

Trinity Monotheism

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1. Trinity Monotheism and the Challenge of Polytheism

According to the Athanasian Creed, “the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God,” that is, “each Person by himself is God”; nevertheless, “they are not three Gods, but one God.” These words imply that the Father is *not a different* God from the Son, and if not a different God, then the *same* God. The Athanasian Creed also affirms that “there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.” These words imply that the Father is a *different* Person from the Son, and if a different Person, then *not the same* Person. I take it that the Athanasian Creed here expresses two claims that are partially constitutive of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Sameness Claim: the Father is the same God as the Son.

The Difference Claim: the Father is not the same Person as the Son.

These two claims arguably contradict each other. If we suppose that the relation of sameness that is affirmed in the Sameness Claim is absolute identity, then the Sameness Claim is an abbreviation of the following conjunction: The Father has the property of being a God, the Son has the property of being a God, and

The Person Identity Claim: the Father is absolutely identical with the Son.

In like fashion, if we suppose that the relation of sameness that is denied in the Difference Claim is absolute identity (and if we suppose that the Father is a Person and that the Son is a Person, two other claims partially constitutive of the doctrine of the Trinity), then the Difference Claim is an abbreviation of the following conjunction: The Father has the property of being a Person, the Son has the property of being a Person, and the denial of the Person Identity Claim, namely, the Father is not absolutely identical with the

Son. Thus, given our suppositions, the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim cannot both be true; their conjunction entails a contradiction.

How might the Trinitarian respond? One option is to deny that the relation of sameness that is affirmed in the Sameness Claim and that is denied in the Difference Claim is absolute identity.¹ Another option is to insist that, properly understood, the conjunction of the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim does not lead to contradiction, even if the relation of sameness expressed in both claims is absolute identity. This is the route taken by J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig.²

According to Moreland and Craig, if the Sameness Claim is to be read in a coherent fashion, it must be interpreted as a way of ascribing the same property or office of divinity to each of the Father and the Son.³ In that case, the Sameness Claim should be interpreted as a conjunction of the following three claims: (1) the Father is divine, (2) the Son is divine, and (3)

The Property Identity Claim: the property of divinity that the Father instantiates is absolutely identical with the property of divinity that the Son instantiates.

The Father and the Son share in common the very same property in virtue of which each of them is divine; it is false that the Father exemplifies one property of divinity and the Son exemplifies another property of divinity. There exists exactly one property of divinity that each of the Persons exemplifies. In contrast with the Sameness Claim understood as implying the Person Identity Claim, the Sameness Claim understood as implying the Property Identity Claim does not imply that the Father is absolutely identical with the

¹ In what follows, I will assume that the relation of sameness in question is absolute identity. My assumption should not be mistaken for endorsement, however. Peter van Inwagen has constructed a logic of relative identity, and in that logic the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim are consistent both with themselves and a host of other orthodox Trinitarian and incarnational claims. See his “And Yet They are not Three Gods but One God,” and “Not by Confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person,” in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1995). Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea have defined a relation of numerical sameness with neither absolute nor relative identity, and it, for all I know, might be the relation in virtue of which the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim are compatible. See their “Material Constitution and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* (forthcoming).

² My first interaction with the Trinitarianism of Moreland and Craig was through Craig’s “Toward a Sensible Social Trinitarianism,” presented at the Seventy-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Society for the Philosophy of Religion, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, March 2003, which I commented on at that meeting. Since then, I learned that the paper was excerpted from chapter 29, in their enormous, coauthored *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 575–96.

³ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 590–1.

Son. Interpreting the Sameness Claim in this way avoids the contradiction argued for above.

Unfortunately, reading the Sameness Claim as implying the Property Identity Claim arguably contradicts another claim that is partially constitutive of the doctrine of the Trinity, namely

Monotheism: there exists exactly one God.

Here is why. First, the Difference Claim entails that the Father is not absolutely identical with the Son. Second, the Sameness Claim, understood as implying the Property Identity Claim, entails both that the Father has the property of being divine and that the Son has the property of being divine. But, third, necessarily, for any x and y , if x is not absolutely identical with y but x has the property of being divine and y has the property of being divine, then x is a God and y is a God and x is not the same God as y . It follows that the Father is a God and the Son is a God, and the Father is not the same God as the Son. Fourthly, necessarily, for any x and y , if x is a God and y is a God and x is not the same God as y , then there are two Gods. Thus, if we read the Sameness Claim as implying the Property Identity Claim, then, given the Difference Claim, it is false that there exists exactly one God—which contradicts Monotheism. Let us call the argument of this paragraph the “Challenge of Polytheism.”

2. *Trinity Monotheism Displayed*

Moreland’s and Craig’s response to the Challenge of Polytheism displays three tenets central to their version of Social Trinitarianism, what they call *Trinity Monotheism*.⁴ To gain a clearer view of these tenets and to highlight their (alleged) utility, I will display in section 2 how they can be used to respond to three worries, beginning with the Challenge of Polytheism.

2.1. *The Challenge of Polytheism*

Moreland and Craig propose to meet the Challenge of Polytheism by denying its third premise, namely the following:

Necessarily, for any x and y , if x is not absolutely identical with y but x has the property of being divine and y has the property of being divine, then x is a God and y is a God and x is not the same God as y .

⁴ Brian Leftow coined the term. See “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen Davis; Daniel Kendall, SJ; Gerald O’Collins, SJ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203–50.

According to Moreland and Craig, while the Persons are each divine and absolutely distinct, they are not distinct *Gods*. For on their view, there exists exactly one God, namely the Trinity “as a whole,” and no Person is absolutely identical with the Trinity “as a whole.” Rather, each Person is a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole.” Still, each of the Persons is “fully and unambiguously” divine. It is just that they are not divine in the way in which the Trinity “as a whole” is divine; they are fully divine in another, second way. Consequently, there is a way of being divine which is such that each Person is divine in that way and one’s being divine in that way does not imply that one is a God.

Here we see at work all three of the core tenets of Moreland’s and Craig’s Trinity Monotheism:

The First Tenet: the Trinity “as a whole” is absolutely identical with God.

The Second Tenet: there is more than one way to be fully divine.

The Composition Claim: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose the Trinity “as a whole,” that is, the Persons are proper parts of the Trinity “as a whole.”

Of course, whether Moreland and Craig can meet the Challenge of Polytheism by deploying the core tenets of their Trinity Monotheism depends on whether those tenets are possibly true and consistent with orthodoxy, both individually and jointly. One might worry that the Second Tenet is especially dubious. How could one be fully divine without exemplifying the nature of divinity?

Moreland and Craig offer a distinctively Christian answer to this question.⁵ They say that according to Christian orthodoxy God is triune; moreover, God does not just happen to be triune. Consequently, the property of *being triune* is an essential property of God, in which case it is a property of the divine nature.⁶ But if the property of being triune is a property of the divine nature, then none of the Persons exemplifies the divine nature; for none of them exemplifies the property of being triune. But the Persons *are* fully divine, and hence there must be a second way of being fully divine, a way other than that of exemplifying the divine nature. This second way is the way of being a proper part of something that exemplifies the divine nature, that is, the Trinity “as a whole.” To help us see how it could be that

⁵ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 590.

