

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

---

Volume 11 | Issue 3

Article 1

---

7-1-1994

## Could there be More than One Lord?

T W Bartel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Bartel, T W (1994) "Could there be More than One Lord?," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 3 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol11/iss3/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

# COULD THERE BE MORE THAN ONE LORD?

T W Bartel

In this article I defend the Social Trinitarian—someone who maintains that the Trinity consists of three distinct divine individuals—against the objection that it is metaphysically impossible for each member of a Social Trinity to exercise the kind of sovereignty over the created world that traditional theists attribute to a divine being. I consider what I take to be the most forceful argument for this objection, and construct a reply which, though not conclusive, poses a serious challenge to those who believe that the argument has much force against Social Trinitarianism.

'Let it be admitted,' writes the anonymous author of an eighteenth-century Unitarian pamphlet, 'that you had proved the supreme divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the natural conclusion would have been three distinct Gods, which is a doctrine expressly condemned by Scripture and reason.'<sup>1</sup> I agree that the 'natural conclusion'—in fact, the only reasonable conclusion—to draw from the divinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is that there are three distinct divine individuals—a view I shall henceforth call 'the Social Theory of the Trinity.'<sup>2</sup> But I do not agree that the Social Theory is expressly, or implicitly, condemned by Scripture, tradition, or reason. I shall not attempt in this paper to demonstrate that Social Trinitarianism can be reconciled with Scripture and tradition.<sup>3</sup> Nor shall I try to defuse every objection to the Social Theory that can claim any support from reason. But I shall attempt to complete a modest fragment of the task of defending the philosophical plausibility of Social Trinitarianism—albeit a fragment that will prove to be of considerable interest not only for Christian philosophers and theologians, but also for theists in general, and indeed for anyone who cares about the philosophical problems of action, causation, states of affairs and their individuation, and more. In brief, I shall undertake to defend the Social Theorist against the charge that it is impossible for each member of a Social Trinity to exercise the kind of sovereignty over the created world that Christians are obliged to attribute to God—and so are we forbidden by reason, if not the catholic religion, to say, There be three Lords. This charge can be supported by quite a forceful argument; so if my defence succeeds, it will enhance the reputation of the Social Theory. My examination of this objection will also warn us away from a tempting, but fatally flawed, interpretation of Social Trinitarianism, and will enable us to state the Social Theory with unprecedented precision.



## I

The objection I shall consider epitomises a very common method for trying to impugn the coherence of Social Trinitarianism: selecting an attribute that is essential for being fully divine and arguing that this attribute is *unshareable*—that is, there is no possible world in which more than one being has this attribute. The stock example of such an attribute is omnipotence. Several philosophers have recently contended that this property is not unshareable.<sup>4</sup> But there is another divine attribute which has frequently been considered unshareable; and to the best of my knowledge, no-one has yet attempted to discredit any of the arguments for this opinion. This attribute is *sovereignty*—God’s control over everything in the created world. I shall set forth the best argument I can for the unshareability of divine sovereignty—I will call it ‘the Causal Argument’—and then construct a reply which, though not conclusive, poses a serious challenge to those who believe that this argument has much force against the Social Theory of the Trinity.

The Causal Argument aims to demonstrate that it is impossible for more than one being in each possible world to exercise the sort of sovereign control over the universe that a being must wield in order to count as divine. This argument is at least as old as Scotus, but its best formulation to date can be found in a recent article by William Wainwright—and although I shall suggest some improvements to this version, my presentation of the argument will remain very close to his.<sup>5</sup>

We begin with a principle that has a considerable amount of intuitive appeal: whenever some state of affairs which obtains at a certain time is causally sufficient for an effect, nothing else obtaining at that same time is causally necessary for the same effect. Or, more formally:

1. For any states of affairs  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  and any time  $t$ : if  $x$ ’s obtaining at  $t$  is causally sufficient for  $y$ ’s obtaining, then if  $z$  occurs at  $t$  and  $z$  is neither identical to  $x$  nor a proper part of  $x$ ,  $z$  is not causally necessary for the obtaining of  $y$ .<sup>6</sup>

This principle seems to be a necessary truth, and an obvious necessary truth at that: it appears to flow irresistibly from the concepts of causal necessity and causal sufficiency. If  $x$  is causally sufficient for  $y$ , then surely, it seems, nothing over and above  $x$  is needed for  $y$  to obtain. Furthermore, 1 can be bolstered by examples. Consider a case of simultaneous causal overdetermination—a case in which a state of affairs has two simultaneous sets of causally sufficient conditions. Suppose that two independent switches, W1 and W2, are flipped at exactly the same time and that each of the currents that flows down a wire from each switch reaches the filament of a single bulb at the same instant, whereupon the bulb lights up. Each of the chains of causes leading from one of the switches to the filament is in itself causally sufficient

for the lighting of the bulb. And of course neither of these causal chains is necessary for the bulb's lighting: if W1 had not been turned on but W2 had, or vice versa, the light would still have come on.

The second premise of the Causal Argument expresses an important element of the traditional doctrine of divine sovereignty. I will use the term 'creature' as a convenient synonym for 'non-divine contingent substance'—an actual non-divine substance that does not exist in every possible world. And I will assume—but only for the moment—a volitional theory of divine action, according to which every effect that a divine being brings about in the created world is caused by that being's willing that effect to obtain. We shall notice later that the Causal Argument can easily dispense with this assumption, but the argument is more elegant if we retain it.

Now one of the fundamental components of the traditional conception of divine sovereignty is the claim that no creature can exist apart from God's creative or sustaining power. In order to formulate this claim precisely, however, we must remove an ambiguity which can easily infect our talk of divine volitions. The scope of the temporal operator in the sentence

S.  $x$  wills the existence of  $y$  at  $t$

may include either the existence of  $y$ —so that it should be read as

S1.  $x$ , at an unspecified time (or in the 'timeless present'), wills the state of affairs denoted by ' $y$ 's existing at  $t$ '—

or the willing of  $x$ —which means

S2.  $x$ , at  $t$ , wills the existence of  $y$ ,

with the time of  $y$ 's existing left unspecified—or both the existence of  $y$  and the willing of  $x$ , which yields

S3.  $x$  wills at  $t$  the state of affairs denoted by ' $y$ 's existing at  $t$ .'

I shall use hyphens to indicate that a particular temporal operator applies only to the state of affairs that is willed, and not to the willing—thus, ' $x$  wills the existence of  $y$ -at- $t$ ' is equivalent to S1—and I shall indicate the time of  $x$ 's willing (if any) by using ' $x$ 's willing at  $t$ .'

We are now prepared to state the second premise of the Causal Argument:

2. For any  $x$ , if  $x$  is divine, then for every creature  $y$  and time  $t$ , if  $y$  exists at  $t$  then  $x$ 's willing at  $t$  (or in the 'timeless present') the existence of  $y$ -at- $t$  is causally necessary for  $y$ 's existing-at- $t$ .<sup>7</sup>

The third premise of the Causal Argument is more elaborate, and needs some prior explanation. This premise is entailed by, though it does not entail, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*—the claim that God brought the universe into being from nothing. One crucial point expressed by this doctrine is that God's

productive activity is sufficient to bring the universe into existence: God had no need of anything else, such as pre-existing matter, to create our cosmos. Some theists go further than this, and maintain that God's activity is sufficient for the obtaining of every contingent state of affairs. But of course other theists believe that this goes too far—that, for example, such a conception of divine activity annihilates human freedom and moral responsibility, since God would causally predetermine each human choice. Since this ancient controversy shows no sign at present of disappearing, any argument against Trinitarianism should resolutely refrain from taking sides on this issue.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately for the Causal Argument, it can stay out of this dispute—all it requires for its third premise is the principle that the will of a divine being is causally sufficient for the existence of at least one creature. That is:

3. For any  $x$ , if  $x$  is divine and there exists at least one creature, then there exists a creature  $y$  and a time  $t$  such that  $x$ 's willing at  $t$  the existence of  $y$ -at- $t$  is causally sufficient for the existence of  $y$  at  $t$ .

We shall need a concise term for the attribute which 2 and 3 taken together ascribe to a divine being—it will not quite do to call it *the property of being such that one's activity is causally necessary for the existence of every creature and causally sufficient for the existence of at least one creature*. And although the conjunction of 2 and 3 does not exhaust the content of the traditional doctrine of divine sovereignty, I should still think it appropriate to call this attribute 'sovereignty,' so that any being who satisfies both 2 and 3 is sovereign.

Now if 1, 2, and 3 are all true, the Causal Argument needs only one more premise in order to demonstrate that the Social Theory of the Trinity is incoherent:

4. For any agents  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $x$  is not identical to  $y$ , then no act-token performed by  $x$  is identical with any act-token performed by  $y$ .

In other words, two act-tokens are identical only if they involve the same agent. For suppose that the Social Theory is true. Then, given what else we know,

5. The Father is divine, the Son is divine, the Father is not the same agent as the Son, and there is at least one creature.

And 3 and 5 jointly entail

6. At some time  $t$ , there exists a creature  $c$  such that God the Father's willing at  $t$  the existence of  $c$ -at- $t$  (call this act-token ' $f$ ') is causally sufficient for the existence of  $c$  at  $t$ .

Moreover, 2 and 5 jointly entail

7. God the Son's willing at  $t$  the existence of  $c$ -at- $t$  (call this act-token ' $s$ ') is causally necessary for the existence of  $c$  at  $t$ .

But it follows from 4 and 5 that

8.  $f$  is not identical to  $s$ .

And it follows from 1, 6, and 8 that

9.  $s$  is not causally necessary for the existence of  $c$  at  $t$ ,

which of course contradicts 7.

Since the truth of 1-4 is incompatible with the Social Theory of the Trinity, Social Trinitarians are obliged to find some reason for rejecting, or at least doubting, one of the premises of the Causal Argument. It would be fruitless for the Social Theorist to vent her scepticism on either 2 or 3, for a being which lacked sovereignty over the created world could scarcely count as almighty. An almighty being has the ability to bring about a creature without the assistance of anyone or anything else, and no creature is independent of that being for its existence at even a single moment. So the only way for the Social Trinitarian to discredit the Causal Argument and remain faithful to her own view is to find something wrong with either 1 or 4.

## II

As it happens, some Christian theologians may have suggested that the Trinity is an exception to premise 4. Consider, for example, this remark by Gregory of Nyssa:

. . . the action of each[—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—]concerning anything is not separate and peculiar, but whatever comes to pass, in reference either to the acts of his providence for us, or to the government and constitution of the universe, comes to pass by the action of the Three. . . . The Holy Trinity fulfils every operation in a manner similar to that of which I have spoken, not by separate action according to the number of the persons, but so that there is one motion and disposition of the good will which is communicated from the Father through the Son to the Spirit. . . .<sup>9</sup>

To be sure, Gregory is not trying to rebut the Causal Argument: he is responding to the accusation that Christians are compelled to believe in three Gods. But whatever the purpose of this passage, and whatever Gregory may have meant, it does lucidly express the traditional Trinitarian dictum of *omnia opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*, and it does at least hint at an interpretation of this dictum which can serve as an intriguing rejoinder to the Causal Argument. For we might construe *omnia opera Trinitatis* to mean that whenever the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit wills a particular effect *ad extra*—a particular effect in the created world—all of the members of the Trinity will this effect, and the effective volition of any one of them is token-identical to the effective volition of each of the other two. Thus, for example, when the Trinity enlightens a human soul with knowledge on a particular occasion, the Father's enlightening, the Son's enlightening, and the

Spirit's enlightening are not three different act-tokens—they are numerically one and the same. And since creating and sustaining creatures counts *par excellence* as acting *ad extra*, we can extract the following principle from the preceding suggestion:

The Identity Theory [of Divine Creation]. For any volition  $x$ , any creature  $y$ , and any time  $t$ : if  $x$  is a volition of God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit and  $x$  is causally sufficient for the existence of  $y$  at  $t$ , then for any  $z$ , if  $z$  is a volition of the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit and  $z$  is causally necessary for the existence of  $y$  at  $t$ , then  $z = x$ .<sup>10</sup>

We should be careful to envisage this theory clearly, for it is easily confused with other principles that are compatible with 4 and which therefore cannot be used against the Causal Argument. It is especially important to realise that the Identity Theory does not merely claim that many acts of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are type-identical—numerically distinct act-tokens of the same kind, such as the millions of acts of voting that occur whenever a general election is held in Great Britain. The relation which the Identity Theory attributes to many acts of the various Trinitarian persons is the most intimate relation imaginable: numerical sameness.

If the Identity Theory is defensible, then it will be easy for the Social Trinitarian to parry the Causal Argument. She may concede premises 1, 2, and 3; and 5, 6, and 7 follow from these premises and the Social Theory. But without 4, the partisan of the Causal Argument is not entitled to 8; and without 8 he cannot derive a contradiction from Social Trinitarianism. If  $f$  is identical to  $s$ , then the Social Theory does not violate 1, for this premise does not prevent one and the same act-token from being both causally necessary and causally sufficient for the same effect—and nor will any other sensible causal principle.

