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COULD THERE BE MORE THAN ONE GOD?

Richard Swinburne

I understand by a God a person necessarily necessary, eternal, essentially bodiless, omnipresent, creator and sustainer of any world there may be, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and a source of moral obligation.¹ Although some religious thinkers have understood some of these predicates in rather different ways from others, it remains the case that, by and large, those who have worshipped one being during the last two thousand years have had somewhat similar understandings of what he is like captured (with all their possibilities for diversity of interpretation) by these predicates.

This was not a foolish understanding on the part of the worshipers because these predicates fit together in the sense that a being characterized by a property of almightiness, which I shall shortly describe, would necessarily have all the properties designated by these predicates (and conversely), at any rate as long as some of the predicates are taken in certain senses rather than others. If I am right in supposing that the predicates do thus fit together, that there is a God becomes a very simple claim and for that reason more likely to be true.² The supposition of God's existence is not then the supposition of the coinstantiation of an *ad hoc* jumble of properties. There is the good reason for understanding the divine predicates in those senses in which they do fit together, that the resulting God is more likely to exist than any other.

That some of the properties include others will be fairly evident. To be a person in the limited sense in which I am concerned with it is to have beliefs and to be able to perform intentional actions. God's being a person is therefore included in his being omniscient—knowing everything includes having beliefs about everything—and omnipotent—to be omnipotent is to be able to do everything in the sense of succeeding in doing it if you choose to, and that involves intentionality. To have a body is to acquire knowledge of the world and make a difference to it through one particular chunk of matter. An omnipotent and omniscient being would not be tied down to such a mode of causality and knowledge acquisition. He could have a body in that if he chose he could acquire as an additional mode of operation on the world and acquisition of knowledge about it, a body which was subject only to his will (and not to the will of a created individual) and provided beliefs only for him. But his body would give him no extra knowledge and power, and would be slough-offable at will. It is in



this sense that I understand his being essentially bodiless. I understand by an essentially bodiless being being omnipresent that he is able to exercise his power without intermediary at every place and that he has knowledge of what is happening at every place which does not depend on any intermediary.³ An omnipotent and omniscient being will have that sort of power and knowledge. He will also, if eternal, be the creator and sustainer of any world in the sense that any world which exists will exist because and as long as he permits it to do so—either because he himself sustains it, or because he permits some other being to do so. If it had a beginning, it will be he who created it or allowed some other being to do so. Given that the world and we who inhabit it depend so totally on him, he will (within limits) have the right to tell us to use the world which he has given us in certain ways, and his telling us will create for us the corresponding obligation. He will thus be a source of moral obligation. If he is perfectly good, he will not tell us to do what he does not have the right to tell us to do; and hence all that he tells us to do will be obligatory for us to do.

So the claim that there is a God boils down to the claim that there exists an individual who is perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, eternal, and necessary. I shall leave perfect goodness unanalyzed for the moment, returning to it later. 'Eternal' may be understood either as "everlasting" or as "timeless"; nothing turns on which understanding we take, for present purposes. Personally I think that the notion of a timeless person is incoherent, and so I will understand "eternal" as "everlasting"; but if the notion of a timeless person is coherent, my argument can be rephrased in terms of it. "Necessary" may be understood either as "metaphysically necessary" or as "logically necessary." By a being being "metaphysically necessary" at a time I understand his existence at that time being an ultimate brute fact about the universe, which because of the principles which govern how things are, could not but be (just as if there is no God on which their operation depends, the operation of the laws of nature is metaphysically necessary). Again, I think that the notion of a logically necessary person is incoherent, and so I will take "necessary" as "metaphysically necessary"; but if the notion of a logically necessary person is coherent, my argument can be rephrased in terms of it. It is normal to understand God being "omnipotent" as his being able to do anything logically possible; and that in turn must, I suggest, be understood not as his being able to do anything logically possible simpliciter, but as his being able to do anything logically possible, the doing of which is compatible with the world being as it is in any ways not logically possible to affect. So, if God is everlasting and is a being in time and if it is not logically possible that an agent affect the past (causes cannot follow their effects),⁴ then at any time the past is fixed and God can only do those actions which are compatible with it being as it is. For example, he cannot now kill my thirty-year-old son, because I don't have a thirty-year-old son, and nothing he

can do now can make it the case that I do.

God's omniscience has usually been understood as his knowledge of all true propositions. In my view, however, necessary omniscience in this sense cannot be combined with God's perfect freedom. For if God necessarily foreknew his future actions, let alone ours, they would not be free.⁵ For this reason I shall understand God's omniscience as his knowledge of everything not affectable by his will. Put oversimply, the past is subject to God's knowledge, the future to his will. This does not imply that God will predetermine all future states, only that he could, if he so chose.⁶ But, again, if a stronger notion of omniscience is compatible with his perfect freedom, my argument can be rephrased in terms of it. God's perfect freedom consists in his being subject to no causal influences in choosing how to act. He is subject to no influences either from without or from within which incline him to any degree to act this way rather than that—except that he sees any reasons there may be for acting this way rather than that.

