

'TWINSY' AND TRINITY: AN ASSESSMENT OF
THE 'TRINITY MONOTHEISM' OF
WILLIAM LANE CRAIG

by

James R. Gordon

B.A. University of Michigan

Box D-333

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1. Introduction

The Trinitarian theologian concerned with maintaining orthodoxy faces a difficult task from the onset of his or her project, namely, how to avoid contradiction while asserting the following seven propositions:

- (1) The Father is God.
- (2) The Son is God.
- (3) The Holy Spirit is God
- (4) The Father is not the Son.
- (5) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
- (6) The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
- (7) There is exactly one God.

The conjunction of propositions (1), (2), (3), and (7) entails a contradiction, and the denial of any of the propositions entails a departure from orthodoxy. Consequently, three major solutions have been put forward as a way to avoid both contradiction and heresy: Latin Trinitarianism,¹ Social Trinitarianism,² and Relative Identity.³ Each of these options has been heavily discussed and

¹ See, for example the following: Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203-249; Brian Leftow, “A Latin Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (2004), 304-333; Trenton Merricks, “Split Brains and the Godhead,” in *Knowledge and Reality: Essays in Honour of Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Thomas M. Crisp, Matthew Davidson, and David Vander Laan (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006).

² See, for example, the following: Timothy Bartel, “Could There Be More Than One Lord?” *Faith and Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (1994), 357-378 and “Could There Be More Than One Almighty?” *Religious Studies* 29 (1993), 465-495; William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 575–595; Stephen T. Davis, “Perichoretic Monotheism: A Defense of a Social Theory of the Trinity,” in *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 35-52 and “A Somewhat Playful Proof of the Social Trinity in Five Easy Steps,” *Philosophia Christi* 1, no. 2 (1999), 103-105; Peter Forrest, “Divine Fission: A New Way of Moderating Social

debated, and no definitive agreement has been reached. One particular Social Trinitarian proposal that has received little attention in the literature, however, is that of William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland.⁴ With the exception of a lengthy critique by philosopher Daniel Howard Snyder,⁵ the proposal of Moreland and Craig has been left largely untouched. Though I am sympathetic to their model, insofar as it emphasizes the distinctness of the Persons—as do all

Trinitarianism,” *Religious Studies* 34 (1998), 281-297; Stephen C. Layman, “Tritheism and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 3 (1988), 291-298; Tom McCall, “Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism Again: A Response to Brian Leftow,” *Philosophia Christi* 5, no. 2 (2003), 405-430; Cornelius Plantinga, “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 21-47; Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 170-191; Edward Wierenga, “Trinity and Polytheism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (2004), 281-303; C. J. F. Williams, “Neither Confounding the Persons nor Dividing the Substance,” in *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne*, ed. Alan Padgett (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 227-243. For critiques of Social Trinitarianism, see the following: Jeffrey Brower, “The Problem with Social Trinitarianism: A Reply to Wierenga,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004), 295–303; Kelly James Clark, “Trinity or Tritheism?” *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), 463–476; Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Trinity Monotheism” *Philosophia Christi* (2003), 375–403; and Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203-249.

³ See, for example, the following: G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 118–20; James Cain, “The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Logic of Relative Identity,” *Religious Studies* 25 (1989), 141–52; Peter Geach, “Identity,” *Review of Metaphysics* 21 (1967): 3–12; A. P. Martinich, “God, Emperor, and Relative Identity,” *Franciscan Studies* 39 (1979), 180–91; A. P. Martinich, “Identity and Trinity,” *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978), 169–81; Michael C. Rea, “Relative Identity and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Philosophia Christi* 5, no. 2 (2003), 431-446; Peter van Inwagen, “And Yet They Are Not Three Gods But One God,” in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas Morris (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 241–78; Peter van Inwagen, “Three Persons in One Being,” in *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue*, ed. Melville Y. Stewart (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 83-97.

⁴ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. esp. 576-595.

⁵ Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Trinity Monotheism.”

Social Trinitarian models—I feel that their proposal is not without its problems. In fact, I am hesitant to affirm that they are indeed positing a genuinely “social” Trinity.⁶ In what follows, I will provide a brief restatement of Moreland and Craig’s position followed by an overview of what are, in my view, the most pressing objections to their proposal. I will take into account the response of Daniel Howard-Snyder as well as the rejoinder of William Lane Craig, voicing my own concerns with the two respective positions. Finally, a proposal for a way forward will be offered, taking into account what I see to be the concessions that both sides must make in order to remain both orthodox and logically coherent in search for a beneficial formulation of the Trinitarian faith.

