Religious Studies (2018) **54**, 359–376 © Cambridge University Press 2018
doi:10.1017/S0034412518000215

The Trinity is unconstitutional

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Abstract: Some marble, appropriately worked, comes to constitute a statue: constitution is the relation between the resulting statue and the marble it is made of. Some recent authors use the concept of constitution to explicate or at least provide an analogy for the doctrine of the Trinity. I argue that this won't do, because there is no viable candidate for the role the marble plays in the statue's case.

The Athanasian Creed states that Christians

> worship one God in Trinity . . . Neither confounding the Persons; nor separating the essence . . . there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Spirit . . . the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God . . . Christian truth compels us to confess every Person by himself to be God (and) forbids us to say, There are three Gods.[1]

There are three Persons. To say that there is only one would 'confound' them. Plausibly the 'is' in 'the Father is God' expresses identity.[2] Yet we cannot infer that there are three Gods. The Creed, in other words, seems to say that

The Father = God,

The Son = God, and

The Holy Spirit = God,

and yet deny that Father = Son = Spirit or that there are three Gods. Yet it seems that one or the other must follow from these premises. The Creed, in other words, seems to preclude Christians' being both orthodox and logically consistent. Some Christian thinkers have of late used the concept of constitution to try to deal with this. I think this won't do. I will now try to convince you of this. I begin by explaining in general terms what constitution is supposed to be. I then argue against constitution accounts of the Trinity.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000215 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Constitution

Suppose that a sculptor moulds a hunk of clay, Hunk, into a statue of Athena, henceforth Athena. Hunk existed before Athena. So they have different temporal properties. They may also have different modal properties. Plausibly statues cannot survive crushing and hunks can. Athena cannot exist after Athena, but if Hunk can survive what Athena cannot, Hunk can exist after Athena. Objects which differ in property are not identical. So it seems that Hunk ≠ Athena. But if so, while Athena exists, Hunk and Athena are non-identical objects in the same place. We jib at this. It doesn't look like that place contains two things. When Hunk is moulded into Athena, the weight in Hunk's place does not double. So it would be nice if we could acknowledge that Hunk ≠ Athena and also say why it seems that there aren't two things in Hunk's place. At this point, some philosophers invoke constitution. Hunk, they say, constitutes Athena. They are distinct, but constitution is (they say) a stronger relation than simple coincidence in place, which can explain the appearance that just one object occupies Athena's place. The combined force of the intuitions favouring distinct temporal and modal properties, and so two objects, and those favouring just one object per occupied spatial region, is supposed to drive us to posit a special relation, constitution, that lets us preserve them all.

The Trinitarian application

I now briefly sketch three constitution accounts of the Trinity. Michael Rea and Jeffrey Brower suggest that though Hunk ≠ Athena, just one material thing fills Hunk's place. That is, they say that though not identical, Hunk and Athena are one material object. Their key claim is this:

> *X* is a material object iff *x* is a matter–form compound; exactly one material object fills a region R iff at least one matter–form compound fills R; and *x* is (numerically) the same material object as *y* iff *x* and *y* are matter–form compounds sharing the same matter. (Brower & Rea (2009), 272)[3]

The notion of a matter–form compound is of course Aristotelian. Hunk and Athena are matter–form compounds. On this definition, they are one material object because they share all their matter. In their case, $x \neq y$, and one mass of matter in R hosts two forms, one making the matter *x*, one making it *y*. Iff things share all their matter, they are (say Brower and Rea (henceforth BR)) one in number – they stand in a relation of numerical sameness. When we count by numerical sameness, we count by masses of matter in a place: thus we count Hunk and Athena as numerically the same material object. Numerical sameness without identity is BR's constitution relation. As they see it, for *x* to constitute *y* is for *x* and *y* to stand in this relation.[4]

BR build an account of the Trinity on this. Father, Son and Spirit, they say, are three immaterial analogues of matter–form compounds. They share something

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that plays the role of matter, but there are three forms in that something, making up three things.[5] In line with the claim just quoted, BR suggest that

> *X* is a God iff *x* is a matter–form compound whose 'matter' is some divine essence; *x* is the same God as *y* iff *x* and *y* are matter–form compounds whose 'matter' is some divine essence and *x*'s 'matter' is the same 'matter' as *y*'s, and there is exactly one God iff there is an *x* such that *x* is God and every God is the same God as *x*; (and) *x* is God iff *x* is a God and there is exactly one God. (*ibid.*, 277)[6]

Christopher Hughes suggests instead that either God is the divine 'matter', and the God–Person relation is being-materiated-by, i.e. having God as their matter, or God is the substance of the Persons and their relation to God is being-ensubstanced-by, i.e. having God as their substance.[7] Either (he suggests) might make the God-Person relation like that between someone with a divided mind and the plural 'centers of consciousness' into which that mind divides.[8] William Hasker adopts the divided-mind analogy, but asserts that what constitutes is neither God nor a Person nor 'some divine essence'.[9]

A constitution account of the Trinity says that something constitutes the Persons. So it must say what does this and explain the constitution relation that links this 'what' to the Persons. Here I take up what constitutes the Persons. I deal with the constitution relation elsewhere.[10]

What constitutes: a property?