But is the Identity Theory defensible? No matter how coarse-grained a criterion for individuating human act-tokens might tolerably be, it is exceedingly implausible to believe that an act-token of one human being is identical to an act-token of another. Of course, human beings can perform joint actions. But these are not exceptions to 4: for example, Tom's contribution to winning a tennis doubles match is not numerically identical with the contribution of his partner Jerry. The acts of the Trinity, however, are different from human acts in a number of notable respects, and some of these dissimilarities make an identity theory of Trinitarian actions seem more credible than an identity theory of human actions. Consider two different oboists, each of whom plays an A-440. First, we may observe that whereas we can distinguish each of the act-tokens of each of the oboists by spatial or temporal location, we cannot use these criteria to distinguish the volitions of the Trinity. Even if both oboists are sounding the same pitch at exactly the same moment, neither of them is playing at precisely the same place. But obviously, any creative volition of one member

of the Trinity which the Identity Theory would want to identify with some creative volition of the others will not occur at a different time or place than the latter. Traditional theism maintains that neither the Father's, nor the Son's, nor the Spirit's willings are located in space; and even if each of these volitions is temporal, each occurs at exactly the same time.

It might be replied that it is nevertheless possible for states of affairs to be distinct even though they cannot be distinguished by spatio-temporal location. For instance, some philosophers do not ascribe spatiality to mental events, and thus cannot use spatio-temporal criteria to distinguish two simultaneous occurrent beliefs with exactly the same content—as when a Tottenham fan and an Arsenal fan simultaneously acquire a belief that Tottenham have just defeated Arsenal. But the Trinitarian can reply that we do resort to other criteria to tell these beliefs apart—and these criteria cannot be used against the Identity Theory. For example, in typical circumstances, the Tottenham fan's belief results in delight, whereas the Arsenal fan's belief results in disappointment.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, it seems that any Trinitarian act-tokens which the Identity Theorist regards as numerically identical have exactly the same effects. For nothing has resulted from the Father's work of creation that has not also resulted from the Son's and the Spirit's. As Gregory says,

Yet although we set forth three persons and three names, we do not consider that we have had bestowed upon [each one of] us three lives, one from each person separately; but the same life is wrought in [each one of] us by the Father, and prepared by the Son, and depends upon the will of the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, the Identity Theorist can avail herself of a noteworthy consequence of *omnia opera Trinitatis*:

10. For any possible world *W*, any being *x*, and any time *t*, if *x* is a creature and *x* exists in *W*, then at least one person in the Trinity wills at *t* in *W* the existence of *x*-at-*t*-in-*W* if and only if all three persons of the Trinity will at *t* in *W* the existence of *x*-at-*t*-in-*W*.<sup>13</sup>

And lest anyone object that 10 has been fabricated solely to avert the unwelcome conclusion of the Causal Argument, and could play no other role in Trinitarian theology, the Identity Theorist has a convincing reply: 10 can be justified by independent argumentation. In fact, we can do this by modifying slightly the second premise of the Causal Argument.

First, let us assume that whatever is fully divine exists in all possible worlds. This assumption, of course, is highly controversial; but at the cost of greater complexity our argument could be recast without it.<sup>14</sup> We can then change the modality of 2 into necessity *de re*:

- 2n. For any *x*, if *x* is divine, then for any possible world *W* and any time *t* in *W*, and for any creature *y*, if *y* exists at *t* in *W* then *x*'s willing in *W* that *y* exist-at-*t*-in-*W* is causally necessary for the existence of *y* at *t* in *W*.



Now suppose that 10 is false. Then it is possible that there is a creature who exists at a time without all of the members of the Trinity willing its existence-at-that-time. And that would mean, contrary to 2n, that there is a divine person whose volition at that time is not necessary for that creature's existence.

But 2n is at least worthy of belief. Apart from its intuitive plausibility, a number of respectable lines of reasoning converge on it, such as many of the modal cosmological arguments for the existence of God. The Identity Theorist is therefore entitled to 10. And with 10 in hand, he can draw our attention to another significant difference between Trinitarian and human acts. Let us return to our example of the two oboists, each of whom is playing an A-440. Clearly either of these playings could have existed without the other. And that, according to the standard view of identity, gives us a conclusive reason for denying that these playings are numerically identical. For on this view, identities are metaphysically necessary—if *a* and *b* are numerically identical at all, they are identical in every possible world in which they exist. Thus, if *a* could have existed without *b* or vice versa, then *a* is not even possibly identical with *b*. But according to 10, the divine act-tokens which the Identity Theorist considers the same are necessarily coextensive. Now some philosophers have contended that propositions which are logically equivalent—which are true in exactly the same possible worlds—are numerically identical. And though this claim is not unobjectionable, neither is it obviously incredible. It can seem reasonable, then, to hold that necessarily coextensive act-tokens are numerically identical. And it can seem even more reasonable to identify necessarily coextensive act-tokens that do not occur in different times or different places and that do not have different effects.

Briefly put, we can shore up the Identity Theory with a host of appealing, traditional theistic claims that enable it to withstand a number of decisive objections to an identity theory of human act-tokens. It might therefore appear that even Social Trinitarians are entitled to believe the Identity Theory. And if that is true, then they have nothing to fear from the Causal Argument.<sup>15</sup>

### III

But the attractiveness of the Identity Theory evaporates under closer scrutiny—at the very least, it has consequences that are manifestly unpalatable to the traditional Christian. Given one of the two currently plausible conceptions of free action, the Identity Theory is patently false; given the other, it is incompatible with Christological orthodoxy.

Philosophers have by no means unanimously accepted a single theory of the nature of free action, and so there is more than one way to gloss the Causal Argument. But although philosophical disagreements in this area run deep, it is generally agreed that at present there are only two conceptions of free action with much initial plausibility—the so-called 'Agency Theory,' promi-

nently advocated by, among others, Thomas Reid, C. A. Campbell, Richard Taylor, and Roderick Chisholm; and a rival I shall call the 'Event-Causation Theory,' notably defended by Donald Davidson and Alvin Goldman.<sup>16</sup>

Consider first the Agency Theory. According to this view, no agent freely brings about  $x$  if each of the causes of  $x$  is a state of affairs—and that includes states of affairs involving the agent herself, such as the agent's own beliefs and desires. Nor does an agent freely bring about  $x$  if  $x$  is uncaused. An agent freely brings about  $x$  only if one of the causes of  $x$  is the agent herself—only if, to use the words of some Agency Theorists,  $x$  is brought about by 'agent-causation' or 'immanent causation' rather than being brought about exclusively by 'event-causation' or 'transeunt causation.' The Agency Theory enforces a sharp distinction between these two types of causation: agent-causation is not a form of event-causation, but is *sui generis*, unique, unanalysable. Even a complete list of the states of affairs that are causes of an effect brought about by a free act would omit the one factor which makes the effect the result of a free act: the agent.