I now introduce the notion of an almighty being as one who is pure limitless intentional power, in the following sense. He is ever acting intentionally; all his actions are intentional actions; he acts as he does because he means so to do. The power is pure in that nothing acts on him; he is perfectly free. It is limitless in that (within the laws of logic) all choices are available to him and are efficacious. In writing that he *is* such power, rather than that he *has* such power, I mean that such power is inseparable from him, and that all his properties derive from this power. Physicists have sometimes postulated as their ultimate entities, not so much things which exercise force, but centres of force characterized by no further properties. It is like this analogously with an almighty being. It is, in consequence, the nature of an almighty being to keep things in being, which belongs to him so inseparably that how all other things are depends on his currently⁷ sustaining power; they cannot even have the independence which would be involved in their existing now on their own because of his prior act. Intuitively, I suggest, this notion of pure limitless intentional power is a very simple one, the maximum degree of a kind of causality (known intimately to ourselves when we perform intentional actions).

An almighty being is clearly omnipotent and perfectly free. His power being inseparable from him, and being the ultimate source of how things are, he will be a necessary being. I stress that if there is an almighty being, what exists of metaphysical necessity is not some-almighty-being-or-other, but this one. If one said that it was necessary that there be a God and as a matter of contingent fact G_1 was that God, but it could have been G_2 instead, G_1 would not be an almighty being in my sense. Almightyness also entails omniscience, in my sense. For the choices for the future which are open to an almighty being are a function of how things have been in the past. An almighty being cannot bring about now the first earthquake ever to hit Sicily; the past history of Sicily constrains the choices

open to him. In order to choose what to do, he must know what he can do, and that means knowing everything about how the world is in the respects not subject to his will.

An almighty being will also be perfectly good, in a sense which needs careful spelling out. He acts intentionally, and that means that, as with any of us, whatever he does he believes is in some way good to do, there is some reason to do. But we human beings are subject to desire, to inclinations which pull us away from doing what we believe is overall good to do, let alone the best thing to do, into doing only what is, we believe, in some way a good thing to do. It may be what we believe is overall a bad thing to do (even a wrong thing, a breach of obligation). A perfectly free being is subject to no such inclinations, and so acts from reason alone. Taking all conjunctions of actions which an agent can do simultaneously as one action, then a perfectly free being will do (among the actions open to him at a time) no action which is, he believes, overall a bad action; if there is one, he will do that action which he believes the best one to do; or, if he believes that there are alternative best actions, he will do one of them.

I shall assume that there are truths in this area—some actions are overall bad, and some are overall good, and among the latter some are objectively better than other ones. (In calling this an assumption, I do not imply that I cannot argue for it,⁸ only that there is no time to do so here.) There are obligations to others, some of which arise from benefits received from others (we have obligations to our parents, our teachers, our country) and others which we undertake voluntarily (such as keeping promises and paying debts). In general, doing the best act involves fulfilling one's obligations first before undertaking supererogatory good acts. But there is a limit to obligations, and we can in general fulfill them all. But there is no limit to supererogatory goodness; we can go on and on doing more and more worthwhile acts, acts of benefiting others and creative acts (such as painting a picture, or composing a symphony, which may benefit no one apart from the agent). Insofar as an action is good, there is reason to do it; and there is overriding reason for doing the best action or one of the equal best actions. Insofar as an action is bad, there is reason not to do it; and insofar as overall it is bad, there is overriding reason not to do it. In general there is overriding reason not to do an action which is wrong (i.e., a breach of obligation). So an almighty being, who knows all such moral truths and is subject to no desire diverting him from doing the best action, will always do the best action—where there is one. And where there are many equal best actions, he will do one of them. The trouble is that for God so often not merely is there no best action; there is no equal best. Often the range of actions open to God is an infinite range of actions, each of which is inferior to some other action. Thus for any world of conscious agents which God could create *e nihilo*, there is, plausibly, a better one—e.g., one obtained by adding one more conscious agent (sufficiently distant

