Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Reconstitution of Metaphysics

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby certify that the thesis I am submitting is my own original work, except where otherwise indicated. No proper part of this thesis has been submitted, or is currently being submitted, for any degree, diploma, certificate, or other qualification in this University or elsewhere.



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Abstract

This thesis provides a critical examination of Robert Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity, and the ways in which Jenson's development of this doctrine corrects central aspects of contemporary metaphysics. Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity develops from his belief in the significance of the narrative form of Scripture, and the way in which the Christian Gospel addresses human religiosity. In order to explain this development, the thesis addresses some topics not addressed in scholarship on Jenson, especially his understanding of theological language and his approach to religious epistemology. It also describes the ways in which Jenson's theological project coheres with the task and method of contemporary metaphysics.

After describing Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity, the thesis moves on to address substantial critiques from George Hunsinger, David Bentley Hart, and Oliver Crisp. Hunsinger critiques Jenson on the ground of orthodoxy. He claims that Jenson's views commit him to a number of heresies, both ancient and modern. David Bentley Hart also critiques Jenson for his perceived unorthodoxy, arguing that Jenson makes the world necessary for God, and makes God responsible for evil in a way which is at odds with the Christian faith. Oliver Crisp critiques Jenson's metaphysics on the grounds of coherence. The thesis provides responses to all of these critiques.

Following these critiques, the thesis describes the ways in which Jenson's Trinitarianism reconstitutes certain central aspects of contemporary metaphysics,

especially in the philosophy of time and fundamental metaphysics. Jenson argues on Trinitarian grounds that Christians ought to hold something akin to a moving spotlight view of time. He also argues that Christians ought to deny the category of substance and hold 'event' to be the primary category of metaphysics.

The thesis also highlights several weaknesses in Jenson's thought: he has no clear epistemology, his response to the problem of evil is inconsistent, and his work on 'being' is misdirected. None of these weaknesses are found to be fatal to Jenson's project, and the thesis offers suggestions for how each in turn could be corrected.

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Introduction

David Bentley Hart remarks that, when asked 'if there was any modern American theologian whose thinking I thought especially fascinating,' and 'if there was any American theologian with whose thought I myself found it profitable to struggle,' (Hart 2005) the answer to both questions was Robert Jenson, whom Hart calls '"our" systematic theologian.' (*ibid.*) Hart goes on to note that, while Jenson is not exactly obscure, 'his thought is too little taught and too little studied; too few dissertations engage his ideas; not enough attention is paid to his contributions to modern dogmatics and too little pride is taken in the dignity his work lends to American theology.' (*ibid.*) With this thesis, I hope to do my part to remedy these ills.[1]

Robert Jenson's theological reflection began, in his own words, 'in college, where it first occurred to me that my inherited religion claimed to be true - and therefore might be false.' (Jenson 2007, 46) Several years later, after seminary study and doctoral work in Germany with Peter Brunner and Karl Barth, Jenson was invited to spend three years, from 1966-1968, as Dean and Tutor of Lutheran Students at Mansfield College, Oxford. (Braaten 2000, 6; cf. Jenson 2007) According to Jenson's life-long friend and collaborator, Carl Braaten, Jenson spent his years at Oxford immersing himself in insights of linguistic philosophers then in vogue at Oxford, especially Ludwig Wittgenstein, John Wisdom, and J.L. Austin; using them 'to explore the meaning of the statements of Christian eschatology, which were being

[1] There have, of course, been other theses focusing on Jenson's work. (e. g. Ive 1995; Gatewood 2005; Gray 2006; Curtis 2007)

newly affirmed by the theologians of hope.' (*ibid.*, 6) Interestingly, Jenson himself claims not to have been very familiar with the work of the 'theologians of hope' at this time.[2] Jenson says that his eschatological focus stems from disappointment with Bultmann, whose work he had come to know at seminary and then later in Heidelberg. The decisive passage is thus:

> Faith, said Bultmann, is "openness to the future." Good, but what is the content of that future? The Bultmannian answer had to be "openness to the future." One day this struck me as absurd, which left me with the abiding question: "What *describable* future does the Gospel open? That is the root of my later labelling as a "theologian of hope"; though in fact I knew nothing about the movement until the book that got me the label - *Story and Promise* - was almost finished. (2007, 48)

As a result of research during his Oxford years, in 1969 Jenson published two books, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* and *God after God*, which contained most of the themes and ideas which would shape the future of his theological career. Even so, neither has received much attention, and *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* as been especially poorly served.[3]

After publishing *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, Jenson's understanding of language matured through association with George Lindbeck in Lutheran-Catholic ecumenical dialogue. His involvement in ecumenical dialogue was important to the development of his theology throughout his career. Out of these efforts came his book *Unbaptized God*. (Jenson 2007, 52-53) While it is possible to trace development in Jenson's ideas through the 1960s, from 1969 on, with some small changes, his primary perspective in theology has remained constant. This is not to say that his thought has

[2] The term typically refers to those theologians who adopted insights of the communist philosopher Ernst Bloch; paradigmatically, Moltmann 1965. For an excellent overview of the subject, see Braatan 1967. For an alternate view of the roots of the 'Theology of Hope', see Winn and Heltzel 2009.
[3] One work that does offer some reflection on Jenson here is Murphy 2007, 16-21.

not developed since 1969. Rather, his development is found in the sources he engages. Especially useful is A. N. Williams, who elegantly traces Jenson's changing dialogue partners. (2000)

Aside from his doctoral supervisor, Peter Brunner, there have been four people of particular importance to Jenson's thought. The first is Wolfhart Pannenberg. Early in his doctorate, Jenson attended a series of lectures Pannenberg delivered as a *privatdozent*. (Jenson 2007, 49) These lectures led to life long friendship and intellectual exchange between the two.[4] The second is Karl Barth. While Jenson was officially supervised by Peter Brunner, he wrote his doctoral thesis on Barth's theology, and spent time in Basel being informally supervised by Barth himself.[5] (*ibid.,* 49) While Jenson expends more focus on Barth's thought in his earlier work, he notes influence from Barth throughout. Nevertheless, Jenson does not consider himself 'Barthian', but rather, someone who has benefited from engaging, and disagreeing with, Barth's work. (*ibid.*, 50) Third is Jenson's life-long collaborator, Carl Braaten. Jenson and Braaten met early in their careers, and have since collaborated on and co-authored a number of works. (*ibid.*, 48) While this friendship has been important for Jenson, as the focus of this thesis is Jenson himself, I have taken the decision not to engage with co-authored works. This decision is taken pragmatically in part. Jenson has a great many works of which he is the sole author, and so some method of limiting the number of primary sources is useful. Jenson's sole authored works, especially his *The Triune Identity* and his *Systematic Theology* have had greater impact on the wider world of contemporary theology. Finally, Jenson notes the influence his wife,

[4] For a doctoral thesis focusing on Jenson and Pannenberg on time, see Gray 2006.
[5] For a doctoral thesis focusing on Jenson and Barth on time, see Curtis 2007.

Blanche. Blanche Jenson was not only instrumental in introducing Robert Jenson to Braaten, according to Jenson, she persuaded him to begin studying Jonathan Edwards, who became important for his work. Robert Jenson credits Blanche with a great deal of the thought and research that went into *Unbaptized God*, and says that it was only at her insistence that she was not listed as co-author. (*ibid.*, 48-49, 52; Jenson 1992, v)

The purpose of this thesis is to examine, critique, and at times suggest improvements to, Robert Jenson's Trinitarian reconstitution of metaphysics. As such, we are interested in his positive and constructive doctrine of the Trinity. This includes those claims from the past that he wants to maintain, and as well as his own constructive additions. His polemics, and his historical claims, are less important. As such, we will focus primarily on the vision of the Trinity that Jenson attempts to put across to his readers. At times, as we have already seen, it will be useful to explore his polemical and historical claims; however, we only do this to further the goal of understanding his Trinitarian thought.

This thesis is split into four parts, spread over ten chapters. Chapters one through four provide important context within Jenson's theology for understanding his Trinitarian and metaphysical developments. Chapters five and six describe Jenson's Trinitarian doctrine and introduce some notes of critique, while chapters seven and eight are devoted to answering the most serious critiques of Jenson's Trinitarianism: that Jenson's God is too closely tied to His creation, and that Jenson's understanding of God brings about an all-but-unanswerable problem of evil. The final two chapters are devoted to tracing the ways in which Jenson believes his Trinitarian doctrine not only refines the metaphysical discussions ongoing in Christian theology, but contributes to

and comments upon metaphysics more broadly, especially with regard to contemporary philosophy of time, and fundamental ontology.

Often, the chapters proceed by describing Jenson's view on a subject, then finding either that this view can be clarified and strengthened by appeal to contemporary philosophy, or that it has been subjected to critique that can be answered most directly by appeal to contemporary philosophy. As such, this thesis aims to explain Jenson's view on the doctrine of the Trinity and how that impacts our understanding of the most general features of the world, but frequently, it also provides a corrective or clarification to Jenson's thought.

The first chapter is concerned with Jenson's broad claim that Christian theology is metaphysics. This claim is approached by describing the task of metaphysics as it is broadly understood within contemporary analytic, or Anglo-American, metaphysics. It then describes Jenson's own approach to theology and finds that there are several areas of overlap. In particular, both are realist exercises that describe the most basic features of reality and, in both, reflection on language plays a central role. There are two areas of potential dissimilarity between Jenson's theology and contemporary metaphysics. First, in much contemporary metaphysics, revealed claims are not employed in metaphysical argument. In Jenson's theology, obviously, they are. Second, part of the definition of metaphysics might be that its purpose is to understand the most fundamental features of reality. In Jenson's theology, the purpose is to understand the Gospel. That the fundamental features of reality are illuminated by this attempt is not the point, but rather a nice side benefit. Nevertheless, contemporary metaphysics is broad enough in its definition that

Jenson's claim that his theology is metaphysics is, in general terms plausible. Chapter one has two goals. It introduces some aspects of Jenson's method, and evaluates Jenson's claim to be doing metaphysics in broad terms. If there is no recognizable similarity between what Jenson does, and what philosophers do, then it is hard to see how Jenson can claim he is making metaphysical claims. Jenson himself denies boundaries between disciplines. In doing so, he opens himself up to critique from philosophy, just as much as he enables himself to critique philosophy on the grounds of theological claims. Chapter one explores how this works in broad terms.

The second chapter investigates Jenson's understanding of theological language, primarily focusing on his book, *Knowledge of Things Hoped For*. Jenson's understanding of theological language has drawn scant attention. As such, in addition to playing a role in the development of this thesis, this chapter can serve individually to address a lacuna in scholarship on Jenson. Jenson begins his examination of theological language with the observation that Christian speech has become meaningless to those not engaged with it, and that, for the proclamation of the Gospel to proceed, Christianity must be meaningful, not just to initiates, but to non-Christians. Jenson sets out to construct a theory of theological language by evaluating the approaches of Origen and Thomas Aquinas. He concludes this evaluation with a list of features of the two views that are beneficial. He also critiques both approaches for seemingly capitulating to the idea that there is an appropriate incomprehensibility to Christian speech. He uses these positive and negative criteria to develop his own theory of theological language in dialogue with mid twentieth-century analytic philosophy of language. Interestingly, his own approach draws upon Austin's work on speech-acts, as well as John Hick's use of verificationism. The chapter notes the

features of Jenson's own view that grow into important and central features of his more mature work. Among these are his forthright criticism of appeals to mystery in theology, and his views of natural theology and general revelation, developed in chapter four.

Chapter three addresses another lacuna in scholarship on Jenson: his theological epistemology. Chapter three is concerned with epistemology in part because in any work of metaphysics it is helpful to have some comment on epistemology, and in part because there is a gap in work on Jenson. Nevertheless, to focus on Jenson's theological epistemology is odd, not least because of his apparent disavowal of epistemological justification for Christian belief. This disavowal is only apparent however, so long as the epistemology offered is grounded not in general phenomena or natural theology, but rather in the revelation of God. The chapter describes Jenson's work on the knowledge of God, and then proposes that Jenson's work, if not Jenson himself, could be amenable to certain kinds of contemporary epistemology, especially 'phenomenal conservatism'. The chapter then demonstrates this amenability by describing a few areas of Jenson's published works in which features of phenomenal conservatism seems to be implicit.

Chapter four begins the narration of a story: the emergence of Christianity into the Hellenistic world, which begins with both Hebrew and Greek thought, and moves toward Cappadocian Trinitarianism through many dangers, toils, and snares. Chapter four focuses on the negative side of this: humanity's religious quest. The chapter describes Jenson's idiosyncratic understanding of religion, then follows Jenson's account of pre-Christian and Christian-era Hellenistic religion. Noting that many of

the figures which Jenson claims have a direct effect on Christian thought are not contemporary with the early centuries of Christianity, the chapter attempts to fill in the blanks of Jenson's historical scholarship using work by Wolfhart Pannenberg. It finds that Jenson's claims are still reasonably plausible. The chapter then moves on to describe Jenson's critique of natural theology, which grows out of his understanding of religion generally and Hellenistic religion specifically. Yet it also notes that Jenson does have space for general revelation, and argues that this is not a contradiction in terms, given the way Jenson understands natural theology and general revelation. The unifying theme for chapter four is the polemical context in which Jenson believes the doctrine of the Trinity develops.

Chapter five begins an account of Jenson's Trinitarian doctrine. It also continues the narrative begun in chapter four. It is split into two parts. The first part is concerned with 'primary Trinitarianism'. Primary Trinitarianism is the Trinitarianism Jenson finds in the Christian Scriptures. Trinitarianism in this use, refers to the personages of God described in the Bible whose multiplicity and agency within the history of Israel give rise to Trinitarian thought. The second section describes Jenson's 'secondary' Trinitarianism; that is, the development of the doctrine of the Trinity proper in the early church, which in Jenson's account is driven by a clash between God as described in the Scriptures, and the atemporal divinity of Greek philosophical religion.

Chapter six focuses on other aspects of Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity: his 'patrological' and 'pneumatological problems. The first is Jenson's account of what it means to refer to God as a person, and develops understanding of Jenson's Trinitarian innovations. The second is concerned with perhaps the most prominent innovation of

Jenson's Trinitarian doctrine: drawing eschatology into the doctrine of the Trinity by assigning the Holy Spirit status as divine 'future'. This chapter introduces Jenson's Trinitarian naming, whereby the Father is 'Past', the Son is 'Present', and the Spirit is 'Future' within God. The chapter concludes by describing some of George Hunsinger's critiques of Jenson's *Systematic Theology*, and attempts to formulate cogent response employing Jenson's own thought.

