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.

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.

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.
The Four R's

Responses to Apparent Contradiction(s) in Christian Theology

Redirection  Resistance  Restraint  Resolution
The Eight R's

Responses to Apparent Contradiction(s) in Christian Theology

- Redirection
- Resistance
- Restraint
- Resolution

  - Rational Reinterpretation
  - Revision
    - Reforming Revision
    - Reinventing Revision
OK, but which ways are orthodox?

Responses to Apparent Contradiction(s)
in Christian Theology

orthodox

unorthodox

Redirection
Resistance
Restraint
Resolution

Rational Reinterpretation

?

Reforming Revision
Reinventing Revision

Revision
Which way to go?

Responses to Apparent Contradiction(s) in Christian Theology

- Redirection
- Resistance
- Restraint
- Resolution

- Rational Reinterpretation
  - most Christian philosophers

- Revision
  - Reforming Revision
  - Reinventing Revision

most theologians

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.
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".
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.
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.
"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."
Objection: Isn't this modalism? (One divine person - God - eternally lives his life in three different ways - which are the "persons" of the Trinity?)
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 Resistors. It is reasonable, they argue, to believe these apparent contradictions.
Responses to Apparent Contradiction(s) in Christian Theology

- Redirection
- Resistance
- Restraint
- Resolution

Rational Reinterpretation

DEAD END

Reforming Revision
Reinventing Revision

Link: "Trinity" @ The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy