

# Antiunitarian Arguments from Divine Perfection

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**Abstract:** Some have argued that unipersonal concepts of God collapse into incoherence, so that such a being is no more possible than a square circle, or at least that such theologies are, as non-trinitarian, significantly less probable than some trinitarian theologies. I discuss the general strategy and examine recent arguments by William Lane Craig, C. Stephen Layman, Thomas V. Morris, and Richard Swinburne based on divine love, flourishing, and glory. I show why none of these arguments is compelling, as each has at least one weak premise.

## 1. Pulling Down the Temple?

In recent times it has become fashionable in some Christian circles to argue that only a triune god—or at least, only a multipersonal god—can be perfect. It is alleged that necessarily, any unipersonal God must be imperfect. Thus, any theology on which God is a single self and yet is perfect, is incoherent. If you want to believe in a *perfect* god, on this way of thinking, you must abandon your Jewish, unitarian Christian, or Islamic concept of God as a great self.

This argument is bold; like Samson (Judges 16), it takes hold of two pillars in the non-trinitarian, monotheistic temple (perfection and literal personality), so as to pull the whole edifice to the ground. Their temple imploded, such people will take shelter under the Trinity; that's the hope. This type of argument was first made by Richard of St. Victor (fl. 1160) (Richard 2011), and versions of it have been developed anew by Richard of Oxford (b. 1934) (Swinburne 1994, 2008, 2018) and following his lead by some other Christian analytic philosophers (Morris 1991; Davis 1999, 2006; Craig n.d., Moreland and Craig 2017; Layman 2016).<sup>1</sup> Now, in simplified form, such arguments are spread abroad by a host of preachers, apologists, and popular authors (e.g., Reeves 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> I have previously critiqued similar arguments (Tuggy 2014; Lebens and Tuggy 2019).

## 2. The Argument from Perfect Love

The main task in constructing such an argument is to find some feature *F*, such that (1) a unipersonal god *can't* have *F*, and (2) a perfect being *must* have *F*. For this to be a compelling argument, it should be evident to anyone, even the unitarian monotheist, that both (1) and (2) are true of this feature *F*. The most popular candidate for *F* is the quality *essentially perfectly loving*—being loving in the highest degree or in the best possible way, and this essentially, so that it is not possible that one fails to be this way. The argument, then, in its simplest form, is:

P1. Necessarily, God is perfectly loving.	Premise
P2. Necessarily, being perfectly loving entails actually loving another.	Premise
P3. Necessarily, any other God loves is either within God or is part of God's creation.	Premise
P4. Necessarily, God was free not to create.	Premise
P5. Necessarily, this object of love isn't part of God's creation.	P4
P6. Therefore, necessarily, God must have another within him to love.	P3, P4, P5
P7. Therefore, necessarily, it is not the case that God is unipersonal (that God is a single self).	P6

The controversial premise here is P2. Why should anyone think it is true?<sup>2</sup> *Perfect lovingness* is a character trait. Like other character traits, it may be had but not

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<sup>2</sup> I shall not here explore the options of doubting or denying P3 or P4. It seems to me that P4 is implied by God's being essentially omniscient and omnipotent and his existing and flourishing *a se*, without dependence on any other being. About P3, one may worry what it could mean for there be another self to love who is "in God," but I suggest that for the sake of argument a non-trinitarian monotheist ought to grant that some such idea could be intelligible. In any case, if the first disjunct in P3 turns out to be a necessary falsehood, then P3 would be logically equivalent to: "Necessarily, any other God loves is part of God's creation," which a unitarian should agree with.

expressed; it doesn't imply being in an actual interpersonal relationship. It's like the trait *friendly*. Imagine a friendly man who has been shipwrecked on a desert isle. Now, sadly, the man is friendless; he has no other with whom to share his life. Still, he's a friendly man; if we put another suitable castaway on the island, he'll form a friendship with that person—or at least, he'll have a strong tendency to do that. That's what it is to be friendly: it's to be disposed, in appropriate circumstances, to enter into and remain within (at least superficial) friendships. Just so with the quality *perfectly loving*. It is having the disposition to act and react in perfectly loving ways, if and when there is another to love. In isolation, one may still be perfectly loving. At least, this is conceivable, and no one has shown it to imply a contradiction, and so to be impossible. It looks like one should deny P2, because it seems possible that someone should have the character trait of being perfectly loving even while not actually loving another, or at least withhold on P2 because there seems to be no contradiction in the situation just mentioned.

At this point, our would-be Samson may reach for some other *F*, such as being generous, being creative, or not being lonely. The first two, being essentially generous, or creative, do nothing to yield a compelling premise corresponding to P2. Being traits of character, it seems that they needn't be manifested, exercised, or acted upon to be had. Thus, the corresponding second premises would be false.<sup>3</sup> If one is worried that this general rule may not apply to virtues (good character traits) had to the highest degree or in the greatest way, still, there are no grounds for thinking it to be impossible for there to be a case of perfect generosity (etc.) which doesn't imply actually acting on that tendency. In that case, one will withhold as to the truth or falsity of the second premise, as with P2 above. Either way, we should not think that such an argument is sound.

The same point can be made with a parody argument.<sup>4</sup>

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| F1. Necessarily, God is perfectly forgiving.   | Premise |
| F2. Necessarily, being perfectly forgiving entails actually forgiving another.             | Premise |
| F3. Necessarily, any other God forgives is either within God or is part of God's creation. | Premise |
| F4. Necessarily, God was free not to create.   | Premise |

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<sup>3</sup> I consider an argument involving divine loneliness below.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Lebens and I use a similar parody argument in Lebens and Tuggy (2019), Section 2.

- F5. Necessarily, this one who is forgiven isn't part of God's creation. F4
- F6. Therefore, necessarily, God must have another within him to forgive. F3, F4, F5
- F7. Therefore, necessarily, someone within God has done something requiring forgiveness. F6

But such a conclusion is unwelcome. There is evidently no mistake of reasoning; each argument seems formally valid. But in our parody argument, the falsity of the second premise seems obvious. But it is no less obviously false than the second premise in our first argument. Arguably, both arguments are unsound because their respective second premises are false.

I think this parody argument is parallel enough to make the point. But even if you think this argument has some defect not shared by the first, my previous point still stands: that the second premise is false (or at least: not reasonably believed to be true), when *F* is the essential quality of being perfectly loving, generous, or creative.

One may object that I've overlooked an interpretation of statements that a divine person must be "perfect in love."<sup>5</sup> Couldn't this mean that such a person must be loving in the most *complete* way? Isn't it plausible in general that no one can have a character-trait *in the most complete way* without manifesting it? In reply, there are some intuitions here deriving from the human condition, but these are not relevant to the situation of a divine person. One is the plausible idea that we are given the ability to have character-traits like lovingness precisely so that we can exercise them. In that way "the completion of" such traits, i.e., their purpose or goal as intended by our Creator, is actual loving relationships. But this consideration doesn't apply in the case of a divine person. Again, for many (perhaps even all) human virtues, their initial acquisition, maintenance, and improvement all require the exercise of our powers to act in appropriate ways. To become loving (i.e., to obtain that character trait), to keep it, and to increase the degree to which I have that trait, surely I must engage in the love of others. If you knew that I'd never engaged in such loving acts, you could be sure that my lovingness was at very best incomplete. But there is no reason to think a divine person would be bound by such constraints. Unlike me, such would not have to fight against the gravity of bad tendencies or to deal with the consequences of his own stupid and/or wicked choices. Again, consider the parody argument above. No Christian should want to

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<sup>5</sup> I thank an anonymous reader for this journal for this objection.

say that a divine person must actually forgive in order to have the character trait of being forgiving in the best or most perfect or most complete way. Nor would such have to actually forgive to obtain, maintain, or increase his character trait of being forgiving. If such a person has never actually forgiven, nothing seems to follow about the completeness or perfection of their trait of being disposed to forgive.

It is sometimes suggested that a doctrine of God as somehow multipersonal is needed to solve “the problem of the lonely God” (Morris 1991, 177). This doesn’t have to do, as one may think on first hearing it, with a divine person suffering from loneliness; it would better be called “the problem of a lone divine self.” The problem is supposed to be that Christians should think that God was free to create or not, and yet if God doesn’t create, there’s no other to receive his love. But his love *must* be expressed. It’s the same as our first argument above, really. It’s not an independent problem any theist or any Christian just finds herself with. Rather, it’s generated in part by the assumption that, in Thomas Morris’s words: “surely, in order to be a fully loving person, an individual must extend his or her love beyond the bounds of self alone” (*Ibid.*). But to the contrary, it seems possible for there to be a perfectly loving self who does not cause there to be another to love. No contradiction has been shown to follow from such a scenario. It’s not clear, then, that there is a problem here which needs to be solved by a theory that God is multipersonal.

Some presentations trade on the ambiguity of the English phrase “perfectly loving.” On the one hand, as we’ve seen, it means a certain character trait, a trait which is entailed by being morally perfect. On the other hand, it may refer to an action, like the phrase “beautifully whistling.” Here, being “perfectly loving” implies that one is actively loving, in the best or most perfect way. One then argues that the best kind of love must be love of another, and perhaps of a peer or an equal as well. Thus, if there’s one divine person who is absolutely perfect, he’s therefore morally perfect, and this (allegedly) implies that he must be performing the action of loving in the best way, and so there must be at least one more divine person.

But it won’t do merely to assert that a perfect being must perform that action. Parsing their words carefully, one can observe that the most philosophically astute proponents of such arguments sense this ambiguity in the phrase “perfectly loving.” If it means an action, then it is by no means clear that being perfect entails performing that action. Thus, they reason from divine perfection to a character trait, and then from the character trait to an action.

### **3. Craig: God as “Perfectly Loving”**

Let’s look at this crucial move in the work of William Lane Craig, labeling where he has in mind a character trait, and where he is talking about an action expressing that trait.

... God must be perfect. Now a perfect being must be a loving being [character trait]. For love [character trait] is a moral perfection ... God therefore must be a perfectly loving being [i.e., he must have that character trait]. Now it is of the very nature of love [character trait] to give oneself away [action]. Love [character trait] reaches out [action] to another person rather than centering wholly in oneself. So if God is perfectly loving [character trait] by his very nature, he must be giving himself in love to another [action]. (Moreland and Craig 2017, 593.)<sup>6</sup>

The last sentence appears to be a non sequitur. Truly, to be a loving person is to have a tendency or disposition to give oneself away, as it were, and to “reach out” to others, *if* there are any. It is, we all think, possible to be loving (i.e., to have that character trait) even while lacking any other to love. What if one is loving (character trait) in the highest degree or in the best way? Still, we see no contradiction in supposing that there is a perfectly loving (character trait) being who is alone. Anyone who claims there is a contradiction in such a scenario needs to “show his work,” that is, give a proof that starts with “There is a perfectly loving being who is not actually loving any other being” and ends with some *P* and not-*P*. Craig hasn’t even tried to do this, merely asserting a necessary connection between this particular character trait and this sort of action. But then in effect he is merely asserting the impossibility of a unipersonal god; non-trinitarian theists should not be impressed.

Craig has been presented with the logical gap between his two claims, that necessarily God is perfectly loving (character trait), and that necessarily God is loving another. A correspondent objects,

... why not understand love as we understand God’s other perfections? For example, I take it that God’s perfect justice is not expressed until some moment after His creation rebels against Him ... If we can claim that God is just without having to express it until creation, then why not claim that a unitarian God can be loving without creation (later expressing it towards created beings)? (Craig 2010)

Craig answers, first, that justice manifests in ways other than punishment of sin, and so perhaps the Persons of the Trinity manifest justice in those ways in eternity, independently of creation. But more fundamentally,

... it’s not enough to think of love as ... the disposition to love if some other person were to exist. Being loving is not merely the disposition to give oneself away to another if that other existed. Being loving involves actually giving

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<sup>6</sup> Material in brackets added. While this book is co-authored with J.P. Moreland, my understanding is that Craig authored the Trinity chapter, and it is only Craig who has continued to publish on the Trinity.

oneself away to another. So this disposition cannot lie merely latent in God and never be actualized. It would follow, then, that a unitarian God would have to create other persons necessarily, which is what your suggestion implies. But that contradicts what both Christians and Muslims believe about God's freedom in creating. Therefore, God must be a plurality of uncreated persons, which is what the doctrine of the Trinity affirms.

So my argument comes down to this: love cannot be reduced to a mere disposition. Though it is at least that, it is far more than that. Therefore, the unitarian concept of God is inadequate. (*Ibid.*)

What Craig asserts here is obviously false, that "Being loving involves actually giving oneself away to another."<sup>7</sup> If this were true, it would be a contradiction to say that a person stranded alone on a desert island is a loving person. But surely, there actually has been such a person! That they were, even while alone, a loving person, is shown by their soon coming to love some new island-mate or a rescuer. (It's not plausible that such events would bring about a quick character improvement in the one rescued.)

But we should probably read Craig as speaking loosely here, using "being loving" to abbreviate "being essentially perfectly loving." Still, he has merely asserted that this can't only be a disposition. He has given us no reason to agree that in the highest possible degree, the virtue of lovingness (had essentially or not) must manifest or be acted on. He has only asserted what looks like a non sequitur: Necessarily, God is essentially perfectly loving, therefore necessarily, God is loving another.<sup>8</sup> This seems as clear a mistake as: Necessarily, God is essentially perfectly forgiving, therefore necessarily, God is forgiving another.

Following up on the above exchange, another correspondent asks Craig,

So thinking about mercy, if being loving requires one to have an object which is being loved, then could it be argued that if God is merciful he would require an object to which such mercy is shown? (Craig 2016)

Craig replies, in part,

Retributive justice and mercy cannot be essential properties of God because they both entail the existence of persons who can be punished or forgiven, that is to say, created persons, and orthodox theology has always held that creation is a contingent, freely willed act of God, so that creatures exist only contingently. So there are possible worlds in which God is neither punitive nor merciful; but He is nevertheless just and loving in such worlds.

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<sup>7</sup> More recently, equivalently, he asserts that "it is of the very nature of love to give oneself away" (2017).

<sup>8</sup> Thus, in another place he says that "God is essentially loving. He has always been loving" (2009).

... I'd say that while love is an essential property of God, mercy is a contingent property of God, the way God's love expresses itself toward fallen creatures if they do exist. In the absence of any creatures, God is loving but not merciful. (*Ibid.*)

Here Craig seems to assume that "merciful," when applied to God, must refer to an action of showing mercy, and not to a mere character trait of being disposed to show mercy. But we do describe one another as "merciful" even when the person in question is not actively showing mercy to another, and there seems to be no problem in assigning such a character trait to God. Craig seems to miss the force of the objection; he only wants to talk about merciful actions. The objection is equivalent to the parody argument above, and it seems fatal to this sort of antiunitarian argument.

On occasion Craig will briefly gesture at some other line of argument for his conclusion. Thus he asserts that,

On the unitarian view God is a person who does not give Himself away essentially in love for another; He is focused essentially only on Himself. Hence, He cannot be the most perfect being. (2017; compare: Moreland and Craig 2017, 593)

Here again Craig commits a non sequitur. It is true that "On the unitarian view God is a person who does not give Himself away essentially in love for another," but it does not follow that such a God is "focused essentially only on Himself." We should parse this phrase carefully. The idea is not that essentially, God only thinks about himself, even if there are others around. Rather, Craig must mean, if we read him charitably, that God's essence only *implies* that he loves himself, but doesn't imply that God loves anyone else. This is consistent with God being perfectly attentive to any creatures there may be and does not clearly indicate any deficiency in character. In other words, someone who is "focused essentially only on Himself" need not be selfish or unduly self-focused. Even apart from creation, a divine person would plausibly, being essentially omniscient, essentially have in mind the infinities of possible creatures which it is in his power to create. Thus essentially, such a deity's interests would be directed "outward," as it were, albeit towards mere potentialities. Of course, after creating, being essentially perfectly benevolent, he would focus on each of his many creatures.

Craig has not put his finger on any imperfection which seems to be implied by a unitarian understanding of God. Thus, it seems that he has not come anywhere close to showing that "since God is essentially loving, the doctrine of the Trinity is more plausible than any unitarian doctrine of God" (Moreland and Craig 2017, 593).



## 4. Layman's Argument from Perfect Love

In a chapter proposing a “social” interpretation of the Trinity which is similar in various ways to those of Swinburne and Craig,<sup>9</sup> C. Stephen Layman cites the claim of Davis and Swinburne that “Completely unexpressed love is not perfect love” (Layman 2016, 153). He admits that such a claim is controversial, remarking that it

. . . is denied by those who hold that since love is a dispositional state or property one can fully possess it even if one has never acted in a loving way. (Roughly, one has the virtue of perfect love as long as one *would always act* in loving ways if one were in circumstances that called for such acts. (*Ibid.*)

Such an implausible claim isn't qualified to be a premise in an argument showing the impossibility of a unipersonal god, right? But Layman urges,

There is, however, considerable plausibility in the claim that a truly solitary person who throughout all eternity never expressed any love for anyone would not be a perfectly loving person. (*Ibid.*)

This strikes me as special pleading. What motivation for this assertion can there be, except the desire for there to be an argument showing that a perfect being can't be unipersonal?

Imagine that from eternity, God caused there to be an angel named “Murray,” and that Murray was given the power of reproduction by self-division.<sup>10</sup> Further, God created Murray in isolation; Murray is in an enclosed portion of the cosmos where he knows that he can't relate to any others, unless he self-divides, making another Murray-like angel who would be a suitable friend. Finally, suppose that we know about this arrangement, and know that Murray has already existed for an infinitely long time without exercising his power to produce a friend. Can we conclude that Murray's character is deficient in the area of lovingness? It's hard to see how! In fact, let's just add to the story that God endows Murray with perfection in character when it comes to lovingness. Does adding this element to the story render it clearly incoherent? It's hard to see that it does. To the contrary, it seems like something which an omnipotent being would be able to do. The burden is on someone making an antiunitarian argument to show the impossibility of perfect lovingness which doesn't manifest in actual love for another.

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of this see Tuggy (2020b), Section 2.5.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, in his earliest discussion of how many divine selves there can and must be, Swinburne talks about divine self-division in order to avoid casting the divine processions as involving creation *ex nihilo*. See the discussion in Hasker (2013), 152–53.

At this point, Layman throws in the towel; rather than urging that an argument from perfect love *proves* that a divine person can't be alone, Layman declares this argument to be merely an interesting and plausible attempt

... to explain why we might expect there to be multiple divine persons (if there are any), and why the very nature of a divine person might logically necessitate that there be one or more additional divine persons. (Layman 2016, 154)

At this point, a non-trinitarian monotheist might simply grant that there is *some* plausibility in the idea that a perfect person implies at least one more. Such considerations fall short of the sort of "Samson" argument we've been seeking. Further, they will either turn out to have some solid grounding in reason, or they will be mere speculations, and one must admit that it is worrisome that it seems that such ideas first occurred to someone in the twelfth century C.E.<sup>11</sup> It may be that Layman thinks that this weak argument gains some support by being paired with some similar speculations about divine happiness, which we'll examine below. But first, let us turn to the motherlode of antiunitarian arguments based on love.

## 5. Swinburne's A Priori Proof of Exactly Three Divine Persons

On this subject, Davis, Craig, and Layman are disciples of Swinburne.<sup>12</sup> Does the master do better than his disciples? As we'll see, he tries to do more with this sort of argument, as he thinks that these speculations are much more important to the rationality of belief in God as a Trinity.

Swinburne too is mindful of the difference between a character trait and an action which expresses that trait. Thus he writes,

... perfection includes perfect love [character trait]. There is something profoundly imperfect ... in a solitary divine individual. If such an individual is love [i.e., has the character trait being loving in the highest degree or best way], he must share [i.e., must perform the action of loving another] ... A divine individual's love [character trait] has to be manifested [in the action of loving another] ... (1994, 190, material in brackets added)

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<sup>11</sup> Swinburne attempts to find such an idea in a passage by Augustine, but as I show below, he misreads that passage.

<sup>12</sup> I will focus on Swinburne's most recent version of this argument in his 2018 article. This is substantially the same as the argument in his 2008 book but it differs from his most discussed version in his 1994 book.

Notice that the entailment between the character trait and the action is merely asserted, not argued for. But it needs to be argued for, because it is neither self-evident nor clearly supported by any obvious evidence.

Just after this passage, while discussing the earlier Richard, Swinburne mentions another character trait: generosity. In a later presentation, he returns to this theme. First, he asserts that a perfect self would bring about an equal to love. He mentions that in general, “goodness is diffusive: it spreads itself,” calling this “the Dionysian principle” (2008, 29).<sup>13</sup> Such an abstract, vague claim, though, does nothing to show the impossibility of a perfect self which doesn’t cause there to be an equal for the purpose of loving and being loved by him.

To provide more support for his controversial claim he proceeds to extract an argument from Augustine.

Augustine wrote (*On Diverse Questions* 83 q.50) that if the Father ‘wished to beget’ the Son [that is, cause the Son to exist], and was unable to do it, he would have been weak; if he was able to do it but did not wish to, he would have failed to do it because of ‘envy’ (that is, because he wished to be the only divine person). A solitary God would have been an ungenerous god and so no God. (2008, 29)<sup>14</sup>

I can’t see why Swinburne thinks there is an argument here that a perfect self must cause the existence of another self to love. The whole passage in Augustine (all of section 50) in a modern translation is:

Since God could not beget something better than himself (for nothing is better than God), then the one whom he did beget he had to beget as his equal. For if he had the desire and not the power, then he is weak; if he had the power and not the desire, then he is envious. From this it follows that God has begotten the Son as his equal. (Augustine 1982, 84)

This is not an argument for the conclusion that the Father must beget another. Rather, it assumes that he must. It is an argument that *given that* the Father begets, the begotten one must be his equal. It can’t be his superior, as there is not any possible being which is greater than a fully divine being. And it can’t be his inferior. Why? The argument is something like this:

A1. The Father is perfect.

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<sup>13</sup> Compare: “goodness by its very nature is diffusive of itself: it seeks to produce more good things” (2018, 429).

<sup>14</sup> The material in brackets is in Swinburne’s original. He briefly quotes this same passage in his 1994 (190) and his 2018 (429), but in neither place does he expound any implicit argument in it.

- A2. Either the Father has or lacks this combination of qualities: the desire to beget an equal, and the power to beget an equal.
- A3. If he has both of those qualities, then the Father begets an equal.
- A4. If he lacked the desire to beget an equal, then the Father would be envious.
- A5. If he lacked the power to beget an equal, then the Father would be to some degree weak.
- A6. A perfect being is neither envious nor to any degree weak.
- A7. Therefore, the Father begets an equal.

The argument seems valid but is far from compelling. It is not clear why anyone should accept A3. An omnipotent and omniscient being will have countless desire-power combinations on which he does not act. He will both know and desire each of the infinity of good possibilities. And many of these he will be able to single-handedly bring about. But many such, it would seem, he will not, or at least, there is no good reason to think that he ever will. Here's a good and possible state of affairs: that there are lions which are as docile and friendly to humans as housecats. Will God ever bring about the existence of such creatures? We have no idea!

Another problem with the argument is that premises A4 and A5 assume that it is possible for God to cause the existence of a being equal to him. But this is by no means clear. What if a perfect being must exist independently of any other, that is, have the quality *aseity*? (More on this below.) If so, then even an all-knowing and all-powerful being will not be able to bring about, whether by generation or creation or any other sort of process, the existence of an equally perfect being, that is, another being with *all* the perfections he has. But for the moment, let us, like the catholic Nicene mainstream, assume that divinity *doesn't* imply aseity.

Still, it is not clear that A4 is true. If God lacked that desire, why must the motive be envy? Swinburne suggests that it is really lack of generosity which is in view. But keep in mind that we're imagining a solitary being here. To whom would he owe any obligation whatever? It would seem: to no one. But then, how is he being ungenerous if he doesn't cause the existence of another? Would he be ungenerous *to himself* if he didn't do that? Why would he have any obligation to supply himself with someone to love?

Augustine provides no help here. But Swinburne says more and seems to cast aside any need for controversial theses about divine generosity, envy, or even lovingness.

For the Father to cause the Son to exist would be a unique best act of the Father; and so, since being perfectly good is an essential property of a divine person, the Father will inevitably always cause the Son to exist. (2008, 29)

Generosity drops out of the picture here. The argument, wisely, doesn't say anything more about character traits than that *divinity* implies being *perfectly good*.<sup>15</sup> It seems to me that Swinburne's reasoning can be filled out to provide an indirect proof that there can't be only one divine self. To my eye, this is a new antiunitarian argument.

S1. Suppose the Father is the only divine self.	Supposition for reductio
S2. Divinity implies perfect goodness. <sup>16</sup>	Premise
S3. A perfectly good being must do the uniquely best possible action available to him, whenever such an action is available. <sup>17</sup>	Premise
S4. The uniquely best possible action which is available to a solitary divine self is to cause there to be a second divine self. <sup>18</sup>	Premise
S5. Therefore, the Father must cause there to be a second divine self.	S1-S4
S6. Therefore, there is a divine self in addition to the Father.	S5
S7. But this is impossible.	S1, S6

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<sup>15</sup> I set aside for the sake of argument that this entails that the Son, contrary to the New Testament, can't be tempted.

<sup>16</sup> Swinburne (2018), 427, 430.

<sup>17</sup> Swinburne observes that in many situations there will not be a best single action, but there may be a type of action such that it is best for one to do some instance or other of that type. For instance, if one can give to this charity or that, and each action would be equally good, then one's goodness would not push one towards either one or the other. However, one may still be motivated to do one or the other—the action-type *giving to a charity* may, in this circumstance, be the best *sort* of action one may do. See his 1994, 134–36, 2008, 9–11, 29, 2018, 427, 430–31.

<sup>18</sup> "For the Father always to cause the Son to exist would be a unique best act of the Father" (2008, 29). See also his 2018, 430.

S8. Therefore, it is not the case that the Father is the only divine self. S1-S7

The argument is valid, and it seems to me that any monotheist ought to agree with premise S2.

Unfortunately, many will find principled reasons to doubt S3 and/or S4. About S3: suppose a kid comes to your door to “trick or treat,” and she holds out her treat bag to you. You look down into your bowl of candies and notice the last Snickers chocolate candy bar sitting atop many clearly inferior candies. Does it display your moral imperfection if you hand her something other than the Snickers bar? Generally, we have a wide degree of freedom in how much benefit we bestow on another, consistent with moral duty and with the display of good character. S3 is neither true by definition nor self-evident. There is a tradition in theodicy of saying that the greatness of the cosmos is enhanced by having beings with varying degrees of goodness or greatness. Analogously, one may think that a perfect being’s actions may be overall more worthy or beautiful if they include actions with a variety of worth, even at the expense of sometimes foregoing a best available action.

