Trinitarian theories to systemically explicate the nature of the Trinity. These propositions are as follows:

(1) God is divine.
(2) The Father of Jesus Christ is divine.
(3) The Son, Jesus Christ, is divine.
(4) The Holy Spirit is divine.
(5) The Father is not the Son is not the Holy Spirit is not God. That is, these four—Father, Son, Holy Spirit, God are numerically distinct individuals.
(6) Whatever is divine is identical to at least one of these: the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

In addition, Tuggy rightfully divides (5) into separate propositional claims:

(5a) These three are numerically distinct: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
(5b) God is numerically distinct from any of these: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

As is perhaps already obvious, these propositions are redolent within many of the most familiar formulations of the Trinity. The Athanasian creed for instance, most likely penned in the 5th century some 100 years after Athanasius' death, professes the Trinity with its first 28 lines. In this early creedal manifesto, the claims (1)-(4) and (5a) are prominently expressed. The creed professes:

> And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God;
> the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but

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[1] Dale Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing," *Religious Studies* 39, no. 02 (2003): 165-183.

one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord.[2]

The only proposition that the Trinitarian theologian is welcome to reject without trespassing Orthodoxy is (5b), inasmuch as the claim, though perhaps utilized in some Trinitarian theorizing, is not itself a biblical claim. Tuggy himself seems to lean towards a rejection of (5b) and a solution that creates an identity relationship between God and the Father exclusively, saying, "Many careful readers have noticed that in the New Testament 'God' and 'the Father' are almost always two names for one thing. They are used more or less interchangeably." Accordingly, this would seem to present a rather simple solution to the problem as Tuggy has represented it. The only genuine danger here is not that any of these propositions are false, save (5b) perhaps, but that we may be want to artificially limit our theorizing only to this set of propositions. This is why James Anderson, a professor of theology and philosophy at Reformed Theology Seminary, in his response to Tuggy's critique, offers to solidify Tuggy's unstated biblical datum by way of the additional proposition:

(7) The Father of Jesus Christ is identical to God.

Tuggy is certainly right that the Bible is rife with verses that seem to indicate a numerical equivalency between the Father and God. Consider the author of the book of John's statement in John 6:45 (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6):

It is written in the prophets, 'and they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.[3]

But this single additional proposition leaves the equation still somewhat wanting, causing the careful reader to question why our early Christian forebears found it necessary to affirm with

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[2] P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes* (Harper, 1877), 96-99.

[3] Jn 6:45 (New American Standard Bible).

such doctrinal ferocity the reality of the Trinity in a way that claims more than Tuggy's premises, claiming more than just the divinity of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Thus, Tuggy's listed premises are disingenuous to exclude with reticent oversight the additional proposition that has long been affirmed in the History of Christian orthodoxy and its many creeds, namely Anderson's other helpful propositional addition:

(8) The Son, Jesus Christ, is identical to God.

Tuggy's omission of this proposition cannot be due to lack of biblical warrant, though one may be led to believe that is precisely Tuggy's belief, in that he maintains that the name "God" in referential use to any entity other than the Father "isn't a name for the individual Yahweh, but is rather a descriptive term like 'divine,' which says something about what sort of being the son is."[4] This would be all well and good if it were not for the preponderance of biblical data that seems to affront Tuggy's extenuating reasons for omitting (8). For instance, Matthew 3:3 and Mark 1:3 refer to John the Baptist as the prophetic embodiment of Isaiah 40:3, wherein John is the person to prepare the way of Yahweh. Of course, John the Baptist did not prepare the way for the Father but for Jesus Christ (unless one is willing to do some hermeneutical gymnastics). Similarly, Jesus, in John 8:58, identifies himself with God's self-disclosed identity in Exodus 3:14, claiming to be nontemporally bound using such similar phraseology that the connection can hardly be reasonably denied.[5] Moreover, the author of the Gospel of John stated in no uncertain

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[4] Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing," 169.

[5] For further exposition of this point see: M.J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Baker Publishing Group, 1992); R. Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (OUP Oxford, 2008); J.F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Moody Publishers, 1969); M. Endo, *Creation and Christology: A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts* (Mohr Seibeck, 2002).

terms that the image Isaiah saw of Yahweh's glory in Isaiah 6 was "Jesus' Glory."[6] Also, Jesus

is identified as the "living stone" in 1 Peter 2:4: "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected

by humans but chosen by God and precious to him," (NIV). As mentioned before, this parallels

Isaiah 8:13-14,

> The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy,
>   he is the one you are to fear,
>   he is the one you are to dread.
> He will be a holy place;
>   for both Israel and Judah he will be
> a stone that causes people to stumble
>   and a rock that makes them fall.
> And for the people of Jerusalem he will be
>   a trap and a snare.

Isaiah states that Yahweh is the stone that will cause people to stumble, where it is Jesus in 1

Peter 2:8 who is said to be that very same thing according to the same scripture.[7] It follows,

Anderson notes, that there is a very strong numerical identity at work in the Scripture with regard

to Jesus and God such that we must conclude that they are indeed coreferential. While Anderson

uses more scriptural justification to establish reasonable grounds to conclude the numerical

equivalency of Jesus and God, and still others have written volumes, it should at this point be

clear that our forebears were not too hasty in contending that (8) is, indeed, a valid biblical

proposition.

Because of Tuggy's oversights with regard to important biblical propositions that should

be considered in any work of Trinitarian theorizing, this paper has opted to use Tuggy's premises

with the addition of Anderson's premises as a means of inquiry into the problems of Trinitarian

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[6] Jn 12:41 (New International Version)

[7] "and, 'A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for." 1 Pt. 2:8.

theorizing and why an appeal to mystery may really be the best option available. The whole set

of propositional claims that this paper will take as the best representation of Trinitarian

orthodoxy is as follows:

> (1) God is divine.
> (2) The Father of Jesus Christ is divine.
> (3) The Son, Jesus Christ, is divine.
> (4) The Holy Spirit is divine.
> (5a) These three are numerically distinct: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
> (6) Whatever is divine is identical to at least one of these: the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.[8]
> (7) The Father of Jesus Christ is identical to God.
> (8) The Son, Jesus Christ, is identical to God.
> (9) The Holy Spirit is identical to God.
> (10) There is one divine being.[9]

The last two propositional claims have not yet been discussed but they are equally clear from

Trinitarian history to be central claims to Latin or traditional Trinitarianism. Before moving

forward, I will briefly discuss their biblical value.

It may already be abundantly clear that Tuggy's original formulation is a bit premature,

insofar as it omits some foundational biblical claims that prove to be central to many Trinitarian

theories. At the outset of his criticism of Trinitirian theories, Tuggy suggests that there exists an

endemic threefold problem for bygone and contemporary theories of the Trinity. These problems

arise over issues of consistency, intelligibility, and biblical soundness. As is perhaps evident,

these issues look increasingly daunting and perhaps impossible to surmount when the latter

additional premises are compounded with Tuggy's original six. But as already shown for (7) and

(8), the addition of these premises is not only prudent, but necessary if we are to take seriously a

commitment to biblical soundness. Though the last two propositions (9) and (10) are not needed

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[8] Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing," 166.

[9] James Anderson, "In Defence of Mystery: A Reply to Dale Tuggy," *Religious Studies* 41, no. 02 (2005): 146-147.

to increase the level of logical confusion any more than (8) and (9) already have, they are necessary nonetheless. It seems that Scripture does have something to say about the actual deity of the Holy Spirit. For instance, Acts 5:3-4 is typically considered among the best proof texts for this claim, inasmuch as the author of Acts recounts Peter telling Ananias that by having lied to the Holy Spirit he has lied to God. Thus, a similar coreferential relationship that Jesus shares with God is also shared by the Holy Spirit.

As for (10), it could merely be said to be implicit in all of the biblical text, but there seems to be at least a few explicit scriptural passages that add considerably more weight to (10). For instance, 1 Samuel 2:2 states, "There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God." Of course, if LORD in this passage was only a reference to one of the members of the Trinity, say, the Father, then it would certainly not be true that there is no one at least like Him, for there would be at least two beings who are similar in divinity and holiness. As it were, there then being one divine being and three divine persons seems itself to be a difficult mystery for any Trinitarian theory to explain. But scholarship reveals that there are at least two primary ways of handling this issue. Most theologians resolve this issue by surmounting the inconsistencies, finding various ways to make important distinctions to eliminate apparent contradiction. This is no doubt the most popular route. Among these are Social Trinitarians and Latin Trinitarians. A rough distinction can be made here, wherein Social Trinitarians start with the threeness of God and reason from that stance that God is *one* by something similar or exactly identical to an inexorable and eternal loving relationship. Quite oppositely, Latin Trinitarians start with God as *one* and reason how God can possibly be *three*. These approaches will be discussed here because they share the foundational quality of wanting to satisfy human reason while remaining orthodox.

There is still another approach known as Mysterianism, which is considered a meta-theory insofar as it purports to say something about all other theories, but it is also a theory in its own right. Mysterianism can be disambiguated into two forms, negative and positive. Negative forms of Mysterianism maintain that we simply do not have enough intelligible content to determine whether Trinitarian belief is either consistent or inconsistent. That is to say, the information provided is either too scarce or itself too unfathomable to form a theory that can be toiled and tried by human reason. Conversely, positive Mysterianism asserts that mystery is not the result of too little content, but rather an abundance of it. That is, the human mind can entertain and even understand many divine truths but sometimes the conjunction of those truths dissolves and is seemingly rationally inconsistent. These truths coalesce in paradox inasmuch as they are "a set of claims which taken in conjunction appear to be logically inconsistent." [10] So, unlike the negative Mysterianism, positive Mysterianism believes a wide range of content is available to make independently truthful claims about God and God's triunity, though the claims themselves are rationally abrasive or seemingly entirely contradictory when conjoined. Therefore positive Mysterianism will maintain that the claims themselves are not mysterious, but rather the issue of how such claims can remain true when conjoined is what is mysterious. Thus, while negative Mysterianism will maintain that it is the content itself that is mysterious, positive Mysterianism will profess that it is actually the *combination* of perfectly epistemically accessible claims that becomes increasingly unfathomable.

This chapter briefly discussed the Trinitarian problem as it exists in scholarship today. Problems arise over issues of logical consistency, intelligibility and/or biblical soundness. The premises of the Trinity articulated in Scripture (and compiled by Anderson and Tuggy) make the

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[10] J. Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of Its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), 4-6.

task of any theologian whose goal is a rationally accessible, formulaic expression of the Trinity a particularly arduous one. The popular routes used in attempting to traverse this difficult journey and surmount the looming problems are expressed in three distinct frameworks: Latin Trinitarianism, Social Trinitarianism, and Mysterianism. The following chapters will be devoted to explaining these frameworks and discussing how and why the two former are inadequate and why the latter may be the only viable alternative.

CHAPTER 2

LATIN TRINITARIANISM AS THE POSITION OF OUR CHRISTIAN FOREBEARS

Chapter one laid the groundwork with regard to what the Trinity positively asserts and how this has come to be a problem. This chapter will briefly explain the historical development and underpinnings of the Latin Trinitarian (LT) model and how the problems of the previous chapter interact with this model. This chapter will also explore the LT attempt to resolve the problems specified in the previous chapter. This exploration involves examining issues of identity and will look specifically at how modern thinkers have attempted to either stay within modern laws of thought or find rational ways to fudge the rules.

The LT model is perhaps best described as the traditional view of the Trinity, wherein an emphasis is placed more on the belief of independently true propositions without considering how these propositions may conflict when conjoined. Associate professor of philosophy at Purdue University, Jeffrey Brower, and professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, Michael Rea, in their co-authored article, "Understanding the Trinity," suggest the following quote from the Athanasian Creed as a paradigmatic example of this historic understanding of the Trinity:

> We Worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confusing the Persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person for the Father, another for the Son, and yet another for the Holy Spirit. But the divinity of the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit is one… Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God.[11]

The claims evident in the aforementioned quote are virtually identical to some of those expounded by Tuggy. Brower and Rea narrow it down to these three claims:

(11)   There is exactly one god.
(12)   The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God.
(13)   The Father is not the Son, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

The tension evident in the joint assertion of these premises needs little explanation. How could God possibly be numerically equal to one if in fact, three independent divine beings exist who are numerically distinct yet precisely identical to God? Thus, the assertion that Latin Trinitarians are more concerned with true premises than with how these premises interact with each other seems accurate. But as Brower and Rea maintain, no Christian is at liberty to reject any of the three latter claims unless he is willing to reject historical orthodoxy and its firm biblical foundation.[12]

Moreover, the LT tradition seems itself to have been sharpened against the iron of the early Church's most notorious heresies: Polytheism, Subordinationism and Sabellianism. After the Constantinian shift in 313 AD, ushered in by the Edict of Milan, whereby Christians were to be treated benevolently and given right to worship, there was a great need for the scattered and divided Churches to be brought into unity.[13] Since the dawn of the Church it had known nothing besides persecution. From Nero to Diocletian, Domitian to Galerius, the Church had not had enough time to campaign against the serious doctrinal issues that began to undo any amount of

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[11]E. Brower Jeffrey and C. Rea Michael, "Understanding the Trinity," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2005): 145.

[12] Ibid, 147.

[13] B. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language: Third Edition* (Thomas Nelson, 1996), 99-107.

unity that persecution had afforded.[14] The pastor of the influential Baucalis church, Arius, fought

with the then Bishop of Alexanderia, Alexander, over the deity of Jesus and Jesus' relationship

to the Father. This conflict and many like it led to the now famous council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

Thus began Christianity's creedal journey to define with rigorous accuracy precisely what the

Bible did and did not say about God.[15]

Out of this milieu of biblical precision was born a strict Trinitarianism, and although the

propositions of this creedal era left our forebears content to commend mystery, contemporary

theologians and philosophers now take pains to square them with human reason (reason that

seems increasingly opposed to the actual existence of the mysterious). The pressing question

now is how well these theologians and philosophers have faired. For instance, the Shield of the

Trinity or *Scutum Fidei*, an early symbol of the Trinity with roots in the 12th century (though

popularized in the 15th and 16th century), gives strong indication as to where the fundamental

difficulty lies in the LT thesis.[16] According to the *Scutum Fidei*, the Father is God, the Son is

God and the Holy Spirit is God yet none of these numerically distinct persons is identical to the

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[14] G. de Ste. Croix, M. Whitby, and J. Streeter, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (OUP Oxford, 2006); E.D. Hunt, "Papers by De Ste. Croix (G.E.M.) De Ste. Croix Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy. Edited by Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter; Pp. xii + 394. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Cased, £60. Isbn: 0-19-927812-1," *The Classical Review (New Series)* 58, no. 02 (2008); M. Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (University of California Press, 2005).