Chapter seven begins the critique of Jenson's Trinitarianism proper. That is, it asks whether it is consistent for Jenson to claim that God's identity is constituted in the history of the creation, while also claiming that the triune God exists necessarily, and that the creation exists contingently. The chapter resolves this apparent paradox by arguing that the same event can happen in different ways, just as the same object can take on different properties. For Jenson, God is an event, and so God might exist necessarily as the event he is, and yet have occurred differently. This involves a slight modification to Jenson's Trinitarian claims, in that the persons of the Trinity must have adventitious, or contingent, properties, even if their relations to one another are necessary, and occur within the history of creation.

Chapter eight develops the problem of evil as a critique of Jenson's theology, and then looks for resources within and without Jenson's theology to defend him. Within Jenson's theology we find Jenson's own brand of Jonathan Edwards-inspired supralapsarianism, and then show how this can be turned into a theodicy using the work of Peter van Inwagen.

Chapters nine and ten focus on the metaphysical implications of Jenson's Trinitarian doctrine. Chapter nine is concerned with time, both God's time, and created time. On the former, chapter nine attempts to describe Jenson's understanding of divine eternity by responding to the accusation of incoherence leveled by Oliver Crisp. This is aided by the use of Brian Leftow's 'quasi-temporal eternity', which helps to show how God could have some features typically associated with atemporality, and some with temporality. It also offers Jenson's definition of analogy and shows that Jenson meets his own criteria for being able to apply the label 'temporal' to God. The chapter then moves to consider an interesting and potentially unique feature of Jenson's work. He argues for specific positions within contemporary philosophy of time based solely upon his Trinitarian concerns.

Chapter ten describes Jenson's fundamental ontology. It begins by summarizing Jenson's account of Aristotle's account of being. It then describes Aristotle's science of being *qua* being in the work of Christopher Shields. It finds that Jenson's understanding of Aristotle is probably inaccurate, and yet, this shows that while Jenson does not give an account of being, he does give a fundamental ontology, in the sense that he offers a critique of substance. He shows why Christians ought not admit substance as the fundamental category of ontology, and instead argues that God is an event, and that the fundamental category of created reality is likewise, 'event.'

In this thesis I have focused on Jenson's own doctrine and critiques of his own views, rather than his place in the wider development of twentieth and twenty-first century theology. However, I would be remiss if I did not briefly mention two very fine

accounts of Jenson's place. Fred Sanders places Jenson alongside Hegel, Moltmann, and Pannenberg, as one for whom history has come to hold a central place in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. (Sanders 2012, 23-30) Yet, while Sanders finds that 'Jenson has much in common with Moltmann and Pannenberg…his emphasis on the narrative surface of revelation sets him apart…he is installing story as the central ontological category.' (*ibid.*, 30)

Stephen Holmes remarks that

> Jenson's greatness – and in my estimation he is one of the greatest theologians working today – is that he sees with astonishing clarity just how thoroughly classical theology will have to be revised if 'Rahner's rule' is to be taken seriously, and does not shrink from this revision, because he believes that to speak faithfully of the Gospel, this revision is necessary. (Holmes 2012, 24)

Holmes names Jenson as the one who has most consistently followed through on the ideas of the contemporary Trinitarian movement, including

> a focus on the Gospel narratives, largely to the exclusion of other biblical data, particularly of the Old Testament; an unshakeable belief in the full personality, in the modern sense, of the three divine persons; a commitment to univocal language applying to the divine; and a willingness to entangle God's life with the history of the world. (*ibid.*, 199).

Nevertheless, Holmes' own evaluation of this movement is largely negative, concluding his account of more traditional Trinitarianism with a brief but trenchant remark: 'We called what we were doing a 'Trinitarian revival'; future historians might want to ask us why.' (*ibid.*, 200)

This introduction concludes by introducing Jenson's account of doctrine generally, and how this applies to the doctrine of the Trinity. Briefly, theology advances by asking this question: 'Given what we *have* heard and seen as the Gospel, what *shall* we say and enact, that the Gospel may be spoken.' (Jenson 1997, 21) The Gospel is 'the

news the apostles brought,' (*ibid.* 23) that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. This question admits of a distinction between historical and systematic theology, which Jenson allows only on the condition that the line not be drawn too heavily. Historical theology looks at the theological work of the past and asks where in it the Gospel is evident; systematic theology looks toward the future and evaluates what we must say such that the Gospel continues to be evident in the church. Jenson makes a further distinction between systematic and dogmatic theology. Theology, he says 'is the church's continuing communal effort to think through her mission of speaking the Gospel.' (*ibid.*, 22) Dogmas, specifically, 'are the irreversible communal decisions made so far in that effort.' (*ibid.*) Pedagogically, dogmatic theology attempts to explain the dogmas of the church, while systematic theology is 'more freely concerned with the truth of the Gospel, whether dogmatically defined or not.' (*ibid.*) It should be clear from this that the claims made in systematic theology will be broader than those of dogmatic theology, but the decisions made about those claims will be held more tentatively. There is nothing tentative about properly dogmatic theology, and Jenson says that 'all theology is subject to the authority of dogma and may in turn contribute to dogma yet to be formulated. The theologian who understands his or her work knows that to proceed in contradiction or indifference to dogma is to turn from theology to another practice.' (*ibid.*)

Doctrine, by reasonable conjecture, is that upon which systematic theology operates. For Jenson, it includes both historical discussion and development of theological claims, as well as the claims themselves. The claims of doctrine can become dogma by decree of the church. As such, all dogmas are doctrinal claims, but not all doctrinal

claims are dogmas, nor is doctrine exhausted by what Jenson calls 'theologoumena'. Having made these distinctions, we can turn to the Trinitarian doctrine specifically.

The doctrine of the Trinity, says Jenson, 'is less a homogenous body of propositions than it is a task: that of the church's continuing effort to recognize and adhere to the biblical God's hypostatic being.' (*ibid.,* 90) What Jenson means by 'the biblical God's hypostatic being' will be addressed in due course. For now, note that in line with what has been said about doctrine, the doctrine of the Trinity is not simply a body of propositions or set of claims. It undoubtedly contains such doctrinal claims, some of them have ascended to dogmas, but it is not exhausted by such as these.

Jenson's own account of the Trinity can be divided roughly into three kinds of claims: historical, polemical, and constructive. The historical claims give an account of what has been said about the Trinity, and why it was said. Polemical claims are those that argue against a way of understanding God, and in favour of an alternate way. The constructive claims are those for which Jenson would like to argue, which he does not think have been made explicitly in the tradition.

Having made this three-fold distinction, it is important to keep in mind that there is no rigid line of demarcation between them. In general, they related to one another in the following way. The doctrine of the Trinity has from its inception been a polemic. For Jenson, it is a polemic carried out through the history of the church against an alien vision of God, not compatible with the testimony of Scripture and more importantly, the Gospel of the church. The history Jenson recounts is designed to show that his polemic is identical to the polemic of the orthodox traditions of the

church, found in the church Fathers. Put another way, Jenson recounts the history of Trinitarian controversy and finds present in it a polemic that he believes it is vital to remember and continue. His own constructive claims then are intended as either corrections or extensions of the historic and orthodox traditional Trinitarian polemic.

1 Robert Jenson and Contemporary Metaphysics[1]

The first three chapters of this thesis will focus on topics that are important both for understanding Jenson's approach to theology, and for the purpose of this thesis: understanding, evaluating, and at times correcting, Jenson's Trinitarian reconstitution of metaphysics. This chapter concerns Jenson's claim that his theology is metaphysics. The second chapter will describe Jenson's approach to theological language, while the third chapter will describe a way of approaching epistemology that would support Jenson's theological concerns. The goal of this chapter is to evaluate, on a general level, Jenson's claim that his theology is concerned with metaphysics. In order to achieve this aim, the chapter pursues three related tasks. The first is to develop a working understanding of the project of metaphysics, and then to see how Jenson might fit into this project. The second is to describe, in broad terms, the way that metaphysics is conducted, and then to give an example of a narrower contemporary method employed by some metaphysicians. I will then ask how Jenson fits into this broad method, and describe possible convergence between this narrower method of metaphysics and Jenson's own work. The third element will be to describe the sources, or 'data', employed in contemporary metaphysics, and again, to see how Jenson can relate to this.

Jenson has often claimed that theology is, and ought to be, a form of metaphysics (Jenson 2014a); this despite the fact that he attributes certain central systematic

[1] An earlier version of this chapter appeared in the *Journal of Analytic Theology*. (Crocker 2016)

(Jenson 2010) and ecumenical (Jenson 1992) difficulties to metaphysics adopted by large parts of the Christian tradition.[2] Christian theology, he thinks, has suffered from an inadequate digestion of the thought of classical antiquity: we have a peculiarly Greek dyspepsia. Jenson's first response to this problem aped that of many other theologians. He simply declared that theology ought to avoid metaphysics altogether. (Jenson 2014a) However, he soon realized that metaphysics is not coextensive with that style of thinking which found its culmination in post-Kantian continental idealism (Jenson 2007), and, with a broadened conception of metaphysics, came to the position he has argued from circa 1969 to the present. That is, as above, that Christian theology is, and ought to be, a form of metaphysics.

That theology ought to lay claim to the term 'metaphysics', means that, when theologians are working well, what they produce must bear at least some similarity to what metaphysicians produce. Otherwise, the use of the term is otiose. Thus, while Jenson has problems with some of the forms that metaphysics has taken historically, in general he ought to consider what metaphysicians produce to be useful and licit for theologians.

The aim of this chapter is modest. I hope to show that Jenson's theological project does fit within a broad conception of metaphysics, and that certain features of his method are similar to methods employed by contemporary metaphysicians. That is, I aim to

[2] Recent theological works discussing theology's status as, or relation to, metaphysics include Milbank 1995, Hart 2004, Westphal 2007, Hector 2011. Compare these to "Proclamation without Metaphysics," Jenson 2014a, 4-17. Recent works incorporating contemporary analytic philosophy in theological reflection include Crisp, Rea, et al. 2011, and Hasker 2017.

provide support for his contention that his theology *is* metaphysics according to standards drawn from contemporary metaphysics.

One final qualification: this chapter contextualizes Jenson's thought against so-called 'analytic', that is, Anglo-American (with some Australian) metaphysics. This is appropriate because it was during Jenson's engagement with analytic philosophy in Oxford that his views on theology and metaphysics were forged. (Jenson 2007) However, debates on method in analytic metaphysics will be obscure to many theologians. As a result, for the sake of both length and expediency, my use of contemporary work in analytic metaphysics in this chapter will be rough and loose. I am looking for claims that are broadly true, and positions that fit, even if awkwardly. I will not be as kind to the detail of what I survey as many analytic metaphysicians would, quite rightly, like and expect.

I Jenson's Theological Method

Jenson sets out his methodological presuppositions reasonably clearly at the beginning of volume 1 of his *Systematic Theology*. Among these are the nature and role of the church, the sources of theology, the proper object of theology, and many other matters of importance. For our purposes, we will focus on his vision of theology as a second order, grammatical discourse, which reflects on the proclamation of the church found in both evangelism and worship.

Jenson claims that we ought not think that prolegomena to theology 'must enable the enterprise, that the axioms and warrants needed to set specifically theological cognition in motion must be antecedently established.' (Jenson 1997, 3) This is, *in nuce*, Jenson's denial of natural theology. No philosophical system ought to be used to set a foundation for theological work.

Instead, theology will begin with Gospel, specifically, that God raised Jesus from the dead, and the implications of that historical event. Theology, Jenson claims, occurs at the transition from reception of this news to proclamation, with the goal of discerning what its meaning and implications are. As such, the form of a theological proposition, or as Jenson says, a 'theologoumenon', is always, 'to be saying the Gospel, let us say 'F' (rather than 'G').' Where 'F' is 'a *sample* of right Gospel,' or 'a metalinguistic *stipulation about* the Gospel.' (1997, 17) This does not mean that theology has finished with any particular set of such claims, or that it will finish at any point. Theology is an ongoing consultation, a debate that continues when confronted with questions both new and old.

If this is really the form theology ought to take, then theology is a second-order discourse: it is grammatical. Grammatical discourse is discussion of norms for speech. It can concern both rules about how words related to one another; that is, how to form well-formed formulae. It can also concern how words relate to extra-linguistic entities; that is, how words ought to be related to things, events, or situations. In all of this section of the *Systematic Theology*, George Lindbeck, with whom Jenson has worked in ecumenical efforts, is a readily apparent influence. Jenson says that, 'The first-order discourse of faith is, on the one hand, proclamation and, on the other hand, prayer

and praise; we have described theology as hermeneutic reflection *about* this believing discourse.' (1997, 18) This point is not new of course; all creedal and conciliar statements work like this. (Crisp 2013)

Thus far, this brief summary follows Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic account of doctrine reasonably closely. (Lindbeck 1984, 79-83) This setup may itself be a joke that Jenson is playing on the reader. He observes that such propositions do not in fact appear merely to be grammatical rules. When the Creed has it that 'Christ is very God and very Man in one *hypostasis*', Jenson says that it 'seems to say something not just about language but also about an extralinguistic entity, the person Jesus Christ.' (1997, 18) This is how the framers would have taken it. Indeed, 'the drafters and promulgaters of this doctrine would certainly have denied that it could accomplish its grammatical task except just as it has this descriptive force.' (*ibid.*) To put this more forcefully, Jenson says that theological propositions have the 'appearance of regulating language by stating extralinguistic fact.' (*ibid.*, 19)

For Jenson, there is a convenient parallel from the world of grammar, properly speaking: 'if Christian theology is grammar, then it is *prescriptive* grammar. Theology does not necessarily map the actual practice of the Christianese-speaking community at any time.' (1997, 21) Thus does Jenson turn Lindbeck's model on its head, neatly fitting it into what Lindbeck would call the propositional model of doctrine. (Lindbeck 1984, 63-69) If not from reflection on actual practice, how can Jenson justify prescriptivism of this kind? Such prescriptivism can only be justified by revelation in the context of the church. Alluding to an essay on 'hegemonic discourse' he published in the nineties, Jenson says that 'we are able to do this because we do

indeed overhear how our King speaks; we are in one community with the discourse 'of God and his saints.'' (Jenson 1997, 20; cf. Jenson 1994)

For Jenson, such linguistic prescriptivism can mean only one thing: theology proper is, has always been, and must be metaphysics. What does he mean by metaphysics? 'It claims to know elements of reality that are not directly available to the empirical sciences or their predecessor modes of cognition, but that yet must be known – if only subliminally – if such lower-level cognitive enterprises are to flourish.' (Jenson 1997, 20) This is a robust description of a realist metaphysics. Further, for Jenson, 'theology…claims to know the one God of all and so to know the one decisive fact about all things, so that theology must be either a universal or founding discipline or a delusion.' (*ibid.*) This gives us, in brief, some understanding of Jenson's theology, and why theology and metaphysics are coextensive disciplines. Our task next will be to give a brief account of metaphysics as understood in the contemporary Anglo-American tradition, before looking at some more specific aspects of method.

II What is Metaphysics?

Peter van Inwagen describes metaphysics as 'the study of ultimate reality.' (van Inwagen 2009, 1; cf. Lowe 2001, 2) We might then ask, how exactly does one go about studying 'ultimate reality'? Michael Loux explains that the aim of metaphysics as he sees it is to 'characterize the nature of reality, to say how things are.' (2006, 11) For Loux, category theory is especially appropriate for general metaphysics; indeed, contemporary metaphysics *is* category theory. What does he mean by category

theory? There are two ways of understanding it, roughly termed, Kantian and Aristotelian. For the Kantian, the task is to 'identify the most general concepts at work in our representation of the world, the relationships that obtain among these concepts, and the presuppositions of their objective employment.' (*ibid.*, 7) For the Aristotelian, the task of metaphysics includes the categorical delineation of reality, rather than mere concepts. For our investigation of Jenson, the Aristotelian approach will prove most useful.

How does the metaphysician identify the most general categories with which she works? The method is, in brief, to ask of something 'what is it?' Once that is answered, ask again, 'what is that?' and so on until one comes to the answer 'a being' or 'something which exists.' The most general category is the penultimate answer. This, Loux admits, does not seem like a useful or interesting discipline, and it is hard to understand how disagreements arise if this exercise of extended stamp collecting and cataloguing is the extent of metaphysics.

In order to ask 'what is it?', we must first have a set of objects. The question becomes 'what is there?' In contemporary metaphysics, this has become the foundational question of ontology (Quine 1948). As it happens, it is also a very difficult and controversial question, and it explains the interest of metaphysics as category theory: 'philosophers who disagree about categories disagree about what objects there are.' (Loux 2006, 15) That is, they disagree over ontology. To quote at length, in a metaphysical dispute:

> there is a body of prephilosophical facts that function as data for the dispute. One party to the dispute insists that to explain the relevant prephilosophical facts, we must answer the existential question affirmatively. The other party

> claims that there is something philosophically problematic in the admission of entities of the relevant sort into our ontology, and argues that we can account for the prephilosophical facts without doing so. (*ibid.*, 16-17)

There are several important aspects to note in this description of metaphysical activity. First, there is a sense in which this is quite conservative. The constant appeal is to explanation of prephilosophical facts. These need not be facts from everyday experience however: they could be facts coming from the sciences, physics, biology, chemistry and so on. These facts might also include political or religious claims, as we will see. However, it is important to note that the kinds of claims that are to be admitted into metaphysical argumentation, and the way one decides which to admit, are contentious. Second, this kind of philosophy is conversational. Third, what metaphysics does is account for prephilosophical facts in a consistent way.

In addition to working out the categories native to an ontology, metaphysicians dispute the relationships between categories. Two philosophers might agree on the ontological status of some object, but disagree on whether its type reduces to some more fundamental type. The question here is whether the category into which some existent object fits is primitive, or basic. This is an important part of metaphysics, as Loux says, 'to provide a complete metaphysical theory is to provide a complete catalogue of the categories under which things fall and to identify the sorts of relations that obtain among those categories.' (Loux 2006, 18)

A. W. Moore offers a similar account of the task of metaphysics, although it is distinct enough to be worth mentioning. Part of the reason that Moore's task is different is that, rather than introducing the subject area of metaphysics as is Loux, or offering a

brief metaphysical system, as is van Inwagen, Moore is engaged in historical philosophy in his work, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*. His definition needs to be broad enough to encompass those writers central to the development of the discipline, rather than simply delineating what goes on under the name of metaphysics today.

Moore says that 'Metaphysics is the most general attempt to make sense of things.' (2012, 1) This is a working definition, formulated explicitly for his purpose in writing a history of metaphysics. It is also a vague definition. This allows him to discuss many diverse things that go under the name 'metaphysics'. Moreover, it is by no mean obvious that a vague definition for 'metaphysics' in a general sense is a bad thing. In any case, Moore's definition requires explanation.

By 'most general', Moore intends those concepts with which metaphysics is primarily concerned. That is, concepts under which a great many other concepts fall, and which make up features of our thinking about any subject. He uses it to describe these concepts because he does not want to assume anything about such concepts being analytic, synthetic, *a priori*, or *a posteriori*, the quartet originating with Kant that has so often been used to define the business of metaphysics. He also wants to make use of the 'superlative' element of the expression 'most general'. For instance, for the positivist who sees no use for non-empirical theorizing, metaphysics might simply coincide with the most basic physics, whether cosmological or quantum.

Moore calls metaphysics an 'attempt', in part because he does not want to assume that it is a science, productive of knowledge. He also uses the term because it ensures the possibility of metaphysics. An attempt is easier to make than a successful attempt.

Finally, metaphysics aims at making sense of things. Both the terms 'sense' and 'things' are intentionally vague. To make sense might mean to find 'something worth living for, perhaps even finding the meaning of life, and on the other hand discovering how things work.' (2012, 5) Moore does not want to decide between these aspects in his definition. That metaphysics is directed toward 'things' helps it to hold onto some object, however vague. Metaphysics is not like pure mathematics. 'Things' also serves a useful purpose in relation to 'make sense of', as 'making sense *of* something is a matter of rendering intelligible, with all the associations of productivity that has.' (*ibid.*, 6)

Given these various broad definitions of metaphysics, does Jenson's theology count? The product of Jenson's theology does not count as metaphysics under Moore's broad definition. Why is this? For Moore, metaphysics is the most general attempt to make sense of things. For Jenson, theology is primarily a practical science directed towards maintaining the cogency of the activity of the church. A part of this activity is speculative engagement with the events of the Gospel, which events are somehow identical with God. Even here, however, the intention is not to make general sense of things. Rather, because God is the Creator of all, if we focus on God, things get made sense of inevitably as a result. To see this explicitly, it is worth quoting him at length:

> You try to think your way through the Gospel, letting the metaphysical chips fall where they may. In the process however, they make a heap. They amount to something. They add up to something like a Christian philosophy. It won't

> be because you started out to make a Christian philosophy either. It will be because you started out trying to understand the Gospel. (Jenson 2014b)

Interestingly then, for Moore's definition, it is Jenson's intention, rather than the kind of system he produces, which stops him from being a metaphysician. In contrast to Moore, undeniably, under Loux's definition, Jenson produces metaphysics of a kind. He delineates categories, and makes straightforward ontological claims about what exists, and how categories of existent things relate to one another. (e.g. Jenson 1997, 207-223) Jenson can be considered as a metaphysician under Loux's definition because Loux does not build intention into his definition. Which method of definition is more appropriate is not our concern here. We need only point out that under some broad, plausible definition of metaphysics Jenson's work counts, while under another, it does not. To further enquire into Jenson's relation to contemporary metaphysics, it will be worthwhile to consider his relationship to some recent trends in method.

III From Truths to Ontology

We have seen that contemporary metaphysics takes prephilosophical facts as data. For one strand of the current debate, this data takes the form of descriptive sentences, or more precisely, propositions. The method consists of the way one approaches these sentences, and the sentences that are permitted for philosophizing.[3] There are a number of philosophers who can be grouped together in a broad sense, although the details of their views differ considerably. Here I try to demonstrate the similarity by

[3] For a defense of 'operating on the semantical plane' in metaphysics, see Quine 1948.

focusing on two major figures, which in different ways move from a set of propositions to the description of an ontology.

a Quine and quantification

In his famous essay, 'On What There Is?', W.V.O Quine remarked that the question of ontology can be summed up in the question 'what is there? (1948, 21) This question can be answered even more simply: 'everything.' As we have seen above however, 'there remains room for disagreement over cases.' (*ibid.*) The remainder of Quine's essay is taken up with a discussion of how this disagreement can be formulated. For our purposes, the key section is short:

> We commit ourselves to an ontology containing numbers when we say there are prime numbers between 1000 and 1010; we commit ourselves to an ontology containing centaurs when we say there are centaurs; and we commit ourselves to an ontology containing Pegasus when we say Pegasus is. (*ibid.*, 28)

The Quinean method for answering the ontological question is commonly understood to be this: one takes the simplest form of the set of the most fundamental propositions one would want to maintain. These sentences are then translated into a 'quantifier-variable' idiom.[4] Whatever one quantifies over using the existential quantifier is a constituent of the ontology of the one who maintains that set of propositions.

There are two caveats we need to be careful to bear in mind if we are to understand Quine correctly. First, his method is a tool for discussing the possible ontological commitments of a theory, not for establishing any particular ontology or ontological

[4] For a helpful introduction to quantifier variable idiom, see van Inwagen 1998, 237-241.

system beyond doubt. Because this method operates as reflection on a theory or a set of given propositions, any ontology that results will necessarily reflect the propositions given. Second, this method is not mechanical. Sentences can often be translated into the quantifier-variable idiom in a number of ways, and depending on the translation, the resulting ontology can vary. This would be a significant weakness if the method were aimed at finishing in a finally conclusive ontology. However, as a tool for discussion between parties who disagree, it serves as an aid in the clarification of precisely where disagreements lie, and it fulfills this function admirably. (van Inwagen 1998)

b Armstrong and truthmakers

David Armstrong wrote the standard text in metaphysics concerning 'truthmakers', called *Truth and Truthmakers*. It came out of a discussion in Australian metaphysics concerning phenomenalism, the 'claim that physical objects are constituted out of sense-data or sense-impressions.' (Armstrong 2004, 1) The problem was that if this is the case, it becomes difficult to make sense of counter-factual claims regarding the existence of a world without any sensate beings, such as 'the universe could have existed without any beings possessing mind.' Armstrong asks, 'Suppose that the required counterfactual propositions are indeed true. What are the truthmakers for these truths? Must there not be *some way the world is* in virtue of which these truths are true? *What is it?* How does the world make these truths true? (*ibid.*) Armstrong admits that this way of thinking will only be appealing to a realist: 'to demand truthmakers for particular truths is to accept a *realist* theory for those truths.' (*ibid.*, 5)

This, however, is not to the detriment of the project. It allows us to take Armstrong to be a part of the Aristotelian project of metaphysics as described above.

Armstrong notes that the search for truthmakers for all the categories of truths we want to accept amounts, in effect, to a metaphysics: 'The question what truthmakers are needed for particular truths…can be, and regularly is, as difficult as the question of metaphysics, the question of ontology.' (*ibid.*, 4) The search for truthmakers can function as a method for metaphysics, although not, Armstrong warns, a 'royal road.'

By this point, the general realist idea behind truthmakers should be apparent, but for the sake of clarity, we can describe a truthmaker in this way: for some truth, there is a truthmaker, 'some existent, some portion of reality, in virtue of which that truth is true.' (*ibid.*, 5) The relationship between a truthmaker and its truth is cross-categorical. For Armstrong, a 'truth' is simply a true proposition. The relation is cross-categorical because the truthmakers for true propositions will not necessarily themselves be propositions.

The path from language to ontology need not be strictly one-way. As with Quine's method, there is room for nuance and care. The method begins with truths, true propositions: 'it is what we take to be truths, that have to be our starting point.' (*ibid.*, 26) But this does not have to be slavish. Even if we proceed by taking 'certain things to be true, and then ask what truthmakers these truths demand,' (*ibid.*) there is room for judgment. It may be that identifying certain truthmakers will lead us to assert propositions that previously we had not asserted. It may also be that certain sentences necessitate classes of truthmakers that we find problematic, in which case our task

turns to translation of these sentences to see if these truthmakers can be avoided. In either case, 'to postulate certain truthmakers for certain truths is to admit those truthmakers to one's ontology. The complete range of truthmakers admitted constitutes a metaphysics… (*ibid.*, 23)

At this very general level, there are many ways in which Armstrong's project seems similar to Quine's. Armstrong himself describes the key difference. 'Why should we desert Quine's procedure for some other method? The great advantage, as I see it, of the search for truthmakers is that it focuses us not merely on the metaphysical implications of the subject terms of propositions but also on their *predicates*.' (*ibid.*, 23) If we recall, Quine's procedure relied on, sometimes creative, translation of sentences into quantifier-variable idiom. This translation only involves quantifying over the subjects of sentences, which was intentional on Quine's part, as he referred to predicates as 'ideology.' (*ibid.*) Armstrong is trying to bring predicates back into metaphysics, as he thinks that certain kinds of metaphysical enquiry are overlooked by Quine's method.

If we look at these two figures, the similarity is clear. As above, they both, in various ways, move from propositions to the assertion of an ontology. At a broad level, this is what Jenson is describing when he calls theology a second level, grammatical discourse which issues in prescriptive grammar. As with Quine and Armstrong, Jenson has some flexibility built into his method. Reflecting on the truths proclaimed by the Christian faith issues in a grammar that is held to be authoritative for the church, but similarly, this grammar provides new truths that can provide material for further reflection. There is also a difference. Quine and Armstrong take it that, aside from the set of

propositions used, there are no criteria for the kind of ontology put forward, other than perhaps parsimony, plausibility, and consistency. For Jenson, as has been implicit in his description of a normative grammar beholden to the language of God and the saints, theology has a wider set of norms, which it must satisfy.

IV The Range of Admissible Propositions

If we accept some kind of method moving from language, or from propositions, to ontology, we are still left with a very important question: which sentences ought we to operate on in our metaphysical discussion? This question takes on new importance because it is an area where there is the potential to drive a wedge between Jenson and contemporary metaphysics. My contention will be that although this will certainly alienate Jenson from some metaphysicians, there is no standard for what kinds of propositions ought to be grist to the metaphysical mill, which standard is both explicitly affirmed by all metaphysicians, and denied by Jenson. As such, it is possible that Jenson will not be so easily edged out of the ground occupied by contemporary metaphysics.

a Armstrong

Famously, for Quine the sentences that we ought to operate on are the deliverances of the natural sciences. For Armstrong, there are three classes of truths from which a metaphysics might properly deduce the existence of truthmakers.

The first class is Moorean truths. Moorean truths are, in essence, the deliverances of common sense. Common sense has to be treated carefully here. Armstrong distinguishes it from those things that everyone tends to believe. For example, on his understanding, that the world is round is not part of common sense, or 'bedrock common sense,' (*ibid.*, 27) as he calls it. Rather, it concerns propositions like 'human beings have heads', 'there is air outside the window,' and 'the sun will rise tomorrow.' These things, says Armstrong are '*general* Moorean truths, and a good rough test for the members of this class is that it is almost embarrassing to mention them outside the context of philosophy.' (*ibid.*) It is possible for what we have taken to be Moorean truths to be false, but as Moorean truths are epistemically fundamental, they will always be shown false based on *other* Moorean truths. As such, Armstrong thinks we must accept Moorean truths in some form in our philosophizing.

The second class is the deliverances of the 'rational sciences', mathematics and logic. Armstrong distinguishes 'rational sciences' from 'empirical sciences' by asserting that the former are *a priori* while the latter are *a posteriori*.

The third set of acceptable premises is the deliverances of the empirical sciences. Within the empirical sciences, there is a vague distinction between settled issues: the composition of water, or the theory of evolution, for instance, and frontier science, which is still very much under debate. Nevertheless, the empirical sciences do give us propositions which are known, and, says Armstrong, even when knowledge is lacking, there are 'cases where a high degree of rational assurance can be assigned to that belief.' (*ibid.*, 32)

For Armstrong, these three classes constitute the acceptable starting point for metaphysical enquiry. He labels them, 'the rational consensus.' Interestingly however, they do not exhaust what it is rational for a person to *believe*. He says that he has been convinced by Peter van Inwagen that 'we all hold beliefs…on matters that go beyond what we might call the rational consensus.' (*ibid.*, 34) These might include religious, social, moral, or political beliefs that people are not going to give up, even though everyone is perfectly aware that others might disagree with them. This happens in philosophy as well. Philosophical beliefs are explicitly not a part of the so-called rational consensus, and 'yet that does not stop us from upholding our own opinions in the most vigorous and obstinate way.' (*ibid.*, 35) This is not irrational. Indeed, 'belief not only can and does, but in many cases *should*, run ahead of…the rational consensus.' (*ibid.*)

Nevertheless, in philosophy, 'we should retain a feeling for where there really is knowledge and where there is only more or less rational belief.' (*ibid.*) In other words, the truths with which we work in the search for truthmakers are those of the rational consensus. Why is this so, what is Armstrong's justification for this restriction? It seems to be that philosophy ought to work with knowledge, rather than merely rational beliefs. To quote at length:

> I do not think that it is rational for any of the contending persons, in religion or in philosophy, publicly to *claim* knowledge. For though they *may* know (I am prepared to concede), it is hard to see how they can know that they know. A quiet hope that they really do have knowledge will be best. (*ibid.*)

For our purposes, we note that Armstrong wants to assert a principled distinction between the kinds of prephilosophical truths that one doing the work of metaphysics ought to observe, and those one ought not to observe.

b van Inwagen

Armstrong names van Inwagen as the origin of his insight that it is licit for us to believe things for which we do not have firm evidence or proof. He cites the paper 'It is Wrong Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence.' (van Inwagen, 1996) In it, van Inwagen explores the implications of this attitude, taken from W. K. Clifford's lecture, 'The Ethics of Belief' (1999, originally published 1877), and finds that if taken seriously, this attitude would be seriously debilitating in all areas of life, not simply with regard to religious or political beliefs. He does not discuss whether such beliefs can be used in metaphysical argumentation. For that we may turn to his *Metaphysics*, already mentioned above.

In his *Metaphysics*, van Inwagen describes physical cosmology and revealed theology as two subject areas that substantially overlap with philosophical metaphysics. Of these two, he states that for the purposes of his introductory work, he will employ the results of physical cosmology, but not of revealed religion. This then seems like it could be a restriction similar to Armstrong's desire to include the rational consensus, but not religious or political beliefs, in metaphysics. Helpfully, van Inwagen gives us his rationalization for excluding revealed theology from his work:

> The reason is simple enough: by appealing to physical cosmology, I do not restrict my audience in any significant way, and if I were to appeal to what I believed to be divine revelation, I should no doubt restrict my audience to those who agreed with me about the content of divine revelation – and I do not wish so to restrict my audience. (2009, 9)

Rather than the kind of distinction we saw above concerning a rational consensus, van Inwagen does not appeal to some defining difference intrinsic to the kinds of propositions he will examine. Instead, it is a pragmatic decision based on the desired scope of his *audience*. Presumably, although van Inwagen does not say this here, he would find it acceptable to employ religious and revealed doctrines in metaphysics that was conducted for a specific community that accepted such religious and revealed doctrines as true.

If we remove principled limitations to the kinds of claims that can count as a beginning for metaphysics, we come to a situation much like the 'dialogical pluralism' described by Nicholas Wolterstorff (2011), which is created precisely by the lack of any generally convincing claims about which beliefs can count as rational, and which sentences count as meaningful. This also allows Jenson into the metaphysical game.

The contention of this chapter is that if we accepts some metaphysical method that moves from language to ontology, but do not cut out religious claims from the admissible prephilosophical data, we end up with an activity which looks similar to the prescriptive grammatical method which Jenson promotes in his *Systematic Theology*.

How so? If we take truthmaker metaphysics broadly considered, we have a method aiming at a realist metaphysics, moving from propositions to ontology. If these propositions do not exclude religious claims, then how would such a metaphysics operate except as second-order grammatical discussion which seeks 'truthmakers', features of reality in virtue of which religious and other claims are true? Interestingly, such a theology/metaphysics need not exclude Moorean truths, rational sciences, or

natural science from its own presuppositions. Jenson does in fact appeal to Moorean truths in some of his arguments (1999, 31-35), in the prolegomena to his Systematic Theology he explicitly grants that the study of logic is not something to be excluded as 'Olympian Parmenidean' religion (1997, 10), and in a fascinating essay called 'You Wonder Where the Body Went' he denies that there can be any strict boundary even between theology and the natural sciences (1995).

V Norms for Theology

Jenson does not ask precisely the same question as we find in Quine and Armstrong concerning the permissible range of propositions to be used in ontology, and yet there is an analogous concern. If theology is prescriptive grammar, what are the grounds upon which it prescribes? For Jenson, the answer to this involves complex historical investigation, as well as some way to delineate which propositions Christians ought to maintain. We will dwell on this topic longer than is warranted by the immediate context of this chapter, as Jenson's comments on norms for theology are of wider importance in the rest of this thesis.

Theologians require norms to make prescriptive judgments. In its most primitive manifestation, the work of theology occurred when, while the apostles were still living, they were asked 'is this the Gospel?' and could answer, yes or no. Such exchanges are found in the New Testament. As the apostles died out, the trio of Scripture, creed and office developed to fulfil this role. Jenson says that 'the church's tradition sustains the community's self-identity through time only in that it sustains witness to a particular

event, the Resurrection.' (1997, 25) Tradition, however, is not unproblematic. Many things other than a sustained reflection on an event, or a communal purpose, can sustain institutions. Initiation rights, organizational structure, or historical ties can all impel an organization through time. The church has all of these. As such, it is certainly possible that an organization could persist, and yet lose that which had, at one time, made it the 'church'. Jenson says succinctly, 'Tradition…is notoriously a threat to such content, precisely as it maintains the transmitting group.' (*ibid.*)

All this is not to say that the 'church' should be other than an organized institution existing in the world. That it must be. Double-edged swords cut both ways. The practice of theology, the speculative side of theology, are aimed at skill-at-arms. Doing theology, and being a member of the church, is an act of faith. God uses the church to preserve the Gospel – for Jenson, this is the activity of the Holy Spirit: 'Faith that the church is still the church is faith in the Spirit's presence and rule in and by the structures of the church's historical continuity.' (*ibid.*) The church, while an historical entity, is also eschatological. One of Jenson's typical claims is that the Spirit is the power of the future. The church is only finally constituted by its eschatological purpose, and by God's promise that in it, His ends will be fulfilled.

a Scripture

Historically speaking, the church produces the Scriptures. Alternately, we may say that the church receives them from the Holy Spirit. However it is viewed, Jenson asserts that once Scripture is established, it is, in the traditional formula, *norma normans non normata*. This much, however, does not tell us how it actually functions.

Within a tradition, in disputes we appeal to an authority. This authority may be a bishop or theologian of the past, or a figure who has, through the course of the tradition been found to be helpful in delimiting Gospel-speaking. In the case of irreconcilable authorities, the final authority for the church is the testimony of the apostles. This is because 'if the apostles did not get it right, no one ever did.' (*ibid.*, 27) If the apostolic witness to, and appreciation of, the events of the resurrection were significantly flawed, then as Paul says, 'our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God…we are of all people most to be pitied.' (1 Corinthians 15:14-15, 19) This means that 'belief that the Gospel is still extant includes belief that the canon is adequate. And adequacy is, as with dogma, all that is required.' (Jenson 1997, 19)

Scripture is the norm of Gospel-speaking, not directly of either faith or theology, 'it is therefore necessary to distinguish between Scripture's authority as living word of God and its authority as a norm used in the church's theological effort to speak that living word.' (*ibid.*, 28-9) Above this, Scripture is complex, and it is not straightforward how it can be used as a norm. It speaks with more than one voice. We do not have to reproduce all of the claims of those voices. Not all apostolic claims may be felicitous: 'we turn to the apostolic church not for the certainly best thought-out instances of Gospel-speaking, but for unchallengeable instances.' (*ibid.*, 32) When confronted with diversity in the New Testament, even to the point of disagreement, it is not necessary to artificially harmonise. The faith and theology of the church evolve in a process of discussion directed toward the event of the resurrection. We engage with the New Testament as in a continuing deliberation. For Jenson, 'Theology is a

continuing argument between different and sometimes incompatible proposals, and presumably always will be.' (*ibid.*, 33) As such, the use of Scripture as a norm cannot happen by the piling up of proof-texts, rather 'the Scripture test of a theologoumenon is its success as a[sic] hermeneutical principle: whether it leads to exegetical success or failure with mandated churchly homiletical, liturgical, and catechetical uses of Scripture.' (*ibid.*)

Finally then, on Scripture as a norm for theology, how are theological claims to be tested? Jenson does not think that direct comparison, asking the question, 'is this what the Bible says?' (*ibid.*) is helpful because it will almost always be ambiguous at the level of an isolated claim. Instead, 'the testing occurs rather in that which both Scripture and theology are to further: the first-level discourse of churchly proclamation and devotion.' (*ibid.*) That is, 'the scriptural test of a theologoumenon is its success as a hermeneutical principle.' (*ibid.*) The test of a systematic theology is similar, it is 'tested against Scripture by its success or failure as a hermeneutical principle for Scripture taken as a whole, as one great text with a very complex internal structure.' (*ibid.*) This means that inevitably, the Scriptural test for a system of theology is not straightforward, and must take place over a great deal of time. Ultimately, says Jenson, 'final scriptural verification of a theological system occurs outside the system, as it proves or fails to prove itself as a heremeneutical principle for the church's general use of Scripture.' (*ibid.*)

b Instituted Liturgy

Jenson's theology has a greater emphasis on liturgy than we might otherwise expect from a contemporary protestant theologian. Jenson believes that it is the liturgy of the church that shepherds the development of orthodox Trinitarian theology through the early heresies to which Christian thought has from time to time been tempted. (see chapter four) Jenson defines an institution as 'a historical event that initiates a diachronically identifiable rite and mandates its repetition.' (*ibid.*, 34) Institutions include, but are not limited to, 'sacraments'.

Some, but not all, institutions are dogmatically mandated, and of these, some will find their foundation in Scripture. However, he also thinks that 'the relation between Scripture and liturgical mandates is itself variable.' (*ibid.*) Dogmatically mandated institutions regulated church speech in three ways, thinks Jenson. First, 'they must themselves be done as instituted.' (*ibid.*) This follows pretty clearly from the concept of a mandated institution. Second, 'no other rite can be proper that does not bond dramatically with them into one, encompassing, continuing communal action.' (*ibid.*) The import of this seems to be that institutions must cohere with one another. A new institution ought not to be put in place if it does not flow naturally from older institutions. Third, and most importantly for the practice of theology, 'no teaching can be true whose consequences would pervert the practice or darken the understanding of irreversibly instituted liturgy.' (*ibid.*) Theological teaching which has the effect of changing an institution beyond recognition must be regarded as illicit. Jenson choses to use both reformation era Catholic *and* protestant teaching on the Eucharist as an example of how this can occur:

> the Reformers insisted there must be something wrong with established teaching about the mass because it sanctioned the proliferation of private and votive masses, a situation not coherent with the canonically instituted rite;

> Catholics charged that Reformation teaching about works must be wrong because it would lead to "abolishing the mass" altogether. *Both* accusations proved right. (*ibid.*)

c Dogma

The production of dogma is near-inevitable for a missionary faith such as Christianity according to Jenson, as 'a missionary faith necessarily lives from statement of the message to be brought and accepted.' (*ibid.*, 35) Jenson thinks that dogma takes two forms and performs two distinct functions. The first are rules of faith, which are 'direct instruction in the Gospel, especially over against particular challenges posed by the antecedent religious culture of the neophytes.' (*ibid.*, 36). These are used for the purpose of instruction. Among the many things which a new convert must learn is the 'grammar of the church's discourse within itself and with the world.' (*ibid.*) Such rules of faith become norms for theology very directly: 'the labor of theology, to enunciate second-level rules for the church's discourse, is in its historical actuality labor to expand and purify an already existing network of such regulations, whose most stable components are the so-far established rules of faith.' (*ibid.*) Restated more succinctly as a norm, Jensons says that "the bounds of the permissible will be set by the metarule: no proposed theologoumenon can be true that would hinder a dogma's control of the church's discourse.' (*ibid.*)

