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VOLUME I
Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement

EDITED BY
Michael Rea

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VOLUME 1

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Volume 1

Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement

Edited by
MICHAEL REA

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For Aaron

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Introduction*

Over the past sixty years, within the so-called analytic tradition of philosophy, there has been a significant revival of interest in the philosophy of religion. Various factors have contributed to this revival.¹ One of the most important has been the wane of logical empiricism and the corresponding growth and flourishing of speculative metaphysics that has taken place over roughly the same period of time. The wane of logical empiricism made room for more serious exploration of the epistemology of religious belief; the growth of speculative metaphysics made room for more serious theorizing about the nature of God and about the coherence of and systematic relations among various theological doctrines. Whereas non-analytic philosophy has largely pushed theological reflection in an apophatic direction,² recent analytic philosophy has witnessed a great deal of substantive theoretical work on the epistemology of religious belief, on the metaphysical underpinnings of various traditional religious doctrines, and a lot else besides.

The development of contemporary philosophy of religion has in some ways resembled the development of twentieth-century philosophy of science. Earlier works in the latter field tended to focus on questions about the nature of science, theory choice, laws of nature, and the like—questions that could be answered without much specialized knowledge of particular sciences and that pertained more or less to all of them. Later work became progressively more interdisciplinary. We now have interdisciplinary sub-disciplines, like the philosophy of physics—areas of inquiry which take as their focus concepts, theories, and

* I would like to thank the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at the University of Notre Dame for financial support that assisted in the production of this volume. I am also grateful to Luke Potter for helping me to assemble the manuscript and secure the permissions. Portions of this essay overlap parts of my paper, 'The Trinity', in Thomas P. Flint and Michael Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), and also parts of chapter 3 of Michael Murray and Michael Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). I am grateful for those publishers for permission to use the material.

¹ For discussion of some of the most important factors, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'How Philosophical Theology became Possible within the Analytic Tradition of Philosophy', in Oliver D. Crisp and Michael Rea (eds.), *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

² On this, see e.g. the introduction and the essays by Sarah Coakley and Nicholas Wolterstorff in Crisp and Rea (eds.), *Analytic Theology*.

problems in *particular* sciences rather than in the sciences in general. Likewise, in the early days of the revival of philosophy of religion, there was an overwhelming tendency to focus on topics about religion (or about theism) in general that could be addressed with little or no special theological background. The main issues pertained to the rationality of religious belief, particular arguments for and against the existence of God, the possibility of religious discourse, and the coherence and compossibility of traditional divine attributes. In more recent years, however, philosophers of religion have turned in a more self-consciously interdisciplinary direction, focusing (for the most part) on topics that have traditionally been the provenance of systematic theologians in the Christian tradition.

Notably, philosophers of science very shortly saw the value of branching into a variety of interdisciplinary endeavours. Thus, we have not just philosophy of *physics*, but philosophy of *biology*, philosophy of *chemistry*, and so on. So too, many of us hope that philosophers of religion will branch more consciously and in greater numbers into *Jewish* philosophical theology, *Islamic* philosophical theology, and other such fields. But for now, the primary interdisciplinary sub-field of analytic philosophy of religion has been Christian philosophical theology.

For purposes of these two volumes, I have selected six topics in philosophical theology to represent the field—four that have occupied a very prominent place in the literature, and two that are of vital importance but which have been comparatively and curiously neglected. The first four topics are the doctrine of the trinity, the doctrine of the incarnation, divine providence, and the resurrection of the dead. The remaining two topics are the doctrine of the atonement and divine revelation and the inspiration of scripture. The topics of providence, resurrection, and scripture arise in all three of the major theistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For this reason, they are introduced and discussed together in Volume II. The topics of trinity, incarnation, and atonement arise exclusively in Christian philosophical theology (since they all pertain centrally to the person and work of Jesus). These are treated together in the present volume and introduced, in turn, in each of the remaining three sections of this essay.

I. TRINITY

The doctrine of the trinity maintains that God exists in three persons. The doctrine is not found explicitly in the Bible. Rather, it has been inferred from biblical claims and formulated as official doctrine in various Christian creeds and confessions.³ The earliest creedal formulations of the doctrine—in the Creed of

³ For a useful discussion of the biblical support for the doctrine, see Gerald O'Collins, SJ, *The Tripersonal God* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999).

Nicaea (325), the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (380/1), and the Athanasian Creed (c.500) tell us in a limited way what it is for God to exist in three persons; but problems still remain.

The limited characterization we have is this: In God, there are three *genuinely distinct* persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The persons are not to be viewed as mere *manifestations* or *aspects* of a single substance; rather, each is a substance, and is *consubstantial* with the Father.⁴ To say that the persons are consubstantial is *at least* to say that they share a common nature. Whatever else it means, then, it means that all three persons are equally divine: no one is superior to or any more divine than any of the others. Thus, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct divine beings. *And yet*, says the Athanasian Creed, *they are not three gods, but there is one god.*⁵

In light of all this, the doctrine of the trinity may fruitfully be viewed as the conjunction of three theses, along with some constraints. The theses are T1–T3:

(T1) There is exactly one god.⁶

(T2) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not identical to one another.

(T3) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are consubstantial.⁷

The (primary) constraints are that T1–T3 are to be interpreted in such a way as to avoid the following three errors, or heresies: *modalism* (the view that the persons are mere manifestations or aspects of something), *subordinationism* (the view that the divinity of one or more is subordinate to that of another), and

⁴ The consubstantiality of the Son with the Father is explicit in the creeds of produced by the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and the First Constantinopolitan Council in 380/1. (It is the latter creed that is nowadays usually referred to by the label ‘the Nicene Creed’.) The consubstantiality of the Spirit with the Father is affirmed in the Synodical Letter of the First Constantinopolitan Council. The Greek term, which appears in a lot of the relevant literature, is *homoousion* (ὁμοούσιον).

⁵ This translation is from the essay by Brower and Rea, Chapter 6 in this volume, but with the capitalizations removed from the word ‘god’. I have done this to make it clear that ‘god’ in this context functions not as a name but rather as a kind-term. It’s a rather weak monotheism to say ‘There is exactly one God’, with ‘God’ functioning as a name. For, after all, *that* claim is consistent with the claim that there is exactly one Zeus and with the claim that there are gods superior to God.

⁶ As indicated in note 5, I think that what is essential to the doctrine of the trinity is not the claim that there is exactly one bearer of the *name* ‘God’, but rather that there is exactly one substance of the *kind* god. So, to avoid various confusions, I’ll restrict the capitalized ‘God’ for proper-name uses. I do this for the sake of convenience here, not on principle. (Elsewhere I have been happy to mark the relevant distinctions and so on in other ways.)

⁷ It is more common nowadays to claim that the central tenets of the doctrine are these three: (i) there is exactly one God; (ii) the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Father is not the Spirit; and (iii) the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. This way of characterizing the doctrine more closely follows the Athanasian Creed. But the language of (iii) is less clear than the language of T3 above (due to the fact that the predicate ‘is God’ can be, and has been, assigned a variety of different meanings). Just as importantly, this formulation obscures the centrality of the notion of *consubstantiality* in the doctrine—the very notion that lay at the centre of some of the most important controversies surrounding the First Nicene Council. My own formulation of the doctrine is more in accord with formulations found, for example, in the systematic theologies of Louis Berkhof and Charles Hodge.

polytheism (the view that it is not the case that there is exactly one god). This is the heart of the doctrine of the trinity.

But problems linger. The most notable problem, and the one that has dominated the attention of contemporary philosophers, is the apparent threat of contradiction. (Thus it is usually called the *logical problem of the trinity*.) There are various ways of trying to demonstrate the inconsistency. The one I favour focuses on the fact that two divine beings who are *consubstantial* are identical with respect to their divinity (so that neither is any more or less of a god than the other). Thus:

- (1) There is exactly one god, the Father Almighty. (From T1)
 - (2) The Father is a god. (From 1)
 - (3) The Son is consubstantial with the Father but not identical to the Father. (From T2 and T3)
 - (4) If there are x and y such that x is a god, x is not identical to y , and y is consubstantial with x , then it is not the case that there is exactly one god. (Premise)
 - (5) Therefore: It is not the case that there is exactly one god. (From 2, 3, 4)
- ***Contradiction

The only way out of the contradiction is either to give up one of the tenets of the doctrine of the trinity or to give up Premise 4.

Most philosophers working on this problem have tried to solve it in one (or a combination) of the following three ways: (i) by offering a *model* or *analogy* that helps us to see how it might be coherent to say that there is one god but three divine persons, (ii) by offering an account of what it means to say 'there is exactly one god' that doesn't imply that all divine beings are the same god, or (iii) by defending a view according to which numerically distinct beings might nonetheless *be* the same god. The models are heuristic devices aimed at making the doctrine intelligible. They solve the problem, however, only if they help us to see our way clear to rejecting Premise 4. Strategies (ii) and (iii) are more directly aimed at that task. In particular, each is aimed at helping us to see how the following claim might be coherent:

CLAIM: There are three divine beings but there is exactly one god.

If 'there is exactly one god' doesn't imply that all gods are the same divine being, then 'there is exactly one god' doesn't imply that there is exactly one divine being, and so CLAIM is unproblematic. Likewise, if distinct beings can be the same god, then it might be that there are three divine beings who nevertheless count as one god. Hence, again, CLAIM is unproblematic. And if CLAIM is true, then Premise 4 is false.

Until recently, it has been common in the literature to try to force solutions to the problem of the trinity into one of two camps: Social Trinitarianism (ST) and Latin Trinitarianism (LT). Supposedly, ST represents a way of thinking about the

trinity that has its roots in the Eastern Church, most notably in the work of the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa, his brother Basil of Caesarea, and their friend Gregory Nazianzen). LT, on the other hand, is supposed to be a substantially different way of thinking about the trinity which has its roots in the Western Church and is paradigmatically exemplified in the work of Augustine and Aquinas. According to the common lore, ST takes the threeness of the persons as given and tries to explain their unity, whereas LT takes the unity of God as given and tries to explain the threeness of the persons. Accordingly, social trinitarians are commonly charged with erring on the side of polytheism whereas Latin trinitarians are often accused of slipping into modalism.

Note, however, that the difference between ST and LT is not at all obviously the same as the difference between strategies (ii) and (iii) mentioned above. Nor is it clear what exactly it means to take either the threeness of the persons or the unity of God 'as given' and to try to explain the other (while somehow not also explaining what one allegedly takes as given). This should make us suspicious of the utility of this standard way of dividing the literature. Moreover, the LT/ST classificatory scheme has recently come under heavy attack for historical reasons as well.⁸

That said, though, much of the most important contemporary literature presupposes the standard ST/LT classificatory scheme. In terms of that scheme, the essays in Part I by J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig and by Peter Forrest exemplify the ST approach whereas the essay by Brian Leftow exemplifies the LT approach. The essay by Peter van Inwagen seems to me to transcend the LT/ST categories. Richard Cross's paper offers some of the historical reasons for thinking that the LT/ST classificatory scheme ought simply to be rejected; and the paper by Jeffrey Brower and myself presents a view roughly in line with van Inwagen's which is fleshed out in a way that I think is well in keeping with models offered by the most prominent fourth- and fifth-century writers on the doctrine of the trinity (including both Augustine and Cappadocian Fathers).⁹

Elsewhere, I have suggested that contemporary social trinitarianism is committed to the following central tenets:

⁸ See esp. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Michel René Barnes, 'Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology', *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 237–50, and 'De Regnon Reconsidered', *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51–80.

⁹ For further details on the contemporary literature, see Michael Rea, 'The Trinity', in Flint and Rea (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*. For an excellent and thorough overview of the 4th-cent. controversies over the doctrine, see Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*. Useful collections on the doctrine of the trinity include Stephen T. Davis et al. (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Thomas McCall and Michael Rea (eds.), *These Three are One: Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

1. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not numerically the same substance. Rather, the persons of the trinity are consubstantial only in the sense that they share a common nature; and the sharing is to be understood straightforwardly on analogy with the way in which three human beings share a common nature.
2. Monotheism does not imply that there is exactly one divine substance. Rather, it implies at most only that *all divine substances*—all gods, in the ordinary sense of the term ‘god’—stand in some particular relation R to one another, a relation other than *being the same divine substance*.
3. The persons of the trinity stand to one another in the relation R that is required for monotheism to be true.

Different versions of ST might then be distinguished in accord with differences over what relation R amounts to.

There are many candidates in the literature for being monotheism-securing relations, but the most popular are the following:

- (a) Being parts of a whole that is itself divine.
- (b) Being the only members of the only divine kind.
- (c) Being the only members of the community that rules the cosmos.
- (d) Being the only members of a divine family.
- (e) Being necessarily mutually interdependent, so that none can exist without the others.
- (f) Enjoying perfect love and harmony of will with one another, unlike the members of pagan pantheons.

Most social trinitarians in fact opt for a combination of these, and most (but not all) of the combinations include at least (a), (b), and (c).¹⁰ William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland focus primarily on (a). On their view, God is composed of the divine persons in a sense analogous to the way in which the three-headed dog Cerberus, guardian of the underworld in Greek mythology, might be thought to be composed of three ‘centers of consciousness’. On their view, the three conscious parts of Cerberus are not *dogs*; there is only one full-fledged dog—Cerberus. But the centres of consciousness are canine, just as any other part of Cerberus is (derivatively) canine. One dog, then; three derivatively canine individuals. Likewise in the trinity: one full-fledged god; three derivatively divine individuals. Monotheism is thus secured by the fact that the persons are parts of a single fully divine being.

¹⁰ See, for starters, Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985); and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., ‘Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity’, *Thomist* 50 (1986): 25–352; ‘The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity’, *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 37–53; and ‘Social Trinity and Tritheism’, pp. 21–47 in Ronald Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). Additional references may be found in the essays that follow.

Peter Forrest, on the other hand, develops a model according to which the persons are ‘quasi-individuals’ who are the products of divine fission. To say that they are quasi-individuals is to say (i) that they lack individuating properties, and so (ii) there is a unique *lowest* correct answer to the question ‘how many are they?’ but no unique *correct* answer. To get a handle on what this means, consider a world about which we may correctly say ‘there is nothing in the world except for two perfectly indiscernible spheres’. If the spheres are perfectly indiscernible, then they have no individuating properties (no ‘thisness’). But if they have no individuating properties, then, really, there is *no fact of the matter* how many spheres there are. It is appropriate to say that there are two; but one might just as well say that there is one (presumably bi-located) sphere. Likewise, he thinks, one might also correctly say that there are three, or four, or however many you like. There is, therefore, no correct answer to the question of how many spheres there are, but (since there is *at least* one sphere) there is a *lowest* correct answer. He then suggests applying this metaphysic to the trinity: The lowest correct answer to the question ‘How many (primordial, pre-fission) gods are there?’ is *one*; but, due to divine fission, the lowest correct answer to the question ‘How many divine persons are there?’ is *three*. Much of the paper is devoted to arguing that this way of thinking of things provides a model of the trinity that preserves a great deal of what we (adherents of orthodoxy) want to say about the trinity.

Pursuing a related idea, Brian Leftow argues that the persons of the trinity might be thought of on analogy with a time traveller who appears thrice located at a single time.¹¹ Toward developing his model, Leftow offers us the example of Jane, a Rockette who is scheduled to dance in a chorus line but, at the last minute, discovers that two of her partners have failed to show up. Jane goes on stage and dances her part, then later enters a time machine (twice) so that she can (twice) go on stage with herself and dance the leftmost and rightmost parts as well. According to Leftow, there is a very clear sense in which Jane’s part of the chorus line contains three of something; and yet there is just one substance (Jane) in that part. Likewise in the case of God. The three persons are analogous to the three simultaneously existing ‘segments’ of Jane’s life. According to Leftow, ‘[e]ach Rockette is Jane. But in these many events, Jane is there many times over.’ And, apparently, what we say about Jane and the three Rockettes is also to be said about God and the three divine persons.

The papers by van Inwagen and by Jeffrey Brower and myself aim to solve the problem in a very different way: by explicitly pursuing strategy (iii) above. Pursuing strategy (iii) is a matter of trying to show that distinct beings might nonetheless count as *the same god*. How would one do this? The most

¹¹ I say that Leftow’s idea is related to Forrest’s because I think that there is an interesting resemblance between divine fission as Forrest characterizes it and the sort of splitting into three ‘life events’ that Leftow seems to have in mind. Whether the similarities should call into question Forrest’s characterization of his own view as a form of ST, or Leftow’s characterization of his view as LT, is an interesting further question.

straightforward way is to endorse the doctrine of *relative identity*. There is a weak version of this doctrine, and a strong version. The weak version says:

- (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 .

The strong version is just the weak version plus (RI2):

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

RI2 is not needed for solving the problem of the trinity; but some philosophers—notably, Peter Geach—endorse it for other reasons, and it serves as independent motivation for RI1.¹²

Defenders of the relative identity solution have mostly occupied themselves with working out the *logic* of relative identity in an effort to show that the doctrine of relative identity itself is coherent, and to show that the doctrine of the trinity can be stated in a way that is *provably* consistent given the assumption of relative identity. The most important paper of this sort is Peter van Inwagen's (highly technical) 'And Yet They Are Not Three Gods, But One God'.¹³ The paper included in this volume is a shortened and somewhat simplified presentation of the same line of reasoning.

RI2 in particular is widely rejected as implausible; and I have argued elsewhere that invoking it in a solution to the problem of the trinity implies that the difference between the persons is theory-dependent, and so merely conceptual.¹⁴ But without RI2, RI1 is (at first glance, anyway) unintelligible. The reason is simple: sameness statements are naturally interpreted as identity statements. So, the claim that ' x and y are the same F ' seems logically equivalent to the claim that ' x is an F , y is an F , and $x = y$ '. RI1 is inconsistent with this analysis of sameness statements. But on its own, it doesn't supply any *replacement* for that analysis. Thus, it renders sameness claims utterly mysterious. Appealing to RI1 without a supplemental story as a way of solving the problem of the trinity, then, simply replaces one mystery with another. That is hardly progress.

The paper by Jeffrey Brower and myself supplies the relevant supplemental story: a story according to which, in short, to say that x and y are the same god is just to say that x and y do something analogous to sharing all of the same matter in common. At the heart of our view is the idea that the divine persons are to be thought of on the model of Aristotelian matter-form compounds. Their constituents are a shared divine nature which plays the role of matter and a

¹² See e.g. Peter Geach, 'Identity', *Review of Metaphysics* 21 (1967): 3–12, and *Reference and Generality*, 3rd edn. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), secs. 30, 34, and 110.

¹³ pp. 241–78 in Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

¹⁴ 'Relative Identity and the Doctrine of the Trinity', *Philosophia Christi* 5 (2003): 431–46.

person-defining property (like *being the Son*, or *being Begotten*) that plays the role of form. Thought of this way, however, our view is quite similar to the view that Richard Cross identifies as the fundamental point of agreement between Eastern and Western views of the trinity. According to Cross, East and West agreed that (a) the divine nature is a property, and (b) that one and the same divine nature is a constituent of each of the divine persons—i.e., it is the point at which they *overlap*. If this is correct, then the view that we defend has some claim to being a development of a way of thinking about the trinity that was held in common by the most important fourth- and fifth-century defenders of Nicene orthodoxy in both the East and the West.¹⁵

II. INCARNATION

According to the doctrine of the incarnation, Jesus of Nazareth is the Second Person of the trinity in human flesh. The idea, however, isn't just that the Son took on a body. Rather, according to the Chalcedonian Definition (451) which lays down what is generally regarded as the 'official' characterization of the doctrine, the Son took on a human *nature*. Jesus of Nazareth, then, was one person with two natures.¹⁶ He was consubstantial with the Father with respect to his divinity, and consubstantial with us with respect to his humanity. But what could possibly lead someone *rationally* to think that a 30-something-year-old Palestinian man, born to a local carpenter and raised in a town of little import was none other than the Lord of the Cosmos in human flesh? And what could it possibly mean to say that someone is God incarnate, possessed of two natures? These are some of the main questions that philosophers have taken up with respect to the doctrine of the incarnation, and the essays in Part II of this volume touch on both of them.¹⁷

One of the main arguments in support of the rationality of belief in the doctrine of the incarnation is the so-called 'Mad, Bad, or God' argument. This argument was first formulated in the seventeenth century by Blaise Pascal as an argument for the conclusion that the testimony of the Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) is reliable. It was more recently popularized in the 1950s

¹⁵ See my 'The Trinity' for details.

¹⁶ Chalcedon wasn't quite the final word, however. Later councils added further clarifications. Most notably, the Third Council of Constantinople (680/1) added that Jesus had *two wills*—the divine will and a human will.

¹⁷ For a start into the literature, see Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Richard Cross, 'The Incarnation', in Flint and Rea (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*; S. T. Davis et al., *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); C. Stephen Evans (ed.), *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

by C. S. Lewis. It is presented and defended here in the essay by Stephen T. Davis.

The argument starts with the premise that Jesus claimed, at least implicitly, to be divine. Virtually none of the sayings of Jesus in the New Testament strike modern readers as perfectly explicit, outright claims to divinity. For example, one never finds Jesus saying to his followers anything so comfortingly clear as this:

Listen, Peter, John, and the rest of you: I am God incarnate. I am fully, one hundred percent divine, and so I have all of the attributes of divinity, including aseity, omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness. Like the Father, I am uncreated—saying that I am ‘begotten, not made’ would be a very good way of expressing it. And I am as much to be worshipped as the other two persons of the trinity, the Father and the Spirit.

What we do find is a lot more open to interpretation. In response to the high priest’s demand to ‘tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God,’ Jesus answered, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’¹⁸ But what does *Son of Man* mean? And must one be *divine* to be the ‘Christ’ (literally, the *anointed*), the ‘Son’ of God? Likewise, Jesus is reported to have said, ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’¹⁹ That looks like a claim to divinity; but, unfortunately, it looks as much like a claim to *identity with the Father*, which orthodox trinitarianism rejects. And so on. The essay by Craig Evans explores some of the reasons for thinking that Jesus really *did* claim to be divine.

Suppose we grant that Jesus claimed, at least implicitly, to be divine. The ‘Mad, Bad, or God’ argument then offers a trilemma: The claim to divinity must be either true or false and, if it is false, it must be a claim that Jesus either knew to be false or didn’t know to be false. If Jesus knowingly falsely claimed to be divine, then he was (by definition) a liar. On the other hand, if he unwittingly falsely claimed to be divine, then he was crazy. Remarkably few people, however, want to say that Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic—and this not just because doing so would be politically incorrect. The influence of Jesus’ teachings on Western intellectual history has been enormous. Hundreds of millions of people have found peace, sanity, and virtue in orienting their lives around his teachings. Even those who do not worship him as God incarnate nevertheless often regard him as a sage or a saint. It is, in short, hard to believe that his teachings were the products of the mind of a man so fundamentally confused and egomaniacal as to think (presumably in the face of *constant* evidence to the contrary) that he was the all-powerful, omnipresent, eternal, and perfectly good creator of the universe. Likewise, it is hard to believe that they were the teachings of a man wicked

¹⁸ Matthew 26: 63–4, *New Revised Standard Version*, Copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. (All Bible quotations herein are from this text.)

¹⁹ John 14: 9.

enough deliberately to deceive others into thinking that he was divine. If Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic, though—so the argument goes—then there is only one alternative left: his claim to divinity was true.

Despite a certain measure of surface plausibility, however, there are various objections one might raise—many of which *are* raised in the essay by Daniel Howard-Snyder. For Howard-Snyder, the main problem with the argument lies in the supposition that if Jesus unwittingly falsely claimed to be divine, then he was a lunatic. One apparently overlooked possibility, he argues, is that Jesus might have been sincerely mistaken. Much of the essay is taken up with the effort to show that this suggestion is not as implausible as it might initially seem.

The remaining essays in Part II take up questions about the metaphysics of the incarnation. The doctrine maintains that Jesus of Nazareth possessed both a divine nature and a human nature. But we have evidence from scripture that Jesus *lacked* some of the traditional attributes of divinity, which seems to count against his having a divine nature. For example, the Gospel of Luke (2: 52) reports that Jesus ‘grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and men’. But nothing can grow in wisdom without at some time lacking complete wisdom. An omniscient being cannot lack complete wisdom, however; for an omniscient being would always know what the wisest course of action would be in any circumstance. (That is, he would know every truth of the form ‘The wisest course of action in this circumstance . . . is to behave as follows . . .’.) Thus, if Jesus grew in wisdom he was not omniscient. Likewise, the Gospel of Matthew has Jesus reporting lack of knowledge of the day and the hour of his own second coming. You might think that he lacks this knowledge just because the day and the hour are not yet decided—the facts about when Jesus will return are somehow indeterminate. But this response is ruled out by Jesus’ claim in the same passage that ‘only the Father knows’ when the second coming will occur (which, of course, implies that there *is* a determinate fact of the matter). So again, there is reason to doubt that Jesus is omniscient.

Moreover, the Gospels, as well as the Epistle to the Hebrews, report that Jesus was tempted to sin. But one cannot be tempted to do that which one has no desire to do. Thus, for example, it would be literally impossible (apart from outright deception) to tempt a severely claustrophobic person to allow herself to be buried alive. Whatever cajoling you might do to try to persuade the person to submit to such a thing, it couldn’t really be called *temptation*. And, though it is not sin simply to *desire* sinful behaviours, it does seem to be a moral defect. A person who desires to torture small children but refrains is surely better than a person who gives in to the desire. But it would be better still not even to have the desire in the first place; and if we found out that one of our friends had such a desire, we would be appalled. Plausibly, then, a morally perfect being cannot desire to sin. But if such a being cannot desire to sin, then such a being cannot be tempted to sin. But Jesus was tempted to sin. Thus, it would appear that he lacked moral perfection.

In light of these considerations, there seems, at least initially, to be good reason for thinking that the Bible says things that imply that Jesus lacked some important divine attributes. But then it is puzzling, to say the least, how he could have been fully divine. There are various strategies for handling this problem. The final three essays in Part II present three of the most important ones.

One strategy—considered and rejected in the essay by Thomas Morris, but defended in the essay by Peter Forrest—involves appeal to the doctrine of *kenosis*. The term ‘kenosis’ comes from the Greek verb *hekenosen*, (ἐκένωσεν) which is translated ‘emptied’ in the following passage from St Paul’s epistle to the Philippians:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.²⁰

Kenotic theories of the incarnation say that the Word either *abandoned* some of the traditional attributes of divinity when he became incarnate or at least *simulated* their abandonment by imposing certain restraints upon himself.

Saying that the Word abandoned some of the traditional attributes of divinity upon becoming incarnate just raises, rather than answers, the question we are trying to answer—namely, the question of how he can be divine if he lacks some of the traditional attributes of divinity. The answer given by kenoticists, though, is simple: Not all of the traditional attributes of divinity are *necessary* for divinity. This sort of claim is a hard sell to theists (and there are many of them) who accept a *perfect-being* conception of divinity; for, if being divine is fundamentally a matter of being perfect in every respect, there seems to be no room for the claim that traditional attributes like omnipotence and omniscience are unnecessary for divinity. Various strategies for making sense of the kenoticist’s central claim are explored in the essays by Morris and Forrest. In the end, Forrest recommends abandoning the perfect-being conception of divinity in favour of one more thoroughly kenotic.

An alternative route, discussed in the essay by Adams and defended in the essay by Morris is to try to accommodate the problematic passages mentioned above by saying that the Incarnate Christ had a *divided mind*. On Morris’s view, just as Jesus had two natures, so too he had two distinct ranges of consciousness: one human, non-omniscient, susceptible to temptation, and so on; the other divine, omniscient, impervious to temptation, and the like. The human range of consciousness grew in wisdom; the divine didn’t. And, according to Morris, the two ‘minds’ of Christ stood in an ‘asymmetric accessing relation’: the divine mind had full, unrestricted access to the human mind, but not vice versa. Thus, the *incarnation* was in part a decision on the part of the Second Person of the trinity to live out his life from the ‘perspective’ of the human mind rather than the

²⁰ Philippians 2: 5–7.

divine mind; and so in this way, he *experienced* the limitations that go along with being human, despite (by virtue of having a divine mind as well) being in fact unlimited in those ways.

Adams is content with Morris's view, but she also presents a third way of treating the metaphysics of the incarnation. This third way involves making distinctions among the *ways* in which the two natures are possessed. Christ's divine nature is possessed essentially. His human nature isn't. As I understand it, the view she presents (and attributes to Ockham and Scotus, among others) is that this difference in modes of possession allows us to say that certain properties Christ has as a result of his human activities aren't exactly the ones that an ordinary human would have as a result of the same sorts of activities. For example, an ordinary human growing in wisdom would have the property *growing in wisdom*, and having this would entail that she is non-omniscient. When Christ grows in wisdom, however, he has the property *growing-in-wisdom-qua-human*, which (on the view in question) doesn't entail that Christ is *non-omniscient*.

There is a real challenge here in understanding why *growing-in-wisdom-qua-human* shouldn't imply being non-omniscient. After all, we want to say that it is closely and intelligibly related to growing in wisdom *simpliciter*. But if it is, then one would think it should carry roughly the same entailments. But perhaps we can make some progress by considering a rather different pair of cases. First: Fred loves Wilma. But right now, Fred is sleeping, so he isn't actively or occurrently loving anybody. Still, it seems wrong to say, unqualifiedly, that Fred lacks the property *loving Wilma*. Perhaps, then, we can say that, though Fred really does have the property *loving Wilma*, he lacks that property *qua sleeper*. Second: Suppose Fred has temporarily been transformed into a frog and, accordingly, is incapable of any mental state rising to the level of love. If it is wrong to say that sleeping Fred lacks the property *loving Wilma*, it should likewise be wrong (other things being equal) to say that Fred the frog lacks that property. Perhaps, then, we can say that *qua frog*, Fred lacks the property, despite the fact that, *qua man*, he has it. If this is intelligible, then perhaps it sheds some light on what one might mean in saying that Christ himself is omniscient, despite being ignorant of certain things *qua human*.

III. ATONEMENT

The essays in Part III of this volume treat the doctrine of the atonement. When Christians talk about 'the atonement', what they generally have in mind is the particular work or set of works done by Jesus that made it possible (or at least more feasible) for individual human beings to be reconciled with God, to obtain forgiveness from God for their sins, and to avoid being condemned to hell. By all accounts, the death of Jesus on the cross was part of the atonement; but whether

the atonement also includes (say) Jesus' obedient life, his suffering in Gethsemane, or other parts of his life is not so universally agreed upon. A *theory* of the atonement, typically offers a theory about what the relevant *works* were, and about how they brought about their positive effect upon the relations between God and human beings.²¹

In contrast to what we find with the doctrines of trinity and incarnation, there is no creedally sanctioned theory of the atonement. Or, at any rate, there is no theory that has been sanctioned by the so-called *ecumenical* creeds—the creeds that are common to the Roman, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant churches together. Moreover, it would be impossible in a volume of this size to provide ample coverage of the wide variety of theories that have been put forward. Consequently, I have decided to focus on three of the most important contenders: the *satisfaction* theory, of which the penal substitution theory is one (but not the only) version; the *merit* theory; and the *exemplar* theory. Various other theories (such as the *ransom* theory, which had some measure of popularity in the Patristic period and which was more recently allegorized in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*) are discussed in passing, but they are not given substantive treatment. The satisfaction theory is discussed and defended in the essays by Richard Swinburne, David Lewis, Steven L. Porter, and Eleonore Stump. The essay by Richard Cross rejects the satisfaction theory and defends the merit theory, and the essay by Philip L. Quinn explores and defends a version of the exemplar theory.²²

Let us begin with the satisfaction theory. To 'make satisfaction' for something is, roughly speaking, to *compensate* someone for a wrong done, a harm inflicted, or a debt incurred. It is to give the person what you in some sense owe her, or to give her something that will somehow make up for her inability to get from you what you owe. Making satisfaction might involve making restitution of some sort; it might involve repayment of a debt, or repayment with something extra to compensate for the trouble caused by the debt; it might involve undergoing some form of punishment; or it might involve something else entirely. The core idea of the satisfaction theory, then, is that the primary function of Jesus' atoning work is to enable God to be compensated somehow for our sins.

The satisfaction theory starts with something like the following characterization of the human predicament: Our sin has put us in the position of owing God something that we cannot possibly repay on our own. From birth, we have owed God a perfect life. By sinning, we have failed to give him his due, and we have

²¹ What about a theory (which, of course, many in fact hold) according to which Jesus' death on the cross did no atoning work whatsoever—a theory according to which his death was simply the death of an inspiring but merely human teacher in a world devoid of God? Isn't that too a 'theory of the atonement' (in the way in which, say, moral nihilism is a 'theory of morality')? I say no; but this is a terminological decision of no real consequence.

²² For helpful surveys of different theories of the atonement, see Oliver Crisp, 'The Atonement', in Flint and Rea (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, and Linwood Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought*, rev. and expanded edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

also rendered it impossible for him to receive his due from us (since we can't take back our sin and thus give him the perfect life we initially owed him). Moreover, we have affronted God by failing to give him what we owe; so we now owe something further to make up for the affront. But we cannot compensate God for the affront for precisely the same reason that we cannot make restitution for our sins: anything we tried to offer up as restitution or compensation would only be what we already owed in the first place. Thus, we are in need of help. Satisfaction can be made, our relationship with God can be restored, only if someone with greater resources (and no debt of his own to pay to God) steps in to help. But there is no one who can help apart from God himself; hence, the incarnation.²³

This much is common to the most well-known versions of the satisfaction theory. But from here the different versions diverge, differences arising out of different answers to the question of what exactly it would take to make satisfaction for our sins. All versions maintain that our own repentance and apology play some role in making satisfaction. The *penal substitution* theory maintains that, in the end, satisfaction can be made only if we or someone helping us suffers *punishment* for our sins.²⁴ No amount of repentance and apology will suffice; restitution is impossible; thus, justice demands punishment. The *penitential substitution* theory,²⁵ on the other hand, maintains that what is due to God is restitution and penance. Penance differs from punishment in being something that is not *deserved* (or required to satisfy the demands of justice) but that is voluntarily undergone for the purpose of demonstrating sorrow over the harm that one has done, sincere repentance, or something similar.

The two opening essays in this section, by Eleonore Stump and Richard Swinburne, both defend the penitential substitution theory. (Stump attributes the view to Thomas Aquinas.²⁶) Both Stump and Swinburne agree that it would be appropriate for God to punish human sin; but they deny that punishment is required—God's justice is perfectly compatible with our not being punished. Indeed, Stump argues that the very idea that forgiveness is morally possible implies that justice does not require punishment. Nevertheless, our sin constitutes a grievous wrong against God; and so our relationship with God can be restored only if we take at least faltering steps toward making reparation and penance. But, again, we cannot make our own penance; for anything we might

²³ This is, in crude form, the line of reasoning Anselm uses to explain why God had to become incarnate. On Anselm's theory of the atonement in general, see David Brown, 'Anselm on Atonement', pp. 279–302 in Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁴ The penal substitution theory is often regarded as separate from the satisfaction theory, rather than being a version of it. This is the position taken by Crisp, for example, in 'The Atonement'. Even Crisp admits, however, that the 'hard core' of the satisfaction theory comports with the penal substitution theory.

²⁵ I borrow this term from David Lewis's essay.

²⁶ Philip Quinn, on the other hand, characterizes Aquinas's view differently. See his essay, p. 000, and also his 'Aquinas on Atonement', pp. 153–77 in Feenstra and Plantinga (eds.), *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*.

do or give to God is only what we already owe. Jesus, however, by his perfect life of obedience and by his obedience unto death, gives to God something that is of great value; and it is something that both shows us how to make faltering steps toward repentance and restitution and penance, and it is also something that we can ask God to accept in place of the restitution and penance that we cannot possibly provide ourselves.

Before moving on to the next theory, I should add that, though it provides a convenient label, there is something a bit misleading about characterizing the theory described by Swinburne and Stump as a ‘penitential substitution’ theory. It is misleading not because there is something inappropriate about saying that penitential substitution is involved in the theories, but rather because the label suggests that the notion of penitential substitution covers the *full extent* of Christ’s atoning work. But neither Stump nor Swinburne (nor Aquinas on Stump’s reading) would agree with this latter claim. Both Stump and Swinburne note that part of the way in which Christ’s life and death help to reconcile us to God is by helping us in our *repentance*, our turning away from sin. This idea is briefly discussed in Swinburne’s article and developed in detail in Stump’s. This added component provides for an even richer overall theory of atonement than one might be accustomed to if one is only familiar (as many nowadays are) with brief sketches or outright caricatures of various kinds of satisfaction theory.

The next two essays, by David Lewis and Steven Porter, speak in favour of the penal substitution theory. This theory has been attributed to more theologians than have in fact held it; but it is, at any rate, popular among evangelical Protestants, particularly in the Reformed tradition. Central to the view is the idea that *justice* demands that human sin be *punished*, but that justice does *not* require that the sinner herself receive the punishment that is due. Thus, ordinary sinful humans can escape punishment for their sins if—and only if—a perfectly innocent and willing substitute takes their punishment instead. (It is important that the substitute be innocent; for otherwise—since sin merits eternal punishment—any punishment the substitute received would only be what is already due.) Jesus, of course, is supposed to be the substitute. By literally taking our punishment upon himself in his death on the cross, Jesus satisfied the demands of justice, provided an outlet for the wrath of God, and thereby made it the case that we (who have pled his punishment on our own behalf) are no longer objects of divine wrath and can justly and appropriately be recipients of mercy rather than punishment.

Though it is not prescribed by any ecumenical creed, many Protestants regard the penal substitutionary theory as *de rigueur* for anybody concerned about respecting traditional Christian orthodoxy. But the view is also subject to some rather serious *prima facie* objections. The most obvious objection, and the one that Lewis and Porter aim to address, is that, far from ‘satisfying the demands of justice’, the punishment of an innocent substitute—especially for a *serious* crime, as all sin is supposed to be—seems horribly unjust. If, for example, we were to

allow a murderer's innocent mother to accept the death penalty in place of the murderer herself, nobody would think that justice had been served. Indeed, we would think of the mother as simply another of the murderer's victims, and we would think that a serious *miscarriage* of justice had taken place.

As an atheist, Lewis does not endorse the doctrine of the atonement, or any particular theory about it. But he does argue that this standard objection against the penal substitution theory is indecisive on account of the fact that we—all of us—seem to be of two minds about penal substitution. On the one hand, we have intuitions (like those described above) that oppose it. On the other hand, our actual institutions of punishment (which might plausibly be thought to reflect our collective beliefs and values) *allow* for penal substitution in the case of serious punitive fines. This, then, might be thought to cast some doubt on the intuitions that oppose it. Porter, on the other hand, borrows ideas from Swinburne's version of the penitential theory to try to show that penal substitution might sometimes be in keeping with what is fitting and just after all—specifically in cases where the goods attained by punishing an offender could equally or perhaps even better be attained by the punishment of a willing substitute.

The remaining two essays in this section urge different views of the atonement. Richard Cross opposes satisfaction theories in general, arguing that human beings can make satisfaction on their own for their sins, and that satisfaction does not bring about forgiveness anyway since it does not put the offended under any obligation to forgive the offender. He defends instead what he calls a 'merit' theory of the atonement. This theory takes as its point of departure the Anselmian idea that Christ's death merits a reward from God. On Anselm's view, by *obeying* God unto death—a death he did not deserve—the Son gave to the Father something good enough to merit a reward. According to Anselm, however, as God incarnate, it is absolutely impossible for Jesus to receive a reward: how do you give a gift to a man who, quite literally, possesses everything and is perfect in all other respects? Thus, there is a bit of a dilemma: Jesus deserves a reward; it would be unfitting for God not to give a reward in response to what Jesus has done; and yet it is impossible for Jesus to be rewarded. The solution to this 'problem' is precisely the solution to ours: the reward is transferred; Jesus claims as his reward the Father's forgiveness for human sin. This much is Anselm; what Cross adds is that Jesus' work *secures* human forgiveness (in a way that mere satisfaction does not) because the Father obligates himself with a promise to forgive human sin in return for Christ's perfect obedience unto death.

In the final essay, Philip L. Quinn defends Peter Abelard's *exemplar theory* of the atonement. Abelard's theory is sometimes caricatured as maintaining that Christ's death 'reconciles' us to God *simply* by providing a paradigm example of love and obedience for us to follow. There is, on the common caricature, nothing more to Christ's atoning work beyond its setting a fine example for us to imitate; and so there is, at best, only a loose connection between what Jesus has done and our own reconciliation with God. Quinn, however, argues that Abelard's theory

is much richer and more promising than it is often given credit for being. He notes that there are various motifs in Abelard's overall theory of the atonement, one of which, in fact, is penal substitutionary. But the principle motif is one according to which Christ's love serves to transform human character. He writes:

My suggestion is that what Abelard has to contribute to our thinking about the atonement is the idea that divine love, made manifest throughout the life of Christ but especially in his suffering and dying, has the power to transform human sinners, if they cooperate, in ways that fit them for everlasting life in intimate union with God. (360)

Moreover, the *way* in which this love accomplishes its transforming effect is not simply by providing a model (though it does that too), but by awakening the same sort of love within us. To this extent, then, the common characterization of Abelard's theory as an 'exemplar' theory is apt, but somewhat misleading. There is much more to Christ's atoning work than the provision of an imitable example; and the connection between that work and human transformation is not nearly as tenuous as it is often made out to be.

PART I
TRINITY

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1

The Trinity*

J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig

Let me ask of my reader, wherever, alike with myself, he is certain, there to go on with me; wherever, alike with myself, he hesitates, there to join with me in inquiring; wherever he recognizes himself to be in error, there to return to me; wherever he recognizes me to be so, there to call me back. . . . And I would make this pious and safe agreement, . . . above all, in the case of those who inquire into the unity of the Trinity, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; because in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.

AUGUSTINE *ON THE TRINITY* 1.3.5

INTRODUCTION

One of the most noteworthy developments in contemporary philosophy of religion has been the ingress of Christian philosophers into areas normally considered the province of systematic theologians. In particular, many Christian philosophers have taken up a share of the task of formulating and defending coherent statements of Christian doctrine. In the next three chapters we shall examine briefly a few of the most important peculiarly Christian doctrines which have attracted philosophical attention.

It is remarkable that despite the fact that its founder and earliest protagonists were to a man monotheistic Jews, Christianity, while zealous to preserve Jewish monotheism, came to enunciate a nonunitarian concept of God.

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On the Christian view, God is not a single person, as traditionally conceived, but is tripersonal. There are three persons, denominated the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who deserve to be called God, and yet there is but one God, not three. This startling rethinking of Jewish monotheism doubtless grew out of reflection on the radical self-understanding of Jesus of Nazareth himself and on the charismatic experience of the early church. Although many New Testament critics have called into question the historical Jesus' use of explicit christological titles, a very strong historical case can be made for Jesus' self-understanding as the Son of man (a divine-human eschatological figure in Daniel 7) and the unique Son of God (Mt 11:27; Mk 13:32; Lk 20:9–19). Moreover, something of a consensus has emerged among New Testament critics that in his teachings and actions—such as his assertion of personal authority, his revising of the divinely given Mosaic Law, his proclamation of the in-breaking of God's reign or kingdom into history in his person, his performing miracles and exorcisms as signs of the advent of that kingdom, his messianic pretensions to restore Israel, and his claim to forgive sins—Jesus enunciated an implicit Christology, putting himself in God's place. The German theologian Horst Georg Pöhlmann asserts,

This unheard of claim to authority, as it comes to expression in the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount, for example, is implicit Christology, since it presupposes a unity of Jesus with God that is deeper than that of all men, namely a unity of essence. This . . . claim to authority is explicable only from the side of his deity. This authority only God himself can claim. With regard to Jesus there are only two possible modes of behavior; either to believe that in him God encounters us or to nail him to the cross as a blasphemer. *Tertium non datur*.¹

Moreover, the post-Easter church continued to experience the presence and power of Christ among them, despite his physical absence. Jesus himself had been a charismatic, imbued with the Spirit of God; and the Jesus movement which followed him was likewise a charismatic fellowship that experienced individually and corporately the supernatural filling and gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was thought to stand in the place of the risen and ascended Christ and to continue in his temporary absence his ministry to his people (Jn 7:39; 14:16–17; 15:26; 16:7–16; Rom 8:9–10; Gal 4:6).

In the pages of the New Testament, then, we find the raw data that the doctrine of the Trinity later sought to systematize. The New Testament church remained faithful to its heritage of Jewish monotheism in affirming that there is only one God (Mk 12:29; Rom 3:29–30; 1 Cor 8:4; 1 Tim 2:5; Jas 2:19). In accord with the portrayal of God in the Old Testament (Is 63:16) and the

¹ Horst Georg Pöhlmann, *Abriss der Dogmarik*, 3d rev. ed. (Gütersloh, Germany: Gerd Mohn, 1980), p. 230.

teaching of Jesus (Mt 6:9), Christians also conceived of God as Father, a distinct person from Jesus his Son (Mt 11:27; 26:39; Mk 1:9–11; Jn 17:5–26). Indeed, in New Testament usage, *God* (*ho theos*) typically refers to God the Father (e.g., Gal 4:4–6). Now this occasioned a problem for the New Testament church: If *God* designates the Father, how can one affirm the deity of Christ without identifying him as the Father? In response to this difficulty the New Testament writers refer to Jesus principally as “Lord” (*kyrios*), the same word which the Septuagint translators used in place of God’s name Yahweh. The New Testament writers applied to Jesus Old Testament proof texts concerning Yahweh (e.g., Rom 10:9, 13). Indeed, the confession “Jesus is Lord” was the central confession of the early church (1 Cor 12:3), and they not only called Jesus “Lord” but also addressed him in prayer as Lord (1 Cor 16:22). This difference-in-sameness can lead to odd locutions like Paul’s confession “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6).

Furthermore, the New Testament church, not content with use of divine nomenclature for Christ, also ascribed to him God’s role as the Creator and Sustainer of all reality apart from God (Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:1–4; Jn 1:1–3). In places restraint is thrown to the winds, and Jesus is explicitly affirmed to be (*ho*) *theos* (Jn 1:1, 18; 20:28; Rom 9:5; Tit 2:13; Heb 1:8–12; 1 Jn 5:20). Noting that the oldest Christian sermon, the oldest account of a Christian martyr, the oldest pagan report of the church, and the oldest liturgical prayer (1 Cor 16:22) all refer to Christ as Lord and God, Jaroslav Pelikan, the great historian of Christian thought, concludes, “Clearly it was the message of what the church believed and taught that ‘God’ was an appropriate name for Jesus Christ.”²

Finally, the Holy Spirit, who is also identified as God (Acts 5:3–4) and the Spirit of God (Mt 12:28; 1 Cor 6:11), is conceived as personally distinct from both the Father and the Son (Mt 28:19; Lk 11:13; Jn 14:26; 15:26; Rom 8:26–27; 2 Cor 13:13; 1 Pet 1:1–2). As these and other passages make clear, the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force, but a personal reality who teaches and intercedes for believers, who possesses a mind, who can be grieved and lied to, and who is ranked as an equal partner with the Father and the Son.

In short, the New Testament church was sure that only one God exists. But they also believed that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, while personally distinct, all deserve to be called God. The challenge facing the postapostolic church was how to make sense of these affirmations. How could the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each be God without there being either three Gods or only one person?

² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1: *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 173.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Logos Christology

The stage for both the later trinitarian controversy and the christological controversies, in which the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation were forged and given creedal form, was set by the early Greek Apologists of the second century, such as Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus and Athenagoras. Connecting the divine Word (*Logos*) of the prologue of John's Gospel (Jn 1:1–5) with the divine Logos (Reason) as it played a role in the system of the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.–c. A.D. 50), the Apologists sought to explain Christian doctrine in Philonic categories. For good or ill, their appropriation of Hellenistic thought is one of the most striking examples of the profound and enduring influence of philosophy on Christian theology. For Philo, the Logos was God's reason, which is the creative principle behind the creation of the world and which, in turn, informs the world with its rational structure. Similarly, for the Christian Apologists, God the Father, existing alone without the world, had within himself his Word or Reason or Wisdom (cf. Prov 8:22–31), which somehow proceeded forth from him, like a spoken word from a speaker's mind, to become a distinct individual who created the world and ultimately became incarnate as Jesus Christ. The procession of the Logos from the Father was variously conceived as taking place either at the moment of creation or, alternatively, eternally. Although christological concerns occupied center stage, the Holy Spirit too might be understood to proceed from God the Father's mind. Here is how Athenagoras describes it:

The Son of God is the Word of the Father in Ideal Form and energizing power; for in his likeness and through him all things came into existence, which presupposes that the Father and the Son are one. Now since the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son by a powerful unity of Spirit, the Son of God is the mind and reason of the Father. . . . He is the first begotten of the Father. The term is used not because he came into existence (for God, who is eternal mind, had in himself his word or reason from the beginning, since he was eternally rational) but because he came forth to serve as Ideal Form and Energizing Power for everything material. . . . The . . . Holy Spirit . . . we regard as an effluence of God which flows forth from him and returns like a ray of the sun. (*A Plea for the Christians*, 10)

According to this doctrine, then, there is one God, but he is not an undifferentiated unity. Rather, certain aspects of his mind become expressed as distinct individuals. The Logos doctrine of the Apologists thus involves a fundamental reinterpretation of the fatherhood of God: God is not merely the Father of mankind or even, especially, of Jesus of Nazareth; rather, he is the Father from whom the Logos is begotten before all worlds. Christ is not merely

the only-begotten Son of God in virtue of his Incarnation; rather, he is begotten of the Father even in his preincarnate divinity.

2.2 Modalism

The Logos-doctrine of the Greek Apologists was taken up into Western theology by Irenaeus, who identifies God's Word with the Son and his Wisdom with the Holy Spirit (*Against Heresies* 4.20.3; cf. 2.30.9). During the following century a quite different conception of the divine personages emerged in contrast to the Logos doctrine. Noetus, Praxeus and Sabellius espoused a unitarian view of God, variously called modalism, monarchianism, or Sabellianism, according to which the Son and Spirit are not distinct individuals from the Father. Either it was the Father who became incarnate, suffered and died—the Son being at most the human aspect of Christ—or else the one God sequentially assumed three roles as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in relation to his creatures. In his refutation of modalism, *Against Praxeas*, the North African church father Tertullian brought greater precision to many of the ideas and much of the terminology later adopted in the creedal formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity. While anxious to preserve the divine monarchy (a term employed by the Greek Apologists to designate monotheism), Tertullian insisted that we dare not ignore the divine economy (a term borrowed from Irenaeus), by which Tertullian seems to mean the way in which the one God exists. The error of the monarchians or modalists is their “thinking that one cannot believe in one only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the very selfsame person.” But while “all are of one, by unity (that is) of substance,” Tertullian insists that

the mystery of the economy . . . distributes the unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is one God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (*Against Praxeas* 2)

In saying that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in substance, Tertullian employs the word *substance* in both the senses explained by Aristotle. First, there is, as Tertullian affirms, just “one God,” one thing which is God. But Tertullian also means that the three distinct persons share the same essential nature. Thus, in his exegesis of the monarchian proof text “I and my Father are one” (Jn 10:30), Tertullian points out (1) that the plural subject and verb intimate that there are two entities, namely, two persons, involved, but (2) that the predicate is an abstract (not a personal) noun—*unum*, not *unus*. He comments, “*Unum*, a neuter term, . . . does not imply singularity of number, but unity of essence, likeness, conjunction, affection on the Father's part, . . . and submission on the

Son's. . . . When He says, 'I and my Father are one' in essence—*unum*—He shows that there are two, whom He puts on an equality and unites in one" (22).

So when Tertullian says that the one substance is distributed into three forms or aspects, he is not affirming modalism, but the diversity of three persons sharing the same nature. Indeed, he is so bold in affirming the distinctness of the persons, even calling them "three beings" (13; cf. 22), that he seems at times to court tritheism. Comparing the Father and the Son to the sun and a sunbeam, he declares, "For although I make not two suns, still I shall reckon both the sun and its ray to be as much two things and two forms of one undivided substance, as God and His Word, as the Father and the Son" (13). Thus he conceives the Son to be "really a substantive being, by having a substance of his own, in such a way that he may be regarded as an objective thing and a person, and so able . . . to make two, the Father and the Son, God and the Word" (7). Tertullian even seems to think of the Father and Son as distinct parcels of the same spiritual stuff out of which, in his idiosyncratic view, he believed God to be constituted (7).

Conventional wisdom has it that in affirming that God is three persons, church fathers like Tertullian meant at most three individuals, not three persons in the modern, psychological sense of three centers of self-consciousness. We shall return to this issue when we look at the creedal formulation of trinitarian doctrine, but for now we may note that an examination of Tertullian's statements suggests that such a claim is greatly exaggerated. In a remarkable passage aimed at illustrating the doctrine of the Son as the immanent Logos in the Father's mind, Tertullian invites his reader, who, he says, is created in the image and likeness of God, to consider the role of reason in the reader's own self-reflective thinking. "Observe, then, that when you are silently conversing with yourself, this very process is carried on within you by your reason, which meets you with a word at every movement of your thought, at every impulse of your conception" (5). Tertullian envisions one's own reason as a sort of dialogue partner when one is engaged in self-reflective thought. No doubt every one of us has carried on such an internal dialogue, which requires not merely consciousness but self-consciousness. Tertullian's point is that "in a certain sense, the word is a second person within you" through which you generate thought. He realizes, of course, that no human being is literally two persons, but he holds that "all this is much more fully transacted in God," who possesses his immanent Logos even when he is silent. Or again, in proving the personal distinctness of the Father and the Son, Tertullian appeals to scriptural passages employing first- and second-person indexical words distinguishing Father and Son. Alluding to Psalm 2:7, Tertullian says to the modalist, "If you want me to believe Him to be both the Father and the Son, show me some other passage where it is declared, 'The Lord said unto himself, I am my own Son, today I have begotten myself'" (11). He quotes numerous passages that, through their use of personal indexicals, illustrate the I-Thou relationship in which the persons of the Trinity stand to one another. He challenges the modalist to explain how a Being

who is absolutely one and singular can use first-person plural pronouns, as in “Let us make man in our image.” Tertullian clearly thinks of the Father, Son and Spirit as individuals capable of employing first-person indexicals and addressing one another with second-person indexicals, which entails that they are self-conscious persons. Hence, “in these few quotations the distinction of persons in the Trinity is clearly set forth” (11). Tertullian thus implicitly affirms that the persons of the Trinity are three distinct, self-conscious individuals.

The only qualification that might be made to this picture lies in a vestige of the Apologists’ Logos doctrine in Tertullian’s theology. He not only accepts their view that there are relations of derivation among the persons of the Trinity, but that these relations are not eternal. The Father he calls “the fountain of the Godhead” (29); “the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole” (9). The Father exists eternally with his immanent Logos; and at creation, before the beginning of all things, the Son proceeds from the Father and so becomes his first begotten Son, through whom the world is created (19). Thus the Logos only becomes the Son of God when he proceeds from the Father as a substantive being (7). Tertullian is fond of analogies such as the sunbeam emitted by the sun or the river by the spring (8, 22) to illustrate the oneness of substance of the Son as he proceeds from the Father. The Son, then, is “God of God” (15). Similarly, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son (4). It seems that Tertullian would consider the Son and Spirit to be distinct persons only after their procession from the Father (7), but it is clear that he insists on their personal distinctness from at least that point.

Through the efforts of church fathers like Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen and Novatian, the church came to reject modalism as a proper understanding of God and to affirm the distinctness of the three persons called Father, Son and Holy Spirit. During the ensuing century, the church was confronted with a challenge from the opposite end of the spectrum: Arianism, which affirmed the personal distinctness of the Father and the Son, but only at the sacrifice of the Son’s deity.

2.3 Arianism

In 319 an Alexandrian presbyter named Arius began to propagate his doctrine that the Son was not of the same substance with the Father, but was rather created by the Father before the beginning of the world. This marked the beginning of the great trinitarian controversy, which lasted through the end of the century and gave us the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds. Although Alexandrian theologians like Origen, in contrast to Tertullian, had argued that the begetting of the Logos from the Father did not have a beginning but is from eternity, the reason most theologians found Arius’s doctrine unacceptable was not, as Arius fancied, so much because he affirmed “The Son has a beginning, but God is

without beginning” (*Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia* 4–5). Rather, what was objectionable was that Arius denied even that the Logos preexisted immanently in God before being begotten or was in any sense from the substance of the Father, so that his beginning was not, in fact, a begetting but a creation *ex nihilo* and that therefore the Son is a creature. As Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, was later to protest, on Arius’s view, God without the Son lacked his Word and his Wisdom, which is blasphemous (*Orations Against the Arians* 1.6.17), and the Son is “a creature and a work, not proper to the Father’s essence” (1.3.9). In 325 a council at Antioch condemned anyone who says that the Son is a creature or originated or made or not truly an offspring or that once he did not exist; later that year the ecumenical Council of Nicaea issued its creedal formulation of trinitarian belief.

The creed states,

We believe in one God, the Father All Governing, creator of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father, through whom all things came into being, both in heaven and in earth; Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human. He suffered and the third day he rose, and ascended into the heavens. And he will come to judge both the living and the dead.

And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit.

But, those who say, Once he was not, or he was not before his generation, or he came to be out of nothing, or who assert that he, the Son of God, is a different *hypostasis* or *ousia*, or that he is a creature, or changeable, or mutable, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.

Several features of this statement deserve comment: (1) The Son (and by implication the Holy Spirit) is declared to be of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the Father. This is to say that the Son and Father both share the same divine nature. Therefore, the Son cannot be a creature, having, as Arius claimed, a nature different (*heteroousios*) from the divine nature. (2) The Son is declared to be begotten, not made. This anti-Arian affirmation is said with respect to Christ’s divine nature, not his human nature, and represents the legacy of the old Logos Christology. In the creed of Eusebius of Caesarea, used as a draft of the Nicene statement, the word *Logos* stood where *Son* stands in the Nicene Creed, and the Logos is declared to be “begotten of the Father before all ages.” The condemnations appended to the Nicene Creed similarly imply that this begetting is eternal. Athanasius explains through a subtle word play that while both the Father and the Son are *agenetos* (that is, did not come into being at some moment), nevertheless only the Father is *agenetos* (that is, unbegotten), whereas the Son is *gennetos* (begotten) eternally from the Father (*Four Discourses Against the*

Arians 1.9.31). (3) The condemnation of those who say that Christ “is a different *hypostasis* or *ousia*” from the Father occasioned great confusion in the church. For Western, Latin-speaking theologians the Greek word *hypostasis* was etymologically parallel to, and hence synonymous with, the Latin *substantia* (“substance”). Therefore, they denied a plurality of *hypostaseis* in God. Although the Nicene Creed was drafted in Greek, the meaning of the terms is Western. For many Eastern, Greek-speaking theologians *hypostasis* and *ousia* were not synonymous. *Ousia* meant “substance,” and *hypostasis* designated a concrete individual, a property-bearer. As Gregory of Nyssa, one of three Cappadocian church fathers renowned for their explication of the Nicene Creed, explains, a *hypostasis* is “what subsists and is specially and peculiarly indicated by [a] name,” for example, Paul, in contrast to *ousia*, which refers to the universal nature common to things of a certain type—for example, man (*Epistle* 38.2–3). The Father and Son, while sharing the same substance, are clearly distinct *hypostaseis*, since they have different properties (only the Father for example, has the property of being unbegotten). Therefore, the Nicene Creed’s assertion that the Father and Son are the same *hypostasis* sounded like modalism to many Eastern thinkers. After decades of intense debate, this terminological confusion was cleared up at the Council of Alexandria in 362, which affirmed *homoousios* but allowed that there are three divine *hypostaseis*.

What were these *hypostaseis*, all sharing the divine nature? The unanimous answer of orthodox theologians was that they were three *persons*. It is customarily said, as previously mentioned, that we must not read this affirmation anachronistically, as employing the modern psychological concept of a person. This caution must, however, be qualified. While *hypostasis* does not mean “person,” nevertheless a rational *hypostasis* comes very close to what we mean by a “person.” For Aristotle the generic essence of man is captured by the phrase “rational animal.” Animals have souls but lack rationality, and it is the property of rationality that serves to distinguish human beings from other animals. Thus a rational *hypostasis* can only be what we call a person. It is noteworthy that Gregory of Nyssa’s illustration of three *hypostaseis* having one substance is Peter, James and John, all exemplifying the same human nature (*To Ablabius That There Are Not Three Gods*). How else can this be taken than as an intended illustration of three persons with one nature? Moreover, the Cappadocians ascribe to the three divine *hypostaseis* the properties constitutive of personhood, such as mutual knowledge, love and volition, even if, as Gregory of Nazianzus emphasizes, these are always in concord and so incapable of being severed from one another (*Third Theological Oration: On the Son* 2). Thus Gregory boasts that his flock, unlike the Sabellians, “worship the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One Godhead; God the Father, God the Son and (do not be angry) God the Holy Spirit, One Nature in Three Personalities, intellectual, perfect, self-existent, numerically separate, but not separate in Godhead” (*Oration* 33.16). The ascription of personal properties is especially evident in the robust defense of the full equality

of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son as a divine *hypostasis*. Basil states that the Holy Spirit is not only “incorporeal, purely immaterial, and indivisible,” but that “we are compelled to direct our thoughts on high, and to think of an intelligent being, boundless in power” (*On the Holy Spirit* 9.22). Quoting 1 Corinthians 2:11, he compares God’s Spirit to the human spirit in each of us (16.40) and states that in his sanctifying work the Holy Spirit makes people spiritual “by fellowship with Himself” (9.23). The Cappadocians would have resisted fiercely any attempt to treat the Holy Spirit as an impersonal, divine force. Thus their intention was to affirm that there really are three persons in a rich psychological sense who are the one God.

In sum, while modalism affirmed the equal deity of the three persons at the expense of their personal distinctness, orthodox Christians maintained both the equal deity and personal distinctness of the three persons. Moreover, they did so while claiming to maintain the commitment of all parties to monotheism. There exists only one God, who is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2.4 Models of the Trinity

Does the doctrine of the Trinity make sense? Enlightenment thinkers denounced the doctrine as incoherent, but during the twentieth century many theologians came to a fresh appreciation of trinitarian theology, and in recent decades a number of Christian philosophers have sought to formulate philosophically defensible versions of the doctrine of the Trinity. Two broad models or approaches are typically identified: **social trinitarianism**, which lays greater emphasis on the diversity of the persons, and **Latin trinitarianism**, which places greater stress on the unity of God. This nomenclature, however, is misleading, since the great Latin church fathers Tertullian and Hilary were both social trinitarians, as was Athanasius, a fount of Latin theology. Therefore, we shall instead contrast social trinitarianism with what one wag has called **anti social trinitarianism**. The central commitment of social trinitarianism is that in God there are three distinct centers of self-consciousness, each with its proper intellect and will. The central commitment of anti social trinitarianism is that there is only one God, whose unicity of intellect and will is not compromised by the diversity of persons. Social trinitarianism threatens to veer into tritheism; anti social trinitarianism is in danger of lapsing into unitarianism.

Social trinitarians typically look to the Cappadocian Fathers as their champions. As we have seen, they explain the difference between substance and *hypostasis* as the difference between a generic essence, say, *man*, and particular instances of it, in this case, several men like Peter, James and John. This leads to an obvious question: if Peter, James and John are three men each having the same nature, then why would not the Father, Son and Holy Spirit similarly be three Gods each having the divine nature?

In his letter *To Ablabius That There Are Not Three Gods*, Gregory of Nyssa struggled to answer this question. He emphasizes the primacy of the universal, which is one and unchangeable in each of the three men. This is merely to highlight a universal property, which Gregory holds to be one in its many instantiations, rather than the property instance of that universal in each man. Gregory, like Plato, thinks of the universal as the primary reality. He advises that rather than speaking of three Gods, we ought instead to speak of one man. But this answer solves nothing. Even if we think of the universal as the primary reality, still it is undeniable that there are three instances of that reality who, in the one case, are three distinct men, as is obvious from the fact that one man can cease to exist without the others ceasing to do so. Similarly, even if the one divine nature is the primary reality, still it is undeniably exemplified by three *hypostaseis*, who should each be an instance of deity.

In order to block the inference to three Gods, Gregory also appeals to the ineffability of the divine nature and to the fact that all the operations of the Trinity toward the world involve the participation of all three persons. But even granted his assumptions, one cannot justifiably conclude that there are not three cooperatively acting individuals who each share this ineffable nature, and any remaining indistinguishability seems purely epistemic, not ontological.

Gregory goes on to stress that every operation between God and creation finds its origin in the Father, proceeds through the Son and is perfected by the Holy Spirit. Because of this, he claims, we cannot speak of those who conjointly and inseparably carry out these operations as three Gods. But Gregory's inference seems unjustified. Simply because we creatures cannot distinguish the persons who carry out such operations, one cannot therefore conclude that there are not three instances of the divine nature at work; moreover, the very fact that these operations originate in the Father, proceed through the Son and are perfected by the Spirit seems to prove that there are three distinct if inseparable operations in every work of the Trinity toward creation.

Finally, Gregory appears to deny that the divine nature can be multiply instantiated. He identifies the principle of individuation as "bodily appearance, and size, and place, and difference in figure and color"—"That which is not thus circumscribed is not enumerated, and that which is not enumerated cannot be contemplated in multitude." Therefore, the divine nature "does not admit in its own case the signification of multitude." But if this is Gregory's argument, not only is it incompatible with there being three Gods, but it precludes there being even one God. The divine nature would be uninstantiable, since there is no principle to individuate it. If it cannot be enumerated, there cannot even be one. On the other hand, if Gregory's argument intends merely to show that there is just one generic divine nature, not many, then he has simply proved too little: for the universal nature may be one, but multiply instantiated. Given that there are three *hypostaseis* in the Godhead, distinguished according to Gregory by the

intratrinitarian relations, then there should be three Gods. The most pressing task of contemporary social trinitarians is to find some more convincing answer to why, on their view, there are not three Gods.

Anti social trinitarians typically look to Latin-speaking theologians like Augustine and Aquinas as their champions. To a considerable extent the appeal to Augustine rests on a misinterpretation that results from taking in isolation his analogies of the Trinity in the human mind, such as the lover, the beloved and love itself (*On the Trinity* 8.10.14; 9.2.2) or memory, understanding and will (or love) (10.11.17–18). Augustine explicitly states that the persons of the Trinity are not identified with these features of God's mind; rather, they are "an image of the Trinity in man" (14.8.11; 15.8.14). "Do we," he asks, "in such manner also see the Trinity that is in God?" He answers, "Doubtless we either do not at all understand and behold the invisible things of God by those things that are made, or if we behold them at all, we do not behold the Trinity in them" (15.7.10). In particular, Augustine realizes that these features are not each identical to a person but rather are features which any single human person possesses (15.7.11). Identifying the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with the divine memory, understanding and love, Augustine recognizes, would lead to the absurd conclusion that the Father knows himself only by the Son or loves himself only by the Holy Spirit, as though the Son were the understanding of the Father and the Spirit, and the Father the memory of the Spirit and the Son! Rather, memory, understanding and will or love) must belong to each of the individual persons (15.7.12). Augustine concludes with the reflection that having found in one human person an image of the Trinity, he had desired to illuminate the relation among the three divine persons; but in the end three things which belong to one person cannot suit the three persons of the Trinity (15.24.45).

Anti social trinitarians frequently interpret Augustine to hold that the persons of the Trinity just are various relations subsisting in God. But this is not what Augustine says (5.3.4–5.5.6). Arians had objected that if the Father is essentially unbegotten and the Son essentially begotten, then the Father and Son cannot share the same essence or substance (*homoousios*). In response to this ingenious objection Augustine claims that the distinction between Father and Son is a matter neither of different essential properties nor of different accidental properties. Rather, the persons are distinguished in virtue of the relations in which they stand. Because "Father" and "Son" are relational terms implying the existence of something else, Augustine thinks that properties like *begotten by God* cannot belong to anything's essence. He evidently assumes that only intrinsic properties go to constitute something's essence. But if *being begotten* is not part of the Son's essence, is it not accidental to him? No, says Augustine, for it is eternally and immutably the case for the Son to be begotten. Augustine's answer is not

adequate, however, since eternity and immutability are not sufficient for necessity; there could still be possible worlds in which the person who in the actual world is the Father does not beget a Son and so is not a Father. Augustine should instead claim that *Father* and *Son* imply internal relations between the persons of the Godhead, so that there is no possible world in which they do not stand in that relation. The Father and Son would share the same intrinsic essential properties, but they would differ in virtue of their differing relational properties or the different internal relations in which they stand. Note what Augustine does not say, namely, that the Father and Son just are relations. It is true that Augustine felt uneasy about the terminology of “three persons” because this seems to imply three instances of a generic type and hence three Gods (5.9.10; 7.4.7–8). He accepted the terminology somewhat grudgingly for want of a better word. But he did not try to reduce the persons to mere relations.

For a bona fide example of anti social trinitarianism, we may turn to Thomas Aquinas, who pushes the Augustinian analogy to its apparent limit. Aquinas holds that there is a likeness of the Trinity in the human mind insofar as it understands itself and loves itself (*Summa contra gentiles* 4.26.6). We find in the mind the mind itself, the mind conceived in the intellect, and the mind beloved in the will. The difference between this human likeness and the Trinity is, first, that the human mind’s acts of understanding and will are not identical with its being and, second, that the mind as understood and the mind as beloved do not subsist and so are not persons. By contrast, Aquinas’s doctrine of divine simplicity implies that God’s acts of understanding and willing are identical with his being, and he further holds (paradoxically) that God as understood and God as beloved do subsist and therefore count as distinct persons from God the Father. According to Aquinas, since God knows himself, there is in God the one who knows and the object of that knowledge, which is the one known. The one known exists in the one knowing as his Word. They share the same essence and are indeed identical to it, but they are relationally distinct (4.11.13). Indeed, Aquinas holds that the different divine persons just are the different relations in God, like *paternity* (*being father of*) and *filiation* (*being son of*) (*Summa theologiae* 1a.40.2). Despite his commitment to divine simplicity, Aquinas regards these relations as subsisting entities in God (*Summa contra gentiles* 4.14.6, 11). Because the one knowing generates the one known and they share the same essence, they are related as Father to Son. Moreover, God loves himself, so that God as beloved is relationally distinct from God as loving (4.19.7–12) and is called the Holy Spirit. Since God’s knowing and willing are not really distinct, the Son and Holy Spirit would be one person if the only difference between them were that one proceeds by way of God’s knowing himself and the other by way of God’s loving himself. But they are distinct because only the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son.

3 ASSESSMENT OF THE MODELS

3.1 Anti Social Trinitarianism

Is Thomistic anti social trinitarianism viable? Thomas's doctrine of the Trinity is doubtless inconsistent with his doctrine of divine simplicity. Intuitively, it seems obvious that a being that is absolutely without composition and transcends all distinctions cannot have real relations subsisting within it, much less be three distinct persons. More specifically, Aquinas's contention that each of the three persons has the same divine essence entails, given divine simplicity, that each person just is that essence. But if two things are identical with some third thing, they are identical with each other. Therefore, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit cannot be distinct persons or relations. Since this unwelcome conclusion arises not so much from Aquinas's trinitarian doctrine as from the doctrine of divine simplicity, and since we have already found reason to call that doctrine seriously into question, let us ask whether Thomas's account of anti social trinitarianism is viable once freed of the constraints of the simplicity doctrine.

It seems not. Without begging the question in favor of social trinitarianism, it can safely be said that on no reasonable understanding of *person* can a person be equated with a relation. Relations do not cause things, know truths or love people in the way the Bible says God does. Moreover, to think that the intentional objects of God's knowing himself and loving himself constitute in any sense really distinct persons is wholly implausible. Even if God the Father were a person and not a mere relation, there is no reason, even in Aquinas's own metaphysical system, why the Father as understood and loved by himself would be different persons. The distinction involved here is merely that between oneself as subject ("I") and as object ("me"). There is no more reason to think that the individual designated by "I", "me" and "myself" constitutes a plurality of persons in God's case than in any human being's case. Anti social trinitarianism seems to reduce to classical modalism.

Suppose the anti social trinitarian insists that in God's case the subsistent relations within God really do constitute distinct persons in a sufficiently robust sense. Then two problems present themselves. First, there arises an infinite regress of persons in the Godhead. If God as understood really is a distinct person called the Son, then the Son, like the Father, must also understand himself and love himself. There are thereby generated two further persons of the Godhead, who in turn can also consider themselves as intentional objects of their knowledge and will, thereby generating further persons ad infinitum. We wind up with a fractal-like infinite series of Trinities within Trinities in the Godhead. Aquinas actually considers this objection, and his answer is that "just as the Word is not another god, so neither is He another intellect; consequently, not another act of understanding; hence, not another word"

(*Summa contra gentiles* 4.13.2). This answer only reinforces the previous impression of modalism, for the Son's intellect and act of understanding just are the Father's intellect and act of understanding; the Son's understanding himself is identical with the Father's understanding himself. The Son seems but a name given to the Father's *me*. Second, one person does not exist in another person. On Aquinas's view the Son or Word remains in the Father (4.11.180). While we can make sense of a relation's existing in a person, it seems unintelligible to say that one person exists in another person. (Two persons' inhabiting the same body is obviously not a counterexample.) Classic trinitarian doctrine affirms that more than one person may exist in one being, but persons are not the sort of entity that exists in another person. It is true that the classic doctrine involves a *perichoresis* (*circumincessio*) or mutual indwelling of the three persons in one another, which is often enunciated as each person's existing in the others. But this may be understood in terms of complete harmony of will and action, of mutual love, and full knowledge of one another with respect to the persons of the Godhead; beyond that it remains obscure what literally could be meant by one person's being in another person. Again, we seem forced to conclude that the subsisting relations posited by the anti social trinitarian do not rise to the standard of personhood.

3.2 Social Trinitarianism

3.2.1 Functional Monotheism

Are there brighter prospects for a viable social trinitarianism? Brian Leftow has distinguished three forms of social trinitarianism on offer: Trinity monotheism, group mind monotheism and functional monotheism.

To consider these in reverse order, functional monotheism appeals to the harmonious, interrelated functioning of the divine persons as the basis for viewing them as one God. For example, Richard Swinburne considers God to be a logically indivisible, collective substance composed of three persons who are also substances. He sees the Father as the everlasting active cause of the Son and Spirit, and the latter as permissive causes, in turn, of the Father. Because all of them are omnipotent and perfectly good, they cooperate in all their volitions and actions. It is logically impossible that any one person should exist or act independent of the other two. Swinburne considers this understanding sufficient to capture the intention of the church councils, whose monotheistic affirmations, he thinks, meant to deny that there were three independent divine beings who could exist and act without one another.

Leftow blasts Swinburne's view as "a refined paganism," a thinly veiled form of polytheism.³ Since, on Swinburne's view, each person is a discrete substance, it is

³ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," in *The Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 232.

a distinct being, even if that being is causally dependent on some other being for its existence. Indeed, the causal dependence of the Son on the Father is problematic for the Son's being divine. For on Swinburne's account, the Son exists in the same way that creatures exist—only due to a divine person's conserving him in being and not annihilating him. Indeed, given that the Son is a distinct substance from the Father, the Father's begetting the Son amounts to *creatio ex nihilo*, which as Arius saw, makes the Son a creature. If we eliminate from Swinburne's account the causal dependence relation among the divine persons, then we are stuck with the surprising and inexplicable fact that there just happen to exist three divine beings all sharing the same nature, which seems incredible. As for the unity of will among the three divine persons, there is no reason at all to see this as constitutive of a collective substance, for three separate Gods who were each omnipotent and morally perfect would similarly act cooperatively, if Swinburne's argument against the possibility of dissension is correct. Thus there is no salient difference between functional monotheism and polytheism.

3.2.2 *Group Mind Monotheism*

Group mind monotheism holds that the Trinity is a mind that is composed of the minds of the three persons in the Godhead. If such a model is to be theologically acceptable, the mind of the Trinity cannot be a self-conscious self in addition to the three self-conscious selves who are the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for otherwise we have not a Trinity but a Quaternity, so to speak. Therefore, the Trinity itself cannot be construed as an agent, endowed with intellect and will, in addition to the three persons of the Trinity. The three persons would have to be thought of as subminds of the mind of God. In order to render such a view intelligible, Leftow appeals to thought experiments involving surgical operations in which the cerebral commissures, the network of nerves connecting the two hemispheres of the brain, are severed. Such operations have been performed as a treatment for severe epilepsy, and the results are provocative. Patients sometimes behave as though the two halves of their brain were operating independent of each other. The interpretation of such results is controversial, but one interpretation, suggested by various thought experiments, is that the patients come to have two minds. Now the question arises whether in a normally functioning human being we do not already have two separable subminds linked to their respective hemispheres that cooperate together in producing a single human consciousness. In such a case the human mind would itself be a group mind.

Applying this notion of a group mind to the Trinity, we must, if we are to remain biblically orthodox, maintain that the minds of the persons of the Trinity are more than mere subminds which either never come to self-consciousness or else share a common mental state as a single self-consciousness. For such a view is

incompatible with the persons' existing in I-Thou relationships with one another; on such a view God really is only one person.

In order to be theologically acceptable, group mind monotheism will have to be construed dynamically, as a process in which the subminds emerge into self-consciousness to replace the single trinitarian self-consciousness. In other words, what group mind monotheism offers is a strikingly modern version of the old Logos doctrine of the Greek Apologists. The divine monarchy (the single self-consciousness of the Trinity) contains within itself an immanent Logos (a submind) that at the beginning of the creation of the world is deployed into the divine economy (the subminds emerge into self-consciousness in replacement of the former single self-consciousness).

This provocative model gives some sense to the otherwise very difficult idea of the Father's begetting the Son in his divine nature. On the other hand, if we think of the primal self-consciousness of the Godhead as the Father, then the model requires that the person of the Father expires in the emergence of the three subminds into self-consciousness (cf. Athanasius *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 4.3). In order to avoid this unwelcome implication, one would need to think of some way in which the Father's personal identity is preserved through the deployment of the divine economy, just as a patient survives a commissurotomy.

The whole model, of course, depends on the very controversial notion of subminds and their emergence into distinct persons. If we do not equate minds with persons, then the result of the deployment of the divine economy will be merely one person with three minds, which falls short of the doctrine of the Trinity. But if, as seems plausible, we understand minds and persons to exist in a one-to-one correspondence, then the emergence of three distinct persons raises once again the specter of tritheism. The driving force behind group mind monotheism is to preserve the unity of God's being in a way functional monotheism cannot. But once the divine economy has been deployed, the group mind has lapsed away, and it is unclear why we do not now have three Gods in the place of one.

3.2.3 *Trinity Monotheism*

We turn finally to Trinity monotheism, which holds that while the persons of the Trinity are divine, it is the Trinity as a whole that is properly God. If this view is to be orthodox, it must hold that the Trinity alone is God and that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, while divine, are not Gods. Leftow presents the following challenge to this view:

Either the Trinity is a fourth case of the divine nature, in addition to the Persons, or it is not. If it is, we have too many cases of deity for orthodoxy. If it is not, and yet is divine, there are two ways to be divine—by being a case of deity, and by being a Trinity of such cases. If there is more than one way to be divine, Trinity monotheism becomes

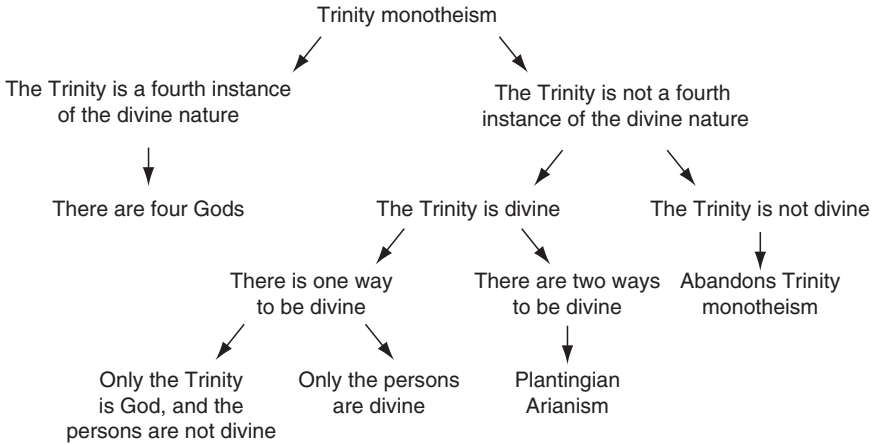
The Trinity

Fig. 1.1 Leftow's dilemma for Trinity monotheism

Plantingian Arianism. But if there is in fact only one way to be divine, then there are two alternatives. One is that only the Trinity is God, and God is composed of non-divine persons. The other is that the sum of all divine persons is somehow not divine. To accept this last claim would be to give up Trinity monotheism altogether.⁴

How should the Trinity monotheist respond to this dilemma? Starting with the first disjunction, he will clearly want to say that the Trinity is not a fourth instance of the divine nature, lest there be four divine persons. Moving then to the next set of options, he must say that the Trinity is divine, since that is entailed by Trinity monotheism. Now if the Trinity is divine but is not a fourth instance of the divine nature, this suggests that there is more than one way to be divine. This alternative is said to lead to Plantingian Arianism. What is that? Leftow defines it merely as “the positing of more than one way to be divine.”⁵ This is uninformative, however; what we want to know is why the view is objectionable. Leftow responds, “If we take the Trinity’s claim to be God seriously, . . . we wind up downgrading the Persons’ deity and/or [being] unorthodox.”⁶ The alleged problem is that if only the Trinity exemplifies the complete divine nature, then the way in which the persons are divine is less than fully divine.

This inference would follow, however, only if there were but one way to be divine (namely, by instantiating the divine nature); but the position asserts that there is more than one way to be divine. The persons of the Trinity are not divine in virtue of instantiating the divine nature. For presumably *being triune* is a property of the divine nature (God does not just happen to be triune); yet the

⁴ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *The Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 221.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁶ *Ibid.*

persons of the Trinity do not have that property. It now becomes clear that the reason that the Trinity is not a fourth instance of the divine nature is that there are no other instances of the divine nature. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not instances of the divine nature, and that is why there are not three Gods. The Trinity is the sole instance of the divine nature, and therefore there is but one God. So while the statement “The Trinity is God” is an identity statement, statements about the persons like “The Father is God” are not identity statements. Rather, they perform other functions, such as ascribing a title or office to a person (like “Belshazzar is king,” which is not incompatible with there being coregents) or ascribing a property to a person (a way of saying, “The Father is divine,” as one might say, “Belshazzar is regal”).

So if the persons of the Trinity are not divine in virtue of being instances of the divine nature, in virtue of what are they divine? Consider an analogy. One way of being feline is to instantiate the nature of a cat. But there are other ways to be feline as well. A cat’s DNA or skeleton is feline, even if neither is a cat. Nor is this a sort of downgraded or attenuated felinity: A cat’s skeleton is fully and unambiguously feline. Indeed, a cat just is a feline animal, as a cat’s skeleton is a feline skeleton. Now if a cat is feline in virtue of being an instance of the cat nature, in virtue of what is a cat’s DNA or skeleton feline? One plausible answer is that they are parts of a cat. This suggests that we could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God. Now obviously, the persons are not parts of God in the sense in which a skeleton is part of a cat; but given that the Father, for example, is not the whole Godhead, it seems undeniable that there is some sort of part-whole relation obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.

Far from downgrading the divinity of the persons, such an account can be very illuminating of their contribution to the divine nature. For parts can possess properties which the whole does not, and the whole can have a property because some part has it. Thus, when we ascribe omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not making the Trinity a fourth person or agent; rather, God has these properties because the persons do. Divine attributes like omniscience, omnipotence and goodness are grounded in the persons’ possessing these properties, while divine attributes like necessity, aseity and eternity are not so grounded. With respect to the latter, the persons have these properties because God as a whole has them. For parts can have some properties in virtue of the wholes of which they are parts. The point is that if we think of the divinity of the persons in terms of a part-whole relation to the Trinity that God is, then their deity seems in no way diminished because they are not instances of the divine nature.

Is such a solution unorthodox? It is true that the church fathers frequently insisted that the expression “from the substance of the Father” should not be understood to imply that the Son is formed by division or separation of the Father’s substance. But the concern here was clearly to avoid imagining the divine substance as a sort of “stuff” which could be parceled out into smaller pieces.

Such a stricture is wholly compatible with our suggestion that no one person is identical to the whole Trinity, for the part-whole relation at issue here does not involve separable parts. It is simply to say that the Father, for example, is not the whole Godhead. The Latin church father Hilary seems to capture the idea nicely when he asserts, “Each divine person is in the Unity, yet no person is the one God” (*On the Trinity* 7.2; cf. 7.13, 32).

On the other hand, it must be admitted that a number of post-Nicene creeds, probably under the influence of the doctrine of divine simplicity, do include statements that can be construed to identify each person of the Trinity with God as a whole. For example, the Eleventh Council of Toledo (675) affirms, “Each single person is wholly God in Himself,” the so-called Athanasian Creed (fifth century) enjoins Christians “to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord,” and the Fourth Lateran Council, in condemning the idea of a divine Quaternity, declares, “each of the Persons is that reality, *viz.*, that divine substance, essence, or nature . . . what the Father is, this very same reality is also the Son, this the Holy Spirit.” If these declarations are intended to imply that statements like “The Father is God” are **identity statements**, then they threaten the doctrine of the Trinity with logical incoherence. For the logic of identity requires that if the Father is identical with God and the Son is identical with God, then the Father is identical with the Son, which the same councils also deny.

Peter van Inwagen has sought to defend the coherence of such creedal affirmations by appeal to **relative identity**. According to this notion, the identity relation is not absolute but is relative to a sort of thing. For example, we say, “The couch is the same color as the chair” (not “The couch is the chair”) or “The Lord Mayor John is the same person as the schoolboy Johnny” (not “The Lord Mayor is the schoolboy Johnny”). Given certain assumptions, van Inwagen shows that we can coherently affirm not only statements like “The Father is the same being as the Son,” “The Father is not the same person as the Son,” but even paradoxical statements like “God is a person,” “God is the same person as the Father,” “God is the same person as the Son,” and “The Son is not the same person as the Father.” The fundamental problem with the appeal to relative identity, however, is that the very notion of relative identity is widely recognized to be spurious. Van Inwagen himself admits that apart from trinitarian theology, there are no known cases of allegedly relative identities that cannot be analyzed in terms of classical identity. Our example of the couch and the chair is not any kind of identity statement at all, for neither piece of furniture literally is a color; rather, they have the same color as a property. The example of the Lord Mayor is solved by taking seriously the tense of the sentence; we should say, “The Lord Mayor was the schoolboy Johnny.” Not only are the alleged cases of relative identity spurious, but there is a powerful theoretical argument against making identity relative. Suppose that two things x and y could be the same N but could not be the same P . In such a case x could not fail to be the same P as x itself, but y could. Therefore, x and y are discernible and so cannot be the same thing. But then it follows that

they cannot be the same N , since they cannot be the same anything. Identity must therefore be absolute.

Finally, even granted relative identity, its application to trinitarian doctrine involves highly dubious assumptions. For example, it must be presupposed that x and y can be the identical being without being the identical person. Notice how different this is from saying that x and y are parts of the same being but are different persons. The latter statement is like the affirmation that x and y are parts of the same body but are different hands; the former is like the affirmation that x and y are the identical body but are different hands. Van Inwagen confesses that he has no answer to the questions of how x and y can be the same being without being the same person or, more generally, how x and y can be the same N without being the same P . It seems, then, that the ability to state coherently the trinitarian claims under discussion using the device of relative identity is a hollow victory.

Protestants bring all doctrinal statements, even conciliar creeds, especially creeds of nonecumenical councils, before the bar of Scripture. Nothing in Scripture warrants us in thinking that God is simple and that each person of the Trinity is identical to the whole Trinity. Nothing in Scripture prohibits us from maintaining that the three persons of the Godhead stand in some sort of part-whole relation to the Trinity. Therefore, Trinity monotheism cannot be condemned as unorthodox in a biblical sense. Trinity monotheism seems therefore to be thus far vindicated.

All of this still leaves us wondering, however, how three persons could be parts of the same being, rather than be three separate beings. What is the salient difference between three divine persons who are each a being and three divine persons who are together one being?

Perhaps we can get a start at this question by means of an analogy. (There is no reason to think that there must be any analogy to the Trinity among created things, but analogies may prove helpful as a springboard for philosophical reflection and formulation.) In Greco-Roman mythology there is said to stand guarding the gates of Hades a three-headed dog named Cerberus. We may suppose that Cerberus has three brains and therefore three distinct states of consciousness of whatever it is like to be a dog. Therefore, Cerberus, while a sentient being, does not have a unified consciousness. He has three consciousnesses. We could even assign proper names to each of them: Rover, Bowser and Spike. These centers of consciousness are entirely discrete and might well come into conflict with one another. Still, in order for Cerberus to be biologically viable, not to mention in order to function effectively as a guard dog, there must be a considerable degree of cooperation among Rover, Bowser and Spike. Despite the diversity of his mental states, Cerberus is clearly one dog. He is a single biological organism having a canine nature. Rover, Bowser and Spike may be said to be canine, too, though they are not three dogs, but parts of the one dog Cerberus. If Hercules were attempting to enter Hades and Spike snarled at him or bit his leg, he might well report, "Cerberus snarled at me" or "Cerberus

attacked me.” Although the church fathers rejected analogies like Cerberus, once we give up divine simplicity, Cerberus does seem to represent what Augustine called an image of the Trinity among creatures.

We can enhance the Cerberus story by investing him with rationality and self-consciousness. In that case Rover, Bowser and Spike are plausibly personal agents and Cerberus a tripersonal being. Now if we were asked what makes Cerberus a single being despite his multiple minds, we should doubtless reply that it is because he has a single physical body. But suppose Cerberus were to be killed and his minds survive the death of his body. In what sense would they still be one being? How would they differ intrinsically from three exactly similar minds that have always been unembodied? Since the divine persons are, prior to the Incarnation, three unembodied minds, in virtue of what are they one being rather than three individual beings?

The question of what makes several parts constitute a single object rather than distinct objects is a difficult one. But in this case perhaps we can get some insight by reflecting on the nature of the soul. We have argued that souls are immaterial substances and have seen that it is plausible that animals have souls. Souls come in a spectrum of varying capacities and faculties. Higher animals such as chimpanzees and dolphins possess souls more richly endowed with powers than those of iguanas and turtles. What makes the human soul a person is that the human soul is equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition that enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination. Now God is very much like an unembodied soul; indeed, as a mental substance God just seems to be a soul. We naturally equate a rational soul with a person, since the human souls with which we are acquainted are persons. But the reason human souls are individual persons is because each soul is equipped with one set of rational faculties sufficient for being a person. Suppose, then, that God is a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood. Then God, though one soul, would not be one person but three, for God would have three centers of self-consciousness, intentionality and volition, as social trinitarians maintain. God would clearly not be three discrete souls because the cognitive faculties in question are all faculties belonging to just one soul, one immaterial substance. God would therefore be one being that supports three persons, just as our own individual beings each support one person. Such a model of Trinity monotheism seems to give a clear sense to the classical formula “three persons in one substance.”

Finally, such a model does not feature (though it does not preclude) the derivation of one person from another, enshrined in the confession that the Son is “begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made” (Constantinopolitan Creed). God could simply exist eternally with his multiple cognitive faculties and capacities. This is, in our view, all for the better. For although creedally affirmed, the doctrine of the generation of the Son (and the procession of the Spirit) is a relic of Logos

Christology which finds virtually no warrant in the biblical text and introduces a subordinationism into the Godhead which anyone who affirms the full deity of Christ ought to find very troubling.⁷

Finally, although the doctrine of the Trinity belongs to revealed theology rather than to natural theology, we may ask if there are any positive arguments which might be offered on behalf of the plausibility of that doctrine. We close with an argument that a number of Christian philosophers have defended for God's being a plurality of persons. God is by definition the greatest conceivable being. As the greatest conceivable being, God must be perfect. Now a perfect being must be a loving being. For love is a moral perfection; it is better for a person to be loving rather than unloving. God therefore must be a perfectly loving being. Now it is of the very nature of love to give oneself away. Love reaches out to another person rather than centering wholly in oneself. So if God is perfectly loving by his very nature, he must be giving himself in love to another. But who is that other? It cannot be any created person, since creation is a result of God's free will, not a result of his nature. It belongs to God's very essence to love, but it does not belong to his essence to create. So we can imagine a possible world in which God is perfectly loving and yet no created persons exist. So created persons cannot sufficiently explain whom God loves. Moreover, contemporary cosmology makes it plausible that created persons have not always existed. But God is eternally loving. So again created persons alone are insufficient to account for God's being perfectly loving. It therefore follows that the other to whom God's love is necessarily directed must be internal to God himself.

In other words, God is not a single, isolated person, as unitarian forms of theism like Islam hold; rather, God is a plurality of persons, as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity affirms. On the unitarian view God is a person who does not give himself away essentially in love for another; he is focused essentially only on himself. Hence, he cannot be the most perfect being. But on the Christian view, God is a triad of persons in eternal, self-giving love relationships. Thus, since God is essentially loving, the doctrine of the Trinity is more plausible than any unitarian doctrine of God.

⁷ For a systematic theologian's argument for abandoning eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, see John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2001), pp. 488–92. Feinberg stands in the tradition of evangelical theologians like J. Oliver Buswell Jr. who have expressed misgivings about this doctrine.

2

Divine Fission: A New Way of Moderating Social Trinitarianism*

Peter Forrest

The topic of this paper is a way of speculating about the Trinity in which we start with a heterodox Social Trinitarianism and then moderate it to ensure that various desiderata are satisfied. We could think of this as the synthetic approach: understanding God as a unity formed out of three divine persons. This may be contrasted with the analytic approach in which we start with the one God and discover the three persons in God. St Augustine's Psychological Trinitarianism is an example of that analytic approach. But neither the analytic approach nor ways of seeing the two approaches as compatible are within the scope of this paper. I note, however, that one promising way of combining the approaches is to use Geach's relative identity theory of the Trinity. This has recently been defended by Van Inwagen who notes its antecedents in the Athanasian Creed.¹ Indeed I suspect this is the only way of achieving literal conformity with that creed, which however, is not the decree of any ecumenical council. I do, however, respect it because of its traditional use in Christian liturgy. There is a proviso, though, namely that its authority is of an informal kind and so, I hold, there is no need to conform to it literally. Subject to that proviso I shall take respect for the Athanasian creed as one of the desiderata for social trinitarians.

I note at the outset that I shall not be considering the case for believing that there are no more than three divine persons, as opposed to believing there are at least three and then suspending judgement about whether there are any more. Nonetheless for convenience of exposition I shall take myself to be defending the traditional doctrine.

* From *Religious Studies* 34 (1998): 281–97. © 1998 Cambridge University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

¹ See Peter van Inwagen, 'And Yet They Are Not Three Gods but One God', in *God, Knowledge and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 222–259. For a critique of this appeal to relative identity see T. W. Bartel, 'The Plight of the Relative Trinitarian', *Religious Studies* 24 (1988), 129–55.

My starting point is Swinburne's Moderate Social Trinitarianism (Ch. 8),² explaining where I disagree and where I think more needs to be said. In spite of these disagreements I am heavily indebted to Swinburne's clear and coherent speculation about the Trinity. And I follow him both in holding that divine persons lack thisness and in what I take to be the most significant feature of his speculation. This is the way he starts with an account of the existence and nature of a God who is a single divine person only—the primordial God in my terminology. Swinburne then explains how the Trinity could arise from the primordial God. I take this to be important as an objection to the widespread assumption that the Trinity is more mysterious, and so intellectually more expensive, than mere theism. I grant, however, that the sort of speculation he gives is in some way 'abstract' or 'arid'. In this paper I shall have occasion to note both intellectual and affective versions of various desiderata for Trinitarianism. It is my contention that the affective aspects of religion presuppose the 'arid' intellectual aspects, so the former are incomplete without the latter. I hope that my speculative development of Moderate Social Trinitarianism both illustrates and supports this contention.

The most striking difference between my speculation and Swinburne's is in our answers to the question: 'How is the Trinity possible?' His speculation is that the First Person is the ultimate cause of all things. I reject this because I identify the ultimate cause of all things with the God who is the Trinity, not the First Person. Accordingly, I speculate that the Trinity arises as a result of fission by the primordial God, rather than the primordial God bringing other divine persons into existence.

I. SWINBURNE'S SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM

I shall assume that we have a good enough grasp of what it is to be a human person. And I assume that, in spite of the historical influence in the other direction, we now form the idea of a divine person by analogy with that of a human person.³ I shall also assume that we have a good grasp of the sort of gods which polytheists worship. These gods are divine persons who, unlike the three persons of the Trinity, are individuals in much the sense that we are. I take it that this individuality is what lies behind the 'all too human' antics of the gods of Greek, Indian and other mythologies.

² Unless otherwise indicated all references to Swinburne are to: Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

³ See David Brown, 'Trinity, Personhood and Individuality', in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 21–47 for an account of the development of the concept of a person and the relevance of this to the doctrine of the Trinity.

My starting point is a certain kind of monotheism: God is not an atemporal being but one who of necessity exists at all times and of necessity is a good, loving being at all times. My speculation is compatible with, but does not require, the further claims that: (1) of necessity God has complete knowledge of other things which exist; (2) of necessity God has complete power over all other things to bring into existence any possible kind of universe and to control what has been brought into existence; and (3) of necessity no other things can exist without God's sustaining them. In all the above we should ask what sort of necessity is being considered. Here I follow Swinburne (Ch. 5) and distinguish ontological necessity from mere metaphysical necessity. Ontological necessity is that which is both metaphysically necessary and uncaused. Consider an act by God required by the divine goodness. For example, suppose that there is a best kind of universe. Then, I would hold, it is required by the divine goodness that God create a universe of that kind. The resultant product of any such divine act would be metaphysically necessary but not ontologically necessary.

Now Swinburne considers that the Trinity has the power to annihilate itself, although the necessary divine goodness renders such annihilation metaphysically impossible (p. 147). This power of self-destruction arises because each of the divine persons has the power to annihilate the others. If these powers were simultaneously exercised then there would be no God any more. By contrast, the speculation I provide is compatible with the claim that the continued existence of God is ontologically necessary. Again my speculation is compatible with interpreting necessity as ontological necessity in the further claims (1), (2) and (3) above. I am not sure how much it matters to Swinburne that the continued existence of God is not ontologically necessary, so this difference may not be significant. I note, however, that Clark criticises Swinburne for using metaphysical rather than ontological necessity in his account.⁴ My speculation will be not be subject to that criticism.

Like Swinburne I shall assume that the Trinity comes about and that before it existed God was what I call the primordial God—a single isolated divine person. On my speculation God changes quite radically, undergoing fission. On Swinburne's speculation (pp. 174–7) the primordial God brought into existence another divine person, and they jointly brought into existence a third. This happened because the primordial God, being good, recognised that a loving community was of greater value than a single person. Hence the community of three persons is metaphysically necessary because required by the goodness of the primordial God.

That, I take it, is Swinburne's Social Trinitarianism. In answer to the question as to why Social Trinitarianism counts as Trinitarianism (not, as Clark charges,

⁴ All references to Clark are to Kelly James Clark, 'Trinity or Tritheism?', *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), 463–76.

mere Tritheism), social trinitarians might say that God is to be characterized as the perfect being and that what is perfect is not any one of these three gods, glorious though they be, but the community of love which they constitute. I shall characterize Extreme Social Trinitarianism as the position whose only concession to monotheism is to identify God with the community of gods. Now I grant that extreme social trinitarians believe there is but one God. But they also believe in three gods. So they are, after all, tritheists.

Extreme Social Trinitarianism is tritheistic. But Swinburne is not a tritheist, for he implicitly moderates Social Trinitarianism in two ways. One way is via his claim that God is a unity. The other is via the point that the three divine persons are 'gods' rather than gods—for they lack the sort of individuality that human persons have, and which characterized the gods of polytheistic religion. The one God is a unity in that it is impossible that any of the parts (i.e. the three divine persons) exist without the others existing. For instance, it is impossible that the First Person exist without the second, for the necessary goodness of the First Person requires the causation of the second. This contrasts with the way in which even in ideal human communities some of the parts (i.e. human persons) could have existed without others.

The second moderation of Social Trinitarianism is due to the important thesis that divine persons lack thisness. Here by a thisness I mean an unanalysable intrinsic property necessarily unique to the thing which has it. Swinburne contrasts divine thisness with his common sense thesis that human persons do have thisness. Or at least I take that to be common sense, but in order to do so I give it a gloss, namely that the doctrine of thisness is neutral between a nominalist and realist interpretation. On a realist interpretation a thisness exists as a constituent of the person. On a nominalist interpretation to say that a person has thisness is to say no more than that a person is primitively a this, that is, an individual whose individuality does not derive from anything else. Taken in this neutral way the thesis that human persons have thisness follows from common sense intuitions. One such intuition concerns indiscernible but non-identical human persons. The intuition is that this is an ontologically possible, although perhaps absurd, situation.⁵ Here, we should note, the intuition is not about metaphysical possibility. For we may well think that God's goodness would prevent such an absurdity.

One of Swinburne's major contributions is to have pointed out that there are many non-divine things which lack thisness, notably regions of space-time but also, probably, subatomic particles.⁶ Provided we do not think that being a person implies having thisness, it follows that there is nothing ad hoc in proposing that divine persons lack thisness.

⁵ Richard Swinburne, 'Thisness', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 73 (1995), 389–400. See p. 396.

⁶ Richard Swinburne, 'Thisness'. See p. 394.

Having made the contrast between divine persons which lack thisness and human persons which have thisness, Swinburne then follows a long tradition which maintains that the divine persons are distinct because and only because they stand in different relations to each other.⁷ Hence the three persons derive their individuality from precisely that which makes them parts of the one God, while human communities are, partially at least, formed out of pre-existing individuals.⁸

Both the ways in which Swinburne moderates Social Trinitarianism require the lack of thisness by divine persons. This is obvious in the case of the divine persons' lack of full individuality, which prevents them being gods rather than 'gods'. And Swinburne argues for it in the case of the unity of God; for were there to be three divine persons, each with thisness, we might envisage the first divine person bringing into existence not the actual second divine person but one with a different thisness (p. 176). Having a different thisness would not prevent exact similarity and the choice of one thisness rather than another is not constrained by goodness. So there could be no reason flowing from divine goodness for there being this rather than that second divine person.

The thesis that human persons have thisness may well be common sense but it is nonetheless open to objection, and if it mattered for Swinburne's moderation of Social Trinitarianism I would explain in detail why I do not rely on it.⁹ But it does not matter. For what is required to moderate Social Trinitarianism is divine thisnessless not human thisness. For suppose neither human nor divine persons have thisness. Then we can still make the contrast. On the one hand, divine persons are individuals because of the relations between them, which relations are also such as make them form the one God. On the other hand, human persons are individuals because of their differing physical and mental properties together with their relations with persons who already exist. Both the contingency of the relations with other human persons and the importance of physical and mental properties show human beings to be far more separate from each other than the divine persons.

A natural objection to Social Trinitarianism is that monotheism requires that there be just a single divine thing. My reply is that if we insist on counting divine things and put no restriction on what sort of thing we are considering, then any

⁷ At least prior to Creation. We need not discuss the question of whether the three divine persons are differently related to created things.

