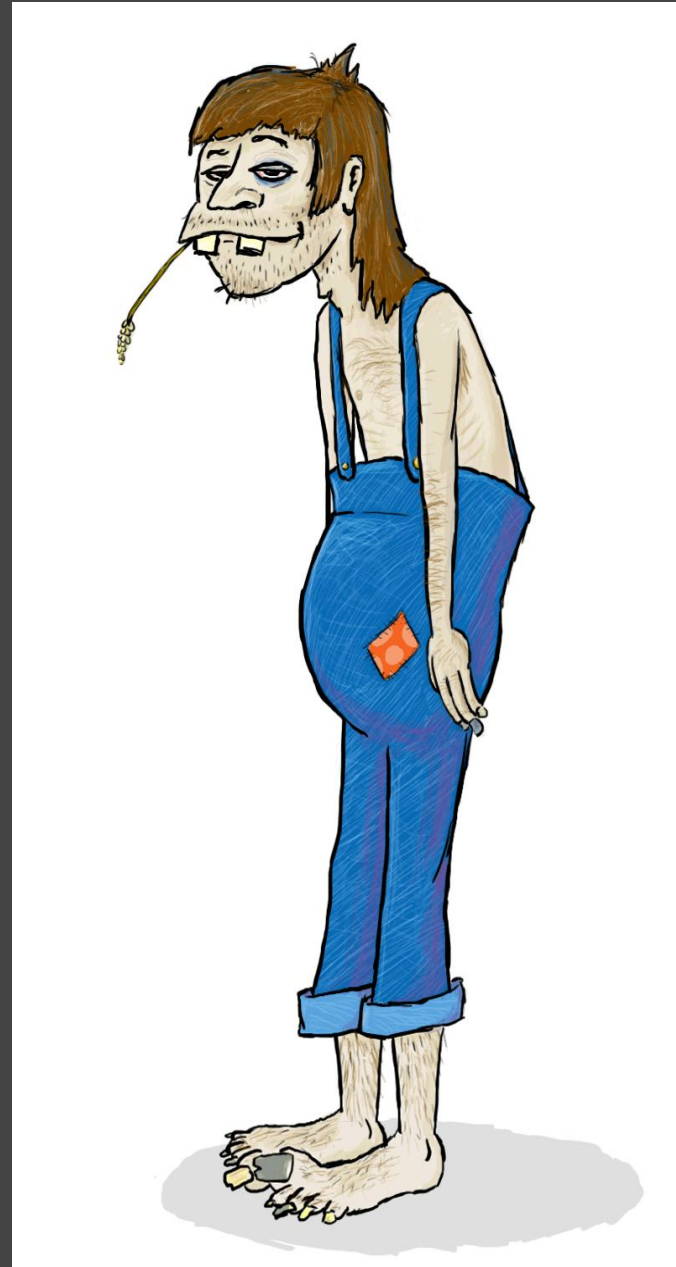


# Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Incoherent?

Dale Tuggy @ Christian Fellowship Church  
Amherst, NY 3/1/09

# Inconsistent sets of claims

1. All southerners are stupid.
2. Dale is a southerner.
3. Dale is *not* stupid.



# Problems with =



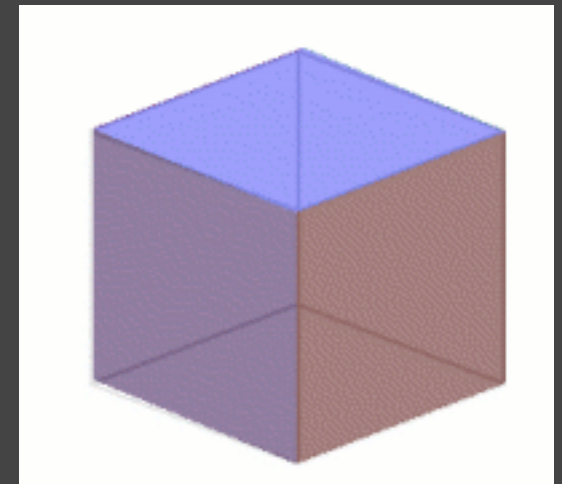
If "is" means = (numerical identity) then this is an inconsistent set of claims.

Identity (=) is transitive, like >, and symmetrical, like "related to".

If Father = God and Son = God then God = Son, and Father = Son.

Link: = @ trinities.

modalism: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
are three ways the one divine person  
(God) is / appears / acts / is thought of.



[Link: modalism @ trinities.](#)

# What is orthodox trinitarianism?

## First Council of Constantinople (381)

We believe in one God the Father all-powerful, maker of heaven and of earth, and of all things both seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all the ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, **consubstantial** with the Father, through whom all things came to be; for us humans and for our salvation he came down from the heavens and became incarnate from the holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, became human and was crucified on our behalf under Pontius Pilate... And in the Spirit, the holy, the lordly and life-giving one, proceeding forth from the Father, co-worshipped and co-glorified with Father and Son, the one who spoke through the prophets; in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. We confess one baptism for the forgiving of sins. We look forward to a resurrection of the dead and life in the age to come. Amen.

*[Link: discussion @ trinities.](#)*

# What is orthodox trinitarianism?

Father and Son are Consubstantial  
("one essence", Greek: *homoousios* )

- one being (numerically one)
- one kind of being - both share in the universal: deity
- similar (both in some sense "divine")
- constituted by the same portion of stuff
- constituted by the same kind of stuff
- functionally unified
- parts of one being
- aspects of one being
- personalities of one being

# What is orthodox trinitarianism?



**Father, Son, and Spirit are three divine persons but are one being, one God.**

**Or:**

**There are three persons in God.**

**Or:**

**There is one God eternally existing in three persons.**

# Apparent contradictions

What is a god? A divine self/person/personal being. How many of those are there, according to the doctrine of the Trinity? Exactly three. How many gods? Exactly one.

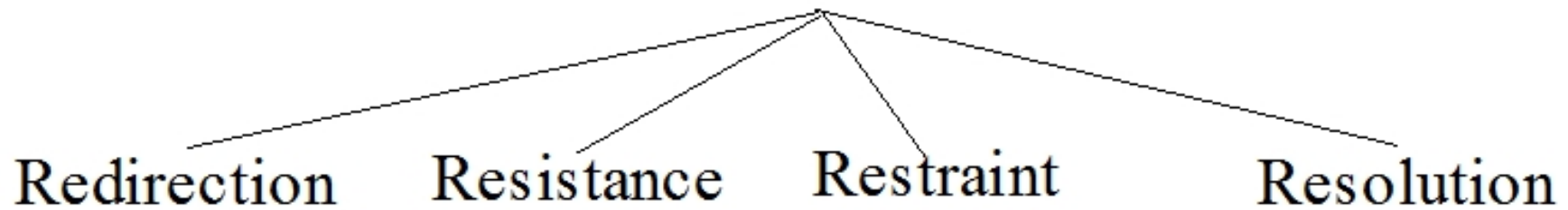
One god has one will. The Son is the same god as the Father. Yet, there was a time when their wills differed (Gethsemane). But nothing can at one time differ from itself.

Father and Son are equally and fully divine. What is fully divine doesn't come from anything else. Yet the Father eternally "generates" the Son.

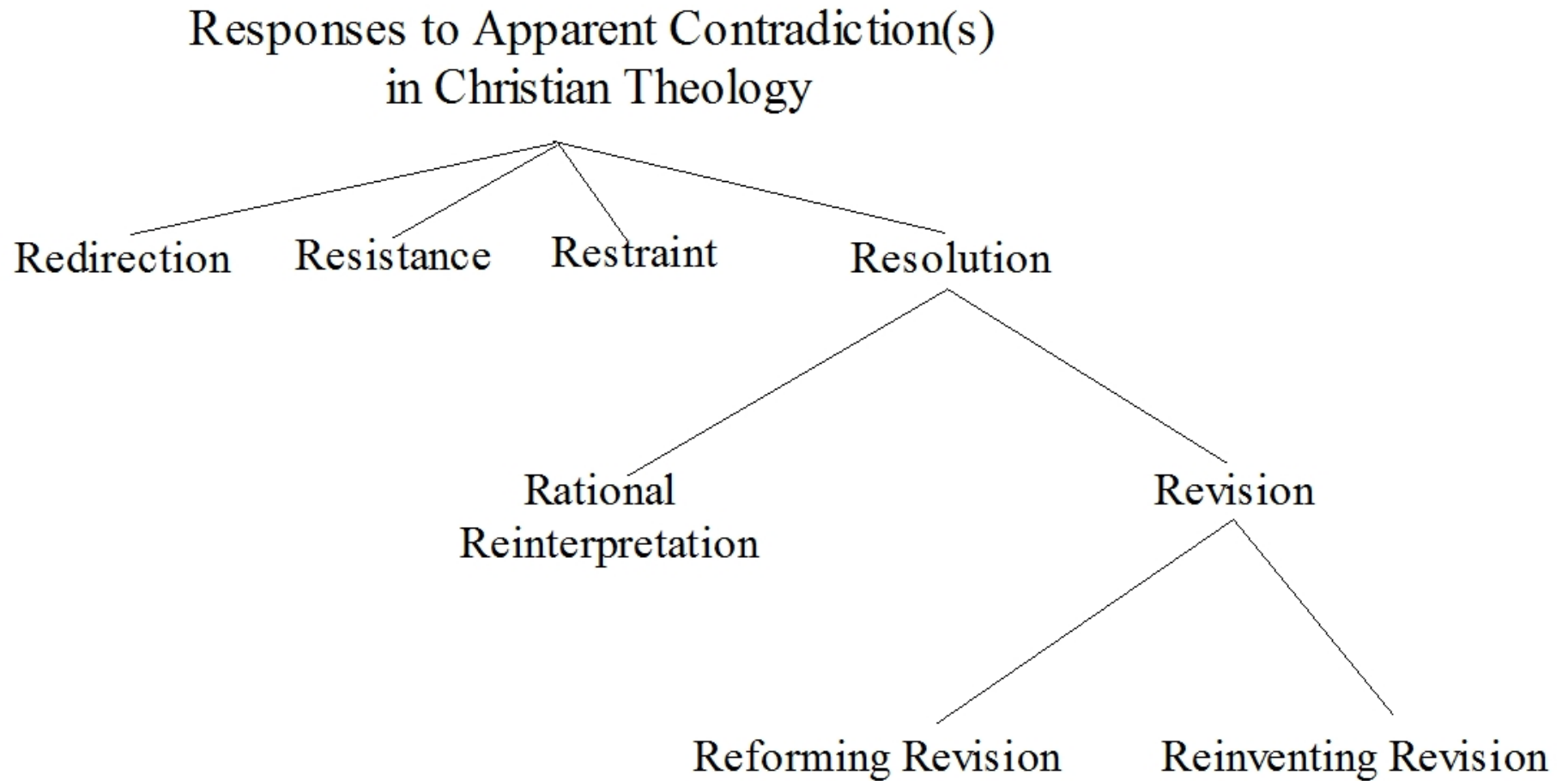


# The Four R's

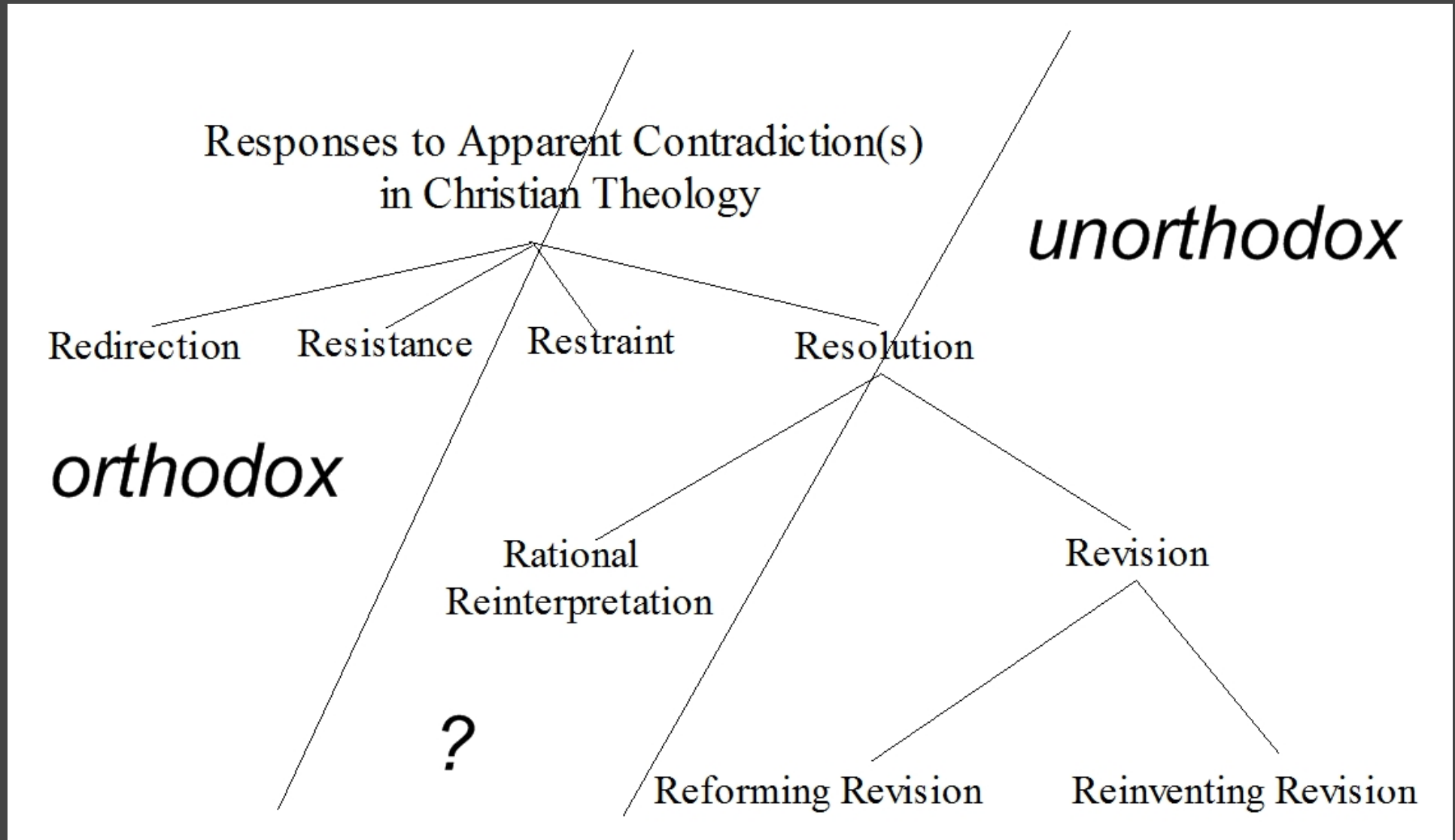
## Responses to Apparent Contradiction(s) in Christian Theology