The second form of dogma are confessional formulae. While the rule of faith is something used to instruct a new member of the church, the confessional formula is something that the new member says in response. In keeping with his polemical understanding of theological work, Jenson says that 'such formulations also respond

to the culturally and historically particular spiritual and intellectual reinterpretation with which the neophyte will struggle.' (*ibid.*) Confessional formulae with 'dogmatic' standing are known, says Jenson, as creeds. Their function in the life of the church is that 'any legitimate member of the church must be able to join in it.' (*ibid.*) Creeds regulate theological formulations by rendering some possible hermeneutics unacceptable. They can 'exclude an entire mode of interpretation.' (*ibid.*, 37)

Creeds cannot function in a vacuum, and require context to understand what it is they are ruling out, and ruling in. More broadly, Jenson says that 'dogmas mean what they mean only from their historical and systematic locations in the total theological tradition.' (*ibid.*, 38) As an example, he cites Chalcedon, whose Christological decrees cannot be obeyed 'if one knows nothing of the thinking of Cyril or Leo, or if one regards these persons as simply curiosities of the past.' (*ibid.*)

d The Magisterium

The first three norms for theology that Jenson has described are directly or indirectly involved with texts. In his fourth, he moves from texts to the necessity of an ecclesiastical teaching office. He begins by noting that there is a difference between disagreeing with a text and disagreeing with a person. We can engage with a person to better understand them, elicit new explanation and better understanding. However 'if I am reading a text, I have to agree or disagree with it and not with the writer. Over against a text, the question cannot be, What do you want to say? It can only be, What did someone in fact say, even if unintentionally?' (*ibid.*, 39)

The nature of texts is to be in a certain sense powerless, but in another, uniquely powerful. As to the first, Jenson notes that readers can seem 'omnipotent' over texts. While 'a speaker is there to defend his or her intention against my interpretation,' (*ibid.*) a text lacks this possibility. Instead, 'if the text itself is in any degree to adjudicate between proposed interpretations, some living, personal reality must maintain the text's independence.' (*ibid.*) However, the text does have a kind of native independence that a live speaker's words might lack: 'precisely in being abandoned by its author the text…becomes my *object*. Objects are the components of facts; thus there are facts about any actual text that no interpretation can ignore and sustain its claim to be interpretation of that text.' (*ibid.*) This then gives us a method by which a defender of texts can defend them, by pointing to facts about the actual text. The question is, who is to perform this function?

For Jenson, for the purposes of theology, those against which the texts concerned must be defended are primarily the church as an association of its members, that is, a group of individuals. The defender of texts is the church as community: 'all texts need a true community as interpreter; in the church, Scripture has such a defender.' (*ibid.*, 40) The church's voice, acting as defender, is called the 'magisterium'. What is the mark of a true magisterium? For Jenson, 'the church speaks as one diachronically communal reality and is guarded in this unity precisely by so speaking; therefore the teaching office must itself be essentially characterized by diachronic unity…those are to teach who make one community with former teachers.' (*ibid.*)

None of the institutional norms for theology guarantee the continuity of the Gospel message. In the history of the Western church, Jenson notes that the magisterium has

come under particular suspicion, especially from protestants. The problem is that 'the teaching office speaks dogma… [which] must be tested against Scripture and existing dogma. But…it is, again, the teaching office by which Scripture and dogmatic texts can assert themselves.' (*ibid.*) There is an obvious problem of circularity here. And yet 'we see that a teaching office is necessary if Scripture or dogma are themselves to exercise authority.' (*ibid.*) Jenson's answer to this problem is as it has been for the previous norms. 'The magesterium can be the necessary enunciator of the Gospel's diachronic identity rather than a threat to it…only if the circularity of the magisterium's role marks the freedom of a charism, if the teaching office is an instrument of God the Spirit.' (*ibid.*, 40-41)

In describing four different types of norms for Christian theology, Scripture, institutions or rites, dogma, and the magesterium, Jenson gives us a thorough overview of practical ways in which his theology might be critiqued.

Jenson offers four kinds of norms for theology. Scripture is the primary norm in that it is the norm by which the others must be evaluated, however, Scripture is not useful apart from these other three. In practice, theology is tested against Scripture by the utility of a theological claim or system in interpreting the Scriptures. The Scriptures themselves are diverse, and allowance must be made for this diversity in theological work. Jenson's second norm is instituted rites of the church. Any theological system or claim that does damage to the practice of a duly instituted rite of the church must be held at least suspect. Jenson's third kind of norm is dogma, found in the form of rules of faith and creeds. These set limits on the kinds of claims theology can make by excluding certain formulations of doctrine. The final type of norm is the magisterium of the church, in which the church as a community defends the interpretation of its

normative texts embodied in the previous three kinds of norms from the, at times, wayward views of its members.

e Coherence

There is a fifth norm which Jenson employs, and which we have already discussed. This is the norm of logical coherence. Such coherence is a basic necessity of any form of rational discourse, and Jenson explicitly endorses it in the prolegomena to his *Systematic Theology*, (*ibid.*, 10) and employs it both in his critique of theological claims and in his own constructive work.

Although these enumerated norms are distinct from the data employed in contemporary metaphysics as described above, these norms, in addition to criteria for evaluation of theological claims, offer propositions for reflection that are accepted as the evidence upon which theology works in second-order reflection. These propositions function as the prephilosophical data for metaphysics functions above, although the theological reflection on them is controlled by the norms described.

VII Conclusion

My purpose has been to lend plausibility to Jenson's claim that his theology is metaphysics. I have done this by seeing how Jenson fares under some broad understandings of metaphysics. In this, I found that Jenson fails under Adrian Moore's definition, but very likely succeeds under Loux's. I then turned to a narrower

understanding of the method of metaphysics in some important 20th century authors. I found that, so long as the range of propositions taken as prephilosophical data is fairly broad, Jenson's theology does look quite a lot like a metaphysics that moves from language to ontology. As there is no consensus as to how broad this range of propositions ought to be, it should not be a problem for Jenson that he requires it to be quite broad. I then related some of Jenson's views on the norms of theology. As such, it is at least plausible that when Jenson says his theology is metaphysics, according to the standards of contemporary metaphysics, he is right.

This chapter has sought to establish, in broad terms, the plausibility of Jenson's claim that theology is metaphysics, or ought to make metaphysical claims. In the rest of this thesis, we will delve into the more complex issue of the specific theological claims Jenson makes, and the kinds of metaphysical claims in which they issue. First, however, this thesis will be concerned with laying the groundwork for the kinds of Trinitarian innovations Jenson offers by discussion his understanding of theological language, his epistemology, and his approach to natural theology.

2. The Problem of Theological language

The previous chapter evaluated Jenson's contention that his theology is a kind of metaphysics in broad terms. It found that under some plausible definition of metaphysics, and method of undertaking metaphysics, Jenson's theology is metaphysics. However, it also showed that under at least one contemporary definition of the task of metaphysics, Jenson's theology does not count. This and the following chapter each lay part of the groundwork for the more specific task of describing and evaluating Jenson's Trinitarian doctrine and the implications thereof.

This chapter describes an aspect of Jenson's work that typically draws little attention: his views on theological language.[1] Most work on Jenson, including the present thesis,

[1] There are two kinds of confusion that set a snare for theologians engaging in reflection on theological language. The first is a confusion between semantics and ontology; the second a confusion of language and epistemology. The first kind of confusion is described in Thomas Williams' critique of Radical Orthodox work on Duns Scotus. He argues that defenders of Radical Orthodoxy misunderstand Scotus on univocity because they treat 'the doctrine of univocity as containing, or perhaps entailing, ontological doctrines that Scotus explicitly disavows.' (Williams 2005, 275) However, 'insistence on a distinction between semantics and ontology is absolutely crucial to Scotus's account of univocity, and every reliable interpreter notes it.' (ibid., 577) In this chapter, we are concerned with Jenson's understanding of theological language. In the remainder of the thesis we are primarily concerned with Jenson's metaphysics. However it is worth noting that issues of metaphysics and ontology do come up in his view of language. We must therefore be careful to understand the way in which these topics are related, and not confuse them.

The second kind of confusion is more easily expressed: this is confusion between whether a sentence is meaningful, and whether it is rational to believe. Evidence for this confusion can be found in the full title of Jenson's book itself, '*The Knowledge of Things Hoped For: The Sense of Theological Discourse*.' On the surface, this book looks like a work in theological epistemology, but it is not. The subtitle is more accurate as regards the content, and yet these two halves of the title promise very different exercises.

focuses on his Trinitarian doctrine, his view of time, his ecclesiology, eschatology, and Christology. Nevertheless, theological language is an important, if at times subliminal, feature of Jenson's theology. Odd or sudden turns in argument are sometimes best explained by an appeal to this feature. Despite this, it is easy to understand why this work is often overlooked. Jenson wrote *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, his monograph on language, fairly early in his career.[2] His later work continues to draw upon his efforts, completed in 1969, and yet he does not often replicate or revisit those efforts.

This chapter serves two ends. First, it introduces Jenson's understanding of theological language, and so remedies the current situation in which it is too little known. Second, for the purpose of this thesis, it introduces key themes and ideas that will be

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[2] Jenson's work prior to *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* had been reflective of his theological education, it had been steeped in mid twentieth-century German theology, and often progressed in conversation with Karl Barth's work. *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* is strikingly different, in style and literary context, if not in content. This perhaps reflects the fact that Jenson was living and working in Oxford, a center for analysis of language, at the time. This work seems much in line with works of Anglican theology such as Ian Ramsey's *Religious Language*, and especially covers much of the same ground as John Macquarrie's *God-Talk*, published two years earlier.

Although Jenson does not mention *God-Talk*, his mixture of existentialism and the contemporary English philosophy of analysis to describe and revise theological language fits Macquarrie's project. We will note various areas of similarity to Macquarrie throughout this chapter, but it is worth noting what seems to be distinctive of Jenson here. Although both Macquarrie and Jenson take the meaning of the term 'God' to be the key to unlocking the meaning of the language of a religion in general, Jenson is much more explicit about the distinctiveness and superiority of the Christian answer, which locates the meaning of the term God in the life of the man Jesus Christ. That is, for Jenson, there can be no appearance of the acceptance of the symbols resident in other faith traditions to adequately interpret the term 'God' and the sentences attendant to it. In the terms Jenson adopts, Macquarrie and Jenson agree about the nature of the 'logical mother' of theological language, but there is at least the appearance of a disagreement concerning the 'logical father'.

useful in the coming chapters. In order to introduce these themes, we will briefly mention four important turns of argument in Jenson's later theology that assume his views about theological language. The first is his dismissal of elements of Augustine's Trinitarianism as 'vacuous' and 'pious mystery-mongering'; the second is his use of Austin in his *Systematic Theology* to define a form of 'analogy'; the third is his use of Strawson to describe the concept of 'identity' central to Jenson's own work; finally, claims about the 'logical mother' and 'logical father' of theological language presage Jenson's views on natural theology and general revelation. All four of these features are found in Jenson's early work on theological language.

In brief, as we shall see later, Jenson objects to some aspects of Augustine's Trinitarianism on the grounds that Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity undercuts those passages of the Scriptures upon which the doctrine of the Trinity is based: 'When logically detached from the biblical triune narrative, the Nicene-Cappadocian propositions about the immanent Trinity become formulas without any meaning we can know.' (Jenson 1997, 113) It is Jenson's contention that this doctrine of divine simplicity evacuates Trinitarian language of any meaning, and instead turns Trinitarian claims into a 'paradox formula'. (Jenson 2002a, 126). It is one of the contentions of Jenson's approach to theological language that it must be clearly meaningful. As such, Jenson must reject or reform doctrines that cause such language to become, as he says, 'pious mystery-mongering.' (*ibid.*)

Further evidence of Jenson's continued attention to theological language as influenced by twentieth-century philosophy of language comes in his discussion of

God's being in *Systematic Theology*, volume 2.[3] We will return to this in chapter ten. Jenson argues that we should think of the term 'being' as applied to God as univocal with 'being' as applied to creatures. Recognizing that this is a break with much historical theology, Jenson claims that we should interpret propositions about God's being univocally, but that utterances referring to God's being might have a distinct illocutionary force from those referring to creaturely being, and as such, there is perhaps a sense in which sentences about God's being are analogous, in that while the locution might assert the same of God as of creatures, the illocutionary force is distinct. (Jenson 1999, 38) This use of Austin's speech-act theory to analyse theological language is developed by Jenson in his *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*.

[3] Macquarrie draws on the same kind of German theological background as Jenson does in other works, setting his analysis of theological language against the theology of Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich. Of these, Barth undoubtedly has had the most impact on Jenson, for obvious reasons already related. Macquarrie finds Barth's views of theological language insufficient. Macquarrie says that for Barth, the problem of theological language is 'how the words of man can bring to expression the primary Word of God.' (Macquarrie 1967, 43) Ultimately, this problem is answered as 'God *makes* our language about him *veridical*. He confers on it the capacity to speak meaningfully and truly about him.' (ibid. 49) Macquarrie finds this solution insufficient for the kind of understanding of theological language he would like. In brief, Barth tells us that theological sentences have meaning, but his method of doing so does not allow us to find out what that meaning is. (ibid. 49).

More recent scholarship has been kinder to Barth, especially Roger White's *Talking about God*. White traces the development of analogy from Euclid's mathematics to Aristotle's biology, then to his metaphysics, to Aquinas' theology, to Kant, and finally to Barth, where, using insights from contemporary philosophy of language, he finds a compelling vision of theological language. Ultimately, it is possible that Macquarrie's critique is answered by White. (2010, 185-191) Interestingly, White's interpretation of Barth aligns well with Jenson's later work on theological language, e. g. in his 1994 essay 'On Hegemonic Discourse.' (Jenson 2014a, 18-22)

One of the most central concepts in Jenson's theology is that of 'identity'. He uses the term to translate the Cappadocian use of *hypostasis*, and yet when he comes to define it, his description of the way identity is fixed in ordinary language is often similar to that found in the linguistic analysis of P. F. Strawson (Jenson 2002a, 178n.29). Indeed, Strawson seems to stand behind Jenson's description of the practice of narrative identification, which is important for his Trinitarian doctrine. This analysis first makes an appearance in *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*.

