

Hasker's Quests for a Viable Social Theory

Abstract: *In a series of papers William Hasker, in conversation with important recent work in philosophical theology, has carefully articulated and argued for a version of "social" trinitarianism. I argue that this theory should be rejected because it is not consistently monotheistic.*

Introduction

In the last forty years or so, many broadly traditional Christian theologians and philosophers have lined up behind a way of understanding the Trinity, according to which the "persons" of the Trinity really are three persons, that is, selves – so many subjects of experience, intentional agents, each with his own intellect and will. In a series of papers, William Hasker has fought offensively and defensively on behalf of this "social" trinitarianism (hereafter, ST). He defends ST against many recent objections by philosophical theologians, and argues that the genuine Christian tradition requires belief in something like ST, and that ST is what the historical mainstream tradition has always been getting at. Moreover, he's authored trenchant critiques of some important rival approaches.¹

Elsewhere I've argued that his replies to my deception objections to ST are completely unsuccessful.² Here I shall discuss only Hasker's positive thrusts, his claims about what ST amounts to. I shall argue that any Christian should reject it, because it implies polytheism (and the falsity of monotheism).³

The First Quest

For Hasker the *sine qua non* of ST is the claim that the "persons" of the Trinity enjoy genuine personal relationships.⁴ In a 1970 essay, Hasker says that he assumes that the "persons" of the Trinity, but not so much the Trinity itself, are analogous to human persons.⁵ While not defining the term "person" in the doctrine that God "is three persons," he specifies that

*A person is that which enters into personal relationships. ...Each Person is to each Person as an "I" to a "Thou."*⁶

Hasker asserts that both the Bible and important fourth century "fathers" support ST, and he boldly proposes "a reconstruction of the doctrine of the Trinity developed in terms of contemporary philosophy of mind."⁷ This recasting is needed, because

The Fathers may have resolved the problem [of answering the question: Three *what* in one *what*?] for themselves, but they did not resolve it for us.⁸

Moreover, Hasker wants to answer this question without falling into tritheism.⁹ He plausibly argues that a human "person must be regarded as a continuing [i.e. lasting through time] subject of experiences" which has a "nature," which is "the ontological ground" of the person's dispositions, and "is the real capacity... for having such experiences."¹⁰ His reconstruction, then, is this:

...the one individual and indivisible Nature of God is possessed by three

*Subjects, each of whom is really distinct from the other two and is the Subject of his own distinct experiences in the unity of the one divine nature and life.*¹¹

One may ask: why is this not a sort of tritheism, wherein the three gods happen to share a nature? That they can be said to share “a life” doesn’t make them one god. Hasker argues that because they share a nature, they can’t but cooperate, and that they are somehow always involved in each other’s actions.¹² He holds this shared nature not to be a generic or universal one, but a particular one,¹³ which is a “‘real potentiality’ for the divine experiences.”¹⁴ This, Hasker insists, is “a significant, and not a merely nominal, affirmation of unity.”¹⁵

True enough – nature sharing would be a kind of objective unity. But why think this implies that those three selves are in or somehow amount to one god? There’s a dilemma here. Either it is or is not possible for diverse (non-identical) things to share one and the same particular nature, one and the same individual potentiality for experiences. Suppose that it *is* possible: why then, think that because divine persons share a nature that they are one god? Might not three gods share a nature, just as there might be Siamese triplets which share, say, a certain bone or organ? On the other hand, if it is *not* possible, then it is not actual, nor can it be part of or implied by any true Trinity theory.

Can an individual property be shared by two or three things? Philosophers fall into four camps on the topic of properties or qualities. Some deny there are such entities as properties. Others believe in properties, but only understood as universals. A third group affirms properties, but only as particulars. Finally, some believe in both particular and universal properties. For the first two groups, it will be a necessary truth that there are no shared particular properties, because necessarily there are no such things as particular properties. Members of the third group typically hold properties to be “necessarily such that they are exhibited by just one object.”¹⁶ And members of the fourth group posit shared properties, but only universal ones. Presumably, for them as well, in principle there can’t be a shared *particular* property. Thus, surveying the theories, if there are properties, it *seems* impossible that there be a shared particular property. In the context of a general metaphysics of properties, no one takes this option seriously. Is this not a strong reason against any theological theory positing a shared particular property?

In saying this, I’m thinking of fundamental, basic, or underived properties, as it were some of the bottom-level metaphysical ingredients of things. But if one has a looser concept of a property, on which a whole may “borrow” some of its parts’ properties, then one may allow for shared particular properties. Suppose that human selves are living organisms, and that conjoined twins are overlapping organisms, physical objects which share certain parts. Now consider conjoined twins who share a heart. It would be plausible, on these assumptions, that the one twin’s power of pumping blood just is the other twin’s power of pumping blood. This would be plausible because each twin has that power just by having one and the same heart, with, we presume, exactly one blood-pumping power.

I don’t endorse this metaphor of property “borrowing,” and suspect that such talk confuses properties and predicates. But for present purposes, I’ll grant that it makes sense in the above case. The persons of the Trinity are not supposed to share any proper part, so this sort of case neither shows nor even suggests that it is possible for them to share a particular property.

One may object that it is precisely the doctrine of the Trinity which gives us reason to believe there can be a shared particular property.¹⁷ Maybe *ordinary* particular properties can’t

be shared, but the divine nature is no ordinary particular property, and *is* shared by non-identical entities. And haven't great Christian minds, for example, the medieval philosopher-theologian Anselm, believed this?¹⁸ Moreover, isn't it just part and parcel of Christian commitment to believe that this particular property, the divine nature, is shared by non-identical entities?