from the others not to crowd them). And so among the actions of creating conscious agents *e nihilo* there is no best. What goes for conscious agents goes also for creating inanimate things *e nihilo*. And no doubt, though I do not need to argue this here, for much else too, for the kinds of powers and knowledge he gives to things and for the length of days he keeps them in being. What will an omniscient and perfectly free being do in such a situation, knowing the worth of the actions open to him and diverted by no irrational desire from pursuing the good? He will do no action bad overall (any bad aspect will have to be outweighed by good aspects). He will do some good action, but it cannot be the best—because there is no best. However, I suggest, God's acting on reason leading to his pursuit of the best where there is a best will lead to his doing some action of a best kind, where there is a best kind of action but no best of that kind. Thus, suppose that the only actions open to God are actions of creating inanimate things, and actions of creating conscious agents (with or without inanimate things as well). There are an infinite number of possible actions in each category, but, plausibly, any action in the latter category is better than any action in the former category and better for a kind of reason—e.g., that it is not merely an act of creating but an act of creating an agent who himself can intentionally make a difference to things—which applies to all actions in the latter category and none in the former. And suppose that the difference among actions in the latter category is a purely quantitative one—the number of agents created. In that case, I suggest, there is overriding reason to do an action in the latter category; and so an almighty being will do one. Insofar, then, as there is a best act, or an equal best act, or a best kind of act, God by his very nature will do it or one of them (as applicable), and his so doing we may call an essential act; it follows from his nature. Insofar as he acts within that framework, his perfect goodness does not dictate what he will do; and any acts within the framework we may call acts of will. God's perfect goodness is a matter of his doing all essential acts and no overall bad act. Because God's goodness thus limits his capacity for choice, there will be many things which God can do, in the sense that he will do them if he chooses; but which he cannot choose to do.⁹ I shall say that he can do such things in the compatibilist sense of power, but not in the absolute sense of power. It would surely be a bad act for an almighty being to commit suicide, for being that without which nothing can exist, he would make it impossible for anything to exist ever again. So being perfectly good, an almighty being cannot (in the absolute sense) commit suicide; and so the necessity of his existence will be an eternal necessity.¹⁰

So almightiness entails all the divine properties; and thus since it is the nature of an almighty being to be almighty, an almighty being is characterized by these properties necessarily.

The converse also follows. A necessarily omnipotent being who is also neces-

sarily perfectly free and omniscient will be an intentional power unlimited by forces of a non-rational kind and aware of all alternatives available to him. If he is also necessary, his existence so constituted will be a fact which could not but be because of the principles which govern how things are. So he will be pure limitless intentional power whose inseparable nature it is to keep things in being.

II

Could there be more than one being of this sort? There could certainly be two or more beings who were everlasting, necessary, perfectly free, and perfectly good. The difficulties arise with omnipotence and omniscience. Any limits to omniscience arise from any limits to omnipotence. If there could be two omnipotent beings (G_1 and G_2) of the above kind, each of whom would be able to affect everything which was logically possible for him to affect, then anything beyond those limits would be fixed and so knowable. Any limits to omniscience would arise from there being a class of states of affairs lying beyond the power of one such being to affect, but not for reasons of logic. So it all turns on omnipotence. Could there be two omnipotent beings having also the other divine properties?

An initial gut reaction is "No." Would not the omnipotence of one God be subject to frustration by the other God, and so not be omnipotence? Not in general—for the omnipotence of God is only the power to do good actions within ranges of the kind which I have discussed. Each God would be bringing about many good states, within himself, in relation to the other God, and creating and sustaining without. Since each would recognize the other as having the divine properties, including perfect goodness, it is plausible to suppose that each would recognize a duty not to prevent or frustrate the acts of the other, to use his omnipotence to forward them rather than frustrate them. If the second God creates a Universe which the first God by himself would not have chosen to create, there would be wrong in the first God attempting to prevent or frustrate this creative work; on the contrary, it would be good that he should give it his backing.

The only possibility of conflict between the acts of Gods would arise where each tried to do a best act or a best kind of act incompatible with the best act which the other was trying simultaneously to do. Thus, it might be an equally good event that Abraham be called by a God to settle in Iraq as that he be called to settle in Iran, and thus there might be before both Gods two equally good possible acts. One might try to perform the one, and the other the other. Or (if we call the present direction of revolution of the Earth round the sun clockwise) it might be equally good that the Earth revolve anticlockwise as that it revolve clockwise, and thus again there might be before both Gods two equally good

possible acts of bringing about these states of affairs. One might choose the one and the other the other. There could not be two Gods, unless there was some mechanism to prevent interference¹¹ and the mechanism could not limit their power in the compatibilist sense, only in the absolute sense. It could do that only by there being something which made it a bad thing for each to act in an area where the other was operative, e.g., an agreement between them not to do so. But how are the lines of distribution of the proper exercise of power to be drawn up? By one God? But there is nothing to guarantee that at the moment at which he draws up a proposal for distributing power, the other God might not draw up a different proposal; and even with the best will in the world, only luck could prevent an actual collision of wills. (Compare the situation where two people are approaching each other along a pavement, and each tries to move to that side of the pavement where he guesses the other will not go; they may or may not collide.) Only if one lays down what the rules are, and his decision is accepted because he has the authority to lay down the rules, would the collision necessarily be avoided. But a difference in authority would have to arise from some other difference of status between the gods; in some way one would have to be the source of being of the other. And that surely must be for reasons additional to those which I have just given. All arguments to the existence of God derive their force, in my view, from their ability to explain the orderly complexity of our world as deriving from a single source of being. To suppose that there were two or more sources of being, neither of which was dependent on the other, would deprive such arguments of their force.

