# A RATIONAL THEIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF GOD; AN ARGUMENT FROM LOGIC AND SIMPLICITY

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## Abstract

This paper will pursue a rational theist perspective to investigate which conception of God within Christianity is better at fulfilling the demands of logic and simplicity without using any scriptural or aposteriori arguments. This question is important because it takes a perspective of a theist who has already arrived at the truth of monotheism, so this paper will only seek to stay consistent to the principles they derived while arriving at their conclusion. In the first two chapters we will discuss various solutions, put forward to reconcile the apparent logical problems with the concept of the trinity, by Richard of St. Victor, William Lane craig, J. P. Mooreland, Richard Swinburne, Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. We will eventually conclude that these conceptions do not fulfill the demands of simplicity and logic better than Arianism (an unorthodox conception). Subsequently we will argue that Arianism is the better option, given the alternatives, for the rational theist.

# Acknowledgement

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# Table of Contents

# Table of Figure

# Introduction

This thesis is written from the perspective of a rational theist who upholds the principles of simplicity and logic and subsequently arrives at the conclusion of the truth of Monotheism. However, there are various conceptions of Monotheistic religions, the most popular of them being the three Abrahamic faiths: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

This thesis will only evaluate certain conceptions of the Christian Trinity and decide whether they stay consistent to the principles that lead the rational theist there. The reason being that the theist as a result of their journey cannot abandon these principles unless there is a sufficient reason to do so. This thesis will not evaluate any claims about the truth of scripture, miracles, or any other aposteriori proofs for the truth of a religion and hence will limit itself to apriori reasonings. A crucial reason for this is that the rational theist may or may not have had epistemic access to the former and cannot base his reasonings on such contingent arguments. Whereas apriori reasoning is more universal and does not restrict epistemic access to certain groups or individuals.

The rational theist in this paper takes their point of departure from arguments such as the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments which are standard in the study of philosophy of religion that claim to arrive at the existence of a Monotheistic God. These arguments conventionally lead to a perfect being also known as God. This perfect being is known to possess properties such as aseity, omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, immutable, and eternal.[1] It is necessary that these properties be timeless and immutable so that God remains perfect and transcendent to created beings. This perfect being exists necessarily and does not rely on any other being for its existence. It is the first cause or the uncaused cause and is the one who caused or willed everything else into existence. It is all

1 Leftow, B. (2011). Why perfect being theology? International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, 69(2), 103-118.

powerful, all knowledgeable and is perfectly good. There is no other being with the same attributes except this perfect being. It is concrete but immaterial which means that it has power to cause changes in the material world without itself being restricted to a material substance. It is then an intellectual or spiritual substance which is transcendent to material substances or creatures. This perfect being in virtue of being the origin of the universe, is also the origin of reason and simplicity and consequently should exist in harmony with logic and the principle of simplicity. The principle of simplicity also known as "Occam's Razor", argues that if there are competing explanations for something then the simpler explanation is the better one.[2]

This paper will limit its claims to the arguments discussed in this paper. There are other arguments that also exist in the literature, but this paper has chosen arguments keeping in mind the criteria of logic and simplicity. It is also important to note a difference between a rational theist and an orthodox theist. An orthodox theist does not reject logic or simplicity but rather subordinates these principles to scripture or orthodox interpretations. As we discussed in the previous paragraph, the rational theist will ignore such considerations in this paper and will freely use logic and simplicity and evaluate where it leads them. They will not constrain themselves to only orthodox solutions as we will see in the final chapter when we discuss the heresy of Arianism.

The investigation of this question is important despite the fact that similar research has been done in the literature, but the key distinguishing feature is that it did not undertake those investigations from the perspective of a rational theist (as defined in this paper). This could also be seen as view from outside Christianity, a philosopher's view who has not decided which position he will accept in the end. Which makes the first principles of logic and

2 Audi, R. (ed.), 1995, The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

simplicity very important because they are going to guide the rational theist in deciding whether they should accept a certain conception or not.

Keeping this aim in mind, we will first survey various solutions within the category of the social trinity. Social trinitarians emphasize the personhood of each of the three persons within the trinity. We will investigate four different conceptions within the social trinity and evaluate if they are able to stay consistent to the principle of logic and simplicity.

We will then evaluate whether the Latin trinity meets the demands of logic and simplicity. In this paper we will only discuss Aquinas' conception of the Latin trinity. Latin trinitarians in general try to emphasize the unity of the three divine persons to stay within the realm of monotheism and Aquinas' attempt is no different. In the final chapter we will investigate whether Arianism, despite being a heretic conception, is better than the conceptions discussed under the headings of social and Latin trinity. In the end we will conclude which solution was better than its counterparts in satisfying the criteria set by the rational theist.

# 1. The Social Trinity

The concept of the Trinity has historically been explained in different ways by the Church Fathers and Christian theologians. In recent times, one of the ways in which contemporary theologians have made sense of it is Social Trinitarianism or the Social Trinity.

These terms have gained prominence after the publication of Jurgen Moltman`s "The Trinity and the Kingdom of God". In comparison with the Latin Trinity, the social doctrine of the trinity places greater emphasis on the personhood of each of the three persons, i.e., Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, while maintaining the orthodox position of belief in the existence of only one God, i.e., Monotheism[3], while trying to stay clear of the heresies of Modalism/Sabellianism and Arianism.

According to the Social Trinity, God[4] is constituted by a community of three divine persons (i.e. Father, Son and the Holy Spirit). The persons within God are numerically distinct, i.e., the Son is not the Father, the Father is not the Holy Spirit, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. Social trinitarians use the works of the three Cappadocian Fathers as the basis for their theory. In the 4th century A.D, they developed the formula of one substance or essence (Ousia) in three persons (hypostasis). This is the view that the three persons in God share a common nature or essence.[5] The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit each instantiate this essence[6] and given that each of them is a person, we have three persons and one nature.

The Athanasian creed is inspiration for both Social and Latin Trinity. It was produced to distinguish the Nicene creed from the heresy of Arianism in the 6th century. It states, "So the

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3 Monotheism  entails the denial of [any kind of polytheism including] tritheism (belief in the existence of 3 Gods).

4 God is sometimes referred to as the Godhead.

5 J. T. Lienhard, Ousia and Hypostasis: the Cappadocian settlement and the Theology of "One Hypostasis", Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, & Gerald O'Collins SJ (eds) The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

6 J.P Mooreland and William Lane Craig, The Trinity, Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology Volume 1 Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement, p.31

Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God."[7]

This quite clearly indicates that each of the three persons is God, but they are still one God. Inspired by the Athanasian creed, Social Trinitarians incline towards the view that there are three persons in the Godhead each of whom is a God. But then we would have to conclude that there are three Gods, raising the obvious *prima facie* objection that this conception seems to be tri-theistic rather than monotheistic *contra* orthodox Christianity. Troubled by this objection, Christian theologians have come up with multiple strategies to reconcile the Social Trinity with orthodox Christianity.

## 1.1. The Love Argument from Richard of St. Victor

One of the central strategies used is the argument that God is love. Since God is perfectly good it follows that love is a constituent of God. One of the popular proponents of this argument is medieval theologian Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173). He proposes that since God is perfect, hence he must be capable of perfect love. One of the components of Perfect love for Richard is that it should be directed outside oneself since self-directed love seems selfish. But it cannot be dependent on creation because perfect love should be independent of creation. In any case, how would God have exercised this perfect love before creation if it consisted of only one person? So, God must be at least two persons so that it can practice perfect love but according to Richard, love limited between two persons is also plagued by a tinge of selfishness because there is an expectation of reciprocity between two persons. Hence only when a third person is added to the mix does perfect love occur. He says in his book De Trinitate, "Certainly in mutual and very fervent love nothing is rarer or more

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7 This is Schaff's emendation of the Book of Common Prayer translation. See Schaff (1877b, pp. 66–71)

magnificent than to wish that another be loved equally by the one whom you love supremely and by whom you are supremely loved."[8]

Love between two persons will be unshared or too exclusive contrary to the shared nature of love. Richard uses the Latin word 'condilectus' (co-beloved[9]) to explain that when two people love each other, each must wish that the other love a third person in order to exemplify perfect love. This desire that the third person be loved in the same manner represents a willingness to share the love, whereas an unwillingness to share the love would constitute selfishness. God should therefore be a trinity—three persons—so that it can truly exemplify perfect love.