Again, it would seem that duties must be owed to actual, not potential beings. If you have a child and neglect her, you have violated your duty to her. But if you decide not to have children at all, it may be that you’ve wronged *someone*—perhaps yourself, your parents, your spouse, or the people composing your society—but certainly you have *not* wronged your merely potential children. Now, consider a divine self deliberating about bringing about another divine self. If he doesn’t, so to speak, reproduce, would this be morally objectionable in any way, so as to conflict with his moral perfection? It’s hard to see how; there’s no reason to think that he would have a duty to himself and there simply isn’t anyone else to whom he would owe such a duty. If you say that if he doesn’t do this, he’ll be without love of another—well, this is true, but an omnipotent and omniscient being who doesn’t create is thereby forgoing countless valuable goods. Why should this good be any different? Why would a perfect self *have to* enjoy this benefit, love of a peer?

Still, perhaps many will find S3 plausible. But even if S3 is granted, there is arguably a good reason to deny S4, which assumes that divinity doesn’t imply aseity, the property of existing independently of any other.<sup>19</sup> If causing there to be an equal

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<sup>19</sup> In his book *Was Jesus God?* the Father is “ontologically necessary,” but the Son and Spirit are not (2008, 31). Swinburne there defines an “ontologically necessary” being as one whose “existence is not contingent on anything else: no other individual or physical or metaphysical principle causes (or has any share in causing) the existence of” such a being. (15) So as to have some sort of “necessity” for the Three Persons of the Trinity to share, he coins the term “metaphysical necessity” and says they all share this. It is, oddly, defined as “either it is ontologically necessary or it is inevitably caused to exist by an ontologically necessary being” (31). He adds that “the whole Trinity is ontologically necessary because nothing else caused it to exist” (*ibid.*). But this seems wrong given his own views. On his account, the Trinity exists *because of* the causal activities of two other beings, namely the

requires bringing about the existence of another being *with aseity*, then this won't be a best action available to the Father, as it is not a metaphysically possible action. (It implies the existence of a being which does and does not exist independently of anything else.) It seems to me that a supremely perfect being must essentially exist *a se*, so it is absolutely impossible for a divinely perfect self to bring about or cause another divinely perfect self.

Here we enter into the agonies of trinitarian speculations. Some reject the traditional creedal language of "eternal generation" and "eternal procession" because such claims are not taught in the Bible, and/or because they imply that neither the Son nor the Spirit are fully divine, each having a cause for his existence, while full divinity requires aseity (Moreland and Craig 2017, 512–13, 593; Craig 2019; Mullins 2017, 2020). Other trinitarians accept "generation" and "procession" language but deny that these imply that the Father is the source, cause, or reason for the existence of the Son and the Spirit. In effect, they deny that we can understand the meaning of such language. Others go further, denying that there are any causal relationships among the "Persons" of the Trinity (Davis 2006, 66–67). Swinburne's argument presupposes that "eternal generation" is real and causal, and that neither absolute perfection nor full divinity imply aseity.

Let's grant all of that to Swinburne for the moment, so that it is a metaphysically possible action for one divine self to cause there to be another divine self. Why should anyone think that this is *a uniquely best* available action? Why should one agree with his premise S4?

First, the meaning of S4 should be clarified. The action mentioned there is an action-type, not a single individual action. He says, "bringing about the sharing of divinity is a best kind of action" (2008, 33; compare 2018, 430). Further, it is not the only best available type of action available to the "first" divine person. He immediately adds, ". . . and so is bringing about cooperation in sharing divinity"

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Father and the Son. Perhaps his idea was that the Trinity doesn't depend on anything beyond its own parts or members or components. Most recently, Swinburne has repented of his idiosyncratic term "metaphysical necessity," saying instead that the Father is "ontologically necessary" independently of any other, while the Son and Spirit are "ontologically necessary" because of the Father. But inconsistently with this, he explains "ontologically necessary" as meaning "having the cause of his everlasting existence within himself" (2018, 436, n.14). On either definition, it is a contradiction for a being to be "ontologically necessary" because of any other. And as he says, in his view, the Son and Spirit "exist necessarily" in the sense that their existence is "a necessary consequence of the existence of a necessary being," (i.e., the Father). Perhaps now all he means by "ontologically necessary" is inevitably or unavoidably existing, so that the Father does this because of himself, whereas the Son and Spirit do it because of the Father. The Trinity, then, would, like the persons, unavoidably exist, and so be "ontologically necessary," but not through itself, but because of the eternal and inevitable actions of the Father and Son. On any of his accounts, neither the Trinity nor the Son nor the Spirit will exist *a se*. This will be a problem for trinitarians who are convinced that full divinity implies aseity.

(*ibid.*).<sup>20</sup> Here, the reader may worry that the story is incoherent. How, among the sorts of actions available to that one divine person, can there be two different available action types, each of which is *the best*? If one is the best, mustn't the other be, at most, second best?

To untie this little knot, it is helpful to recall Swinburne's comment that his argument

... depends on two very simple moral intuitions: that perfect love requires total sharing with an equal and requires cooperating in spreading that love further, so that anyone you love has someone else to love and be loved by. (2008, 38)<sup>21</sup>

Swinburne typically describes the production of two more divine selves in terms of two actions: the production of the Son by the Father, and the production of the Spirit by the Father and the Son (2018, 430). But it seems to me that since the Father is supposed to be essentially all-knowing and all-powerful, the whole thing can be described as one complex action of the Father, one which incorporates other actions as means: his causing the Son in order to (inevitably) cooperate with him in bringing about the Spirit, in order that (inevitably) there should be the best kind of love. The goal is that there should be peer-love with total sharing which is also "unselfish" love, wherein the lovers ensure that each of their beloveds is also loved by someone else (*ibid.*). For the sake of discussion, let's call this sort of action "spreading the love." Spreading the love in this sense entails bringing about at least one divine peer, so it entails the more specific action described in premise S4.

But for an essentially omniscient and omnipotent being, *conceivably* there will be an infinity of ways to spread the love. On the face of it, love-spreading is a general action-type which encompasses an infinite number of mutually exclusive more specific action-types. The first divine person might bring about, for instance,

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<sup>20</sup> In his latest piece he says "it will be a unique best action of the Father to cause the existence of a third divine being whom Father and Son could love and by whom each could be loved" (2018, 430).