Now no matter how murky the Agency Theory may be, at least one thing is abundantly clear—if we apply this view to divine action, the Identity Theory loses its charm. For the way to frame 2 in accordance with the Agency Theory is this:

- 2a. For any  $x$ , if  $x$  is divine, then for every creature  $y$  and time  $t$ ,  $x$  itself is causally necessary for  $y$ 's existing at  $t$ .<sup>17</sup>

whereas 3 becomes

- 3a. For any  $x$ , if  $x$  is divine and there exists one or more creatures, then for some creature  $y$  and time  $t$ ,  $x$  itself is causally sufficient for the existence of  $y$  at  $t$ .

But then we do not even need 4 in order to deduce a contradiction from the Social Theory. For given 3a and 5,

- 6a. At some time  $t$ , there exists a creature  $c$  such that God the Father himself is causally sufficient for  $c$ 's existence at  $t$ ;

given 2a, 5, and 6a,

- 7a. God the Son himself is causally necessary for  $c$ 's existence at  $t$ ;

and given 1, 5, and 6a,

- 8a. God the Son himself is not causally necessary for  $c$ 's existence at  $t$ .<sup>18</sup>

The Agency Theory, however, is not above controversy. More than a few philosophers have dismissed it as an account of human action: they have maintained that its concept of a 'metaphysical self' which can exercise a special kind of causal efficacy is hopelessly obscure, or that it makes the

epistemology of singular action statements an inexplicable miracle, or that it cannot explain why we attribute free and responsible acts to persons but not to non-human animals, or that it cannot explain why we care deeply about whether we are capable of acting freely, or that there is no way even in principle of knowing whether the Agency Theory is empirically possible—et cetera.<sup>19</sup> And some of these objections can be applied to the notion of God as an agent-cause. We should therefore consider whether the Identity Theory fares any better under an Event-Causation approach to divine action.

The Event-Causation theorist affirms what the Agency Theory denies—that causation by agents is simply a special form of causation by states of affairs. Whenever an agent freely brings about an effect, each of the causes of the effect is a state of affairs—there are no ‘agent-causes’ over and above states of affairs involving the agent herself. Of course, agents are causes. But they exercise their causal efficacy only via their wants, beliefs, intentions, preferences, and other states of themselves.

Now an Event-Causation conception of divine action may seem more adept at protecting the Social Trinitarian from the Causal Argument. For while no act-token of one person of the Trinity can be numerically identical with any act-token of another person if each of these persons is a causally efficacious ‘metaphysical self,’ it does appear much more plausible to identify the states of the Trinitarian persons which are causally responsible for a creature’s existence. After all, a long and respectable tradition in Christian philosophical theology regards all of the standard divine perfections as *de re* essential characteristics of each member of the Trinity: not only are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect, and so forth, but each possesses all of these perfections in every possible world in which he exists. And there is a lot that can be said for the following claim:

11. Necessarily, for any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  essentially possess all of the divine perfections, then for any world  $W$ , any propositional-attitude type  $A$ , and any time  $t$ :  $x$  has a propositional attitude of type  $A$  at  $t$  in  $W$  if and only if  $y$  has a propositional attitude of type  $A$  at  $t$  in  $W$ .

(I understand propositional attitudes to be states of mind consisting in some sort of stance *vis-à-vis* a proposition—for example, believing, or hoping, or doubting, that there is rational life on other planets. It is not easy to state exactly what it is for two propositional-attitude tokens to belong to the same type, but for my purposes it is enough to say that two tokens are of the same type just in case they both exemplify the same sort of stance—e.g. believing, or rejecting, or suspending judgment—toward the same proposition.) Two omniscient beings in the same world would not differ in any of their beliefs, since each believes every truth and no falsehood.<sup>20</sup> Again, since each member of the Trinity is essentially perfectly loving and wise, how could their wills possibly conflict? But if we allow the Trinitarian both 11 and the Event-Causation

view of divine action, the Identity Theory begins to look viable. Let partisans of the Causal Argument choose a propositional attitude of the Father which they wish to regard as a cause of a creature's existence at a particular time; the Trinitarian may then ascribe a propositional attitude of the same type to the Son and the Spirit, and may regard this attitude as a cause of the same creature at the same time. And what is to stop even the Social Theorist from identifying these attitudes—from considering them one instead of three? 11 guarantees that the Father's attitude exists in exactly the same possible worlds as the Son's and the Spirit's. Moreover, as we have noted, traditional theology guarantees that they have exactly the same effects, and that there is no spatial or temporal difference between them. But if the Event-Causation Theory is correct, what else need we regard as divine causes of creatures apart from the propositional attitudes of the persons of the Trinity? It is beginning to appear as if this conception of divine action will accommodate the Identity Theory, and therefore shelter the Social Trinitarian from the Causal Argument.

But given that the Event-Causation theory of divine action is true, the traditional Christian is committed to a theological proposition which prevents the Trinity from being an exception to 4—the claim that only God the Son, and not the Father or the Holy Spirit, became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. For the sake of convenience, let us call the relation of *belonging to the same person as* the relation of *copersonality*.<sup>21</sup> Then according to the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation, God the Son is copersonal with Jesus of Nazareth, which implies that all of the states of God the Son are copersonal with a state of Jesus of Nazareth. And although not every predicate expresses a genuine property, any theory of properties with the slightest plausibility will admit that 'being copersonal with a state of Jesus of Nazareth' does. Now states which are numerically identical share all of their properties in common. Hence, if any state of the Father is numerically identical with some state of God the Son, then there is a state of the Father which is copersonal with some state of Jesus of Nazareth. But then, of course, the Father is the same person as Jesus; or in other words, contrary to received Christian teaching, the Father also became incarnate in Jesus. The only way to avoid this unorthodox conclusion is to maintain that no state of the Father is copersonal with a state of Jesus. However, since each of the states of God the Son is copersonal with a state of Jesus, it follows by the Indiscernibility of Identicals that not a single state of God the Father is numerically identical with any state of the Son. And if 1, 2, and 3 are all true, then the traditional Trinitarian doctrine of divine sovereignty cannot be reconciled with the Event-Causation theory of divine action—for the Causal Argument will go through. If 3 is true, and every state of the Father is distinct from every state of the Son, then there is a causal chain leading from the Father to a creature which is sufficient for

that creature's existing at  $t$  and which contains no state of the Son—otherwise, the Father's causal activity would not be sufficient for that creature's existing at  $t$ . But then, given 1, it follows that no causal chain containing a state of the Son would be causally necessary for that creature's existing at  $t$ , for such a chain could not be identical with, or a proper part of, the causal chain leading from the Father to the creature.