2. *Trinity Monotheism*

In their *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, Moreland and Craig sketch a model of ST called Trinity monotheism,⁷ “which holds that while the persons of the Trinity are divine, it is the Trinity as a whole that is properly God.”⁸ In other words, they assert that there are two ways to be divine: something could either a) be an instance of the divine nature (i.e., the Trinity) or b) be a part of something that instantiates the divine nature (i.e., the persons). The persons of the Trinity, they argue, cannot be said to be instances of the divine nature in and of themselves because they are not each triune, which is an essential attribute of the divine nature.⁹ On their view, (1), (2), and (3) are not identity statements but predication

⁶ This suspicion is confirmed by Trenton Merricks who posits a model nearly identical to Craig’s Trinity Monotheism while at the same time denying the feasibility of Social Trinitarianism. Trenton Merricks, “Split Brains and the Godhead.”

⁷ “Trinity Monotheism” was coined in Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism.”

⁸ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 589.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 590.

statements; they merely ascribe a certain property to the subject (i.e., the Father has the property of being God, but he does not instantiate the divine nature).¹⁰

In order to explain this part-whole relationship, Moreland and Craig appeal to an analogy dealing with the ways of being feline. They suggest that something could be feline by instantiating the nature of a feline or by being a part of a feline. For example, a cat's skeleton is feline, but it is not an instantiation of feline nature; it is only feline by virtue of the fact that it is (or was) part of a feline. In the same way, they say, "we could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God."¹¹ Central to this part-whole relationship is the notion that parts can possess properties that the whole does not possess. For if the Trinity possessed certain properties (i.e., omniscience or omnipotence), then there would be no way of avoiding a fourth subject in addition to the three persons, turning the Trinity into a "quaternity." Yet, the Trinity (the divine nature), can be referred to as omniscient or omnipotent because the individual persons are omniscient and omnipotent. More succinctly: "the whole can have properties because some part has [them]."¹²

Moreland and Craig assert that their position is entirely orthodox, though some creeds influenced by divine simplicity may disagree.¹³ Their position, at this point, is not untenable;

¹⁰ This linguistic qualification has been referred to by Brian Leftow as "Plantinga's sort of Arianism," in Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," 208.

¹¹ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 591.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 592. Interestingly enough, Moreland and Craig call divine simplicity "a radical doctrine that enjoys no biblical support and even is at odds with the biblical conception of God in various ways" (525). Moreland and Craig also affirm absolute identity, which is quite insignificant to the argument of this paper. See also Peter Wiggins, *Substance and Sameness* for a treatment of Absolute Identity.

yet, one major concern looms over their proposal: tritheism. They recognize “how three persons could be parts of the same being, rather than be three separate beings” is essential to Trinity Monotheism (as well as any Social Trinitarian strategy).¹⁴

In order to maintain the oneness of the Trinity, they propose the analogy of Cerberus, a mythological character described as a three-headed dog with three distinct centers of consciousness.¹⁵ This dog, they say, is one dog—not three separate dogs—because it has one body. However, since the Trinity does not have a body, Moreland and Craig modify their analogy by considering the soul. In order to iron out the incongruity, they suggest that upon the death of Cerberus, the dog’s soul continues to exist along with the three centers of consciousness contained therein. They go on to say, “Suppose, then, that God is a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood. Then God, though one soul, would not be one person but three, for God would have three centers of self-consciousness, intentionality, and volition, as social trinitarians maintain.”¹⁶ It seems, then, that the soul, for Moreland and Craig, is the basis for the oneness of God, uniting the three persons—that is, three centers of consciousness—in a way that maintains logical coherence as well as conforms to the standard “three persons in one substance” creedal formulation. The strength of this proposal, they think, is that it “does not rest content with a merely formulaic understanding

¹⁴ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 593.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 594.

of the Trinity. Rather, [they] try to offer a model which actually shows how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be three persons in one substance.”¹⁷

3. *Anti Trinity Monotheism*

Not all scholars, however, have embraced Moreland and Craig’s proposal with open arms. In fact, as Craig noticed, “Daniel Howard-Snyder...really does not like Trinity Monotheism!”¹⁸ This is evidenced by his pointed response to Moreland and Craig, in which he raises a number of significant objections to their theory.¹⁹ Because Howard-Snyder’s response is inordinately long (and since space is limited), I will not attempt to state each of his objections; instead, I will briefly survey his best arguments against Trinity Monotheism, elaborating on those which I see as significant but undeveloped.