[15] J. Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (Yale University Press, 2003).

[16] D.K. Naugle and D.S. Dockery, *Philosophy: A Student's Guide* (Crossway, 2012), 38-40.

other.[17] So God is one being wherein three divine persons subsist in completely perfect and seemingly incomprehensible coalescence.
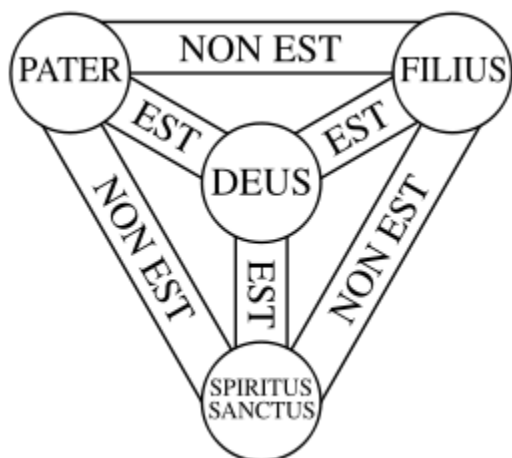
This leads to what is considered at base the most difficult hurdle for the LT thesis to surpass.

Logical absurdity, the puzzles of identity

We are asked in orthodox renderings of the Trinity to affirm a set of supposedly definite propositions that, taken together, create a philosophically messy situation. Aristotle famously stated, "It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect."[19] This has been simplified to what we currently hold to be the law of non-contradiction, which is that X cannot be both X and non-X in the same way at the same time. For instance, John Lennon cannot be both a man and a non-man in the same way and at the same time. Aquinas, following in stride with Aristotle, stated that the necessary action to

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[17] J.R. Brokhoff, *This You Can Believe: Faith Seeking Understanding* (CSS Pub., 2001), 37-38.

[18] The *Scutum Fidei*, or Shield of the Trinity, illustrates that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each God (*Deus*) but they are not (*non est*) each other.

[19] D.E. Machuca, *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy* (Springer, 2011), 53.

be taken when faced with a contradiction is to render a distinction. Thinkers bygone and current

have sought to bring to light these distinctions, and though some of these distinctions include

temporal modifiers (e.g. Modalism), most are of a semantic quality.[20] Leaving aside the more

discernible heterodoxy of temporal distinctions (God is sometimes Father and sometimes Son[21]),

there are still enormous problems with most semantic distinctions, inasmuch as they run afoul

with either reason or orthodoxy. The Trinity has never been easy. For how could it be, as an

instance of the difficulty spoken of here, that the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit are separate,

non-identical totals of the same being? How can the Son know all yet be ignorant of some?[22]

What does it mean to say that separate beings can be identical to God but not one another? Our

intuition begs us to reconsider the propositions that we are inclined to join inharmoniously

together—seeds of inconsistency sown by our forebears—wherein we now only reap contradiction.

The problem is that it frankly makes no sense to say that each person of the Trinity is God but

that each of these persons is distinctly not the other. The rationale involved in the *Scutum Fidei*,

for instance, runs afoul with our most fundamental laws of thought which have long held to be

undeniably true since the days that Aristotle first articulated them.

   The most important law of thought for this discussion is the Law of Identity, which states

that any entity *a* is exactly equal to itself. Or, in formal logic, $a \rightarrow a$ (If you have *a* then you have

a). Though it is not a tautology in formal logic, it is in ordinary language. This law should also

be taken in conjunction with Leibniz's Identity of Indiscernibles, which states that it is

impossible to have an ontological separation among entities that share all the same properties in

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[20]Anderson, "In Defence of Mystery: A Reply to Dale Tuggy," 145-146.

[21] Cf. Matt. 3:16-17.

[22] Cf. Matt. 8:10; Mk. 5:30; Mk. 13:32; Lk. 7:9; Jn. 16:30; Jn. 21:17; Col. 2:2, 3.

common.[23] That is to say, if any entity x shares all of its properties in common with y then it is necessary that x and y are the same entity.[24] Accordingly, in order for an identity relationship to exist, like in the *Scutum Fidei*, three properties of equivalence must obtain symmetry, transitivity, and reflexivity. For instance, x is identical to y if and only if it is reflexive, inasmuch as it refers to itself ($x = x$). Similarly, x is identical to y if and only if the relationship could be phrased equally as $x = y$ and $y = x$, making it symmetric. And lastly, x is identical to y if and only if it proves to be transitive. In order to be transitive, it would have to be the case that if $y = z$ than $z = x$.

This absolute identity seems to be what most early proponents of the Trinity referred to when they said that Jesus is God. That is, Jesus is identical to God in the reflexive, symmetric and transitive way cited above. Though the Trinity was challenged in various ways from the Reformation onward, it was not until the 1960's, when analytic philosophy took off in the world of theology, that the Trinity started becoming more rigorously defined in ways that sought to make it defensible by use of reason. As such, many philosophers and theologians who are compelled by the propositional claims inherent in the LT thesis (exemplified by the *Scutum Fidei*) have devised creative epicycles in order to avoid the pitfalls created by these rules of absolute identity.

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[23] B. Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz: With an Appendix of Leading Passages* (Cosimo, Incorporated, 2008), 54-63.

[24] Though Max Black offers criticism of Leibniz's identity principle, saying, "If a and b are identical, there is just one thing having the two names 'a' and 'b'; and in that case it is absurd to say that a and b are two. Conversely, once you have supposed there are *two* things having all their properties in common, you cannot without contradicting yourself say that *they* are 'identical.'" J. Margolis and J. Catudal, *The Quarrel between Invariance and Flux: A Guide for Philosphers and Other Players* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 69.

In the 20th century, a popular route for those in the LT camp (or who leaned more towards the embrace of God's ultimate oneness) to avoid the abovementioned problems of identity was to embrace an essentially modalistic Trinitarian theory. That is precisely what influential theologians Karl Barth and Karl Rahner did, endorsing and employing "modes of being" or "manners of subsisting" as alternative language for "person." Accordingly, Jesus was not a person, per se, but simply a "manner" or "mode" of God's subsistence. The majority of theologians reject Modalism as heresy, but theologians typically define Modalism as any theory that resembles the ancient Sabellianism (of Sabellius) in the 3rd century. This Modalism held God's modes to be a sequential act, wherein His modes came in temporal epochs. First God came as transcendent Father to His people, then He came as flesh among them in the form of Jesus Christ and now, in this current epoch, God exists as Holy Spirit. Were it not for strong biblical evidence to the contrary, this would be a very easy way to solve the ostensibly mysterious nature of the Trinity. However, this explanation strongly conflicts with Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:16, 17, where all three members of the Trinity are present simultaneously. It is clear then that theories involving this sort of Modalism should be rejected. Nonetheless, some have argued that it is not altogether clear why other forms of Modalism should be rejected out of hand.[25] It could be the case that these modes are non-sequential eternally and maximally overlapping modes expressed concurrently. It would be something like a person with a multiple personality disorder that could express all separate and distinct personalities simultaneously (the psychological impossibility of this scenario notwithstanding).[26]

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[25] K. Ward, *God: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Oneworld, 2002), 236; K. Ward, *Christianity: A Short Introduction* (Oneworld, 2000), 90.

[26] Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (United States of America: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 101-107.

The perpetual thorn in the side of even these revised forms of Modalism is the scant biblical precedent in its favor. The Bible seems to develop individuated persons who correspond with one another in a mutual, personal and loving relationship. Even the biblical accounts referenced by Modalists defending their theory must be interpreted in a specific manner. For instance, the Father being well pleased with his Son as expressed at Jesus' baptism would seem full of hubris rather than genuine paternal love. For all the Father would be expressing in that moment is his pleasure with another mode of himself. Furthermore, such modal language becomes increasingly more difficult to maintain when one considers the mediation language of the New Testament, where Jesus is said to be the mediator between God and humans. If we cannot satisfactorily determine the personhood of Jesus from the New Testament, then we must also not be able to determine that Simon really was Peter, despite clear evidence to the contrary.

More recently, Brain Leftow, professor of philosophy at Oxford University, introduced a Latin theory that supposedly avoids both the problems presented by rules of identity (maybe) and the temptations of Modalism.[27] Leftow summarizes his position:

> On LT, there is just one divine being (or substance), God. God constitutes three Persons, but all three are at bottom just God. Thus, the Creed of the Council of Toledo has it that 'although we profess three persons, we do not profess three substances, but one substance and three persons…they are not three gods, he is one God….Each single person is wholly God in Himself and…all three persons together are one God.
>
> Again, Aquinas writes that 'among creatures, the nature the one generated receives is not numerically identical with the nature the one generating has….But God begotten receives numerically the same nature God betting has.' Begotten receives numerically the same nature God begetting has.' To make Aquinas' claim perfectly plain, I introduce a technical term, 'trope'. Abel and Cain were both human. So they had the same nature, humanity. Yet each also had his own

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[27] William Hasker contends that Leftow's LT version is actually a version of a ST model, insofar as Hasker's definition of ST obtains if the persons of the Trinity are able to relate to each other in personally distinctive ways. Leftow insists that he and Hasker have uncomplimentary definitions of ST. William Hasker, "Objections to Social Trinitarianism," *Religious Studies* 46, no. 4 (2010); Brian Leftow, "Two Trinities: Reply to Hasker," *Religious Studies* 46, no. 4 (2010).

> nature, and Cain's humanity was not identical with Abel's… A trope is an individualized case of an attribute. Their bearers individuate tropes: Cain's humanity is distinct from Abel's just because it is Cain's, not Abel's. With this term in hand, I now restate Aquinas' claim: while Father and Son instance the divine nature (deity), they have but one trope of deity between them, which is God's… bearers individuate tropes. If the Father's deity is God's, this is because the Father *just is* God….[28]

The claims being made here are not entirely clear; perhaps due to the fact that the term "trope" is seeking to define something very abstract. In the Cain and Abel example, for instance, we know what it means to say that Cain and Abel share the nature of humanity, so far as they both were human. Additionally, we also know what it means for Cain and Abel to be uniquely human in a way not shared by the other (though it is not entirely clear how this is to be dissected more narrowly). Now "trope" seems not to be an attribute itself but instead describes any attribute that is entirely unique to one individual. This must be what Leftow means when he says, "A trope is an individualized case of an attribute." For instance, if Cain weighed 155 pounds, it could not be said that the sum of Cain's bodily parts is equal to Abel's bodily parts even if their individual weights equaled the same. Tuggy actually criticizes Leftow's proposal as incoherent along these lines, inasmuch as it is not entirely clear what it means to say that Cain and Abel are two distinct individuals who share the same height trope.[29] This criticism may be a bit premature, however, as is evident in the case of conjoined twins (and though much rarer, there are cases of conjoined triplets[30]), wherein two numerically distinct individuals do share the same height trope. Or perhaps not, since according to Leftow, the Father has the same trope of divinity with God

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[28] M.C. Rea, *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology: Volume 1: Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (OUP Oxford, 2009), 76-77.

[29] Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing," 174.

[30] Apostolos P. Athanasiadis et al., "A Unique Case of Conjoined Triplets," *American journal of obstetrics and gynecology* 192, no. 6 (2005).

precisely because the Father just *is* God. But that is certainly not the case with conjoined twins

who only share what is *normally* an individuated attribute. Of course, being non-spaciotemporal

and immaterial, it is not clear how this could helpfully apply to the Trinity in the Latin sense,

even if it did work.

There are other problems with Leftow's trope theory too. It seems that Leftow is

committed to affirming that if any entity x shares the same trope as y, then x = y. But that would

put us right back at square one, struggling all over again to avoid being committed to the idea

that the Father and Son are numerically equal. Leftow senses, perhaps, the sort of modalism that

could be drawn out of this trope theory and clarifies his position:

> In LT, then, the numerical identity of God is secure, but one wonders just how the
> Persons manage to be three. For in LT, the Persons are distinct but not discrete.
> Instead, LT's Persons have God in common, though not exactly as a common
> part. In [Social Trinitarianism], the Persons are distinct and discrete. There is
> nothing one would be tempted to call a part they have in common. What they
> share is the generic divine nature, an attribute.[31]

It is hard to see what exactly this solves since Leftow seemingly clarifies the obscure with the

obscure. Perhaps he means to say that the Father and the Son are modes (Tuggy's term) of the

same God. The modes are numerically distinct from the other though not exactly equal to that of

which they are a mode. Leftow further clarifies this with an analogy to a time traveling dance

member, Jane. Jane's two other fellow Rockette members called in sick before a performance.

But lucky for Jane, her nephew just happened to have completed a fully functional time-machine

wherein she was able to complete the dance routine as all three members. The Trinity analog

here is evident. God can be three different modes of himself, so to speak, contemporaneously

with the other modes, all whilst remaining, ostensibly, substantially undivided.

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[31] B. Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204.

The most important question here is whether or not time travel is even logically possible. If it is not, then the analogy is not helpful as a way of making the LT model coherent. To do this, Leftow did not attempt to show that time travel is physically possible given our current real-world physics, but rather that there is some metaphysically possible world where time travel could exist. If there is, indeed, some metaphysically possible world where time travel can obtain, then the analogy is helpful inasmuch as God could conceivably exist in an analogously similar way.

Leftow's analogy may not be as helpful as it appears, however. It is hard to imagine how the metaphysically possible existence of time travel illuminates the fundamental problem. In fact, it seems like Leftow is seeking to explain mystery by appealing to mystery. If time travel is metaphysically possible, it is a mysterious feat, overcoming significant coherency issues. For instance, there are issues of continuity that involve the possibility of a future-self traveling backwards in time and murdering the past-self. Or a future-self informing the past-self about how to build the time machine that allowed future-self to travel backwards to begin with. These as well as many more examples constitute significant intuitive problems that are not contingent upon physics,[32] but rather upon the logical laws of thought that seemingly govern all logically possible worlds.[33]

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[32] Hong Kong physicist, Du Shengwang, from The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, demonstrated in a study that a single photon cannot travel faster than the speed of light, rendering time travel according to our present physics impossible, given that time travel would require superluminal velocity of photons, stating, "By showing that single photons cannot travel faster than the speed of light, our results bring a closure to the debate on the true speed of information carried by a single photon." "Time Travel Impossible, Say Scientists," *Discovery*, July 24, 2011, accessed August 9, 2013, http://news.discovery.com/space/private-spaceflight/time-travel-impossible-photon-110724.htm.

[33] Alasdair Richmond, "Time-Travel Fictions and Philosophy," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2001).