Richard's conception of God seems to be premised on the existence of a perfect being similar to St. Anselm's conception of God. This perfect being has all the perfect-making attributes which includes perfect goodness and hence perfect love.

## 1.2. Problems with the Love Argument

Though this argument appears coherent, there is clearly some unsubstantiated assumptions at play here. One of them is that it presumes that the self-love of God as a single person is selfish but provides no account of why this is so. One of the ways we think of selfishness is when a person looks out only for their own interests with no or little regard for others. However, this is not just restricted to isolated individuals. Groups can also be selfish when they only look out for the interests of their own group with little or no care for other groups and individuals. We often see this in groups that become too exclusive and focus on maximizing benefits for their own group even at the expense of others. So, when Richard

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8 Grover A. Zinn in Richard of St Victor, the Twelve Patriarchs. The Mystical Ark. Book Three of "The Trinity", Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) pp. 384-5. as cited in Declan Marmion, Rik van Nieuwenhove, An Introduction to the Trinity. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.100
9 Ibid.

postulates that a single person in God will be selfish and hence not instantiate perfect love, he presumes the former scenario but ignores the latter one. Hence one can argue that the trinity is a selfish group that only restricts perfect love to its own constituents and does not share it with other beings. If the aim is to eliminate selfishness by positing three persons, its not clear how that occurs.

And if the reason for positing three persons was that they fulfill the criteria that it provides the possibility for each person to desire that other person is also loved in the same way then why does this restrict the number of persons to only three? Since, four or more than four persons can also fulfill these criteria and we can keep adding more persons ad-infinitum and still not deviate from the criteria. Richard might argue that three persons are sufficient to fulfill these criteria and any further addition would be redundant for the purposes of instantiating perfect love. However, Richard made use of this criteria to go from one person to three, arguing that this enhances the relation of love but why does this enhancement only stop at three? If adding persons was augmenting the relation of love, then there is no reason to stop at only three persons.

Another assumption he makes is that the self-love of God is selfish. But if we have assumed the existence of a God who is perfect, superior, and unlike all other beings then is it wise to project a human understanding of selfishness on it? If God is a transcendent being then does not that implicate that the projection of human understandings of selfishness onto it is inappropriate?

If we think of perfect love in terms of the subjects involved in the relation, then we might arrive at a different conclusion. If a perfect being loves itself (who is perfect) then is not this

sufficient for perfect love to occur because a perfect subject directs its love to a perfect object. Such a conception of perfect love would eliminate the necessity for more than one person in the Godhead.

But even if we do accept that self-love is a negative trait for God as much as it is for a human being, it is not clear whether self-love is, in the first place, necessarily bad even for a human being. After all, there are various forms of self care such as looking after our own physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing that are not considered inherently negative. Not all forms of self-love are narcissistic, especially if it is done while respecting and accounting for others. One could object to this line of reasoning saying that God as a perfect being does not require such self-maintenance by virtue of it being perfect. However, then our earlier point becomes valid again that if God is perfect and transcendent to human beings then maybe self-love is not a negative trait for it. Hence, God does not need other persons to be able to instantiate perfect love because he is perfectly capable of doing it by itself.

## 1.3. Monotheistic Social Trinitarians?

According to Brian Leftow, aside from the arguments discussed above, Social Trinitarians use broadly three strategies to validate their position as Monotheistic as opposed to Tri-theistic while at the same time being orthodox.[10] He classifies these strategies under three categories known as: Functional Monotheism, Groupmind Monotheism and Trinity Monotheism.

### Functional Monotheism

The biggest proponent of this strategy is Richard Swinburne, who argues that this position is Monotheistic in his book "Christian god". He says:

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[10] Brian Leftow 'Anti-Social Trinitarianism', Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, & Gerald O'Collins SJ (eds) The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

On the account which I have given, the three divine individuals taken together would form a collective source of the being of all other things; the members would be totally mutually dependent and necessarily jointly behind each other's acts. This collective would be indivisible in its being for logical reasons - that is, the kind of being that it would be is such that each of its members is necessarily everlasting, and would not have existed unless it had brought about or been brought about by the others. The collective would also be indivisible in its causal action in the sense that each would back totally the causal action of the others. The collective would be causeless and so ... unlike its members, ontologically necessary and not dependent for its existence on outside itself. ... [T]his very strong unity of the collective would make it, as well as its individual members, an appropriate object of worship.[11]

According to this view what matters most then is the harmony and cooperation with which the Trinitarian persons exist and act. Hence according to this view Monotheism would have to mean the indivisible unity of the divine persons rather than just one divine person. God comprises of the three divine persons who are also substances. The trinity, as a collective, is divine by virtue of the three persons being divine. Since collectives are not usually divine, the only way we can make sense of a collective being divine is that all the persons in the collective are divine and so by natural extension the collective is divine. God, as a collective, is not a separate substance over and above the three persons. Hence for him, the persons are primarily divine in virtue of which God is divine.

God is also logically indivisible in the sense that you cannot ascribe a particular action to only one particular person because they act as one. He emphasizes that no trinitarian person will act independently without the support of the other two persons. Each person is

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11  Richard Swinburne, The Christian God (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 181 as cited in Clark, Kelly James. "Trinity or Tritheism?" *Religious Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1996, pp. 471

omnipotent and perfectly good and so they will necessarily cooperate with the other two persons in all their actions and volitions. There is never a scenario, where the three persons differ in their actions due to them being perfectly good and because no action would be possible without the consensus of the three persons.

According to this view, the Father is the 'eternal cause' of the Son and the Holy Spirit. While the Son and the Holy Spirit are 'permissive causes' for the Father in the sense that they allow the Father to be the first and perpetual cause of their existence.[12]  The Father being eternally unbegotten while the Son is eternally begotten from the Father. While the spirit proceeds from both of them together according to Western roots of Christianity while according to Eastern roots it flows from the Father through the son.

However, the issue of how these 3 divine persons, necessarily and harmoniously, coordinate still remains. Swinburne argues in Christian God:

> But how the lines of distribution of the proper exercise of power to be drawn up? By one divine individual? But there is nothing to guarantee that at the moment at which he draws up a proposal for distributing power, the other divine individual might not draw up a different proposal; and even with the best will in the world, only luck could prevent an actual collision of wills. (Compare the situation where two people are approaching each other along a pavement, and each tries to move to that side of the pavement where he guesses the other will not go; they may or may not collide). Only if one lays down what the rules are, and his decision is accepted because he has the authority to lay down the rules, will the collision necessarily be avoided.[13]

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12  J.P Mooreland and William Lane Craig, The Trinity, Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology Volume 1 Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement, p.35

13 Richard Swinburne The Christian God (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 172-173 as cited in Clark, Kelly James. "Trinity or Tritheism?" *Religious Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1996, pp. 468

Swinburne argues for a hierarchy of wills with the Father being the eternal source of existence of the son and the Holy Spirit. He believes the Father will be the one who will decide the rules and the other two persons will accept this on account of being perfectly good.[14] This will avoid the problem of divergent wills between the three divine persons and will ensure harmony of volitions in the Godhead.

Crucially through, Swinburne affirms the literal understanding of the first half of the Athanasian creed which posits that each person individually is God.[15] While the latter part where it also paradoxically affirms that the trinity is still one God, a monotheism, does this only in the sense that God always acts as one (functionally), not that it is one ontologically. He is essentially arguing then that God is used in two senses in the Athanasian creed, and the trinity only logically makes sense when understood in this way.