Taking the last point first: no. There have long been unitarian Christians (who hold that the one god, God, is numerically identical to the Father, so that God is, as is sometimes said, "unipersonal," or more clearly, just is a certain great self), modalists (who hold that the three "persons" of the Trinity are not distinct entities, but are rather in some sense ways the one god is – hence, just *one* entity has the divine nature), and social trinitarians who hold the divine nature to be a shared *universal* property. One might object that none of these have been in the catholic mainstream, but this is mistaken - leading catholic intellectuals have held all three views.¹⁹

I agree with the objector that knowing a first-rate thinker has believed something is a reason to believe it, but it is often not, by itself, a sufficient reason. This is particularly so when it comes down to theses which clash with our fundamental intuitions. Most of us have this intuition: *if* there's such a thing as this property: *this paperclip's flexibility*, that *individual* power or disposition couldn't also be had by another paperclip. And changing to mental properties: My *individual* ability to empathize couldn't also be had by you. Consider now Hasker's suggestion that the Father's ability to experience just is the Son's ability. That the subject has shifted to spirits, or to divine selves, seems irrelevant, for this scenario seems impossible as strongly as does the paperclip scenario. The point seems to hold generally for any property which is particular and not universal (again, assuming that there are properties).

Thus, the burden is on trinitarians who posit a shared individual divine nature, to give us a reason, other than that their theory requires it, for thinking that it is even *possible* for a individual property to be had by more than one entity. Until they do this, their claim that an individual divine nature is shared is not well motivated.

As for Anselm, insofar as I follow his reasoning, it is that the divine nature can't be a shared universal, or else the Trinity would be three gods. But all properties (so, all natures or essential properties) are either universals or particulars. Therefore, the shared divine nature is a particular property. The best recent commenters on Anselm note that he simply doesn't have developed views about universals, and this is probably why he never considers objections like the one just given.²⁰ I suggest that in the light of nine hundred more years of philosophizing about properties, more must be said, and account must be taken of the fact that when not defending Trinity theories, seemingly no philosopher takes seriously the idea of a fundamental shared particular property.

Note that if this intuition is correct (that it is impossible for distinct things to share a fundamental particular property), then any "two" things sharing any fundamental particular property (nature or not) must be numerically one. This explains why many trinitarians assume that if, e.g. the Father and Son share a particular nature, then they must be one being. Indeed, that is so. But that is to say that they are numerically one being, that they are numerically identical. That "nature" is very ambiguous helps to hide this implication of the claim. It appears then, that we can answer the question above, as to why there couldn't be three gods sharing a particular nature. The answer is that if things share a particular fundamental property of any sort, this implies that they are a single thing. On the imagined

scenario, the “three” gods would actually be one god, and one entity/being.

Does this insight doom any Trinity theory? Not necessarily. Recently, philosophical theologians have floated the idea that the divine nature is a property, but is neither a universal property nor a particular property.²¹ About this, I will only say that if nature-sharing is supposed to explain why three divine selves are one god, we will have to understand what it is about this sort of nature (which is neither particular nor universal) which makes this so.

I conclude that Hasker’s claim that the three divine selves enjoy an objective sort of unity in the sense that they share a individual power or capacity needs further support to be plausible. As things stand, the theory seems a necessary falsehood. Further, we can see why Hasker and others suppose that individual-nature-sharing would make three divine selves one god. It would. But it would also make them one being. It is self-evident that if some x and some y are the same god, then x is a god, y is a god, and x and y are one and the same (are numerically identical). Yet, Hasker would agree, the Father, Son, and Spirit can’t be one and the same, for they have qualitatively differed from one another.

At the end of the essay, Hasker asks “whether ‘personality’ is most correctly ascribed to God in his unity or to the *personae* individually.”²² He answers that

The *personae* are Persons! Each of them is a “he,” and to each Person distinct divine actions are appropriately ascribed. Yet such is the oneness of the Godhead [i.e. the divine nature], such is the concurrent, united operation of all three Persons, that the Three together may be regarded and spoken of in the singular as “he” - as... a single divine “personal society.” Thus, both the entire Godhead [i.e. the Trinity] and the Persons individually may be referred to as “he,” but the latter usage must be held to be systematically and ontologically fundamental.²³

In other words, each “person” of the Trinity is a self, and the whole Trinity is not a self, though it is a single, unified reality, and because the members of the Trinity are so unified, it can *seem like* an intelligent agent itself, and so it can be thought of and spoken of as if it were a self.

Aren’t we advised here to be tritheists, but to soothe our worries by personifying this group of three gods, talking about them and thinking about them *as if* they were themselves a single god? At the end of his essay, Hasker admits that

...the whole position may be simply dismissed as tritheistic. Our only answer... is that Jesus Christ is presented in the New Testament as one who does what only God can do, says what only God can say, and is in fact very God himself in his essential being. And we believe that he is truly so presented.²⁴

The thrust here, clearer in the whole context, is that we ought not let *a priori* intuitions about what is impossible or possible prevent us from believing what has in fact been revealed as actual (and so which must be possible). This is, I think, an important and correct point to make, but it isn’t germane here. Suppose it is correct that the New Testament presents Jesus as being “very God himself.” It might follow that some sort of “high” two-nature christology is called for (i.e. Jesus is divine, has a divine nature, as much as the Father) but what does this have to do with the worry about tritheism? Here Hasker only confesses his unshakable confidence that the mainstream catholic tradition of theology has got the New Testament right, and that the New Testament is reliable in what it says about Jesus. He tacitly confesses that

he has no answer to the tritheism objection. But a Trinity doctrine is *by definition* supposed to be monotheistic (and not also tritheistic).

Thus, though this piece throughout displays the many philosophical virtues for which Hasker is known, in the end it is a theoretical failure. He aims for a theory which does not “imply a denial or weakening of the unity of God.”²⁵ This desideratum is conveniently unclear. But if we read it as requiring the truth of monotheism and the falsity of polytheism, Hasker’s theory comes up short.²⁶

The Second Quest

But that is Hasker’s first, not his last discussion of the Trinity. More than forty years on, Hasker has published the boldly titled “How to Think About the Trinity.”²⁷ In addition, he’s weighed in with critical comments on two recent Trinity theories by analytic philosophers, in each case attempting to derive positive lessons about the doctrine. Here I shall weigh his advice, concentrating on how he construes “the” doctrine itself, leaving aside most of his many methodological points.

The persons of the Trinity are, for Hasker, so many selves. At times he pulls his punch and describes them more ambiguously as “personal,” “social,” and as “centers of consciousness.” But they stand in non-reflexive interpersonal relationships to one another and to humans, and this implies that they are in the final analysis, and after the last nod to analogy, *literally* selves.²⁸ While they enjoy perfect fellowship, and act with regard to other things in a perfectly unified way, these factors alone do not, Hasker plausibly holds, make them a single god.²⁹ Hasker cites three further factors, which I assume are meant to be jointly sufficient, perhaps together with the two other features just mentioned, to make the three one god. On the other hand, it may be that it is really the last claim which is meant to by itself suffice for their being one god.

First, he endorses the patristic claims that the Son is eternally “begotten” of the Father, while the Spirit eternally “proceeds” from the Father and the Son. Hasker notes that such doctrines offer “an explanation of the existence of more than one divine Person,” and he urges that they have “some scriptural support.” Seemingly conceding that the traditionally cited biblical proof-texts imply no such claims, he argues that terms such as *logos* and “son” are “strongly suggestive of a derivative status for the Son.”³⁰

This may be so, but Hasker makes a big leap in claiming that such terms give “significant support” for the doctrines in question, for they are consistent with various subordinationist unitarian theories, such as that propounded by Origen. On such theories, the one god is identical to the Father and the Son exists because of the Father. Though such theories may allow that the Son is in some sense “divine,” he enjoys this status because of the Father, who is greater. As Origen says,

...some of those among the multitudes of believers... because of their rashness suppose that the Saviour is the greatest and supreme God. But we at least do not take that view, since we believe him who said: ‘The Father who sent me is greater than I.’³¹

Hasker’s main point, though, is just that these claims feature prominently in the Constantinopolitan Creed; he is unwilling to countenance that these fourth century “fathers”

could have been off track. Thus, he scolds fellow “social” trinitarians Craig and Moreland for denying the generation and procession claims. But he doesn’t address their grounds for so doing. There’s a significant consensus among modern exegetes that no biblical text either asserts, implies, or assumes the eternal generation and procession claims.³² And philosophically, it is plausible that these derivation claims imply that Christ and the Spirit are not fully divine, since full divinity requires aseity – not existing because of anything else. On the traditional generation and procession doctrines, the Father has aseity, but the Son and Spirit do not. Instead of engaging Moreland and Craig on this interesting objection (I’m inclined to take their side, that a maximally great being must exist and have its essential perfections *a se*) Hasker dismisses this concern on the grounds that if generation or procession ruled out divinity, then the Constantinopolitan creed would be inconsistent with itself.³³ I take it that Hasker holds that divine providence would not allow this. But even if full divinity *doesn’t* imply aseity, still, one may think that the Father, being the origin or source or cause of the Son, the one from whom the Son gets his divine nature, must therefore be *greater than* the Son – even though the Son is “true God from true God.”

If we’re worried about how all this counts as monotheism, it’s hard to see the relevance of affirming generation and procession; for all we know, *if* there could be three gods, it could be that they stand in this pattern of dependence (the second depending on the first, and the third in some different way depending on both the first and the second, while the first depends on nothing).

But perhaps these causal or quasi-causal relations are supposed to work in conjunction with the second factor, namely that the Three share a single “common nature which is concrete and is numerically one.”³⁴ As we’ve seen, however, this strategy works too well, for individual-nature-sharing seems to imply being numerically one. The problem discussed above hasn’t been addressed.

Third, Hasker tells us that

The tension of “one” versus “three” is resolved by postulating that there is in the Trinity a single divine mind with three personal centers of consciousness, knowledge, and will.³⁵

How should we unpack this new claim? Hasker gives two thrusts. First, he quotes Moreland and Craig, to the effect that the one god is one soul, but not one person. I just am my soul, and my soul is (identical to) a self/person, in their view, because it has one set of cognitive (and presumably, active and affective) faculties.³⁶ In contrast, say Moreland and Craig, God has three such sets of powers, and so in *some* sense is, in their words “three centers of self-consciousness, intentionality, and volition.”³⁷ But is this possible, Hasker asks? Well, we don’t know it to be *impossible*, he argues, citing split-brain experiments and victims of multiple personality disorder.