But even if we assume that Leftow's analogy goes through as planned because it is broadly conceivable (which Leftow argues[34]), there may be a more pernicious problem at work. If it is true that the ontology of God is comprised of something similar to the instantiation of a person who has time-traveled backwards twice to the same moment, then we have three instantiations of the same person. What would subsequently delineate these three instantiations would be the *way* they lived their lives. As applied to the Trinity, God would in one strand of his life live in a fatherly way, in still another he would live in a sonly way, and lastly, presumably, he would live in a pneumatic way. Thus, what ultimately delineates the persons of God is simply the *way* they live their life. This is not a substantive delineation, but an adjectival one. Furthermore, it is hard to see how these manifestations could be present prior to the creation of the universe and time. God not being temporally bound yet also being comprised of persons that are only distinguishable by the *way* they live is a mysterious conundrum.

Latin Trinitarianism and Relative Identity Theory

Because of the problems of absolute identity, some thinkers sought to instead redefine identity. It may not be entirely accurate to call this approach an LT theory, because in many respects it transcends what is commonly seen as the divide between LT and ST theories. However, the theory itself is intended to validate the words of our forebears who defined God as simultaneously one and three. In this respect, the theory is Latin. The primary issue for LT theories centers on identity. But what if we could fudge the rule a bit? What if these so-called laws of identity are not as absolute as they intuitively seem? It is this question that many current theologians and philosophers are now asking in hopes of erecting a theory powerful enough to sustain the LT frame. Nothing is more powerful in this respect than simply denying that there is

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[34] B. Leftow, "A Latin Trinity," *Faith and Philosophy* 21, (2004): 311.

such a relation as identity, commonly denoted by the mathematical symbol "=". Numerical identity, however, is specifically meaningless in this case and the only kind of identity that matters is the sort of identity relative to some other thing. In relationship to the Trinity, Tuggy defines the relative-identity thesis as follows:

(5^{II}) Each divine person (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is *the same god as* the others, but is not *the same person as* the others.[35]

It is very hard to interpret the meaning of this statement. Tuggy suggests that "at best, this sort of refined LT can give us a version of internally consistent Trinitarian claims, but it does so at the price of intelligibility."[36] It seems rather *prima facie* true that there is such a relationship as non-relative identity. The intelligibility of everyday speech and understanding unilaterally hinges upon the single notion of universal identity. Identity is described as "the only relation that everything has to itself and nothing has to anything else."[37] Nonetheless, many philosophers have attempted to redefine identity in a way that allows something like (5^{II}).[38] Thus relative identity solutions are mostly occupied with determining the precise logic that would make this identity possible and little effort towards how this would then be applied to God. Rea observes two different versions of the doctrine being tried and tested among philosophers. The weak version he lists as:

(RI1) States of affairs of the following sort are possible: x is an F, y is an F, x is a G, y is a G, x is the same F as y, but x is not the same G as y.

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[35] Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing," 173.

[36] Ibid, 174.

[37] William P. Alston and Jonathan Bennett, "Identity and Cardinality: Geach and Frege," *Philosophical Review* 93, no. 4 (1984): 559.

[38] See the following for further defense of relative identity proper: P. T. Geach, "Identity," *The Review of Metaphysics* 21, no. 1 (1967).

Rea also lists the strong version:

> (RI2)   Either absolute (classical) identity does not exist, or statements of the form '$x = y$' are to be analyzed in terms of statements of the form 'x is the same F as y' rather than the other way around.

Rea admits that (RI2) is not necessary for alleviating problems associated with the Trinity but notes that some popular philosophers, namely Peter Geach, endorse it nonetheless. Rea goes on to describe how invoking relative identity schemas to solve problems of the Trinity is not helpful unless some sort of "supplemental story" exists to clarify the situation. For instance, appealing to (RI1) without this additional information only suffices in replacing "one mystery with another." The problem is that (RI1) really does not say anything about God, it only defines our conceptual analysis of God. Thus, we could say that Jesus and the Father are the same God, but we really have no idea what that actually means.

Rea and Bower, however, suggest a constitutional view that supplies the right "story," so to speak, to allow us to make sense of the (RI1) theory with respect to the Trinity. Rea presents the example of an artistic building contractor who fashions a statue that is also to be used as a pillar. Of course, we would not say that these two distinct descriptions are also two material objects, as if fused. Instead, we are perfectly content in distinguishing the pillar and statue, even though they comprise a single material object. While surface erosion in time will destroy the details that make it a statue, it will not destroy the pillar in like manner. Contradistinctively, if some internal damage to the pillar material that corrupts its load-bearing capabilities and requires removal of the material structure in order to preserve to the statue, we could say that the pillar has been destroyed though the statue remains. Rea insists that though the pillar and statue comprise one material object, they are not identical. If this is, indeed, true, then it only makes sense under (RI1).

Does this explanation really work? For instance, we can imagine Michelangelo's "David" sculpture (fig. 1), which is made of solid marble. The marble that constitutes "David" is numerically equal to the statue "David" itself. But the statue and the marble are not *identical*, inasmuch as the marble could be used to form another, different statue. This interpretation seems to be precisely what the LT theory needs to make a cogent case, a way to say that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are numerically equal to God yet non-identical persons. This all seems to be in order, but William Lane Craig, an analytic philosopher and research professor at the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University, criticizes this composition theory, suggesting that it makes very little sense to say that one portion of matter can simultaneously have incompatible properties. For instance, "David" has no incompatible properties with the marble and the marble none with "David." The entire portion of marble that forms "David" cannot simultaneously be both "David" and "The Reclining Hermaphrodite," as "David" and "The Reclining Hermaphrodite" do not have compatible properties (say, the fact that David stands and Hermaphrodite lays as example of the many differences). So it would have to be true that the persons of the Trinity do not manifest incompatible properties. But this simply cannot be said. Craig suggests that it is true for Jesus to think "I died on a cross," but that it would not make sense for the Father or Spirit to think the same thing. Jesus has the property of begettedness, while the Father does not. The Holy Spirit has the property of procession and the Father does not. The Son can truly say He lived and died in a remote part of Palestine a finite time ago, while the others cannot. This existence of incompatible properties not accounted for in Rea and Bower's analogy make it of no use to the subject it most dearly wishes to resolve.

Fig 1: Michelangelo's David Sculpture.[39]

Other problems have to do with the idea of taking Aristotle's hylomorphic compound ideas too seriously. It is also not clear whether there is a meaningful ontological difference between marble and the statue it comprises. There are certainly conceptual differences and, in the case of the pillar and statue example, functional ones, but any real differences beyond subject-bound perceptions of the material remain hazy. For instance, a farmer may view a pitch fork as a reliable instrument for pitching hay or other loose materials. A warrior may find the same instrument to be better suited as a weapon, valuable for thrusting into the fray. These conceptual perceptions with regard to the functional utility of the same instrument are not identical, nor would any thinking person believe so, but the instrument from which these conceptions were derived remains wholly identical to itself. But surely the theory intends to extend farther than the mere perceptual, though it still remains to be seen how such a task is possible, as even the examples portray human perception regarding a single unified molecular mass.

Therefore, while Bower and Rea do scale back and affirm a weaker form of relative identity, granting that non-relative identity exists parallel to instances of irreducible relational identity, they fail to provide an intelligible "supplemental story." Thus, Tuggy's criticism rings true:

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[39] Michelangelo, *David*, 1501-1504. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence. Accessed 27 Aug. 2013. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:David_von_Michelangelo.jpg>

No Philosopher has given a convincing example of two things which are the same (some kind of thing) but not the same (some other kind of thing). One would be incredulous if told, for example, that John and Peter were the same apostle but different men, or that Rover and Spot were the same mammal but different dogs. Why should one be less incredulous at claims like (5^{II}), or the claim that the Son is the same being as, but a different person than the Father? It seems that this sort of refined LT is to attempt to illuminate the obscure by the obscure.[40]

Conclusion

This chapter briefly discussed the history and development of the LT theory and the premises that it is committed to defending. Out of a milieu of persistent challenges to the unrefined doctrines of Christianity, the LT theory emerged as a clear biblical guide against the heresies of Arius, Sabellius, and the manifestations of Subordinationism and polytheism respectively. The problem is that once this guide became the subject of the refined logical lens of western pedantry, it became clear that the premises it contained could not be jointly asserted without contradiction. Most specifically, as was discussed in this chapter, there were clear problems of identity. For how could two separate non-identical things both respectively be identical to some other thing? In attempting to resolve these issues of identity, Leftow appealed to the metaphysical possibilities afforded by a time-traveling analogy. Rea and Bower used the uncertain reality of relative identity, where entities can be the same *x* but not the same *y*–or more clearly, where individuals can be the same God but not the same person. While Leftow struggled with a new type of modalism and tried to clarify the uncertain with the logically nebulous, Rea and Bower did not construct the supplemental story necessary for making their theory intelligible. Subsequently, the LT theory is not in a prized position insofar as it has attempted to use reason to defend its position, whereas reason seems increasingly disinclined to validate it. Chapter 1 discussed that if the goal is a rationally accessible, formulaic expression of the Trinity,

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[40] Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing," 173.

the task would be difficult. Indeed, while the LT theory cannot be faulted for any shortcomings with regard to biblical soundness, it can certainly be said to significantly falter with respect to logical consistency and intelligibility. In response to these problems, some theologians and philosophers have attempted to trek forward in a new way. This novel path, Social Trinitarianism, will be the specific focus of the following chapter, where the theory will be examined in order to ascertain whether it can survive similar criticism.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM AND A FAMILY OF DIVINITIES

In chapter 1 the problem was stated: formulaic expressions of the Trinity that are rationally accessible must surmount problems of logical consistency and intelligibility while also remaining distinctly biblical in nature. Chapter 2 surveyed the LT theory and its attempt to meet this burden. There we saw that while the LT theory can boast of its fidelity to the Bible and our early church forebears, it cannot without some significant strain to credulity, boast that it has surmounted issues of logical consistency. Indeed, the LT theory has a problem with the transitive nature of identity, where if Jesus is God and the Father is God, then Jesus and the Father must be the same. But clearly they are not.

Therefore, in order to avoid the necessities demanded by identity relationships, some philosophers have opted to deny that the Father, Jesus or the Holy Spirit are individually exactly equivalent to God. This chapter then will briefly explore the development of the Social Trintiy and discuss the theories of those who most prominently defend it. This will include a focus on what it means for God to be three and how a proponent of the ST theory can reliably say that God is also one.

After surviving the toils of the early first centuries, Tritheism attracted a renaissance of sophistication through the rigor of scholastic attention in the early 20th century. Though

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Cornelius Plantinga is largely accepted to have developed Social Trinitiarinism first (certainly its name) in his now famous article "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," his central thesis regarding the Trinity is not unlike Moltmann's and Boff's before him, namely that God is primarily three before he is one.[41]

The analytical philosophy that the second half of the 20th century provided, a largely Anglophone practice of reducing ideas into atomic sentences that can be weighed through rigorous logical laws and philosophical principles of reason, allowed for the Trinity to be studied in a way unlike ever before. In logical terms, the ancient creeds of our forebears seemed incoherent. Thus, unlike Moltmann and Boff, who rejected the LT versions of the trinity due to its reliance on monarchial models, Plantinga deduced a social model based on his experience with analytical philosophy. Plantinga saw the threeness/oneness controversy as the "central conceptual problem" in the doctrine of the Trinity.[42] The primary reason for his conclusion stems from the notion that all Christian doctrines come in "conceptual clusters," inasmuch as a certain view of, say, sin, will have drastic implications for the manner in which one considers the doctrine of election. In no other area of doctrinal theology is this idea more profoundly articulated than in the longstanding debate between Calvinistic and Wesleyan-Arminian theology. The idea of Total Depravity with the conspicuous absence of any kind of prevenient grace necessitates a kind of election wherein only God participates. Human participation in the work of salvation is absolutely illusory.

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[41] Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23, no. 1 (1988); S.R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 19-23; L. Boff and P. Burns, *Trinity and Society* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005); J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Fortress Press, 1981).

[42] Plantinga, "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," 38.

With this understanding of theology as coming in "conceptual clusters," Plantinga argues that there is no doctrine more supremely important than the central doctrine of Christianity–the Trinity. How we conceive of the Trinity affects our entire theological enterprise. Plantinga states, "A particular or peculiar statement of the doctrine of the Trinity will, for the sake of coherence, compel adjustments in nearly all other doctrinal areas."[43]

Plantinga understands the argument to be expressed most fully in the "debate between Karl Barth and his followers on the one side and social Trinitarians on the other." Plantinga muses that the divine life exists in some essential way as both three and one. It is the task of the theologian to determine the referents of these numbers. God must be three in some way and one in another.[44] Karl Barth's answer to this dilemma is controversial, to put it lightly, in that he bit the modalistic bullet, so to speak, in defending the position that God consisted of "modes of being." Barth saw the work of the Trinity as so dogmatically important (contra Friedrich Schleirmacher, who saw the systematic work of the Trinity as peripheral[45]) that he placed it at the beginning of his *Church Dogmatics*.[46]

Barth asserts that God is not the object of human scrutiny that can come to be known on the basis of intuition. Instead, God is the object of God's own self-knowledge and consequently can only be known via revelation. Thus, in the Bible, we are presented with a unique self-unveiling of God to humanity, wherein we partake of the mystery of God's triunity. In fact,

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[43] Ibid, 37.

[44] Ibid, 38.

[45] J. Mariña, *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 172.

[46] K. Barth, G.W. Bromiley, and T.F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics the Doctrine of the Word of God, Volume 1, Part1: The Word of God as the Criterion of Dogmatics; the Revelation of God* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2004).

Barth exemplified Plantinga's "conceptual clusters" with respect to Christian theology, in that he sought to take on "all aspects of Christian doctrine with Trinitarian teaching in mind."[47] Barth objected to a threeness in personhood, thus, whilst many theologians describe entities within the Trinity as separate persons, Barth's polemic against individuated personhood consisted of his use of an alternative word, *Seinsweise*, commonly translated as "mode of being." [48] Robert Letham, in his, *The Holy Trinity*, states that, "For casual readers, this at once conjures up the specter of modalism."[49] While Letham suggests that Barth was modalistic in his formulation of the Trinity, he at the end seems to somewhat pull his punches saying:

> There is this persistent ambiguity at the heart of Barth's Trinitarianism that does not change. If he is not modalistic, he will escape from the charge of unipersonality only with the greatest difficulty.[50]

For Barth, God's unity was unilaterally tied to his personhood, thus, it could not be said that the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate, individuated persons, inasmuch as, for Barth, the oneness of God *was* his personhood. Thus, the figures that comprise the personhood of God are not themselves persons but are rather ways or modes of the persons of God. This is troubling for more than just the casual reader, as it is not at all clear how a way or a mode of being can exist in a loving relationship with another way or mode of being. Consequently, for Barth, God really is only one personality speaking through, in psychological terms, a single Ego. Barth fought against

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[47] J. Webster, *Karl Barth 2nd Edition* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 57.