## Trinity Monotheism

Trinity Monotheism is the view that only the Trinity is really God while the persons in the trinity are still divine. This obviously raises the immediate question that isn`t "being divine" a property attributed only to God? Trinity Monotheism it seems implies that God is divine as well as the persons. Which then raises the problem of their being 4 instantiations of the divine nature. This seems like a quaternity rather than the trinity and would obviously be neither orthodox nor monotheistic. Another way to reconcile this would be to say that there are two ways of being divine. By either being a divine person itself or by being a trinity (a composite whole) of divine persons. But Leftow problematizes this position by calling it "Plantingan

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14 Clark, Kelly James. "Trinity or Tritheism?" *Religious Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1996, pp. 463–476

15 Richard Swinburne The Christian God (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 180 as cited in Brian Leftow 'Anti-Social Trinitarianism', Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, & Gerald O'Collins SJ (eds) The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Arianism", a form of Arianism.[16] Arianism is a position which is classified as a heresy by orthodox Christian theologians and the church fathers. The position basically makes the claim that Jesus was created by Father the God rather than being eternally begotten. Thereby implying that Jesus was either a lesser divinity or a created being. This however is unacceptable from an orthodox perspective.

Another solution might be to say that the Trinity is composed of 3 persons who are not divine and only the Trinity is divine. But such a solution demotes the persons to a non-divine status which means its unorthodox. J.P Mooreland and William Lane Craig argue for a moderated version of Trinity Monotheism by saying that the Trinity despite of being divine has an additional property of being "Triune" which the persons lack. So only the Trinity is fully God and not the persons. This then gives rise to the question of why are the persons divine? Mooreland and Craig argue that there is a part-whole relation between the persons and the trinity, with the persons being divine in virtue of being part of the Trinity. They argue that a "whole" entails properties that its parts contain while parts can possess properties that the whole does not. According to them properties like omnipotence, omniscience and goodness are contained by the persons but properties like independent existence, necessity and eternality can only be contained by the Trinity as a God.[17]

They also further go on to say that the statements in the Athanasian Creed such as those which state that "…the father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God…" are not identity statements rather it is only ascribing "titles" to the persons. Hence only the trinity is God.

16 Brian Leftow 'Anti-Social Trinitarianism', Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, & Gerald O'Collins SJ (eds) The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

17 J.P Mooreland and William Lane Craig, The Trinity, Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology Volume 1 Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement, p.39

## Group-mind Monotheism

Another strategy used to assert Social Trinitarianism as Monotheistic is Group-mind Monotheism. According to Brian Leftow a group-mind is quite simply "a mind composed of other minds".[18] With these other minds being categorized as sub-minds in the sense that they are qualitatively less than a mind. These sub-minds make up a group-mind. In the case of the Social Trinity, the number of sub-minds would be three, consequently making up one group-mind. This one group-mind, made up of the three persons' minds, would be the divine mind which will only be encompassed by the Trinity. There will be only one God in the sense that it will have only one self-conscious mind. It is important for Group-mind Monotheism that the three persons` minds be sub-minds because if they are all minds on their own, assuming there is an identity relationship between mind and person, then it might run into the problem of tri-theism.

On the face of it Group-mind Monotheism might seem incoherent, but Leftow reignites interest with a thought experiment based on research in brain science.[19] The research talks about an operation of commissurotomy done in extreme cases of epilepsy. This involves surgically bisecting the cerebral commissures, the network of nerves connecting the two halves of the brain. As a result of these operations some patients have displayed symptoms which might indicate the possibility of two functioning and separate minds inside one person. These minds normally so coordinate to act as just one mind hence the individual is not made aware of this split. But after commissurotomy these separate minds could be made to act independently. Basically, it could be interpreted as two in-principle independent and distinct minds, one in each hemisphere, functioning as a single group-mind in one person. Seeing the plausibility of a group-mind as a result of this thought experiment, the question arises

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[18] Brian Leftow 'Anti-Social Trinitarianism', Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, & Gerald O'Collins SJ (eds) The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). p. 203-250

[19] Ibid. p. 223

whether these two sub-minds existed independently before the surgery and whether they used to coordinate using the cerebral commissures to constitute one mind of the group-mind? Are all human minds then group-minds? Leftow believes that this hypothesis is at least plausible.

## 1.4. (In)Compatibility with the Principle of Simplicity and Logic?

Given that the rational theist started their journey by upholding the principle of simplicity and logic, do any of these three versions of the social trinity succeed in staying consistent to these criteria? Let us first discuss Swinburne's functional Monotheism.

Brian Leftow raises an objection to Swinburne's account by referring to a monotheist's ordinary usage of the word 'God'.[20] When one refers to God either in worship or prayer, one thinks of either a single person or in the case of the trinity, a unified collective. If all three persons are equally God, then who is the prayer addressed to? Should a person mention the names of all three persons instead of calling on just God? Because if we just use the word God then we might not be referring to all the persons and our use of the word God could be said to be incorrect.

A helpful analogy to elaborate what Swinburne is saying could be made by using the word 'government'. The government consists of various different institutions and persons, but the acts of the government are always in the singular. Which means that there are no conflicting acts, for example the government can either declare 25th of December a holiday or a working day but it cannot do both at the same time. The members of a parliament can vote in deciding which law is approved or not but ultimately only one law (against competing alternatives) is approved by virtue of a majority or consensus, even if not everyone is on board with it. A

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[20] Ibid. p. 230

member of parliament could vote against a law that is eventually approved but still be part of the government. The government is a distinct entity from the members even if it consists of the members. Hence, when Swinburne tames the existence of this separate and collective entity of God, he ignores the logic of how God is used as a singular in prayers and worship which is an important aspect of being a monotheist.

Recall that he used God in two different ways. If we pray to God in the first sense, that is using it as an identifier, then we are always in error because we do not identify all three persons at the same time. My use of the word God is identifying either Father, Son, or the Holy spirit but not all of them at once. So, every time I use the word God, I am identifying only one person instead of three. And if we pray to God in the second sense then I am not praying to a distinct being which is a person but an abstract collective that only exists in our linguistic use but not ontologically. This seems to denigrate the status of God and a betrayal from the promise of Monotheism which was to believe in one God who is a person and exists not just in linguistic use but also ontologically. This modified use of monotheism does not sit well with rational theist who wants to adhere to the principle of simplicity.

Another important problem with this account is that it posits three distinct substances for each person thereby deviating from the Cappadocian fathers` formula of one substance (Ousia) and three persons (hypostasis). If all three persons are identified as God and do not share a substance, then how is any unity maintained? Swinburne tried to resolve this conflict by positing a new definition of monotheism, but the rational theist already rejected that on account of simplicity. This raises the specter of tri-theism or polytheism, and it does not seem like Swinburne has a solution to avoid this problem if he abides by the normal usage of Monotheism.

Another problem is that Swinburne's attempt to distinguish the three persons by attributing the father as the 'eternal cause' and the son and the holy spirit as the 'permissive cause', compromises the divinity of the son and the holy spirit. This is because the father is the one that will decide the rules because he has priority by virtue of being the 'eternal cause' of the other two persons. This means that the son and the holy spirit are less omnipotent than the father which raises a question about whether they are fully divine as a God or just lower divinities. If they are lower divinities, then is it correct to identify them as a God? In trying to create a distinction between the persons, Swinburne's account becomes logically incoherent.

Trinity Monotheism avoids some of the pitfalls that Functional Monotheism could not avoid but has problems of its own. One of the objections that can be raised is whether the part-whole relation is logical and whether it succeeds in escaping the charge of "Plantingan Arianism", which basically means two ways of being divine. According to William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, the persons in the trinity are divine but not God and only the trinity is God. But if God is also divine, how is a quaternity avoided? It seems like they use the part-whole relation to posit two ways of being divine without directly stating it. If the persons are divine by being part of the trinity and the trinity is divine because it consists of divine persons, then this whole conception seems to be circular. Why do the persons need to be a part of the trinity in order to be divine? There is no independent reason presented that does not presuppose the trinity as God. This could explain why the property of being triune is now added as an essential attribute to be God, which means that the persons individually cannot be granted the status of being God, but they still remain divine. But they do not substantiate why the property of being triune is crucial to being God and how is a divine person not a God anymore. The rational theist in arriving at the conclusion of Monotheism and the necessary properties for God, did not discover this property of being triune. This property then looks

like an arbitrary property posited to ensure that only the trinity is God, question begging the conclusion of Trinity monotheism.

If only the trinity is God, then is it a separate divine person? If yes, then it would mean that there are now four persons in the Godhead which means it is not a trinity anymore. If no, then it faces the same problems that functional monotheism faced when it tried to avoid positing a distinct person as a collective or unified God.

Trinity Monotheism with its solution of the part-whole relation is neither logically coherent nor simple. The property of being triune also complicates the picture with no strong logical reason given for its conclusion in the list of properties required for being a God. If God can exist both with and without the property of being triune, then the rational theist will prefer the former solution due to it adhering to the principle of simplicity. The property of being triune subsequently is redundant for being God and Craig and Moreland do not provide any substantial logical reason why God needs to be triune in order to exist if it can exist without it.

Coming to Group-mind monotheism it is still unclear whether the notion of a group-mind helps the social trinity in qualifying as a monotheism. Let us take a look at some attempts in this endeavor. One could draw a parallel between the trinity's group-mind and our own minds (before commissurotomy). In the sense that it is a single integrated system encompassing sub-minds which are not really independent. This attempt certainly gives us one God which is essential for monotheism, but it diminishes the personhood of the persons because in this conception they have only a sub-mind rather than a mind. Are such persons fully personal even if they have divine abilities? Leftow certainly thinks they are not fully personal due to the persons' inability to refer to themselves as "I" because they are not really independent

hence, they are not self-aware.[21] It is also unclear whether the sub-minds even after being independent, as a result of the commissurotomy, can refer to themselves as "I".[22] As a result the persons distinct identity seems to be subsumed in this trinity group-mind which is counter to the goal of the Social trinity which wanted to stress on the personhood of each person. So, it seems like there is only one person in this conception of the Trinity. It is also extremely unlikely that such a conception of the trinity will be able to instantiate perfect love which was one of the major motivations for the Social Trinitarian.

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[21] Ibid. p.224
[22] Ibid.

## 2. The Latin Trinity

 Latin Trinitarianism is the view that there are three personal gods embalmed within the being of only one God. It focuses more on the unity or oneness of God than the Social Trinity. It is famously depicted in the following way:
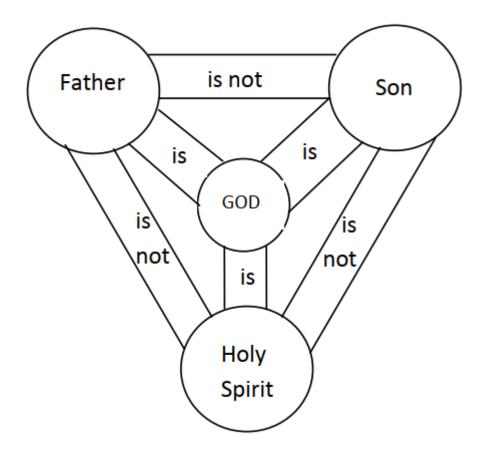


*Figure 1. Latin Trinitarianism*

This is derived from an understanding of the Athanasian creed as mentioned in the earlier section of this paper. Like the Social Trinitarians, proponents of this view also argue that the three persons are numerically distinct but place relatively less emphasis on the distinct identity of the persons.

## 2.1. St. Augustine on the Latin Trinity

St. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 431 A.D.) was a major Christian theologian and is considered a proponent of Latin Trinitarianism. He attempted to philosophically ground the depiction in figure 1 using Neo-Platonic thought. This influence of Neo-Platonism came from the works of Plotinus. As explained by Thomas Wassmer:

> The impact of the mind of Plotinus upon the mind of Augustine was a decisive one because Augustine found a very great area of agreement between the teaching of Plotinus and that of the Scriptures as expounded by St. Ambrose, above all the Gospel of St. John. It was their agreement that God is spirit and altogether immaterial, as Plotinus explains, which liberated him from Manichaean materialism. Augustine thought that Plotinus' teaching about the Divine Mind was identical with that of St. John about the Divine Logos.[23]

The passage clearly conveys the point that Augustine, Plotinus, and St. Ambrose were in complete agreement on the point that God was immaterial, an inference from Platonic spiritualism. But Augustine did not completely agree with Plotinus. Wassmer argues, "He was always willing to admit the great measure of agreement between himself and Plotinus but the influence was always within the clearly defined limits established by the Scriptures interpreted by Catholic tradition."[24]

This makes it clear that Augustine still considered Scriptural evidence as being superior to any philosophical reasoning or resources, and that Neo-Platonic thought had to be used within the limits prescribed by Scriptural resources. Notwithstanding/Despite this, his most

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23 Wassmer, Thomas A. "The Trinitarian Theology of Augustine and his Debt to Plotinus", The Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 53, No. 4, Oct. 1960, pp. 261
24 Ibid., p. 262

notable use of Neo-Platonism was in the defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. Wassmer elaborates:

> Augustine never ceases to stress the Unity of God as the transcendent Principle of all order and number and so of being. This emphasis derives from Plotinus because to be anything other than Absolute Unity is to be an ordered whole of parts and in some sense a unity. Still, in stressing the Unity he equally affirms the Being and the Trinity of God. In considering the Trinity-in-Unity he lays the emphasis on the Unity of the Godhead and not, as the Cappadocian Fathers and the later East, on the Three Divine Persons. Augustine starts from the one and simple divine nature which is the Trinity… This one God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Subordinationism is thus rejected because all that is said of God is also said of each and every one of the Persons who are this God. For Augustine true thinking begins and ends in the Trinity. Thus it is only in the Trinity that God creates us and only as Trinity that we can approach Him. The Three Persons have ad extra only one will and operation… Again, the act, which in the Son's Incarnation, has united the Son to the human nature, thus sending Him into the world, is common to the whole Trinity. Augustine tells us that all that refers to the nature and expresses something absolute must be worded in the singular, since the divine nature, the subject of that absolute, is one.[25]

Augustine`s undeviating emphasis on absolute unity seems to be clearly influenced by Plotinus. However, this emphasis seems to be motivated by a purpose, and that is to assert that the Trinity is the 'absolute unity'. This assertion doesn`t necessarily ground the Trinity in Neo-Platonism rather the most we could say is that it is being discussed in Neo-Platonic language. This has serious implications for the Trinity. By asserting that the Trinity is the absolute unity, Augustine is implying that when the Son was sent into the world, he was not

25 Ibid., pp. 262-3

alone, the persons of the trinity were with him. In other words, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the absolute one God. Wassmer explicates, "It is not the Word alone who appeared, but the Whole Trinity, God; and He did so, not by Himself, but by means of angels who spoke and acted in His name, who manifested themselves to man in a sensible form".[26]

We already know that Augustine believes that the divine nature must be expressed in singular language because he believes the subject of this divine nature is singular and absolute. But it is not clear whether this one God is a singular person or three persons. We also know about his unwavering commitment to the Absolute unity which cannot be compromised. Unfortunately, this uncompromising commitment veers us off into the heresy of Sabellianism or Modalism. Sabellianism is basically the view that God is only a single person who manifests itself in three different roles (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) at different points of time in history. Hence there is only one person who is playing these three roles. But the fact that there are three persons in the trinity, implies that there are three parts in the trinity. This might help Augustine steer clear of Sabellianism, but any mention of parts compromises the absolute unity. According to Wassmer, Augustine tries to reconcile this issue by introducing the concept of relations:

> It is in the doctrine of relations in the Trinity that we have the peculiar
> contribution of Augustine to Trinitarian theology and the principal departures
> from Plotinus… Since Augustine has affirmed at the very beginning of his
> Trinitarian explanation that God is strictly one, the principal difficulty was to
> avoid modalism [Sabellianism] and account for the real plurality of Persons. We
> are introduced to the concept of relations and told that the Persons are relations
> and relations are not identified with the substance or the nature since they are not

something absolute. On the other hand, these relations are not accidents because they are essential to the nature and like it eternal and necessary… As to the term person, it has been used in the Trinitarian language, for lack of a better term, to designate three distinct objects; but like all other terms, it must be understood of God analogically.[27]

By asserting that the trinity is the absolute unity and that the persons are relations, Augustine seems to have departed from the works of Plotinus and as result from any philosophical groundings in Neo-Platonism. If the word person is to be understood analogically and the three persons are distinct objects unified by relations of generation, filiation and procession (Son is generated by Father, Holy Spirit proceeds from Father and Son both), then are these persons, in of themselves, not self-conscious beings? Human beings understand the word 'person' to correspond to a self-conscious being. The meaning of relation does not seem to be entailed by the word "person", certainly not the way it is standardly understood. Though Augustine can argue that our failure to comprehend the word 'person' the way it applies to the Trinitarian persons may be because it is a mystery of the Trinity. By not justifying the logic of this unusual use of the word person, Augustine fails to satisfy the rational theist. In addition, the more an explanation appeals to mystery the less simple it becomes because an appeal to mystery leaves our thirst for understanding unquenched.