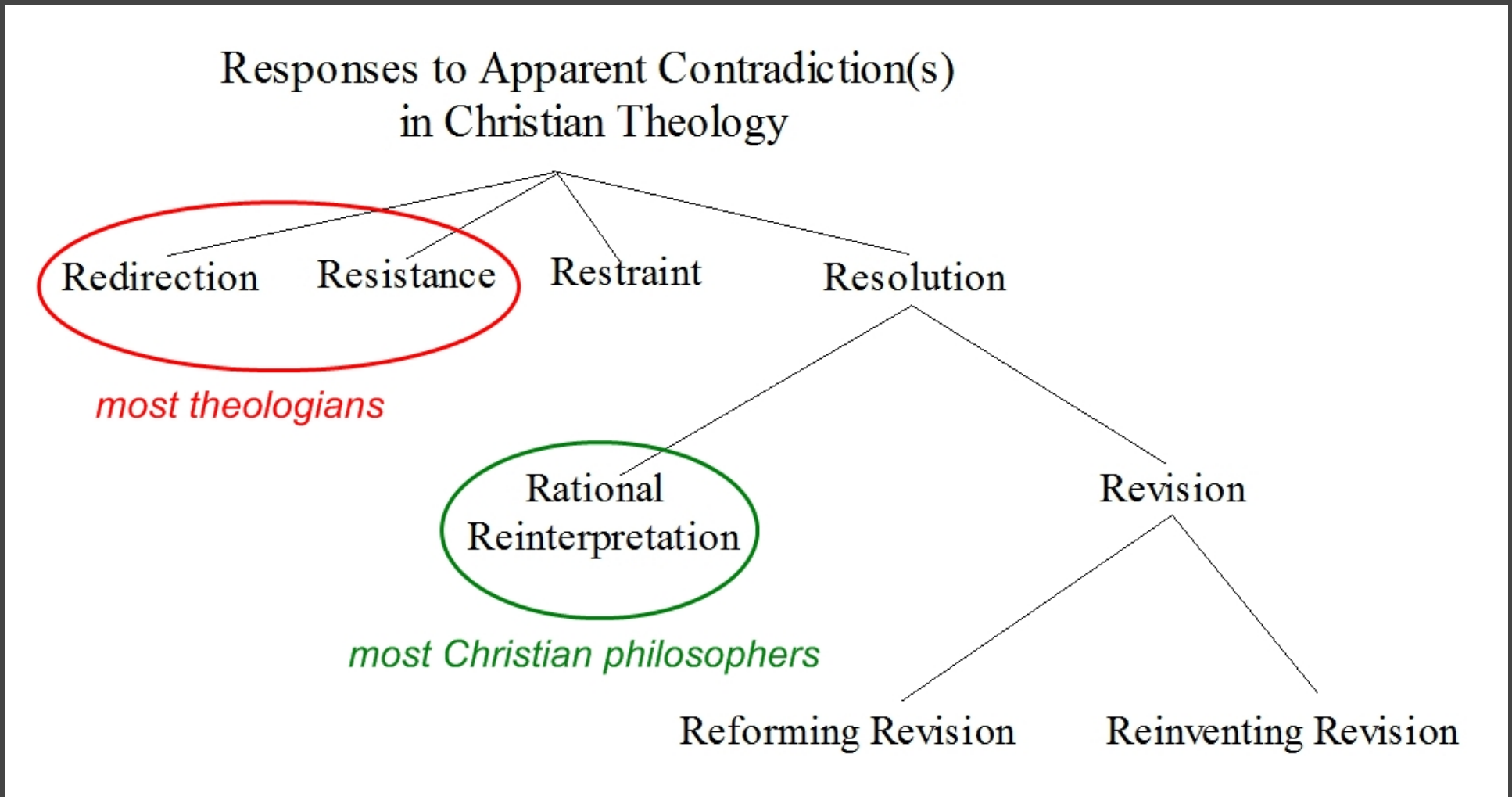
# The Eight R's



# OK, but which ways are orthodox?



# Which way to go?



[Link: mysterian resistance @ trinities.](#)

# Rational Reinterpretation 1: Constitution Trinitarianism - Michael Rea and Jeff Brower



Buffy vs. Lumpy

They differ in some ways,  
and so are not =.

e.g. Lumpy existed before  
Buffy. Lumpy, but not  
Buffy, could survive being  
smashed flat.

# Rational Reinterpretation 1: Constitution Trinitarianism - Michael Rea and Jeff Brower



Buffy and Lumpy  
presently occupy the  
same portion of space.

Though they are not =,  
they are to be counted as  
one physical object - they  
are "numerically the same  
without being identical".

# Rational Reinterpretation 1: Constitution Trinitarianism - Michael Rea and Jeff Brower



Analogy: the divine nature is like the portion of bronze. The Persons of the Trinity are like the statue.