⁸ In view of the popularity of the thesis of the social construction of the self, I should note that what I am saying is quite uncontroversial. Children may in some sense be constructed by their relations with adults, and adults might get reconstructed by their relations with children, but quite clearly adults exist as persons before their children do.

⁹ Cutting a long story short, I grant that our common sense intuitions commit us to the thesis that a human person has a thisness, and I grant that common sense has some authority even on metaphysical issues but I say that this is a defeasible authority and, in this case, may well be defeated because there is no good account of how we could know of thisnesses.

distinct attributes of God would be different divine things. So if God has an infinity of attributes there are infinitely many divine things. Now the thesis of divine simplicity, according to which there is no multiplicity of divine attributes, is not implied by monotheism. Hence we must restrict what is taken to be a thing when we are counting divine things, with the expectation of getting the answer 'one'. I take the semi-technical use of 'ousia' in the Nicene Creed to be a way of suitably interpreting the word 'thing' when counting divine things. And Swinburne's moderated Social Trinitarianism enables us to rely on the explication of 'ousia' to mean 'substance', where I define a substance as something which cannot exist apart from its components and such that the components cannot exist apart from it. This contrasts with a different sense of 'substance' ('hypostasis' in contexts where hypostasis is contrasted with ousia), defined as that in which properties inhere. Social trinitarians, however, do not need to subscribe to the metaphysics presupposed by talk of properties inhering. For they may take it that we have a good enough grasp of the concept of a person and that this concept applies without mere equivocation to divine and human persons.¹⁰ So they can ignore talk of hypostases and use the formula 'three persons one ousia'.

Swinburne interprets the Nicene Creed's talk of the begetting of the second and the procession of the third in causal terms. As Swinburne describes it (p. 171) this requires that prior to this process there is a state in which the First Person is identical to the primordial God. The First Person ceases to be identical to God in bringing about the existence of the Second. Contrast this with my speculation in which the primordial God fissions into three persons.

II. DESIDERATA FOR SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM

Thus far I am merely expounding Swinburne's version of Social Trinitarianism, except that I have already argued that Swinburne's controversial thesis of human thisness is a distraction, quite unnecessary for his project. I shall now list some desiderata not mentioned by Swinburne. In this section I consider those which Swinburne's own version of Social Trinitarianism in fact satisfy. In the next I shall argue that we need to meet further desiderata, and thus moderate Social Trinitarianism in ways which Swinburne does not.

Some of the desiderata for Trinitarianism reflect my reluctance to reject the monotheism of Jews and Muslims. Others are based on what I take to be the tradition of Christian orthodoxy, expressed primarily by the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople, but also, to some extent, by the Athanasian Creed.

¹⁰ This is to bracket off the problems of how we talk about the divine. I assume the phrase 'without mere equivocation' covers both univocal and analogical accounts.

Affective Monotheism

The God of a quite unmoderated Social Trinitarianism is an It, not a He or a She. But why does it sound strange to refer to God as It? I submit that the religious attitude expressed in acts of worship requires for its object a personal being. A preliminary characterization of this attitudes would be that of unconditional submission to the divine will ('Islam') leading to a kind of trust and love which it would not be proper to have in a mere human person. If Extreme Social Trinitarianism were correct it would be a mistake to worship God in this way. We would choose which of the three gods to worship, knowing that the others are not jealous. I take it, however, that Christians worship the one God, who is also worshipped by Jews, Muslims and others. We have therefore, the desideratum of Affective Monotheism. It states that there is but one object of worship, God, and it endorses the horror Jews and Muslims have at the thought that Christians might be worshipping three gods.

Unity of Divine Will

Although not itself a metaphysical thesis, Affective Monotheism presupposes Intellectual Monotheism. This is the thesis that the divine persons are not properly called gods because they are not distinct enough from each other. As it stands, that characterization is rather vague, but one version of it would be the thesis that the three persons necessarily agree. In this way we arrive at the thesis of the Unity of Divine Will.

A further reason for believing in the Unity of the Divine Will is that we should be influenced by the characterization of God as a perfect being. Social trinitarians stress the perfection exemplified by a loving community, but there is a further, and apparently incompatible, perfection, namely that exemplified by a loving individual. If we modify Social Trinitarianism so as to ensure the Unity of the Divine Will we can argue that God has both perfections on the grounds that a community with a united will can behave towards others just as if it were a single individual.

Given the Unity of Divine Will, the act of submission to the will of one divine person, expressed by worship, may reasonably be interpreted as submission to the will of God. So we have at least gone some way towards satisfying the desideratum of Affective Monotheism. Notice that there is a stronger thesis not available to social trinitarians, however moderate. It is that the three persons are distinct conscious beings but share the very same will and hence are a single agent. In that case the divine will would not merely be a unity formed out of the wills of the three persons but a unity in the stronger sense of not being analysable into component wills. Superficially this is no more incoherent than the mythical dog Cerberus's having three heads but one heart. Rather the problem is that it would

destroy the important positive teaching of Social Trinitarianism that the Trinity exemplifies the perfection of a loving community. For, I take it, a perfect loving community must be one in which there are distinct wills, even if they are in harmony.

I submit, then, that Social Trinitarianism should be moderated so that we say the three divine persons necessarily agree on all things. Swinburne argues that this occurs because the first person in bringing the others into existence, delegates powers in such a way as to prevent even the disagreement that can occur among those who love each other and seek only what is good. If an example of such disagreement is required, consider the predicament of a couple one of whom wants to spend the afternoon at the beach and the other wants to spend it in the Botanical Gardens. Neither dislikes what the other prefers. If they are inclined to be unselfish and do what the other wants they would have just as much trouble agreeing as if they are inclined to be selfish.¹¹

Worshipping Christ

A further desideratum is that, without abandoning Affective Monotheism, Christians may properly worship Christ and properly venerate Mary as Mother of God (*theotokos*). This desideratum can be thought of as the affective version of the Athanasian Creed's claim that each of the three distinct persons is not merely a necessary component of God but is identical to God. For if the second divine person is identical to God then in worshipping Christ we are worshipping God. Here I note that my formulation of the Unity of Divine Will allows for the worship of Christ. For I have allowed that there are three divine wills and each is an object of religious attitudes.

Qualitative Difference

The Unity of Divine Wills thesis might suffice to justify Affective Monotheism but we need more to avoid the charge of Tritheism. We need what I call Qualitative Difference, which is one of the ways Swinburne moderates Social Trinitarianism. This states that there is a difference between the Trinity and a pantheon of gods, even if the gods necessarily agree. I would suggest that Qualitative Difference is satisfied because the relations which distinguish the three divine persons are precisely those which make them the constituents of God. By contrast, in a pantheon of gods, either every god is independent of the others and so a substance in the sense of 'ousia', or else they are arranged in a hierarchy of dependence. So Qualitative Difference would not be satisfied on a

¹¹ I am indebted to Phillip Pettit for pointing out that not all coordination problems can be overcome by unselfishness.

version of the Trinity in which the First Person caused the other persons to exist in a way which was neither ontologically nor metaphysically necessary.

III. FURTHER MODERATION

Thus far I have deliberately ignored five desiderata for Moderate Social Trinitarianism which are not satisfied by Swinburne's speculations. One of these is that the first cause of all other things should be the one who is now worshipped as God and not, as in Swinburne's account, a single divine person who was once the whole of God. My chief reason for proposing this as a desideratum is respect for such monotheistic traditions as Judaism and Islam, who would insist that there is just one God which is the cause of all things. I shall satisfy this desideratum by speculating that the primordial God undergoes a fission into the three divine persons. For that ensures the identity of the primordial God with the God who is the Trinity. As far as I can see Swinburne cannot modify his speculation to satisfy this desideratum.

The second desideratum is that, as Clark urges, our account of the Trinity should be compatible with the ontological necessity of the continued existence of God. We should not be committed to the somewhat startling thesis that God has the power of self-destruction. It is not easy to combine this desideratum with the attractive idea that the divine persons express their love by giving each other continued existence. As far as I can see Swinburne could adapt his account to satisfy this desideratum in much the way that I shall, that is by attributing to each divine person the power either to continue their own existence or to confer existence on another. In that way if, of metaphysical impossibility, a war broke out in the Trinity the last divine person left would be God.

The third desideratum is based on Clark's objection that metaphysical necessity is just too weak for the sort of necessity which theologians have had in mind when discussing the existence and nature of God. Now both the unity of God as a substance, in the sense of 'ousia', and the unity of the divine wills is implicated in terms of the necessity of the relations between the persons. Necessarily the first person brings into existence the second, necessarily the first two (or on the Eastern Orthodox view the first) bring into existence the third. Necessarily they agree because, according to Swinburne, necessarily there is a wise delegation of powers. This necessity is, on his speculation, a metaphysical but not an ontological necessity. The third desideratum is that the necessity by which the divine persons are one 'ousia' should be ontological necessity. The argument for this is partly respect for the tradition, but partly that, on intuitive grounds, the parts which constitute a single thing will only do so if it is beyond even divine power to split them.

The fourth desideratum is that the divine wills should be united in the further sense that the divine persons necessarily have the same desires. This is not the same as there being a wise delegation of powers within the Trinity. (Imagine a

culture in which men have power over their sons' education and women over their daughters'. Parents could still disagree about how they want their children educated.) I argue for this fourth desideratum by returning to Affective Monotheism. If the harmony of the wills of the three divine persons is merely a consequence of a delegation of powers then you could knowingly submit yourself to the will of the second person without submitting yourself to the will of the first.¹² Or, more plausibly, you could lovingly submit your will to the Second Person but only grudgingly and resentfully to the First. I say that the submission to the will of the one God, required by affective monotheism, requires there to be a necessary harmony of the divine wills. Only then is it absurd knowingly to submit to the will of one but not the other. I am not sure just what sort of necessity is required here, but my conjecture, for what it is worth, is that the harmony should be due to divine goodness, not to any lack of power to disagree. For lack of the power to disagree among members of the Trinity would seem incompatible with it being a perfect community.

I reject on the above grounds Swinburne's account of how the divine wills are united. In any case, I think his account is unnecessarily complicated. For although not all coordination problems are solved by love, those in finite communities of more than two are. We may assume that provided the outcome is good the chief desire of each of the three divine persons is to please the others.¹³ Hence for any two-way decision all three necessarily desire that the majority will prevail, and unlike in human democracies the majority's will then becomes the ungrudging will of all. Swinburne considers this (p. 174) but then rejects it because of the possibility of decisions with more than two alternatives. Let us suppose, then, that the three divine persons make initially different choices. If we think of it anthropomorphically, each will then desire to defer to one of the others. Of the eight ways of thus deferring six result in a choice by two that the third's will be deferred to. So there is a 75% chance of reaching agreement at each attempt. Assuming there are infinitely many opportunities for the divine persons to try to reach agreement, then the possibility of never doing so has infinitesimal probability.¹⁴

¹² Clearly you can unknowingly submit yourself to the 'will of X' but not 'the will of Y' where X and Y are identical. For instance you could submit yourself to the will of Allah but not to the triune God, not knowing that they are the same. My remarks concern, however, someone who knows all there is for us to know about the persons of the Trinity.

¹³ There is a threat of regress. For example suppose X desires to please Y and Y desires to please Z who desires to please X and so on. Then it might seem that X is motivated to do what Y wants and hence to do what Z wants and hence to do what X wants, and hence to do what Y wants etc. I avoid the regress by submitting that the motive of love is to seek something definite which the beloved already desires. Thus if you do not yet love newly acquired stepchildren whom your spouse loves, love of your spouse would motivate doing specific things for your stepchildren that your spouse desires to occur. By itself love for your spouse would not motivate doing specific things they want about which your spouse is neutral.

¹⁴ Bartel, like me, rejects Swinburne's solution to the problem. His own solution which he considers cannot be guaranteed to succeed depends on Middle Knowledge. See T. W. Bartel, "Could There Be More Than One Almighty?", *Religious Studies* 29 (1993), 465–495.

Perhaps this is just too anthropomorphic but it shows that the final desideratum can be satisfied on any version of Social Trinitarianism. Personally I would prefer to speculate that joint action as a result of joint intentions is really no more mysterious than the action of a single individual, so we do not need such anthropomorphic models. It suffices to point out the three persons would judge it better to act jointly than individually and hence do act jointly.

Finally, there is the desideratum that we respect the Athanasian Creed's statement that each person is God. Perhaps I should add to this the statement, which has the authority of, for instance, the Council of 1421–1445, that the divine persons have no beginning.

We are left, then, with three further desiderata which Swinburne's account does not satisfy—and cannot easily be modified in order to satisfy—namely: (1) that the ultimate cause of all things be God not just the First Person; (2) that, as Clark has stressed, the necessity by which the divine persons are united is more than mere metaphysical necessity; and (3) that we should give some respect to the claim that each person is God and is without beginning. In the next section I develop a speculation satisfying these desiderata.

IV. SOME CONSEQUENCES OF DIVINE THISNESSLESS

I shall now argue that divine thisnessless implies that the divine persons are quasi-individuals not individuals and that this permits divine fission. First, I claim that nothing lacking in thisness is an individual unless it derives its individuality from something with thisness. The primordial God does not have such derived individuality. So the primordial God is not an individual but what I shall call a quasi-individual. I further claim that quasi-individuals can survive fission. Here I note, only to dismiss, the objection that as a matter of conceptual analysis persons must be individuals. I dismiss this because should that be the case it merely shows that the primordial God, although a personal being, was not a person but rather a quasi-person. And that is of no consequence. Nor would it be of much consequence if it should turn out that, even now, the Persons of the Trinity are strictly speaking quasi-persons because they are not individuals in the strict sense. Indeed that might strike some as a welcome further moderation of Social Trinitarianism.

If Xs are genuine individuals there will, ignoring vagueness, be a unique though perhaps infinite answer to the question 'How many Xs are there?' What I mean by a quasi-individual is that if Xs are quasi-individuals the question 'How many Xs are there?' has a unique least correct answer but no unique correct answer. For example, 'three', 'six', 'nine' etc. might all be correct answers to the question, in which case 'three' is the unique least correct answer. The obvious convention for counting quasi-individuals is to speak as if the Identity of

Indiscernibles held and so give the least correct answer, in this case 'three'. I shall be arguing that the primordial God is a quasi-individual and so the question 'How many divine persons are there?' had in the primordial situation any positive whole number as its answer. Therefore, the least correct, and hence conventional answer would have been 'one'.

My claim is that to be an individual rather than a quasi-individual something must either have thisness or derive its individuality by being related to something with thisness in such a way that only one thing could be so related. Suppose Swinburne is correct in claiming that some created things such as human persons have thisness. And suppose joint causation is impossible so only one divine person could create a given item. Then any divine person which created something with thisness would thereby become an individual and so, I say, incapable of further fission. But prior to creation it would seem that the divine persons are quasi-individuals and their number is not so much three as three-or-any-multiple.

I argue for this by exploiting the well-known connection between thisness and the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. I shall first state the argument in the context of the debate over that principle, and then isolate it. First, then, I note that Adams has argued that because the Identity of Indiscernibles fails then there must be things with thisness.¹⁵ To do this he presents a variant on Black's argument that the Identity of Indiscernibles fails because there are possible symmetrical worlds.¹⁶ We could, for instance, consider a world with nothing in it but two qualitatively identical spheres. Because of the symmetry there is nothing to make one sphere this and the other that except, the argument goes, their thisnesses. And that seems correct, provided we are neutral between a realist and a nominalist interpretation of thisness. The weak link in the argument is the assumption that there is a possible world which may only be described as consisting of nothing but two qualitatively identical spheres. That assumption has a certain initial plausibility because we are reluctant to multiply necessities and the only alternative to it initially seems to be that necessarily there cannot be a world describable as consisting of nothing but two qualitatively identical spheres. At this point we should, however, recall Hacking's interpretation of the Identity of Indiscernibles, namely that any possible world may be described as without two indiscernible things.¹⁷ So, in the case of the two spheres example, Hacking would say that there is indeed a world which *may* be described as two spheres which exactly resemble each other, but that this same world may also be described as just a single sphere.

I think Hacking is right about the alternative to believing in thisness. Nothing as strong as the impossibility of two or more qualitatively identical things should follow from the mere lack of thisness. Rather if there is no thisness then there is

¹⁵ See Robert M. Adams 'Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity', *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979), 5–26.

¹⁶ Max Black, 'The Identity of Indiscernibles', *Mind* 61 (1952), 153–64.

¹⁷ Ian Hacking, 'The Identity of Indiscernibles', *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975), 249–56.

no fact of the matter as to whether we describe the possible world as consisting of one sphere or two qualitatively identical spheres. Hence the spheres are quasi-individuals. We may with perfect correctness describe the situation as one with two, or three or more spheres but the minimum number of spheres in a correct description is one.

Isolating the argument, it goes like this. First I invite you to consider items which lack thisness and which are not individuated by other things which have thisness. Then I submit that there is no difference between saying there is just one of them or saying there are many of them which exactly resemble each other. And that, by definition, is to say they are quasi-individuals.

To this you might well reply that it is not even possible for there to be several items which exactly resemble each other. I have two rejoinders to this. The first that this reply multiplies necessities more than is necessary. Necessities are, I say, significant facts about the way things are which should not be made true simply by a lack of thisness.

My other rejoinder is to rely upon Adams' Continuity Argument.¹⁸ Adams, having already rejected Hacking's position, argues against the impossibility of two indiscernible things by noting that there could be things which were discernible in some minute and trivial fashion. Thus, in his example, a quickly forgotten detail of a nightmare is all that might distinguish someone from an otherwise exact replica. Then he relies upon the intuition, which I share, that such minutiae should not affect the issue. I do not, however, take this as an argument for thisness, but rather as showing that where things lack thisness there is no fact of the matter as to whether they are one or many.

I grant that the above argument is just the sort of thing that brings metaphysics into disrepute. How could anyone know, readers might protest, about such matters? How can I be so confident about the principle that necessities are not to be multiplied more than is necessary? And why should we trust an intuition that the difference between the possibility and impossibility of replicas should not depend on some minute difference? I grant that all this is speculative. But in order to defend a moderate Social Trinitarianism it suffices to provide a speculative metaphysics which is no worse than its rivals. At very least, then, we may speculate that items lacking thisness are quasi-individuals unless they derive individuality from items with thisness.

I now argue that quasi-individuals can survive fission.¹⁹ Let us consider again the universe which can be described either as consisting of one sphere or as two (or more) indiscernible spheres. Perhaps this sphere/these spheres are subject to

¹⁸ Adams, 'Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity', p. 17.

¹⁹ Here I am indebted to David Lewis' defence of the possibility of fission. See 'Survival and Identity' in A.O. Rorty (ed.) *The Identities of Persons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 17–40, reprinted in David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers, Vol. I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 55–73, with postscript (pp. 73–7). I take Lewis to be claiming that even we human beings are quasi-individuals.

rare and random deformation. There is a chance that a sphere will become a cube. If we describe the universe as two spheres then there is a chance of one of them becoming a cube. In that case the 'one' sphere has undergone fission into a sphere and a cube. More accurately the minimum answer to the question 'How many solid objects are there?' has increased from one to two. The reason why the object survives such fission is that the situation can truly be described as one in which there were always two objects one of which changed.

Likewise on the assumption that the primordial God lacks thisness there is the possibility of fission into three divine persons. I see no reason, however, to suppose such fission to be beyond the power of the primordial God to control.

Eventually either Creation or the Incarnation might confer individuality on the divine persons, but prior to Creation the divine persons are still quasi-individuals. Hence it is only the asymmetry of some of the relations between them which prevents the conventional number of divine persons being one. So if these asymmetrical relations are few, we can say that it is *almost* the case that the conventional numbering is one. This might help to further moderate Social Trinitarianism.

The above provides a speculative account of how it is possible for divine persons to be individuated by their relations only: it is possible because they are quasi-individuals and the asymmetry of certain relations merely serves to exclude some of the ways of counting them, leaving only those in which there are a multiple of three. Had the relations been symmetric then there would have been all ways of counting so the conventional number of divine persons would be one.

I have speculated that the primordial one-person God fissions into a Trinity for the sake of there being community. To provide further details of how this fission occurs, we may suppose some power of self-limitation in the three (or more) indistinguishable quasi-individuals who are the primordial God. Hence the three persons who are symmetrically related (and hence conventionally counted as one person) can choose to lose half of some of the symmetrical relation. Interestingly, since God then becomes the Trinity this does not require that God ceases to be omnipotent.²⁰ The self-limitation merely concerns the three persons who become distinct—distinct in the sense that their minimum number is now three—by limiting their powers.

But what relations shall we consider? Social trinitarians should not follow Augustine and Aquinas in considering the relations of love and knowledge. For these must surely hold symmetrically between the persons of a perfect community. Now, although there is more to loving than giving and receiving, giving is the typical and appropriate expression of love. I speculate, then, that we may take the relations distinguishing the persons of the Trinity as ones in which some gift

²⁰ Omnipotence is notoriously hard to define, but I take divine omnipotence to be quite neutral on the topic of power to alter the divine composition. Omnipotence concerns power over things other than God.

is given or shared. My speculation is that the gift is one of continued existence and hence the continuance of the joy of being a divine person. The Second Person's existence is a gift from the First and the Third's a gift from the first two. I would further speculate that the three divine persons are faced with a choice of either exercising a power of continued existence or, laying down that power, conferring continued existence on other divine persons. It might go like this. The First Person has the power to continue the Second's existence, and they could both continue in existence of their own power, but they have to lay down this power in bringing the Third into existence, and the Third could then exist without the others but lays down this power in order to ensure the continued existence of the First.

Clearly there are many variants on this speculation. But the basic idea is that the fission of the primordial God results from a voluntary diminution of the powers of the three initially indiscernible persons so that they become a genuine community in which each person expresses love for the others.

It might be objected that love is a sham if you can rely, with rational certainty, on others reciprocating. A loving community, it might be suggested, is one with genuine vulnerability where everyone trusts each other but does so without rational certainty. To this my reply is that the vulnerability implicit in loving relations is that of trust where the one trusted is free not to reciprocate. A perfectly loving community is one in which the individuals can be relied upon with full confidence freely to choose to reciprocate. The disposition to trust others without rational certainty if the circumstances should arise is, however, required for the perfection of being a totally loving person. God has that perfection but it only gets manifested in the Incarnation, which is not my present topic.

If you ask when the fission of the primordial God occurred I would reply that there is, on the one hand, an ordered sequence A of acts by human and divine agents and, on the other, a dimension of time T (more accurately space-time) which is part of and dependent on this universe which is created by God in one of the acts in A. Now the human and perhaps some of the divine acts in A are correlated with moments in T.²¹ So if we ask when the Trinity came into being we may reply in two ways. There is no moment in T at which either it or the creation of this universe occurred, but in the sequence of acts A the formation of the Trinity was, presumably, the very first act. It preceded the act of creation which in turn preceded any of the acts correlated with moments of T.

Notice also the difficulty in providing a speculation in which the primordial God splits into a Binity. For in that case we could only distinguish the two persons by assuming that one (the First) retains the power to continue to exist

²¹ For details of this correlation see Peter Forrest, 'Physical Necessity and the Passage of Time', in Peter J. Riggs (ed.), *Natural Kinds, Laws of Nature and Scientific Methodology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996), pp. 49–62.

while the other (the Second) does not. But then there is no gift of love from the Second to the First.

I have sketched a Swinburne-inspired account of the Trinity as a community of love arising from, and being explained by the existence of a primordial God who is not a Trinity. Following Swinburne I relied heavily on divine thisnessless, but, unlike him, I have not relied on human thisness. It remains to show how the various desiderata are satisfied, especially those which Swinburne's own account did not satisfy.

First, I note that the existence of the divine persons as distinct depends on the differing relations between them. Because they are quasi-individuals, if they remained in existence but did not have these differing relations, they would undergo fusion. That is, the minimum number they could be assigned would drop from three to one. The necessity by which this is so is the necessity of divine thisnessless, which I take to be ontological necessity. It is also worth considering what would happen if, say, the First Person failed to confer existence on the Second. Then the Trinity would collapse into a unitarian God, but by the extinction of the other persons rather than by fusion. All this is compatible with the ontological impossibility of God ceasing to exist. For, whether there is fusion or the survival of just one person, in either case God still exists.

Because of the ontological necessity of the dependence of the divine persons on the relations between them, they constitute a single 'ousia' which satisfies the desideratum of Intellectual Monotheism, and does so in a way which meets Clark's objection that we should be considering ontological rather than meta-physical necessity.

Finally, let us consider the Athanasian Creed used by Clark (p. 472) as an objection to Swinburne's position. Here I agree with Clark. For even given appropriate freedom of interpretation the claim that each of the three divine persons is God should not be taken as merely predicating divinity of them. Rather it means that each divine person is in some sense the whole of God. I shall exhibit two senses in which my speculation identifies each divine person with the whole of God. I leave it to readers to decide whether these satisfy the spirit of the Athanasian Creed. I also note that we will be able to say that in some fashion the divine persons have no beginning. For each person is in some sense identical to the primordial God.

The first sense in which each of the three divine persons is identical to the whole of God is a loose sense of identity over time. If we think of a person as consisting of stages related in a suitable way, then we loosely refer to the relation between stages as identity. In that loose sense, if a person undergoes fission it is often said that the pre-fission stage is identical to each of the post-fission stages. The phrase 'is identical to' in this loose sense seems to mean 'is a part of the same temporally extended person as'. In that sense we may indeed say that the one primordial God is 'identical to' each of the three divine persons, and hence

the divine persons are without beginning in whatever way the primordial God is without beginning.

The other sense concerns not 'identity' over time, but counterfactual identity. Here we may say that each divine person is the whole of God meaning that were the others to cease to exist then what is left would be God without any loss of power or knowledge. On my speculation that does indeed hold, and holds of ontological necessity.²²

²² I would like to thank both the anonymous referee and Peter Byrne for their helpful advice.

3

Three Persons in One Being: On Attempts to Show that the Doctrine of the Trinity is Self-Contradictory*

Peter van Inwagen

Enemies of the Church have frequently contended that two of its central doctrines are not only false but violate various elementary logical principles. These two doctrines are, of course, the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. I shall investigate the contention that the doctrine of the Trinity is logically self-contradictory.

I shall proceed as follows. I shall try to imagine a way of stating the doctrine of the Trinity that has the following feature: when the doctrine is stated in this way, it can be *shown* not to be self-contradictory. I shall leave the following question to theologians (for I am a philosopher, not a theologian): Is what I describe as “a way of stating the doctrine of the Trinity” properly so described—or should it be called a way of *misstating* the doctrine of the Trinity? I claim only this: a strong case can be made for the thesis that the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity I shall propose does succeed in being a statement of what has historically been called ‘the doctrine of the Trinity’; and an even stronger case can be made for the thesis that this formulation is *consistent* with historical orthodoxy. Even if these theses are false, they are, in my view, plausible enough to be worthy of a considered refutation.

My project, therefore, belongs to Christian apologetic. It is a Christian philosopher’s attempt to meet a certain kind of philosophical attack on Christian belief. Whether my attempt at apologetic in fact *distorts* Christian belief is a point on which I humbly (and sensibly) defer to trained theologians. In matters of speculative theology—and particularly when the question at issue is whether certain theological speculations are in accord with historical orthodoxy—theologians must sit in judgment over mere philosophers. (Just as, in my view,

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bishops and councils must sit in judgment over theologians.) I claim only one kind of authority that is denied to theologians: I am the ultimate arbiter of what my own words mean. If a theologian tells me that my proposed way of stating the doctrine of the Trinity is wrong (that is, that what I have proposed as a way of stating “the doctrine of the Trinity” has implications inconsistent with what the Church has always understood by “the doctrine of the Trinity”), I allow myself only one defense: “If I had said what you think I’ve said, you’d be right; but I didn’t say what you think I said.”

Now a qualification. When I said I should propose a way of stating the doctrine of the Trinity, I spoke loosely. What I am going to propose a statement or formulation of is a *part* of the doctrine of the Trinity, the part that is alleged to violate certain principles of logic. In one sense, there can be no more important questions of Trinitarian theology than those raised by the *filioque*. These questions are important because they have consequences for the immensely important task of restoring Christian unity. But these questions would not interest those enemies of the Church who attack the doctrine of the Trinity on logical grounds. They attack aspects of the doctrine that are common to the Eastern and the Western understandings of the Trinity (if indeed there is still any difference between Eastern and Western understandings of the Trinity). Their attacks are not directed at theses concerning the relations the persons of the Trinity bear to one another, but are directed, so to speak, at the persons themselves. But it is time to turn from the abstract to the concrete and to see how the attacks I am going to consider have been formulated. I am going to concentrate on attacks made by present-day unbelievers, but these attacks do not differ in their essential content from those made by Socinians in the seventeenth century, and I should be surprised if similar objections to Trinitarianism had not been raised by Jewish and Muslim philosophers and theologians—although I cannot speak to this question of my own knowledge. The essential points made in these arguments, moreover, were known to the great Trinitarian theologians of the first millennium, and to the philosophers and theologians of the Latin Middle ages.

I will consider two arguments. Here is the first.

The term ‘God’ applies without qualification to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is not the Father. Hence, there are at least three Gods.

We may compare this argument with the following argument:

The term ‘king’ applies without qualification to Gaspar, to Melchior, and to Balthasar. Gaspar is not Melchior; Melchior is not Balthasar; Balthasar is not Gaspar. Hence, there are at least three kings,

and we may note that the former argument and the latter appear to be logically identical, and that the second is certainly logically valid. But monotheism is essential to Christian belief, and indeed, to the doctrine of the Trinity; therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is logically self-contradictory. For this argument to be

valid, the word ‘God’ must be understood as what linguists call a count-noun, that is a noun that, like ‘king,’ has a plural form (and in languages that have an indefinite article, can follow the indefinite article). But this seems to be so: We say, “There is one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth” and “Our God is a God of love” and “The doctrine of the Trinity does not imply that there are three Gods”; and each of these sentences is grammatically correct.

Here is the second argument:

The Father is God. The Son is God. Hence, the Father is the Son.

We may compare this argument with the following argument:

The capital of Russia is Moscow. The largest city in Russia is Moscow.

Hence, the capital of Russia is the largest city in Russia,

and we may note that the former argument and the latter appear to be logically identical, and that the second is certainly logically valid. But it is essential to the doctrine of the Trinity that the Father is not the Son; therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is logically self-contradictory. For this argument to be valid, the word ‘God’ must be understood as a proper name—like ‘Moscow’ or ‘Zeus’ or ‘Socrates.’ But this seems to be so: We say, “O God make speed to save us” and “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God”; and each of these sentences is grammatically correct.

We have noted that these two arguments presuppose two different grammatical functions for the word ‘God.’ But this does not imply that at most one of the two arguments is logically valid, for the word ‘God’ does function both as a count-noun and as a proper name. In every language I know of, a proper name can function, or one might say, be forced to function as a count-noun. (Here is an example used by the German philosopher Frege: Trieste is no Vienna.) But the use of ‘God’ as a count-noun in the first argument is not a case of a proper name being *forced* to function as a count-noun. No force is required when we choose to employ ‘God’ as a count-noun. It is part of the meaning of ‘God’ that it has a dual grammatical function, that it is syntactically ambiguous as it were: it can function both as a count-noun and as a proper name. And if we suppose that ‘God’ functions as a count-noun at each of its occurrences in the first argument, the premises of that argument seem to be true. If, moreover, we suppose that ‘God’ functions as a proper name at each of its occurrences in the second argument, the premises of *that* argument seem to be true. (The fact that God has a proper name in the more usual sense—as we learn from Exodus 3:14—does not affect the point that the word ‘God’ often *functions* as a proper name. I may mention in this connection that Professor Peter Geach has argued that ‘God’ is never a proper name, owing to the fact that, in translations from one language to another, the word is itself translated—the word that means ‘God’ in the original language is replaced with a word of the other language that means ‘God’—and is not merely

phonetically adapted. A contrastive example will make Geach's point clear. The English word 'God' is a true translation of the Russian word 'Bog,' to which it bears no phonetic resemblance and to which it is etymologically unrelated. By way of contrast: the English proper name 'Moscow' is not in anything like the same sense a translation of 'Moskva'; it is merely an adaptation of the name Russians have given to their largest city, a phonetic adaptation that was made because it is easier for someone whose tongue is accustomed to the vowel-and-consonant patterns of English to say 'Moscow' than to say 'Moskva.' Whether or not this argument of Geach's is cogent, its target is not the thesis that I have endorsed. I have not said that 'God' is a proper name as 'Yahweh' is a proper name, but only that in some contexts it functions logically like a proper name. More exactly: I have not *said* this; I have said only that the second of the above arguments depends on the word's so functioning, and that examination of the way the word is used seems to endorse the thesis that it can so function.)

Now what shall we say of these two arguments? I have heard of (but cannot cite) theologians who are, in effect, willing to concede that our two arguments are logically valid and that their premises are true. They concede, therefore, that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is internally inconsistent; and they go on to say that it is nevertheless to be believed. Having made these concessions, they proceed to deprecate 'merely human logic.' Their point (so I have been told) is not that the doctrine is not inconsistent but seems to be inconsistent owing to the deficiencies of merely human logic; it is rather that it is only because of the deficiencies of merely human logic that inconsistency (at least in theology) seems objectionable. This position has (to be gentle) little to recommend it. If one maintains that something is to be believed, one thereby commits oneself to the thesis that that thing is true, for to believe something and to believe that it is true are one and the same thing. And nothing that is true can be internally inconsistent. If a theological doctrine or political ideology or scientific theory comprises three statements, and if that doctrine or ideology or theory is true, then its three constituent statements must be individually true. We might put the matter this way: every "part" of anything that is true must also be true, and anything that is true is consistent with anything else that is true—and an inconsistent doctrine or ideology or theory is one such that some of its parts are inconsistent with others of its parts. Those who are willing to believe what is logically inconsistent have failed to take account of the logically elementary fact that a truth cannot be inconsistent with a truth.

I have said that I could find no theologian who has actually said that inconsistencies were to be believed. Professor Geach claims to be able to identify (although he does not provide explicit citations of) certain medieval Latin thinkers who held a closely related thesis: that there are bodies of truth—just those that comprise the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation—that somehow constitute exceptions to logically valid principles or reasoning. These medievals, Geach says, appended the following warning to their statements of

certain rules of logical inference: *Haec regula habet instantiam in mysterio Sanctae Trinitatis*. (Here is a gloss: WARNING: Do not use this rule when the subject-matter of your reasoning is the mystery of the Holy Trinity; applied to that subject-matter, the rule can license the inference of false conclusions from true premises.)

To say this, or anything like this, is to misunderstand the concept of logic. Nothing is, or could be, above, beyond, or outside the province of logic. The idea does not make sense. And, certainly, it is blasphemous to say that any part of Christian theology is above, beyond, or outside the province of logic. Jesus Christ, in addition to being the Way and the Life, is the Truth. In him there is no darkness at all. In him there is no falsehood. The faith we have from him, and from the Holy Spirit whom he has sent to us, is therefore entirely true, true in every part. And nothing that is entirely true can be above, beyond, or outside the province of logic, for (as I have said) a truth cannot be inconsistent with a truth. If, *per impossibile*, there were some doctrine, some ideology, some theory, that was above, beyond, or outside the province of logic, it would not be entirely true; for what is entirely true is logically internally consistent, and what is logically internally consistent conforms to the rules of logic and cannot therefore be said to be above, beyond, or outside the province of logic.

To say this, however, is not to say that Christian doctrine (or, for that matter, a scientific theory like quantum mechanics; the suggestion has been made that quantum mechanics has just this feature) cannot be in violation of principles of reasoning that are generally *believed* to be logically correct. It is to say that Christians are committed to the thesis that if an essential Christian doctrine violates some principle of reasoning, then that principle is not logically correct, however many reputable professional logicians believe it to be logically correct. Logic—and this statement pertains to the *essence* of logic—makes a universal claim. It claims to apply to the whole of the Real—and nothing has a securer place in the Real than God, who alone can say, “I should be real if nothing else was.” (The Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong believed there to be—in a sense of ‘to be’ he was never able adequately to explain—things that lay outside the Real, and he believed that some of these violated the principles of logic. He thereby denied the universal claim of logic, whose scope he confined to the Real. He in fact denied that, “I pertain to the whole of the Real” *is* a claim to universality. His philosophy, however, seems to me to be nonsense, and—I say—unless one is prepared to follow Meinong into nonsense, one must accept the claim of logic to be of absolutely universal applicability.)

I said I should propose a way of stating the doctrine of the Trinity that was demonstrably consistent. I am not the first to have proposed to do this. Certainly various heretics have. Very roughly speaking, their heresies fall under two headings: modalism and tritheism. Modalism is the heresy that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three modes in which the one God is known by us or presents himself to us—three faces that God shows us, so to speak, as God’s Ape

does in the *Inferno*. Tritheism is, of course, the heresy that there are three Gods: that God the Father is one God, God the Son another God, and God the Holy Spirit a third God. I shall take it for granted that everyone present will agree that modalism is a heresy. It might be thought equally clear that tritheism was a heresy. (“Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God is one Yahweh.”) But there is a modern attempt at a demonstrably consistent statement of the doctrine of the Trinity—at least I should be willing to say that its consistency was demonstrable—according to which there are three Gods, and its author’s defense of its historical orthodoxy is well thought out and not simply to be dismissed. (I have in mind Professor Swinburne’s important essay on the Trinity, “Could There Be More Than One God?”) But whether Professor Swinburne’s account of the Trinity is, or is consistent with, historical orthodoxy is a subtle question, and one that is not, in the end, to be answered by a philosopher. What I can do, as a philosopher, is to exhibit the consequences of his theory—subject, of course, to correction by Professor Swinburne, whose authority to contend that I have got him wrong and whose authority to contend that I have made a mistake in reasoning are both unassailable. I shrink from the risks implicit in criticizing the work of a philosopher who is not only alive but is present as I speak, and will say nothing in detail about his views. I have mentioned these views only to make the point that the question whether tritheism is a heresy is a subtle question—and to make the related point that the question “What, exactly, *is* tritheism?” is likewise a subtle question. I am happy to make these points because, if any charge of heresy were to be lodged against my own speculations concerning the Trinity, it would certainly be that I have fallen into some form of tritheism. No one—I certainly hope this is so—could reasonably accuse me of having embraced modalism in any form.

My attempt to state the doctrine of the Trinity (and I do intend presently to get round to doing it) rests on the contention that certain rules of logical inference that are commonly supposed to be valid are not in fact valid, that these rules must be replaced by other rules, rules that *are* valid, and that the doctrine of the Trinity does not violate any valid rule of logical inference.

That part of logic whose rules the doctrine of the Trinity is in violation of (or is in violation of if the two arguments I set out earlier are valid) is the logic of *identity*. According to standard textbook logic, the logic we have from Frege and Russell, there is a relation called identity. This relation is defined by two properties. First, everything whatever bears this relation to itself. Secondly, this relation forces indiscernability. That is to say, if a thing x bears identity to a thing y , then whatever is true of x is true of y and whatever is true of y is true of x . From these two defining properties of identity (it is easily shown) two other important properties of identity immediately follow: identity is *symmetrical* (that is, if a thing x bears the relation of identity to a thing y , then y bears the relation of identity to x), and identity is transitive (that is, if x bears identity to y and y bears identity to z , then x bears identity to z). These properties of identity entail the

validity of four principles of reasoning or logical rules. In stating these rules, I will use the words ‘is identical with’ instead of ‘bears the relation of identity to.’

The rule of *Reflexivity* tells us that if we are engaged in a piece of reasoning, and if a name like ‘Ivan the Terrible’ occurs in this reasoning, and if this name (unlike, say, ‘Zeus’) actually designates something, we may introduce the sentence formed by surrounding the phrase ‘is identical with’ with two occurrences of that name into our reasoning. For example, if the name ‘Ivan’ occurs in our reasoning, and if ‘Ivan’ designates something, we may introduce into our reasoning the sentence ‘Ivan is identical with Ivan.’ This rule, moreover, applies not only to names but also to any phrase that purports to designate a single thing; ‘the first czar’ for example: Reflexivity licenses us to include in any piece of reasoning the sentence ‘the first czar is identical with the first czar.’

In stating the rule “Reflexivity,” I had to strain to state it generally (and a logician will tell you that I did not really succeed, since I said nothing about what logicians call “variables,” a point I will concede). In the sequel, I will not even attempt to give general statement of the rules whose validity follows from the properties of identity; I shall instead proceed by example and illustration.

The rule called *Leibniz’s Law* or *The Indiscernibility of Identicals* (note that I did not say “The Identity of Indiscernibles”!) allows us to introduce the following sentence into our reasoning:

If Moscow is identical with the city in which the Kremlin stands, then Moscow is populous if and only if the city in which the Kremlin stands is populous.

In this example the first or ‘if’ part of the statement is true, and the predicate ‘is populous’ in fact applies to the one thing that is both Moscow and the city in which the Kremlin stands. But I must point out that logic is in a certain sense blind to truth, and that Leibniz’s Law would allow us to introduce the following sentence into our reasoning:

If Helsinki is identical with the capital of Japan, then Helsinki is a moon of Jupiter if and only if the capital of Japan is a moon of Jupiter.

No doubt no sane person would *want* to introduce this sentence into any piece of reasoning; but a madman who did so would be reasoning logically—something madmen are often very good at. (And, anyway, when you think about it, isn’t it *true* that *if* Helsinki is identical with the capital of Japan, then Helsinki is a moon of Jupiter if and only if the capital of Japan is a moon of Jupiter?)

The rule called *Symmetry* (its validity can be proved, given the validity of Reflexivity and Leibniz’s Law) licenses inferences like these:

Cicero is identical with Tully; *hence*, Tully is identical with Cicero
 Peter the Great is identical with Catherine the Great; *hence*, Catherine the Great is identical with Peter the Great.

The rule called *Transitivity* (its validity can be proved, given the validity of Reflexivity and Leibniz’s Law) licenses inferences like these:

Byzantium is identical with Constantinople; Constantinople is identical with Istanbul; *hence*, Byzantium is identical with Istanbul
 Turgenev is identical with Dostoevski; Dostoevski is identical with the author of *Anna Karenina*; *hence*, Turgenev is identical with the author of *Anna Karenina*.

Infinitely many other rules of inference involving the phrase 'is identical with' can be proved valid given the defining properties of identity. Some of them are even interesting and important; Euclid's Law, or the Substitution of Identicals, for example, which allows us to infer 'Tolstoy was excommunicated' from the two premises 'The author of *Anna Karenina* was excommunicated' and 'Tolstoy is identical with the author of *Anna Karenina*,' but one must make an end somewhere, and perhaps at least the most general features of the logic of identity are now reasonably clear. And this logic of identity is all but universally regarded as an established part of logic. "How, ask the proponents of the validity of these rules, could they fail? Consider Transitivity. Suppose that the sentence 'Byzantium is identical with Constantinople' is true; if this sentence is true, that must be because there is a single thing, a certain city, that bears the two names 'Byzantium' and 'Constantinople.' And if 'Constantinople is identical with Istanbul' is true, that can only be because there is a single thing, a certain city that bears the two names 'Constantinople' and 'Istanbul.' It obviously follows that this "certain city" bears the two names 'Byzantium' and 'Istanbul' (we have said so), and that, therefore, 'Byzantium is identical with Istanbul' is true.

Now consider the first of the two anti-Trinitarian arguments I set out a moment ago. This argument depends on the idea of number; the idea expressed by the question "How many?" Number is explained in terms of identity. The proposition that there is exactly one phoenix can be expressed this way:

Something x is a phoenix and any phoenix is identical with x .

(For this sentence would be false if there were no phoenixes, and it would be false if there were two or more phoenixes: it is true in just exactly the remaining case, the case in which the number of phoenixes is one.)

The proposition that Mars has exactly two moons can be expressed this way:

Something x is a Martian moon and something y is a Martian moon and x is not identical with y and any Martian moon is identical with either x or y .

If we delete the last clause from this sentence (thus):

Something x is a Martian moon and something y is a Martian moon and x is not identical with y ,

the result is a way of expressing the proposition that there are *at least* two Martian moons. (The truncated sentence is false if Mars has no moons or has only one; it is true otherwise.) Now consider the sentence

Something x is a God and something y is a God and something z is a God and x is not identical with y and x is not identical with z and y is not identical with z .

This sentence says that there are at least three Gods. Now suppose someone says these things:

The Father is a God
 The Son is a God
 The Holy Spirit is a God
 The Father is not identical with the Son
 The Father is not identical with the Holy Spirit
 The Son is not identical with the Holy Spirit.

If these six things are true, then it would seem that we have our ' x ,' our ' y ' and our ' z ,' and it would seem, therefore to follow that there are at least three Gods. And are these six things true? Well, I concede that it might be hard to get a Christian to give his unqualified assent to any of them. Christians who speak a language that uses the indefinite article are likely, to say the least, to feel uncomfortable saying 'The Father is a God.' But consider: they will want to say the following two things: 'The Father is God' and 'God is a God'; does that not commit them to the truth of 'The Father is a God,' however reluctant they may be actually to utter these words? As to the final three sentences, perhaps these two will make the Christian uncomfortable. But they will certainly want to say these two things:

The following is true of the Son: that he is begotten of the Father.

The following is not true of the Father: that he is begotten of the Father.

And it follows from these two sentences by Leibniz's Law that the Father is not identical with the Son: for if the Father were identical with the Son, then everything that was true of the Father would also be true of the Son. It would seem, therefore, to follow by the logic of identity from things all Christians assent to that there are at least three Gods. And, since it is an essential element in the doctrine of the Trinity that there is one God, and one only, a logical contradiction can be deduced by the logic of identity from the doctrine of the Trinity. What I have just done, of course, is to present our first argument in a form which makes its reliance on the standard logic of identity explicit. This was a rather complex undertaking. To present our second anti-Trinitarian argument in this form, however, is simplicity itself:

The Father is identical with God
 The Son is identical with God
Hence, by Symmetry, God is identical with the Son
Hence, by Transitivity, the Father is identical with the Son.

And this conclusion certainly contradicts the doctrine of the Trinity. For one thing, as we have seen, it would imply—given that the Father begets the Son and given the standard logic of identity—that the Son begets the Father. For another, it would imply that there was a single thing for which 'the Father' and 'the Son' were alternative names—as there is a single thing for which 'Constantinople' and

'Istanbul' are alternative names—and this is modalism. Might the Christian respond by simply denying the premises, by simply denying that the Father is identical with God and that the Son is identical with God? (The Christian might appeal to Leibniz's Law to establish this: God comprises all three persons of the Holy Trinity; the Father does not comprise all three persons of the Holy Trinity; hence, the Father is not identical with God.) But this response leads to "counting" problems, like those on which our first argument turns. The Father is, as we have seen, a God. And God is certainly a God. Therefore, if the Father is not identical with God, there is something x that is a God and there is something y that is a God and x is not identical with y . That is to say: there are at least two Gods.

It has long seemed to me that the problems our two anti-Trinitarian arguments raise are insoluble, if the standard logic of identity is correct.

That is, it has seemed to me that the doctrine of the Trinity is self-contradictory if the standard logic of identity is correct. I wish, therefore, to explore the possibility of rejecting the standard logic of identity. But it is not possible to reject the standard logic of identity root and branch. There is obviously much that is right about it. I wish therefore, to investigate the possibility of a logic that preserves what is obviously right about the standard logic of identity, but which differs from the standard logic in a way that does not allow the deduction of a contradiction from the doctrine of the Trinity.

The logic of identity I shall propose turns on the idea that there is not one relation of identity but many. Thus, I do not so much propose a logic of identity according to which the rules governing identity I have laid out above are invalid as a logic according to which they are vacuous: I deny that there is one all-encompassing relation of identity for them to govern. When I say that there is no one all-encompassing relation of identity, I mean that there is no relation that is both universally reflexive and forces indiscernibility. When I speak of "many relations of identity," I have in mind relations like these: "being the same horse as," "being the same artifact as," and "being the same apple as." I call these *relations of relative identity*, since the use of any of them in an assertion of sameness relativizes that sameness to a *kind*; it is for that reason that each of the phrases I have mentioned contains a count-noun like 'horse' or 'artifact' or 'apple.' Thus, one might call the relations expressed by the phrases 'horse-identity,' 'artifact-identity,' and 'apple-identity.' In pieces of reasoning whose validity turns on relations of relative identity, count-nouns will occur only in phrases like the ones I have used as examples—'horse' will occur only in the phrase 'is the same horse as,' and so on. Having said this, I qualify it: I will allow predicates not of this form to occur if their form is that illustrated by 'is a horse.' I allow this because predicates of the this sort can be regarded as mere abbreviations for phrases of the sort I allow "officially." For example, 'Bucephalus is a horse' can be understood as a mere abbreviation for 'Bucephalus is the same horse as Bucephalus.' Since 'Bucephalus is the same horse as Bucephalus' expresses (so I contend) the thought expressed by the ordinary sentence 'Bucephalus is a horse,' it is clear that the

logic of relations of relative identity must have no rule corresponding to the rule Reflexivity. If we had such a rule, or, rather, if we had a separate rule of reflexivity for every relation of relative identity, this would have disastrous consequences. For example, the ‘horse’-rule would allow us to introduce the sentence ‘Tolstoy is the same horse as Tolstoy’ into our reasoning. And we do not want that, for that sentence says that Tolstoy is a horse.

I also decline to allow anything corresponding to Leibniz’s Law—that is to supply each relation of relative identity with its own little version of Leibniz’s Law. The logic of relative identity thus does not give us its permission to introduce into our reasoning the sentence

If Bucephalus is the same horse as Alexander’s favorite horse, then Bucephalus was fond of apples if and only if Alexander’s favorite horse was fond of apples.

If the logic of relative identity does not give us its permission to introduce this sentence into our reasoning, neither does it forbid us to do so. I myself think that this sentence expresses a truth, even a necessary truth, and I am therefore perfectly willing to introduce it into my reasoning (and would be equally willing to introduce any sentence built round ‘is the same horse as’ in the same way), but I would justify this willingness by an appeal to what I believe to be features of horse-identity, features that (in my view) may not be shared by all other relations of relative identity.

I in fact allow only two logical rules to govern reasoning about relations of relative identity. First, Symmetry, which is illustrated by this inference:

Bucephalus is the same horse as Alexander’s favorite horse;
hence, Alexander’s favorite horse is the same horse as Bucephalus.

Secondly, Transitivity:

Byzantium is the same city as Constantinople; Constantinople is the same city as Istanbul; *hence*, Byzantium is the same city as Istanbul.

(In the standard logic of identity, Symmetry and Transitivity are derived rules; in the logic of relative identity, they must stand on their own.) Now let us apply these ideas to the doctrine of the Trinity. Suppose we have the two relations of relative identity:

is the same being (substance, *ousia*) as
 is the same person as.

I shall not attempt to explain what either of these phrases means in any philosophically satisfactory way, but I shall make two remarks. First, I use ‘being’ for whatever it is that “there is one of” in the Trinity, and I use ‘person’ for what it is that “there are three of” in the Trinity. Secondly, there has been some debate about the relation between ‘person,’ the technical term of Trinitarian theology, and ‘person,’ the word of ordinary speech. Without attempting to

resolve this debate, I will say that I regard ‘ x is the same person as y ’ as meaning more or less the same as ‘ x is someone and y is someone—but not someone else.’ But nothing I shall say here depends on whether I am right about this. Now it might be thought that all this apparatus of relative identity does not enable us to escape the force of the skeptic’s arguments. Consider the second argument. May the skeptic, even if he has only relations of relative identity at his disposal, not present the following argument?

The Father is the same person as God

The Son is the same person as God

Hence, God is the same person as the Son

Hence, The Father is the same person as the Son.

And is it not true that the Father and the Son are both the same person as God? One way to answer this argument might be to say that strictly ‘person’ applies only to the three “persons” of the Trinity, but does not apply to the Godhead. I will not say anything of this sort. It seems to me that in Holy Scripture God frequently refers to himself as ‘I’—depending on how you understand the Hebrew of Exodus 3:14, it may even be that his name is ‘I Am’ or ‘I Am who Am’—and it would, I believe, be heretical to maintain that the God who speaks in the Hebrew Bible is simply God the Father, one of the persons of the Trinity. No, the theologians tell us, and I think that nothing else makes sense in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity, the God who spoke to Moses and Elijah and Ezekiel was the Triune God. And if this is so, God, the Triune God, must be a person. I would say, rather, that the defect in this argument comes from the way it uses the terms ‘the Father,’ ‘the Son,’ and ‘God.’ It uses these phrases as what logicians call ‘singular terms’ by which they mean terms that bear a relation called ‘denoting’ or ‘reference’ or ‘designation’ or ‘naming’ to a single object. But the very notion of a singular term is infected with the idea of the single all-encompassing relation of identity that we have rejected. If, for example, ‘Catherine the Great’ is a singular term, it follows that if ‘Catherine the Great’ denotes x and also denotes y , then x is identical with y . A logic that, like the logic of relative identity, rejects the very notion of a single, all-encompassing identity relation, must, therefore reject the notion of a singular term. But singular terms pervade, or seem to pervade, all our discourse, religious and non-religious. If we “reject” singular terms we must find something to put in their place, something to do at least some of their work. I will show by example how to do this. Let us first consider the word ‘God.’ One thing we must be able to say that we ordinarily say using this singular term (at least it appears to be a singular term) is this: God spoke by the prophets. Suppose we introduce the predicate ‘is divine’ to express the divine nature or Godhead. Instead of saying ‘God spoke by the prophets’ we may say this:

Something is divine and anything divine is the same being as it, and it spoke by the prophets.

(Here I use ‘something,’ ‘anything,’ and ‘it’ as logicians do: when one is speaking very generally, one many use these words to speak of, well, *anything*, including human beings, angels, and God himself.) Now what of singular terms that purport to denote the individual persons of the Trinity, terms like ‘the Father,’ ‘the Son,’ ‘the second person of the Trinity,’ and ‘he who proceeds from the Father?’ The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are individuated; each is made *who he is* by, the relations that hold among them. The Father, for example, begets the Son, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son (or perhaps proceeds from the Father alone), and the Father proceeds from no one and is unbegotten. Suppose we so understand the predicates ‘begets’ and ‘is begotten’ that no one but the Father begets and no one but the Son is begotten. We could then understand theological sentences that contain ‘the Father’ and ‘the Son’ after the following models:

The Father made all things

Something begets and whatever begets is the same person as it and it made all things

All things were made through the Son

Something is begotten and whatever is begotten is the same person as it and all things were made through it.

Now, what of our embarrassing argument? Is the Father the same person as God? Is the Son the same person as God? If these things are conceded, does it follow that the Son is the same person as the Father. The statement ‘The Father is the same person as God’ would be written like this:

Something x begets and whatever begets is the same person as x and something y is divine and whatever is divine is the same being as y and x is the same person as y .

And similarly for ‘The Son is the same person as God’:

Something x is begotten and whatever is begotten is the same person as x and something y is divine and whatever is divine is the same being as y and x is the same person as y .

But ‘The Son is the same person as the Father’ would be written thus:

Something x begets and whatever begets is the same person as x and something y is begotten and whatever is begotten is the same person as y and x is the same person as y .

And this last statement does not follow from the first two, despite the fact that the rule Transitivity applies to the relation “is the same person as.” I will in fact show you how to prove that the last statement does not follow from the first two—using devices from what logicians call the theory of models. Consider the following little story:

There are exactly two dogs in Ivan's shop. They are of the same breed and are for sale at different prices. One barks at the other, and the other never barks at all.

This little story is sufficient for the truth of the following two statements (if we consider "Ivan's shop" to comprise the whole universe):

Something x barks and whatever barks is the same price as x and something y is a dog and whatever is a dog is the same breed as y and x is the same price as y .

Something x is barked at and whatever is barked at is the same price as x and something y is a dog and whatever is a dog is the same breed as y and x is the same price as y .

Now consider the following statement:

Something x barks and whatever barks is the same price as x and something y is barked at and whatever is barked at is the same price as y and x is the same price as y .

This statement is *not* true in our story, for one thing in the story barks, another is barked at, and they are for sale at different prices. Now consider this question: does the third statement follow from the first two by the standard logic of the textbooks? Unless our story about Ivan's shop is self-contradictory, the answer to this question must be No, for the standard logic of the textbooks is known to have this property: if a story is not self-contradictory, then no statement that is false in the story can be deduced by the rules of the standard logic of the textbooks from any set of statements that are true in the story. But our little story of Ivan's shop and its canine inhabitants is obviously not self-contradictory, and, therefore, the third statement does not follow from the first two.

Now let us return to our three theological statements, our statements that represent 'The Father is the same person as God' and 'The Son is the same person as God' and 'The Father is the same person as the Son.' Does the third, which is certainly inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity, follow from the first two (which I, at least do not find objectionable)—I mean does it follow given the logic of relative identity that I have presented? The answer to this question is, No it does not follow, and this may be shown as follows. If it did follow, then it would be possible explicitly to write down the steps of the reasoning, each valid according to the logic of relative identity, by which the third statement was deduced from the first two. That reasoning could, by a purely mechanical set of transpositions of terms, be turned into a piece of reasoning, valid according to the standard logic of the textbooks, by which 'Something x is barked at and whatever is barked at is the same price as x and something y is a dog and whatever is a dog is the same breed as y and x is the same price as y ' follows from the story of Ivan's shop. And we have seen that this statement does not follow from that story by the standard logic of the textbooks. If all this is too complicated to take

in at one sitting, here is a statement of what I claim to have shown that is not too wide of the mark.

Suppose this set of statements was self-contradictory: 'The Father is the same person as God. The Son is the same person as God. The Father is not the same person as the Son.' It would follow that the simple story of Ivan's shop—There are exactly two dogs in Ivan's shop; they are of the same breed and are for sale at different prices; one barks at the other, and the other never barks at all—was self-contradictory; but this simple little story is obviously not self-contradictory.

In a talk of this length I cannot say enough to establish my general thesis, or even to discuss our first anti-Trinitarian argument. My general thesis is this: All the constituent propositions of the doctrine of the Trinity can be expressed in the language of relative identity, and they can be shown to be mutually consistent, given that the correct logic of identity is the logic of relative identity. That is to say, they can be shown to be mutually consistent *if* a certain simple story about everyday life—a story hardly more complicated than the story of Ivan's shop—is not self-contradictory. And it will be evident to anyone that this simple little story about everyday life is not self-contradictory.

4

A Latin Trinity*

Brian Leftow

The Athanasian Creed has it that Christians

worship one God in Trinity. . . the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.¹

Such odd arithmetic demands explaining. Some explanations begin from the oneness of God, and try to explain just how one God can be three divine Persons.² As Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas pursued this project, let us call it Latin Trinitarianism (LT). I now sketch a Latin view of the Trinity and argue that it is coherent.

THE LATIN VIEW

On LT, there is just one divine being (or substance), God. God constitutes three Persons. But all three are at bottom just God. They contain no constituent distinct from God.³ The Persons are somehow God three times over, since as the Athanasian Creed puts it, “we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be both God and Lord.”⁴ Thus too the Creed of the Council of Toledo has it that

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¹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1979), 864–5.

² Others start from the threeness of the Persons, and try to say just how three Persons can be one God. I discuss these in “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins eds., *The Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203–48.

³ LT’s partisans up to Scotus all accept a strong doctrine of divine simplicity. So while they acknowledge that Father and Son stand in the generative relations of paternity and filiation, they deny that these relations are *constituents* of the Persons. Aquinas, for instance, asserts that the Father is identical with the relation of paternity just as God is with the divine nature, deity (*ST* Ia 29, 4). While divine simplicity no longer commands the wide assent it did, we would still not incline to see relations as constituents of particulars standing in them – save on “bundle” theories of substance, which few now favor.

⁴ *Common Prayer*, 865. So also Barth: “in . . . the inner movement of the begetting of the Father, the being begotten of the Son and the procession of the Spirit from both . . . God is once and again and a third time” (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II: 1, tr. G. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 615). At the back of this is of course John 1:1, “the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” If the Word is God and is with God, God is with God – and so (it seems) we have God twice over.

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.⁵

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 begetting has.⁶

To make Thomas' claim perfectly plain, let us talk of tropes. Abel and Cain were both human. So they had the same nature, humanity. Yet each also had his own nature, and Cain's humanity was not identical with Abel's: Abel's perished with Abel, while Cain's went marching on. On one parsing, this is because while the two had the same nature, they had distinct tropes of that nature. 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 Thomas' claim: while both Father and Son instance the divine nature (deity), they have but one trope of deity between them, which is God's.⁷ While Cain's humanity \neq Abel's humanity, the Father's deity = the Son's deity = God's deity. But bearers individuate tropes. If the Father's deity is God's, this is because the Father *just is* God: which last is what Thomas wants to say.

On LT, then, there clearly is just one God, but one wonders just how the Persons manage to be three. If the Father "just is" God, it seems to follow that

1. the Father = God.

If "each single Person is wholly God in Himself," and both Son and Father have God's trope of deity, it seems also to follow that

2. the Son = God.

But then since

3. God = God,

it seems to follow that

4. the Father = the Son,

and that on LT, there is just one divine Person.

- (1) and (2) raise another problem. Cornelius Plantinga writes that an

⁵ Quoted in Cornelius Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in Cornelius Plantinga and Ronald Feenstra, eds., *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 21.

⁶ S. Thomae de Aquino *Summa Theologiae* Ia (Ottawa: Studii Generalis, 1941) 39, 5 ad 2, 245a. My translation. See also Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 103.

⁷ For Thomas, talk of tropes is not strictly appropriate here, since in fact God is identical with the divine nature (so e.g. Aquinas, *ST* Ia 3, 3). For the nonce this need not concern us.

incoherence . . . comes out in the generation statements: the divine thing does not generate, get generated or proceed, despite the fact that Father, Son and Spirit, identical with it, do. How are we to imagine this?⁸

Plantinga's point is this. According to the Nicene Creed,

5. the Father generates the Son.

But the claim that

6. God generates God

is either unorthodox or necessarily false. Nothing can "generate" itself, i.e. bring itself into existence. So if (6) asserts that something "generates" itself, it is necessarily false. But if (6) asserts that one God "generates" a second God, it implies polytheism, and so is unorthodox. Now the Nicene Creed commits Christians to (5). In conjunction with (1) and (2), (5) yields (6). So if LT is committed to (1), (2) and (5), LT entails either unorthodoxy or a necessary falsehood. Of course, avoiding this problem by rejecting (5) is just unorthodoxy of a different stripe.

The other options for LT are to reject all or just some of (1), (2), and the cognate claim that the Spirit is God. Rejecting all also seems to wind up unorthodox. For then there seem to be four divine things – Father, Son, Spirit and God. But if "each single Person is wholly God in Himself," each includes God somehow. So surely God is not a fourth divine thing in addition to any Person.⁹ And in any case, on the doctrine of the Trinity, there are at most three divine things. That's why it's a doctrine of Trinity, not Quaternity. Rejecting just some can trim the number of divine beings to three – e.g. by accepting (1) but denying (2) and that God = the Spirit. This would retreat to a form of Trinity rejected well before Nicaea. It also raises the question of just what the relation between God and the Son is.¹⁰

Everything is either God, an uncreated object distinct from God or a creature. To call the Son a creature is to embrace Arianism. If the Son is a creature, it's hard to see how He can be fully divine, or even divine at all – divine/creaturely seems an exclusive disjunction. But Scripture does not let Christians deny all deity to the Son.¹¹ Further, whether or not the Son is *as* divine as God, if He is created, He is a divine being who *is not God*. The positing of divine beings in addition to

⁸ Plantinga, "Social Trinity," 40.

⁹ A common constituent of three things which never existed save as included in one of them might to philosophers seem a fourth thing in addition to any of the three though included in all. But the language of the New Testament sits ill with this. References to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "God the Father," or to God simply as Father, are too numerous to list. These would not be appropriate if God were something like a part of the Father. Again, according to *John* 1:1, the Word *was* God. This does not suggest that God was part of the Word.

¹⁰ Henceforth I will not discuss the Spirit where the points to be made exactly parallel those made about the Son.

¹¹ So e.g. *John*. 1:1 and 20:28; *Romans*. 9:5; *I Corinthians* 16:22; *I John* 5:20.

God is of course polytheism. So it is easy to see why the early Church found Arianism unacceptable.

If the Son is an uncreated item discrete from God, it is false that God has made all that He does not include, which flies in the face of Scripture and Creed.¹² To call Him divine, uncreated and discrete from God is to opt for a polytheism even clearer than Arianism's. But if the Son is not a creature or an uncreated item discrete from God, He is in *some way* God.¹³ How then, if not by simple identity? One option here would be to say that God is always Father, but only temporarily Son, or necessarily the Father but only contingently Son. This avoids polytheism: God *is* in some way Son. If there are no temporary or contingent identities, it is consistent with denying (2). But of course it leaves us the question of just what God's relation to the Son *is*. The clearest account of this seems to be Modalism: the being who is always, necessarily the Father, contingently and temporarily takes on a second role, as Son, in such a way that (so to speak) when the Son was on earth, nobody was home in heaven, and the Father counts as crucified. Modalism sits ill with Scriptural passages which seem to treat Father and Son as two separate persons, e.g. Christ's saying "I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me" (*John* 6:38) and praying "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the creation of the world" (*John* 17:5). Such texts make it clear why the early church found Modalism unacceptable. It thus seems that LT cannot be coherent, monotheist and orthodox. I now suggest that LT can be all three, and speculate as to how it may be so.

TIME-TRAVEL, TAP-DANCING, AND THE TRINITY

You are at Radio City Music Hall, watching the Rockettes kick in unison. You notice that they look quite a bit alike. But (you think) they must just be made up to look that way. After all, they came on-stage at once, each from a different point backstage, they put their arms over each others' shoulders for support, smile and

¹² So e.g. *Isaiah* 44:24 "I am the Lord, who has made all things," *Romans* 11:36: "from Him and through Him . . . are all things," and the Nicene Creed's statement that orthodox Christians believe in "one God . . . creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible" (*Common Prayer*, 358)(putative uncreated items presumably are visible or invisible).

¹³ There is one other alternative, that the son be divine, uncreated, and distinct but not discrete from God. If the son is not discrete from God, the son overlaps God. If he overlaps God but is distinct from God, either (a) God has a constituent the son lacks, but every constituent of the son is a constituent of God, or (b) the son has a constituent God lacks, but every constituent of God is a constituent of the son, or (c) God and the son share a constituent but each also has a constituent the other lacks, or (d) they overlap despite sharing no constituents. Or (a) the son is part of God: God is a whole composed of persons. As parts are basic and wholes derived on (a) the three are basic, the one derived: (a) is not a version of LT. (b) was rejected in n. 9. (c) is a form of polytheism. (d) would assert a primitive constitution relation between God and the son. I am skeptical that there is such a relation.

nod to each other, and when the number is over, they scatter offstage each in her own direction. So they certainly seem to be many different women. But appearances deceive. Here is the true story. All the Rockettes but one, Jane, called in sick that morning. So Jane came to work with a time machine her nephew had put together for the school science fair. Jane ran on-stage to her position at the left of the chorus line, linked up, kicked her way through the number, then ran off. She changed her makeup, donned a wig, then stepped into her nephew's Wells-omatic, to emerge in the past, just before the Rockettes went on. She ran on-stage from a point just to the right of her first entry, stepped into line second from the chorus line's left, smiled and whispered a quip to the woman on her right, kicked her way through the number, then ran off. She then changed her makeup again . . . Can one person thus be wholly in many places at once? The short answer is: she is in many places at the same point in *our* lives, but not the same point in *hers*. If Jane travels in time, distinct segments of her life coincide with the same segment of ours. To put this another way, Jane's personal timeline intersects one point in ours repeatedly.

Now in this story, there is among all the Rockettes just one trope of human nature. All tropes of human nature in the Rockettes are identical. But consider this argument:

- 1a. the leftmost Rockette = Jane.
- 2a. the rightmost Rockette = Jane.
- 3a. Jane = Jane.

So

- 4a. the leftmost Rockette = the rightmost Rockette.

The argument appears sound, but doesn't shorten the chorus line. There is just one substance, Jane, in the chorus line. But there *is* also an extended chorus line, with many of *something* in it. Many what, one asks? Some philosophers think that Jane is a four-dimensional object, extended through time as well as space that not Jane's life but Jane herself has earlier and later parts.¹⁴ If this is true, each Rockette is a temporal part of Jane. If (as I believe) Jane has no temporal parts, then not just a temporal part of Jane, but Jane as a whole, appears at each point in the chorus line, and what the line contains many of are segments or episodes of Jane's life-events. This may sound odd. After all, Rockettes dance. Events do not. But what you see are many dancings of one substance. What makes the line a line is the fact that these many events go on in it, in a particular set of relations. Each Rockette is Jane. But in these many events, Jane is there many times over. She plays different causal roles, once (as the leftmost Rockette) supporting the second-from-left Rockette, once (as the second-from-left) being supported by the leftmost, etc. And she has genuine interpersonal relations with herself in her

¹⁴ So e.g. Mark Heller, *The Ontology of Physical Objects* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

other roles. She leans on herself for support, smiles to herself, talks (and talks back) to herself. The talk may even be dialogue in the fullest sense. In changing makeup, wig, etc., Jane might well forget what she said when she was leftmost in the line, and so a remark she hears when she is one in from the left might well surprise her, and prompt a response she did not anticipate.¹⁵ The Wells-o-matic lets the one Jane be present at one time many times over, in many ways, as the leftmost Rockette, the rightmost, etc. It gives us one Jane in many *personae*. If we give the name “Rockette” to what we see many of, it lets the one Jane be (or be present in) many Rockettes. The Wells-o-matic allows this by freeing the events composing Jane’s life from the general order of time.

Is time travel genuinely possible? I travel in time into the future if, with no gaps in my existence, periods of suspended animation, time spent unconscious, or subjective slowing in my experience, I find myself at a point in world-history beyond where the biological aging of my body and (say) the time on my watch would date me: if, say, I step into a machine, step out 10 seconds later by watch- and body-time, and find that it is next year. If this is an acceptable description of futureward time-travel, then the Special Theory of Relativity entails that it occurs. For the theory entails that the time of an accelerated object dilates: if we mount a sufficiently precise clock on a body A, accelerate A a while, then compare the A-clock with one which has not been accelerated, the A-clock will be found to have run more slowly. If A-time thus dilates, the A-clock travels into the future *per* the description above. Experiments have confirmed that time-dilation occurs.¹⁶

In some models of the universe consistent with General Relativity’s field equations and requirements on the universe’s mass-energy distribution, physical objects can travel into the past. This is reason to call pastward time travel physically possible.¹⁷ Paradoxes threaten stories of pastward time travel (“suppose I went back and killed my earlier self before he got into the time machine . . .”). Some think these reason to call it conceptually impossible.¹⁸ But they may not be. According to Earman, these paradoxes

bring out a clash between Gödelian time travel and what might be held to be conceptual truths about spatiotemporal/causal order. But in the same way the twin paradox of special relativity theory reveals a clash between the structure of relativistic space-times and what

¹⁵ Even if Jane later in her life knows what Jane earlier in her life is going to say to her, this need not unfit the analogy for Trinitarian purposes. It is hard to see how one Person could surprise another.

¹⁶ See e.g. Edwin Taylor and John Wheeler, *Spacetime Physics* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1963), 89, and J. Hafele and Richard Keating, “Around-the-world Atomic Clocks: Predicted Relativistic Time Gains and Observed Relativistic Time Gains,” *Science* 177 (1972), 166–70.

¹⁷ So John Earman, “Recent Work on Time Travel,” in Steven Savitt, ed., *Time’s Arrows Today* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 268–310.

¹⁸ So e.g. Richard Swinburne, *Space and Time* (N.Y.: The MacMillan Co., 1968), 169.

were held to be conceptual truths about time lapse. The special and general theories of relativity have both produced conceptual revolutions. The twin paradox and the [time-travel paradoxes] emphasize how radical these revolutions are, but they do not show that these revolutions are not sustainable or contain inherent contradictions.¹⁹

In other words, if the physics clashes with our pre-theoretic intuitions, it may be the intuitions (and *a fortiori* philosophical theories built on them) which should give. And the paradoxes are not necessarily intractable. It would take a full paper of its own fully to motivate a solution to the time-travel paradoxes. But it would be good to say something to suggest that these can be solved, or at least come as close to solution as matters for my purposes. For I go on to model the Trinity on a time-travel case.

TIME-TRAVEL PARADOXES

The “killing my earlier self” paradox is the most disturbing intuitively. This paradox applies to Jane: can Jane as rightmost turn and kill Jane on her left, before next-left Jane made it to the time machine to re-emerge and take her rightmost place? A “no” answer seems untenable. Surely it’s physically possible for Jane to pick up a knife on the way to her rightmost station, turn toward the next person in line, etc. But if yes, then there is a physically possible world in which Jane arrives at a point in her personal future after (it seems) having made it impossible for herself to get there. Moreover, Jane’s killing her earlier self seems to generate a contradiction: Jane does travel back in time this last time, else she could not commit the murder, but if Jane does commit the murder, Jane dies before returning to the time-machine and so does not travel back in time. So if yes, it is apparently within Jane’s power to make a contradiction true.

For my purposes, I need not suggest a full solution to this paradox. I want to suggest by analogy with a time-travel case that it is possible that God be a Latin Trinity. That is, I want to suggest that for all we know, this is how it is with God in some metaphysically possible world. To suggest this, I need only make out the analogy (which I have already begun to do) and make a case that there is a metaphysically possible world containing pastward time travel. To do this last, I need only point to the physics and suggest that in some world with such a physics, the paradoxes would not arise. A full solution to the time-travel paradoxes would show in effect that time-travel is compatible with all the facts about our own world. I need not argue this, for my claim is only that a Latin doctrine of the Trinity has likenesses to something found in *some* metaphysically possible world.

¹⁹ Earman, “Recent Work,” 281.

Now the paradox above is that seemingly we cannot grant either that Jane can or that she cannot kill her past self. To show that there is a possible world immune from this paradox, we need only show that there is a possible world conforming to an appropriate solution to the General Relativity equations in which an analogue of one or the other claim is true. I suggest that in some such GR-world, a creature just like Jane and in her situation simply cannot kill her past self. We think that Jane can kill her past self because we think she has libertarian freedom and the physical possibility of so using it. But it is within God's power to make creatures very like us save that they lack libertarian free will, and to site them in an appropriate GR-world physically deterministic at the macro-level. Suppose that God makes such a creature, Janet, and sets her in such a world which physically determines that she does not kill her past self when she emerges from a time-machine. Then there is no possible world indiscernible from Janet's up to the time at which she exits the machine in which she kills her past self. It is just not possible that she do so given these antecedents. Physical determinism and the lack of libertarian freedom can occur in an appropriate GR-world. So the "retro-suicide" paradox does not entail that pastward time travel does not occur in any possible world. And I do not need to claim that time travel can occur in *our* world to claim that a Latin Trinity exists in some world. For that matter, I don't need to claim this to assert that a Latin Trinity exists in our world. For if physical indeterminism and created libertarian freedom did in fact rule time travel out of our world, they would not also rule out a Latin Trinity. These things have no bearing at all on God's nature, since I do not claim that God travels in time, and in any case they exist only logically after God has His nature.

A second sort of paradox can be built on the first, and to this I now suggest a full solution. Suppose that rightmost-Jane knifes the next person in line. Next-left Jane, stunned and confused by the attack, picks up a knife to defend herself on the way back to the time-machine, and in her confusion attacks in the wrong direction when she emerges: she attacks herself because she was attacked. A causal "loop" runs from next-left Jane's being attacked to the attack by rightmost Jane, and so the being-attacked is in its own causal ancestry. Every event in the causal loop is fully explained causally by immediately prior events. The puzzle is that *globally*, each event seems its own full explanation – since in tracing its ancestry, we find our way around the loop to the event itself – and that since nothing can explain its own occurring, it seems that *globally*, each event has no full explanation at all, despite having a *local* causal explanation. Putting it another way, there seems no real reason that Jane has a knife-wound. She has it at every point in the loop due to something earlier in the loop, but there seems no answer to the question of why there is ever any time at all at which Jane has a wound.

This is a paradox, but is it an impossibility? Quantum theory suggests that we must learn to live with events with no full physical causes. "No event causes itself" looks like a necessary truth, but it doesn't rule loops out. In the loop, no event *locally* causes itself. Nor does any event *globally* cause itself. Globally – that

is, taking into account all events in the loop – events in the loop are uncaused, at least physically. The loop offends against intuitions that favor principles of sufficient reason, but it is impossible only if some fairly strong PSR is a necessary truth. If one is, of course, one can run powerful arguments for the existence of God. So atheists, at least, might not wish to push this sort of objection. Of course, an atheist might Chisholm away at PSRs to produce one gerrymandered to keep both loops and God out. But such a principle would quite likely forfeit its claim on our intuitions, and so provide no real *reason* to think loops impossible. And even theists needn't push PSR objections. For given a PSR strong enough to yield God, an explanation of the entire loop's existence is available from outside the loop. It is that God brought it into existence: the reason Jane has a wound is that God brought this about, by conserving the entire loop.²⁰ So I claim that an intuitively plausible PSR strong enough to rule loops out will rule God in. But with God ruled in, loops become compatible with the PSR after all. I conclude that the possibility of loops is an oddity, but does not rule time travel out.

Retro-suicide and causal loops yield the strongest objections I know to the possibility of time-travel. I suggest that the loop paradox dissolves on inspection, leaving us with an oddity that falls well short of contradiction, and that there is a possible world containing time-travel in which retro-suicide is not possible. But even if I turn out wrong about these things, Jane's story is consistent and broadly conceivable. Even if pastward time travel is in some way impossible, we have detailed physical models of the world in which it can occur. It is physically impossible that there be frictionless planes, but talk about them—detailed physical models in which they occur—can clarify the behavior of actual physical things. More to the point, time-travel stories may have at worst the status of intuitionist logic. I hold that classical logic is true, and necessarily true. If it is, there are no intuitionist possible worlds—it is not, for instance, possible for some p that $\neg\neg p$ be true and p not be true. The distinctive theses of intuitionism state metaphysical impossibilities. But they are internally consistent, comprehensible impossibilities. We know in great detail how logic would be were they true – so to speak, we have detailed logical models of the world in which they occur. We understand intuitionist theses full well, we can reason consistently within intuitionist strictures, and – here's the most important point – we can even appeal to intuitionist theses to clarify other things which may be metaphysically possible or even true (“if the future is indeterminate, then it is as if for some future-tensed propositions, negation behaves intuitionistically”). So even if pastward time

²⁰ This doesn't take away Jane's agency or freedom. For both can figure in every *local* explanation along the loop. That divine conservation is compatible with creaturely agency and freedom is non-negotiable for Western theists. Arguably conservation differs from creation only in that we call the same divine action creation when what God causes begins to exist and conservation when it continues to exist (so e.g. Scotus, *Quodlibet* 12). If this is true, the compatibility of creation and libertarian freedom/agency is equally non-negotiable, and I could as easily have spoken of God as creating the loop.

travel is impossible, talk about it may help us clarify other, genuinely possible things.

Further, *if* pastward time-travel is impossible, this is due to the nature of space, time, and the causal order within them: in short, because of the relations which link events located in space and time. If pastward time-travel is impossible, what pastward time-travel stories show us are relations time-bound events cannot instance because they *are* time-bound. The classic Latin Trinitarians agree that God is not in time. If He is not, then if there *are* such things as events in His life, they are free from temporal constraints. They need not be related as events in time are. Again, if God *is* in time, it does not follow that events in His life are ordered as other temporal events are. Even if they have some temporal properties, they might not have the full complement of ordinary temporal properties.²¹ If God's life is at least as free from ordinary temporal ordering as a pastward time traveler's would be, it is conceivable and so may be possible that in His life, one substance is three Persons in some form of social relation – as in Jane's case one substance is (or is present in) many Rockettes. So we need not suppose that God travels in time to draw this moral: God's life may be free from time's bonds. If it is, its events may be strangely structured, and this may be relevant to the doctrine of the Trinity.

EVENTS AND THE TRINITY

There is one Jane, but she was present many times over in the chorus line. At one point in our lives, many discrete maximal episodes in her life were co-present. These episodes were discrete in that along Jane's own personal timeline, they did not overlap (they were strictly successive). These episodes were maximal in that any point during each included one event in Jane's life of which every other event occurring at that point in Jane's life was part, and at any point we could say, for a shorthand, simply that *that* event was occurring. Suppose, then, that God's life has the following peculiar structure: at any point in our lives, three discrete parts of God's life are present. But this is not because one life's successive parts appear at once. Rather, it 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.²² In one strand God lives the Father's life, in one the Son's,

²¹ Keith Ward speculates that a temporal God may be free from the usual temporal ordering (*Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (N.Y.: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 164–70); Philip Quinn advances the same notion in some detail in unpublished comments given at the 1993 APA Central Division meeting. Swinburne (*Christian God*, 137–44) and Alan Padgett (*God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1992)) suggest His freedom from other aspects of time.

²² In saying this I use an ordinary, intuitive concept of an event. On some theories of events (e.g. Kim's), such things as God's being divine and God's being omniscient count as events. (For Kim's theory, see Jaegwon Kim, "Events as Property-Exemplifications," in Douglas Walton and Myles

and in one the Spirit's. The events of each strand add up to the life of a Person.²³ 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, as Jane was in the chorus line: being the Son is a bit like being the leftmost Rockette.

Of course, the cases also differ. Not all of Jane's life is on display in the chorus line. But every event in God's life is part of the Father-Son-Spirit chorus line; God does not live save as Father, Son and Spirit. Jane has just one life, with a peculiar episode partway through. It does not consist of anything else that counts as an entire life. God's life always consists of three other things which count as entire ongoing lives.²⁴ While the disruption between Jane's personal timeline and the sequence of events in ordinary public time had a special cause, God's life just naturally runs in three streams. Again, along Jane's personal timeline, first she only dances in one spot, then she runs to the machine, then she only dances in another spot. Jane dances in one spot only after she dances in another. Not so for God: God always lives in all three streams. God's life always consists of three non-overlapping lives going on at once, none after the other, as the series of positive numbers consists of two non-overlapping series, the positive rationals and irrationals, "going on at once" within the series, neither after the other.

Jane's story includes an account of how the many Rockettes are generated (the time-travel story) which involves succession. This account does not rule out Jane's existing at all times, and even having three streams of her life going at all times. For suppose that Jane exists at all public times. Then if public time has a first and last instant, the time-machine brings it about that after Jane's life at time's last instant comes a next instant of Jane's life located at time's first instant.²⁵ There is no public time after public time's last instant or before its first, but in Jane's life, her personal time, there is a period after the last instant of time (one which begins Jane's life's second stream, at time's first instant) and one

Brand, eds., *Action Theory* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980), 159–77.) If you hold such a view, modify this claim to: the strands have in common only those events involved in God's bare existence and having His nature, not any events composing His conscious life or involving His agency. Any other modifications to accommodate theories of events would not (I think) affect the basics of the view I am setting forth.

²³ For now I do not take up just what makes this so.

²⁴ If we are reincarnated, we have lives which consist of other items which count as complete lives. So the Trinitarian claim is at least as coherent as belief in this sort of reincarnation.

²⁵ If so, Jane's life fails to be continuous. It is not even dense, as there is no time, public or Jane-private, between Jane's life at public time's last instant and her life's next instant. On the other hand, there is no temporal *gap* between Jane at the last instant and Jane's next either. If Jane's life always has three segments ongoing, then it consists of three discrete segments with zero duration between them. In that sense, the segments' endpoints are closer together than any two points in a continuous stretch of time. No qualms about Jane's identity between time's last instant and her next ought to arise, then. If we found that time was universally discrete in the small, consisting of chronons (as some have argued), we would not conclude that no-one is identical over any long duration. We would adjust our account of identity over time to allow for this, speaking of not-quite-continuous duration where we used to speak of continuous. We can do the like for Jane.

before public time's first instant (namely, her entire first life-stream).²⁶ If time has a finite length but no last instant, there is a further puzzle. Suppose that the Wells-o-matic sends Jane pastward at some particular time. If time has no last instant, there is time *after* that time. So it seems that Jane misses some of time the first time around, in which case it's not true that her first life-stream exists at all times. But suppose e.g. that there is a last full second followed by an open period not more than a second long. Then we can simply say that Jane spends all of that open period in the machine, and that the machine brings it about that the first period of Jane's second life-stream succeeds the period she spent in the machine. If time has an infinite future, there is no particular problem in saying that infinite periods of Jane's life succeed one another. Such number-series as 1, 3, 5 . . . 2, 4, 6 . . . are mathematically unproblematic. Jane's life in this case would consist of minutes paired 1:1 with the members of some such series. What's puzzling is again just when the machine sends Jane back. One way to dissolve the puzzle is just to have Jane live in the machine for all time after a particular point, and say that the machine links her time in it to her life's second stream earlier in time. It should be clear from what I've said how the time-machine scenario can handle further permutations on the length and topology of time. So talk of time-travel can even provide some model of a life which always has three streams. Jane's generation-account, again, involves succession. Whatever account we give in God's case will not. But here my point is simply that we can make some sense of there being a life so structured as to have three discrete streams going on at once, even if that life includes all of time. I do not claim that the analogy is perfect.

Some might say that what makes the time-travel story comprehensible is precisely what's missing in the Trinitarian case.²⁷ Parts of Jane's life *succeed* parts of Jane's life, and so we can make sense of her winding up as three dancers at once as we watch her. But Persons' lives do not succeed Persons' lives. Instead, I've said, God just always lives in three streams. So how does one better understand the Trinity *via* the time-travel analogy? In Jane's story, again, three streams of events going on at once, which initially seem like three lives, turn out to be the life of one individual. On the surface, it might seem that what makes the story work is the succession between the life-segments. But it's more basically the causal relations between her life-segments. These are segments of one individual's life not because they succeed one another in a timeline but because the right causal relations link

²⁶ In principle then, as a referee pointed out, Jane could live an infinite life by looping back endlessly through a finite period of public time. (She'd need infinite space to do this, as otherwise she would eventually run out of room—the whole universe would be filled nothing but time-travelling Janes. But there's no reason to think infinite space impossible.) But this does not entail that public time is infinite. Its properties arise out of the properties of all personal/private times. Even given Jane's peculiar life, all personal times might have the following trait: either they end no later than a particular instant – say, the Big Crunch – or they continue through that instant to some instant which as of the Big Crunch has already been occupied.

²⁷ An anonymous referee raised this.

them. For one can imagine (borrowing an illustration from Lewis²⁸) that when Jane enters the time-machine, she is annihilated and replaced by an atom-for-atom duplicate put together by the machine, with Jane existing at all times up to t in her personal timeline and the duplicate existing from Jane-time t onward. In this story, the duplicate is an “immaculate replacement” for Jane—its timeline succeeds and continues hers without a gap. But clearly the resulting life is not a further part of Jane’s. Now some argue that the difference between duplicate-succession and continued existence is primitive and ultimate—that identity over time is a brute matter, not grounded in relations among the events of a life.²⁹ But if it is not, it rests largely on causality. The duplicate’s life does not continue Jane’s *inter alia* because the causal relations between the events aren’t right—the positions, motion etc. of the atoms constituting Jane’s body (and Jane herself, on materialism) don’t directly cause those of the duplicate’s atoms.³⁰ Conversely, on materialism, it’s because (*inter alia*) these atoms’ present motion is caused in the right way by the immediately prior motion of the atoms in Jane’s body that this person’s life continues Jane’s, and so this person is Jane. If Jane has a soul and continues to exist only if it does, still causation is relevant, for the same soul continues to exist only if its earlier states contribute causally to appropriate sets of its later.³¹ Succession by a duplicate isn’t continued existence, and so doesn’t give us a case of three streams of one life going on at once, because the causal relations between the relevant streams of events aren’t right. Causal relations at least help determine the identity of the substance in the differing streams of Jane’s life; it’s (perhaps *inter alia*) because the right causal relations link them that they are successive stages of one life, as vs. successive smoothly

²⁸ David Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel, in David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*, v. 2(N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 73.

²⁹ So e.g. Trenton Merricks, “There Are No Criteria of Identity,” *Nous* 32 (1998), 106–24.

³⁰ It’s not enough to have Jane that the atoms making her up at t be those which made her up just prior to t . There is also a causal condition, that her atoms be moving in ways their prior motion directly accounts for. A Star Trek transporter beam story can make this clear. One can suppose the beam to work by disassembling us into our constituent atoms, accelerating these to a destination, then rebuilding someone looking just like us from them there. Most people, given this description, will think of the transporter as a way to get killed, not a way to be transported: we do not survive being smashed into our constituent atoms, even if something is rebuilt from them later which looks like us. Now let’s modify the case: suppose the disassembly is literally instantaneous, and the transporter sends one’s atoms to their destination so fast that there is no time between our standing here whole and something looking just like us standing there whole at the destination. I suggest that even so, our intuition that we don’t survive the process doesn’t change. For what matters here is our belief that we don’t survive being disassembled into atoms, not any fact about how fast the bits are reassembled. Disassembly and smashing are precisely situations in which there is massive interference with the movements our atoms would otherwise be making, and given the intervention of the beam, the positions, motion etc. of Jane’s atoms prior to teleportation don’t directly cause those of the duplicate’s atoms at the destination point. So (I claim) the transporter story supports the text’s claim that it defeats a claim of continued existence that the positions, motion etc. of the atoms constituting Jane’s body don’t directly cause those of the duplicate’s atoms.

³¹ The causation here is “immanent,” not “transeunt.” See Dean Zimmerman, “Immanent Causation,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 11 (1997), 433–71.

continuous lives of duplicate Janes. And if this is correct, it lends itself to Trinitarian use.

As causal relations between the event-streams in the Jane case help make them streams within one life, we can suppose that causal relations do the like without succession in the Trinitarian case: that is, we can suppose that causal relations between the event-streams involved are what make them all streams within one individual's life. The causal relations involved are those of the Trinitarian processions: the Father "begetting" the Son, the Father and the Son "spirating" the Spirit. Nobody has ever claimed to explain how these work, so I'm at no disadvantage if I do not either. Every Trinitarian has claimed that whatever these relations amount to, they yield distinct Persons who are the same God. I say the same. The time-travel analogy makes this point: causal relations between streams of events going on at once and apparently involving wholly distinct individuals can make them streams of events within a single life. That point applies univocally to the Trinitarian case. Those who hold that the Son eternally proceeds from the Father hold that there eternally is a causal relation between them such that the events of the Son's life and the events of the Father's are events within the life of one single God. They leave the mechanism involved a mystery. The time-travel case shows that there is some intelligible story one can put where the mystery is in a structurally similar case. This does not remove the mystery, but it domesticates it a bit: thinking about time-travel shows us that causation can do the kind of thing Trinitarians claim it does. In Jane's case, ordinary identity-preserving causal relations link events in her life as each Rockette, and the causal relation which makes what look like three individuals' lives into the lives of one individual—the one the time-machine induces—directly links only the ends of various short event-streams, not the events in the middle. The Trinitarian relations of generation directly link entire streams: every maximal event in the Father's stream has or contains a begetting relation to an appropriate event or set of events in the Son's stream. But we know of nothing that would make this impossible—why *can't* causal relations which turn what are apparently three lives into one life link more than just the end-segments of streams?

If one asks what sort of persons the Persons are, on this account, the right answer is that they are whatever sort God is— the Persons just *are* God, as the Latin approach will have it. The Persons have the same trope of deity. Numerically the same substance generates their mental episodes. Just as Jane has her own thoughts while she is the left- and rightmost Rockettes, God has His own thoughts as Father and Son. But just as Jane does not think her leftmost thoughts at the point in her life at which she is rightmost, God does not think His Father-thoughts at the points in His life at which He is Son. Just as Jane can token with truth "I am the leftmost Rockette" and "I am the rightmost," God can token with truth "I am the Father" and "I am the Son." But just as Jane cannot token both claims with truth at the same points in her life, God cannot token with truth "I am the

Son” at points in His life at which He is Father.³² Just as Jane at the leftmost spot on the chorus line has no internal access to and is not thinking the thoughts she thinks at the rightmost spot, God as Father has no internal access to and is not thinking the thoughts of God as Son.³³ So the Son is distinct from the Father as leftmost Rockette is from rightmost, and the Son’s mind is distinct from the Father’s as leftmost’s is from rightmost’s.

On my account, the Persons’ distinctness, like the Rockettes’, depends on that of events involving a particular substance. Their identities are event-based; facts about events in God’s life are what make Him triune. There is reason to say that at least one classic Latin account of the Trinity is in this way event-based. Aquinas begins his *Summa Theologiae* Ia account of the Trinity with questions on Persons’ procession from Persons (q. 27), relations among Persons (q. 28) and finally the Persons themselves (q. 29). The first claim in his positive account of procession is that “all procession is according to some action”³⁴ that Persons proceed from Persons because of some divine act. The story Thomas tells of some of these acts is this.³⁵ God understands Himself. This is a divine act—God *does* something.³⁶ Because God does something, His understanding Himself is what we would call an event.³⁷ According to Thomas, because God understands Himself, His mind naturally generates an “understood intention,” something expressing the content of His self-understanding. This is His “inner Word.”³⁸ The coming to be of this “intention” is the Word’s proceeding from the Father. Now “coming to be” suggests a process. This is misleading, as the Word is generated instantaneously and so exists co-eternal with God’s self-understanding.³⁹ As Thomas points out, what’s left when we remove this misleading implication is just an eternal relation of origin.⁴⁰ But this is a *causal* relation. And so its distal term is a caused state of affairs, the Word’s existing. The obtaining of a caused state of affairs as and because it is caused is (I’d argue) an event.⁴¹ One can call this event the Word’s filiation. Because the Word proceeds, God’s initial self-understanding has a relational property: it is the cause of an understood intention. Because it has

³² When Jane is the rightmost Rockette, she *used to be* the leftmost, even though she is rightmost and leftmost during the same period of public time. So strictly, she could say both that she is and that she used to be the leftmost, depending on whether she tensed the verbs to the public or to her personal timeline. But as we see in greater detail below, if time-travel is possible, the personal timeline takes precedence. I suggest below that something similar holds in the Trinitarian case.

³³ Even if the Father reads the Son’s mind, He reads it “from without.”

³⁴ Aquinas, *ST* Ia 27, 1, 182a2–3.

³⁵ Thomas’ story about the Spirit’s proceeding is the same in all respects that matter to my point. So I needn’t go into it here.

³⁶ As Thomas sees it, this act is by nature rather than choice (*ST* Ia 41, 2). But that it is not in all respects free does not entail that it is not something God does. Even coerced acts are acts.

³⁷ Though as Eleonore Stump pointed out to me, Thomas likely does not have a single concept that does the work of our event-concept.

³⁸ *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.* ⁴⁰ *ST* Ia 41, 1 *ad* 2.

⁴¹ Some would rejoin: for Thomas, the Word’s existing, caused or not, is atemporal (*ST* Ia 10, 1 *et* 4). So it can’t count as an event. Well, if that’s right, a timeless God can’t act, either. For a case that

this property, God's understanding Himself is also the Father's fathering the Son, His having the causal relation of paternity. For Thomas (following Augustine and Boethius), the Persons are distinguished solely by relational properties (being the Father of, being the Son of). That is, the only difference between God the Father and God the Son is that one is someone's Father (and no-one's Son) and the other is someone's Son (and no-one's Father). These relational properties are exemplified entirely because certain acts- events-take place in God's inner life (self-understanding, inner expression; fathering, filiation): this is why Thomas orders *ST's* Trinity treatise to move from acts to processions to relational properties, and only then to Persons. In fact, Thomas says, the relational properties' being exemplified just *is* the acts' taking place.⁴² So what distinguishes God the Father from God the Son is simply which act God is performing. God the Father is God fathering. God the Son is God filiating, or being fathered. The Persons simply are God as in certain acts—certain events—in His inner life.⁴³ These events have no temporal sequence. None succeeds the other, for none are in time. As they are not in time, they have no temporal parts. God just eternally *does* the acts which constitute His life; these acts render Him triune.

Aquinas attempts to explain why God's self-understanding renders Him a Father and a Son, when our own acts of self-understanding do not do this to us.⁴⁴ But we needn't tackle this issue, at least for now.⁴⁵ One *could* suggest that it's just a primitive fact about the kind of thing God is that one stream of His life generates a second stream, and the two together generate a third stream, as it is about our kind that that this does not happen to us.⁴⁶ Explanation has to

a timeless God can, see my *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 291–7. For a more general case in favor of non-temporal events, see my "The Eternal Present," in Gregory Ganssle and David Woodruff, eds., *God and Time* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21–48. In any case, that Thomas believes that some acts are atemporal is irrelevant to the fact that his Trinity-account is act-based, and so event-based.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Actually, things get a bit more complex than this. Due to the impact of his doctrine of divine simplicity, there are really two accounts of the Trinity in Thomas. I've given one; in the other, it might be better to say that the Persons *are* events in God's inner life.

⁴⁴ See e.g. *Compendium of Theology* I, 41. The explanation has a surprising feature: while we might think the doctrine of divine simplicity a hindrance to the doctrine of the Trinity (how can a simple God contain Triune complexity?), Aquinas argues that the reason God is a Trinity and we are not is precisely that God is simple and we are not.

⁴⁵ Here is at least a gesture at a different explanation. Suppose that as Aquinas thought, there are just three discrete maximal episodes in God's life: three events such that everything God does, thinks or experiences is part of just one of these. Then if God is timeless, these events are somehow all *there*, timelessly. They do not cease to occur. Neither does one take another's place. Yet as they are discrete, they do not overlap: one does not occur *within* another. What there timelessly is to the reality of God, then, is God in one episode, and in the second, and in the third. God might differ from episode to episode, as Father differs from Son. As events are natural causal relata, it would not be surprising if (say) God in one episode had causal relations He did not have in others, e.g. becoming incarnate in just one episode. Perhaps, in short, God's timelessness plus an assumption about God's life can generate a Latin Trinity—*given* the tenability of the notion of an atemporal event.

⁴⁶ This is of course the pattern of generation-relations Western Christians posit between the Persons.

stop someplace, and the doctrine of the Trinity is supposed to be in the end mysterious.

PRESERVING THE PERSONS

To be minimally acceptable, an account of the Trinity must be coherent and orthodox. So an event-based account must at least show that it can deal with (1)–(4) and the “generation” argument. On an event-based account, on one reading, (1)–(4) is sound but irrelevant. If God as the Persons is relevantly like Jane as the Rockettes, then just as (1a)–(4a) did not shorten the chorus line, (1)–(4) do not collapse the Trinity. (1a)–(4a) did not shorten the chorus line because the real force of (4a) is

4a*. the substance who is the leftmost Rockette = the substance who is the rightmost Rockette.

(4a*) is compatible with the sort of distinction leftmost and rightmost have. To eliminate Rockettes, one would have to infer from (1a)–(3a) not (4a) or (4a*), but that the episode of Jane’s life in which she is the leftmost Rockette and has not previously been any other Rockette is the last episode on her timeline in which she is any Rockette. It’s obvious that (1a)–(3a) cannot by themselves yield this conclusion. The Trinitarian parallel is clear: (1)–(3) do not license the conclusion that the events (life) in which God is Father are the only events (life) in which He is any Person.

On the present view, the generation argument loses its sting. For it assigns (5) the sense

5a. God in the event(s) in which He is Father generates God in the event(s) in which He is Son.

(5a) asserts something relevantly like event causation within God’s life: it causally links one segment of God’s life to another. This does not entail that a second God exists *or* that one item causes itself to exist.⁴⁷ (5a) so taken still yields (6), but also so interprets (6) as to make it harmless. And in fact, the event-causal relations involved here provide a natural hook on which to hang an account of the Persons’ generation-relations.

Thus one could simply concede (and ignore) these arguments. But in fact, there is more than one way to read them. On the second reading, thinking about time-travel suggests that they are in an unusual way unsound and invalid.

⁴⁷ Thus it is a case of immanent, not transeunt causality.

TIMELINES AND SOUNDNESS

For an argument to be sound, all its premises must be true at once. We see all the Rockettes at once. So of course it seems to us that (1a)–(3a) are all true at once. For that matter, we tend to think all identity-statements true omnitemporally if true at all (or at least true for all time after their subjects begin to exist⁴⁸), and so again true at once (once their subjects exist). But when Jane has gone home, nothing satisfies the description “the leftmost Rockette” (though Jane of course satisfies “the person who *was* the leftmost Rockette”). If nothing satisfies “the leftmost Rockette,” the description does not refer. And if the description does not refer, (1a) is not true. If we see (1a) as omnitemporally true (or as true for all time after Jane starts to exist), this is because we treat “the leftmost Rockette” as temporally rigid, picking out Jane at all times if it picks her out at any (or all future times once it picks her out at any). But we needn’t. And read as involving a temporally non-rigid description, (1a) can cease to be true. This might suggest that (1a) is not “really” an identity-statement, that at some deep level it is “really” the predication that Jane is the leftmost Rockette. I take no stand on this. What’s clear is that the predication can cease to be true, and on the non-rigid reading, the identity-statement is true only as long as the predication is.

With the descriptions rigid, (1a)–(4a) is sound but irrelevant: we took the descriptions as rigid in the last section. Now let us read (1a) and (2a) non-rigidly. If we do, an ambiguity emerges. (1a)–(3a) are all true at the same point in our lives. So for us, the argument is sound (though still irrelevant). But on Jane’s timeline, things differ. When Jane is the leftmost Rockette, she has not yet lived through dancing in the rightmost Rockette’s spot—even if she has a perfect memory, she has no memory of this. Jane then shares the stage with the rightmost. So Jane is then living through existing simultaneously in public time with her dancing in the rightmost Rockette’s spot. But still, on Jane’s timeline, (2a) is not yet true, because Jane has not yet done what she must to satisfy the description “the rightmost Rockette,” even though (1a) and (2a) are true at once on *our* timeline. So too, when (2a) is true on Jane’s personal timeline, (1a) has ceased to be true. Jane *recalls* dancing in the leftmost spot, and so qualifying for the title “the leftmost Rockette,” and one can only remember what has happened in one’s past. Dancing as leftmost is something she *once* did but is no longer doing—on her timeline. This is so even though Jane is then living through existing simultaneously in public time with her dancing in the leftmost spot. So on Jane’s personal timeline, with its premises read non-rigidly, (1a)–(4a) *is never sound*.

⁴⁸ But even here, one has to wonder. Is it really still true that Lincoln = Lincoln? “Lincoln = Lincoln” is after all a more precise rendering of “Lincoln is Lincoln.” The latter is present-tensed. Perhaps if Lincoln no longer exists, nobody has any longer the property of identity with Lincoln.

This suggests that there is actually a tense involved in (1a) and (2a), at least when we treat the descriptions as non-rigid. The ordinary-language sentences (1a) renders are after all “Jane is the leftmost” or “Jane is identical with the leftmost” (and so for (2a)). In these, “is” is present-tensed. Whether non-rigid (1a) and (2a) are true at once depends on whether the present the tense brings in is Jane’s own or that of the public timeline. So here is the ambiguity: the non-rigid-description reading of (1a)–(4a) is sound (though as irrelevant as the rigid reading) if the tenses invoke the public timeline, but never sound if they invoke Jane’s. If pastward time-travel can occur, it’s Jane’s timeline that counts: that (1a)–(4a) is sound along the public timeline is irrelevant. To show why, I now sketch another problem about time-travel.

In the same period of public time, Jane does (as rightmost) and does not (as leftmost) remember exiting the stage after the leftmost Rockette danced her number. So it seems that time-travel entails a flat-out contradiction. To avoid this, the defender of time-travel must relativize Jane’s remembering somehow. One option would be to relativize to different places: Jane recalls this in the rightmost but not the leftmost spot, and it is no contradiction to recall-this-in-the-rightmost-spot at t but not recall-this-in-the-left-most-spot at t , even though it is one to recall this and not recall this at t . But this is unintuitive, it’s hard to avoid the feeling that if Jane remembers in one spot then Jane remembers *simpliciter* (which re-instates the contradiction), and it isn’t sufficiently general, as it would not handle time-travelers not located in space (angels, perhaps). Another option would be to relativize to different temporal parts of Jane—the rightmost part does recall and the leftmost does not—and reject the move from Jane’s part’s remembering then to Jane’s remembering then or else parse “Jane remembers then” strictly in terms of her temporal parts. But that Jane has temporal parts so ordered implies that Jane has a personal timeline distinct from the public timeline.⁴⁹ So if relativizing to Jane’s timeline will solve the problem by itself, it’s a cheaper solution: it doesn’t commit one to temporal parts. It’s better, then, to relativize to Jane’s time-line, i.e. to say that there’s no contradiction involved in Jane’s time-travel because Jane recalls and does not recall at different points in her life. But this dissolves the problem only if Jane’s personal timeline takes precedence over the public time-line: that is, only if that Jane recalls P at a point in her life coinciding with public time t does not imply that Jane recalls P at t *simpliciter*. For of course, if this did follow, the original contradiction would be re-instated. Pastward time-travel is possible only if it does not involve the contradiction above. The best way to block the contradiction is to relativize Jane’s recalling to her timeline. But this works

⁴⁹ If Jane had just one temporal part at public time t , she would be like the rest of us. Her personal timeline would not diverge from public time at t . If Jane has distinct temporal parts at public t , then one of them is in the other’s past along Jane’s timeline. But along the public timeline, whatever is at t when t is present is present. So if Jane has distinct temporal parts at public t , her timeline diverges from that of public time.

only if facts about the order of segments of Jane's own life supersede facts about the public timeline—only if, as it were, Jane while time-travelling is really in her own time even though every instant of her life coincides with some instant of public time. This last is exactly what one would expect if there can be pastward time-travel, in which individual timelines break free of the public timeline.

If time-travel can occur, then that P at a point in one's life which coincides with public time t does not entail that P at t. Nor does P's being so at public t entail that P is so at every point in one's life which coincides with public t. Jane exits the stage from her leftmost position at public time $t + 1$. So at public time t, she has not yet made the exit, and does not remember it. As Jane exits the stage after her first dancing, her timeline has not yet diverged from public time. So if her not recalling this exit at public t, before she made it, entailed that she did not recall it at every point in her life which coincided with t, then she would both recall it and not recall it as rightmost. If time-travel can occur, then, that Jane does not at public time t recall her exit does not entail that Jane does not recall this at every point in her life which coincides with t. Not all facts about the public timeline impose themselves on the time-traveler's timeline.

There are stages of our lives at which Jane is presently both the leftmost and the rightmost Rockette. During any such stage, (1a)–(4a) is sound. But Jane's life has no such stage. For again, as we watch the Rockettes, we see all at once events that for Jane are successive, i.e. not all co-present. On her timeline, when she is presently the rightmost Rockette, being the leftmost Rockette is in her past.⁵⁰ Now if time-travel can occur, facts about time-travelers' personal timelines supersede facts about public time. That (1a)–(3a) are all true at once in public time does not entail that they are all true at once during Jane's life, even though all segments of Jane's life coincide with public times. So if time-travel can occur, the fact that (1a)–(4a) is sound in public time does not matter. Along Jane's timeline it is wrong to treat (1a)–(4a) as a proof, even though we would be right to do so. Even if the argument were able (as it were) to shorten the chorus line, it would do so only if it were sound along Jane's timeline.

It would strengthen my overall case if I could show that what must be so if time-travel is possible is so- i.e. that for quite general reasons, personal timelines supersede public time. For the nonce I can only suggest something weaker. There is not (say I) some single substantival entity, Time, which passes at Newton's "uniform and equable rate." What we call time's passage is just a function of what events occur, and how they occur. Events compose all timelines, public and personal. So at the very least, there is no *a priori* reason that we should treat public time as having priority over personal, and able (as it were) to impose itself upon it. For both are wholes composed equally of the same basic parts. They

⁵⁰ Another angle on the same fact: on Jane's timeline, there are times between the leftmost and the rightmost Rockettes' arrivals onstage. There are none in our timeline—for us, all Rockettes step onstage from backstage at once.

simply arrange those parts differently, if they differ. Now in some cases, parts compose wholes only by composing larger parts of those wholes: players compose baseball leagues only by composing those leagues' teams, atoms compose walls only by composing bricks which compose walls. It is at least arguable that public time is really just the fusion of personal times—that events compose public time only by composing personal times which compose public time. If this is not just arguable but true, of course, then traits of personal times take precedence.

SOUNDNESS AND TRINITARIAN TIMELINES

In any case, the Trinitarian parallel to my treatment of Jane is clear. On my account, God's life runs in three streams. In one stream, (1) is so. In another, (2) is so. In no stream are both so. So in no stream of God's life are (1)—(4) or the generation-argument sound. For this fact to matter, pastward time-travel need not be possible—though if it is, that of course is helpful. It need only be the case that as in my treatment of the time-travel case, facts about God's personal timeline(s) supersede facts about the public timeline. I now argue that if God is atemporal, they do, while if God is temporal, it is at least coherent to maintain that they do.

If God is atemporal, as the classic Latin Trinitarians held, His life is wholly independent of time, and so the public timeline does not constrain it. Facts about the order of events in His life supersede facts about the public timeline in almost the sense facts about Jane's timeline do. If time-travel can occur, "P at a point in one's life which coincides with public time *t*" does not entail "P at *t*," nor *vice-versa*. It's hard even to come up with a sense in which a timeless God's life would coincide with times.⁵¹ But just suppose that if God is timeless, then there is *some* sense in which (1) is so at a point in God's life coinciding with all times—after all, at every time, if one asserts (1), what one asserts is true. Even so, it does not follow from this that (1) is so *at any t*. For if God is timeless, no event in His life occurs at any time. But if (1) were the case at *t*, this would be because an event helping make it so occurred at *t*: what is true then is true then because part of what makes it so occurs then.⁵² So if God is timeless, it's not true in his case that for all P, if P at a point in His life coinciding with *t*, then P at *t*. If God is timeless, then even if P is true of Him and it is now *t*, it is not the case that P *at t*. Instead, P is so without temporal location.

⁵¹ Stump and Kretzmann's ET-simultaneity is one attempt (Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 429–58).

⁵² If P is present-tense and true, an improper part of its truthmaker is at *t*. If P is past-tensed and true, a proper part is: that Casar crossed the Rubicon is true due to an event now over (the crossing) and one now going on, which makes it later now than the crossing and so makes it correct to use the past tense. The life is so if P is future-tense and true. If God is timeless, "God knows that $2 + 2 = 4$ " has no temporal tense at all. Its truthmaker thus lies entirely outside time.

The reverse entailment, from “P at t” to “P at some point in God’s life coinciding with t,” seems to fail as well if God is timeless. For at t, all and only those events before t are such that their happening is in the past. But at no point in God’s life is this so. If for God anything is in the past—over, done and gone—God has a past, and so is temporal. Even if we waive this and allow that somehow, things can have happened for a timeless God, still if only *some* of time has happened for Him, then for Him, time has reached only that point—and so the rest of it lies in His future, and so He has a future and is again temporal. Moreover, if God’s life does not occur in time, no facts about public time are relevant to “when” in His life claims are true. Events occur at different points in public time, but on any account of divine timelessness, they are given “all at once” for God—that is, at the same point(s) in His life. So events’ order for God differs from their order in public time—though of course God knows what their order in public time *is*.

One might think that the public timeline imposes itself on God’s this way: if God is atemporal, at every moment of time t, it is timelessly so that (1) and (2). So (1) and (2) are the case at t timelessly, and so the case at one time timelessly. However, timeless facts obtain, but not *at* any time. So “at t, it’s the case that timelessly P” does not entail “it’s the case at t timelessly that P.” Further, suppose that (1) and (2) are the case at one time timelessly (whatever this might mean). This would not make (1) and (2) true at the same point in God’s life. A parallel case can show this. Suppose God were temporal, but His personal time were simply a series of periods wholly discrete from our time—none before, during or after any period in our time. Then God’s time would be related to ours just as the life of a timeless God would be, and it would be true that

A. for each public time of ours t, at t, somewhere in God’s own time, (1) and somewhere in God’s own time, (2).

But (A) would not entail that (1) and (2) are true at once in God’s own time. Times discrete on God’s own timeline would not be collapsed into one because there is a second time to each period of which each has exactly the same temporal relation, namely none at all. If this isn’t clear intuitively, consider a spatial parallel: suppose that there is a second space, consisting of points with no spatial relations at all to ours. Then (let’s say)

B. for each place of ours p, it is the case at p that in the second space, both a dog and a cat are located somewhere.

But (B) does not entail that the dog and the cat occupy the same place. So if God is timeless, facts about the public timeline and about God’s life’s relations to it cannot supersede facts about when within God’s life (1) and (2) are true. If (1) and (2) are true only in discrete parts of God’s timeless life, facts about our time cannot make them true “at once.”

Now if God is timeless, it is just timelessly the case that God's life has three "streams." That is, it consists of three aggregates of events each with the right internal relations to count as a single life and the right generation relations to set it off from events in the other sets.⁵³ If there is no temporal relation between these streams, and facts about our time cannot make them true at one time, then it is not the case that (1) and (2) are true at one time-period. But this is not enough to show that (1)–(4) and the generation argument are never sound for God. For suppose that there were neither time nor God—that there was only a three-dimensional space. If there is no time, no claims are true at one time. But surely the argument "this is a space; any space has dimensions; so this space has dimensions" would be sound. Again, plausibly mathematical truths are timeless. If so, none are true at one time. But even so, surely some mathematical arguments are sound. So the truth about soundness must be that an argument is sound only if none of its premises' being true is separate temporally or in some other relevant way from the rest's. In the case of mathematical truths, there is no relevant separation. In God's case, there is. (1) and (2) are true only in non-overlapping parts of God's life which are relevantly like temporal maximal episodes. This makes (1)'s and (2)'s being true relevantly separate, as does the parallel gap in Jane's life between (1a)'s and (2a)'s being true. The separation in Jane's case is discreteness along a private timeline. If God is timeless, the discreteness of episodes in His life is not along a timeline. But (I now suggest) it is enough like discreteness along a timeline in its *causal* aspects for Jane's case to be relevant to God's.

In Jane's case, the separation of what occurs all at once in public time into different segments of one life is there due to causal relations among the segments. These events' causal relations make them parts of one and the same life. They also account for the events' discreteness, for they include relations events cannot bear to their own parts. Events are discrete iff they have no parts in common. If event A causes all parts of event B, it follows that B and A share no parts, as no event causes the occurrence of its own proper parts, and so that A and B are discrete. By causing B, A accounts for B's existence and its having the parts it does. B's having just the parts it does establishes B's discreteness from A. So by causing B, A accounts for B's discreteness from A. Finally, these events' causal relations make them temporally ordered non-simultaneous parts of Jane's life (even though they are simultaneous parts of public time) if they include causation of a sort involving temporal precedence.

Now if a life is temporal, then if two of its segments are discrete, it follows that either one immediately succeeds the other or there is a temporal gap between them. Because of this, propositions can be true in one segment but not the other. So if a life is temporal and two of its segments are discrete, then due to this they

⁵³ Talk of atemporal events may cause pain here; see *ops. cit.* n. 37.

stand in a relation which lets propositions be true in one but not the other. I now generalize from this, and say that if segments are discrete yet in one life, then due to this they stand in a relation which lets propositions be true in one but not the other, whether or not the life is temporal. I do so based on my brief rejection above of substantialist time. For non-substantialists about times, times just are sets or fusions of co-occurring events. If so, then if truths can differ at different times, they can equally differ at different sets or fusions of co-occurring events: to relativize truths to times is to relativize them to events. If relativizing to events is fine for temporal events, why would things differ for atemporal?

If this is true, then if causal relations account for the segments' discreteness and their being in one life, they also account for the fact that propositions can be true during one of these segments which are not true during the other. Nor does time play the essential role here. By starting something new of a temporal sort, A's causal powers make time pass. It's not that A places B at a later point in time and so lets B make true truths A did not. It's rather that A brings B about, and so makes things true which were not true before, and so makes B's time a later one. Facts about time are not basic but derivative. It's causation which makes the temporal facts about A and B what they are. The real story about the relations between segments of Jane's life, the one which lets them have different properties while we watch them all at once, is causal, not temporal.

In Jane's case, all the segments occurred in one public-temporal period, but causal relations between them made them discrete segments of one life, with truths unique to each. In a timeless God's case, all the segments occur at once in the eternal present, but causal relations between them make them discrete segments of one life. Here too, then, there are truths unique to each. There is no temporal separation along a private timeline in this case. But I've suggested that it is causal, not temporal features that matter here, and in any case there is a more profound temporal disconnect, in that there are no temporal relations *at all* between the segments—only causal ones. Causation, not time, accounts for the distinctive features of Jane's case. I've claimed that the causal relations involved in Trinitarian generation are enough like those involved in time-travel that the key features of Jane's case carry over. If this is correct, arguments sound in public time need not come out sound along the "time"line of the Trinitarian lives.

The remaining question, then, is whether there is some analogue to a public timeline within timeless eternity, which might make (1) and (2) true at once for God. The short answer is: there is, but it can't, any more than the fact that the many Janes all dance at once in public time can make the segments of Jane's life we see in the chorus line simultaneous in Jane's private time (which would be to collapse them all to a single segment). Causal relations between the lives of the Persons make them both discrete as lives and yet lives of one God. This is the mystery of the Trinitarian generations; I have not claimed to crack it. That there

is one eternal present is the public timeline of eternity. That the events occur at one present does not eliminate the discreteness of the events whose one present this is any more than it did in Jane's case. Again: it is causal relations between events in Jane's life which both make them discrete—as effect from cause—and unite them into one individual's life, even if all these events are linked by time-travel and occurring at one present. So too, causal relations make the Persons' lives both discrete and the lives of one God, even if linked by Trinitarian generation and occurring at one eternal present. Causal relations so bind Jane-events that (1a)–(4a) fails, even if all the Rockettes kick at once in public time. So too, I suggest, causal relations among the atemporal events of an atemporal God's life block (1)–(4) even if the Persons share a single eternal present. If all of eternity is a single present and God's life has discrete parts, what follows is simply that God's life is relevantly like a time-traveler's, with discrete parts occurring at once in such a way as to respect the discreteness of the parts. I submit, then, that if God is timeless, (1)–(4) and the generation argument are not sound on His "time"—line. (1) and (2) are never true at the same points in God's life even if they share a single eternal present.

Each Rockette is Jane. But in terms of Jane's personal timeline, in the way just set out, each is not Jane *while* the others are Jane. Let "while*" be a connective relativized to a particular timeline, and making no reference to general, public time. Then Jane is not the leftmost Rockette while* she is the rightmost, though her being both coincides with the whole of the public time her number involves. In the same way, each Person is God, but God is not the Father while* He is the Son.

WHAT IF GOD IS TEMPORAL?

If God is temporal, facts about His timeline might equally well supersede facts about the public timeline. A temporalist could assert that they do without argument, making it simply part of his/her particular conception of God's eternity. But some temporalists, at least, could offer an argument that this is so. For some temporalists maintain that God has made time, or that it is as it is because He is as He is: that God's being has some sort of causal priority to time's existing or having its character.⁵⁴ If either is true, then surely God gives time such a nature as permits Him to exist as His nature dictates. If God determines time's nature, then even if He is temporal, if God's nature is such that His life should consist of three streams related relevantly like streams of a time-traveler's life, nothing in the nature of time will preclude this.

⁵⁴ See e.g. William Craig, "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," and Alan Padgett, "God the Lord of Time," in Gregory Ganssle, ed., *God and Time* (Wheaton, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2001).

SORTALS AND SOUNDNESS

No infant is a man. But Lincoln was infant and man: “that infant” and “that man” picked Lincoln out at different points in his life. Now consider this argument:

7. that infant = Lincoln,
8. that man = Lincoln,
9. Lincoln = Lincoln,

and so

10. that infant = that man.

Taking the descriptions as temporally rigid, the argument is sound, but of course does not prove that someone is both infant and man at once. Taking the descriptions non-rigidly, (7) ceases to be true when Lincoln ceases to be an infant, well before Lincoln is an adult. So the argument is never sound. One might think (10) true even so. But more precisely, what’s true is that the person who was that infant = the person who is that man. Strictly speaking, reading the descriptions non-rigidly, (10) is false. For an identity statement is true only if the terms flanking “=” refer to the same item at once, and if we take them non-rigidly, “that infant” and “that man” never refer to the same item at once⁵⁵: nothing is a man while* it is an infant. Let me now introduce a technical term, “phased sortal.”⁵⁶ “Infant” and “man” are phased sortals: they pick out a substance under a description which essentially involves a particular phase of its life. Identity-statements linking temporally non-rigid descriptions involving mutually exclusive phased sortals cannot be true. So with the descriptions non-rigid, (7)–(10) is not only never sound but has a false conclusion.

In the Rockette case, “the leftmost Rockette” and “the rightmost Rockette” act as mutually exclusive phased sortals picking out Jane, if we’re dealing only with Jane’s own timeline. So too, on the account of the Trinity I’ve been suggesting, “Father” and “Son” are mutually exclusive phased sortals picking out God. (1) and (2) are never true at once*: God is not Father while* He is Son. And (4), like (10), cannot be true—though it is of course true that while* God is the Son, God is the God who is also the Father.

⁵⁵ How about “remember that infant I pointed out to you years ago? That man over there, the President, is that infant”? This is loose speech for “that man *was* that infant,” i.e. “the person who is that man was that infant.”

⁵⁶ See e.g. David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 24ff.

TRINITARIAN LIVES AND VALIDITY

Once temporary identities enter the picture, identity-statements are implicitly relativized to times (or something time-like). If so, then if we let “ t ”s refer to times on Jane’s timeline, with the descriptions read non-rigidly, we really have

- 1b. $(t_1 \rightarrow t_2)(\text{Jane} = \text{the leftmost Rockette}),$
- 2b. $(t_3 (>t_2 \rightarrow t_4)(\text{Jane} = \text{the rightmost Rockette}),$ and
- 3b. $(t)(\text{Jane} = \text{Jane}).$

(1b)–(3b) are all true. But what I now argue suggests that the move from them to (4a) is invalid.

Here is an argument philosophers have discussed at length⁵⁷:

- 11. Necessarily, 9 is greater than 7.
- 12. 9 = the number of the planets. So
- 13. Necessarily, the number of the planets is greater than 7.

The premises are true, yet the conclusion is false, since there could have been just 6 planets. So obviously, something goes wrong here.

(11) asserts of 9 that it has a property, being greater than 7, in all possible worlds. (12) is true, but not in all possible worlds. “9” and “the number of the planets” actually refer to the same number. But they need not have. Neptune and Pluto might never have formed, or might have formed but never been caught by the Sun’s gravity. So it could have been the case that there were just seven planets. If it had, “9” and “the number of the planets” would not have had the same referent. So it is possible that “9” and “the number of the planets” do not refer to the same number. (13) asserts in effect that “the number of the planets” picks out a number larger than 7 in every possible world. But as we have seen, this is not true. So this inference from necessarily Fx and $x = y$ to necessarily Fy is invalid. One moral one might draw from this is that in a modal context (i.e. within the scope of “necessarily”), the fact that two terms “a” and “b” actually refer to the same thing (i.e. that an identity-statement like (12) is true) does not suffice to warrant substituting “b” for “a.” What is required instead to have a valid inference (one which cannot take us from true premises to a false conclusion) is that “a” and “b” refer to the same thing in every possible world. For consider by contrast

- 11. Necessarily, 9 is greater than 7.
- 12a. $9 = 3^2.$ So
- 13a. Necessarily, 3^2 is greater than 7.

⁵⁷ Its *locus classicus* is W.V. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1961), 147–8.

“9” and “3²” refer to the same thing in every possible world. And thus both premises and conclusion are true.

Times are like possible worlds—both are items at which propositions can be true—and temporal contexts can be like modal contexts. Consider this argument:

- 11b. 9 is always greater than 7.
- 12. 9 = the number of the planets. So
- 13b. The number of the planets is always greater than 7.

Here we go astray as in (11)–(13). For not all the planets formed simultaneously, our sun existed before it had any planets, and the universe existed even before our sun did: (13b) is false. To see why we went astray, let us parse the argument a bit more perspicuously, as involving a temporal operator which quantifies over times as “□” does over possible worlds:

- 11c. At all times (9 is greater than 7).
- 12. 9 = the number of the planets. So
- 13c. At all times (the number of the planets is greater than 7).

The problem is that while (12) is true, it is not true at all times. As the problem parallels that above, one can draw a parallel moral. In a universal-temporal context, even if “a” and “b” now refer to the same thing, it is valid to substitute “a” for “b” only if “a” and “b” always (i.e. at all times) refer to the same thing. This explains the invalidity of the move from (1b)–(3b) to (4a).

I now suggest that the identities in (1) and (2) do not license the universal inter-substitution of terms denoting the one God—that is, that the move from (1), (2) and (5) to (6) is invalid. To move from Jane’s case to the Trinity, we need just note that on non-substantival theories of time, times just *are* sets or mereological fusions of events.⁵⁸ So if it makes sense to index propositions to times (i.e. treat times as items at which propositions can be true), it can also make sense to index propositions to sets or fusions of events. This (I now submit) is what we must do on the present account of the Trinity. On this account, whether or not God is temporal, there are items *like* times in God’s life—sets or fusions of events in God’s life at which propositions are true. These are the sets or fusions of just the events of each Person’s life.

The generation argument, again, moves from

- 1. the Father = God
- 2. the Son = God, and
- 5. the Father generates the Son,

to

- 6. God generates God

⁵⁸ Such theories face a variety of philosophical problems. Many can be treated along lines laid out in Graeme Forbes, “Time, Events and Modality,” in Robin Le Poidevin and Murray MacBeath, eds., *The Philosophy of Time* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1993), 80–95, and Jan Cover, “Reference, Modality and Relational Time,” *Philosophical Studies* 70 (1993), 251–77.

(5) is true at all Trinitarian lives; it is the Trinitarian equivalent of a necessary or omnitemporal truth. But (1) and (2) are like (12). As (12) is true only at some possible worlds and times, (1) and (2) are each true only at some Trinitarian lives. So though (1) and (2) are true, they do not make it valid to substitute “God” for “the Father” and “the Son” in (5), for reasons akin to those operative in the modal and temporal arguments above. The basic point of the Rockette analogy is that one should approach the Trinity by asking in what ways God’s life is free from ordinary temporal relations. I suggest that it is free enough from ordinary temporal ordering that we can say that God lives His life in three streams at once, index Trinitarian truths to appropriate sets of events, then use this indexing to block the move to (6). Of course, one can also block the move to (4) this way.

THE MENACE OF MODALISM

Accounts of the Trinity must skirt the Scylla of tri-theism and the Charybdis of modalism. Tri-theists so emphasize the separateness of the Persons as to wind up affirming three separate Gods, not three Persons in one God. Modalists so emphasize the unity of God as to wind up affirming one God who has three modes of appearing or of dealing with us, not one God in three Persons. Or so we think. It is no easy thing to say just what Modalism *was*, or exactly why it was rejected, as the Church Fathers who fought it seem to have suppressed all copies of the works they deemed heretical. Still, scholars have pieced together some sense of it from quotes, allusions and (perhaps biased) descriptions which survive in non-Modalist works, and at least on the depictions of Modalism one finds in standard theological dictionaries, my account seems comfortably far from it.⁵⁹ Such works describe Modalism as holding that all distinctions between Persons are impermanent and transitory⁶⁰, or “are a mere succession of modes or operations,”⁶¹ that

the one God becomes Trinitarian only in respect of the modes of His operation *ad extra*⁶²,
that

God is three only with respect to the modes of His action in the world⁶³,

⁵⁹ The more extended account one finds in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (N.Y.: HarperCollins, 1978), rev. ed., 119–26, merely validates the briefer dictionary descriptions quoted below.

⁶⁰ F.L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1097.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1102, in an account of Patripassionism, which overlapped Modalism.

⁶² Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Dictionary of Theology* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1981), 312.

⁶³ J. Komonchak, M. Collins, D. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), 668.

that

the one God . . . has three manners (modes) of appearance, rather than being one God in three Persons.⁶⁴

and that for Modalism,

the three Persons are assigned the status of modes or manifestations of the one divine being: the one God is substantial, the three differentiations adjectival . . . the Modalist God metamorphosed Himself to meet the changing needs of the world⁶⁵,

and so there is

a Trinity of manifestation, not even a Trinity of economy, still less a Trinity of being.⁶⁶

Nothing in my account of the Trinity precludes saying that the Persons' distinction is an eternal, necessary, non-successive and intrinsic feature of God's life, one which would be there even if there were no creatures. If one asserts all this, one asserts a "Trinity of being," with no reference to actions *ad extra* or appearances to creatures. Further items on an anti-Modalist checklist: does the view set out here entail that the Father is crucified? No, though the God who is the Father is crucified—at the point in His life at which He is not the Father, but the Son. Can the view deal adequately with the anti-Modalist texts cited above? On the present view, the Son cannot token truly "I am the Father," though He can token truly "I am the God who is (at another point in His life) the Father." Nor can the Son say truly that

14. I am at one point in my life the Father and at another the Son,
since at no point in the Son's life is He the Father. The Son can say truly that

15. I am the God who is at one point in His life the Father and at another
the Son,

i.e. that He is God, and God is both Father and Son. But this is so on any Latin view of the Trinity. A natural question here is, "if the Son just is God, can't the Son use 'I' to refer to God, not to the Son, and if He does, can't He assert (14) truly?" But if the Son so uses "I," what He asserts is in effect (15), not (14). On any Latin approach, for a tri-personal God, "I" cannot be purely referential, a term whose contribution to the content of a sentence is simply an individual to whom God refers. For if there is just one individual, God, in the three Persons, then a purely referential "I" would always contribute simply God to a sentence's content. No Person could speak as "I" and refer to Himself as a Person; the Son could not say with truth, "I am not the Father," for His "I" would refer to God, and God *is* the Father. So on any Latin approach, if Persons can speak as

⁶⁴ Donald McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Pres, 1996), 176.

⁶⁵ H.E.W. Turner, "Modalism," in Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1983), 375.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

themselves, and the Son can know that He is not the Father, God's "I" always includes a mode of presentation, a sense under which the speaker conceives and refers to Himself. When the Son speaks as the Son, He presents Himself to Himself as the Son, and so the Father is never other than another "I," who as such has His own mind and will. This is enough to make adequate sense of the texts, given the way my view guarantees the real distinctness of Father and Son.⁶⁷ And this is why if the Son uses 'I' to refer to God, what He asserts comes out as (15): the "I's mode of presentation builds "the God" etc. into the content of His claim.

The question is sure to come, though: aren't your Persons still "modes," if not modes of appearance, "adjectival" rather than "substantial"? One reply is that on the present account, each Person is as substantial as the one God is, since each Person is God in a different "part" of His life. If an infant isn't a mode of a substance, neither is a Son. Again, arguably a person could be a substance despite having identity-conditions that depend on events: Locke, for instance, rested the identity-conditions for persons on certain relations among mental events, and while he has of late been charged with many things, turning persons into events, accidents or modes has not been among them. Most latter-day Lockean see persons as substances which are also material objects, or at least supervenient on them.

God's life is not constrained by time. If it is at least as free from time's bonds as a pastward time-traveler's would be, this provides a way to make sense of the doctrine of the Trinity- orthodox sense, or so I've argued. Note that in this last statement, pastward time-travel serves only as a model for the Trinity. While I have used pastward time-travel as a model, my view is not hostage to whether such travel is possible. My account is metaphysically possible if pastward time travel is, and I have in fact suggested that time travel is possible. If time travel is not, my account is still at least as conceivable as time travel is, and the impossibility of time travel may not count against my account's possibility, even as the impossibility of intuitionist logic does not count against the possibility of an indeterminate future. There is more to say here- in particular, about *why* God is a Trinity, and what sort of persons Persons are. But this will have to do for now.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ In the *John 17* text cited, the Son prays to the Father. This is like one Rockette's talking to another.

⁶⁸ My thanks to Jeff Brower, Paul Reasoner, Eleonore Stump, Dale Tuggy, Dean Zimmerman and an anonymous referee for comments.

5

Two Models of the Trinity?*

Richard Cross

A commonplace of the history of doctrine has it that the East (following the Cappadocian Fathers) and the West (following Augustine) adopt radically divergent accounts of the Trinity, though it is less commonly agreed just what the differences between the accounts are. For example, it is often held in the textbooks that the Eastern view somehow ‘starts from’ the persons, whereas the Western view somehow ‘starts from’ the essence.¹ As Lewis Ayres has powerfully argued, it is decidedly unclear what precisely is meant by this claim. Ayres notes, however, some consensus on the matter: starting from the essence (as the West is alleged to do) supposedly entails that the divine essence is an object that is somehow prior to—even independent of—the divine persons, and that this belief distinguishes it from the Eastern view.²

Ayres is clearly correct in supposing that this characterization of the matter is false, and I would like to develop that assessment here. It is easy enough to establish that both views accept a sense in which the divine essence is somehow ‘shared’ by the three persons. (Thus, we need to be very careful if we wish to

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¹ Brian Leftow, for example, makes a related move by distinguishing ‘social’ views of the Trinity from the ‘Latin’ view by *defining* a social view as one which starts from the persons: see his ‘Anti Social Trinitarianism’ in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 203–49, at p. 203. I hope it will become clear from my argument below that this is not a very satisfactory way of proceeding—however valuable many other aspects of Leftow’s powerful essay are. More generally, the ascription to the Cappadocians of a ‘generic’ interpretation of the *homoousion*, as opposed to a ‘unitary’ one, is a commonplace from Theodore von Zahn, *Marcellus von Ancyra: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Theologie* (Gotha, 1867) onwards (see Zahn, *Marcellus*, p. 87). Equally common is the claim that Augustine understands the divine essence in a non-generic, unitary way. I do not want in principle to challenge the substance of these analyses. As I shall make clear below, my aim is, rather, to show that the Cappadocian generic interpretation and the Augustinian unitary interpretation do not differ in any substantial metaphysical way. ‘Generic’ and ‘unitary’ are simply in this context different labels for the same thing, and the choice of terminology is determined by considerations extrinsic to the question of the Trinity. It is determined, in short, by considerations of the nature of creaturely substances, and in particular of creaturely universals.

² See Lewis Ayres, ‘“Remember That You Are Catholic” (*serm.* 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000), pp. 39–82, at pp. 39–40.

assert that the Trinity is simply *reducible* to the persons and the relations that obtain between them.)³ There is a clear difference between the two views, however, and it is this: the Eastern view does, and the Western view does not, generally accept a sense in which the divine essence is a shared *universal*. This divergence can clearly be seen in the originators of the two different approaches. As I will show below, Gregory of Nyssa, for example, asserts that the divine essence is a universal, and Augustine just as decisively denies this. And similar assertions are not hard to find later in the various traditions too (as I will show in the cases of John of Damascus and Thomas Aquinas). What happens if we deny that the divine essence is a universal? What model, in other words, is available to us to give an account of how the divine essence could be ‘shared’ by the three divine persons? This, of course, is a metaphysical question, and cannot be answered adequately without a full understanding of the metaphysical thought of the theologians under discussion. To do this properly for the whole history of Trinitarian debate would be a massive task. And it seems that the motivations for the various Trinitarian views may well in any case be more reliant on intuitions than on clearly articulated metaphysical systems. Still, these intuitions are at least in part philosophical, and I shall defend the perhaps controversial thesis that, once we take account of the divergent metaphysical presuppositions of the various writers I shall consider here, we discover that there is after all no significant difference between Eastern and Western views on the specific question I am interested in—despite the apparent divergence on the question of the divine essence as a universal.

What I shall do here is briefly consider a couple of philosophical theories on the relations between particulars and universals (section I), and then show how, if at all, the theories could dovetail with Trinitarian theology (section II). In my final section—section III—I attempt to deal with an objection to my analysis, namely that Eastern views, as commonly understood, seem compatible with ‘social’ views of the Trinity in ways that Western views do not. I shall argue that this analysis is mistaken, both on historical and on conceptual grounds.

Although my purpose is more speculative than historical, I shall (as I have indicated) give examples of thinkers who apply the different theories to the Trinity, and show how, in the light of their general metaphysical strategies, they understand the particular claims that they want to make about the Trinity. I shall try to show that the differences between the various views, despite the way in which these views are commonly presented now, are very slight indeed. I leave it to others to judge how useful my observations may be for any ecumenical *rapprochement*. It may be that all sides will judge the close philosophical analysis

³ I do not believe in any case that a claim that the divine essence is somehow shared by the three persons entails that there is any philosophically significant sense in which the essence is prior to the persons, let alone independent of them. I will return to this below.

of these theological matters to be undesirable, though I hope it will be clear by the end of this article just how fruitful such analyses can turn out to be. I do not mean to suggest by all this that the texts I examine are not amenable to other sorts of readings too; merely that philosophical readings are, in the cases I consider here, both appropriate and illuminating.

One note on what I shall not attempt: I will not deal with the divergent accounts of the monarchy of the Father. It would certainly be an interesting experiment to see whether or not there are substantive differences on this question. What I hope will become clear is that the mature Eastern view—represented here by Gregory of Nyssa and John of Damascus—tends to understand the divine essence as a universal shared by all three persons. Thus, I hope it will be clear by implication that the monarchy of the Father cannot be appealed to—at least in the thinkers I consider here—as a necessary condition for the *homoousion*.⁴ The *homoousion* is simply the fact that the three divine persons share one and the same (universal) essence. And as will become clear, it is in just this understanding of the *homoousion* that East and West are in fundamental agreement. In the light of this, a comparison of the Eastern and Western views of the monarchy of the Father would be a further task, and one that I will not attempt here.⁵

I. METAPHYSICAL OPTIONS

The following analysis aims to provide an exhaustive typology of theories on the relation between particulars and universals. There is nothing much original about the typology, and the aim in providing it is merely to offer a helpful template for understanding theological analyses of the Trinity, rather than to shed

⁴ Pace, e.g., John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), pp. 40–1: ‘Among the Greek Fathers the unity of God, the one God, and the ontological “principle” or “cause” of the being and life of God does not consist in the one substance of God but in the *hypostasis*, that is, the *person of the Father*. The one God is not the one substance but the Father, who is the “cause” both of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit.’ There clearly are derivation accounts of divine unity in Gregory of Nyssa (see, e.g., Gregory, *Oratio Catechetica* 3, edited by E. Mühlberg, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* [= GNO], 3/4 [Leiden, New York, Cologne, 1996], 13.23–6). But these accounts are inconsistent with Gregory’s general theory of the divine essence. Although it is often held that the Eastern tradition remains faithful to Athanasius in this matter, it seems to me—and I shall provide some evidence for this claim in what follows—that the respect paid in the Eastern tradition to Athanasius’s view is little more than lip-service, and that it is Gregory’s view that comes to dominate.

⁵ And it would not be hard to demonstrate also fundamental agreement on the claim that the Father—and not the divine essence—is the ultimate source of the other two persons too (though East and West are in genuine disagreement on the question of the possible communication of the Father’s ‘spirative’ power to the Son): what else could be the point of the claim that the Son and Spirit *proceed* from the Father? See the comments on Augustine in Lewis Ayres’s review of Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1992), pp. 780–2, at p. 781.

any light on the substantive philosophical question. The exhaustive nature of the typology, I hope, makes it clear that the sorts of distinction that I am making are conceptual matters, and to that extent logically unavoidable. Equally, while the typology is, as far as I can see, exhaustive, there are many different ways in which the theories proposed could be developed. The philosophical issue is, thus, more complex than my analysis may suggest. Still, I hope to provide a set of tools sufficient for my theological purposes here. I will state now that the conclusion of the discussion will be that a universal is a (numerically) singular item that can be a property of more than one substance. Someone considerably more interested in the application of this conclusion to the theological question than in the establishment of the conclusion in the first place could skip this first section altogether and go straight on now to section II.

Let me start with a distinction between a property and a substrate. Very roughly, a property is a describable characteristic of a thing. A substrate is a bearer of such characteristics, in itself distinct—in some way or other—from any and every property. This distinction yields the first disjunction in the basic typology. For we could hold that a thing—a substance—includes both a substrate and one or more properties; or we could hold that a substance includes only properties—that it is a bundle of properties. (Nothing could be *just* a substrate, because such a thing would lack any describable characteristics, and would thus be nothing at all.) A second distinction will increase the number of options. For we could hold that properties are particulars, or we could hold that properties are universals. If properties are particulars, then the properties of numerically distinct substances—even indiscernible properties—are numerically distinct from each other. If properties are universals, then the indiscernible properties of numerically distinct substances are (numerically) identical with each other. For example, if the redness of this rose is numerically distinct from just the same shade of redness in that rose, then the two rednesses are two particular properties. If, on the other hand, the redness of this rose is (numerically) identical with the redness of that rose, then redness is a universal, shared by the two roses.⁶ This distinction—between particular and universal properties—allows us to increase the range of our typology. Suppose we accept that a substance includes

⁶ I speak of ‘numerical’ identity here. Some theories of universals have denied that numerical identity is the relevant sort of identity, at least in the case of creaturely properties. Duns Scotus, for example, famously claims that the identity that obtains between two instances of a property is ‘less than numerical’. But this introduces a complication that makes no difference to my argument, so I ignore it here (except for my brief discussion of Scotus below). For the ‘numerical’ identity of universals, see the classic modern discussion in D. M. Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 112, with reference to Scotus’s claims about less-than-numerical unity: ‘For myself, I cannot understand what this second, lesser, sort of identity is. Partial identity, as when two things overlap but do no more than overlap, or when two things have some but not all the same properties so that their nature “overlaps”, can be understood readily enough. But identity is just identity. . . I take it that the Realist ought to allow that two “numerically diverse” particulars which have the same property are *not* wholly diverse. They are partially identical in nature and so are partially identical.’

both substrate and properties. We could accept that the properties in question are particular properties, or we could accept that the properties in question are universal properties. For that matter, we could suppose that some of the properties are particular, and some universal. Equally, suppose we accept that a substance is simply a bundle of properties. We could hold that the properties in question are particulars, or universals, or a combination of the two. This yields six basic models in the typology. I am not interested here in which of these models is true as a matter of fact: merely in seeing how the models impact on the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is important to note that accepting one of these bundle theories does not in itself entail abandoning talk of substances. Philosophers who accept bundle theories appeal to a notion first introduced by Bertrand Russell—himself a thinker who accepted that a particular is a bundle of universal properties: the notion of *compresence*. Compresence is a basic unanalysed relation that is symmetrical and intransitive: that is to say, if *a* is compresent with *b*, then *b* is compresent with *a* (symmetry); but, if *a* is compresent with *b*, *b*'s compresence with *c* does not entail *a*'s compresence with *c* (intransitivity).⁷ The intransitivity criterion allows two sets of compresent properties to overlap. The possibility of overlapping is vital for Russell's theory, since if a property is a constituent of more than one substance (as must be possible if a property is a universal), then that property will be a constituent of more than one set of compresent properties. Substances, on Russell's sort of view, tend to overlap (for reasons just suggested), and there is no further whole thing constituted by the union of overlapping substances.

By *definition*, then, a universal is a property that can be a constituent of more than one substance. This is sufficient to distinguish universal properties from particular properties: unlike universal properties, particular properties cannot be constituents of more than one substance.⁸ It follows straightforwardly from this

⁷ For a useful and accessible discussion of Russell's view, see Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism*, pp. 89–91.

⁸ The situation needs somewhat careful handling, however, since even philosophers who deny the existence of universal properties may need to allow for overlapping: some of the *parts* of a mereologically complex particular substance (a substance, that is to say, that includes parts) are themselves overlapping sets of particular properties. Without going into needless complexity here, we simply need to note that the properties included in these overlapping sets are not properties of more than one *substance*—even though they may be properties of both a substance and one or more of its parts. For this, then, all we need is an intuitive account of the sorts of things that may count as substances. I have tried in this short account to proceed on the assumption that the set of substances on any bundle theory of substance includes objects that are themselves mereologically complex, composed of parts that are themselves bundles of compresent properties, whether particular or universal. Substances are (let us say) *complete* bundles of properties, that may (though need not) include various overlapping sets of compresent properties. A complete bundle is a bundle to which (whether for physical or logical reasons) no further property can be added. On the view that substances themselves can include overlapping sets of compresent properties, it follows that not all of the properties of a substance are compresent. (Thus, I am using 'complete' to include, in principle, properties which need not all be compresent. What account we give of the union of such

account that the only bundle sort of ontology that can allow for overlapping substances is one that accepts universals. This claim is of extreme importance for my analysis of the Trinitarian debates, for if it is firmly grasped, it can help us to see why the supposed divergence of Eastern and Western views on this topic is not what it appears to be.⁹

One terminological matter. I am talking about substances here; the standard theological terms for such things in the Trinitarian context are ‘hypostases’ and ‘persons’. The divine essence is the sort of thing that I am referring to as a property. As Western theologians have long recognized, there is a terminological divergence between East and West that only serves further to muddy the waters of Trinitarian discussion. What the Western theologians tend to call ‘substance’ is labelled ‘ousia’ (‘essence’) by the East; the Eastern term ‘hypostasis’ (literally *substance*) is labelled ‘person’ by the West.¹⁰ I treat ‘substance’ and ‘person’ as synonyms for the sake of this discussion, and (following Augustine’s preferred usage) employ ‘essence’ for ‘ousia’.¹¹

I shall assume that the divine essence is just *one* property—and not, for example, a bundle of properties.¹² It is for reasons of simplicity that I shall accept the view that the divine essence is just one property. Historically, those theologians who have been interested in the question of divine simplicity have tended generally, though not universally, to affirm that the divine essence does not include more than one property (namely, itself), and making this concession means that we can ignore the vexed question of the simplicity of the divine essence.¹³ It does not mean that we can ignore the question of the simplicity of a divine person, since such a person is generally held somehow to include more than just the divine essence—an issue to which I will return below. Still, nothing substantive of a strictly Trinitarian nature turns on the assertion or denial of the

sets is well beyond the scope of my article here—indeed, it would require a full account of the logic of mereology [viz., of part-whole relations]: a matter of extreme philosophical complexity. Fortunately, it is irrelevant for my very limited purposes here.)

⁹ We could allow that the parts of substances are themselves substances. In this case, we should simply have to claim that the only ontology that can allow for complete substances to overlap is one that includes universals. Nothing substantive turns on this clarification.

¹⁰ For this, see Augustine, *De Trinitate* [= *Trin.*] 5.9.10 (edited by W. J. Mountain, 2 vols. CCSL, 50 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1968], pp. 216–17).

¹¹ For Augustine’s preference here, see below, note 46.

¹² It could not, of course, be a *complete* bundle of properties, for then it would be a substance or person. But it could be a bundle of compossible properties that is included in one or more substances or persons—things in other words that on this view are complete bundles of properties.

¹³ In the context of a general discussion of divine simplicity, Augustine makes the point that the essence cannot be anything other than one simple property: ‘God however is indeed called in multiple ways great, good, wise, blessed, true, and anything else that seems not to be unworthy of him; but his greatness is identical with his wisdom . . . and his goodness is identical with his wisdom and greatness, and his truth is identical with them all; and with him being blessed is not one thing, and being great or wise or true or good, or just simply being (*esse*), another’: *Trin.* 6.7.8 (CCSL, L, 237). Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own, though I have consulted the standard English versions. See too Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium libri* 2.501 (edited by W. Jaeger, 2 vols., GNO, I and II [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960], I, p. 372).

simplicity of the divine essence, and the argument is not affected by my assumption of simplicity here.

II. MODELS OF THE TRINITY

As I noted above, the basic intuition underlying all traditional accounts of the Trinity is that the divine essence is somehow shareable. On the face of it, this would seem to favour those theories that allow that the divine essence is a universal. I shall argue that this is the right response, and that the reasons generally offered by those Western theologians who want to deny that the divine essence is a universal have more to do with their eccentric—or at least distinctive—theories of universals than they do with the theological matters at stake. Thus, I shall argue that the distinctions between the different traditions turn out to be more verbal matters than substantive issues of theology or philosophy.

By way of preliminary, we should keep in mind that the distinction of the divine persons is usually understood to entail that each one has at least one property not had by any of the others. This property is traditionally known as the person's 'personal property'. Thus, on the face of it, any divine person is a complex of essence and personal property. Whether this personal property should count as a particular or universal property is a moot point. It may be thought that the property could not be a universal, since as such it could not necessarily distinguish one person from another. But this is not right. Each person could be a unique bundle of essence + repeatable personal property. (If we think of the personal properties as universals, they would in principle be shared with other things—i.e., creatures.) So long as the combination is unique, the person is too. (In passing, it seems to me likely that Gregory of Nyssa held something like this view, and fairly certain that John of Damascus did too. I discuss this further below.) Still, for the sake of simplicity, I shall suppose that the personal property of a divine person is indeed a particular property, one that is in principle such that it cannot be shared by more than one substance or person. Again, it makes no difference to the question of the status of the divine essence which of these two views on the personal properties we adopt.

Having stated this presupposition, we are in a position to consider more closely the question of the status of the divine essence. We can best do this by considering more closely the applications of the different models of substance to the divine persons. I will ignore the substrate theories, since it is not clear to me that anyone seriously entertains the straightforward claim that the divine persons could be (or include) substrates, or that there could be a substrate for the simple, particular, divine essence. So I shall focus my attention on the claims that a substance (such as the divine person) could be a bundle of compossible properties. It may be felt that talking about a bundle here is too loose a unity, perhaps consistent with a merely aggregative unity. But the theory that a divine person is

nothing more than properties could easily be modified to provide for a distinction between substances and aggregates, and I shall ignore this problem here. No substantial Trinitarian point will turn on this development of the theory. I will return below to the objection that the divine persons will, on this view, be *complexes* of properties (and thus not simple).

The Eastern view—that the divine essence is a shared universal—can be found clearly and unequivocally in Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory holds that the divine essence is *common* (*koinon*) to the three persons.¹⁴ He claims that the divine essence is, in this respect at least, the same as any created essence. He brings out the shared universality of divine and human essences by consistently drawing an analogy between the relation of the divine persons to the divine essence and the relation of three human individuals to human nature:

If now of two or more who are [man] in the same way, like Paul and Silas and Timothy an account of the *ousia* of men is sought, one will not give one account of the *ousia* of Paul, another one of Silas and again another one of Timothy; but by whatever terms the *ousia* of Paul is shown, these same will fit the others as well. And those are *homoousioi* to each other, who are described by the same formula of being.¹⁵ . . . If now you transfer to the doctrine of God the principle of differentiation between *ousia* and hypostasis that you acknowledge on the human level, you will not go astray.¹⁶

As Gregory understands such universals, they are *numerically* singular:

But the nature is one, united to itself and a precisely undivided unit (*monas*), not increased through addition, not decreased through subtraction, but being and remaining one (even if it were to appear in a multitude), undivided, continuous, perfect, and not divided by the individuals who participate in it.¹⁷

The term *monas* is found in the earlier theological tradition as a description of the Father, and in Plato and Plotinus as the form of (the) one. But in Iamblichean forms of Neoplatonism it is used to express the numerical singularity and indivisibility of *any* extrinsic form. In the passage from Gregory just quoted, it is a shared essence (such as the divine) that is described in this way: thus securing the understanding of this essence as a numerically singular universal. Gregory makes the claim about numerical singularity elsewhere too:

¹⁴ See, e.g., Gregory, *Ad Ablabium* [=Abl.] (GNO, III/1, 39.17, 40.11, 15, 20); *Ad Graecos* [=Graec.] (GNO, III/1, 27.1, 32.1).

¹⁵ Basil of Caesarea (= Gregory of Nyssa?), *Epistula* [=Ep.] 38.2, II. 19–26 (edited by Yves Courtonne, 3 vols., Collection des universités de France [Paris: Belles Lettres, 1957–66]), I, p. 82; translation from Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, 46 (Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 2000), p. 70.

¹⁶ Basil/Gregory, *Ep.* 38.3, II. 30–3 (Courtonne, I, 83). The analogy to human nature can be found in unquestionably authentic works of Gregory too: see, e.g., Gregory, *Graec.* (GNO, III/1, 21.2–10).

¹⁷ Gregory, *Abl.* (GNO, III/1, 40.24–41.7). Note that Gregory uses ‘nature’ (*phusis*) for ‘essence’ (*ousia*) here. It is easy enough, however, to show that he generally uses these two terms synonymously. I attempt to demonstrate this in my ‘Gregory of Nyssa on Universals’, *Vigiliae Christianae*, forthcoming, where I substantiate in more detail many of the claims briefly made here.

The essence is not divided into each of the persons, such that there are three essences for the respective persons. It is evident that the term 'God' is not so divided, since it signifies the essence; such a distinction would result in three Gods.¹⁸

In distinction from standard forms of Platonism, however, Gregory's universal essence is *immanent* in each person, rather than some extrinsic object to which each person has some sort of relation. Thus, he speaks of the divine essence as that 'of which' the persons are.¹⁹ Equally, he insists that each of the persons *is* the essence, thereby denying too any sort of substrate theory of substances or (in his terminology) persons.²⁰ Thus, supposing that the divine essence is a universal entails that the divine persons are overlapping bundles of properties. This universal divine essence is shared by them; the personal properties are not.

Gregory's teaching became more or less standard in the East after his time. For example, John of Damascus—the great recapitulator of the whole Eastern tradition—argues similarly that the divine essence is a universal, and indeed that each divine person is a collection of universal essence + a personal property. Thus, he explicitly holds that the divine essence is 'according to the Holy Fathers' *common*,²¹ and that what distinguishes different persons in the same nature are in principle shareable properties.²²

¹⁸ Gregory, *Graec.* (GNO, III/1, 20.20–4).

¹⁹ Gregory, *Graec.* (GNO, III/1, 19.15); Daniel F. Stramara suggestively—and wholly appropriately—translates this as 'of which the persons are constituted', suitably capturing the implied *immanence* of the universal essence in each person: see Stramara, 'Gregory of Nyssa *Ad Graecos* "How It Is That We Say There Are Three Persons In The Divinity But Do Not Say There Are Three Gods" (To the Greeks: Concerning the Commonality of Concepts)', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 41 (1996), pp. 375–91, at p. 381.

²⁰ Gregory, *Graec.* (GNO, III/1, 20.24–25). In one famous passage, influenced by Basil of Caesarea, Gregory claims that the divine essence is a kind of substrate for the persons: see Gregory, *Contra Eunomium libri 3/5.62*, edited by W. Jaeger, II, 182.5–8). It is not clear to me precisely how we should understand this, but I take it that, minimally, it is a way of trying to assert that the divine essence is immanent in each person. Developing the account more fully would require knowledge of Gregory's theory of relations. It may be that Gregory would regard a relation as analogous to an inherent accident, and that asserting that the essence is a substrate is a way of asserting no more than the unity of any divine person (as 'composed' of substrate–essence and inherent relation). The claim that the divine persons fail to be absolutely simple later becomes a weapon in the anti-Nestorian armoury of the Neochalcedonians, which perhaps provides indirect evidence in favour of this reading: see, e.g., Leontius of Jerusalem, *Adversus Nestorianos* 1.28 (PG, LXXXVI, 1493D).

²¹ See John of Damascus, *Contra Jacobitas* 9–10 (edited by Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* [=SJD] 4, Patristische Texte und Studien [=PTS], 22 [Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981], 113.4[9]–9[10]), where John makes it clear that essences are shared, and *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus* [=Volunt.] (SJD, 4, PTS, 22 [Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981], 177^b.1–10, 1. 18–p. 178^b.32) for the applicability of this to the divine essence. See too *De natura composita contra acephalos* (SJD, 4, PTS, 22 [Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981], 412.6–7[4]); *Expositio fidei* [=Expos.] (SJD, 2, PTS, 12 [Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973], 112.39–113.49). For John's teaching on universals and the divine essence, see Richard Cross, 'Perichoresis, Deification, and Christological Predication in John of Damascus', *Mediaeval Studies* 62 (2000), pp. 69–124 (section 1).

²² In addition to the second text cited in the previous note, see too *Dialectica* 28 (SJD, 1, PTS, 7 [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969], 92. 2–3 [28]); *Expos.* 50 (SJD, II, 120, ll. 8–13); *Volunt.* 4 (SJD, IV, 177^b, I. 121–p. 178^b, I. 40). John is never explicit in his application of this general teaching on individuation to the persons of the Trinity—so it may be that he has no explicit teaching on the question of the divine personal properties.

The Eastern teaching, as thus seen in (respectively) its originator and most typical exponent, seems unequivocal: that the divine essence is a shared universal property. It seems to me that, despite their explicit claims to the contrary, the Western theologians accept this too. Thus, in denying *ex professo* that the divine essence is a universal, the Western theologians are not denying the theory accepted by the East. Rather, they accept a different theory of universals, and deny that the divine essence is a universal *in the sense of 'universal' accepted by the West*, not the sense accepted by the East. The distinction between the two views on this question is thus terminological, not substantive. Let me try to show this by discussing Augustine and Aquinas—respectively the originator and clearest exponent of the Western tradition. I shall begin with the account of the divine essence, and then consider the West's account or accounts of universals. As we shall see, only one significant Western thinker (Duns Scotus) can see his way to accepting the *terminology* of the Eastern view, as well as its metaphysical contours—contours that, I am arguing, are accepted by all sides.

Augustine rejects the view that there is any sort of substrate in God, claiming instead that God just is his nature.²³ This essence is (numerically) singular:

So the Father and the Son are together one essence and one greatness and one truth and one wisdom. But the Father and the Son are not both together one Word, because they are not both together one Son . . . It does not follow that because the Father is not the Son nor the Son the Father, or one is unbegotten, the other begotten, that therefore they are not one essence; for these names only declare their relationships. But both together are one wisdom and one essence.²⁴

This essence is somehow shared by the persons, such that it is the same in each:

The Son will be the Godhead of the Father just as he is the wisdom and power of the Father, and just as he is the Word and image of the Father. And furthermore, because it is not one thing for him to be and another for him to be God, it follows that the Son will also be the essence of the Father, just as he is his Word and his image. This means that apart from being Father, the Father is nothing but that the Son is for him.²⁵

Here, the essence of the Son is identical with the essence of the Father. And this has the consequence that the multiplication of persons does not entail the multiplication of essences:

In the simple Trinity one is as much as three are together, and two are not more than one, and in themselves they are infinite. So they are each in each and all in each, and each in all and all in all, and all are one.²⁶

²³ 'The Trinity, the one God, is called great, good, eternal, omnipotent, and he can also be called his own Godhead, his own greatness, his own goodness, his own eternity, his own omnipotence': Augustine, *Trin.* 5.11.12 (CCSL, L, 218–19). See too *Trin.* 5.11.12 (CCSL, L, 220).

²⁴ Augustine, *Trin.* 7.2.3 (CCSL, L, 249, 250).

²⁵ Augustine, *Trin.* 7.1.1 (CCSL, L, 245).

²⁶ Augustine, *Trin.* 6.10.12 (CCSL, L, 243). See too the following: 'Since therefore the Father alone or the Son alone or the Holy Spirit alone is as great as Father and Son and Holy Spirit together, in no way can they be called triple . . . Whether you take Father or Son or Holy Spirit, each is perfect,

The essence really is somehow shared by the persons. I take it that this reading of Augustine is not controversial, though there is, of course, a great deal more that could be said.

Aquinas, likewise, rejects the view that there could be some sort of substrate in God, and claims instead that God is just his nature.²⁷ Furthermore, this nature is numerically singular: 'God is his nature . . . Therefore it is in virtue of the same thing that he is God and that he is this God. It is therefore impossible that there are many Gods.'²⁸ Finally, this nature is identical with each divine person: 'In God, the essence is really identical with a [viz., each] person, even though the persons are really distinct from each other'²⁹—which, given Aquinas's theory of relations (to which I return below), is a way of asserting that one and the same essence is shared by each divine person.

Philosophically, it is hard to distinguish all this from the Eastern view. But the Western theologians nevertheless appear to deny what the East affirms here, at any rate after Gregory of Nyssa: namely, that the divine essence is a universal. Augustine, for example, wants to deny that the divine essence is a universal (here labelled a 'species'):³⁰

If essence is species, like man, and those which we call substances or persons are three, then they have the same species in common, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have in common the species which is called 'man'; and if while man can be subdivided into Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it does not mean that one man can be subdivided into several single men—obviously he cannot, because one man is already a single man—then how can one essence be subdivided into three substances or persons? For if essence, like man, is a species, then one essence is like one man.³¹

Here Augustine initially denies that the divine essence could be a species on the grounds that species are divisible into their instances in a way that the divine essence is not.³² The contrast with Gregory of Nyssa's acceptance of the analogy to three human beings is striking. But Augustine clearly considers too the sort of

and God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is perfect, and so they are a Trinity rather than triple': *Trin.* 6.8.9 (CCSL, L, 238); 'We have demonstrated as briefly as we could the equality of the triad and its one identical substance': *Trin.* 6.9.10 (CCSL, L, 243).

²⁷ Aquinas, *ST* 1.3.3 c (edited by Petrus Caramello, 3 vols. [Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1952–6], I/1, 16^b): 'In things that are not composed of matter and form—in which individuation is not by individual matter, i.e., this matter, but rather the forms are individuated through themselves—it is necessary that the forms themselves are subsistent *supposita*. Whence *suppositum* and nature are identical in them. And thus, since God is not composed of matter and form . . . it is necessary that God is his Godhead, his life, and whatever else is thus predicated of God.' ('Suppositum' is the medieval Latin equivalent of 'hypostasis'.)

²⁸ Aquinas, *ST* 1.11.3 c (I/1, 49^b).

²⁹ Aquinas, *ST* 1.39.1 c (I/1, 193^a).

³⁰ On the identity of species and universal, see, e.g., Augustine, *Trin.* 7.6.11 (CCSL, L, 235), where Augustine asserts that species is common, and contrasts it with individual.

³¹ Augustine, *Trin.* 7.6.11 (CCSL, L, 236).

³² Contrast the Cappadocians' enthusiastic, or at least marked, acceptance of an analogy between the three divine persons and three human persons, noted above.

(universal) essence proposed by the Cappadocians: suppose—he reasons—the essence really is numerically singular, how could there be three persons at all? His puzzlement, it seems, springs simply from the lack, in his ontology of created substance, of anything like an immanent, singular, universal of the sort accepted by the Cappadocians.³³ But it should be noted, too, that his own solution to the Trinitarian problem (as we shall see) entails accepting something like the Cappadocian claim; he simply wants to avoid thinking of the Trinity in terms of species and/or individual at all.

Why should Augustine believe that universals (species) are *divisible*? The reason, as far as I can tell, is that he accepts the standard Neoplatonist understanding of *in re* universals. Neoplatonists are nominalists on the question of *in re* universals, and hold that universals are just aggregates of particulars. On this sort of view, universals are said to be *divisible* into parts: the *particulars* that compose them.³⁴ Augustine's use of 'subdivided' here is very suggestive of a Neoplatonic, nominalist, understanding of universals, and given that it is no surprise to find him rejecting the view that a universal is an appropriate analogue for the divine essence. The lesson of the later extreme monophysite John Philoponus is illuminating here. Philoponus held that there are three particular natures or essences in God, and that the universal divine essence is merely a concept. But John's view was rejected, by orthodox and monophysite alike, as amounting to tritheism,³⁵ and it is easy to see how Augustine would have wanted to avoid such a position. If the available model of universals is nominalist and Neoplatonist, then the divine essence cannot be a universal.

In the later Middle Ages, Aquinas makes the Augustinian point beautifully: 'no universal is numerically the same in the things beneath it', whereas 'the divine essence is numerically the same in many persons'.³⁶ In denying that a universal is numerically the same in the things beneath it, of course, Aquinas is not advocating a Neoplatonic nominalism, but a more Aristotelian variety of realism,

³³ At *Trin.* 5.8.10 (L, 216–17), Augustine claims not to know what the purpose of the *ousia*–*hypostasis* distinction is. This, presumably, is because he assimilates both to substance, and understands that there cannot be overlapping substances, at least in the (comprehensible) created realm. As he notes, the word 'person' is used merely so as not to remain silent. But this is too pessimistic a view of his own analysis. In fact, Augustine on my reading has a straightforward account of overlapping substances, where the essence is simply the overlap, as it were. The agnosticism about the term 'person' is simply a function of the disanalogy, for Augustine, between anything like a Cappadocian universal property and anything in the created realm.

³⁴ See, e.g., Boethius, *De divisione liber: Critical Edition, Translation, Prolegomena and Commentary* (Philosophia Antiqua 77), edited by John Magee (Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 1998), 8.9–16, reporting the teaching of Porphyry on the matter. I provide a detailed account of Neoplatonist views on all this in my 'Gregory of Nyssa on Universals'.

³⁵ For a brief discussion of this, see Cross, 'Perichoresis, Deification, and Christological Predication', section 1.

³⁶ Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum [=In Sent.]* 1.19.4.2 (edited by P. Mandonnet and M. F. Moos, 4 vols. [Paris: Lethielleux, 1929–47], I, 483). Interestingly, in the light of my argument here, Aquinas concedes that the divine essence is like a universal in the sense that it can be predicated (*In Sent.* 1.19.3.2 ad 1 [I, 483–4]).

according to which a common nature has some kind of unity 'prior' to its instantiation—a view that reached its apogee in Scotus's claim that creaturely common natures have less-than-numerical unity.³⁷

Unlike the Eastern tradition, thus, the Western tradition accepts—as a matter of philosophical fact—that universals, even *in re* universals, are not such that they are *numerically* identical in each exemplification. Hence, if the divine essence were a universal, it could not be numerically one. Of course, on this understanding of universals, it makes no sense to claim that the divine essence is a universal, since such a claim would amount to the view that the divine essence fails to be numerically one—a view rejected by all sides in the debate. A universal, on this view, fails to have the relevant degree of unity necessary for the divine essence. Of course, this view of universals is very different from the one that I introduced above, since on that view the mark of a universal is that one and the same universal can be found in more than one substance. I have been arguing here that the view of universals that I have been advocating is, as it happens, the one that can be found in the Cappadocians, and in the majority of Eastern Fathers after this time. The Cappadocian view is that all universals, not just the divine essence, are numerically singular, and (furthermore) that particulars are collections of such universals. Viewed in this way, it is not at all clear that Augustine and the Cappadocians—and indeed the Eastern and Western traditions here—are in fact in conflict on the question of the divine essence at all. To the extent that all parties accept that the divine essence is a numerically singular property, shared by the three divine persons—the point at which the persons overlap—all parties are in agreement.

Of course, all this philosophical talk about overlapping particulars may sound suspiciously like an abandonment of divine simplicity, and for that matter even of the view that each person is one substance. But it should not do. Properties are not *eo ipso* parts, and claiming that things are bundles of compresent properties does not in itself introduce *mereological* composition, composition from parts. I will return to this question again in the next section. Equally, claiming that the persons are overlapping bundles of properties does not entail that they are parts of some greater whole. Just as in Russell's view, there is no problem in the thought that *complete* substances can overlap in the way proposed. Their overlapping simply does not constitute some greater whole.

Do the sorts of theory that I have been discussing here entail that there is some sense in which the divine essence is something over and above the persons, or that it is somehow prior to or independent of them? Clearly not the latter two of these options, since there is no reason to suppose that *universalia in rebus* could possibly be prior to or independent of their exemplifications. Indeed, the

³⁷ For a discussion of Scotus's teaching on less-than-numerical unity, see my 'Divisibility, Communicability, and Predicability in Duns Scotus's Theories of the Common Nature', forthcoming in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001).

whole point of this sort of theory is to make the ontological order the other way around: such universals are dependent on, and posterior to, their exemplifications. Are such universals things over and above their exemplifications? Yes, but only in the very limited sense that the presence of a universal means that discrete objects can nevertheless be identical in part: they share identically the same essence without thereby being identically the same things. But this is harmless enough: the divine essence is the overlap of the divine persons, not a further thing distinct from any and all of them.

III. SOCIAL THEORIES OF THE TRINITY AND THE 'EASTERN' TRADITION

It may be objected that my attempt to show how close, in principle, the different views (Eastern and Western) are, ignores what many see as the most important distinguishing feature, namely that whereas the Cappadocian account can plausibly be appealed to by those who defend some sort of social view of the Trinity, the Augustinian one cannot be. The basic point of the objection is that, whether or not the divine persons could be distinct ontological subjects, there is no way in which they could be distinct *psychological* subjects³⁸ on the Western view—as witness Augustine's use of the psychological acts and operations of just one person (psychological subject) as analogues for the distinct persons of the Trinity.

My reply to this objection is that it proceeds in delightful ignorance of the metaphysics of the matter. I have been arguing thus far that the account of the divine essence as such is not significantly distinct in Eastern and Western traditions. If this argument is correct, then it follows that the alleged amenability of Eastern views to social understandings of the Trinity must lie elsewhere. The most plausible candidate here would be a denial of the common Western view that the divine persons are subsistent relations, a view that on the face of it is incompatible with social Trinitarianism. I shall suggest that the gist of Western views here is arguably accepted by Eastern theologians, at least in the person of Gregory of Nyssa, whom I am taking as representative here.

It is clear that many Western thinkers have been sensitive to the worry about divine simplicity. By the time of Aquinas, certainly, a solution is available to deal with specifically Trinitarian concerns. Thus far, I have been assuming that a personal property is the sort of thing that could be a constituent in a compresent bundle of properties, whether particular, universal, or 'mixed' (including both particular and universal). But the standard Western view is that the personal

³⁸ By a 'psychological subject', I mean merely something that can be a subject of psychological states such as cognition and appetite, states that all theologians would ascribe to God. Talk of 'centres of consciousness' presumably requires something more: a self's awareness of itself as an object.

properties are relations, and furthermore that relations are not entities with sufficient ontological depth to be (in any sense) constituents of things. Relations—at least in the context of the divine—are dyadic properties that somehow ‘hang between’ their *relata* rather than inhere in one or other of them. They cannot, on this view, be constituents of things. Suppose that ‘A’ is a proper name for the divine essence, and that the Father is A along with a relation, and the Son A along with a different relation. Relations are not properties, so neither Father nor Son include any property not included by A. But neither Father nor Son is identical with A, supposing that two objects can differ merely in virtue of relation—the Father includes a relation, whereas A does not; and likewise for the Son.³⁹

It seems to me that something like this is the gist of Aquinas’s account of these matters. He holds that the divine persons are ‘rationally distinct’ from the divine essence:⁴⁰ by which he means that each person includes a relation not included by the divine essence, such that relations are not in any sense things—or even real properties—over and above the divine essence.⁴¹ But he holds too that the persons are really distinct from each other: by which he means that each person includes a relation impossible with the relations included in either of the other persons.⁴² In short, Aquinas holds that the persons are subsistent relations: that the only thing that distinguishes one person from another is its relation to that other person:

Distinction in God arises only through relations of origin . . . But a relation in God is not like an accident inherent in a subject, but is the divine essence itself. So it is subsistent just as the divine essence is subsistent. Just as, therefore, the Godhead is God, so the divine paternity is God the Father, who is a divine person. Therefore ‘divine person’ signifies a relation as subsistent.⁴³

The source of this relation theory is Augustine. Augustine brings in the notion of relations as a way of dealing with the Arian threat that plurality of persons

³⁹ Of course, we could deny that two things can differ merely in virtue of a relation, but we would then—to deal with the Trinitarian doctrine—need to accept relative identity, such that Father and Son are both the same as A, but not the same as each other: see Peter van Inwagen, ‘And Yet There Are Not Three Gods but One God’ in T. V. Morris (ed.), *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), pp. 241–78.

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *ST* 1.39.1 c (I/1, 193^a): ‘Relation, compared to the essence, does not differ really but rationally’: as we shall see in a moment, Aquinas holds that the divine persons are really identical with their relations of origin.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *ST* 1.28.1 c (I/1, 151^b), and esp. *ST* 1.28.2 c (I/1: 152^b–3^a), where Aquinas makes it clear that relations in God do not add any sort of reality to the divine essence: relations are merely conditions of being ‘towards’ another thing.

⁴² Aquinas, *ST* 1.39.1 c (I/1, 193^a): ‘[Relation], compared to the opposed relation, has, in virtue of the opposition, a real distinction.’

⁴³ Aquinas, *ST* 1.29.4 c (I/1, 159^b). More properly, the view that the persons are subsistent relations requires too the claim that the relations are not entities distinct from the persons. It is not clear to me whether a Greek theologian could subscribe to this claim, since it requires a clearly specified theory of relations. On this, see too note 20 above.

entails plurality of (kinds of) substance. The Arian argument, as reported by Augustine, is that God's inability to be a subject for accidents entails that all predications relate to his substance, such that the presence of incompatible properties (e.g., unbegotten–begotten) entails two distinct sorts of substance (e.g., an unbegotten sort of substance and a begotten sort of substance). Augustine notes that the premiss that God cannot be a subject for accidents—a premiss with which Augustine agrees—does not entail the Arian conclusion, since the Arians have overlooked a further sort of predicate in the Aristotelian categorical scheme, namely relation. Relations are non-inherent, and thus do not create the problems for divine immutability that all sides agree are created by the postulation of accidents in God:

With God, nothing is said accidentally, because there is nothing changeable with him. And yet not everything that is said of him is said substantially. Some things are said with reference to something else, like Father with reference to Son and Son with reference to Father; and this is not said accidentally, because the one is always Father and the other always Son.⁴⁴

Augustine explicitly draws the conclusion that distinction of relational predicates does not entail distinction of substance: 'What is stated relationally does not designate substance. So although begotten differs from unbegotten, it does not indicate a different substance.'⁴⁵

The motivation here is anti-Arian. Nevertheless, Augustine holds that each divine person is simple, just as he holds to the simplicity of the divine essence: 'Just as it is the same for him to be as to be God, to be great, to be good, so it is the same for him to be as to be person.'⁴⁶ Although he does not make the point explicitly, Augustine is clearly supposing that appealing to relations in this context is a way of avoiding composition in a divine person. After all, he holds that accidents require a substrate, and that the presence of a substrate is incompatible with simplicity. He makes all these connections when arguing that God (the divine essence) is not properly a substance:

The word ['substance'] is rightly used for ordinary things which provide subjects for those things that are said to be in a subject, like colour or shape in a body. . . . But if God subsists in such a way that he can properly be called substance, then something is in him as in its underlying subject, and he is not simple.⁴⁷

The argument entails that a divine person can include a relation without that relation thereby entailing composition.

If it is held, as the vast consensus in the West is inclined to hold, that the *only* distinguishing features of the persons are their relations—that, in the standard

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Trin.* 5.5.6 (CCSL, L, 210).

⁴⁵ Augustine, *Trin.* 5.7.8 (CCSL, L, 214).

⁴⁶ Augustine, *Trin.* 7.6.11 (CCSL, L, 262).

⁴⁷ Augustine, *Trin.* 7.5.10 (CCSL, L, 261).

terminology, they are subsistent relations—then it is obvious enough that they cannot be distinct psychological subjects, since this subjecthood itself would be a distinct feature of them. This does not entail, of course, that the persons could not be distinct ontological subjects—and persons or substances in this sense. After all, on this view, substances can be distinct merely in virtue of relations. But they cannot be distinct psychological subjects unless they differ also in terms of psychological (and thus non-relational) properties.

Of course, holding that the persons are *individuated* by relations does not entail that relations are their only distinguishing features—the only things that the persons do not have in common. If they have other distinctive properties, then there is no reason why these properties could not include psychological ones. Still, the Western ‘relation’ account just outlined—the view that, in effect, the persons are subsistent relations—is equally open to the Eastern view, and it could not unreasonably be suggested that this is the gist of the Cappadocian view that the persons are distinguished by relations. Indeed, Gregory of Nyssa sometimes speaks as though the only distinguishing features of the persons are their causal relations to each other:

While confessing that the nature is undifferentiated, we do not deny a distinction in causality, by which alone we seize the distinction of the one from the other: that is, by believing that one is the cause and the other is from the cause. We also consider another distinction with regard to that which is from the cause. There is the one which depends on the first, and there is that one which is through that which depends on the first.⁴⁸

This would suggest that Gregory too accepts that the persons are just—in the Western sense—what a Western scholastic would call subsistent relations.⁴⁹ In fact, this reading can be confirmed by other evidence too. For Gregory of Nyssa—in so far as he considers the problem—seems inclined to deny that the

⁴⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Abl.* (GNO, III/1, 55.24–56.6).

⁴⁹ A Western theologian may be inclined at this point to object that, if I am right, then Eastern theologians ought to accept the *filioque*. After all, a standard Western argument in favour of the *filioque* is that, if the persons were just subsistent relations, then there would be no way for Son and Spirit to be distinct unless a distinct relation (of origin) obtains between them. The argument is that two objects *x* and *y* cannot be distinct from each other merely in terms of their relations (of origin) to some one further object *z*. *z* may have two relations, one to *x* and one to *y*, but this by itself does not guarantee that *x* and *y* fail to be identical: see e.g., Aquinas, *ST* 1.36.2 (I/1, 183^b–4^a). But this argument is specious if the relevant relations are relations of *origin*. One object cannot have two distinct relations of origin to one and the same thing. So if the Father has two relations of origin, then Son and Spirit are *eo ipso* distinct, even if they have no relation of origin between themselves. Thus the view that the persons are subsistent relations does not entail the *filioque*. Aquinas argues further, in the same article, that the presence of two non-opposed relations in the Father—one to Son and one to Spirit—does not entail that the Father is two persons; hence, the argument goes, non-opposed relations do not distinguish persons. But this ignores the originative order that obtains between the persons: one person can have two distinct ‘causal’ relations to two distinct things in a way that one thing cannot have two distinct and individually sufficient ‘causal’ origins. (Of course, it is open to Western theologians to hold that Father and Son are necessary and *jointly* sufficient ‘causes’ of the Spirit; this would amount to a claim that the *filioque* is true, but not amount to any sort of *argument* against the Eastern view.)

persons include distinct properties other than their relations. Sarah Coakley has recently argued compellingly that we should not think of persons in Gregory's account as centres of consciousness,⁵⁰ and in any case the view that the persons are distinct only by relations seems straightforwardly entailed by Gregory's claim that the real distinction between divine and created essences lies in God's unity of activity.⁵¹

Having said this, it is easy enough to see how, at an intuitive level, the Western theologians may have more naturally tended away from social views, and towards the view that the persons are just subsistent relations. After all, putting the matter bluntly, a Western theologian could easily suppose that there is only one psychological subject because his usual account of substances in general—and thus of psychological subjects in particular—is that they are logically equivalent to particular essences (of the relevant type): that is, to the parts of an essence that is divided ('subdivided', in Augustine's terminology) on instantiation. There are many such human essences, one for each instantiation of human nature, and thus many human substances. But there is one divine essence (shared by the three persons), and an analogy with creaturely essences could thus incline a theologian to accept just one divine subject. Subjecthood and substancehood (or, equivalently, personhood) would, on this analysis, tend to diverge. But they need not, of course; and if they do, then the reason for the distinction between God and creatures here has nothing to do with the distinctive shape of the proposed Trinitarian theology, and everything to do with the account of creaturely essences. If the West, then, inclines against social models, and in favour of the view that the persons are subsistent relations, this is due to a difference in the metaphysical account of created natures.

If I am right about all this, then, Eastern and Western views of the divine essence are both consistent with social accounts of the Trinity, though neither entails such accounts. And both, arguably, reject such accounts, not because of considerations about the divine essence, but because of agreements about the nature of the relational distinctions between the persons.⁵²

One further point, of course, is that the closer the case of the divine essence is to that of creaturely essences, the less easy it is to show how the existence of three divine persons does not entail three Gods. For the West it is easy: 'God' is simply

⁵⁰ See Sarah Coakley, "'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion" in Davis, Kendall and O'Collins (eds.), *The Trinity*, pp. 123–44.

⁵¹ Gregory, *Abl.* (GNO, III/1, 50.13–20).

⁵² Whether they are right to do this is, of course, another matter. It seems to me that there is one powerful argument in favour of a social theory of the Trinity. Clearly, on any account of the divine persons, such persons are subjects of mental properties and states. If they are in some sense just *one* subject—as is entailed by the denial of the social view as I am characterizing it here—then Patripassianism is true. At the very least, the Son must be able to become a separate subject of (human) mental states in virtue of his assumption of human nature. The claim that there would be two divine psychological subjects during the Incarnation (one the Father and Spirit, and the other the Son) seems remarkably implausible, though not I suppose unorthodox.

a proper name for the shared divine essence. The East, too, can make such a claim, and indeed does so. But this does not allow the Eastern theologian to distinguish the case of God from that of any other essence. Gregory of Nyssa famously spots this, and claims that substance-sortals in general name essences: hence his claim that, properly speaking, there is only one man.⁵³ For Gregory, the distinction between God and creatures on this point is located other than in the *homoousion*. What really accounts for divine unity, according to Gregory, is the persons' unity of *activity*—a unity of a kind not found in creatures.⁵⁴

Thus far, I have ignored perhaps the most interesting Western account of these matters, the only account to notice that the claim that the numerically singular divine essence is shared by all three persons entails that the divine essence is a universal. The account is that of Duns Scotus, and he explicitly derives his view from John of Damascus.⁵⁵ Scotus's strategy for distinguishing the case of God from that of creatures is very simple. He agrees with the Western metaphysical tradition in general that no shared creaturely essence is numerically one, but he claims that the divine essence is numerically one. For technical reasons, he restricts the notion of universality to those things that are both shared and numerically one. Thus, for him, the only truly universal essence is the divine essence.⁵⁶ But it is important to grasp that the metaphysical differences between Scotus and the rest of the Western tradition are not great here, although the terminology is. In this, Scotus is—if my analysis here is correct—typical of the Eastern tradition and his relationship with his Western contemporaries a good case of the fundamental similarities between the two traditions. But his solution is novel: adopting the Western tradition (on the question of universals) for creatures, but, with the Eastern tradition, allowing the term 'universal' to refer to numerically singular objects such as the divine essence too.

Of course, from a Western point of view, Scotus is for other reasons a controversial figure to bring into the debate. He sees that nothing in the Western view about persons as subsistent relation entails the *filioque*, and he comes close to rejecting the view that the persons are distinguished by relations.⁵⁷ Briefly, Western theologians argue that the divine persons must be relations in order to avoid a quaternity of (non-relational) substances in God.⁵⁸ But Scotus clearly

⁵³ See, e.g., Gregory, *Abl.* (GNO, III/1, 40.19–21, 41.8–12).

⁵⁴ Gregory, *Abl.* (GNO, III/1, 44.7–53.3).

⁵⁵ See Scotus, *Ordinatio* [= *Ord.*] 2.3.1.1, nn. 39–40 (*Opera Omnia*, edited by C. Balić et al. [Civitas Vaticana: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950–], VII, p. 408).

⁵⁶ For all of this, see my 'Duns Scotus on Divine Substance and the Trinity', forthcoming in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11 (2002).

⁵⁷ On all of this, see Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus*, Great Medieval Thinkers (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 63–4 (*filioque*) and pp. 65–7 (distinction between divine persons), and the references cited there.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the problem, see David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 70–3; in particular p. 72: 'the three relative subsistences imply only three corresponding relative incommunicabilities, which cannot be counted long with the absolute incommunicability of the divine essence but are contained within it.'

understands the speciousness of this argument: the divine essence is a substance in a very different sense from the persons: it is a universal, whereas the persons are irreducibly particular.⁵⁹ And *this* is sufficient to block the quaternity argument. But it would take me much too far to explore Scotus's Trinitarian theology in any detail here.

Is this whole discussion just a case of merely 'solving philosophical puzzles about the oneness and threeness of God'?⁶⁰ Perhaps to some extent it is, but it seems clear enough to me that there are philosophical puzzles here, and that both East and West regarded solution of these as a pressing *theological* matter. If my analysis in this article is correct, then much of the traditional debate between East and West on the question of the divine essence should be thought out afresh. By the time of the Middle Ages, the established Western view—springing from Augustine—is that the divine essence is a numerically singular property shared by all three persons. And this, of course, is precisely the Eastern view too. Furthermore, it is not clear that Eastern views of the relationality of the divine persons are massively different from those defended by Western theologians. As I have tried to show, there seems no reason to suppose that Eastern views of the divine essence and relations are necessarily much closer to social views of the Trinity than Western views are. Equally, it is clear that if there are significant differences between East and West, then they are likely to be located in the very specific area of the sorts of properties that distinguish the persons—the greater the list, the more a view will tend towards some sort of social Trinitarianism (though I take it that full-blown social Trinitarianism will require the ascription of distinct *mental* states to the three persons). If my analysis is right—or even if it is no more than partly right—then there is a need for a thorough reassessment of the traditional alignments of Trinitarian theology. I hope to have shown here how I think such a reassessment could begin.

⁵⁹ Scotus, *Ord.* 1.5.1.un., n. 12 (Vatican edition, IV, 16).

⁶⁰ As Colin Gunton remarks on the nature of the Trinitarian project as conceived in the West—as opposed to the East, for whom it is (allegedly) a matter of 'fundamental ontology', whatever this may be: see *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 54.

6

Material Constitution and the Trinity*

Jeffrey E. Brower and Michael C. Rea

As is well known, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity poses a serious philosophical problem. On the one hand, it affirms that there are three distinct Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each of whom is God. On the other hand, it says that there is one and only one God. The doctrine therefore pulls us in two directions at once—in the direction of saying that there is exactly one divine being and in the direction of saying that there is more than one.

There is another well-known philosophical problem that presents us with the same sort of tension: the problem of material constitution. This problem arises whenever it appears that an object *a* and an object *b* share all of the same parts and yet have different modal properties.¹ To take just one of the many well-worn examples in the literature: Consider a bronze statue of the Greek goddess, Athena, and the lump of bronze that constitutes it. On the one hand, it would appear that we must recognize at least *two* material objects in the region occupied by the statue. For presumably the statue cannot survive the process of being melted down and recast whereas the lump of bronze can. On the other hand, our ordinary counting practices lead us to recognize only *one* material object in the region. As Harold Noonan aptly puts it, counting two material objects in such a region seems to “manifest a bad case of double vision”.² Here, then, as with the doctrine of the Trinity, we are pulled in two directions at once.

Admittedly, the analogy between the two problems is far from perfect. But we mention it because, as we shall argue below, it turns out that a relatively neglected response to the problem of material constitution can be developed into a novel solution to the problem of the Trinity. In our view, this new solution is more promising than the other solutions available in the contemporary literature. It is

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¹ For purposes here, an object *x* and an object *y* stand in the relation of material constitution just in case *x* and *y* share all of the same *material* parts. Thus, on our view, material constitution is both symmetric and transitive. Contrary to some philosophers (e.g., Lynne Baker, discussed below) who treat material constitution as asymmetric, we think that there are good theoretical reasons for regarding it as a symmetric relation; but we will not attempt to defend that view here.

² Noonan 1988, 222.

independently plausible, it is motivated by considerations independent of the problem of the Trinity, and it is immune to objections that afflict the other solutions. The guiding intuition is the Aristotelian idea that it is possible for an object *a* and an object *b* to be “one in number”—that is, numerically the same—without being strictly identical.

We will begin in Section 1 by offering a precise statement of the problem of the Trinity. In Section 2, we will flesh out the Aristotelian notion of “numerical sameness without identity”, explain how it solves the problem of material constitution, and defend it against what we take to be the most obvious and important objections to it. Also in that section we will distinguish numerical sameness without identity from two superficially similar relations. Finally, in Sections 3 and 4, we will show how the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution can be developed into a solution to the problem of the Trinity, and we will highlight some of the more interesting consequences of the solution we describe.³

1. THE PROBLEM OF THE TRINITY

The central claim of the doctrine of the Trinity is that God exists in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This claim is not problematic because of any superficial incoherence or inconsistency with well-entrenched intuitions. Rather, it is problematic because of a tension that results from constraints imposed on its interpretation by other aspects of orthodox Christian theology. These constraints are neatly summarized in the following passage from the so-called Athanasian Creed:

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 . . . The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, and the Holy Spirit is eternal; and yet they

³ Note, however, that we stop short of actually endorsing the solution that we describe. There are three reasons for this. First, our solution, like most others, attempts to provide a metaphysical account of the ultimate nature of God. But surely here, if anywhere, a great deal of circumspection is warranted. Second, the contemporary Trinitarian debate, as we see it, is still in its infancy; hence a definitive stand on any particular solution, including our own, strikes us as a bit premature. Third, the solution we develop strongly supports a specific understanding of material constitution (as will become clear in Section 4)—one that is at odds with some of our previously considered views on the matter. (See, e.g., Rea 2000.) But, given the current state of the Trinitarian debate, we are uncertain whether this fact should motivate us to change our views about material constitution or to continue exploring yet other alternatives to the currently available accounts of the Trinity. Thus, it is important to understand that we are not here aiming to resolve the contemporary Trinitarian debate once and for all, but rather to advance it by introducing what seems to us to be the most promising solution to the problem of the Trinity developed so far.

are not three eternal, but there is one eternal. Likewise, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, and the Holy Spirit is almighty; and yet there are not three almighties, but there is one almighty. 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.⁴

The passage quoted here is widely—and rightly—taken to offer a paradigm statement of the orthodox understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Moreover, it tells us that the doctrine of the Trinity must be understood in such a way as to be compatible with each of the following theses:

- (T1) Each Person of the Trinity is distinct from each of the others.
- (T2) Each Person of the Trinity is God.
- (T3) There is exactly one God.

Each of these theses is affirmed by the Creed in order to rule out a specific heresy. T1 is intended to rule out *modalism*, the view that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not really distinct from one another. According to modalism, each Person is just God in a different guise, or playing a different role—much like Superman and Clark Kent are just the Kryptonian Kal-El in different guises, or playing different roles. T2 is intended to rule out *subordinationism*, the view that not all of the Persons are divine, or that the divinity of one or more of the Persons is somehow unequal with, or subordinate to, that of the others. T3 is intended to rule out *polytheism*, the view that there is more than one God. The problem, however, is that the conjunction of T1–T3 is apparently incoherent. For on their most natural interpretation, they imply that three distinct beings are each identical with one being (since each of the Persons is God, and yet there is only one God).

In the contemporary literature, there are two main strategies for solving the problem: the Relative-Identity strategy, and the Social-Trinitarian strategy. Both of these strategies solve the problem at least in part by denying that the words ‘is God’ in Trinitarian formulations mean ‘is absolutely identical with God’. Thus both are well-poised to avoid the heresy of modalism.⁵ Furthermore, both affirm T2 (or some suitable variant thereof); thus, subordinationism is not a worry either. The real question is whether either manages to avoid polytheism without incurring other problems in the process. In our view, the answer is *no*—at least not as these solutions have been developed in the literature so far. Social Trinitarianism we reject outright. The Relative-Identity solution we reject as a *stand-alone* solution to the problem of the Trinity. (That is, we think that it is successful only if it is supplemented by a story about the metaphysics of relative-identity relations. More on this at the end of Section 2 below). Since we have already explained elsewhere why we find these solutions unsatisfying, we will not

⁴ *Quicumque vult* (our translation).

⁵ Denying that ‘is God’ means ‘is absolutely identical with God’ doesn’t guarantee that modalism is false; but making the denial removes any pressure toward modalism that might arise out of T1–T3.

repeat the details of our objections here.⁶ Instead, we'll simply summarize by saying that we reject both the Social-Trinitarian solution and existing versions of the Relative-Identity solution because they fail to provide an account of the Trinity that satisfies the following five desiderata:

- (D1) It is clearly consistent with the view that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are divine individuals, and that there is exactly one divine individual.
- (D2) It does not conflict with a natural reading of either the Bible or the ecumenical creeds.
- (D3) It is consistent with the view that God is an individual rather than a society, and that the Persons are not parts of God.⁷
- (D4) It is consistent with the view that classical identity exists and is not to be analyzed in terms of more fundamental sortal-relativized sameness relations like *being the same person as*.
- (D5) It carries no anti-realist commitments in metaphysics.

The Social-Trinitarian solution violates D1–D3. Extant versions of the Relative-Identity solution violate D1, D4, or D5. As will emerge shortly, our solution, which may fruitfully be thought of as an appropriately supplemented version of the Relative Identity solution, succeeds precisely where these others fail—namely, in satisfying all five desiderata.

⁶ See Rea 2003 and Brower 2004a. Proponents of the Relative-Identity strategy include Cain (1989), Anscombe & Geach (1961, pp. 118–20), Martinich (1978, 1979), and van Inwagen (1988). Proponents of the more typical versions of the Social-Trinitarian strategy include Bartel (1993, 1994), Brown (1985, 1989), Davis (1999), Layman (1988), C. Plantinga (1986, 1988, 1989), and Swinburne (1994). The position is commonly attributed to the Cappadocian Fathers. (See, esp., Brown 1985, Plantinga 1986, and Wolfson 1964). It is against these relatively typical versions of ST that our previously published objections most straightforwardly apply. Among the less typical versions of ST are, for example, Peter Forrest's (1998) (this volume, ch. 2), according to which the Persons are three "quasi-individuals" that result from an event of divine fission, and C.J.F. Williams's (1994), according to which "God is the love of three Persons for each other." We reject Forrest's view because it implies (among other things) that there is no fact about whether there are one or many Gods, and there is no fact about whether there are three or many more than three Persons. On his view, 'one' is the lowest correct answer to the question 'How many Gods are there?' and 'three' is the lowest correct answer to the question 'How many persons are there?'; but it is sheer convention that allows us to say that 'one' and 'three'—rather than, say 'twenty' and 'two hundred and forty one'—are the correct answers to those questions. As for Williams's view, we take it that his, along with other less common versions of ST, will fall prey to objections similar to those we raise against the more typical versions. For further critical discussion of both the Relative-Identity strategy and the Social-Trinitarian strategy, see Bartel 1988, Cartwright 1987, Clark 1996, Feser 1997, Leftow 1999, and Merricks 2005.

⁷ Note that the point of D3 isn't to deny that the Persons compose a society. Of course they do, if there are genuinely *three* Persons. Rather, the point of D3 is to deny both that the name 'God' refers to the society composed of these Persons and that the Persons are *proper parts* of God. But if the society of Persons is the Trinity, and the Trinity is God, doesn't it follow that 'God' refers to the society of Persons after all? No. Each member of the Trinity is God, and God "is a Trinity" (that is, He exists in three Persons). But nothing in orthodoxy seems to require that the Trinity is itself a whole composed of three Persons and referred to by the name 'God'. Moreover, in light of objections to Social Trinitarianism raised here and elsewhere, it seems that orthodoxy actually precludes us from saying such a thing (which is part of why we reject Social Trinitarianism).

2. SAMENESS WITHOUT IDENTITY AND THE PROBLEM OF MATERIAL CONSTITUTION

The point of departure for our solution is Aristotle's notion of "accidental sameness". Elsewhere, we have proposed (for the sake of argument, at any rate) that the phenomenon of material constitution be understood in terms of accidental sameness.⁸ What we here propose is that the unity of the divine Persons also be understood in terms of this relation (or more accurately, in terms of the genus of which it is a species—namely, numerical sameness without identity⁹). In this section, therefore, we review the way in which appeal to accidental sameness provides a solution to the problem of material constitution and address what we take to be the most natural objections to it.

2.1 Accidental Sameness Characterized

According to Aristotle, familiar particulars (trees, cats, human beings, etc.) are hylomorphic compounds—things that exist because and just so long as some matter instantiates a certain kind of form. Forms, for Aristotle, are complex organizational properties, and properties are immanent universals (or, as some have it, tropes). The matter of a thing is not itself an individual thing; rather, it is that which combines with a form to *make* an individual thing.¹⁰ Thus, for example, a human being exists just in case some matter instantiates the complex organizational property *humanity*. Each human being depends for its continued existence on the continued instantiation of *humanity* by some matter; and each human being is appropriately viewed as a composite whose parts (at one level of decomposition) are just its matter and (its) humanity.¹¹

On Aristotle's view, living organisms are the paradigmatic examples of material objects. But Aristotle also acknowledges the existence of other hylomorphic

⁸ See Rea 1998 and Brower 2004b.

⁹ For reasons that we shall explain below, the label 'accidental sameness' is not appropriate in the context of the Trinity.

¹⁰ This claim is negotiable; and, in fact, there are independent (non-Aristotelian) reasons for thinking that "masses of matter" *must* be treated as individuals. (See, e.g., Zimmerman 1995). But the view of matter articulated here seems to comport best with Aristotle's metaphysics and with the solution to the problem of the Trinity that we will propose, and so we will go ahead and endorse it here. Those who think of masses of matter as individuals may be inclined (in Section 3 below) also to think of what we will call "the divine essence" as an individual. Were we to endorse this view, we would deny that the divine essence is a fourth Person or a second God (just as we would deny that Socrates's matter is a second man co-located with Socrates). Rather, we would say that the divine essence is one in number with God, a *sui generis* individual distinct from the Persons and, indeed, nothing other than a substrate for the Persons. We would also deny that there is any sense in which the divine essence is prior to or independent of God.

¹¹ We place 'its' in parentheses to signal our neutrality on the question whether, say, the humanity of Plato is a special kind of trope or a multiply instantiated universal.

compounds. Thus, books, caskets, beds, thresholds, hands, hearts, and various other non-organisms populate his ontology, and (like an organism) each one exists because and only so long as some matter instantiates a particular complex organizational property.¹² Indeed, Aristotle even countenances what Gareth Matthews calls “kooky” objects—objects like ‘seated-Socrates’, a thing that comes into existence when Socrates sits down and which passes away when Socrates ceases to be seated.¹³ Seated-Socrates is an ‘accidental unity’—a unified thing that exists only by virtue of the instantiation of an accidental (non-essential) property (like seatedness) by a substance (like Socrates). The substance plays the role of matter in this sort of hylomorphic compound (though, of course, unlike matter properly conceived, the substance is a pre-existing individual thing), and the accidental property plays the role of form. Accidental sameness, according to Aristotle, is just the relation that obtains between an accidental unity and its parent substance.¹⁴

One might balk at this point on the grounds that Aristotle’s accidental unities are just a bit *too* kooky for serious ontology. We see that Socrates has seated himself; but why believe that in doing so he has brought into existence a new object—seated-Socrates? Indeed, one might think it’s clear that we *shouldn’t* believe this. For there is nothing special about seatedness, and so, if we acknowledge the existence of seated-Socrates, we must also acknowledge the existence of a myriad other kooky objects: pale-Socrates, bald-Socrates, barefoot-Socrates, and so on. But surely there are not millions of objects completely overlapping Socrates.

Fair enough; and nothing here depends on our believing in seated-Socrates or his cohorts. But note that, regardless of what we think of seated-Socrates, we (fans of common sense) believe in many things relevantly *like* seated-Socrates. That is, we believe in things that are very plausibly characterized as hylomorphic compounds whose matter is a *familiar material object* and whose form is an accidental property. For example, we believe in fists and hands, bronze statues and lumps of bronze, cats and heaps of cat tissue, and so on. Why we should believe all *this* but not that sitting down is a way of replacing one kind of object (a standing-man) with another (a seated-man) is an interesting and surprisingly difficult question. But never mind that for now. The important point here is that, whether we go along with Aristotle in believing in what *he* calls accidental unities, the fact is that many of us will be inclined to believe in things relevantly like accidental unities along with other things that are relevantly like the parent substances of accidental unities.

¹² See, e.g., *Metaphysics* H2, 1042b15–25.

¹³ Matthews 1982, 1992.

¹⁴ *Topics* A7, 103a23–31; *Physics* A3, 190a17–21, 190b18–22; *Metaphysics* D6, 1015b16–22, 1016b32–1017a6; *Metaphysics* D9, 1024b30–1.

This last point is important because the things we have listed as being relevantly like accidental unities and their parent substances are precisely the sorts of things belief in which gives rise to the problem of material constitution. Hence the relevance of Aristotle's doctrine of accidental sameness. Aristotle agrees with common sense in thinking that there is only one material object that fills the region occupied by Socrates when he is seated. Thus, he says that the relation between accidental unities and their parent substances is a variety of *numerical sameness*. Socrates and seated-Socrates are, as he would put it, *one in number but not one in being*.¹⁵ They are distinct, but they are to be counted as one material object.¹⁶ But once one is committed to believing in such a relation, one has a solution to the problem of material constitution ready to hand. Recall that the problem arises whenever it appears that an object *a* and an object *b* share all of the same parts and yet have different modal properties. In such cases we are pushed in the direction of denying that the relevant *a* and *b* are identical and yet we also want to avoid saying that they are *two* material objects occupying the same place at the same time. Belief in the relation of accidental sameness solves this problem because it allows us to deny that the relevant *a* and *b* are identical without thereby committing us to the claim that *a* and *b* are *two material objects*. Thus, one can continue to believe that (e.g.) there are bronze statues and lumps of bronze, that every region occupied by a bronze statue is occupied by a lump of bronze, that no bronze statue is identical to a lump of bronze (after all, statues and lumps have different persistence conditions), but also that there are never two material objects occupying precisely the same place at the same time. One can believe all this because one can say that bronze statues and their constitutive lumps stand in the relation of accidental sameness: they are one in number but not one in being.

2.2 Accidental Sameness Defended

But should we believe in accidental sameness? The fact of the matter is that this sort of solution to the problem of material constitution is probably the single most neglected solution to that problem in the contemporary literature; and it is not hard to see why. Initially it is hard to swallow the idea that there is a variety of *numerical sameness* that falls short of identity. But, in our view, the most obvious and serious objections are failures, and the bare fact that the doctrine of accidental sameness is counterintuitive is mitigated by the fact that *every* solution to the problem of material constitution is counterintuitive (a fact which largely explains the problem's lasting philosophical interest). In the remainder of this section, we will address what we take to be the four most serious objections

¹⁵ *Topics* A7, 103a23–31; *Metaphysics* D6, 1015b16–22, 1016b32–1017a6.

¹⁶ And, we might add, the same would hold true for Socrates and his matter, if indeed the matter of a thing were to be understood as an *individual* distinct from that thing.

against the doctrine of accidental sameness. We will also explain how the relation of accidental sameness differs from two other relations to which it bears some superficial resemblance. In doing all this, we hope to shed further light on the metaphysics of material objects that attends belief in accidental sameness.

First objection: Most contemporary philosophers think that, for any material objects a and b , a and b are to be counted as *one* if and only if a and b are identical. Indeed, it is fairly standard to define number in terms of identity, as follows:

- (1F) there is exactly one $F =_{df} \exists x(Fx \ \& \ \forall y(Fy \equiv y = x))$
 (2F) there are exactly two F s $=_{df} \exists x \exists y(Fx \ \& \ Fy \ \& \ x \neq y \ \& \ \forall z(Fz \equiv y = z \vee x = z))$
 etc.

But if that is right, then it is hard to see how there could be a relation that does not obey Leibniz's Law but is nevertheless such that objects standing in that relation are to be counted as one.

Obviously enough, a believer in accidental sameness must reject standard definitions like 1F and 2F. But this does not seem to us to be an especially radical move. As is often pointed out, common sense does not always count by identity.¹⁷ If you sell a piano, you won't charge for the piano *and* for the lump of wood, ivory, and metal that constitutes it. As a fan of common sense, you will probably believe that there are pianos and lumps, and that the persistence conditions of pianos differ from the persistence conditions of lumps. Still, for sales purposes, and so for common sense counting purposes, pianos and their constitutive lumps are counted as *one material object*. One might say that common sense is wrong to count this way. But why go along with that? Even if we grant that 1F and its relatives are strongly intuitive, we must still reckon with the fact that we have strong intuitions that support the following:

- (MC) In the region occupied by a bronze statue, there is a statue and there is a lump of bronze; the lump is not identical with the statue (the statue but not the lump would be destroyed if the lump were melted down and recast in the shape of a disc); but only one material object fills that region.

If we did not have intuitions that support MC, there would be no problem of material constitution. But if MC is true, then 1F and its relatives are false, and there seems to be no compelling reason to prefer the latter over the former.

Of course, if rejecting 1F and its relatives were to leave us without any way of defining number, then our move *would* be radical, and there would be compelling reason to give up MC. But the fact is, rejecting 1F and its relatives does *not* leave us in any such situation. Indeed, belief in accidental sameness doesn't even preclude us altogether from counting by identity. At worst, it simply requires us to acknowledge a distinction between sortals that permit counting by identity

¹⁷ See, e.g., Lewis 1993: 175, and Robinson 1985.

and sortals that do not. For example, according to the believer in accidental sameness, we do not count *material objects* by identity. Rather, we count them by numerical sameness (the more general relation of which both accidental sameness and identity are species). Thus:

- (1M) there is exactly one material object =_{df} $\exists x (x \text{ is a material object} \ \& \ \forall y (y \text{ is a material object} \ \equiv \ y \text{ is numerically the same as } x))$
- (2M) there are exactly two material objects =_{df} $\exists x \exists y (x \text{ is a material object} \ \& \ y \text{ is a material object} \ \text{and } x \text{ is not numerically the same as } y \ \text{and } \forall z (z \text{ is a material object} \ \equiv \ z \text{ is numerically the same as } x \ \text{or } z \text{ is numerically the same as } y))$

etc.

Perhaps the same is true for other familiar sortals. For example: Suppose a lump of bronze that constitutes a bronze statue is nominally, but not essentially, a statue.¹⁸ Then the lump and the statue are distinct, and both are statues. But, intuitively, the region occupied by the lump/statue is occupied by only one statue. Thus, given the initial supposition, we should not count statues by identity either. Nevertheless, we can still grant that there are some sortals that do allow us to count by identity. Likely candidates are technical philosophical sortals like ‘hylomorphic compound’, or maximally general sortals, like ‘thing’ or ‘being’. For such sortals, number terms can be defined in the style of 1F and its relatives. Admittedly, the business of defining number is a bit more complicated for those who believe in accidental sameness (we must recognize at least two different styles of defining number corresponding to two different kinds of sortal terms). The important point, however, is that it is not impossible.

In saying what we have about the categories of *hylomorphic compound*, *thing*, and *being*, we grant that proponents of our Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution are committed to a kind of co-locationism. Although cases of material constitution will never, on the view we are proposing, present us with two material objects in the same place at the same time, they will present us with (at least) two *hylomorphic compounds* or *things* in the same place at the same time. But we deny that this commitment is problematic. By our lights, it is a conceptual truth that material objects cannot be co-located; but it is not a conceptual truth that hylomorphic compounds (e.g., a statue and a lump, a fist and a hand, etc.) or things (e.g., a material object and an event) cannot be co-located. We take it as an advantage of the Aristotelian solution that it respects these *prima facie* truths.

Second objection: To say that hylomorphic compounds, or mere things, can be co-located but material objects cannot smacks of pretense. For while it preserves the letter, it does not preserve the spirit of the intuition that material objects cannot be co-located. If counting two material objects in the same place

¹⁸ An object belongs to a kind in the *nominal* way just in case it displays the superficial features distinctive of members of that kind.

at the same time “reeks of double counting”,¹⁹ then the same reek must attend the counting of two hylomorphic compounds or two things in the same place at the same time. At best, therefore, the Aristotelian solution is only verbally distinct from the co-locationists solution. For co-locationists and fans of accidental sameness will still have the same *metaphysical* story to tell about statues and their constitutive lumps—namely, that they are distinct, despite occupying precisely the same region of spacetime—and that metaphysical story is all that matters.

But this objection is sound only on the assumption that the properties *being a material object*, *being a hylomorphic compound*, and *being a thing* are on a par with one another. From ‘ x is a hylomorphic compound & y is a hylomorphic compound & $x \neq y$ ’, we rightly infer that x and y are two hylomorphic compounds. And if, somehow, we come to believe that x and y are co-located, we’d have no choice but to conclude that x and y are *two* distinct hylomorphic compounds sharing the same place at the same time. The reason is that the following seems to be a necessary truth about the property of being a hylomorphic compound:

- (H1) x is a hylomorphic compound iff x is a matter-form composite; exactly one hylomorphic compound fills a region R iff some matter instantiates exactly one form; and x is (numerically) the same hylomorphic compound as y iff x is a hylomorphic compound and $x = y$.

According to the second objection, a parallel principle expresses a necessary truth about the property of being a material object:

- (M1) x is a material object iff x is a hylomorphic compound; exactly one material object fills a region R iff exactly one hylomorphic compound fills R ; and x is (numerically) the same material object as y iff x is a material object and $x = y$

Note that M1 is not a mere *linguistic* principle; it is a substantive claim about the necessary and sufficient conditions for having *a* material object in a region, having *exactly one* material object in a region, and having (numerically) *the same* material object in a region. But M1 is a claim that will be denied by proponents of the Aristotelian solution we have been describing here. As should by now be clear, proponents of that solution will reject M1 in favor of something like M2:

- (M2) x is a material object iff x is a hylomorphic compound; exactly one material object fills a region R iff *at least one* hylomorphic compound fills R ; and x is (numerically) the same material object as y iff x and y are hylomorphic compounds sharing the same matter in common.

M2 is equivalent to M1 on the assumption that no two hylomorphic compounds can share the same matter in common; but, short of treating the technical

¹⁹ Lewis 1986: 252.

philosophical category *hylomorphic compound* as co-extensive with the common-sense category *material object*, it is hard to see what would motivate that assumption. Thus, there is room for disagreement on the question whether M2 is true or whether M2 is equivalent to M1; and, importantly, accidental-sameness theorists and co-locationists will come down on different sides of those questions. Thus, there is a *substantive* (as opposed to a merely verbal) disagreement to be had here after all.

Two further points should be made before we move on to the third objection. First, though M2 is specifically a thesis about the property *being a material object*, the doctrine of accidental sameness makes it plausible to think that similar theses about various other properties will be true. In particular, if one thinks that sortals like ‘cat’, ‘house’, ‘lump’, ‘statue’, and so on can apply nominally to things that constitute cats, houses, lumps, or statues, then something like M2 is true of *most* familiar composite object kinds. Second, though it may be tempting to think that the relation of accidental sameness (or of numerical sameness without identity) is nothing other than the relation of sharing exactly the same *matter*, as we see it, this isn’t quite correct. On our view (though probably not on Aristotle’s), the relation of numerical sameness without identity can hold between *immaterial* objects, so long as the relevant immaterial objects are plausibly thought of on analogy with hylomorphic compounds. Thus, it is inappropriate to say (as might so far seem natural to say) that the relation of numerical sameness without identity is nothing other than the relation of material constitution. Rather, what is appropriate to say is that material constitution is a species of numerical sameness without identity.

Third objection: The principles for counting that we have just described (i.e., H1 and M2) are apparently *inconsistent* with the doctrine of accidental sameness. To see why, consider the following argument. Let Athena be a particular bronze statue; let Lump be the lump of bronze that constitutes it. Let R be the region filled by Athena and Lump. Then:

- (1) Athena is identical with the material object in R whose matter is arranged statuewise.
- (2) Lump is identical with the material object in R whose matter is arranged lumpwise.
- (3) The material object whose matter is arranged statuewise is identical with the material object whose matter is arranged lumpwise.
- (4) Therefore, Athena is identical with Lump (contrary to the doctrine of accidental sameness).

The crucial premise, of course, is premise 3; and premise 3 seems to follow directly from a proposition that is entailed by the facts of the example in conjunction with our remarks about counting—namely, that there is exactly one object in R whose matter is arranged both statuewise and lumpwise.

On reflection, however, it is easy to see that this objection is a nonstarter. For premise 3 follows *only* if the doctrine of accidental sameness is false. Numerical sameness, according to Aristotle, does not entail identity. Thus, if his view is correct, it does *not* follow from the fact that there is exactly one material object in R whose matter is arranged both statuewise and lumpwise that the object whose matter is arranged lumpwise is identical with the object whose matter is arranged statuewise. Simply to assume otherwise, then, is to beg the question. One might insist that the assumption is nevertheless highly intuitive, and therefore legitimate. But, again, the right response here is that *every* solution to the problem of material constitution is such that its denial is highly intuitive. That is why we have a problem. Successfully rejecting a solution requires showing that the intuitive cost is higher with the objectionable solution than with some other solution; but, with respect to the doctrine of accidental sameness, this has not yet been done.

Fourth objection: We say that there is one (and only one) material object that fills a region just in case the region is filled by matter unified in any object-constituting way. So consider a region R that is filled by matter arranged both lumpwise and statuewise. What is the object in R? What are its essential properties? If there is exactly one object in R, these two questions should have straightforward answers. But they do not (at least not so long as we continue to say that there is a statue *and* a lump in R). Thus, there is reason to doubt that there could really be exactly one object in R.

This is probably the most serious objection of the lot. But there is a perfectly sensible reply: To the first question, the correct answer is that the object is both a statue and a lump; to the second question there is no correct answer.²⁰ If the doctrine of accidental sameness is true, a statue and its constitutive lump are numerically the same object. This fact seems sufficient to entitle believers in accidental sameness to say that the object in R 'is' both a statue and a lump, so long as they don't take this to imply either that the statue is identical to the lump or that some statue or lump exemplifies contradictory essential properties. But if this view is right, how *could* there be any correct answer to the question "What are its essential properties?" absent further information about whether the word 'it' is supposed to refer to the statue or the lump? The pronoun is ambiguous, as is the noun ('the object in R') to which it refers.²¹ Thus, we would need to disambiguate before answering the question. Does this imply that there are two material objects in R? It might appear to because we are accustomed to finding

²⁰ We assume that 'object' in the context here means 'material object'.

²¹ Here is why 'the object in R' is ambiguous. There aren't *two* material objects in R; and the material object in R isn't a third thing in addition to Athena and Lump. Thus, 'Athena = the material object in R' and 'Lump = the material object in R' must both express truths. But they can't both express truths unless either Lump = Athena (which the doctrine of accidental sameness denies) or 'the material object in R' is ambiguous.

ambiguity only in cases where a noun or pronoun refers to *two* objects rather than one. But if the doctrine of accidental sameness is true, we should also expect to find such ambiguity in cases of accidental sameness. Thus, to infer from the fact of pronoun ambiguity the conclusion that there must be two objects in R is simply to beg the question against the doctrine of accidental sameness.

So much for objections. Now, in closing this section, we would like to make it clear how accidental sameness differs from two apparently similar relations.

Those who have followed the recent literature on material constitution will know that, like us, Lynne Baker has spoken of a relation that stands “between identity and separate existence” (2000: 29) and that this relation is (on her view) to be identified with the relation of material constitution. On hearing this characterization, one might naturally think that what Baker has in mind is something very much like accidental sameness. In fact, however, the similarity between accidental sameness and Baker-style constitution ends with the characterization just quoted. Baker’s definition of constitution is somewhat complicated; but for present purposes we needn’t go into the details. Suffice it to say that, according to Baker, the relation of material constitution is neither symmetric nor transitive whereas accidental sameness is both symmetric and transitive. (At least, it is synchronically transitive.) Lacking the same formal properties, the two relations could not possibly be the same.²²

One might also naturally wonder whether what we call ‘numerical sameness without identity’ isn’t just good old-fashioned *relative identity* under a different name. Different views have been advertised in the literature under the label ‘relative identity’. But one doctrine that virtually all of these views (and certainly all that *deserve* the label) share in common is the following:

- (R1) 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 .

This is a claim that we will endorse too; and, like those who endorse the Relative-Identity solution to the problem of the Trinity, it is a truth we rely on in order to show that T1–T3 are consistent with one another. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that we say that our solution may fruitfully be thought of as a version of the Relative Identity strategy. Despite our commitment to R1, it would be a mistake to suppose that we endorse a doctrine of relative identity. Our solution to the problem of the Trinity is therefore importantly different from the Relative-Identity solution in its purest form.²³

²² Baker’s definition appears in both Baker 1999 and Baker 2000. For critical discussion, see Pereboom 2002, Rea 2002, Sider 2002, and Zimmerman 2002.

²³ Elsewhere we distinguish between *pure* and *impure* versions of the Relative Identity strategy (see Rea 2003). Impure versions endorse R1 without endorsing a doctrine of relative identity; pure versions endorse R1 in conjunction with either R2 or R3 below. Our solution is thus an impure version of the Relative Identity solution.

How is it possible to accept R1 while at the same time rejecting relative identity? The answer, as we see it, is that identity is truly *relative* only if one of the following claims is true:

- (R2) Statements of the form ‘ $x = y$ ’ are incomplete and therefore ill-formed. A proper identity statement has the form ‘ x is the same F as y ’.
- (R3) Sortal-relative identity statements are more fundamental than absolute identity statements.²⁴

R2 is famously associated with P. T. Geach (1967, 1969, and 1973), whereas R3 is defended by, among others, Nicholas Griffin (1977).²⁵ Views according to which classical identity exists and is no less fundamental than other sameness relations are simply not views according to which *identity* is relative. Perhaps, on those views, there are multiple sameness relations; and perhaps some of those relations are both sortal-relative and such that R1 is true of them. But so long as classical identity exists and is in no way derivative upon or less fundamental than they are, there seems to be no reason whatsoever to think of other “sameness” relations as identity relations. Thus, on views that reject both R2 and R3, there seems to be no reason for thinking that identity is relative.

The difference between accidental sameness and relative identity is important, especially in the present context, because it highlights the fact that there is more than one way to make sense of sameness without identity. It is for this reason that endorsing R1 *apart* from R2 or R3 won’t suffice all by itself to solve the problem of the Trinity. As we have argued elsewhere (Rea 2003), absent an appropriate supplemental story about the metaphysics underlying relative-identity relations, endorsing R1 apart from R2 or R3 leaves one, at best, with an incomplete solution to the problem of the Trinity and, at worst, with an heretical solution.²⁶ We think that the doctrine of accidental sameness provides the right sort of supplemental story, and that the solution it yields (in conjunction with R1) is both complete and orthodox.

We suspect, moreover, that failure to distinguish different ways of making sense of sameness without identity is partly responsible for the attraction that the Relative-Identity solution holds for many. As is well known, respected Christian philosophers and theologians—such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas—habitually speak of the Trinity in ways that require the introduction of a form of sameness that fails Leibniz Law. But this way of speaking, it is often assumed,

²⁴ To say that sortal-relative identity statements are more fundamental than absolute identity statements is, at least in part, to say that absolute identity statements are to be *analyzed or defined* in terms of more primitive sortal-relative identity statements, rather than the other way around. See Rea 2003 for further discussion of views that endorse R3.

²⁵ See also Routley & Griffin 1979.

²⁶ This is, roughly, the problem that we think Peter van Inwagen’s solution to the problem of the Trinity faces. (Cf. Rea 2003.)

can only be explained in terms of relative identity.²⁷ In light of what has just been said, however, we can see that this assumption is false. Sameness without identity does not imply relative identity, and hence any appeal to such sameness either to determine the views of actual historical figures or to provide authoritative support for a (pure) Relative-Identity solution is wholly misguided. Relative identity does provide one way of explaining (numerical) sameness without identity, but it does not provide the only way of explaining it.

3. SAMENESS WITHOUT IDENTITY AND THE PROBLEM OF THE TRINITY

If we accept the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution, then, as we have seen, the familiar particulars of experience must be conceived of as hylomorphic compounds—that is, as matter–form structures related to other things sharing their matter by the relation of accidental sameness. The relevance of this Aristotelian solution to the problem of the Trinity is perhaps already clear. For like the familiar particulars of experience, the Persons of the Trinity can also be conceived of in terms of hylomorphic compounds. Thus, we can think of the divine essence as playing the role of matter; and we can regard the properties *being a Father*, *being a Son*, and *being a Spirit* as distinct forms instantiated by the divine essence, each giving rise to a distinct Person. As in the case of matter, moreover, we can regard the divine essence not as an individual thing in its own right but rather as that which, together with the requisite “form”, constitutes a Person. Each Person will then be a compound structure whose matter is the divine essence and whose form is one of the three distinctive Trinitarian properties. On this way of thinking, the Persons of the Trinity are directly analogous to particulars that stand in the familiar relation of material constitution.

Of course, there are also some obvious disanalogies. For example, in contrast to ordinary material objects, the role of matter in the case of the Trinity is played by immaterial stuff, and so the structures or compounds constituted from the divine essence (namely, the divine persons) will be ‘hylomorphic’ only in an extended sense. Also, in the case of material objects, the form of a particular hylomorphic compound will typically only be contingently instantiated by the matter. Not so, however, in the case of the Trinity. For Christian orthodoxy requires us to say that properties like *being a Father* and *being a Son* are essentially such as to be instantiated by the divine essence. As we have seen, moreover, the relation of *accidental sameness* on which our solution is modeled is, in Aristotle

²⁷ For example, Cartwright (1987: 193) claims to detect an appeal to relative identity in a letter of Anselm, as well as the Eleventh Council of Toledo, on just these grounds. The same sort of reasoning may also help to explain Anscombe & Geach’s (1961: 118) attribution of the Relative-Identity solution to Aquinas.

anyway, paradigmatically a relation between a *substance* (e.g., a man) and a hylomorphic structure built out of the substance and an accidental property. The Persons, however, are not like this. Thus, it is at best misleading to say that the relation between them is one of *accidental sameness*. Better instead to go with the more general label we have used throughout this paper: the Persons stand in the relation of *numerical sameness without identity*.

As far as we can tell, none of these disanalogies are of deep import. It seems not at all inappropriate to think of the divine Persons on analogy with hylomorphic compounds; and once we do think of them this way, the problem of the Trinity disappears. Return to the analogy with material objects: According to the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution, a statue and its constitutive lump are *two* distinct hylomorphic compounds; yet they are numerically one material object. Likewise, then, the Persons of the Trinity are *three* distinct Persons but numerically one God. The key to understanding this is just to see that the right way to count Gods resembles the right way to count material objects. Thus:

(G1) x is a God iff x is a hylomorphic compound whose “matter” is some divine essence; x is the same God as y iff x and y are each hylomorphic compounds whose “matter” is some divine essence and x ’s “matter” is the same “matter” as y ’s; and there is exactly one God iff there is an x such that x is a God and every God is the same God as x .

And, in light of G1, the following principle also seems reasonable:

(G2) x is God iff x is a God and there is exactly one God.

If these principles are correct, and if (as Christians assume) there are three (and only three) Persons that share the same divine essence, then we arrive directly at the central Trinitarian claims T1–T3 without contradiction. For in that case, there will be three distinct Persons; each Person will be God (and will be the same God as each of the other Persons); and there will be exactly one God. Admittedly, if G1 is taken all by itself and without explanation, it might appear just as mysterious as the conjunction of T1–T3 initially appeared. But that is to be expected. What is important is that once the parallel with M2 is appreciated, and the doctrine of numerical sameness without identity is understood and embraced, much of the mystery goes away.

We are now in a position to see how our Aristotelian account of the Trinity meets the desiderata we set out earlier for an adequate solution to the problem of the Trinity (namely, D1–D5). As should already be clear, our solution resolves the apparent inconsistency of T1–T3 in the same basic way that Relative-Identity and Social-Trinitarian solutions do: namely, by rejecting the idea that the words ‘is God’ in Trinitarian statements like “Each of the Persons is God” mean ‘is absolutely identical with God’. According to our solution, these words should be

interpreted to mean 'is numerically the same as the one and only God'. But once this interpretation of T2 is adopted—together with a proper understanding of the relata of the relation of numerical sameness without identity—the apparent inconsistency of T1–T3 is resolved, and in a way that satisfies D1 and D2. For inasmuch as the Persons of the Trinity are distinct hylomorphic compounds, they are distinct from one another (hence T1 is true); and inasmuch as they are each numerically the same as the one and only God, each of them is God and there is only one God (hence T2 and T3 are true). Moreover, since our solution implies that each of the Persons is a divine individual who is *one in number* with each of the other two Persons, it is consistent with the claim that there are three Persons but exactly one divine individual (thus satisfying D1),²⁸ and it also seems to preserve the intention of traditional formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity (thereby satisfying D2).

It should also be clear how our solution meets the other desiderata. Unlike (pure) Relative-Identity solutions, ours is compatible with the claim that classical identity exists and is as fundamental as any other sameness relation (and hence satisfies D4). Moreover, it supplies an explanation for why ' $x = y$ ' does not follow from ' x is the same God as y '. Unlike Social-Trinitarian strategies, on the other hand, ours is clearly compatible with the view that God is an individual rather than a society, and that the Persons are not parts of God (and hence satisfies D3). Furthermore, our story about the unity of the Persons exploits what we take to be a plausible story about the unity of distinct hylomorphic compounds, whereas no similarly plausible analogy seems to be available to the Social Trinitarian. Finally, though we deny that it makes sense to say, unequivocally, that each of the Persons is absolutely identical with God, our view—unlike either of the other two strategies—allows us to say that the Father is identical with God, the Son is identical with God, the Holy Spirit is identical with God, and yet the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct from one another. And it can do all of this without introducing any anti-realist commitments in metaphysics (thus satisfying D5). Consider a parallel drawn from one of our earlier examples: Athena is identical to the material object in R; Lump is identical to the material object in R; but Athena is distinct from Lump. Since 'the material object in R' is ambiguous, there is no threat of contradiction; and the doctrine of numerical sameness without identity blocks an inference to the claim that Lump and Athena are co-located material objects. Likewise in the case of the Trinity.

For all these reasons, therefore, our Aristotelian solution to the problem of the Trinity seems to us to be the most philosophically promising and theologically satisfying solution currently on offer.

²⁸ Assuming, anyway, that counting *divine individuals* is more like counting *Gods* than counting *Persons*. But this assumption seems clearly legitimate in context of D1.

4. IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES

This completes our defense of the Aristotelian account of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. As we see it, however, this account is not only interesting in its own right, but also has several important consequences. We close by calling attention to two of these.

First, our solution suggests a revision in our understanding of the nature of the copula. Philosophers traditionally distinguish what is called the 'is' of predication from the 'is' of identity. It is sometimes added, moreover, that any solution to the problem of material constitution that denies that constitution is identity must introduce a third sense of 'is'. As Lynne Baker says:

If the constitution view [i.e., the view that constitution is not identity] is correct, then there is a third sense of 'is', distinct from the other two. The third sense of 'is' is the 'is' of constitution (as in 'is (constituted by) a piece of marble').²⁹

Baker seems to think that if constitution is not identity, there will have to be three main senses of the copula, each co-ordinate with the other two. But we can now see that this is a mistake. If our account of the Trinity is correct, constitution can be explained in terms of something other than identity (namely, accidental sameness). Even so, there will be only two main senses of the copula, namely, the traditional 'is' of predication and a heretofore unrecognized sense of the copula, the 'is' of numerical sameness. There will still be an 'is' of identity and an

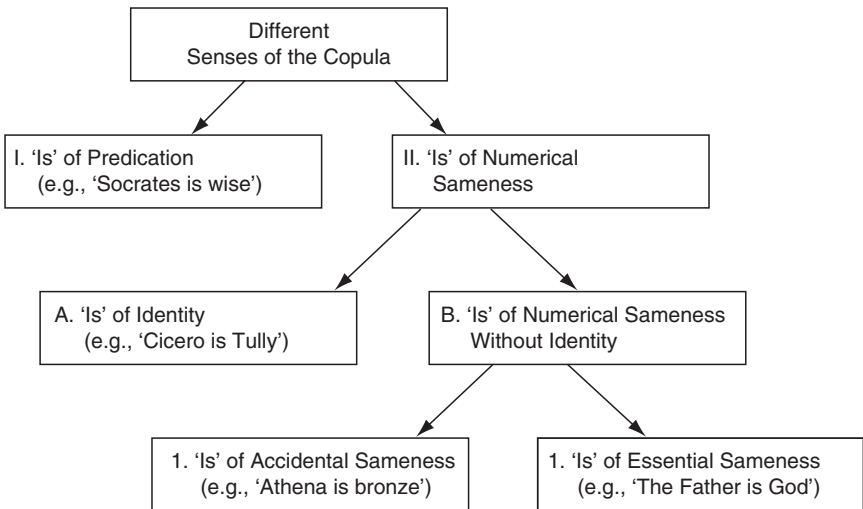


Fig. 6.1.

²⁹ Baker 1999:51.

'is' of constitution, as Baker suggests, but these will both be subsumed under the second of the two main senses just mentioned. Indeed, if we take into account all of the changes suggested by our account of the Trinity, we will get a fairly complex set of relations holding between the various senses of the copula, as Figure 4.1 makes clear:

Second, our solution helps to make clear that both the problem of material constitution and the problem of the Trinity are generated in part by the fact that we have incompatible intuitions about how to *count* things. Thus, both problems might plausibly be seen as special instances of a broader *counting problem*—a problem that arises whenever we appear to have, on the one hand, a single object of one sort (e.g., *God* or *material object*) and, on the other hand, multiple coinciding objects of a different sort (e.g., *Person*, or *hylomorphic compound*). One significant advantage of the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution is that it alone seems to provide a unified strategy for resolving the broader problem of which it is an instance.³⁰

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³⁰ This paper has benefited greatly from the advice and criticism of Michael Bergmann, Jan Cover, Tom Crisp, William Hasker, John Hawthorne, Michael Jacovides, Brian Leftow, Trenton Merricks, Laurie Paul, William Rowe, and two anonymous referees for *Faith and Philosophy*.

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PART II
INCARNATION

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Jesus' Self-Designation 'The Son of Man' and the Recognition of His Divinity*

Craig A. Evans

Apart from the divine identity of Jesus as the Son there could not be a Trinity—at least not in the traditional Christian sense. The concept of Trinity expresses the idea that the three Persons that make it up are fully divine, fully God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Theologians, philosophers, and apologists have debated and will continue to debate whether or not Jesus was divine and in what manner he related and/or relates to God. The historical exegete is left to explore the question whether or not our sources indicate that Jesus and/or his contemporaries understood him as in any sense divine. It is this latter point that the present paper explores.

For the last century or so biblical critics have frequently asserted or assumed that the ascription of divine status to Jesus was to be traced to early Christianity's contact with the Greco-Roman influences outside the Jewish Palestinian environment in which the movement had its beginning. The overlap between Greco-Roman language and New Testament language is extensive and meaningful. The former describes kings and emperors as 'gods', 'sons of god', 'saviours', 'lords', 'benefactors', and even 'creators'. A sampling of inscriptions will make this clear. From the Greek world, a third-century BCE inscription from Halicarnassus honours *Πτολεμαίου τοῦ σωτήρος καὶ θεοῦ* ('Ptolemy, saviour and god'). The famous Rosetta Stone bears the inscription of a later Ptolemy (196 BCE), who is described as *Βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος αἰωνόβιος . . . ὑπάρχων θεὸς ἐκ θεοῦ καὶ θεᾶς* ('King Ptolemy, the everliving . . . being a god [born] of a god and a goddess'). An inscription found over a door of a Temple of Isis on the island of Philae refers to Ptolemy XIII (62 BCE): *τοῦ κυρίου βασιλ[έ]ος θεοῦ* ('of the lord king god'). Another inscription comes from Alexandria and refers to Ptolemy XIV and Cleopatra (52 BCE): *τοῖς κυρίοις θεοῖς μεγίστοις* ('to the lords, the greatest gods').

Roman popular culture and politics adopted much of Greek ideology and put it to work to advance the cult of the emperor. The development of this cult

* From S. T. Davis, et al., eds., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*. © 1999 Oxford University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

parallels the emergence of the Julian dynasty. In its earliest stages we see it in an inscription from Ephesus, which describes Julius Caesar (48 BCE–44 BCE) as *τὸν ἀπὸ Ἄρεως καὶ Ἀφροδείτης θεὸν ἐπιφανῆ καὶ κοινὸν τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου βίου σωτήρα* ('the manifest god from Mars and Aphrodite, and universal saviour of human life').¹ The language of Titus 2: 13 is immediately called to mind: *ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτήρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* ('the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ'). The people of Carthaea honoured Caesar as saviour and god: *Καίσαρα . . . γεγονότα δὲ σωτήρα καὶ εὐεργέτην καὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας πόλεως* ('[The Carthaeian people honour] Caesar . . . who has become saviour and benefactor of our city'). And again: *ὁ δῆμος ὁ Καρθαίειων τὸν θεὸν καὶ αὐτοκράτορα καὶ σωτήρα τῆς οἰκουμένης Γαῖον Ἰούλιον Καίσαρα Γαίου Καίσαρος υἱὸν ἀνέθηκεν* ('The Carthaeian people honour the god and emperor and saviour of the inhabited world Gaius Julius Caesar son of Gaius Caesar').² The people of Mytilene hailed Caesar as god (*θεός*), benefactor (*εὐεργέτης*), and founder or creator (*κτίστης*).³

The dynasty's greatest ruler was Caesar's nephew Octavius, who assumed the name Caesar Augustus (30 BCE–14 CE). Queen Dunamis of Phanagoria honoured Augustus as *Ἀυτοκράτορα Καίσαρα θεοῦ υἱὸν θεὸν Σεραστὸν πάσης γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης ἐπόπτην* ('The Emperor, Caesar, son of god, the god Augustus, the overseer of every land and sea').⁴ An inscription from Halicarnassus reads: *Δία δὲ πατρῶν καὶ σωτήρα τοῦ κοινού τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους* ('Hereditary god and saviour of the universal race of humanity').⁵ The famous calendrical inscription from Priene refers to the birth of Augustus as the *ἡ γενέθλιος τοῦ θεοῦ* ('the birthday of the god') and the 'beginning of the good news [*εὐαγγέλια*] for the world', and later refers to Augustus as *τοῦ θηοτάτου Καίσαρος* ('the most divine Caesar').⁶ The parallel with Mark's opening verse is obvious: 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God' (Mark 1: 1). Libations were offered up *ὑπὲρ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἀυτοκράτορος* ('in behalf of the god and Emperor'). An inscription found at Tarsus reads: *Ἀυτοκράτορα Καίσαρα θεοῦ υἱὸν Σεβαστὸν ὁ δῆμος ὁ Ταρσεῶν* ('The people of Tarsus [honour] Emperor Caesar Augustus son of god').⁷

¹ SIG 760.

² IG 12.5, 556–7.

³ IG 12.2, 165b.

⁴ IGR 1.901; cf. IGR 4.309, 315.

⁵ GIBM 994.

⁶ OGIS 458.

⁷ For fuller texts and discussion of these and many other related inscriptions and papyri, see P. Bureth, *Les Titulatures impériales dans les papyrus, les ostraca et les inscriptions d'Égypte* (30 a. C.–284 p. C.) (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Elisabeth, 1964), 23–41; A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton; New York: Harper & Row, 1927), 338–78; W. Foerster, *Herr ist Jesus: Herkunft und Bedeutung des urchristlichen Kyrios-Bekenntnisses* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1924), 99–118; P. Kneissl, *Die Siegestitulatur der römischen Kaiser: Untersuchungen zu den Siegerbeinamen der ersten und zweiten Jahrhunderts* Hypomnemata 23 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 27–57; D. Magie, *De Romanorum iuris publici sacrique vocabulis* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1905), 62–9; L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor*, APAMS 1 (New York: Arno, 1931; repr. Chico: Scholars Press, 1975), 267–83.

With the celebrated accomplishments of Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus the pattern was established, and the successors of these emperors imitated their great patriarchs, but not with equal success. Whereas both Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus were officially deified posthumously, the honour was denied to all of their Julian successors: the eccentric and lecherous Tiberius (14–37 CE), the murderous and insane Caligula (37–41 CE), the stuttering and cowardly Claudius (41–54 CE)—although in his case the honour was bestowed but later rescinded—and the treacherous and maniacal Nero (54–68 CE), the last of the Julians.

That Christianity felt compelled to proclaim Jesus, Messiah of Israel and Lord of the Church, in language that rivalled the language applied to the Roman emperor is understandable. But the important question was whether the assertion of Jesus' divine status is itself to be explained in these terms. Did this tendency arise simply as a result of competition with the Roman cult of the emperor, or did it arise from things that Jesus said and did?

In what follows it will be argued that the trinitarian trajectory has its roots in Jesus' self-predication, claims, deeds, and predictions. The most important of these elements was his definition of messiahship in terms of the 'son of man' of Daniel 7. This identification heightened the significance of the honorific language found in Psalms 2 and 110, whereby Israel's anointed king was thought of as God's son seated at God's right hand. To be sure, these concepts made important contributions to Jesus' messianism, but the appeal to Daniel 7, where the 'son of man' approaches the divine throne and directly from God receives kingdom and authority, takes this messianism to a new level.⁸ It is this ingredient, which evidently represents an innovation, that launches a messianic trajectory that will find its way to the more formalized expressions of Trinitarian theology.

The points that follow will begin with Jesus' employment of imagery and self-predication from Daniel 7. Not all of the subsequent points flow from this principal argument, but it will be shown that in various ways it conditions our understanding of them. These points are five in number:

- (1) Jesus' self-identification as the 'son of man' of Daniel 7 suggests a very special relationship to God.
- (2) Jesus' self-identification as God's wisdom supports this suggestion.
- (3) Jesus' claims to divine sonship seem to go beyond the merely honorific title that is part of messianology.
- (4) Jesus' Passover request that the disciples eat meals in his memory implies that Jesus associated himself very closely with God, for Jews

⁸ I say 'new level' because most if not all actual attempts to act out messianic programs in Jesus' approximate time (i.e. from the death of Herod the Great to Bar Kokhba) seem primarily to have been efforts to restore an independent Jewish monarchy. Jesus' understanding of his mission seems to have been significantly different in this regard.

ate sacrificial meals in God's presence and, at Passover, in memory of God's deliverance of Israel.

- (5) Jesus' claim that he would sit at God's right hand, 'coming with the clouds of heaven', implies that he would sit upon God's chariot throne, a seat reserved for the deity.

Let us now consider each of these points in turn.

I. ONE 'LIKE A SON OF MAN'

One of the oddest features about the teaching of Jesus is his frequent reference to himself as 'the son of man' (*ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*).⁹ Because this epithet, which in Aramaic (*בֶּר אִנְשׁ*) simply means the 'human' or 'mortal', played virtually no role in the development of christology (as attested, for example, in the letters of Paul), it may rightly be inferred that this manner of speaking derives from Jesus, not from the early Church. Why would the early Church attribute such an epithet to Jesus, which in the Greco-Roman world holds little meaning and which for Christianity's earliest theologians made no significant contribution to christology? The best answer is that this curious epithet originated with Jesus.

Although many scholars are willing to concede that Jesus probably did refer to himself as 'the son of man', some doubt the authenticity of those sayings that speak of his suffering (the so-called Passion predictions), while others doubt the authenticity of those that speak of the enthronement and coming of the son of man.¹⁰ The latter are of importance for the present concerns, for the allusion to the figure of Daniel 7 is more obvious.¹¹ These sayings will receive our attention. The material that is of especial interest to us is that which describes the authority and dominion granted to the 'son of man'. The pertinent material reads:

I beheld till thrones were set up, and One that was ancient of days sat down. His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousands of thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The judgment was set, and the books were opened. . . . I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man, and he came to the

⁹ The epithet is found in the four Gospels approximately 80 times. Outside of the Gospels, it occurs but four times (Acts 7: 56; Heb. 2: 6; Rev. 1: 13; 14: 14). Linguistically, the difference between the Greek epithet attributed to Jesus and the Aramaic and Hebrew equivalents is that the Greek is always definite (i.e. 'the son of [the] man'), while the Semitic forms usually are not.

¹⁰ For assessments of these and related issues, see B. Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man: A Fresh Examination of the Son of Man Sayings in the Gospels in the Light of Recent Research* (London: SPCK; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983); D. R. A. Hare, *The Son of Man Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

¹¹ In my opinion, Jesus' Passion predictions also allude to Daniel 7. When Jesus says the 'son of man' will 'suffer' and 'be killed', we have allusion to the struggle described in Dan. 7: 21, 25.

Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given to him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (vv. 9–10, 13–14)

Daniel's vision describes the setting up of thrones, one of which is the chariot throne on which the 'One that was ancient of days' (i.e. God) sat. It is not called a chariot, but the reference to its wheels as burning fire makes that a reasonable assumption (cf. Ezek. 1: 4; 10: 6; 2 Kgs. 2: 11–12). Daniel's vision presupposes Ezekiel's much more elaborate description of God's chariot throne. The vision goes on to describe the appearance of 'one like a son of man', that is, a human-like being. Exactly who this human is, or whether it really is a human (it is said to be *like* a son of man), is much debated. In any case, this being stands in contrast to the violent, war-like beasts (which represent various Pagan kingdoms) described in chapter 7 and elsewhere in Daniel. The human-like being approaches God and is given 'dominion, and glory, and a kingdom'. In Greek 'dominion' is rendered 'authority' (ἐξουσία). The result is that 'all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him' and his kingdom 'shall not be destroyed'.

The feature that is particularly interesting, and would prove to be controversial among some rabbinic interpreters, is that more than one throne is set up (note the plural 'thrones' in v. 9) and that the human-like being is brought before God. What is the meaning of the plural 'thrones' the rabbis asked? 'One is for Him; the other is for David.'¹² So opined Rabbi Aqiba. But this interpretation scandalized Rabbi Yose, who replied: 'Aqiba, how long will you profane the Divine Presence?' It was unthinkable that a mere mortal could sit next to God. But Aqiba's interpretation enjoys the support of Psalm 122: 5, which speaks of the tribes going up to Jerusalem, where 'sit thrones for judgment, thrones for the house of Israel'.¹³ The association of the plural thrones of Psalm 122 with the plural thrones of Daniel 7 is based on the frequently invoked rabbinic interpretive principle of *gezera šawa*, whereby scriptural passages containing common terminology may interpret one another. Aqiba evidently thought it possible that a mortal could sit next to God, or perhaps he thought that the Messiah (i.e. 'David' in the rabbinic context) was more than a mere mortal.

That this human-like being could be brought before God is especially surprising when it is remembered that not even the great lawgiver Moses was permitted to see God's face (as in Exod. 33–4). He is told, 'No man shall see me and live' (Exod. 33: 20). Yet, the 'son of man' in Daniel 7 is ushered right into the very presence of God himself, seated on his throne. Indeed, according to Aqiba, David (or the Messiah, and probably the son of man of Daniel 7) will take his seat next to God on his own throne.

¹² See b. Sanh. 38b; b. Hag. 14a.

¹³ See the longer, more involved interpretation preserved in Midr. Tan. B on Lev. 19: 1–2 (*Qedosin* §1).

The ancient background from which the imagery of the son of man and the Ancient of Days derives is probably Canaanite¹⁴ and seems to parallel the relationship of Baal to 'El.¹⁵ The former is well known in Ugaritic texts as the 'rider of the clouds', while the latter is called 'father of years' and is often depicted as aged. As such this description seems to parallel Daniel's 'Ancient of Days'. Like the 'son of man' in Daniel 7, Baal is promised an 'everlasting kingdom' and 'dominion for ever and ever'.¹⁶ Although 'El confers kingship on Baal, the latter remains subordinate to the former.

John Collins rightly argues that Daniel is not directly dependent on Ugaritic sources (which date to the fourteenth century BCE), but on subsequent traditions, whether Pagan or Jewish, that made use of them. According to Collins: 'What is important is the pattern of relationships: the opposition between the sea and the rider of the clouds, the presence of two godlike figures, and the fact that one who comes with the clouds receives everlasting dominion. These are the relationships that determine the structure of the vision in Daniel 7. No other material now extant provides as good an explanation of the configuration of imagery in Daniel's dream.'¹⁷ This background helps to clarify Daniel's visionary scene. It also suggests that all of the characters in this celestial drama, the Ancient of Days, the one that is like a son of man, and the holy ones are heavenly beings, not mortals.

Interpreters of Daniel 7 in late antiquity almost always understood the 'son of man' figure as referring to an individual, often to the Messiah (as in the Gospels, 1 Enoch, and 4 Ezra).¹⁸ Many modern interpreters, however, think the one 'like a son of man' is none other than the archangel Michael, the prince or guardian of Israel, who receives from God the kingdom in Israel's behalf, and that the 'holy ones' who struggle against the evil forces also are angels.¹⁹ It is not necessary to choose between these interpretations. It is significant to note that this celestial figure, closely associated with God and with the angels of heaven, was also understood as a messianic figure in some circles in late antiquity. That this messianic figure might actually have been understood as a supernatural figure, such as an angel, would only add to his heavenly status. That Jesus chose to define himself and, by implication, his messiahship in this way is very significant.

¹⁴ So J. A. Emerton, 'The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery', *JTS* 9 (1958), 225–42; L. Rost, 'Zur Deutung des Menschensohnes in Daniel 7', in G. Dellling (ed.), *Gott und die Götter: Festgabe für Brich Fascher zum 60. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Evangelischer Verlag, 1958), 41–3; see now more recently P. G. Mosca, 'Ugarit and Daniel 7: A Missing Link', *Bib* 67 (1986), 496–517, who emphasizes the royal setting of the traditions.

¹⁵ *CTA* 2.1.21.

¹⁶ *CTA* 2.4.10.

¹⁷ J. J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 291; see also the comments on pp. 293–4. J. D. G. Dunn (*Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1980), 72) is correct to observe that there is no firm evidence that the 'Son of man' was understood in a messianic sense prior to the time of Jesus.

¹⁸ See the discussion by A. Y. Collins in the excursus, "'One Like a Human Being'", in J. J. Collins, *Daniel*, 305–8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 310.

The vision of the 'son of man', or 'human', in Daniel 7 lies behind the following sayings of Jesus:

1. But that you may know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2: 10)
2. so that the son of man is lord even of the sabbath (Mark 2: 28)
3. For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mark 8: 38)
4. For the son of man also came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10: 45)
5. And then shall they see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory (Mark 13: 26)
6. I am; and you shall see the son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven (Mark 14: 62)
7. The son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity (Matt. 13: 41)
8. Truly I say to you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19: 28 = Luke 22: 28–30; cf. Mark 10: 35–45)
9. For as the lightning comes forth from the east, and is seen even to the west; so shall be the coming of the son of man (Matt 24: 27)
10. and then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matt. 24: 30)
11. And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the son of man (Matt. 24: 37)
12. and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the son of man (Matt. 24: 39)
13. Therefore be also ready; for in an hour that you think not the son of man comes (Matt. 24: 44)
14. But when the son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory (Matt. 25: 31)
15. And I say to you, Every one who shall confess me before people, the son of man shall also confess him before the angels of God (Luke 12: 8; cf. Matt. 10: 32)
16. But watch at every season, making supplication, that you may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the son of man (Luke 21: 36)²⁰

In the first saying, Jesus' claim to have 'authority on earth' alludes to the heavenly scene of Daniel 7. That is, the implication is that the son of man not only has authority in heaven, where that authority was received, but he has it on

²⁰ Limitations of space prohibit discussion of the authenticity and meaning (in Jesus and later in the respective evangelists) of each and every saying. Such discussion will be taken up in future studies.

earth, where he currently ministers. The authority is also understood to extend to the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' critics had reacted to Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness with the question: 'Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' (Mark 2: 7). Some think that Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness constitutes infringement on priestly prerogatives, but then we should have expected the question to be 'Who can forgive sins but priests alone?' In essence Jesus has claimed an authority that bypasses the function of the priests whereby acting in God's place, or perhaps as God's vice regent, he extends forgiveness in an immediate and unmediated manner.

A similar authority is seen in the pronouncement made in the second saying listed above. As the son of man, Jesus 'is lord even of the sabbath' (Mark 2: 28). Given the high view of the sabbath, the day sanctified by God himself (cf. Gen. 2: 2-3), any claim to be 'lord of the sabbath' implies a remarkable degree of authority. Apart from God himself, who could possess such authority? Only the son of man of Daniel 7, who received authority directly from God, could possess such authority.

In the third and fifth sayings Jesus speaks of the son of man coming 'in the glory of his Father with the holy angels' (Mark 8: 38; cf. 13: 26). In the Greek version of Daniel 7: 14 the son of man receives 'all glory', while later in Daniel's vision we hear of the 'holy ones', who are probably to be understood as angels. Indeed, in the seventh saying Jesus speaks of 'his angels' (Matt. 13: 41; cf. the fourteenth saying, Matt. 25: 31). The references to glory and to angels are consistent with the vision of Daniel 7. Even the reference to 'his angels', which implies a measure of authority over the angels, fits the picture in Daniel 7.

In the sixth saying Jesus affirms that he is indeed 'the Messiah, son of the Blessed' (cf. Mark 14: 61) and that the High Priest and his colleagues will 'see the son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14: 62). The implication of judgement is found in the tenth saying, where 'all the tribes of the earth mourn', the eleventh and twelfth sayings, which make comparison with Noah's flood, the thirteenth and sixteenth sayings, which enjoin preparedness so that one may 'stand before the son of man' and, presumably, escape condemnation. The fifteenth saying makes the remarkable claim, again consistent with the heavenly scene of judgement in Daniel 7, that the son of man will 'confess before the angels of God' every person who confesses him 'before people'.

The ninth saying depicts the suddenness and drama of the appearance of the son of man, 'as the lightning comes forth from the east, and is seen even to the west'. This description is consistent with the heavenly scene of Daniel 7. The tenth saying is similar, referring to a 'sign of the son of man in heaven'. The thirteenth saying underscores the element of suddenness: 'in an hour that you think not the son of man comes'.

Finally, some of these sayings speak of enthronement. The eighth saying promises that the 'son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory' and his disciples

also will 'sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel'. What is described here is in effect a new government, a celestial government establishment on earth by which all twelve tribes of Israel will be faithfully governed, perhaps even protected.²¹ The fourteenth saying also speaks of the son of man sitting 'on the throne of his glory'. This is consistent with the plural 'thrones' of Daniel 7: 9 and the later interpretation seen in 1 Enoch²² and the even later interpretation in rabbinic literature.²³

Taken together, these sayings (and there are others that were not cited) constitute a remarkable portrait of a figure who has received heavenly authority and acts in many ways as a heavenly being. This may very well explain Jesus' questioning of the scribal tendency to call the Messiah 'the son of David' (Mark 12: 35–7). Jesus counters this interpretation by noting that David calls the Messiah 'lord', thus implying that the Messiah is no mere son of David (which according to conventions of Jewish culture could imply that the Messiah is subordinate to his great ancestor) but is something greater. Yes, the Messiah would be greater than David if he is the one 'like a human' of Daniel 7, the being who receives authority and kingdom from God and possesses prerogatives usually thought to be God's. This is consistent with Jesus' claim to be 'greater than Solomon' (Matt. 12: 42)—David's (mere) son—and even stronger than Satan the strong man (Mark 3: 27).²⁴ How can Jesus be stronger than Satan,

²¹ What is probably meant is that the tribes will be 'judged' in the Old Testament sense as in the Book of Judges. The tribes will not be condemned (as some patristic interpreters for polemical purposes chose to understand the passage).

²² The 'son of man' is virtually deified in 1 Enoch 37–71 (or the Similitudes of Enoch), where we are told that the 'son of man' had the countenance of 'holy angels' (46: 2), that was given the name 'Before-Time' and was so named in God's presence (48: 2), and that he was concealed in God's presence prior to the creation of the world (48: 6; 62: 7). He is also called the 'Chosen One' (48: 6), 'Elect One' (49: 2; 51: 4; 52: 6; 53: 6; 55: 4; 61: 8; 62: 1), and 'Messiah' (48: 10; 52: 4). We are told that the day is coming when 'all the kings, the governors, the high officials, and those who rule the earth shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and raise their hopes in that Son of Man; they shall beg and plead for mercy at his feet' (62: 9). In 1 Enoch the epithet 'son of man' has become titular (and so has been capitalized).

²³ The 'bar naphle' pun in b. Sanh. 96b-97a links Dan. 7: 13 to Amos 9: 11 (the promise to raise up the fallen tent of David). In Greek *nephele* means 'cloud', so *bar nephele* means 'son of the cloud'; while in Aramaic/Hebrew *bar naphle* means 'son of the fallen'. Dan. 7: 13 is understood in a messianic sense elsewhere in rabbinic literature (cf. b. Sanh. 98a; Num. Rab. 13.14 [on Num. 7: 13]; Midr. Ps. 21. 5 [on Ps. 21: 7]; 93. 1 [on Ps. 93: 1]; Frag. Tg. Ex. 12: 42).

²⁴ The possibility that Judaism of late antiquity could regard as divine a being other than God is seen in the presentation of Melchizedek in one of the Scrolls from Qumran (11QMelch). In this document Isa. 61: 2 is paraphrased to read: 'the year of Melchizedek's favour'. Here the name Melchizedek is substituted for the 'Lord'. Verses from the Psalms are applied to this mysterious figure: 'A godlike being has taken his place in the council of God; in the midst of the divine beings he holds judgment' (Ps. 82: 1). Scripture also says about him, 'Over it take your seat in the highest heaven; A divine being will judge the peoples' (Ps. 7: 7–8). It is interesting that Melchizedek, like the son of man of Daniel and of Jesus' sayings, takes a seat in heaven and judges people. Still later in this document it is said that Melchizedek, a 'divine being (*el*)', 'reigns' (quoting Isa. 52: 7).

a heavenly being against whom the archangels have struggled with difficulty (Dan. 10: 13; 12: 1)? Jesus can be stronger only if he is the one 'like a son of man' who was presented to God and from him received authority and the kingdom.

Jesus' identification of himself as the being of Daniel 7 not only confirms his messianic self-understanding, but defines the nature of his messianism. It suggests that he saw himself as more than a popular messiah whose mission was to throw off the Roman yoke and restore the kingdom of Israel, as in the days of David and Solomon. The frequent appeal to the figure of Daniel 7 to define himself, his mission, his struggle, his death, and subsequent vindication strongly implies that Jesus understood himself in terms that transcend those of a mere mortal. In the points that follow we shall explore further indications that support this implication. These additional points will be treated more briefly.

II. JESUS AS GOD'S WISDOM

The very style of Jesus' teaching and ministry may have prompted his earliest followers to view him as Wisdom incarnate.²⁵ Perhaps the most intriguing saying in the dominical tradition is the one in which Jesus speaks as Wisdom personified: 'Come [δεῦτε] to me [πρὸς με] all who labour [κοπιᾶν] and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest [ἀναπαύειν]. Take my yoke [ζυγός] upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest [ἀνάπαυσιν] for your souls [ψυχῆ]. For my yoke [ζυγός] is easy and my burden is light' (Matt. 11: 28–30).²⁶ This language reminds us of Wisdom's summons: 'Come to me [πρὸς με]' (Sir. 24: 19; cf. Prov. 9: 5); 'Come [δεῦτε], therefore, let

Probably also relevant is the prediction in 4Q521 that 'heaven and earth will obey his Messiah'. It is hard to see how a messianic figure of such expectation would have been thought of as a mortal and nothing more. 4Q246 should also be mentioned, where there is expected one who will be called 'son of God' and 'son of the Most High'. 4Q369 also speaks of a 'first-born son', a 'prince and ruler', whom God will instruct 'in eternal light'.

²⁵ See B. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 147–208.

²⁶ A few scholars have regarded Matt. 11: 28–30 as authentic dominical tradition, cf. E. Klostermann, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 4th edn., HNT 4 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1971), 102; A. M. Hunter, 'Crux Criticorum—Matt. 11. 25–30', *NTS* 8 (1962), 241–9; S. Bacchiocchi, 'Matthew 11: 28–30: Jesus' Rest and the Sabbath', *AUSS* 22 (1984), 289–316; J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 2 vols., ABRL 3 and 9 (New York: Doubleday, 1992–4), ii. 335, 387 n.174. Others have contested this view, cf. R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 219; C. Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and the Easy Yoke: Wisdom, Torah and Discipleship in Matthew 11.25–30*, JSNTSup 18 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 51; D. C. Allison and W. D. Davies, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988–91), ii. 293. If the substance of Matt. 11: 28–30 does indeed go back to Jesus, there can be little question that the tradition has been heavily edited (cf. Allison and Davies, *Matthew*, ii. 287–91). But even if inauthentic, Matt. II: 28–30 does reflect aspects of Jesus' manner of speaking and acting as Wisdom's envoy.

us enjoy the good things . . .’ (Wisd. 2: 6); ‘Come [δεῦτε], O children, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord’ (LXX Ps. 33: 12 [34: 11]). Especially interesting is Sirach 51: 23–7: ‘Draw near to me [πρὸς με], you who are untaught . . . Put your neck under the yoke [ζυγός], and let your soul [ψυχὴ] receive instruction; it is to be found close by. See with your eyes that I have laboured [κοπιᾶν] little and found for myself much rest [ἀνάπαυσιν].’²⁷ These sayings hint that Jesus may have understood himself as God’s Wisdom (or as Wisdom’s messenger). This suspicion is confirmed when he claims to be ‘greater than Solomon’ (Luke 11: 31 = Matt. 12: 42), Israel’s famous patron of Wisdom.²⁸ In light of these passages and others Martin Hengel has concluded that Jesus understood himself as the messianic teacher of wisdom, indeed as Wisdom’s envoy.²⁹

The significance of this wisdom element in Jesus’ lifestyle and self-reference lies in the observation that Wisdom personified was viewed as a way of speaking of God. Spirit, Wisdom, and Word were three important abstractions that often in late antiquity functioned as hypostases, carrying on the divine function on earth. Among other things, this way of speaking and conceptualizing enabled the pious to affirm the transcendence of God, on the one hand, and the immanence of God, on the other. In Jewish thinking of the first century, Jesus’ speaking and acting as though he were God’s Wisdom would have made a significant contribution to early christology, out of which ideas of deification [= belief in Jesus’ divine status, eds.] would have readily and naturally sprung. The christology of the fourth Gospel is indebted to Wisdom traditions.³⁰ Indeed, what is only hinted at in a few places in the Synoptics is ubiquitous and explicit in the fourth Gospel. To a certain extent Pauline christology is also indebted to Wisdom traditions. This is seen in the apostle’s assertion that ‘Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1: 24; cf. 1: 30: ‘Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom’).

²⁷ See Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 163–4.

²⁸ R. Bultmann (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 112–13) accepts the saying as authentic. Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, ii, 689–90) makes the point that there is no evidence that the early Church showed a tendency to enhance or exploit a Solomon typology.

²⁹ M. Hengel, ‘Jesus als messianischer Lehrer der Weisheit und die Anfänge der Christologie’, in J. Leclant *et al.* (eds.), *Sagesse et religion: Colloque de Strasbourg, Octobre 1976* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Centres d’Études Supérieures Spécialisés, 1979), 147–88, esp. 163–6, 180–8. See also Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus*, 51–3, 221–8, 274–5; B. L. Mack, ‘The Christ and Jewish Wisdom’, in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, The First Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 192–221, esp. 210–15.

³⁰ See M. Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus*, JSNTSup 71 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). Statements such as ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14: 9) are illustrative of wisdom christology.

III. JESUS' CLAIM TO DIVINE SONSHIP

Another important element in Gospel tradition is the various references to Jesus as the 'son', 'son of God', or 'son of the Most High'. The cries of the demonized (Mark 3: 11 = Luke 4: 41: 'You are the son of God!'; Mark 5: 7; 'Jesus, son of the Most High God') are in all probability rooted in authentic tradition.³¹ These epithets remind us of 4Q246, where we find reference to one who will be called 'son of God' and 'son of the Most High'. This Aramaic text, dating from the first century BCE, confirms the expectation of a coming world saviour who would be thought of as 'son of God'; it also confirms that this concept was right at home in Palestine.³² Two other references have a reasonable claim to authenticity, though some have challenged them. Jesus asserts that no one knows the eschatological hour, 'not even the son, only the Father' (Mark 13: 32).³³ In one of the Wisdom passages Jesus affirms that 'no one knows the Father except the son' (Matt. 11: 27).³⁴ These references to 'son', especially in contrast to the 'Father', should be understood as a shortened form of 'son of God'. To be called 'son of God', as opposed to 'prophet of God' (cf. Ezra 5: 2; Luke 7: 16)/'prophet of Yahweh' (1 Sam. 3: 20) or 'man of God' (cf. 1 Kgs. 17: 24), carries with it the implication that one shares in the divine nature. This is the implication of the inscriptions seen above, where various kings and despots call themselves 'son of God' and 'God'. There is no reason to think that Jesus' Jewish contemporaries, who were themselves very much part of the Greco-Roman world,³⁵ would have thought of these expressions in terms significantly different from those held by Gentiles. This is not to say that the epithet 'son of God' necessarily implied divinity, for it could be honorific or mystical (as I think we have it in the case of certain Jewish holy men who were supposedly addressed by heaven as 'my son').³⁶ But such an

³¹ It has to be admitted that these cries complement Markan christology; cf. R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8: 26*, WBC 34A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 148-9. On the possibility of the authenticity of the tradition, see R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 158-9.

³² See the discussion by J. J. Collins, 'The *Son of God* Text from Qumran', in M. C. De Boer (ed.), *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge*, JSNTSup 84 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 65-82; J. D. G. Dunn, "'Son of God'" as "'Son of Man'" in the Dead Sea Scrolls? A Response to John Collins on 4Q246', in S. E. Porter and C. A. Evans (eds.), *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After*, JSPSup 26; RILP 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 197-209.

³³ On the authenticity of this passage, see Gundry, *Mark*, 747-8, 792-5; *idem*, *Matthew*, 492; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, ii. 347. Gundry comments: 'That Mark does not exclude Jesus' ignorance of the exact time bears tribute to Mark's respect for the tradition' (*Mark*, 747-8).

³⁴ On the authenticity of this passage, see Gundry, *Matthew*, 218; A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 160-73.

³⁵ Hengel's discussion in *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989) is apposite.

³⁶ Jewish legends relate a story about God addressing Hanina ben Dosa: 'My son Hanina' (cf. b. Ta'an. 24b; b. Ber. 17b).

epithet, given its usage in late antiquity, would have contributed to belief in Jesus' heavenly status.

IV. 'DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME'

The words of institution, uttered on the occasion of the Last Supper, are themselves suggestive of Jesus' heavenly status. Jesus associates his body and blood with the Passover sacrifice, implying that in his death a new covenant is established: 'And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many"' (Mark 14: 23–4).

In what sense could the blood of an ordinary sacrificial victim, even that of a pious human, effect the promise of the new covenant (cf. Jer. 31: 31; Zech. 9: 11)? The sacrifice of one whose status is of a heavenly order, however, may establish a new covenant. Indeed, the words 'my blood of the covenant' in Mark approximate the words in Zechariah 9: 11: 'the blood of my covenant'. Because it is *God* who speaks in Zechariah's prophecy, the verbal parallel is suggestive.

In what is probably an authentic fragment of the words of institution, Paul concludes this scene with these words: 'Do this, as often as you drink it, in memory of me' (1 Cor. 11: 25). The Passover request that the disciples remember Jesus is in itself interesting, for the Passover was instituted to commemorate God's salvific action in the exodus. Apparently Jesus asks his disciples to remember his action in going to the cross, presumably to effect salvation once again for his people. Remembering God's saving act and Jesus' saving act appear to be parallel.

Indeed, the idea of sharing a meal in memory of Jesus, as though Jesus were present, is in itself very interesting. It may parallel the idea that Israelites shared meals with God when they partook of the sacrifice (usually the so-called fellowship offerings). Just as an Israelite eats a special meal with God, so the disciple eats a special meal with Jesus. The parallel is intriguing and to my knowledge unique in Judaism of late antiquity.

Finally, in the Greco-Roman world drinking and pouring libations in honour of or in memory of various gods, including the Roman emperor, was a common practice. The words of institution, in all probability deriving from Jesus, and not from the post-Easter Church, may also have contributed to the early belief in the divinity of Jesus.

V. SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND

With this last point, we return to an important element that derives from Daniel 7. This element is found in the passage that describes Jesus' hearing before Caiaphas and members of the Sanhedrin (Mark 14: 55–65). Searching for

an incriminating charge the High Priest asks Jesus: 'Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed?' (Mark 14: 61).³⁷ Jesus replies: 'I am; and you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14: 62). Caiaphas accuses Jesus of 'blasphemy' (Mark 14: 63). Jesus' answer is not blasphemous simply for affirming that he is the Messiah (or Christ), nor is it necessarily blasphemous for affirming that he is the 'son of God', since sonship was probably understood by many to be a concomitant of messiahship (as seen in Ps. 2: 2, 7; 2 Sam. 7: 14). Jesus' blasphemy lay in his combination of Psalm 110: 1 ('sit at my right hand'³⁸) and Daniel 7: 13 ('son of man coming with the clouds of heaven'), implying that he will take his seat in heaven next to God.

The juxtaposition of these Scriptures suggests to me that Jesus interpreted Daniel 7: 9 much as Aqiba is said to have done almost one century later. That is, the Messiah was to sit on a throne next to God, or at God's right hand (as Psalm 110 requires).³⁹ As Hengel has shown, sitting at God's right hand may actually have implied that Jesus was asserting that he would sit at God's right hand *in God's throne* (cf. 1 Chr. 29: 23: 'Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king'). Such an idea is not only part of primitive royal traditions in the Old Testament but can even be found in the New Testament in reference to the resurrected Christ: 'I will grant him who conquers to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne' (Rev. 3: 21). When we remember that the throne of Daniel 7: 9 had burning wheels, we should think that Jesus has claimed that he will sit with God on the Chariot Throne and will, as in the vivid imagery of Daniel 7, come with God in judgement.⁴⁰ This tradition, which I do not think early Christians understood well nor exploited, is authentic and not a piece of Christian confession or scriptural interpretation.⁴¹

VI. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The recognition of Jesus' divine status was a long process, culminating in the creeds affirming the Trinity and the full humanity and full deity of Jesus.

³⁷ 'The Blessed' is a circumlocution for 'God' (cf. m. Ber. 7: 3) and is probably an abbreviated form of the longer phrase, 'the Holy One blessed be He', which is ubiquitous in rabbinic literature.

³⁸ Gundry (*Mark*, 915–18) could be right in his suggestion that Jesus' own words were 'seated at the right hand of Yahweh' and that in the 'public' version of Jesus' offence, the circumlocution 'Power' was introduced (as prescribed in m. Sanh. 6: 4; 7: 5).

³⁹ See C. A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, AGJU 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 204–10.

⁴⁰ Recognition that it is the chariot throne that is in view makes unnecessary D. A. Juel's suggestion (*Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, SBLDS 31 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1977), 95) that Mark 14: 62 is a clumsy and inauthentic combination of contradictory materials. He finds contradiction in the aspects of *sitting* and *coming*. But Juel does not adequately assess the underlying Danielic imagery. Being seated on the divine Chariot Throne and coming with the clouds of heaven are complementary elements.

⁴¹ For further discussion, see Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 210–11, 431–3.

Although it cannot be shown that all of the elements of Chalcedonian christology are plainly taught in Scripture, the belief in the deity of Jesus appears to be rooted in his teaching and activities and not simply in post-Easter ideas. This is probable, not only for the reasons argued above, but also because the affirmation of Jesus as Israel's Messiah required no confession of his divinity. That the awaited Messiah might possess divine attributes was a possibility, given what is said of him in 1 Enoch and his identification with the son of man figure in Daniel, but it was not a requirement. Popular expectation seems to have looked more for a Davidic-like figure who would drive the Romans from Israel and restore the kingdom along the lines of the classical period.⁴²

Had Jesus not claimed to be Israel's awaited Messiah, it is not likely that his disciples would have later said that he had. Easter alone would have provided no motivation to infuse the content of Jesus' teaching with messianism. If Jesus had been no more than a righteous prophet or beloved rabbi, a teacher of national reform or of personal salvation, then why not proclaim his resurrection to be vindication of his prophecy or teaching? Why introduce messianism, a new agenda, and a foreign body of teaching? If Jesus allowed his disciples to think of him as Israel's Messiah, but possessing no qualities of divinity or special relationship to God whereby divinity might reasonably be inferred, then why would the disciples introduce this element, when conventional messianism did not require it and strict, Jewish monotheism would not encourage it?

These questions are raised at the end of this essay to show that the burden of proof rests on the sceptic who wishes to maintain that the tradition of the Gospels and subsequent Christian interpretation of this tradition should be discounted. The sceptic not only must refute the points argued above, but must also answer the questions in the previous paragraph. In my judgement, the Gospels' presentation of Jesus' teaching and conduct as ultimately messianic and in places connoting divinity is compelling. The most plausible explanation of the Gospels as we have them and of the earliest Church's proclamation is that Jesus claimed to be Daniel's heavenly son of man figure through whom God would defeat his enemies and bring about the everlasting kingdom. From this claim and from related teachings and actions the early Church rightly inferred Jesus' divinity, which in view of other theological and philosophical considerations led to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity of the Godhead.

⁴² See *Ibid.* 53–81.

8

Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?*

Stephen T. Davis

I

The argument that Jesus was either ‘mad, bad, or God’ (let’s call it the MBG argument) is sometimes used by popular Christian apologists as a way of defending the incarnation. Since Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God—so the argument goes—then if he was not in fact divine, he must have been either a lunatic or a moral monster. No sane and righteous person can wrongly claim to be divine. But since Jesus was evidently neither a lunatic nor a moral monster—so the argument concludes—he must indeed have been divine.

Occasionally one encounters this argument in serious Christian literature as well. For example, C. S. Lewis wrote:

Then comes the real shock. Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if he was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says he is coming to judge the world at the end of time. . . . I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil in Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.¹

And even J. A. T. Robinson, in the midst of a discussion of the Fourth Gospel in which he argues for its early dating and the general historical reliability of its picture of Jesus, can say: ‘No sane person goes about saying “Before Abraham was I am” or “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood shall live forever.” These are theological interpretations, not literal utterances. Yet at the deepest level of

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¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960). 40–1. I have been unable to locate any published uses of the argument prior to the 20th cent. G. K. Chesterton does not state the argument as clearly or succinctly as does Lewis, but its premises can be found in *The Everlasting Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955 (1925)). 185–212.

faith they may indeed be the truth about the eternal Word of life, made flesh in this supremely individual and uniquely moral man of history.²

On the other hand, the MBG argument is often severely criticized, both by people who do and by people who do not believe in the divinity of Jesus. For example, Donald MacKinnon criticized the argument on the grounds that it presupposes that we know what it is like to be God.³ And John Hick makes critical reference to the MBG argument in *The Myth of God Incarnate*. He recalls that he was taught the argument in his childhood confirmation class and comments that it reflects a precritical attitude toward the Christian faith, one in which the idea of supernatural divine interventions in human history are acceptable and in which the Gospels are read as straightforward historical accounts of the life of Jesus.⁴ Others object to the MBG argument on the grounds that the statements made by Jesus about himself in the Gospels that form the basis of the argument are being misinterpreted; properly understood, they do not constitute 'claims to divinity'. Finally, and doubtless most importantly, some argue that the statements about himself that are attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were not really said by him: they express the views not of Jesus but of the Christian church forty to sixty years later.

It is odd that the MBG argument is subject to such differing evaluations—all the way from people who endorse and use it, presumably because they consider it a good argument,⁵ to people who dismiss it as unworthy of serious consideration.⁶ Is it a good argument, or not?⁷ Probably no central issue of Christian

² J. A. T. Robinson. *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977). 91. See also R. H. Fuller and P. Perkins. *Who Is This Christ? Gospel Christology and Contemporary Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). 24: 'Therefore, the question of Jesus' identity, role, or relationship to the divine forced itself on those who came in contact with him. Either he was blasphemous, a fool, or he spoke with divine authority.'

³ MacKinnon made this remark in a lecture attended by me at the Divinity School, Cambridge, in the Lent Term of 1978.

⁴ John Hick (ed.). *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 4.

⁵ Two contemporary apologists who make use of the argument are W. L. Craig and P. Kreeft. See W. L. Craig. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1984), 233–54, and P. Kreeft and R. K. Tacelli. *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994). 150–74. For a more extended discussion of the argument, see P. Kreeft, *Between Heaven and Hell: A Dialog Somewhere Beyond Death with John F. Kennedy, C. S. Lewis, and Aldous Huxley* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1982). See also J. M. Boice. *Foundations of Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 275–7.

⁶ One such person is John Beversluis, who strongly criticizes C. S. Lewis's version of the MBG argument in *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), 54–7. He calls the argument 'emotionally inflammatory' and claims it is based on a 'fallacious strategy', i.e. a 'false dilemma'. It is 'not a philosophical argument but a psychological spell'. Beversluis is correct that the truth and value of Jesus' moral teachings need not be affected by a judgement that he was mistaken in claiming to be divine: even if he was a lunatic, his moral teachings may still stand. But the major problem with Beversluis's critique is that he does not succeed in explaining how a sane person can be sincerely mistaken in claiming to be God. When Beversluis sets out to explain this point, he inexplicably switches from Jesus' claim to be divine to his claim to be the Messiah. These are two quite different things. Of course, there were sane people in ancient Judaism who mistakenly claimed to be the Messiah: indeed, that was almost commonplace. But how can a sane person—especially a 1st-cent. Jew—mistakenly claim to be *divine*?

⁷ I am presupposing here the discussion of the nature of argument, proof, validity, soundness, and success for an argument in *my God, Reason, and Theistic Proofs* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1997), 1–14, 188–93.

belief depends on the argument. Orthodox Christians could go on believing in the divinity of Jesus even if the argument fails. (On the other hand, if the argument succeeds, those who deny the incarnation at the very least have some explaining to do.) But the frequency with which the argument appears in popular defences of the divinity of Jesus, as well as its almost total absence from discussions about the status of Jesus by professional theologians and biblical scholars, makes one curious what to make of the argument.

The present paper constitutes a qualified defence of one version of the argument. I will claim that the MBG argument, properly understood, can establish the rationality of belief in the incarnation of Jesus. But a caveat is called for: I do not want to be interpreted as implying that any validation of Jesus' divinity must rest solely on what Jesus himself (explicitly or implicitly) claimed to be. Along with the memory of Jesus' sayings and doings, the post-Easter response to his death and resurrection (as well as the coming of the Holy Spirit) also played a crucial role in forming the early Christians' confession of Jesus as their divine Lord and Son of God. Even if it concentrates on what we know of Jesus' pre-Easter activity, the MBG argument should not be taken to belittle or ignore the post-Easter developments. I am definitely not suggesting that the MBG argument is the only or even the best argument Christians can give for the divinity of Jesus.

II

It will facilitate matters if I lay out the argument in what I take to be its logical form:

- (1) Jesus claimed, either explicitly or implicitly, to be divine.
- (2) Jesus was either right or wrong in claiming to be divine.
- (3) If Jesus was wrong in claiming to be divine, Jesus was either mad or bad.
- (4) Jesus was not bad.
- (5) Jesus was not mad.
- (6) Therefore, Jesus was not wrong in claiming to be divine.
- (7) Therefore Jesus was right in claiming to be divine.
- (8) Therefore, Jesus was divine.

Let me now comment on each premise. Some will require more extended discussion than others.

Premise (1) will turn out to be crucial—indeed, it is probably the crux of the argument—so let us postpone extended comment on it till later. Suffice it for now simply to define its crucial term. Let us say that someone is *divine* if that person is in some strong sense identical with or equivalent to the omnipotent, omniscient, and loving creator of the heavens and the earth.

Now if (1) is true (as I will argue), then premise (2) follows from a substitution-instance of a well-recognized law of logic, namely, the law of excluded middle. Some philosophers have raised questions about this law (which says that every proposition is either true or, if not true, then false), but it nevertheless seems about as secure as any premise of any argument can be. The vast majority of philosophers will agree that (2) is true. The claim, 'Jesus was correct in claiming to be divine', is either true or, if not true, then false. The MBG argument cannot be successfully challenged here.

But premise (3) *can* be questioned. Let us say that the statement, 'Jesus was mad', means that he was insane or mentally deluded, just like those confused and frequently institutionalized people today who sincerely believe themselves to be the Virgin Mary or Napoleon. Let us say that the statement, 'Jesus was bad', means that he was a liar, or was at least lying about who he was, just like someone today who intentionally deceives people by claiming to be someone else.

Perhaps Jesus claimed to be divine, was neither mad nor bad, but was merely *sincerely mistaken* about the matter, just as it is possible for a person to be sincerely mistaken about who her true parents are. Now the defender of the MBG argument will surely not want to claim that it is logically or even causally impossible⁸ that Jesus was sincerely mistaken in claiming to be divine. If we tried hard enough, we probably could cook up a scenario in which a sane and moral person mistakenly took himself to be divine. But is it *probable* that Jesus was both sane and sincerely mistaken? Is it probable that

(9) Any good person who mistakenly claims to be divine is mad is false? Or is it probable that

(10) Any sane person who mistakenly claims to be divine is bad⁹ is false?

These are obviously difficult questions. I am inclined to accept both (9) and (10) (and thus (3) as well), but I do not know how to prove them. Certainly a sane and good person could be sincerely mistaken about who her true parents are. Doubtless this very thing has occurred. But it is hard to see how a sane and good person could be sincerely mistaken in holding the extremely bizarre belief that she is divine (assuming she uses the word 'divine', as Christians normally do in this context, i.e. as indicating a robust identity with the omnipotent, omniscient, loving creator of the world). There *is* something extremely odd about the notion of a sincere, good, and sane person mistakenly claiming to be God. Nor do I consider it possible for an *otherwise* perfectly sane and good person mistakenly

⁸ Let us say that 'Jesus was sincerely mistaken in claiming to be divine' is logically impossible if the statement amounts to or entails a contradiction. Let us say that 'Jesus was sincerely mistaken in claiming to be divine' is causally impossible if its truth entails a violation of one or more of the laws of nature—gravity, thermodynamics, the speed of light, etc.

⁹ The Revd Jim Jones, whose cult followers committed mass suicide in Guyana in 1978, is reported to have said to them: 'I'm the closest thing to God you'll ever see.'

to consider herself to be God. Accordingly, (9) and (10) (and thus (3)). seem to have a high degree of plausibility. I conclude, then, that while (3) may be false, it is most probably true and can stand as a premise in a successful argument.

One suspects that few will want to dispute (4) and (5). It is possible, however, that someone might want to use them against each other, so to speak, and argue either that:

- (11) If Jesus mistakenly claimed to be divine and wasn't mad, then, improbable as it seems, he must have been bad.

or else:

- (12) If Jesus mistakenly claimed to be divine and wasn't bad, then, improbable as it seems, he must have been mad.

But, again, I believe there is good reason to accept both (4) and (5). Unless the most radical of Gospel critics are correct—those who claim we can know virtually nothing about the historical Jesus¹⁰—there is precious little in the Gospels to suggest that Jesus was either a lunatic or a liar, and much to suggest strongly that he was neither.

Virtually everyone who reads the Gospels—whether committed to Christianity or not—comes away with the conviction that Jesus was a wise and good man. He was loving, compassionate, and caring, hardly the sort who tells lies for self-interested reasons. During his lifetime Jesus was apparently accused by his enemies of being demon-possessed and 'out of his mind' (cf. John 10: 20). And Jesus is certainly quoted as making what can seem to be bizarre claims, especially when taken outside the context of his life and the rest of his teachings: for example: 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you' (John 6: 53).

But Peter Kreeft argues convincingly that Jesus shows none of the character traits usually associated with those who have delusions of grandeur or 'divinity complexes'. Such people are easily recognized by their egotism, narcissism, inflexibility, predictable behaviour, and inability to relate understandingly and lovingly to others.¹¹ Other seriously disturbed people show signs of extreme irritability, debilitating anxiety, or inappropriate beliefs and behaviour. This is not the sort of picture of Jesus that we form by reading the Gospels. We live in an age when all sorts of bizarre claims about the historical Jesus are confidently made. But few Scripture scholars of any theological stripe seriously entertain the possibility that Jesus was either a lunatic or a liar. When we return below to premise (1) we will have to enter more deeply into the question of the reliability

¹⁰ 'I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus', Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. L. P. Smith and E. H. Lantero (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 8.

¹¹ Kreeft and Tacelli. *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 159.

of the New Testament picture of Jesus. Suffice it to say here that there seems every good reason to accept both (4) and (5).¹²

Premise (6) is entailed by premises (2), (3), (4), and (5). It is impossible for them to be true and (6) false. Premise (7) is entailed by premises (2) and (6). If they are true, it is true. Finally, step (8), the conclusion of the MBG argument, is entailed by premise (7). If (7) is true, then (8) must be true as well. What we have in the MBG argument, then, is a *valid* argument. That is, there are no mistakes in logic in the argument; it is logically impossible for its premises (i.e. (1)–(7)) to be true and its conclusion (i.e. step (8)) false.

But is the argument also *sound*? Let us say that a sound argument is a valid argument whose premises are all true. It appears thus far that while premises (3), (4), and (5) can be criticized, a plausible case can be made for their truth. Clearly the premise that will seem most vulnerable to criticism is premise (1).

Is it true that Jesus claimed, either explicitly or implicitly, to be divine? Before addressing this question directly, it will be helpful to consider the notion of an 'implicit claim', since my argument in the present paper is that Jesus *implicitly* claimed to be divine. First, what is a 'claim'? Let's say that a claim is an assertion or statement, the kind of linguistic utterance that has a truth value. That is, according to the principle of excluded middle, it is true or if not true, then false. Now an *explicit* claim that a proposition *p* is true would be a statement like '*p* is true' or 'Not-*p* is false': or 'It is true that *p* is true' or even simply '*p*'.

What then is an *implicit* claim that *p* is true? Well, there appear to be several ways of implicitly claiming that *p* is true. (1) One might implicitly claim that *p* is true by explicitly asserting that *x*, *y*, and *z* are true, where *x*, *y*, and *z* logically entail *p*. If one were explicitly to assert 'R. E. Lee was a Confederate general' and 'R. E. Lee was a famous general' and 'R. E. Lee was a great general', that could be taken as an implicit claim to the effect that 'R. E. Lee was a great and famous Confederate general'. (2) Or one might implicitly claim that *p* is true by explicitly asserting *x*, *y*, and *z*, where only people who hold that *p* is true can hold that *x*, *y*, and *z* are true. If one were explicitly to assert that 'R. E. Lee was a Confederate general' and 'R. E. Lee was a famous general' and 'R. E. Lee was a great general', that could be taken as an implicit claim to the effect that 'R. E. Lee was a human being'.¹³ (3) Most importantly, one might implicitly claim that *p* is true by *doing* action *A*, where the only people, or the only sensible people, who do *A* are people who believe *p*. Suppose that Jones, tired and

¹² For a fascinating argument against any claim that Jesus was mad, written by a practising clinical psychiatrist, see O. Q. Hyder, 'On the Mental Health of Jesus Christ', *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 5: 1 (Winter 1977), 3–12. Hyder's argument falters at one or two places, but he skilfully shows that we find no convincing evidence in the biblical materials that Jesus was delusional, paranoid, schizoid, or manic depressive, and lots of convincing evidence that he was an emotionally sound and healthy person.

¹³ The difference between (1) and (2) is perhaps not very great. In the case of (2), it is quite possible that the one who is making the implicit claim has never consciously formulated the belief. 'R. E. Lee was a human being', while that seems less probable for the one who is making the implicit claim that 'R. E. Lee was a great and famous Confederate general' in (1).

perspiring at the end of a long run, bends over and drinks from a drinking fountain. This might be taken as an implicit claim on Jones's part to the effect that 'The liquid emanating from this drinking fountain is potable'.

We are now able to return to the question whether Jesus implicitly claimed to be divine. This is a good question, to say the least. Much ink has been spilled over it, especially in the past two centuries. (Before that it would have been taken as virtually axiomatic that the answer is yes—indeed, that he *explicitly* claimed as much.) What is clear, and I think is quite beyond dispute, is that a literalistic and ahistorical reading of the Gospels, and especially the Fourth Gospel, strongly supports premise (1). Notice, for example, the following statements that are attributed to Jesus there (as well as, in some cases, the reactions of those who heard him):

But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is still working, and I also am working.' For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God. (John 5: 17–18)

The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. (John 5: 22)

'Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.' So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. (John 8: 58–9)

'The Father and I are one.' The Jews took up stones again to stone him. (John 10: 30–1)

'The Father is in me and I am in the Father.' Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. (John 10: 38–9)

'Have I been with you all this time. Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father'. (John 14: 9)

Now there appear to be four main attitudes that might be taken towards claims such as these. First, perhaps Jesus explicitly taught his own divinity, that is, perhaps words such as these constitute the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. Second, perhaps Jesus only implicitly taught his own divinity. Third, perhaps Jesus said the things, or some of them, that have been taken to imply his own divinity in John's Gospel and elsewhere, but this is not the proper interpretation of those sayings. Those who defend this option (which corresponds to the third objection to the MBG argument mentioned in Section I) might argue as follows: the words from Jesus like those just cited should be interpreted as indicating something less than robust identity with God: perhaps Jesus was only indicating unity of purpose or will with the Father, or something of that sort. What Jesus *really meant*, so it might be said, is that he had a very special place in God's redemptive plan, or he had an extraordinarily strong desire to do God's bidding, or he felt such an intimate closeness to God that it was almost as if God were his own father.¹⁴ Fourth, perhaps Jesus said nothing about the matter, and the relevant

¹⁴ This is certainly the route that must be taken by all those who, like Jehovah's Witnesses, claim to accept the full theological authority of the Bible but reject the idea that Jesus was God incarnate.

statements attributed to him in the Gospels are inauthentic; they represent the beliefs not of Jesus but of the Christian church at the time that the Gospels were being written.

In the present chapter, I do not intend to defend the first option, but rather the second; thus I must argue against options three and four.

III

As noted in Section I, there appear to be four main criticisms that can be raised against the MBG argument. First, it presupposes that we know what it is like to be God. Second, it presupposes a naive world-view, one that allows for special divine acts in history. Third (the same point as the third option just discussed), it misinterprets what Jesus meant by the statements about himself that we find in the Gospels. Fourth, it presupposes a precritical view of the Gospels (and especially John), one that views them (and it) as straightforward history. Let us consider these objections in turn. (When we get to the fourth objection, we will also be replying to the fourth option noted at the end of Section III—that the high christological statements attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are inauthentic.)

As to the first criticism, it is not easy to understand precisely what MacKinnon had in mind. What he said was that the MBG argument presupposes that we know what it is like to be God. Of course it is true that we do not know what it is like to be God. But it is hard to grasp exactly why the MBG arguer must presuppose that we have that knowledge. Let's make a distinction between *knowing what it is like to be God* and *knowing what God is like*. It is surely true that it would border on blasphemy for those who use the MBG argument—or anybody else, for that matter—to presuppose that they know what it is like to be God. In the fullest sense, we don't even know what it is like to be another human being, or what it is like to be a bat.¹⁵

But is it possible for human beings to know what God is like? The answer to this, at least from a Christian perspective, is surely yes. One of the defining ideas of the Christian faith (as well as other versions of theism) is that God has been revealed, God has chosen to show us and tell us what God is like. God is self-revealed. We learn in the Scriptures, for example, that God is the creator, that God is all-powerful, that God is all-knowing, that God is to be worshipped and obeyed, that God is loving, that God works for the salvation of humankind, that God forgives our sins, etc.

It is surely true that the MBG argument presupposes that we know something of what God is like. If a person is morally despicable, that person is not God. If a person makes insane claims, that person is not God. But, as noted, Christians

¹⁵ See Thomas Nagel's article, 'What is it Like to Be a Bat?', in Douglas Hofstadter and Daniel Dennett (eds.), *The Mind's I* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1981), 391–403.

hold that we *do* know what God is like (to the extent that it has been revealed to us by God),¹⁶ and there seems to be nothing blasphemous or otherwise theologically untoward here. For the MBG argument to work, our knowledge of God need not be comprehensive; we need to know only a little about God. So the partialness of our knowledge of God need not constitute a problem for the MBG argument. But does the MBG argument presuppose that we know what it is like to be God? Certainly not. Or at least, it is not easy to see how. I conclude that MacKinnon's criticism does not damage the MBG argument.

As to the second criticism. Hick argues that the MBG argument presupposes a pre-critical world view, one in which special divine acts in human history are allowable. But there is something slightly off-target about this criticism: Hick's objection appears to be directed more against the idea of incarnation as such than against the MBG argument in favour of the incarnation. Hick is right that the very idea of incarnation—of God becoming a human being—presupposes divine interventions in human history. This is why Deists must deny not only all miracles, epiphanies, visions from God, and prophetic messages from God, but all incarnations as well.

And it is true that if the very idea of incarnation is discredited, then the MBG argument can hardly constitute a successful argument in favour of incarnation. Still, since Hick's criticism is not directed against the MBG argument *per se*, and especially since many contemporary Christian philosophers have defended the adequacy of theism versus Deism (i.e. of the possibility of special divine acts),¹⁷ I will discuss this matter no further here. (An atheist could similarly argue that belief in incarnation is irrational because belief in *God* is outmoded, but again that would not count as an objection to the MBG argument itself.)

As to the third objection, the violent reactions of Jesus' enemies in the texts cited (and in many other texts where Jesus speaks about himself, some from the Synoptics) seem to preclude any such minimalist interpretation as, 'Jesus just meant that he felt extraordinarily close to God'. As well as the reactions mentioned in the above citations, note the argument of the chief priests at John's trial account: 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God' (John 19: 7). It would hardly have constituted an offence worthy of arrest and execution had Jesus simply been declaring his own unity of purpose or will with the Father, or claiming to have a special place in God's plan. Odd, maybe; egotistical, maybe; but hardly blasphemous. Notice further that Jesus did not step in to correct the impression his enemies apparently gained from hearing his words.

¹⁶ To avoid any hint of circularity (since Christians claim that the fullest revelation of God's nature is Christ), we could even limit our knowledge of God to what can be known about God apart from Christ. We could limit ourselves to what has been revealed about God in the natural order, or in the OT Law, or in the words of the prophets.

¹⁷ Including myself in ch. 1 of my *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993).

As noted earlier, the fourth criticism—that the MBG argument presupposes a precritical view of the Gospels and especially John as straightforward history—is the really important one. This criticism amounts to a denial of premise (1) of the MBG argument. Is premise (1) true?

It is a commonplace of much contemporary New Testament scholarship that words such as those cited above from the Fourth Gospel do not constitute the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. These statements, it is said, and the many other statements in the New Testament that imply or seem to imply the divinity of Jesus, tell us more about the faith of the early church at the time the Gospels were being written or were receiving final form than they do about the actual teachings of Jesus. Later Christians wrongly attributed these words to Jesus as part of their theological programme. Thus—so a critic of the MBG argument will argue—the MBG argument for the incarnation cannot even get going. Its first premise is false; Jesus never claimed—explicitly or implicitly—to be divine.

IV

Is this a good objection? Well, there is much in the neighbourhood that is beyond reproach. It is true that the Gospels are statements of faith with definite theological agendas rather than ‘facts-only’ biographies of Jesus. (The writer of John even admits as much—see John 20: 31.) It is also almost certainly true that John’s Gospel was the last canonical gospel written, and thus the furthest removed from the events it records. But it is a long way from these sensible admissions about the Gospels to the point that none of the sayings of Jesus that imply or seem to imply his own divinity can be authentic. Let us see what can be said on behalf of the historical reliability of some of the statements Jesus makes about himself in the Gospels, especially in the Synoptics. I will *not* presuppose the view that the evangelists were offering straightforward, theologically neutral history. Moreover, I take it as given that the church translated, edited, rearranged, recontextualised, paraphrased, abbreviated, and expanded the sayings of Jesus. Furthermore, since the NT was written in Greek, then assuming that Jesus spoke and taught in Aramaic, precisely *none* of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels constitute his *ipsissima verba* (except possibly those few sayings that are cited in Aramaic).

Again, premise (1) of the MBG argument says:

(1) Jesus claimed, either explicitly or implicitly, to be divine.

Is this true? I am going to argue that it is. But let me first note three things that I am not claiming. First, I am not claiming that Jesus went about saying ‘I am God’ or making any sort of *explicit* claim to status as deity. The radical monotheism to which first-century Judaism was committed, in all its various forms, made anything like that impossible. Second, I am not claiming that Jesus’

consciousness of his divinity was expressed by him in the language of later creedal orthodoxy: for example, 'truly divine and truly human', 'of one substance with the Father', 'Second Person of the Blessed Trinity', etc. Third, I am not claiming to be able to psychoanalyse Jesus. As N. T. Wright points out, historians are frequently concerned with the motivation and self-understanding of the figures they write about, especially as they find expression in what these figures can sensibly be concluded to have said and done, and that is what I am doing here.¹⁸

My claim is that by his words and deeds, Jesus implicitly saw or experienced himself as divine, as having a unique relationship of divine sonship to God. This does not necessarily mean that Jesus, throughout his life or even throughout his ministry, ever formulated or expressed the idea precisely in language, although I hold that at some point he was able to do so. I suspect his sense of mission and identity was shaped and confirmed by various crucial events during his ministry, for example, the baptism, temptation, transfiguration, and passion. It is possible to have a vague and inchoate awareness of something that one is able only later to capture in words. So the question, 'Did Jesus know that he was God?' is ill-formed. Jesus surely did not confuse himself with God the Father to whom he prayed. But did he implicitly claim to be divine or to have divine prerogatives? Did he implicitly claim to have a unique relationship to the Father which in effect placed him on a par with God? I believe the answer to these questions is yes. (Again, my argument will not presuppose a naive and ahistorical reading of the Gospels.)

How do we go about deciding what someone believes or implicitly claims? Well, the most obvious way to find out whether Jones believes *p* is to ask her or wait till she expresses some sort of epistemic attitude toward *p* (assertion, denial, certainty, doubt, uncertainty, etc.). And in cases where there is no good reason to doubt Jones's word, this will normally be convincing evidence. In other cases, we might have to listen to other things that Jones says or watch things that she does in order to see if any of them constitute convincing evidence that Jones implicitly claims that *p* (or not-*p*) is true. It is possible, as noted above, for a person to believe that *p* is true without ever having formulated '*p*' as a conscious belief. There are probably people who walk to work every day who believe, without ever having consciously formulated the belief, that 'the pavement will hold me up'.

I am going to present my argument in two stages. The first will presuppose the basic correctness of the methods and conclusions of some of the most radical of biblical critics.¹⁹ Its aim is to open the door to the *possibility* of showing, even on the methods of people like Bultmann, Perrin, and the members of the Jesus Seminar, that Jesus implicitly taught his own divinity. The second stage (which

¹⁸ N. T. Wright, 'Jesus and the Identity of God', *Ex Auditu* 14 (1998), 51.

¹⁹ Here I indicate my indebtedness to Royce Gordon Gruenler, who follows a similar methodology in his *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels: A Phenomenological and Exegetical Study of Synoptic Christology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1982), esp. 19–108.

contains five sub-arguments) will try to confirm the point that Jesus *actually did* this very thing. At this second stage, I will continue to eschew any naive or ahistorical view of the Gospels, but will no longer consider myself limited by the views of the radical critics.

In this first stage of my argument, I want simply (1) to point out a fact about early Christian history that is becoming clearer and clearer, even if radical methods of criticism are employed, namely, that *worship of Jesus* was a very ancient phenomenon in the Christian community; and (2) to ask why this fact is so. As to the fact that worship of Jesus was primitive in the Christian community, Richard Bauckham says: 'The prevalence and centrality of the worship of Jesus in early Christianity from an early date has frequently been underestimated. . . . In the earliest Christian community Jesus was already understood to be risen and exalted to God's right hand in heaven, active in the community by his Spirit, and coming in the future as ruler and judge of the world.'²⁰

Notice that prayers addressed to Jesus can be found from the earliest times. It is significant that Greek-speaking churches preserved in Aramaic the cry *Maranatha* ('Our Lord, come!') (1 Cor. 16: 22; Didache 10: 6); this shows its primitive origin. Personal prayers to Jesus seem to have been commonplace (2 Cor. 12: 8; 1 Thess. 3: 11–13; 2 Thess. 2: 16–17; 3: 5, 16; Acts 1: 24; 7: 59–60). There were also doxologies addressed to Christ, or to Christ and the Father together, although most appear in relatively late NT texts (2 Tim. 4: 18; 2 Pet. 3: 18; Rev. 1: 5–6, 13; cf. 7: 10). In earlier texts, doxologies with the phrase 'through Jesus Christ' appear (Rom. 16: 27; cf. 2 Cor. 1: 20). Hymns of praise to Christ were also common (Phil. 2: 6–11; 1 Tim. 3: 16; cf. Eph. 5: 19; Col. 3: 16).²¹

In a recent paper, L. W. Hurtado argues that a careful reading of Matthew and Mark reveals that there was vigorous Jewish opposition in the pre-70 period to Jewish-Christian worship of Jesus.²² Bauckham claims that the transition from prayers to Jesus, thanks-giving to Jesus, and reverence for Jesus to actual *worship* of Jesus (cf. Acts 13: 2) was a smooth and perhaps not even conscious process; there is no evidence, he says, of anybody in the earliest Christian community contesting it. He concludes that 'the role which Jesus played in the Christian religion from the beginning was such as to cause him to be treated as God in worship'.²³

²⁰ R. Bauckham, 'Jesus, Worship of', *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), iii. 812. See also L. W. Hurtado, 'Pre-70 C.E. Jewish Opposition to Christ Devotion', *JTS* 50: 1 (April 1999), 36.

²¹ The hymn from Phil. 2. in particular, witnesses to the way in which early Christians viewed the crucified and exalted Jesus as meriting the adoration of the universe. In *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2000). Geza Vermes has recently suggested that a later, anonymous copyist inserted this hymn into the text of the letter (pp. 78–9)—a proposal which enjoys no support from the New Testament MS evidence.

²² Hurtado, 'Pre-70 C.E. Jewish Opposition', 5–6, 10.

²³ 'Jesus, Worship of', 815.

All this despite the fact that the earliest Christians were Jews, people whose rigid monotheism and antipathy to worship of any other gods besides the Lord was perhaps their defining religious characteristic. Indeed, the New Testament church did not see itself as backing away from monotheism; in 1 Corinthians 8: 4–6 Paul accepts the classic *Shema* of Judaism (Deut. 6: 4), but interprets the monotheism of the Christian community as including the lordship of Jesus. And in the Book of Revelation, Jesus is considered worthy of divine worship because worship of Jesus can be included in worship of the one God (Rev. 5: 8–12). Worship of Jesus *was* worship of (not a competitor to God but) God.

Next, a question: if Bauckham is correct that worship of Jesus was primitive in the Christian community, *why* is this the case? There appear to be two main possibilities. First, perhaps the early church worshipped Jesus because social, economic, liturgical, polemical, or other sorts of needs and pressures that the early Christians faced pushed them in that direction. That is, the early church made up the idea that Jesus was divine. Second, perhaps they worshipped Jesus at least in part because Jesus himself implicitly encouraged, instructed, or allowed them to do so.²⁴ That is, Jesus himself was conscious of being divine and implicitly communicated that fact, by his words and deeds, to his followers.

Interestingly, the Synoptic Gospels, and especially Matthew, opt for the second alternative. That does not settle the case, because for now we are accepting the methodology and conclusions of some of the radical critics, and many of them regard Matthew's Gospel as an unreliable guide to the life of Jesus. Still, Matthew commonly uses one or another form of the word *proskynesis* (obeisance, prostration before someone in worship) in relation to Jesus. Jesus is worshipped by the wise men from the East (2: 2, 11), by the disciples in the boat (14: 33), by Mary Magdalene and the other Mary after the resurrection (28: 9), and by the eleven disciples on the mountain (28: 17). Bauckham argues that 'Matthew's consistent use of the word *proskynein* and his emphasis on the point show that he intends a kind of reverence which, paid to any other human, he would have regarded as idolatrous'.²⁵

Let's now look at a few Synoptic texts that are accepted as authentic by people like Bultmann, Perrin, and the members of the Jesus Seminar. Even in limiting ourselves in that way, I believe a probable case can be made that Jesus implicitly taught his own divinity.

But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. (Luke 11: 20: par. Matt. 12:28)

Bultmann enthusiastically accepted the authenticity of this statement from Jesus.²⁶ In it, Jesus is clearly claiming to be exhibiting in his exorcisms the

²⁴ I say 'at least in part' since Jesus' resurrection from the dead and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (both of which need, of course, to be independently investigated) also fed into the new faith and practice of early Christians.

²⁵ 'Jesus, Worship of', 813.

²⁶ R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans, John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 162.

eschatological power of the finger of God. Note the parallel to Exodus 8: 19, where the Egyptian magicians confess their inability to duplicate the plague of gnats, and declare, 'This is the finger of God.' Jesus is claiming to be acting as the agent through which the reign of God, with all God's power, enters history.

On a different vein, notice:

Listen to me, all of you, and understand; there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. (Mark 7: 14–15; par. Matt. 15: 10–11; Thomas 14: 5)

This text, which Perrin accepts as authentic²⁷ and which the Jesus Seminar rates pink ('Jesus probably said something like this'²⁸), is remarkable in the authority that Jesus is taking upon himself to relativize and de-emphasize Jewish dietary law. Jesus is in effect abolishing the divinely given food laws; that is, he is dismantling one of the major barriers between Jews and Gentiles that God was understood to have erected. Jesus is saying that in the light of his own presence in the world, a radically new attitude toward religion is required. Along the same lines, notice this statement (again coloured pink by the Jesus Seminar):

The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is Lord even of the sabbath. (Mark 2: 27–8; par. Matt. 12: 8; Luke 6: 5)

Here again Jesus is taking upon himself the authority to reinterpret the teachings of Moses in a radically new way. Even more dramatically, notice this text (accepted as authentic by Perrin and coloured pink by the Jesus Seminar):

Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead (Matt. 8: 22; par. Luke 9: 59)

where Jesus is clearly opposing and correcting the Mosaic Law. Proper burial, especially of one's relatives, was one of the most sacred duties in Palestinian Judaism (cf. Gen. 50: 5–6; Lev. 21: 2–3; Tobit 4: 3); this duty took precedence over study of the Torah, Temple service, circumcision rites, and even reciting the *Shema* (Megillah, 3b; Berakath 3: 1). Accordingly, Jesus was declaring that the need for people immediately and unconditionally to become his disciples took precedence even over the solemn responsibility to bury one's own father.

It would be helpful to ask at this point what sort of first-century Jew would take upon himself the authority to set aside requirements of the Mosaic law and replace them with his own teachings? It seems that Jesus' view of his own

²⁷ N. Perrin. *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press; New York: Harper & Row, 1967). 149–50.

²⁸ Robert Funk *et al.*, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 36, 69. This work in collaboration came from the Jesus Seminar, a group of biblical scholars led by R. Funk and J. D. Crossan, who met mainly in Sonoma (California) and voted on the authenticity of the Gospel material: a red bead for what sounded to them 'Definitely from Jesus', a pink bead for 'May well be', a grey for 'Doubtful', and a black for 'Definitely not'.

authority was such that he took the duty to follow him as a far more urgent task than burying one's father. Gruenler pointedly asks. 'Who could possibly make such an offensive and insensitive statement except one who is absolutely convinced that following him is worth more than anything else in the world?'²⁹ In other words, it is probable that Jesus considered himself to be divinely authoritative.

Notice also the new attitude toward enemies, sins, and the forgiveness of sins that Jesus introduced. (I am not here speaking of Jesus' taking upon himself the authority to forgive sins; we shall discuss that point later.) Most famously, note:

You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'. (Matt. 5: 43–4; par. Luke 6: 27, 35)

The 'love your enemies' piece of this text is coloured red by the Jesus Seminar; they are suspicious of the rest of it (it is either black or gray); but Perrin accepts the whole antithesis as authentic. The point is that those who were once considered unforgivable enemies (Gentiles, outcasts, sinners, etc.) are now, in the light of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God in Jesus, seen as recipients of God's love and forgiveness, and as worthy participants in table-fellowship in the kingdom of God. Jesus is again apparently taking upon himself the authority to reorder religious life, in this case around the principles of love and forgiveness. We see this same point more fully and dramatically in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11–32; coloured pink by the Jesus Seminar). Gruenler comments: 'Only one who is conscious of exercising divine privileges (or is mad) could assume the right to proclaim the eschatological presence of the forgiveness of sins with such authority. . . . [Jesus] is consciously speaking as the voice of God on matters that belong only to God, and accordingly is creating a new and decisive Christology which far exceeds in claim to authority the messianic models of Judaism.'³⁰ Jesus' idea seems to have been that salvation has arrived in his own person and ministry, that salvation for humans is to be understood in terms of his own person and mission, and that he can speak with divine authority. Jesus had an extraordinarily high opinion of himself and his mission.

Notice finally the parable of the wicked tenants in Mark 12: 1–9 (coloured gray by the Jesus Seminar but pink in the *Gospel of Thomas* (65: 1–7)).³¹ The owner of the vineyard unsuccessfully sends two employees to collect the harvest, and then finally sends his son, whom the tenants recognize as the son and heir, and then murder him. Clearly, the son in the parable allegorically stands

²⁹ *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels*. 61.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 46.

³¹ As they themselves admit in their commentary on this text, the members of the Seminar were bothered by the allegorical aspect of the parable in its Synoptic versions, with its obvious application to Jesus (= the son) himself. Funk *et al.* *Five Gospels*, 101.

for Jesus himself, who is different from and superior to God's previous emissaries (the prophets), and who is indeed God's son and heir.

Now I am not claiming that Bultmann, Perrin, Funk, Crossan, *et al.* accept my interpretations of these texts. Doubtless they do not. My claim is simply that they consider these statements from Jesus to be authentic or probably authentic, and that from these texts alone a very high Christology can be inferred.³² That is, a probable case can be made that Jesus implicitly taught his own divinity. Perhaps then one reason for the existence of worship of Jesus in the primitive Christian community is that Jesus himself expected and accepted it.

V

Let me now proceed to the second stage of my argument that premise (1) is true, that Jesus implicitly taught his own divinity. By the use of five sub-arguments, I will try to prove not just the possibility that Jesus implicitly taught his own divinity, but its actuality. Again, I will strive to avoid ahistorical use of the Gospel texts, but I will no longer limit myself to texts accepted as authentic by radical critics. Some of the sub-arguments will at this point sound familiar, but the slightly more relaxed methodology just mentioned will allow some new points to be made.

Let me then discuss five reasons why Jesus can be said to have implicitly claimed to be divine. No one reason constitutes, in and of itself, a convincing argument. There is no 'smoking gun' on this issue. What we do find are various considerations which together, and together with points already made, constitute a powerful cumulative case argument in favour of premise (1). The best interpretation of the five considerations that I am about to discuss—so I am arguing—is that Jesus did indeed implicitly view himself as divine.

First, Jesus assumed for himself the divine prerogative to forgive sins (see Mark 2: 5, 10; Luke 7: 48). Now, all human beings as moral agents own the prerogative to forgive sins *that have been committed against them*, but only God (or God incarnate) can *forgive sins*. Some have objected to this point. John Hick, for

³² Beyond question, the interpretation of all these texts, especially those that bear on the Jewish law, is controversial. Vermes for example interprets the sayings about the sabbath, the dietary laws, and the antitheses ('but I say to you . . .') as entailing no high claims for Jesus' personal identity; they are, he says, the kinds of statements that could have been made by Jewish teachers of his time (*Changing Faces of Jesus*, 196–7). Yet some of the evidence to which Vermes points comes from rabbis who lived one or two centuries later. Besides, the more one portrays Jesus as religiously 'normal' and not scandalously offensive, the more puzzling becomes the opposition that led to his crucifixion. The present chapter attempts to sketch the various steps in the MBG argument. For a full discussion of the key texts about Jesus and the Jewish law, see the work of such scholars as J. D. G. Dunn, E. P. Sanders, and the earlier Vermes, as well as the data supplied by commentaries on Matthew, Mark, and Luke from such writers as J. A. Fitzmyer, R. A. Guelich, D. Hagner, and J. Nolland.

example, argues that Jesus did not usurp God's prerogatives, but only 'pronounced forgiveness, which is not the prerogative of God, but of the priesthood'.³³ But this is hardly a convincing argument. For one thing, it concedes part of the point at issue, namely, that Jesus was usurping prerogatives that were not his. He was a layman, not of the priestly tribe, and was forgiving sins outside what were understood to be the divinely established means of obtaining forgiveness. More importantly, there are several texts that cannot be reconciled with Hick's argument. Note the story of the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2: 1–12. There is no evidence here on the part of the paralytic of any of the religious acts normally requisite for forgiveness—no sorrow for his sins, confession, repentance, sacrificial acts at the temple, etc. This is surely the reason the scribes were so incensed when Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'. They said: 'Why does this fellow speak in this way? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' In other words, the violent reaction of the scribes belies Hick's interpretation of such texts.

Second, the intimate, almost blasphemous way Jesus addressed God (usually translated 'Abba, Father!'—something analogous to our English expression 'Papa') indicates at least a uniquely close relationship to God. I suspect the amazement caused by this novel way of speaking to God—whose name was sacred to first-century Jews—was the reason that the church remembered and imitated it (Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4: 6). Hick also objects to this point. 'Abba' was fairly commonly used of God in first-century Judaism, he claims, and simply meant 'father'; while Jesus certainly sensed that God was his Heavenly Father, this had nothing to do with incarnation.³⁴ But other scholars deny that there are any Jewish parallels to referring to God in prayer the way Jesus does; nobody has ever produced a convincing example of *Abba* being used of God in pre-Christian, first-century Judaism.³⁵ The argument that Jesus' use of *Abba* shows a consciousness on his part of a unique position in relation to God stands. Jesus very probably thought of himself as God's special son.³⁶

³³ J. Hick. *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 32. Here Hick quotes E. P. Sanders. *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 240.

³⁴ *Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 31, Hick is following the lead of James Barr at this point. See Barr's 'Abba Isn't "Daddy"', *JTS* 39 (1988), 28–47, and 'Abba, Father', *Theology* 91 (1988): 173–9. For a response to Barr, see G. D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 408–12.

³⁵ Thus Joachim Jeremias: 'Nowhere in the literature of the prayers of ancient Judaism . . . is this invocation of God as *Abba* to be found, neither in the liturgical nor in the informal prayers' J. Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 19. See also G. O'Collins. *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60–2, and J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), ii. 358–9, both of whom support Jeremias's conclusion.

³⁶ Ben Witherington sensibly discusses all the arguments and evidence, and supports the notion that Jesus' use of *Abba* in prayer was unique and indicated a relationship of intimacy with the Father. See his *Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 215–21.