But let’s first return to Moreland’s and Craig’s claim. This soul (an immaterial entity) which is God has three faculties, that is, three general powers, each of which is sufficient to make it a self.³⁸ This doesn’t make the soul *be* three selves; they would agree, I think, that identity is a one-one relation, so that it is impossible for several distinct things to be identical to some one thing. Rather, this soul would thereby be just one self whose self-hood is overdetermined. Nor would it follow that this soul somehow supports or underlies three selves. Suppose Ralph is a rotten husband, and that he has three tendencies each of which is sufficient to make him a rotten husband. First, Ralph is habitually unfaithful. Second, Ralph is

a chronic liar. Third, Ralph is a coward. This doesn't make Ralph three bad husbands; it makes him a single, triply bad one. His wife need only divorce one man.

Thus, if it is really *God* which has these three faculties, e.g. three abilities to truly to think, I suppose in three different ways (whatever that amounts to) "I exist," then it does not follow that God "is three persons," or that he's in any sense composed of three selves. What follows is that God is a self, able to think (etc.) in three different ways, by exercising three different powers. Moreland and Craig want to say that God "is" three persons in the sense that God "supports" three persons, as a sort of substratum, but again, they are *his* powers, not (merely) the powers of his parts, if indeed the "persons" should be thought of as parts on their theory. Thus, when they identify the one God with this aforementioned soul,³⁹ they make God to be a self after all, but one which can live in three ways. He's *personal*, but he's also a person (self), albeit an unusual one. Each "person" of the Trinity, on this theory, would be this one self thinking in a certain way, exercising one of his three cognitive powers. But this runs contrary to their, and Hasker's, claim that the "persons" of the Trinity stand in personal relationships to one another.⁴⁰ No self can enjoy an *inter-personal* (non-reflexive) relationship with himself.

But despite their talk of "God" having three properties sufficient for personhood, the above can't be what Moreland and Craig intend; after all, they deny that God/the Trinity is "a fourth person or agent" - not because God's *the only self* in the Trinity, but rather because it (God) *isn't a self* (hence, not a fourth self).⁴¹ Perhaps what they want to say is that "God" is a soul (or at any rate a non-physical substance or entity - "soul" may be misleading here) with three powers sufficient not for *being a self*, but rather, sufficient for *somehow containing a "center of consciousness."*⁴² But are these "centers" selves or not? If not, the central desiderata of ST isn't met, for non-selves can't be friends. If they are selves, then a ST proponent who adopts the Moreland-Craig model must think the triune God to be a complex substance composed of three selves.⁴³ But if they are substances (or simply concrete, individual entities which are agents, knowers, lovers) they can't be "in" this one soul in the way that a property is "in" or "had by" its bearer; each is an entity in its own right. And each being omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent,⁴⁴ they appear to be so many gods, just amalgamated into a complex whole thing called "God," which isn't a god, though it has gods as parts. If there can be more than one god, why can't they be joined to form some whole? I don't know; thus, if this is what Moreland and Craig intend, I don't know why anyone should consider it a sort of monotheism.

Daniel Howard-Snyder has pointedly pressed the monotheism objection.⁴⁵ In reply, Craig asserts that there's no problem with their ST implying that God isn't (identical to) a self, since "That's part and parcel of Trinitarian orthodoxy."⁴⁶ This would come as a shock to contemporary Christian laypeople and theologians who hold to a one-self understanding of the Trinity, on which the Trinity just is a certain self, God, who exists (or: acts, lives, manifests, or reveals himself) in three different ways. It would also come as a shock to theologians who were considered within the catholic fold in the second, third, and fourth centuries, what we now call subordinationists and monarchians, to leave aside the so-called "Arians."⁴⁷ These assumed the one god to be numerically identical to the Father, and at least in many cases, they held the Father to be a self.

In sum, the Moreland-Craig theory either abandons ST for a one-self account of the Trinity, giving up the claim that the members of the Trinity enjoy an ideal friendship, or it is an

unappealing tritheism, in which three gods are parts of a whole, which is dubbed “God,” though it is not itself a god. But monotheism is the view that there’s exactly one *god*, not the view that there’s at least one god-supporting thing (this “soul”). The biblical God is not a what, but rather a who.⁴⁸

Hasker ought not claim, then, that Moreland and Craig give us “a helpful and illuminating statement of the central claim of social Trinitarianism.”⁴⁹ But let’s move on to the abnormal psychology cases, for Hasker claims these are somewhat analogous to what he understands the Trinity to be. So as not to multiply words, I’ll assume the reader is familiar with split brain and multiple personality disorder phenomena. Hasker urges that the “most obvious reading of the evidence” is that in either case we have “a single mind” which contains “two or more centers of consciousness or psychological subjects.”⁵⁰ This is of course *plenty* disputable. But Hasker doesn’t offer this as a metaphysical model of the Trinity. His sole point is a defensive one:

...the point of the examples is not to show that something precisely analogous to the Trinity exists in ordinary (or even extraordinary) experience. ...The point of the examples is a conceptual one, to show that our concepts of “mind” and “psychological subject” admit (or can be revised so as to admit) the possibility that a single mind contains two or more such subjects. This possibility, I maintain, is indeed exhibited in the split-brain and multiple personality cases.⁵¹

His point, then, is that a certain supposition *isn’t* known to be contradictory. But what is this claim? As best I can tell, it is that there is a self which contains or is composed of two or more selves. But this point, even if correct, is of no aid to Hasker’s ST, for at the end of this piece, he tells us that

In view of the indissoluble unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the work of creation and redemption, it is appropriate in some contexts to refer to the Trinity as a whole as *if* to a single person or agent.⁵²

That “as if” is important. The Trinity, for him, is not itself a self, though it can be thought of, and talked about as *if* it were. Hasker tacitly admits, then, that the analogies are not apt, for the mental patients in question *are* selves – it is one human self who checks in the hospital and is treated for her multiple personality disorder. And it is one human self who endures the effects of having her corpus callosum severed. But then, *if* Hasker’s interpretation of these phenomena is reasonable, it would support the possibility of something irrelevant to his ST – that a self may contain or be composed of others.

In the end, I can’t discern why Hasker thinks his theory is monotheistic, other than, that it *just must be*, since it is *meant to be* an orthodox theory. I understand the three selves, but I don’t see why anyone should hold them to in *some* sense be (be parts of? constitute?) one god. I can see why you might think they’re one thing, one entity. After all, it is plausible that non-universal natures, or non-universal properties of any kind, can’t be shared by multiple things. So whatever “things” have a particular nature, such as Bill’s humanity – things like Bill Hasker, and Mrs. Hasker’s husband – must be one and the same. But I take it these Three can’t be one in *that* way (numerically one) as they differ, Hasker would say, in their properties of origin – none (Father), Father (Son), Father-and-Son (Spirit). And even if one jettisons the generation and procession claims, they will differ in other ways.

What does monotheism require anyway? “Monotheism” is the view that there’s only one god. The lowercase “god” is a fairly vague word, but in the relevant sense, which implies

being a proper object of worship, it entails being a self.⁵³ As Samuel Clarke observes,

...worship [is] nothing else, but the acknowledgement or payment of due honor, correspondent to the true dominion and dignity of the person to whom it is paid... for all worship or honor is personal, paid not to a metaphysical substance, but to an intelligent agent...⁵⁴

Even Hasker's characterization of Old Testament monotheism, on which this one god is the creator, implies that this one god is some self or other, creation being an intentional action.⁵⁵ But Hasker counsels that

...Christian thinkers ought to maintain a certain openness in their understanding of the unity of God... [not] prematurely adopt[ing] definition of divine unity that may cause problem when it comes time to state the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁶

In particular, he urges, it needn't be "acceptable also to Jews." But why not? The Jews (whether we mean first century Jews, like the authors of the New Testament, or later Jews) either have or haven't remained faithful to divine revelation on this score. If they have, and one's conception of divine unity is inconsistent with their view, then we're holding later revelation not merely to complete or disambiguate early revelation, but we're holding the two to strictly contradict. This is not, I take it, the Christian doctrine of progressive revelation, but rather something like the controversial Islamic doctrine of abrogation.⁵⁷ If the Jews have *not* been faithful to divine revelation regarding monotheism, then let's say what they've misunderstood or wrongly added to it, so as to make clear that our Trinity theory is consistent with what *the Jewish scriptures* (which are also ours) say about Yahweh. Hasker's advice here regarding "monotheism" is mere special pleading on behalf of his controversial theory.

Help from the Competition?

But might we gain any clarity from Hasker's interaction with two other highly creative philosophical theologians – authors of rival theories who are also important critics of ST, Brian Leftow and Michael Rea? Leaving aside the dialectic Hasker has with each, what positive lessons for ST does he draw from their work?

From Rea Hasker adopts a concept of constitution, as in: "A batch of clay constitutes a pot."⁵⁸ The basic idea is that one thing may constitute multiple other things of a different sort. In Hasker's hands, the constitution relation is no longer part of a relative-identity approach (i.e. one which depends on a controversial concept of numerical sameness which is not absolute identity), and constitution relations are asymmetric. He admits it to be unclear quite what "constitution" means in this new, non-physical context, but presumably he'll say that the meaning is analogous to more familiar material cases.⁵⁹ Hasker suggests,

Each of the Persons, we may say, is *constituted by* the divine nature but is not *identical with* that nature. And in virtue of the fact that each of the Persons is constituted by the divine nature, each Person *is God* (though not, to be sure, *is a God*, an assertion which has consistently been avoided by the Trinitarian tradition).⁶⁰

This requires some exposition. Hasker glosses the phrase "each of the Persons is in himself God" as meaning that the "divine attributes... belong to each Person fully."⁶¹ So by saying that each "is God" (a confusing phrase, given the name-like quality of the capitalized English "God") he means that each is divine, which amounts to each having the divine nature. Each,

he says, “is *wholly God*, but not *the whole of God*.” Less confusingly: each is divine, but none is the only divine thing. Or equivalently: each has the concrete divine nature, but is not the only thing which has the concrete divine nature.

Again, the monotheism slips away. A divine thing, or a thing which has the divine nature, is *by definition* a god, and there are (at least) three gods on Hasker’s theory, even given his prohibition of *saying*, e.g. of the Son, that he is “a god.” He wants to say, I think, that something which has the one, concrete, divine nature is “the God.” Let him say it; nonetheless, he’s posited three numerically distinct things which enjoy this condition. As we’ve seen, each of his divine persons qualitatively differs from the other two, and is therefore numerically other than both of his fellow divinities.