The Father, Son, and Spirit relate to the divine nature in a way somewhat like Buffy relates to Lumpy. (constitution)

# Rational Reinterpretation 1: Constitution Trinitarianism - Michael Rea and Jeff Brower



## Objections:

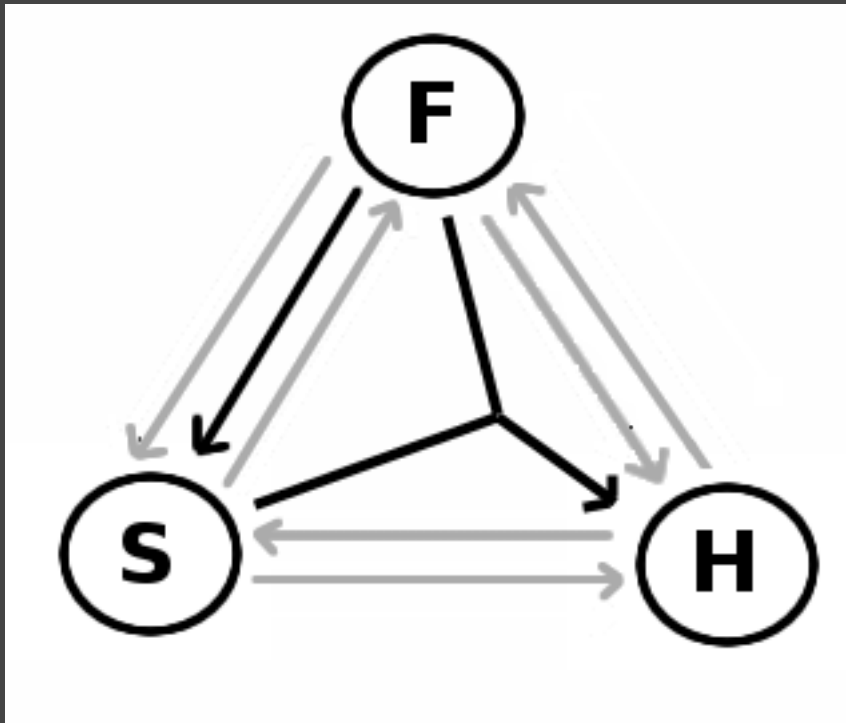
Divine stuff/matter?

Non-identical things which are "numerically the same"?

Pseudo-monotheism?  
(One "divine nature".  
Three divine persons  
constituted by it.)

Link: [discussions @ trinities](#)

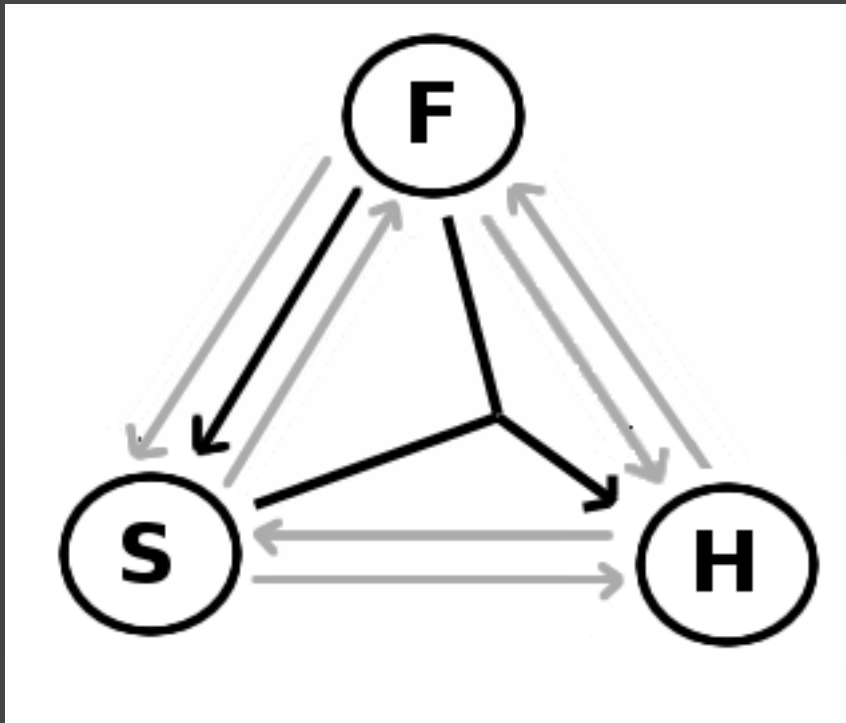
# Rational Reinterpretation 2: Richard Swinburne's Social Trinitarianism



If there is (at least) one divine person, there must be exactly three divine persons.