⁶ The inference this sentence contains is fallacious. The individual who is God can have a property essentially even if that property is not partly constitutive of the divine nature. Compare: my cat, Socrates, can have a property essentially even if that property is not partially constitutive of the feline nature.

the Persons are fully divine simply in virtue of being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole,” they ask us to 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 is just 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 seem undeniable that there is some sort of part-whole relation obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.⁷

The upshot, then, is this. There are not four Gods but just one because the divine nature includes the property of being triune and there exists exactly one item which is such that it exemplifies that property, namely the Trinity “as a whole.” Still, each of the three Persons is fully divine since each is a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole.” So one way to be divine is to instantiate the divine nature; this is how the Trinity “as a whole” gets to be divine. A second way to be divine is to be a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole”; this is how each of the Persons gets to be divine. The cat analogy is supposed to help us see how this latter claim could be true.

2.2. The Diminished Divinity Problem

One might worry that this response to the Challenge of Polytheism comes at a steep price: the divinity of the Persons has been diminished. For if the Persons do not instantiate the divine nature and they are divine in the way in which a cat’s skeleton is feline, then they are no more God-like than a feline skeleton is cat-like, which is to say they are hardly God-like at all. You might put the point this way: if the sense in which the Persons are “divine” approximates the sense in which a cat’s skeleton is “feline,” then the sense in which the Persons are “divine” approximates the sense in which any one of the properties that are constitutive of full divinity is “divine” or the sense in which a divine plan is “divine.” But the property of being, say, worthy of worship, although doubtless divine in this sense, lacks what Christians have had in mind when they affirm the fully divinity of each of the Persons; similarly for, say, God’s plan to redeem Israel. Neither the prop-

⁷ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 591.

erty of being worthy of worship nor God's plan to redeem Israel exemplify those properties that Christians have had in mind when they affirm the full divinity of each of the Persons, even though the property of being worthy of worship and God's plan to redeem Israel are both "fully and unambiguously" divine. Apparently, one can be fully divine—in this second sense of "divine"—while lacking the traditional attributes of God. It appears, then, that the Challenge of Polytheism is met at the expense of the "Diminished Divinity Problem," as I will call it. That is a price no Christian should pay.

Moreland and Craig argue that "[f]ar from downgrading the divinity of the persons, such an account [as theirs] 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.⁸

So, according to Moreland and Craig, being divine by virtue of being a proper part of the Trinity does not diminish the divinity of the Persons, contrary to the Diminished Divinity Problem. Each of the Persons has those properties traditional theists typically associate with divinity, for example, omnipotence, omniscience, unsurpassable moral goodness, necessity, aseity, eternity.

2.3. The Composition Question

Moreland and Craig rightly observe that "[a]ll of this leaves us still wondering . . . how three persons could be parts of the same being, rather than 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?"⁹

This is an excellent question: how exactly is it that the three Persons compose the Trinity "as a whole"? Let us call it the Composition Question.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 593.

Moreland and Craig suggest that the answer can be seen by reflecting on an analogy. "In Greco-Roman mythology," they write,

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 exemplifying 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." . . . 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 tri-personal 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.¹⁰

One might initially worry that the Trinity "as a whole" does not have a physical body, and consequently that the analogy fails to illuminate how the Persons can compose the Trinity "as a whole." Alive to this worry, Moreland and Craig write:

[S]uppose 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 which 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?¹¹

To answer this question, Moreland and Craig dispense with the Cerberus analogy and answer it with reference to their view regarding the nature of the soul:

The question of what makes several parts constitute a single object rather than distinct objects is a difficult one. But in this case perhaps

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

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 (see chap. 11). Souls come in a spectrum of varying capacities and faculties. Higher animals such as chimpanzees and dolphins possess souls much 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 which 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 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 which supports three persons, just as our individual beings support one person. Such a model of Trinity Monotheism seems to give a clear sense to the classical formula "three persons in one substance."¹²

What should we make of these passages that are directed at the Composition Question, especially the last passage? Several preliminary observations are in order.

First, with respect to the Cerberus analogy, it becomes clear that Moreland and Craig meant to say something like this: Cerberus is a single physical organism, and Rover, Bowser, and Spike compose Cerberus *because* Cerberus, that very physical organism, *supports* Rover, Bowser, and Spike; analogously, God is a single immaterial substance, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose God *because* God, that very immaterial substance, *supports* the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Second, Moreland and Craig identify themselves as proponents of a substance metaphysic whose broad contours they describe as Aristotelian.¹³ This metaphysic distinguishes individual (or primary) substances or beings from other sorts of things. According to Moreland and Craig, among the immaterial individual substances are souls, which earlier (in chapter 11 of

¹² Ibid., 593–4. The reference to chapter 11 is a reference to chapter 11 of their book.

¹³ Ibid., 215ff.

¹⁴ Ibid., 232. Whether Moreland and Craig think that there are no immaterial individual substances other than souls is none of my concern here.

their book) they identified as “mental substances that have mental properties.”¹⁴ Each *soul*—that is, each *mental* substance—is absolutely identical with a particular *immaterial* individual substance. Now, according to Moreland and Craig, the Persons are persons, but no Person is absolutely identical with an individual substance. There is no individual substance *x* such that the Father is absolutely identical with *x*, even though there is some person *y* such that the Father is absolutely identical with *y*. And the same goes for the Son and the Holy Spirit. Apparently, then, a person can fail to be absolutely identical with an individual substance.

On first reading, this claim is liable to induce an incredulous stare. After all, in the Aristotelian tradition, persons are paradigmatic individual substances. *You*, for example, are an individual substance, as am *I*. Perhaps Moreland and Craig do not wish to deny that *we* are absolutely identical with individual substances. Indeed, it appears that they do not.¹⁵ It appears that they only wish to deny that the three Persons are absolutely identical with individual substances.¹⁶

Third, Moreland’s and Craig’s contention that the Father is absolutely identical with a particular person but not with a particular individual substance is mirrored by another thesis, namely that God is absolutely identical with a particular individual substance but not with a particular person. God has three persons as proper parts, but God, the Trinity “as a whole,” is not a person. Strictly speaking, using personal pronouns to refer to God presupposes, on their view, the *false* proposition that God is a person. And here I do not mean by “person” anything distinctively modern or Cartesian or anything else (allegedly) objectionable. I have in mind the concept of whatever is, strictly and literally, the referent of a personal pronoun.¹⁷ Even in that minimalist sense of “person,” the suggestion that the Christian God is not a person is most unusual, to say the least.

¹⁵ Direct awareness through introspection of one’s self, they write, “shows that a person is not identical to his or her body in whole or in part or to one’s experiences, but rather is the thing that has them. In short, one is a mental substance,” that is, a soul (239); “[t]he clearest and most obvious case of a substance is in our own self-acquaintance” (300). Part 3 of *Philosophical Foundations* is peppered with the implication that each human soul we are acquainted with is—in the sense of absolute identity—a human person.

¹⁶ This seems to be implied by the sentence, “[w]e naturally equate a rational soul with a person, since the human souls with which we are acquainted are persons.” Of course, by their lights, this “natural equation” is *false*. We make the equation because each *human* soul we are familiar with is absolutely identical with a particular person, but the universal equation of souls and persons turns out to be a hasty generalization. In particular, the equation is false since, on their view, the Father is absolutely identical with a particular person but not with a particular individual substance. Likewise for the Son and the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ Cf. Peter van Inwagen, “Not by Confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person,” and Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 263–5.

Fourth, according to Moreland's and Craig's Trinity Monotheism, an individual substance can *be* three persons. God is such a substance, they say, "God, though one soul [that is, one immaterial individual substance], would not *be* one person but three persons" (emphasis added). This is an unfortunate choice of words since they might be mistaken for the claim that God is absolutely identical with the three Persons. This claim is false since the relation of absolute identity is a one-one relation, not one-many; moreover, it is incompatible with the conjunction of the First Tenet and the Composition Claim.¹⁸ I suggest that when Moreland and Craig tell us that "God, though one soul, would not be one person but three," they mean that, although the Trinity "as a whole" is absolutely identical with a particular soul, It *has as proper parts* three absolutely distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

Although this is not the place to spell out the details, what has been said so far seems to pose some difficulties for the internal consistency of the Moreland-Craig take on the philosophical foundations for a Christian worldview, at least as those foundations are expressed in their book by that title. One difficulty is that it appears that none of the arguments for substance dualism that they offer is valid. After all, the Father has each mental property Moreland and Craig ascribe to me, each one of which, they say, is

¹⁸ Argument: the conjunction of

(1) God is absolutely identical with the three Persons

and

(2) The Trinity "as a whole" is absolutely identical with God,

which is the First Tenet, entails by the transitivity of absolute identity that

(3) The Trinity "as a whole" is absolutely identical with the three Persons.

But recall the composition claim:

(4) The three Persons compose the Trinity "as a whole."

Using the term "the *ps*" as a plural variable which collectively refers to the *ps* and not to any object which has the *ps* as its parts or members,

(5) Necessarily, for any *ps* and for any thing *x*, if the *ps* compose *x*, then *x* is not absolutely identical with the *ps*.

The denial of (3) follows from (4) and (5).

¹⁹ Moreland and Craig think that there is an "is" of composition, as exhibited in sentences like "Socrates is flesh and bone." See Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 174–5. Whether there is an "is" of composition or not, the fact that they *think* there is adds some reason to suppose that they mean to say that God *is composed* of the Persons when they say that God *is* the Persons.

²⁰ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 238–43. They have in mind properties such as a direct awareness of the self, the irreducibility of the first-person perspective, the capacity to retain identity through change, freedom, and the unity of consciousness. My point is that even if these properties can only be had by immaterial *persons*, it does not follow that they can only be had by immaterial *individual substances*—provided, of course, that there can be immaterial persons that are not immaterial individual substances, which, according to them, there can.

sufficient for my being a mental substance. But if a person can have each of those properties without being a mental substance, as is the case with the Father, then how does the fact that I have them preclude the possibility that I am a person that is not a mental substance? It looks like my having those mental properties does not guarantee that I am a mental substance, a soul.²⁰ Another difficulty is that none of the Persons has libertarian freedom since, according to Moreland and Craig, none of the Persons is a genuine substance and “a necessary condition for libertarian freedom is that the agent be a genuine substance in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas.”²¹ Of course, it also seems that only persons can have libertarian freedom. If so, then, since God is not a person on their view, God does not have libertarian freedom either. But if neither the Persons nor the Trinity “as a whole” has libertarian freedom, then nothing in the vicinity of the Christian God has libertarian freedom. A third difficulty, which is more central to Trinitarian concerns, is that their argument for a plurality of persons within the Godhead relies on the premise that “creation is a result of God’s free will.”²² But, again, according to their Trinity Monotheism, God is not a person; thus, God has no free will. Finally, their Trinity Monotheism seems to be incompatible with their theory of the Incarnation since, according to their Trinity Monotheism, the Son is *not* an individual substance but, on their theory of the Incarnation, the Son *is* an individual substance. For, they tell us, on their theory of the Incarnation, the Logos, which is absolutely identical with the Son, “completes the individual human nature of Christ by furnishing it with a rational soul, which is the Logos himself.”²³ It cannot be the case that a particular rational soul *is* the Logos himself while the Logos himself *is not* a particular soul at all.

Although I would like to report that Moreland’s and Craig’s Trinity Monotheism is a smashing success, I am afraid that I must instead register several worries. In section 3, I emphasize worries with respect to what they have to say about the Persons; in section 4, I emphasize worries with respect to what they have to say about God.

3. Worries about the Persons

As we saw above, according to Moreland and Craig, the Trinity “as a whole” is divine because it exemplifies the divine nature. Each Person of the Trinity is also divine, but not because each exemplifies the divine nature; rather, each Person is divine because each is a proper part of the Trinity “as

²¹ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 279–80.

²² *Ibid.*, 594.

²³ *Ibid.*, 610.

a whole.” To explain how this could be, they offered the cat analogy. A cat is fully feline because it exemplifies the feline nature. The skeleton of a cat is also fully feline but not because it exemplifies the feline nature; rather, the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part of a cat. In the present section, I will first express three worries about the cat analogy as an analogy. Then, having granted the analogy for the sake of argument, I will urge that Moreland’s and Craig’s part-whole explanation of how the Persons could be fully divine fails. Finally, I will argue that the Persons are individual substances, given the conditions that Moreland and Craig themselves lay down.

3.1. *The Cat Analogy*

Moreland and Craig assert that the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part of a cat. This implies that being a proper part of a cat is sufficient for being feline. This implication is false, however. First, since organs can be transplanted from a member of one species into a member of another species, something that is not feline can nevertheless be a proper part of a cat. Being a proper part of a cat, therefore, is not sufficient for being feline. Second, since the part-whole relation is transitive, it follows that if being a proper part of a cat is sufficient for being feline, then each of the atoms and molecules of a cat are feline—which is false.

These two worries are minor, perhaps. Instead of saying that the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part of a cat, Moreland and Craig can say that the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part *that is distinctive of the species*.²⁴

My third worry about the cat analogy is major. According to Moreland and Craig, *there are two ways of being feline*. What could be meant by these words? Only one of two things, so far as I can see:

The Cat Analogy (1) There is one and only one property of felinity whereby something can be fully feline, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being a cat and the second way is by being a proper part of a cat.

The Cat Analogy (2) Words of the form “*x* is feline” are ambiguous between the attribution of two distinct properties, each of which is a way of being fully feline: the first property is the property of being a cat and

²⁴ I owe this qualification to Bill Craig. In what follows, I will leave it tacit. We might not be satisfied with the qualification. After all, as Mike Rea pointed out to me, it is not at all clear what it is for a proper part to be *distinctive* of a species.

the second property is the property of being a proper part of a cat.

Which of these do Moreland and Craig have in mind? I think the text can be read either way, but the first version seems to me the least likely candidate since it fits least well with their attempt to meet the Challenge of Polytheism and to solve the Diminished Divinity Problem. Let me explain.

The cat analogy is supposed to illuminate how it could be that there are two ways to be (fully) divine, which is the Second Tenet of Trinity Monotheism. But if version one is the right way to understand the cat analogy, then we must understand the Second Tenet in like fashion:

The Second Tenet (1) There is one and only one property of divinity whereby something can be fully divine, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being the Trinity “as a whole” and the second way is by being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole.”