Finally, in *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, Jenson analyses theological language in terms of a 'logical mother' and 'logical father'. The 'logical mother' is a desire, universal to all human beings, that there be some form of unity or completion to human experience and human life, that human life be for something. (cf. Macquarrie 1967, 99-101) The logical father is the concrete experience or state of affairs that demonstrates a real fulfillment to such a desire. This anticipates Jenson's explanation of general revelation, and of 'religion', another central concept to the development of his Trinitarian theology, and one link between Trinitarian theology and time in Jenson's thought.

As such, in addition to shining light on an important area of Jenson's theology rarely examined, this chapter gives important insight into several central areas of Jenson's Trinitarian doctrine by providing the origin of many of the key concepts Jenson will later employ.

In *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, Jenson attempts to address a perception that, in the face of scientific language, theological claims are meaningless. The way in

which Jenson approaches the broad question of how one decides on a semantic theory is outlined. We take sentences that seem meaningful as data points, and then come up with a theory to fit. We do not begin with a theory, and then discount otherwise seemingly meaningful sentences. This is a surprisingly modern, and helpful approach. He then derives criteria for his further work from studying Thomas Aquinas and Origen. These two criteria are 1) theological language ought to be in continuity with everyday and scientific speech, so that those outside of the Christian community can hear Christian claims as meaningful. 2) Christian theological language ought to be made possible only by the events of the life of Christ, and subsequent development. With these criteria, he evaluates a range of mid 20th century semantic theories, seen here: speech-acts, descriptive reference, and verificationism. None of them are fully sufficient to explain the phenomena with which they are presented while adhering to his desiderata. However, from each he derives helpful elements.

Jenson draws on a number of distinct approaches in philosophy of language, both ancient and modern, with the intention of setting out a theory of theological language. The result of this eclecticism is a somewhat bewildering text. Jenson's conclusions cannot be neatly summarized, and an archeological approach to the text is beyond the remit of this thesis and would extend far beyond the space available for this chapter.

Jenson's aim is to show that traditional Christian speech is robust, meaningful, and useful. In this chapter, I will describe some of the eclectic elements of Jenson's early linguistic theory. I pursue this line because an attempt at clarity regarding Jenson's use of language will pay dividends in understanding his future theology. Moreover,

Jenson's theory of Christian speech has received little critical attention in contemporary theological discussion, and, as I shall argue, it does offer a robust and useful perspective. This chapter will begin to offer a corrective to this oversight.

I Jenson and the Traditional Problem

That traditional problem of theological language can be stated simply. How can our language, language in turns evolved and developed to deal with the realities and complexities of the created world, be adequate to describe the Creator of that reality? How we are to understand theological language is a perennial problem for the church. This question assumes that the distinction between Creator and created is such that a transferal of language is problematic. This assumption has proven uncontroversial for much of the history of theological discussion. This problem can be found, in simple form, in the Scriptures of the Christian faith, and is treated from the beginning of reflection upon the faith.

Such reflection characteristically attempts to navigate between equivocity, where words and sentences concerning God mean something completely different than what we would expect them to mean in other contexts – rendering language about God unintelligible; and univocity, where words mean exactly the same when applied to God as they do otherwise. This middle way is labelled 'analogy', but applying a label is far from presenting a working theory.

This problem is mentioned simply to point out that, although Jenson does gesture towards some features of a theory of theological language in response to this problem, he does not offer a full theory, and addressing the traditional problem is a secondary aim for his project in *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*. Rather, Jenson wants to understand, and to defend, everyday language about God, rather than focus solely on technical or academic theology.

II The Primary Focus

Jenson says that, when taken simply as the outworking of faith, proclamations involving the term 'God' are not problematic for the one making them. (Jenson 1969, 7) It is upon reflection that these utterances can become problematic. A temptation in the face of such problems is to retreat into a private linguistic community and disengage from the larger world with regard to this one language-game. As Jenson says, 'The crisis of language has been dealt with often enough by retreat from speech in the public language, to the safety of private communication of sectarian religion.' (*ibid.*, 9)Jenson thinks this is an inappropriate response for Christians.

Christianity's Gospel is presented by the New Testament as a universal message, to be proclaimed to all: 'thus we assert that for faith's speaking about God to be speaking of faith, it must be in some, for the present undefined, sort of logical continuity with our other utterances. Men must be able to call its utterances into question. The unbeliever must be able to reject them.' (*ibid.*) For the language of faith to be spoken faithfully, it must be meaningful enough for its hearers that they can reject it, as 'even to reject the

Gospel one must hear it. The language in which the Gospel is said must be comprehensible; one must be able to play the game, whether as protagonist or as opponent.' (*ibid.*, 5) Yet the opponents of theological language in the early twentieth-century made their stand based not on a rejection of the factual claims of Christianity, but on a denial of the meaningfulness of those claims.

Jenson's approach, noting that in normal use everyday theological speech is unproblematic, preempts the state of the field in contemporary philosophy of language generally. (Lycan 2008, 2-3) Jenson is responding to the claims of those with developed semantic theories who think that, given their theory, the claims of Christianity come out as meaningless. In the face of the continued inability of philosophers to define a semantic theory that does not face strong objections and problems, contemporary philosophy tends to be more modest. This results in a perspective that takes for granted that everyday speech is meaningful, and it works. This meaningfulness is a datum to be explained, rather than a claim to be established. (Wolterstorff 2011)

This perspective is akin to that employed by Jenson. He gives three preliminary methodological claims as the ground of his enterprise. He will simply assume that theological language is meaningful, and that any confusion in the actual practice of theological speech can be fixed through analysis. (Jenson 1969, 21) He also assumes that 'it is possible to speak of proposed analyses of how God-utterances work as correct or incorrect.' (*ibid.*) Simply put, there is a fact of the matter as to the truth of an analysis of theological language. Finally, he is in a position to tell the difference between a correct and an incorrect analysis. (*ibid.*) The second and third claims are the

necessary starting point of any enquiry. The first is an assumption of theology that Jenson asserts can only be adequately substantiated by preaching. We will return to this claim in chapter three, on developing a theological epistemology.

For many cases, in everyday life, it is easy enough to establish whether a claim is meaningful or not. However, the only way to establish that a claim that seems meaningful to ordinary language users is meaningless, is first to describe a convincing semantic theory, and only then to move on to show that the particular claim lies outside linguistic norms articulated by the theory. Finding oneself on the wrong side of that line, the speaker can argue that their claim is actually licit given the theory, or they can dispute the status of the semantic theory. Interestingly, Jenson opts for the former in almost all cases. Nevertheless, he does discuss the later option.

For Jenson, every language is a way of seeing the world: 'the structure of our language is the structure of our apprehension of reality.' (*ibid.*, 12) This means that 'the decision to accept or reject a philosophical analysis is in the life of the decider a move of the kind that used to be accomplished as an advance in metaphysical discovery. It is an existential move to a particular vantage point on and in reality.' (*ibid.*) Different types of analysis betray ways of approaching and understanding the world. This was apparent in the previous chapter when we briefly addressed the problem of translation from natural language into quantifier-variable idiom in contemporary metaphysics.

What are the grounds upon which we can accept a semantic theory? For Jenson,

> adopting or rejecting a proposed language is a metaphysical move, it is determined by and determines one's posture in the world. In the case of a religious language, accepting or rejecting is a move of one's attitude toward

> the goal by which his life has meaning. If, therefore, one is asked to give reasons, he can only respond *theologically*, by attempting to state his commitments. (*ibid.*, 22)

The question Jenson seeks to answer is how world-pictures, in particular, Christianity, can be appropriately verified.

For Jenson, the Christian theologian has a necessary constraint. If we narrow the focus from analysis of language in general to analysis of theological language, Jenson is adamant that such analysis must be guided by theology, simply because there is no other way to do it:

> Any proposed analysis of *how* a language means is essentially a proposed set of definitions for 'means': that is, a summary of several proposed sets of semantic rules, each of which determines a language activity with special reference to the likenesses and differences among the sets. (*ibid.*)

Jenson asserts that semantic theories are internally irrefutable. That is, once such a theory is accepted, it cannot be rejected within the language it determines. On the one hand, it is always possible simply to reject the semantic theory proposed. It is not obligatory to accept any particular semantic theory, and in a case where a semantic theory treats as meaningless sentences which we use and which seem to be meaningful, it can be more appropriate to reject the theory in favour of defending the meaningfulness of the disputed claim. Nevertheless, Jenson will respond individually to semantic theories that, on the surface, seem to make Christian speech problematic. Before turning to Jenson's positive response to philosophical challenges, we must first look at his discussion of Thomas and Origen, from which he draws two further criteria for theological semantics.

III Jenson's Traditional Sources

After giving an account of theological language in Origen and Aquinas[4], Jenson discerns six similarities in their understanding of how theological language functions, and two dissimilarities. (1) For both Origen and Thomas 'the ontological difference between God and man makes the ordinary conventions of language inapplicable when we talk of God.' (Jenson 1969, 90) For these two thinkers, according to Jenson, ordinary language is tied to a particular way of conducting metaphysics, specifically, object-language, where at least some sentential subjects and predicates refer to extra-linguistic entities. This language might imply a metaphysical structure to objects as they are found in the created world. For instance, 'the sweater is red', implies the existence of a sweater, and redness. That the sweater is a sortal serving as a sentential subject implies that the sweater is a thing, and predicating 'is red' implies both that 'red' is a property, and that the sweater possesses a property. As such, this ordinary sentence can be interpreted in accordance with metaphysical claims about the structure of reality. God is taken to be 'ontologically different'; God relates to his 'being' in a different way. The result is that normal language cannot apply to God because such language has ontological implications about the metaphysical composition of objects that are not true of God. If God is simple, for instance, it is not clear how he might possess properties, and so a sentence like 'God is good' cannot operate in the same way as 'the sweater is red'. Nevertheless, (2) both Origen and

[4] There are a great many accounts of theological language in Aquinas. Murphy claims that Jenson's own is indebted to grammatical Thomism. (2008, 20-21) There are no references in Jenson's own work to the chief authors of grammatical Thomism, however, the interpretation he develops does bear a striking resemblance to Victor Preller's own account, as described by Adam Eitel. We should note that Eitel thanks Jenson for reading this paper and giving comments. (2012, 33n60) For criticism of similar ideas to those developed by Preller and Eitel, see Morreall 1983.

Thomas 'posit some sort of likeness of the creatures to God which makes it possible to talk of Him if we use language in a way appropriate to the mode of likeness.' (*ibid.*) However, this similarity between Origen and Thomas only works on a general level. In particulars, it is actually a difference: the things which are taken to be 'similar' to God are distinct in Origen and Thomas. Another similarity lurks here, however. (3) For both of them, likeness between God and creation comes from seeing an 'ancient artisan-prototype-image scheme as the fundamental ontological scheme.' (*ibid.*) As a result, (4) both see 'theological language as able to point to *something* in God that is the prototype of a created perfection, but as not able to specify the relationship between the prototype and the image, because our ordinary usage rules do not operate.' (*ibid.*) In addition to these considerations, (5) 'both hold that theological language is cognitive,' (*ibid.*) and (6) theological language is necessarily eschatological. (*ibid.*)

There are also two key differences between Origen and Thomas, I have already alluded to the first. (7) While there is some similarity in the idea of likeness between God and creation, 'for Origen the image that makes speech about God possible is the history of Jesus Christ…This emphasis is wholly absent from Thomas, for whom the image is all created reality.' (*ibid.*) Jenson takes Origen's side here. However (8) 'Origen speaks theologically about Christ by moving to a "higher" level of speech, by developing a language, defined by rules of its own, *other* than the normal object-language by which we deal with the things of this world. His language is "spiritual". Thomas does not set out on this path.' (*ibid.*, 91) Nor will Jenson.

Jenson draws two lessons from this investigation. First, theological language ought only to be made possible by the events of the history of Christ. In this way, Christians avoid importing damaging metaphysical schema into their theology. Jenson's discussions of speech-acts, reference, and verification, described in the following two sections, show how it is that the events of the history of Christ make theological language possible. Second, theological language ought to be in some sense continuous with everyday and scientific language, this serves the end of making Christian speech universal, which is a desideratum already mentioned. This second lesson is enacted in Jenson's discussion of verificationism, which follows the discussion of speech-acts in our telling.

IV Austin's Speech-Acts

Perhaps the most detailed semantic theory Jenson describes and interacts with is Austin's speech-act theory (see Austin 1962). Jenson begins his constructive work by discussing three aspects of any utterance: the locutionary meaning, which is just what the sentence expresses; the illocutionary force, which is 'the character of the *act* that is the *saying* of it' (*ibid.*, 114); and the perlocutionary effect, which is what is caused or not caused by the act of speech. For his discussion of theological language, Jenson focuses on different types of illocutionary force.

First, *exercitive/performative* sentences bring about the truth of the claim they express. The paradigm cases of exercitive sentences are acts of naming, but Jenson also

includes priestly proclamations of blessing. Their defining feature is that they make the propositional content of the utterance true just by being stated.

Second, *constatives* simply make a claim, they have a content which is properly evaluated as true or false. As such, they directly express propositions. Their implicit form is 'P', but explicitly, we could say 'I state that P'. For Jenson 'the chief insight here is that making such an utterance is also but one sort of illocutionary act: I estimate, guess, warn, state, etc.' (*ibid.*, 115) The significance of this observation is that one of the problems of philosophy of language in the early 20th century was that it primarily considered propositional sentences in its analysis of meaning. What Austin brings is an awareness of the diversity of language, which Jenson is using to give a more precise description to theological language than simple factual claims assessed by verifiability.

Third, *commissive* sentences commit the speaker or the subject of the sentence to a future specific behavior. The forms include "I pledge X" or "Y will be loyal". While these could appear simply to express propositions, as they are used, they are not most appropriately be judged according to truth or falsity, but according to whether they are fulfilled or unfufilled. If I make an oath, then fail to follow through on it, I do not make my earlier statement false, I rather fail to fulfill an obligation. These claims still have what Jenson calls 'abstractable' content, what I have been calling propositional content, but this is not their primary function in language.

Next, *behabitive* sentences take up an attitude to the person addressed or the object discussed. Some, but not all, behabitive sentences have propositional content, but even if the content turns out to be false 'an attitude is still adopted toward the

supposed state of affairs.' Examples of behabitive sentences might include "I love you", "The Lord is good", or "John is fine man". Even if John isn't a fine man, my sentence expresses an attitude on my part, whether appropriate or not.