The foregoing discussion of the Identity Theory has necessitated a welcome clarification of the relation that must exist on a Social Trinitarian view between the *ad extra* acts of the different members of the Trinity. Although virtually every Social Trinitarian has asserted that *omnia opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*, few of them have distinguished between the Identity Theory and the weaker claim that the *ad extra* acts of the Trinity are type-identical.<sup>22</sup> It might be thought that the Trinitarian owes no-one any obligation to keep these claims distinct, for it might be supposed that nothing of any importance hinges on the fate of the Identity Theory. Only those with an inordinate fondness for counting entities should care about whether the *ad extra* acts of the Trinity are one or three—the rest of us can safely ignore this question. But that is emphatically not the case. If the Identity Theory were serviceable, it would foil an impressive argument against Social Trinitarianism. But this theory is not serviceable—and therefore the Social Trinitarian must learn how to live without it. If orthodox Christology is to be believed, then whatever the divine causes of creatures—be it the special agent-causality of the individual persons or their mental states—the Father's causal activity is not numerically identical with the Son's, and neither the Son's nor the Father's is numerically identical with the Spirit's. Since the theological commitments of the traditionally-minded Social Trinitarian prevent her from casting aspersions on 2, 3, or 4, she can only rebut the Causal Argument by discrediting its first premise. Can she?

#### IV

It seems not. As we noted earlier, it appears obvious that 1 is a necessary truth. Never mind that philosophers vigorously disagree about the nature of causal necessity and causal sufficiency—that some regard causal necessity, for example, as a kind of counterfactual dependence, some as suppressibility by the interference of agents, others as necessary conditionship, yet others as statistical relevance, and still others as unanalysable. And never mind that proponents of the Causal Argument do not specify what they mean by causal necessity and causal sufficiency. For it looks as if 1 will come out true no matter what theories of causal concepts turn out to be satisfactory. How *could* one state of affairs be causally necessary for an effect if a distinct and simultaneous state of affairs is causally sufficient for that same effect?

But in this case, as in so many others, appearances are deceiving: 1 is not

at all as obvious as it may seem. We can sketch an account of divine causal necessity and sufficiency which not only deserves serious consideration, but also casts grave suspicions on the plausibility of 1. I will not be able to argue that this account is reasonable and that it is incompatible with 1, so I will not be able to prove that the Social Trinitarian can justifiably reject the Causal Argument. But I think I will be able to mount a strong challenge to advocates of this argument—they will need to show what is wrong with my reply if they wish to continue maintaining that their argument discredits the Social Theory of the Trinity.

I would prefer to block the Causal Argument by developing a well-motivated, defensible general analysis of causal necessity and sufficiency ‘from the ground up’—a general definition of these concepts that does not presuppose any unanalysed causal notions—and then showing that on this analysis, it is possible for each of the simultaneous volitions of each of the members of the Trinity to be causally necessary and yet also causally sufficient for the existence of one and the same creature at one and the same time. This would constitute as decisive a refutation of the Causal Argument as the Social Trinitarian could hope for. But this would also require much more space than I am permitted, and much more resourcefulness than I can command. Since the rekindling of interest a generation ago in the analysis of singular causal statements, it has proved notoriously difficult to come up with a theory of causation that is demonstrably adequate—each attempt has provoked formidable objections to its tenability. Granted, one does not have to find an adequate theory of causality in order to deal a considerable blow to the Causal Argument—it would be enough to show that every account of causation taken seriously at present will produce a definition of divine causal necessity and sufficiency which permits each of the members of the Trinity to be sovereign. But even this is too involved to attempt here. How unfortunate that the Identity Theory of Divine Creation does not work—if only it did, the Social Trinitarian could ignore the tortuous question of the nature of causality, since she could dispense with the Causal Argument simply by disproving 4. But, as Bernard Williams has said in another context, there is no road back from reflectiveness.

On the other hand, I do not think it self-evident that the Social Trinitarian must delve into general accounts of causality in order to show that 1 is rather questionable. What if she begins instead by taking as primitive the concept of divine *ad extra* causation—specifically, the notion that a divine being brings about states of affairs in the created world by the exercise of its agency—and presuming that this concept is at least *prima facie* free from insurmountable difficulties? Suppose we once again conveniently assume a volitional theory of action. Then what is obviously and irremediably defective with the claim that a being with the divine attributes literally

has volitions—willings that such-and-such a state of affairs occur—and these volitions cause states of affairs that satisfy their propositional content—for example, the divine volition that Eve exist-at-*t* brings about the existence of Eve at *t*?

Granted, a number of well-known theories of causality would logically rule out this claim. One example is the mechanistic account, which maintains that states of affairs cannot be causally related unless they are spatio-temporally contiguous. Another is the standard Humean theory, which insists that states of affairs can be causally related only if they can be subsumed under a contingent empirical law. Moreover, philosophers and theologians have often argued that traditional theology is compelled to saddle God with properties that are logically incompatible with acting in the world—such as timelessness, or immutability. But theories of causality that are inconsistent with divine *ad extra* causation are anything but indubitable. And even if Christians cannot remain orthodox unless they ascribe such properties as immutability or timelessness to a divine being, it is very much an open question whether these properties logically prevent an agent from bringing about effects in the created world.<sup>23</sup>

The Social Trinitarian, then, is permitted to suppose in the absence of further evidence that there are no flagrant problems with the concept of divine *ad extra* causation: even though God's bringing about the existence of a creature is enormously different from a human being's bringing about the existence of something, the two relations have enough in common for it to be at least initially reasonable to regard the former as a genuine case of causation. Naturally, more would have to be done to show that the notion of divine *ad extra* causation is intellectually respectable. But since so many attempts to prove otherwise have failed, it would be preemptory to prohibit the Social Trinitarian from using this notion to fashion a reply to the Causal Argument. Whatever conceptual problems may plague the idea of divine causation in the world, they are by no means as egregious as the conceptual problems which plague the idea that numbers, propositions, and other Platonica are capable of efficient causality. Furthermore, there is much we can do to characterise the relation of divine *ad extra* causation even if we do not attempt to analyse it from the ground up—we can point out that this relation is necessarily irreflexive and necessarily asymmetrical, that it supports counterfactuals such as 'If God had not willed that Eve exist-at-*t*, Eve would not have existed at *t*,' and so forth. I shall therefore take as primitive the notion of divine *ad extra* causation, and shall suppose not only that it is *prima facie* legitimate, but also that we understand it well enough to use it to fill out the analyses of divine causal relations which I shall now present.

I begin with the analysis of divine causal necessity—an analysis clearly inspired by counterfactual theories of causal dependence:

12. For any states of affairs  $x$  and  $y$  and any possible world  $W$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  obtain in  $W$  and  $x$  is a divine volition that  $y$  obtain-in- $W$ , then  $x$  is causally necessary in  $W$  for  $y$ 's obtaining-in- $W$  if and only if it is true in  $W$  that if  $x$  had not obtained,  $y$  would not have obtained.