Third, Jesus spoke ‘with authority’, not citing sources or precedents of famous rabbis. He was no mere prophet or religious teacher (as is so often asserted about him today); no such person would have acted and spoken with such independence of the Mosaic law as Jesus did. Note the way he quotes, and then corrects, the Mosaic teaching about divorce in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt, 5: 31–2: cf, Mark 10: 2–12). Jesus spoke, not as if he were speaking *on behalf of God* (he did not say, as the prophets had done, ‘Thus says the Lord’), but *as if he were divine*, delivering the truth to human beings. As J. A. T. Robinson said, ‘This is epitomized in his characteristic and distinctive form of address, “Amen, I say to you” ... While a pious Jew concluded his prayer with an “Amen” ... Jesus prefaces his words with an “Amen”, thus identifying God with what he would say.’³⁷ As Raymond Brown points out, nowhere in the Gospels does it say anything like, ‘The word of God came to Jesus.’ The idea instead seems to have been that he already had or even (in John’s terminology) *was* the word.³⁸ His words are true and binding because of his own personal position and authority; he is in a position to give the Law’s true meaning, to reveal God’s will.

Ernst Käsemann argues that Jesus’ ‘but I say to you’ language ‘embodies a claim to an authority which rivals and challenges that of Moses’.³⁹ The fact that Jesus claimed Moses-like authority, an authority to supervene all other authorities, has been noticed, and reacted to negatively, by contemporary Jewish scholars who write about Jesus. For example, Schalom Ben-Chorin says: ‘The sense of the unique, absolute authority that is evident from [Jesus’] way of acting remains deeply problematic for the Jewish view of Jesus.’⁴⁰ And Jacob Neusner states⁴¹ that Jesus’ attitude toward the Torah makes him want to ask: ‘Who do you think you are? God?’⁴² It is highly significant that Jesus assumed for himself the authority to reinterpret and even overrule the OT Law (see Matt. 5: 21–48; Mark 2: 23–8), again something no mere human being could do. Jesus considered his words as permanent and indestructible (Mark 13: 31). In short, Jesus did not think of himself as just another prophetic spokesperson for God: he spoke as if he were divine.

Fourth, even in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus said things that can sensibly be interpreted as implicit claims to divinity. I see no way of ruling out as inauthentic Jesus’ claim to be ‘the Christ, the Son of the Blessed’ (Mark 14: 61–2), which the high priest took to be blasphemy. Notice finally this claim, the so-called ‘Johannine thunderbolt’, which seems a kind of bridge from the Christology of the

³⁷ Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?*, 104.

³⁸ R. Brown, ‘Did Jesus Know He Was God?’, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15 (1988): 77.

³⁹ E. Käsemann, ‘The Problem of the Historical Jesus’, in id.. *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1964), 37.

⁴⁰ S. Ben-Chorin, *Jesus in Judaism* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus. 1970). 41. cited in Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 241.

⁴¹ In an interview about his book, *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus: An Intermillennial, Interfaith Exchange* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

⁴² Cited in Wright, ‘Jesus and the Identity of God’, 22.

Synoptics to the Christology of the Fourth Gospel: 'All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matt. 11: 27).⁴³ Here Jesus seems to be claiming to be the Son of God in a unique and exclusive sense, the only true and authoritative revelation of the Father.

Fifth, Jesus, the coming 'Son of Man', implicitly made two dramatic claims: first, that our relationship to him would determine our final status before God; second, that he himself would be the judge of all human beings at the end of history.⁴⁴ Both seem clearly to be claims to be standing in a divine role.⁴⁵

So Jesus apparently saw himself as having the right to act as God and do what God appropriately does. The argument in favour of this point does not depend on ahistorical readings of the Gospels, nor on the claim that the sayings cited from the Fourth Gospel above come directly from Jesus (though I believe that in substance they do).⁴⁶ Jesus implicitly claimed divine status. That is the best interpretation of the four considerations I have been citing. Accordingly, a strong case can be made that premise (1) of the MBG argument is true.

VI

Where then do we stand? Is the MBG argument a successful argument, or not? Can it be used as a convincing piece of Christian apologetics (as Lewis clearly thought it could), or not? The conclusion we reached earlier is that the argument, as outlined in steps (1)–(8), is valid. But of course that does not show much. The argument:

- (13) Everybody in Tibet believes in Jesus;
- (14) Bertrand Russell lives in Tibet;
- (15) Therefore Bertrand Russell believes in Jesus

is also a valid argument, but is obviously a rhetorically useless device for providing rational support for its conclusion.

⁴³ Witherington argues convincingly that these words are authentic. See *Christology of Jesus*, 221–8.

⁴⁴ See O'Collins, *Christology*, 60–2.

⁴⁵ There is a curious tribute to this argument from an unexpected source in George W. E. Nickelsburg's entry, 'Son of Man', in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vi. 149. He argues that Jesus could not have implied that he was the 'Son of Man', because that would mean (what Nickelsburg cannot accept) that he went around claiming to be the eschatological judge of all.

⁴⁶ A brief note about the Christology of the Fourth Gospel: it is often pointed out that alongside the texts such as those cited above that seem to indicate Jesus' oneness with God and equality with the Father, there are texts that point toward Jesus' dependence on the Father, who is greater than he (see 7: 16; 5: 19, 30–1; 14: 28). My only comment is that the best way to keep both sorts of texts theologically in view is the classic doctrine of the incarnation, where Jesus is both 'fully divine' and 'begotten of the Father'.

But is the argument *sound* (i.e. valid plus true premises)? Well, as we have seen, premise (2) is virtually beyond reproach; and while premises (3), (4), and (5) can be disputed, an excellent case can also be made for their truth. But premise (1), which I take to be the crux of the argument, not only can be but frequently is disputed, even by some who believe in the incarnation. I take it that the perceived weakness of premise (1) is the most important reason why the MBG argument has not often been used or defended by Christian theologians and exegetes (as opposed to a few apologists) since Lewis. But, as we have also seen, a strong (and, in my view, convincing) case can also be made in favour of premise (1), a case that does not depend on viewing the Gospels ahistorically. The MBG argument also seems immune to such informal fallacies as equivocation, question-begging, arguing in a circle, etc.

Whether the MBG argument is a successful argument accordingly depends on what 'success' for an argument amounts to. That is, it depends on what is taken to be the goal, purpose, or aim of the argument. And of course there are many quite different ways of envisioning the goal or purpose of the MBG argument (or indeed of any deductive argument). Suppose the goal of the MBG argument were *to convince all nonbelievers in the incarnation of Jesus to believe in it* or *to constitute an argument that rationally should convince all nonbelievers in the incarnation of Jesus to believe in it*. Then one must doubt that the MBG argument can count as successful. Few nonbelievers will be converted by it; no matter how hard we argue for the truth of premise (1) (or even premises (3), (4), or (5)), the nonbeliever can go on disputing it (or them). Indeed, it seems a nonbeliever in the incarnation can always say something like this: 'I do not know whether Jesus was mad, bad, honestly mistaken, or never said or implied that he was divine—after all, that was twenty centuries ago, and by now it's hard to tell—but one thing I do know is that he was not divine.'

But suppose the aim of the MBG argument is *to demonstrate the truth of the incarnation of Jesus* or (see the very end of Section I, above) *to demonstrate the rationality of belief in the incarnation of Jesus*. If one of these constitutes the true aim or goal of the MBG argument, then it will not matter whether nonbelievers in the incarnation can rationally reject one or another of the argument's premises.

My own view is that the last goal mentioned—to demonstrate the rationality of belief in the incarnation of Jesus—is the proper goal or aim of the MBG argument. And given what we have concluded in this chapter, I believe it succeeds in doing that very thing. Accordingly, the MBG argument can constitute a powerful piece of Christian apologetics.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ I would like to thank C. Stephen Evans, Daniel Howard-Snyder, Brian Leftow, Carey Newman, Gerald O'Collins, SJ, Alan Padgett, Dale Tuggy, and an anonymous referee from Oxford University Press for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

9

Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God? . . . or Merely Mistaken?*

Daniel Howard-Snyder

Apparently some of the Church Fathers argued for the divinity of Jesus on the grounds that if his claim to divinity was false, then he was a bad man; for if he was not divine, then either he was lying about who he was or he was mad, neither of which is true. This argument—sometimes called the *Mad, Bad, or God Argument*, or *MBG*, for short—is heard from contemporary Christian apologists in one form or another, perhaps most notably from C. S. Lewis:

I am trying to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. . . .

We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (and is) just what He said or else a lunatic, or something worse. Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend; and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God. God has landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form.¹

In this paper, I aim to assess the MBG argument. In section 1, I present a version of it that seems most perspicuous to me, followed by several stage-setting remarks, including two ground rules for assessing it. In section 2, I present the dwindling probabilities objection, a variation on an objection that Alvin Plan-

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¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1952, revised ed), 55–6.

tinga uses against traditional historical arguments for the great truths of the gospel.² In section 3, I drop the probabilistic machinery and grant every premise of the MBG argument but one, the premise that denies that Jesus was merely mistaken in his claim to divinity. I then assess the most compelling defenses of that denial and conclude that they fail. In section 4, I argue that we—or, at any rate, those who share my epistemic situation vis-à-vis that premise—should suspend judgment about it.

1. THE MBG ARGUMENT

The version of the MBG argument that I am interested in is this:

1. Jesus claimed, explicitly or implicitly, to be divine.³
2. Either Jesus was right or he was wrong.
3. If he was wrong, then either
 - (a.) he believed he was wrong and he was lying, or
 - (b.) he did not believe he was wrong but he was institutionalizable, or
 - (c.) he did not believe he was wrong and he was not institutionalizable; rather, he was merely mistaken.
4. He was not lying, i.e. a is false.
5. He was not institutionalizable, i.e. b is false.
6. He was not merely mistaken, i.e. c is false.
7. So, he was right, i.e. Jesus was, and presumably still is, divine.

Let me make four preliminary observations about this argument.

First, although the argument is deductively valid, its proponents affirm the main premises—1, 4, 5, and 6—on probabilistic grounds. In no small part, these grounds have to do with the New Testament texts, especially their reliability vis-à-vis the claims, character, and conduct of Jesus. The proponents of the MBG argument wisely avoid insisting on the divine authority of these texts in the context of defending its premises; if one would have to endorse their divine authority in order to accept the proffered grounds for affirming the main premises, the argument would lose much of its interest. And it certainly is not presented that way by its proponents. Rather, its proponents insist that, on

² See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 268–80.

³ On the difference between explicitly claiming that *p* and implicitly claiming that *p* see Stephen Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?” *The Incarnation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), eds S. Davis, D. Kendall, G. O’Collins, 221–45. Roughly, the idea is this. To explicitly claim that *p* is to sincerely assert ‘*p*’ or ‘*p* is true’ or ‘not-*p* is false’ and the like. One can implicitly claim that *p*, however, by explicitly claiming several things that entail *p*, or by explicitly claiming several things that only people who think *p* is true would explicitly claim, or by performing some action where the only people, or the only sensible people, who perform such actions believe *p*.

the basis of historical scholarship alone, the information gleaned from the New Testament, along with other relevant information, makes it likely that the main premises are true. So, the first ground rule is this: While considering what might be offered on behalf of the premises of the MBG argument (and while assessing objections to them, for that matter), we are not allowed to treat the biblical texts as divinely authoritative.

Second, premise 1 assumes that Jesus existed. I take it that the probability of this assumption, on the relevant information, is 1, or as close to 1 as to make no difference. I will also assume that *if* Jesus claimed to be divine, he claimed to be divine in a robust sense, one that a run-of-the-mill first-century orthodox Jew would attribute only to God. Those familiar with discussions of the MBG argument will notice that I have just ruled out the so-called *myth* and *guru* options.⁴ In doing so, I mean to display my prejudice that they are unworthy of serious consideration.

Third, most proponents of the argument present it as a trilemma: mad, bad, or God... Lord, liar, or lunatic. Hence the popular name of the argument, *the Trilemma*. My version is an explicit quadrilemma: mad, bad, God, or neither mad nor bad, but merely mistaken. By formulating the argument in this way I mean to display my conviction that the merely mistaken option has been unduly neglected by the proponents of the argument.

Fourth, consider the following claim by Stephen Davis, a proponent of the argument: "the MBG argument, properly understood, can establish the rationality of belief in the incarnation of Jesus".⁵ Davis does not mean to suggest that the MBG argument is the only or even the best argument for the divinity of Jesus; indeed, he does not even mean to imply that the rationality of belief in His divinity must find its source in argument at all. Rather, I take it, Davis means to claim that the MBG argument, properly understood, can be an *independent* and *sufficient* evidential basis for rational belief in the divinity of Jesus. What do I mean by "independent" here? I mean this. There are several lines of evidence that might enter into an assessment of the claim that Jesus was divine. His pre-resurrection miracles, his fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and his resurrection have, among other things, been emphasized by apologists. When I say that the MBG argument can be independent evidence for the divinity of Jesus, I mean that the MBG argument can be evidence for the divinity of Jesus *absent considerations such as these*. If we approach the argument in this way (as I shall), then we have a second ground rule for assessing it: While considering what might

⁴ The myth option is that Jesus never existed; the guru option is that Jesus claimed to be divine alright, but the divinity to which he laid claim was something every human being has in himself or herself, a "spark of the divine" or some such new-ageish thing.

⁵ Stephen Davis, "Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?" *The Incarnation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 223 and 245. Presumably, Davis means by "the incarnation of Jesus" the *divinity* of Jesus.

be offered on behalf of the premises of the MBG argument (and while assessing objections to them, for that matter), we are not allowed to appeal to independent evidence for Jesus' divinity.

At the outset, let me emphasize that even if the MBG argument fails to establish the rationality of belief in the divinity of Jesus, the considerations it points to might still play a part in a cumulative case for his divinity. In this paper, however, I am exclusively concerned with the argument as *independent* evidence that is *sufficient* to establish rational belief in the divinity of Jesus.

I turn now to the first objection. (Readers who have no interest in the probability calculus may turn directly to the second objection in section 3.)

2. DWINDLING PROBABILITIES

Suppose that the proper way to evaluate a probabilistic case for a proposition is to apply the probability calculus to our evidence for it. In the present case, that would involve determining the probability of

D. Jesus was (is) divine,

given our "background knowledge," which is what we take for granted, call it *K*. So the goal is to determine the probability of D given K, i.e. $P(D/K)$. Toward that end, the MBG argument offers us as evidence the conjunction of its four main premises:

C. Jesus claimed, explicitly or implicitly, to be divine.

\sim L. He was not lying.⁶

\sim I. He was not institutionalizable.

\sim M. He was not merely mistaken.

Let us call the conjunction of these premises *X*. I will assume that the $P(D/K \& X) = 1$, or so close to 1 as to make no difference. This assumption favors the proponent of the argument since it amounts to granting that if the main premises are true, then Jesus was divine.⁷ I will also assume that $P(D/K \& \sim X) = 0$, or so close to 0 as to make no difference. Although this assumption favors the critic of the argument, we must make it since to assume otherwise is to assume, among other things, that there is a significant chance—say, one in a thousand—that Jesus was divine even though he did not claim to be, or even though he was lying, or even though he was institutionalizable. Given

⁶ In this paper, I will use the symbol \sim , called *the tilde*, to abbreviate "it is false that"; the symbol $\&$, called *the ampersand*, to abbreviate "and"; the symbol $=$, called *the identity sign*, to abbreviate "is numerically identical with".

⁷ I will also assume that the four options are all-or-nothing categories and that they are mutually exclusive. This assumption favors the proponent of the argument since the more options there are, the more material there is to press the dwindling probabilities objection.

these two assumptions, the calculus tells us that to determine $P(D/K)$ we just need to determine the $P(X/K)$, and to do that, we just need to assign a value to each of these probabilities:

$$\begin{aligned} &P(C/K) \\ &P(\sim L/K \& C) \\ &P(\sim I/K \& C \& \sim L) \\ &P(\sim M/K \& C \& \sim L \& \sim I) \end{aligned}$$

To assign a value to $P(X/K)$, the calculus tells us to multiply these four values. That is,

$$P(X/K) = P(C/K) \times P(\sim L/K \& C) \times P(\sim I/K \& C \& \sim L) \times P(\sim M/K \& C \& \sim L \& \sim I).$$

Clearly enough, we cannot assign precise numerical values to these four probabilities; we can, however, assign rough numerical ranges which express that the probability of a proposition is very low, or low, or middling, or high, or very high, and the like. That is what I will do. Let us turn now to the first probability.

$P(C/K)$. What is the probability that Jesus claimed, either explicitly or implicitly, to be divine, given our background knowledge? Now, I am no expert on this matter and, unsurprisingly, the experts disagree. On one end of the spectrum, we have, for example, Craig Evans, who sums up a recent essay on Jesus' self-understanding in these words:

... [T]he belief in the deity of Jesus appears to be rooted in his teaching and activities and not simply in post-Easter ideas. This is probable, not only for reasons argued above [reasons having to do with Jesus' designation of Himself as 'the son of man'], but also because the affirmation of Jesus as Israel's Messiah required no confession of his divinity. That the awaited Messiah might possess divine attributes was a possibility, given what is said of him in I Enoch and his identification with the son of man figure in Daniel, but it was not a requirement. Popular expectation seems to have looked more for a Davidic-like figure who would drive the Romans from Israel and restore the kingdom along the lines of the classical period.

Had Jesus not claimed to be Israel's awaited Messiah, it is not likely that his disciples would have later said that he had. Easter alone would have provided no motivation to infuse the content of Jesus' teaching with messianism. ... [Furthermore, if] Jesus allowed his disciples to think of him as Israel's Messiah, but possessing no qualities of divinity or special relationship to God whereby divinity might reasonably be inferred, then why would the disciples introduce this element, when conventional messianism did not require it and strict, Jewish monotheism would not encourage it?

... In my judgement, the Gospels' presentation of Jesus' teaching and conduct as ultimately messianic and in places connoting divinity is compelling. The most plausible explanation of the Gospels as we have them and of the earliest Church's proclamation is that Jesus claimed to be Daniel's heavenly son of man figure through whom God would

defeat his enemies and bring about the everlasting kingdom. From this claim and from related teachings and actions the early Church rightly inferred Jesus' divinity. . . .⁸

What is important for my purposes about Evans' conclusion is not how he arrives at it but how he expresses it. Oversimplifying a bit, he concludes that Jesus *probably* regarded himself as divine, or that a *compelling case* can be made for this thesis, or that it is *the most plausible explanation* of the available data. These are not the words one would use if one thought it was virtually certain or even extremely likely that Jesus believed that he was divine. These are the words one would use if one thought there was a lot going for the thesis, that it was fairly likely, that its probability was in the range, say, of .7–.9.

I need not quote those who would scoff at Evans' judgement. Let's simply acknowledge that there are plenty of experts who are aware of all the historical material that Evans is aware of and yet who would say that the probability that Jesus claimed to be divine, either implicitly or explicitly, was virtually nil. And, of course, there are those in between. Let us be generous, however; let us suppose that Evans is right and that those who are glamorized by the popular media are wrong. Let us say that $P(C/K) = .7-.9$.

$P(\sim L/K\&C)$. What is the probability that Jesus was not lying, given our background knowledge and the proposition that he claimed, implicitly or explicitly, to be divine? While some readers of the Gospels are puzzled by some of the moral traits Jesus displays (e.g., in causing economic ruin by sending demons into a herd of swine or by threatening eternal punishment in a lake of fire), most come away with the impression that, on the whole, Jesus was compassionate and principled, not the sort of person who would lie for personal gain. Let us say, then, that it is very likely that Jesus did not lie about who he was, that $P(\sim L/K\&C) = .85-.95$.

$P(\sim I/K\&C\&\sim L)$. What is the probability that Jesus was not institutionalizable, given our background knowledge and the proposition that he claimed to be divine and was not lying? Albert Schweitzer famously defended the clinical sanity of Jesus from nineteenth-century detractors by arguing that they relied on material from the Gospels that was unhistorical and that they failed to acquaint themselves with the worldview in which Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries were embedded. Schweitzer concluded that

The only symptoms to be accepted as historical and possibly to be discussed from the psychiatric point of view—the high estimate which Jesus has of himself and perhaps also the hallucination at the baptism—fall far short of proving the existence of mental illness.⁹

⁸ Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Self-Designation 'The Son of Man' and the Recognition of His Divinity," *The Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), eds S. Davis, D. Kendall, G. O'Collins, 29–47. The quotation is from pages 46–7.

⁹ Albert Schweitzer, *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948 (1913)), translated by Charles R. Joy, 72.

Winfred Overholser, past president of the American Psychiatric Association, agrees with Schweitzer's overall conclusion but nevertheless suggests that the texts that Schweitzer deems historical are consonant with a diagnosis of paranoid psychosis, even if, as according to Schweitzer, Jesus did not develop ideas of injury and persecution and was able to modify his view of his vocation in a pragmatic and logical way.¹⁰

Others assume that the Gospels as they stand are historically accurate, at least to the extent of revealing Jesus' character and personality, and then argue, for example, as practicing psychiatrist O. Quentin Hyder does, that the "evidences from the gospel record, though far from complete, are sufficient to document that Jesus' patterns of thought, speech, behavior, and interpersonal relationships were not those of known patterns in people who are mentally ill," and that "any contention that Jesus was paranoid or delusional simply does not fit in with present day descriptions of such psychiatric disorders," and that "Jesus was not psychiatrically diagnosable as mentally ill".¹¹ Of particular importance to Hyder is the fact that the Gospels do not portray Jesus as exhibiting any of those symptoms that tend to accompany mental illnesses that involve delusions of grandeur. Indeed, quite the opposite is true. The Jesus of the Gospels, says Hyder, constitutes a paradigm of mental health.

Oddly enough, Hyder fails to mention, even in passing, textual evidence that works against his case. For example, the texts state that a great many eyewitnesses who were familiar with Jesus' teaching, activities, and reputation asserted that he was "raving mad" (John 10:19) and that he was "out of his mind" (Mark 3: 21). These included not only members of the common populace but members of his own family. If we take the Gospels at face value, such testimony must enter into the balance.

So, what should we say? Well, once more, let us be generous. Let us say that the probability that Jesus was not institutionalizable, given our background knowledge and the proposition that he claimed to be divine and was not lying, is very high; let us say that $P(\sim I/K\&C\&\sim L) = .85 - .95$.

$P(\sim M/K\&C\&\sim L\&\sim I)$. What is the probability that Jesus was not merely mistaken, given our background knowledge and the proposition that he claimed to be divine, was not lying, and was not institutionalizable? I will delve into this question more deeply in sections 3 and 4. For now, however, let's grant that it is very likely that Jesus was *not* merely mistaken, that $P(\sim M/K\&C\&\sim L\&\sim I) = .85 - .95$.

Given the above probability assignments, we are now in a position to determine the $P(X/K)$. It falls within the range .43-.77. Apprised of this fact, should we nevertheless say that the MBG argument establishes for us the rationality of

¹⁰ Winfred Overholser, "Foreword," *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus*, 15.

¹¹ O. Quentin Hyder, "On the Mental Health of Jesus Christ," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (1977), 3-12. The quotations are from pages 8, 9, and 11. This article is replicated as chapter 6, "Delusions or Grandeur?," in Jon A. Buell and O. Quentin Hyder, *Jesus: God, Ghost or Guru?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), 87-102.

belief in the divinity of Jesus? Clearly not, since it would be arbitrary of us to affirm any point within the proffered range. Instead, we should profess ignorance and suspend judgment about the matter. This is *the dwindling probabilities objection*.

No doubt proponents of the MBG argument will say that I have loaded the dice. I would remind them, however, that our ground rules tell us to assess the probabilities in question while regarding the texts only as historical sources of information and not as divinely authoritative. Moreover, even if the historical evidence for the main premises is as good as or better than the evidence for any comparable set of claims about any other figure in ancient history, it is still only historical evidence about persons, times, and events far removed from us. The probability ranges that I have correlated with “fairly high” and “very high” are generous, not stingy. If we assign values significantly higher than these we will, in effect, be treating the historical evidence for the claims, conduct, and character of Jesus on a par with the historical evidence for much more recent events and persons. That would be unwise.

If I am even approximately right in the assignment of probability ranges, then the dwindling probabilities objection constitutes something of an obstacle to affirming the MBG argument, at least for those who think that the application of the probability calculus in this sort of historical context is fitting and that belief in a proposition should be guided by the results of applying the calculus to the evidence for it. In what follows, I will take a much simpler and less contentious approach to assessing the MBG argument.

3. THE MERELY MISTAKEN OPTION: ASSESSING THE REASONS AGAINST IT

Suppose we affirm that Jesus claimed to be divine, that he wasn't lying, and that he wasn't institutionalizable; and suppose we do this without violating our ground rules. Then everything hangs on the merely mistaken option. In this section, I begin my assessment of that option by evaluating some strategies that have been used against it.

3.1 The Subsumption Strategy

The first strategy attempts to subsume the merely mistaken option under the institutionalizable option; the former reduces to or is just a not so cleverly disguised instance of the latter.

3.1.1 *Merely Mistaken, So Mentally Bad, So Lunatic*

Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli say that

... if Jesus wasn't really God, then he was still a bad man, even though sincere. He was not morally bad (he did not deliberately deceive people); he was mentally bad (he was deceived himself). A lunatic may not be wicked, but he is not much more trustworthy than a liar.¹²

Put formally, the argument here is this:

1. If Jesus was merely mistaken, then he was mentally bad.
2. If he was mentally bad, then he was a lunatic.
3. He was not a lunatic.
4. So, Jesus was not merely mistaken. (1–3)

What should we make of this argument?

I suggest that it equivocates on the term “mentally bad”. There is a sense in which anybody who has a false belief is mentally bad, and the more important the belief is, the more mentally bad one is in this sense. For example, early on in his career Adolf Hitler was mentally bad in this *non-clinical* sense, as we might call it. Not only did he have a false belief about the superiority of those of Aryan blood, this false belief—and its corollary, that the Jews were radically inferior—turned out to be monumentally significant, leading as it did to Nazi propaganda and policy-making that culminated in the Final Solution. And this non-clinical sense of the term “mentally bad” was applicable to Jesus as well, if he was merely mistaken. Believing you are divine when you are not is believing something importantly false; mistaking yourself, a mere creature, for the Creator is a profound mistake. So premise 1 is true, if we take “mentally bad” in this non-clinical sense. But in this non-clinical sense, premise 2 is false. Merely being wrong about something important, even something as important as whether one is divine, neither implies nor makes it likely that one is a lunatic, insane, deranged, or otherwise fit to be institutionalized. So premise 2 is false, if we understand “mentally bad” in the non-clinical sense.

On the other hand, one might use the term “mentally bad” to denote a condition that *is* properly described by the terms “lunacy,” “insanity,” “derangement,” and the like. If Kreeft and Tacelli mean to use this *clinical* sense of the term “mentally bad,” then premise 2 is certainly true; indeed, it is true by definition. But in this clinical sense of the term, premise 1 is false. Being mistaken about something important, even something as important as whether one is divine, neither implies nor makes it likely that one is a lunatic, insane, deranged, fit to be institutionalized. Indeed, premise 1 is arguably necessarily false. It could not follow from Jesus’ being merely mistaken that he was mentally bad, in the clinical sense, since to be merely mistaken is, as I have defined that position, to be mistaken but neither lying *nor institutionalizable*.

¹² Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 159.

I conclude that there is no univocal sense of the phrase “mentally bad” which, if used uniformly in the premises of the argument under discussion, renders premises 1 and 2 both true.

3.1.2 *Merely Mistaken, So Deluded, So Diagnosible*

Another version of the subsumption strategy appears in the following line of thought:¹³

1. If Jesus was merely mistaken, then he was deluded.
2. If Jesus was deluded, then He was diagnosably psychotic, melancholic, manic depressive, schizophrenic, or paranoid (i.e. he was institutionalizable).
3. Jesus was not diagnosable in these ways (i.e. he was not institutionalizable).
4. So, Jesus was not merely mistaken. (1–3)

Well, what should we make of this argument?

I suggest that it equivocates on the term “deluded.” The term “delusion” and its cognates can be used in a colloquial sense to mean, quite simply, to suffer from false belief, or to suffer from a persistent error of perception occasioned by false belief. In this *colloquial sense* of the term “delusion,” premise 1 is true. For if Jesus was merely mistaken, then he had a false belief. Moreover, he persistently saw himself as properly carrying out divine prerogatives like retracting Levitical law, forgiving sins, and instituting a way to be properly related to God; and these perceptions were rooted in his false belief that he was divine. So on the merely mistaken option, Jesus was deluded in the colloquial sense of the term. But to be deluded in the colloquial sense neither implies nor makes it likely that one is psychotic, melancholic, manic depressive, schizophrenic, or paranoid. To be sure, if Jesus was deluded in the colloquial sense, then his contact with reality was impaired. Anybody with a false belief or a systematic misperception of things has some sort of impairment that affects their contact with reality. But it is false that if Jesus was deluded in the colloquial sense of the term, then he was mentally ill, a lunatic, institutionalizable. That is, if the argument above uses the colloquial sense of “deluded,” then premise 2 is false.

The term “delusion” and its cognates can be used, however, in a technical sense, a sense that, by definition, denotes a condition that almost invariably accompanies psychosis, melancholia, manic depression, schizophrenia, and paranoia. In this *clinical sense* of the term, if Jesus was deluded, then he was mentally ill, a lunatic, institutionalizable. In the clinical sense of the term “deluded,” premise 2 is true or, at any rate, highly likely to be true. But Jesus’ being deluded in the clinical sense does not follow from his being merely mistaken. In the context of the MBG argument, to say that Jesus was “merely mistaken” is just to

¹³ See O. Quentin Hyder, “On the Mental Health of Jesus Christ,” and Jon A. Buell and O. Quentin Hyder, *Jesus: God, Ghost, or Guru?*

say that Jesus was mistaken but neither lying *nor institutionalizable*; but if he was not institutionalizable, he was not deluded in the clinical sense. Therefore, in the clinical sense of “deluded,” premise 1 is false.

I conclude that there is no univocal sense of the term “deluded” which, if used uniformly in the premises of the argument under discussion, renders premises 1 and 2 both true.

3.2 The “What If Someone You Knew Claimed To Be Divine?” Strategy

The strategy that I want to consider next can be found in C. Stephen Evans’ endorsement of the MBG argument. He writes:

... Jesus clearly used titles for himself that conveyed divinity. He called himself *Lord* and *Son of God*. He even used for himself the personal name of God, revealed by God to Moses, which was regarded by devout Jews as too sacred even to be pronounced. He forgave sins, not just sins against himself, but sins in which other people had been wrong, as if *he* had been the one offended. This makes sense only if all sin is regarded as an offense against God and if Jesus saw himself as God.

It is not easy to grasp how profoundly shocking these claims must have been to his contemporaries. The best way to understand this is simply to imagine someone you know today making similar claims. Imagine a neighbor who goes around preaching that you ought to repent, claiming to be God, and offering to forgive your sins. You would almost certainly regard him as insane. If you did not think him insane, you would certainly find him evil, a fraud who was probably out for power or money or both. The fact is you would find it impossible to be neutral about such a person. If you believed him, you would become a devoted follower. If you did not believe him, you would be repulsed.

This is precisely how people reacted to Jesus, and these reactions continue to be the only sensible ones. It makes no sense to regard such a man as a “simple moral teacher”. Either he is who he claims to be or he is a lunatic or something worse than a lunatic.¹⁴

What, exactly, is the line of thought here?

It appears to be an argument by analogy. Consider my neighbor, an elderly woman by the name of ‘Florence’, in the counter-to-fact situation of her claiming to be divine, implicitly or explicitly. In that situation, if I did not regard her as divine (and, despite her many virtues, I assure you that I would not), I would most certainly regard her as insane or evil, and not merely mistaken. Similarly for Jesus. Given his claims to divinity, if I did not regard him as divine (I do, but suppose I didn’t), I would most certainly regard him as insane or evil, not merely mistaken. Thus, for me to regard him as merely mistaken is no more sensible

¹⁴ C. Stephen Evans, *Why Believe?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996), 75. Evans is not alone in this line of thought. See, e.g., John W. Montgomery, *History and Christianity* (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 64, and Josh McDowell, *More than a Carpenter* (Tyndale House Publishers: Carol Stream, Illinois, 1987). A former president of the Society of Christian Philosophers tenaciously defended it in conversation.

than it would be for me to regard Florence as merely mistaken—which is to say that it is not sensible at all.

What should we make of this argument? It seems to me to be much less telling than it is popularly thought to be. Suppose that Jesus was possessed of matchless sagacity, as the proponent of the MBG argument and I both insist. That is, suppose that if you had gotten to know Jesus really well, you would have learned not only that he was possessed of “intellectual distinction,” to borrow G.K. Chesterton’s phrase, you would also have discovered that he never ever clearly displayed a moral feature that was incompatible with divinity. Now, either my neighbor Florence possesses such sagacity or she does not. Let us explore each option. Suppose I am convinced that she lacks it, as in fact I am. Consequently, when I take up Evans’ advice to imagine Florence going around preaching that I ought to repent, claiming to be God, and offering to forgive my sins, I imagine myself regarding her as morally suspect or, more likely, insane. However, when I imagine *Jesus* claiming to be divine, I imagine one whom I regard as possessed of unrivaled sagacity making the claim, in which case when I add that he was mistaken, I do not imagine inferring that he is insane or evil; rather, I hold constant his unrivaled sagacity and imagine inferring that he is merely mistaken. On the other hand, suppose that I’m convinced that Florence possesses Christ-like sagacity. Then when I take up Evans’ advice to imagine her claiming to be God and the like, I imagine one whom I regard as possessed of “intellectual distinction” and moral flawlessness making the claim, in which case when I add that she is mistaken, I get the same result that I get with Jesus: I imagine inferring that she is merely mistaken.

The problem with the analogy is that it holds only in the case in which Jesus is regarded as an ordinary human, or at least unsage-like. For the only case in which we would regard Jesus’ claims to divinity in the way in which we would regard our neighbors’ comparable claims—namely, as indicative of insanity or worse—is the case in which we regarded him as intellectually and morally defective in the way in which we believe *they* are. But neither I nor the proponent of the MBG argument regard Jesus in this way. We hold him in much greater esteem than that. When we hold Jesus’ sagacity constant in our comparison of him with our neighbors, either we will regard the cases as relevantly disanalogous (he is sagacious and they are not), or else we will regard the cases as relevantly analogous (he is sagacious and they are too), in which case we will regard both him and them as merely mistaken.

3.3 The Sagacity Strategy

Peter Kreeft assesses the MBG argument by way of a fanciful post-mortem dialogue between three characters, all of whom died on the same day in 1963:

Aldous Huxley, John F. Kennedy, and C.S. Lewis. (The latter represents Kreeft's own viewpoint.) At one point, Kreeft presents the MBG argument like this:

Lewis: There are only four possibilities. He [Jesus] is either God, or a bad man (blasphemous or insane), or a good man (a mere sage), or an ordinary man. . . . And you can't classify Jesus in any one of the other three categories.¹⁵

That's a good start. At least a variation on the merely mistaken option is on the table (Jesus was a good man, a mere sage).

Our question, then, is this: exactly why can't we classify Jesus in the category of "a good man (a mere sage)"? Kreeft's only discernible answer is contained in this short passage:

Lewis: Into which of the following three classes would you put him? Ordinary people, sages or pseudogods?

Kennedy: Sages, of course.

Lewis: No, for they do not claim to be God, and he does.

Kennedy: Hmmm. Suppose we try pseudogods?

Lewis: No, because they lack the wisdom, compassion and creativity that he has.

Kennedy: And not ordinary people, because. . .

Lewis: For both reasons. There is only one possibility left. How can it be avoided?

Kennedy: And that is?

Lewis: He is a sage, therefore to be trusted. And he claims to be God, therefore he is not just another human sage.¹⁶

What reason is offered here for rejecting the merely mistaken option? I have two suggestions.

3.3.1 "He Is a Sage, Therefore To Be Trusted"

My first suggestion focuses on Lewis' last speech, which suggests this argument:

1. Jesus was a sage.
2. If Jesus was a sage, then he was trustworthy.
3. So, Jesus was trustworthy. (1,2)
4. Jesus claimed to be divine.
5. If Jesus was trustworthy and he claimed to be divine, then he was not mistaken.
6. So, Jesus was not mistaken, and hence not merely mistaken. (3-5)

What should we think of the argument here?

¹⁵ Peter Kreeft, *Between Heaven and Hell* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 67.

¹⁶ *Between Heaven and Hell*, 64. Let us not be detained by the question of how the pseudogod option is supposed to fit into Kreeft's fourfold classification; and let us not fret over the consistency of Lewis' denying that Jesus is a sage, at the outset of the passage, and then affirming that he is a sage, at the end of the same passage.

I take it that we should be no more apt to accept premise 5 than to accept the proposition that if the Buddha was trustworthy and he claimed to be divine, then he was not mistaken, or that if Confucious was trustworthy and he claimed to be divine, then he was not mistaken, etc. But surely these other propositions are not reasonable to accept. That's because one can be trustworthy on many matters of the first importance and yet be mistaken about other equally weighty matters.

No doubt, many of us will insist that Jesus was not merely trustworthy, he was *perfectly* trustworthy; and, of course, if Jesus was perfectly trustworthy and he claimed to be divine, then he was indeed not mistaken. If we modify the argument accordingly, then, in order to retain validity, we will need to modify it like this:

- 1*. Jesus was a *perfect* sage.
- 2*. If Jesus was a *perfect* sage, then he was *perfectly* trustworthy.
- 3*. So, Jesus was *perfectly* trustworthy. (1*,2*)
4. Jesus claimed to be divine.
- 5*. If Jesus was *perfectly* trustworthy and he claimed to be divine, then he was not mistaken.
6. So, Jesus was not mistaken, and hence not merely mistaken. (3*–5*)

How should we assess this argument?

Well, first of all, notice that the phrase “perfect sage” in premise 1* means, in part, that one is perfectly trustworthy. Secondly, note that to be “perfectly trustworthy” means, in part, that one asserts only true things. Thus, premise 1* means, in part, that Jesus asserted only true things. But why should we suppose that Jesus asserted only true things? The only reason I know of is this: Jesus was divine. Now, I have no gripe against those who wish to assert that Jesus was divine. I do it routinely when I confess my faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. I do, however, have a gripe against those who use that assertion on behalf of a premise in the MBG argument.

3.3.2 “*The Last Man in the World to Suffer from that Intoxication*”

My second suggestion is that the passage from Kreeft contains the following argument:

1. If Jesus was a sage but not divine, then he did not claim to be divine.
2. Jesus claimed to be divine.
3. So, either Jesus was not a sage or he was divine. (1,2)
4. Jesus was a sage.
5. So, he was divine (and hence was not merely mistaken). (3,4)

The logic is impeccable and we are granting premise 2. Moreover, those considerations that (let us suppose) led us to reject the liar and lunatic options also lead us (let us suppose) to affirm premise 4. That leaves premise 1. Why should we accept it? Unfortunately, Kreeft is silent.

We might try to fill the gap by querying whether there is something about sagacity that is at odds with a *mere* (i.e. nondivine) sage claiming to be divine. The suggestion is common enough. G.K. Chesterton, for example, develops it at length when, after remarking on the subtlety and superiority of Christ's intellect as portrayed in the way he expressed his moral teaching, he writes:

... [T]his is the very last character that commonly goes with mere megalomania; especially such steep and staggering megalomania as might be involved in that claim [i.e. the claim to divinity]. This quality that can only be called intellectual distinction is not, of course, an evidence of divinity. But it is an evidence of a probable distaste for vulgar and vainglorious claims to divinity. A man of that sort, if he were only a man, would be the last man in the world to suffer from that intoxication by one notion from nowhere in particular, which is the mark of the self-deluding sensationalist in religion. . . .

... If Christ was simply a human character, he really was a highly complex and contradictory human character. For he combined exactly the two things that lie at the two extremes of human variation. He was exactly what the man with a delusion never is; he was wise; he was a good judge. What he said was always unexpected; but it was always unexpectedly magnanimous and often unexpectedly moderate. Take a thing like the point of the parable of the tares and the wheat. It has the quality that unites sanity and subtlety. It has not the simplicity of a madman. It has not even the simplicity of a fanatic. . . . Nothing could be less like this quality of seeing beyond and all round obvious things, than the condition of the egomaniac with the one sensitive spot on his brain. I really do not see how these two characters could be convincingly combined, except in the astonishing way in which the creed combines them. . . . Divinity is great enough to be divine; it is great enough to call itself divine. But as humanity grows greater, it grows less and less likely to do so. God is God, as the Moslems say; but a great man knows he is not God, and the greater he is the better he knows it.¹⁷

Philip Schaff, the eminent historian, joins Chesterton when he asks:

Is such an intellect—clear as the sky, bracing as the mountain air, sharp and penetrating as a sword, thoroughly healthy and vigorous, always ready and always self-possessed—liable to a radical and most serious delusion concerning his own character and mission?¹⁸

Schaff's answer: "Preposterous imagination!" C.S. Lewis, in a similar vein, writes:

The historical difficulty of giving for the life, sayings and influence of Jesus any explanation that is not harder than the Christian explanation, is very great. The discrepancy between the depth and sanity and (let me add) shrewdness of His moral teaching and the

¹⁷ G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), 247–49, a reprint of the edition published by Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, 1925.

¹⁸ Philip Schaff, *The Person of Christ* (New York: American Tract Society, 1918), 97.

rampant megalomania which must lie behind His theological teaching unless He is indeed God, has never been satisfactorily got over. Hence the non-Christian hypotheses succeed one another with the restless fertility of bewilderment.¹⁹

I think it is helpful to read Chesterton, Schaff, and Lewis as claiming that the merely mistaken option must combine two elements—first, a mistaken claim to divinity and, second, an unmatched sagacity—the combination of which is “preposterous” and “unconvincing.” For as Chesterton puts it, “Divinity is great enough to be divine; it is great enough to call itself divine. But as humanity grows greater, it grows less and less likely to do so.” The sage, of course, exemplifies humanity at its greatest; so the sage is “the last man in the world” to make a “vulgar and vainglorious claim to divinity.” He is “the last man in the world to suffer from that intoxication.”

What should we make of this argument for premise 1? Well, I do not know why we would need to impugn a mere sage with vulgarity and vanity just because he incorrectly claimed to be divine. Remember, we are assuming that the claim is fully sincere. So let us drop the rhetorical extravagance, in which case we can formulate the argument crisply like this:

- 1a. If Jesus was a sage but not divine, then he was wise enough to know that he was not divine.
- 1b. If Jesus was wise enough to know that he was not divine, then he did not claim to be divine.
- 1. So, if Jesus was a sage but not divine, then he did not claim to be divine. (1a, 1b)

The argument is valid and 1b is true; but 1a is no more plausible than its denial. Let me explain.

If Jesus was a non-divine sage, then either

- Jesus was a non-divine sage who *possessed* sufficient reason to think he was divine,

or

- Jesus was a non-divine sage who *lacked* sufficient reason to think he was divine.

To be sure, if Jesus was a non-divine sage who lacked sufficient reason to think he was divine, then he would be wise enough to know that he was not divine. It is false, however, that if Jesus was a non-divine sage who possessed sufficient reason to think he was divine, then he would be wise enough to know that he was not divine. Indeed, quite the opposite is true. If Jesus was a non-divine sage who possessed sufficient reason to think he was divine, then his “intellectual distinction” would naturally lead him to think he was divine. So, premise 1a is true only

¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 113.

if Jesus lacked sufficient reason to think he was divine. But why should we suppose that Jesus lacked sufficient reason to think he was divine?

Kreeft and Tacelli suggest that a merely human Jesus could not have believed himself divine since he was a Jew and “No Jew could sincerely think he was God”.²⁰ What should we make of this familiar idea? Would Jesus’ first-century orthodox Jewish theology have precluded his thinking that he was divine—if in fact he was *not* divine? Perhaps it would have, but, if so, I do not see why. Suppose he was who he claimed to be; suppose he *was* divine, as I believe he was (and is). In that case, he had sufficient reason to think he was divine. Whatever that reason was, why couldn’t it, or something similar to it in epistemically relevant respects, be duplicated for one who was *not* divine? I don’t see why it could not. But if it were duplicable, then a first-century orthodox Jew—even one as sagacious as I believe Jesus was—could mistakenly think he was divine.

Here is another reason to suppose that Jesus lacked sufficient reason to think that he was divine, if he was not divine yet sane: if Jesus was not divine yet sane, as the merely mistaken option holds, then he would believe that he was not omniscient; at any rate, at least he would have a doubt about it. But in that case, he would have a defeater for his belief in his own divinity, since divinity requires omniscience and omniscience is incompatible with doubt about omniscience. Thus, if Jesus was not divine yet sane, he could have no better than *defeated* reason for his belief in his own divinity, which is hardly *sufficient* reason. What should we make of this argument?²¹

My main worry about this argument is that *I* have to suspend judgment about at least one of its premises. That’s because I believe that Jesus was the Son incarnate, and the only two models for the Incarnation that I understand both imply that at least one of the premises is false. Of course, for all I know, those two models are false; but then again, for all I know, one of them is correct. It would be unwise for *me* to defend an argument for the divinity of Jesus at the cost of rejecting the only two models of the Incarnation that I understand. So I suspend judgment.

The two models I have in mind are the kenotic model and the two-minds model. Kenoticism denies the premise that divinity requires omniscience since, according to the model, Jesus was fully divine but not omniscient. He was, at best, omniscient; this latter property, not omniscience, is essential to divinity. If we adjust the argument under discussion so that it is compatible with kenoticism, it then has the false premise that omniscience-unless-incarnate is incompatible with doubt about omniscience-unless-incarnate. According to the two-minds model, Jesus was one person with two minds, one of which was divine and the

²⁰ Kreeft and Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 161. Of course, Christians believe that at least one Jew could sincerely think he was God, i.e. Jesus. Presumably Kreeft and Tacelli meant, “No Jew *who wasn’t* God could sincerely think he was God”.

²¹ I am indebted to my student, Daniel Jeffery, for bringing this argument to my attention, and to Michael Murray for insisting that I address it.

other of which was human. While the divine mind had full access to the contents and experiences of the human mind, the human mind lacked access to the divine mind, except as the divine mind permitted it. One of the advantages of this model is supposed to be that it shows how one and the same person can be omniscient while genuinely engaging in human development, as Jesus is supposed to have done. Suppose that this advantage is real. Then, on the model and contrary to the argument under discussion, Jesus could have been omniscient even if he had doubts about it.

Those who are not committed to the Incarnation will not have the reason that I have for suspending judgment about the argument under discussion. Perhaps, however, they will have this reason: it is false that if Jesus mistakenly believed that he was divine and yet was sane, then he would believe that he was not omniscient or at least have a doubt about it. That's because his reasons for believing that he was divine could have been sufficiently compelling, given his cultural circumstances, that he would have had a doubt about it only if he had been insanely under-confident or pathologically skeptical, neither of which belongs to a picture of matchless sagacity. More judiciously, one might argue for suspension of judgment about the matter. For all we can say with any confidence, Jesus' reasons for believing that he was divine could have been sufficiently compelling, given his cultural circumstances, that he would have had a doubt about it only if he had been insanely under-confident or pathologically skeptical. I'll try to put more flesh on the bones of this line of thought in section 4 below.

3.4 The “It Is Hard to See How” Strategy

Consider the following words from Stephen Davis:

Perhaps Jesus claimed to be divine, was neither mad nor bad, but was *sincerely mistaken* about the matter. . . . Now the defender of the MBG argument will surely not want to claim that it is logically or even causally impossible that Jesus was sincerely mistaken in claiming to be divine. If we tried hard enough, we probably could cook up a scenario in which a sane and moral person mistakenly took himself to be divine. . . . But it is hard to see how a sane and good person could be sincerely mistaken in holding the extremely bizarre belief that she is divine (assuming she uses the word ‘divine’, as Christians normally do in this context, i.e. as indicating a robust identity with the omnipotent, omniscient, loving creator of the world). There *is* something extremely odd about the notion of a sincere, good, and sane person mistakenly claiming to be God.²²

The central idea here is that it is hard to see how Jesus could be sane and good but sincerely mistaken about who he claimed to be since, in general, “it is hard to see how a sane and good person could be sincerely mistaken in [believing] she is divine.”

²² Stephen Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?” 224–5.

Let's try to get a bit clearer about what Davis is up to here. He says that we are faced with a certain sort of difficulty. We have a hard time seeing something. From this he infers, presumably, the implausibility or improbability of the merely mistaken option. But what, *exactly*, does Davis think we have a hard time seeing? A certain possibility, of course; specifically, *how* a good, sane, sincere person *could* mistakenly claim to be divine. But what *sort* of possibility does he have in mind? He says that he does "not want to claim that it is logically or even causally impossible that Jesus was sincerely mistaken in claiming to be divine." So he has neither physical nor logical possibility in mind. But then, what sort of possibility *does* he have in mind?

Perhaps *epistemic possibility*. A proposition or state of affairs p is epistemically possible just in case p is consistent²³ with what we take for granted (or most of us, or most of us in some specified context, e.g. most of us who are students of the MBG argument—I'll leave the qualification tacit from here on out). And, naturally enough, p is *not* epistemically possible just in case it is inconsistent with what we take for granted. Thus, the proposition that a sane and good person is sincerely mistaken in believing he is divine is epistemically possible just in case that proposition is consistent with what we take for granted. And, the proposition that a sane and good person is sincerely mistaken in believing he is divine is not epistemically possible just in case that proposition is inconsistent with what we take for granted.

Our question, then, is this: is it hard to see how it is epistemically possible for a good, sane, sincere person to mistakenly claim to be divine? Is it hard to see how the proposition that a good, sane, and sincere person mistakenly claims to be divine is consistent with what we take for granted? To be sure, seeing how this could be won't be like having a Cartesian "clear and distinct idea" about, say, the essence of body; and it won't be like discerning Locke's "bright aura," the numinous glow that attends reflective attention on $2 + 1 = 3$ and other obvious necessities. But to insist on such standards here would be unreasonable. Rather, to see how a good, sane, and sincere person might mistakenly claim to be divine it suffices to tell "just so" stories, stories that, on reflection, look to be consistent with what we take for granted and lack that "cooked up" quality that Davis detests.

4. THE MERELY MISTAKEN OPTION: HOW IT (EPISTEMICALLY) MIGHT HAVE BEEN

The merely mistaken option, at its best, has Jesus possessing sufficient reason (or, more broadly, grounds) for thinking that he was divine, or so I suggested above.

²³ A proposition p is *consistent* with a proposition q =_{df} an explicit contradiction cannot be derived from their conjunction, using first-order logic and synonyms alone.

In the present section, I will tell two “just so” stories that seem to have this feature. I don’t claim, however, that they are likely or more likely than not or, for that matter, even logically possible. I claim only that, on reflection, they are not silly and they seem to be consistent with what we properly take for granted in the context of assessing the MBG argument.

4.1 The Beelzebub Story

The first story I have in mind might be called *the Beelzebub Story*. Its main plot goes like this:

The one and only God, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen, created angels before He created humans. Those angels were created with astounding capacities, and both the power to exercise them for the sake of God’s glory and their own fulfillment as angels, and the power to refrain from exercising them toward that end. A great proportion of them refrained; they spurned their Creator and led by Satan, the Prince of Darkness, made it their goal to ruin God’s creatures. That goal remains intact to this day. One of the ways in which Satan tries to ruin God’s creatures is to deceive human beings, to trick them into worshipping not the one, true God, but a mere creature. He has discovered that one of the most effective ways to do this is to masquerade as an angel of light, as St. Paul observed; but the *most* effective deception involves getting a man to masquerade as God Himself. Toward that end, Satan duplicates for a mere man the good grounds that a man would or might have for believing he was divine, if he were divine. He then does his best to orchestrate things so that, well, something akin to the events of the New Testament unfold. This, in fact, is what happened to Jesus. The rest is history. Satan had no idea that things would work so well.

What should we make of this simple story? Is it consistent with what we take for granted? Does it shed some light on how a sane and good person—in this case Jesus—could be sincerely mistaken in believing that he is divine?

Well, at best, the Beelzebub Story is only of use to those who are, at a minimum, open to theism and the Satan tradition. I count myself as a member of this audience. In the present subsection (4.1), I will speak only to those who share this openness. In the next subsection (4.2), I will speak to a broader audience.

We might object that the Beelzebub Story is inconsistent with what we take for granted since God would not let such a horrible thing happen. Presumably, those words will make it only halfway out of our mouths. For although God might well impose some limits on the deceptive power of Satan, the way the world is strongly suggests that this isn’t one of them. God lets some pretty horrible things happen, in general; and among them is letting people be deceived about matters of fundamental importance for a proper relationship with Him, even through no fault of their own. The Beelzebub Story is simply an instance of this sort.

We might object that the Satan could not duplicate for a mere man the good but fallible grounds that a man would or might have for believing he was divine if he were indeed divine.

There are two questions here. First, what might such good grounds be like? Second, are they duplicable? I submit that *if* there are strong but fallible grounds for supposing that one is divine (something that is in this respect like, say, sensory experience), then there is no impediment to Satan duplicating them in a mere man. So what might strong but fallible grounds for a man to believe he is divine be like?

The Beelzebub Story can be developed to answer this question. Central to that development is the claim that Satan could make it look to Jesus and others that, e.g., Jesus raised a man from the dead and performed various other miracles of the sort we find in the pre-resurrection narratives. But perhaps that would not be good enough reason for a man to suppose that he was divine. Non-divine prophets, after all, could perform miracles, and even raise men from the dead! What more would be enough?

Here's one suggestion, call it the *What-It's-Like Addition* to the Beelzebub Story. There is such a thing as what it is like to be divinity incarnate, a distinctive way of experiencing the world. What it's like to be divinity incarnate is like what it's like to be a male person in that one could experience what it's like to be male, that is, have a distinctively male perspective on the world, and yet not be male, although if one experiences it, that is, has that perspective, that's adequate grounds to think that one is male. If what it's like to be divinity incarnate is like this, i.e. fallible but sufficient grounds for believing that one is divine, then, if one had it, it might well be sufficient reason to believe that one was divine, especially if it were backed up by (what appeared to be genuine but what were in fact satanically-produced) signs and wonders. I see no reason why Satan could not duplicate for a mere man such a perspective.

Here's a second suggestion, call it the *Abba Addition* to the Beelzebub Story. There is such a thing as having direct, close-up experiential contact with God. Moreover, there is such a thing as what it would or might be like if God *were* to vouchsafe, through a series of communications and confirmations in the context of such intimacy, that one was divine. Of course, on the Beelzebub Story, God does no such thing, but He permits satanic subterfuge of the relevant sort: He permits Satan, for example, to make it *seem abundantly clear* to Jesus that he enjoyed intimacy with God the Father, Abba; and He permits Satan to make it *seem abundantly clear* that, in and through that experience, Jesus bore a special relationship to God the Father, a relationship adequately expressed by the words "unique Son of God". Of course, this complex of experiential grounds is not infallible; one could have it and yet fail to be in the relationship it conveys. Nevertheless, like virtually any other experiential grounds, its fallibility does not preclude its being adequate grounds, especially if it were confirmed by the performance of "miracles," as the Beelzebub Story supposes that it was.

A third suggestion consists in the *combination* of the What-It's-Like and Abba Additions. (A fourth adds to the combination the main lines of the Messianic Story sketched below.)

Perhaps the reader will scoff at the Additions I have suggested. My experience has been that such a response is rooted in the thought that, as a matter of necessity, a sane and good man could have sufficient reason to believe that he is divine *only if* he *is* divine. Sufficient reason for believing in one's own divinity must be infallible. In the second part of section 3.2.2, I rejected two arguments for this claim and I am aware of no others that are more plausible than them. So I'm left wondering why we should suppose that sufficient reason for a sane and good man to believe that he is divine is, as a matter of necessity, infallible? It isn't just obvious that this is the case. Nor does it have the feel of something that we properly take for granted. So why?

Consider the matter like this. If we suppose that sufficient reason for a sane and good man to believe that he is divine must be infallible, are we not supposing that we are very well acquainted with what it's like to be divinity incarnate and what, on the Christian view of things, Jesus' experience of God the Father was like? In fact, aren't we supposing that we are so well acquainted with this perspective and experience that we properly regard it as infallible? It seems so. But does anybody *really* think that they are in a position to make that judgment? Proponents of the MBG argument who think that they are familiar with such matters have some explaining to do, to say the least.

4.2 The Messianic Story

Here's another way to cash out the merely mistaken option, this time in a way that's consistent with naturalism, and hence the views of a broader audience than that to which the Beelzebub Story might appeal. Call it *the Messianic Story*:

Jesus had sufficient reason, or at any rate, what counted as sufficient reason in first-century Palestine, to believe He was the Anointed One of the line of David, the King of the Jews, and, in this Davidic sense, the Messiah, Messiah ben David. Apparently, he wasn't alone. Plenty of others both before and after Jesus thought of themselves as Messiah, and many, many more agreed with them. When each of their bids to overthrow Rome failed, more candidates and their followers were waiting in the wings.

After Jesus came to believe he was Messiah, he continued his practice of reading the Jewish Scriptures closely, where he found hitherto undiscovered nuances and suggestions that led him to a fusion of ideas that was extraordinarily shocking. For example, he noticed that "the child" of Isaiah 9:6—who will be "born to us," that is, born to Israel, and upon whose shoulders the government will rest; the child whom every Second Temple Jew regarded as Messiah—is described as *el gibber*. Jesus recognized

the ambiguity—*el gibber* can be read “Mighty Warrior” as well as “Mighty God”—but he reasoned against the traditional view according to which it meant “Mighty Warrior”. After all, the child is also designated, in the same verse, “Prince of Peace,” and that title is more at odds with “Mighty Warrior” than “Mighty God”. Moreover, this interpretation made better sense of “Eternal Father,” which was applied to “the child” in the same verse, a reading the tradition had subjugated with remarks about its being merely honorific. No, thought Jesus; the child, the kingly Messiah, born to Israel, is quite literally “Mighty God” and “Eternal Father”. But the child could not be *these* things unless . . . (and here the shock of the fusion must have been great indeed) . . . unless Messiah *is divine*.

Once the association of Messiah and divinity had surfaced, Jesus saw it expressed elsewhere in the Scriptures, for example in Psalm 45. Although the explicit theme there is the exaltation of the particular king whom the psalmist is addressing, a broader theme was recognizably implicit. Implicitly, thought Jesus, God was gesturing through the psalmist’s exaltation of the king before him toward another king, one whose dominion *really would* endure, Messiah ben David. And how was the kingly Messiah addressed? Not only as one who was “set above” his “companions” among men (v.7), but also as one who was *el gibber* (v.3) and *no less than God Himself* (v.6). After all, speaking of and to the kingly Messiah the psalmist proclaims, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.” To Jesus’ mind, this was Messiah and divinity fused again.

A third case: Jesus’ contemporaries took it that no human being was greater than David, the greatest of earthly kings. Jesus pointed out, however, that David himself declared, in Psalm 110:1, that “The LORD [Yahweh] said to *my* Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet’.” David here refers to *his own* Lord [Adonai], a term which Jesus and his contemporaries took to refer to Messiah. And Jesus saw that in calling Messiah his own Lord, David implied that he was Messiah’s inferior. What, then, is the best explanation of the twin fact that David is inferior to Messiah and yet no man is greater than David? The best explanation, Jesus inferred, was that Messiah was no mere man; he was divine as well. Again: Messiah and divinity fused.

A fourth, and final illustration. Like many of his contemporaries, Jesus took it that “the son of man” was commonly used in the Prophets to refer to Messiah. The son of man, Jesus saw in Daniel 7, was ushered into the presence of God Himself, the Ancient of Days, the Most High. But, as the LORD had told Moses: “No man shall see me and live” (Ex. 33:20). So the son of man, Messiah, sits on the LORD’s throne, and doubtless sees Him; but, no human can do that. Apparently, the son of man was no mere man, but divine as well. Fusion.

So Jesus thought that in some important sense the kingly Messiah was divine. But there is only one God, he reasoned. In some sense, then, there is one and only one God, yet, given the fusion of Messiah and divinity, there was some sense in which God was plural. Was there any precedence for this in non-messianic texts? *Of course*, Jesus thought to himself: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness . . .’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him” (Gen. 1:26–7). Divine plurality in divine unity was a well-known phenomenon in the Scriptures.

So it was: first, Jesus came to believe he himself was Messiah ben David. Then, given his reading of the Jewish Scriptures, he came to believe that Messiah was divine. He made the natural deduction.

That’s a sketch of the Messianic Story. We might embellish it with more alleged textual fusions of Messiah and divinity, but the basic idea, I hope, is clear. What should we make of it?

We might object to it on the grounds that it has Jesus coming to believe that he is Messiah without confirmation by miracles. Absent miracles, Jesus would have been an idiot if he believed he was Messiah. By way of response, while it is true that the Messianic Story does not specify how Jesus came to believe he was Messiah, I take it that he might well have had what was, in his cultural circumstances, considered to be sufficient reason to believe that one was Messiah without miraculous confirmation. After all, at the time, a lot of people claimed to be Messiah without such confirmation, and many thousands more believed them despite the lack of such confirmation.

Perhaps the objection is not that, absent miracles, Jesus would have been an idiot to believe that he was Messiah, but rather that, absent miracles, Jesus would have been an idiot to infer his divinity from his belief that he was Messiah. By way of response, even if the inference to divinity would have been significantly more reasonable in the light of miraculous confirmation, such confirmation does not seem necessary. At any rate, if I took it for granted, along with my peers, that the Old Testament was divinely authoritative, then, if I became convinced that I was Messiah and then, later, saw many of those texts fuse Messiah and divinity in the way depicted by the Messianic Story, I would think that I had superlative grounds to suppose that I was divine—especially if my interpretive skills had been repeatedly confirmed since my youth by acknowledged experts. Why would I *need* more evidence in those cultural circumstances?

5. CONCLUSION

Proponents of the MBG argument contend that the MBG argument, properly understood, can establish the rationality of belief in the divinity of Jesus. I suspect

that their contention is false. Perhaps a bit more circumspectly, it does not establish *for me* the rationality of belief in our Lord's divinity, and I am fairly sure that this is not due to a failure on my part to understand the argument properly. I understand it at least as well as its contemporary advocates, and yet it fails to establish the rationality of belief in Jesus' divinity for me.

It is important to remember the role of my just-so stories in my assessment of the MBG argument. I have not argued that they give us good reason to think that the merely mistaken option is true, likely to be true, more likely than the God option, or any thing of the kind. Neither story is more than a bit of imaginative speculation. Rather, my contention is this: even if we know with certainty all the other premises of the MBG argument, it can establish for us the rationality of belief in the divinity of Jesus only if, given ground rules, we are in a position to say that the merely mistaken option is significantly less likely or plausible than the God option. But we are in such a position only if, given the ground rules, we are in a position to say that competing options like the Beelzebub Story and the Messianic Story are significantly less likely or plausible than the God option. My contention is that we are in no such position. At any rate, I know that *I* am not. When I hold fast to the ground rules—suspending, as it were, my belief in the divine authority of the New Testament record and my belief in our Lord's miracles and His bodily resurrection from the dead, among other such things—the position I am in is characterized by doubt whether the God option is more likely or plausible than the merely mistaken option. No one in my position can go on to say that the MBG argument is sufficient to establish for them the rationality of belief in the divinity of Jesus, our Lord.²⁴

²⁴ For comments and conversation related to this paper, I wish to thank William Alston, Steve Davis, Bill Hasker, John Hawthorne, James Patrick Holding, Frances Howard-Snyder, Hud Hudson, Daniel Jeffery, Jeff Lowder, Michael Murray, George Nakhnikian, Eleonore Stump, Mark Webb, four anonymous referees, and the audience at the Society of Christian Philosophers meeting at Indiana University (September 2002).

10

The Metaphysics of God Incarnate*

Thomas V. Morris

Come now, blessed listener (worthy of that name), and true lover of Christ, let us follow up the faith of our religion, and set forth also what relates to the Word's becoming man, and to his divine appearing amongst us, which Jews traduce and Greeks laugh to scorn, but we worship; in order that, all the more for the seeming low estate of the Word, your piety toward him may be increased and multiplied. For the more he is mocked among the unbelieving, the more witness does he give of his own Godhead; inasmuch as he not only himself demonstrates as possible what men mistake, thinking impossible, but what men deride as unseemly, this by his own goodness he clothes with seemliness, and what men, in their conceit of wisdom, laugh at as merely human, he by his own power demonstrates to be divine . . .

With this proposal, St Athanasius launched the discourse of his early, and enormously influential, treatise, *On the Incarnation of the Word*.¹ From his time to ours, the central doctrine of the Christian faith, the doctrine of the Incarnation, has been a focus of hot theological and philosophical controversy. As a result of the theological battles he joined, Athanasius was forced into exile five times, and in 356 a price was set on his head. In those days, philosophical theology could be hazardous to your health. But the Bishop of Alexandria survived and flourished, bequeathing to us a tradition of faithful and rational reflection on this most fundamental tenet of Christian experience and affirmation.

Since the days of Athanasius, the doctrine of the Incarnation has provided Christian philosophers with at least two distinguishable challenges. First, it needs to be defended against criticisms that purport to show it is false, or impossible, or even absurd. As Athanasius's remarks make clear, such criticisms have been around for quite a while, although in the last couple of decades they may have gained a new level of prominence, even among avowedly Christian theologians. Second, there is the more positive task of elucidating the conceptual content of

* From Ronald Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga Jr., eds., *Trinity, Incarnation; and Atonement*. © 1989 University of Notre Dame Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

¹ Edward R. Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 55.

the doctrine. In order to do this well at the present time, we may need to try to gain as much clarity as possible concerning the theological and philosophical assumptions lying behind the doctrine's original formulations, as well as beneath its continuing affirmation by most Christians throughout the centuries. But I think that what is most important for this task of conceptual explication is the construction and testing of possible accounts, or models, of the metaphysics of God Incarnate. Nothing but this metaphysical activity will issue in the sort of conceptual clarity that is wanted here.

I say only that these two tasks of defense and metaphysical construction are distinguishable, not that they are separable, because I am convinced that in the case of the orthodox, Chalcedonian definition of the Incarnation, the best defense is a good offense. Of course, many theologians nowadays seem to find any defense at all pretty offensive. But what I have in mind is that to turn back the arguments of the doctrine's critics with any real plausibility, we must try to provide as much as we can by way of a positive account of what it could be for God to become man. This is precisely what I began in some small way to do in the book *The Logic of God Incarnate*.² In this essay, I want to take the opportunity to reflect on the overall strategy employed there, highlight some of the central ideas, and endeavor to advance the discussion a bit further.

I. THE PROBLEM

The doctrine of the Incarnation is of course the claim that in the case of Jesus the Christ, we are confronted by one person with two natures, human and divine. The claim is that a properly divine person, God the Son, the second person of the divine Trinity, has taken on a human nature for us and our salvation. Before the Incarnation, this person existed from all eternity as fully divine. Then, in the days of Herod the king, he took upon himself a fully human form of existence, yet never therein ceasing to be that which he eternally was. The early Christian experience of Christ led the Council of Chalcedon to decree in the year 451 that:

Following therefore the holy Fathers, we confess one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ, and we all teach harmoniously [that he is] the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father in Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood, like us in all things except sin; begotten before ages of the Father in Godhead, the same in the last days for us; and for our salvation born of Mary the virgin *theotokos* in manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, unique; acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation—the difference of the natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved, and (each) combining in one person

² Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).

and *hypostasis*—not divided or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets of old and the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us about him, and the symbol of the Fathers has handed down to us.³

By so speaking, the Council presented the Christian church with the definition of orthodoxy on the ontology of Christ.

But, of course, the central philosophical problem here is not difficult to discern. In the Judeo-Christian vision of reality, no beings could be more different from each other than God the creator of all and any kind of creature. And even granting the *Imago Dei*, the doctrine that human beings are created in the image of God, humanity and divinity can certainly seem to be so different as to render it metaphysically and even logically impossible for any single individual to be both human and divine, *truly* God and *truly* man. God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, ontologically independent, and absolutely perfect. We human beings, of course, have none of these properties. And this surely seems to be no accident. Could I possibly have been a greatest possible being? Could you have been uncreated, eternally existent, and omnipresent in all of creation? Surely the logical complements, or opposites, of these divine properties are essential to you and to me. We could not exist without certain sorts of metaphysical limitations and dependencies—limitations and dependencies which are necessarily alien to the divine form of existence as it is conceived in Jewish and Christian theology. From this, critics of Chalcedon have concluded that there are properties necessary for being divine that no human being could possibly have, and properties essential for being human that no divine being could possibly have. The dramatic story told by Chalcedon is then viewed as a metaphysical impossibility.

The tension inherent in the two-natures doctrine of Christ was felt from the very earliest days of reflective Christian theology. The psilanthropists denied that Jesus was truly divine. The docetists concluded that he was not really human. The Arians denied that he was literally either. Apollinarians tried to whittle down the humanity to make room for the divinity. And Nestorians speculated on a composite Christ, one individual human person and one individual divine person, distinct from one another but acting in the closest possible relation of moral harmony. The church at large rejected all these strategies of partial or complete capitulation and insisted again and again on the Chalcedonian formula: one person, two natures, truly God and truly man.⁴

³ Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, p. 373.

⁴ More on the ancient Christian heresies can be found in such standard texts as Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (London: John Murray, 1891); H. M. Relton, *A Study in Christology* (London: S.P.C.K., 1917); E. G. Jay, *Son of Man, Son of God* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1965); and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978).

II. THE FIRST STAGE OF A DEFENSIVE STRATEGY

The question is whether orthodoxy embraces a possibility. Can the doctrine even possibly be true? I am convinced that it can be plausibly defended against any arguments that purport to show otherwise, as I have attempted to demonstrate in *The Logic of God Incarnate*. My strategy of defense is fairly simple. The initial operative assumption is that we should begin with the most exalted conception of divinity, a down-to-earth conception of humanity, and the metaphysical constraints passed on to us by the early ecumenical councils of the church. Given these starting points, the procedure is then to turn back the philosophical arguments against the Incarnation's possibility by the use of conceptual distinctions and metaphysical postulations that flout no strong, reflectively held intuitions, and that together succeed in providing a picture of the metaphysics of God Incarnate that will accord with the portrayal of Christ in the documents of the New Testament.

Can we have it all? I do not know, but I think so. At least, we should try. And I take this to be a good point of strategy anywhere in philosophy, true almost to the point of triviality: Seek to preserve as much as you can of what you believe to be true. Attempt to develop and defend a position which satisfies as many legitimate desiderata as possible, and be prepared to retreat to fall-back positions, philosophical compromises, only when forced to. So let me sketch out briefly how I think this strategy can be applied to the case of the Incarnation.

I begin with the most exalted conception of deity possible, that conception captured by what is often known as Perfect Being Theology, and sometimes, in honor of one of its greatest proponents, called Anselmian Theism.⁵ That is to say, I begin by thinking of any divine being as a greatest possible, or maximally perfect being. Divinity, or deity, I construe as analogous to a natural kind, and thus as comprising a kind-essence, a cluster of properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for belonging to the kind, or in this case, for being divine. I take omnipotence and omniscience, for example, to be such properties essential to deity. And, following standard Anselmian intuitions, I take the strongly modalized properties of *necessary* omnipotence (omnipotence in all possible worlds, and at all times in any such worlds) and *necessary* omniscience to be ingredient in deity as well. Thus, on this picture, no individual could possibly be God without being omnipotent. And no being could count as literally divine without having that attribute necessarily. The picture of God I begin from thus holds that such properties as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, eternity, moral perfection, and ontological independence must belong to any individual who is divine and must be had with the strongest possible modal status.

⁵ For more on this conception, see Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987) and "Perfect Being Theology," *Nous* 21 (March 1987): 19–30.

If such an exalted conception of divinity can be squared with the doctrine of the Incarnation, then presumably more modest conceptions can be as well.

All other things being equal, it would seem that the more extreme a conception we have of deity, the more trouble we are going to have mapping out a coherent account of a divine Incarnation. But I do not think critics of the Incarnation usually go wrong by having too exalted a conception of divinity. Rather, I think they most commonly come to judge the Incarnation an impossibility mainly on account of an incorrect, metaphysically flawed conception of humanity. Only if we assume that it is necessary for being human, or for having a human nature, that an individual lack *any* of those properties ingredient in deity, do we have an obvious logical and metaphysical obstacle to the orthodox two-natures view of Christ. And I believe that the critics of the doctrine have come to hold such a conception of human nature only by missing some fairly simple distinctions and by ignoring some intriguing metaphysical possibilities.

First, there is the fairly well-known distinction between an *individual-essence*, a cluster of properties essential for an individual's being the particular entity it is, properties without which it would not exist, and a *kind-essence*, that cluster of properties without which, as we have seen, an individual would not belong to the particular natural kind it distinctively exemplifies. Of necessity, an individual can have no more than one individual-essence or individual nature, but it does not follow from this, and is not, so far as I can tell, demonstrable from any other quarter, that an individual can have no more than one kind-essence. And this is surely a good thing, for if such an argument could be made out, it would block from the start the doctrine of the Incarnation, at least the orthodox two-natures view, without the need of turning to consider the specifics of divinity and humanity.

Once we have recognized a distinction like that between individual-essences and kind-essences, we can see that necessities intuitively thought to characterize individual human beings cannot automatically be deemed to be such in virtue of those beings' common human nature, as part of the kind-essence of humanity. You and I, and any of our colleagues, may be such that we necessarily are non-eternal, created beings and we may share that modal characterization with all of the human beings living on the surface of the earth today without it at all following that this necessity constitutes part of what it is to have a human nature. It may be the case that all of our individual essences incorporate these modal properties of limited metaphysical status without it being the case that these properties are metaphysical prerequisites for being human.

Of course, critics of the Incarnation have discerned such necessities while thinking about human beings, have identified them as ingredients in human nature, and, pointing out that quite contrary necessities form the divine nature, have gone on to conclude that it is impossible for a properly divine being to take on human nature.⁶ But more caution is needed here than is customarily exercised.

⁶ For an example, see A. D. Smith, "God's Death," *Theology* 80 (July 1979): 262-8.

In drawing their conclusions about what is essential for being human, critics of the Incarnation have, I think, made some errors which can be highlighted and then avoided by the use of two more straightforward distinctions.

In trying to enumerate the properties essential for being human, some theologians have included the property of being sinful.⁷ But this is a property the decree of Chalcedon explicitly denies of Christ. Why would anyone ever think it is part of the kind-essence of humanity? Probably because they have employed a very simple and very inadequate method for determining the elements of human nature, a method that we can call “The Look Around Town Approach”: Look around town, and what do you see? Every human being you come across shares numerous properties with every other human in town, including, most likely, the property of being sinful. To conclude that being sinful is thus a part of human nature is, however, to miss a simple distinction. There are properties which happen to be *common* to members of a natural kind, which may even be *universal* to all members of that kind, without being *essential* to membership in the kind. Mere observation alone can suffice to establish commonality. Thought experiments and modal intuitions must be drawn upon to determine necessity, or kind-essentiality. Once these distinctions are properly drawn, we can acknowledge the commonality of sinfulness among human beings while at the same time following Chalcedon in denying both its strict universality and its presence in the kind-essence which we call human nature.

Such properties as those of being contingent, created, non-eternal, non-omnipotent, non-omniscient, and non-omnipresent are certainly common to human beings. Apart from the case of Christ, they are even, presumably, universal human properties. But I submit that they are not kind-essential human properties. It is not true that an individual must be a contingent being, non-eternal, and non-omnipotent in order to exemplify human nature. It is possible for an individual to be human without being characterized by any of these limitation properties. And so it is possible for an individual who essentially lacks such properties, an individual who is properly divine, to take up at the same time a human nature.

The many properties of metaphysical limitation and dependence that characterize you and me do so, then, not because they are essential elements in our common human nature. They may characterize you and me necessarily. Presumably, they do. But it is not in virtue of our being human; rather, it is in virtue of the humans we are. Such properties may partially comprise our respective individual essences, or, more likely, may characterize us in virtue of the fact that we created human beings are *merely human*—we are no more than human. Humanity crowns our ontological status as the greatest foothold we have in the grand scheme of things. We are *fully human*: we have all the properties

⁷ On this extreme, see John Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

constituting the kind-essence of humanity. But we are merely human as well: we have certain limitation properties in virtue of being God's creatures. Those limitations need not be ingredient in our human-ness; only in our creatureliness. Thus, God the Son, through whom all things are created, need not have taken on any of those limitation properties distinctive of our creatureliness in order to take on a human nature. He could have become fully human without being merely human.

Now, all these distinctions and defensive moves may be fine, each taken in itself, one by one. But the net result of applying them to a full defense of the Incarnation can appear problematic in the extreme. When we consult the pages of the New Testament, we see in the portrait of Jesus the workings of a mind which, extraordinarily wise and discerning as it may be, seems less than omniscient, and which appears, for all its strength, to lack the power of omnipotence in itself, having to turn heavenward for resources just as we do. We see a mind conditioned by the first-century Palestinian worldview. We see a man who shared the anguish and joys of the human condition. Our metaphysical distinctions cannot be allowed to blind us to this. And it would be both foolish and heterodox to minimize it. We need a picture of the Incarnation that will account for all of these appearances.

III. TWO PICTURES OF GOD INCARNATE

I assume it is clear at this point what I mean when I say that I begin with an exalted conception of divinity. It may not be clear at all what I meant when I added that I also start with a down-to-earth conception of humanity. Now is the time to make it clear. Taking on a human nature involves taking on a human body and a human mind, no more and no less. What essentially constitutes a human body and a human mind we wait upon a perfected science or a more complete revelation to say. We have neither a very full-blown nor a very fine-grained understanding of either at this point. But we do know well enough what a human body is and what a human mind is for it to be informative to be told that taking on such a body and mind is taking on a human nature. It is both necessary and sufficient for being human. This is almost embarrassingly simple as metaphysics goes. No modal razzle-dazzle, no ontological arcana: If you have a human body and mind, you have a human nature—you exemplify the kind-essence of humanity. This is surely a down-to-earth conception of humanity if anything is.

For God the Son to become human, he thus had to take on a human body and a human mind, with all that entails. He did not have to become a created, contingent being. He just had to take on a created, contingent body and mind of the right sort. And so he was born of Mary the virgin and lived a human life.

But how did he manage this? Isn't it clear that taking on a human body and mind in order to live a human life involves taking on limitations of knowledge, power, and presence? And aren't such limitations incompatible with divinity? As we have noted, the New Testament pictures an extraordinary individual living out a life among his fellows from limited human resources. How is this to be reconciled with his being divine? Some philosophers and theologians have believed that Jesus' limits force us to tone down a bit our conception of what deity consists in. They have come to think that facing up to what the New Testament shows us concerning Jesus' real limits requires us to conclude that in becoming incarnate he—that is, God the Son—gave up temporarily some of his unrestricted divine attributes, for example, his omniscience, his omnipotence, and his omnipresence. This, they think, was required in order for him to take on the limitations involved in living a genuinely human life and sharing fully in our common human condition. This is the story told by kenotic Christology (from the Greek word *kenōsis*, or emptying). If kenotic Christology is true, if God the Son temporarily emptied himself, giving up his properly divine power, relinquishing his complete knowledge, and restricting his presence to the confines of his mortal shell while nonetheless remaining divine, it cannot be that divinity necessarily comprises or requires omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. For if during the earthly sojourn the Second Person of the Trinity was divine but was without these exalted properties, they cannot be among those things required for true deity. As kenotic Christology is incompatible with seeing divinity as, at least in part, constituted by necessary omnipotence, necessary omniscience, and necessary omnipresence, so it is also incompatible with holding the simple, non-modal properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence to be requisites of divinity.

Well, then, on the kenotic view, what *are* the necessary truths about divinity? What is it to be God? The kenotic suggestion, perhaps, is something like this: In order to be literally divine, it is necessary for an individual to have in all possible worlds the property of *being omnipotent unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise*, the property of *being omniscient unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise*, and likewise for omnipresence. On this modally less extreme view of divinity, a divine being is not necessarily invulnerable to ignorance and weakness. He can render himself vulnerable to these deficiencies, he can take them on, while yet remaining truly divine.

Kenotic Christology began to be developed during the nineteenth century and continues to be refined today despite numerous critics—many of whom have just failed to grasp the subtlety with which the position can be deployed. And it must be said in behalf of the kenotic strategy that (1) what it seeks to accommodate in the biblical portrayal of Christ is indeed crucial to preserve, and (2) it is altogether legitimate and proper for a Christian to apply his convictions arising out of divine revelation and the events of salvation history to his philosophical theology, and in particular to his philosophical conception of God. There must

be a dynamic interaction between whatever *a priori*, intuitive, or purely philosophical constraints there are on philosophical theology and the agreed data of revelation. The kenotic maneuver presents us with an intriguing possibility, yet I must admit that I have a hard time finding it satisfactory. And my misgivings about such an account of Christ's deity are not without parallel in the weightiest theological treatises.

During the early years of the fifth century, Pope Leo wrote an essay on the Incarnation which the Council of Chalcedon embraced as properly capturing the two-natures view of Christ. Known as *The Tome of Leo*, it says of Christ that, among other things:

He took on him "the form of a servant" without the defilement of sins, augmenting what was human, not diminishing what was divine; because that "emptying of himself," whereby the Invisible made himself visible, and the Creator and Lord of all things willed to be one among mortals, was a stooping down of compassion, not a failure of power. Accordingly, the same who, remaining in the form of God, made man, was made Man in the form of a servant, so the form of a servant does not impair the form of God.⁸

A sophisticated kenotic Christology can be argued to preserve the letter of Leo's claims, but I have difficulty seeing how it can be thought to be true to the spirit of those claims. But in case this is unclear, consider again St. Athanasius who earlier wrote concerning the incarnate Christ:

He was not, as might be imagined, circumscribed in the body, nor, while present in the body, was he absent elsewhere; nor, while he moved the body, was the universe left void of his working and providence; but, thing most marvelous, Word as he was, so far from being contained by anything, he rather contained all things himself; and just as while present in the whole of creation, he is at once distinct in being from the universe, and present in all things by his own power, . . . thus, even while present in a human body and himself quickening it, he was, without inconsistency, quickening the universe as well. . . .⁹

So for Athanasius it seems that Christ was not limited in power, knowledge, and effect to the workings of his human mind and body during the time of the Incarnation. There is no restricting of his being to the confines of the human alone. This is surely no kenotic, metaphysical emptying or relinquishing of the properly divine status or functioning. While having a human body and mind and living out a human life on this terrestrial globe, Christ nonetheless retained all of the resources and prerogatives of divinity in the most robust sense.

But can we make sense of such a view? Can we indeed have it all, the fullness of humanity and the fullness of divinity? I think so, for there is an alternative to the kenotic picture of Christ, an alternative which, in *The Logic of God Incarnate*,

⁸ Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, pp. 363, 364.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 71.

I called “the two-minds view.”¹⁰ On this account of the Incarnation, taking on a human body and mind did not require or involve relinquishing the proper resources of divinity. Just as we saw that God the Son’s taking on of a created, contingent body and mind does not entail that he himself was a created, contingent being, so, on the two-minds view, his taking on of a body and mind limited in knowledge, power, and presence does not entail that he himself, in his deepest continuing mode of existence, was limited in knowledge, power, or presence. Rather, in the case of God Incarnate we must recognize something like two distinct minds or systems of mentality. There is first what we can call the eternal mind of God the Son, with its distinctively divine consciousness, whatever that might be like, encompassing the full scope of omniscience, empowered by the resources of omnipotence, and present in power and knowledge throughout the entirety of creation. And in addition to this divine mind, there is the distinctly earthly mind with its consciousness that came into existence and developed with the human birth and growth of Christ’s earthly form of existence. The human mind drew its visual imagery from what the eyes of Jesus saw, and its concepts from the languages he learned. This earthly mind, with its range of consciousness and self-consciousness, was thoroughly human, Jewish, and first-century Palestinian in nature. By living out his earthly life from only the resources of his human body and mind, he took on the form of our existence and shared in the plight of our condition.

So on the two-minds view, the Incarnation involved not just a duality of abstract natures, but a duality of consciousness or mentality which was thus introduced into the divine life of God the Son. The two minds of Christ should be thought of as standing in something like an asymmetric accessing relation: the human mind was contained by but did not itself contain the divine mind, or, to portray it from the other side, the divine mind contained, but was not contained by, the human mind. Everything present to the human mind of Christ was thereby present to the divine mind as well, but not vice versa. There was immediate, direct access from the human mind to the divine mind, but no such converse immediacy of access. Insofar as Christ normally chose to live his earthly life out of his human resources alone, the words he spoke and the actions he performed by means of the body were words and actions arising out of his human mind. He had all the mental, intellectual, emotional, and volitional resources we all have, lacking none. And it was these, not his divine resources, that he typically drew on for the personal history enacted on this earth. But this living of a human life through human resources was, on the two-minds view, going on at the same time that he, in his properly divine form of existence, was continuing to exercise his omnipotence, with the wisdom of his omniscience, in his omnipresent activities throughout creation.

¹⁰ See *The Logic of God Incarnate*, pp. 102–7 and 149–62.

IV. TWO MINDS AND THE UNITY OF CHRIST

Can we really understand the two-minds view? Can we attain any firm grasp of what it might have been like for God Incarnate to have at one and the same time a limited human consciousness and an overarching divine mind? In my earlier work on the Incarnation, I suggested that there are numerous earthly phenomena with which we are familiar that provide very helpful partial analogies to the two-minds view of Christ. There seem to be cases of dreams in which the dreamer both plays a role within the environs of the dream story, operating with a consciousness formed from within the dream, and at the same time retains an overarching consciousness that the drama of the dream is just that—only a dream. Another sort of analogy is provided by thought experiments dealing with artificial intelligence, in which two physical systems are each such as to be credited with mentality and yet stand in such an asymmetric accessing relation that one can be considered a sub-system of the other, with its own distinctive origin and functions, but belonging to the unity of a larger system of mentality. And then there are numerous, powerful, partial analogies available in the literature dealing with human cases of multiple personality. In many such cases, there seem to exist different centers or spheres of consciousness standing in an asymmetric accessing relation to an overarching or executive self, and ultimately belonging to one person. Of course, human cases of multiple personality involve severe dysfunction and undesirable traits starkly disanalogous to anything we want to acknowledge in the Incarnation. But this just helps us to see where the specific limits of this sort of analogy lie.

There are certain phenomena having to do with hypnosis, brain commissurotomy, self-deception, and *akrasia*, or weakness of will, in which there seem to be operative different levels or spheres of awareness, information retention and processing, or, in general, mentality which are, in important metaphysical ways, analogous to what the two-minds view recognizes in the case of the Incarnation. Again, it must be stressed that the negative aspects of these extraordinary worldly cases of multiple mentality are not meant at all to characterize the Incarnation, and in fact can be argued decisively not to cloud Christ's case in the least. These are only partial analogies which provide us with some imaginative grip on the two-minds picture.

One of the best analogies may be provided by the claim of twentieth-century psychologists that every normal human being partakes of a variety of levels of mentality. Consider for example the very simple distinction of the conscious human mind, the seat of occurrent awareness, from the unconscious mind. In most standard accounts of such a distinction, the unconscious mind stands to the conscious mind in much the same relation that the two-minds view sees between the divine and human minds in the case of Christ. God the Son, on this picture,

took on every normal level or sphere of human mentality, but enjoyed the extra depth as well of his properly divine mindedness.

One interesting feature of all these analogies which have to do with human psychological phenomena is that they point toward what some theorists are calling a “multi-mind” view of persons in general.¹¹ On this sort of a view, a person is, or at least it is inevitable that a person potentially has, *a system of systems of mentality*, to use the broadest possible terminology. This systems view of the person is in close accord with the more generalized view of all of life as involving hierarchically stratified systems of organization and control, but is arrived at with evidence of its own, not as just the application of the more general view to the case of persons.

We can develop a systems view here in such a way that all finite mental systems are metaphysically open-ended for hierarchical subsumption by deeper, or higher, systems—use whichever vertical metaphor you prefer. Epistemologically, we come to recognize the existence of a multiplicity of mental systems in the case of a human being only when things go awry, as in multiple personality, commissurotomy, or what is called self-deception. But the systems view is that what we thus come to recognize, the multiplicity of systems of mentality, is always there in normal cases as well, although functioning very differently and thus being manifested very differently, if at all, to normal observation.

It is of course not my claim that a systems view of mentality proves the two-minds view of Christ, that it serves as any evidence for the truth of this theological view, or that it even establishes the possibility of this picture of the Incarnation. It only provides us with an account of mentality generally which is thoroughly consonant with the main features of the metaphysical postulations distinctive of the two-minds view, and gives us a vantage point from which to come to better understand the view. It also helps to answer some questions that can otherwise seem to yield troubling problems for the view.

Did Christ have erroneous beliefs, such as would have been acquired through the natural functioning of his human mind in the social and intellectual environment in which he lived? Did he have a geocentric picture of the cosmos? Did he really not know who touched the hem of his garment? He had a limited human mind and a divine mind, so what is the answer, yes or no? Our ordinary practices and locutions for belief ascription can lead to puzzling questions concerning God Incarnate. But I think the two-minds view, rather than creating such puzzlement, actually helps us to see through it. First of all, we must be cautious about assuming that our ordinary linguistic practices are completely in order here, in such a way that they can act as altogether reliable touchstones of truth. If it is asked exactly what Christ believed, the two-minds view will direct us to ask what information was contained in his earthly mind, and then what

¹¹ For a popular presentation of this sort of view, see Robert Ornstein, *Multimind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986).

information was contained in his divine mind. And this sort of response is to be expected on any multi-mind view of the person, or on any multi-systems approach to mentality. Folk psychology may not be nearly as bad off as some philosophers of mind now suggest, but may still provide less than absolutely reliable guidance where such metaphysical precision is required as in the doctrine of the Incarnation.

But if the question is pressed concerning what the person, God the Son, himself believed on this or that issue, evading the question by appealing to the duality of minds can appear to threaten the unity of the person, and thus the coherence of the whole picture. The response of dividing the question does remind us of something important. God the Son Incarnate had two minds and chose to live out the life of the body on this earth normally through the resources of the human mind alone. That was the primary font of most of his earthly behavior and speech. Nevertheless, if the question is really pressed, if it is insisted that we be prepared, in principle, to say what he, the individual person, believed about this or that, we must appeal to the feature of hierarchical organization endemic to a systems view of mentality and, recognizing the priority of the divine, represent God the Son's ultimate doxastic state as captured in his divine omniscience. This feature of hierarchical organization thus does not leave us in puzzlement concerning the final story about the person.

This move seems to indicate a compatibility between metaphysical double-mindedness and personal unity. But what exactly does the personal unity of Christ consist in on the two-minds view? What makes the human mind of Jesus a mind of God the Son? A number of readers of *The Logic of God Incarnate* have raised such questions for the two-minds view. It has been pointed out, for example, that on the standard view of God as utterly omniscient, any divine person stands in a direct, immediate, and complete asymmetric accessing relation to the mind of every human being. If standing in that relation is what makes Jesus' earthly mind a mind of God, all our minds are minds of God, and thus we are all divine incarnations. If this were a safe inference from the two-minds view, I think it is safe to say it would serve as an effective *reductio*, demonstrating its unacceptability.

The accessing relation alone, however, is not intended by the two-minds view to count as a sufficient condition of Incarnation. Information flow by itself does not constitute mental, metaphysical ownership. So, what does? I must admit that I am no more sure about how to spell out what constitutes metaphysical ownership in the case of the Incarnation than I am about how to spell out exactly what it is for a range of mentality to be a part of my mind, or to belong to me. There are mysteries here in any case, not just in the case of what the two-minds view claims about the Incarnation. But, fortunately, this is not all there is to be said.

What we can refer to as my human mental system was intended by God to define a person. If my human mental system is subsumed or overridden by any

other causal system, my personal freedom is abrogated. The complete human mental system of Jesus was not intended alone to define a person. It was created to belong to a person with a divine mind as well, as the ultimate, hierarchically maximal mental system. At any point during the metaphysical event of the Incarnation, it is thus possible that the human capacities of Christ, or the entirety of what we are calling his human mental system, be subsumed and overridden by the divine mind without its being the case that any person's freedom is thereby abrogated. And this is a crucial difference between Jesus and any other human being, indeed, between Jesus and any free-willed *creature* of God. When our attention has been directed to this, it has been directed to the distinctiveness of the metaphysics of God Incarnate.

We are always in danger of misunderstanding the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the two-minds view of Christ in particular, if we forget that here, as in other properly metaphysical contexts, 'person' is an ultimate, ontological status term, not a composition term. Functionalism in the philosophy of mind, for all its problems, has served of late to remind us of that.¹² The entirety of the human mental system of God the Son did not serve to compose a human person distinct from the person who was and is properly divine, because having the status of exemplifying a human body-mind composite was not the deepest truth about the ontological status of that individual. The personhood of Jesus was a matter of his ultimate ontological status, and nothing less. This is the claim of the Christian tradition.

The two-minds view of Christ strikes me as extraordinarily interesting philosophically and theologically, and, at least *prima facie*, it seems to me strongly preferable to the alternative of kenotic Christology. Something like one or the other of these pictures of the Incarnation is necessary, I think, if we are to make full sense of the manifest earthly career of Jesus from the perspective of a high Christology; or, to put it the other way around, if we are to make full sense of a high Christology from the perspective of the manifest, earthly career of Jesus. From either point of view, we need some such account of the metaphysics of God Incarnate.

¹² For a succinct, accessible presentation of the salient idea in functionalism, along with a good direction into the literature, see William P. Alston, "Functionalism and Theological Language," in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), especially pp. 25–32.

The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis*

Peter Forrest

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to compare two rival accounts of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, the classical and the kenotic, defending the latter. These accounts agree that the second divine person, the Word, remained divine at the Incarnation. They disagree, however, in that the kenotic account denies that Jesus had the powers *normal* for a divine person. Here the plural 'powers' is a reminder that I am including both the power to act and the power to know. So the normal divine powers would include a capacity to act and know far exceeding the human, without the implication that these capacities are exercised.

As a preliminary, I shall clarify the kenotic position by arguing that a position which is often called kenotic is actually a quasi-kenotic version of the classical account, according to which Jesus had normal divine powers but chose not to exercise them. I suggest that Thomasius, the source of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century kenotic theories, and Stephen T. Davis, often cited as a philosopher defending kenosis, held the quasi-kenotic theory. This might suggest that my terminology is eccentric, so if readers prefer, they could re-label quasi-kenosis as moderate kenosis, and kenosis in my sense as extreme kenosis. In that case this paper is a defence of extreme kenosis as a serious alternative to both the classical account and moderate kenosis. This dispute over terminology is not entirely trivial, however. For mine is the natural one if we are primarily interested in the relevant philosophical issues, whereas the alternative might be more appropriate if we were considering Scripture or the beliefs of the early Church. For I doubt if such considerations would distinguish between quasi-kenotic and kenotic accounts except via philosophical argument such as I provide in this paper.

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After this preliminary, I reply to three objections to the kenotic account. Of these the most widespread is that it conflicts with the standard list of attributes considered essential to God, including immutability. I consider but reject as ad hoc the strategy of merely qualifying the standard list of divine attributes. Instead I offer the more robust reply that the objection is based upon a misguided conception of the divine. After that I turn to the problem posed by the Exaltation, namely the resumption by Jesus of normal divine powers after his life on Earth. Finally I tackle a question which defenders of kenosis must answer: how is it possible for Jesus to be the same person as the pre-incarnate Word? I offer a suggestion as to how the conditions for personal identity can be met in the case of the Incarnation.

QUASI-KENOSIS AND QUALIFIED KENOSIS

A kenotic account of Incarnation is contrasted with the classical account according to which the Word never ceased to have normal divine powers. Now those who hold the classical account may well do so because they consider that divinity entails omnipotence and omniscience. But I want to leave open the possibility that, even prior to the Incarnation, God had freely given up some power for the sake of creatures, perhaps in order to ensure their freedom. So normal divine powers may or may not be taken to imply omnipotence and omniscience. I am, of course, assuming that, but for the Incarnation, the Word would have had vastly greater powers than any human being. In particular these powers would not have been spatially limited.

With that qualification, then, I mean by a quasi-kenotic account one according to which Jesus possessed but chose never to exercise these normal divine powers. This comes in a number of versions which may be illustrated by supposing that we grant that water was turned into wine at Cana.¹ On the kenotic account Jesus did not and could not work this miracle. Instead he exercised a perfectly normal human power of praying for a miracle. On an unqualified classical account Jesus, having normal divine powers, exercised the power directly to turn water into wine. According to the least kenotic version of the quasi-kenotic account Jesus could have directly turned water into wine but chose not to, praying instead for a miracle. On another version he had no power directly to turn water into wine but could have decided to reacquire that power. And, if we insist, we can iterate the distinction between having a direct power and having the power to acquire a direct power, but there would be little point in such iteration. Now I shall assume that having the power to acquire the power to do X is already having the power to do X, but is not having the power directly to do X. Hence even if Jesus had no

¹ Or that the water was annihilated and wine created *ex nihilo*. For present purposes this will not be distinguished from the turning of water into wine.

power directly to turn water into wine he had the power indirectly to do so if he had the power to acquire the power directly to do so, or, implausibly, the power to acquire the power to acquire the power directly to do so.

Thomasius argued that the ‘omni’ properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and, he added, omnipresence, were not essential divine attributes because they were relative, presupposing there exists a universe to have power over, to know, and to be present in.² These ‘omni’ attributes are, however, said to be manifestations of the essential divine attributes. This suggests that the essential divine attributes include the power to be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, which would make Thomasius a proponent of the quasi-kenotic version of the classical account.

Davis distinguishes omnipotence and omniscience *simpliciter*, which he denies are essential for divinity, from qualified senses which are essential.³ He distinguishes between having a power and choosing to exercise it and he identifies omnipotence and omniscience *simpliciter* with the nonessential total exercise of the essential divine power. So his is, in my terminology, also a quasi-kenotic classical account.

Some attempts to qualify kenosis result, then, in versions not of the kenotic account but of the classical one. To further clarify the position which I am defending, I note that a kenotic account is, however, quite compatible with some other qualifications. The first of these is that, as Davis and others have pointed out, being truly human does not entail being a normal human being.⁴ So, for instance, I hypothesize that Jesus had some memories of his pre-incarnate state. The next is that I hold that Jesus resumed normal divine powers, hence the kenosis of the Incarnation is qualified by its temporary character. One reason for holding this doctrine of the Exaltation, as it is called, is that it makes sense of the Ascension without requiring an otherwise unnecessary hypothesis about space.⁵ Jesus did not go anywhere—by becoming omnipresent he went everywhere. A more important reason is that the love which is an excellence does not involve reckless sacrifice, such as taking a serious risk of drowning in order merely to retrieve an object of sentimental value to your beloved. Kenosis is easily accused of recklessness and permanent kenosis really would be. And if that is not persuasive I suggest that the divine joy experienced by the persons of the Trinity

² See Ronald J. Feenstra ‘Reconsidering kenotic Christology’, in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga Jr (eds) *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 130.

³ Stephen T. Davis *Logic and the Nature of God* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 125–6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵ As C. S. Lewis noted, twentieth-century ideas about space and time make a fairly literal interpretation of the Ascension more believable than they have been at any time since the medieval world view was abandoned. For there is nothing in contemporary physics that excludes treating heaven as a parallel universe literally less than a mile from ours—or an inch. So Jesus might have moved continuously from our universe to heaven. But why hypothesize this without good reason?

requires normal divine powers. So, out of love for each other, none of them would permanently abdicate their powers.

Although I am not committed to this, we might also suppose that the temporary character of kenosis is not merely true but is essential for being a divine person. So no divine person could abdicate power permanently. I mention this largely because Morris, who eventually rejects the kenotic account, provides a sympathetic interpretation of it in which the 'omni' properties are not essential. Rather the essential properties have the qualification 'unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise'.⁶

KENOSIS AND THE ESSENTIAL DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

The most widespread objection to kenotic accounts is that the 'omni' properties are essential divine attributes, so divine persons cannot lose them, whether they want to or not. A similar objection is that to be unchanging is essential to being divine, so divine persons could not lose any attributes, even if not considered essential on other grounds.

Here we could distinguish between: (a) an attribute being necessary *de dicto*, that is, necessary if something is to belong to the kind, divine person; and (b) an attribute being necessary *de re*, that is, necessary for the existence of the person in question, whether or not that person ceases to be divine. As Morris points out, if the 'omni' attributes were necessary *de dicto* but not *de re* then kenosis would be possible but would imply that the Word ceased to be divine.⁷ If, however, the 'omni' attributes were necessary *de re*, then the Word could not lose them, except perhaps by ceasing to exist. In whichever sense we take it, if the 'omni' attributes are necessary then the kenotic account as I have stated it is false. For I am proposing that Jesus was truly divine but lacked normal divine powers.

At this point defenders of the kenotic theory are tempted to qualify the standard list of attributes. Morris suggests the qualification 'unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise'.⁸ I think he is right, but by itself this provides no defence against the objection that a divine person is immutable. For an immutable divine person cannot choose to be otherwise. In any case, unless some further rationale is provided, the method of qualifying traditional attributes is ad hoc and so a weakness in an account.

The problem, as I understand it, is not with the kenotic account of the Incarnation itself so much as the attempt to combine that account with a classical conception of the divine. The problem is solved by adopting a more thoroughly kenotic theology. To argue for this I first note that there can be various different

⁶ Thomas V. Morris *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 99.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 93. ⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

conceptions of God without any ambiguity in the *concept* of God.⁹ This may be illustrated by means of a once common abuse of students by philosophy lecturers. A purportedly unbiased discussion of the Argument from Evil would begin with something not discussed at all—a definition of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and morally good. Any students who suggested qualifying these attributes would be told they had changed the topic. But that is not a definition, at least not in the sense of an accurate analysis of our concept of God. Far better is St Anselm's 'that than which no greater can be conceived of', although, for various reasons I would then gloss 'greater' as 'properly more awe-inspiring'. For present purposes these details may not matter much, so let us just talk of a perfect being. Our conceptions of God are based upon (implicit) inferences about what sort of entity a perfect being would have to be. For a start I share with most Christians a personal conception of God, namely that a perfect being would be either a person or a community of persons. But it does not follow that a pantheist who rejects the personal conception of the divine is using the words 'divine' and 'God' differently from me.¹⁰ Rather there is a different conception because an inference I find obvious has been rejected by the pantheist. Likewise the philosophy lecturer who defined God as omnipotent, omniscient, and morally good was mistaking the 'omni' God conception for a definition. This 'omni' God conception is based upon an (implicit) inference that a perfect being would 'obviously' have to have the maximum amount of power, knowledge, and goodness.

Now the Anselmian definition coheres well with a process of subtraction or *aufhebung* whereby we progress from more to less inadequate conceptions of God as we conceive of something greater than anything we had previously conceived of. The central thesis of kenotic theism is that we should progress beyond the 'omni-God' conception to that of the kenotic God who out of love abandons absolute power, while retaining sufficient power to warrant total trust. It follows that there is nothing ad hoc about Morris's 'unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise' qualification to the 'omni' attributes. Likewise, there is nothing ad hoc in first replacing the divine attribute of immutability by the power to remain unchanged and then qualifying that power with the 'unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise' qualification.

The resulting conception is of a God who had the power to remain forever unchanging, as an omnipotent and omniscient being. Such a being, even if a single person, would have been great, but there is something greater yet, namely a community of divine persons who are able and willing to abandon their initial omnipotence and omniscience.¹¹

⁹ I am indebted to Fred d'Agostino for helping me see just how important the Rawlsian concept/conception distinction is in so many contexts.