In a solo piece, Rea suggests that the divine essence that constitutes the Persons is a sharable, multiply locatable power – an attribute.[11] 'Divine essence' does sound like a term for a property. But the thought that a property makes up Persons is hard to fathom. Persons are concrete things. They have causal powers. Leaving bundle theories aside for the moment, what makes up a concrete object is either some stuff or another object, but it is hard to see how something abstract could be the stuff of something concrete, or an abstract object could constitute a concrete object. If one thing constitutes another, they share a significant range of properties because of this: because Hunk constitutes Athena, they have the same size, shape, chemical composition, and causal powers. But abstract objects have no such significant properties in common with concrete ones. BR say that form, added to matter, 'makes' it an object, e.g. a statue. What could be added to a property to make it a concrete object? What magic would it take to do that? Of course, on a bundle theory, *everything* concrete is just a bundle of properties. But bundle theories just make the 'magic' problem perfectly general rather than solving it. So it seems implausible that a property can constitute the Persons. We have to look instead to something concrete.

Concrete stuff

Stuffs are concrete. And BR write that 'the role of matter in the case of the Trinity is played by immaterial stuff' (*ibid.*, 276). They add that 'The matter of a

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thing is not an individual thing; rather it is that which combines with form to *make* an individual thing' (*ibid*., 267). If it is not an individual thing, then it is somehow non-individual stuff. BR comment in a footnote that this stuff 'view of matter . . . seems to comport best with [our] solution to the problem of the Trinity' (*ibid*., 264 n. 3). They call the position they sketch 'the most promising solution to the problem of the Trinity developed so far' (*ibid*.). So it sounds like BR believe in immaterial stuff, and for them 'some divine essence' indicates a quantity of that stuff – or at the least took this idea fairly seriously when they wrote. But they may not. In a personal communication, Brower writes that 'I . . . think of what plays the role of matter in God . . . as a concrete individual, not as . . . immaterial stuff. I thought this when Rea and I authored our joint . . . piece, and I continue to think this now.'[12] As noted above, Rea too opts for something else.[13] Perhaps neither of them ever really took immaterial stuff seriously.[14] Let that be a lesson about writing philosophy by committee. Still, BR put immaterial stuff on the table, and belief in 'spiritual' matter has a respectable ancestry in ibn Gabirol and some Franciscans. So let's consider it.

If we opt for a stuff, we must make sense of immaterial stuff. Now stuff comes in quantities. So consider these exchanges: 'How much divine essence does it take to make a divine person?' 'All of it, fool!' 'Does divine essence come in batches?' 'Well, the Father and the Son have the same batch of it.' This is crazy talk – but it should make sense if the divine essence is a stuff. Quantities of stuff typically divide: one can divide a batch of dough. Dividing them supposes or creates parts – either the batch has halves even before we cut it in half, and that is why we can do so, or the halving creates the halves. The divine essence does not have halves, and nothing could be done to it to give it any. Dividing the parts is separating them spatially; if dividing creates halves, it does so by separating them. Even if the Persons' batch of divine essence had parts – I do not claim that I can make sense of that – the batch is not in space and so could not be spatially divided. I do think any other sort of division applies either. Again, quantities of stuff can merge: one can reunite the halves of the dough. But there is just the one primordial batch of divine essence, and if it can't split, it can't reunite. It's not clear, then, that we can make sense of quantities of divine essence. We can use one Person's worth as a sort of pseudo-quantity, but in the typical case, we can make sense of quantities of stuff independent of the objects they make up – there can be more or less than one loaf's worth of dough. If we can't do this here, there is more than a whiff of cheating about 'one Person's worth'. Similarly, 'all of it' can't really count as quantitative without more filling out. We can in the same way speak of having all of a property, but properties don't come in quantities.

If we opt for a stuff, we must also make sense of how the stuff makes up an immaterial thing. We know how matter manages to make up material substances, because we know how matter takes on form and how we get it to do this. We mould clay into a statue: taking advantage of its extension and plasticity, we

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physically impose a new shape. We chip marble into a statue: we take advantage of its brittleness, the weak bonds between some parts of it, to separate the statue from what surrounds it. We move some bits of marble away from others. To combine chemical elements into a compound, we move some bits near other bits, and new causal links form between them. All of this depends on distinctively material aspects of matter: shape, occupying space, having spatial relations, being divisible, having spatially discrete parts. We can use these aspects to give a thick, contentful explanation of matter's ability to constitute objects.

All of these useful properties are absent with immaterial stuff. So if we ask how it is able to do the trick of making up an object – what properties of immaterial stuff make this possible – there is no answer. Subtract the distinctively matter-ish bits of the concept of matter, and nothing seems left over to make it a stuff save having a nature that does not partition it into quantities (stuff always comes in some quantity or other, but its very nature does not divide it into (say) distinct one-ounce units) and the ability to constitute objects, when combined with a form. As to the first, the nature of triangles does not partition them into quantities, and yet triangles are not a stuff. Further, we don't know what 'partition' and 'quantities' can amount to in this case anyway, save in the trivial sense that making up some objects might 'partition' some immaterial stuff from other immaterial stuff and 'one object's worth' is a sort of place-marker for a quantity.

The second, I submit, runs into a wall. We have no explanation of how immaterial stuff can constitute an object or combine with a form. Perhaps a Franciscan would say 'it's just a case of potentiality and actuality. The immaterial stuff is a being in potentiality which gets actualized by form, thus yielding an object.'[15] As I see it, this is at best an epicycle. The same is supposed to be true in the case of material stuff. But in the material case, we know what takes place to 'educe' the form from the matter, or impose it on the matter. We know just how the trick is done, and it's this story, not the bare invocation of potentiality and actuality, that does the explaining. The statue is 'in potentiality' in the clay. The clay is potentially a statue. Why? Because it can be moulded into one. It has the needed (passive) powers, in virtue of these-and-those facts about its physical makeup, and we know how to exploit them, and how they react when we do, and just what it consists in to impose a new form in this way and so make it actually a statue. Talk of raising a being in potentiality to actuality is just a shorthand for these and relevantly similar stories. By itself, it explains nothing. As I've argued, we can't fill out the story in the immaterial case at all. So if bare mention of potentiality and actuality can't explain by itself, as I have suggested, the claim that the divine essence is a stuff cannot tell us how it can constitute objects. Without a thicker concept of what an immaterial stuff might be, the claim that there is one and it's just what's needed to allow for immaterial constitution is going to sound like hand-waving, an invocation of magic. But what else can there be to being an immaterial stuff? It doesn't come in quantities. It's not divisible in any way we grasp. It's not extended or spatially related. Everything we understand

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about being a stuff goes with being material stuff. Subtract all that and it's not clear what's left.