This analysis, in conjunction with principles to which the Social Trinitarian is firmly committed, has at least two consequences which are much to be desired by traditional Christians. The first is jointly entailed by 12 and 2: for every  $x$ , every  $y$ , and every time  $t$ , if  $x$  is a member of the Trinity,  $y$  is a creature, and  $y$  exists at  $t$ ,  $y$  would not have existed at  $t$  if  $x$  had not willed at  $t$  that  $y$  exist-at- $t$ . The second is that whenever the volition of one member of the Trinity at  $t$  is causally necessary for a creature's existence at  $t$ , each of the corresponding volitions of the other members of the Trinity at  $t$  is also causally necessary for that creature's existence at  $t$ . For according to every credible semantics for counterfactual conditionals, the following inference is deductively valid:

- I-1. If  $p$  had not been the case, then  $q$  would not have been the case;  
 $p$  is logically equivalent to  $r$ —that is,  $p$  and  $r$  are true in exactly the same possible worlds;  
 therefore, if  $r$  had not been the case,  $q$  would not have been the case.

Since I-1 is valid, so is any instance of it, including the following argument-form:

- I-2. If Trinitarian person  $P$  had not willed at  $t$  the existence of creature  $c$ -at- $t$ , then  $c$  would not have existed at  $t$ ;  
 $P$ 's willing at  $t$  the existence of  $c$ -at- $t$  is logically equivalent to Trinitarian person  $Q$ 's willing at  $t$  the existence of  $c$ -at- $t$ ;  
 therefore, if  $Q$  had not willed at  $t$  the existence of  $c$ -at- $t$ ,  $c$  would not have existed at  $t$ .

And since I-2 is also valid, any instance of it is also valid, no matter which Trinitarian names we substitute for ' $P$ ' and for ' $Q$ ,' and no matter which creaturely name we substitute for ' $c$ .' But any instance of the first premise of I-2 will be jointly entailed by Social Trinitarianism, 2, and 12. And any instance of the second premise of I-2 is a consequence of 10, which, as we have seen, the Social Trinitarian is fully entitled to believe.

Of course, general counterfactual theories of causality face several imposing difficulties, notably the problem of distinguishing genuinely causal from merely logical relations of dependence. But of course, 12 does not try to define divine causal sufficiency without presupposing any causal notions, so 12 does not try to distinguish genuinely causal divine sufficiency from other forms of divine sufficiency. It may be helpful at this point to recall Saul Kripke's memorable remarks against those who raise sceptical doubts about



the possibility of trans-world identification of individuals. As Kripke notes, these doubts often arise from talking of possible worlds as if they were distant and unfamiliar places we must view through a special kind of telescope, so that first we see objects in other possible worlds which look somewhat similar to objects in our own world, and then we agonise over whether the objects in the other worlds are identical to any objects in our own. But this sort of talk is patently ridiculous. And it is just as ridiculous to fancy that once the Social Trinitarian stipulates that a possible world contains both a creature *c* which exists at *t* and a divine volition that *c* exist-at-*t*, we have to peer at that world through a telescope to ascertain whether the divine volition brings about the existence of *c*-at-*t*. Given such a divine volition and such a state of affairs, it follows that the volition is an efficient cause of the state. 12, then, merely tells us what needs to be added to this causal relation in order for the divine volition to be causally necessary for the state.

However, 12 does invite an objection that the Social Trinitarian cannot brush aside so easily: even if a divine *ad extra* volition and a state of affairs satisfying its propositional content are related in the way specified by 12, and this relation counts as causality, it still does not count as causal necessity. Since this objection is too troublesome for a summary dismissal, I shall have to leave it for another occasion. Nonetheless, the Social Trinitarian can say much in her defence. For instance, she can quite easily distinguish divine creation and preservation from many kinds of counterexamples to the sufficiency of various counterfactual analyses of causal necessity. In the divine case, the volition that a creature exist is not a constituent part of the creature's existing; in the divine case, God does not do one action by doing another, because the state of affairs that is counterfactually dependent upon the divine willing is not even an action; and given at least a rudimentary understanding of divine *ad extra* causation, we need not worry about disambiguating the direction of causation—it is simply analytic that a divine volition is causally prior to a state of affairs that satisfies the propositional content of the volition. Furthermore, perhaps the Social Trinitarian can also say that in cases in which it is evident to naïve intuition that neither of two simultaneous causes of a state of affairs is causally necessary for that state, the effect is not counterfactually dependent on either of its causes, whereas the existence of a creature at a time, as we have seen, is counterfactually dependent upon each of the relevant volitions of each of the persons in the Trinity. In the switch case mentioned earlier, for example, it is not true of either switch that if it had not been flipped, the light would not have come on, because according to the usual comparative-similarity semantics for counterfactual conditionals, the light comes on in those possible worlds closest to the actual world in which one of the switches is not flipped. And perhaps this could help to justify the Social Trinitarian's conviction that each of the relevant Trinitarian volitions is causally necessary for the existence of a creature.<sup>24</sup>

As for divine causal sufficiency, my analysis is reminiscent of the neo-Humean regularity theory, which contends that one state of affairs is causally sufficient for another just in case the obtaining of the first state, in conjunction with the laws of nature, entails the obtaining of the second, but neither the obtaining of the first state nor the laws of nature alone entail the obtaining of the second. Of course, the regularity theory will not do as it stands for an analysis of divine causal sufficiency, since it would imply that a divine volition by itself cannot be causally sufficient for anything. But we can overcome this problem once we are allowed to use our unanalysed concept of divine *ad extra* causality: we can maintain that what makes a case of divine causality into a case of divine sufficient causation is simply that the divine volition entails that its effect obtains, so that God's causal sufficiency is not subject to the laws of nature. In other words,

13. For any states of affairs  $x$  and  $y$  and any possible world  $W$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  obtain in  $W$  and  $x$  is a divine volition that  $y$  obtain-in- $W$ , then  $x$  is causally sufficient for  $y$  in  $W$  if and only if there is no possible world in which  $x$  obtains but  $y$  does not obtain.

This principle follows from a claim that is endorsed by a great many traditional theists—that it is a *de re* essential property of any individual that is divine that its will is unimpedable, i.e. it is not possible for it to will a state of affairs without that state's coming to pass. And 13, like 12, entails, in conjunction with other central beliefs of Social Trinitarianism, a consequence that traditional Christians will welcome: it logically guarantees that if one member of the Trinity has a volition at  $t$  which is causally sufficient for the existence of a creature at  $t$ , then the other two members of the Trinity will each have a volition at  $t$  which is also causally sufficient for the existence of that creature at  $t$ . For necessarily, given any states of affairs  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ , if  $x$  entails  $y$  and  $z$  is necessarily coextensive with  $x$ , then  $z$  also entails  $x$ . And according to 10, it is a necessary truth that, for any volition of a Trinitarian person at a time  $t$  which entails the existence of a creature at  $t$ , there is a volition of each of the other Trinitarian persons at  $t$  which also entails the existence of that creature at  $t$ .

And if 12 and 13 are both acceptable, then 1 is, at the very least, questionable. For it is scarcely axiomatic that one and the same state of affairs cannot be both individually entailed by each of two other states of affairs and also counterfactually dependent upon each of them. In fact, according to one respected criterion for the individuation of states of affairs, there are many such states which obtain in the actual world. For instance, *the number of my eyes being 2*, *the number of my eyes being the smallest even positive integer*, and *the number of my eyes being the smallest positive prime number* are all distinct states of affairs, yet the first is both entailed by and counterfactually dependent upon the second, and is both entailed by and counterfactually

dependent upon the third. Now of course this criterion is disputable; and even if it were not, the relations of entailment and counterfactual dependence between these states of affairs, unlike the dependence of creatures on God, are symmetrical. But why should this worry the Social Trinitarian? It may well mean that Trinitarian causation of creatures is unique in this respect—but what is wrong with that? Why should we believe that a state of affairs cannot be both asymmetrically entailed by each of two other states of affairs and also asymmetrically counterfactually dependent on each of them? Hence, contrary to what proponents of the Causal Argument have heretofore supposed, 1 cannot be effortlessly extracted from our concepts of causal necessity and causal sufficiency.

This completes my reply to the Causal Argument. I concede that I have not refuted it. But I think I have cast considerable doubt on its cogency. Those who believe in it must explain why the Social Trinitarian is not entitled to 12 and 13—or why 1 is plausible even if she is. If no such explanation can be given, then she may safely repudiate the Causal Argument: if there be any convincing reasons for denying the coherence of her claim that there is more than one God who exercises sovereign power over the created world, these reasons will not arise from any account of causal necessity and sufficiency that we are obliged to believe. If these concepts will not forbid us to say, There be one Lord, they will not forbid us to say, There be more than one.<sup>25</sup>

## NOTES

1. *The Trinitarian Controversy Reviewed: or a Defence of the Appeal to the Common Sense of all Christian People* (London, 1760), author identified only as 'the Author of the Appeal,' p. 338. I have relied on a citation in a more accessible source: L. Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Nisbet, 1943), p. 219.

2. I argue that this is the only reasonable conclusion in 'The Plight of the Relative Trinitarian,' *Religious Studies*, vol. 24 (1989), pp. 129-55. I am aware that the Social Theory of the Trinity is not always characterised in this way—it is often taken to mean simply that the Trinity consists of three distinct, fully divine persons, which is formally consistent with the contention that there is some sortal other than 'person' under which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are numerically the same. See, for example, D. Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1985), p. 244. But several recent writers have formulated the Social Theory as I do—for instance, T. Morris, in *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1986), p. 210 *et passim*, and C. J. Plantinga Jr., 'Social Trinity and Tritheism,' in R. J. Feenstra and C. J. Plantinga, eds., *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989), p. 40. Since neither usage is primary, I shall presume that mine is acceptable.

3. But I take some steps in this direction in section VII of 'The Plight of the Relative Trinitarian.' See also Plantinga, *ibid.*

4. See, for example, Morris, *ibid.*, pp. 213-14; R. Swinburne, 'Could There Be More

Than One God?,' *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 5 (1988), pp. 230-31; A. R. Mele and M. P. Smith, 'The New Paradox of the Stone,' *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 5 (1988), pp. 283-90; and my 'Could There Be More Than One Almighty?,' *Religious Studies*, vol. 29 (1993), pp. 465-95.

5. Scotus' formulation of the Causal Argument is in *Opus Oxoniense* I, dist. 2, q. 3, way 4; English translation by A. Wolter, *Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1962), p. 88 (Latin text on page 87). For Wainwright's version, see 'Monotheism,' in R. Audi and W. Wainwright, eds., *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1986), pp. 296-97 and 300. I point out in note 8 that Wainwright's argument supersedes Scotus'. I should also point out that according to Wainwright, the Causal Argument does not preclude the existence of the Trinity, there being at least one orthodox interpretation of the Trinity which the argument is powerless to refute—the view that the divine will is an aspect of the one divine essence, so that there is only one creative will in the Godhead (*ibid.*, p. 310). But I argue in the next section of my paper that this interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity presupposes the truth of an indefensible principle.

6. There are several reasons why I have chosen to quantify over states of affairs rather than events. For instance, I favour the view that an event is an exemplification of a property by a concrete individual at a time. But we shall soon see that among the entities within the intended range of the quantifiers in 1 are such things as the existence of a contingent substance at a time. And I am loath to commit myself to the notoriously controversial claim that existence is a property. (I owe this point to P. Quinn, 'Divine Conservation, Secondary Causes, and Occasionalism,' in T. Morris, ed., *Divine and Human Action* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1988), pp. 50-73; cf. p. 52.) On the other hand, nothing in my formulation of the Causal Argument is inimical to regarding events as a species of states of affairs. I have added the proviso that  $z$  not be a proper part of  $x$  because a causally sufficient condition of an effect can have a proper part which is itself causally necessary for that effect. Indeed, this is an everyday occurrence—an example is a Parliamentary measure's passing by 300 votes to 299.

7. From now on I shall suppress '(or in the "timeless present")' in the interests of readability. But note that the Causal Argument can be tailored to the doctrine of divine timelessness.

8. One major defect of Scotus' form of the Causal Argument is that it does not remain uncommitted on this point. His second premise, which he takes to be self-evident, states, 'an infinite power is the total primary cause of every single effect that exists' (*ibid.*)—that is, an infinitely powerful being is a causally sufficient condition of every single effect. On the other hand, Wainwright scrupulously detaches the Causal Argument from anti-libertarian assumptions, and that is why his version of the argument supersedes Scotus'.

9. *Quod Non Sint Tres Dii*, translated by H. A. Wilson, in W. Moore and H. A. Wilson, eds. and trs., *Select Writings and Letters of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa* (New York: Christian Literature, 1893), p. 334.

10. Although it seems to me far from obvious that Gregory of Nyssa ever advocated an Identity Theory for any divine act-tokens—I am inclined to think that on this, as on many other important philosophical matters, Patristic theologians were pre-theoretical—at least one modern philosopher, Richard Sturch, holds that it is logically possible for a mental

particular of one member of the Trinity to be numerically identical with a mental particular of another member. See his *The Word and the Christ* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), pp. 249-50. But Sturch also believes that there are mental particulars which are peculiar to one member of the Trinity. Since he does not suggest how he would classify the Trinity's creating volitions, it is unclear whether he would accept the Identity Theory.