Finally, *verdictive* sentences express a judgment. In some ways verdictives are like exercitives, except they can be challenged by facts. They are not simple constatives though because 'a constative can be accepted or rejected by some agreed procedure, whereas the issue raised by verdictives can only be settled by a method that depends on the conventional authority of the speaker.' (*ibid.*, 117)

The illocutionary force of an utterance is determined by context, as well as the form of the expression. Primarily though, 'the context that determines the illocutionary force is the language itself with all its conventions'. (*ibid.*) Often, narrower contexts will be determinative. It is essential for Jenson's purposes to note that a single utterance can have several distinct illocutionary forces, and these might well depend on the speaker, so for instance ' 'God is good' is behavitive and commissive said by someone brought up in the Christian tradition, but may not be said by an animist of his high god.' (*ibid.*) Further, the relationship between propositional content and illocutionary force is complex, so for instance, 'some behabitives have no abstractable content. Other behabitives and all verdictives have a factual content that is true or false independently of the behabitive or verdictive utterance.' (*ibid.*)

Jenson continues, 'utterances of all illocutionary sorts also have factual presuppositions.' (*ibid.*, 118) Jenson's contention is that the force of any given utterance will be a function of its unique context of other illocutionary forces,

propositions, and factual presuppositions. All utterances are also events in a pattern of events labelled an 'experience'. He proposes that 'its location in some segment of its whole pattern of illocutionary forces, factual contents and presuppositions will be the same as its location in the pattern of expectations and fulfillments which are the unity of that experience.' (*ibid.*)

The point of describing this machinery of illocutionary forces is so that he can offer a precise definition of an 'onlook', an idea he takes from Donald E. Evans, albeit in a modified way. An onlook is, simplistically put, 'an utterance translatable into this 'I look on…as…' form.' (*ibid.*) We note that any descriptive sentence can qualify as an onlook in this sense, whether it be a description of extra-mental reality or of subjective attitude. 'The grass is well-cut' can be reworked as 'I look on the grass as well-cut' in the same way that 'I am ambivalent towards Shakespeare' can become 'I look on myself as ambivalent to Shakespeare's merit'. The key is that rendering these utterances as onlooks is supposed to make explicit something which would otherwise be missed. Jenson simplifies Evans and claims that an utterance is more precisely defined by a particular pattern of illocutionary force. Specifically, onlooks utterences are commissive, behabitive with content, and verdictive with regard to the content of the behabitive: 'this particular mutual dependence of several illocutionary forces defines an onlook.' (*ibid.*, 119)

An onlook statement commits the speaker to certain future behaviours, expresses an attitude towards a state of affairs, and judges that the state of affairs is true. As such, onlook statements can be both expressive of attitudes, and make factual claims, in addition to other illocutionary aspects. This network of illocutionary forces is useful

for Jenson's attempts to describe what is occurring in the use of liturgical language, and other forms of religious speech. For our purposes, we need simply to note that, whatever is occurring, at least one element of speech is the assertion of a proposition, a sentence evaluated in terms of its truth or falsity. Jenson finds that, although onlook statements form an important part of his understanding of religious speech, they cannot be the full picture, as they still leave open the possibility of an isolated linguistic community which cannot communicate with those who are not initiates. This violates his principle of the universality of Christian assertion, and as such he must search elsewhere for semantic ideas that can fulfill this aim. For this he turns to verificationism. However, before we venture into Jenson's verificationism, it will serve us to describe his views on reference, and the way in which the term 'God' becomes meaningful.

V Reference

We now turn to Jenson's account of reference. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, Jenson's writing on reference is important to the development of his use of 'identity' as a concept, which concept becomes important to his Trinitarian doctrine. When used as a semantic theory, reference alone is too simple. The basic idea is that 'linguistic expressions have the meanings they do because they *stand for things*; what they mean is what they stand for.' (Lycan 2008, 4) This view is open to a host of objections. After all, not all words stand for things, even though some do, and a list of names does not of itself constitute a meaningful sentence. Consider: dog, cup, book, run, pannacotta.

However, Jenson's interest in reference is not to give a general semantic theory, but to understand our use of the term 'God'. For this, he employs a broadly Strawsonian account of reference. (see Strawson 1959) Jenson proposes that 'how utterances containing 'God' fit into the rest of our utterances, whether indeed they fit in at all or belong to a self-sustaining language activity with its own discontinuous kind of adjudication depends, one may say, on "how you define 'God.'" (Jenson 1969, 133) 'The term 'God' is a name, a term for a particular, as such 'the question is how the term *identifies* some particular.' (*ibid.*) Jenson says that if someone does not understand the use of a name, the problem is that they 'are unable to pick out *which* of the possible particulars' (*ibid.*) that the speaker might be referring to is the referent of the term. The response is to ask a question of clarification which calls for more information in order to fix the reference of the term. So if I begin talking about John who has come to fix the pipes, and my interlocutor doesn't know whom I am talking about, they will ask 'Who is John?' If John is present, fixing the referent is relatively easy, because I can just point and say 'him'. If John is not present, then I can give a series of descriptions to help fix the reference: 'John is the local plumber, married to Mary, went to school with your brother.'

For Jenson, the important point is that 'the use of such a 'who…' [descriptive reference fixing] clause is implicitly a claim about what is so.' (*ibid.*, 134) Jenson's contention is that information given to fix a reference does not always do so unless the information is factually correct. Modern philosophy of language has created problems and counterexamples to this claim (see Soames 2010, 7-20), but it is adequate for Jenson's purposes in describing theological language. Jenson says that

‘the question about ‘God’ is thus the question about what sort of claims about what is so must be made in order to introduce ‘God’ into discourse.’ (*ibid.*) To link this to the previous section: ‘’The needed truth claims will be the same as the abstractable contents of the reversed form of Evans’ basic onlooks: ‘I look on such-and-such observables as such-and-such in relation to God.’ (*ibid.*)

Jenson believes that the key to understanding this issue is how we understand the relationship 'between the world in general and Jesus in particular as the objects of our religious language.'(*ibid.,* 135) He turns to I. M. Crombie for aid in this analysis. Crombie describes the operation of theological language in terms of its 'logical mother' and 'logical father', language that Jenson adopts. The point of these designations is that, when they come together, the ‘mother’ and ‘father’ produce Christian speech about God.

The logical mother of theological language is 'undifferentiated theism,'(*ibid.*) which 'arises from the experience, inseparable from human life, of the *incomplete* and *obligated* character of our life.'(*ibid.*) This leads us to speak of ourselves as contingent. The term ‘god’ is introduced as a designation for that which is not contingent, but the definition is purely negative, because we have no experience of anything of this kind: 'we do not and could not acquire knowledge of any entity by that name, for we have no idea what it would mean for there to be a noncontingent being. But we do acquire the word, and the word has a function in our lives: that is, it is meaningful.'(*ibid.*) Jenson wants to insist that nothing positive can be known about God from this feature of human life, that is, the experience of finitude. It announces a lack, but does not imply or give any justification for the claim that there exists something that can

properly address that lack. This appears to be behind Jenson's concept of what we will call, 'general revelation without natural theology' in chapter four. The word 'god' becomes meaningful in this way, but does not necessarily refer to, or give us any knowledge of, any existing entity.

Jenson brings in the idea of drama at this point, which should call to mind verdictive illocutionary force. He says that we can understand the logical mother of theological language to be the experience of

> our lives as incomplete *stories*, as dramas missing their climax and denouement. For that we are mortal means that the possibilities raised by our past, by the part of the drama we have experienced, can never *all* be brought to rest, even by disappointment, except by an event that we apparently cannot experience. I therefore can never experience the whole play.' (*ibid.*)

Language about God comes about as a way of supplying the missing climax and denouement of the stories of our lives: 'In our God-utterances we posit what is to complete and fulfill our mortality.' (*ibid.*, 136) This idea will be determinative for all of Jenson's subsequent theological writing.

It is precisely at this point that Jenson thinks we can understand what makes Christian discourse different from that of all other religion: 'it is exactly this undertaking of creating the fulfillment of our lives ourselves, in the power of *our* exercitive utterance, that the New Testament calls "works-righteousness.'(*ibid.*) Recall that exercitive utterances are those sentences that, in combination with relevant social factors, bring about a state of affairs. For instance, when a priest announces, 'I now pronounce you man and wife', he makes it the case that the couple is married, and it is his announcement that accomplishes the work. 'Works-righteousness,' as Jenson uses it here, is any human attempt to respond to this felt lack, labelled 'logical mother' above,

by creating meaning, or projecting divinity in response to such a lack. The attempt, by human beings, to create a meaning for life by announcing such a meaning, is the kind of exercitive utterance that Jenson is attempting both to explain and discredit.

This provides the Christian with an explanation for the vacuity, or at least perceived vacuity, of much talk about God. Says Jenson, 'If 'God is love' is equivalent to 'I need love,' this may be so, but it indeed tells nothing about the conclusion of life but only of *my* demand that it have a conclusion.' (*ibid.*) Put more succinctly, if this is how religious language operates, the reason it lacks any continuity of adjudicability with scientific language is that it says nothing true at all. In what must be a conscious echo of Luther, Jenson concludes that 'the "logical mother" of theological language, the language of religion-as-such, is a whore.' (*ibid.*) As such, it is just 'our vain and self-defeating attempt to evade mortality.' (*ibid.*) This critique perhaps oversteps the mark. The 'logical mother' will serve whomever pays her, including the 'logical father' (see Leftow 1994, 189).[5] This despair over contingency plays an analogous role to Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*; it has a productive role when used legitimately, but it can and does produce illegitimate offspring outside of a proper relationship. Jenson says even if we were capable of evading death by means of our excercitive utterances, we would still not be providing a climax and denouement to our stories, we would not thereby imbue our lives with meaning, but only with extension: '*We* cannot utter that beyond ourselves *for* which we may live.' (1969, 137) This is the logical mother of theological language.

[5] As we shall see, this possibility is the possibility of legitimate Christian language about God.

The 'logical father' of theological utterance is 'the interpretation of some concrete reality in experience as divine. It is because we find something about which we are compelled to say what cannot be said without using 'God' that we come to speak theologically.' (*ibid.*) For Christianity, says Jenson, this concrete reality is 'the complex of events named by 'Jesus Christ." (*ibid.*) In fact, extending what Crombie says, Jenson wants to say that the logical father is 'an event that occurs *as* that over against which we thus experience our incompleteness. For believers, the career of Jesus is that event.' (*ibid.*) The logical father of theological language forms the experience of the logical mother. It is for this reason that the term 'God' is licit for Christian believers at all. Use of the term makes clear that they too are talking about the 'end' of life.

Jenson continues, with Crombie, and asserts that 'religious utterance is the telling of parables.' (*ibid.*) In parables, words are used in their ordinary senses, but 'we do not therefore know *how* what is said in the parable applies to *God*,' (*ibid.*) as Jenson is trying to avoid using the *via eminentiae* available to those with an image metaphysics undergirding their understanding of theological language. As such 'we use parables…*on the authority* of Jesus Christ, who authorizes us to speak of God and, in so doing, to use certain particular parabolic statements.' (*ibid.*, 138) However, only the predicates of theological utterances are parables. 'God' gets its meaning from 'undifferentiated theism'. The purpose of this use is that 'with it, we apply the pseudo-category of divinity to our parables, thereby stipulating to what these parables refer.' (*ibid.*) However, the reference here is not to a thing, but to a direction, or an interpretive rule for speech.

These parables are not, for Jenson, those told by Jesus. Instead 'the claim of the church has rather been that the stories in question are *Jesus' own story* "commended" by the fact that His life occurs as the event of God for us.' (*ibid.*, 139) As such '*Theological utterance is narration of the story about Jesus, qualified by and qualifying 'God'…* Theological utterance is narration of the story about Jesus as the story about God.' (*ibid.*) As 'God' is that against which we define our lives, 'to tell Jesus' story as the story about God is to tell it as narrative of the climax and denouement of my story and your story.' (*ibid.*, 140) And again, to make clear the implication: 'Jesus' story qualifies 'God' by giving it content. 'Godly' means "appropriate to the career of Jesus of Nazareth."' (*ibid.*) Crombie wants to say that 'God' qualifies stories of Jesus by referring them 'up', but here Jenson disagrees. He claims that this simply reinstates the errors of Aquinas and Origen. Rather, 'god' ought to direct stories of Jesus 'forward', so that we can say 'the absolutely last thing has happened, in the events of Jesus' existence. His story tells the conclusion of our lives.' (*ibid.*) In his future writings, the effect of this will be to say that any Christian understanding of God and the world must begin with the history of Jesus Christ, and any source which makes speaking of God in this way problematic must be excised.

This gives Jenson an interesting take on the elucidation, by means of narrative, of the divine attributes. If we are to find out what it means to call God 'just', we must look at the kinds of things Jesus did with the lawbreakers and those in contention with the justice of his day. We have to look at his dealing with sinners to understand the meaning of divine justice. This also gives Jenson a way to deal with the relation between the doctrine of divine attributes and the doctrine of the Trinity, which bears fruit in his later works. He says that 'all theological utterance can be compressed in the

convertible sentence 'God is Jesus' or 'Jesus is God' - that is, in the doctrine of the Trinity.' (*ibid.*) In other words, the Trinity becomes the foundational rule for Christian talk about God, precisely because of Christian claims about Jesus, with the result that the doctrine of the Trinity grounds discussion of the divine attributes. As such, Jenson has a Christological rule for the meaningfulness of theological language. His proposal is similar in some ways to that of Origen and Aquinas, yet at the crucial point of elucidating how language functions, he does not appeal to hidden meaning, nor does he appeal to the general likeness between God and creation, nor does he analogise without clear rules.

VI Verificationism

Despite his acknowledgment that the era of logical positivism has passed, one of Jenson's primary concerns in *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* is to respond to verification theory, which was 'correctly perceived by moral philosophers, poets, theologians, and many others as directly attacking the foundations of their respective enterprises.' (Lycan 2008, 117) In order to see how Jenson responds to verification theory, it will be useful to briefly examine the semantics it offered. For the verificationist, a sentence is meaningful only if it meets one of two conditions. Either it must be 'analytic', or it must be empirically verifiable. Most theological claims do not pretend to be analytic, as such the empirical condition is more pertinent. As regards this condition, 'if some bit of language is supposed to be meaningful, then it has got to make some kind of difference.' (*ibid.*) The difference it makes is a difference in future experience. Differing propositions lead one to expect different experiences,

and propositions are shown to be true or false by what one experiences. This set of future experiences is called the 'verification condition' of a sentence. Verificationists take this a step further and assert that a sentence's verification conditions are the meaning of that sentence. Verification theory is thus an '*epistemic* account of meaning; that is, it locates meaning in our ways of coming to know or find out things.'(*ibid.*) It is important for the theory that one is able to specify what the verification conditions of a sentence are.