<sup>21</sup> Here Swinburne, as his subsequent remarks have clarified, has quietly changed a key part of his argument. For Swinburne's recent accounts of this change, see his 2018, note 14 and Tuggy 2018, 42:35–47:05 minutes. In the quotation, the first alleged truth is supposed to explain why a divine self must produce at least one other. The second is supposed to explain why he can't produce more than two others. (More on this below.) In his most famous discussion, the second principle was the value of co-operating with another for the benefit of a third party (1994, 177). It has been objected, sensibly, that it might be even more valuable to cooperate with *two* others, thus it is not clear that this second principle really stops the proliferation of divine selves at three (Leftow 1999). To my knowledge, Swinburne has never publicly replied to this objection. But in his most recent version, he doesn't quite withdraw the cooperation principle, but says in his view Richard of St. Victor supplies another and stronger reason why there must be a third, but not a fourth divine self. This is the value of "unselfish" love, where one loves an equal and wants the beloved to the same degree to love and to be loved by a third party. Confusingly, in his 2008 book he appeals to both alleged motivations without signaling the new claim.



four others, so that the five of them would enjoy a love that is so unselfish that each has four others to love and be loved by. And so on. It would seem, the more the merrier; the more divine selves there are sharing their love totally with one another unselfishly, the better the situation is, and so, it would seem, the better that first person's complex action is.

Swinburne has pushed a boulder, which he hopes will roll over the unitarian. But he needs it not to also crush the trinitarian. He is, after all, aiming at more than an antiunitarian argument. It is important, he thinks, for there to be a strong *a priori* argument for the Trinity, since it can't be deduced even from an infallible Bible, and because many Christians will not accept catholic tradition since 381 as establishing the doctrine by its own authority, or as establishing trinitarian interpretations of various texts in the Bible (2018, 419).<sup>22</sup> Swinburne's aim here is to find an *a priori* argument for exactly three divine selves, not for three or more.

Ultimately, then, Swinburne needs to establish two impossibilities. First, he must show it to be impossible that there should be less than three divine selves. Second, he must show it to be impossible that there should be more than three divine selves. He believes that he's established the first, on the grounds that a perfect being will be compelled to bring about a peer so that there can be love of equals involving total sharing, and further, that this must involve at least one more, on the grounds that divine love must be "unselfish" in that each lovee should be also loved by another. (More on this just below.) But how can he stop the boulder at three, before it rolls on to a Quaternity of divine persons or worse? Swinburne's reasoning here is hard to follow, but I believe it can be represented as this argument:

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| B1. Suppose that the first divine person "spreads the love" in a way that entails bringing about a fourth divine person. | Supposition for reductio |
| B2. Necessarily, a divine person exists inevitably.  | Premise                  |
| B3. This fourth divine person would exist inevitably.  | B1, B2                   |

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<sup>22</sup> Specifically, Swinburne says that one can't deduce a Trinity doctrine from Scripture because there are equally plausible, contextual readings of the relevant passages on which God's "Spirit" is *not* a divine person in addition to the Father and the Son. But this is just one of many problems. Another problem is that some arguably essential elements any credal Trinity doctrine simply aren't in the biblical sources, and seemingly can't be deduced from them. On this, see my 2019a. Another problem is that the New Testament writers seem to think that the one God just is the Father alone, which rules out that the one God is the Trinity. On this see my 2019b. On the 381 creed as the first major creed which assumes or implies the idea of a tripersonal God, see my 2017a and my 2020a.

- B4. Necessarily, any act of a divine person is either an act of essence (i.e., one which he must perform because he is divine) or an act of will (i.e., one which he freely chooses to perform and which he could have refrained from performing), but not both. Premise
- B5. Whereas the production of a second and a third divine person would be acts of essence by the first person (being essentially good, he must “spread the love”), production of any further divine person would not be an act of essence, since it wouldn’t be required by love-spreading. Premise
- B6. This fourth divine person exists because of an act of will by the first divine person. B1, B4, B5
- B7. The existence of this fourth divine person was not inevitable. B4, B6
- B8. But this is impossible. B2, B7
- B9. Therefore, it is not the case that the first divine person “spreads the love” by bringing about a fourth divine person. B1–B8

Premises B2 and B4 strike me as relatively uncontroversial. It is plausible that if a divine self exists, there never should have been any way that this could have been prevented; his existence should be unavoidable in principle, so that he exists “no matter what.” And it is plausible that a divine self might be compelled by his own divinity to perform certain actions, such as loving himself, but not other actions, such as creating a cosmos. B5 is the really controversial premise. It asserts that a perfect self would be compelled to bring about two others, and that he would not be compelled to bring about any more than two.

Again, some trinitarians will understandably balk at the idea of a divine person being caused. Swinburne clarifies here that in his view, a divine person can only be caused by an act of essence of one or more other divine persons, so that although caused, his existence is nonetheless inevitable, in a manner of speaking, “necessary.”

But what about the other claim in B5, that a first divine person, as divine, must produce at least two other divine persons, that is, that he must “spread the love” as explained above? What is so great about that? Swinburne argues,

A twosome can be selfish. A marriage in which husband and wife are interested only in each other and do not seek to spread the love they have for each other, is a deficient marriage. (And of course the obvious way, but not the only way, in which they can spread their love is by having children.) Perfect love for a beloved, Richard [of St. Victor] ([*On the Trinity*] 3.11) argues, must involve the wish that the beloved should be loved by someone else also. Hence it will be a unique best action for the Father to cause the existence of a third divine being whom Father and Son could love and by whom each could be loved. Hence the Holy Spirit . . . Three persons is the necessary minimum for unselfish love. (2018, 430)

The “selfishness” envisioned here is a lover’s not being motivated to share the love of his beloved with another. But the idea is that the best sort of love requires not only as Swinburne says here a “wish” that another too should enjoy the beloved, but also that one is compelled to try to bring this about.

The marriage analogy here seems to be inapt for divine persons. For one thing, one may think that procreation is a sort of natural function of human marriage, that this is *a* if not *the* purpose of it.<sup>23</sup> If this is so, then a procreation-less marriage would be lacking in something important, even if very valuable overall. But such would not apply in the case of divine selves who neither marry nor procreate. Further, husband and wife typically do not share their own unique love life with another; otherwise the marriage bed would be overpopulated. Despite what some contemporary advocates for polyamory claim, it is plausible that sexual human love is meant to be exclusive, or at least that there is nothing selfish or otherwise morally bad about such exclusivity. At any rate, such considerations don’t apply to the sexless persons and the alleged asexual love within the Trinity.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps a better analogy would be asexual, “Platonic” friendship. The intuition is that there is something deficient in such a friendship if the friends don’t try to bring it about that others can also be friends with their friend. If a friend fails to do this, presumably this is because she wants to keep her friend all for herself, which is a selfish stance. Of course, this presupposes a context in which there *are* other potential friends, people who stand to lose out if the friendship remains closed. But suppose no others are available. Imagine that two men are shipwrecked on an otherwise deserted island, and that the island-mates become close friends.