But perhaps there is help to be had in Brian Leftow’s creative speculations on the subject. Hasker, I think correctly, congratulates Leftow’s theory on its preservation of monotheism.⁶² In the paper in question Leftow suggests that the each “person” in the Trinity is, at bottom, God living his life in a certain way.⁶³ But *why* is it monotheistic? Hasker observes, “In Leftow’s proposal there is just *one* divine being; there is a *single* person who is God.”⁶⁴ Indeed – God is a god *and* the only god. In the ancient near east and throughout the Bible a god is *by definition* some sort of super self. So if there is exactly one god, there is exactly one super self of some sort. Hasker suggests that Leftow’s theory could stand a little adjustment – instead of God being one self living his life in three “strands,” Hasker says, “we simply posit a distinct subject of experience for each of the strands.”⁶⁵ And by “distinct subject,” he of course means a divine self, a god, so we’re back to tritheism.

For all Hasker’s confidence in asserting “the” doctrine of the Trinity, it seems that he’s unclear about just what that doctrine is. It is sobering that someone as informed, able, and serious as Hasker is struggling in this way. Nor is he a bold speculator or a crank; to the contrary, he’s well-versed in ancient and recent catholic theology, and he patiently tries to mine insights from recent work by some of our ablest Christian philosophers. Despite his open theism, he’s very confident that divine providence has lead mainstream, catholic Christianity along a correct path here. In his view, this path is, or at least eventually led to ST. Hasker doesn’t make the anachronistic claim that these theologians asserted ST, but he wants to be, as it were, walking further down the same paths. Whether he actually succeeds in this is another matter.⁶⁶

Conclusion

We should not take Hasker’s advice on “How to Think About the Trinity.” While it’s been observed that views advertised as “social trinitarianism” make it “sound equivalent to the thesis that the Doctrine of the Trinity is true but modalism is false,”⁶⁷ Hasker is clearer; he stipulates that the *real* core of ST is just the three, co-equal divine selves. This certainly has, in recent times, been a popular idea or image: a loving community of divine friends. We should be grateful that Hasker has vigorously, carefully, and systematically pursued a precise theoretical articulation of this.

But I’ve argued that Hasker has succeeded only in constructing a new version of polytheism. His theory features three gods, which must be numerically different because they’re qualitatively different. Hasker tries to cover this abundance of gods with a fig leaf of monotheistic language and a smokescreen of analogy appeals. Hasker asserts that there is

“one only living and true God,”⁶⁸ but as we’ve seen, it turns out that “God” here is a group of gods which is itself somewhat self-like. We can’t say that he clearly and consistently asserts monotheism – that there is exactly one being like the Yahweh of Isaiah, one true god. He does theorize that these divine selves share a particular property, a nature, which implies that they are one and the same – one and the same god, but also (contrary to both Hasker’s intentions and the New Testament) one and the same self. *If* there is no other particular divine nature, then the account would imply monotheism. But that’s not good enough; it’s agreed all around (or nearly so – inconsistency has its fans) that a successful Trinity theory must imply monotheism without also implying polytheism.⁶⁹

1 William Hasker, “Tri-Unity,” *The Journal of Religion* 50:1 (1970): 1-32; “Has a Trinitarian God Deceived Us?” in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, ed. Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38-51; “A Leftovian Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26:2 (2009): 154-166; “Objections to Social Trinitarianism,” *Religious Studies* 46 (2010): 421-39; “Constitution and the Trinity: The Brower-Rea Proposal,” *Faith and Philosophy* 27:3 (2010), 321-9; “How to Think About the Trinity,” in *Christian Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Colin Ruloff (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).

2 Dale Tuggy, “Divine deception and monotheism: a reply to Hasker,” *Religious Studies* 47 (2011): 109-15. Hasker replies in his “Deception and the Trinity: a rejoinder to Tuggy,” *Religious Studies* 47:1 (2011), 117-20. My “Divine Deception and Monotheism” (unpublished) continues the conversation.

3 There is much confusion about monotheism in the scholarly literatures. By “monotheism” I shall mean the thesis that there is exactly one GOD. A GOD is the sort of being which Yahweh is assumed and asserted to be in the Bible. Polytheism is normally taken to be the thesis that there is more than one god – that is, roughly, more than one self with supernatural power, and far greater power than any ordinary human. A GOD is necessarily a god, but not vice-versa; GOD is the more specific concept. As just defined, “monotheism” and “polytheism” are not obviously inconsistent; it seems there could be exactly one GOD but more than one god. However, in this paper, because of the Christian context, by “polytheism” I mean the claim that there is more than one GOD. Similarly, “tritheism” shall mean not that there are exactly three gods, but rather that there are exactly three GODS. For stylistic reasons, I shall use the conventional “god” to express the GOD concept. And I shall use the capitalized “God” only when using that word like a proper name and shall otherwise use “god.” On the god-GOD distinction see my “Divine Deception and Monotheism” (unpublished).

4 “Has a Trinitarian God Deceived Us?” 47 footnote 15; cf. “Tri-Unity,” 4.

5 “Tri-Unity,” 4. However, he proceeds to of the Trinity as if it were a self: “...suppose... that this triune God desired to reveal himself to men...” (5)

6 “Tri-Unity,” 4, 5, original emphases.

7 “Tri-Unity,” 3; cf. 31. Hasker’s project here is a clear example of what I elsewhere call the project of Resolution of an apparent contradiction by Rational Reconstruction of the doctrine. See my “On Positive Mysterianism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69:3 (2011), 205-26.

8 “Tri-Unity,” 1.

9 “Tri-Unity,” 11.

10 “Tri-Unity,” 22, 24.

11 “Tri-Unity,” 27, original italics.