The view BR develop jointly treats deity as stuff without form,[16] which combines with form to make up a Person. That is, BR treat it as an immaterial analogue of Thomist 'prime matter', matter which in itself isn't anything at all, but is potentially many things because it can combine with many forms. With all respect to Aquinas, most people don't think this concept really makes sense. I've heard it described as 'the nothing that is something'.[17] Leaving that aside, this analogy creates a worry about monotheism. Prime matter, according to Aquinas, is just 'privatively one'. Having no form of its own, it is not on its own a positive unity or being, but since of itself it contains no form to distinguish one batch of it from another – no kind, no extension, no part-structure – it is one in a negative way.[18] That is, all prime matter is one only in the sense that there is nothing intrinsic to any of it to distinguish some of it from other of it.[19] Really, talk of it all being one is just a way to say that when we get down to the level of prime matter in individual substances, taking away all their forms, there is nothing left to distinguish one substance from another.

This raises a monotheism problem because for BR, the unity of the divine essence, the Persons' sharing the same divine essence, is supposed to make the Persons one and be the ultimate reason there is just one God. On a prime matter approach to immaterial stuff, then, the Persons are one only in the sense that at the level of the divine essence, there is nothing to distinguish one from another. But then they are one exactly as you and I are one: we have the same kind-essence and there is nothing to distinguish you and me at the level of prime matter or kind-essence. Despite this unity, you and I are just two discrete members of the kind human, and there is no one human we both form. By analogy, then, the Persons would be two discrete Gods who do not make up any single God. The sense in which there is one God on this reading of BR is no thicker than the sense in which you and I are one human. That's not good enough. Further, this problem recurs on Rea's property account of the divine essence. Any realist about universals would say that the same abstract object is my nature and yours, and that would not change if the realist had an Armstrong-style account of exemplification, which makes our attributes literally our shared constituents – things in which we overlap.[20] So on Rea's version of constitutionalism too, the Persons are no more one God than you and I are one human.

Concrete individuals

Still, one need not treat what constitutes the Persons as non-individual stuff or as a property. Quantities of stuff divide into smaller quantities. When water does not divide into smaller parts which are also water, we have reached its minimum quantity, a single atom: we no longer have some stuff, but simply an individual.

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Were the divine essence stuff, it would be an atom of the stuff, in the strong Lucretian sense of a simple part. For if God's batch of it were not simple, it would have a decomposition into smaller amounts. (I do not say that it could be separated into these smaller amounts. Perhaps its parts would inseparable.) God would have halves, quarters, etc., or some analogue of these. That God has these is just too strange to believe. Further, the amounts of divine essence in these either would or would not be enough to make them almost- or quasi- or a bit divine. On the one alternative, God would have an exhaustive decomposition into gods or godlets. On the other, God would have an exhaustive decomposition into non-divine parts. Either is also too strange to believe.

I suggest, then, that if the divine essence were batch of a stuff, it would not have smaller parts. It would be a simple, an atom, and so an individual thing. In any case, quantities of stuff are individuals, whether or not atomic. They are countable, not just weighable or measureable: one can't count clay, but one can count pounds of clay. A pound of clay is an individual, even though clay – just clay, full stop – is not. So a constitution view *should* treat the divine essence as an individual. It should say that the Persons have a concrete individual in common.

Still, without the matterish bits of the concept of a concrete constituting individual, I do not see what understanding talk of constitution really yields for the Trinity. We seem to be left with only a distant analogy, one undermined precisely by the immateriality of God. In BR's case, we seem left with little but a version of relative identity.[21] There is some F supposed to be relevantly like matter, and according to BR, the Persons can be the same God but different Persons because their Fs are (absolutely) identical. But given what I've said above, Fs' likeness to matter seems to be no more than an unexplained ability to constitute objects. Without more to fill out the likeness to matter, the reference to Fs does no explanatory work, and so it's not clear that BR's view represents any advance on a simple relative-identity account.[22] But let us in any case consider what the constituting object for 'constitution' Trinitarianism might be.

The Father

One candidate is the Father; we might see the Creed's talk of processions as a way to get at eternal, necessary relations of constitution. But if the Father constituted the Son, plausibly the Father suffered on the Cross. The Father is one subject of experience and the Son another, but plausibly if one conscious subject of experience constitutes another, they share experiences. Now we might take this conditional in a different direction in our own case. I am conscious. Suppose that my body constitutes me. It seems odd at best to say that person and body are distinct conscious subjects of the same experiences. So as I am a conscious subject, we might infer that my body is not.[23] This argues, in effect, that as constituting and constituted would share experience, they are not both conscious subjects. This move is possible in our case because it is open to us to deny that our bodies are

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conscious subjects of experience. It is not open to us to deny that the Father is. So it seems plausible that if the Father constituted the Son, then when the Son suffered on the Cross, the Father did too.