¹⁰ I am indebted to Michael Levine for drawing this to my attention.

¹¹ See my 'Divine fission: a new way of moderating social trinitarianism', *Religious Studies*, 34 (1998), 281–98. (this volume, Ch. 2)

I now turn to three objections to the account I have just given of the divine attributes. First, there is Feenstra's objection that Morris's qualification is too permissive. I am committed to that qualification, so I need to consider Feenstra's objection. It is that, given Morris's qualification, all three divine persons could simultaneously abdicate the powers normal for a divine being.¹² I shall restate this problem as an inconsistent tetrad:

- (1) Each divine person has the unqualified power to abdicate normal divine powers.
- (2) If a number of persons have the unqualified power to do something then it is possible that they all exercise that power.
- (3) If all divine persons exercise the divine power to abdicate normal divine powers then God as a whole would cease to have normal divine powers.
- (4) But necessarily God retains normal divine powers.

Feenstra rejects (1), and after some discussion, suggests instead that a divine person has the essential attribute of only being able to abdicate divine power by becoming kenotically incarnate which can only happen for the purposes of redemption.¹³ Not only does Feenstra's qualification seem rather ad hoc, it does not prevent the possibility of all three persons simultaneously abdicating normal divine powers by becoming incarnate. For that might happen if there were three planets whose inhabitants simultaneously required redemption. So I shall not reject (1).¹⁴ Now (3) could only be rejected if we thought of God as something additional to the community of divine persons, which is not merely an unnecessary complication, but would seem to suggest that creation is the work of some impersonal force which operates through the divine persons who are not therefore free. This would conflict with my personal conception of a perfect being. Therefore to defend my position I should abandon either (2) or (4). First consider (4). I ask why we would object to the idea that God as a whole, and not just one (or two) divine persons, might abandon normal divine powers? The only reason I can think of is that it would be foolish or wrong to do so. Perhaps this is because it would interfere with the life of the Trinity, or because God needs to exercise providential care over the universe or perhaps because God's continual activity is required to keep the universe in existence, and it would be wrong having created the universe just to let it cease to exist. Now it has been pointed out that none of these reasons require the retention of *full* divine powers.¹⁵ While I grant this I note that the problem being discussed can be restated with the phrase 'normal divine power' interpreted as 'sufficient divine power to sustain a

¹² Feenstra 'Reconsidering kenotic Christology', 140.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁴ Feenstra also considers the suggestion that only one of the three persons has the capacity to become incarnate. He rejects this because it contradicts the orthodoxy that the three persons are coequal (142).

¹⁵ By one of the anonymous referees for this journal (*Religious Studies*).

universe in existence'. And rejecting (4) will not solve the restated problem. So there is a case for retaining (4) but I note that it depends on the thesis that God is necessarily good.¹⁶ Otherwise we could say that we have every reason to hope the divine persons would not do anything as rash as simultaneously abandoning normal divine powers, but that this is nonetheless possible.

I now argue that if we accept the thesis of necessary divine goodness, as I think we should, then (2) should be abandoned. (And if we do not accept that thesis we can reject (4).) Now (2) seemed plausible only because we took it for granted that if a person has a power it is possible for that person to exercise it, and then we asked ourselves what could possibly prevent several persons simultaneously exercising their powers. But I reject what was taken for granted. Having the freedom to exercise a power is compatible with necessarily never exercising it. For, a necessarily good person will necessarily never exercise the power to act wrongly, a necessarily wise person will necessarily never exercise the power to act foolishly, and so on. The necessity governs the intentions, and so does not interfere with the freedom to act in accordance with other, impossible, intentions.

I grant that this is a compatibilist position, reconciling necessity and freedom, but it is not an attempt to reconcile causal determinism and freedom. If someone is caused by earlier events to act in one way rather than another that, I grant, is not freedom. The sort of moderate compatibilism I am here considering occurs when no earlier event causes the divine person to act one way or the other. It is just that the divine character is necessarily such that wrong or foolish acts are never performed. To those who reject even this moderate compatibilism I have a doubly *ad hominem* argument. Can God create something God has no power over—a stone too 'heavy' for God to 'lift'? It would seem that an essentially omnipotent God has less power than one who is not essentially omnipotent, because an essentially omnipotent God lacks powers of self-limitation.¹⁷ Now the classical conception of God as omnipotent is based on the assumption that power contributes to greatness. So as an *ad hominem* we can argue in favour of the kenotic conception of God as having once been omnipotent but as having exercised a kenotic power of self-limitation. Against this, defenders of the classical conception could provide the compatibilist reply, namely that God has the power of self-limitation but necessarily does not exercise it. This is fair enough except that I am engaged in an *ad hominem* against those who deny such compatibilism.

¹⁶ For a discussion of this see Morris *The Logic of God Incarnate*, ch. 5.

¹⁷ The classical reply here is that 'a stone too heavy for God to lift' is incoherent because, God being omnipotent, there cannot be such a stone. So, it is said, the supposed power is not a genuine one. But incoherence requires more than necessary falsehood. It requires, at least, inconsistency with the definition of God. So this classical reply is itself based upon the incorrect premise that our *concept* of God is of an omnipotent being.

The above reply to Feenstra's objection might make us reconsider the question of divine immutability. The kenotic account was that divine persons are under no compulsion to change but may freely do so. Now it could be objected that while this is adequate as part of an account of divine greatness, there is another reason for holding that God is immutable. For, as Davis observes in his discussion notes, Geach argues that a mutable God would have to have a cause, but God has no cause.¹⁸ But, as Davis points out, Geach's argument seems to depend on a strong version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, namely that anything changeable has a cause, not the less controversial version that anything that comes into existence has a cause.¹⁹ Or we might replace the strong version with the appealing principle that every change has an intuitively adequate explanation, where in the case of divine changes the divine motives of goodness and love would be adequate as explanations of the change.

THE EXALTATION

Does a kenotic account of the Incarnation require the Exaltation? Or might, instead, the kenosis be permanent? One reason for rejecting permanent kenosis is the thought that the Word might have extra-terrestrial incarnations and that the saving power of these would require resumption of normal divine attributes before the further incarnation. But that is too speculative to be of much weight. Instead, as I have already mentioned, permanent kenosis would be reckless. Moreover it would conflict with the love for the other divine persons. For surely giving is part of loving and giving is frustrated by lack of means.

Feenstra in his discussion notes the problem posed by the Exaltation. If, as Baillie argues, the 'distinctive' divine and human attributes are incompatible then the Exaltation requires that Jesus lose his humanity on resuming normal divine powers.²⁰ The simplest response to this is that of Brown and others cited by Feenstra: deny the humanity of the exalted Christ. I would be reluctant to adopt this response because of its incompatibility with traditional devotion to Jesus as mediator between the purely divine and the purely human. Moreover, it is excluded by the considerations of personal identity to be discussed at the end of the paper. Feenstra considers two other solutions: arguing that kenosis is required for becoming human but not for remaining human; and arguing that the Incarnation does not imply kenosis even though the Incarnation was accompanied by kenosis.²¹ These two solutions agree that the kenosis could come to an end even though Jesus continued to be human, or, in a minor variant, resumes

¹⁸ Davis *Logic and the Nature of God*, ch. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50–1.

²⁰ Feenstra 'Reconsidering kenotic Christology', 144.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 147–8.

humanity in the future after a non-human interlude. And that is the position which I shall defend.

This leaves me with the following problem: why should we abandon the classical account of the earthly life of Jesus if we are to assume just that account of his exalted life?²² The answer to this question depends on the reasons we have for preferring a kenotic to a classical account. Since the purpose of this paper is merely to defend the kenotic account I will not discuss those reasons in detail. I shall merely claim, without further argument, that while being human is compatible with having normal divine powers there are some limitations which a person of normal divine powers could not have, but which in the Incarnation reveal the nature of divine love. I shall call these limitations the *paradoxical* attributes because there is an air of Kierkegaardian paradox in Jesus' possession of a limitation necessary for revealing that which is unlimited. I believe, but shall not here argue, that Jesus had two such paradoxical attributes: his capacity to share human suffering at its worst, namely suffering unrelieved by any accompanying joy; and his capacity to be genuinely tempted. These paradoxical attributes were required in order for Jesus to reveal divine love but not in order for him to be human. Having revealed divine love there is no need for him to go on revealing it. Hence the exalted Christ can be human while having the normal divine powers even though the purpose of the Incarnation required that Jesus, while on earth, did not have these powers.

HOW IS KENOTIC INCARNATION POSSIBLE?

The defence of a kenotic account of the Incarnation is incomplete until we answer some awkward questions concerning personal identity, questions which have been unduly neglected. For unless it is possible, and not merely conceivable, that the human being Jesus is the very same person as the pre-Incarnation Word, not even divine power can bring it about.

There are two main contenders for theories of personal identity: versions of the Simple View and versions of the Psychological Continuity Theory. The former asserts that either personal identity cannot be further explained or is explained by positing some enduring component or constituent of a person, such as a Cartesian ego or, on Swinburne's current version of the Simple View, a thisness.²³

The Psychological Continuity Theory comes in many versions but the following is representative. It asserts that: (i) persons are essentially historical beings, so that to be a given person is to be as that person now is and to have had that

²² I take it that this is Baillie's objection when, in a passage quoted by Feenstra, he says 'The presupposition of the [kenotic] theory is that the distinctive divine attributes... and the distinctive human attributes... cannot be united simultaneously...'; (Feenstra 'Reconsidering kenotic Christology', 144).

²³ Richard Swinburne *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), ch. 2.

person's history; (ii) a person's history is a sequence of stages which are (a) explanatorily connected in the appropriate way, that is, later stages are as they are largely because earlier stages were as they were, and (b) there are no abrupt changes or discontinuities in the sequence of stages; (iii) a person at one time is said to be the same person as a person at another time only if one of the histories is part of the other.

I am not asserting that there is nothing more to personal identity than the conditions given in this account. For a start even though persons are essentially historical every person has to be a person of some kind, and, I assume, no one can remain the same person if they lose one of the attributes characteristic of that person-kind. Hence I assume that a divine person cannot cease to be divine. Furthermore, just as according to moderate dualists the mental depends upon but is not fully explained by the physical, likewise it can be said that being the same person is a mysterious matter which is not fully explained in terms of such necessary and sufficient conditions which we are able to formulate for personal identity. The Psychological Continuity Theory, then, might not be the whole truth concerning personal identity. But I am not concerned with the whole truth, merely that part of the truth which makes it problematic to say of a certain human being, Jesus, that he is the very same person as the Word.

The Psychological Continuity Theory has the consequence that a person could undergo fission, which, in the human case Swinburne takes as a reason for holding the Simple View, positing thisnesses. But, for good reasons, he rejects this in the divine case, where it would have the further disadvantage of making the Trinity problematic.²⁴ I am inclined to reject the Simple View in all cases, but, fortunately, this issue need not be decided here. For I note that if we hold the Simple View, the possibility of a kenotic incarnation would be trivial in two ways. First it would be trivial in the sense that the required identity of thisness or ego may simply be asserted. But second, it would be trivial in the sense that nothing much has been accomplished. For the point of the doctrine is not to assert the unity of the human and the divine in some ontological sense with no consequence, which is what identity of thisness would amount to. Even were the Simple View correct Christians would need to assert in addition the psychological continuity of the humanity and divinity of Jesus, resulting in discussions just like those which arise for the Incarnation if we assume the Psychological Continuity Theory.

As far as the dispute between the Simple View and Psychological Continuity is concerned, then, we should concentrate on the latter. Before doing so, however, we should briefly consider two other, less popular, theories of personal identity. There is the possibility of requiring both a strictly identical component, say a thisness, and psychological continuity. But given the triviality of the implications of the Simple View for the Incarnation that would leave us with the same

²⁴ Richard Swinburne *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), ch. 2. 163–9.

problem as with Psychological Continuity. There is also, of course, the theory that to be the same person there must be the same living organism. Although this would be inconsistent with the Incarnation as usually stated, it would not be a genuine threat to Christianity. For were we to accept that theory, then psychological continuity would be more significant for us than personal identity. So rather than reject the doctrine of the Incarnation, we should reformulate it as asserting the psychological continuity of the humanity and divinity of Jesus.

Regardless of just which is the best theory of personal identity we should, therefore, assume the Psychological Continuity Theory when discussing the Incarnation.

Prior to the Incarnation, the Word enjoys normal divine powers. Perhaps these are limited by previous kenotic acts such as granting free will to some creatures. Nonetheless, on the kenotic account there is an infinite difference between the power and knowledge of the pre-incarnate Word and the powerlessness and ignorance of Jesus at birth. So how could there be continuity? But even supposing continuity, we might wonder whether the enormous difference between the two states is compatible with personal identity. And there is a third problem, to do with the explanatory connection. To be sure there is no problem with the pre-incarnate Word causing Jesus to be born with certain characteristics. This requires only that either at creation or subsequently the Word guide humanity's and Israel's history providentially. But there is still a problem for psychological continuity. For how can it be that the details of Jesus' life on Earth are explained by the details of earlier stages of the Word?

First let us consider the continuity problem. There is no difficulty with a continuity between the finite and the infinite provided it is possible for a process to be made up of an actual infinity of stages. We may suppose that to have divine power is to have knowledge of an infinity of possible worlds, knowing which parts of them are actual and which merely possible, and to be able to actualize any part that is not actual but still possible.²⁵ We may think of this infinite domain of possibilities as divided into infinitely many portions, each comparable to that which a human being can know and have power over. Whatever infinity we are considering, removing the knowledge and power piece by piece must, in an infinity of stages—the same infinity—reduce the divine consciousness to a human one. Instead of one big act of kenosis there could be a kenotic process made up of an infinity of small kenotic acts whereby the Word gradually comes to have purely human powers.

There are three possible objections to this account of continuity. First there are those who deny the actual infinity. Clearly they would reject the account I gave of

²⁵ God's actualizing preexisting *possibilia* is Plantinga's way of describing the divine creative power. I prefer to describe it in terms of God increasing the determinacy of an indeterminate actual world. Some might object to the (moderate) modal realism implicit in either of these descriptions. Presumably they can be paraphrased so as to avoid ontological commitment to *possibilia*.

the divine knowledge and power, but they would also reject the idea that there could be an actual infinity of real stages in any process. They may well be right, but if they are then the same objection holds to any continuous process, such as that occurring in Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. Hence whatever we say of the latter we can say of the process of kenosis.²⁶

The second objection is that, given the usual ideas we have about time, we cannot have a process made up of more than countably many stages yet there must surely be uncountably many possible worlds. Suppose I grant the impossibility of a process with uncountably many stages. I could still insist that continuity requires only that at each stage an infinitesimal proportion of the divine power and knowledge be removed from the Word, even if each infinitesimal proportion is itself infinite. Since anything, however large, can be thought of as made up of countably many parts which are infinitesimal as proportions of the original, it would follow that only countably many stages are required.

The final objection is, I think, the most important. It is that as kenosis occurs there should be physical correlates to the process—something should happen in the universe. But, the objection goes, this would be contrary to the laws of nature and, more serious, noticeable. My reply is that either, as I hold, free acts are quite compatible with the laws of nature or these laws have exceptions which accommodate free acts. I see no reason why the act of kenosis should raise problems not already there in the case of free human acts. To reply to the more serious part of the objection, we need to speculate about the physical correlates of a gradual restriction of the Word's powers. To illustrate the sort of speculation we might come up with, let us concentrate on the moral order and let us suppose that it has been decided that providential guidance for human beings is divided up as follows: that which provides the basic understanding of morality and a command-like motivation to act rightly comes from the first person, that which provides the practical wisdom to act rightly rather than merely with good intentions comes from the third, and that which provides the opportunity for repentance or change of heart comes from the second, the Word. We may also suppose that to rebel freely against the divine will expressed by the guidance of the first two persons nullifies the guidance of the third until there is repentance, and, as a result, general moral principles are respected but misapplied. That in turn results in appropriate guilt but no effective means for improvement. If that were so, then as the Word underwent kenosis, humans were increasingly left without any providential guidance towards repentance, which therefore becomes haphazard. This would result in a gradual deterioration of the moral order, accompanied by an increase in guilt and a corresponding increase in misguided ways of trying to eliminate guilt, such as human sacrifice. Such a deterioration

²⁶ Either a small finite number of comparatively small discontinuities occur and this is compatible with the persistence of the same objects or there is a continuous process but its infinitely many stages are not real stages of which the process is the sum but rather Whiteheadian extensive abstractions from the process.

would have been of immense importance but not perhaps that noticeable to historians.

Gradual kenosis does not by itself establish the psychological continuity between the pre-Incarnation and post-Incarnation stages. For the psychological states of Jesus must be explained by and continuous with earlier stages. Here, I suggest, we need to consider character, projects and memories. As regards character, continuity could be ensured by Jesus having perfect love. And Jesus' project seems to have been to call as many as he could to repentance, leading to friendship with himself and reconciliation with the first person. And we may assume that this is a continuation of the distinctive role of the Word in human affairs. We still need to give an account of Jesus' memories. Now full recall is not required for psychological continuity, but I do not think the continuity of character and projects is sufficiently great to establish psychological continuity if Jesus had no memories of the pre-Incarnation state. So I am committed to something that might seem all too classical to those attracted by kenosis, namely that Jesus had some sort of memories of his former state. My commitment might surprise those who would insist that in the ordinary human case persons could survive total amnesia. But the case of the Incarnation lacks those factors which replace memory in the case of total amnesia: the continuity of body image; and the continuity of routine behaviour patterns, such as the way of eating, the way of dressing, the way of walking, and so on.

We should suppose, then, that Jesus had a memory of the life of the Trinity, and in particular of what the first person was like, which he could not communicate to his disciples. Perhaps this memory would, in neurophysiological terms, be somewhat like the recollection of a mystical experience. But in any case we may suppose it to be connected with his incapacity to sin and his having perfect divine love.

For personal identity the successive stages should not merely be continuous but earlier stages should explain later ones, and explain them in the appropriate way. If we ignore the proviso that the explanation be appropriate then we have no problem. The Word providentially arranges for the occurrence of the requisite kind of human being to occur just as the last of the normal divine powers is abdicated. The proviso cannot, however, be ignored. For an appropriateness condition is standard in accounts of memory and psychological continuity more generally. For example, you do not remember your first birthday if you have an apparent memory caused by seeing a video recording of the event, even though that apparent memory depends, in detail, on the events of your first birthday. Likewise, it is doubtful if psychological continuity is ensured if a human being dies and eventually leaves no trace but God then decides to recreate a qualitatively identical person at the Resurrection of the Dead. Hence is it is not sufficient for an incarnation that the Word providentially arranges for a perfect human being to have the appropriate character, projects and apparent memories, while simultaneously abdicating all power.

The appropriateness requirement is, I submit, satisfied if and only if the divine kenosis itself may be said to cause the existence of the human being who was Jesus, with that character and projects, and with those memories, which, as a consequence are genuine, not merely apparent, memories. This might prompt a re-description question directed at the kenotic account. What, it could be asked, is the difference between the divine kenosis causing Jesus' existence and the hypothetical situation in which the Word ensures the occurrence of human being with appropriate character projects and 'memory' at just the moment that all power and knowledge are abdicated? In either case the Word gradually restricts power and knowledge and ceases to have anything like normal divine powers just prior to the coming into existence of the human being, Jesus, who has the appropriate character, projects, and memories. In either case we have for each stage S of the kenosis a set of possibilities $P(S)$ which the Word has power to actualize at stage S , where if S^* is later than S then $P(S^*)$ is contained in $P(S)$. Fortunately this re-description question can be given a precise answer. The product of the process of kenosis is specified by the intersection of the $P(S)$, that is the by the set of possibilities which the Word has the power to actualize at every stage in the process. In the case of total abdication this intersection would be empty. In the case of the Incarnation this intersection is just the set of possibilities which Jesus has the power to actualize by making such free choices in his life as he can make.²⁷

A corollary of this is that Jesus must have been excepted from any divine kenosis by which the Word ceased to have power over human affairs, for the sake of our freedom. For were Jesus not such an exception then the Incarnation would have resulted in a total abdication of the Word's power rather than the required continuity between the Word's power and that of Jesus.

Finally, I need to consider whether the exalted Christ could be identical to the human being Jesus if, as Brown suggests, he is no longer human. The problem here is that a purely divine Christ would have the same sort of knowledge of what it was like to have been Mary, or John, as of what it was like to have been Jesus. It is only if the exalted Christ knows some things in the divine way and others in a human way that he can have the memories which seem to be required for him to be identical with Jesus, rather than anyone else who came to share in the Word's project of reconciling humanity to the God. I conclude that the identity of Jesus with a purely divine person prior to the Incarnation is less problematic than any supposed identity with a purely divine person after the Exaltation.²⁸

²⁷ Here I agree with both Morris and Swinburne in assuming that it is metaphysically impossible for Jesus, being divine, to choose the bad. Nonetheless, I hold that he had the ordinary human power to do so. But even if he did not he would still have had the power to choose the lesser good.

²⁸ I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous referees for this journal for their most helpful comments.

12

Christ as God-Man, Metaphysically Construed*

Marilyn McCord Adams

Central to my “Chalcedonian” approach to Christology is the insistence that it is *God* who becomes human. Positively, from the viewpoint of my cosmological hypothesis, Incarnation is key to satisfying God’s unitive aims in creation. Negatively, Divine solidarity is key to the solution of human non-optimality problems: Stage-I defeat requires that it is *God* who participates in horrors. Both ways identify *God* as the One of Whom we affirm that He was born of the Virgin Mary; that He walked and talked; spat and touched; ate, drank, and slept; that He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered, died, was buried but rose on the third day.

Yet, common sense joins with philosophy and *Myth-of-God-Incarnate* theologians to press Mary’s question: “how can this be?” (Luke 1:34). By way of an answer, I shall outline two accounts of the metaphysics of Christology: one offered by Richard Swinburne in his book *The Christian God*; and the other inspired by a family of formulations defended by thirteenth- and fourteenth-century medieval Latin school theologians. Like all theories, each has its costs and benefits. My own preference is for the second, but I believe that either is sufficient to rebut the mythographers’ charge that the notion of a God-man is unintelligible.

* From *Christ and Horrors*, Cambridge University Press. © 2006 Marilyn McCord Adams. Reprinted by permission of the author and publisher.

The terms ‘Stage-I horror-defeat’ and ‘Stage-III horror-defeat’ both appear undefined in the present selection. Elsewhere in *Christ and Horrors*, Adams characterizes the three stages of horror-defeat as follows: Stage-I horror-defeat involves turning “merely human horror-participation into occasions of personal intimacy with God,” which weaves an individual’s horror participation into the fabric of his/her overall beatific personal relationship with God, a relationship which is incommensurately good-for the human individual. Stage-II horror-defeat involves “healing and coaching” our meaning-making capacities so that we are able to make positive sense of our lives even when they involve participation in horrors. Stage-III horror-defeat involves God’s “renegotiating” relations between human persons and our material environment “so that we are no longer radically vulnerable to horrors.” (47–8)—Ed.

1. DOCTRINAL DESIDERATA

First, a brief reminder of the historical parameters of the discussion is in order. Chalcedon laid it down that

(T1) in Christ there are two distinct natures—one human and one Divine;
and

(T2) in Christ, there is a real unity of natures in a single person or supposit; while Ephesus made their corollary explicit:

(T3) in Christ, there are two wills—one human and one Divine.

Already in the first quarter of the sixth century, Boethius took it for granted that “person” or “supposit” (*suppositum, hypostasis*) means the same thing in the doctrine of the Trinity (one God, three persons) as in Christology (two natures, one person), because the second person of the Trinity (i.e., God the Son, the Divine Word) was supposed to be the One Who became Incarnate. Boethius’ definition—

(D1) a person is an individual substance of a rational nature;
and its implicit companion understanding:

(D2) a supposit is an individual substance—

had the authority of a classic by Anselm’s time. Thirteenth-century medieval Latin school theologians had reached consensus on the following interpretive theses:

(T4) in the Incarnation, human nature is assumed by the Divine Word;

(T5) the Divine Word is its own supposit/person and hence the single person or supposit in Christ;

(T6) the Incarnation of the Divine Word is a contingent matter of Divine free choice;

(T7) the Incarnation of the Divine Word is reversible (having become human, the Divine Word could cease to be human) but will in fact never be reversed.

Yet, both Boethius’ definition and medieval Latin school theology’s metaphysical developments of these doctrines found their philosophical roots in Aristotelian philosophy, to which we now turn.

2. ARISTOTELIAN BACKGROUND

Metaphysics is inherently controversial. But in the *Categories*, Aristotle aims to articulate the commonsense view that there are things, which are characterized by features, some of which are more permanent than others.

Seeking to order such intuitions, he distinguishes substance from accidents, and primary substances (e.g., Socrates, Beulah the cow, Brownie the donkey) from secondary substances or substance-kinds (e.g., man, cow, donkey).

- (i) The secondary substance or substance-kind is “*said of*” the primary substance and is that through which the primary substance is constituted as the very thing it is (e.g., Beulah the cow is made the very thing she is by bovinity; Socrates, the very thing he is by humanity).
- (ii) Accidents “*exist in*” primary substances and characterize them in ways that the primary substance could exist without (e.g., Socrates is pale in winter but becomes tan in summer, was once, but in adulthood is no longer, shorter than his mother, etc.).
- (iii) Primary substances neither exist in (like accidents) nor are said of (like secondary substances) anything, but are the ultimate subjects of the properties.

Aristotle took the substance- and accident-kinds with which he was concerned to be *natural* kinds, not nominal essences—kind-terms (like “desk” or “bachelor”) that are the products of human linguistic conventions. Human and whiteness are *real* essences: what-it-is-to-be human or white is what it is prior to and independently of human attempts to conceptualize and talk about the world.

Medieval interpreters, harmonizing across Aristotle’s works, read him as an *essentialist*—that is, as holding that

- (T8) for each primary substance x , there is a secondary substance-kind K that pertains to it *per se* and is essential to it, in the sense that x could not exist without being a K .

Because the necessary connection is not between concepts (as in “a bachelor is an unmarried, post-pubescent male”) but between the thing (Socrates or Beulah) and the kind (humanity or bovinity), the connection is said to be necessary *de re*. Because such essential substance-kinds constitute the primary substance as the very thing it is, Aristotle also held:

- (T9) for each primary substance x , there is *only one* secondary substance-kind K that pertains to x through itself and is essential to it, in the sense that x could not exist without being a K .

It is impossible for any substance individual to have two substance-kind natures *essentially*, for that would involve its being constituted as the very thing it is twice-over!

How, then, can one individual be both Divine and human? If the Divine Word is constituted as the very thing It is by Divinity (together with the person-distinguishing property of Filiation), how could it take on human nature as its own? This problem remains commonsensical. What Beulah *is* is a cow. Surely, Beulah could not *also* be a donkey; nor could *Beulah* be a donkey instead!

Unmodified Aristotelian essentialism raises a problem for how a substance individual could have two substance-natures *essentially*, in such a way that it could not exist without them. Unmodified Aristotelian essentialism rests here, because it doesn't envision any other way for a substance individual to have or be characterized by a substance-kind.

But the doctrine of the Incarnation does not assert that the Divine Word possesses two substance-kinds *essentially* (and so does not run afoul of [T8] and [T9]). Rather it maintains that the Divine Word is essentially Divine, couldn't exist without being Divine, but contingently begins to be human (in c. 4 BCE). The doctrine of the Incarnation holds that

(T10) it is possible for a primary substance x that is essentially of substance-kind K also to possess/be/come to be of substance-kind K' (where K is not the same as K') contingently and non-essentially.

Nowadays, this is terminologically confusing because substance-kinds are often referred to as essences, setting up an equivocation between contemporary-sense essential possession (x possesses K essentially =_{def} x couldn't exist without possessing K) and essential possession as possession of a substance-kind as one's own (x 's being K where K is a substance-kind). But the former usage of "essential" refers to *the way* the property is possessed (in such a way that the thing couldn't exist without it), while the latter refers to *the type* of property possessed (a substance-kind property rather than an accident). Commentators needlessly worry that if the Divine Word does not possess human nature in the way we do—i.e., contemporary-sense essentially, in such a way that we could not exist without being human—then the Divine Word isn't fully or perfectly human—i.e., doesn't really possess all of what goes into being a human being.¹ What the doctrine requires is that the Divine Word—while essentially Divine—contingently come to possess human nature in such a way as to be characterized by such features. So far as I know, no one (not even the total absolute kenoticists) has envisioned the Divine Word's possessing human nature essentially in such a way that the Divine Word couldn't exist without being human. Most Christian theologians would agree: not only is this false; it makes no sense!

Even if Incarnation does not require the idea that one substance individual has two natures contemporary-sense *essentially* (in such a way that it could not exist without them), mere characterization is enough to make the so-called Contradiction Problem arise:

1. Jesus is God (Chalcedonian definition).
2. Jesus is a human being (Chalcedonian definition).

¹ Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ch. 8, sec. 2, 205; Allan Bäck, "Scotus on the Consistency of the Incarnation and the Trinity," *Vivarium* 36:1 (1998), 86 and 95.

3. God is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, eternal, immutable, impassible, infinite (partial analysis of what it is to be God).
4. Human beings are rational animals and so generable and corruptible, mutable and capable of being causally affected and suffering; finite and so of limited power and knowledge (partial analysis of what it is to be a human being).
5. Therefore, Jesus is infinite and finite, immutable and mutable, omnipotent but limited in power, omniscient but limited in knowledge, immutable and impassible, ingenerable and incorruptible but susceptible of growing in wisdom and stature and suffering death on a cross—which is multiply contradictory.

Faced with statements apparently of the form “ x is F and x is not F ,” one may choose between two basic strategies for removing the contradiction and eliminating the assertion that genuine contradictories are true of the same subject in the same respect eternally or at one and the same time. One is to argue that it is *not really the same subject* x that is the proximate subject of contradictory properties, so that really the situation is that x is F but y is not F , or that z is F and y is not F (where x is not identical with y , and y is not identical with z). The other is to argue that *the predicates* only appear but *are not really contradictory*, so that it is not a matter of x 's being F and not F , but of x 's being F and not G . Obviously, one can also combine the two strategies, insisting that same-subject and same-property affirmed and denied are both only a matter of appearance.

In Christology, however, these strategies represent complementary risks and temptations. The first—arguing that different subjects are Divine and human, respectively—seems to flirt with Nestorianism. The second—maintaining that the predicates are not really contradictory—may redefine Divinity and humanity in ways that no longer capture what Chalcedon intended (a problem charged against some versions of partial absolute kenosis).

3. SWINBURNE ON DIVIDING GOD'S MIND

3.1. Metaphysical Presuppositions

Like Aristotle, Swinburne posits a distinction between substances or concrete individual things that have properties, and properties (whether monadic or relational) that are universals that can be instantiated in many things and that exist only as instantiated by concrete individual substances.²

While agreeing with Aristotle that not all essences are *nominal*, Swinburne nevertheless takes a page from Descartes in supposing that there are only two basic (Swinburne calls them “minimalist”) *natural* kinds—material substance

² Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch. 1, 7–8.

and soul substance. These minimalist natural kinds are *essential* to the individuals that in fact instantiate them, in the sense that those individuals could not exist without instantiating them (some *de re* necessities are allowed). Thus he explains that each substance essentially belongs to a minimal essential kind;³ that each substance that is a material substance is essentially a material substance and so essentially a space-occupier and essentially possesses no features to which anyone has privileged access,⁴ whereas each substance that is a soul is essentially a soul and essentially possesses features to which one individual has privileged access.⁵ Nor could a *res cogitans* be essentially a *res extensa*, or vice versa. Swinburne would have no trouble accepting (T8) and (T9).

By contrast, Swinburne insists that many of Aristotle's favorite biological kinds (such as "cow" or "oak tree"), artifact kinds (such as "desk" or "bed"), and phase terms (such as "sapling" or "child") that we use in describing the world are only nominal essences, words that have meanings established by linguistic conventions. Swinburne insists that no one set of conventions is exclusive or exhaustive; the real world of matter and souls could be linguistically and conventionally carved up by nominal essences in many different ways.⁶ Swinburne finds no problem in endorsing (T10) where the second, contingently possessed substance-kind *K* is a *nominal* essence.

Significantly for Christology, Swinburne counts human being among the nominal essences: he claims that "human" is a word for whose use our criteria are vague and malleable in different directions.⁷ Swinburne denies that the property of being human is essential to things that have it, because—quite apart from Christology—he thinks it is intelligible that an individual should persist through the change of being transformed from a human being into a gorilla.⁸ Moreover, Swinburne insists that (psychological-sense) person is only a phase term and hence not essential to the individuals it truly describes (by Swinburne's criteria, according to which personality requires a certain complexity of current mental life, some Alzheimer's patients were persons but are no longer). Likewise, souls, while essentially souls, may be able to change from one kind into another – from human into non-human or into some very powerful disembodied spirit.⁹

By contrast, Divinity is an *essential* kind: any individual who is God couldn't exist without being God,¹⁰ where to be God is to be an inevitably everlasting person who does not essentially depend on a body to exist or function, who is the

³ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 2, 33.

⁴ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 1, 9.

⁵ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 1, 16–17.

⁶ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 1, 12–13, 15–16.

⁷ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 1, 30–2.

⁸ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 1, 27–32.

⁹ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 1, 32.

¹⁰ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 6, 148–9.

omnipresent creator and sustainer of any universe there may be, and who is perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.¹¹ For Swinburne, a Divine individual is thus a high-powered and essentially permanent kind of soul (of *res cogitans*)!

Importantly, however, Swinburne does not understand Divinity to include essential immutability and impassibility (and so would not accept step [3] of the Contradiction argument as it stands). It is metaphysically possible for souls of the Divine kind to change or to be causally interactive. Divine self-determination is preserved so long as Divine souls control whether and how they change and are acted upon.

3.2. Three-Souled God, Social Trinity!

With this metaphysical apparatus in hand, Swinburne gives explicit endorsement to the Social Trinity that kenotic theories had assumed *en passant*. For Swinburne, the three Divine persons are three numerically distinct souls of the Divine essential kind, each instantiating the universal Divinity, each inevitably everlasting¹² but individuated from one another by relations of origin (the Father causes the Son; Father and Son cause the Holy Spirit).¹³

Looming large for Swinburne is the metaphysical challenge that Divine omnipotence poses to these claims. Scotus argues that a plurality of necessarily existent, essentially omnipotent, and essentially free beings is logically impossible. Omnipotent power is necessarily efficacious, and freedom (as self-determining power for opposites) can will whatever it wants. If there were two such beings (*A* and *B*), it would be possible for *A* to will *S* for time *T* and *B* to will not-*S* for time *T* and so for contradictories to be simultaneously true. If *B* were not essentially free, the problem could be solved by *A*'s always causally determining what *B* wills, or vice versa. If *B* were not essentially omnipotent, then the problem could be solved by *A*'s making *B* not to be omnipotent any longer, or vice versa. If *B* were not necessarily existent, the problem could be solved by *A*'s making *B* cease to exist. But if *B* is supposed to be necessarily existent, essentially omnipotent, and essentially free, the contradiction cannot be avoided.

Medieval formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity hoped to evade the omnipotence problem metaphysically, by appeal to their claim that there is one and only one concrete thing—viz., the Divine essence—that is omnipotent, and that it is numerically unmultiplied in the three Divine persons. Since they all share numerically the same power-pack, they also share numerically the same thoughts and actions *ad extra*. Here Swinburne has begged to differ, taking the

¹¹ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 6, 126–37. There are some problems with Swinburne's accounts of God's ontological or metaphysical necessity, but they need not detain us now.

¹² Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 8, 181–2.

¹³ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 8, 176–7.

Trinity to be constituted of three Divine souls, which he identifies with three concrete individual essences. Turning the Trinity into three numerically distinct individual souls that share no metaphysical constituents is the first division Swinburne effects in God's mind!

Instead, Swinburne seeks to handle the omnipotence problem by appeal to his own distinctive-action theory, according to which freedom is not a self-determining power for opposites, but an unobstructed orientation towards what is reasonable. Reason aims at maximizing or equal-besting the apparent good. That some course is the best constitutes overriding reason to do it; that each of some set of alternatives is "equal best" constitutes overriding reason to implement one of them; that an action is overall bad constitutes overriding reason not to do it; that it is good (bad) constitutes some reason for (against) doing it. Rational agents do (refrain from) what they have overriding reason to do (not to do) unless obstructed by non-rational forces.¹⁴

If there were a plurality of Divine individuals, each would know that it would be wrong for them to contradict and so to frustrate one another. Hence, Divine omniscience, perfect goodness, and perfect freedom (in Swinburne's sense) would mean that necessarily, if there is a plurality of Divine individuals, they will devise some cooperative scheme: either elect someone chief, or vote, or divide the labor. Much the western theological minority report that it is, Swinburne thinks division of labor would be best.¹⁵ Thus, for Swinburne, there can be a plurality of Divine individuals, because perfect goodness combines with omniscience to limit what omnipotence can choose, while perfect freedom necessarily conforms!

3.3. Word–Flesh Christology, Modified

Swinburne has affirmed that Divinity is an essential kind. However cooperative the Divine individual souls constituting the Social Trinity must be, one corollary is clear: if they are—as Swinburne claims—neither immutable nor impassible, then the Divine persons can to some extent think different thoughts, perform different actions, and have different experiences from one another. By contrast, Swinburne declares that human being is a nominal essence, a conventional sortal with fuzzy boundaries. However vague and variable the concept, Swinburne finds human being as we know and speak about it susceptible of a mind–body dualist analysis: the core of human being is a human soul that is normally connected with a human body and so capable of having sensations, thoughts, and purposes, a structure of beliefs and desires, and limitations on its powers and knowledge imposed by the human body.

How could a Divine individual, Who is essentially Divine, become human as well? Not by acquiring *another* soul, Swinburne insists, because two souls would

¹⁴ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 3, 68–71.

¹⁵ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 8, 172–5.

mean two concrete individual substances and his metaphysics has no way appropriately to unite them—to make them belong to one another in such a way that the Divine individual could be characterized by the numerically distinct human soul's characteristics.¹⁶ If Incarnation is to be metaphysically possible, it must be that a Divine individual soul—while remaining Divine—can become human (come to fall under the conventional sortal “human being”) as well.¹⁷

In effect, Swinburne forwards a modified Word–flesh Christology: it is a *Word–flesh* Christology because the Divine Word (the second person of the Trinity) is the only soul Christ has; it is a *modified* Word–flesh Christology because the Divine Word is understood to be mutable and passible in such a way as to be able to become human as well as Divine. For God to become human, a Divine individual soul would have to take a human body from our gene pool and permit Itself to become causally interactive with that body in the way human souls normally are. The Divine individual soul would not thereby lose the cognitive contents, the thoughts and preferences, that It has by virtue of Its essential Divine attributes. Since It is *essentially* Divine, and since omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect goodness are essential to Divinity, that would be metaphysically impossible. Rather, the Divine individual soul would allow Itself to acquire a further range of contents—sensations, feelings, beliefs, and desires—by virtue of Its connection with the human body. As on Weston's theory, Incarnation would mean not kenosis, but an *extension* of Its normal modes of operation. Besides the Divine way of thinking and acting, the Divine individual would have a human way of thinking and acting.¹⁸

Metaphysically, what Swinburne offers is one soul substance with two ranges of consciousness: a divided mind. Swinburne credits Freud with helping us to see how an agent can have two systems of belief that are to some extent independent of one another, so that, in performing some actions, the agent is acting on one system of belief and not guided by beliefs of the other system; and conversely. All desires and beliefs are accessible to the agent, but s/he refuses to admit to consciousness those beliefs that are relevant to the action but on which s/he is not acting. While Freud proposed this model to account for our widespread and systematic self-deception, Swinburne reckons that soteriological motives for Incarnation would furnish God the Son with good, non-neurotic reasons for dividing His mind. The partition would be created and enforced by a conscious decision informed by the comprehensive Divine consciousness, which would have access to everything. But there would be a vast gap between the range of consciousness out of which the Divine Word operates as God and that out of which He functions as human—all the more so, because Swinburne wants the human consciousness to correspond to a plain-sense reading of New Testament

¹⁶ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 9, 196–7.

¹⁷ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 9, 194.

¹⁸ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 9, 196–8.

accounts of Jesus' earthly career. The human range would have to house ignorance, growth, temptation, experiencing infirmities, learning obedience through suffering. The human range would have limited access to the comprehensive contents of the Divine mind.¹⁹

Moreover, Swinburne envisions the Divine Word acting out of Its comprehensive consciousness to exercise some editorial control over the contents of Its narrower human consciousness. Imagining perfect goodness to be bound by obligations and duties, Swinburne reckons that Christ's human belief-set should include enough to guarantee reliable knowledge of His human duties and of the doctrinal content His earthly ministry was supposed to convey, but might not be enough to rule out temptations to the lesser good. Likewise, the Divine Word's human affections should not sum to a balance of desire to do wrong. Its human beliefs and affections might render It liable to do less than the best action, however, and leave Its human consciousness fearing It might succumb to temptation.²⁰

Looking back to Weston's modified kenotic theory, recall how his quest for psychological models was frustrated partly because he insisted on claiming not only that there is one and only one subject of consciousness or psychological center behind the career of Jesus described in the Gospels, but also that there is one and only one subject of consciousness or psychological center in Christ at all; and partly because Weston's human cases didn't show one person operating out of two centers of relationship at once! Swinburne's strategy is explicitly to abandon the first to insist that Incarnation involves not one, but two psychological centers of thought and action. Otherwise, Swinburne's account stands as one good way to capture metaphysically the rest of what Weston wanted to say.

3.4. The Contradiction Problem

Swinburne offers us an individual soul that is—à la (T10)—essentially and everlastingly Divine but that begins contingently to be human. Swinburne supposes this to be metaphysically possible because the predicates “Divine” and “human” are not really incompatible. The same individual soul can have both a comprehensive consciousness and a limited system of beliefs and desires which are the interactive product of its connection with a human body. A soul that has such a set of beliefs and desires is thereby human. A soul thus interacting with the body is a human being. Swinburne thus denies that “*x* is human” entails “*x* has limited knowledge and power”; rather “*x* is human” entails “*x* includes a limited system of beliefs and desires and puts limited power to act behind them.” Again, Swinburne insists, “*x* is human” does not entail “*x* is *merely* human” but only “*x* has a human way of thinking and acting.”²¹

¹⁹ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 9, 201.

²⁰ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 9, 198–9, 204–8.

²¹ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 9, 197–8.

Swinburne's Christology depends on his mind–body dualist account of what it is to be a human being, on his understanding of Divinity as mutable and passible (and hence on a revision of [3]), on his contention that souls might change and come to be of a nominal-essence kind that they weren't before (e.g., humans into gorillas; Divine into human), and on his claim that some souls might be of two kinds at once (notably, Divine *and* human). Are these philosophical interpretations adequate to the Christological intentions of Chalcedon (two natures; one person) and Constantinople (two wills)?

Swinburne insists that Divinity hasn't been diluted, because a mutable and passible Deity can do all of the explanatory work his inductive cosmological arguments require. (Swinburne gives a strong defense of this claim in his other books, but space does not permit a rehearsal of that case here.)

What about Christ's humanity? Does Swinburne not demote humanity when he says that God's being human does not involve a separate soul? Isn't his account reductive with respect to Constantinople's contention that Christ has a human as well as a Divine will? Swinburne protests that he has accommodated patristic desiderata and intentions. When the fathers worried that unmodified Word–flesh Christology denied a human soul to Christ, what they were concerned about was depriving Jesus of any human psychological life. When the fathers insisted on two wills, they meant to say that He has a human way of acting in which His choices and desires are informed by a human way of thinking. Swinburne insists that they could not have been wedded to the idea of Christ's literally having two concrete individual souls in which to house the two distinct ranges of consciousness, because—on Swinburne's metaphysics—that would be tantamount to Nestorianism.²² Does not Swinburne's claim—that the Divine soul becomes human as well—run counter to Chalcedon by confusing the two natures? Swinburne would defend his negative answer the same way. Housing the human range of consciousness in numerically the same soul as the Divine consciousness does not swallow up or fail to preserve the properties of the human nature. He has avoided Apollinarianism or monophysitism by including a distinctly and distinctively human psychological life within numerically the same soul.

4. MEDIEVAL METAPHYSICS, ARISTOTLE REVISED AGAIN!

4.1. Real Distinction and Characterization

Like Aristotle but contrary to Swinburne, medieval Latin school theologians take human being for a real, not a nominal essence, one that is—in all non-miraculous

²² Ibid.

cases—contemporary-sense essential to the primary substances that have it (e.g., to Socrates, to Plato, and to each of us). That meant that for them—unlike Swinburne—their endorsement of (T10) carried with it the claim that a given *natural* kind might be essential to some, but only contingently characterize others.

Not only do they treat natural kinds as susceptible of *real* definitions. They *reify* the natures by treating them as really constitutive of the things to which they belong. They read Aristotle to be claiming

(T12) a primary substance (e.g., Socrates) is necessarily identical with the individual substance nature (Socrates' humanity) that is contemporary-sense essential to it.

Their endorsement of (T10) drove them to draw a further distinction that never entered Aristotle's mind, to complicate Aristotle's contrast between primary and secondary substances by positing two types of concrete individual substance things: primary substances (e.g., Socrates or Beulah the cow) and individual substance natures (Socrates' humanity; Beulah's bovinity). They needed to claim that it was possible for something that is not essentially human (preeminently, a Divine person, the Divine Word, Who is essentially Divine) to unite itself to a really distinct concrete individual human nature in such a way as to be characterized by it and to be the ultimate subject of the actions and passions that are done and suffered through it.

Faced with an analogous problem—how to unite really distinct Divine and human souls—Swinburne throws up his hands, insists that it is impossible. If the only type of union available between really distinct substance things were aggregation, then Swinburne would appear to be right. Mere aggregation can unite any really distinct things into a whole (e.g., the Taj Mahal and the honey bee in the hive), but the union would be too loose for Christological purposes, because it does not support any literal sharing of attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*)—any literal denomination or *naming* of one part *from* another (e.g., the Taj Mahal is not truly said to be a honey-maker, nor is the bee truly called a beautiful building).

Medievals recognized three ways in which one thing might be named from or denominated from something:

- (a) *per se* denomination: the Divine Word is Divine *per se* and Socrates is human *per se*; the Divine Word couldn't exist without being Divine, and Socrates couldn't exist without being human;
- (b) *per accidens* denomination: Socrates is white *per accidens*. Socrates is really distinct from whiteness and is contingently white in the sense that Socrates could exist without being white;
- (c) *extrinsic* denomination: Socrates is older than Plato and shorter than Aristotle and uglier than Alcibiades.

By [T9] the Divine Word as essentially Divine could not be human *per se* and essentially. But extrinsic denomination seems too loose to reflect human nature's actually belonging to the Divine Word as Its own. Accordingly, Scotus and Ockham take as analogy denomination *per accidens*.

Medieval Latin Aristotelians reify not only substance natures, but some or all accident natures, qualities chief among them. Yet, from their Aristotelian point of view, white Socrates is not a mere aggregation of Socrates and whiteness; whiteness *inheres* in Socrates. Likewise, they want to say, the Word made flesh is not a mere aggregate of Divinity and humanity; the individual human nature is *assumed* by the Divine Word.

But what is the metaphysical difference between mere aggregation and inherence? Medieval Latin Aristotelians cite three features:

- (a) co-location: Socrates and his whiteness are in the same place at the same time;
- (b) potency-actualization: the whiteness actualizes a potency for being white in Socrates;
- (c) ontological dependence: the whiteness essentially depends on Socrates for its existence in a non-efficient-causal way.

(a) does not seem relevant to angels (as essentially immaterial substances) and their inherent accidents. Likewise, it is of no help in understanding the Divine Word's relation to the human nature, because the Divine Word is either nowhere (because immaterial) or everywhere (by virtue of Divine knowledge and power) and no more where the human nature is than where everything else is.

Medievals ruled out (b) on the philosophical ground that the Divine Word as simple cannot be a subject of inherence. They also excluded it on philosophico-theological grounds. Philosophy tells us that, when whiteness actualizes a substance's potency for being white, it affects how it is qualified; and when a substantial form actualizes matter's potency to receive it, it affects the substance-kind to which its subject belongs. Medieval reasoning that human nature is a substance-kind. If it actualized the potency of some subject to receive it, it would affect the substance-kind to which its subject belonged. Since the Divine Word is essentially Divine, such potency-actualization would result in a metaphysically impossible and theologically impermissible confusion of natures! Likewise, the other way around, if the Divine Word were supposed to inhere in the human nature!²³

Scotus concludes that the most relevant relation is (c), an accident's ontological dependence on its subject. Scotus emphasizes that this relation is not to be identified with (although it bears some analogies to) efficient causal dependence. All creatures are efficient causally dependent on all three persons of the Trinity as

²³ Aquinas, *Sent.* III, d. 5, q. 1, a. 2, c; Parma VII.68B (= Parma edition, volume VII, page 68, column B); Scotus, *Op. Ox.* III, d. 5, q. 1, n. 2; d. 6, q. 1, n. 9; Wadding VII.1.121, 176 (= Wadding edition, vol. VII.1, pages 121 and 176).

their first efficient cause. But not all creatures are assumed by the Divine persons.²⁴ Likewise, a subject (e.g., the intellect) may be an efficient partial cause of some of its accidents (e.g., an act of understanding), but this is a different relation from the ontological dependence the accident has on it as its subject. Scotus declares that ontological dependence of a broad-sense property thing on a subject is sufficient for characterization. Even if whiteness did not actualize a potency in Socrates, Socrates would be the subject on which the whiteness ontologically depended and that would be enough to make it true that Socrates is white. Likewise, ontological dependence by the assumed human nature on the Divine Word is sufficient for the Divine Word to be contingently denominated from the human nature.

Even if the Divine Word had no potency to be actualized by the individual human nature, it might seem that, if the Divine Word is first not-related and then related, the Divine Word undergoes a change—contrary to Divine simplicity and immutability. To avoid this, Scotus invokes the doctrine of non-mutual relations. Sometimes the truth of “ aRb ” requires a relation thing R in a and a co-relation thing R' in b (e.g., where this wall is similar in color to that wall). But other times it is enough if a is the term of a relation-thing R' that inheres in b (i.e., if $bR'a$). Scotus imagines that the Divine Word (a) will be the term of such a dependence relation (R') that inheres in the assumed human nature (b) without any corresponding R -thing inhering in It (a), and that this will be enough to make “the Divine Word assumes the human nature” true.²⁵

²⁴ Scotus, *Op.Ox.* III, d. 1, q. 1, n. 7; Wadding VII.1.12; III, d. 1, q. 1, nn. 9–10; Wadding VII.1.15–16; III, d. 1, q. 2, nn. 5–8; Wadding VII.1.36–8.

²⁵ Scotus, *Op.Ox.* III, d. 1, q. 1, n. 4; Wadding VII.1.7.

Richard Cross complains that this is to treat essential dependence as a one-place predicate (*The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ch. 9, 207, 213). But this doesn't follow. Scotus is embracing a non-uniform account of the truth conditions for “ aRb ”:

- (i) Where each of a and b could exist without being related, then “ aRb ” requires a relation thing R in a , and a co-relation thing R' in b (e.g., this wall's being similar in color to that wall).
- (ii) Where a couldn't exist without being R to b , even if b could exist without being R' to a , R is really the same as but formally distinct from a (e.g. the creature's relation of dependence on the Creator).
- (iii) Where “ aRb ” can come to be true if there is a change without any change in b , then it suffices that R is in a and b is the term of R .

All of these metaphysical analyses treat R as a two-place predicate, which has a term as well as a foundation of inherence. They differ as to whether a co-relation property R' has to exist in the term of R and in whether R is really distinct from a or from its foundation in a . See my *William Ockham* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1987), ch. 7, 215–76.

Cross also suggests that treating assumption as a non-mutual relation which the Divine Word is first not the term of, and then the term of, without any real change in the Divine Word Itself, is to count assumption among the merely external relations (like “shorter than” or “to the right of”). Because no real change in the Divine Word is involved, this would—Cross claims—skate too close to Docetism (the heresy that Christ was not really Himself human but only appeared human). (*The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ch. 9, 215).

But, once again, Scotus regards relations as two-place predicates, as involving both a *foundation* which is or is in one of the relata and a *term*. Suppose Socrates and Plato are similar in being white. According to Scotus, Socrates' similarity inheres in its foundation (Socrates' whiteness), but it is

Although this idea of non-mutual relations was widely accepted among medieval Aristotelians, anyone who – like Swinburne – denied immutability and impassibility to be essential to Godhead could allow that the Divine Word acquires a new relation of assuming when it assumes the human nature. Nor would this necessarily renew their worry about the fusion of natures, for it is one thing to suppose that human nature inheres in by actualizing a potency in Divinity or Divinity inheres in by actualizing a potency in humanity. It is another to suppose that Divinity is first not inhered in and then inhered in by the co-relative of the ontological dependence relation in the human nature—that is, by the relation of sustaining or supporting or suppositing the human nature.

What is key is that the ontological dependence relation that Scotus identifies be sufficient for characterization. Scotus says that it is: the ontological dependence of whiteness on Socrates suffices for the truth of “Socrates is white,” and the ontological dependence of the human nature on the Divine Word would suffice for the truth of “The Divine Word is human” and be enough to license the further credal predications: “born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, buried, but rose on the third day.”

4.2. Characterization and Contradiction

No sooner is characterization secured than the contradiction problem raises its head. Indeed, it might seem that Christology is trapped in a dilemma: either the Divine Word and the human nature are united enough for characterization—in which case the Divine Word is the subject of contradictory properties simultaneously, or they aren’t united enough for characterization—in which case Nestorianism seems to follow.²⁶

Limited denomination? Traditional Christology requires that the Divine Word and the human nature be joined in such a way that the Divine Word can be characterized from it. But the traditional tag—*communicatio idiomatum* or sharing of the predicates—was recognized early on not to mean that whatever is truly predicable of the ontologically dependent thing is truly predicable of that on which it ontologically depends. (i) This is trivially true, since the ontologically dependent thing is ontologically dependent on its subject, but the subject is not ontologically dependent on itself as on a subject. (Ontological dependence is not a reflexive relation: a thing may be independent, but nothing can be

“towards” Plato who is the term of that relation, with the result that Socrates is similar *to* Plato. By contrast, whiteness inheres in Socrates but is not *towards* anything; that is why it is a one-place predicate! Likewise, the assumed human nature is the foundation of a real relation of ontological dependence, which inheres in the human nature but is *towards* the Divine Word. Cross’ criticism refuses to take seriously Scotus’ idea that being the term of a relation of ontological dependence would be enough for characterization (so that it is true to say *both* that the assumed human nature depends on the Divine Word *and* that the Divine Word supports or sustains or supposits the human nature) even if no co-relation really inhered in the term itself.

²⁶ Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ch. 8, 192–9.

ontologically dependent on itself!) Likewise, the assumed nature is really distinct from the Divine Word, but the Divine Word is not really distinct from Itself. (ii) More substantively, neither the essence nor the definition of the ontologically dependent thing would be truly predicated of its subject. Whiteness is essentially a color and a quality, but Socrates is not essentially or otherwise a color or a quality. What is true is that by virtue of the ontological dependence of whiteness on Socrates, Socrates is denominated from these, so that Socrates is colored and Socrates is qualified. (iii) Again, the origination properties of the ontologically dependent thing are not thereby truly predicated of the subject on which it depends. Socrates' whiteness may begin to be at t_m , but it does not follow that Socrates begins to be at t_m . But Socrates is denominated from this origination property, so that it is true that Socrates begins to be white at t_m .²⁷

All the same, these more technical observations do not seem to address the cases most important for Christology: that the Divine Word walked and talked, touched and spat, was ignorant of the day and the hour, suffered within the frame of a finite consciousness, was possessed of a mind that could be "blown," whose meaning-making functions could be brought at least temporarily to a halt by the pain and degradation of crucifixion.

Qualifying the assertions: One ancient and honorable way to handle the Contradiction Problem is to explain that it is *qua* Divine that God the Son is eternal but *qua* human that He is born of a virgin, *qua* Divine that God the Son is omniscient but *qua* human that He does not know the day or the hour. Recent philosophers²⁸ cast suspicion on these moves, however. Without further metaphysical underpinnings it is easy to reduce to an absurdity. Why could we not equally well claim that "x is a round square" is not contradictory even though it implies that "x is a figure without angles and x is a figure with four right angles," because really "x *qua* round is without angles and x *qua* square has four right angles," and angleless pertains primarily to round while four-times-right-angled pertains primarily to square?

Medievals probed how the "*qua*" should be understood to function and distinguished three principal ways. (1) *Reduplication:* Strictly, they held that in statements of the form "x *qua* G is F" the "*qua* G" functions to give the reason why the predicate F attaches to the subject x. Accordingly, such propositions were expounded by something like the following: "x is F and x is G and all Gs are F." Thus, "Socrates *qua* human is rational" is true, while "Socrates *qua* white is

²⁷ This might be enough to defuse the worries raised by Morris about the putative contradiction between "God is eternal" and "The human nature begins to be at c. 4 BCE." Morris' own strategy is to extract origination properties from the substance-kind essences and relocate them in the individual essences. But Morris' move runs counter to Aristotelian intuitions according to which it is the substance-kind that explains the individual's origination (or lack thereof) and duration (*The Logic of God Incarnate*, ch. 3, 56–62, ch. 4, 71–2).

²⁸ Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, ch. 2, 38–9, and Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ch. 8, 205.

rational” is false, because all humans but not all white things are (necessarily) rational. *Qua*-propositions reduplicatively construed are of no help with the Contradiction Problem in Christology, however, because “*x qua G is F*” entails “*x is F*.” On a reduplicative analysis, “The Divine Word *qua* Divine is omniscient” and “The Divine Word *qua* human is ignorant of the day and the hour” entail “The Divine Word is omniscient and yet ignorant of the day and the hour.”

(2) *Specification*: Less properly, the *qua*-clause is taken to qualify the subject term *x*, by “distracting” it from standing for the whole and making it stand instead for the named part (the *G* in “*qua G*”) of which the predicate *F* is literally true. Consider the ancient example “the Ethiopian is white with respect to his teeth.” Taken specifically, “with respect to his teeth” distracts the subject term—“the Ethiopian”—from standing for the whole Ethiopian to standing instead for his teeth, which are literally and truly white. Likewise, in “Christ *qua* Divine is omniscient,” the subject term stands for His Divine nature or for the Divine Word which is really the same as the Divine nature, while in “Christ *qua* human does not know the day or the hour” the subject term stands for His humanity. When the qualification is taken specifically, the inference “*x qua G is F; therefore x is F*” is invalid. Contradiction is averted: it will not follow from “the Ethiopian is white with respect to his teeth” that the Ethiopian is white; and it will not follow from “Christ *qua* Divine is omniscient and Christ *qua* human does not know the day or the hour” that Christ is omniscient and Christ is not omniscient.

To apply the specificative analysis to the Christological propositions is to treat Christ as a whole made up of really distinct parts, which can serve as really distinct subjects of the contradictory properties. The trouble here is the same as that for mere aggregation: the specificative interpretation threatens to remove contradiction at the expense of characterization, for it is not generally true (indeed is very often false) that a property truly predicable of one part is truly predicable of another part or of the whole of which it is a part. Yet, *God*, the Divine Word, is supposed to be the One Who is not only omniscient, but ignorant of the day and the hour!²⁹

This difficulty did not escape medieval attention. Aquinas and Scotus both distinguish two kinds of cases. (i) Sometimes a predicate *F* applies to a part *P* where the predicate *F* is the type of predicate that could also apply to other parts or to the whole *W* of which *P* is a part. For example, the table leg might weigh two pounds, but weight is a property that pertains to the other legs, to the table top, and to the whole table. Thus, one can't infer from the fact that the table leg weighs two pounds that the whole table weighs two pounds. (ii) But there are other cases in which a predicate *F* applies to a part *P* (a) where *P* is the precise

²⁹ Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ch. 8, 192–9.

or only part of *W* to which *F* could apply, or (b) where *P* is the principal part by virtue of which *F* would apply to the whole.

For an example of (ii.a), hair is the only part of Socrates that could be literally blond. Aquinas says, because of this, Socrates' having blond hair makes it at least figuratively true that (the whole) Socrates is blond. Analogously, since Christ's human soul is His only part that could be ignorant of the day and the hour (because the Divine Word is *essentially* omniscient), it is at least figuratively true that (the whole) Christ is ignorant of the day and the hour. This way, we can have *figurative* characterization without contradicting the literal truth that Christ is omniscient.³⁰

For an example of (ii.b), Aquinas and Scotus identify the heart or the chest as the principal subject of health. Aquinas is willing to say that Socrates is figuratively healthy because his heart/chest is healthy. But Scotus is willing to allow that—if the heart/chest were really the principal or only relevant part—we might even say that Socrates is *literally* healthy because his heart/chest is healthy.³¹ Scotus does not find this much help with the Christological characterization problem, however, because neither the human nature nor the human soul is Christ's principal part. These observations would not allow us to infer from "Christ *qua* human is ignorant" or "Christ *qua* human is a creature," that Christ is ignorant or that Christ is a creature.³² Likewise, with "an Ethiopian is white with respect to his teeth": "whiteness" is apt to pertain to other body parts (e.g., skin) as much as to teeth, so that whiteness in the teeth is not sufficient to make it appropriate to call the Ethiopian as a whole white. By contrast, skin might seem to be his principal colored part, by virtue of whose blackness it would be appropriate to say that the Ethiopian is black.³³

(3) *Qualifying the predicate term*: The remaining alternative is to let the *qua*-clause qualify the predicate term. Scotus says that the *qua*-phrase distracts the predicate term: on this analysis, the predicate in "the Ethiopian is white with respect to his teeth" is not "white" but "white-toothed."³⁴ Likewise, in "Socrates is blond with respect to his hair" the predicate is not "blond" but "blond-haired." In "Christ *qua* human is a creature," the predicate would be "created human," and "Christ *qua* human is a creature" would not entail "Christ is a creature."³⁵ In general, "the Divine Word is *F-qua*-Divine and not-*F-qua*-human" seems both to keep characterization and to avoid contradiction! Was this not the desired result?

In his book *The Metaphysics of The Incarnation*, Richard Cross remains dubious. On this analysis, where the *qua*-clause is taken to qualify the predicate

³⁰ Allan Bäck, "Scotus on the Consistency of the Incarnation and the Trinity," 86. Aquinas' example is "curly" but that doesn't work as well in English (*Summa Theologica* III, q. 16, a. 8).

³¹ Scotus, *Op. Ox.* III, d. 11, q. 2, n. 6; Wadding VII.247.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Scotus, *Op. Ox.* III, d. 11, q. 2, n. 4; Wadding VII.1.246.

³⁴ Scotus, *Op. Ox.* III, d. 11, q. 2, n. 3; Wadding VII.1.246.

³⁵ Scotus, *Op. Ox.* III, d. 11, qq. 2–5; Wadding VII.1.246–7.

term, it turns out that, in “the Ethiopian is white with respect to his teeth” and “Socrates is white,” different predicates are asserted of the Ethiopian and of Socrates, for the Ethiopian is said to be white-toothed, while Socrates is said to be white *simpliciter*. Likewise, Christ or the Divine Word will be said to be humanly ignorant, while Peter and Paul are ignorant *simpliciter*. Christ or the Divine Word will be denominated from the assumed nature, but the same predicates will not be true of the Divine Word as of mere humans. Cross charges that this is theologically inadequate, because Chalcedon asserts that “our Lord Jesus Christ . . . is the same (*homoousios*) with us as to His manhood.”

Cross worries that two-natures Christology is locked in yet another destructive dilemma:

Either [a] the *qua*-phrase distracts the subject or [b] it qualifies the predicate.

If [a] it distracts the subject [to the human nature itself], then [c] the human-nature predicates aren't predicated of the same subject as the Divine-nature predicates [viz., the Divine Word].

If [b] it distracts the predicate term, then [d] the Divine Word doesn't have the same predicates predicated of It through Its human nature as we do through our human nature.

Each of [c] and [d] fails to conform to the requirements of Chalcedon.

Both ways [e] the simple literal predication of the human nature property of Christ and/or the Divine Word is ruled out—which also fails to conform to the requirements of Chalcedon.³⁶

My own reply is that Chalcedon's demand that Christ be *homoousios* with the Father with respect to Godhead and *homoousios* with us as to His manhood does not require the simple predication of the human nature or the predicates that flow from it. It takes a brief metaphysical excursus to grasp what I have in mind.

Metaphysical refocusing: Arguably, semantics presupposes metaphysics; putative truth conditions vary with ontological commitments. Metaphysical revision might dictate a change in the semantics as well. Medieval Latin school theologians have modified Aristotle by endorsing

(T10) it is metaphysically possible for a primary substance *x* that is essentially of substance-kind *K* also to possess/be/come to be of substance kind *K'* (where *K* is not the same as *K'*) contingently and non-essentially.

For them, the flip side of this claim is that

(T13) it is metaphysically possible for any creatable substance nature to be ontologically dependent upon something else as its subject.

In the *Categories*, Aristotle advances individual substance things as necessarily primary substances, the ultimate subjects which it is metaphysically impossible to

³⁶ Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ch. 8, 204–5.

subject to (in the sense of ontologically dependent upon) anything else. Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham concede that Aristotle not only captures the way things for the most part are. He gives a correct analysis of the metaphysical default position: apart from Divine intervention, individual substance natures will be primary substances and no creature has power to subject them to (make them ontologically dependent upon) anything else. But they reasoned that the case of Incarnation reveals something about individual substance natures that Aristotle was in no position to know: viz., that each and all of them has the metaphysical possibility of being subjected to (made ontologically dependent upon) something else by Divine power. Ockham went on explicitly to draw the conclusion that not only Divine persons, but each and every created individual substance (e.g., Socrates, Beulah the cow, Brownie the donkey, Fido the dog), has the metaphysical possibility of being an “alien” supposit for a created individual substance nature of another kind.³⁷

My suggestion is that these metaphysical revisions complicate our semantics. Once it is claimed that not only Aristotelian accidents but individual substance natures can be ontologically dependent, once it is admitted that alien supposition is possible, then one has to relativize the predicates to the substance nature in question: not just “ x is F ” but “ x is F *qua* N .” Where N is the nature that x cannot exist without, then “ x is F *qua* N ” collapses into/entails “ x is F .” But where x is an alien supposit of N , “ x is F *qua* N ” does not entail “ x is F .” Suppose God caused Socrates to assume a bovine nature. From “Socrates is rational *qua* human” we could infer “Socrates is rational *simpliciter*” because Socrates is essentially human. But from “Socrates is not rational *qua* bovine” we could not infer “Socrates is not rational *simpliciter*” because Socrates is not essentially a cow but only an alien supposit of the bovine nature. Socrates would really share the same substance-kind—bovinity—with Beulah. Both Socrates and Beulah would be cud-chewers *qua* bovine. But Socrates would not share with Beulah the predicate “cud-chewer *simpliciter*” because of the way Socrates possesses bovinity.

Likewise, “the Divine Word is omniscient *qua* Divine” entails “the Divine Word is omniscient” because the Divine Word is essentially Divine. But “the Divine Word knows neither the day nor the hour *qua* human” does not entail “the Divine Word is ignorant *simpliciter*” because the Divine Word is an alien supposit of the human nature. This result is not un-Chalcedonian, however, because the difference between valid and invalid inferences from the *secundum*

³⁷ For a more detailed discussion, see my “The Metaphysics of the Incarnation in Some Fourteenth Century Franciscans,” in *Essays Honoring Allan B. Wolter* (Franciscan Institute Publications, 1985), 21–57, and “What’s Metaphysically Special about Supposits?” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume 78 (2005), 15–52. For Scotus and Ockham, these claims did not eliminate but revised Aristotle’s substance/accident distinction. What for Aristotle were metaphysical necessities—that individual substance things are ultimate subjects that cannot depend on anything as on a subject, while accidents are inherent and cannot exist without depending on something as on a subject—became for Scotus *natural* aptitudes—individual substances have a natural aptitude to be unsubjected ultimate subjects and accidents have a natural aptitude to inhere in another as in a subject—and for Ockham metaphysical defaults which could not be obstructed by any created power but only by Divine power.

quid to *simpliciter* propositions does not reflect *the content* of the human nature predicated but the different *ways* in which Socrates and Christ have their human natures. Chalcedon requires us to attribute a real human nature—a real human body and a real human soul—to Christ. But Chalcedon also requires us to attribute them to Christ in a different way from the way we attribute them to Socrates. Qualifying the predicates captures the point that the subject *is* characterized or denominated by the nature for which it is an alien supposit. Since it is not characterized *simpliciter*, you do not get contradiction—which is the very result we want.

If one asks what I mean by “*qua*” when I say “*x* is *F qua N*” I mean that *N* is the nature by virtue of which *x* is *F*. But “by virtue of which” is ambiguous between two meanings, both of which I intend. In some cases, *N* is the nature by virtue of which *x* is *F* because *N* entails *F*: e.g., “Socrates is rational *qua* human” “the Divine Word is omniscient *qua* Divine.” In some cases, *N* is the nature by virtue of which *x* is *F* because *N* entails the real possibility of *F*. In Aristotelian metaphysics, the substance nature makes a thing of such a kind as to have accidents from various determinable ranges and not to be able to have accidents of other kinds: e.g., being an angel makes something the kind of thing that can have thoughts and choices; being a body makes something the kind of thing that can be colored. Being human makes the Divine Word the kind of thing that can eat figs, but it doesn’t settle the question of whether He will actually eat figs during His earthly life.

One further point requires clarification. My soteriological plot requires *God* to perform human actions and to suffer human pain and grief in roughly the ways that the Gospels describe. It is easy to imagine, however, that since the Divine Word is essentially God the assumed human nature is like a ventriloquist’s puppet which the Divine Word operates through Its Divine thought and will. Divine determinism is, of course, an ancient and honorable if controversial position in philosophical theology. Certainly, medieval Latin school theologians agreed that God creates and sustains all creatures, and concurs in the exercise of their active and passive causal powers. Certainly, the Blessed Trinity will do for Christ’s human nature whatever the Blessed Trinity does for any other creature—create, sustain, and concur. What is important for present purposes is to see that our medieval Aristotelian account of hypostatic union does not, by itself, imply the determination of the Divine Word’s human agency by Its Divine agency, or that the Divine Word is related to Its human agency only through the mediation of Its Divine agency. This is easier to see by considering the different example of Socrates’ assuming (becoming the alien supposit for) an individual bovine nature. When Socrates chewed cud or swatted flies with his tail or became agitated at the swishing of the matador’s red cape, his human nature would not *ipso facto* be engaged at all, for his human nature included no power to mobilize such bovine activities before, and acquires none with the hypostatic union. Socrates’ acting and suffering through his bovine nature would be unmediated

by his human nature. Socrates is the ultimate subject of bovine acting and suffering because of the ontological dependence that the individual bovine nature bears to him.³⁸

5. CONCLUDING PROS AND CONS

In my judgment, both of the metaphysical theories just sketched—Swinburne’s and the medieval modified Aristotelian one—allow for characterization without contradiction. Both bring out of the theoretical storehouse what is new and what is old.

5.1. Form over Content

Distinctive of medieval Aristotelian accounts is that they establish the union between the Divine Word and the assumed human nature *metaphysically*. They do not make the union depend on anything about the content of the two substance natures. In particular, they do not make hypostatic union depend on how Godlike the human nature is or on the moral character formed or moral track record of actions performed or the cultural lifestyle lived through it. Christologies that make Jesus’ status as Christ depend upon or *consist in* His being the bearer of exemplary God-consciousness (Schleiermacher) or of new being (Tillich), or His being a moral paragon or the quintessence of self-sacrifice to which a turn-of-the-twentieth-century Englishman might aspire (Temple), make systematically driven assumptions about Jesus’ human nature that run beyond our evidence. They are empirically vulnerable to historical studies of Second Temple Judaism which might unveil Jesus’ New Testament roles as something culturally much more remote from us than we thought. Medieval Aristotelian accounts explain how the metaphysical connection they envision is possible between any Divine person (some say any substance supposit) and any creatable individual substance nature, whatever its content may be. This versatility also makes the relation of hypostatic union (cached as ontological dependence) reusable, and I intend to reuse it to account for the real presence of Christ’s Body and Blood in the eucharist (see chapter 10 [of *Christ and Horrors*]).

Medieval Aristotelian accounts preserve flexibility by not requiring us to adopt any particular solution to the mind–body problem as it applies to human being. Given their doctrine of non-mutual relations, they do not make hypostatic union depend on Divine mutability or passibility either. Even if the real relation of assumption that inheres in the assumed nature has a corresponding co-relation

³⁸ Cross wrestles with this problem in a difficult set of reflections in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ch. 10, 218–29.

(a relation of supporting or sustaining or suppositing) that inheres in the Divine Word, the resultant account of hypostatic union would not require the Divinity to be mutable or passible with respect to other more interesting non-relational properties. Thus, medieval Aristotelian accounts of hypostatic union afford the theologian systematic flexibility to let his/her conclusions about the contents of Divine and human natures be determined by other systematic desiderata, by Scriptures and the results of their historical and text-critical analysis, by reason, and by experience.

Medieval Aristotelian accounts are also strong in preserving Divine and human natures complete and *distinct without confusion*. They do not make the human soul an aspect of the Divine mind, but house it in something created and really distinct from Godhead. They assign the Divine Word a complete human nature, including both a human body and a human soul, both a human intellect and a human will. By itself, the metaphysical connection leaves it open whether and how much control the Divine agency exercises over the human agency and so in no way jeopardizes the two-wills requirement. The exact interaction between them is something for other systematic desiderata, for Scripture and ecclesial pronouncements, to decide.

Medieval Aristotelian theories do reify *individual* properties—both substance and (at least some) accident properties. Medieval Latin Christology did not require the further move of reifying universal properties, because—whatever their philosophical differences regarding the problem of universals—all agreed that it was an individual human nature, not universal human nature, that Christ assumed. Likewise, they embrace *de re* necessities. They see primary substances or substance supposit (e.g., Socrates or Beulah) as constituted by the substance properties that they have essentially. And they understand really distinct accident things (e.g., whiteness) to bear relations of ontological dependence to primary substances or substance supposit, by virtue of which the former characterize the latter (e.g., Socrates is white). So far, rightly or wrongly, they take themselves merely to be following their mentor, Aristotle.

Medieval Aristotelian theories are metaphysically innovative, insofar as they recast the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accidents, to allow individual substance natures to exist without being ultimate subjects but instead to be subjected (via an ontological dependence relation) to alien supposit. Concrete individual substance things still have a natural tendency (Scotus) or metaphysical default (Ockham) towards existing as ultimate subjects. Accidents still have a natural tendency or metaphysical default towards existing in individual substances as ultimate subjects. Not always, but for the most part, things are as Aristotle would have predicted, because these natural tendencies or defaults are obstructable only by Divine power.

5.2. Content over Form

Swinburne's theory carries different metaphysical baggage. He begins with the ancient and honorable and philosophically familiar: with a *res cogitans/res extensa* metaphysical dualism and a mind–body dualist account of human nature. But his position packs in significant metaphysical innovations as well. Salient for Christology are his claims that many soul kinds (e.g., human and gorilla) are merely nominal essences that pertain to individual souls inessentially; kinds that individual souls can have one after another and that Divine souls can have at the same time as being Divine. Companion to these are his theological innovations, most prominently his rendering of a Social Trinity in which the Divine essence is numerically multiplied in the three Divine souls; and his understanding of Divinity as mutable and passible in a special way. Not only are Divine souls able to take the place of human souls in causing the functions of human bodies the way unmodified Word-flesh Christology claimed (a view that was condemned for confusing the natures by making Christ a hybrid). Divine souls are also able to *become human* by becoming causally interactive with human bodies in such a way as to acquire a human range of consciousness distinct from the comprehensive Divine consciousness. This way, the human suffering of Christ involves suffering in the Divine soul's human range of consciousness. Swinburne relies on his Social Trinity, on the fact that the three Divine souls share no metaphysical constituents, to avoid patripassianism. And he relies on the Divinely enforced segregation of the Divine Word's human range of consciousness from His comprehensive range of consciousness to keep the natures unconfused.

5.3. Systematic Preferences

My focus on horrors leads me to agree with Swinburne that the Divine nature is mutable and passible, although ever exercising self-determination over whether and how it changes.³⁹ Taking a page from Hartshorne, I want to say that Divine omniscience involves God in feeling all our feelings, while Divine love for the world expresses Itself in the Trinity's experiencing God-sized grief and frustration over human horror-participation. Such Trinitarian sympathy would mean that Godhead changes and is very likely acted upon. But it would not suffice for Divine solidarity with humans in horror-participation, for, however ghastly the things that we and God experience, the Divine mind cannot be “blown” by them; Divine meaning-making capacities cannot be stumped by them. God's comprehensive consciousness recontextualizes them in a field that includes joy and delight in the Divine perfections, in the Divine persons' love for one another,

³⁹ For a fuller discussion of this point, see my *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, ch. 8, 168–74.

in cosmic excellences beyond our ken (see the YHWH speeches in Job 38–42:6). Even in the midst of horrors, Divine imagination already sees a way around them, Divine power is mobilizing ways and means to make good on them, not only globally but within the frame of each and every individual horror-participant's life. As Anselm says, Divine Wisdom doesn't start what it can't finish, and Divine Power always finishes what it starts. Put otherwise, even if Divinity is mutable and passible, the Divine Persons in Their Divine nature are not vulnerable to horrors. For God to share the horrors, God has to become a kind of thing that can be radically vulnerable to horrors. And this will require a finite range of consciousness with limited powers to cope. That is why I have claimed that Stage-I horror-defeat is accomplished by Incarnation.

Centerpiecing horrors disinclines me to mind-body dualism where human being is concerned. Swinburne's dualism makes us essentially souls, only contingently embodied and only contingently of the human kind. My diagnosis of human radical vulnerability to horrors traces our non-optimality problems to our being personal *animals*, *enmattered* spirits, *embodied* persons, in a material world of real and apparent scarcity. My cosmological hypothesis about God's creative purposes sees the evolution of human being as a contribution towards satisfying God's assimilative aims by personifying matter. My estimates of what it would take for universal Stage-III horror-defeat requires life after death and hence either temporary disembodied survival or temporally interrupted existence followed by resurrection. These desiderata might be accommodated by a dualism that posited a sufficiently intense degree of psycho-physical causal interaction and vulnerability of mind to body. But my analysis of horrors and my experience of life leaves me convinced that embodied persons is what we *are essentially*, and to suspect that something in the neighborhood of medieval hylomorphic theories of human nature might be more apt.

If I incline to a metaphysically tighter connection between the human mind and the human body, I feel more comfortable with the medieval way of dividing Christ's minds (i.e., by making them really distinct things). For Swinburne, the independence of Christ's human from Christ's Divine way of thinking and acting is a function of how the Divine way of thinking and acting chooses to split off the human range. Swinburne's vision of Divine manipulation of the "human" affections to secure the right moral profile not only threatens the human *freedom* of Christ (this would happen as well on medieval Aristotelian theories); on his account, it also jeopardizes the *humanness* of Christ by blurring the boundaries between His human and His comprehensive Divine ranges of consciousness. Swinburne may protest that his accounts have taken care to keep them distinct enough. But I find it preferable to keep the Divine and human minds and wills of Christ distinct by identifying them with really distinct things.

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PART III
ATONEMENT

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13

Atonement According to Aquinas*

Eleonore Stump

I

The doctrine of the Atonement, the doctrine that God has resolved the problem of moral evil in the world by means of the suffering and death of Christ, is the central doctrine of Christianity; and yet very little attention has been paid to it by contemporary philosophers of religion. There are no doubt many reasons for the neglect; but among them is embarrassment, for many of us know this doctrine only in the version which tends to be promulgated by unreflective believers who are more to be admired for devotion than for philosophical expertise. This unreflective account of the Atonement is often assumed to be just the theory of the Atonement held by Anselm (or Luther, or some other notable philosophical theologian), but careful study of the work of such theologians will show that their theories differ significantly from the unreflective account with which most of us are familiar. That account tends to consist in the following set of claims (or something approximately like it).

(A) Human beings by their evil actions have offended God. This offense against God generates a kind of debt, a debt so enormous that human beings by themselves can never repay it. God could, of course, cancel this debt, but God is perfectly just, and it would be a violation of perfect justice simply to cancel a debt without extracting the payment owed. Therefore, God cannot just forgive a person's sin; as a just judge he must sentence all people to everlasting torment as the punishment for their sin. God is also infinitely merciful, however; and so he brings it about that he himself pays their debt in full, by assuming human nature as the incarnate Christ and in that nature enduring the penalty which would otherwise have been imposed on human beings. In consequence, the sins of ordinary human beings are forgiven, and by God's mercy exercised through Christ's passion, they are saved from sin and hell and brought to heaven.

There are many problems with this version of the doctrine of the Atonement. To begin with, contrary to what it intends, it does not, in fact, present God as

* From Thomas V. Morris, ed., *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*. © 1988 University of Notre Dame Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

forgiving human sin. To forgive a debtor is to fail to exact all that is in justice due. But, according to (A), God does exact every bit of the debt owed him by humans; he allows none of it to go unpaid. As (A) tells the story, God himself fully pays the debt owed him. This part of the story is perplexing; but what it shows is that God himself has arranged that the debt be paid in full, not that he has agreed to overlook any part of the debt.

The proponent of (A) might claim that God's forgiveness consists precisely in his not requiring that *we* pay the debt for sin but rather he himself paying it for us in the person of Christ. But it is hard to see what constitutes forgiveness on this claim. Suppose that Daniel owes Susan \$1000 and cannot pay it, but Susan's daughter Maggie, who is Daniel's good friend, does pay Susan the whole \$1000 on Daniel's behalf. Is there any sense in which Susan can be said to forgive the debt? On the contrary, Susan has been repaid in full and has foregone none of what was owed her.

The proponent of (A) will say that God's justice precludes his overlooking the debt and that therefore he has shown mercy and forgiveness in the only way he can, by he himself paying the debt owed him. And, the proponent of (A) might say, surely our intuitions about Susan's forgiveness would be different if it turned out that although her justice did not allow her to cancel Daniel's debt, Susan had instructed her daughter to pay the debt. The case for (A) is also strengthened by remembering that, on the doctrine of the Trinity, Christ is one in being with God the Father, so that the one paying the debt is the same as the one to whom the debt is paid.

Apart from the other perplexities raised by this rejoinder, however, it seems not to emphasize God's justice but to rest on a denial of it. For all the talk of debt is really a metaphor. What (A) is really telling us is that any human being's sins are so great that it is a violation of justice not to punish that person with damnation. What God does in response, however, is to punish not the sinner but a perfectly innocent person instead (a person who, even on the doctrine of the Trinity, is not identical with God the Father, who does the punishing). But how is this just? Suppose that a mother with two sons, one innocent and one very disobedient, inflicted all her disobedient son's justly deserved punishment on her innocent son, on the grounds that the disobedient one was too little to bear all his punishment and her justice required her to punish someone. We would not praise her justice, but rather condemn her as cruel and barbaric, even if the innocent son had assented to this procedure. If the mother could after all forego punishing the disobedient son, why did she not just do so without inflicting suffering on the other child? And how is justice served by punishing a completely innocent person?

Furthermore, the account given in (A) is inconsistent both with itself and with another fundamental Christian doctrine. In the first place, (A) claims that in his suffering and death on the cross Christ paid the full penalty for all human sin so that humans would not have to pay it. And yet it also claims that the penalty for

sin is everlasting damnation; but no matter what sort of agony Christ experienced in his crucifixion, it certainly was not (and was not equivalent to) everlasting punishment, if for no other reason than that Christ's suffering came to an end. Second, (A) maintains that Christ pays the penalty for all sin in full so that humans do not have to do so. But it is a fundamental Christian doctrine that God justly condemns some people to everlasting punishment in hell. If Christ has paid the penalty for sin completely, how is God just in demanding that some people pay the penalty again?

The proponent of (A) may try to answer both these objections by altering his account to say that the penalty Christ pays for humans is his death and suffering. But this answer is no help. On Christian doctrine, the punishment for sin is not just death but hell, so that this alteration of (A) has the infelicitous result that what Christ undergoes in his substitutionary suffering is not the assigned penalty for sin. But even if it were, his suffering would not remove the penalty from humans since they all suffer death anyway.

Finally, it is not clear what the Atonement accomplishes, on the account given in (A). According to Christian doctrine, the main problem with sin is that it leaves humans alienated from God. Human beings tend to will what they ought not to will, and so their wills are not in conformity with God's will. Consequently, they do not live in peace with God now, and in that state they cannot be united to God in heaven. According to (A), the Atonement consists in Christ's paying the penalty for sin. But nothing in (A) suggests in any way that the Atonement alters the human nature and proclivities which were responsible for sin. In (A)'s version of it, the Atonement is efficacious to remove not sin, but only the penalty for sin. In that case, however, the Atonement is not really an Atonement; for, as (A) tells it, the Atonement leaves humans with just the same tendencies to will what is contrary to God's will, so that their wills are no more conformable to God's will, they are no more tending toward unity with God, than they were before the Atonement.

It seems to me, then, that the version of the Atonement in (A) is really hopeless, so full of philosophical and theological problems as to be irremediable. But often enough when we find a piece of Christian doctrine which looks hopeless in popular theology, it turns out to be a garbled version of an idea which was once presented with philosophical sophistication in the work of Christian theologians. In the rest of this paper I want to present a carefully worked out theory of the Atonement, one that can be found in the work of Aquinas. Aquinas's theory is by no means the only alternative to (A) worth taking seriously. Other alternatives can be found in the work of John Calvin, for example, or John of the Cross. But I have picked Aquinas's theory to focus on largely because his is the most philosophically rigorous and complete of the accounts I know. At the end of the paper I will say something more about Aquinas's theory in the history of Christian theology.

II

Aquinas assigns a number of roles to Christ's passion and death;¹ but they can all be subsumed under two general functions, namely, making satisfaction and meriting grace. These functions correspond, roughly, to two different problems posed by moral evil.

Consider two friends, Susan and David. They have been best friends for years; but recently David has become an alcoholic, and he is given to driving while drunk. On one such occasion he has a bad accident while driving with Susan's little daughter Maggie in his car, and, because in his drunken state he had neglected to buckle the child in, Maggie is killed. If Susan and David are not to be alienated despite this dreadful event, there will be two obstacles to their friendship: first, the problem of dealing with the moral wrong David has done (I will call this the problem of past sin) and, second, the problem of dealing with the moral wrong David is likely to do, given that he is still an alcoholic (I will call this the problem of future sin).

Aquinas believes that the Atonement is God's solution to both those sorts of problems.² Christ's passion and death, understood as making satisfaction, is the solution to the problem of past sin and, understood as meriting grace, is the solution to the problem of future sin. So, he says, Christ's suffering has two principal effects: satisfaction for our past sins and salvation from our sinful nature.³ I will begin with his understanding of the Atonement as making satisfaction for sin.

At first glance, the Thomistic account of the Atonement as making satisfaction to God for sins sounds perilously like (A):

[Christ] willed to suffer that he might make satisfaction for our sins. And he suffered for us those things which we deserved to suffer because of the sin of our first parent. The chief of these is death, to which all other human sufferings are ordered as to their end. . . . Accordingly Christ also willed to suffer death for our sins so that, by himself without any fault of His own bearing the penalty we owed, he might free us from the sentence of death, in the way that anyone would be freed from a penalty he owed if another person undertook the penalty for him.⁴

¹ In *Summa theologiae* (ST) III, q. 48, Aquinas says Christ's passion operated as a source of merit, as a sacrifice, as a mode of redemption, and as satisfaction making atonement for human sins.

² See, e.g., *Compendium theologiae* (CT), chapters 226–30. Robert Adams has suggested to me that alcoholism may be a bad example to illustrate the problem of future sin because we tend to think of alcoholism as a disease involving physical addiction, and perhaps his suggestion is right, although it seems to me that the cure of alcoholism typically includes a painful and difficult moral struggle which is illustrative of the problem of future sin. We could, however, readily replace the example involving alcoholism with other examples of habitual evil such as chronic marital infidelity.

³ See, e.g., CT, chapter 227.

⁴ CT, chapter 227. Cf. also ST III, q. 46, a. 1 and *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) IV, chapter 55, n. 3952. This section in the Latin corresponds to section 22 in the translation of SCG IV by

To understand Aquinas's account of this function of the Atonement, it is important to be clear about what he means by satisfaction and what importance he attaches to it. Satisfaction, he says, removes the debt of punishment for sin.⁵ Now if God had willed to free humans from sin without any satisfaction, he would not have acted against justice; for if he forgives sin without satisfaction – without removal (that is) of the debt of punishment – he wrongs no one, just as anyone who overlooks a trespass against himself acts mercifully and not unjustly.⁶ Nonetheless, there was no more suitable way of healing our nature than by making satisfaction.⁷

These remarks show that for Aquinas the problem of past sin is understood very differently from the way it is understood in (A). On (A) the problem with the sins a person such as David has committed is that they have resulted in God's alienation from David and in God's consequent inability to refrain from punishing him. But on Aquinas's account, the problem is rather that David is alienated from God, who is free to punish him or not. That this is so can be seen most clearly from Aquinas's general account of satisfaction as one of the three integral parts of penance (the other two being contrition and confession).⁸ Aquinas sees penance as a kind of medicine for sin:⁹ It consists in detesting one's sin and purposing to change one's life for the better,¹⁰ and it aims primarily at the restoration of friendship between the wrongdoer and the one wronged.¹¹ The

Charles J. O'Neil (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975); I will add section numbers to this translation in parentheses after the Latin section number.

... ut pro peccatis nostris satisfaceret, voluit pati. Passus est autem pro nobis ea quae ut nos pateremur ex peccato primi parentis meruimus, quorum praecipuum est mors, ad quam omnes aliae passiones humanae ordinantur sicut ad ultimum. ... Unde et Christus pro peccatis nostris voluit mortem pati, ut dum poenam nobis debitam ipse sine culpa susciperet, nos a reatu mortis liberaret, sicut aliquis debito poenae liberaretur, alio pro eo poenam sustinente.

⁵ *ST III*, q. 22, a. 3.

⁶ *ST III*, q. 46, a. 2.

⁷ *ST III*, q. 46, a. 3. In conversation with me, Thomas Tracy raised a problem for this part of Aquinas's account and also helpfully suggested a solution. According to Tracy, it might occur to someone to wonder whether God would be justified in allowing the innocent Christ to suffer if his suffering was not necessary for salvation, as Aquinas claims it is not. In terms of my analogy (yet to come in the text), we might wonder whether Anna was morally justified in allowing Aaron to suffer in the process of restoring the garden if his suffering was not necessary to bring about a change of heart in Nathan. Tracy's solution is to suggest that Aquinas's account requires a traditional Christology. In the case of Anna, we might very well be inclined to deny that she is justified in allowing the unnecessary suffering. But if we add traditional Christology to Aquinas's account of the Atonement, then the one who suffers unnecessarily is both truly man and truly God. Thus God does not allow the unnecessary suffering of some third party but rather himself endures it as a means of redemption. And just as we would have no moral qualms about the case if Anna herself chose to endure some unnecessary suffering to rescue her son, so there seems no basis for objecting to *God's* undergoing unnecessary suffering as a means to human redemption. So although Aquinas does not hold that the passion and death of Christ are necessary for salvation, once God has chosen to save people in that way it is necessary that God be the one suffering.

⁸ *ST III*, q. 90, a. 2.

⁹ *ST III*, q. 84, a. 5.

¹⁰ *ST III*, q. 85, a. 1.

¹¹ *ST III*, q. 85, a. 3 and q. 86, a. 2.

function of satisfaction for Aquinas, then, is not to placate a wrathful God but instead to restore a sinner to a state of harmony with God. So, Aquinas says, sins are remitted when the soul of the *offender* is at peace with the one offended.¹²

We can understand the gist of his idea by considering a homely example of minor evil. Suppose Anna is the mother of a feisty little boy, Nathan, who loves soccer. Anna, on the other hand, loves flowers and has asked him repeatedly not to practice soccer on the side of the house where her flower beds are. But Nathan does play with his soccer ball near the flower beds, and the inevitable occurs: some of the flowers are trampled. Nathan, however, is so interested in his ball playing that he stops just long enough to run into the house and say, “Sorry, Mom, I trampled your flowers” before he returns to his game. What he has done presents his mother with two problems, one regarding the flowers and one regarding her son. She has lost some of her flowers, and it will take her some time and energy and money to replace them. But her real problem is with her son, because from this episode she sees two things about him. In the first place, he does not love what she loves; if he had had any care for the flowers, he would have played with his soccer ball in a different place. And second, he does not love her as she would like him to, because although he knows *she* loves her flowers, he does not have a care for the flowers for her sake. So what Nathan has done has created some distance between himself and his mother. His will and hers are not in harmony and he does not love her as he might; and her recognition of both these facts makes her sad.

Nothing in Nathan’s response to his own action will lessen her sadness. In recognition of his misdeed he has offered a hasty and casual apology and nothing more. If he had any real care for his mother or her flowers, if he had really been sorry for what he had done, he would also have done what he could to fix the damage. And his mother would have been very glad of his efforts, even if they were clumsy and ultimately unsuccessful, because they would have manifested a change of heart: after the fact, at any rate, Nathan would have had a care for his mother and for her flowers. And so by his efforts at undoing the damage caused by his action, he would have restored a harmony of will and love between himself and his mother which his wrong action had disrupted. In Aquinas’s terms, Nathan would then have made satisfaction for his sin. The chief value of this satisfaction is not so much that it restores Anna’s flowers – if Nathan’s efforts are clumsy enough, the flowers may even be worse off than if he had not tried to improve their condition – rather, the value of the satisfaction is that it restores the harmonious and loving relationship between Anna and her son.

Considerations of this sort, I think, underlie Aquinas’s claim that in assigning the penalty or satisfaction for sin one considers the sinner, rather than the one sinned against.¹³ On Aquinas’s view, the will moves away from sin by moving in a direction opposed to those movements which inclined it to sin. Doing so requires

¹² *STI-II*, q. 113, a. 2.

¹³ *SCG IV*, chapter 55, n. 3953 (23).

being sorry for past sin in such a way that the past sin comes to be against one's present will.¹⁴ When Nathan attempts to rectify the damage he has done, he shows that he is truly sorry for his action, that if he had it to do over again, he would be more careful – in short, that he now wills the opposite of what he willed when he hurt his mother's flowers and feelings.

But now suppose that Nathan is too little to make any satisfaction for his misdeed. Perhaps to rectify the damage he would need to buy and plant new flowers, but he has no money and is too small either to go to the store or to use a shovel. If he is truly sorry, what can he do? Suppose that he has an older brother Aaron, who can do what Nathan cannot. And suppose that Nathan explains his predicament to his brother and asks his brother to buy flowers and plant them for him. If Aaron loves his brother enough, he may then use his own time and money to undo his brother's mischief. Now when Anna learns of this situation, she may have a special love for Aaron because of his kindness to his brother. But if Nathan's will really is set on some restitution for his misdeed, he will have returned to harmony with his mother even if all the actual work of restitution was done solely by Aaron. In this context, just in virtue of allying himself with Aaron's restitution, Nathan shows he cares for his mother and for the things she values; and so he restores the close relationship with his mother although Aaron is the one who restores the garden.

In this way, then, it is possible for one person to make satisfaction for another's sins. Because the point of making satisfaction is to return the wrongdoer's will to conformity with the will of the person wronged, rather than to inflict retributive punishment on the wrongdoer or to placate the person wronged, it is possible for the satisfaction to be made by a substitute, provided that the wrongdoer allies himself with the substitute in willing to undo as far as possible the damage he has done. Thus Aquinas says that one person can make satisfaction for another only to the extent to which they are united,¹⁵ or that one person can atone for another insofar as they are one in charity.¹⁶

Now the story in which Aaron makes satisfaction for Nathan's wrong action has obvious parallels to Aquinas's theory of Christ's Atonement, but it is also disanalogous in many ways which might be thought to make a difference to the plausibility of Aquinas's account. We can, however, alter the story till many of the disanalogies vanish. Suppose, for example, that instead of Nathan's asking Aaron for help, he just continues playing soccer but that *Aaron* comes to *him* and asks if he would like to have Aaron fix the damage for him. That the initiation of restitution lies with Aaron increases his merit but is no hindrance to the subsequent reconciliation between Nathan and his mother. Provided that Nathan does now have a care for his mother and her concerns, it does not matter to their

¹⁴ SCG III, chapter 158, n. 3305 (1).

¹⁵ ST I–II, q. 87, a. 7 and a. 8.

¹⁶ ST III, q. 48, a. 2.

reconciliation whether the credit for his change of heart is due to Nathan himself or to his brother. The salient fact is that Nathan's will is now in harmony with his mother's.

Or, finally, suppose that Nathan has no brother or anyone else who could fulfill the same function for him. And suppose, further, that he shows no signs of any interest in restitution or reconciliation with his mother. If Anna were, like the mother of Aeneas, endowed with the power of transforming herself, and if she really loved her son, she might appear to him in disguise and in that disguise try to talk him into letting *her* make his restitution for him. If we think of the problem between Nathan and Anna as consisting in her loss of flowers or her distress over the damage to the flowers, then, of course, this story is just farcical, for in this story Anna is in effect giving flowers to herself. But if we understand, as Aquinas would, that the real problem lies in Nathan's will, which is turned away from his mother, and if we suppose not that Anna is wrathful and vengeful towards her little sinner but rather deeply loving, then the story makes very good sense. For by this complicated and somewhat demeaning method Anna may succeed in turning her son's will and love back to her, so that the harmony of their relationship is restored. As long as Nathan wills heartily to undo the wrong he did, it does not matter whether he himself or someone else, including even Anna, actually does the work of making restitution. And this version of the story of Anna and Nathan is analogous in all relevant respects to Aquinas's account of the Atonement as making satisfaction.

So although both (A) and Aquinas's account are couched in terms of a debt of punishment for sin, they reflect two different ways of understanding the notion of incurring a debt of punishment. That in (A) rests on a conception of God that makes him seem something like an accountant keeping double column books on the universe. When a person commits a sin, a debt of guilt is registered in one column which must be balanced on the same line in the other column by the payment of a punishment which compensates for the guilt. This view raises a problem about how the books could ever balance if the debt is to be paid by someone other than the sinner, because the debt is one of guilt, and guilt is not a transferable commodity.

Aquinas, on the other hand, has a different understanding of the notion of incurring a debt of punishment, which in turn rests on a different conception of God. This is a conception of God not as accountant but as parent. A good parent believes that a misbehaved child incurs a debt of punishment for his misbehavior, not because the parent is trying to keep the spiritual books of the household balanced, but rather because the parent loves the child, and everything from old wives' tales to contemporary psychology suggests that negative reinforcement extinguishes undesirable behavior. The parent's concern is with the child, that the child develop into the best person she can be and that there be a loving relationship between the child and her parent. Any punishing, then, is strictly a means to an end, the end of making the child a good person in harmony with

the parent. If punishment is the only hope for achieving that end, then a good parent will not omit punishment—but for the parent, unlike the celestial accountant, the punishment by itself does not accomplish the end desired.

When a person sins, both on (A) and on Aquinas's theory, he incurs a debt of punishment. On (A), the sin results in a debt of guilt in that person's celestial accounts, which must be paid back somehow. And if the sinner could pay back the debt, as on (A) he cannot, then God would be satisfied (in more than one sense of the term). But on Aquinas's account, God is not concerned to balance the accounts. He is concerned with the sinner, with his child. What he wants is for that person to love what God loves and to be in harmony with God. His aim, then, is to turn that person around; and what will satisfy him is not punishment and repayment, but the goodness and love of his creature.

Punishment is one means to that end; but it is a desperate, last ditch effort, because while punishment is known for its efficacy in extinguishing certain behavior, it is not famous for its effectiveness at winning hearts. So while Anna in my story may well hold some punishment in reserve for her little sinner, if she is a wise as well as a loving mother, she will try some other means first. If she forces Nathan to fix the flower bed as punishment for his sin, he may repent, or alternatively he may hate flowers all his life. On the other hand, if she provides vicarious satisfaction for her son, in the way I think Aquinas understands vicarious satisfaction, she eases his return to her. She invites rather than forces his compliance. She counts as sufficient for reconciliation his willingness to undo his mischief and does not require his actually restoring the garden. And finally, in the person of the substitute making vicarious satisfaction, she sets before him a living model of what he should be if he were up for it, so that he does not need to initiate the desired state of mind in himself, but needs just to watch and copy someone else's. So if Anna sends Aaron to offer in a spirit of love to fix the damage on his brother's behalf, she stands a better chance of getting what she wants: not compensation, but the heart and mind of her disobedient son.

For Aquinas, then, the *aim* of any satisfaction (including vicarious satisfaction) is not to cancel a debt incurred by sin but to restore a sinner to harmony with God. And the person making the vicarious satisfaction is not paying a debt so much as acting the part of a template representing the desired compensatory character or action, in accordance with which the sinner can align his own will and inclinations to achieve a state of mind which it is at least unlikely he would have achieved on his own.

Focusing on this aim of satisfaction helps to answer an important question.¹⁷ If the aim is just a sinner's repentance, why bother restoring the garden? Why not just forget about the garden and the whole notion of vicarious satisfaction and aim solely at producing repentance? Aquinas says that it *was* open to God to deal

¹⁷ I am grateful to Philip Quinn for raising this question in his comments on an earlier draft.

with sin in just that way, that nothing required God to deal with sin by means of vicarious satisfaction, but that there is nonetheless something appropriate about God's doing so.¹⁸ The appropriateness seems to me of two sorts. In the first place, if a person is truly sorry for a sin, he will *want* to do whatever he can to undo what he did; and there is something loving about gratifying his desire to undo or compensate for the wrong he has done. In the second place, having eased a sinner into repentance by vicarious satisfaction, one wants to be sure he is not readily eased out of it again. True repentance, being sorry for a sin and resolving not to repeat it, is very difficult; and people are apt to deceive themselves into thinking that they have repented when they have, in fact, just had some short-lived remorse. Participation in making compensation for the wrong done – even the indirect compensation involved in making satisfaction vicariously – helps cement the remorse into repentance; the willing of compensation, voluntarily undertaken in contrition, helps strengthen the will in its resolution of repentance.

These considerations show that there is some value in making satisfaction for a wrong action, and they also explain how one person can make satisfaction for the sins of another, even when the one making satisfaction is the same as the one wronged. But it is not yet clear *how* Christ is supposed to make satisfaction, on Aquinas's account. It is not clear, that is, what the theological equivalent of restoring the flowers is.

According to Aquinas, Christ makes satisfaction for all the sins of the human race in his passion, that is, in the suffering which leads up to and includes his dying in physical and psychological pain.¹⁹ Something in what Christ endured in dying, in other words, rectifies for God what was disordered or destroyed by human beings in sinning. But what is it that human sin ruins? In general, a person sins by preferring his own immediate power or pleasure over greater goods. Human sin has pride and selfishness at its root, then, and it constitutes disobedience to God, whose will it contravenes. So what is most directly ruined by sin is human character; a proud, selfish, disobedient mind is the theological analogue of the trampled garden. In Aquinas's terms the immediate effect of sin is to leave something like a stain on the soul;²⁰ and the cumulative stains of sin lessen or destroy the soul's comeliness,²¹ so that by sinning a person directly mars part of God's creation, namely, himself.

To make satisfaction for human sinning, then, is to present God with an instance of human nature which is marked by perfect obedience, humility, and charity and which is at least as precious in God's eyes as the marring of humanity by sin is offensive. But this is just what the second person of the Trinity does by taking on human nature and voluntarily suffering a painful and shameful death. By being willing to move from the exaltation of deity to the humiliation of

¹⁸ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 2 and a. 3. ¹⁹ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2.

²⁰ *ST* I–II, q. 86, a. 2.

²¹ *ST* I–II, q. 89, a. 1.

crucifixion, he showed boundless humility; and by consenting to suffer the agony of his torture because God willed it when something in his own nature shrank powerfully from it, he manifested absolute obedience.²² Finally, because he undertook all the suffering and humiliation out of love for sinful humans, he exhibits the most intense charity. So in his passion and death Christ makes restitution to God for the marring of human nature caused by sin because he gives God a particularly precious instance of human nature with the greatest possible humility, obedience, and charity. And one answer to the question why Christ had to suffer is that humility, obedience, and charity are present in suffering that is voluntarily and obediently endured for someone else's sake in a way in which they could not be, for example, in Christ's preaching to the Jews or healing the sick.²³ (I will say more about the suffering of Christ later in this paper.)

In this way, then, because of his divine nature and because of the extent of his humility, obedience, and charity,²⁴ Christ has made satisfaction for all the sins of the human race,²⁵ both those committed before his death and those committed after it. On Aquinas's view, Christ's passion is like a medicine for sin²⁶ available to cure sin in all ages of human history.²⁷ But it is clear on Aquinas's account – as it is not clear on (A) – why Christ's having made satisfaction for all human sins does not entail that there be no humans in hell. Given the understanding of satisfaction on which Aquinas's theory of the Atonement is based, satisfaction for sin made by a substitute for the sinner effects reconciliation only in case the sinner allies himself with the substitute by willing the restitution the substitute makes. The medicine of Christ's satisfaction is unavailing unless a person applies it to himself by accepting Christ's suffering and death as making satisfaction for his own sins.

To ally oneself with Christ's making satisfaction involves, first of all, having faith in his passion. That is, it involves believing that the incarnate Christ suffered for the sake of humans and in their stead. But this belief by itself is not enough, as we can see by remembering the example of satisfaction considered earlier; for Nathan might believe that Aaron was restoring the flowers for his sake and in his stead and yet, in a fit of perversity, hate what Aaron is doing. In that case Aaron's action is not successful in producing reconciliation between Nathan and his

²² See, e.g., *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis* (Sent.), Bk. III, d. 19, q. 1, a. 4, q. 2.

²³ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2; cf. *SCG* IV, chapter 55, n. 3947–8 (17–18).

²⁴ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 3.

²⁵ *ST* III, q. 49, a. 4.

²⁶ *ST* III, q. 49, a. 1.

²⁷ As for those who lived before Christ, Aquinas holds that all persons in hell were visited by Christ in the period between his crucifixion and resurrection; see, e.g., *ST* III, q. 52. Aquinas interprets this traditional doctrine of Christ's harrowing hell in a stern fashion; those whom Christ takes out of hell with him are only those who had some foreknowledge of him and were united to him in faith and love, namely, the righteous among the Jews who were awaiting him as Messiah.

mother. So, Aquinas says, for Christ's passion to be applied to a person, that person must have both faith and charity. He must not only believe that Christ has made satisfaction for his sin; he must also have the love of God and goodness which makes him glad of the fact. In such a case, then, the mind and heart of the sinner cleave to Christ, and he applies the medicine of Christ's passion to himself for the remission of his sin²⁸ and for reconciling himself with God.

Thus, we can see that although Aquinas's account superficially resembles (A), it is in fact very different. For Aquinas sees the problem of the alienation between God and humans as consisting not in God's wrathfulness toward humans but rather in human withdrawal from God. And he understands Christ's passion as atoning, as producing reconciliation between God and humans, not because God in his justice must inflict the punishment for sin on someone and the innocent Christ substitutes for guilty humans, but rather because humans by allying their hearts and minds with Christ in his passion as he makes satisfaction for their sins are converted to a state of mind in harmony with God's will.

There is real mercy and forgiveness on this account, because according to this view God does not require the penalties for sins either from humans or from Christ; God does not inflict Christ's suffering on him as a punishment for human sins, but rather accepts it as an act of making satisfaction. In accepting Aaron's restoration of her flowers Anna does not inflict restoration of the flowers on Aaron as punishment even if she was the instigator of his action. The purpose of Aaron's action (and Anna's participation in it) is not to punish Nathan's misdeed but to change his mind so that he is again in harmony with his mother. Furthermore, it is clear on this account as it is not on (A) why not all people experience the benefit of the Atonement, because on Aquinas's account it is not possible for Christ's atoning action to be efficacious for anyone unless that person freely wills to accept Christ's action on his behalf.

And, finally, this account, unlike (A), provides some comprehensible connection between Christ's atoning action and salvation from sin, because according to Aquinas's theory when a person accepts Christ's making satisfaction for him, he wills the contrary of the pride, selfishness, and disobedience he wills when he sins, and in so willing he moves away from sin.²⁹

III

If we return now to the earlier example of Susan and David, her alcoholic friend, we can see that Aquinas's account of the Atonement as satisfaction for sins is only part of the solution to the problem of moral evil. According to the story in that example, David drove while drunk and in doing so killed Susan's child Maggie.

²⁸ *ST* III, q. 49, a. 1 and a. 3; cf. also *ST* III, q. 62, a. 5 and *SCG* IV, chapter 72.

²⁹ Cf., e.g., *SCG* III, chap. 158.

No matter how forgiving Susan may be, David's action disrupts their friendship. Among other reasons, David will not be able to share with Susan the most important current event in her life, the death of her daughter, because his sense of guilt and regret will be too painfully exacerbated by witnessing her grief and pain; and what David may say to himself by way of diminishing his guilt will ring in his own ears as hollow excuses if said to Susan.

One way of restoring these people to friendship with each other, on Aquinas's view, is for David (or someone else acting for David) to make satisfaction for the wrong done by offering Susan something which she would not have had otherwise and which she values as much as what she lost, thereby evincing the real care for Susan and for what she loves which he lacked in those actions that resulted in Maggie's death. Suppose, for example, that Susan has a second daughter who is dying from kidney disease and for whom a donor has not been found; and suppose David's tissues are compatible with the daughter's. If David in a spirit of contrition donates one of his kidneys and thereby saves Susan's other daughter from death, he goes a long way toward restoring his friendship with Susan. But even in such rare felicitous circumstances, their friendship will not be completely restored. For David remains an alcoholic. In that state he does not share many of Susan's most important concerns and desires; and, as he and Susan both know, he may at any time again do something as terrible as killing a child.

Analogously, although Aquinas's account of the Atonement as satisfaction explains how Christ's passion remits past sin, this account by itself is not enough to show that Christ's passion reconciles humans and God, because human nature remains in its post-Fall sinful condition. Christ's passion considered as making satisfaction does not alter the disordered relationship among human reason, will, and emotions which, on Aquinas's view, is responsible for the tendency of human beings to do what they ought not to do.³⁰ This disordered condition of human nature and the consequent failure to develop positive virtuous dispositions constitutes the problem of future sin. According to Aquinas, when his account of Christ's passion as making satisfaction is supplemented by an explanation of the passion as Christ's meriting grace and thereby healing human nature and enabling it to become virtuous, it also provides a solution to the problem of future sin. And so, Aquinas says, Christ's passion and death are both a remedy of satisfaction and a sacrament of salvation;³¹ Christ's suffering has *two* principal beneficial effects: satisfaction for one's past sins and salvation from one's sinful nature.³²

This second part of Aquinas's theory of the Atonement is much more complicated and difficult than his account of the Atonement as satisfaction. It is couched in the technical terminology of medieval theology; it is set in the context

³⁰ See, e.g., *ST I-II*, q. 82, a. 3.

³¹ *CT*, chap. 227.

³² *ST III*, q. 49, a. 1 and a. 3.

of Aquinas's elaborate treatment of the nature and varieties of God's grace; and on first hearing it is likely to strike a contemporary audience as obscure and implausible at best. In what follows I will give a very brief summary of the salient points of Aquinas's account, presenting just as much of his work on grace as I need to make this part of his theory of the Atonement intelligible and without pausing to comment on the many questions Aquinas's views raise. After this uncritical presentation I will try to recast Aquinas's theory in more familiar terms in order to consider whether it is successful in arguing that the Atonement is a solution to the problem of future sin.

According to Aquinas, Christ is the head of the Church; and since all human beings are potentially members of the Church, Christ is (at least potentially) the head of the whole human race.³³ By saying that Christ is the head of the whole human race, Aquinas means that he is first among humans in order, perfection, and power;³⁴ but, more importantly, he also means that together Christ and human beings form one mystical body, analogous to the physical body formed by the head and other members of a human body.³⁵ All humans are potentially and believers are actually part of this mystical body. In his passion Christ merits grace sufficient to cure all human sin;³⁶ and as head of the body of the church, he infuses the grace he has merited into those persons actually united with him in this mystical body.³⁷

The source of Christ's merit that provides grace for humans is his will.³⁸ For someone to merit something is for him to bring it about that some good thing should in justice be given him. In the last analysis, however, good things for humans are those which contribute to obtaining eternal life. Now an action meriting eternal life must be an action done out of charity.³⁹ And in fact charity is the root of all merit⁴⁰ because it is the love of God,⁴¹ who is goodness personified,⁴² and the love of other persons and things for the sake of goodness. Without charity, then, no true virtue is possible,⁴³ and charity is, as it were, the form of all virtuous acts.⁴⁴ But Christ in his passion suffered out of the deepest charity, for he voluntarily accepted great suffering and death out of love for all humans.⁴⁵ His suffering was intense, both physically and psychically, partly

³³ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 3.

³⁴ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ See, e.g., *ST* III, q. 8, a. 5.

³⁷ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 6 and q. 48, a. 1.

³⁸ See, e.g., *Sent.*, Bk. III, d. 18, *divisio textus*.

³⁹ *Sent.*, Bk. III, d. 18, q. 1, a. 2.

⁴⁰ *ST* I–II, q. 114, a. 4.

⁴¹ *ST* II–II, q. 23, a. 1.

⁴² For an exposition and defense of the Thomistic doctrine of simplicity, on which this claim is based, see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985):353–382.

⁴³ *ST* II–II, q. 23, a. 7.

⁴⁴ *ST* II–II, q. 23, a. 8.

⁴⁵ *Sent.* Bk. III, d. 18, q. 1, a. 5.

because during his passion he grieved for all the sins of the human race at once,⁴⁶ and partly because there is more charity involved when a greater person submits to suffering for the sake of others.⁴⁷ So because of the intensity of his love for human beings Christ merits grace leading to eternal life; and as the head of all humans (at least potentially), he merits this grace for all people.

To understand this part of Aquinas's account, we have to be clear about his complicated views of grace. In what follows I will generally mean by 'grace' only what Aquinas calls cooperating grace. He recognizes several other species of grace as well; but understanding his view of cooperating grace is sufficient for our purposes here. For Aquinas, then, grace is a habit or disposition bestowed in virtue of Christ's passion by the Holy Spirit on a person, inclining that person toward freely complying with God's precepts and prohibitions.⁴⁸ This disposition is bestowed when a person's mind is illuminated to know things which exceed reason and when his affections in consequence cleave to God in love, being inclined to do all the things such love requires.⁴⁹ The end or purpose of this grace is the union of a human person with God.⁵⁰ It accomplishes this end by inclining the natural powers of the mind to love of God and by making that love come easily and pleasantly.⁵¹

Nonetheless, this inclining of a person's mind to charity is always accomplished by the Holy Spirit by means of a free act of that person's will.⁵² While grace is being infused into a person, that person assents to the process in an act of free will,⁵³ so that the infusion of grace is simultaneous with the movement of the will.⁵⁴ Thus, no one comes to God by grace without freely willing to do so. It is God who moves a person toward charity, from which the virtues flow; but God moves everything in accordance with the nature of the thing moved, and since it is part of human nature to have free will, God's movement of a person in the process of infusing grace does not take place without a movement of free will.⁵⁵ Furthermore, what grace confers is a habitual disposition. But one can always act against a disposition or habit, and so a person in grace is always capable of sinning.⁵⁶ And, finally, grace is available to all human beings; the only humans who are deprived of grace are those who offer an obstacle to grace within themselves.⁵⁷

Grace itself is not a virtue;⁵⁸ but it prepares the will for virtue by giving it a disposition, by preparing it to love God and to act rightly.⁵⁹ So grace gives rise to all the virtues,⁶⁰ and especially the theological virtues.⁶¹ The process of the

⁴⁶ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 6.

⁴⁷ *SCG* IV, chapter 55, n. 3957 (27).

⁴⁸ See, e.g., *ST* I–II, q. 108, a. 1 and q. 109, a. 4. ⁴⁹ *CT*, chap. 143.

⁵⁰ *ST* III, q. 7, a. 12.

⁵¹ *ST* II–II, q. 23, a. 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *ST* I–II, q. 111, a. 2.

⁵⁴ *ST* I–II, q. 113, a. 7.

⁵⁵ *ST* I–II, q. 113, a. 3.

⁵⁶ *SCG* IV, chapter 70.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., *CT*, chapter 144; *ST* I–II, q. 112, a. 4 and q. 113, a. 2.

⁵⁸ *ST* I–II, q. 110, a. 3.

⁵⁹ *ST* I–II, q. 109, a. 3–4.

⁶⁰ *Sent.*, Bk. II, d. 26, a. 4.

⁶¹ *ST* I–II, q. 110, a. 3.

infusion of grace and the consequent effects of grace on the mind of the person receiving it is the process of sanctification, in which a person's sinful nature is slowly converted into a righteous character. Thus, Aquinas says, there are five effects of grace in humans: (1) healing of the soul, (2) desire of the good, (3) carrying out the good desired, (4) perseverance in good, and (5) attainment of eternal life.⁶²

Even if this account of grace were entirely clear and wholly plausible as a solution to the problem of future sin, it would not yet suffice as part of a theory of the Atonement, because so far we have no connection between the bestowal of grace and Christ's passion. That connection is provided by Aquinas's theory of the means by which God has chosen to bestow grace, namely, the sacraments. Grace is involved in all the sacraments, but the one most important for Aquinas's theory of the Atonement is the Eucharist. Christ's passion works its effect of saving humans from sin through faith, charity, and the sacraments,⁶³ he says, in particular the Eucharist. The sacraments are for the spiritual life what certain physical things are for bodily life;⁶⁴ the Eucharist is nourishment for the psyche, and it provides growth in virtue⁶⁵ by conferring grace.⁶⁶

The sacrament of the Eucharist is also intimately related to Christ's passion. On Aquinas's view, in accordance with Christ's institution at the last supper Christians maintain that Christ's body and blood are actually, literally, present in the sacrament. Christ's body, however, is not in the sacrament as a physical body is in a place, that is, contained by the place and filling it. Rather it is in the sacrament only substantially, as being the substance of what was bread. Thus Christ's body is in the (apparent) bread in such a way that the whole body of Christ is comprised in every part of the bread.⁶⁷ Finally, the nature of the Eucharist is such that when a believer partakes of it, he does not turn the sacrament into his substance, as happens when he eats other food, but instead he becomes part of the body of Christ and is incorporated into him.⁶⁸

The effect of the sacrament, then, for those who receive it properly (with the right sort of will) is that they are united with Christ and become part of the body of Christ.⁶⁹ But if a person is part of Christ, then the grace Christ merited on the cross by his passion flows into him; and so the grace won by Christ's passion is bestowed by the Eucharist on those who partake of it appropriately.⁷⁰ So union with Christ is the effect of this sacrament, since in the sacrament a believer receives Christ within himself in such a way as to become incorporated into Christ;⁷¹ and the result of this union is the protection of the soul against future sin, because by the grace bestowed through the sacrament a believer's love of God

⁶² *ST* I–II, q. 111, a. 3.

⁶⁴ *SCG* IV, chapter 58.

⁶⁶ *ST* III, q. 79, a. 1.

⁶⁸ *ST* III, q. 73, a. 3.

⁷⁰ *ST* III, q. 79, a. 1.

⁶³ *ST* III, q. 49, a. 3.

⁶⁵ *SCG* IV, chapter 61.

⁶⁷ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 1 and q. 76, a. 4–5.

⁶⁹ *ST* III, q. 73, a. 3 and q. 80, a. 2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

and love of goodness is stimulated and strengthened.⁷² In the sacrament, Aquinas says (in one of the few lyrical passages in his scholastic prose), a believer's soul is inebriated by the sweetness of the divine goodness.⁷³

Although the grace Christ merited by his passion is sufficient for undoing bad habits acquired in the past and preventing further sin in the future, it is efficacious to cure the sin only of those joined to him. The joining is effected by faith and love.⁷⁴ And although love of God can be stimulated by other examples of God's love for his creatures, it is stirred especially by reflection on Christ's passion⁷⁵ and by the bond of charity brought about by participation in the Eucharist. When a person cleaves to Christ in faith and love, an act of free will is elicited in him simultaneous with the infusing of Christ's grace. This act of free will is directed in different ways both toward past sins and toward future righteousness. In it a person hates his past sin and desires God's righteousness, so that by this act of will the mind withdraws from sin and draws nearer to righteousness.⁷⁶ Simultaneously with this willing God infuses grace into the believer's soul; that is, God adds to the soul a disposition inclining it toward the good and away from sin. The repetition of this cooperative action is the process of sanctification, conforming the believer's mind and character to Christ's and culminating in eternal life with him.

So the Atonement solves the problem of future sin because by means of the sacrament of the Eucharist a union of sorts is effected between the believer and Christ such that Grace merited by Christ in his passion is transferred to the believer in one cooperative divine and human action in which the believer desires goodness and hates sin and God adds to him a disposition for that state, with the result that in the course of time the believer comes to be more righteous and more like Christ.

IV

Because Aquinas's account of grace is complex and problematic, this part of his theory of the Atonement may leave us cold and uncomprehending. It is, for example, not clear how a disposition toward a certain sort of willing could be infused simultaneously with a free act of such willing. And why should it take an intricate ceremony like the Eucharist for God to bestow this grace? Furthermore, the connection of Christ's passion to the Eucharist and the bestowal of grace is

⁷² *ST* III, q. 79, a. 4 and 6.

⁷³ *ST* III, q. 79, a. 1.

⁷⁴ In fact, Aquinas goes so far as to say that faith and love are efficacious without the Eucharist if a person has an implicit desire for the Eucharist but is somehow prevented from acting on that desire; see, e.g., *ST* III, q. 73, a. 3.

⁷⁵ *Sent.*, Bk. III, d. 19, q. 1, a. 1, q. 2.

⁷⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 13, a. 6.

perplexing. The talk of the mystical body of Christ is more mysterious than helpful, and it is difficult to see why it was necessary for Christ to suffer in order to effect this mystical body. The transfer of grace merited by Christ in his passion to believers united to him raises moral and metaphysical problems. The nature of grace includes a disposition to love and goodness, and it is hard to understand how this disposition of Christ's could be directly transferred from him to another person, no matter how they are joined together. And finally, it is not clear why God could not simply bestow grace directly without the suffering of Christ's passion or the ritual of the Eucharist.

Part of the trouble we have in understanding Aquinas's account, I think, stems from the fact that he explains in medieval metaphysical terms what we would be more inclined to explain in psychological terms. I want to try, then, to present Aquinas's account in non-medieval terms more familiar to us. My attempt will not help elucidate the metaphysical perplexities of Aquinas's account; but I believe it will help to show his general idea of the way in which the Atonement solves the problem of future sin, and it will provide answers to some but not all of the questions I just raised about this part of Aquinas's account.

Consider again David, the alcoholic who has killed a child because he was driving while drunk. Suppose also that David is a lapsed Christian (of a Thomistic sort) and that shortly after his dreadful accident, full of sorrow and remorse, he returns to church and communion. What will this experience be like for David? Consider first what he believes. He believes that he has done something morally reprehensible and that he did it because of his continuing enslavement to alcohol; and he sees himself in consequence as a hateful person. But since he is a Christian, he also believes that God does not hate him but rather *loves* him intensely. God himself is perfectly good, holy in righteousness, and he also sees completely all the evil in David's heart and actions. And yet Christ's love for David, for the hateful, alcoholic David, was so great that he voluntarily undertook the shame and agony of crucifixion for him. And for what purpose? To heal David of his sin. To offer for David what David himself could not offer to God, so that he might be reconciled to God, no matter what awful evil he had done, and so that he might be transformed from something hateful into something holy, into someone like Christ.

Furthermore, Christ's great love for him is not just part of some old historical narrative or abstruse theological argument. For the person who loves David so intensely as to die for him in order to keep David from dying in his sin is right there then, present to David's spirit even if hidden from his eyes. In fact, not only is he present, but (David will believe) in the sacrament of the Eucharist the Christ who loves him comes closer to him and is more intimately united to him than it is possible for two created persons to be in this life; for in receiving the sacrament David will receive the body and blood of Christ in such a way that he himself becomes a part of the body of Christ, bound together with him into one spiritual entity.

If David believes all this, what is the effect on him likely to be?⁷⁷ In the first place, his guilt is assuaged; Christ has made satisfaction to God for David's sin and restored the relationship between David and God which David's past sin had disrupted. Second, David's hostility to himself is alleviated; the judge most in a position to despise and condemn him instead loves him and means to rescue him from his evil. Then, too, David's hope for himself will be strengthened. God, who sees David as he is and who can do anything, is himself on David's side. It is God's intention that David be turned into a righteous person, at peace with God and with himself. And if God be for him, what can be against him? Furthermore, David will feel a great debt of gratitude to Christ, who suffered so to free him, and with that gratitude will come a determination that Christ's suffering should not be for nothing. Finally, David will feel a surge of love for this person who first so loved him, and also a sense of joy, for the person who loves him is present to him and united with him.

As long as David is in this frame of mind, what chance has his addiction got of retaining its mastery over him? To use Aquinas's terminology for a moment, what David has done in this state is to cleave to Christ in charity and thus to will freely to draw near to righteousness and withdraw from sin.

If at some other time out of love for David God were simply to alter David's will to hate his addiction to alcohol, he would be destroying David's free will, because he would be making David will contrary to what David himself would have willed. But if God acts on David's will while he is in this frame of mind, if he strengthens David's will in its resolution to stop drinking, he is not violating David's will, for in this state David is in effect willing to have his will be set against drinking. In other words, the beliefs and desires stimulated in David by the Eucharist and reflection on Christ's passion evoke in David a powerful second-order willing, namely, the will that his first-order willing be against drinking. In giving David grace on such an occasion, God is infusing him with a disposition (of one degree of strength or another) to first-order willing against drinking; but that God does so in no way detracts from the freedom of David's will because it is David's own (second-order) will that he have a (first-order) will against drinking. In strengthening David's will in its resolution, then, God does not undermine the freedom of his will but rather cooperates with it to produce the state of will which David himself wills to have. And this is, I think, the sort of thing Aquinas has in mind when he says that the grace bestowed by means of the Eucharist *cooperates* with free will. He does say that this grace is infused simultaneously with an action of free will; but since Aquinas also believes that God is outside time, nothing prevents him from supposing that the grace infused simultaneously with an act of free will is in fact infused because of and as a

⁷⁷ 'Likely' is a necessary qualifier here, because grace is not efficacious without an act of free will. It is possible for David to react to the Eucharist with perversity or hardness of heart.

response to that act of free will. (The worry that this interpretation is on the road to Pelagianism will be discussed in the next section.)

It is clear that if David's response during the sacrament is of the ordinary human variety of emotion, if it is not the unusually powerful and life-transforming emotion of a Paul on the road to Damascus, his exalted state of mind will fade and his resolution will weaken. Even so, however, he will have made some progress, because God will have acted on David's second-order will to have his will altered. But not even omnipotence can make David's will stronger in its willing of righteousness than David wills it to be, on pain of violating David's will. Without the sudden wholesale conversion of will of the sort experienced by Paul, David will also have a strong disposition toward first-order willings to drink, which undermines his second-order willing to have a will not to drink and which thus resists God's grace.⁷⁸ So David's road away from his sin and toward righteousness will take time, during which some willing will bring with it some grace and consequently some fixing of his will, and these in turn will stimulate further willing and further fixing.

In telling this story of David, of course, I have picked an example of a person whose sense of himself makes him naturally likely to receive communion emotionally, and it might occur to someone to wonder whether the same story could be told about someone who came to communion with a relatively untroubled conscience. I know of no way to prove that communion would have similar effects on such a believer, short of some poll of communicants. But I offer as some evidence for the view that it could Aquinas's poem, *Adoro te devote*,⁷⁹ which shows the depth of emotion the Eucharist could stir even in a man whose life was apparently morally blameless.

On the basis of this psychological presentation of Aquinas's scholastic explanation of the Atonement, as regards the problem of future sin, we can provide some answers to the questions with which I began this section of the paper.

We can understand the bestowal of grace as God's response to the believer's willing to have his will altered, and such grace is tied to the Eucharist because it is the Eucharist which inspires and calls forth the willing. Both the bestowal of grace and the willing of a righteous will associated with the Eucharist are

⁷⁸ Compare, for example, Augustine's struggle for continence and his agonized prayer that God give him chastity—"but not yet;" *Confessions*, tr. Edward Pusey (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1961), Bk VIII, p. 125.

⁷⁹

Adoro devote, latens veritas,
te qui sub his formis vere latitas:
tibi se cor meum totum subicit,
quia te contemplans totum deficit.
Visus, gustus, tactus in te fallitur;
sed solus auditus tute creditur.
credo quicquid dixit Dei filius:
nihil veritatis verbo verius.

connected to Christ's passion, because it is Christ's love as manifested in his passion which elicits the believer's love and consequent willingness to will righteousness. It is also clear why God could not bestow grace directly without Christ's passion, because God's bestowal of grace is efficacious only in connection with an act of free will, which is called forth by the commemoration of Christ's passion in the Eucharist. On this interpretation, the mystical body of Christ is (or at least essentially includes) a union of minds, when the believer values and desires what Christ does, in the love engendered by the intimacy and poignancy of the Eucharist. It would be a mistake for someone, hearing the expression 'the mystical body of Christ' for the first time in this context, to ask what sort of thing this body is or where it is located, not because the expression is a figurative one which does not refer to anything, but rather because what it does refer to is a very complex set of shared experiences constituting the loving interweaving of human wills and minds with Christ's.

In this sort of way it is also possible to give a more understandable interpretation of Aquinas's claim that Christ's grace is transferred to a believer in the Eucharist. When David acquires grace on partaking of the Eucharist, it is not because some moral disposition of Christ is magically plucked from his soul and transplanted into David's. Instead in loving Christ because he believes Christ loves him and wants David's love in return, with all that that love implies in the context, David allies himself with Christ and takes on a frame of mind like that which he believes characterized Christ in his passion, namely, charity accompanied by a hatred of sin (in David's case, his own sin) and a love of goodness. In this frame of mind David forms a second-order willing to have first-order willings of the sort he believes he ought to have, so that God can infuse in David (to the

In cruce latebat sola deitas;
sed hic latet simul et humanitas.
ambo tamen credens atque confitens
peto quod petivit latro poenitens.

Plagas, sicut Thomas, non intueor;
meum tamen Deum te confiteor.
fac me tibi semper magis credere,
in te spem habere, te diligere.

O memoriale mortis Domini,
panis veram vitam praestans homini,
praesta meae menti de te vivere,
et te illi semper dulce sapere.

Pie pelicane, Iesu Domine,
me immundum munda tuo sanguine,
cuius una stilla alvum facere
totum mundum posset omni scelere.

Iesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
quando fiet illud quod tam cupio,
ut te revelata cernens facie
visu sim beatus tuae gloriae?

degree warranted by David's second-order will) a disposition to will not to drink without thereby violating the freedom of David's will. In this way, then, Christ's grace is transferred from him to David, not in the way that tulip bulbs are transferred from one plot to another but rather in the way that understanding is sometimes transferred from one mind to another, by the two minds being joined together in certain aims and beliefs and one mind's being kindled and illuminated by the other.

V

If we combine these two parts of Aquinas's account, Christ's passion as satisfaction and Christ's passion as meriting grace, we can see that he has a theory of the Atonement which can handle both the problem of past sin and that of future sin. Return again to the story of Susan and David, close friends who are alienated because David in his ongoing alcoholism has killed Susan's daughter. This story is in many (but certainly not all) respects analogous to the Christian view of the relationship between God and human beings. They are alienated because humans in their on-going post-Fall nature tend to will the contrary of what God wills, generally their own pleasure or power in preference to greater goods. To reconcile Susan and David requires first David's doing what he can to make satisfaction for the evil he has done. On Aquinas's theory of the Atonement, God out of love for humans initiates this process by sending his Son to make satisfaction for a person's past sins, by offering in his passion what that person in his current state cannot offer to God, namely, an instance of human nature with perfect humility, obedience, and love of God. But making satisfaction for past sins is not enough to effect reconciliation. For David and Susan to be reconciled also requires David's abandoning his addiction, and similarly for human beings and God to be at one again requires a person's converting from his post-Fall disordered nature with its inclination to evil to a new Christ-like character inclined to righteousness. On Aquinas's theory, Christ also provides the means for effecting this conversion by his passion and its commemoration in the Eucharist. The love manifested by Christ's passion and the loving union experienced in the Eucharist call forth the believer's love of Christ, which generates a willingness to will goodness and withdraw from evil. Once the believer has been stimulated by God to this act of will, then God can give the believer's will supernatural aid, assisting and strengthening the will to will the good, without thereby violating the believer's free will.

It might occur to someone at this point to protest that in explaining Aquinas's account I have in effect changed it from an orthodox view of the Atonement into something perilously close to Abelard's theory of the Atonement, a theory repudiated by the medieval church. For Abelard, Christ's role in human salvation from sin amounts to little more than that of a moral example, guiding and

stimulating right conduct on the part of believers. But according to Aquinas, as I have explained his position, the work of saving a person from his sin is done not by the struggling sinner himself but by God's grace won by Christ in his passion. Christ participates in this human reformation as its cause rather than just as a moral influence prompting it.

It is true that the causal efficacy of Christ's passion is dependent on human free will, however; and so someone might object that my interpretation of Aquinas is Pelagian even if it is not Abelardian. Here, I think, it is worth pausing to clarify the role of free will in my interpretation of Aquinas's account. Consider again Anna and her son Nathan: Suppose that Nathan loathes vegetables but that Anna means Nathan to eat them anyway. Anna lectures her son on the benefits of eating vegetables, offers rewards for eating them, threatens punishments for not doing so, and finally as a last resort spoons the vegetables into his mouth herself. Now, on the one hand, if Nathan does eat his vegetables, the credit goes to Anna, whose labor, ingenuity, persistence, and determination brought about the desired result. And yet, considered from the standpoint of Nathan and his attitude toward vegetables, the bare failure to keep his mouth closed, which is all he can claim as his share in the cooperative enterprise of Anna's getting him to eat his vegetables, may cost him a severe struggle with himself. And so although the credit for success is Anna's, there is nonetheless room in this story not just for exhortation but even for praise of Nathan. On the other hand, if Nathan does not eat his vegetables, the fault is all his, because no efforts to get him to eat his vegetables, no matter how clever or forceful, *can* succeed if he refuses to open his mouth.

This story is analogous to Aquinas's account of cooperative grace. What God infuses as grace is a disposition to righteous first-order willing; but God can do so only if a person is willing to have him do so, only if a person wills to will what he ought to will. It is open to a person to do what is in effect refusing to receive grace. So in a way analogous to that in my homely example, the credit for bringing about the desired result is God's, although exhortation of and praise for human actions is compatible with this fact; but any failure is entirely attributable to the sinner, whose persistence in sin stems from his refusal of divine aid. This view is hardly what we usually consider Pelagianism.

Whether it is Pelagian or not, it is considered a theological monster by the noted Thomist Garrigou-Lagrange. According to him, the doctrine according to which "man by his consent causes the grace of God to be efficacious" is "a monster, a chimera, or at least a puerile invention."⁸⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange takes this view because he holds that "God is either *determining* or *determined*, there is *no* other alternative;"⁸¹ and, he goes on, "only anthropomorphism can admit the second term of the dilemma and therefore, from sheer necessity, we must keep to

⁸⁰ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *God, His Existence and Nature*, 5th ed., tr. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis, Mo.: Herder, 1955), p. 540.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 546.

the first.”⁸² But if God must always be determining and can never be determined, then a person’s use of his free will can make no difference to what God is or does.

A full examination of Garrigou-Lagrange’s claim is beyond the scope of this paper, but two things should be said in answer to his charge. In the first place, Garrigou-Lagrange’s general thesis seems based on a mistaken notion of God’s greatness. A God who can create things like himself in their ability to act of their own accord, without determination by something else, is surely greater than a God who can create only things whose activities are entirely determined by himself. But if God creates entities which can act on their own apart from his determination of them, then he also brings it about that some of what he does is a response to what his creatures do; he brings it about, in other words, that he is sometimes determined rather than determining. In the second place, if Garrigou-Lagrange’s thesis is correct, it seems to me that the monstrosity is all on its side, because then God is the determiner of all the evils around us, and the human sense of freedom is an illusion. Both David’s alcoholic bouts and his trusting prayers to God for redemption from his addiction are equally and wholly determined by God. So Garrigou-Lagrange’s thesis seems to me to render the problem of evil (among others) insoluble and to make a mockery of some cherished religious practices. Consequently, I think a principle of charity can plausibly be invoked here. Aquinas need not be read as Garrigou-Lagrange reads him; as my preceding exposition shows, it is possible to interpret him consistently in a way which violates Garrigou-Lagrange’s thesis. And since it is possible to read Aquinas in a way which frees him from the (to my mind) monstrous consequences of Garrigou-Lagrange’s thesis, it is charitable and reasonable to do so.

Those familiar with other theories of the Atonement, such as Calvin’s, for example, may also wonder at the fact that there is here hardly any mention of the work of the Holy Spirit, which features significantly in Calvin’s account, as in others. In fact, Aquinas’s theory does assign a prominent place to the Holy Spirit, because on Aquinas’s view grace is the grace of the Holy Spirit,⁸³ so that the infusion of grace is the Holy Spirit working in the heart. But covering all the complexities and elaborations of Aquinas’s account of the Atonement is more than could be managed in one paper, and so I have left to one side any issues which can be omitted without distorting the heart of his idea. The work of the Holy Spirit is one such issue; the relation of Christ’s passion to original sin and the role of Christ’s resurrection in the process of atonement are others.

There is, however, one idea found in other, more familiar theories of the Atonement which is not mentioned in this paper because it is not in Aquinas; the fact that it is not seems to me a serious flaw in his account. Luther, for example, in his theory of the Atonement, emphasizes the idea that Christ somehow actually bears all human sin; that is, in some way all the sins ever committed in human

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 547.

⁸³ *ST I-II*, q. 112, a. 1; cf. *ST I*, q. 38, a. 2.

history are transferred to Christ's soul in his suffering on the cross. (I will refer to this claim as 'Luther's idea,' for the sake of convenience only.) There is no similar or analogous claim in Aquinas's account. The problem for Aquinas, then, is to square his account with the New Testament story of the passion. The cry of dereliction from the cross is certainly easier to explain on Luther's idea than on Aquinas's account. So is Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane. For Aquinas it is difficult to explain why the incarnate deity should have been in such torment over his death when so many of the merely human martyrs went gladly, even cheerfully, to death by tortures worse than crucifixion. Aquinas's interpretation of the relevant New Testament passages seems to me to eviscerate the text. Given that he is trying to provide a theory of the Atonement, his failure to do justice to these passages is a major fault.

We might be tempted to suppose that Aquinas does not include an idea such as Luther's because it makes no sense; sins cannot be transferred like money in bank accounts. But, in fact, Luther's idea is less counterintuitive than it seems at first, and Aquinas has the doctrines and distinctions necessary for supporting it. For example, Aquinas distinguishes between a sinful action and what he calls 'the stain on the soul' left by that sinful action.⁸⁴ By 'the stain on the soul' he understands, roughly, something which includes the distressing knowledge of what it feels like to have committed a particular sin and the tormenting awareness of what it is to desire such an evil action. On this understanding, it is, arguably, possible to have a stain on the soul without having the sin which usually precedes it. For example, a powerful scene in a movie portraying a brutal murder may succeed in evoking in receptive members of the audience a mild version of the stain on the soul ordinarily produced only by the evil action itself. Luther's idea could thus be explained in Aquinas's own terms by claiming that in his passion Christ acquires all the stains on the soul produced by all the sins of the human beings with whom he is united. The horror and pain of such a burden would explain the agony in Gethsemane and the cry of dereliction. And that Christ had to suffer in such a way could perhaps be explained as a necessary concomitant of Christ's uniting himself with human beings in the process of saving them from sin. If David is united with Christ, then Christ is also united with David. David experiences the uniting as allying himself with an overwhelmingly holy, loving person. But perhaps Christ experiences this uniting as allying himself with a selfish, alcoholic killer of a child. So it is possible for Aquinas's account of the Atonement to accommodate Luther's idea. That Aquinas has no equivalent idea stems, I think, from his tendency to emphasize the divine nature of Christ at the expense of his human nature, rather than from any philosophical absurdity (in Aquinas's terms or ours) in Luther's idea. But Aquinas's theory of the Atonement would have been theologically more powerful, and also perhaps more humanly compelling, if it had included something equivalent to Luther's idea.

⁸⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 86.

Finally, it is, of course, clear that Aquinas's account is not the only theory of the Atonement that is an alternative to the unreflective (A) with which this discussion began. Anselm, Abelard, Luther, Calvin, and John of the Cross, to name just a few, also worked out sophisticated theories of the Atonement. What my examination of Aquinas's account shows is not the preferability of his version to any of these others but rather just the nature of one defensible theory of the Atonement and the general constraints on any acceptable account. Aquinas's theory of the Atonement is a reflective version of (A). As Aquinas explains it, Christ in virtue of his passion really does solve the problem of human sinfulness and really does make people at one with God. Whatever the details of other theories of the Atonement, they must explain how the Atonement solves the problem both of past and of future sin; and they must do so, like Aquinas's account, in a way which does not undermine God's justice and mercy or human nature.⁸⁵

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⁸⁵ I am indebted to Robert Adams, William Mann, George Mavrodes, Alvin Plantinga, Philip Quinn, Richard Swinburne, Charles Taliaferro, and Thomas Tracy for comments or suggestions. I am especially grateful to Norman Kretzmann for his many helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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The Christian Scheme of Salvation*

Richard Swinburne

Christianity offers to us salvation, salvation from the guilt of our past sin, salvation from our proneness to present sin, salvation for the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision of God in the company of the blessed in Heaven. This salvation was made available to humans by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This paper is concerned to analyze how this life, death, and resurrection made available salvation from the guilt of past sin. In so doing I shall be spelling out a theory of Atonement which I believe to be in essence very similar to the theory expounded by St. Thomas Aquinas and also to the view of Christ's death as a sacrifice developed in the Epistle to the Hebrews. I shall, however, start from scratch and try to avoid using their technical terms without definition and to avoid using their implicit assumptions without bringing them out into the open.

I

Before anyone can understand how Christianity provides salvation from the past, he needs to understand three crucial concepts—guilt, atonement, and forgiveness. These concepts are crucial for understanding relations between one person and another, as well as relations between humans and God; and it is tragic that so much modern moral philosophy has neglected their study. I shall need to devote the larger part of this paper to analyzing these concepts before applying my analysis to the Christian message.

Among good acts, some are obligatory—duties owed to particular individuals, such as keeping promises or educating one's children. Good acts which go beyond obligation are supererogatory good acts. Giving one's life to save the life of a comrade is a plausible example of such an act. The scope for goodness is

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unending; however many good acts one has done, there is always another one waiting to be done. But it is a matter of dispute how wide is the range of obligation. Whether our obligations are a narrow set which can easily be fulfilled or a large set (including duties to help the poor in distant lands), which leaves little room for supererogatory goodness, is disputed.¹ Wherever the line is drawn, guilt belongs to a person only in respect of his failure to perform his obligations, or his doing what it is obligatory not to do, i.e., something wrong. (I shall often omit this second negative clause in future discussions of guilt, for the sake of simplicity of exposition. It will be obvious how it is to be inserted.)

The guilt is objective guilt if the agent has failed to fulfill a moral obligation (or done an act obligatory not to do) whether or not he realized that this was his moral obligation or that he was failing in respect of it. I am objectively guilty for failing to educate my children properly even if I believe that I have no duty to educate my children or if I believe that sending them to a certain school, which unknown to me is totally incompetent, is educating my children properly. The guilt is subjective if the agent has failed to fulfill what he believes to be his moral obligation (or done what he believed to be obligatory not to do), whether or not there was such an obligation—so long as the agent was free to do or refrain from doing the action, in whatever sense of “free” makes him morally responsible for that action.

But the assertion that someone is guilty is not just an assertion about the past; it makes two further claims about the present. The first is that the guilty one owes something to the one whom he has wronged, his victim. If I fail in an obligation, I do not just do a wrong, I do a wrong to someone. If I promise you that I will give a lecture and then do not turn up, or if I kick you in a fit of anger, I have done a wrong to you. By hurting you, I put myself in a moral situation somewhat like the legal situation of a debtor who has failed to repay money borrowed from a bank. But the kind of debt owed by failure to perform one's moral obligations is often no mere financial one. Insofar as the victim is a person, that person is known personally to the wrongdoer, the failure is a failure of personal trust, and above all if there is ill-will (deliberate malice or negligence) on the part of the wrong-doer, then there is a totally new kind of harm involved—the harm done to personal relations by a wrong attitude by the wrongdoer. Yet there is still more to moral guilt than past failure and present debt. Through his past failure the guilty one has acquired a negative status, somewhat like being unclean,² which needs to be removed. By making a promise a person puts himself under certain

¹ The importance of the notion of supererogation was first brought to the attention of modern moral philosophers by J. O. Urmson in his article, “Saints and Heroes,” in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. T. Melden (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), and reprinted in *Moral Concepts*, ed. J. Feinberg (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). For the history of this concept, and its elaboration and defence, see David Heyd, *Supererogation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

² For this analogy, see St. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1.19.

obligations, but his status is in no way bad or unclean in consequence. There is more in the present to being guilty than incurring new obligations.

There is something wrong with a person even if his guilt is purely objective. If I unintentionally break your best vase or light the fire with the manuscript of your book, I acquire the status of a wrongdoer even if my actions were done in total ignorance of their nature or consequence (and even if I had taken all reasonable precautions to ensure that they had no such nature or consequence). It is, I suggest, a virtually unanimous moral intuition that this is so, that in such circumstances I acquire a status which needs purging by reparation if possible, and certainly by apology. This is because in interacting with my fellows, I undertake responsibility for seeing that certain things are done and certain things are not done (e.g., in holding your vase, I take responsibility for its not getting broken); and bad luck (my actions having bad consequences, despite my taking reasonable precautions) no more removes the responsibility, than it excuses you from repaying a man a sum of money which you have borrowed from him, even if you have that same amount stolen.

But of course the guilt is of a different kind if I knowingly fail in my obligations toward you—if my guilt is subjective as well as objective. Here again I suggest that a virtually unanimous moral intuition suggests that far more is wrong, and far more needs doing to put it right. If I deliberately break your best vase, it is no good my saying “I really am very sorry.” I have got to make several speeches distancing myself from the act and I have got to make reparation very quickly. I have wronged you so much the worse that my guilt is of a qualitatively different kind. The Book of Numbers differentiated between “sins committed unknowingly” and “sins committed with a high hand” (i.e., knowingly), declaring various kinds of ritual reparation suitable for the former and some very serious punishment for the latter.³ The reason for the vast difference is that when I deliberately break your best vase, I have failed not merely in my outward obligations toward you, but also in that attitude of purpose toward you which I owe you, the attitude of seeking no harm for you.

What if there is no objective guilt, but I fail in what I believe to be my obligations toward you? I try to break your best vase, but by accident break my own instead. Have I wronged you? My argument suggests that the answer is yes; and we can see that the answer is correct from considering more serious cases. I try to kill you but the shot misfires. From the obvious need for reparation of rather more than a short apology, we can see that wrong has been done and guilt acquired. Both subjective and objective guilt are stains on a soul requiring expunging; but subjective guilt is embedded in the soul while objective guilt lies on the surface.

Such, I have suggested by example, is the common understanding of moral guilt, the status acquired by one who fails in his obligations. When modern

³ Numbers 15:28–31.

moral philosophers neglect this concept, they ignore the fact that letting someone down hurts, and matters. We cannot undo the past, but we can remove its consequences—How is the taint of guilt to be removed? For perfect removal, the guilty one must make atonement for his wrong act, and the wronged person must forgive him.

Atonement involves four components: reparation, repentance, apology, and what, for want of a better word, I shall call penance (though not all of these are always required). They are all contributions to removing as much of the consequences of the past act as logically can be removed. The consequences are, first, the harm caused by and distinguishable from the act of causing it and second, the purposive attitude of the guilty one toward the wronged one manifested in the causing of harm. By removing the former harm the guilty one makes reparation. Sometimes he can literally restore the status quo. If I steal your watch and have not sold it, I can return it to you. Sometimes I can only make things rather similar to the way they were, so that the victim is almost equally happy with the new state. I can compensate him adequately, that is. If I steal and sell your watch, I can buy you another one. If I smash up your car, I can pay for the repairs. Sometimes, alas, full compensation is not possible. If I run you over with my car, and paralyze you for life, nothing I can do can compensate you fully for that. Full reparation is not possible. But some things which I can do can compensate you in part. I can pay for wheelchairs and machines to lift you out of bed in the morning.

But the consequences of the act are not merely such harm, but the fact that by doing the act the guilty one has made himself the one who has harmed the wronged one. He cannot change that past fact, but he can distance himself from it by privately and publicly disowning the act. The wronged one has been hurt, and so it is to the wronged one that the disowning is owed and must be shown. But the disowning which is owed must be sincere and so must reflect the attitude that the guilty one now has and naturally expresses to himself. The natural expression to oneself is repentance, the public expression to the wronged one is apology. Repentance involves, first, acknowledgment by the guilty one that he did the act and that it was a wrong act to do. Thereby the guilty one distances the act from his present ideals. Repentance also involves a resolve to amend—you cannot repent of a past act if you intend to do a similar act at the next available opportunity. Preachers often draw our attention to the etymology of the Greek word translated “repent,” *Μετανοεῖν*, which means literally to “change one’s mind.” By resolving to amend, the guilty one distances the past act from his present purposes. In acknowledging his initiation of the past act, but distancing it both from his present ideals and from his present purposes, the guilty one makes the sharp contrast between the attitude behind the past act and his present attitude. He disowns the past act publicly by expressing to the wronged one the repentance which he expresses to himself privately, assuring the wronged one that he recognizes its wrongness and that he purposes to amend. There are

conventional ways of doing this; one may say “I’m very sorry” or “I really do apologize.” An agent cannot alter the fact that he did the past act, but what he can do is make the present “he” in his attitude as different as possible from the past “he” who did the act; that is the most he can do toward undoing the act.

The above account of repentance and apology applies insofar as there is an element of subjectivity in the guilt, insofar as deliberately or through negligence the guilty one has some moral responsibility for doing the harm. If the guilt is purely objective, arising from the performance of an unintentional act in which there was not even the slightest negligence involved (e.g., dropping your best vase when startled by a loud noise), an apology of a sort is still owed, for the reason that in interacting with others we accept responsibility in advance for not causing them certain kinds of harm. If unintentionally we are the agents of harm, we must distance ourselves from that agency. But insofar as we never intended it in the first place (and had every intention of preventing it), what we must do is to emphasize that our present benevolent ideals and purposes were our past ones also. An apology (but one which brings out the unintentional character of the action) is needed; but it needs behind it no repentance in the form of change of mind, only sincerity in the reemphasis of ideals and purposes.

Apology can often be very difficult. It costs many of us a lot to say “I’m sorry.” But sometimes, for some people, apology can be very easy. We all know the smooth, amiable people who say “I’m frightfully sorry” with such a charming smile that our reaction is “Yes, but do you really mean it?” And what else can show “meaning it,” what else can show the sincerity of the apology? You lend your friend a considerably large sum of money. He forgets to return it until you remind him five times; in consequence of which you have to borrow money yourself and disappoint your own creditors. He then acknowledges his wrongdoing and resolves not to do it again (publicly, and, let us suppose, also privately). He pays you the money back and compensates you financially for extra financial costs, and says he is sorry. And yet that is not quite good enough, is it? We feel something else is required. The “something else” would be some token of his sorrow—a favor which we did not expect, interest on the money which was not part of the original bargain, perhaps a bunch of flowers—something more than mere compensation.⁴ The giving of the extra gift does not have the function of making clear something which was true whether or not the agent made it clear; that he meant the apology. Rather it is a performative⁵ act whereby he disowns

⁴ “When anyone pays what he has unjustly taken away, he ought to give something which could not have been demanded of him, had he not stolen what belonged to another” (Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1.11).

⁵ J. L. Austin introduced the terminology of “performative utterances” to describe such utterances as “I promise,” “I solemnly swear,” “I name this ship,” which do not report already existing states of affairs but themselves bring about states of affairs. (See, e.g., his “Performative Utterances” in his *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1961.) The man who promises does not report an interior mental act but creates an obligation upon himself to do something, an obligation

the wrong act (in a way which mere words do not do when the wrong is a serious one). By doing his act of disowning, by doing something which costs him time, effort, and money, he constitutes that act as a meant and serious act. To give what we cannot too easily afford is always a serious act. The penitent constitutes his apology as serious by making it costly.

With reparation, repentance, apology, and penance, the guilty person has done what he can toward removing his guilt, toward atonement for the past, toward making him and the wronged one at one again. Not all such are needed in every case. For some wrongs reparation is inappropriate—there is no reparation for an insult; for the less serious wrongs, penance is not needed. But sincere apology is always needed. In the case of subjective guilt, apology involves repentance of the kind described.

The final act belongs to the wronged party—to forgive. In making apology, reparation, and penance, I am giving you something. All gifts have to be accepted (explicitly or implicitly) or else they remain with the giver. Gifts are accepted by the recipient completing the process which the giver is trying to effect by presenting them to the recipient. You accept my box of chocolates by taking it from me, the elephant I give you by accepting responsibility for its upkeep. What I give you in making reparation, penance, and apology is my contribution toward destroying the consequences (physical and not so physical) of my act of hurting you. You accept my reparation and penance by taking over the money, flowers, or whatever. My apology is my disowning of the past act. You accept my disowning by forwarding the purpose I had in showing you this disowning—to make it the case, as far as logically can be done, that I was not the originator of an act by which I wronged you. You do that by undertaking to treat me and think of me in the future not as one who has hurt you, by agreeing not to hold my act against me. Your acceptance of my reparation, penance, and, above all, apology, is forgiving. Forgiving is a performative act—achieved perhaps by saying solemnly “I forgive you” or perhaps by saying “that’s all right” or maybe just by a smile.

A person’s guilt is removed when his repentance, reparation, apology, and penance find their response in the victim’s forgiveness. Can the victim forgive him without any act of atonement on his part? The victim can indeed disown the act, in the sense that he explicitly says something like “let us regard this as not having happened” and then acts as though it had not happened. Such disowning could be done at any time, even if the guilty one makes no atonement; but unless it was done in response to atonement it would not be acceptance of that. And it will not then suffice to remove guilt, for the guilty one has not distanced himself from that act. We can see this by example. I borrow your car and damage the

which did not previously exist. Actions other than utterances may create or abolish states of people or relations between them, describable in such moral terms as responsibility and obligation. I convey money to you and thereby abolish my debt, and in the context of an auction a nod is enough to constitute a bid (i.e., a promise to pay).

bodywork. I do not even apologize, but all the same you say "That's quite all right." But I remain one who has wronged you and I need to purge myself of my guilt, as I may well realize in later life. A mere financial debt can easily be removed by the creditor, but the unclean status of guilt requires some work by the debtor.

Indeed, not merely is it ineffective but it is wrong, in the case of serious acts, for the wronged person to treat the acts as not having been done, in the absence of some atonement at least in the form of apology from the guilty person. In the case of acts done to hurt us which are not done with much deliberation and where the hurt is not great, this may indeed be the right course of action. (It would be wrong to treat very seriously acts which were not in their intentions or consequences very serious.) But this would be the wrong course in the case of a serious hurt, and, above all, one done deliberately. Suppose that I have murdered your dearly loved wife; you know this, but for some reason I am beyond the power of the law. Being a modern and charitable man, you decide to overlook my offence (insofar as it hurt you). "The past is the past," you say, "What is the point of nursing a grievance?" The party we are both going to attend will go with more of a swing if we forget about this little incident. But, of course, that attitude of yours trivializes human life, your love for your wife, and the importance of right action. And it involves your failing to treat me seriously, to take seriously my attitude toward you expressed in my action. Thereby it trivializes human relationships, for it supposes that good human relations can exist when we do not take each other seriously.⁶

It is both wrong and ineffective for a victim of a serious hurt to disown the hurt when no atonement at all has been made.⁷ What, however, is within the victim's power is to determine, within limits, just how much atonement is necessary

⁶ To say that it would be wrong for me to treat an act done deliberately to hurt me as not having been done in the absence of some apology from the guilty person is not to say that one ought to seek revenge or continually harbor malevolent thoughts. It is only to say that I should not treat the wrongdoer with such disdain as to ignore his seriously intended actions.

⁷ Whether we call the disowning of a hurtful act by the victim "forgiveness," when no atonement at all has been made, seems to be a matter which requires a linguistic decision. In view of the fact that forgiving is normally thought of as a good thing, I suggest that a victim's disowning of an act hurting him is to be called "forgiveness" only when it is in response to some minimal attempt at atonement, such as an apology. One of the very few recent philosophical discussions of the issues of this paper is William Neblett's "The Ethics of Guilt," *Journal of Philosophy* 71 (1974):652-63. As I do, he claims that men become guilty through performing wrong actions, and that this guilt needs atonement; but he claims that a man can be forgiven, even when he has not made atonement.

One recent article, which in my view fails to see what forgiveness is about, is Anne C. Minas, "God and Forgiveness," *Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1975):138-150. She claims that God cannot forgive because forgiveness is either changing one's moral judgment, or remitting deserved punishment, or abandoning a feeling of resentment; and she has arguments to show that a good God will not do any of these. However, forgiveness does not involve changing any moral judgment, and feelings need not be involved (I can easily forgive that which I do not resent). It is true that if I forgive you for some act, I ought not subsequently punish you for that act. Yet forgiveness still has application in contexts where there is no question of punishment.

before he is prepared to give the forgiveness which will eliminate guilt. The guilty one must offer some atonement—certainly repentance and apology and some attempt at reparation insofar as it lies within his power. But the victim may, if he chooses, let the guilty one off from doing any more; his forgiveness, without insisting on more, would be efficacious. But if he chooses, the victim can insist on substantial reparation, and sometimes it is good that he should do so, that he should insist on the guilty one, for his own sake, making a serious atonement; for that allows him to take seriously the harm that he has done.

What now if the guilty one makes due amends, gives a serious apology with due reparation and penance, but the victim fails to forgive? Does the guilt remain? My answer is that it does remain initially; the victim has the power to sustain it for a while. But if the apology is pressed, the penance increased, and still the victim refuses to forgive, the guilt disappears. Ideally both those involved—the guilty one and victim—need to disown the act, but if the guilty one does all that he can both to disown the act and to get the victim to disown the act, he will have done all he can to remove his involvement in the act. All that is logically possible for the guilty one to do to remove his status has been done.

If by my past act I have wronged you, that gives you a certain right against me—a right to accept or ignore my plea for pardon. If we were to say that the guilty party had, as it were, a fixed fine to pay in the way of atonement, that guilt did not disappear before the fine was paid but that it disappeared automatically when the fine was paid, that would have the consequence that I can wrong you and then remove my guilt at will. That would not take seriously the fact that the act is an act by which you are wronged, and in the wiping out of which you ought therefore to have a say. One consequence of my harming you is that it is in part up to you whether my guilt is remitted. But although my act gives you a right against me, it does not give you an infinite right. The harm which I have done you and the guilt which in consequence I acquire is limited. Hence your power to keep me guilty is limited. The victim has the right, within limits, to judge when the guilty one's atonement suffices. He can take an apology which sounds sincere and so indicates repentance as sufficient, or refuse forgiveness until the apology is renewed with reparation and penance. He cannot forgive when the apology is totally casual and so shows no repentance, and if he refuses forgiveness after a serious, repeated genuine apology with reparation and penance, the guilt vanishes despite the lack of forgiveness. But, within those limits, the final remission of guilt depends on the victim.

There is, in general, no obligation on the victim to forgive. How can my hurting you and then trying to undo the harm, actions all of my choice and not yours, put you under an obligation to do something, which did not exist before? Barring an exception to be explained below, your positive obligations arise from your choices, including your acceptance of my favors, not from my choices. However, forgiving the serious penitent is clearly good—a work of supererogation. (There is, however, an obligation to forgive others, on anyone who has

solemnly undertaken to do so. For this reason Christians, unlike others, have an obligation to forgive all who seek their forgiveness. For it is a central theme of the gospel, embedded in the Lord's Prayer, that God's forgiveness can only be had by those prepared to forgive others; Christians who accept God's forgiveness thereby undertake the obligation to forgive others.)

In this paper so far I have in general been assuming that a person acquires guilt and so the need for atonement and forgiveness only in respect of actions which he has done himself, that atonement is owed only to those hurt (in an obvious and direct sense) by his actions, and that he alone can make atonement for the actions which he has done. It is time to bring in third parties.

We live in a network of obligations, some of them undertaken voluntarily—as are our obligations to care for our spouses and children—and some of them incurred involuntarily, as are our obligations to care for our parents and other benefactors of our youth. Normally it is only the accepting of a benefit which creates any positive obligation, and that together with the accepting of the obligation is something which we do voluntarily. But the greatest benefits—of life, nurture, and initial education—are ones which a benefactor must convey without the recipient being able to choose whether to accept or refuse them—because only when he has them does he have the ability to accept or refuse benefits. A benefactor reasonably assumes that a recipient would, if he had the choice, accept such benefits; and the conferring of the benefit, given that reasonable assumption, creates, I suggest, an obligation on the recipient to do something in return—to care for parents, teachers, and other members of his nurturing community in their need.

The web of obligations to care stretches further than to parents and teachers, spouses and children. Voluntarily we have accepted friendship and cooperation with many, and that acceptance brings obligations to help our friends in their need. Involuntarily we have received benefits from a very wide community in space and time, stretching back to the first human who was sensitive to moral distinctions, and first chose intentionally to confer what was good on his children including some knowledge of what was good and bad. Many of our benefactors are dead. But the dead can still be benefited by bringing about what they would wish to have brought about, e.g., by conferring benefits on their descendants, our siblings and cousins and ultimately all members of the human race.

Among our obligations to our benefactors is the obligation to make some good use of benefits received. Of course if someone gives us a gift, we are not obliged to use it exactly as they wish. For it is the essence of a gift that, within limits, the recipient can do as he wishes with it. If I "give" you some money and tell you exactly what to buy for me with it, I have not given you a gift. But there are limits as to what a recipient can do with the gift. To accept an expensive present and then to throw it away is to wrong our benefactor. A recipient has *some* obligation to try to put what he has been given to some good use.

Given this web of obligations, what guilt have we for the actions of others? Those who are responsible for the moral education of children often have some guilt for the wrong acts of the children. Of course, a parent cannot make his children be good; there are other influences on the child, and also in the view of many, the child has some indeterministic freedom of choice. But the parent has a responsibility to influence, and if bad behavior results when he has failed to do so, the parent has some responsibility for this. Also, there is the responsibility of a member of a community to deter a fellow member from doing some particular grossly immoral act, on which he is intent. A husband has a duty to try to deter his wife from shop-lifting; a German a duty to protest against his country's extermination of Jews. Failure to protest involves a share in the resulting guilt.

Yet with these exceptions a person is surely not responsible for, not guilty in respect of, the acts of others; above all, he is not guilty for the acts of others which he could not have prevented. And yet, there is a sense in which a person is "involved" in the objective or subjective guilt of others of his community—although he bears no guilt for it himself. Our duty to help others of our community in their need includes a duty to help them with perhaps their greatest need, to get rid of their burden of past guilt. I cannot share my friend's guilt, but I can treat it as my burden and help him to cope with it in the ways in which he needs to cope with it—to acknowledge that it is his, and to help him by atonement to get rid of it.

Just as others are involved in our moral failures, so they can indeed help us get rid of our guilt. But the word is "help"; unless the guilty party participates in the process of "atonement," his guilt is not removed. If my child damages your property, and I tell you that he apologizes profusely, I pay the damage and give you a bottle of whisky at Christmas, my child's guilt remains. But I can help my child carry out the process of atonement—first, by encouraging him to set about it and second, by paying such of the reparation and proper penance as lies beyond his resources.⁸ I can even help him say the words of apology—go along with him to knock at your door and provide him with cues. But beyond that I cannot go, if the atonement is to be his. Some offerings which others may give us to use as our reparation and penance are ones useful for other purposes. When my child damages your window and I give him money in the hope that he will pay for the repair, he could use the money for another purpose. But if I tell him that if he orders the glazier to mend the window, I will settle the bill, he does not give in reparation something which he could have used for another purpose. Nevertheless, in allowing me to do this for him, especially if it was something which I could ill afford and which required trouble to arrange, he is doing the only thing he can do and thereby he is showing humility (in recognizing the wrong he has

⁸ Aquinas urges that although confession has to be made and contrition shown by the sinner himself, "satisfaction has to do with the exterior act, and here one can make use of instruments" (*Summa Theologiae* III q. 48, a.2, ad 1), i.e., one can use reparation provided by others.

done and his inability to right it by himself) when he transfers my generosity to you. And that is sometimes all that a wrongdoer without resources can do.

II

Such is the structure of guilt, atonement, and forgiveness. I now introduce a theological assumption—that there is a God, that is, a perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient creator, who made the world and the natural laws which govern its operation and so (indirectly) made us and the framework within which we operate, that he became incarnate in Christ who was both God and man, lived a perfect human life, foreseeing correctly that such perfection would have the consequence that he would be crucified, intended that that life and death should be available to us to offer to God in full atonement for our sins, rose from the dead, founded a church to carry on his work and seeks our eternal well-being in friendship with himself. This very detailed assumption is of course provided by parts of the Christian credal package other than the doctrine of the Atonement. In calling it an assumption I do not, of course, in the least imply that it cannot be the subject of rational argument, only that I need to take it for granted in a short paper on another subject. My aim is to show that, given what I have shown about the nature of guilt, atonement, and forgiveness, my assumption has the consequence that Christ's life and death is indeed, as he intended, efficacious for anyone who pleads it as a perfect atonement for his actual sins and the sins of others with whom he is involved.

If there is a God, the moral worth of humans is far lower than it would otherwise be. As I have argued, we owe it to our parents and educators to obey them and to do what they wish to some limited extent, in view of all that they have done for us. *A fortiori*, if there is a God, we have a greater duty by far to obey his commands and fulfill his wishes. For our existence at each moment and all that we have depends on him; our dependence on our parents and educators is very limited in time and degree, and their ability to benefit us arises from God's gift to them. Our dependence on God is so total that we owe it to God not merely to obey any explicit commands—to worship and evangelize, say—but also generally to fulfill God's wish by making something good out of our lives, something better than what we owe to our parents and educators. When we fail in any objective or subjective duty to our fellows, we fail also in our duty to God our creator.

If, further, as I have assumed, God seeks our eternal well-being in friendship with himself, then there is a pattern of life and a goal of fulfillment open to us, which would not otherwise be available. The greatest human well-being is to be found in friendship with good and interesting people in the pursuit of worthy aims. God is a better friend with more interesting aspects of himself to reveal than human friends (given his necessity and perfect goodness an infinitely better

friend with infinitely more aspects) and he has worthwhile tasks which humans can share with him in bringing themselves and others to reconciliation with each other and God, to growth in the contemplation of God and the universe which he made, and to beautifying that universe. If there is a God, such tasks will necessarily be vastly more worthwhile than secular tasks—for there will be a depth of contemplation of the richness of life of a person, God, open to us which would not be open if there is no omnipotent and omniscient being; and there will be the infinite time of an after-life which God, seeking our well-being, is able to make available to us to help in the beautifying of the world and the spiritual healing of our fellows. And God, unlike humans, is a necessary being, who is the ultimate source of being and therefore of a kind quite other than finite things; the entering into contact with him has a richness and mystery and meaning which Rudolf Otto so vividly described as the “numinous.” The existence of God, which makes human moral worth far lower than it would otherwise be, makes our prospects for the future infinitely brighter.

If there is no God, humans have no obligations to give their lives to prayer or philosophical reflection or artistic creativity or helping to enrich the spiritual, intellectual, and physical lives of others, good though it is that these things be done. But if all talents depend totally on God, and if doing these things is the way to form our characters and those of others over a few years of earthly life to fit us for the life of heaven, then to use our lives in some such way passes into the realm of the obligatory.

Because of our total dependence on God, and because the possibilities for us are of a vastly different kind in quality and quantity, it follows that, if there is a God, acts which otherwise would be supererogatorily good or not good at all become obligations; and failure to perform them is a breach of obligation to God. Failure in a duty to God is called sin. If a person does what is wrong (whether or not he realizes it), he sins objectively. If he does what he believes to be wrong, he sins subjectively.

Yet we have sinned, all humans have sinned, all humans have sinned considerably. So much is obvious, given the understanding which I have spelled out of what sin is. Hence all of us are guilty for our own sins, and also in part for the sins of those whom we ought to have influenced for good but failed to influence, and are involved in the way, which I have analyzed, in the sins of so many others of the human race. This responsibility for and involvement in the sins of others is a natural understanding of one part of original sin. (Original sin involves both some element of guilt for the sins of others, which I have analyzed, and also a proneness or tendency to sin.)⁹ Each of us suffers from the burden of actual and original sin.

⁹ For the history of Christian views of original sin, see N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and Original Sin* (London: Longmans, 1927). For analysis and assessment of the doctrine of the proneness or tendency to sin, see my “Original Sinfulness,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie*, 27 (1985): 235–50.

And so, each human owes atonement to God for the sins which he has committed and he owes it to God to help others make atonement for their sins, atonement in the form of repentance, reparation, apology, and penance. If you take seriously the theological background to human wrongdoing, you realize both the extent of atonement needed and the difficulty of making it—especially in respect of reparation and penance. For if God has given us so much, we have a duty to live a worthwhile life; and, if we have failed to do so, it's going to be very difficult to find a bit extra to offer to God in compensation for past misuse. We are too close to the situation of the criminal who has spent his ill-gotten gains and is unable to make reparation. We need help from outside.

But why in that situation would a good God not simply ignore our sins? I argued earlier that it is wrong for any victim to ignore serious harm done to him by another—for it involves not taking the other seriously in the attitudes expressed in his actions. But why would not God forgive us in return for repentance and apology without demanding reparation and penance? Aquinas claimed that he could have done so if he had so chosen.¹⁰ But since our actions and their consequences matter, it matters that if we do wrong, *we* should take *proper* steps to cancel our actions, to pay our debts, as far as logically can be done. Just as a good parent may put in the way of a child an opportunity for making amends (an opportunity which he would not otherwise have had) rather than just accept an apology, so a good God also may do just that. God cannot literally atone for our sins, but he can help us to atone for our sins by making available to us an offering which we may offer as our reparation and penance, and by encouraging us to repent and apologize. He could give to us the opportunity to be serious enough about our sins to use his life and death as man to be our atoning offering.

And what is a suitable offering to God for our sins? Many offerings might suit, but a perfect human life would suit very well. For our sins make our human lives less worthwhile than the lives we owe to God; the best way of making it up to him would be for us to offer him a life which is perfect and so better than the life which is owed to God. The best reparation is that in which the reparation restores the damage done rather than gives something else in compensation; and the best penance is that which more than makes it up to the victim in the respect in which he was harmed rather than in some irrelevant respect. Having damaged the rusty bumper of your car, I can do penance better by giving you a new bumper, rather than restoring the old one and giving you a box of chocolates at the same time. This is because penance, to be good, must evince a concern that the particular harm which was done was done. The living of perfect human life by God himself forms a far more perfect offering for us to offer to God than a perfect life lived by an ordinary human. For the ordinary human has an obligation to God to live a worthwhile life, and so some of the perfection of his life would be owed anyway.

¹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III q. 46, a. 1–4.

An incarnate God does not owe it to any benefactor to live any particular kind of life, and so the whole of the perfection of that life would be available to others to use as their offering.

So if, as our theological assumption claims, God did indeed become incarnate in Christ and lived a human life so perfect that it ended in a foreseen death, and if he intended that that life should be available to be used by us to make our atonement, it is indeed the sort of thing which we could offer to God as our reparation and penance. Whether or not it would be a full reparation for the sins of all humans, it is good reparation such that a good God could indeed forgive us without demanding more. Given that Christ the man who made the offering intending it to avail fully for our atonement, is also the God to whom it was offered, he will forgive us without demanding more.

Christ offered the sacrifice on behalf of all. But it can only atone for me, if I use it—if I join my feeble repentance and halting words of apology to it, if I use it to pay my fine, to make my peace. There has to be a formal association with it in the process of my disassociating myself from my own sins and from involvement in those of others. A further part of my theological assumption was that Christ founded a body to carry on his work. The Christian Church provides a formal ceremony of association in the pledges made by the candidate for admission in its initiation ceremonies of baptism and confirmation, and before participation in the Eucharist in which, as Paul put it, we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”¹¹

I plead the sacrifice of Christ in joining and rejoining myself to the new humanity, the new and voluntary association of those who accept Christ’s offering on their behalf, the Church. And as it is difficult to repent and utter the words of apology, that too, the Church in its evangelistic and pastoral capacity helps me to do.¹²

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 11:26.

¹² The account of atonement which I have given in this paper is that provided in the New Testament by the metaphor of sacrifice. We make a sacrifice to God by giving him something valuable, often as a gift to effect reconciliation. This is, of course, the way in which the doctrine of Atonement is worked out in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and is, I think, despite the emphasis on the Law Court metaphor in the Epistle to the Romans, the way of expressing the doctrine which has the widest base in the New Testament.

Do We Believe in Penal Substitution?*

David Lewis

Imagine that an offender has a devoted and innocent friend. The offender has been justly sentenced to be punished for his offence. But the friend volunteers to be punished in his place.¹ If the friend undergoes the punishment that the offender deserved, does that render it permissible (or even obligatory) to leave the offender unpunished? Is that any reason at all in favour of sparing the offender?

Mostly we think not. It is unheard of that a burglar's devoted friend serves the burglar's prison sentence while the burglar himself goes free; or that a murderer's still-more-devoted friend serves the murderer's death sentence. Yet if ever such a thing happened, we surely would hear of it—for what a newsworthy story it would be! Such things do not happen. And not, I think, because a burglar or a murderer never has a sufficiently devoted friend. Rather, because the friend will know full well that, whatever he might wish, it would be futile to offer himself as a substitute for punishment. The offer would strike the authorities as senseless, and they would decline it out of hand.

Even if the friend managed to substitute himself by stealth, and arranged for it to be found out afterward that he had been punished in place of the offender, the scheme would fail. Once the authorities learned that the offender had gone unpunished, they would get on with the job. However much they might regret their mistake in punishing the innocent friend, they could not undo that mistake by failing to punish the guilty offender. That would merely add a second mistake to the first.

* From *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 26 (1997): 203–9. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

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¹ A. M. Quinton once argued, in 'On Punishment', *Analysis* 14 (1954), pp. 133–42, that punishment of the innocent is logically impossible, simply a contradiction in terms. Maybe so. Nevertheless, since abuse of language makes for easier communication than circumlocution or neologism, I shall speak of the innocent volunteer being punished. I trust that the reader will understand: I mean that the volunteer undergoes something that would have constituted punishment if it had happened instead to the guilty offender.

We can say, if we like, that the offender ‘owes a debt of punishment’. But the metaphor is misleading. As we mostly conceive of them, the condition of owing a debt and the condition of deserving to be punished are not alike. In the case of debt, what is required is that the creditor *shall not* suffer a loss of the money he lent; what happens to the debtor is beside the point. Whereas in the case of a ‘debt of punishment’, what is required is that the debtor *shall* suffer a loss; there is no creditor. (Society?—Not really. The creditor is supposed to be the one who suffers a loss if the debt is not paid. But sometimes, what with the cost of prisons, society will suffer more of a loss if the debt *is* paid.) This is common ground between alternative conceptions of the function of punishment. Perhaps the guilty ought to suffer a loss simply because it is better that the wicked not prosper; or as an expression of our abhorrence of their offences; or as a means to the end of reforming their characters; or as a means to the end of depriving them of the resources—life and liberty—to repeat their offences; or as a means of deterring others from similar offences. Punishment of innocent substitutes would serve none of these functions. (Not even deterrence, since the deception that would be required to make deterrence effective could not be relied upon.)

What function would we have to ascribe to punishment in order to make it make sense to punish an innocent substitute?—A compensatory function. Suppose that the offender’s punishment were seen mainly as a benefit to the victim, a benefit sufficient to undo whatever loss the offender had inflicted upon him. Then the source of the benefit wouldn’t matter. If the offender’s innocent friend provided the benefit, the compensatory function would be served, no less than if the offender himself provided it.

But our actual institutions of punishment are not designed to serve a compensatory function. A murderer’s victim cannot be compensated at all, yet we punish murderers just the same. A burglar’s victim can be compensated (so long as the victim is still alive), and may indeed be compensated, but not by the punishment of the burglar. How does it benefit the victim if the burglar serves a prison sentence? The victim, like anyone else, may be pleased to know that wrongdoing has met with its just reward; but this ‘compensation’, if such it be, could not (without deception) be provided by the punishment of the burglar’s innocent friend.

We can imagine a world in which the punishment of burglars really is designed to serve a compensatory function, and in such a way as to make sense of substitution. But when we do, the differences from actuality are immense. Suppose, for instance, that the burglar was required to serve a sentence of penal servitude as the victim’s personal slave. Then a compensatory function would indeed be served; and punishing an innocent substitute could serve that function equally well. Or suppose the burglar was to be hanged before the victim’s eyes. If the victim took sufficient pleasure in watching a hanging, that might compensate him for the loss of his gold; and if he enjoyed hangings of

the innocent no less than hangings of the guilty, then again punishment of a substitute could serve a compensatory function.

A one-sided diet of mundane examples might convince us that we do not believe in penal substitution; we agree, in other words, that the substitutionary punishment of the innocent friend is never any reason to leave the offender unpunished. But of course we do not all agree to this. For many among us are Christians; and many among the Christians explain the Atonement as a case of penal substitution. They say that when Christ died for our sins, He paid the debt of punishment that the sinners owed; and thereby He rendered it permissible, and thereby He brought it about, that the sinners (those of them that accepted His gift) were spared the punishment of damnation that they deserved.

Although these Christians do believe in penal substitution in the context of theology, they do not seem to believe anything out of the ordinary in the context of mundane criminal justice. We do not hear of them arguing that just as Christ paid the debt of punishment owed by all the sinners, so likewise other innocent volunteers can pay the lesser debts of punishment owed by burglars and murderers. ('Innocent' not in the sense that they are without sin, but only in the sense that they are not guilty of burglary or murder.) Why not? I think we must conclude that these Christians are of two minds about penal substitution. Their principles alter from one case to another, for no apparent reason.

My point is not new (though neither is it heard as much as we might expect). Here is a recent statement of the point by Philip Quinn:

In [medieval legal] codes, the debt of punishment for even such serious crimes as killing was literally pecuniary; one paid the debt by paying monetary compensation. What was important for such purposes as avoiding blood feud was that the debt be paid; who paid it was not crucial. . . . But our intuitions about the proper relations of crime and punishment are tutored by a very different legal picture. Though a parent can pay her child's pecuniary debts, a murderer's mother cannot pay his debt of punishment by serving his prison term. . . . So to the extent that we think of serious sins as analogous to crimes and respect the practices embedded in our system of criminal law, we should expect the very idea of vicarious satisfaction for sin to seem alien and morally problematic.²

However, the heart of the rebuke against those Christians who explain the Atonement as a case of penal substitution is not that they are out of date and disagree with our 'intuitions'. Rather, it is that they disagree with what they themselves think the rest of the time.

An impatient doubter might say that it is pointless to rebuke these Christians for their on-again-off-again belief in penal substitution. The prior problem lies elsewhere. Even if their (sometime) principle of penal substitution were right,

² Philip Quinn, 'Aquinas on Atonement', *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement*, ed. R. Feenstra and C. Plantinga (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 171–2. See also Eleonore Stump, 'Atonement According to Aquinas', *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. T. Morris (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 61–3 (this volume, pp. 267–9).

and even if they themselves accepted it single-mindedly, still they would be misapplying it. For in the case of the Atonement, the supposed substitution is far from equal. Evil though it is to be put to death by crucifixion, even if the death is temporary and foreseen to be temporary, still the eternal damnation of even one sinner, let alone all of them, is a far worse evil. How can the former be a fair exchange for the latter, even if we grant in general that such exchanges make sense?

But to this question the Christians have an answer. They may say, with scriptural support, that what happened to Christ on the cross was something very much worse than crucifixion. He ‘bore our sins’, whatever that means, and He found Himself forsaken by God.³ Perhaps these evils, if not the crucifixion itself, were an equal substitute for the deserved damnation that the sinners escaped in return.

An alternative answer is on offer. Perhaps Christ paid only some small part of the debt of punishment that the sinners owed; only just enough so that, if they had paid it for themselves, it would have been the penance required as a constitutive element of sincere repentance. Thereby He made it possible for them to repent, and when they repented the rest of their debt was forgiven outright.⁴

So we can see, at least dimly, how our doubter’s inequality objection might be fended off. And if it is, we are back where we were before: the real problem is with the very idea that someone else can pay the sinners’ debt of punishment.

Those Christians who explain the Atonement as a case of penal substitution, yet do not in general believe in the principle they invoke, really are in a bad way. Yet the rest of us should not be overbold in rebuking them. For we live in the proverbial glass house. *All* of us—atheists and agnostics, believers of other persuasions, the lot—are likewise of two minds about penal substitution.

We do not believe that the offender’s friend can serve the offender’s prison sentence, or his death sentence. Neither can the friend serve the offender’s sentence of flogging, transportation, or hard labour. But we do believe—do we not?—that the friend can pay the offender’s fine. (At least, if the offender consents.) Yet this is just as much a case of penal substitution as the others.

Or is it? You might think that the proper lesson is just that the classification of fines as punishments is not to be taken seriously. Consider a parking space with a one-hour limit. If you want to park there for an hour, you pay a fee by putting a coin in the meter. If you want to park there for two hours, you pay a fee at

³ How could Christ have been forsaken by God when He *was* God?—perhaps God the Son found Himself forsaken by the other persons of the Trinity.

⁴ See Richard Swinburne, ‘The Christian Scheme of Salvation’, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. T. Morris (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 15–30 (this volume, Ch. 14). Although Swinburne’s theory of the Atonement is not the standard penal substitution theory—it is rather a theory of *penitential* substitution—Swinburne by no means abandons the idea of substitution. ‘God . . . can help us atone for our sins by making available to us an offering which *we* may offer as *our* reparation and penance . . .’ (p. 27 (this volume, p. 306), my emphasis).

a higher hourly rate; the fee is collected by a more cumbersome method; and the fee is called a 'fine'. But what's in a name? The function served is the same in either case. The fee helps pay the cost of providing the parking place; and, in a rough and ready way, it allocates the space to those who want it more in preference to those who want it less. Since those who want it more include some who want to make a gift of it instead of using it themselves, and since some of these may want to make a gift of two-hour rather than one-hour use, the payment of others' 'fines' fits right in. Paying someone else's 'fine' for two-hour parking is no more problematic than buying someone else a pot of beer. It has little in common with the penal substitution we mostly do not believe in.

Agreed. But set aside these little 'fines' that are really fees. Some fines are altogether more serious. They are as much of a burden as some prison sentences. (If given the choice 'pay the fine or serve the time', some would choose to serve the time.) They convey opprobrium. They serve the same functions that other punishments serve. They do not serve a compensatory function, since the fine is not handed over to the victim. Yet if the offender is sentenced to pay a fine of this serious sort, and his friend pays it for him, we who do not otherwise believe in penal substitution will find that not amiss—or anyway, not very much amiss.

You might think that in the case of fines, but not in other cases, we accept penal substitution because we have no practical way to prevent it. Suppose we had a law saying that a cheque drawn on someone else's bank account would not be accepted in payment of a fine. Anyone sentenced to pay a fine would either have to write a cheque on his own bank account or else hand over the cash in person. What difference would that make?—None.

If the friend gives the offender a gift sufficient to pay the fine, we have a *de facto* case of penal substitution. Whoever may sign the cheque, it is the friend who mainly suffers the loss that was meant to be the offender's punishment. What happens to the offender?—His debt of punishment is replaced by a debt of gratitude, which may or may not be any burden to him; he gets the opprobrium; if the friend has taken the precaution of withholding his gift until the fine has actually been paid, he may need a short-term loan; and there his burden is at an end. Whereas what happens to the friend, according to our stipulation of the case, is that he suffers a monetary loss which is as much of a burden as some prison sentences. The transfer of burden from the offender to the friend may not be quite complete, but plainly the friend is getting much the worst of it.

How to prevent *de facto* penal substitution by means of gifts? Shall we have a law that those who are sentenced to pay fines may not receive gifts? (Forever? For a year and a day? Even if the gift was given before the case came to trial? Before the offence was committed? If the recipient of a generous gift afterward commits an offence and uses the gift to pay his fine, could that make the giver an accomplice before the fact?) Such a law would be well-nigh impossible to get right; to enforce; or to square with our customary encouragement of generosity even toward the undeserving. We well might judge that what it would take to

prevent *de facto* penal substitution in the payment of fines would be a cure worse than the disease.

Here we have the makings of an explanation of why we sometimes waver in our rejection of penal substitution. It would go like this. In the first place, we tolerate penal substitution in the case of fines because it is obviously impractical to prevent it. Since, in the case of punishment by fines, the condition of being sentenced to punishment is the condition of owing a debt—literally—the metaphor of a ‘debt of punishment’ gets a grip on us. Then some of us persist in applying this metaphor, even when it is out of place because the ‘debt of punishment’ is nothing like a debt in the literal sense. That is how we fall for such nonsense as a penal substitution theory of the Atonement.

Well—that might be right. But I doubt it: the hypothesis posits too much sloppy thinking to be credible. The worst problem comes right at the start. If we were single-mindedly against penal substitution, and yet we saw that preventing it in the case of fines was impractical, we should not on that account abandon our objections to penal substitution. Rather we ought to conclude that fines are an unsatisfactory form of punishment. (Serious fines, not the little ‘fines’ that are really fees.) We might not abandon fines, because the alternatives might have their own drawbacks.⁵ But our dissatisfaction ought to show. Yet it does not show. The risk of *de facto* penal substitution ought to be a frequently mentioned drawback of punishment by fines. It is not. And that is why I maintain that all of us, not just some Christians, are of two minds about penal substitution.

If the rest of us were to make so bold as to rebuke the Christians for their two-mindedness, they would have a good *tu quoque* against us. A *tu quoque* is not a rejoinder on behalf of penal substitution. Yet neither is it intellectually weightless. It indicates that both sides agree that penal substitution sometimes makes sense after all, even if none can say how it makes sense. And if both sides agree to that, that is some evidence that somehow they might both be right.

⁵ Might we console ourselves with the thought that, although penal substitution has not been prevented, cases of it are at least not frequent?—That might not be much of a consolation. For if cases are rare, those few cases that do occur will seem all the more outrageous.

Swinburnian Atonement and the Doctrine of Penal Substitution*

Steven L. Porter

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of Christian doctrine, the cross of Christ has proved to be a magnet for widespread theological interpretation. We possess Irenaeus's recapitulation theory, Gregory of Nyssa's fish-hook theory, Athanasius's mystical theory, Augustine's ransom theory, Abelard's moral-influence theory, Anselm's satisfaction theory, Scotus's acceptilation theory, and Calvin's theory of penal substitution, to name only a few of the historical stand-outs.¹ Since the Reformation, divergent views of the atoning work of Christ have ballooned all the more, with the typical battle line drawn between objective and subjective theories.² Even philosophers have gotten into the fray. Kant and Kierkegaard each have extended discussions of the atonement, and in contemporary, analytic philosophy, the likes of Philip Quinn, Eleonore Stump, Richard Swinburne, John Hare, and David Lewis have published on the doctrine of the atonement.³

While no one theory of the atonement has received the stamp of orthodoxy within Christendom, amongst many conservative Christians various versions of the theory of penal substitution continue to rule the day.⁴ And yet, outside of

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¹ For a more detailed treatment of these and other theories see L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Manchester: University Press, 1920) and Robert S. Franks, *The Work of Christ* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962).

² On the objective side we have various versions of penal substitution (e.g. Wesley, Turretin, Strong, Hodge, Barth), various versions of the governmental theory (e.g. Grotius, Miley, Campbell), and Gustaf Aulen's *Christus Victor* theory. On the subjective side we have just about everybody else—for instance, Socinus, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Bushnell, Rashdall, Moberly, Dillistone, etc.

³ See Philip Quinn, "Christian Atonement and Kantian Justification," *Faith and Philosophy* 3:4 (1986) 440–52; Eleonore Stump, "Atonement and Justification," in R. Feenstra and C. Plantinga, eds., *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989) 188–206; Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); David Lewis, "Do we believe in penal substitution?," in *Philosophical Papers* 26 (1997) 203–9 (this volume, Ch. 15).

⁴ For example, Donald Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997); John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986); Millard Erickson, *Christian*

these conservative circles, the notion of penal substitution is dismissed out of hand. Keith Ward, for instance, represents a fairly common stance, “One must therefore reject those crude accounts of Christian doctrine which . . . say that Christ has been justly punished in our place so that he has taken away our guilt and enabled God to forgive us. Almost everything is ethically wrong about these accounts.”⁵ Many of us simply cannot swallow the idea of a God who is unable to deal with his anger over sin in any other way than by doling out punishment to sinners or to the incarnate Christ as a penal substitute.

While I am sympathetic to such sentiments, I am equally moved by the historical legacy of penal accounts of the atonement and the corresponding biblical evidence in favor of such understandings of the cross of Christ. Furthermore, and more germane to this present paper, the doctrine of penal substitution offers a rationale for the cross that appears lacking on rival accounts. There is, of course, much more to the person and work of Christ as the means of salvation than merely his death on the cross for human sin, but this latter notion remains a central biblical and theological theme that deserves careful delineation. Since many have found the idea of penal substitution to be morally suspect, my aim here is to take a further step towards a contemporary philosophical defense of the doctrine.⁶

One of the most recent and most compelling attempts to put forth a philosophical defense of Christ’s atonement is found in Richard Swinburne’s *Responsibility and Atonement*. While Swinburne’s theory is not a penal view of the atonement, Swinburne does present Christ’s person and work as a means to satisfy the moral debt sinners owe to God. In so doing, I will argue that Swinburne prepares the ground for a plausible understanding of the doctrine of penal substitution. In the critical part of this paper I lay out Swinburne’s satisfaction-type theory and surface one central weakness of it—a weakness which provides some motivation for a renewed look at the doctrine of penal substitution. This leads to the constructive part of the paper in which I attempt to harness Swinburne’s methodological approach to atonement theorizing and put it to work in favor of a theory of penal substitution.

Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998) 818–840. These theologians do not limit Christ’s salvific work to his crucifixion, it is just that they find the doctrine of penal substitution to be the best conception of how it is that Christ’s death accomplishes the forgiveness of human sin. It is important to remind ourselves that forgiveness of human sin is only one part of the reconciliation of God and humans.

⁵ Keith Ward, *Ethics and Christianity* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1970) 240.

⁶ The first step was taken in Steven L. Porter, “Rethinking the Logic of Penal Substitution,” in William Lane Craig, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2002) 596–608.

1. SWINBURNE'S THEORY

The essential dilemma of the atonement is clearly stated by St. Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo?*, "If God could not save sinners except by condemning a just man, where is his omnipotence? If, on the other hand, he was capable of doing so, but did not will it, how shall we defend his wisdom and justice?"⁷ Anselm takes the first horn of the dilemma arguing that despite God's omnipotence it was morally impossible for him to save sinners without the satisfaction of Christ. Swinburne takes the second horn. On his view, God could have forgiven the sins of humanity in various morally suitable ways, it is simply that the means utilizing Christ's life and death is one of those suitable ways.⁸ God's wisdom and justice are vindicated for while the requirement of Christ's life and death is not morally obligatory for the forgiveness of sins, it is a morally fitting condition for the forgiveness of those sins.

In setting out his case, Swinburne first analyzes the process of atonement in the human context and he then applies the resultant understanding to the case of God and sinners. Through an appeal to common moral intuitions in cases of intentional and unintentional wrongdoing, Swinburne contends that wrongdoers owe their victims a certain kind of response. For instance, if I borrow your car and I accidentally smash the front end into a concrete wall, upon returning it to you I cannot merely hand you the keys and walk away without addressing what has happened. Nor can I casually mention the damage and attempt to laugh it off. Of course, I *can* do either of these things, it is just that I shouldn't. Something would be morally amiss with either of these responses. This is because, Swinburne urges, I am morally indebted to you due to my offense and I owe you some kind of proper repayment. I am in a state of objective guilt before you for I have failed in my duty to handle your property well.⁹

Swinburne suggests that in unintentional wrongdoing wrongdoers owe the offended party at least an apology and reparation if possible. In apology I publicly distance myself from my act by sincerely disowning my wrongdoing to you.

⁷ Anselm, "Why God Became Man," in Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 275/1.8.

⁸ Swinburne's view is most fully laid out in *Responsibility and Atonement*, though an earlier and more condensed treatment of Swinburne's view of the atonement can be found in his "The Christian Scheme of Salvation," in Thomas Morris, ed., *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) (this volume, Ch. 14). For a helpful discussion of Swinburne's view, see Philip L. Quinn, "Swinburne on Guilt, Atonement, and Christian Redemption," in Alan G. Padgett, ed., *Reason and the Christian Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 277–300; and Eleonore Stump, "Richard Swinburne: *Responsibility and Atonement*," *Faith and Philosophy* XI (1994) 321–8.

⁹ Swinburne distinguishes between objective wrongdoing and subjective wrongdoing, and the corresponding notions of objective guilt and subjective guilt. An agent does objective wrong when he fails to fulfill his obligations, whether or not he knows he has these obligations. Objective guilt is the status such an agent acquires. An agent does subjective wrong when he fails to try to fulfill his obligations. Subjective guilt is the status such an agent acquires. See Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* 73–4.

And in reparation I seek to remove the consequences of the harm as much as is logically possible. If my wrongdoing is deliberate, then I owe you even more than apology and reparation. For in deliberate wrongdoing I have a malevolent attitude and purpose towards you which adds a deeper offense to my already offensive act. Hence, I must repent and also perform penance. In repentance I privately acknowledge the wrongness of my act and I resolve not to act in such a way again. And in penance I go beyond what is required in reparation and I give you a costly gift as a demonstration that my previous steps towards reconciliation were meant and serious.¹⁰

Swinburne writes that these four components of atonement—repentance, apology, reparation, and penance—are “all contributions to removing as much of the consequences of the past act as logically can be removed by the wrongdoer” and by offering them the “wrongdoer has done what he can towards removing his guilt . . . towards making him and the victim at one again.”¹¹ The final act of ‘at-one-ment’ is the victim’s decision whether or not to forgive the wrongdoer on the basis of his gift of atonement.¹² Forgiveness for Swinburne occurs when the victim changes his disposition towards the wrongdoer such that the victim undertakes to treat the wrongdoer as no longer the originator of the wrong act.¹³ It is in virtue of the victim’s forgiveness that the wrongdoer’s guilt is removed.

Swinburne holds that with serious wrongs, it is bad for a victim to attempt to forgive without some form of atonement on the part of the wrongdoer, for this trivializes human relationships and the importance of right action by not taking the wrongdoer and the wrong done seriously.¹⁴ So the victim must at least require an apology from the wrongdoer, and if the act was intentional, repentance as well. Beyond this, the victim has it within his power to determine, within limits, how much further atonement is needed before he forgives. The victim can forgive with just repentance and apology, or he can insist on some degree of reparation and penance before granting forgiveness. Sometimes it is good that the victim require substantive reparation and penance, for that allows the wrongdoer the opportunity to take seriously the harm he has done.¹⁵

Swinburne applies this general view of atonement to the divine/human relationship. The idea here is that human sinners have acquired guilt before God in failing to live their lives well. Just as children owe it to their parents to do what they say, do what will please them, and make something worthwhile of their lives, *a fortiori*, humans have a duty to God to obey his commands, do what will please him, and live a virtuous life.¹⁶ For God is our ultimate benefactor in that our existence and all that we have depends on him. So when we fail in any duty to our fellows, we fail to live a good life, and thus, we fail in our duty to God. Such a failure of one’s duty to God is to sin.¹⁷

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 80–84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 81, 84.

¹² *Ibid.*, 84.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85–86.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Moreover, Swinburne assumes that “God seeks man’s eternal well-being in friendship with himself”, and that God has worthwhile tasks with which humans can participate.¹⁸ For instance, we can help God in reconciling others to himself and to one another, we can grow in the contemplation of God and his universe, and we can help in beautifying the universe. Since these great opportunities are available to us, we do a great wrong to God in failing to take steps towards fulfilling these ends.

Thus, Swinburne holds that we have failed to fulfil our duties to God, “badly abusing” the opportunities he has given us.¹⁹ We owe God first-rate lives, though we live second-rate lives at best. And so, human persons are sinners, they are in debt to God because of their sins, and they are obligated to make atonement to God for their wrongdoing.²⁰ Swinburne writes, “it is good that if we do wrong, *we* should take *proper* steps to cancel our actions, to pay our debts, as far as logically can be done.”²¹ To just walk away from God without addressing our sins is morally inappropriate.

Similarly, it would be morally inappropriate for God to forgive our sins without at least requiring repentance and apology.²² But since our actions and their consequences matter, it is good for God not only to require repentance and apology, but reparation and penance as well. By doing so, God takes sin seriously, treats us as responsible moral agents, and demonstrates the value he places on the divine/human relationship.

But because of the extent of reparation and penance needed, sinners are unable to make it. We need help from the outside. God gives us this help by providing a means of substantive reparation and penance. Swinburne writes:

If [a] child has broken the parent’s window and does not have the money to pay for a replacement, the parent may give him the money wherewith to pay a glazier to put in a new window . . . and thereby make due reparation. The parent can refuse to accept the apology until the window is mended. Thereby he allows the child to take his action and its consequence . . . as seriously as he can in the circumstances of the child’s initial inability to pay. That treats the child as a responsible agent, and it treats the harm done as a harm. It treats things as they are.²³

Since Christ’s life and death are traditionally seen as the means of atonement for human sins, Swinburne concludes that God has provided the voluntarily offered life and death of Christ as a means for sinners to offer substantive reparation and penance.²⁴ Since the wrongs done were human lives lived imperfectly, it was fitting for a life lived perfectly to be offered as reparation and penance.²⁵ It is only

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁰ Swinburne also maintains that because humans are involved in the sins of others, they are also obligated to help their fellow humans make their atonement. Swinburne, 149.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 148.

²³ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 153–4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 156–7.

when sinners combine their repentance and apology with pleading the atoning work of Christ as a means of reparation and penance that God forgives them their sins and their guilt is removed.

Swinburne's theory clearly articulates an intuitively compelling understanding of atonement. It does seem good that victims of wrongdoing condition their forgiveness at times on not only repentance and apology, but also substantive reparation and penance. Since sinners are unable to provide this, God in Christ offers them a way to realize the goods of such reparation and penance. It is not that it is necessary for God to forgive sinners in this manner, but it is a fitting way for him to do so amongst other fitting ways given God's overall intentions for human salvation.

But this otherwise plausible move generates a weakness. On Swinburne's theory God could freely choose any valuable act to serve as reparation and penance. Swinburne writes:

... it is the victim of wrongdoing—in this case God—who has a right to choose, up to the limit of the equivalent to the harm done and the need for a little more in penance, how much reparation and penance to require before he will forgive. So, despite all of these considerations about man's inability to make substantial reparation and penance, God could have chosen to accept one supererogatory act of an ordinary man as adequate for the sins of the world. Or he could have chosen to accept some angel's act for this purpose.²⁶

In fact, God could have required merely Christ's valuable life for this purpose without requiring the crucifixion. Surely all the good acts of Christ's life as well as the suffering and humility he endured in the incarnation constitute a substantive gift to offer as reparation and penance. So, since the goods obtained by Christ offering reparation and penance on behalf of sinners could be accomplished without his suffering and death, it is implausible to think that a good God would require such an event for forgiveness.²⁷ For a voluntary sacrifice of life is not a morally valuable act unless there is some good purpose that can only or best be achieved by means of it. Since the goods of reparation and penance can be achieved without Christ's death, it would appear that his voluntary death was either foolish or suicidal.²⁸

Swinburne does contend that Christ's life and death are a peculiarly appropriate means for reparation and penance in that they make up a perfect human life offered up for persons who led ruinous lives.²⁹ The idea here is that since the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

²⁷ Quinn makes a similar point in his "Swinburne on Guilt, Atonement, and Christian Redemption," 290–291. I press this point in a slightly different manner in my "Rethinking the Logic of Penal Substitution," 601–2.

²⁸ If I jump in front of a speeding coach for the sake of my wife while she is at home safe and sound, my sacrifice of life is either foolish or suicidal. It is only when I jump in front of a speeding coach in order to push her out of the way that my death is morally valuable.

²⁹ Swinburne writes, "Since what needs atonement to God is human sin, men living second-rate lives when they have been given such great opportunities by their creator, appropriate reparation and penance would be made by a perfect human life, given away through being lived perfectly." Swinburne, 157.

best reparation and penance are closely connected with the harm done, a perfect human life is *apropos* when the harms done were the imperfect lives of human persons.

While this seems right, it is not clear why Christ's *death* is an important part of his perfect human life. Would Christ's life have been less perfect if he had ascended into the heavens right after, say, the Garden of Gethsemane? If Christ's death was voluntary, as Swinburne assumes, then I fail to see how his going to the cross is a part of his living a perfect human life when the goods of substantive reparation and penance could be equally well-served by his life alone. One might think that if Christ had avoided the cross, then Christ would be seen as having dodged the inevitable result of the kind of life he led. But dodging bullets—even inevitable ones—seems a virtue, unless there is some good purpose to take the bullet. Since Christ's life alone accomplishes the goods of substantive reparation and penance, Swinburne's view of the atonement provides no good reason for Christ to voluntarily go to the cross.

Of course, there might be some other good purpose or purposes which the cross served which made it a valuable act, and thus, rendered it capable of being a part of the reparation and penance offered to God on behalf of sinners. But Swinburne does not suggest what these other possible goods may be. And whatever they may be, it will always seem that they could be achieved equally well without Christ's death. It appears essential for Swinburne's case that he spell out some great goods which could only or best be achieved by the death of Christ, or else there will be no sufficient reason for Christ going to the cross nor God requiring it for forgiveness.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that Swinburne does capture a salient feature of the atonement process, namely, that we owe God righteous lives and that Christ's righteous life—his active obedience—serves as a satisfaction of our debt. But I have contended that such an atonement scheme fails to make sense of Christ's voluntary death—his passive obedience. If all we need is Christ's righteous life as satisfaction for our moral debt to God, then the crucifixion would be at best inconsequential as regards the forgiveness of sins and at worse a completely worthless act. What is needed is an atonement theory more intrinsically related to Christ's suffering and death on the cross.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF PENAL SUBSTITUTION

Given this particular weakness of Swinburne's theory, there arises some motivation to investigate the doctrine of penal substitution. For a penal understanding of the cross of Christ manifests a clear connection between the death of Christ and the forgiveness of human sin.³⁰ If moral sense can be made of the idea that

³⁰ While there have been many different formulations of the doctrine of penal substitution, the earliest comprehensive statement of the doctrine is John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,

the punishment of sinners is what God requires for forgiveness and that this punishment was provided for in the crucifixion of Christ, then, whatever else this conception of the atonement may have in its favor, it plainly establishes a lucid rationale for Christ's voluntary sacrifice. In what follows, I will first argue for a moral framework that makes sense of the infliction of penal consequences on wrongdoers, and then apply this framework to the case of God and sinners. I will conclude with a defense of the coherence of transferring punishment from a guilty party to an innocent party.

Victims of wrongdoing (or rightful representatives of those victims) have a retributive right to punish their wrongdoers. Perhaps harkening back to the example in which I borrow your car will helpfully illustrate this somewhat controversial point. Let us say that this time I deliberately crash your car because I am jealous of you. Now all of what Swinburne says would seem to apply. I am in moral debt to you and I ought to repent, apologize, and seek to make reparation and penance. I owe this to you and just as it would be good of me to offer it to you, so too it would be good of you to require such an atonement process as a condition of your forgiveness.

But while it seems clear that I owe you this kind of response, it also seems clear that I deserve more than this. For even after engaging in the Swinburnian atonement process, it seems permissible for you to withdraw my car-borrowing privileges. I certainly don't deserve the privilege after what I have done, and in fact it appears that I deserve to lose that privilege—at least for a time. Due to my misuse of a certain privilege, you have the right to withdraw that privilege from me. Now, of course, you could let me borrow your car again after I've engaged in the Swinburnian atonement process, but when you do so you graciously pass over what I otherwise rightly deserve.

As another example, take the unfaithful husband who comes to his wife repentant, apologetic, and willing to make reparation and penance for his adultery. It seems permissible for the wife to accept these steps towards reconciliation but to nevertheless demand that he move out of the family home—at least for a time. The wife may say to her husband, "I will forgive you, but for now, pack your things and get out of the house." If there was a debate about whether or not this was fair, I take it that we would side with the wife. For it appears that the husband deserves to be treated in such a manner—he deserves to lose certain rights and privileges of family life due to his misuse of those rights and privileges.

This analysis seems to suggest that intentional wrongdoers have a further moral debt to their victims—what might be called a penal debt.³¹ For even

II.12–17. Amongst the Reformers, Luther, Zwingli, and Melancthon also present the penal theory. On the views of these Reformers, see Grensted, 198–252; and H. D. MacDonald, "Models of the Atonement in Reformed Theology," in Donald K. McKim, ed., *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 117–31.

³¹ In favor of such a notion, M.S. Moore writes, "Our feelings of guilt thus generate a judgment that we deserve the suffering that is punishment. If the feelings of guilt are virtuous to possess, we

after intentional wrongdoers repent, apologize, and make reparation and penance in response to what they owe their victims, they often deserve further loss. Due to the fact that they have deliberately misused certain rights and/or privileges, they deserve to have those rights and/or privileges withdrawn. Thus, it is permissible for victims of deliberate wrongdoing to demand that the deserved loss be exacted from their wrongdoers. Retributive punishment, then, is the forcible withdrawal of certain rights and/or privileges from a wrongdoer in response to the intentional misuse of those rights and/or privileges by the wrongdoer.