A divine person is perfect in all ways, including perfect in love. This requires another, to be loved. So, the Father generates the Son.

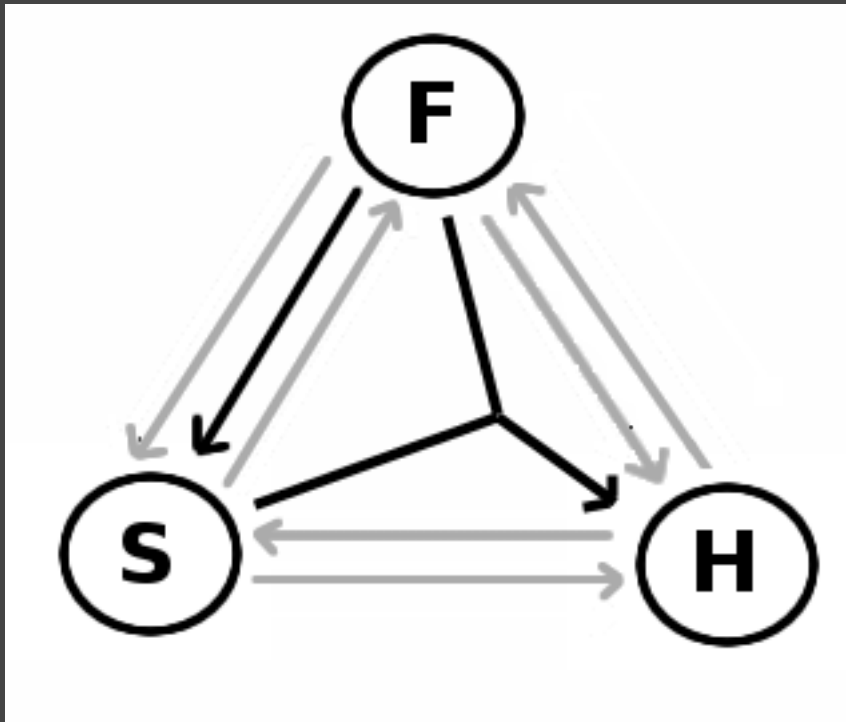
# Rational Reinterpretation 2: Richard Swinburne's Social Trinitarianism



If there is (at least) one divine person, there must be exactly three divine persons.

But the best kind of love involves cooperating with another to benefit a third. Hence, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

# Rational Reinterpretation 2: Richard Swinburne's Social Trinitarianism



Objections:

Tritheism?

Subordinationism?

"God"... a group?

[Link: discussions @ trinities.](#)

# Rational Reinterpretation 3: Brian Leftow's "Latin Trinitarianism"

Analogy: The time-traveling Rockette.

One woman, several concurrent life-stages or streams.



# Rational Reinterpretation 3: Brian Leftow's "Latin Trinitarianism"

**"God always lives His life in three discrete strands at once, no event of His life occurring in more than one strand and no strand succeeding another. In one strand, God lives the Father's life, in one the Son's, and in one the Spirit's. The events of each strand add up to the life of a Person. The lives of the Persons add up to the life God lives as the three Persons. There is one God, but He is many in the events of His life, as Jane was in the chorus line: being the Son is a bit like being the leftmost Rockette."**

# Rational Reinterpretation 3: Brian Leftow's "Latin Trinitarianism"

Objection: Isn't this modalism? (One divine person - God - eternally lives his life in three different ways - which are the "persons" of the Trinity?)