3.1. The Polytheism Objection

The first part of Howard-Snyder’s paper builds off the Athanasian Creed and attempts to reveal Moreland’s and Craig’s proclivity toward polytheism. In Craig’s response to Howard-Snyder, this objection is completely overlooked, and rightly so, for Trinity Monotheism is only polytheistic insofar as its main objective—i.e., to remain monotheistic—is unmet. Howard-Snyder assumes a creedal formula that *de facto* renders Trinity Monotheism untrue, namely, the Athanasian Creed, which asserts that “each Person by himself is God.”²⁰ This is precisely what

¹⁷ William Lane Craig, “Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder,” *Philosophia Christi* 8 no. 1 (2006), 101.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Trinity Monotheism.”

²⁰ Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Trinity Monotheism,” 375. It has been noted elsewhere that the Athanasian Creed was never approved by an ecumenical council—and in fact denied by the Eastern Orthodox Church—and therefore should not be confused as *the* standard of orthodoxy. See, for example, Thomas McCall, “Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism Again,” 427.

Moreland and Craig are arguing against, for they claim that each Person by himself is God by virtue of the fact that each Person is a proper part of the Trinity, not by virtue of instantiating the divine nature. It seems impossible, on any Trinitarian formulation, for each Person by himself to instantiate the divine nature, for the result would be a quaternity of beings that instantiate the divine nature. Propositions (1), (2), and (3), then, must be read without taking the “is” to be the strict “is of identity.” A quaternity is not an orthodox understanding of Trinitarian thought. Therefore, the first section of Howard-Snyder’s essay begs the question by assuming that his position is a better alternative to Moreland and Craig’s. In virtue of this, the remaining objections to Trinity Monotheism must be considered before determining just how many Gods are affirmed by Moreland and Craig.

3.2. *The Diminished Divinity/Two Ways to be Divine Objection*

It is Howard-Snyder’s concern to answer the charge of polytheism that leads to his second major objection against Trinity Monotheism, namely, the “Diminished Divinity Problem.” According to Howard-Snyder, “if the Persons do not instantiate the divine nature and they are divine in the way in which a cat’s skeleton is feline, then they are no more God-like than a feline skeleton is cat-like, which is to say they are hardly God-like at all.”²¹ He attempts to further the objection by asserting that if this part-whole relationship holds true, then *mutatis mutandis*, the properties belonging to each of the Persons (i.e., having a divine plan) are divine in the same way that the Persons are divine, thus diminishing divinity by making the divine plan as worthy of worship as the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit. It is doubtful, however, that anyone—including Craig—would assert that the plan of God is divine in the same way that the Persons of the Godhead are divine. The Trinity, according to Trinity Monotheism, instantiates

²¹ Ibid., 379.

the divine nature and is *properly composed* of Persons. The Persons are not properly composed of, say, a divine plan; rather, the divine plan is only divine insofar as it is executed by a part of the divine whole, that is, by one of the persons. It is not a part of the Persons in the same way that the Persons are a part of the Trinity. For this reason, Craig does not answer this objection from Howard-Snyder since it poses virtually no challenge to the coherency or orthodoxy of his proposal.

3.3. *The Incarnation Objection*

Howard-Snyder offers yet another objection that calls Moreland and Craig's view of the Persons of the Trinity into question. In the incarnation, according to Moreland and Craig, the Logos "completes the individual human nature of Christ by furnishing it with a rational soul, which is the Logos himself."²² How, one wonders, could the second Person of the Godhead, the Logos, fill Christ's human nature with a soul if he is only a part of a soul? Howard-Snyder recognizes this difficulty: "It cannot be the case that a particular rational soul *is* the Logos himself while the Logos himself *is not* a particular soul at all."²³ I think Moreland and Craig are left with two options, given their account of the incarnation. They can either a) propose that the whole Trinity (the divine soul) took up residence in the physical body of Jesus Christ, or they could b) propose that only the center of consciousness of the second person of the Godhead dwelt in Christ's body.

The first option is quite untenable in light of orthodoxy, but follows from their understanding of the divine nature being a "soul which is endowed with three complete sets of

²² Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 610.