But what is morally permissible is not always morally fitting. In other words, while victims of wrongdoing have a *prima facie* retributive right to punish, the moral justification for exercising that right depends on the ultimate moral worth or fittingness of such punishment.³² Thankfully, there are times when the withholding of punishment, and hence the manifestation of mercy, is of ultimate moral worth. But there are other times in which great moral worth can be located in executing rightful punishment. While the potential utilitarian ends of retributive punishment are well-known (deterrence, rehabilitation, and prevention), there are also what might be called intrinsic ends that are secured in all cases of rightful, retributive punishment. For to demand that a wrongdoer suffer the loss that he deserves takes the harm done with due moral seriousness; it treats the wrongdoer as a responsible moral agent; and it expresses the value of the victim as well as the value of the personal relationship involved.³³ This in turn provides the wrongdoer the opportunity to take himself, his act, the victim, and the relationship involved with due moral seriousness by his abiding by and perceiving the justice of the enforced demands. In the case of serious wrongdoing or repeated offenses, the absence of punishment can trivialize all of these elements.³⁴

So when the wife demands that her unfaithful husband moves out of the family home, she takes the harm done with appropriate seriousness; she treats her husband as responsible for the consequences of his actions; and she expresses or

have reason to believe that this last judgment is correct, generated as it is by emotions whose epistemic import is not in question." See M.S. Moore, "The Moral Worth of Retribution," in F. Schoeman, ed., *Responsibility, Character and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 178.

³² For further delineation of this view of retributive punishment, see K.G. Armstrong, "The Retributivist Hits Back," in H.B. Acton, ed., *The Philosophy of Punishment* (London: Macmillan, 1969) 155–7; and Jonathon Jacobs, "Luck and Retribution," *Philosophy* 74 (1999) 540–55.

³³ Various moral theorists have brought to light this function of retributive punishment, which can be called the expressive good of punishment. For more on the expressive theory, see Jean Hampton, "The Retributive Idea," in Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, eds., *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 111–61. For an application of this concept to atonement theory, see Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 243–59.

³⁴ Punishment can also serve other extrinsic goods, such as deterrence, prevention, and reformation, and the likelihood of these goods might be what makes punishment obligatory in certain cases. That is, given that a victim has a *prima facie* right to punish, if such punishment is likely to deter other wrong-doing, and/or prevent the wrongdoer from further wrongdoing, and/or rehabilitate the wrongdoer, then such punishment would be obligatory.

vindicating the true value of herself and her marriage relationship both of which her husband had devalued in his adultery. Furthermore, she provides the opportunity for her husband to recognize the moral import of all of these things. If the wife does not exact some kind of punishment like that described, she runs risk of trivializing the importance of right action, responsibility, and the other moral values involved.

Having argued that there are situations in which retributive punishment is morally appropriate amongst human persons, the question now becomes whether God is in such a situation vis-a-vis sinners. As Swinburne argues, humans have failed in their duties to God, and are therefore in debt to him. What we owe God are lives lived well, rather than the second-rate lives we do live. But more than simply owing God good lives we cannot produce, we do not deserve to have the lives that have been given to us.

Assuming that earthly human life is a good and gracious gift of God and that the opportunity for loving relationship with himself is the highest good bar none, then to intentionally abuse the goods and opportunities of earthly human life, including the spiteful rejection of God's offer of eternal friendship, is a clear misuse of the rights and privileges we have been given by God. Granting the above argumentation, it is permissible for God to forcibly withdraw the rights and privileges of human life on earth and the opportunity for relationship with himself. For we deserve to lose these things due to our misuse of them. If I come in late from working all day to my wife's welcome embrace and a well-prepared dinner, only to push her away and throw the food on the floor in disgust, I certainly do not deserve such generous treatment again. Just as my wife would be right to withdraw her good gifts, so too God would be right to withdraw the good gifts of human life in friendship with himself from those who abuse and reject it.³⁵ To put the matter in theological terms, we deserve the divine punishment of physical and spiritual death. That is, we deserve to be physically separated from the goods and opportunities of earthly human life and we deserve to be spiritually separated from God's loving presence.

³⁵ Some might question this idea that sinners deliberately rebel or reject God's offer of friendship and a good life. It might seem that some do in fact do this, while others do not, either because they choose to live obedient lives or because they are ignorant of their obligations to God "through no fault of their own." It seems to me that those who do have knowledge of God's offer of life in friendship with himself do at some point or another, in one way or another, intentionally reject him and what he has on offer. If we understand life in friendship with God to be inexorably linked to the virtuous life, then any intentional wrongdoing is an intentional rejection of God. Further, if we know that we are obligated to obey God and do what pleases him, then any intentional wrongdoing is an intentional rejection of God. For those who are purportedly ignorant of all this, they are still failing to fulfill what would be objectively good, and thus they fail (though not intentionally) in their obligations to God. So these people too are in debt to God. But if they are truly ignorant, then punishment would not seem justified. So either the purported ignorance is a result of negligence and thus they are morally culpable for it and thereby rightly punished, or these ignorant ones will be relieved of their ignorance at some point so that they too can freely choose to either join themselves to God, repenting and apologizing for their unintentional wrongdoing against him, or they can choose to reject life in friendship with God, and would thereby be rightfully punished.

At this point I am not prepared to argue that such punishment is obligatory. In fact, I am prone to agree with Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin that God could forgive our sins without exacting such loss.³⁶ Nevertheless, it is morally permissible for him to exact the loss due us, and there is great moral worth in him doing so. For, parallel to the previous cases, such an exaction of loss takes human sin seriously, it treats sinners as responsible moral agents, and it vindicates or expresses the appropriate value of both the Godhead and the divine/human relationship. The result of this is that the sinner has the opportunity to be morally educated and formed, and the provision of this opportunity is good even if sinners are unwilling to recognize the correct moral values which are expressed in the punishment.³⁷

So at this point I have attempted to argue that there is a plausible conception of retributive punishment that makes punishment permissible in cases of intentional wrongdoing and that certain intrinsic good ends are involved in the exercise of such punishment. Granting this theory of punishment, I have argued that God is in such a position with sinners. What is left is to show the moral coherence of transferring such punishment to Christ.

The substitution aspect of penal substitution has been bothersome to many. As Brian Hebblethwaite declares:

What sort of judge can impose death on another or even on himself as a substitutory punishment, thus letting me go free? Such ideas are morally objectionable in their analogical base—the purely human context—before ever they get transferred, by analogy, to the divine-human context; and *a fortiori*, they make no moral sense when predicated of a God of love.³⁸

So, first off, is such a transfer of punishment from a guilty party to an innocent party right or permissible in the human context? While it is a fairly trivial objection, it has been suggested that it is a logical impossibility to punish the innocent. For instance, Anthony Quinton writes, “For the necessity of not punishing the innocent is not moral but logical. It is not, as some retributivists think, that we *may* not punish the innocent and *ought* only to punish the guilty, but that we *cannot* punish the innocent and *must* only punish the guilty.”³⁹ So Quinton is claiming that it is part of the meaning of the word ‘punish’ that the

³⁶ For Augustine, see *De Agone Christi*, c.xi and *De Trinitate*, xiii.10; for Aquinas, see *Summa Theologiae*, 3a.46.2 ad 3; and for Calvin see *Institutes*, II, 12.1. For a slightly more detailed defense of the grounds for rejecting the notion that Christ’s death was necessary for divine forgiveness, see my “Rethinking the Logic of Penal Substitution,” 602–3. See also Richard Purtill, “Justice, Mercy, Supererogation, and Atonement,” in Thomas Flint, ed., *Christian Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990) 40.

³⁷ It is good that the wife of the unfaithful husband provide him the opportunity to recognize the correct moral values, even if the wife knows he is so hardened that he won’t do so.

³⁸ Brian Hebblethwaite, “Does the Doctrine of the Atonement Make Sense?,” in his *Ethics and Religion in a Pluralistic Age* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) 79.

³⁹ Anthony M. Quinton, “On Punishment,” in Acton, ed., *The Philosophy of Punishment*, 58–9.

one inflicted must be guilty. But as R.M. Hare points out, even if we mistakenly punish an innocent person, they were nevertheless punished.⁴⁰ This is what makes such a situation tragic. So the claim that punishment must only be of the guilty is not a logical claim, *contra* Quinton, but a moral one. It is not logically impossible to punish an innocent person whom we think is guilty, rather it is morally egregious to do so just because it is logically possible.

But the case of substitutionary punishment is not of this kind. The idea here is that someone voluntarily takes the guilty one's place for the punishment the guilty one deserves. It would seem that the only possible way such a transfer of punishment could be just is if the substitute voluntarily and with sound mind accepts the penalty. But given that the substitute meets these conditions, I fail to see what is unjust about such a transfer. Since punishment, on the view I have sketched, is the exercise of a retributive right in order to accomplish certain good ends, how one goes about executing this right appears somewhat flexible. For on this view, there is no absolute principle of justice which necessitates punishment in response to wrongdoing. Punishment is permissible in response to wrongdoing, but it is ultimately motivated by the moral goods which can be brought about through it. Hence, the victim, within limits, has the freedom to decide to what extent and in what manner to inflict punishment. I do not see how this freedom would not extend to accepting a voluntary penal substitute.

Take for instance the football player who is late to team practice. The coach of the team punishes the late player by demanding he run 5 laps around the field. The team captain steps forward and asks the coach if he could run the 5 laps in the other's stead. If the coach agrees to such an arrangement, then there does not seem to be anything unjust about this transfer of penalty. I take it this is because in the transfer the initial justification for punishment is still in place—that is, the late player's misuse of his team-privileges led to the temporary withdrawal of a team-privilege. Whether the late player or the team captain serves the punishment, the initial justification is the same. And the additional good ends that the punishment is likely to secure (e.g. team unity) are accomplished whether the late player runs the laps or the team captain runs them.

It is clear in this example that part of what makes a penal transfer just is that the infliction of punishment is the right of the one offended and it does not have to be executed. This opens up logical space for the exercise of punishment to take on various forms. What motivates the vicarious form is that the good ends which justify the punishment of the one who deserves it are also served in the punishment of the substitute.

But the practice of penal substitution in other scenarios seems wrong. We do not think it good for the mother of a convicted rapist to serve his time in prison. I propose that the reason why such a transfer is morally counter-intuitive is that

⁴⁰ R.M. Hare, "Punishment and Retributive Justice," in R.M. Hare, *Essays on Political Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 203.

while the victim still has the right to transfer the punishment, the likely good ends of such punishment would not be served by such a transfer. Given that deterrence and prevention are the main potential goods of criminal punishment, it is probably never good that such a penalty be transferred, for there is little hope of achieving these goods through a transfer.⁴¹

But the same good ends are not at issue in the divine/human situation, and so it may be good for Christ to voluntarily serve the kind of punishment that is due sinners. Christ's voluntary submission to the crucifixion coupled with his human experience of alienation from the Father is the kind of physical and spiritual death sinners deserve. It seems fair to say that Christ experienced on the cross the loss of the good gifts and opportunities of human life in friendship with God. These are the rights and privileges we abused, and it seems that they are the rights and privileges Christ gave up on the cross in our stead. On the view of punishment I have sketched, God as the victim of wrongdoing can decide to what extent and in what manner the punishment we deserve should be executed. As long as Christ voluntarily and with sound mind offers his death as the punishment we deserve and as long as God considers it in this way, there does not seem to be any injustice in this arrangement. In God demanding and Christ taking on the kind punishment we deserve in our place, human sin is taken with utter seriousness, sinners are treated as responsible moral agents, and the high value of the Godhead and the divine/human relationship is expressed. Moreover, sinners are provided the opportunity in the cross to recognize the gravity of their offense, to realize their responsibility before God, to grasp the great value of the Godhead and the divine/human relationship, and in all of this to become aware of the riches of God's mercy, grace, and love.

CONCLUSION

What I have attempted to do in this paper is surface a central weakness in Swinburne's theory of the atonement which motivates a renewed look at the doctrine of penal substitution. Given this motivation, I have proposed a moral framework in which human sinners deserve and God is morally justified in executing retributive punishment. But due to the intrinsic ends of such retributive punishment and God's right to determine the extent and manner in which the punishment should be executed, I have maintained that Christ's voluntary death on the cross can be plausibly understood as the punishment human sinners deserve. So while Swinburne's satisfaction theory of the atonement presents a helpful construal of how Christ's active obedience provides the righteous lives we owe to God, the theory of penal substitution present a helpful construal of how

⁴¹ This is part of the answer to Lewis's query in his "Do we believe in penal substitution?," (this volume, Ch. 15).

Christ's passive obedience provides the kind of punishment we deserve to suffer. Whatever else might be said for and against such a conception of the doctrine of the atonement, the plausibility of the theory presented here should give us pause in the often hasty rejection of the doctrine of penal substitution.⁴²

⁴² I am grateful to Richard Swinburne, Joseph Jedwab, Daniel VonWachter, Greg Welty, and Hugh Rice for comments and discussion on earlier versions of this paper.

Atonement Without Satisfaction*

Richard Cross

Finding a theory to explain how Christ's life, death, and resurrection can bring about human redemption has long been one of the more intractable tasks faced by the theologian. Perhaps the most interesting and convincing modern attempt to do this can be found in Richard Swinburne's work, *Responsibility and Atonement*.¹ Swinburne modifies the satisfaction theory first proposed by Anselm in *Cur Deus homo* and developed fully in the work of the medieval schoolmen. I shall argue that, while a satisfaction theory of the atonement cannot be adequately defended, Swinburne's nuanced account possesses many of the materials to allow us to develop a different theory, also based on ideas found in Anselm and developed by the later schoolmen. I shall label this alternative theory the *merit* theory of the atonement.

In what follows, I shall first describe Swinburne's theory. Secondly, I shall try to suggest why this theory is untenable. Thirdly, I shall try to show how the medieval merit theory might be developed as an alternative (and preferable) explanation of the process whereby Christ's life, death, and resurrection effect human redemption. Finally, I shall try to deal with two possible objections to this theory, showing how they can be satisfactorily overcome.

SWINBURNE'S SATISFACTION THEORY OF ATONEMENT

According to Richard Swinburne, there are two possible ways of dealing with the guilt that attaches to a human being as a result of his or her morally bad action. The first is by atonement or voluntary satisfaction, consisting of repentance, apology, reparation, and penance, culminating ideally (though not morally necessarily) in forgiveness by the wronged party.² (Forgiveness is not morally

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¹ Richard Swinburne *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to this work.

² For Swinburne's account of satisfaction, see *ibid.*, ch. 5.

necessarily because, according to Swinburne, forgiveness is supererogatory—no one has a duty to forgive someone who has wronged them. Nevertheless, Swinburne holds that, in interpersonal human relationships, guilt can be removed by voluntary satisfaction without the need of forgiveness. Both of these claims seem to me clearly true, and I will not discuss them further.) Such reparation is obligatory—‘a wrongdoer is under obligation to deal with his guilt’ (81; see also 148).

Repentance and apology are obvious enough—the attempt to distance ourselves from the harm that we have done, where this distancing is both internal (repentance) and public (apology). But reparation and penance perhaps require a word of comment. Reparation is an attempt to remove the harm done—either straightforwardly, replacing like with like, or by appropriate compensation in kind, doing what can be done to remove the harm. And this too seems clear enough—as we shall see below, Swinburne rightly holds that the victim of wrongdoing has the right to claim these sorts of compensation. The wrongdoer’s penance is some further token of sorrow,

... a performative act... whereby he disowns his wrong act (in a way which mere words do not do, where the wrong is a serious one). By doing his act of disowning, by doing something which costs him time, effort, and money, he constitutes that act as a meant and serious act. (84)

Central to Swinburne’s account is the claim that it is morally wrong for the victim of a seriously morally bad act merely to condone the bad act without any atonement at all—that is to say, without at least an apology from the wrongdoer. To do so would trivialize the bad act, and the value of those harmed by the act. But not only that; it would trivialize the wrongdoer too, failing to treat him seriously, and failing to take seriously his attitude to the wronged party. ‘Thereby it trivializes human relationships, for it supposes that good human relations can exist when we do not take each other seriously’ (86).³

The second way in which guilt can be removed, according to Swinburne, is by punishment—the wronged party (or somebody appointed by him, or with the due authority) ‘taking reparation by force’ (93). The wronged party’s taking reparation is labelled by Swinburne ‘revenge’; punishment is primarily justified as ‘a substitute for revenge in circumstances where it is better that some authority act as the agent of the victim in exacting revenge’ (94). Swinburne thus adopts a version of a retributive theory of punishment. This entails that

³ Note that Swinburne holds that it is logically impossible for the victim of a seriously morally bad act to forgive the wrongdoer without any atonement at all: ‘A victim’s disowning of a hurtful act is only to be called forgiveness when it is in response to at least some minimal attempt at atonement such as an apology’ (87).

If *A* [the wrongdoer] has things which *B* [the wronged party] desires, *B* can choose them, be they money, goods, or service. But if *A* does not have things which *B* can use, *B* nevertheless has a right to take things from *A*, even if he cannot use them. That gives *B* the right to subject *A* to imprisonment or unpleasant experiences of various kinds. For a debt is a debt; and even if the creditor cannot use the only things the debtor has, such as his liberty and freedom from pain, he still has the right to take them. (96–7)

Unlike more standard retributive theories, however, Swinburne holds that while the victim has the right to exact punishment, there is no obligation on the part of the victim so to do. Nevertheless, since atonement is obligatory, punishment must involve more than would be required by voluntary atonement (94), presumably since retribution must also be taken for failure in the obligation to make atonement.

Swinburne uses his account of satisfaction and punishment to elucidate the nature of Christ's redemptive work. Wrongdoers have a duty to atone for their wrongs. Each human wrong is also a sin, an abuse of 'the opportunities which [human beings'] creator gave them' (148). As such, each human being owes atonement to God, since atonement is obligatory. But, 'If you take seriously the theological background to human wrongdoing, you realize both the extent of atonement needed and the difficulty which man suffering from original sinfulness will have in making it. We need help from outside' (148). According to Swinburne, this help is provided in the sacrificial life and death of Christ, which put us in a position to offer something to God by means of reparation for our sin. Swinburne rightly does not hold that Christ makes atonement for the sins of human beings by substituting for their repentance and apology—as he notes, no one can make this sort of atonement for another person. But satisfaction, according to Swinburne, involves—or can involve—two further components too: reparation and penance. What Christ provides is reparation (149) and penance (154). Given that Christ has made a contribution towards the reparation that God has a right to demand for human sin, human beings can 'plead Christ's death in atonement for their sins' (153). Christ's life and death are most appropriately what is needed for atonement: 'Since what needs atonement to God is human sin, men living second-rate lives when they have been given such great opportunities by their creator, appropriate reparation and penance would be made by a perfect human life, given away through having been lived perfectly' (157).

Of course, God did not need such a great offering as the life and death of a perfect man. As the wronged party, God

... has the right to choose, up to the limit of an equivalent to the harm done and the need for a little more in penance, how much reparation and penance to require before he will forgive. . . . But if it is good that there be reparation and penance, it is good that these be substantial; that the atoning sacrifice be not a trivial one. (160–1)

Swinburne holds that it is good for us to be in a position to be able to make reparation, to 'take *proper* steps to cancel our actions', and that 'if we are in no

position to make proper atonement for what we have done, it is good that someone else (even the victim) put us in that position and thereby allow us to make proper atonement' (149). It is, of course, precisely this that God has done in Christ.

Swinburne does not, in fact, hold that Christ's life and death is equivalent to the atonement that God has the right to require, but that it is 'simply a costly reparation sufficient for a merciful God to let men off the rest' (154). But, of course, God cannot forgive those who fail to repent and apologize—indeed, Swinburne rightly holds that it would be morally wrong of God to condone morally bad actions, for example by disowning these actions without any attempt on the part of the wrongdoer to disown them too. So the impenitent are justly punished, deprived of the friendship with God that is the result of divine forgiveness.⁴ This is of course, wholly consistent with God's merciful nature. Indeed, Swinburne notes that one advantage of his retributive theory of punishment is that it allows a place for mercy—an agent's failure to exact the retribution to which the agent has a right. It would be morally wrong of God to be merciful to the impenitent. But God has a right to a reparation from us that, after a certain amount of costly satisfaction on our part, He simply and mercifully remits—failing to exact the retribution that is his due.

REPARATION AND THE SATISFACTION THEORY

Swinburne's theory represents perhaps the most sophisticated defence of the satisfaction theory ever formulated. There seem to me, however, to be insurmountable problems with this theory as proposed by Swinburne. These problems focus on the nature of the *reparation* due for human sin. But before I look at this, I want to examine three *prima facie* arguments against the satisfaction theory which do not, in fact, constitute genuine arguments against every such theory.

Many modern theories of punishment reject retribution as a component of punishment. I am inclined to agree with this rejection. Swinburne claims, for example, that a debt remains a debt unless the wrongdoer be deprived of something—irrespective of whether this deprivation can be used as reparation to the wronged party (see Swinburne, 96–7, quoted above). I would argue instead that a debt remains a debt unless something can be given in reparation to the wronged party. The result of this is that punishment—*contra* Swinburne—does not provide a way for dealing with guilt.⁵

So retribution cannot be defended in terms of a theory of debt-payment. And it seems to me that all *prima facie* reasonable theories of retribution entail the claim that punishment is a form of (or strongly analogous to) debt-payment.

⁴ On hell and damnation, see *ibid.*, ch. 12.

⁵ I will discuss below the *prima facie* consequence that some guilt on this account may *never* be dealt with. I will show there that my theory by no means entails this conclusion.

There might, of course, be other reasons for punishing a wrongdoer; my claim is merely that punishment by itself does not pay any debt. Given this (which I do not want or need fully to argue for here), it would be an argument against the satisfaction theory if it could be shown to presuppose a retributive theory of punishment. As I mentioned above, Swinburne clearly accepts a retributive theory of punishment. And punishment, on his account, clearly entails the legitimate possibility of a wrongdoer's being deprived of goods even if no benefit accrues thereby to the wronged party. But the theory of satisfaction Swinburne proposes does not require the possibility of the penitent's being deprived of goods in this way. The theory is a theory of reparation. Reparation entails that goods are restored to the wronged party. But this does not in itself entail the legitimacy of the wrongdoer's merely being deprived (or depriving himself) of goods without any consequent benefit being conferred on the wronged party. So the satisfaction theory does not entail a retributive theory of punishment.

John Hick suggests another putative objection to the satisfaction theory of atonement as defended by Swinburne. According to Hick, Swinburne's theory is too anthropomorphic. Our wrongful actions do not harm God except insofar as they harm his creation. Likewise, our good actions do not benefit God except insofar as they benefit his creation. Christ's life and death, then, do not benefit God, and thus cannot function as reparation for human wrongdoing.⁶

This objection relies on the claim that our rejection of God does not count among the things that can objectively harm God—not least since everyone has a duty to love God. More broadly, as Swinburne suggests, sin can be seen in terms of a failure in a duty to God: thus, every sin harms Him, at least by failing in a duty of service to God—perhaps a duty to use the goods given to the sinner by God. Even so it might be objected, how can our failing in duty to God be objectively harmful to God? (If it is not objectively harmful, then it is hard to see how it can require reparation to be made to God.) On the face of it, failing in a duty to someone is always in itself objectively harmful—even if it does not do that person any *further* injury. My intending to murder you harms you, even if I fail—and fail so miserably that you do not feel in any way threatened by my actions. My intending to murder you harms you even if I never translate this intention into any sort of action. In the case at hand, God is deprived of service that we owe Him. And this deprivation is objectively harmful. And the result of this deprivation is God's displeasure, our failure to please God. In this case, I do not see that it is overly anthropomorphic to argue that this harm done to God requires some sort of reparation, if reparation can be made.⁷

⁶ John Hick *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 122–3.

⁷ It has been objected to me that spelling out sin in fundamentally moral terms—as opposed to (say) relational terms—yields an impoverished account of the nature of sin, failing to heed its interpersonal and dysfunctional aspects. But it seems to me that giving a moral account here allows us to see precisely what it is that goes wrong in sinful interpersonal relationships. It is clearly wrong to understand moral accounts of sin in purely 'transactional' terms; central to Swinburne's account,

The third failed objection is what we might call the ‘transference’ problem: how Christ’s life and death can be appropriated by us. According to Swinburne, Christ’s life and death are not in themselves a reparation for sin. Swinburne’s suggestion is that they can be used by us as a reparation for sin. (This does not mean that Christ’s life, lived perfectly and without sin, did not please God. The only point at issue is how God’s being pleased with Christ’s life can be extended to include God’s being pleased with us as well.) We might be tempted to think that there is no way in which Christ’s life and death can be appropriated by us such that we can offer them as reparation for our sins. But this would be mistaken. Clearly, we can think of Christ’s life and death as replacing whatever God has been deprived of by human sin. And we can think of Christ’s life and death, not only as replacing whatever God has been deprived of, but also as removing the obligation for sinners to pay this debt. All that is required is that all three parties (God, Christ, and the penitent sinner) agree that Christ’s life and death can be used by the sinner as reparation. If I owe you a certain sum of money, my friend can pay the money to you. But so long as you, he, and I all agree that the payment cancels the debt, then that is indeed what it does.⁸

for example, is a discussion of the real harm that we do to each other, and of the sorts of steps required for proper interpersonal relationships to be restored. I would argue that the components of disordered relationships are our moral failings to each other and to God. Theological accounts of sin talk about the matter with greater richness of rhetorical density, but they do not seem to add any clearly discernible further analytic component. As Swinburne notes, we are all involved in the sin of each other, and there are ways of being so involved that are somehow beyond our individual control to fix. But these accumulated communal wrongs are still moral in character, the social disorder emergent from the moral wrongs of many individuals. I will return to this matter below. Equally, I deal below with the question of the psychological disorder that results from human sin. Another related objection might be that, whatever our account of interpersonal human relationships, God at any rate is not a moral agent, and so such moral categories cannot be appropriate in an analysis of the relationship between God and human beings. I discuss the status of divine goodness in note 19 below.

⁸ For this misunderstanding, see e.g. Steven S. Aspenon ‘Swinburne on atonement’, *Religious Studies*, 32 (1996), 187–204, 203. Perhaps the most interesting and illuminating critical response to Swinburne’s theory is that proposed by David McNaughton—interesting and illuminating not least because it includes the report of further important clarifications of Swinburne’s theory provided by Swinburne in correspondence with McNaughton. According to McNaughton, Christ’s life and death, even though they confer a benefit on God, cannot constitute a reparation for sin. McNaughton argues that the relevant benefit is merely God’s forgiving the sinner—a ‘wholly circular’ state of affairs: ‘The person wronged has made forgiveness conditional on the offering of some benefit in reparation; he cannot, therefore, coherently accept as a fulfilment of that condition, a benefit which flows from his forgiving the wrongdoer, since his forgiveness of the wrongdoer is itself to be a consequence of that condition being fulfilled’; David McNaughton ‘Reparation and atonement’, *Religious Studies*, 28 (1992), 129–44, 141. This objection is based on a misunderstanding of the implications of Swinburne’s theory. According to Swinburne, complete reparation places the wronged party in a position to forgive. But it does not *oblige* the wronged party to forgive the wrongdoer. So Swinburne’s theory entails that Christ’s death as offered by us confers on God the benefit not as such of forgiving us, but of being in a position to forgive us: it gives God the *opportunity* to forgive us, an opportunity that He would not otherwise have. And this opportunity is a good for God irrespective of His actual forgiveness of us. Distinguishing between forgiveness and having the opportunity to forgive—a distinction that follows directly from Swinburne’s account—is sufficient to block the vicious circularity identified by McNaughton.

So none of the three objections proposed thus far is effective. But this does not mean that there is not an objection to Swinburne's theory. The objection focuses on the reparation that is appropriate for human sin. In effect, I shall argue that the only reparation required to be made to God for human sin, over and above the reparation that we owe each other, is *apology*. To see this, we need to think about the reasons why human sin displeases God. I shall suppose that all forms of displeasure are caused by (in some sense or other) deprivation. A person is displeased only if that person is deprived of something that that person wants or needs. This deprivation need not always have any moral trade-off; moral considerations enter in if the person has a *right* to what she is deprived of, or if others have a duty not to deprive her of the thing she is deprived of.

The relevant deprivation in the case of the harm human beings do to God is a deprivation of *service*. There seem to me to be two different ways in which someone can be deprived of service. In the first way, the deprivation of service in turn entails a further deprivation; in the second case, it does not. Suppose I have a son, and that I ask him to do the washing up. He fails to do this, and in so doing fails not only in a duty of service, but also brings it about (in a loose sense) that I have to do the washing up. But suppose instead I ask him to tidy his bedroom. He fails to do this, but in so doing fails me in no more than a duty of service. The only other harm he does is to himself, not to me: my request that he tidy his bedroom was made not for my good but for his, that he might not have to live in unpleasant surroundings.

Clearly, there are some cases in which we fail God merely in a duty of service in a way that is analogous to the second sort of case just discussed—perhaps the failure to love God sufficiently would be a case in point, or failing in such a way to act that this failure is sufficient to deprive us of friendship with God. What is appropriate sort of atonement for sins of this nature? The answer to this depends on precisely on how we understand the obligation to service that we have to God.

So let me pause to consider more closely the source of the obligation to service that we have to God. I agree with Swinburne that this obligation is fundamentally the obligation that any beneficiary has to his or her benefactor (see e.g. 123).⁹ But Swinburne's persistent use of financial analogies obscures the point here. For the gifts that God gives to human beings come at no expense to Himself, and their abuse causes God no other harm than the deprivation of service. So there is an important sense in which these divine gifts to us differ from standard cases of benefaction, which involve some kind of cost. (Indeed, it

⁹ The argument of Aspenson's article, 'Swinburne on atonement', is that the benefits conferred on human beings by God are unasked for, and therefore not such that they can entail duties of service. Aspenson's argument seems to me to show that someone who does not want these benefits has no duty to be grateful. (This insight could perhaps be used as part of an argument, one that I do not want to explore here, on the moral justifiability of suicide.) But many people—probably most people—want to be alive and to enjoy the blessings of life, such as they are. And I do not see that Aspenson's argument would show that these people have no duty of service to God.

is this costliness that gives them their distinctively moral character: we regard a benefaction from a poor person as more morally valuable than monetarily the same benefaction from a wealthy one.)

In this way, God's benefaction to human beings that generates this obligation to service in itself causes God no loss, and human sinfulness causes God no harm other than a loss of service. So the only loss to God in the sort of case that I am sketching is a loss of service. It seems to me that there is a fairly close analogue to the sort of sin that I am describing. Suppose I fail you by secretly intending to murder you. (I mean 'intention' here to be taken as seriously as possible: I really would murder you if the occasion arose. But I do not mean it to entail my being involved in any actual conspiracy to murder you. My intention has not yet been put into any sort of action, howsoever minimal. Adultery, to take a different example, would not count as a wrong merely in intention, though a mere intention to commit adultery would.) In a case such as this, I have injured you in some way: I have deprived you of something—your right not to have me intend to murder you. The deprivation of this sort of right in this sort of way seems close to the deprivation merely of service that I am trying to describe here. In neither case is *further* harm done to the person wronged.

Given this analogy, can we cast any further light on the sort of atonement relevant in the case of a failure merely in service? We can do so by exploring a little more closely the sort of atonement relevant in the case of a failure merely in intention. It seems to me that appropriate reparation in such cases is merely apology, where such apology of course presupposes genuine repentance. Repentance is sufficient to remove a bad intention. As such, repentance does not pay back any loss to the wronged party. So it cannot function as reparation. Repentance, after all, is simply a way of restoring an attitude that we are obliged to have, whether or not we ever fail in any duty. But *apology* can be thought of as reparation in cases of a failure merely in intention. Apology is an act that would not be required if the wrong had not been done, and it is an act that is specifically and explicitly directed to the wronged party. It is, furthermore, an act that obviously *gives something* to the wronged party: apology constitutes an overt disavowal of the past wrong act, and (more importantly) openly gives an explicit assurance of future good intention. (This assurance is presupposed in a morally healthy relationship, but there is no duty to provide such an open and explicit affirmation of it in such a relationship.) As such, it seems to me that apology is just the sort of act that would satisfy the requirements of reparation: apology is a compensation in kind for the harm done in cases where no injury has been done over and above a bad intention—in cases, that is, where nothing further has been taken from the wronged party.¹⁰

¹⁰ There is a *prima facie* objection to this scheme. There are degrees of bad intentions: e.g. an intention to murder is much worse than an intention to steal. But on the scheme proposed, the satisfaction required in the case of an intention to murder—viz. apology—appears identical to the satisfaction required in the case of an intention to steal. Thus the scheme cannot distinguish

If I am right about this, we can use this analysis to help come to a conclusion about the sort of reparation appropriate in cases merely of failure in service. Suppose my son fails to tidy his room when I ask him. He has failed in a service to me, but he has not failed me in any other way. I think that we would regard apology as sufficient reparation in such cases. Of course, apology involves an undertaking to perform the task required—at least if I still want it done. (Presumably it does not involve any such duty if I have changed my mind about the desirability of the task, or if the required task has been done in some other way.) But the crucial *reparative* component here is the apology.¹¹ If this is right, then there is a set of sins—those that deprive God of service without harming any other person other than the agent—for which human beings can indeed make sufficient reparation.

We can fail in our duty of service to God in another way too. Every time we sin against each other, we are failing in our duty of service to God. And there are two kinds of such failure. If I injure someone in a way which does not affect that person's ultimate standing *coram Deo*, I fail in my duties both to God—that I use for good purposes the goods He has given me—and to the other person. But suppose, secondly, I injure someone in such a way that the result is her turning

between degrees of bad intention. In reply, I would suggest that both repentance and apology require far more of the wrongdoer in the first case—murder—than in the second case—thrift. In the first case, but not to such an extent in the second, genuine repentance would involve the confrontation of the darkest and most repugnant of moral characteristics, a process that would be painful and deeply disturbing. Equally, apology would be harder and more exacting than any apology required for an intention to steal. Clearly, the real difficulty here lies in repentance, not in apology. So we should have to say that the difference in the two cases cannot be discerned primarily in the degree of reparation, but in the effort required in the act of repentance that is presupposed to the reparation itself. So there is no obvious way, on this scheme, of making a difference in the amount of reparation in the two cases. But perhaps difference in the amount of reparation is not all that important, given that in both cases the harm done to the victim seems to me *relatively* slight—it does not, for example, constitute a real physical or even psychological injury as I have been describing it. (If it did, of course, then more reparation would be required. But cases such as this are not the sort of cases I am focusing on here.) In the case of merely bad intentions, in fact, we are not always obliged to apologize, since it might be the case that sometimes interpersonal relations are better restored if the wronged person simply does not know that she or he has been wronged by a bad intention. Indeed, it may be that there are cases where we are obliged *not* to apologize—cases where the wronged party might feel more threatened by the knowledge of a bad intention than he or she would have felt without such knowledge. This perhaps suggests that reparation is simply the wrong category to appeal to in cases merely of bad intentions, which in turn might suggest that merely bad intentions do not genuinely deprive the wronged party of anything at all. But perhaps we could claim instead of this that repentance could indeed count as reparation just in those cases—if such there be—where apology is morally wrong. Of course, none of these observations can apply in the case of our wronging God.

¹¹ We could deny the appropriateness of the category of reparation here at all. But I do not see that we should. If we acknowledge that apology counts as reparation, we can have a consistent account of all moral wrongs as, *ceteris paribus*, involving an obligation to make reparation. Equally, if we regard apology as insufficient, it seems to me very plausible that it is nearly sufficient, enough 'for a merciful God to let [us] off the rest'. There is no way of representing in this story God's original benefaction to us. But this original benefaction does not alter the moral dynamic of the situation, since it does not in itself involve God in any cost.

away from God. In this case my failure in service not only frustrates God's plans in a very serious way, preventing God's plan for this person from coming to fulfilment, it also deprives God of the good of friendship with the person I harm in this way. What sort of reparation is appropriate in these two cases? In the first case, God's ultimate plans are not affected. So it seems to me that the wrong that we do to God in such a case is adequately dealt with by the following two acts: first, apology and further reparation to the person I injure; secondly, apology to God, where this apology counts, as outlined above, as sufficient reparation for the injury I do to God directly.¹²

The second case requires much more careful treatment. Not only are God's ultimate purposes frustrated by my actions, God is possibly deprived of someone's friendship. And this might seem to do more harm to God than would be done merely by a failure in intention. But again it does not seem to me that the reparation required for the 'Godward' aspect of this sin need be any greater than our apology to God (and, of course, making whatever additional reparation is required to the person that we harm). God does require reparation from me—but this reparation is identified as my apology.

Why should we accept this account of the case I am considering here? The reason depends on a particular view of God's reasons for creation. This account of God's creative purposes might strengthen the exposition I have given of the appropriate reparation for other sins than those I am considering right now; but the account is necessary for the particular case of the frustration of God's ultimate purposes for another human being. The account of God's creative purpose that I am thinking of now is that all of God's creative activity is *altruistic*: 'motivated merely by the belief that someone else will benefit or avoid harm by it'.¹³ God creates the world to benefit not Himself but others—in fact, to benefit the creatures He creates. (It does not matter for my purposes just how creatures benefit – whether it is by seeing God's glory, or by being able to share in God's love. Neither does it matter for my purposes that the very existence of the beneficiaries of creation depends on creation.) I shall suppose that God's having made the world entails certain moral obligations for any moral creature that inhabits it. In particular, it entails a duty of service to God. It might also (and I shall suppose in the case of the actual world certainly does) entail duties to the created order too, both duties of care to the environment and more complex duties to other created moral agents. It is this last sort of case that I am interested in here. We clearly wrong God by wronging each other, and this failure in one of our obligations clearly entails that reparation is made to God. But what sort of reparation should God demand here? On the account of altruistic action I have been sketching, God's loss is a loss of something that He wants not for Himself

¹² Or, again, sufficient for a merciful God to let us off the rest; and likewise for the case I discuss in the next paragraph.

¹³ For this standard definition of 'altruism', see Thomas Nagel *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 16, n. 1.

but for the sake of someone else. So my wrong actions deprive God of a service, but they deprive God of a service that He wants for the sake of another. Suppose I do what I can to apologize and make reparation to this other person. Does this adequately deal with what I owe to God? Not quite, but presumably very nearly. Not quite, because I do still, objectively, owe God a duty of service that I have failed in. But very nearly, because this duty, although owed to God, is owed to Him precisely and only because He wants the good of the other person. If I deal with the debt I owe to this other person, then it is hard to see that God could reasonably require a vast additional reparation to be made by me to Him. God's pleasure consists fundamentally in the good of the third person; if I make reparation to this third person, then I have done almost all of what is required to restore God's good pleasure. In dealing with the debt I owe to the third person, I have dealt with the fundamental harm done to God's intentions. All that remains by way of reparation is apology to God.

Of course, it might be that I owe this third person a great deal. I have, after all, been instrumental in depriving him of his ultimate goal. Still, although instrumental, I am not in fact the only cause of this deprivation. If someone is deprived forever of his final goal, this must ultimately be because of his own choice to place himself in a position in which his desire for the good is eliminated. If his being in this position were not the result of his own free choice—or at least the result of his own voluntary action—it is hard to see how God could reasonably allow him to remain in such a position.¹⁴

This issue does, however, highlight a potential problem here. Might reparation to the human being I wrong in some cases not be beyond my power? And if it is, how can I deal with the objective guilt that attaches to me? One solution here is to appeal to a retributive theory of punishment, according to which a person I wrong retains the right to take things from me even if that person can make no use of these things. I have suggested already that retributive theories of punishment are false. But suppose a retributive theory of punishment were true. In this case, penitent human beings on my view would be punished not for the wrong they do to God (since the guilt attaching to this is sorted out by repentance and apology) but for the wrong they do to each other—some of which cannot be sorted out by adequate reparation. This punishment would not be equivalent to damnation, since the wrongs that we do to each other would on a retributive view all have merely finite punishment. Could Christ substitute for this punishment? Perhaps he could,¹⁵ but it looks massively implausible to

¹⁴ I return to this briefly in note 25 below.

¹⁵ The most interesting modern attempt to defend a penal theory of the atonement is perhaps that proposed by John E. Hare *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance*, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 243–59. But I find Hare's 'expressive' theory of punishment, according to which punishment is a visible corrective exacted from the wrongdoer as a 'vindication of the victim's value' (247) so implausible that I do not think the theory can ultimately succeed. On Hare's scheme, punishment results in the victimization of the

suggest that Christ's atoning work is required only to deal with the wrongs we do to each other, so I would take this as further evidence against believing a retributive theory of punishment to be true.

Still, this line of argument is in any case not open to me, since I reject retributive theories of punishment. How can I allow a human being to make sufficient reparation, supposing a wronged person to exercise her right in demanding this? My strategy here is to deny that there are cases in which the payment of finite reparation is beyond any human being's power. For we do not need to restrict the payment of these sorts of debts to this life. Christians hope for a future life of happiness, and in this future life, there might indeed be countless occasions and opportunities to make reparation to each other for the wrongs that we do to each other. This explains how on my theory no wrong that human beings do to each other is such that reparation is impossible: a murderer can even make reparation to his victim on this view. Our opportunities for reparation are *eschatological*.¹⁶ These opportunities need not be associated with the enjoyment of the bliss of heaven: we could indeed invoke notions of purgatory in this context, or of some other state of moral growth or purification intermediate between this life and the vision of God.¹⁷

wrongdoer, and thus does not appear to rectify any moral balance. For a modern response to Swinburne that presupposes a retributive theory of punishment, see Philip L. Quinn 'Swinburne on guilt, atonement, and Christian redemption', in Alan G. Padgett (ed.) *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 277–300.

¹⁶ The supposition I am making here is that a wronged person actually exercise her right in demanding the reparation required for the removal of any objective guilt attaching to the person who has wronged her. The Christian religion counsels mercy; so perhaps we could think that the wronged person is obliged to forgo the *full* reparation that she could demand. (In this case, someone would have a duty to forgo a right. It is hard to see that objective guilt could attach to a wrongdoer if the person wronged herself fails in a duty of mercy to the person who has wronged her.) And this, of course, tends to reduce the amount of reparation *required* from human beings for the wrongs that they do to each other.

¹⁷ Equally, fallen human beings live in a world some of whose disorder they might take collective responsibility for, but for which they cannot take individual responsibility: this I take it is part of the content of traditional doctrines of original sin. (The disorder is still moral; it is merely outside the scope of any individual to deal with.) I think that individual can indeed make reparation sufficient for dealing with guilt in these sorts of circumstances. To see this, we need to see that (as I suggested above) the disorder for which human beings might take collective responsibility is itself *moral*: it is something that emerges from, and is parasitic upon, the individual wrongs that we do to each other. If there were no individual wrongs, there would be no collective disorder; and the individual wrongs that we do to each other are sufficient for the emergence of the collective disorder. On this view, if all human beings were to deal properly with their individual guilt, there would be no collective disorder. So a person deals with this guilt simply by dealing with the guilt that attaches to her in virtue of the wrongs she does to individuals, and perhaps by doing whatever she can of whatever would be required of her were human beings collectively to deal with their guilt—perhaps voting for the interests of the community, local or global; encouraging the support of ethical policies; or simply giving to charity. In any case, Christians await the creation of a new heaven and a new earth; if such human beings do all they can to sort out their guilt, they can rely on God to sort out the rest. Indeed, if the forgiveness of sins ultimately requires that God renew or replace the structures that provide the context for individual human sinfulness, then the reward for Christ's meritorious work would indeed include the recreation of the universe.

There is one further aspect of human sin that I have thus far neglected: the harm that human beings do to the environment. There are three aspects of this: the duty that we owe to God not to harm something that He cares for; the duties that we owe to the environment itself (including for example the duty to treat animals with care); and the duties that we owe to future generation of humans for whom we have the world on trust. The second and third of these are complex issues, but I do not think that they present any difficulties for the theory of the atonement. The first is, however, relevant here. I would suggest that harming God's creation in general is precisely reducible to the harm done to someone when we harm something she cares for. This harm—to the carer—is adequately satisfied when we both apologize (and repent) and attempt to repair the thing cared for. If we harm the environment, we make satisfaction to God by doing what we can to repair the harm we have done, and by apologizing to God for this harm.

So the gist of all this is that I can deal with the Godward aspect of my sinfulness by apology and by dealing with the 'manward' aspect of it, and that I can deal with the manward aspect of it by apology and making sufficient additional reparation, as outlined by Swinburne. So human beings can indeed make sufficient reparation for the Godward aspect their sins. They thus do not need to plead Christ's life and death as reparation for their sin. Indeed, they cannot do so, since a debt cannot be paid twice, and their own reparation—their repentance and apology—sufficiently pays it. Their dealing with their guilt is, of course, required of them. It certainly is not supererogatory, or meritorious, and if we adopt Swinburne's claim that the wrongdoer's successful attempt to deal with his or her guilt does not morally necessitate forgiveness, it certainly places no necessity on God to forgive the penitent.

In general, then, our repentance and apology to God is sufficient to deal with the Godward aspect of sin. Human beings on this account could in principle do more than is required of them. This would be penance. Perhaps a human being, in the normal run of things, could do sufficient penance to merit a reward from God—possibly the forgiveness of sin. But I see no reason not to be more sympathetic to the intuitions of the Christian tradition about original sinfulness: the 'difficulty which man suffering from original sinfulness' (adapting a passage from Swinburne) will have in doing the sort of supererogatory action sufficient to merit forgiveness surely means that human beings simply cannot act in this sort of way, caught up as they are in their own wrongdoing, in the sinfulness of their fellows, and in the disordered social and political structures in which they live.

A MERIT THEORY OF ATONEMENT

I have argued that satisfaction theories of the atonement are false for the *prima facie* striking reason that we can make sufficient reparation to God for our sins. I hope to have shown that this view is not as outlandish as it might at first appear.

If satisfaction theories are false, what sense can we make of the redemptive value of Christ's death? Swinburne's insightful account of the nature of repentance and forgiveness provides the tools to enable us to formulate an alternative theory that remains faithful to the tradition while not relying on a theory of satisfaction and the objections to which it seems open.¹⁸

In *Cur Deus homo*, Anselm develops a two-pronged approach to his analysis of the redemptive value of Christ's death. The dominant—and more famous—side is the satisfaction theory. But towards the end of the work, he develops a different (and in principle independent) theory, according to which Christ's death *merits* certain rewards for human beings. I shall label this theory the merit theory. In what follows I will try to show—making use of some of the tools provided by Swinburne—how a merit theory might be developed independently of a satisfaction theory of the atonement.

Supposing that Christ's death cannot be made to function as a reparation for human sin, what sense can we make of its atoning value? The first step in sketching out a merit theory is to recall that satisfaction to God for sin—if my argument is sound—can be adequately made by sinful human beings themselves, since this satisfaction consists of no more than repentance and apology. The second step is to recall Swinburne's important point that the forgiveness of sins is supererogatory. God is thus not obliged to forgive sins.¹⁹ If God does not forgive sins, we are not restored to friendship with God, and thus ultimately suffer what theologians sometimes call the *poena damni*—the deprivation of the undeserved good of the vision of God.²⁰ Given that this deprivation is a bad thing, God is merciful if He decides not so to deprive the penitent—He is, in other words, merciful if He decides to restore the penitent to His friendship.

Of course, God is merciful. But this mercy is not something on which anyone can rightly presume—God is merciful if He gives the undeserved gift of His

¹⁸ There are, of course, several alternative theories found in the tradition. Swinburne outlines the most important at 150–155 and 162. In general, Swinburne's objections seem to me sufficient to rule out these alternative theories. Theories of deification, mentioned by Hick in the passage I cited above as a further alternative to Swinburne's, seem to presuppose that the guilt attaching to sin has been sorted out: they appear in other words to be theories about sanctification.

¹⁹ Swinburne spells out God's goodness in ways which include God's duties to act in certain ways. But we do not need to follow him in this. We could hold, for example, that God, while having no duties, necessarily acts in ways which would represent duties for a moral agent; (for a defence of this sort of approach, see Thomas V. Morris 'Duty and divine goodness', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 21 (1984), 261–8). When I talk of God's duties and obligations, I intend to speak loosely, also allowing for this second possible understanding of divine goodness. On Morris's account, God is not a moral agent, and this might be the gist of Hick's objection to Swinburne too. But we have duties to God whether or not God is a moral agent. So there seems no reason why sin should not be understood—as Swinburne does—in ultimately moral terms, and consequently why the notion of atonement too should not be so understood.

²⁰ On Swinburne's scheme, reparation might be sufficient to remove guilt even if the wronged party—God in this case—does not forgive. In the case at hand, we should think of our guilt as removed even if we do not receive the (additional) good of the vision of God. So although I talk in traditional terms of the *poena damni*, I mean rather the deprivation of an undeserved good, not a punishment as such.

friendship to just one penitent person. But God can place Himself under an *obligation* to forgive after due satisfaction. He can do this, of course, by a direct promise. But He can do it as the result of an indirect promise too. For example, God can place Himself under an obligation to forgive after due satisfaction if the following two conditions are satisfied: (1) He promises that He will do as person *x* asks, and (2) *x* asks God to forgive the sins of the penitent. What good reason could God have in this case for promising to do what person *x* asks? One such good reason would be that God does this—makes this promise—as a reward for a meritorious action. On this view, underlying (1) is a further essential step: a prior meritorious action, an action that merits from God a reward that, as it happens, coincides with the reward stated in (1).

According to St Anselm, this is exactly what God does in the case of the supererogatory merit of Christ's sacrificial life and death:

It is necessary that the Father should compensate the Son, . . . On whom is it more appropriate for [Christ] to bestow the reward and recompense for his death than those for whose salvation . . . he has made himself a man, and for whom, as we have said, he set an example, by his death, of dying for the sake of righteousness?²¹

On this scheme, Christ's death is a supererogatorily good act that merits a reward from God. The reward is to be whatever Christ asks for. (This reward is not rashly or irresponsibly ascribed by God if we suppose that Christ is necessarily good, and thus incapable of asking for anything bad.) Christ asks that God forgive the sins of those who repent and apologize to God. God is then obliged to do so. So the redemptive result of Christ's sacrifice is God's being obliged to forgive those who call upon him in penitence and sorrow.

I will explain in a moment both the possible precise content of Christ's request and the advantages of this indirect sort of divine promise over and above a direct promise to forgive sins after repentance and apology. But first, I want to clarify the details of my proposed Anselmian scheme by looking more closely at the nature of the relationship between a meritorious action and its reward. Again, we can profitably adopt wholesale from Swinburne's account. According to Swinburne, supererogatory actions place their recipient under an obligation to gratitude; and supererogatory actions of sufficient magnitude place their recipient under an obligation to more than merely gratitude (64–6). Both of these sorts of supererogatory action are labelled by Swinburne 'meritorious' (70). Christ's death thus seems to place God under an obligation to reward it in some way. Of course, the nature of this reward is appropriately determined by God. So, in relation to the atonement, there is nothing about Christ's death that in itself guarantees the forgiveness of sin: there is, in other words, nothing that guarantees

²¹ Anselm *Cur Deus Homo*, 2, 19, in Franciscus Salesius Schmitt (ed.) *Opera Omnia*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946–61), vol. 2, 130; ET in Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (eds) *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, Oxford's World Classics (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 352–3.

in advance that the reward is to be whatever Christ asks for. Christ sets out, as it were, in hope; God rewards this hope by promising to do whatever Christ asks. Given both (1) this promise, and (2) Christ's request that God forgives the sins of those who repent and apologize, God is obliged to forgive the sins of those who repent and apologize.²²

What precisely is the content of Christ's request made on our behalf? Thus far, I have spoken of it merely as a request to forgive the sins of those who repent and apologize. But I think we will need to affirm rather more than this. For one thing, it appears to omit any mention of the 'manward' aspect of sin—the wrong that we do not to God directly but rather to each other. Secondly, it might be thought that there are objections of a theological nature: does Christ's request, as I have outlined it, not make forgiveness conditional on our doing certain things? And—related to this—does it not omit any reference to the role of *faith* in the forgiveness of sins?

I have dealt with the manward aspect of sin at length in the previous section. In line with this, part of the content of Christ's request to God would need to be that God forgive us provided we repent and apologize to him. But this repentance itself requires that we do what we can to deal with the wrongs we do to other human beings. As I made clear in the previous section, it also involves doing what needs to be done to repair the harm we do to God's creation in general. Does all of this not make our forgiveness conditional on our performing certain good deeds—whether this be our repentance *coram Deo* or whatever reparation we can offer to our fellow human beings? Perhaps it does, but even the most convinced Augustinian must affirm that forgiveness is conditional at least on our *acceptance* of it: and it is hard to see how this acceptance could not presuppose at least repentance and apology. Perhaps it will involve thankfulness as well, gratitude for a gift given: but no-one holds that the gift is given to the *impenitent*. The link of all of this with traditional theories of justification by faith is clear enough—though I would not want to be tied into a requirement of explicit faith here, since it seems to me that a theory of salvation that is inclusive of all people of goodwill is immeasurably preferable to one that is not. Equally, the only person able to merit the forgiveness of our sins in this scheme remains Jesus.

²² The Resurrection has no redemptive place in this scheme—and perhaps it ought not to in any case, given that the resurrection of the body is a hope for all the saved. But the Resurrection certainly can be, as Swinburne—and the majority of the Western tradition—holds, God's showing that 'he accepted the offering as sufficient for the purpose for which it was made' (160). The Resurrection can also have an instrumental role in the general resurrection, and in the recreation of the universe and sanctification of humankind: see e.g. Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* IIIa, q. 56, A. 1, 2. One further point. My account thus far has ignored the psychological aspects of human sin: the psychological disorder, for example, that results from our sinful treatment of each other. The moral component here is dealt with in the way that I have outlined. The psychological component requires a different sort of treatment—perhaps the infusion of divine grace—and I could build such healing into the content of Jesus's request to God: not only that God forgive the sin of the penitent, but that he heal their psychological disorder; or perhaps that God heal psychological disorder in a way sufficient to allow the process of repentance to begin.

This scheme, of course, creates further obligations on the part of human beings: specifically, an obligation of service to Christ as the benefactor who bestows on us the rewards of his meritorious action. But this obligation is easily satisfied: we serve Christ precisely when we make good use of the gift he has given us, by repenting and apologizing. (I take it that there is a similar duty of service in Swinburne's account, and that we satisfy this obligation on Swinburne's account when we plead Christ's death in reparation for our sins.)

Why is it better for God to place Himself under an obligation in this way than to do so merely by a direct promise? Part of the traditional Christian doctrine of the atonement is that Christ is a divine person. So this complex scheme of redemption would very effectively show the extent of God's love—as traditional atonement theories invariably claim. It also gives us an example of the sort of life that it is good for us to lead: not merely satisfying all our obligations, but doing more than is required of us, and in this way pleasing God.²³

It is important to understand this aspect of the theory. In effect, I am claiming that the sinner need not know that Christ has acted in this meritorious way. For that matter, the theory does not require any knowledge of Christ at all. To this extent, the theory is transactional in way that Swinburne's is not. A result of this is that the only difference *knowledge* of Christ's redemptive activity makes is exemplary: Christ gives the believer a pattern of behaviour. These seem to me to be advantages, since they allow Christ a role in redemption that does not exclude people of other faiths or of no faith. But at any rate it is worth being clear about this. Of course, none of this entails that Christ's life is not good in itself. Its goodness lies not in its being a reparation, but in Christ's performance of God's

²³ On this exemplary aspect of Christ's work, see too Richard L. Purtill 'Justice, mercy, supererogation, and atonement', in Thomas P. Flint (ed.) *Christian Philosophy*, University of Notre Dame Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 37–50, 44–5. (Purtill's account presupposes a theory of punishment that has retributive components, and this renders his theory of the atonement to my mind unacceptable.) On the account I am sketching, it is worth keeping in mind that it is sufficient but not necessary for human salvation that Christ live and die in the way that he did. To show us how much God loves us, the sufficiency of Christ's life and death for human salvation are indeed themselves sufficient. Aquinas is here in a similar position. He clearly affirms that God could save us in ways other than the one He has chosen—perhaps even merely by forgiving us. But it is good for God to save us by living a perfectly good life and death, so that 'through it a human being might know how much God loves humankind, and through this might be inspired to love [God], which is the perfection of human salvation': Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* IIIa, q. 46, A. 3, c. A theory that would make these things necessary for salvation would be able more effectively to show us the extent of divine love. But such a theory might be less good than mine (or Aquinas's) in other respects—e.g. it might rely on the (false) retributive theory of punishment. There might in any case be other reasons too that make it good for a divine person to become incarnate. Perhaps it would allow God to experience things—suffering and ignorance—that He could not otherwise experience. (This is not the same as the claim made by Stephen R. I. Clark in *God, Religion and Reality* (London: SPCK, 1998), 118: 'God himself must become an ignorant individual, and suffer as we do, so that He can manage real sympathy and support for us: without these there are things He does not know.' It is not that God is ignorant of the notions of suffering and ignorance, but that He does not *experience* these things unless he becomes incarnate.)

will to the extent not merely of satisfying all his obligations but also of living a self-sacrificial life of supererogatory goodness.

On the theory I am proposing, God is obliged to forgive the penitent. On the face of it this seems to preclude divine mercy. After all, if God is obliged to forgive the penitent, then His so doing can hardly count—as it does in Swinburne's proposal—as an act of mercy. And this in turn seems to render otiose standard Christian prayers for mercy—prayers that form a central part of the liturgy. I think it is clear that the merit theory I am proposing entails—at the very least—a modification to the traditional accounts of mercy that Swinburne's system copes with so elegantly. There is nothing about my proposal that is inconsistent with the claim that God *helps* sinners to repent. And this—God's helping sinners to repent—is certainly supererogatory. There is nothing about the repentance of a sinner that obliges God to help. God is thus merciful when he helps a sinner repent, and thereby achieve salvation and friendship with God.²⁴ (I do not need, of course, to be committed to the view that people can repent *only if* God helps them. There might be all sorts of advantages to divine help, and thus it be good that God help people repent and apologize, even if this help is not a necessary condition for their repentance and apology.) Alternatively, we could understand all pleas for mercy as simply ways of formally expressing our repentance and apology.

This theory is, in principle, neutral on all questions of predestination (for example, before or after foreseen good actions, and so on). After all, we do not know to what extent grace is necessary to allow us to repent and apologize to God, or to allow us to do whatever can be counted as such repentance and apology. Equally, we could appropriately think of the only properly meritorious action in our redemption being that of Christ: Christ merits the forgiveness of those who repent. Our repentance could properly be seen merely as an occasion for this forgiveness, not a cause of it.

The theory is also neutral on the question of the possibility of damnation. Central to the merit theory I am proposing is that repentance and apology is necessary for salvation, and thus for friendship with God. People who fail to repent and apologize for their sin are deprived of friendship with God. This deprivation is equivalent to the theologian's *poena damni*, traditionally understood retributively as a punishment. But there is no need to understand the deprivation of friendship with God as a punishment. By freely choosing not to repent and apologize, people freely choose enmity with God. But this does not

²⁴ In a different way, Aquinas again is open to an analogous problem with the notion of mercy. For Aquinas, Christ's satisfaction is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins; divine mercy is identified as God's freely providing satisfaction for our redemption: see Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q. 46, A. 1 and 3. If we wanted to develop an account of the work of the Holy Spirit, we would doubtless do it in part here: it is the Holy Spirit who without coercion moves us to repentance, and thus to receive the reward merited by Christ—just as the work of sanctification after forgiveness can be ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

mean that God is not mercifully trying to help such people to repentance and apology. Equally, if such repentance and apology is free, God does not know whether someone suffering the *poena damni* might not in future repent and apologize. God's help can be—if need be—everlasting.²⁵

OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

There seem to me to be at least two *prima facie* objections to this theory that need dealing with. The first, and perhaps most troubling, is that all this talk of God rewarding Christ's action with a promise to do whatever Christ chooses appears decidedly lacking in scriptural warrant. The second is that it seems to involve the absurd claim that God rewards Himself in some way, given the standard Christian claim that Jesus is a person who is both divine and human.

The scriptural objection requires careful treatment. Clearly, the New Testament contains no more than inchoate suggestions about the nature of Christ's redemptive work—hints at models and metaphors that Christians might want to use to state with force *that* Christ's death is somehow redemptive, without stating *how* it is redemptive. Still, my account can make sense of two important strands of New Testament material: that which sees Christ's death as a sacrifice, and that in which Christ himself promises the forgiveness of sins. In terms of sacrifice, I have been arguing that Christ's death is indeed Christ giving up something valuable, and giving something of benefit to God. Christ himself is portrayed in the Gospels as promising the forgiveness of sins to the penitent. And that God has promised the forgiveness of sins to the penitent is just what I am proposing. Given the way in which New Testament theology is developed—suggestively and metaphorically, and fundamentally through narrative—it should come as no surprise that the precise mechanism whereby this promise is put in place is left mysterious.²⁶ Indeed, my theory is not conspicuously worse off in this respect than any other.

Secondly, there is the Trinitarian aspect of all this. Christ is a divine person, and insofar as he merits a reward from God in effect—and oddly—rewards

²⁵ On the face of it, annihilation is a possible alternative here. But annihilationism seems to me to be false, since I would want to allow that God can never tell whether or not a person will repent and apologize. Annihilation destroys someone's chances of repentance when there is still a real chance—perhaps even a likelihood, given God's help—that he will repent. God's not annihilating such a person would of course be an act of mercy, since God is not obliged to save such a person. Swinburne argues that people can choose to place themselves in a position where repentance is not an option—where the desire for the good as such is eliminated (173–8). I am not sure about this, since it is not clear that character traits are as indelible as Swinburne supposes, particularly if we allow the action of God always non-coercively drawing people to the good. Supposing that no character traits are indelibly fixed, then I do not suppose that we should want to affirm annihilation.

²⁶ This does not require that Christ be aware of this promise by means of, or in virtue of, his human mind, and thus it does not require that any of the proposed scheme be made clear by Christ in his life and death.

himself for certain supererogatory deeds. One way to deal with this is to point out that he does so under different descriptions, and in different functions. And this removes the putative oddity. Suppose, for example, that a town council offers a prize for a race that all inhabitants of the town—including members of the council—are eligible to enter. The race is won by one of the councillors. In this case, the winner of the race is part of a body that awards the prize to him. *Qua* winner of the race, he receives the prize; *qua* town council member, he awards the prize. An analogous situation would obtain in the case of Christ's meritorious action. *Qua* man, he merits reward; *qua* God, He gives the reward. As far as I can see, this does not raise any insurmountable logical problems.²⁷

Another way of dealing with this would be to adopt the more Anselmian insight that there is a sense in which the Son merits a reward from the Father. This proposal would allow the theologian to affirm the continuity of the Son's work before and after incarnation: the Son always pleads that the Father will mercifully restore human beings to his friendship; the Incarnation allows the Son to merit such restoration, removing it from the realm of divine mercy, and placing it in the realm of divine justice.²⁸

²⁷ This is not to say that all potential Christological problems of a logical nature can be dealt with by the expedient of this sort of qualification—what the medievals called 'reduplication'. But I do not see a reason why the problem I have been discussing here cannot be so dealt with.

²⁸ I would like to thank Martin Stone and Richard Swinburne for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, and Essaka Joshua for talking at length about some of the issues with me. A very early version was read at a graduate seminar on doctrine at Oxford University: thanks to the participants there, especially Joseph Jedwab, Christopher Jones, Joseph Shaw, and Daniel von Wachter.

Abelard on Atonement: “Nothing Unintelligible, Arbitrary, Illogical, or Immoral about It”*

Philip L. Quinn

It was, according to a prominent English philosopher and theologian, a moment of theological recovery. “For the first time—or rather for the first time since the days of the earliest and most philosophical Greek fathers—the doctrine of the atonement was stated,” Hastings Rashdall says, “in a way which had nothing unintelligible, arbitrary, illogical, or immoral about it.”¹ Rashdall, who coined the term ‘ideal utilitarianism’ and ably advocated the position since then so called, made this remark in his Bampton Lectures of 1915, published in 1919 under the title *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*.² He was referring to the account of atonement set forth by Peter Abelard in his *Commentary on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*. In this essay I argue that there is a lot to be said for Rashdall’s strongly positive evaluation of Abelard’s account of the Atonement.

As two good recent books on atonement make clear, Rashdall’s view is not the conventional wisdom of our own times. In *The Actuality of Atonement*, Colin Gunton, who is Professor of Christian Doctrine at King’s College, London, does not so much as mention Abelard; Abelard is not listed in the book’s index of names or in its bibliography.³ And in his *Responsibility and Atonement*, Richard Swinburne, who is Nolloth Professor of Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford, dismisses Abelard in a single sentence; he claims that “Abelard’s exemplary theory of the atonement, that Christ’s life and death work to remove our sins by inspiring us to do penance and good acts, contains no objective transaction.”⁴ Implicit in this remark is a criticism of Abelard’s account of atonement

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¹ Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1919), p. 360.

² For a brief discussion of Rashdall’s life and works, see A. K. Stout, “Hastings Rashdall,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 7:68.

³ Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1989).

⁴ Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 162. A detailed discussion of Swinburne’s impressive positive account of atonement is outside the scope of this essay.

that is often thought to be devastating. The charge is that Abelard's views on atonement are exemplarist in character. But what exactly does the charge come to: What is exemplarism? Why is it a bad thing to be an exemplarist? And is Abelard guilty as charged? These are questions to which I shall offer answers in the course of the present discussion.

The difficulty is not, I think, that it is false or unorthodox to claim that Christ's life and death are an inspiring example. Thomas Aquinas, who is surely a sound guide on this point, explicitly endorses this claim. When enumerating some of the benefits that accrue to us as a result of the Incarnation, he includes on a list of five that contribute to our furtherance in good both having our charity kindled because God's love for us stimulates us to love in return and being inspired to do good because God himself sets an example for us.⁵ And Gunton remarks that if "we are to establish a case for an objective, past atonement, it cannot be at the cost of denying the subjective and exemplary implications."⁶ So the difficulty must rather be that exemplarists are explicitly or implicitly committed to the view that Christ's life and death are no more than an inspiring example, a paradigm of Christian existence. Such an exclusive view would, it is alleged, leave out something important about Christ's atoning work. Exemplarists are thus to be faulted because they have an incomplete doctrine of the Atonement. What they say is sound as far as it goes, but it is not the whole truth.

What objective transaction or past fact do the exemplarists neglect? For historical reasons, it would be virtually impossible to get agreement on an answer to this question among Christian theologians or philosophers. In this respect, there is a sharp contrast between the doctrine of the Atonement and other central Christian doctrines such as the Incarnation and the Trinity. Under pressure from theological controversy, the early church felt itself obliged to formulate the fairly precise definitions of such doctrines that we find expressed by the familiar Nicene and Chalcedonian formulas. Such definitions have operated as a traditional constraint on theological theorizing. Nothing similar happened in the case of the doctrine of the Atonement, and so the history of theological reflection on it is richly pluralistic. It is a colorful tapestry of scriptural motifs and theological elaborations.

In the present context, it turns out to be useful to impose some taxonomic order on the otherwise bewildering variety of accounts of the Atonement by thinking of them as falling at various places in a spectrum. At one end of this spectrum would be accounts that emphasize one motif to the exclusion of all others if there were any such purely monistic accounts. The theory Anselm proposes in *Cur Deus homo* falls close to this end of the spectrum. According to Anselm, God became human in order to pay a debt that human sinners owe

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, Q. 1, A. 2; hereafter *ST*.

⁶ Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p. 157.

but cannot pay and thereby to spare sinful humans the punishment that would otherwise be consequent upon their inability to pay this debt.⁷ So Anselm understands the Atonement almost exclusively in terms of the legalistic category of making satisfaction for a debt of sin. At the other end of the spectrum would be accounts that incorporate several motifs and treat them all as being of more or less equal importance. The account Gunton sets forth in *The Actuality of Atonement* is an example of such egalitarian pluralism. It focuses on three ideas: Christ's work as a victory over demonic forces, Christ's work as a contribution to cosmic justice, and Christ's work as a priestly sacrifice.⁸ All three motifs are taken to be metaphoric in nature; they are not to be confused with theories and must be understood in suitably nuanced and qualified ways. But when properly understood, each of these metaphors has something vital to contribute to our admittedly imperfect grasp of the complex mystery of the Atonement. In the middle of the spectrum are accounts that draw on a plurality of motifs but assign pride of place to some and relegate others to subordinate roles. The story Aquinas tells in the *Summa theologiae* furnishes an instance of this kind of hierarchical pluralism. Like Anselm, Aquinas thinks that the principal function of Christ's atoning work is to make satisfaction for human sin by paying a debt of punishment human sinners cannot pay.⁹ Aquinas holds that the power to do this comes from Christ's Passion, but he insists that the Passion also has other functions. It contributes to the salvation of sinners by meriting grace for them on account of its voluntary character, by redeeming them from bondage to the devil through a ransom paid to God, and by reconciling them to God because it is an acceptable sacrifice. So although satisfaction is the dominant theme in Aquinas's account of the Atonement, he eclectically mobilizes other motifs to play subsidiary parts.

We can, I believe, clarify the question that needs to be put to Abelard's account of the Atonement if we ask where on this spectrum it is to be located. As we shall see once we begin to examine the texts, there is no room for doubt that Abelard makes much of the inspiring love displayed in God becoming incarnate and suffering unto death for his human creatures. But even if the exemplary motif is the dominant theme in Abelard's account, it does not follow without further argument that it is the only theme. Absent such argument, the possibility remains open that Abelard, like Aquinas, is a hierarchical pluralist and so is not an exemplarist in the sense of excluding part of the truth about the Atonement.

⁷ Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo* II, 6.

⁸ Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*. These motifs are elaborated in chaps. 3, 4 and 5.

⁹ Aquinas, *ST III, QQ. 46–9*. I argue for this interpretation of Aquinas in Philip L. Quinn, "Aquinas on Atonement", in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 153–77. Further support for this view is to be found in Romanus Cesario, *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982). A rather different interpretation is set forth in Eleonore Stump, "Atonement according to Aquinas", in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 61–91 (this volume, Ch. 13).

Indeed, it could turn out that Abelard and Aquinas differ not so much over which motifs should be included in a fairly comprehensive account of the Atonement as over the more delicate matter of which themes are most important and deserve to be highlighted. And if this were so, Abelard too would be located somewhere in the middle of the spectrum in terms of which we are for present purposes ordering accounts of the Atonement. In that case, an evaluation of Abelard's account would involve the subtle task of determining whether it does a better job than its rivals in answering questions about which motifs ought to be regarded as central to a well-rounded doctrine of the Atonement and thus deserve emphasis in its presentation.

Should we embrace Abelard with the enthusiasm Rashdall displayed near the beginning of this century? Or should we write Abelard off as an exemplarist in the way Swinburne has done near the century's end? Let us look at what Abelard says with the possibility in mind that neither response rests on an adequate appreciation of the merits of his views.

1. THE CENTRAL MOTIF OF ABELARD'S ACCOUNT

Abelard interrupts his commentary on Romans 3 to raise the question of what Christ's death does to atone for our sins. It is the solution he proposes to the problems that come up in the course of this discussion that has given rise to the charge of exemplarism. So we need to look with particular care at what he actually says in this celebrated passage.

The passage begins with arguments against the view that sinners are rightfully held in bondage by the devil until Christ ransoms them by his death. On this view, the devil holds all mere humans in bondage by right because the first man, Adam, yielded himself to the devil's authority by an act of voluntary obedience. Being perfectly just, God respects the devil's rights and so will not free sinners from their bondage by force. Instead he ransoms them from captivity at the price of Christ's blood. Abelard has three objections to this view. Two hang on rather esoteric theological points. The first is that Christ redeemed only the elect, who were never in the devil's power. Alluding to Luke 16:26, Abelard contends that Abraham there declares that a great gulf has been fixed between the elect and the wicked so that the latter can never cross over to the former. From this Abelard concludes that "still less may the devil, who is more evil than all, acquire any power in that place where no wicked person has a place or even entry."¹⁰ The

¹⁰ Peter Abelard, *Commentaria in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*. The Latin text is to be found in *Petri Abaelardi opera theologica*, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis 11, ed. E. M. Buytaert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969). An English translation of selected passages is to be found in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, The Library of Christian Classics 10, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956). For the sake of convenience, I quote this translation whenever possible, but I also refer to the Latin text by page and lines. Thus the quoted material to which this note is appended is at Buytaert, p. 114, lines 149–51, and Fairweather, p. 281.

second point is that the devil never acquired rights over the first humans because he seduced them by means of a lying promise. Alluding to Genesis 3:4, Abelard maintains that “the devil could not grant that immortality which he promised man as a reward of transgression in the hope that in this way he might hold him fast by some sort of right.”¹¹ Presumably the thought here is that the first humans were willing to grant rights over them to the devil in return for immortality, but he did not actually acquire rights over them because he could not and so did not live up to his part of the bargain.

Abelard’s third objection echoes a point that Anselm had made earlier.¹² He concedes that God may have given express permission to the devil to torture humans by way of punishment for their sins, but he denies that the devil on that account holds sinful humans in bondage as a matter of right. If one servant of a master seduces another to depart from obedience to the master, the master properly regards the seducer as much more guilty than the seduced servant. “And how unjust it would be,” Abelard exclaims, “that he who seduced the other should deserve, as a result, to have any special right or authority over him!”¹³ Even the express permission to punish sinners will, according to Abelard, be withdrawn if God chooses to forgive their sins and to remit the punishment for them, as Matthew 9:2 reports Christ did in the case of a paralytic. If God were mercifully to choose to forgive other sinners, Abelard argues, then “assuredly, once the sins for which they were undergoing punishment have been forgiven, there appears to remain no reason why they should be any longer punished for them.”¹⁴ So there really is no need for God to ransom human sinners from the devil. The devil has no rights over them which God must in justice respect, and God can retract the devil’s permission to punish simply by forgiving them and remitting the punishment.

But this makes the following question all the more urgent for Abelard: “What need was there, I say, that the Son of God, for our redemption, should take upon him our flesh and endure such numerous fastings, insults, scourgings and spittings, and finally that most bitter and disgraceful death upon the cross, enduring even the cross of punishment with the wicked?”¹⁵ Would it not be reasonable to suppose, Abelard asks, that the suffering and death of his Son should increase God’s anger at sinful humanity because humans acted more criminally by crucifying his Son than they did by disobeying his first command in paradise in eating a single apple? Nor does it seem promising to think of Christ’s atonement as a blood price paid to God rather than to the devil for the redemption of sinful humanity, for it appears to be inconsistent with God’s perfect goodness that he should demand such a price. As Abelard puts the point,

¹¹ Buytaert, p. 115, lines 171–3; Fairweather, p. 281.

¹² Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* I, 7.

¹³ Buytaert, p. 115, lines 161–3; Fairweather, p. 281.

¹⁴ Buytaert, p. 116, lines 198–200; Fairweather, p. 282.

¹⁵ Buytaert, p. 116, lines 205–9; Fairweather, p. 282.

“How cruel and wicked it seems that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should in any way please him that an innocent man should be slain—still less that God should consider the death of his Son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the whole world!”¹⁶ And thus passionately put, the point has considerable force.

Having done his best to impress upon his readers the difficulty of the question, Abelard audaciously propounds an answer to it. The passage deserves to be quoted at length both on account of its intrinsic interest and because of the controversy to which it has given rise among scholars:

Now it seems to us that we have been justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God in this way: through this unique act of grace manifested to us—in that his Son has taken upon himself our nature and persevered therein in teaching us by word and example even unto death—he has more fully bound us to himself by love; with the result that our hearts should be enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true charity should not now shrink from enduring anything for him. And we do not doubt that the ancient Fathers, waiting in faith for this same gift, were aroused to very great love of God in the same way as men of this dispensation of grace, since it is written: “And they that went before and they that followed cried, saying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’” etc. Yet everyone becomes more righteous—by which we mean a greater lover of the Lord—after the Passion of Christ than before, since a realized gift inspires greater love than one which is only hoped for. Wherefore, our redemption through Christ’s suffering is that deeper affection [*dilectio*] in us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also wins for us the true liberty of sons of God, so that we do all things out of love rather than fear—love to him who has shown us such grace that no greater can be found, as he himself asserts, saying, “Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”¹⁷

The case for taking Abelard to be an exemplarist rests almost entirely on interpretation of this text.

Thus, for example, after setting forth his own translation of its first and last sentences, Robert S. Franks concludes that it is evident that Abelard “has reduced the whole process of redemption to one single clear principle, viz. the manifestation of God’s love to us in Christ, which awakens an answering love in us.”¹⁸ Rashdall proceeds in a similar fashion. First he sets forth his own translation of the last two sentences of the quoted passage, and then he adds his translation of the somewhat different version of its first two sentences to be found in the charges against Abelard drawn up and transmitted to the pope by Bernard of Clairvaux. These texts constitute the bulk of Rashdall’s evidence for the following strong claims about Abelard’s views on the nature of Christ’s atoning work:

¹⁶ Buytaert, p. 117, lines 234–38; Fairweather, p. 283.

¹⁷ Buytaert, pp. 117–18, lines 242–62; Fairweather, pp. 283–84.

¹⁸ Robert S. Franks, *The Work of Christ* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), p. 146.

In Abelard not only the ransom theory but any kind of substitutionary or expiatory atonement is explicitly denied. We get rid altogether of the notion of a mysterious guilt which, by an abstract necessity of things, required to be extinguished by death or suffering, no matter whose, and of all pseudo-Platonic hypostatizing of the universal "Humanity." The efficacy of Christ's death is now quite definitely and explicitly explained by its subjective influence upon the mind of the sinner. The voluntary death of the innocent Son of God on man's behalf moves the sinner to gratitude and answering love—and so to consciousness of sin, repentance, amendment.¹⁹

And, needless to say, Rashdall wholeheartedly approves of all these things he attributes to Abelard.

Is this an adequate summary of Abelard's account of the Atonement? We should, I think, approach this summary with some suspicion precisely because almost all the evidence for it comes from a single passage, albeit an eloquent one, that covers slightly less than one page out of a total of three hundred pages of text in the Corpus Christianorum edition of Abelard's *Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. And even in and around this famous passage there are small clues indicating that Abelard's view is more complicated than Franks or Rashdall takes it to be. First of all, in the final sentence of the famous passage Abelard does say that our redemption through Christ's suffering frees us from slavery to sin, though, to be sure, he does not at this point offer an explanation of how it does so. Second, a few lines after the close of the famous passage Abelard indicates that the explanation of the manner of our redemption it proposes is incomplete but reserves further elaboration for another treatise.²⁰

Moreover, the translations of the famous passage provided by Franks and Rashdall give it an exemplarist flavor that is absent from the Latin original. In his "Was Abelard an Exemplarist?" which challenges Rashdall's interpretation of Abelard, Robert O. P. Taylor points to several instances of this in Rashdall. To my mind, the most striking among them is this one. The Latin that begins the final sentence of the famous passage goes as follows: "Redemptio itaque nostra est illa summa in nobis per passionem Christi dilectio." "But this," Taylor insists, "surely, means, 'Our redemption, therefore, is that supreme love which is *in us* through the Passion of Christ.'"²¹ The translation I quoted does convey the idea that the *dilectio* which is our redemption is something in us. But, as Taylor observes, this is not the idea conveyed by Rashdall's translation. Rashdall renders the Latin thus: "Our redemption, therefore, is that supreme love of Christ *shown to us* by His passion" (my emphasis).²² Franks performs a similar transformation. His rendition of the Latin is this: "And so our redemption is that supreme love *manifested in our case* by the passion of Christ" (my emphasis).²³ In short, both

¹⁹ Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement*, p. 358.

²⁰ Buytaert, p. 118, lines 271–74; Fairweather, p. 284.

²¹ Robert O. P. Taylor, "Was Abelard an Exemplarist?" *Theology* 31 (1935): 212.

²² Rashdall, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p. 358.

²³ Franks, *The Work of Christ*, p. 145.

Rashdall and Franks take Abelard to be saying that our redemption is the love Christ shows or manifests by suffering for our sakes. From this thought it is only a small step to the conclusion that Christ's love is no more than an example displayed for our inspection. But this is not the only possible, or even the most natural, reading of the text. And if we take seriously the idea that our redemption is a love in us through Christ's Passion, then it remains to be seen how the Passion of Christ actually works to implant or produce this love in us.

So it is not clear that the famous passage actually teaches that Christ's love is merely an example, "something displayed in the hope that we may see that it is so admirable that we ought to emulate or adopt it."²⁴ And even if by itself it will bear an exemplarist interpretation, it does not follow that exemplarism is the only motif at work in Abelard's thinking about the Atonement. As we shall next see, it is not.

2. PENAL SUBSTITUTION IN ABELARD

A survey of medieval accounts of the Atonement, called "The Concept of Satisfaction in Medieval Redemption Theory", argues that the key elements of Scholastic thought on this topic are satisfaction for the dishonor of sin, substitution for the punishment imposed, and the restoration of humankind. Its author, J. Patout Burns, holds that "the first is a contribution of Anselm; the second derives from Abelard; the third becomes central only in the thirteenth century."²⁵ It would be easy to quarrel with the last of these conclusions on the basis of the famous passage previously discussed. After all, Abelard there tells us that our redemption not only frees us from slavery to sin but also wins for us the true liberty of sons of God, so that we do all things out of love rather than fear, and the latter effect of our redemption certainly seems to involve the restoration of fallen humans to a state of liberty God meant them to occupy. But more interesting in the present context is the claim that Abelard is the source of the idea that Christ substitutes for the rest of us in bearing the punishment due to us for our sins and thereby makes it possible for us to avoid undergoing such punishment. There is no hint of this in the famous passage on which those who take Abelard to be nothing but an exemplarist build their case.

Nevertheless, Abelard clearly does endorse the notion of penal substitution in the *Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. In discussing Romans 4:25, where it is said that Christ was handed over to death for our sins, Abelard says this:

²⁴ Taylor, "Was Abelard an Exemplarist?" p. 213.

²⁵ J. Patout Burns, S.J., "The Concept of Satisfaction in Medieval Redemption Theory", *Theological Studies* 36 (1975): 304.

In two ways he is said to have died for our faults: first, because the faults for which he died were ours, and we committed the sins for which he bore the punishment; secondly, that by dying he might remove our sins, that is, the punishment of our sins, introducing us into paradise at the price of his own death, and might, by the display of grace such that he himself said "Greater love no man hath," draw our minds away from the will to sin and enkindle in them the highest love of himself.²⁶

So Abelard is committed to holding that Christ removes our sins in the sense that he, who is innocent and so deserves no punishment, takes our place and endures the punishment we deserve. It may be that this view is illogical because it is logically impossible for one person to pay a debt of punishment for sin another person owes. And it may be that it is immoral in the sense that it is morally repugnant to imagine that the suffering of an innocent person could remove the debt of punishment of a guilty person.²⁷ But, if so, Rashdall is mistaken in claiming that there is nothing illogical or immoral about Abelard's account of the Atonement, for this view is part of that account.

Of course, as L. W. Grensted remarks in commenting on this passage, Abelard's heart is really in the thought with which it concludes, the idea that the grace displayed in Christ's dying may work an interior transformation in us by which our minds are drawn away from sin and toward Christ in love.²⁸ So there is some grist for the exemplarist's mill even here but not for the strong thesis that the only benefit conferred on sinful humans by Christ's Passion is an inspiring example of love. Scholars such as Rashdall and Franks are, of course, aware that Abelard says things which do not comport well with taking him to be a pure exemplarist, but they typically dismiss such embarrassing remarks. Thus, in a note, Rashdall concedes that "it must be admitted that Abelard sometimes shows a tendency to relapse into views hardly consistent with this position."²⁹ And when Franks encounters evidence that undermines his contention that Abelard reduces the whole process of redemption to a single principle, his reply is that "if Abelard does in other places present views along different lines, and so himself controvert his own tendency to a simplification of doctrine, this need not prevent our recognizing that this tendency exists."³⁰ Grensted provides a more balanced assessment. After citing the last sentence of the famous passage quoted and another passage which expresses a similar thought, he concludes that they represent "an attempt to set the ethical, manward, aspect of Atonement in a

²⁶ Buytaert, p. 153, lines 992–1000. (my translation).

²⁷ I have pressed this objection against Anselm's account of the Atonement in Philip L. Quinn, "Christian Atonement and Kantian Justification," *Faith and Philosophy*, 3 (1986): 440–62 and against Aquinas's account in Quinn, "Aquinas on Atonement".

²⁸ L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), p. 109.

²⁹ Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement*, p. 363.

³⁰ Franks, *The Work of Christ*, p. 148.

primary and not in a secondary place.”³¹ It does seem fair to say that the dominant motif in Abelard’s account is the power of love in us through Christ’s Passion to transform us both by freeing us from slavery to sin and, more important, by winning for us the positive Christian liberty to do all things out of love for God. Godward aspects of Atonement, such as paying a debt of punishment owed to divine retributive justice, are relegated to distinctly subordinate roles in Abelard’s account. But they are not altogether absent, and Rashdall is simply mistaken in claiming that any kind of substitutionary or expiatory atonement is explicitly denied. On the contrary, as we have seen, substitutionary atonement is explicitly affirmed.

In terms of the taxonomy I have proposed, it thus seems best to classify Abelard as a hierarchical pluralist. Like Aquinas, he offers an account of the Atonement that has a dominant motif to which others are subordinated. But unlike Aquinas, for whom satisfaction for sin is the principal theme, Abelard proposes to make a love that transforms motive and character in redeemed humans the heart of the matter. Abelard’s views were fiercely denounced by Bernard of Clairvaux and condemned by the church of his day. So it will be worth our while to look into the question of whether they, or modifications of them that are recognizably Abelardian in spirit, are theologically and philosophically defensible. It is to this question that I now turn my attention.

3. IS IT ILL-DISGUISED PELAGIANISM?

Rashdall is far from being the first to take Abelard’s views on the Atonement to be exemplarist. Although he did not put it in these terms, Bernard clearly interpreted Abelard in this way. But while exemplarism pleases Rashdall, it horrified Bernard. In a passage of considerable rhetorical power in his letter to Innocent II, Bernard thunders against Abelard’s account of the Atonement: “He holds and argues that it must be reduced just to this, that by His life and teaching He handed down to men a pattern of life, that by His suffering and death He set up a standard of love. Did He then teach righteousness and not bestow it; reveal love and not infuse it; and so return to his own place?”³² And later on in the letter he remarks with what strikes me as a touch of sarcasm: “If Christ’s benefit consisted only in the display of good works, it remains but to say that Adam only harmed us by the display of sin.”³³ But, though Bernard was an ecclesiastical administrator and politician of genius, and a formidable mystical theologian, he was far from being a fair-minded philosophical critic. As Grensted acknowledges,

³¹ Grensted, *A Short History*, p. 105.

³² Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus ad Innocentium II Pontificem contra quaedam capitula errorum Abaelardi*, quoted in Grensted, *A Short History*, p. 106.

³³ *Ibid.*

Abelard's "extremest statements were taken as representative of his whole position and were even exaggerated by Bernard's rhetoric."³⁴ Grensted maintains, however, that Bernard had put his finger on a real weakness in Abelard's position: a Pelagian tendency, which, if pressed to its logical conclusion, must belittle both the sin of humans and the grace of God and fail to appreciate both the solidarity of humankind in sin and the solidarity of the redeemed in Christ. If it were true that the sin of our first parents is no more than a bad example their descendants can freely imitate or shun, then it would seem that we no more need redemption from a fallen state of bondage to sin than they did in their prelapsarian state. By the same token, if it were true that Christ confers on us no more than the benefit of a good example we can freely follow or reject, then it would seem that whether we are justified in the sight of God is something wholly within our power to determine. So the Pelagian danger Bernard fears is that Abelard has rendered Christ's atoning work unnecessary for our salvation. On such a view, we are in principle capable of earning worthiness of salvation on our own.

Yet according to Richard Weingart, whose book on Abelard's soteriology is the most detailed recent treatment of the topic in English, it cannot be repeated too often that Abelard is no Pelagian. "Although he denies that Christ's work is one of appeasement or substitution," Weingart contends, "he never moves to the other extreme of presenting the atonement as nothing more than an inducement for man to effect his own salvation."³⁵ And there are texts in the *Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans* in which Abelard explicitly denies that it is within the unaided power of mere humans in the postlapsarian state to make themselves worthy of salvation. In commenting on Romans 7:25, Abelard affirms that our redemption is "thanks to God, that is, not the law, not our own powers, not any merits, but a divine benefit of grace conferred on us through Jesus, that is, the savior of the world."³⁶ Nor does the famous passage I have quoted at length provide unequivocal evidential support for Bernard's charge that Abelard is committed to Pelagianism. Consider, for example, its third sentence. The Latin goes as follows: "Iustior quoque, id est amplius Deum diligens, quisque fit post passionem Christi quam ante, quia amplius in amorem accendit completum beneficium quam speratum." Those words can, I suppose, be read in a way that speaks, as the translation I quoted does, of everyone becoming more righteous after the Passion than before because a realized gift inspires greater love than one merely hoped for. But Rashdall himself offers a different translation. It goes as follows: "Every man *is* also *made* juster, that is to say, *becomes* more loving to the Lord after the passion of Christ than he was before, because a benefit actually received kindles the soul into love more than one merely hoped for" (my

³⁴ Grensted, *A Short History*, p. 107.

³⁵ Richard E. Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love: A Critical Analysis of the Soteriology of Peter Abailard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 150.

³⁶ Buytaert, p. 210, lines 779–81 (my translation).

emphasis).³⁷ Noticing that there is some oddity in the fact that Rashdall uses both “made” and “becomes” to translate the word *fit*, once used and not repeated, Taylor asks: “Why not translate *fit* as ‘is made’ in both cases?”³⁸ If we adopt the suggestion implicit in this rhetorical question, the result is this: ‘Every man *is* also *made* juster, that is to say, *is made* more loving to the Lord after the passion of Christ than he was before, because a benefit actually received kindles the soul into love more than one merely hoped for.’ And this translation, which speaks of everyone being made more loving because a received benefit kindles love more than one merely hoped for, resists being interpreted in a way that supports attributing Pelagian tendencies to Abelard. Hence, even if it is granted that the famous passage considered in isolation permits a reading that supports the charge of Pelagian tendencies, it does not follow and it is far from clear that it is best read in this way once contextual factors are brought to bear on interpreting it. And surely a factor that should be given appreciable weight is Abelard’s explicit claim that we are saved, not by our own powers, but through a benefit of grace conferred on us through Christ.

As I see it, then, the import of the famous passage is to some extent indeterminate. By itself it does not answer such questions as these: By what mechanism does the love that is in us through Christ’s Passion get implanted in us? How precisely are we made or do we become more just or righteous after Christ’s Passion? And what exactly is the process by which the benefit of Christ’s Passion operates to inspire or kindle love in us? Because Abelard’s thought does not return clear answers to these questions, interpreters can reasonably disagree about whether it commits Abelard to Pelagian views or tends to do so. I doubt that further exegetical work on this passage would yield a conclusive resolution of those disagreements. But because the principle of charity requires us not to attribute inconsistency to a thinker of Abelard’s stature if we can help doing so, I think it is best to read it in a way that harmonizes with Abelard’s explicit denials of Pelagian views in other passages and so to interpret it in a manner that does not clinch the case for Bernard’s charge that Abelard is a Pelagian. If, as Grensted says, Bernard has identified a real weakness in Abelard’s position, it is the relatively harmless flaw of having an incomplete account of how the love manifested in Christ’s Passion works upon the human heart and hence of not having said enough to preclude purely exemplarist or Pelagian readings. But it may well be, as Taylor claims, that Abelard considers love to be “a spiritual force exerted by the lover on the beloved, and, in a responsive heart, setting up a reflex, which tends to become permanent.”³⁹ Such a conception of the transformative power of love could, perhaps, partly explain the efficacy of Christ’s Passion. If it is Abelard’s,

³⁷ Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement*, p. 358.

³⁸ Taylor, “Was Abelard an Exemplarist?” p. 211.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

however, he has not succeeded in making it clear either to friends such as Rashdall or to foes such as Bernard.

We may conclude that Abelard's account of the Atonement is neither as attractive as admirers such as Rashdall contend nor as unattractive as critics such as Bernard maintain. When the famous passage is interpreted in the light of its context, it offers no firm support for the conclusion that Abelard is either an exemplarist or a Pelagian, though it does suggest tendencies in these directions. Yet it did introduce a fresh motif into medieval discussion of the effects of Christ's life, suffering, and death, and it continues to speak with considerable power to some Christians in our own times. So it seems to me worthwhile to develop that motif with an eye to seeing whether it could play an important role in an account of the Atonement that would appeal to contemporary Christians. I devote the final section of this essay to a somewhat speculative sketch of one way in which such development might proceed.

4. TOWARD A CONSTRUCTIVE ABELARDIAN CONTRIBUTION

My suggestion is that what Abelard has to contribute to our thinking about the Atonement is the idea that divine love, made manifest throughout the life of Christ but especially in his suffering and dying, has the power to transform human sinners, if they cooperate, in ways that fit them for everlasting life in intimate union with God. But before I begin to elaborate on this suggestion, I need to issue two disclaimers in order to head off potential misunderstandings. First, I am not henceforth claiming that Abelard actually held the views I am going to recommend. Although they are inspired by the famous passage and, I hope, faithful to its spirit, my aim in setting them forth is to make a contribution to philosophical theology rather than to textual exegesis. Second, I do not claim that the motif of transformative divine love is the only idea that can help us appreciate the Atonement. I am attracted to the view that the Atonement is a mystery not to be fully fathomed by human understanding but best grasped in terms of a plurality of metaphors and models. So I am willing to entertain the hypothesis, shared by Anselm and Aquinas, that it functions in some manner to persuade God to remit a debt of punishment human sinners owe but cannot by themselves pay.⁴⁰ But I do not think that such legalistic considerations are the heart of the matter or should be allowed to dominate our understanding of the Atonement. Abelard strikes me as being on target in emphasizing the interior transformations wrought in sinners by God's love for them, for I am of the opinion that Christian reflection on Christ's atoning work

⁴⁰ In Quinn, "Aquinas on Atonement", I try to illustrate by means of a fable how such persuasion might work (pp. 174–5).

should be rooted in a lively sense of what God has graciously done in us. And this leads me to favor a conception of the Atonement like Abelard's in which other motifs are subordinated to the theme of the transformative power of divine love.

In order to make it quite clear, as Abelard in the famous passage does not succeed in doing, that this power exceeds any merely human example's power to inspire, it is important to insist that the relation between the operations of divine love and those of merely human love is not identity but analogy of some sort. To be sure, ordinary human love has some transformative power, and that is why the analogy shows promise of being useful in soteriology. Contemplation of the lives and deeds of saintly people such as Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa can contribute causally to making us better persons. But if we assume that examples of this kind operate in influencing beliefs and desires wholly within a natural order of causes, we should then deny that this is the only way in which divine love can operate in influencing us in order to avoid the reductionistic implications of exemplarism. We should instead affirm that divine love also operates outside the natural order, within what theologians call the order of grace, to produce changes in us. On such a view, the love of God for us exhibited in the life of Christ is a good example to imitate, but it is not merely an example. Above and beyond its exemplary value, there is in it a surplus of mysterious causal efficacy that no merely human love possesses. And the operation of divine love in that supernatural mode is a causally necessary condition of there being implanted or kindled in us the kind of responsive love of God that, as Abelard supposes, enables us to do all things out of love and so to conquer the motives that would otherwise keep us enslaved to sin.

By insisting that this supernatural operation of divine love in us is causally necessary for fallen humans to act out of love in a way that grounds God's gracious bestowal of righteousness on them, an Abelardian account of the Atonement can avoid the danger of falling into Pelagianism. What is to be shunned is a view according to which fallen humans have it within their power to perform works that will justify them in the eyes of God apart from a divine assistance that goes beyond God's ordinary conserving activity. So if being a person for whom it is in character to act out of love is a large part of what freedom from bondage to sin involves, we should not suppose that becoming such a person is an accomplishment within the reach of the unaided powers of postlapsarian humans. A vexed theological question is whether this operation of divine love is a causally sufficient condition for transforming the personalities of fallen humans in such a way that they habitually act from responsive love. No doubt divine love could, if God so chose, work such a transformation because it is powerful enough to overwhelm the resistance of a stubbornly recalcitrant human will. But I am inclined to think that God does not in fact act in this way; instead he refrains from making the pressure of his love irresistible in order to leave room for a free human response to it. So I would say that the causal efficacy of supernatural divine love, though not by itself sufficient to work such

transformations in the fallen human character, is a non-redundant part of any condition that is sufficient for this purpose. Thus we may come close to agreeing with Bernard by saying that God makes an essential causal contribution to the presence of love in us, and we may say that God infuses love into us and bestows righteousness upon us, provided it is understood that this is not a deterministic mechanical process and that we are free to reject these gracious divine gifts.

Finally, lest the merely exemplary power of love exhibited throughout the life of Christ and particularly in his suffering unto death be decoupled from the supernatural divine love that is necessary to transform the fallen human personality, an Abelardian account of the Atonement must insist that this supernatural transformative love somehow operates through Christ's life and especially through the Passion. I take it that this is a contingent fact; God could have used some other channel to make his transforming love available to a humanity ravaged by sin. But perhaps, as Aquinas claims, it was peculiarly fitting, for reasons we humans are unlikely to be able to comprehend fully in this life at least, that such love come to us through Christ's suffering rather than in some other way.⁴¹ If so, there is an answer to Abelard's question about why Christ endured insults, scourgings and spittings, and finally a bitter and disgraceful death in terms of the appropriateness of this mode of access to divine love for members of our species, even if we do not know precisely what that answer is. Is Christ the exclusive channel through which transformative divine love comes to fallen humanity? If so, this is another contingent fact about how divine providence works. However, there is no good reason to deny that providence has arranged things in this fashion provided no human who could benefit from such love is excluded from access to it. It would, I think, be unfair and so unworthy of a perfectly good being to limit access to the benefits of transforming love to the members of a particular empirical church in a world like ours in which some who might respond positively to that love have, through no fault of their own, no chance to be members of the church in question. For all I know, however, God has made his transformative love available to all fallen humans, Christian and non-Christian alike, through Christ, though of course non-Christians who benefit from it will not, at least in this life, have true beliefs about the channel through which this gift comes to them if this is the case.

It might be objected that it is empirically implausible to suppose that the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth have had such an influence on subsequent history. If he had never lived, the human condition would now not be much different from what it actually is because other inspiring examples of love would have had approximately the same good effects. My response to this objection is skeptical. According to another scenario, the human condition would now be very much worse than it actually is if Jesus had never lived because fallen human nature

⁴¹ Aquinas, *ST* III, Q. 1, A. 2.

would have been progressively enfeebled by an increasing burden of sin. I doubt that empirical information about the actual course of history by itself supports the counterfactual that underlies the objection rather than the rival counterfactual that I have set forth. Such empirical information together with certain background assumptions does lend differential support to the objection's counterfactual, but that information together with traditional Christian beliefs about original sin lends differential support to my rival counterfactual. In short, empirical information about the actual course of history alone does not settle the controversy about how much of a difference the life and death of Jesus have made to human history because such information by itself is insufficient to render plausible any particular view of what the subsequent course of history would have been like in the absence of those events.

It is no accident that the Abelardian account of transformative divine love I have been sketching bears some resemblance to accounts of the operation of grace formulated by other medieval theologians. But many contemporary Christians do not find these highly metaphysical theories of grace credible. Speaking of Aquinas, Eleonore Stump admits that, because his account of grace is complex and problematic, the part of his theory of the Atonement that depends on it "may leave us cold and uncomprehending."⁴² Part of the difficulty, as she diagnoses it, is that "he explains in medieval metaphysical terms what we would be more inclined to explain in psychological terms."⁴³ It seems to me that one of the advantages of the Abelardian emphasis on love in giving an account of the Atonement is precisely that it provides a model of psychological transformation rooted in ordinary human experience that can be analogically extended to divine action. Many of us have actually experienced the power of human love to influence our characters for the better by provoking a responsive love, and some of us have experienced the power of meditation on the example of love displayed in the life and death of Christ to contribute to bringing about such psychological improvements in us. So it is a genuine aid to understanding to think of the way in which God acts on us to help make us better in terms of a divine love that has among its effects making a contribution to implanting a loving disposition in us. Indeed, it does not appear to me farfetched to claim that we can in certain circumstances experience the pressure of this divine love on us in a manner analogous to the way in which we experience the force of human love. And this analogy may help us grasp the point Karl Rahner is getting at in maintaining that God's grace is experiential.⁴⁴

We would do well not to underestimate the depth of the human longing to be able to love God. As a televangelist character puts it in a novel by Sarah Shankman, "*Of course* you think I'm a shuck. But that's because you don't come

⁴² Stump, "Atonement according to Aquinas", p. 77.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, *Fundamentals of Christian Faith*, trans. W. V. Dych (New York: Crossroads, 1982), p. 55.

from what I come from. Don't know what I know. Don't know the mingy tight pinched little lives people like me grow up with. Don't know how much we'd love to *love* the Lord."⁴⁵ An Abelardian account of the Atonement is directly responsive to this longing because it focuses our attention on the way in which divine love contributes to kindling in us love to him who has shown us such grace that no greater can be found and thereby to making us better persons. And even traditional Christians who cannot accept Rashdall's attempt to reduce the role of God in soteriology to providing in Christ an example of love can endorse his claim that Abelard "sees that God can only be supposed to forgive by making the sinner better."⁴⁶ Or, if that rather casual remark seems not to leave enough room for free human response to the gracious initiative of divine love, the insight he attributes to Abelard might be more precisely formulated by saying that God can only be supposed to reconcile sinners to himself by contributing in an important way to making them better persons. Whatever we may think about other motifs such as penal substitution that show up in Abelard's comments on Paul's Epistle to the Romans and arguably have some role to play in a complete account of the Atonement, it is, I believe, safe to agree with Rashdall that there is nothing unintelligible, arbitrary, illogical, or immoral about the thought that the main thing the Atonement does to benefit us is to give us access to a divine love on whose power we must rely in order to become better persons.

My conclusion is that an account along the Abelardian lines I have been laying out shows a lot of promise of enriching our understanding of the mystery of the Atonement. Part of that promise stems from the fact that such an account's emphasis on the inward transformation of sinners would be in tune with the modern inclination to explain the Atonement largely in terms of its psychological effects. Another part derives from the fact that such an account would, by virtue of highlighting the efficacy of the Atonement in improving the characters of sinners, be better balanced than satisfaction-theoretic rivals, such as those proposed by Anselm and Aquinas, which are dominated by legalistic concerns with paying debts of honor or punishment. It is not merely that, as Gunton suggests, we should not deny the subjective implications or psychological consequences of the Atonement. I would urge that we must in an Abelardian spirit acknowledge that the transformation of the sinful human subject wrought in large part by divine love channeled to us through Christ is the most important purpose the Atonement serves. Abelard's legacy is that this motif should dominate our thinking when we reflect on the benefits graciously made available to us through Christ's life, suffering, and death.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Sarah Shankman, *Now Let's Talk of Graves* (New York: Pocket Books, 1990), p. 139.

⁴⁶ Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement*, p. 359.

⁴⁷ An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Claremont Graduate School's Twelfth Annual Philosophy of Religion Conference. I am grateful to Richard Rice, my commentator on that occasion, and to Marcia Colish, Alfred J. Freddoso, John Hick, James Wm. McClendon, and Eleonore Stump for helpful advice and criticism.

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