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27 Wassmer, Thomas A pp. 264-5

## 2.2. St. Thomas Aquinas' Conception for Latin Trinity

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 A.D) was a major medieval philosopher and a Christian theologian. The task undertaken by Aquinas was to provide a solution that had plagued trinitarian thinking since its origin, and that was to reconcile how the trinity was still a monotheism despite their existing three divine persons. More precisely speaking, how to establish the plurality (of the three persons) within the unity (one God). Notice how this is a different problem then what concerned the Social trinitarians. The Social Trinitarians were concerned about how to establish the unity after starting from the premise that there existed three divine persons.

Aquinas built on the works of his early predecessors, which included the Cappadocian fathers, St. Augustine and Boethius. Themes such as incomprehensibility of God, analogical knowledge, relations, and so on, which were central to Aquinas` treatise on the trinity were borrowed or inspired by these predecessors.[28]

St Basil, who was one of the Cappadocian fathers, mentions for the first time in his treatise the concept of relation:

> Amongst the names, some are connected to the thing itself, as an absolute, and when they are pronounced they signify the substrate of the realities in question; others are said in connection with beings other than themselves, and are only made known through their relation (schesis) with the others in connection with which they are spoken. For example, man, horse, cow, express each of the named entities; but son, slave, or friend just indicate a connection with the term to which it is joined. This is why what is expressed by the word 'offspring' (genne ˆma) does not lead one to think of a substance (ousia), but it conceives the entity in question as connected to another.

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28 Emery, Gilles, OP. The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 81 footnote 12

For 'offspring' is called 'offspring' as springing from someone. In fact, since what it puts before us is not the notion of a subject but an indication of relation (schesis) to another thing, isn't it the height of insanity to decide that it means the substance?[29]

According to Basil there are two kinds of names, one referring to the essence and the second referring to the relation. Similarly, there are two levels in the way we approach God, one through the essence and the other through the properties of the persons. And the combination of these two levels affects our language for God. The point being that the Son, despite not having the property of being the Father nor of being unbegotten, is still divine because these properties refer to the divine essence. And the names Father or Son refer to the mutual relation between them and not to the divine essence.

Thereafter S.t Augustine also used similar elements to explain his view:

With God, nothing is said under the heading of accident, because he is unchangeable. And yet, not everything that is said of him is said substance-wise. Some things are posited as relations (ad aliquid): for instance, the Father is relative to the Son and the Son is relative to the Father, which is not an accident. The one is always Father, the other is always Son . . . This is why, if being the Father and being the Son is not the same, the substance is nonetheless not different. These appellations do not belong to the order of substance but to that of relation (relativum), relation which is not an accident because change is foreign to it.[30]

According to Augustine, God is a changeless or immutable substance. Now what this means is that God's substance or essence is inalterable. While having a relation is a contingent property, for example, God by virtue of being the Creator of Michael Jackson has a 'relational property'. This is surely not an essential property for otherwise God's existence

29 Basil of Caesarea, Contra Eunomius II.9 (SC 305, pp. 36–37) as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 81

30 Augustine, De Trinitate V.V.6 (BA 15, pp. 432-5) as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 82

would depend on being the Creator of Michael Jackson. We know that Michael Jackson is not an eternally necessary being and so it is possible that God would not have ever created him. Hence even if Michael Jackson was not created it would not have made a difference to God's essence or nature. Hence having the relation of being the Creator of Michael Jackson is an accidental property. Augustine is basically saying that not everything that is said about God is related to its unchangeable essence or nature. Some things might refer to accidental events, for example, being the Creator of Michael Jackson. But somethings may neither be essential nor accidental, for example, God by virtue of being the Father of Jesus has a 'relational property'. Such a property is not contingent since the son is a necessary and eternal being, and so unlike Michael Jackson does not have the possibility of non-existence. But it not an essential property either since the relation of paternity refers to the being of the Son instead of the essence of God. Nevertheless, the Father and Son still co-exist as part of the one essence or nature of God, that is they share the same nature or essence. In other words they are consubstantial. So, the relations of Paternity (Fatherhood) and Filiation (Sonship) are not related to the essence, but they still play a role in maintaining a distinction between the persons while still having only one unified essence.

In light of the explanations attempted by the Cappadocians and Augustine, Boethius made further progress in the beginning of the sixth century. He was essential in this link of transmission from the Cappadocians to the Medieval philosophers, particularly St. Aquinas.[31] Boethius elucidates:

> It cannot be affirmed that a category of relation increases, decreases, or alters in any way the substance of the thing to which it is applied. The category of relation, then, has nothing to do with the essence of the substance; it simply denotes a condition of

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31 See ST I, q. 28, a. 1, arg. 1 and ad 2; q. 28, a. 3, sed contra; q. 30, a. 1, arg. 3 and ad 3; q. 36,

a. 1, arg. 2; q. 39, a. 1; q. 40, a. 2, sed contra; q. 41, a. 1, arg. 1 and sol. as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 83

relativity, and that not necessarily to something else, but sometimes to the subject itself… Accordingly those predicates which do not denote the essential nature of a thing cannot alter, change, or disturb its nature in any way. Wherefore if Father and Son are predicates of relation, and, as we have said, have no other difference but that of relation… it will effect no real difference in its subject… the plurality of the Trinity is secured through the category of relation, and the unity is maintained through the fact that there is no difference of substance, … So then, the category of substance preserves the Unity, that of relation brings about the Trinity. Hence only terms belonging to relation may be applied singly to each.[32]

According to Boethius, the three divine persons belong to only one substance but are distinguished through the relations between each other. He adds that the distinction between them by way of relations is external and does not affect the unified essence or nature. Hence the essential nature of God is left undisturbed by relations or relative properties. Therefore, unity is maintained through consubstantial persons while Trinity is established through separate relations of Paternity, Filiation and Procession. Also, Boethius made the distinction that the categories of essence and relation do not apply to human beings the way they apply to Trinitarian persons, since the divine essence is attributed to everything in God.

The Augustinian view, further elaborated by Boethius, seems to face two grave issues. The first is that if the relations are something external to the persons and do not add anything to the essence then are these relations really real? Because if they are not, there would not be any real distinction between the persons and the view starts to resemble the Sabellian heresy of there being only one God who is instantiated by three persons. The second issue is that if the relations are external then are they not different from the persons themselves? For

32 Boethius, The Trinity is One God not Three Gods, chs. 5-6 (English-Latin in the Loeb edition: Boethius,

The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy, trans. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand,

London, 1918, 1968) as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 83-4

example, is Filiation different from the Son because Filiation is not part of the essence of God. In other words, Filiation is just a relative property and not one of the essential properties that make up the divine essence. If this is the case then this view might not be compatible with divine simplicity.[33]

Another critical issue, which has been discussed earlier, is what exactly does Augustine mean by the word 'person'? Augustine writes:

> In this Trinity, when we speak of the person of the Father,… we mean nothing other than the substance of the Father. … Person is an absolute term [ad se dicitur] and not a term which is relative to the Son or the Holy Spirit, like absolute terms such as: God, great, good, just, and other qualitatives of that kind[34]… If one asks oneself, three whats? Human language is too bare to say. But one can reply: three persons, less in order to say what is there than in order not to be reduced to silence.[35]

So, "person is an absolute term" and not a relative term according to Augustine. And each of these persons is identical to the essence of God. Then the person of the son is not distinct from the person of the Holy Spirit. Augustine again appeals to analogical reasoning and ineffability of language when he says that we can answer "three persons" in response to the question of "three whats" and that this might not be the right answer and we can`t express the right answer given the limits of human language. It seems like there is only one person for Augustine because every attempt of distinguishing seems also to be identical to the one nature/essence. Hence if there is such a unity that there is only one consciousness, will, action, etc, then it seems like there is only one person in God according to Augustine.