²³ Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Trinity Monotheism," 385.

rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood.”²⁴ If the Logos is not an individual soul but only a center of consciousness that is a part of the one, Divine soul, then it is difficult to see how a mere center of consciousness could in any way provide a human nature with a robust soul. Yet, they must maintain that the whole Divine Soul did not take up its residence in the body of Jesus Christ in order to remain orthodox. Suppose that Moreland and Craig hold to the second option. If the center of consciousness that is the Logos is sufficient to supply the person of Christ with an individual soul, then what is one to make of their model of the Trinity in which the Divine Nature is properly a soul? Would the Divine Nature then be a soul composed of “subsouls” each sufficient for “soulness”? It is safe to say from these observations that their theory of the incarnation or their understanding of the divine soul must be modified in order to maintain internal coherence.

3.4. The Free Will Objection

The next objection, although virtually ignored by Craig in his response to Howard-Snyder, presents a dilemma for Trinity Monotheism. What I will call the “free will objection” makes use Moreland and Craig’s qualifications for libertarian free will to argue that the Persons of the Trinity cannot have such free will. Howard-Snyder notes that, “none of the Persons has libertarian freedom since, according to Moreland and Craig, none of the Persons is a genuine substance and ‘a necessary condition for libertarian freedom is that the agent be a genuine substance in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas.”²⁵ He is absolutely right to note that Craig and Moreland avoid referring to the Persons as substances; they do so, according to Howard-Snyder, “because they want their model to be a clear instance of ‘the classical formula,’ namely

²⁴ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 594.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 385.

‘three persons in one substance.’”²⁶ Certainly Moreland and Craig desire to affirm the freedom of the persons of the Godhead, since the Trinity by itself, they think, it not a person. In other words, given their account of how the whole (the Trinity) possesses properties, the Trinity could only be free insofar as its properties (the persons) are free. If the Trinity (i.e., the Divine Soul) were to instantiate freedom, Moreland and Craig would be left with a quaternity. Therefore, in order to maintain the freedom of God, they must attribute freedom to the persons; however, this would require Moreland and Craig to call the persons unique substances. However, as Howard-Snyder hinted at, doing so would cause many to dismiss their proposal as unorthodox, but, perhaps more importantly, it would require a significant modification of their doctrines of the Trinity, freedom, and general metaphysics.

3.5. *The “Twinsy Objection”*

Though the above objections indicate minor inconsistency in the thought of Moreland and Craig, Trinity Monotheism could still offer a constructive proposal for Trinitarian thought; none of the objections yet mentioned provide a basis for a rejection of the theory. However, I think that Howard-Snyder’s most serious critique, “the Twinsy objection,” renders Trinity Monotheism with major difficulties. As previously mentioned, in order to illustrate how the three persons of the Trinity could remain one substance and not three Gods, Moreland and Craig made use of the mythological figure, Cerberus, as an analogy to show how a single soul could contain three sets of cognitive faculties—three centers of consciousness. Along with Howard-Snyder, I am unconvinced that this analogy safeguards the oneness of the Trinity.

Howard-Snyder’s critique of Moreland and Craig’s Cerberus analogy is constructed by the proposal of a counterexample involving “Twinsy,” “a particular pair of Siamese twins that

²⁶ Ibid., 395.

share vital organs below the neck.”²⁷ According to the Cerberus analogy, there are not three dogs but one—at least this is what Craig and Moreland would have us believe. Howard-Snyder proposes instead that there are actually “three partially overlapping dogs, each of which instantiates the canine nature, and not a single one of them is Cerberus.”²⁸ In order to prove his point, Howard-Snyder appeals to Twinsy and argues that intuitively, Jack and Jill, who together compose Twinsy, are each individual instances of the human nature. If Craig and Moreland desire to maintain continuity between Cerberus and Twinsy, they must declare that there is only one human nature instantiated by Twinsy, while Jack and Jill are simply centers of consciousness that are parts of Twinsy. Howard-Snyder develops this example further by delving into surgical alteration cases which Craig objects to, noting that in such cases, “no solution stands out as clearly correct.”²⁹ I want to take this case in a different direction, one that I think will show that Howard-Snyder’s objection is more serious than admitted by Craig.

On Craig’s view it seems that the body is irrelevant to either the composition of a person or the instantiation of a nature, for consider his account of Cerberus. Though Craig notes that the dog is a “single being despite his multiple minds...because he has a single physical body,” it appears that such a body is of no consequence.³⁰ Craig goes on: “suppose Cerberus were to be killed and his minds survive the death of his body.”³¹ It seems then that on Craig’s

²⁷ Ibid., 396.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ William Lane Craig, “Trinity Monotheism Once More.”