Note that version one of the Second Tenet implies that the three Persons exemplify exactly the same property of divinity that the Trinity “as a whole” exemplifies, that the property by virtue of which each of the Persons is divine is absolutely identical with the property by virtue of which the Trinity “as a whole” is divine, and that there is no other property by virtue of which something can be divine.

From a Trinitarian point of view, the theological implications of Trinity Monotheism combined with version one of the Second Tenet are odious in the extreme. For Trinitarianism insists that each of the Persons is divine, and Trinity Monotheism insists that the composite formed by the Persons—the Trinity “as a whole”—is divine. There are (at least) four items, then, that are divine. This much Moreland and Craig affirm. But, given version one of the Second Tenet, the property in virtue of which each of those four things is divine is exactly the same property, and there is no other property by virtue of which the Persons or the Trinity “as a whole” are each divine. So, given version one of the Second Tenet, the rationale Moreland and Craig offered for thinking that there is exactly one God vanishes. True, the Trinity “as a whole” exemplifies the property of being composed of the Persons while no Person exemplifies it. But, given version one of the Second Tenet, the divine nature cannot include that property since there is one and only one complex property whereby a thing can be divine and each of the Persons exemplifies that property but each of them lacks the property of being composed of the Persons. So, given version one of the Second Tenet, there are four items that exemplify the divine nature and hence there are four Gods. If, however, contrary to what I just argued, the divine nature *does* include the property of

being composed of the Persons, then none of the Persons is divine since, given version one of the Second Tenet, there is no other nature whereby a thing can be divine. The upshot is that a version of Trinity Monotheism wedded to the first version of the cat analogy either fails to meet the Challenge of Polytheism or fails to solve the Diminished Divinity Problem.

So if Trinity Monotheism is to be guided by the cat analogy, it must be guided by the second version, which, to repeat, is this:

The Cat Analogy (2) Words of the form “ x is feline” are ambiguous between the attribution of two distinct properties, each of which is a way of being fully feline: the first property is the property of being a cat and the second property is the property of being a proper part of a cat.

Of course, the property of being a cat is just the nature of a cat, a natural kind essence if you will. That way of being feline is the heartwarmingly mysterious way of being feline we are familiar with. But what is this allegedly second way of being fully feline, this distinct, second property of felinity? Moreland and Craig tell us that it is a property exemplified by something that is a proper part of a cat, something that is a proper part of a thing that exemplifies the first, familiar property, the property of being a cat.²⁵ But is there really any such second property of felinity? Let us look into the matter more closely.

Consider my cat, Socrates. Suppose I assert that

(1) Socrates is feline.

The truth-maker for (1) is the fact that

(TM1) There exists a property C such that C is the nature of a cat, and there exists an x such that x is Socrates, and x instantiates C .

Now suppose I assert that

(2) Socrates’s skeleton is feline.

If the second version of the cat analogy is true, then the truth-maker for (2) is the fact that

(TM2) There exists a property C such that C is the nature of a cat, *and there exists a property C^* such that C^* is a way of being “fully*

²⁵ What if a cat dies and the soft tissue of its corpse rots, dries, and blows away, but its skeleton remains pretty much intact. Is the skeleton feline? It seems so, but it is not if Moreland and Craig are correct; they say a cat’s DNA and skeleton are feline because “they *are* parts of a cat” (my emphasis, note the tense), and in this case, the skeleton is no longer a proper part of a cat, even though it once was. Moreland and Craig can say (if they would like; some Aristotelian substance theorists do not) that a skeleton is feline just in case it is, *or was*, a proper part of a cat. Another case: can God create a feline skeleton *ex nihilo*, without it ever being a proper part of a cat? If so, we need to fiddle with their account some more. Consider it done, if you think it needs doing. For the sake of expository simplicity, I am going to stick with the simple present tense version in what follows.

and unambiguously feline” and C^* is not C , and there exists an x such that x is Socrates and x instantiates C , and there exists a y such that y is Socrates’s skeleton and y instantiates C^* , and y is a proper part of x .

What should we think of this implication of the second version of the cat analogy? I think we should reject it. The reason is this. Suppose I assert that

(3) Socrates’s skeleton is a part of a cat.

The truth-maker for (3) is the fact that

(TM3) There exists a property C such that C is the nature of a cat, and there exists an x such that x is Socrates and x instantiates C , and there exists a y such that y is Socrates’s skeleton, and y is a proper part of x .

But the truth-maker for (3) is the truth-maker for (2), as evidenced by the fact that what I intended to convey by (2) would be just as well conveyed by (3), and vice versa.²⁶ So the truth-maker for (2) is *not* the truth-maker that is implied by the second version of the cat analogy, with its extra ontological commitment to a second property of felinity (as indicated by the italicized portions of [2]). That is, the second version of the cat analogy is false.

Moreland and Craig wanted us to see that the Persons could be divine without exemplifying the divine nature. Toward this end, they asserted that there are two ways to be divine, *fully* divine. To help us see their meaning, they argued that just as the skeleton of a cat is fully feline without being a cat but rather in virtue of being a proper part of a cat, so each of the Persons is fully divine without being a God but rather in virtue of being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole.” I argued that there are two ways to understand

²⁶ As you try to think of counterexamples to this premise, keep in mind that I am assuming the simple present tense version of Moreland’s and Craig’s claim that *a cat’s DNA and skeleton are fully and unambiguously feline because “they are parts of a cat.”* See the previous note. So construct your counterexamples in accordance with that charitable assumption.

²⁷ Frances Howard-Snyder insists that there is a third version of the cat analogy lurking here. Recall that, strictly speaking, a whole is a part of itself. To be sure, it is not a *proper* part of itself, but it is, as they say, an *improper* part of itself. A cat, therefore, is a part—an improper part—of a cat. Of course, Socrates’s skeleton is also a part of a cat, namely Socrates himself. So Socrates and his skeleton share a certain feature: being a part of a cat.

Thus, we have

The Cat Analogy (3) There is one and only one property of felinity whereby something can be fully feline, namely being a part of a cat, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being a proper part of a cat and the second way is by being an improper part of a cat.

Dale Tuggy insists that there is a fourth version of the cat analogy:

The Cat Analogy (4) There is one and only one way to be feline, namely by exemplifying the nature of a cat; but “feline” is predicable of items that are not feline, e.g., certain proper parts of cats.

Version three inherits some of the difficulties mentioned in the text. Version four implies that the Persons are not divine even if “divinity” is predicable of them.

I am indebted to Jeff Jordan for putting me onto this worry about the cat analogy, and to Frances Howard-Snyder and Hud Hudson for helping me to work it out properly.

what they said about cats; the first way, when applied to the Persons, leads to theological unacceptabilities, while the second way is simply false. The cat analogy, therefore, fails to help us see how the Persons could be divine without exemplifying the divine nature.²⁷

3.2. *The Diminished Divinity Problem, Again*

Suppose that, contrary to what I have just argued, the cat analogy helps us see how the Second Tenet of Trinity Monotheism could be true. That is, suppose it helps us see how there could be two ways of being fully divine. Then one of the following claims is true:

The Second Tenet (1) There is one and only one property of divinity whereby something can be fully divine, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being the Trinity “as a whole” and the second way is by being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole.”