But how can there be an almighty being which depends on another almighty being for its existence? How can there be a necessary being which derives its existence from another? No problem, so long as the derivation is necessary. If G_1 is eternally necessitated to keep G_2 in being, then both can be almighty. The eternal bringing about of G_2 by G_1 would be an essential act of G_1 ; and it would provide a mechanism by which to ensure that there was no conflict of action between them. For G_1 would prescribe what the mechanism was.

There are many different ways in which unity of action can be secured among individuals who might otherwise impede each other's efforts. One of them could take all the decisions and the others simply execute those decisions. Another way is to have a vote on every issue and for each then to carry out the result of the vote. A third way is to have a division of functions. One individual takes decisions on certain kinds of issues, and the others support him in these. Another individual takes decisions on other issues, and the others support him in those, and so on. Which would be the best way for Gods to secure unity of action, to determine a choice between equally good but incompatible actions? The first way would seem an imperfect way of sharing power between Gods, and so one which G_1 would not adopt. The second way, taken strictly, is not a possible

way when there are only two individuals, for, unless they agree in advance, votes will always be tied. (Marriage cannot be a democracy.) And where there are more than two individuals, but many alternative actions (such that there is no overriding reason for doing one rather than another), is there any reason to suppose that there will often be a majority in favour of one course of action? Only the third way would seem a viable way of securing unity of action in shared power among Gods.

Such unity of action could be secured if the first God solemnly vows to the second God in creating him that he will not frustrate any action of his in a certain sphere of activity, and expresses the request that in return the second God should not frustrate any action of his in the other sphere. The vow of the first God would create an obligation on him not to frustrate any action within his allocated sphere of activity. So, although the first God retains his omnipotence, it is, as before, limited by the inability to do evil and in virtue of his promise this limitation will ensure that he does not frustrate the actions of the second God. Conversely, although the power is given to the second God, it comes with a request that it should not be exercised in a certain way. The overall goodness of conformity to that request (not to conform would be not to conform to a reasonable request from the source of his being and power) will ensure that, although omnipotent, the second God cannot frustrate any action of the first God. The sharing of divinity could (logically) only occur subject to some restriction preventing mutual impediment of action. I have presented a highly fallible human judgment as to what the best such mechanism (and so the one which would be adopted) would be.

The creation of the second God by the first of which I am speaking is an everlasting creation; at each moment of endless time the first God keeps in being the second God. How in that case is the creation to be done? *Ex nihilo*? No. For that would not create a God. For to be God, as we saw earlier, a being has to be necessary—it has to be no accident that he exists rather than some qualitatively identical individual with his powers. God could create out of the blue one of any number of possible beings. Yet however much power one had, he would not be almighty because he would not be a necessary being. But if it is an overall best act that a solitary God share his essential almightiness, the only way in which this can be done is if he creates as a separate God what is God anyway, i.e., if he divides himself. The creation being everlasting, this is to be read as: he creates as a separate God what, but for his creative action, would be himself^{f12}. How then will it be true of the second God that “all other things depend on his currently sustaining power”? How can the first God depend on the second God for his existence if the second God depends on the first God? At each moment, the first God depends for his existence on the second God, in that if the second God so chose, he could bring about the non-existence of the first God. He has

the compatibilist power to annihilate the first God. But he can't exercise this power, because it would be bad to do so. He does not have the absolute power to annihilate the first God. Each depends on the other, in that each could eliminate the other if he chose, but neither can so choose. There is the difference, however, between the first and second Gods that the action starts from the first God in that the first God actively brings about the existence of the second God, whereas the second God simply has the power to eliminate the first God. Both are, however, almighty on my definition.

So there can be more than one God if it is necessary that the first God brings about the existence of a second God. It is possible that there be more than one God only if it is necessary that there be more than one God. But since nothing affects how a God acts except reason, this can only be if the first God has an overriding reason to bring about the existence of a second God.

I have talked only of a second God. But similar arguments will obviously show that there can be a third God only if it is necessary that there be a third God, and that will be only if the first God, or the second God, or both together, have overriding reason for bringing about the third God. If there is such overriding reason, then one way in which this could come about is if the first God in creating the second God requests him to confine himself to a narrower field of activity, and one or the other or both together then bring about the existence of the third God, with both Gods undertaking not to interfere with his activity in a certain sphere. Such requests and undertakings would again limit the absolute power of each God, but not the compatibilist power.