11. There is some dispute over whether it is possible to formulate a non-circular criterion for distinguishing states of affairs in terms of their causes and effects. For the sake of simplicity, I assume in the text that this can be done. If it cannot be done, then of course no such criterion can be used to attack the Identity Theory.

12. *Ibid.*

13. The temporal and world indices make 10 a bit cumbersome, but they are needed in order to make it absolutely plain that necessarily, no-one in the Trinity wills an *ad extra* state of affairs unless every member of the Trinity *simultaneously* wills that same state of affairs. Otherwise, as will soon become obvious, 10 would lend no plausibility to the Identity Theory.

14. We could begin with the concept of a state of affairs which is *contingent with respect to the existence of something*:

Necessarily, for any state of affairs *x* and for any *y*, *x* is contingent with respect to the existence of *y* if and only if *x* occurs in some but not all of the possible worlds in which *y* exists.

Then we could recast 2 as follows:

2n\*. For any *x*, if *x* is divine, then in any possible world *W*, if *x* exists in *W*, then for any creature *y* whose existence is contingent with respect to the existence of *x*, and for any time *t*, if *y* exists at *t* in *W* then *x*'s willing at *t* in *W* that *y* exist-at-*t*-in-*W* is causally necessary for the existence of *y* at *t* in *W*.

And the rest of the argument would be very similar to the one in the text.

15. One might wonder how the Identity Theorist could possibly have any grounds for differentiating the divine individuals. But perhaps he could reasonably invoke the venerable Christian claim that the persons of the Trinity differ in their essential relational properties—for example, God the Son is eternally begotten by the Father whereas the Father is unbegotten. It may well be extremely difficult for the Identity Theorist to spell out the meaning of this claim. But perhaps he could reasonably invoke another widespread Christian belief—that it is pointless, or even impious, for human reason to strive for a clear understanding of the internal Trinitarian relations. As Gregory of Nazianzus said, 'Define the unbegottenness of the Father and I will describe the nature of the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, and let us both go mad, prying into God's mysteries' (*Orations*, 31, 7). And however opaque these relational properties might be to human reason, Christian theologians nonetheless insist that they are genuine properties—from which it follows by the Indiscernability of Identicals that each of the Trinitarian persons is absolutely distinct from the other two.

16. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, essay IV, in W. Hamilton, ed., *The Works of Thomas Reid* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1872), vol. II, pp. 599-636; Campbell, 'Is "Free Will" a Pseudo-Problem?', *Mind*, vol. 60 (1951), pp. 441-65, and *On Selfhood and Godhood* (London: Macmillan, 1957); Taylor, *Action and Purpose* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 111; Chisholm, 'Freedom and Action,' in Keith

Lehrer, ed., *Freedom and Determinism* (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 11-44; Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes,' *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 60 (1963), pp. 685-700; and Goldman, *A Theory of Human Action* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1970), chap. 3.

17. Or, more plausibly,  $x$  itself and certain states of  $x$ , such as wants and beliefs. The same point holds for the Agency Theory restatement of 3 below. However, this qualification makes no difference in the end to the fate of the Identity Theory, so in the interests of elegance I shall omit it.

18. Thus the Causal Argument sheds its earlier assumption of a volitional theory of divine agency.

19. See, for instance, Goldman, *ibid.*, pp. 80-85; H. G. Frankfurt, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,' *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 68 (1971), section IV; and G. Watson, in Watson, ed., *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1982), p. 10.

20. Actually, this is quite contentious. Many philosophers have argued that in order to explain intentional human action, we must ascribe to human agents what have come to be called 'irreducibly *de se* attitudes'—attitudes that the agent would express in the first person if she expressed them at all, or in other words, attitudes that are not equivalent to any that she could express by using a non-indexical term to refer to herself. See, for example, J. Perry, 'The Problem of the Essential Indexical,' *Nous*, vol. 13 (1979), pp. 3-21. I believe that this is right, and I also believe that this point can be extended to the divine case: we cannot give an adequate explanation of a creature's existence in terms of the intentional agency of a person of the Trinity unless we attribute to that person a repertoire of irreducibly *de se* attitudes. But if so, then the Identity Theory is a lost cause. I lack the space to explain why, but the reader should be able to construct a proof which is closely similar to the Agency Theory variant of the Causal Argument. Nevertheless, I shall suppose that I am mistaken—I shall suppose that the persons in the Trinity do not have irreducibly *de se* attitudes which causally contribute to the existence of creatures. As we shall see in a moment, the Identity Theory is indefensible anyway.

21. So far as I know, it was Bertrand Russell who originated this useful term. See his 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism,' in R. C. Marsh, ed., *Logic and Knowledge* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 277.

22. An exception is Richard Swinburne. He implicitly assumes that the Identity Theory is false, for he argues that the members of the Trinity would impede each other's *ad extra* work if the Father were not the source of the existence of the other two persons (*ibid.*, section II).

23. For sophisticated arguments that such properties are not logically incompatible with *ad extra* agency, see, for instance, E. Stump and N. Kretzmann, 'Eternity,' *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 79 (1981), pp. 429-58, and P. Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

24. I admit, however, that this line of argument needs much more development if it is to be convincing. We can think of everyday examples in which an effect has two simultaneous sets of causally sufficient conditions and it is true of each of these sets that if it had not obtained, the effect would not have obtained, either, but we are nonetheless inclined to say that neither of these sets is causally necessary for the effect. Many of us,

for instance, are in the habit of using both hands to close a drawer, even though one hand would do. Suppose that someone has a deeply engrained habit of this sort. Then, on a certain occasion when he pushes with both hands on a drawer at  $t$  and the drawer moves at  $t$ -plus-delta, it might well be true of each hand that, if he had not pushed the drawer with that hand at  $t$ , the drawer would not have moved at  $t$ -plus-delta. For if his habit of two-handed pushing is especially deeply engrained, then, given the supposition that he does not push the drawer at  $t$  with both hands, it would be less of a departure from actuality to imagine that he simply does not push the drawer at  $t$  than to imagine that he pushes the drawer at  $t$  with only one hand. But perhaps we can still find a relevant difference between this kind of case and the Trinity. In the preceding example, it is false that, if the man had pushed the drawer with only one of his hands, the drawer would have stayed where it was—in the absence of only one of the two sets of sufficient conditions, the drawer would have moved anyway. But it does not seem to be false that, if one of the Trinitarian willings had been present but another absent, the effect would have obtained anyway. After all, the antecedent of this counterfactual is logically impossible, and therefore, on all of the standard semantics, the counterfactual itself is vacuously true. I do not regard this reply as conclusive, but I do think it is worthy of further investigation.

25. I am grateful to the editor and one of his referees for helpful criticism of an earlier draft of this paper.