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<sup>23</sup> By “marriage” here I mean the exclusive, permanent, and sexual pairing of humans, not the social or legal institutions which go by that name.

<sup>24</sup> The Son is supposed to be without sex at least before the Incarnation, whereupon he came to be human and male. Still, his love of the other members of the Trinity is assumed to be wholly asexual before and after the Incarnation.

Suppose also that they reasonably believe it to be dangerous to try to escape the island via swimming or homemade boat. Is their friendship so deficient that they should be strongly motivated to take such a serious risk in order to add a third party to their friendship? Are they “selfish” if they don’t try to escape, so as to try to obtain (so to speak) a third wheel? It’s hard to see how they would be. Their friendship may in fact be plenty “open,” in the sense that *if* there were others available, they would be welcomed into the friendship. An actual third party doesn’t seem necessary for these two friends or their relationship to have this virtuous kind of openness.

Return now to the imagined twosome of the Father and the Son, two divine persons. Each may have, as Swinburne says, “the wish that the beloved would be love by someone else also.” Yet this pair would *not* seem to be selfish if they don’t cause there to be a third member of their little circle. Their friendship may in fact be “open,” not too exclusive, so that *if* they should choose to create, eventually other, created persons may enter in. These, being less than divine, will not be capable of what Swinburne calls “total” sharing. But, so what? It’s not been shown that simply as divine persons, the two would have to bring about a third, because it has neither been shown that a uniquely best action of the Father would be to cause a Son who will then automatically co-operate to cause the Spirit, nor has it been shown that a perfect being must always do the best sort of action when there is one.

As we’ve seen, Swinburne’s creative and elaborate story is a tale of two impossibilities. First it is allegedly impossible for a divine self not to bring about at least one other. If he can prove this much, he has a successful antiunitarian argument. Second, it is allegedly impossible for a divine self to bring about either fewer than or more than two others. If he can establish this, he has an *a priori* argument for God being tripersonal, or at least for there being exactly three divine selves.

For my part, I can’t see that either argument is sound, much less rationally compelling. In the first argument above, I think we have reason to deny premise S3, that “A perfectly good being must do the uniquely best possible action available to him, whenever such an action is available.” And premise S4 seems to me to be false. It states that “The uniquely best possible action which is available to a solitary divine self is to cause there to be a second divine self.” I deny this because in my view the monotheistic concept of divinity requires existing independently of any other. In monotheistic theologies, divinity, being a god, is supposed to imply ultimacy, being the “furthest back” or most real or most fundamental being, a suitable stopping-point in seeking explanations for the existence of things (Tuggy 2017b). (This is, in part, why many trinitarians in modern times eschew any doctrine of “processions” *if* this means any divine person causing another to exist.) If this is correct, then the “uniquely best action” Swinburne mentions here is not a possible action at all, as it implies a contradiction.

The whole point of Swinburne’s second argument is to stop the rolling boulder of divine-person-proliferation. But it seems to me the boulder hasn’t been

rolled at all. Despite the impressive creativity of his arguments, Swinburne has not given us a reason to think that having the character trait of being perfectly loving or more generally the trait of being absolutely perfect entails the action of engaging in love of another. In a recent public conversation, Swinburne says something in defense of his “Dionysian Principle,” namely that “there is something odd in a good being as it were not producing anything, not producing more goodness, keeping it all to himself” (Tuggy 2018, 43:03–43:22). Indeed, we do find this odd. But so far we have only existed in an environment in which it is crucial that agents do good for the benefit of others. One who squanders opportunities for doing good actions, creating good things, or helping to bring about good events or states of affairs is often letting others down. But we ought not to confuse our context with that of a divine person before creation, existing alone. Such a person may be fully well off and not need anything, and if so, he would not be letting anyone down by not “spreading the love” as defined above. It’s not clear that he would be compelled by his own goodness to do that.

## 6. Layman’s Arguments from Flourishing and from Glory

So far, the prospects for a compelling antiunitarian argument seem dim. The common strategy of starting with the claim that the Christian God must “be perfectly loving” doesn’t work. Either this “being perfectly loving” is a character trait or it is an action. If it’s an action, it’s hard to imagine a reason why divine perfection should require it. If it’s a character trait, it is very plausible that divine perfection requires it, as a facet of moral perfection. But then, it doesn’t seem to imply that God is always or in eternity loving another. Swinburne’s appeal to perfect goodness doesn’t seem to fare any better. But could there be another trait, as I put it above, some *F* such that a unipersonal god can’t have *F*, and a perfect being must have *F*?

Acknowledging the weakness of arguments from God’s “being perfectly loving,” Layman suggests that *F* = flourishing or being well off apart from creation (2016, 154–56). I understand his main argument here to be an indirect proof of the impossibility of a single divine self.

F1. There is only one divine self.

Supposition  
for reductio

F2. Necessarily, any divine self is flourishing / well off.

Premise<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Layman does not state this premise, but I believe that his argument assumes it.

F3. Necessarily, a divine self who is not in relationship with another divine self is not flourishing / well off.	Premise <sup>26</sup>
F4. The divine self is flourishing / well off.	F1, F2
F5. It is not the case that the divine self is flourishing / well off.	F1, F3
F6. But this is impossible.	F4, F5
F6. There is not only one divine self.	F1, F2-F6

It seems to me that a monotheist who thinks that God is perfect should find F2 to be very plausible; part of God's fullness of life, one should think, and part of his independence is his necessary happiness or well-being; it is inconceivable that his life should be ruined or on the whole not worth living.<sup>27</sup> But the real weight-bearing premise here is F3. Why should one agree with F3? Is it plausible that a solitary divine person would suffer from a terrible, happiness-destroying loneliness? Layman argues that,

A divine person is a being with a first-person perspective and one that is perfectly loving. Such a being is capable of giving and receiving the greatest possible love. And it is the very nature of such a being to be generous. It seems to me inconceivable that any such entity could flourish in total isolation [i.e., without being in an interpersonal relationship].  
 . . . a uni-personal God, if generous and loving by nature, would be eternally unfulfilled and frustrated." (154, 156)

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<sup>26</sup> "It seems to me inconceivable that any such entity could flourish in total isolation" (154). "Such a person would have a very significant deficiency and would even be an appropriate object of pity" (155). Lest one try to deny F3 by suggesting that necessarily, the one divine self would create a cosmos with creatures he can relate to, Layman argues that just as a human requires peer-love to flourish (e.g., love of a pet or of a toddler won't be enough), so a divine person would need a peer to flourish (155).

<sup>27</sup> For the idea of independent happiness as a great-making property, see my 2014, 132.

This suggests that the reason F3 is true is that a lone divine self would have strong but frustrated desires, and so would be intensely suffering, so much so that he would fail to be well-off overall.