III

So is there overriding reason for a first God to create a second or third or fourth God? I believe that there is overriding reason for a first God to create a second God and with him to create a third God, but no reason to go further. If the Christian religion has helped us, Christians and non-Christians, to see anything about what is worthwhile, it has helped us to see that love is a supreme good. Love is sharing, giving to the other what of one's own is good for him and receiving from the other what of his is good for one; and love is cooperating with another to benefit third parties. This latter is crucial for worthwhile love. There would be something deeply unsatisfactory (even if for inadequate humans sometimes unavoidable) about a marriage in which the parties were concerned solely with each other and did not use their mutual love to bring forth good to others, for example by begetting, nourishing and educating children, but possibly in other ways instead. Love must share and love must cooperate in sharing.¹³ The best love would share all that it had, if it could; it would share itself. A God would see that for him too a best kind of action would be to share and to

cooperate in sharing. Now a first God is the almighty principle of being; but for his choice there would be none other with whom to share. So the divine love of a first God G_1 would be manifested first in creating another God G_2 with whom to share his life, and the divine love of G_1 or G_2 would be manifested in creating another god G_3 with whom G_1 and G_2 cooperatively could share their lives. G_2 and G_3 would then cooperate in keeping G_1 in being, for but for their refraining from destroying him, there would be no G_1 . They would then cooperate further in backing the activities of each other in their respective spheres of activity.¹⁴

If God is thus divisible, why should not the process continue further? The reason why it was an overall good that the first God should create the second was that otherwise there was none with whom to share totally; and the reason why it was an overall good that the first and second Gods should create a third was that otherwise there was no one with whom to cooperate in sharing totally. But that argument does not provide a reason for any more creation. In allowing the other Gods to exercise sovereignty in a certain area, and thus backing that sovereignty with his own sovereignty, each gives and cooperates in giving. But if giving and cooperating in giving are overriding goods, why not cooperating with two others in giving? My ethical intuitions are inevitably highly fallible here, but it seems to me that cooperating with two others in giving is not essential to the manifestation of love so long as cooperation with one in giving is going on. There is a qualitative difference between giving and cooperating in giving, and hence overriding reason for divine acts of both kind; but, as it seems to me, no similar qualitative difference between cooperating with one in giving and cooperating with two. So one God (or two or three Gods together) could not create a fourth as an essential act. But no God could create another God as an act of will. For any being created by an act of will might (metaphysically) not have existed, and so could not be God.

I conclude (tentatively) that necessarily if there is at least one God, then there are three and only three Gods.

IV

It should now be apparent that, although I have on the whole avoided the traditional terminology, the conclusion which I have reached is that necessarily God is the Holy Trinity, in the sense in which that doctrine was defined by Councils beginning from the Council of Nicaea in 325A.D. and captured in "The Athanasian Creed."¹⁵ Let us reinsert the traditional terminology. First, we require names for the three individuals. In Latin they are (from the Greek) *hypostases* and, being rational ones, *personae*; and, being almighty, are divine persons. Each is god, in the sense that the predicate 'divine' (i.e., almighty) belongs to

him. They are individual centres of consciousness and will. There is a difference between them in respect of which depends on which and also in respect of function, and the traditional names bring out both of these aspects of the differences. Traditionally, the first God is called "Father," the second "Son" (or "Word"), the third "Spirit." "Father" seems a name appropriate to the original source. Both "Son" and "Word" suggest a second or third God. Biblical tradition apportions both these names to Christ, and if the second person of the Trinity became incarnate, they are then appropriate names for that second person. Likewise the name of "Spirit" for the third God derives from his traditional role in sanctification. I have no arguments beyond those deriving from biblico-ecclesiastical tradition for tying the members of the Trinity defined by the relative dependencies with these particular roles. But my arguments suggest that each will have a different function in the scheme of things.

If the second person of the Trinity is to be called "Son" an obvious name for the kind of way in which the Father brings him about is "begets." I have earlier used the word "creates" in a very general sense of "brings about the existence of," but the Fathers and Scholastics thought of "creates" as applicable only to the bringing about of something finite by an act of will, and so they avoided that word for the bringing about within the Trinity. ("Made" for them meant made out of some separate preexisting matter.) Could we use the same word, "begets," for the bringing about of the third person of the Trinity by the others? We could. But there is a difference in the mode of dependence of Son on Father from that of Spirit on Son and Father, since the dependence is on two rather than on one, and results from the overriding goodness of cooperation in sharing rather than the overriding goodness of sharing itself. So we may give a different name to the mode of origin of Spirit from Father and Son—"proceeding." (Avoiding the word "begotten" for this process of dependence on two does have the additional advantage of avoiding the obvious analogy for the second God of "mother" with all the misunderstanding which that would introduce.) Augustine expresses agnosticism about the nature of the difference between "begetting" and "proceeding";¹⁶ and Aquinas uses a different terminology so that "proceeding" is a generic name for both bringings about, "begetting" is the species of this relation which applies to the Father/Son case, and Aquinas hesitantly invents a word "spirating" to cover the bringing about of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ Both insist there is a difference between the two bringings about but can tell us little more about it. I have tried to say a little more about where it must consist. The Western church's version of the Nicene creed asserts that the Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son," whereas the Eastern church's version asserts that the Spirit proceeds "from the Father through the Son." It seems to me that the Western version brings out more satisfactorily the fact, which my argument could account for, that the generation of the Spirit is a cooperative act.