The Second Tenet (2) Words of the form “ x is divine” are ambiguous between the attribution of two distinct properties, each of which is a way of being fully divine: the first property is the property of being the Trinity “as a whole” and the second property is the property of being a proper part of the Trinity.

I argued in section 3.1 that version one of the Second Tenet leads to theological unacceptabilities. I have nothing more to say about it. In the remainder of section 3, I will focus on version two.

In order to keep track of things, let us name the first property referred to in version two, that is, the property of divinity which is exemplified by the Trinity “as a whole,” *divinity*₁, and let us name the second property, that is, the property of divinity which is exemplified by the parts of the Trinity, *divinity*₂. I can best get at my worries about version two of the Second Tenet by reminding us that, according to Moreland and Craig, just as the skeleton of a cat is *fully* feline, so the three Persons are *fully* divine. They are not interested in defending some watered-down sort of divinity of the Persons, they are interested in defending the real traditional article. As we have seen, however, according to Moreland and Craig, the Persons are not fully divine in the traditional way, that is, by exemplifying the divine nature. Rather, according to them, the Persons are fully divine because they are proper parts of the Trinity “as a whole.” Given version two of the Second Tenet, this explanation of the divinity of the Persons is to be understood explicitly as follows: the reason why the Persons are fully divine is that they are *divine*₂, and the reason they are *divine*₂ is that they are proper parts of the Trinity “as

a whole.” Thus, the reason why the Persons are fully divine is that they are proper parts of the Trinity “as a whole.”

Now, I take it that one way in which this explanation can fail is if something’s being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” is *logically insufficient* for its being fully divine. A second way it can fail is if it *sheds no light* on how it can be that the Persons are fully divine despite their failure to exemplify the divine nature. With this in mind, consider the following two objections.

First, the part-whole relation is transitive. Thus, if the Father is a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole,” then the proper parts of the Father are proper parts of the Trinity “as a whole.” Here are three proper parts of the Father: the Father’s cognitive faculty, the Father’s affective faculty, and the Father’s conative faculty. Consider any one them, for example, the Father’s affective faculty. Although it is a proper part of the Father and hence a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole,” and although it is no doubt impressive in many respects, *it*—the Father’s affective faculty—fails to exemplify the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and unsurpassable moral goodness; moreover, *it*—the Father’s affective faculty—is not worthy of worship. These properties, however, or at least some of them, are partially constitutive of what it is to be fully divine. It is false, therefore, that something’s being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” is logically sufficient for its being fully divine.

How might Moreland and Craig respond to this objection? Perhaps they will say that the Father has no proper parts. Their talk of the “rational faculties” of the Persons was never intended to be strictly and literally true; rather, the strict and literal truth of the matter is that the Father has various states, capacities, and powers, and these are not proper parts of the things that have them. One might think that this response fails since, even if the Father has no proper parts, it is nevertheless a consequence of Moreland’s and Craig’s position that if He did, they would be omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, and worship-worthy; however, this counterpossible proposition is false.²⁸

Another response is to agree that being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” is logically insufficient for full divinity but add that being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” *and a person* is logically sufficient. Thus, even if the Father had proper parts, they would not have the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, unsurpassable goodness, and worship-worthiness (unless they were persons, which they would not be). This leads to what I think is a more telling, second objection.

²⁸ I take it that counterpossibles can, in principle, be false. Depending on how sympathetic you are to false counterpossibles, you will find this objection convincing. Thanks to Mike Rea for helping me to see how to put this point.

Imagine what it would be like for someone alien to Trinitarianism to hear for the first time that God is composed of three distinct Persons. Our alien might naturally wonder whether the Persons are fully divine and, if so, how that could be, especially after he is told that the Persons do not exemplify the divine nature. If he were answered that the Persons are, indeed, fully divine, because they are proper parts of God, he would rightly remain puzzled. After all, he might say, something's being a proper part of God would not logically suffice for its being fully divine; would it not have to be a proper part that was *a person* as well? "Well, of course!" we might reply; we were taking it for granted that the Persons are persons. Our alien might still remain puzzled, however. After all, he might say, something is a person just in case it has powers of rationality, volition, and so on that are sufficient for personhood, but something's being a proper part of God that possesses any old powers of rationality, and so forth, is not logically sufficient for its being fully divine. Would it not have to possess the *appropriate* powers of rationality, and so forth, those that are logically sufficient for being fully divine? "Well, of course!" we might reply; we were taking it for granted that the Persons were persons who had the appropriate powers of rationality, and so on.

What should our alien make of this answer? Two things, I suggest. First, he should concede that something's *being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole" that possesses powers of rationality, volition, and so forth, that are logically sufficient for full divinity* is, indeed, logically sufficient for its being fully divine. Second, he should be unsatisfied with this answer. He asked not only *whether* the Persons are fully divine but also, if so, *how that could be*, given that they do not exemplify the divine nature. The new explanans sheds no light on that question; moreover, the part of it that has to do with being a proper part is explanatorily idle. It is idle because the appeal to being a proper part of God plays no role at all in the new explanans. What is doing the explaining (if anything at all) is the appeal to each Person possessing the relevant powers. The new explanans sheds no light because the explanans that was originally given has been expanded so that it merely asserts that the Persons are fully divine.

The upshot is that, along with the cat analogy itself, Moreland's and Craig's more direct part-whole explanation of how the Persons could be fully divine fails. The Diminished Divinity Problem remains on the table; the Second Tenet of Trinity Monotheism remains shrouded in obscurity, hardly the hallmark of a useful model of the consistency of Trinitarianism.

3.3. *Are the Persons Individual Substances?*

According to Moreland and Craig, although the Persons are persons, they are not individual substances. The mode of being that the Persons enjoy is not as basic or primary or fundamental as the mode of being that God and cats and dogs enjoy.

One worry about this view of the Persons is best seen by way of a question: if the Persons are not individual substances, then to what category do they belong? Aristotle divided the category of substance into primary or individual substances such as you and me, and secondary substances such as the genus animal and the species humankind. Secondary substances, however, are universals; presumably, Moreland and Craig do not mean to say that each Person is absolutely identical with a universal. So what does that leave us in the way of categories to which the Persons might belong? On the traditional Aristotelian list of the categories, we are left with the nine categories of quantity, quality, a relative, a place, a time, a position, a having, a doing, and a being affected. But none of the Persons is absolutely identical to such “things.” Once you rule out the category of individual substance which is the natural home of persons, the pickings appear to be quite slim. Instead of exploring the options here, I want to focus on the following question: given Moreland’s and Craig’s own broadly Aristotelian account of what an individual substance is, are the Persons individual substances?

Moreland and Craig introduce their readers to individual substances with these words: “It would seem that properties do, in fact exist and that they are genuine universals. However, reality involves a lot more than properties; there are also individual things like cats and dogs that have properties. Philosophers call such individuals substances. . . .”²⁹

To be sure, they note, there have been different conceptions of substance throughout the ages, but, they say, “the most central idea . . . is one which takes living organisms—individual human beings, butterflies, dogs, oak trees—as the paradigm cases.”³⁰ And that conception is the one that they denominate “substance,” or, more accurately, “individual substance.” They go on to list what they regard as several features of “the traditional notion of substance,” which they affirm, and which they appear to offer as individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being an individual substance.³¹

- (1) An individual substance has properties, but nothing has an individual substance in the sense of having a property.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 215–19.