³⁰ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 593.

³¹ Ibid.

understanding of the nature of the body, it is relatively insignificant for the composition of persons or the instantiation of the human nature.³²

The Twinsky objection is never answered by Craig; he instead objects to the surgical alterations proposed by Howard-Snyder. But suppose Craig were to deal with the Twinsky analogy. He could either say that Twinsky, composed of two persons, Jack and Jill, is one human nature or two human natures.³³ If Craig says that Twinsky is two instantiations of the human nature, he must also concede that Cerberus is three instantiations of the canine nature, consequently ruining his proposal. This seems to be the most straightforward response to the Twinsky case. However, Craig could assert that Jack and Jill only instantiate one human nature, though they are two separate persons. This seems extremely counter-intuitive, but since two persons joined at the shoulders sharing all significant organs is also extremely counterintuitive, the example should be modified.³⁴ To answer this objection, I propose that we modify the Twinsky example proposed by Howard-Snyder, whereby instead of being joined at the neck and sharing all significant organs the two are simply joined by the tips of their index fingers, having no organs in common. We will call this example Twinsky₂, composed of Jack₂ and Jill₂. Given

³² I wonder if, given the emphasis of the body in the eschaton that a proposal for personal identity should give a more prominent place to the body. Moreover, considering modern neuroscience and the apparent connection between consciousness and brain states, it seems that there is much work to be done in the field. Granted, allowing for such bodily connections raises many of the issues in Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), which are notoriously difficult and, as mentioned by Craig, not having obvious solutions.

³³ I suppose he could argue that Twinsky is a third instance of the human nature in addition to Jack and Jill, but since Twinsky is not self-conscious and since this would not help his case for guarding orthodox Trinitarian thought, it is doubtful that Craig would assert this.

³⁴ Though this case may sound far-fetched, there is actually a well-documented case in which two twins are joined at the shoulders and share most their organs. See, for example, Claudia Wallis, "The Most Intimate Bond," *Time*, n.p. [cited 6 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,984307,00.html>.

the insignificance of the body for the instantiation of human nature and the composition of persons, on Craig's account, it seems that this case should, for Craig, be parallel to the original Twinsy case. In other words, Twinsy and Twinsy₂ should be treated in the same manner, given Craig's understanding of the soul and centers of consciousness. So, Craig could say that Jack₂ and Jill₂ are either one instantiation of the human nature or two. Again, if he admits that they are two instantiations, his proposal is consequently ruined, for the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, *and* the Trinity would each be instantiations of the divine nature; this is a quaternity, not a Trinity.

Suppose, however, that Craig were to hold on to his original intuition, affirming that Jack₂ and Jill₂, though only joined at the fingertip, are only one instantiation of the human nature. This proposition, far from being involving conflicting intuitions, seems absolutely ridiculous, since a simple surgery could separate the two with no detrimental side effects. One has no good reason why both Jack₂ and Jill₂ should not be considered instantiations of the human nature. In fact, this is the position that Craig took in his response to Howard-Snyder. He proposes that if Cerberus were to be surgically separated, "after the surgery we have three distinct animals, at most one of which is identical with Cerberus, the other two being new animals."³⁵ In other words, in the parallel Twinsy₂ case, before the surgery Jack₂ and Jill₂ were two persons but one human nature, but after they were separated, they suddenly became two instances of the human nature. This is extremely counterintuitive. Craig must explain how a fingertip connection could be either necessary or sufficient for causing only one instantiation of the human nature. It seems, then, that there are no compelling reasons to accept either Craig's or Howard-Snyder's assertion concerning the number of instances of canine nature in Cerberus. Craig says there is one, and

³⁵ Craig, "Trinity Monotheism Once More."

Howard-Snyder says there are three; Craig accuses Howard-Snyder of “mere assertion,” but he is guilty of the same error.³⁶ It does not seem to me that a proposal which has its only compelling reason for belief in opinion of one man over another is one worth holding on to.