All the three persons have eternally the same divine properties of almightiness; none is greater than another. Certainly some came from others, but the others had no option in this matter, and for this reason (together with the eternal existence of each), in my view, dependence does not diminish greatness. Consequently they are all of one substance (in the sense of “second substance,” i.e., in the sense that they are each of the same kind, viz. almighty). But they are also of one substance, in the sense of “first substance,” on a not unnatural understanding of that expression.¹⁸ A substance is not unnaturally understood as an individual thing which does not have parts capable of independent existence. Now the three persons are such that of logical necessity none can exist without the other—the Father would not be an almighty being unless he were perfectly good and so generated the Son; nor would the Son be such a being unless he refrained from annihilating the Father. They are therefore not unnaturally said to form one “first substance,” and we may follow a natural tradition in calling that substance ‘God.’¹⁹ The Son and the Spirit are eternally “from the substance” of the Father in that they derive their being from him; the Son and Spirit arise by a division of the Father which does not diminish him²⁰. The mutual dependence of the three persons is naturally called “coinherence” and the fact that each puts his omnipotence behind the acts of the others in their fields of activity is properly expressed (in Latin) as the doctrine that *omnia opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. To speak strictly—the acts of God are always the acts of each member of the Trinity, one or more initiating the process and the others backing it.

Have I not purported to prove by reason what tradition has claimed to depend on revelation? It has always seemed to me mistaken to say that certain items of Christian doctrine are known by natural reason and certain other items are known by revelation. Plausibly, both reason and revelation have a role in respect to most items of doctrine. But for some items the weight of evidence comes more from natural reason and for other items more from revelation. And although it may be the case that much evidence for the Trinity comes from revelation, such evidence seems to my humble judgment insufficient; that doctrine needs to have quite a bit of *a priori* probability before biblical texts and conciliar pronouncements will tip the balance. Further, although Aquinas²¹ and subsequent Catholic (and Protestant) tradition has taught that the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity is known only by revelation, that view was by no means common before Aquinas. Augustine made the remark with respect to the Father generating an equal “Si voluit et non potuit, infirmus est; si potuit et non voluit, invidus est.”²² That remark generated a tradition of similar *a priori* argument for the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity, of which the best and most quoted representative whom I have found is Richard of St. Victor. He got the point both that perfect love involves there being someone else to whom to be generous (though his argument diverges from mine at this stage, by claiming that a creature would be unworthy

of perfect love); and also that perfect loving involves a third individual, the loving of whom could be shared with the second. The Father needs *socium et condilectum* in his loving.²³

And although these writers made explicit some of the thoughts which I have repeated, I do not think that my thoughts are that far distant from those entertained implicitly by many thinkers of early centuries who advocated the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Of course the biblical texts had enormous influence, yet on their own they could have given rise to a hundred different theologies. Certainly emanations and trinities formed part of the common stock of religious ideas current in the Mediterranean of the first centuries A.D., but these ideas took many different forms, and there were other ideas around. So why did Christians choose to see in the Biblical Texts Trinitarianism of the kind which subsequently became the orthodoxy? The answer is, I think, this. They had two basic convictions. One was that our complex and orderly universe derived its being from a single personal source of being, possessed of all perfection. The other was that perfection includes perfect love. There is something profoundly imperfect and therefore inadequately divine in a solitary God. If God is love, he must share, and sharing with finite beings such as humans is imperfect sharing. God's love has to be manifested in a sharing with a God, and that (to keep the divine unity) means within the godhead. And that is the core of my argument.

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NOTES

1. I gave a detailed account of how these predicates were to be understood in *The Coherence of Theism*, Clarendon Press, 1977. There is one minor difference between the present list and that of *The Coherence of Theism*. I wrote there of God being "without a body." I did not there wish to rule out God's temporary acquisition of a body in a certain sense which I shall elucidate shortly; and hence I write here instead of God's being "essentially bodiless." My understanding of the predicates here is more or less the same as that in *The Coherence of Theism*. I do however understand "necessary" in a more restricted sense here than in *The Coherence of Theism*; the extra elements involved in my understanding of it there are, I now see, already present in the concepts of omnipotence and perfect freedom. Also, my understanding of God's perfect goodness is far more developed than in *Coherence*. With these exceptions I simply summarize in Part I of this paper ideas developed more fully in that book. The views expanded in the other parts of this paper are however contrary to those of *Coherence*.