- (2) The properties and capacities of an individual substance, as well as its proper parts if it has any, form a tight unity. Each individual substance has a nature (essence) by virtue of which it is the kind of thing that it is and without which it would neither exist nor have the basic structure or capacities that it has. If it is a whole composed of parts, its parts are what they are in virtue of playing the role that they play in the whole; apart from the whole, they cease to exist.
- (3) An individual substance remains the same through change.
- (4) An individual substance grows and develops in a law-like fashion in accordance with its nature, and it has in its nature a tendency to realize various potentialities contained therein.
- (5) An individual substance has something which individuates it from other individual substances that share its nature, something in virtue of which it is a this.

Now, consider the Father. Clearly enough, He has properties, but nothing has Him in the sense of having properties; thus, (1) is satisfied. To be sure, on the view of Moreland and Craig, God *has* the Father in some sense—namely, in the way in which a whole has its proper parts—but it certainly does not follow that God has the property of being the Father. Does the Father have a nature (essence)? Does He belong to a (super)natural kind? Moreland and Craig insist that no Person exemplifies the divine nature since the divine nature includes the property of being triune and no Person has that property, but they also insist that each Person is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, unsurpassably morally good, and the like. I see no recourse here but to say that, on their view, each Person exemplifies the nature of a *divine person*; this nature distinguishes the Persons from God, that is, the Trinity “as a whole,” since God, on their view, is not a person at all. Moreover, it is in virtue of exemplifying the nature of a divine person that the Father is the sort of thing that He is and has the fundamental features and capacities that He has; if He did not exemplify this nature, He would not exist. Finally, being a divine person is a tight unity; all and only divine persons fall into the class of divine persons. Condition (2) is satisfied.

Given the satisfaction of conditions (1) and (2), condition (5) is satisfied. Whatever the details about the “individuating component,” the Father is *this* divine person and not one of *the others*. As for condition (3), the Father remains the same through change in His contingent relations to creatures, for example, their conversion and apostasy. As for contingent nonrelational features: if He has any, then presumably *wanting me to stop cussing so much* and *feeling saddened by my cussing so much* are two that He has these days, properties He lacked before I was ten years old and will lack upon my complete sanctification (I hope).

Condition (4) is the oddball. While organisms, the paradigms of individual substances, may well grow and develop, thereby lawfully realizing their potential as the sorts of things they are, only on views which share too much in common with process theology can we say the same thing of God—which is another way of saying (4) is not a strict necessary condition on being an individual substance. Thus, the Persons meet the conditions for being individual substances just as God does, contrary to the Trinitarian model Moreland and Craig propose.³²

Why does this matter? Why cannot Moreland and Craig just grant that the Persons are individual substances? Why did they insist otherwise in the first place? So far as I can discern, they insist that the Persons are not individual substances because they want their model to be a clear instance of “the classical formula,” namely “three persons in one substance,” where “substance” means individual substance and where the preposition “in” is taken seriously.³³ Perhaps they are thinking that if the Persons are individual substances, then their model posits four individual substances, not just one, as the classical formula requires. *If* the classical formula does indeed require that there be only one individual substance in the neighborhood (and I am not saying that it does), then, since by their own accounting the Persons are distinct individual substances, their model is indeed incompatible with the classical formula that they seek to exemplify.

Thus far I have focused on worries about Moreland’s and Craig’s account of the Persons. I now turn to worries in the region of their treatment of God.

4. Worries about the Trinity “as a Whole”

Recall that, according to Moreland and Craig, God is absolutely identical with the Trinity “as a whole,” a composite individual substance that has as proper parts the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Trinity “as a whole” is the only item that exemplifies the divine nature; the Persons do not. Finally, with respect to the Composition Question—the question of how it is that the Persons compose God—Moreland and Craig answer that just as Cerberus is a single physical organism, and Rover, Bowser, and Spike compose him *because* he, that very physical organism, *supports* Rover, Bowser, and Spike, so God is a single immaterial substance, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose God *because* God, that very immaterial substance, *supports* the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

³² If (4) is a strict necessary condition and God satisfies it, then I see no reason why each of the Persons does not also.

³³ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 594.

In section 4.1, I focus on worries about their explanation of how the Persons compose the Trinity “as a whole.” In 4.2, I focus on worries about the fact that the Trinity “as a whole” is not, on their view, a person. In 4.3, I express worries about whether Trinity Monotheism is a version of Monotheism in name only.

4.1. *Composing and “Supporting”*

According to Moreland and Craig, the Persons compose the Trinity “as a whole” because the Trinity “as a whole” *supports* the Persons. To help us see how this can be, they give us two analogies; unfortunately, neither analogy serves its purpose.

The first analogy is the Cerberus analogy. I have two worries about it. First of all, the story of Cerberus is unfit as an analogy. That is because it serves as an analogy only if there is exactly one dog in the story, exactly one item that exemplifies the canine nature, just as there is exactly one God in Trinity Monotheism, exactly one item that exemplifies the divine nature. But it is false that there is exactly one dog in the story. There are exactly three partially overlapping dogs, each of which instantiates the canine nature, and not a single one of them is Cerberus. Cerberus (if there is such a thing) is an unnatural composite whose proper parts are three dogs, Rover, Bowser, and Spike; as such, Cerberus—Rover, Bowser, and Spike “as a whole,” you might say—is not a dog at all. Think of it this way. Consider a particular pair of Siamese twins that share vital organs below the neck, call them “Jack” and “Jill”; let them compose a whole called “Twinsy.” Jack and Jill are distinct humans even if they are partially overlapping. Jack and Jill each exemplify human nature, but Twinsy, whatever it is, does not exemplify human nature. Since there is no salient difference between the (false) claim that Twinsy is a human and the claim that Cerberus is a dog, we should infer that Cerberus is not a dog.

If the story of Cerberus provides an analogy for anything in the vicinity of Social Trinitarianism, it provides an analogy for a Social Trinitarianism according to which there are three exemplifications of the divine nature, that is, a version that implies that there are three Gods, and that the Trinity “as a whole”—if there is such a composite thing—does not exemplify the divine nature at all. This is not Trinity Monotheism; it is the Social Trinitarianism of Richard Swinburne, which is avowedly tritheistic.³⁴

One might object that although Jack and Jill are distinct *persons*, there exists exactly one human being in their vicinity, albeit an unusual one with

³⁴ Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter 8.

two heads, namely Twinsky. It is because we confuse human beings and persons that we tend to think that Jack and Jill are distinct human beings. The same goes for Cerberus, *mutatis mutandis*. It is because we confuse dogs and “canine” persons that we tend to think that Rover, Bowser, and Spike are distinct dogs. Thus, although Rover, Bowser, and Spike are distinct “canine” persons, there exists exactly one dog in their vicinity, albeit an unusual dog with three heads, namely Cerberus.