Further, if the Father constituted the Son, the Father was incarnate with the Son. The metaphysics of the Incarnation is a complex topic.[24] But there is a relation between the Son and the composite of Jesus' human body B and soul S (henceforth B + S), in virtue of which the Son is incarnate in B + S. This incarnation relation is either identity, constitution, or an analogue of dualist embodiment.[25] If the Father constitutes the Son, B + S does not. For if both constitute the Son, entirely discrete, non-overlapping objects wholly constitute the Son. It is as if some wood wholly constituted my chair and also some marble wholly constituted it. I cannot make sense of this. So if the Father constitutes the Son, the incarnation-relation must be identity or like dualist embodiment. I argue against an identity account elsewhere.[26] But if we adopt one, then if the Son = B + S and the Father constitutes the Son, the Father constitutes B + S.

B + S is biologically alive. An object constituting a biologically live object shares many properties with it, and among them, I submit, is being biologically alive. If anything constitutes me, it is a mass of matter. If I am alive, the mass is also, even if not every part of it is. At one level of decomposition, the mass consists mostly or wholly of live cells. Their interrelations just are my biological life. But those relations take place in the mass. So I suggest that they are just as truly its life as mine. One might reply here with a parallel to the argument just given about biological subjects, but while it is plausible that bodies as distinct from persons do not count as conscious, it is rather less so that biologically integrated masses of live human tissue as distinct from human beings count as alive. For B + S's biological life to be the Son's biological life just is what it is for the Son to be incarnate in B + S. If an object constituting a biologically live object shares being biologically alive with it, then if the Father constitutes B + S, B + S's biological life is also the Father's. If for B + S's biological life to be the Son's biological life just is what it is for the Son to be incarnate in B + S, then if B + S's biological life is also the Father's, the Father is incarnate in B + S. So if the Son is incarnate by identity and the Father constitutes the Son, the Father is also incarnate, though not by identity.

Finally, suppose that the Son is to B + S as a soul is to its body. We then must ask what makes my soul 'incarnate' – embodied – in my body. On Thomist and other pre-Cartesian accounts, it is that my soul enlivens this body – that my soul's life is its life. So on this approach, the Son's incarnation-relation to B + S would be that they live His life, or He lives His life in and through them. If so, B + S's biological life is the Son's biological life. So we get again the last paragraph's result, that the Father is also incarnate. On Cartesian accounts, a special causal setup embodies a soul in a body, e.g. that the body sends sensory input only to this soul and the soul can move only this body in a basic action.[27] It seems a general truth that constituting and constituted objects share their causal relations at a basic level. If some

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marble constitutes the statue, I see both at once, by the same causal relation to what fills that particular region; both strike me if the statue falls on me; etc. If that's *not* true in a given case, I lose my grip on what it means to say that the one constitutes the other. Now I specified 'at a basic level' because there might be levels of causal story at which the two are distinct. An art critic, seeing a statue, might have some reactions only to the statue, not the marble, and an animal might react only to the marble, lacking the ability to see it as a statue. At any rate, in an irenic spirit, I'm prepared to countenance that thought. But it seems plausible to me, at least, that embodying causal relations will be at a suitably basic level. If my soul were made of a mass of spiritual matter, my body could not send sensory input to the soul without sending it to the spiritual matter, and if my soul moved my body, plausibly the mass of spiritual matter would, just as if the statue moves my arm, the marble does. If this is right, then plausibly, if the Son has 'embodying' causal relations to B + S, and the Father constitutes the Son, so does the Father.

This is a consequential argument, as the claim that the Father was also incarnate is (to put it mildly) unorthodox. But it has a further consequence. If it is correct, then if the Father constitutes the Son, the Father also died on the Cross. For if the Son is biologically alive and the Father constitutes the Son, the Father is biologically alive. This is not because constituting objects must share all or all relevant properties of what they constitute – that is obviously false. It is rather because if the Son is incarnate in a particular body and the Father constitutes the Son, the Father is also incarnate in that body, and someone is incarnate in a body only if he or she is biologically alive. Now for the Son to die is for the Son to lose the property of being biologically alive. If the Son loses this and the Father constitutes the Son, the Father loses this. For the Son loses it just if His body ceases to live, and if the body ceases to live, the constituting Father cannot still be biologically alive.

Now the claim that the Father suffered and/or died on the Cross does not quite add up to full historical Patripassianism. For that seems (insofar as we can reconstruct it) to have included a denial that Father and Son were eternally distinct within an eternal Trinity, and in the present context, that the Father suffered and/or died on the Cross does not entail this. But still, the debate over Patripassianism made orthodox the conclusion that the Father did not suffer or die: only the Son did.[28] We have not made sense of the Creed unless we stay orthodox. So having the Father constitute the other Persons is out.[29]

The other Persons are not plausible candidates for a constituting object. For the procession statements in the Creeds make it plain that they are in some sense not as basic in reality as the Father. But there are two broad approaches to constitution. On one, which we see in BR, constituting and constituted objects are equally basic: the Father has the relation of numerical sameness without identity to the Son just if the Son has it to the Father, and so constitution leaves them symmetrically related. On the other, which we see e.g. in Lynn Rudder Baker, the constituting object is more basic.[30] So the procession statements militate against any

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other Person constituting the Father. I submit, then, that no Person is a good candidate for a constituting object.

God as constituting

For Hughes, the constituting object is God. Now if the God–Person relation is constitution, not identity, God and the Persons are four individuals, not three. Further, God is divine. So we have four divine individuals: quaternity, not Trinity. BR too seem to give us a Quaternity. For BR, the constituting object is the divine essence.[31] The Persons are numerically one with it without identity. This is what makes them divine. The divine essence is numerically one with it with identity.[32] I am willing to be enlightened, but I do not see why the presence or absence of identity would matter here. So it seems that the constituting object is divine for BR too. None of the four can be treated as an 'ontologically innocent'[33] sum of others, or in some other way as not really adding to the number of divine beings. But having four divine individuals seems problematic.