But this is to assume that a divine person has social needs. It's not true in general that if you're able to do something, then you're not content unless you're doing it. A being who is perfect in goodness, knowledge, and power will be aware of countless wonderful things which he might bring about and enjoy. But if Christians are committed to God's creating freely, to his being able not to create, this entails that he is able to simply take a pass on countless infinities of such created goods. Why would *this* good, the good of having a peer to relate to, be any different?

Despite Layman's assertion that it's "inconceivable" that a lone divine self should flourish, to the contrary, it is easily conceivable: simply imagine a divine person who is perfectly content, not aching for the company of another, while being perfectly alone. Some animals seem to be essentially solitary, and apart from when they need to reproduce, they seem to thrive on their own, without the company of their peers. Other animals, like humans, are social, and can't thrive apart from their fellows. Layman seems to assume that because a divine person is capable of relationship with a peer, any such will be, so to speak, a social animal. But need for the company of others—this is the sort of limitation it is plausible to think that a divine person would not have, just as they don't need food, shelter, clothes, encouragement, touch, or affirmation from another. Nor would a divine person have a natural compulsion to reproduce and pass on his genes.

Unaided reason, then, doesn't support Layman's crucial premise F3 here, and it's hard to imagine any support in Scripture or in traditional theology for the claim that a divine person requires at least one peer-relationship to flourish. In sum, there seems to be no good reason to think F3 is true, and some reason to think F3 is false, and thus, the argument doesn't show us that it's impossible for there to be only one divine person.

But Layman takes another stab at showing the impossibility of a single divine self. This time the *F* which a perfect being must have and which a single divine self can't have is "glory," which is explained as "something at least akin to fame—a kind of recognition, approval, or appreciation" (156).

R1. There is only one divine self.

Supposition for  
reductio

R2. Any divine self is glorious even before creation.<sup>28</sup>

Premise

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<sup>28</sup> Layman takes this to be supported by Jesus's statement in the gospel according to John that he had glory with God the Father "before the world existed (John 17:5)" (157).

R3. Whoever is glorious is so, in part, because of someone else. <sup>29</sup>	Premise
R4. The divine self is glorious even before creation.	R1, R2
R5. It is not the case that the divine self is glorious even before creation.	R1, R3
R6. But this is impossible.	R4, R5
R7. It is false that there is only one divine self.	R1, R2–R6

In support of R3, Layman distinguishes the concept of glory from that of splendor, which presumably is an intrinsic property that supervenes on other divine attributes. He suggests that “the Scriptural concept of *divine* glory is. . . in part social,” so that “the glory of the divine persons is partly conferred, in some way mutually conferred” (157). But if glory is only “in part social,” then the part of it which is *not* conferred by another may still be there even when one is alone. But then, the above argument is invalid; R5 doesn’t follow from R1 and R3, because it could be that the lone divine self is glorious on his own prior to creation, and glorious in part because of at least one other after creation.

Layman’s analysis of the concept of glory is strange, in that “glory” is allowed to be intrinsic *and* relational; let us help out this argument by instead defining glory as a relational quality, one which one can only have because of someone else. That change yields this valid argument below. G5 follows from G1 and G3 because before creation there is, we’re supposing, no one else, and so no one else who could confer glory.

G1. There is only one divine self.	Supposition for reductio
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<sup>29</sup> 157.



- G2. Any divine self is glorious even before creation. Premise
- G3. Whoever is glorious is so because of someone else. Premise
- G4. The divine self is glorious even before creation. G1, G2
- G5. It is not the case that the divine self is glorious even before creation. G1, G3
- G6. But this is impossible. G4, G5
- G7. It is false that there is only one divine self. G1, G2–G6

The weak link here is premise G2; this seems to be something which one would only accept if one already accepted that there were always (or eternally) multiple divine persons. But we're trying to find an argument here which doesn't beg the question.

I think this is why Layman adds a sort of inductive argument from the fourth gospel. There Jesus says that God the Father (at some time or other) glorifies him (John 8:54, 17:5), that God has glorified him (John 13:31–32, 17:24), and that he and the Father have glorified one another (John 13:31–32). The Holy Spirit, though, goes unmentioned. And while it's clear here that Jesus and God are glorifying one another during the earthly ministry of Jesus, it's not clear that these passages actually assume that such mutual glorifying activity was already occurring before creation, as "the glory that [Jesus] had with [God] before the world existed" may well refer to God's eternal plan that Jesus should glorify God with his atoning death, which is the focus of Jesus's "glory" in this book.<sup>30</sup> It's hard to see, then, that all of this amounts to significant support for G2.

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<sup>30</sup> Many commenters observe that Jesus's "glory" in the gospel according to John is primarily his crucifixion (e.g. Bruce 1983, 292–93). This idiom of describing predestined things and events as having always existed in or with God is evidenced in various kinds of Second Temple era Jewish literature. On this see Smith and Tuggy 2014. A possible New Testament example (translations vary here) is Revelation 13:8 (RSV): "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [i.e., "the Beast"], whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Of course, Jesus was not crucified back at the foundation of the world; the idea would be that this

And it's not plausible that a divine person would *need* glory (i.e., affirmation or recognition from another). One would think that the point of such would be so that *non*-divine persons would pay attention to and recognize the greatness of any divine persons there are, or just, that non-divine persons like us should recognize the greatness of God and of his human Son, his Messiah. So it's not clear that there is any reason why any divine person there is must have glory (as defined here), prior to creation, either from reason or from Scripture.

## 7. Conclusion

If Allah, the Jews' Yahweh, and Christian unitarians' one God, the Father Almighty are to be shown as inadequate in comparison to the Trinity, it will have to be on other grounds. Perfect being theology alone seems not to be enough. Trinitarians should let go of their desire for an all-destroying Samson, a simple argument which decisively refutes any unitarian theology by showing that any such is straightforwardly incoherent. As with J.L. Mackie's much-discussed "logical" argument from evil, they are trying to do too much too quickly. Contrary to Mackie, monotheistic religions don't collapse into incoherence by clearly implying both that there is and isn't some quantity and variety of evil. Likewise, it seems that unitarian theologies don't collapse into incoherence, implying that God is both perfect (because they explicitly say so) and yet not perfect (because God lacks some feature a perfect being must have). If it can be shown that unitarian theology is less likely than trinitarian theology, or is even manifestly incoherent, some other argument(s) will have to be made.

But this is just what most trinitarians have always thought, that a doctrine of God as Trinity can only be based on the claims of Christian Scripture and/or later authoritative creeds. Philosophy is not enough; the trinitarian will have to argue with her unitarian, Jewish, or Muslim friend by arguing about the interpretation of mutually accepted Scriptures (unitarian Christian) or by also arguing for the superior authority or reliability of her own Scriptures and/or later traditions as compared to theirs (Jewish, Muslim).<sup>31</sup>

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important event was preordained even back then. As it were transferring a future event back into the past is a vivid way of asserting its longstanding inevitability.

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