What should we make of this objection? I submit that two considerations weigh heavily against it. First, it implies that a single dog can have three distinct, complete, independently functioning brains. This implication seems false since brains individuate mammals; three brains, three mammals. But if there exist three mammals, then it seems there exist three dogs. Second, the objection under discussion implies that if Rover, Bowser, and Spike were surgically separated so that each was supplied with functioning vital organs simultaneously resulting in three viable mammals, three *new dogs* would come into existence by the end of the surgery. But what would have happened to Rover, Bowser, and Spike by surgery’s end? Clearly, they did not go out of existence (compare Jack and Jill, *mutatis mutandis*). And none of them is absolutely identical with any of the new dogs since, *ex hypothesi*, none of them were dogs prior to the surgery. Thus, either (a) there exist after the surgery three pairs of *completely* overlapping “canine” persons, one member of each pair being a new dog and the other not being a dog at all, or else (b) there exist after the surgery three new dogs none of which is a “canine” person but each of which is an individual substance that exemplifies the canine nature. Alternatively, contrary to what I asserted above, (c) there exists after the surgery just one spatially scattered dog, namely Cerberus, and three surgically separated “canine” persons none of which is a dog: Rover, Bowser, and Spike. None of these options seems nearly as plausible as the simple suggestion that each of Rover, Bowser, and Spike were dogs prior to and after surgery.³⁵

My second worry about the Cerberus analogy is that even if Moreland and Craig were right about Cerberus, we have not the foggiest idea what they are saying. That is because even if Cerberus “supports” Rover, Bowser, and Spike, and even if that suffices for them to compose Cerberus, we have no idea what relation Moreland and Craig mean to refer to by the word “support.” I will develop this point shortly.

The second analogy makes matters worse. They tell us that, on their view, “God would therefore be one being which supports three persons, just as our individual beings support one person.” But what is it, even vaguely, for my “individual being,” that is, the individual substance that is absolutely identical with me, to “support one person”? Well, presumably, the “one

³⁵ Thanks to Joshua Spencer and Hud Hudson for making me alive to worries about Cerberus.

person” in question is the particular person with which I am absolutely identical. But in that case, by the transitivity of identity, the particular individual substance in question (me) is absolutely identical with the particular person in question (me). It follows by Leibniz’s Law that if my “individual being” supports “one person,” namely me, then that person, the one I am absolutely identical with, supports my “individual being.” The supports relation turns out to be symmetric.

This has disastrous consequences for Trinity Monotheism. Return to the claim that “God . . . would be one being which supports three persons.” If we are to understand this claim “just as” we are to understand the claim that “our individual beings support one another,” and if we are to understand the latter in the natural way suggested in the last paragraph, then God, that single composite item, is absolutely identical with the three Persons, which is impossible.

To avoid this disaster, Moreland and Craig must say either that I am not absolutely identical with a particular individual substance, or else that the “one person” in question is not the particular person with whom I am absolutely identical. Neither option looks especially promising for those who are wedded to the Aristotelian claim that human persons are paradigmatic individual substances.

So, with the slightest bit of pressure, both the Cerberus analogy and the individual human person analogy buckle.

My second general worry in this area is that Moreland’s and Craig’s use of “supports” has no precedence in the English language. Suppose that there is some x , y , and z such that x *supports* y and z . Why should we infer that, *therefore*, y and z *compose* x ? The foundation of my house *supports* its walls, floors, roof and so on, but they do not *compose* the foundation. The worry here is intensified by the fact that there is no use of “support” and “compose” in ordinary parlance such that supporting entails composing, as a look at the *Oxford English Dictionary* will reveal. Without, at a minimum, a stipulative definition in terms that we can understand, we have no idea what they mean by “supports” and hence we have no idea what they mean by the claim that the Persons compose the Trinity “as a whole” because the latter *supports* the former; we have no idea what proposition is expressed, we have no idea what model is proposed for our consideration.³⁶

³⁶ I sometimes worry that with all this talk of “supporting,” Moreland and Craig mean to endorse a Lockean rather than an Aristotelian theory of substance. According to Locke, and in agreement with Aristotle, properties cannot subsist on their own; there are no free-floating properties. A substance, says Locke, is that which underlies or supports properties. It is that in which properties inhere. Perhaps Moreland and Craig mean to suggest that God is the substance—the Lockean bare substratum—that supports the Persons, those discrete sets of powers sufficient for personhood. If so, then we have been misled by the talk about the Persons *composing* God, since a Lockean bare substratum cannot be a composite. Indeed, it is not clear what

4.2. *The Divinity of the Trinity “as a Whole”*

Moreland and Craig say that each of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is absolutely identical with a distinct person, and they say that the Trinity “as a whole” is absolutely identical with a particular immaterial mental substance, that is, a soul. In order to avoid saying that there are *four* persons in the vicinity of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity “as a whole”—they say that, although the Trinity “as a whole” is absolutely identical with a particular soul, the Trinity “as a whole” is *not* absolutely identical with a particular person. There is, therefore, at least one soul that is not absolutely identical with a particular person. In that case, the Trinity “as a whole”—that is, God, on their view—is not absolutely identical with a particular person. God, that is, is not a person. Consequently, God is not “equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination.” That is not to say that God does not have proper parts that are thus equipped; it is only to say that God itself lacks the equipment. There are several implications we might draw out here. Let me mention three.

First, recall the opening words of Genesis: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Creation is an intentional act. An intentional act cannot be performed by anything but a person. God is not a person, say Moreland and Craig. Thus, if they are right, God did not create the heavens and the earth; indeed, He could not have done so. The first sentence of the Bible expresses a necessary falsehood. Not a good start!

To be sure, a composite can “borrow” properties from its proper parts, under certain conditions. In that case, can we not say that since the Son created the heavens and the earth, God did—given that the Son is a proper part of God? After all, if I am a composite of flesh and blood, then *I* am bleeding if *my arm* is bleeding.

This objection fails. For there can be no “lending” of a property unless the borrower is antecedently the sort of thing that can have it. Unless I am the sort of thing that can bleed—a flesh and blood composite, say—then it is strictly and literally *false* that if my arm is bleeding I am bleeding. For example, if I am absolutely identical with an immaterial mental substance,

a Lockean bare substratum is; he called it a “something I know not what.” To make matters worse, Locke’s theory implies that an individual substance is something that, in itself, has no properties whatsoever; that is why it is called a *bare* substratum. Unfortunately, that is hardly intelligible. But, even if it were, it would not be of use to Moreland and Craig. They want to say God is absolutely identical with a particular immaterial substance and that God exemplifies the divine nature; but, if the substance in question is a Lockean bare substratum, then God, in itself, has no properties, and hence no essential properties; as such, it does not exemplify any nature, divine or otherwise. Like all theists, Trinitarians will naturally resist this suggestion.

then it is just plain false that I am bleeding if my arm is bleeding. Immaterial things are not the sorts of things that can bleed. Obviously, an immaterial thing might *possess* something—say, a body made of flesh and blood—such that if a part of it bleeds then it too bleeds. But x 's possessing a y which is such that if a part of y is F then y is F no more implies that x is F than does my possessing a tire whose tube can be inflated to 3,000 psi implies that I can be inflated to 3,000 psi. Equally obviously, we all use the words “I am bleeding” in certain circumstances, and we do so without a thought as to whether we are the sorts of things that can bleed. But this fact about our usage no more implies that we express truths when we use “I am bleeding” than our use of “The sun moved behind the trees” implies that we express a truth when we use it.