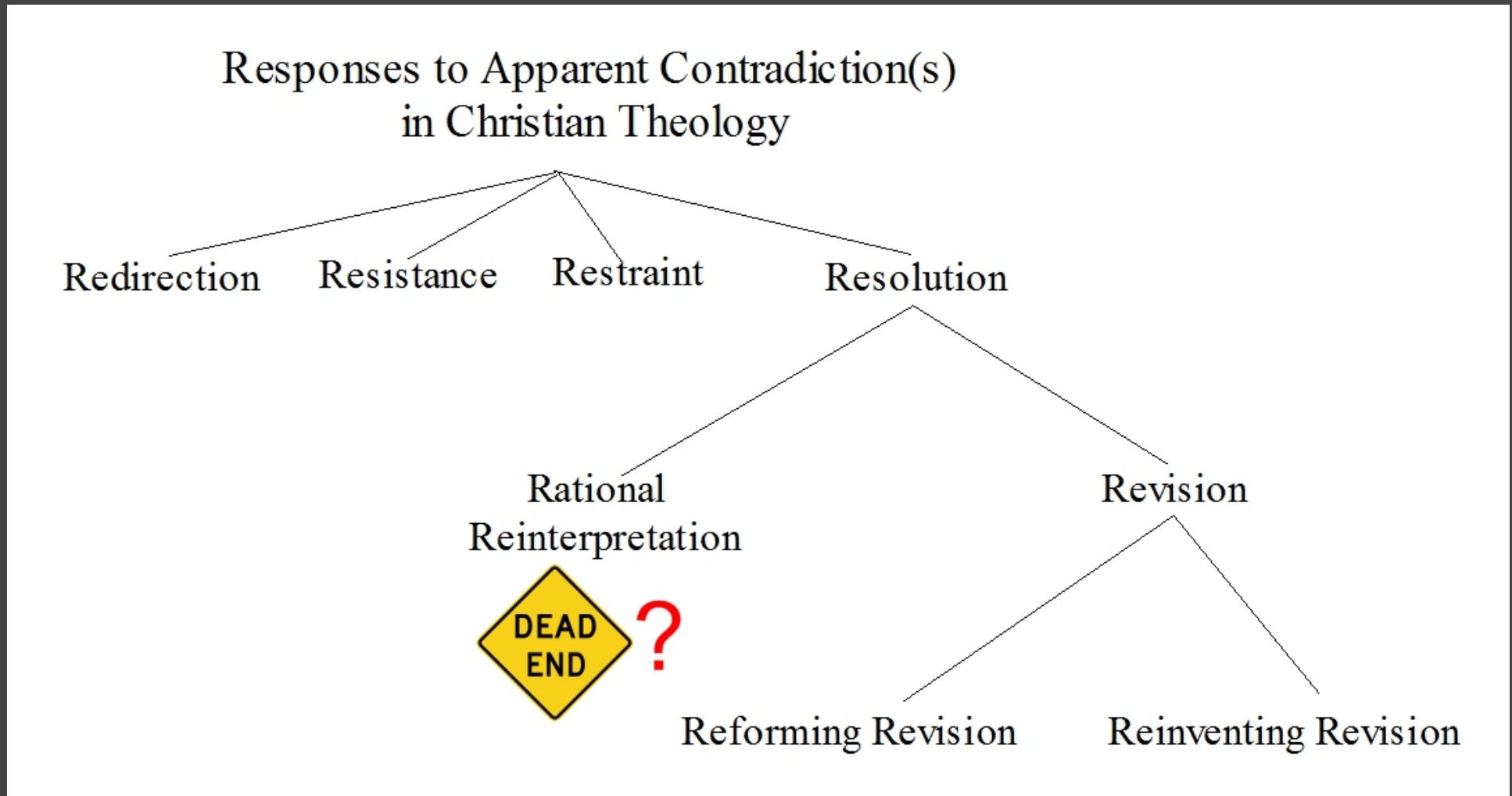
[Link: Leftow @ trinities.](#)

# Conclusion

## 2 Goals:

- defense: the Trinity doctrine isn't *obviously* self-contradictory. It *could* amount to this (insert theory here) which clearly *is* self-consistent.
  - This is the main goal of Resolvers through Rational Reconstruction.
- reasonable belief: properly understood, the Trinity doctrine is reasonably believed by Christians.
  - This is the goal of mysterian Resisters. It is reasonable, they argue, to believe these apparent contradictions.

# Conclusion



[Link: "Trinity" @ The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)