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33 Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 90

34 Augustine, De Trinitate VII.VI.11. as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 115

35 Augustine, De Trinitate V.IX.10; cf. De Trinitate VII.VI.11 as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 115

Aquinas, as discussed earlier, builds his conception of the trinity based on these early predecessors that have been discussed until now. In response to the problems that were plaguing the Trinitarian conceptions of these early predecessors, Aquinas` solution is to posit person and relation as the same thing. In other words the divine persons are the relations. Hence the relations are not anything external or accidental. Then the relations or relative properties of paternity, filiation and procession are the divine persons i.e. Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively. Giles Emery explains Aquinas` solution, "… relations can indeed be considered as 'positioned from outside', since they formally consist in the connection 'to the outside'. But this is only one aspect of relation. So far as its being is concerned, relation inheres 'from within', it has its being in the subject in which it exists."[36]

According to Aquinas, relations are seen to exist in their connection to something external or outside of the subject but the state of existence of this relation is dependent upon the subject. In other words, in absence of a subject no relation exists. Hence the relation originates from the being of the subject. Emery elaborates, "… relation formally consists in a connection to another, and it's being is identical to that of the divine essence.[37] The person is likewise not 'something other' than the essence (each person is God). For these reasons, 'the relation is identical to the person'."[38]

The divine relations are real because they are identical to the divine substance. Similarly the persons are also identical to the divine substance. Hence the relations and the persons are the same thing in the Trinity according to Aquinas. Also, relations or relative properties are not accidental properties when applied to the trinity because the divine essence does not have any accidental properties. Aquinas argues:

36 ST I, q. 28, a. 2; q. 39, a. 1; I Sent. d. 33, q. 1, a. 1. as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 93

37 ST I, q. 28, a. 2; as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 121

38 ST I, q. 40, a. 1; cf. I Sent. d. 33, q. 1, a. 2. as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 121

> Whatever has accidental existence within creatures has substantial existence when transferred into God; for nothing is in God as an accident in its subject, but whatever is in God is his essence. Consequently, from this point of view, while relation in created things exists as an accident in a subject, in God a really existing relation has the being of the divine essence and is wholly identical with it.[39]

Since Aquinas is making the claim that relational properties are identical to the divine essence, he's basically arguing that relative properties are essential properties of the divine essence. Hence the persons just are the relative properties.

According to Aquinas, this solution maintains a distinction between the three divine persons, by arguing that the relations are real, while being consistent with divine simplicity by claiming that the persons are not different from their relative properties.

Despite equating persons to relations, Aquinas still has to make room for minimal distinction between the two words. According to Aquinas, a relation has two elements, firstly it is pure interconnectivity or a connection to another or reference to another and secondly the reality of the relation, the existence of the relation itself.[40] Person signifies the second element of a relation, that is the state of existence of the relation, its reality. While relation signifies the first element which is the connection or reference to others. Hence person signifies a concrete reality such as the son or Father while relation signifies the relative properties between the persons such as Paternity or Filiation. Hence both the words still correspond to the same reality, such as of the Father, but they signify this reality in distinct ways thereby maintaining a slight distinction. Therefore, whenever one says that the Father is a person, they are referring to its concrete reality while when one says that paternity is a relation, they are

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39 ST I, q. 28, a. 2; cf. q. 39, a. 1 as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 94
40 Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 95, 117, 121

signifying the connection between the father and the son.[41] Figure 2 represents Aquinas' understanding of the Latin Trinity.
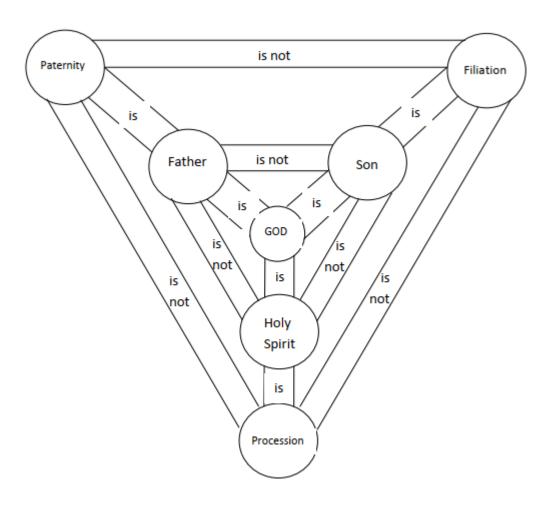


Figure 2. Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology

## 2.3. A philosophical critique of the Latin Trinity

One problem which the Latin Trinity seems to suffer from is the issue of the eternality of the three persons. Aquinas resists any form of "subordinationism" in the godhead such as those proposed by early Christian theologian Origen or by recent proponents such as Richard Swinburne. Subordinationism is basically the view that the son and the Holy Spirit are

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41 ST I, q. 40, a. 2. as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 117

subordinate to the father in the godhead. That is the father by virtue of being unbegotten has a superior status than the son and the Holy Spirit and he has the ultimate authority in the godhead. Contrary to this, Aquinas argues that all three persons are equal in status and nature due to the concept of relations. The father exists eternally, but it is impossible for him to be the father without the son also existing eternally along with him. In other words, co-eternality is a necessary condition for the existence of either father or son. Hence the relation of fatherhood or paternity entails the existence of the father and son. Consequently, no person has superiority over another person in the godhead. This is strongly emphasized by Aquinas, "The Father has no priority in relation to the Son: neither in duration, nor in nature, nor conceptually, nor in dignity… There is no priority whatsoever of one person over another in God".[42]

 If all three persons are eternal, then that means they have co-existed since the beginning of time and hence no one person's existence can precede the existence of the other two. If the father always existed eternally then the son existed with him along with the Holy Spirit. But then there is also the understanding that Father begets the Son while the Father is unbegotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. So then if the father generates the son then that generation cannot involve any duration otherwise the son will not be co-eternal and this might lead to it being classified as a second-class god. So even if this generation took less than even a nanosecond it would still result in negating the co-eternality of the son. Generation or even procession entails some form of change, and any change would logically require time. This conclusion entails that the Holy Spirit would also not be co-eternal hence being reduced to a status of a second-class god just like the son. So although Aquinas argues that generation or procession occurs without any duration in the godhead he does not substantiate why or how this happens. He subsequently might argue that this

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42  Aquinas, I Sentences d. 9, q. 2, a. 1; d. 12, q. 1, a. 1 as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 71

proposition is beyond human understanding and as a result it is simply a mystery we cannot comprehend.

Aquinas' claim that persons are the same thing as relations or relative properties is highly contestable. This meaning of the word person seems quite uncustomary given our understanding of the way it is used in any language. Since the word person is normally understood, by human beings, as a self-conscious being rather than a relation or a property. Such use of the word person seems quite unconventional. As discussed earlier, Aquinas arrived at this person-relation identity by arguing that God cannot have any contingent properties, and to maintain both a distinction between the persons and divine simplicity, any relative property that the persons had would also have to be identical to the divine essence. This solution has two issues. Firstly, if in the pursuit of maintaining divine simplicity everything in the end is identical to the divine essence then how is any distinction maintained between the persons?[43] If filiation is identical to the son and the son is identical to the divine essence but the divine essence is also identical to the father and hence identical to paternity then why is filiation not identical to paternity? Aquinas used relations, which he claimed were distinct, to maintain any real distinction between the persons and so paternity was not the same as filiation but transitivity seems to lead us to the opposite conclusion i.e. paternity is equal to filiation. Aquinas' solution it seems is not equipped to deal with this logical contradiction. The second problem is that if persons are just relative properties, then are they still self-conscious beings? In other words, are relative properties self-conscious beings? One would assume that Aquinas will want to avoid that conclusion. But then which person is self-conscious? Is it fatherhood which is identical to the father which is identical to God? But how is paternity or fatherhood literally personified in the father? In other words, how exactly does this relation instantiate a self-conscious person? This problem doesn't end here, because

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43  Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 121

paternity is not the only relation which is personified by the father, rather it also includes the relation of spiration (procession of the Holy Spirit). This is due to the reason that the Holy spirit proceeds from the father. But since the Holy Spirit proceeds from both father and son, so spiration is also identical to the son.[44] Like earlier, Aquinas might want to attribute our inability to understand this incredulous view of divine simplicity to Trinitarian mystery. Aquinas comments on the conception of persons within the trinity:

"The plurality of persons in God belongs to those realities which are held by faith and which human reason can neither explore nor sufficiently understand; but we hope to know them when we reach our Mother Country, when the essence of God will be seen, when faith will give way to sight."[45]

As we can see Aquinas believes human reason is incapable of even understanding this mystery within the trinity and so he doesn`t give any further explanation for this unconventional use of person nor for divine simplicity.