12 “Tri-Unity,” 27-8, original italics. He says, “Each action of a divine Person takes place *in and by the one Nature of God* – in the “one mind” of God, if we may so speak.” (27) I’m not sure how to take this, or how it could be consistent with his claim that each of the persons has what are only his own acts, and presumably his own, unshared point of view. (28)

13 “Tri-Unity,” 28.

14 “Tri-Unity,” 29.

15 *Ibid.* He also asserts that “When we regard the Persons abstractly, as separated from the Nature, they are mere abstractions, and cannot be parts of anything; but regarded concretely, each Person *possesses and is* the whole indivisible Being [i.e. Nature] of God.” (30, original emphases) I’m not sure what he here asserts, or whether or not it is consistent with his claim that each Person is a self.

16 Michael Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 73.

17 I thank a reader for this journal for raising these objections, which I have paraphrased.

18 E.g. Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, *Anselm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 134-7.

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- 19 By “catholic” I mean Christians within that mainstream, bishop-ruled Christian movement which later split into Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Magisterial Protestant factions. Here are some eminent catholic thinkers who have held, respectively, the three positions mentioned: Samuel Clarke and Origen (Anglican, catholic or “proto-orthodox”), Karl Rahner and Karl Barth (Roman Catholic, Reformed), and Cornelius Plantinga and John Philoponus (Reformed, Orthodox).
- 20 Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 254.
- 21 See Michael Rea, “Hylomorphism and the Incarnation,” in Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill (eds.) *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 134-152, section 6. Preprint online: <http://www.nd.edu/~mrea/papers/Hylomorphism%20and%20Incarnation.pdf> and Michael Rea, “Hylomorphism Reconditioned,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 25 (2012), preprint online: <http://nd.edu/~mrea/papers/Hylomorphism%20Reconditioned.pdf>. Similarly, Richard Cross reads one early catholic theologian as holding that the divine nature is neither concrete nor abstract. (Richard Cross, “Latin Trinitarianism: Some Conceptual and Historical Considerations,” in Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (eds) *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 201-213, 204.)
- 22 Hasker “Tri-Unity,” 31.
- 23 *ibid.*
- 24 “Tri-Unity,” 32.
- 25 “Tri-Unity,” 31.
- 26 See note 3 above on my usage of “monotheism” and “polytheism” here.
- 27 “How to Think About the Trinity,” in Colin Ruloff (ed.) *TITLE*.
- 28 Hasker, “How to Think About the Trinity,” numbers 2-4. As he says elsewhere, “what is the nature of the Persons, as ST conceives it? Put simply, the Persons are persons.” (“Objections to Social Trinitarianism,” 2.)
- 29 “In order to secure the unity of the Trinity, it is necessary though not sufficient to affirm that the Persons enjoy with one another the highest conceivable degree of interpersonal or ‘social’ unity as well as functional unity in their dealings with the created world.” (“How to Think About the Trinity,” number 4) I take it that the “unity” in view is the unity possessed by a single god.
- 30 “How to Think About the Trinity,” number 5.
- 31 Origen, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 462. [=Book 8, section 14] For an overview of Origen’s views on the Trinity see Alvan Lamson, *The Church of the First Three Centuries* (London, 1875), 214-29. [Reprint: (Toronto: University of Toronto Libraries, 2012).]
- 32 J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 594-5. Moreland and Craig refer to the discussion and summary in John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 488-92. On this point, some evangelicals are coming around to a point long ago argued by unitarians – that the traditional proof-texts for the doctrines of eternal generation and procession have been misread. See, e.g. John Wilson, *Scripture Proofs and Scriptural Illustrations of Unitarianism*, 3rd ed. (London, 1846) [Reprint: (Morrisville, NC: Lulu.com, 2007)], 190-6. At least one noted nineteenth century evangelical, trinitarian exegete and theologian drew the same conclusion, on the same grounds – divine aseity and lack of biblical support. (Moses Stuart, *Letters on the Eternal Generation of the Son of God* (Andover, MA: Mark Newman, 1822). [Reprint: Morrisville, NC: Lulu.com, 2010])
- 33 “How to Think About the Trinity,” number 5.
- 34 “How to Think About the Trinity,” number 6.
- 35 “How to Think About the Trinity,” number 7.
- 36 Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 238-9.
- 37 “How to Think About the Trinity,” number 7.
- 38 William Lane Craig, “Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder,” *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006), 101-13, see 104-106. [Partially reprinted as “Another Glance at Trinity Monotheism” in McCall and Rea, *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, 126-30, see 130.]
- 39 Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 594; Craig, “Trinity Monotheism Once More,” 101.
- 40 Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 582-3, 588, 594-5.
- 41 Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 591. In personal correspondence, Craig confirms this interpretation on which the one soul which is God is not a self. Although in one place Craig calls the persons of the Trinity God’s “minds” (“Trinity Monotheism Once More,” 101; cf. *Philosophical Foundations*, 593) these are not to be taken not as God’s powers or faculties of thinking, but rather as selves, thinkers, internal to God.