The upshot is that, as in banking, borrowing and lending in ontology have their conditions and limits. Unless God is antecedently the sort of thing that can act intentionally—that is, unless God is a person—God cannot borrow the property of creating the heavens and the earth from the Son. God cannot create. Of course, creation of the heavens and the earth is only one act attributed to God in the biblical texts. All other acts attributed to God will likewise turn out to be, strictly and literally, false.

Second, Judeo-Christian anthropology will have to be remade. No other text is more central to an understanding of what we are than this: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.” While no image has all of the features of that of which it is an image, the tradition has it that a human being is made in the image of God insofar as he or she “is equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination,” to borrow an apt description from Moreland and Craig. Unfortunately, this is the description of a *person*, which they say God is not. In what respects, then, are we made in the image of an individual substance that is void of all personal attributes?

Third, recall that, according to Moreland and Craig, the Persons do not exemplify the divine nature, only the Trinity “as a whole” enjoys that privilege. Thus, on their view, the Trinity “as a whole” at once exemplifies the divine nature and yet *fails* to be a person. This is not a high view of the divine nature, I take it; indeed, it is abysmally low. To see just how low it is, consider what sorts of properties theists typically associate with the divine nature that cannot be exemplified by something that fails to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination. Without going into the details, I

³⁷ An anonymous referee asserted that *every* model of the Trinity must say that God is not a person. So far as I can see, this assertion does little more than express the referee's myopic view of the options, not to mention his or her disregard for the plain sense of Scripture and tradition.

³⁸ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 591.

take it that the list includes noteworthy members such as omnipotence, omniscience, unsurpassable moral goodness, and worship-worthiness.³⁷

Moreland and Craig are not as forthcoming about this implication as they ought to be. On the only occasion they begin to address it, they tell us that “when we ascribe omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not making the Trinity a fourth person or agent. . . .” That is a good start. But look at how they continue the sentence: “rather, God has these properties because the persons do.”³⁸ God is not a person or agent, yet God is omnipotent, omniscient, and the like. What! If God is not a person or agent, then God does not know anything, cannot act, cannot choose, cannot be morally good, cannot be worthy of worship. This is the God of Moreland’s and Craig’s Trinity Monotheism.³⁹

4.3. Trinity “Monotheism” and Monotheism

Monotheists assert that there exists exactly one God. Moreland and Craig say that they assert *the same thing*. This is not the case, however. What they affirm when they use the words “there exists exactly one God” is not the same thing that monotheists affirm when they use those words.

When monotheists assert that there exists exactly one God, they affirm the existence of something of a certain sort, *a* God; they affirm the existence of something that belongs to a certain supernatural kind if you will, namely divinity. There exists exactly one of *those* things, they say; not many. The claim that there exists exactly one God cannot be understood unless the word “God” in that claim is a class or kind term and not a proper name. That is not to say that there is no use of “God” as a proper name; obviously, there is. It is only to say that when monotheists claim that there exists exactly one God, they are contrasting “one” with “many” and there is no grammatical sense to be made of “one God” in contrast with “many Gods” if “God” is being used as a proper name in both cases. Proper names do not take the plural; class terms do. So Monotheism is a thesis about Gods and the thesis is this: there is one and only one of them.

The point I want to make here is not merely a point of grammar; it is a point of history. There are no monotheists unless traditional Jews are monotheists, and when *they* assert that there exists exactly one God, they

³⁹ Note the fallacy in the text at page 591: “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” (emphasis added). The inference is valid only if God is the sort of thing that antecedently can have the properties that God’s proper parts have, and the denial of personhood and agency to God is exactly that which undercuts the validity of the inference from the Persons having maximal power and knowledge to God having those features.

affirm that there exists a certain number of Gods and the number is one. Moreover, traditional Christians agree with traditional Jews on this score. After all, when the early Christians were accused by their Jewish contemporaries of being polytheists, they responded by insisting that, *like their accusers*, they too affirmed that there exists exactly one God. They *agreed* with them. What they agreed to was what the Jews themselves believed, that there exists a certain number of Gods, and that that number is *one*. It is not an historical accident that the Athanasian Creed (ca. AD 500) affirms that “they are not three Gods, but one God” and that the Creeds of Nicea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381) begin with the words, “We believe in one God.”

The upshot here is that academic Trinitarians cannot mean whatever they like when they insist that they are monotheists. Grammar and history do not permit it, and this point applies to Trinity Monotheism as well, particularly the version of Trinity Monotheism put forward by Moreland and Craig.

Despite their good intentions, their version of Trinity Monotheism is not a version of Monotheism; the tenets of their position do not permit it. Monotheists disagree with them over what properties are included in the nature of a God. Moreland and Craig insist that the divine nature includes the property of being triune and that the divine nature lacks the property of being a person in the minimal sense. Monotheists insist that the divine nature does not include the property of being triune and they insist that the divine nature does include the property of being worthy of worship, which implies being a person in the minimal sense. Monotheists as diverse as Christians and Jews (not to mention Muslims) *agree* that there exists exactly one God, one instance of that supernatural sort of thing, *a* God. If nothing could be a God unless the nature it exemplified included the property of being triune and lacked the property of being a person, then Christians and

⁴⁰ It is important to see that nothing I have said here implies that the one and only thing that in fact exemplifies the divine nature lacks the essential property of *being triune*. Something can have an essential property and yet not have it in virtue of being the kind of thing that it is. Perhaps that is the case with the Christian God; indeed, it had better be if Christians are to be Monotheists.

The argument here applies with equal force to other attempts by Social Trinitarians to “cling to respectability as monotheists,” e.g., Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). Plantinga offers “three ways” in which Social Trinitarians can affirm that there exists exactly one God: (1) There exists exactly one God if “God” is used as “the peculiar designator of the Father,” as the one and only “font of divinity”; (2) there exists exactly one God if “God” is the proper name of “a set of excellent properties severally necessary and jointly sufficient for their possessor to be divine”; and (3) there exists exactly one God if “God” “is used as a designator of the . . . one divine family or monarchy or community, namely, the Holy Trinity itself.”

Jews would not be in agreement on this score. But they are. So, according to Monotheism, something can be a God without exemplifying a nature that includes the property of being triune and nothing can be a God without exemplifying a nature that includes the property of being a person. Either way, Moreland and Craig offer us a version of Trinity Monotheism that is *not* a version of Monotheism.⁴⁰

5. Conclusion

We began with a simple argument: the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim are inconsistent with each other. By way of response, Moreland and Craig suggested that we read the Sameness Claim as implying the Property Identity Claim, not the Person Identity Claim. That response, however, led to the Challenge of Polytheism, to which they responded by invoking their Trinity Monotheism. Unfortunately, their Trinity Monotheism—both on the periphery and at the core—has intolerable consequences for Trinitarianism, or so I have argued. If I am right, then the Challenge of Polytheism remains on the table for Trinity Monotheism; at any rate, I cannot see how Moreland's and Craig's version of Trinity Monotheism has removed it.⁴¹

⁴¹ Thanks to Ben Bradley, William Lane Craig, Frances Howard-Snyder, Hud Hudson, Jeff Jordan, William Kilborn, Shieva Kleinschmidt, Christian Lee, Brian Leftow, Michael Rea, Joshua Spencer, Dale Tuggy, and an anonymous referee for comments on predecessors of this paper.