Another question which arises is how many self-conscious persons are there in the trinity? Since in the end all three persons and relations are identical to the divine substance and this divine essence seems to have just a single divine will, understanding and consciousness. This understanding leads us to the logical conclusion that there is only a single self-conscious person in God. Though this raises the question of whether the historical Jesus was a self-conscious person? If the answer is yes and since there is just a single divine consciousness, then Jesus (the son) had to be God-incarnate. This solution has unfortunately regressed us back into the heresy of Sabellianism. The emphasis on the absolute unity seems to logically lead us to the conclusion that there is just a single self-conscious person in God. This solution seems inescapable unless you amend the meaning of the word 'person' from a self-conscious

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44  Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, q. 40, a. 1, ad 1 as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 121

45 De potentia, q. 9, a. 5. as cited in Emery, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 27

being to a relation or relative property. But just changing the meaning of a word doesn`t change anything in actual reality. For example, you can change the meaning of a sphere to mean a cube. But that doesn`t mean that the shape of the sun is now a cube, it is still a sphere in its conventional meaning. That is, it is still round and does not have any edges unlike a conventional cube. So just calling the sun a cube does not mean that its shape has suddenly transformed.

We discussed in the last section how Aquinas tries to maintain a minimum difference between 'person' and 'relation'. Let us now analyze that attempt. Aquinas claimed that the words designated the same reality, for example the father, but signified this in different ways. That is, person signified the being or concrete reality of the father while fatherhood signified the relation between father and son. Subsequently Aquinas mysteriously integrates the two words so that person is now a relation. But how are we to make sense of the pure integration of these concepts?

To put this into context, Aquinas when working on his theory of relations, was trying to make sure that his theory was aligned with divine simplicity. And so he wanted to get rid of this problem of the relative property being different from the person because it was not in line with divine simplicity. Hence, he asserted that person and relation or relative property were the same thing i.e., they were identical to each other. But even if we grant this assertion, it does not change anything in reality. Prior to this solution, these words were distinct having distinct definitions but now they signify distinct objects despite also being synonyms. It seems like this solution has no relation or link to reality instead it looks like clever word play. It seems like Aquinas will also enter this view under the heading of mystery.

So the words may signify different things but let's focus on what they designate. The relative property fatherhood designates the reality of the father (person) and the father designates the

reality of the father despite not signifying any relation with the son. In addition, the father designates the reality of the divine essence. This is the same essence that designates the reality of the son hence they are consubstantial, i.e. they share the same essence. Hence, fatherhood also designates the same reality as the son which means there is just one concrete reality being designated. This concrete reality has only one subject, understanding, will and consciousness and hence only one person in the conventional sense. In essence then Aquinas' solution is not really all that novel compared to the heresy of Sabellianism.

Sabellianism faces similar problems as groupmind monotheism, which is that it posits the persons as parts within one God. This conception denigrates the personhood of the persons in order to establish the existence of only one God. But in doing so, it presents a complicated conception of a person who is composed of different beings across history. Not to mention such a conception of a composite substance can also threaten the immateriality of God as we will show in the next chapter.

## 3. Arianism as an Unorthodox Solution

One solution that we have not considered seriously in this paper up until now is Arianism. This solution was considered unorthodox by the church fathers and even today Christian theologians and philosophers try to stay clear of it because of this blasphemous charge. However, the rational theist is not necessarily bound by these restrictions and can explore such options and accept them if they adhere to logic and the principle of simplicity.

As discussed earlier in Chapter one, Arianism is the view that the son was not of the same substance as that of the father. It originated in the fourth century where it was propagated by a presbyter, Arius [46] The position also believes that the son did not always exist like the father neither was it eternally begotten rather it came into being after the father willed his existence.[47] Which leads to the conclusion that the son was created by God (the father) and did not always exist immanently alongside with it. The son is therefore not accorded the status of being God. The same is said for the Holy Spirit who is also not considered a God and is also of a distinct substance from the other two persons. All three persons are considered to be of a different substance, and they do not share or partake in the same essence. In other words, there are still three persons (hypostasis) but there is not just one substance. Of the three persons, only the father is considered to be the God. This view, which directly downgrades the status of the son was strictly condemned by the church fathers as unorthodox and was subsequently termed a heresy which was to be avoided at all costs.

46 Gwynn, D. M. (2015, July 6). Arianism. Oxford Classical Dictionary.

https://classics.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore/9780199381135-e-723

47 J.P Mooreland and William Lane Craig, The Trinity, Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology Volume 1 Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement, p.28

## 3.1. Arianism: The Better Option for The Rational Theist

One of key properties that the rational theist derived while arriving at the conclusion of Monotheism was aseity or independent existence. Which means that God was not dependent on anyone for its existence and that it was the 'first cause' or the 'uncaused cause'.[48] So beings that have a cause for their existence are distinct from a being that did not have a cause and was a cause for itself. Since, in Arianism, the son and the holy spirit were created by father the God, they were caused into being by something outside themselves. Which implies that they do not have the property of aseity or existing independent of themselves rather they depend on father the god to cause their existence. Hence, the father, son and holy spirit are each of a distinct substance from each other.

Arius also rejected proposition that the divine properties included the relations of paternity, filiation or spiration, arguing that these are not essential properties of God. For him these were contingent properties that were not essential to the existence of a divine substance.[49] This means that the son and holy spirit are not necessary beings since God could have freely chosen not to create them and still remain a divine substance. The divine substance then does not depend on these relations for its existence. This is in harmony with another conclusion that the rational theist would have arrived at that whoever this monotheistic God is, should have impersonal and timeless properties. These eternal and impersonal properties are necessary to sustain the aseity or independent existence of God while contingent or accidental properties, such as relations, are not necessary for God to exist.

For Arius, any talk of the son originating or begetting 'out of' the father as a distinct being threatens the immutability and simplicity of God and implies that God is a material

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48  Mullins, R. (2016). Divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism. Journal of Analytic Theology, 4, p. 280.

49 Williams, R. (1983). THE LOGIC OF ARIANISM. The Journal of Theological Studies, 34(1), new series, p. 59.

substance.[50] If the son is a separate 'component' or part of God then this implies that God is a composite substance composed of three distinct substances. This could be problematic because this would mean that for God to exist, certain substances like that of the father and son have to exist prior to God. This undermines the eternality of God and is unacceptable. On the other hand, if the substance of the father is extendable to the being of the son, then this would require change and undermine the immutability of God.[51] This extension would require that substance be material contrary to the immaterial or intellectual substance that the rational theist was looking for. This immateriality is crucial to establish the perfection of the divine substance and hence its existence. If the divine substance is restricted to a material nature, then it cannot claim to be the uncaused cause or the creator of the world and all other beings. This is because material beings are not eternal and do not have the power to create other beings out of nothing (ex nihilo). Hence, a transcendent immaterial substance is important to sustain the conception of a divine substance.