[48] For a systematic discussion of Barth's use of *Seinsweise* see Iain Taylor, "In Defence of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 1 (2003).

[49] R. Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 2004), 277.

[50] Ibid, 289.

individuated personhood for the members of the Trinity since, ostensibly, there would be some sort of unmitigated Tritheism.

Totally unlike Barth, Leondard Hodgson, an Anglican Priest and philosopher of the early to mid-20th century, argued that ascribing modes to God was an unsatisfactory way to describe the ultimate threeness of God. Instead, according to Hodgson, not only are the members of the Trinity persons in the fullest sense of the word, but they are also, "intelligent, purposive centres of consciousness."[51] The sort of Trinitarian theorizing that Hodgson embodies has come to be considered the social Trinitarian model, wherein the Trinity, or simply God, consists of three truly individuated persons. In contradistinction to what can be described as the Barthian view and the social Trinitarian view, Plantinga engages another view, which he refers to as the traditional Catholic view but what this Thesis has called the Latin Trinitarian model. The central question that Plantinga began with, namely, "How is God one and how is God three?" is answered in diametrically different ways by all parties. Asked another way, Plantinga inquires, "how many persons does God comprise?" Those in the Barthian camp unequivocally state that God is one person. A social Trinitarian will answer that God is comprised of three distinct persons. Those in the Latin Trinitarian camp will state that God is both one and three. Plantinga summarizes the position of the Latin Trinitarian thusly:

> These Trinitarians seem to want to answer the central question both ways. God comprises three persons in some full sense of 'person.' But since each of these is in fact identical with the one divine essence, or each is in fact a center of exactly the same divine consciousness, the de facto number of persons in God is finally hard to estimate."[52]

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[51] Plantinga, "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," 39.

[52] Ibid, 40.

Plantinga uses the following summary passages of the Athanasian Creed as a reference point for discussing the three aforesaid Trinitarian views:

> (14) So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.
> (15) And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

The nagging question then, is what do we really mean when we confess that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each uniquely God but that there are, in fact, not three Gods, but one? This is summarily asked when Plantinga poses three contrasting analogies, the first of which is as follows:

> Is it like saying John Cooper is professor of theology at Calvin Seminary, Henry Zwaanstra is professor of theology at Calvin Seminary, and Ted Minnema is professor of theology at Calvin Seminary, and yet they are not three Calvin professors, but only one?"[53]

Plantinga suggests that such a reading is highly inappropriate, inasmuch as it renders (14) directly contradictory of (15). He further prods that, "Here one instinctively feels the point of the seventeenth-century anitrintiarian complain that Trinitarians simply do not know how to count."[54] Thus, Plantinga believes that the Trinity must be intelligible to the human brain in order to exist. One may rightly wonder how plausible it is to believe that the existence of an ostensible creator of all things spaciotemporal and heavenly would be contingently bound to the limits of human conceivability.

The second analogy that Plantinga employs avoids this problem of seeming incoherency but presents us with other difficulties:

> The oldest native Minnesotan teaching philosophy at Calvin College is Nick Wolterstorff; the author of Until Justice and Peace embrace is Nick Wolterstorff;

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[53] Ibid, 41.

[54] Ibid.

and the only Michigander who loves the music of a Messiaen is Nick Wolterstorff, yet, there are not three Nick Wolterstorffs but only one.[55]

We may say without much explanation that this calls to mind the infamous heresy of modalism, where God simply functionally distinguishes Himself through the manifestation of different roles. This analogy seems most congenial with Barth's *Seinsweise* theory of God's composition.

The third analogy that ostensibly comports with the social Trinitarian thesis is stated thusly:

> The Cartwright family includes a son Adam, who is tall, silent serious; a son Hoss who is massive, gap-toothed, indelicate; and a son Little Joe, who is a roguish and charming ladies' man.[56]

While the sons are quite observably different, inasmuch as they are possessed of their own unique personal identities, they are held in union through family. That is to say, Adam, Hossm and Little Joe are three persons but one family. The difficulty on this front is that it seems nothing short of Tritheism, inasmuch as it seems that there really are just three gods whose only definite similarity happens to be their affinity to the same noun.

Plantinga does not spar lightly (especially with regard to the LT view) when he summarizes our options with the following words:

> The situation looks doctrinally familiar: coherent views on either end of a spectrum are called heretical, while the middle view, trying to have it both ways, seems utterly paradoxical and literally unbelievable. People who take this middle position often construe the orthodox claim as holding that in God each of Father, Son, and Spirit is a distinct person; yet they aren't three persons but one. And in some quarters this view is dignified with the term "mystery." But, of course, without equivocation there's nothing really mysterious about the claim that in God there both are and aren't three persons. In fact it's not really a claim at all, for what it affirms it also denies. The middle way isn't a mystery but a mess, and it ought to be rejected.[57]

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid, 42.

[57] Ibid, 43.

In pursuit of the erstwhile progenitors of the LT view that Plantinga finds intellectually unstable,

he ultimately locates Augustine as the most significant early supporter. From Augustine onward

we find "classically paradoxical statements of Trinitarian doctrine."[58] The theory that Plantinga

puts forward is that Augustine essentially borrowed from two disparate sources, the Bible

(specifically Johannine theology) and neo-platonic thought. Plantinga describes the Gospel of

John (and Augustine's use of it) as presenting an essentially pluralistic understanding of God,

wherein we see three subjects who possess individuated attributes and their own personhood,

identifying Augustine "as much like a Johannine pluralist as his Greek contemporaries, the

Cappadocians, and as Hilary did a generation earlier."[59] However, according to the Neo-Platonic

doctrine of simplicity, Augustine also holds to an incredibly monistic conception of God,

inasmuch as all of who God is collapses into a divine essence that itself is comprised of no

individuated by parts or parcels—the Trinity just *is* this essence. In fact, Augustine's heavy

oscillating emphasis between a sort of Trithiesm and modalistic Monarchianism was so strong

that Nineteenth-century British church historian Levi Paine asked of Augustine, "Was he a

Sabellian without knowing it, and even while striving to distinguish his doctrine from that of

Sabellius?"[60] Paine further noted that,

> The critical test of Sabellianism versus the Nicene doctrine is whether the Trinity
> is essentially one Being or three Beings. Sabellianism says one Being;
> Athanasianism says three Beings. Hence Saballianism is monistic, while
> Athanasianism is trinitarian. Here Augustine plainly sides with Sabellius?[61]

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid

[60] L.L. Paine, *A Critical History of the Evolution of Trinitarianism: And Its Outcome in the New Christology* (Houghton, Mifflin and company, 1900), 74.

[61] Ibid, 75.

Theologian Gerald Bray considers Augustine to be contradictory, though Augustine may have been more concerned with true statements rather than the coherency of the joint assertion of those same statements.[62] Though, somewhat ironically, author Millard Erickson, in his book *God in Three Persons,* surmises that an analysis of *De Trinitate*, Augustine's major work on the Trinity,[63] reveals that trinitarianism is a circuitous oscillation between Tritheism and Modalism. Erickson comments that,

> There is a fundamental difficulty that lies at the heart of discussion of the doctrine
> of the Trinity: The doctrine seems impossible to believe, because at its very core
> it is contradictory.[64]

This fight to balance the Neo-platonic view of simplicity with tritheistic notions of God is how Plantinga ultimately summarizes Augustine's view of the Trinity specifically and the LT view generally. In Plantinga's judgment, Thomas Aquinas followed suit, presenting the Trinity as a unity comprised of three real persons. However, these three persons are regarded individually as whole and full manifestations of the divine essence. The only real difference between the members of the Trinity, according to Aquinas, is in the nature of their relationship, or simply how they relate to one another. The Father is seen just as paternity, the son just as filiation, and the Spirit just as procession and spiration. But, according to Plantinga,

> Thomas simplifies things so aggressively that even that difference is eventually
> washed out…these relations themselves…are really the same thing as the divine
> essence. They differ from it only in intelligibility, only in perception, only
> notionally, not ontologically. For everything in the universe that is not the divine
> essence is a creature.[65]

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[62] Letham, 185.

[63] G.B. Matthews, *Augustine: On the Trinity* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[64] M.J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Baker Publishing Group, 1995), 130.

[65] Plantinga, "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," 47.

While Plantinga describes the "threeness part" as "biblical and plausible" he insists that the oneness part is "both implausible and unbiblical." The final reduction of the members of the Trinity to abstract divine essences that have identical sets of properties renders talk of persons ultimately meaningless, inasmuch as it fails to make an actual distinction. If we take the LT view as saying that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are really just names for the same divine essence, then we have not elevated beyond modalism. If we, on the other hand, say that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are real persons who finally reduce to divine essences that have identical properties, then we have simply taken more steps to arrive at the same conclusion.

Turning briefly to the Barthian Trinitarian model, which Plantinga describes as inherently modalistic, Plantinga suggests that while the Barthian model can boast coherence, it fails to present a cogent and compelling biblical account. Plantinga admits that "mode" can be used appropriately, but the meaning employed by modern modalists like Eberhard Jüngel, Robert Jenson, Karl Rahner, Hendrikus Berkhof and Dorothy Sayers is too reductionist.[66] He says,

> They reduce three divine persons to modes or roles of one person, thus robbing the doctrine of God of its rich communitarian overtones. They often do this, incidentally, while trying simultaneously to harvest from trinity doctrine all the best fruits of a more social view, such as intratrinitarian harmony, mutuality, fellowship, and intersubjectivity. Nobody is more eloquent on these benefits than Karl Barth. Barth wants in heaven a model of covenant fellowship, the archetype of mutuality that we image as males and females, and a ground for the ethics of agape. But, to tell the truth, his theory cannot consistently yield these fruits. For modes do not love at all. Hence, they cannot love each other.[67]

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[66] For a full exploration of their view see, E. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being Is in Becoming* (Scottish Academic Press, 1976); S.R. Swain, *The God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 2013); H. Berkhof and S. Woudstra, *Christian Faith* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990); D.L. Sayers, *Mind of the Maker* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2005).

[67] Plantinga, "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," 49.

Consequently, modern modalists are stuck to make sense of passages of relational love between the members of the Trinity, for example John 14:31, where Jesus says, "…I love the Father." The biblical witness makes this coherent system of the Trinity extremely unsavory.

Finally, Plantinga revisits the social Trinitarian analogy, wishing to absolve it of the allegations of Tritheism. In this view, we are not dealing with "three miscellaneous divine persons each of whom discovers he has the divine essence and all of whom therefore form an alliance to get on together and combine their loyalties and work." Such would be nothing short of Tritheism.[68] Instead, Plantinga suggests that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share mutually and wholly in the divine essence but are also possessed of their own personal divine essences. Moreover, Plantinga explains that:

> Both kinds of essence unify. The generic essence assures that each person is fully divine. The personal essences relate each to the other in unbroken, unbreakable love and loyalty. For the Father has essentially the property of being permanently related to the Son in an ineffable closeness akin to a parent/child relation. The Son has essentially the property of being permanently related to the Father in an ineffable closeness akin to a child/parent relation. Let us say that the Spirit has essentially the property of being the Father and Son's loyal agent. They in turn have the complement of this property: it is essential to them to have the Spirit as their loyal agent.[69]

The hurdle to be jumped is how, precisely, to come to terms with this in regard to the aforementioned core premises of the Athanasian Creed. There are different ways of understanding what, precisely, the word God means in (14) and (15). We could take the creed to

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[68] Richard Swinburne's functional monotheism insists on something very similar to what Plantinga here rejects, namely that "the three divine individuals taken together would form a collective source of the being of all other things." R. Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Clarendon Press, 1994), 184. The problem, of course, is that this much could be said about any plurality of gods, and with one fine philosophical swoosh of the pen, the whole pantheon of Olympian gods could be worshiped under monotheism.

[69] Ibid, 52.

be using God in the same way that the Old and New Testament often employ the word, namely as the special name for the Father alone. That is to say, while there are three divine persons, there is only one God who is the Father. But then, (14) does not say divine persons, lest we wish to fudge in some way, but rather that all three persons are, indeed, God. Thus, the creed would have to be using the meaning of "God" in a certain way in (14), only to immediately run with a different meaning in (15). We could take God to mean the Trinity entirely, but then we have not sailed in any meaningful way from the problem at hand, all we would be saying is that Jesus is the Trinity, the Father is the Trinity, and the Spirit is the Trinity, yet there is not three Trinities but one. Indeed, this seems even more fantastic in its absurdity than the original (that is if they are truly saying anything different).

This problem of equivocation ultimately boils down to having to use two different meanings of the same word in two corresponding verses of the Athanasian Creed. This would seem a problem to most readers, but Plantinga confesses that it is "no particular problem: verses [(14)] and [(15)] do not form an argument that would be invalidated by equivocation. They rather make a sequence of confessional assertions that, on the reading just offered, need to be understood precisely in order that their coherence might be preserved."[70] Plantinga does not understand such equivocation as a problem for the reason that it would be, perhaps, a graver problem to allow the Athanasian Creed to assert seeming incoherency with regard to God's triune nature. Leftow refers to this social attempt as "Plantingean Arianism," arguing in his paper, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," that social models like the one propagated by Plantinga, finally collapse into plain incoherence or polytheism. Leftow argues that social models misread the Athanasian Creed and simply cannot be considered monotheistic any more than carnivores

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[70] Ibid, 52-53.

can be considered vegetarian.[71] Plantinga's logic is not dissimilar from Einar Duenger Bohn, who argued that the Trinity is an instance of one-many identity, similar to a pair of shoes. That is to say, a pair of shoes, while comprised of two entities, which are not identical to each other, coalesces into a single identity known as a pair.[72] Some metaphysicians claim that the composition of any entity is exactly equal to the fusion of its individual parts.[73] So God is the necessary fusion of three divine beings. This seems to grossly misrepresent the Athanasian Creed, wherein two separate uses of the word God would have to be used one after the other.[74] Similarly, this social model suffers from the criticism of quaternity as discussed earlier, where we are left with four ostensibly unique members, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and God (the Trinity).

It would be hard to escape this quaternity criticism for want of orthodox alternatives. For instance, to say that three separate and individuated divine persons make yet still another divine person brought forth through the conjoining of all three is to make a subsantival claim concerning four ontologically distinct entities. For one would have four divine persons. Or, if this is truly not the claim, then the alternative is to downgrade the claim to an adjectival one, insofar as the claim does not properly concern four nouns but rather concerns three nouns and the

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[71] Leftow States that, "[I]f we take the Trinity's claim to be one God seriously, I argue, we wind up downgrading the Persons' deity and/or unorthodox. If we do not, 'the Trinity' is just a convenient way to refer to three Persons, and talk of the Trinity makes no progress towards monotheism. We soon also see that the moves which most clearly would show ST to be monotheist repeatedly threaten to slide into Plantinga's sort of Arianism." Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," 208.