One might say 'no worries' here, as one might assert that the Creed itself gives us four divine individuals, if we count by absolute identity.[34] Not so: orthodoxy gives us one God and three Persons, but does not say whether they add up to four distinct individuals, each divine. How many individuals one gets depends on the metaphysics one uses to interpret the Creed, and the Creed does not specify that. The Creed means to be monotheist – which surely dictates minimizing the number of divine individuals one takes it to admit. A position which gets us four is thus automatically trumped by any that remain orthodox yet admit three or less. Further, the very fact that the doctrine the Creed states is known as that of the Trinity militates against calling a four-individuals view orthodox. Had the Creed-writers envisioned God plus the Persons as adding up to four divine individuals, surely the doctrine would have been called Quaternity from the beginning.

Nor does it help to say there are two ways to be divine, the Persons' and God's: there are still four divine beings if this is so. Further, if there were two ways, then for Hughes, plausibly one would be second-class. For Hughes, God is the ground of the Persons. The Persons are derivative objects – existing not *a se* but *a* God. But plausibly aseity is an essential divine attribute. Are they really fully divine, then?[35] Without full aseity, they seem at best only second-class deities, and that seems unacceptable. I suggest, then, that it is not a promising move to have God constitute the Persons.

The divine soul

Hasker calls what constitutes the Persons the divine soul.[36] This is not God. It is not a Person either. It is some other sort of concrete divine individual. We had not suspected that a spirit could have a soul; lo, God does![37] In any case, the divine soul helps make up a divine Person, as bones help make up human persons. That's

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trouble: if we can sensibly venerate saints' bones, *a fortiori* we could venerate the divine soul sensibly, and if we do, we should venerate it a lot more than part or even all of a saint. There should not be something other than God or a Person that can get distinctively divine-level veneration.

I would not ordinarily thank your bones if you help me, but I can be glad that they are there, and firm, if you use them to pull me out of quicksand. Similarly, then, I could be very glad that the divine soul is there if God saves me. It is not a Person, and if it therefore can't understand me, I could not sensibly thank it. But I can imagine a liturgy that runs 'Rejoice in the divine soul, mighty and wonderful! Without it, there would be no God. It is great: look at the marvellous attributes it gives God! It is holy: it is the inmost core of the holiest being! It is mighty: all God's power comes from it! By making God what He is, it is the ultimate source of all good things!' If the fact that the soul is not a Person entails that it cannot understand us, we could not mean reciting this to be worship if we properly understood what we were doing: worship addresses something, intending to be understood.[38] But intoning the Liturgy of the Soul is close enough to worship that it should make us uncomfortable. And perhaps the divine soul can hear us in and through the Persons' hearing us: after all, I touch the hunk by touching the statue, and in Hasker's favoured analogy of multiple personality disorder,[39] plausibly the person hears through the personality's hearing. If so, the line between reciting that liturgy and worship becomes vanishingly thin. (If I did think of what I was doing as worship, and all this is true, how plausible is it that I would be wrong?) That tells us that belief in a divine soul is enough like belief in a fully divine entity which is not God or any Person that it should make us uncomfortable, for we would read that liturgy because we thought the divine soul deserved those accolades, and being divine just does go with deserving worship.

One might reply here that we could worship the divine soul only *qua* constituting God, as we can or do admire the marble constituting the statue only *qua* having the form of a statue.[40] But we do admire marble on its own, and I might think the marble pretty but hate what the sculptor made of it. My exclamations over its beauty would not include anything about the sculptor's skill, but they would still express distinctively aesthetic appreciation. And even if we did worship the divine soul only *qua* constituting God, it would be a further object of worship, since '*qua* constituting' doesn't efface its distinctness from God. The liturgy supposes this distinctness, since it rejoices in the soul precisely because of what it does for God. Further, the liturgy made perfect sense but did not speak of the soul only *qua* constituting God. It rejoices in the soul for *its* greatness, holiness and 'might'. The things it does for God manifest these. Its greatness etc. do not consist in them.

Let me expand on the Liturgy of the Soul's 'ultimate source'. BR rightly want there to be nothing in reality in any sense prior to or deeper than God.[41] This may be one reason they find Thomist prime matter an attractive model for what constitutes: prime matter derives its being from the form that 'makes' a substance

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out of it, and so is not more basic in reality than its substance. But as we've seen, the prime matter model has a monotheism problem. On the other hand, if we give divine matter or a divine soul its own positive being, it becomes a positive being that is the foundation of the Persons and of God. In a clear sense, the most basic thing in reality is not God, but what constitutes Him. This just seems wrong to me, as I suspect it does to BR. *God* is supposed to be the ultimate reality. 'God is the ultimate reality' has a flavour of analytic truth about it. Classical theists identified God with His essence[42] precisely to avoid making it more basic than He, and this is a large part of why the identity was nigh-universal before Duns Scotus.

Hasker runs into a final problem because he holds that only the whole Trinity is properly God.[43] On any orthodox account of the Trinity, God is triune by nature, not by accident or deliberate choice. Hasker agrees.[44] For him, it's the nature of the divine soul to generate the Persons and so the whole of God. This makes it the ultimate reality in a thicker sense. It's bad enough to have something lie deeper in reality than God, but should anything *generate* God?

Classification

Elsewhere I distinguish two Trinitarian projects.[45] Both are in effect efforts at conceptual construction. One is this: starting with three divine Persons, explain how they manage to be just one God. Some Greek Patristic writers clearly tried this. I've called this *project* ST – social Trinitarianism – because many on this side of the aisle use social analogies in trying to explain the oneness of God. Another project constructs in the opposite direction: starting with one God, explain how there are three distinct Persons. This is pretty clearly the project medi-aeval Latin theologians like Aquinas pursued: in Aquinas, we get twenty-six Questions on God as one before the Trinity enters the scene, and the Persons are explained in terms of relations God as one bears to God as one. This is in direct descent from Augustine. So I've called this *project* LT, Latin Trinitarianism. As 'LT' names a project, not a geographic description, Greek writers could well engage in it. There are clearly two projects here, and clearly some historical Trinitarians pursued each, whichever language they wrote in.

Rea says that a constitution view 'transcends the divide' between LT and ST.[46] I disagree, at least on my understanding of these terms.[47] Hughes's view is clearly Latin. Hasker is on the Latin side too, as I use the term: Hasker takes one thing as basic and suggests that it gives rise to three, though the one thing is not called God.[48] I think BR belong on the ST side of the divide. On BR's view, the Persons each have the full divine essence. If (*per impossibile*) there were just one Person, He would be the one God, the one thing with the divine essence; as there are three, there is one God because they share it – one God is 'constructed' by their overlap, because they have their 'matter' in common. For recall BR's definition: *x* is the same God as *y* iff *x* and *y* are matter–form compounds whose

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'matter' is some divine essence and *x*'s 'matter' is the same 'matter' as *y*'s. For BR, sameness of God consists in the Persons' sharing 'matter'. Further, for BR, there is exactly one God iff there is an *x* such that *x* is God and every God is the same God as *x*. That is, there being one God consists in all Persons' sharing 'matter'. Facts about how many Gods there are, and the unity of the one God in three Persons, derive from facts about the Persons. BR execute the ST project, though they do not take social analogies as the primary way of understanding the Persons' unity.

Monotheism

I think that ST has monotheism problems.[49] BR's emerge when they discuss this argument:

1. Father = God.
2. Son = God.
3. ¬(Father = Son).
4. Father = Son (from 1, 2 by transitivity of identity).

(3) is part of the Creed. If (1) and (2) correctly construe the Creed, Trinitarians can avoid (4) and contradiction only by blocking the inference or denying a premise. BR accept (1) and (2) and go for the block. Transitivity of identity gets us (4) only if 'God' refers to the same thing in (1) and (2). BR deny this. Rather, they say, 'God' is ambiguous in (1) and (2):

> the Father is identical with God, the Son is identical with God . . . and yet the Father (and) Son . . . are distinct . . . Consider a parallel . . . Athena is identical with the material object in R; Lump is identical to the material object in R; but Athena is distinct from Lump. Since 'the material object in R' is ambiguous, there is no threat of contradiction . . . Likewise in the case of the Trinity. (Brower & Rea (2009), 278)

The parallel argument is this:

5. Athena = the material object in R.
6. Hunk = the material object in R.
7. ¬(Hunk = Athena).
8. Hunk = Athena (from 5, 6, by transitivity of identity).

The ambiguity BR claim is that in (5), 'the material object in R' refers to Athena, while in (6) it refers to Hunk. If so, (5) and (6) do not entail (8). One might think that if Athena ≠ Hunk and both are material objects and in R, nothing is *the* material object in R. If so, 'the material object in R' does not refer to either, and so the ambiguity claim is false. But on BR's definition (quoted above), there is just one material object in a region no matter how many non-identical matter–form compounds are there, and that one object is *the* material object present there. Still, plausibly if the one object 'includes' both Athena and Hunk, neither can simply be identical with it: 'the material object in R' cannot pick out

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either, in either (5) or (6). If both are numerically one with it, neither is a more eligible candidate for the referent of 'the material object in R', in (5) or in (6). So it does not determinately pick out either, in (5) or in (6). It just refers ambiguously to both, as numerically one with the object. If 'Athena' picks out Athena and 'the material object in R' does not determinately do so, (5) cannot be determinately true. Thus (5) and (6) are not determinately true. I am suggesting, in short, that if 'the material object in R' is ambiguous, the ambiguity is generated in a way which defeats the claim that (5) and (6) are determinately true, and so if we treat (1) and (2) on the model of (5) and (6), we threaten the Creed so read with something other than simple truth. But at least it's clear what BR *want* to say. In parallel, they claim, in (1) 'God' refers to the Father, and in (2) to the Son: contradiction averted.

Now 'God' is a singular term in (1) and (2). Let's suppose first that it's a name, and take it as Millian, without sense. I see only one way for a Millian name to be ambiguous – the way 'Brian' is ambiguous as between Leiter and Leftow. This ambiguity arises because a Millian name's meaning is its referent and it has different referents when used of Leiter and of me. Suppose on the other hand that 'God' is a covert definite description, or a name with a definite description as its sense. This would make the parallel with (5) and (6) closer. Let's say that in this case, the sense of 'God' is 'the being with the divine nature'. This description has the same sense in (1) and (2). Arguably if its sense is the same, we should not call it ambiguous. If it *is* ambiguous in (1) and (2), its ambiguity arises at the level of reference – it picks out a different Person in each case, given some context-principle about what the description applies to. With a context principle, then, the ambiguity is explained just as it is if 'God' is a Millian name. Without a context principle, if three Persons have the divine nature, none is *the* being with the divine nature, and so the description is not ambiguous but instead just does not apply, or else it applies, but in parallel with my story about 'the material object in R', it does not determinately pick out any person. If it doesn't apply, or its ambiguity is generated the wrong way, we are driven back to Millianism or a context principle to make (1) and (2) true. One way or the other, then, if BR's account works out, the ambiguity they claim arises due to or consists in different reference. Whether 'God' is a name or a description, if it is ambiguous, it is ambiguous the way names are.

If that's how things are, then just as with Leiter and Leftow we have two Brians, in the Trinity we have three Gods, three distinct individuals the singular term 'God' can pick out, each one God as I am one Brian. Sharing 'matter' doesn't block the point. If Leiter and I were Siamese twins sharing everything but our heads, we would still be two Brians; so too if we were somehow wholly coincident. So it seems that on BR, the Persons are three Gods in the way Leiter and I are two Brians – as good a statement of tritheism as one could wish. I do not see how to explain BR's ambiguity of 'God' – the one they want, not the one they'd get without a context principle for (1) and (2) – without implying tritheism.

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Now one might reply that using 'God' this way is just standard Trinitarianism. Jesus often uses 'Father' and 'God' interchangeably, as naming the same being; at the end of John, Thomas addresses Jesus as 'God' and is not reproved. So that 'God' names Persons (if it is a name) is part of the phenomena theories of the Trinity have to save. If the phenomena aren't tritheist, one might say, neither are BR. I reply that different metaphysical pictures can save the same phenomena, and have different implications when doing so. On modalism, for instance, 'God' names both Father and Son because the one God switches roles. The term isn't ambiguous: it always names the same individual, and so monotheism is secure. On my own account, 'God' also always names the one God, unambiguously, but He doesn't switch roles. Instead He always plays all three Person-roles, in three parts of His life which are running simultaneously. My view is as monotheist as Modalism, but makes the distinction between Persons eternal, necessary, and intrinsic, thus remaining orthodox.[50] While it is part of the phenomena that 'God' names individual Persons, it is not part of the phenomena that 'God' is ambiguous.[51] Coming at it another way, it is not part of the phenomena that the God that is the Father is not identical with the God that is the Son. These are the contributions of BR's distinctive account of the phenomena, and it's these contributions, I've argued, that get us into trouble. They seem to leave us with three overlapping Gods, despite a definition of what it is for there to be one God that seeks to block the consequence. The definition, I am claiming, does not in fact give a sufficient condition for there being one God.[52]

There is just one of the thing Hasker calls the most proper referent of 'God', the Trinity,[53] and so, he thinks, his account is monotheist. But consider his treatment of the Athanasian Creed's 'almighty is the Father, almighty the Son, almighty the Holy Spirit, yet they are not three almighty beings but one almighty'[54] and parallel claims. These, Hasker asserts, are just 'grammatical rules', rules for how to speak about the Trinity.[55] They do not reflect the underlying metaphysics. They just proscribe ways of speaking that might mislead the faithful. In other words, there really are three almighties, but we are forbidden to say it because they share their constituting object. We again have three overlapping Gods, each a God as Leiter and I would be Brians if we were numerically one but non-identical. Again, this does not look like monotheism.

Suppose that Zeus and the rest of the Greek immortals began gradually to merge their matter, while retaining their distinctness. Eventually we'd have one divine blob within which Zeus, Hera *et al*. would retain their full distinctness. Would that really make Greek paganism monotheist? Now suppose that within the blob, Hera and the rest gradually morph into duplicates of Zeus. Would *that* make Greek paganism monotheist? My own intuitions say no. If there were many gods before they merged and morphed, and the merging and morphing did not produce strict identity, there are many gods at the end of the process. And monotheism is false if there are many gods. Further, my intuitions do not shift if I suppose that the gods were *ab initio* as I have described them after

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their merge-and-morph, duplicates of Zeus sharing their matter. Even if the blob was not generated by merge-and-morph, that we can conceive it as generated that way tells us something about what kind of thing it is. It tells us that it contains the sort of distinctness that makes for many gods, not one.

I have run through the options for what constitutes on a constitution picture of the Trinity: a property, divine stuff, the Father, God, or some other thing (divine soul). All seem problematic. So I submit that Christians looking for a metaphysical model or account of the Trinity should look elsewhere.[56]