Craig shows little concern that this objection is even harmful, let alone devastating, to his proposal. So, suppose he were to maintain that his proposal is untouched by this objection, as he did in his original response to Howard-Snyder. One of three things would then become apparent. Either Craig’s Trinitarian formulation is a) *de facto* undefeatable, b) not proposing anything that significantly advances the Trinitarian discussion (rendering it quite useless), or c) must concede to the Twinsky case and affirm that both the persons of the Trinity as well as the Trinity as a whole instantiate the divine nature. If option a) or b) is the answer, then one is better off searching elsewhere for a constructive Trinitarian proposal. However, if option c) is the answer then it seems that Craig is guilty of turning the Trinity into a quaternity. I think there may be a better way. It seems that either Trinity Monotheism should concede that the persons are individual substances or seek a metaphysic that can better handle their concepts. I suggest that the major problem with the Trinity Monotheism of Moreland and Craig is that it lacks the metaphysical firepower their formulation demands.

Interestingly enough, Trenton Merricks posits a nearly identical approach to Craig and Moreland; however, he posits his solution as rejecting Social Trinitarianism and affirming a more Latin approach to the Trinity in order to maintain the Monotheistic element of the Christian faith.³⁷ Perhaps this is something to commend; perhaps such an approach blurs the lines traditionally drawn between Social and Latin Trinitarianism by finding a middle ground in which

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Trenton Merricks, “Split Brains and the Godhead.”

both sides can comfortably dwell. To sum up the objections to Craig and Moreland's Trinity Monotheism, it is evident that there lies a major tension in the understanding of just how the persons of the Trinity can be legitimate persons without at the same time being individual substances. Craig's proposal, it seems, does not have the capacity to overcome this objection.

4. A Way Forward?

4.1. The Issue of the Persons

It seems clear that both sides must affirm the absolute personhood of the members of the Trinity.³⁸ Nothing less could be considered Biblically faithful, for the High Priestly prayer and the Baptism of Jesus seem to demand such an understanding of the Trinity. If one is to understand Jesus' prayer to his Father as more than schizophrenia, then the individuality of the persons must be properly emphasized. Moreover, if unless one is willing to affirm Leftow's time-travelling Rockettes as an explanation of the Baptism of Christ, then he or she must accent the individuals.³⁹ How then can a "social" doctrine of the Trinity maintain the oneness of God—a robust monotheism? Such is the difficulty persistently experienced by the Social Trinitarian.

4.3. Perichoretic Monotheism?

How then should we think of the substance and persons of the Trinity? As previously mentioned, there are three main options: Social Trinitarianism, Latin Trinitarianism, and Relative Identity; however, I remain sympathetic to the basic claim of , namely, that the persons

³⁸ By referring to personhood, I am not committing myself to any specific theory of personal identity, nor am I intending to take a side in the historic discussion of the modern person. Instead, I am simply proposing that the members of the Trinity must be considered to have some sort of "I-Thou" relationship and must be able to act independently by exercising a volition.

³⁹ Brian Leftow, "A Latin Trinity."

of the Trinity must be given priority. The challenge, then, is to arrive at a framework that allows the Christian to confidently affirm that there are not three Gods but one God, for the *shema*—and the rest of Scripture—demands monotheism.⁴⁰ One attempt at making sense of the divine oneness has come from Oliver Crisp, who argues that perichoresis, which has often been considered a theological black box, could provide of understanding just how the three persons are one.⁴¹ He argues, “The persons of the Trinity share all their properties in a common divine essence apart from those properties that serve to individuate one of the persons of the Trinity, or express a relation between only two persons of the Trinity.”⁴² Distinguishing between nature-perichoresis, which has been attributed to the incarnation, and person-perichoresis,⁴³ which has been applied to the Trinity, Crisp clarifies the common misunderstandings of perichoresis and qualifies the doctrine such that the individuation of the Persons of the Trinity remains clearly defined.⁴⁴

Taking perichoresis in a more theological direction, Leonardo Boff notes that the New Testament clearly bears witness to the fact that the Father and the Son are perichoretically one

⁴⁰ One could side with William Alston, who thinks that he is in good company as a “tritheist.” See his “Substance and the Trinity,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴¹ Oliver Crisp, “Problems with Perichoresis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 56 no. 1 (2005), 119-140. See also Randall E. Otto, “The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54, no. 3 (2001), 366-384 for a helpful overview of the mistaken uses of the concept.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴³ *Ibid.* Crisp distinguishes further between “Strong Person-perichoresis,” which is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity, and “Weak Person-perichoresis,” which “makes sense of those properties that are not shared in the divine life of the Godhead” such as omnipresence.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

(John 10:30, 38, 14:11, 17:21).⁴⁵ Boff argues that “perichoresis is a good term to designate what we have seen to be meant by communion, *koinonia*: a permanent process of active reciprocity, a clasping of two hands: the Persons interpenetrate one another and this process of communicating forms their very nature.”⁴⁶ Such a theological understanding of perichoresis, supplemented by Crisp’s clarifications and qualifications of the doctrine may provide a way forward for the social Trinitarian seeking to avoid tritheism while honestly maintaining the oneness of God. Indeed, such an understanding with Scriptural witness seems much more plausible for an understanding of the Holy Trinity than the use of analogies such as William Lane Craig’s “divine soul.”