[72] Einar Duenger Bohn, "The Logic of the Trinity," *Sophia* 50, no. 3 (2011).

[73] Shieva Kleinschmidt, "Many-One Identity and the Trinity," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jon Kvanvig(Oxford University Press).

[74] "So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God." Schaff, "The Creeds of Christendom," 97.

fourth merely being an adjectival claim with regard to the other three persons. Thus, God is not a person at all, but a description of what three divine persons are when referred to as a whole. But saying God is neither a person, place nor thing, but rather a description of some other individuated entities, is an affront to biblical orthodoxy, where any reference to God would be rendered essentially meaningless because, as an adjective, it would have no referent.[75]Similarly, Howard-Snyder suggests that the ST suggestion that "God has three persons as proper parts, but God, the Trinity 'as a whole,' is not a person," makes the beginning section of Genesis particularly awkward, where the intentional act of creation takes place, and must, by necessity, take place by a person.[76] William Hasker, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Huntington University, however, proposes that a composite "can 'borrow' properties from its proper parts."[77] Though it strains credulity to think that a concept is capable of receiving the property of intentional creation, to do anything of its undertaking is to "borrow" it in the first place.

Plantinga's contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity are manifold. If it is true that Plantinga offers a more biblical presentation of the Trinity, then his ideas are truly invaluable. At the very least, however, Plantinga has offered strong reasons for reevaluating old Trinitarian models and suggesting helpful ways of reimagining the Trinity.

Held together by One Substance

Other theologians and philosophers have followed suit and have suggested additional social analogies for the Trinity. Leftow described essentially three different variations of ST: (1) functional monotheism, (2) group-mind monotheism and (3) Trinity monotheism. Swinburne is a

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[75] D. Howard-Snyder, "Trinity Monotheism," *Philosophia Christi* 5, (2003).

[76] Ibid, 383, 399.

[77] Hasker, "Objections to Social Trinitarianism," 423.

prime example of the first, where it is the perfect and harmonious assertion of efforts that render the three Gods one—insofar as they are truly one in purpose. Thus, as the category has it, the three persons of the Trinity are merely functionally triune.[78] The latter two categories, however, seek to bind the three persons of the Trinity in a more substantial way.

Those in the group-mind camp have appealed to modern brain science, which has established evidence for the existence of a mind with multiple minds. Commissurotomy is an operation in neurosurgery performed to treat severe cases of epilepsy. In this procedure, the corpus callosum that connects the right and left hemisphere of the brain undergoes bisection. Sometimes patients who undergo this treatment subsequently manifest two separate centers of consciousness.[79] Attempts to utilize this phenomenon as a helpful analogy have been few. Leftow cites C.J.F Williams as one champion of a theory that utilizes the aforesaid analogy. In order to make these three centers of consciousness one, Williams suggests that the wills of the Trinity "coincide so completely that there is a single act of willing."[80] While Hasker wonders why, if there is literally a single set of mental states, there would even be three persons in the first place, Leftow suggests that incoherency arises when you try to ascribe *first-person* mental states to William's Trinity, saying, "…if the Persons have just one mental state among them it is unclear how any one Person could refer just to himself."[81]

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[78] Swinburne, *The Christian God*.

[79] For more on this phenomenon see, Fred Altieri, "Cerebral Commissurotomy, Consciousness, Minds, and Persons" (ProQuest Information & Learning, 1999).

[80] C. J. F. Williams, "Neither Confounding the Persons nor Dividing the Substance," in *Reason and the Christian Religion*(Oxford: Clarendon Pr, 1994).

[81] Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," 225.

William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland in *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* offer a different analogy in favor of their Trinity monotheism that expresses a substantial connection between the persons of the Trinity. Moreland and Craig straightforwardly assert that the Trinity alone is God and the persons of the Trinity are merely divine.[82] They consider Cerberus, who, in Greek and Roman mythology, is usually depicted as a three-headed dog that guards the gates of the Underworld.[83] In these depictions, Cerberus is a single substance or hellhound, with three unique self-consciousnesses. The application is clear, perhaps God, too, "is a single spiritual substance or soul with three self-consciousnesses."[84] Analogies of this sort can be taken outside of the mythical, as Craig points out later on his website, Reasonablefaith.org. For instance, there are reptiles and mammals that have shared one substance, so to speak, and have possessed two separate centers of consciousness (see Fig. 2).

(a)   (b)

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[82] J.P. Moreland and W.L. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (IVP Academic, 2003), 589.

[83] J.P. Moreland and W.L. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (IVP Academic, 2003), 593.

[84] William Lane Craig, "Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder," *Reasonable Faith*, October 10, 2013, accessed October 10, 2013, http://www.reasonablefaith.org/trinity-monotheism-once-more-a-response-to-daniel-howard-snyder#ixzz2kDnRgZLa.

Fig 2: Some two-headed reptiles[85]

Craig uses these as examples in response to Daniel Howard-Snyder's criticism of Craig and

Moreland's Trinity Monotheism in *Philosophia Christi*.[86] Howard-Snyder suggests that the

mythological hellhound, Cerberus, is actually a poor analogy, inasmuch as the hound is really

only "three partially overlapping dogs."[87] Craig suggests that this claim is "astonishing" because

such creatures really do exist in the real world. Craig states that:

> The metaphysician who wants us to believe that what we actually see here is
> something far more bizarre and recherché than a mutant turtle, namely, two turtles
> which overlap except for their protruding heads, had better have some pretty
> compelling arguments for thinking that this is the case. But Howard-Snyder offers
> none. He simply asserts it.[88]

However, it is hard to see how Craig and Moreland's thesis survives once evidence is brought to

the forefront. For instance, Polycephaly is a well understood biological condition wherein

animals are born with more than one head. Bicephalic (two-headed) and tricephalic (three-

headed) animals observed in the real world are the result of a failed separation of twins who

formed from a single zygote (monozygotic twins). These creatures with multiple heads are really

just two or more fused persons. Thus, to say that Cerberus is just three overlapping dogs is closer

to observed reality than Craig's assertion to the contrary. When this phenemonon is witnessed in

the human kingdom, in the case of Abigail and Brittany Hensel (dicephalic twins whose

symmetry gives the appearance of one unified body), for example, no one honestly suggests that

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[85] Accessed 27 Oct. 2013. <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/trinity-monotheism-once-more-a-response-to-daniel-howard-snyder#_edn2>

[86] Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Trinity Monotheism," *Philosphia Christi* 5 (2003): 396.

[87] Ibid.

[88] William Lane Craig, "Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder."

this is a single person or human with two heads. Instead, it is considered to be two human individuals who are fused together.

The problem seems to ultimately boil down to an ontological question of what individuates an individual, or in this case, a dog. Howard-Snyder suggests that there cannot exist a single dog with three totally separate, distinct and fully functional brains, it simply affronts credulity, given that the brain is what ostensibly individuates individuals. For Craig and Moreland, it seems that it is the actual wholeness of the substance that individuates individuals. Since the turtle and the snake in figure 1 are clearly one substance, we can say that two consciousnesses exist in one turtle. Craig and Moreland's position seems incredibly ontologically nebulous, especially when you consider cases of conjoined twins who are later separated by operation. In such cases we can say at least two things: (1) either there was one human in one body with two centers of consciousness prior to operation and then after the operation there were two new humans (the third human that they at once formed together now ceasing?), or (2) there were two humans prior to the operation and two humans after. In this case, it seems intuition is firmly in the favor of (2). This means that the social Trinitarian analogy has not sufficiently supplanted the accusation of Tritheism with a cogent monotheistic explanation.

There are other problems with Social Trinitarian positions. One offered by Leftow is that of "diminished divinity," which suggests that if the persons of the Trinity are not whole instantiations of the divine nature, then they at best share in some sort of diminished divinity, wherein the fullness of divinity is only truly expressed in the collation of all three persons, the group known as the Trinity. A similar objection to God as a group of divine persons comes from Tuggy. Recalling the previous premises listed in the introduction, we can see how the Social Trinitarian thesis infers the rejected premise (5b)—that is, God is numerically distinct from any

of these: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. This thesis has rejected (5b) because of its obvious problems

with the Athanasian Creed. But ST affirms (5b) clearly in its reasoning. Tuggy puts it this way:

> Nothing is identical to one of its proper parts. If any thing X is composed of three
> different proper parts, A, B, and C, then X is not identical to either A, B, or C.
> Therefore, if God is identical to this community, then He can't also be identical to
> one member of it, for instance the Holy Spirit. In sum, if ST is true, then so is
> [(5b)].[89]

While it remains true that ST variations are not committed to a contradictory set of propositions,

it does not remain true that they affirm all propositions necessary for maintaining an orthodox

understanding of the Trinity. The cost of avoiding Tritheism is simply too high, as it only

succeeds by claiming that the persons of the Trinity are not themselves God at all. According to

Tuggy, most ST variations deny (1), that God is divine. None are so bold as to voice it in such a

way, but whatever is divine in the primary sense is a person or a personal being. But God is not a

person according to ST; indeed, God is the name for a group that is comprised of three divine

persons. In ST variations generally, and in Moreland and Craig's variation specifically, the

persons of the Trinity are divine but not independently God, and the Trinity alone is God but not

divine. Because, "what is not a person is not divine, not a divinity."[90] Tuggy describes this as the

"death of ST." This is true, of course, as any compatible doctrine of the Trinity must conform to

the Scriptures in which both the Old and New Testament are clear on the divinity of God.

In an effort to avoid the above-cited pitfalls, some ST proponents may claim that God as

Trinity truly is a person, in addition to other members that comprise it. Tuggy claims that this

denies (6)—that anything that is divine is identical to at least one of the following: Father, Son or

Holy Spirit. In cases like these, we have altogether done away with the idea of the Trinity and

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[89] Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing," 168.

[90] Ibid.

have instead affirmed a new Quaternity. This approach would suffice if it were, in fact, a scriptural notion. Nonetheless, in the New Testament we encounter only three divine beings with no theological recourse to this manufactured fourth.[91]

Conclusion

This chapter explored the development and defense of the ST theory as a viable formulaic expression of the Trinity. While social-like Trinitarian models preexisted Plantinga's initial use of the term, Plantinga was the first to give it a formulaic expression. Plantinga offered the backdrop of a Barthian model and a LT model (traditional catholic) for his ST theory. Plantinga suggested that Barth's modalism fails because ways or modes simply cannot love each other. The LT model, according to Plantinga, champions what it also denies and, thus, is simply a mess. Moreover, the LT model can be reduced to the conflation of two disparate modalities, namely Johannine theology and neo-platonic philosophy. Plantinga argues that Johannine theology expresses the Trinity in a way more akin to community or familial relation, but neo-platonism demands an ultimate reduction that forces the community into a oneness where distinction is no longer possible. Ostensibly, if ancient thinkers, namely Augustine, had but stuck to the theology of the Bible without outward platonic influence, there would be no discussion of the apparent problems posed by those in the LT camp. The alternative is something like Plantinga's ST model that sees the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as members of a family whose oneness is born out of relationship, not ontology.

C.J.F Williams, who was a British analytical philosopher in the mid and late 20th century, suggested that a helpful analogy could be found by looking at certain phenomena that occur in the human brain, where after bisection of the brain persons can manifest separate and distinct

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[91] For the full discussion on this, see Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing."

centers of consciousness. So multiple consciousnesses can seemingly occupy a single body. Craig and Moreland suggest that the Trinity could be viewed as something similar to the mythological Cerberus, a three headed dog that occupies a single substance. Thus, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit may be three distinct persons who are substantially equal.

The problems with the aforesaid ST reasoning are manifold. Leftow suggested that there is a problem of "diminished divinity" wherein the members of the Trinity only share in a depreciated divinity and it is in their conjoined coalescence that the members appreciate full divine potency. Thus, a theory that is not tritheistic necessitates that the members of the Trinity are not themselves God at all. This is a significant problem with respect to the Athanasian Creed that very clearly states that the members of the Trinity are God. Plantinga suggests that two different meanings of the same word are used by Athanasius in the same stanza. That is, Athanasius means "God" as divine in one breath and "God" as "God" in the other. This seems remarkably *ad hoc*.

There is also the problem of quaternity, where the divinity of three separate and distinct members combine to form still a fourth entity, God. If this is, indeed, not a fourth entity, it is merely a description, and, thus, God is not a person at all, but merely a description of three other persons. Subsequently, as Tuggy suggests, it is hard to imagine how a nonperson could be divine.

CHAPTER 4

MYSTERY AS A VIABLE WAY FORWARD

Thus far we have discussed the variable shortcomings of the LT theory in its attempt to rationally assess the Trinity. It was made clear from Chapter one that any formulaic expression of the Trinity must meet the criteria of logical consistency, intelligibility and biblical soundness. We have seen while the LT theory has yet to surmount areas of logical consistency, the ST theory has foundered on issues of biblical soundness, inasmuch as God as a quaternity or a description are simply not biblically defensible positions. Furthermore, it is not clear how Social Trinitarians avoid tritheism except by appeal to their own credulity. But if LT theorists cannot surmount logical problems of consistency and ST theorists cannot create an intelligible theory that reliably avoids Tritheism and other biblical difficulties, what alternative path is available for theologians who desire a reliable way to think about God's triune nature?

This chapter will survey the possibility of mystery as a reliable way forward. That is, this chapter will discuss Anderson's thesis on Trinity as mystery and whether it is logically consistent, intelligible, and biblically sound.

Philip Melanchthon once remarked that the mystery of the Trinity should be adored rather than speculated upon, as if somehow the deep profundity of the Trinity is for naught when

reduced to the ink of a scholar's pen—meaning lost in the pursuit of its details.[92] Similarly, in a tempera painting on a 20 x 38 cm panel, the Italian painter, Sandro Botticelli, depicted a famous legend:

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As the story behind the painting has it, St. Augustine was walking somewhere along the beach at Hippo in North Africa. Augustine was struggling to no avail to reason through the mystery of the Trinity. As he walked, he came upon a boy carrying water in a bucket back and forth from the ocean surf. As it happened, the boy was attempting to fill with ocean water a small hole in the sand that he had dug. Struck with insatiable curiosity, not unlike his hunger to unravel the mystery of the Trinity, Augustine inquired of the child as to his odd activity. The boy informed Augustine that he was attempting to pour the entire ocean into the small hole. Augustine responded saying, "That is impossible, for the hole is small and the ocean too huge to fit." And, with great irony, the boy retorted back, "Then how can you expect to fit the mystery of the Trinity into that small head of yours?" Incidentally, the boy thereafter disappeared.