2. That this is so was a major theme of my *The Existence of God*, Clarendon Press, 1979.

3. My definition is roughly that of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 8.3.

4. For argument on this, see my *Space and Time* (second edition), London, 1981, chapter 8, especially p. 139.

5. The argument of Nelson Pike (“Divine Omnipotence and Voluntary Action,” *Philosophical Review*, 1965, 74, 27-46”) on this point seem to me compelling, and to remain undefeated by all subsequent writings.

6. In *The Coherence of Theism* (chapter 10) I argued that omniscience was to be understood as knowledge of everything “except those future states and their consequences which are not physically necessitated by anything in the past.” I understood “physical necessitation” as the normal process whereby one inanimate event brings about another and so, if there is a God, a process which operates only subject to his consent. That being so, my account there of omniscience seems to be now too wide. For, except insofar as God is subject to moral obligations, all future states, whether physically necessitated or not, are subject to his future control and so not within the scope of his present necessary omniscience. This understanding of omniscience is forced upon us by our understanding of the other predicates. But given the later argument that all the divine properties follow from one natural property of almightiness, it remains the case that the arguments of *The Existence of God* are arguments to “the simplest kind of person there could be.”

7. For simplicity of exposition, I write of God as bringing about effects simultaneously with his action. However, there are logical difficulties in supposing that causes can be simultaneous with their effects. For if there were no logical difficulty in causes being simultaneous with their effects as such, then it is hard to see what would be the logical difficulty in cause C simultaneously bringing about effect E which in turn simultaneously made something happen incompatible with C. A light signal reflected from a mirror might close a shutter and so prevent the signal from being sent. Only if the present, as well as the past is fixed, would it be logically impossible for such things to happen. God’s omnipotence at t_0 is to be read as the power to bring about anything in the open interval of instants later than t_0 , such that his choice to bring about an effect at t_1 (later than t_0) is cancellable by his choice at any instant later than t_0 but earlier than t_1 .

8. I have argued for this elsewhere. See my “The Objectivity of Morality,” *Philosophy*, 1976, 51, 5-20. The argument is repeated in *The Coherence of Theism*, chapter 11.

9. This was a point well taken by Aquinas in his famous chapter 25 of Book II of *Summa Contra Gentiles* entitled “How the Omnipotent God is said to be incapable of certain things.”

10. Forwardly eternal, that is. He will be backwardly eternal also, for the reason that if he began to exist at some instant t , his existence at t would not have depended on his currently sustaining power in the sense in which the latter is spelled out in n7.

11. In chapter 9 of his *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Cornell University Press, 1986), Thomas Morris rightly sees that for a divine trinity there must be a necessity that the wills of the three persons do not conflict. But he does not suggest what might make such a necessity.

12. The majority of modern philosophers judge the notion of a person being divided into two persons not merely to be coherent but to have plenty of actual applications (e.g., to be what happens when the human brain is bisected). I have myself found this notion problematic—see my *The Evolution of the Soul*, Clarendon Press, 1986, chs. 8 and 9; and I have seen reason to prefer other descriptions of what happens to the human person when his brain is bisected; my arguments on this point were however tentative and not crucial for the main argument of *The Evolution of the Soul*. My difficulty was that if in mid-life a person was divided into two, the person before division would have had reason to hope or fear (as the case may be), the subsequent experiences of both later persons—but how could he have such reason since no one later person would have both sets of experiences?

For reasons which I gave in *Evolution*, persons must be regarded as consisting of souls and bodies. The soul being the essential part of the person and the subject of consciousness. Souls must differ

from each other in some way other than in the kind of experiences they have, and in the bodies to which they are linked. A convenient way to describe this is to say that different souls are made from different soul-stuff. So what division would amount to, in my terminology, if it would occur, is division of soul-stuff, so that each of two later souls is made of soul-stuff which previously formed the stuff of one soul. Each of the two later souls would then be “successor souls” of the earlier soul, partly identical with it and partly different from it—in the way that two cars could be formed from different parts of an earlier car. My difficulty was then a difficulty about whether soul-stuff was divisible.

My difficulty, however, would, if genuine, suggest only the impossibility of a division subsequent to the functioning of a soul. It would not seem to rule out a division which took place at the same moment as the creation of souls. Suppose that whatever process brings into being the existence of souls operated on some occasion abnormally such that it brought about the existence of two souls; and such that, but for the abnormality there would only be one soul and yet the non-occurrence of the abnormality would not have deprived of experience either of the souls who were in fact brought into existence—for both would have been “partly identical” with the soul which did come into existence. My difficulty would not arise in such a case; and so I cannot in such a case see any objection to what most philosophers find quite unproblematic anyway. Put somewhat metaphorically, soul-stuff could be divided before it hardened into soul-atoms.

The clause in the text “[The first God] creates as a separate God what, but for his creative action, would be himself” is therefore to be read as: “The first God keeps in being the second God at each moment of eternal time; both the first God and the second God are partly identical with the God who would have existed, if the first God had never kept the second God in being.” If my original difficulty is genuine, the first God could not at any moment of time divide himself. But it remains the case that at any moment of time he can keep in being or destroy the second God; and, if he had never kept the second God in being, there would have been only one God who would have been partly identical with the second God and with himself.