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Notes

1. My translation, from the Latin given at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athanasian_Creed>.

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2. Here and elsewhere, 'identity' expresses absolute identity. This first section only sets up a problem many have considered. If the identity reading of 'is' here and in similar contexts were not at least plausible, no-one would have thought there was a problem to think about. Some solve the problem I now lay out by denying that 'is' does express identity here.
3. They have 'hylomorphic' where I put 'matter–form'.
4. There can also be numerical sameness *with* identity (Brower & Rea (2009), 279). For if x is a material object and $x = y$, then x and y are matter–form compounds sharing the same matter. The use of the plural, 'compounds', in the quoted text, does not imply non-identity. If it did, then in 'numerical sameness without identity', 'without identity' would be redundant.
5. According to Dale Tuggy, Rea must say that they make up more. See Tuggy (2013), 134–135.
6. The first occurrence of 'x is God' probably should read instead 'x is a God'.
7. Hughes (2009), 309, 311
8. *Ibid.*, 313.
9. Hasker (2013).
10. Leftow (in progress).
11. See Rea (2011), 148.
12. Personal communication.
13. See Rea (2011), 148.
14. Brower's personal communication continues,
when Rea and I wrote . . . n. 10 . . . Rea wasn't sure it made sense to speak of matter as non-individual stuff, and so didn't want to commit himself to saying that it did. (I didn't share his concerns in this regard.) [And] I wasn't sure it made sense to speak of immaterial stuff in God (or perhaps even in angels or the soul), and so didn't want to commit myself to saying that it did. (I don't think Rea shared my concerns in this regard.) Even so, we both agreed – and were trying to indicate in that note – that, for pedagogical reasons, it would be simplest to develop the Aristotelian account of constitution, as well as its Trinitarian analogue, in terms of non-individual stuff, since that would avoid the complication of thinking of matter or the divine essence as a further material object or substance (since presumably only an individual can be a material object or substance). But once it is clear how distinct compounds can be numerically the same, it is easy enough to see how to extend the idea to compounds and their matter, supposing it is individual.
15. So (in pretty much these words) Jeffrey Brower, in correspondence.
16. Well, at least without the sort of form that constitutes an object. It is divine nature, not another kind of stuff: it has an intrinsic character. To any Aristotelian, that would imply that it has form.
17. If it is not prime matter-ish, because it has an intrinsic character, it avoids this label. But then it must on Aristotelian terms contain an immaterial analogue of prime matter, which bears the distinctive form that makes it divine nature rather than some other kind of stuff, and so the problem is only pushed back a step.
18. *ST* Ia 16, 7 ad 2.
19. Brower has a different view on this, developed in Brower (2014). I cannot here get into the exegetical details needed to dispute it.
20. See e.g. Armstrong (1978) and *Idem* (1997).
21. For the notion of relative identity and its application to the Trinity, see van Inwagen (2009).
22. BR might claim some advance in disassociating themselves from more extreme versions of relative identity, e.g. Geach's (on this see Rea (2009a)). But this would be an advance only in paring away associated metaphysical or logical baggage. It would not be an advance in understanding the Trinity.
23. I owe this argument to Christopher Hughes.
24. For my take on some of it, see Leftow (2002), *Idem* (2011a), *Idem* (2011b), and *Idem* (2015).
25. See Leftow (2015).
26. *Ibid.*
27. For discussion of this approach to embodiment, see Leftow (1997).
28. See e.g. Gavrilyuk (2004), 91–100, for discussion and primary sources.
29. For those who feel the pull of divine simplicity, there might also be worries that the Father would come out simple in a way the other Persons were not.
30. See e.g. Rudder Baker (2000).
31. When considered as an object, not 'some stuff': see Brower & Rea (2009), 267, n. 10.
32. Thus the importance of my earlier observation that there can be numerical sameness *with* identity.
33. So David Lewis on mereological sums generally (in Lewis (1991)).

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34. So Christopher Hughes, in correspondence. Brower might also endorse this move: at any rate, in correspondence, he notes that BR give us three Persons and one God, 'which seems to be all that's required by orthodoxy'.
35. There is an issue about the aseity of the Son and Spirit in any case. My own Latin proposal can handle it: on mine, it is just the aseity of God, which is also what the Father has. I hit on the aseity problem independently, but Dale Tuggy beat me to it: see Tuggy (2013), 144.
36. E.g. Hasker (2013), 242.
37. 1 Corinthians 2:10–11 tells us that 'the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God' (NASB). This suggests that God has a soul, but identifies it as the Holy Spirit. If we take this seriously, Hasker's claim would have to be that God has a soul that itself has a soul, and God also has that soul's soul. But perhaps we should not take it quite this seriously.
38. This claim needs qualification, but the qualifications don't affect my present point, so I omit them. I give them in Leftow (2016).
39. Hasker (2013), 233ff.
40. So a referee, though minus the 'or do's.
41. Brower & Rea (2009), 267 n. 10.
42. E.g. Aquinas, *ST* Ia 3, 3.
43. Hasker (2013), 249, 258.
44. *Ibid.*, 243–244.
45. See Leftow (2004).
46. Rea (2009b), 408.
47. On others, including perhaps Rea's own, this might come out true.
48. Hasker gives 'social Trinitarianism' a different sense than I do, and on his meaning of the phrase, he calls himself – correctly – a social Trinitarian.
49. See Leftow (1999).
50. See Leftow (2004).
51. A referee claims that Hebrews 1:8–9 and John 10 are problems for this claim. I don't see this. The Hebrews text is that about the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions.' This shows 'God' naming two Persons. It does not show 'God' being ambiguous in doing so. Whether it is ambiguous is a function of an underlying metaphysics which is just not written into the surface of this text. John 10 seems relevant only at vv. 34–36:

> Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your Law, "I have said you are 'gods' "?' If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came – and Scripture cannot be set aside – what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?

    The Greek is 'theoi', the plural of 'theos'. The latter gets translated 'God', but the translators bring out what is surely an intended contrast by using 'god', not 'God'. 'Theos' taken as a name is not the same word as 'theoi', a plural kind-term. BR's claim is that 'God' is an ambiguous *singular* term. That is what I claim is not part of the phenomena. 'Theoi' isn't singular. So it just isn't relevant.
52. Further, the whole appeal to ambiguity has a problem. We ought to take Old Testament occurrences of 'God' as unambiguous if we can. That is just a reasonable principle of interpretation. And many accounts of the Trinity let us do so. It counts against an account of the Trinity if it does not. But for BR, every Old Testament occurrence of 'God' is ambiguous. It might refer to any one Person or (perhaps?) to all.
53. Hasker (2013), 249, 258.
54. Quoted *ibid.*, 250.
55. *Ibid.*, 252.
56. My thanks for comments to Michael Rea, Jeffrey Brower, Christopher Hughes, two referees, and audiences at the St Thomas Summer Seminar in Philosophy of Religion and an Oxford conference on the Trinity.

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