While mystery in the above story denotes an inability to conceptualize something because of its incomprehensible vastness, mystery is not always employed with such meaning. A reflection on how the modern use of the term mystery differs from the Greek *mysterion* (μυστήριον) may be helpful in avoiding needless equivocation. In contemporary speech, when

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[92] E.P. Meijering, *Melanchthon and Patristic Thought: The Doctrines of Christ and Grace, the Trinity, and the Creation* (E.J. Brill, 1983), 120.

[93] Sandro Botticelli, *Vision of Saint Augustine*, 1488, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, accessed October 12, 2013, http://0.tqn.com/d/ancienthistory/1/0/v/i/2/visionstaugustine.jpg.

we refer to something as mysterious, we tend to mean that such a thing is perhaps marveled at but partly or entirely not understood. Merriam-Webster defines mystery as "exciting wonder, curiosity, or surprise while baffling efforts to comprehend or identify."[94] In Greek, however, the term means something that was a secret to our minds, hidden to us entirely that can only thereafter be known if revealed by the god(s).[95]

In the Pauline corpus the term μυστήριον (mystery) is firmly connected with the kerygma of Christ.[96] Moreover, Christ is referenced as the μυστήριον of God.[97] The term μυστήριον does not everywhere in the NT take its content from the Christ revelation, nor is it always part of the kerygma. For instance, to fathom the mysteries of God—partake in His knowledge—is ostensibly the special spiritual gift of the prophet (1 Cor. 13:2). Similarly, the contents of speaking in tongues, another spiritual gift, are also μυστήρια (1 Cor. 14:2), and seemingly remain ineffable divine mysteries (or are perhaps mysteries revealed via a translator).

Also, according to Günther Bornkamm, a late New Testament scholar who taught at the University of Heidelberg, "everywhere in the NT *musterion* has an eschatological sense."[98] Bornkamm suggests that in Romans 11:25,

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[94] "Mysterious." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed October 10, 2013. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mysterious.

[95] For a good discussion on the history of the Greek *Mysterion* see W.D. Spencer, *Mysterium and Mystery: The Clerical Crime Novel* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 2-13.

[96] κηρύσσειν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον in 1 Corinthians 1:23, καταγγέλλειν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ (2:1), and λαλεῖν θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ (2:7), all demonstrate that what Christian's preach collectively as a gospel message is inherently a mystery. That is, it is something that was once hidden but is now revealed.

[97] Col. 2:2; cf. 1:27; 4:3.

[98] G.W. Bromiley and G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: L - N* (Eerdmans, 1993), 822.

Paul unfolds the final destiny of Israel as a specific mystery. In so doing Paul disclaims personal cleverness (ἵνα μὴ ἦτε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς φρόνιμοι)." To his own intelligence the hardening of Israel would be either a pure enigma or a temptation to arbitrary rational conclusions. Putting the historical fact of the obduracy of Israel into the context of a μυστήριον, Paul discloses the eschatological significance of this event (ἄχρι οὗ … σωθήσεται, 25f.). In the present πώρωσις there is intimated in hidden form the entrance of the πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν into salvation history, and hence the final deliverance of Israel too. [99]

Mysterion appears a total of twenty-one times in Paul's writing and is usually always pointing to mystery with reference to its present disclosure (Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:10; Col. 1:26-27; Eph 1:9; 3:3, 5). Some have argued that 1 Timothy 3:9 is the first time in the NT that *mysterion* has lost what has been described as a characteristically Pauline sense "and describes what transcends ordinary comprehension."[100] Even if the meaning of incomprehensibility were not contextually true, as P.T. O'Brien, a leading New Testament scholar, argues in his short article on mystery, it is the meaning that this paper intends to use for the word "mystery."

A Semantic View of Mystery

Tuggy, who convincingly argued that the two most favored explications of the Trinity, LT and ST, are insufficient with regard to logical or biblical information, also argues that appealing to mystery in the modern sense of the word (or the 1 Timothy 3:9 sense) is grossly unsatisfactory. Tuggy contends that appealing to mystery in order to avoid facing contradictions is rationally absurd.

James Anderson of the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh takes Tuggy to task on this. Anderson added some solid and necessary propositions to Tuggy's original (1)-(6) as was stated in the introduction. With the addition of Anderson's (7)-(10), sincerely logical

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[99] Ibid.

[100] O'Brien, Peter T., "Mystery," in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters,* ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid (DownersGrove, IL:IVP Academic, 1993), 623.

theories are simply not to be seen. But Anderson agrees with Tuggy that one cannot really say that the Trinity is contradictory, inasmuch as there is nothing particularly amiable about openly affirming a contradiction, to say nothing of the fact that you would also bid others to do the same. But Anderson makes the distinction between *apparent* contradictions and *real* contradictions. While it is true that some contradictions may be both apparent and real, there are some that Anderson describes as *merely* apparent contradictions (MAC). He goes on to suggest that the only possible option when dealing with the jointly asserted Trinitarian propositions (1)-(10) is to consider it a MAC.

But what does Anderson mean when he asserts that the Trinity is merely an apparent contradiction? He suggests, "We should avoid, if at all possible, falling back on the idea that the law of non-contradiction does not apply when theorizing about God. Nevertheless, an intelligible distinction may be made between apparent contradiction and real contradiction; thus an intelligible distinction may be made between *apparent-and-real* contradiction and *apparent-but-not-real* contradiction.[101]"

There are essentially two claims being made here. First, Anderson seems to be suggesting that we should not omit God from the rules of logic like that of the law of non-contradiction, and two, that we should also not be so vain as to suggest that our comprehension of God and his respective attributes are sharp enough to identify a *real* contradiction. While our knowledge is ostensibly sufficient to know that laws of logic *really* do totally apply to God and his attributes, it is not quite fine enough to know when God or His attributes really do transgress these laws. Subsequently, when faced with an apparent contradiction regarding the Trinity, Anderson

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[101] Anderson, "In Defence of Mystery: A Reply to Dale Tuggy," 148.

suggests that we are left to discern the existence of a semantic qualifier. Perhaps something within our language merely makes it seem like there is a contradiction.

On this point Anderson gives the example of two claims that seem contradictory without a contextual framework:

(A1)   I am concerned about my wife's operation
(A2)   I am not concerned about my wife's operation

Without a contextual framework, Anderson is right in saying that these two assertions seem diametrically opposed, resulting in what many would consider a blatant contradiction. But what we really have here is a Merely Apparent Contradiction Resulting from an Unarticulated Equivocation, or what Anderson labels MACRUE. If you knew Anderson, you may trust that he is not simply contradicting himself (even if you could not immediately discern why) but that there is some unarticulated equivocation on the term "concerned." Because Anderson actually *meant* that he was *concerned* inasmuch as he genuinely cares about his wife's wellbeing and that he was *not concerned* inasmuch as he was not particularly anxious about the outcome. Thus it was the spectrum of meaning associated with the single word "concern," which resulted in an apparent contradiction when the joint assertions failed to articulate important nuances.

The unfortunate reality of *unarticulated equivocations* is that it is not always clear *how* to make a distinction. In fact, we may not have sufficient epistemic high ground to purchase distinctions at all. But Anderson explains that, "knowing that the relevant distinctions could *in principle* be articulated and explicated is sufficient grounds for distinguishing a MAC from a genuine contradiction."[102]

At this point it seems it would be necessary to add that a distinction must not just be possibly articulated and explicated in principle, but that a distinction must have been intended.

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[102] Ibid.

In the case of Anderson's two assertions regarding his concern for his wife, a distinction could be made, if no variant meaning belied the two separate occurrences of the term "concern," then a genuine contradiction still exists. This contradiction exists then not because two distinctions could not be made, but because no distinction was intended.

Anderson gives another example of a man, Harry, who listens to a lecture given by a continental philosopher. During the duration of the lecture, and due to a combination of sleep inducing affairs, Harry finds himself in and out of sleep. At one point before Harry doses off, he hears the philosopher suggest that:

(B1)   God's kingdom has arrived.

However, when Harry awakes a second time, he distinctly hears the philosopher claim that:

(B2)   God's Kingdom has not arrived.

Harry's initial reaction is that the philosopher must have simply contradicted himself. But upon more serious retrospection, Harry considers the fact that an eminent philosopher probably would not make so egregious a mistake and considers also his own epistemic limitations resulting from his ill-timed slumbering. These things considered, Harry concludes that the philosopher probably means that God's kingdom has arrived *in one sense* but that it has not arrived *in another sense*. So what seems like a contradiction may only be apparent because of some unarticulated (or in Harry's case, unheard) equivocation. It is also important to note that Harry's position on the eminent philosopher's MACRUE is not an intellectually unacceptable one. It is important because Tuggy suggests that the use of mystery in the face of contradiction is intellectually contemptible. It is hard to imagine why it would be better to believe that the eminent philosopher genuinely contradicted himself than to believe that his experience of a contradiction is merely an

apparent one, resulting, as it were, from some missing semantic equivocation. In fact, intuition seems firmly in the favor of the latter.

So how do we apply such semantic qualification to our present Trinitarian situation? Is there some word that could, in principle, be qualified to allow the Trinitarian formulation to exist unencumbered by contradiction? It seems that our ordinary words like "God," "is," "divine," and others that do not have univocal meaning could be varied to eliminate formal inconsistency. Certainly it could be said that Jesus "is" God in *one sense* but is not the Father in *another sense*. The only limitations on this enterprise are exegetical ones, insofar as qualifications ought to comport to a biblical framework, and semantic commonality. Any given word ought to share enough in common with or sufficiently resemble what we *ordinarily* mean by those words. For instance, we cannot simply say that "divine" means what we *ordinarily* mean by the word in one case, and then have it mean "pancake" in another area. We can, however, say that our *ordinary* understanding of some given words is incomplete. This should not be uncomfortable ground for Christians, especially for those who concur with Christendom's adherence to the doctrine of analogy, whereby all language about God is finitely analogical. Saying "God is good" is tantamount to saying "God" is similar to but not limited by our understanding of "good."

Following this explanation, the precise terms that need to be qualified is a question yet to be answered. If the doctrine of the Trinity is, indeed, a MACRUE, then there must be some equivocal term that could, in principle, be disambiguated. Anderson identifies some important conditions of such words carrying significant analogical meaning:

> Whatever meaning ought to be conveyed by those terms designated as carrying analogical senses – 'is', 'divine', 'being', 'one', etc. – the terms will be such that (i) there remains substantial commonality of meaning with same terms used in ordinary discourse and yet (ii) there is difference of meaning at least in those regions where genuine contradiction would otherwise arise with respect to all the other things we want to say about God's nature – most fundamentally, with

respect to the things God says about Himself in scripture. Thus, when Christians affirm with the Athanasian Creed that 'there are not three gods but one God', each of the words exhibits substantial similarity (and in some cases identity) of meaning with the same word used elsewhere, such that the statement can be approximately paraphrased using near-synonyms (e.g. 'there is not a triple of deities but a single deity'); yet there must also be sufficient differentiation of meaning that one cannot correctly infer from this statement (in conjunction with other biblical data) that God the Father took on flesh and bore our sins. The analogous senses of the relevant terms will not permit such a conclusion to be deduced; indeed, it is just because the latter proposition is denied by Christians that terms are to be considered analogous and not univocal.[103]

While this explanation allows formal inconsistencies in the Trinity to be resolved in a fashion more congenial with traditional Christianity, it is a relatively different scenario from the examples proffered earlier. The substantial differences are that in the two examples cited above, the distinctions that one could make are observable, formally articulated, and are capable of being cognitively grasped.[104] We can understand how one may have concern in *one sense* yet not have concern in *another sense*. But though we might understand that equivocation could be involved in formulations of the Trinity, we are not at present capable of understanding precisely in what way or even how the equivocation occurs, a phenomenon referred to by Anderson as a "residue of mystery."[105]

Anderson presses forward to explain why it is rationally appropriate to appeal to mystery contra Tuggy. He summarizes five definitions of mystery as:

(1) the New Testament sense, that of 'a truth formerly unknown'; (2) 'something that we don't completely understand, something whose entire essence we can't grasp'; (3) some fact that we can't fully or adequately explain; (4) an unintelligible doctrine whose meaning we can't begin to grasp; and (5) a truth

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[103] Anderson, "In Defence of Mystery: A Reply to Dale Tuggy," 152.

[104] Ibid, 153.

[105] Ibid.

which one ought to believe 'even though it seems, even after careful reflection, to be impossible and/or contradictory' (175–76).[106]

Anderson believes that we ought to believe the Trinity even though there *seems* to be a contradiction, per the 5th listed definition. But he maintains that the contradiction is merely apparent because of "something that we don't completely understand…,"[107] referencing the 2nd definition.

This does not seem unreasonable, as it has long been established in virtually all realms of inquiry that there are things that we believe exist yet do not understand. Christian author and apologist, Dan Story, in his book, *Defending Your Faith,* puts it this way:

> There are many things about the universe we don't understand today and yet accept at face value simply because of the preponderance of evidence supporting their existence. The scientific method demands that empirical evidence be accepted whether or not science understands why it exists or how it operates. The scientific method does not require that all data be explained before it is accepted.
> Contemporary physics, for instance, has discovered an apparent paradox in the nature of light. Depending on what kind of test one applies (both of them "equally sound"), light appears as either undulatory (wave-like) or corpuscular (particle-like). This is a problem. Light particles have mass, while light waves do not. How can light have mass and not have it, apparently at the same time? Scientists can't yet explain this phenomenon, but neither do they reject one form of light in favor of the other, nor do they reject that light exists at all. Instead, they accept what they've found based on the evidence and press on.[108]

Within this proven noetic framework, we can reasonably accept the existence of things we do not grasp or even understand at present. Anderson suggests that God's revelation of himself through human language lies at the base of the problem. He states that our language is simply not discriminatory enough to provide the distinctions necessary to make our succinct premised

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[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Dan Story, *Defending Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1997), 100-01.

formulations internally consistent. This is not because of some deficiency on God's part but rather because of the limitations of language proper. Anderson believes that "some of our intuitive concepts and categories are simply too coarse and indiscriminating to allow us to grasp the distinctions that would lay bare, as it were, the metaphysical connections between the divine essence and the divine persons."[109] He goes on to say that "God (we may presume) has a perfect grasp of these distinctions and hence can see without difficulty just how there is no breach of the law of non-contradiction; we must rest satisfied (at least for now) only knowing that there is no breach. In a nutshell, the fundamental 'mystery' here is one of informational limitation rather than logical violation."[110]

This explanation also seems to comport with Tuggy's rough criteria for an acceptable appeal to mystery:

> First, one must have very strong grounds for believing the claim or claims in question. Second, one must have some reason to suspect that the contradiction is only apparent. Unless these two conditions are met, one ought not to believe any apparent contradiction, for what is apparently contradictory is for that reason apparently false.[111]