13. On “non-possessive love” involving more than a “two-membered relationship” see p. 175 of Robert M. Adams, “The Problem of Total Devotion” in (ed.) R. Audi and W. J. Wainwright, *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment*, Cornell University Press, 1986.

14. Important to medieval thought was the Dionysian Principle that goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and so of being. A perfectly good being will create more and more. A crucial issue was whether the perfect goodness of God was adequately expressed in the mutual sustenance of the Trinity, or whether perfect goodness needed to express itself further, e.g., in creating a Universe. I am much indebted to lectures by Norman Kretzmann, given at the summer Institute for the philosophy of religion at Bellingham in 1986, and not yet published, for drawing my attention to this issue and thus leading me to write this paper. For his published work on this, see Norman Kretzmann, “Goodness, Knowledge, and Indeterminacy in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 1983, 80, 631-649.

15. “. . . the Catholic Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal . . . The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated . . . The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet there are not three eternals but one eternal . . . So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet there are not three Almighties, but one Almighty . . . Like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge each Person

by himself to be God and Lord; so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to say there be three gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten but proceeding . . . In this Trinity none is before or after another, none is greater or less than another . . . He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

16. *Contra Maximinum* II. 14 (PL 42.770). See also St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa* I.8—"We have learned that there is a difference between generation and procession, but the nature of that difference we in no way understand.

17. *Summa Theologiae* Ia.27, 4 ad 3.

18. There is dispute about the sense of "substance" intended by the Council of Nicaea and its immediately subsequent advocates, in declaring that the Son was ὁμοουσιός ("of the same substance") with the Father. Thus St. Athanasius gave four analogies for the Father/Son relationship, three of which were relations between distinct individuals ("first substances") (including the analogy of the literal father/son relationship) and only one of which was a relation of things within an individual (the analogy of a mind and a word spoken by the mind). See G. C. Stead, *Divine Substance*, Clarendon Press, 1979, pp. 262f.

19. I am grateful to my D. Phil supervisee, Tim Bartel, for drawing my attention to the fact that "deus" ("God") can be used either as a predicate or as a name of a substance. The "Athanasian Creed" in saying that Father, Son and Spirit are each *deus* is best read as saying that each is divine; and in saying *non tres dii, sed unus Deus* as saying that there are not three separate substances which are each God, but only one substance, formed by the three persons together, the name of which is "*Deus*."

But if we read these phrases in such a way that *deus* has the same sense in all its uses as the name of the substance which is divine, it is going to be very difficult to make sense of the credal formulation. A magnificent attempt to begin to do so, with the aid of the logic of relative identity, is that of Peter van Inwagen, "And yet there are not three Gods, but one God" in (ed.) T. V. Morris, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1987, forthcoming. The philosophical doctrine of relative identity claims that one thing, *a*, which is (ϕ and ψ) may be the same ϕ as *b* but not the same ψ as *b*; sameness is relative to the sortal (" ϕ " or " ψ "). The sort of example the doctrine has in mind is that some statue may be the same lump of brass as an earlier statue but not the same statue as the earlier one (because the lump of brass has been remoulded in the interval into a different shape). van Inwagen then claims that "substance" (or "being") and "person" are sortal terms such that the Father is the same being, and so God, as the Son, but not the same person as the Son, and so on. Opponents of relative identity claim that if *a* is the same ϕ as *b* and is also ψ , it will be the same ψ as *b* as well; the only identity, for them is absolute identity. There are substantial philosophical objections to the doctrine of relative identity—see (e.g.) David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance*, Blackwells, 1980. But even if some mundane cases of relative identity are allowed, it is difficult to see what is meant by the Father being the same God but not the same person as the Son. van Inwagen's logic tells us which sentences are significant and which sentences follow from which other sentences, but there remains still an enormous puzzle about what such sentences mean. But then, as he insists, a similar point can be made about Quantum Theory. There does not, however, seem to me any need for quite so much "mystery"; we may understand the Athanasian Creed in the way which I advocate.

20. The Council of Nicaea also declared that the Son was ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς, that is "from

the substance of the Father.” By this it seems to have been ruling out adoptionism, and to be declaring that the Son derived his being and nature from the Father by a method like begetting which produced the same kind of being from the stuff of the begetter. See Stead *op. cit.*, p. 233.

21. *Summa Theologiae* Ia.32.1.

22. *De Diversis Quaestionibus* 83 q.50 (Migne PL, 40, 31). “If he wished to and could not, he is weak; if he could but did not wish to, he is envious.”

23. Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate* 3.2 and 3.15. Quoted (e.g.) in Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologiae* 1.295 and 1.304.