In fact, Stephen T. Davis has proposed an interesting proposal which he calls “Perichoretic Monotheism,” which I think rightly attempts to make use of this theological concept.⁴⁷ He attempts to make use of perichoresis in a way that bridges the gap between ST and LT by moving both theories towards each other: “ST is edged toward LT by *perichoresis*; and LT is edged toward ST by the point that the persons are not *just* relations. The theories virtually merge, because on Perichoretic Monotheism the three are virtually as robustly one as on LT.”⁴⁸ This oneness is maintained by allowing, through omniscience, the divine minds to be wholly open to one another and seemingly allows the Trinitarian to simultaneously posit the threeness and the oneness of Holy God.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1988), 134.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁷ Davis, “Perichoretic Monotheism,” 35-52. See also Davis, “A Somewhat Playful Proof of the Social Trinity in Five Easy Steps,” *Philosophia Christi*, 103-105.

⁴⁸ Davis, “Perichoretic Monotheism,” 49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

4.4 Yandellian Trinitarian Metaphysics?

The previously mentioned accounts of perichoresis may be plausible, but, as Oliver Crisp rightly notices, “None of this actually *explains* what perichoresis is.” What exactly does it mean for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to interpenetrate one another? Concerning such a mutual indwelling, Keith Yandell says, “I do not pretend to have any grasp of what this connection is supposed to be.”⁵⁰ Perhaps perichoresis is where the mystery of the Trinity lies; one must be prepared to live with such a mystery if it is indeed a mystery. Yet, at the same time, there is more work to be done and more work being done. Dr. Yandell, for example, is attempting to propose a Trinitarian metaphysics that can say what the notion of perichoresis may be attempting to accomplish. He says that, “The notion of being strongly necessarily internally particularly connected plays the role that mutual indwelling is said to play.”⁵¹

On this account, the ultimate baseline metaphysical reality is individuality, and it “begin[s] with the idea that God is complex though not composite, along with the tightly related idea that the Persons of the Trinity are necessarily mutually logically dependent. Each person of the Trinity is a bearer-of-properties but is not an individual.”⁵² On this embedded property view, the persons of the Trinity compose God but not in a way that makes use of universal properties like Craig’s Trinity Monotheism. Instead, properties cannot exist independently of their bearer; rather, they are “embedded in their owner.” In other words, the property of omniscience does not exist as something in space that the Father and the Son both take part of, but instead each individual possesses a different, though equal, omniscience (say, omniscience₁ and

⁵⁰ Keith Yandell, “Complexity” (forthcoming), 8.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

omniscience₂). At the same time, however, Yandell's metaphysical account of the Trinity does not forego the concept of divine simplicity like the model offered by William Lane Craig. One could still attempt to make use of the mind as the bottom line metaphysical concept (instantiating an individual) on this account, but the benefit is that the tension of whether or not to say the Persons are substances is lost. It states that the individuals *are* substances, or "bearers of properties," who are necessarily strongly internally complex.⁵³ It seems promising that Yandell's metaphysics can bear the weight of Trinitarian theology; it possesses all the benefits of Social Trinitarianism while in a real way maintaining the oneness of God.

5. Conclusion

Any theologian interested in pursuing a cogent doctrine of the Trinity must take his or her statements about the divine threeness/oneness seriously enough to consider the ramifications of such statements. I conclude that William Lane Craig's Trinity Monotheism, though an ingenious solution, is ultimately incapable of contributing a coherent account of theology as a whole. While his Trinitarian proposal by itself may be plausible, it seems to fail given the requirements of other Christian doctrines. A better way, it seems, is for the Trinitarian to mine the resources of perichoresis as a means of at the same time asserting the threeness and the oneness of the Christian God who is for us and our salvation.

⁵³ Ibid.

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