Arius avoids positing the son as 'consubstantial' with the father in a composite substance because it implies making God divisible and subsequently material. Not to mention that such talk of consubstantiality threatens the simplicity of the conception of God.[52] For him, God was an "individual spiritual subsistent" rather than just an immutable and eternal nature. There is only one instantiation of such a nature and so the nature and the subsistent are not discrete but always assimilated.[53] Hence the divine person and substance are necessarily always one and the same. This in harmony with the singular divine substance and person the rational theist wanted because it conforms to monotheism.

50 Ibid p. 63

51 Ibid p. 63

52 Ibid p. 65

53 Ibid p. 66

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He further argues for this single substance and person by way of a thought experiment. Suppose if we presume two eternal divine substances that exist independently and are unproduced. By what criteria can one distinguish between them? According to Arius, they can only be differentiated by a third term which does not belong to either of the two substances and is also eternal and unproduced. The existence of this third term cannot be dependent or contingent on the other two substances. Which means that we would then have three eternal and unproduced substances, but the obvious question arises that how will this third substance be differentiated from the other two substances? Arius thinks that this will require a fourth term that is eternal and unproduced and so this process will continue on ad-infinitum.[54] This is why he argues that God should be a single substance and person which is indivisible and does not possess any contingent properties. It should be self-identical to itself and be entailed by its definition. Hence for Arius there exists only one divine being who is identified as the father, but its fatherhood is not essential to it being God.[55]

## 3.2. Arianism Against the Alternatives

Arianism, as presented here, is much better in satisfying the criteria of the rational theist, within Christianity, against all the options discussed in this paper. It escapes all the fatal critiques that other conceptions have up till now faced in this paper. Let us see how it avoids all the problems that the Social and Latin Trinity respectively faced in this paper.

Since God is perfectly good in Arianism, it has the ability to instantiate perfect love without requiring three divine substances. We already knew that if God as a transcendent being loves itself this is sufficient to constitute perfect love since the relata of the relation are perfect. But a problem which Richard of St. victor's conception faced was that if perfect love was only

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54 Ibid p. 69-70

55 Ibid p. 70

shared between the three divine persons, then it seemed like a very selfish group because it was restricted perfect love to only those three substances. However, since in Arianism the son and the holy spirit are not divine persons so perfect love is shared even with non-divine creatures. Hence, the perfect love is not faced with the charge of selfishness that Richard wanted to avoid.

The use of the term 'God' in Arianism conforms to the standard usage in monotheism which was not the case for Swinburne's conception of functional monotheism. Since God is only one person, there is no problem in using the word 'God', there is no misattribution or error that occurs. Hence, prayers and worship can be directed towards God rather than a group of three persons.

Another advantage of Arianism is that God is a person who exists ontologically and not just linguistically as it did in Swinburne's account. This maintains the personhood of God that monotheism entailed rather than denying the distinct identity of the entity of God. The Arian conception stays true to the standard definition of monotheism, and it does not have to resort to complex accounts which posits two uses of the word 'God' like Swinburne did.

Even though all three persons are distinct substances and persons on Arianism, one key difference from Swinburne is that all three persons are not accorded the status of God rather only the person identified as father is God. This maintains monotheism while avoiding the threat of polytheism or tri-theism which plagued functional monotheism.

Arianism does not face any huge hurdles to maintain logical coherence when distinguishing the three persons. This is because it is ready to admit that the son and the holy spirit are not divine persons which means that the father has a higher status by virtue of being the only divine person. It is not trying to elevate the status of the son and the holy spirit to God which means it has no problems admitting this hierarchy where the father alone is omnipotent.

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Hence there are no problems or paradoxes of sharing power within the godhead because there is only one person. Unlike Swinburne's account, no additional property of necessary harmony and coordination is required in Arian conception of God.

We saw earlier how Craig and Mooreland used the unjustified conception of the part-whole relation to posit an additional property of being triune that is necessary to be God. Arianism on the other hand does not need to posit arbitrary new properties to the list of essential properties of God. Properties like being triune or necessary harmony and coordination are as we have argued not essential to establish the existence of a monotheistic God.  Which means that an Arian conception of God is simpler compared to the various conceptions we have discussed in this paper.

Unlike group-mind monotheism, Arianism is able to maintain the distinct personhood of each the three persons while maintaining monotheism. All three persons are able to refer to themselves as an "I" unlike in group-mind monotheism where their identity was subsumed into one person or one group-mind. Arianism is able to do this because it maintains that only one person is divine which means it does not have to offer a complex explanation of how 3 persons constitute a monotheism.

Another challenge which group-mind monotheism faces is that because it posits a composite substance it threatens to compromise the immateriality of the divine substance. As we discussed earlier, Arius avoided any talk of composite substance because of this reason and subsequently concluded that God was an "individual spiritual subsistent" rather than any composite substance. The Arian conception not only simpler but also maintains the immateriality of the divine substance which is crucial to its existence.

Recall Aquinas' conception of the Latin trinity where he could not substantiate how the father generates the son eternally without duration. The Arian conception faces no such issue

because God creates the son, instead of eternally begetting him, and hence duration is not a problem as it does not compromise the immutability of the divine substance. This is because Arianism is not burdened to establish the co-eternality of the persons, rather the son and the holy spirit necessarily come into existence after God (the father). This is because they are created beings, not divine persons, despite their high status among creatures. This conception does not have to take refuge in mystery as Aquinas does thereby establishing that its simpler.

Another advantage Arianism has is that unlike Aquinas' conception, it does not have to posit an unorthodox definition of persons as relative properties. Persons are simply self-conscious beings, and all three persons retain their personhood despite the son and the holy spirit not being divine. Arianism also does not run into trouble while maintaining a distinction between the three persons since not all of them are divine. It does not rely on relative properties since according to Arius these were contingent properties and hence are not essential to the existence of the three persons. The son and the holy spirit are caused by the father and hence do not have the property of being ingenerated or uncaused like the God (the father). Hence, it avoids the logical contradiction that Aquinas' conception could not escape.

Since all three persons are distinct not just linguistically but ontologically it means that all three of them designate a separate person and substance. Unlike Aquinas who used relations to signify three persons which in the end designated only one divine substance, Arianism distinguishes between the persons not just via words but also in reality. Hence, each person designates a unique substance instead of the same divine substance.

# Conclusion

We have discussed in this paper how various versions of the social trinity and the Latin trinity fail to satisfy the rational theist given their criteria of logic and simplicity. After discussing the problems these conceptions faced, we investigated whether Arianism can be a better solution that meets the criteria of logic and simplicity.

Arianism turned out to be a better alternative because it stayed consistent to the principle of simplicity and logic which is exactly what the rational theist was searching for. It did this by arguing that the son and the holy spirit are created beings rather than divine persons. This proposition allowed it to avoid the critique that befell the social and the Latin trinity. It avoided veering into polytheism like functional monotheism did by simple positing that only one person is God (identified as the father). It did not add any arbitrary properties in the necessary properties for the existence of God, aside from the ones that the rational theist had discovered when they arrived at the truth of monotheism. This allowed it to avoid the charge of circularity or question-begging premises that we laid upon Trinity monotheism and Richard of St Victor's love argument.

Arianism presented itself as an attractive solution, compared to Aquinas' conception of relations as persons, to the rational theist because it avoided logical contradictions and provided simpler solutions. Arianism did not have to posit alternate meanings to standard terms such as 'monotheism', 'God', and 'person'. It stayed true to the standard definitions and accepted that if they had used similar solutions to the ones discussed in their paper, they would either compromise the personhood of the three persons or collapse into polytheism which would be counter to the promise of monotheism.

In conclusion then the rational theist perspective pursued in this paper has led us to the solution of Arianism despite its being unorthodox. This is a radically different solution then

what the orthodox theist would accept. This paper has argued that within Christianity and the arguments discussed here, Arianism is superior in fulfilling the criteria of logic and simplicity. The rational theist is not concerned about the charge of unorthodoxy because they were only concerned with evaluating these conceptions on the basis of logic and simplicity, any scriptural or historical, political criterion are not relevant for them. Which allows them to freely accept the conclusion of Arianism within Christianity. Whether Arianism is a good rival against the Islamic and Judaic conceptions is maybe a topic for another paper.

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