Of course, as Anderson points out, Tuggy's second condition would seem to flow seamlessly from the fulfillment of the first. If you have good reason for believing a set of independent claims, you then would have good reason for believing that the contradiction resulting from the joint assertion of those claims is merely apparent. The Christian who takes seriously the inspiration of Scripture not only has good reasons for believing biblical claims to be true, he has what in many ways would constitute the best reason for believing those claims, God's very own

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[109] Anderson, "In Defence of Mystery: A Reply to Dale Tuggy," 154.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing," 176.

self-revelation through Scripture. Craig has notably stated the convictions granted Christian
believers via the Holy Spirit constitute an intrinsic defeater. That is to say any argument that
seemingly undercuts biblical claims about God (his goodness or even his existence) are
preemptively defeated by the internal convictions imposed by the enlightenment of the Holy
Spirit and Scripture. Such convictions significantly weaken the normal proclivity to believe that
if upon careful reflection a claim appears contradictory, we ought to reject it. Indeed, appeal to
mystery becomes what Anderson refers to as his RAPT (Rational Affirmation of Paradoxical
Theology) theory.[112]

Furthermore, if there are justificatory grounds in other fields of inquiry to maintain
apparent contradictions (and in some cases even expect them), we must seriously consider what
one should come to expect when inquiring into the very nature of the most Supreme Being over
all of creation. Indeed, Christian tradition has long held to the doctrine of God's
incomprehensibility. Certainly it is uncontroversial to suggest that our understanding of God via
human language is incredibly infinitesimal with respect to God's self-understanding. Anderson
summarizes the concept:

> [T]he difference between Creator and creature is of such magnitude that what
> little we do understand of God is but a drop in the ocean compared to God's self-
> understanding. If such is the case (as most Christians would be inclined to grant),
> should we really expect our systematizations of what God has revealed to us
> about Himself by way of limited human language, grounded in immanent
> experience, to be logically perspicuous at every point? Are we justified in
> assuming that our creaturely repertoire of concepts and categories, while perfectly
> adequate for counting peaches and distinguishing postmen from policemen, is
> sufficiently rich and precise as to accommodate every metaphysical nicety
> required to formulate the truth about God's transcendent nature in an
> unambiguously consistent manner? I strongly suspect not. At the very least, we
> have no grounds for answering affirmatively here; in which case the inference
> from apparent contradiction to real contradiction is undercut.[113]

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[112] J. Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology*, 222.

[113] Anderson, "In Defence of Mystery: A Reply to Dale Tuggy," 155.

This line of reasoning is not substantially different from those employed in the philosophy of religion to undercut atheological attempts to undermine the existence of God by appealing to gratuitous evil. Atheologians utilize methods of inference to conclude that God does not exist. Since it seems likely that at least one apparent instance of gratuitous suffering or pointless evil is real, it is similarly probable that a God who would by nature prohibit the occurrence of such events not exist.

What has come to be the most effective retort for dismantling the abovementioned atheological objections is the appeal to the true myopia of such inferences. Philosopher Daniel Howard-Snyder asks us to consider a similar myopic inference. Imagine I am sitting in my house and, looking out my kitchen window at a garden about twenty yards yonder, say to myself, "It seems to me that there is no slug in that garden." Would it be reasonable for me to thereafter infer that there is no slug in the garden? No. Or consider this example. Imagine I am listening to two seasoned brain surgeons discussing the particulars of a very specific neurological diagnosis. With their brobdingnagian medical vernacular, I may say, "it seems to me that what they're saying makes no sense." Could I reasonably infer, then, that what they are saying actually makes no sense? Probably not.

To state that gratuitous evil exists is to say that there is such a thing as evil that, if prevented, would not cause any greater evil or prevent any greater good from transpiring–that is, an evil completely absent of a morally sufficient purpose. In order to conclude that such evil is probable, it must be concluded that, "the insights attainable by finite, fallible human beings [is] as an adequate indication of what is available in the way of reasons to an omniscient, omnipotent

being."[114] Howard-Snyder suggests that it "is like supposing that when I am confronted with the activity or productions of a master in a field in which I have little expertise, it is reasonable for me to draw inferences about the quality of her work just because I 'don't get it.'"[115]

What good reasons do we have for believing that if such morally sufficient reasons existed we would accurately discern them at all? To the contrary, we have good reasons for doubting our ability to conclude that since 'we don't see 'em, they ain't there.

Similarly, it seems wholly unjustified to think that we sufficiently understand the nature of God so as to conclude that the contradictions stemming from formulaic expressions of the Trinity result from real inconsistency and not any still unknown equivocation resulting from the sheer noetic gap between God's self-knowledge and our limited epistemic access to God's revealed nature through human language. Consequently, if the reasons for objecting to atheological attempts to falsify God via the existence of gratuitous evil are successful, it is not clear why similar reasons cannot be used to overcome common Trinitarian objections.

This is not to affirm the sort of anti-speculative approach affirmed by Thomas a Kempis, but rather to acknowlede that our speculations regarding the Trinity are necessarily limited by the epistemic access that creatures possess with respect to the creator.[116] Just as the expected noetic gap between creature and creator renders inferences to gratuitous evil unwarranted, it similarly reduces inferences to Trinitarian contradictions premature.

The objection that the Trinitarian contradictions are too explicit to allow an appeal to mystery does not withstand scrutiny. It imposes a (assumed rather than proven) univocal

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[114] Daniel Howard-Snyder, "On Rowe's Argument from Particular Horrors," in *Readings in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Kelly Clark(Broadview, 2005), 356.

[115] Ibid.

[116] A.E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Wiley, 2011), 210.

meaning on all the words used in formulaic approaches. Furthermore, no explicit contradiction exists in the Bible but rather in the joint assertion of the claims that have been inferred from the source data. It is not clear why some semantic equivocation, however slight, would not exist in our observably finite understanding of God's self-revelation.

It seems clear that mystery is an effective way forward when wading through the quagmire seemingly inherent within Trinitarian speculation. Both the Latin Trinitarian model and the Social model fail to cogently offer descriptions that can overcome scrutiny. Mystery, however, allows us to confront the claims of Scripture and remain open to accepting them all, irrespective of the seemingly contradictory nature resulting from their joint assertion. Moreover, mystery allows Christians to affirm disparate and difficult biblical claims without having to sacrifice either rational integrity or biblical foundation.

But are there any significant problems with this approach? While Anderson asserts that we expect seeming contradictions to arise when dealing with the nature of an incomprehensible God, Tuggy wonders about the utility of this advice in reality. It is true that we can say, "Jesus both knows all" and "Jesus does not know all" and conclude that this is a MACRUE—where the word "know" scales in meaning in some epistemically inaccessible way—but both those statements really do affect our theological understanding significantly. From this MACRUE, we can draw other conclusions such as, "Jesus is ignorant of some facts," and "Jesus is not ignorant of any facts." If at any point our theological reflections upon these MACRUEs turn to real contradiction, we will never know.[117] Though few instances of MACRUEs even exist in theology, most can be easily resolved without appeal to mystery. The above example, for

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[117] James Anderson, "Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of Its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 26, no. 1 (2009).

instance, may find theological relief through the expression of Jesus' hypostatic union, wherein Jesus is in possession of two natures, divine and human. The real mystery here is how Jesus is to be one hundred percent divine and human, respectively, without confusion.

The Cartesian Option

There remains still another approach to mystery that Anderson opposes, namely the idea that God may surpass even our most established noetic principles, like the law of non-contradiction. Almost all philosophers of religion find it intellectually inappropriate to believe that it is possible for God to transcend any of the laws of thought, as this would create an infinite array of paradoxical questions and a smorgasbord of real impossibilities. Consequently, Philosophers assume that God must exist within these laws himself (or by nature be or exude these laws). [118]

Unlike most philosophers, Rene Descartes suggested that intellectual humility in the face of so supreme a being may cause us to challenge even our most cherished beliefs. When reflecting on God's omnipotence, Descartes suggested that appeals to logic seeking to disqualify omnipotence were ultimately futile, since inherent within the definition of God's power is the ability to defy even the boundaries of logic. Descartes famously stated:

> I would not even dare to say that God cannot arrange that a mountain should exist without a valley, or that one and two should not make three, but I only say that he has given me a mind of such a nature that I cannot conceive a mountain without a

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[118] Philosophers have largely followed the Thomistic route of understanding that God can only do or operate within the realm of what is absolutely possible. Accordingly, God cannot do an act or exist in a way that entails or implies a contradiction. See Aquinas, St. Thomas. 1921 [1274]. *The summa theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas.* 2nd ed. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne.

valley or a sum of one and two which would not be three and so on, and that such things imply contradictions in my conception.[119]

This claim, while it permits rather radical implications, is actually quite modest. Descartes claims that God may have given us brains such that those things that we cannot conceive as possible may be artificial intellectual limitations imposed upon us by God. This claim breaks down into three primary points:

(1) It is possible that God's nature exceeds the limits of human conceivability. This would mean that such things as squared circles, a philosophical go-to when discussing logical impossibilities, would not be logically impossible per se, but only impossible according to the absolute limit of our conceivability. In other words, logical impossibilities exist only to us because God has designed them accordingly.

Descartes dissected it similarly:

> It is easy to dispel this difficulty by considering that the power of God cannot have any limits, and that our mind is finite and so created as to be able to conceive as possible things which God has wished to be in fact possible, but not to be able to conceive as possible things which God could have made possible, but which he has in fact wished to make impossible.

This would mean that the longstanding theological doctrine of the Trinity may be immune to human scrutiny if we take seriously a Cartesian conception of God. The impossibilities we encounter when contemplating the Trinity are not a deficiency with the doctrine proper, but with the computing power, so to speak, of those who observe the doctrine. C.S. Lewis characterized the sort of ineffable nature of the Trinity in this way:

> Now the Christian account of God involves just the same principle. The human level is a simple and rather empty level. On the human level one person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings - just as, in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet of paper) one square is one figure, and any two squares are

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[119] Descartes, "Letter to Arnauld, " 29 July, 1648, in Descartes Philosophical Letters, trans. and ed. by Anthony Kenny (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), p. 236.

two separate figures. On the Divine level you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine. In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube. Of course we cannot fully conceive a Being like that: just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube. But we can get a sort of faint notion of it.[120]

Now it seems clear that Lewis, in defending the cogency of the doctrine of the Trinity, appeals to areas outside of our epistemic access. When I refer to something as epistemically accessible, I mean that this is something we can know. Similarly, when I say something is epistemically inaccessible, I mean that this is something that is inscrutable–completely outside of the area of possible knowledge.[121]

 Lewis' appeal to areas outside of our epistemic access is seen in his assertion that because of our dimensional limitations we simply "cannot imagine" or "fully conceive a Being like that."

At this point, it will be helpful to clarify what it is I mean by epistemically accessible. Picture a traditional target with a bull's-eye. Taking the circumference of this target and multiplying it by the radius squared will provide the entire value of the target's surface area. Imagine that this finite surface area represents the entire range of possible knowledge; that is, it represents the entire field of everything that could ever possibly be known. The bull's-eye and the areas near it represent things we know very well and are, perhaps, very easily known. The closer we get to the outer edges of this target, the more difficult, nebulous, and complicated this knowledge becomes. Now, outside of this surface target area exists an infinite range of

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[120] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: Comprising the Case for Christianity, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 162.

[121] Robin Collins uses this sort of epistemic range in his article on Fine-tuning, see Robin Collins, "Fine-Tuning Arguments and the Problem of the Comparison Range," *Philosophia Christi* 7, no. 2 (2005).

knowledge that is impossible for us to know (at least in this lifetime). This means that things can be logically possible, like the existence of another universe where bananas grow on vines, but also completely inscrutable, meaning it is completely outside of our ability to conceive. This leads to the second point:

(2) The Trinity exceeds the limits of human conceivability.

As Lewis pointed out, our limitations are similar to what a two-dimensional being may experience when dealing with three-dimensional concepts. (P1) and (P2) then, culminate inevitably in the following claim:

(3) The Trinity is possible.

If it is merely possible that God's nature exceeds the absolute limits of human conceivability, then the Trinity may get a philosophical pass, insofar as we can accept all of its separate assertions as true without worrying how those assertions operate in unity. (2) is relatively uncontroversial from a LT perspective. (3) follows logically from the joint assertion of the two prior points. Indeed, the argument seems to hinge unilaterally upon (1). Subsequently, if it can be shown that we have at least some basis for believing (1), then it is hard to see why the Cartesian option for Trinitarian hypothesizing is not a valid alternative meta-theory to Anderson's model.

One could build a substantial and persuasive case by drawing upon the Sentience Quotient concept introduced in the late 1970s by Robert A. Freitas, Jr. Sentience Quotient (SQ) is a way of measuring the efficiency of an individual brain or computing force. One need only provide good reasons for demonstrating the possibility of a significant SQ disparity between an immaterial being not bound by physical limitations and human beings (who have a SQ of +13). If a disparity of such magnitude did exist, then we, earnestly wondering how God could be

triune, would not be relatively different than a plant wondering how to square the sum of two numbers.[122]

Another angle from which to approach the viability of Cartesian reasoning lies in the scientifically undisputed manifest problems associated with traumatic brain injury or mental disorders and deficiencies. While the inability to think abstractly can be caused by various conditions arising from damage to certain neural structures, there are some conditions that render it impossible for a person to conceive of certain concepts. For instance, Anosognosia is a condition that impedes a person's self-awareness, making it impossible for them to become aware of any disability they possess. If a person has a stroke and loses the ability to move some portion of his body, he may make any number of excuses for why he is not moving that portion. These excuses range from insisting that he does not want to move the affected parts to suggesting that the particular portion of his body is, in fact, not his body. This is not denial, a well-known psychological defense mechanism, but rather a full-fledged inability to become self-aware of a disability he or she possesses.[123] Consider, too, Dyscalculia, which some cognitive psychologists explain as a fundamental inability to conceive of numbers as abstract entities, which encumbers comprehension of even the most basic arithmetic.[124] Because of such a disorder, a person may be completely unable to discern which of two numbers is larger than the other.[125] This inability to

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[122] D.E. Haycock, *Being and Perceiving* (Manupod Press, 2011), 23-24.

[123] Wikipedia contributors, "Anosognosia." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anosognosia (Accessed August 10, 2013).

[124] S.D.R.A.I.N. de la Sante et de la Recherche Medicale, *The Number Sense : How the Mind Creates Mathematics: How the Mind Creates Mathematics* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1997), 140-141, 204-6.

[125] Wikipedia contributors, "Dyscalculia." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dyscalculia (Accessed August 10, 2013).

conceive does not mean that such tasks are impossible, even though it seems that way to the person experiencing it, but rather belies a fundamental cognitive deficiency with respect to the person attempting the comparison.

Therefore, the existence of Ansognosia, Dyscalculia, and other brain-related conditions in fact bolsters the Cartesian case. If there are documented and well-understood cases where human brains demonstrate an incapability of conceiving certain phenomena or of thinking abstractly (the most complex state of cognitive thinking), then certainly it could be possible that there is a global, all-encompassing human incapability of conceiving the full spectrum of possibility that governs God's Trinity. Moreover, it is possible that what we perceive as impossible may be the outcome of our inability to fathom higher order truths of the kind to which God would be privy.

By way of another analogy, let us tweak Lewis' dimensional example. Imagine that there exists a divine being known as Cube. Cube is a conscious geometrical shape who is omnipotent. Furthermore, imagine that Cube decides to do something incredible before you. Cube takes you and resolves to create a universe comprised of only two dimensions right before your eyes. So Cube speaks and out of nothing a two dimensional universe is created and populated with intelligent life. Within this universe, there is height and there is width but there is no depth. The universe that Cube has created does not represent the absolute boundaries of Cube but rather is comprised of the absolute boundaries of those who occupy it. But Cube is a benevolent creator who wishes to make himself known to the intelligent beings of his creation. So Cube communicates to them saying, "I am the one and only creator of all that you know." The beings of his creation are ecstatic and worship Cube, their creator. Cube does not wish to stop there, however. Indeed, he wishes to meet his creation. Cube tells his creation that, "I wish to come before you and reveal myself to you." But how could this be possible? How do you communicate

the geometric nature of a cube within a two dimensional plane? You cannot. In fact, according to the inhabitants of Cube's manufactured universe, it is logically impossible for any three-dimensional object to occupy only two dimensions. The inability to conceive of such a being as Cube, however, does not necessitate its nonexistence. Instead, Cube manifests himself in a way accessible to the inhabitants. Before the eyes of one creature, Cube touches just the point of one of his corners (vertex) to the two dimensional plane. Still again in front of another creature, Cube touches just his edge to the plane. Lastly, in view of yet another creature, Cube touches his plane surface on the two dimensional space.

As a result of this manifestation, one creature saw Cube a dot, while another perceived Cube as a line segment, and lastly, another experienced Cube as a square. The creatures began to dispute how Cube could possibly be these three different things yet still be only one Cube. On a two dimensional plane it is logically absurd, simply impossible, for Cube to be those three separate things and still be the one and only creator. Cube insists that "my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." But how does Cube explain that in addition to height and width he also has something called depth. Depth is so completely foreign and, as it happens, epistemically inaccessible to those who occupy only two dimensions that its utterance would be incomprehensible.

This picture demonstrates the practical utility of mystery when working to understand the nature of the being who created everything. It need only be logically possible that the created beings simply do not have access to the categories necessary to describe the complexity of Cube, their creator. Just as two dimensional beings would be bereft of categories to describe three dimensional complexities, so we too may lack categories sufficient for understanding the

complexity of God.[126] This analogy is not unlike Anderson's example, wherein occupants of a two dimensional Flatland grapple with the reality of a three dimensional cone. The idea that something can be both a circle and a triangle simultaneously would be inconceivable when operating within a framework that lacks depth. It is, therefore, perfectly logical for us to imagine circumstances where beings of limited epistemic capacity would conceive as logically impossible states of affairs that are actually possible given the introduction of some epistemically inaccessible reality. Ironically, Anderson's own analogy, similar to the Lewisian one, seems to allow for the possibility of God to actually transcend some of our cherished laws of thought.

In fact, this version of mystery is significantly different than the type that Anderson espouses. Anderson posits mystery on a semantic level, where there is some sort of semantic equivocation happening with one or more of the words used to discuss the Trinity. For instance, "is" or "one" or some other word used in the articulation of the Trinity carries some mysterious (unknown) denotation that allows for all the statements (1)-(10) to be true independently and without contradiction when jointly asserted. For Anderson, mystery takes place on the level governing our knowledge of the full semantic spectrum. The Cartesian mystery, on the other hand, allows for mystery to take place on the level governing our knowledge of even the most fundamental laws of thought. It literally challenges our ability to claim for ourselves an epistemic superiority that is capable of knowing, for certain (in the non-Cartesian sense), when something is impossible. Cartesian mystery does not state that we should believe that God is contradictory, but rather we should believe that it is possible for God to exceed the boundaries of

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[126] While Lewis' analogy seems to allow for the Cartesian option, Lewis would clearly not agree with the conclusions drawn from it here. In fact, in the *Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis says, "[God's] Omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible." Though it is hard to imagine how the reality of a three dimensional being occupying two dimensional space is not itself intrinsically impossible. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 18.

knowledge that ordinarily allow for us to determine contradictions. Consequently, the logical impossibilities we encounter because of some incumbent contradiction may result from the laws we use to form contradictions, which, in fact, represent an artificial limitation on what is actually possible.

This view does not escape criticism. For instance, some contradictions are so clear that it seems frankly awkward to think that the contradiction is not real but merely arises because we lack access to some crucial epistemic category. Plantinga would say that when one sentence is clearly denied by the next, we have little recourse to mystery because the contradiction is clear. Subsequently, contradictions that arise out of the present information and could not be said to be the result of too little information should be denied or clarified. And is not the Latin Trinity just one of these types of contradictions, where it is said that God is Three Gods and One God simultaneously? Does not the LT model affirm what it also denies?

I think that it does. But the Cartesian option allows the affirmation of contradictions of this sort. This is a philosophically uncomfortable position. Reflect, though, for a moment on Anderson's flatland analogy. Occupants of such a reality would be forced, in many respects, to affirm what is to them a logical impossibility. They would be asked to affirm the reality of two independent geometric shapes, circle and triangle, and then be asked to affirm a reality where both circle and triangle are, in fact, one geometrical entity. While the name of this ostensibly single geometry is labeled 'cone,' its label does nothing to change the fact that in two dimensions it is simply not possible for a circle and triangle to exist as one. So the phrase, "a cone is a circular shape and a triangular shape, but there are not two shapes but one," is an example, in flatland, of a phrase that affirms what it also denies. Given our vantage point, however, we know that through the introduction of depth, what is logically impossible given the epistemic

categories of the occupants of flatland, encounters no resistance in three dimensional reality. Therefore, it is not clear that we can simply deny LT variations because they affirm what they also deny when we have conceivable examples where the introduction of an important epistemic category eliminates the problem. The Cartesian option operates under a framework that affirms that what we conceive as possible and impossible, respectively, is based on what God has decided we should conceive as possible and impossible, and does not represent absolute limits.

Some may accuse the Cartesian option of producing a mystery pandemic, insofar as such open logical borders with respect to God eliminate human ability to theologize. For instance, the necessity of the redemption narrative becomes cumbersome to explain if we cannot omit the possibility of God's doing logically impossible things. Why did Jesus have to die? Why do all sin and fall short of the glory of God? The appeal to human freedom becomes less clear when we have no recourse to claim that God cannot do what we conceive as logically impossible.

I confess that such a criticism seems true. But it is not entirely clear that it should matter. The Bible seems universally concerned about faith and not our ability to comprehend the necessity of any given theological doctrine. In fact, if the authority of the biblical witness is enough to compel theologians to believe in the Trinity despite its epistemic difficulties, it is not clear why theologians should not adopt a similar stance with regard to the entirety of the biblical witness, where we see that redemption is necessary, regardless of whether or not we understand the reasoning behind it. This sort of Cartesian mystery is not a destruction of the utility of reason, but rather a sort of Babel toppling, where an attempt to reach for the heavens resulted in the realization that not everything can be known.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Where then does this leave us? The fuller points of the Trinity were born out of various

responses to Patripassianism and Sabellianism in the early 3rd century by Tertullian and

Hippolytus of Rome, who wrote *Against Praxeas* and *Against Noetus*, respectively. These early

expository treatments of Trinitarian theology began the historical process of well-articulated

Trinitarian theorizing, where writings against Monarchianism and Modalism continued to

explore and express Trinitarian theology. Over the years of early Trinitarian theorizing, many

Trinitarian statements became commonplace and accepted as biblically sound. These statements

took authoritative expression in the edicts of the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 and even fuller

expression in the later Athanasian Creed. The premises in the introduction (1)–(10) are taken as

the Trinitarian statements widely accepted by most theologians. These premises again are:

(1) God is divine.
(2) The Father of Jesus Christ is divine.
(3) The Son, Jesus Christ, is divine.
(4) The Holy Spirit is divine.
(5a) These three are numerically distinct: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
(6) Whatever is divine is identical to at least one of these: the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.
(7) The Father of Jesus Christ is identical to God.
(8) The Son, Jesus Christ, is identical to God.
(9) The Holy Spirit is identical to God.
(10) There is one divine being.

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What this paper has demonstrated is that modern attempts to analytically dissect the Trinity fail on fundamental levels of biblical inaccuracy and logical inconsistency. Those in the LT camp, the more traditional approach to the Trinity, have failed to create a cogent case for the Trinity that does not run afoul with the traditional laws of thought. For how could the Son and the Father be the same God but not the same person? This contradiction has led many in the LT camp to fudge identity, saying there must be something called relative identity, whereby absolute identity does not exist. Instead, any entity A may be the same as B relative to C.

Such relative identity theories have only replaced one mystery with another, however, inasmuch as it is not at all clear, or even intelligible, how relative identity could possibly replace absolute identity. Moreover, the examples that LT adherents do use, like Michelangelo's *David* sculpture, where relative identity can be established between the statue and the marble, offer conceptual differences only, not ontological ones. That is to say a statue is really not anything at all, it is only a conceptual understanding regarding the shape of something else.

More uniquely, Leftow sought to clarify an LT doctrine of the Trinity by analogy of three time traveling dancers. If it is logically possible for one being to travel back twice to the same moment, there could theoretically be three instantiations of the same entity. These instantiations would share the same "trope" of divinity, but would still be separate and distinct persons (at least now). Leftow recognized the philosophical shortcomings of time travel proper and thus suggested that it need only be logically possible (not physically possible) because God is not bound by the limitations of current physics. Leftow sought to show why the following argument is invalid:

1. The Father = God
2. The Son = God
3. God = God
4. The Father = The Son

The problem, of course, is that 1-3 are demanded by orthodoxy but 4, implied by 1-3, is

necessarily unorthodox. Consequently, Leftow essentially changed 1-3 to be something other

than absolute identity statements (though he did not state this). Instead, he posited,

> [I]t is because God always lives His life in three discrete strands at once, no event
> of His life occurring in more than one strand and no strand succeeding another. In
> one strand, God lives the Father's life, in one the Son's, and in one the Spirit's.
> The events of each strand add up to the life of a Person. The lives of the Persons
> add up to the life God lives as the three Persons. There is one God, but He is
> many in the events of His life.[127]

In the argument that Leftow sought to invalidate, cited earlier, he has actually modified 1-2 to
state that

1'. The Father is God living fatherly in one strand of life
2'. The Son is God living sonishly in another strand of life

The issue here is that it suffers from a Modalistic problem. These distinctions are not substantive

but only adjectival, meaning that these separate strands of God's life are not properly persons but

are simply events or modes of God.

An inability to make clear substantive Trinitarian distinctions while staying within the

confines of logic has caused many theologians and philosophers to take a different avenue. The

ST route, where God is explained primarily as three before one, describes the persons of the

Trinity as unique individuated self-consciousnesses who are bound into unity by something

similar to a family. Plantinga is notable for first giving this view full explication, when he

compares the ST view with the LT view (traditional catholic view) and Barth's Modalism.

Plantinga suggests that we are compelled by threat of incoherence to accept that the

Athanasian Creed is utilizing the same word "God" to mean two different things. When the

author of the creed says, "[(14)] So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is

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[127] Leftow, "A Latin Trinity," 312.

God. [(15)] And yet they are not three Gods; but one God," he must be employing "God" in a different sense in (14) than he is in (15). Though this approach strains credulity, it is ostensibly a better alternative than incoherency.

In another attempt to defend the ST view, Craig and Moreland look at the mythical Cerberus and Bicephalic animals as a way of drawing a ST analogy. They argue that there are examples where a single individuated being is comprised of two separate and distinct consciousnesses. Similarly, God could be one divine substance and yet comprised of three self-consciousnesses.

It has been convincingly argued, however, that the ST view has several significant problems. For instance, Leftow argued that this theory effects a sort of diminishing divinity, whereby the individual persons of the Trinity are only quasi-divine, inasmuch as the fullness of divinity is only truly expressed when all three together comprise the Trinity. Similarly, just as Plantinga criticized Barth's theory on account of modes of being not being able to exist in loving relationship with each other, it is hard to see how this theory escapes similar shortcomings. Given that nothing is identical to one of its parts, and based on the fact that the Trinity is composed of three separate and distinct parts (or persons), we must then be committed to (5b), that is, the belief that God is numerically distinct from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, we have a quaternity. The alternative would be to downgrade the claim and maintain that God is merely the name of the Trinity composition. But, as Tuggy argued, what is not a person is not divine. And what is not divine is not God.

The varied attempts to construct a Trinity theory that is not laden with significant biblical or rational pitfalls are, at present, unsatisfactory, or as Tuggy maintained, unfinished. The alternative is to embrace again the position of mystery with which our forebears seemed

perfectly content. In his own reworking of a mystery hypothesis, Anderson claimed that mystery cannot account for contradiction, inasmuch as the contradiction is merely apparent, arising from some unarticulated equivocation. Thus, mystery is precisely the unarticulated. We do not know precisely where equivocation takes place along the semantic way, so to speak, but experience grants us the recourse to suggest that it is possible for us to lack the ability to conceive the full expression of God's revealed nature. This approach is analogous to falling asleep during a lecture and waking only find that the two sections heard seem contradictory.

This paper has suggested that Anderson's approach works, but this paper also suggested that the application of mystery can be taken further. The Cartesian alternative makes the modest claim that it is possible that God exists in a way that defies our epistemic range. Descartes believed that God could bring about a state of affairs that, to us, seems contradictory. We may plant our feet in the philosophical ground and claim, as Plantinga does, that the dignified title of mystery is ill placed, as it is really just a nonsensical mess. Nonetheless, readily apparent and verifiable examples of ailments that impede human ability to conceive of logically possible things do exist, why would we assume that it is not possible for a similar phenomenon to affect all of humanity? That is to say, what would drive us to conclude that it is not possible for God to exceed the absolute limits of our imagination? God's complexity may exceed conceivability. Certainly no one ever claimed that Christianity was not a bit messy. Furthermore, if we have no problems understanding how and why a two-dimensional intelligent being would have trouble comprehending the complexities of three-dimensional space, why would we believe ourselves so privileged as to be fully capable of knowing the ways of God? For it was God himself who said, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." [128]

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[128] 2 Cort. 1:19 (NASB).

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