(Email to author of 9/23/10)

- 42 Moreland and Craig introduce ST as the view that “in God there are three distinct centers of self-consciousness, each with its proper intellect and will.” (*Philosophical Foundations*, 583) On this reading, their analogy to human souls mentioned above would *on their views* be a poor one. They hold to a dualism on which I am numerically identical to a soul. They say that just as having one set of mental faculties makes my soul (that is, me) one self, God’s having three such faculties make him three selves. But what that God-soul has three of, they really want to say, are properties sufficient for not for *being*, but rather for *containing* a self. In contrast, I have no such property; although I’m a self, I don’t contain any selves within me.
- 43 This is the final option discussed by Craig. (“Trinity Monotheism Once More,” 113) I’ve just argued that they are already committed to this; given what else they want to say, it’s the only option available.
- 44 “Trinity Monotheism Once More,” 110. I take it, they are straightforwardly so, and not in virtue of being parts of a thing (God, the Trinity) which has those features.
- 45 Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Trinity Monotheism,” *Philosophia Christi* 5:2 (2003), 375-403, see 401-3.
- 46 “Trinity Monotheism Once More,” 106. Craig adds that “Monotheists concur that God is personal, not that He is a person.” (*ibid.*) At first glance, this seems to be an *ad hoc*, theory-saving redefinition of “monotheism.” However, it is not only social trinitarians who understand “God” to be something other than a self. Many medieval theologians, be they Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, modeled their concept of the ultimate being in large measure after the neoplatonic “One,” and arguably don’t believe God to be a god (i.e. a perfect self – that is, a GOD – see note 3 above). On such views God isn’t a self, but is rather “personal,” self-like in some way, e.g. it appears to us to be a self, it is commonly mistaken for a self, or self-implicating concepts apply only analogously to it. It would appear, then, that Craig is correct, if the term “monotheist” may be understood in sense so broad as to include ST theorists and medieval theologians, along with the many Jews, Christians, and Muslims who believe God to be a perfect Self. In my view, what matters to a discussion of the Trinity is what sort of monotheism the Bible asserts. On this see my “Divine Deception and Monotheism.”
- 47 Late 1st – early 2nd c. catholic “monarchians” claimed to uphold the “monarchy,” the one rule, of the Father, in reaction against subordinationists, whom they accused of denying monotheism. As we have only the writings of their bitter enemies, it is hard to get clear on their views, which surely varied in the details. Tertullian accuses them of identifying Father and Son, and it is possible that some did. But probably some held that the Father just is the one true God, and the divine element in the man Jesus, the Word, was God or a property or mode of God. (cf. John 14:10)
- “Arians” were so-called by their theological enemies; they were 4th c. subordinationist theologians who held (as did other catholic theologians before Origen) that before the creation of the cosmos, God (i.e. the Father) created his Son, by whom he then created the cosmos. (cf. Proverbs 8:22) The claim that Father and Son are eternally *homousios* (one substance or one essence), first voted in by the bishops at Nicea (325 CE), was meant to exclude them from catholic Christianity.
- 48 On this point see Anthony Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian: A Call to Return to the Creed of Jesus* (Morrow, GA: Restoration Fellowship, 2007), 46 and my “Divine Deception and Monotheism.”
- 49 Hasker, “How to Think About the Trinity,” number 7.
- 50 *ibid.*
- 51 *ibid.*
- 52 “How to Think About the Trinity,” number 5, emphasis added.
- 53 In the sense relevant, I mean, to Christian, devotional spirituality. In certain theoretical contexts, there is talk of a “God” or “god” which is not a self. See notes 3 and 46 above.
- 54 Samuel Clarke, *A Reply to the Objections of Robert Nelson, Esq. in The Works of Samuel Clarke, D. D.*, Vol. 4., ed. John Clarke (London, 1738) [reprint: *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity and Related Writings*, Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu.com, 2007], 251-324, 278. I have modernized Clarke’s capitalization. Cf. Howard-Snyder, “Trinity Monotheism,” 400-2.
- 55 “How to Think About the Trinity,” number 1.
- 56 *ibid.*
- 57 Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003), 64-9, 74-5
- 58 William Hasker, “Constitution and the Trinity,” 12.
- 59 “Constitution and the Trinity,” 329, footnote 9.
- 60 “Constitution and the Trinity,” 329, original emphases.
- 61 “Objections to Social Trinitarianism,” 434.

62 "Objections to Social Trinitarianism," 435.

63 See my "Trinity," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/trinity/>, section 2.1. In a later work Leftow goes farther, arguing that the "persons" of the Trinity are truly selves, but selves which exist because of certain events in the life of the one God. In his words, "...the Trinity arises because God lives His life in three discrete streams of events at once... these are streams of mental events, and each such stream is the life of a Locke-person. ...There is just one God who generates and lives as the three Persons, by generating and living in three distinct mental streams." (Brian Leftow, "Modes without Modalism," in Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (eds.) *Persons: Human and Divine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 357-75, 374.) While the earlier piece propounds a one-self Trinity, in the later piece Leftow insists that Locke-persons really are selves (367), so the account seems to have four selves in the Trinity: God, Father, Son, and Spirit, with the first in some sense causing the second, who causes the third and fourth.

64 "Objections to Social Trinitarianism," 434.

65 "Objections to Social Trinitarianism," 436.

66 In a longer version of this paper I argued here that he fails in this; I show that some of the theologians he appeals to are hopelessly un- and implicitly anti-ST. This cut section is available online as "Historical supplement to 'Hasker's Quests for a Viable Social Theory' (Dale)", <http://trinities.org/blog/?p=4142>.

67 Trenton Merricks, "Split Brains and the Godhead," in *Knowledge and Reality: Essays in Honor of Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Tom Crisp, Matthew Davidson, and David Vander Laan (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 299–326, 306.

68 "How to Think About the Trinity," number 1.

69 My thanks to William Lane Craig, Richard Cross, Tom Flint, three readers for this journal, and Bill Hasker for helpful correspondence relating to earlier drafts of this paper.