There are a number of robust objections to verificationism that ultimately led to the demise of the program. (*ibid.*, 119ff) We have already seen that Jenson has granted the failure of this approach to semantics. One of the puzzles of *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* is that Jenson puts so much attention into responding to a hostile programme that has already been shown to fail, a rare accolade in philosophy. The explanation for this seems to be that Jenson's concern is not merely to respond to academic philosophers, but also to address the spirit of the approach, which he thinks either inspired verificationism, or has filtered into the public consciousness from it. Despite the demise of verificationism among professional philosophers, it still holds sway among many natural and social scientists, and is often held in some form by people outside of academia. In addition, Adrian Moore has defended verificationism in his recent work discussed in the previous chapter. (Moore 2012, 297-301) As such, Jenson's attempt to show that, even granting some form of verificationism, Christian theology makes meaningful claims, and that this verificationist impulse can be productive for the development of Christian theology, should prove a useful project, perhaps more so now that when Jenson developed his defense. As a limit case, it is

worthwhile to show that Christian claims can be meaningful even granting the most hostile system of semantics.

Recall the section on Jenson's use of Austin's pragmatism. One of the critiques of verificationism as a semantic theory is that it only operates on fact-stating language, declarative sentences. A full semantics would provide a theoretical explanation for meaning in all other varied uses of language. Some philosophers analysing religious language used this as a backdoor for Christian speech. The idea, simply put, was that in expressing religious claims, we do not in fact even attempt to assert facts about the world, but simply express our own moral or aesthetic attitudes. This was an approach taken even by A. J. Ayer in *Language, Truth, and Logic*. Jenson wants to deny this outright. This is not to say that religious language does not perform this function, but it does not perform this function to the exclusion of stating facts. It performs an expressive function only as a result of the facts it states. Jenson's attempt to respond to logical positivism is an attempt to show that theological claims are meaningful and fact-stating, even on verificationist ground. To do this, Jenson has to show that theological claims meet two criteria. First, they predict a certain set of future experiences. Second, these future experiences can be adequately described in advance.

Jenson develops a proposal that he labels 'eschatological verification', a term he takes from John Hick, although his proposal is a significant modification on Hick. Hick compares the decision between theism and atheism to the decision between solipsism and external world realism. There is nothing evidential between them, both account for the data: 'no accumulation of evidence can establish or decisively refute either interpretation - though this does not relieve us of the inevitability of interpreting one

way or the other.' (Jenson 1969, 147) On the other hand, this difference in interpretation is important, 'for whereas naturalism interprets the world as complete in itself, religion interprets the world and man's life as "many-storied."' (*ibid.*) As a result, there is in fact a difference between them that might be subject to a type of verification: 'If we do in fact survive death, this will verify the religious interpretation. And theism is therefore, a genuine assertion.' (*ibid.*) However, Jenson does not think that theism in general necessarily includes belief in an afterlife, so an afterlife would not verify 'theism'. Nevertheless, 'that theological utterances will be adjudicated by the eschaton is the unanimous testimony of the [Christian] theological tradition.' (*ibid.*) The result for Christianity is that the demand of verification 'seems to be satisfied simply by taking faith's talk about Jesus at face value,' (*ibid.*, 148) General theism does not have this fortuitous result under verificationism. For Jenson, Jesus' coming to judge the quick and the dead provides the key. As such 'It is not certain private characters of our experience, when we shall have survived death, that are predicted by Christian assertions, but certain public acts of Jesus.' (*ibid.*, 149) Jenson's contention is that his verification works because ''Jesus is Lord' predicts that a series of events dramatically appropriate as the conclusion of the story of Jesus, as already known to us, will settle the issue of our lives: that is, that these events will happen to and with us also, and that the involvement of each of us will be the dramatically appropriate issue also of each of our lives.' (*ibid.*)

There are four concerns Jenson wants to address to splice together Christian eschatology with verificationism. First 'the predictions whose fulfillment will verify our utterances about God are all predictions about Jesus Christ, a man already known to us.' (*ibid.*) This is important for verification, because if the final evidence is

something ambiguous or unknown, it doesn't tell us anything. This problem would be analogous to Jenson's criticism of verification by means of an I-Thou relation. Without some knowledge about the 'Thou' it doesn't tell us anything. He says that 'unless we know enough about God so that we will be able to tell which coming is His coming, His coming will verify nothing.' (*ibid.*) The adoption of verificationism serves the additional, and for Jenson felicitous, purpose of privileging specifically Christian ideas over those of general theistic natural theology.

This leads to Jenson's second point. His proposal introduces a novel element, that is, 'dramatic appropriateness.' This element is necessary because there will inevitably be problems identifying someone who appears now with someone who died two thousand years ago in Palestine. What are the criteria for determining personal identity that will apply in this situation? Is it a matter of continuity of appearance, memory, causality? All have been proposed in broader philosophical debates. Jenson's point is merely that 'How we stipulate is a *decision* question.' (*ibid.*, 151) That is, it is a metaphysical determination, and 'by it we decide what kinds of realities we will reckon with. In the present case our decision about how we will use 'same person' projects a vision of what man is or is to be.' (*ibid.*) Whether we use old philosophical notions or develop new ones, either way, 'if we are believers, we will posit a concept of personal identity consonant with the pattern of faith to which we are called.' (*ibid.*) The concept we settle on will be 'dramatic' for Christianity. Jenson suggests that 'if a series of events fits Jones's story as so far written, then the doer of those events is Jones.' (*ibid.*, 152)

Jenson further points out that 'the prediction *that* a history will conclude in a dramatically appropriate way and the delineation of *what* will be accepted as dramatically appropriate are independent of each other.' (*ibid.*, 153) This is important so that we can set up a criterion for evaluation for verification without knowing exactly what will happen: 'the attempt to delineate what will in fact be acceptable as a dramatically appropriate conclusion to the story of Jesus is a separate enterprise and the matter of theological eschatology.' (*ibid.*) As such, he leaves it.

Third, Jenson notes that 'even if we could historically establish that Jesus had come back to life, this would in no way establish that the conclusion of His life will be the conclusion of ours, that 'God is Jesus' is true.' (*ibid.*, 153-4) This seems like a rather important problem. The solution to it is further consideration of the concepts of death and resurrection, and an evaluation of the way in which Christ's resurrection relates to ours.

Finally, a technical point: 'Theological utterances do not...satisfy the *same* verifiability criterion as do empirical hypotheses. They satisfy *a* verifiability criterion. Theological language is *one of* the many descriptive assertive languages that interlock in our discourse.'(*ibid.*, 154) The issue here is that we can often go searching for the evidence to verify a scientific, empirical assertion. However, with a theological assertion, if Jenson is right, we cannot bring about the conditions necessary for verification. Rather, we just have to wait.

How does this respond to Jenson's criteria? In effect what he has done is to grant verificationist semantics, then attempt to demonstrate that Christian speech still

comes out as meaningful. The verification conditions of the propositions implied in Christian language are the eschatological events promised by the Gospel. It is important that these events be specifiable, yet they are not clearly known. To answer this, Jenson uses the concept of dramatic unity. We may not be able to unequivocally set out what these conditions are; yet they are not empty, because we can look at the historical actions of Christ and as a result, should be able to recognize the verification of these claims when it occurs. The claims are not compatible with any outcomes whatever; as such, the difference makes a difference.

VII Outcomes: Jenson's Exhortations

Jenson does not set out a systematic semantics for theology. However, as we have seen, in engaging with the semantic theories of his day, he does provide some interesting conclusions. Perhaps more than this, his method of engaging with such theories, beginning with theological criteria and then testing those theories to see if they can measure up, and then modifying them if they are found wanting, is in itself both instructive and characteristic of the way Jenson works as a theologian.

At the end of *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, he issues three concluding exhortations, rules for speech which he believes follow from his efforts. First, 'let us talk of God matter-of-factly. Our utterances containing 'God' must all be, at least implicitly, informative statements about the man Jesus of Nazareth and what he has done and will do.' (*ibid.*, 236) This follows from his use of verificationism, as well as

his attempt to understand the way the referent of the term 'God' is fixed. He issues a rough rule for theological speech:

> Let us follow these rough rules: If we are about to say something about God that if pressed we will have to explain in terms of "analogy," "picture," "symbol," or the like, we will not say it. If we are about to say something about God that "only believers can understand," we will admit that we do not understand it either, and not say it. (*ibid.*, 238)

This summarizes much of Jenson view on theological language developed in *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, some of which we have not had space to discuss. It especially draws on his emphasis on the universality of Christian speech.

Second, following from his use of Austin, 'Let our talk of God *be* a word-event.' (*ibid.*) If we do consider our speech to have something like the form of an onlook statement, part of its illocutionary force will render judgment, as well as invitation. With his ever-colourful style, Jenson implores:

> Let us understand uttering 'God' as an act of violence performed upon the hearer, so that, for better or worse, if he hears, he must come from the experience of hearing a different man than he went in. (*ibid.*, 238)

These two principles imply parsimony around speaking theologically. Jenson thinks we should only say 'God' when we need to. Drawing on his work on defining the idea of a 'mother' and 'father' of theological language, in terms of a general feeling for the meaning of life, and a specific event which meets that desire, Jenson exhorts his readers, 'to speak of *Jesus Christ* so that in *this* speaking the truth of our lives is uttered. If we do this, then ever and again we will not be able to avoid 'God'.' (*ibid.*, 239)

Finally, any speech about Jesus Christ will be eschatological. This draws on his use of verificationism, among other things. It is important in terms of his whole theology however, and especially for the development of this thesis, as many of his innovations surrounding his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, time, and the being of God come from his eschatological focus.

VIII Evaluation

Jenson offers, in some ways, a surprisingly contemporary approach to semantics. That a sentence is meaningful does not need to be proven by appeal to a semantic theory, rather, theory is brought in to help us understand how a sentence, presumed to be meaningful, is such. In his exploration of his contemporary philosophy of language, Jenson picks and chooses different elements of widely disparate theories to makes sense of what is going on with theological language. This need not be considered a defect however. There is no overriding demand that we produce one semantic system that explains all meaning. There may well be different kinds of meaning best catered to with different kinds of explanation.

Certainly, the strangest aspect of Jenson's proposal is his willing dependence on verificationism, a theory that by his time had already been largely abandoned by even its most staunch proponents in philosophy. He uses it to explain how Christian theological claims can undergo scrutiny by those outside of the faith, as well as inside. As he is responding, in part, to pressures from scientific ways of speaking, this is perhaps understandable, yet it might be better considered not as a semantic theory,

but as one possible criterion for judging the merits of theological claims, rather than their meaningfulness. It is no defect to give an account of how a difference in speech can 'make a difference' after all.

Finally, perhaps the most surprising development since the time Jenson wrote *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* in the engagement between philosophy and theology has been that semantics is no longer a battleground. While there are many compelling attacks from epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics against Christian theism, critique from philosophy of language is more of an historical issue. This is not to say that the work Jenson has done is no longer necessary, however attention both in theology, and in philosophy of religion, focuses, once more, on traditional problems.

3 A Trinitarian Epistemology

Robert Jenson often describes his task as a theologian to be the development of a revisionary metaphysics adequate to the claims of the Gospel, and to the reflection of the Gospel found in the traditions of the church. Linguistic concerns take a back seat to this, while epistemological matters are even further behind. Nevertheless, having discussed Jenson's theological method and his views on theological language, it is appropriate to turn to his theological epistemology. There are a number of reasons to address theological epistemology in this thesis.

I Why Discuss Epistemology?

The first reason to discuss epistemology is that works on metaphysics typically contain some reflection on the epistemological status of their premises and conclusions. This is common practice for good reason. By nature, metaphysical claims are often speculative, abstract, and difficult to verify. As such, those who assert such claims have some duty either to provide very compelling reasons for their readers to adopt their claims, or to acknowledge their tentative nature. Over-confident assertion of grandiose speculation opens one to the challenge set out by Kant in his *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*:

> "It is, after all, not completely unheard of, after long cultivation of a science, that in considering with wonder how much progress has been made someone

> should finally allow the question to arise: whether and how such a science is possible at all. (Kant 2004, 6)[1]

Kant had a significant impact on the discipline of metaphysics, and we perhaps see his influence in the tentative way some contemporary metaphysicians address questions about the epistemological status of metaphysical claims.

Some philosophers practice what P. F. Strawson called 'descriptive' metaphysics, whereby one seeks to describe the rational structure of the human mind, or the implied claims found in scientific assertions (Strawson 1959, 9-12; Davidson 2001, 105-121; Quine 1948), others do advance some epistemological justification for their metaphysical claims. For instance, we have already seen the various ways that David Armstrong seeks to ground his Truthmaker metaphysics (2004). Some, like Peter van Inwagen, simply deny that metaphysics, and more generally, philosophy, is a science at all, at least in the sense of providing sure information. So van Inwagen says in the introduction to his *Metaphysics*, 'If some branch of philosophy were suddenly to undergo a revolutionary transformation and began, as a consequence, to yield real information, it would cease to be regarded as a branch of philosophy and would come to be regarded as one of the sciences.' (2009, 11) Finally, some restrict themselves to making tentative claims about speculative metaphysical issues. For instance, in Ted Sider's *Four-Dimensionalism,* he remarks that 'it would be foolish to require generally that epistemological foundations be established before substantive inquiry can begin' (Sider 2001, xv). Nevertheless, he follows this by remarking, 'Metaphysical inquiry

[1] The request for a justification for metaphysics did not originate with Kant. Although Kant names Leibniz and Locke as the originators of metaphysics, Aristotle himself, in the work which came to be known as the *Metaphysics*, asked and sought to answer precisely this question. (2004, I) For a discussion of twentieth-century German protestant religious epistemology, see Zachhuber 2005b.

can survive if we are willing to live with highly tentative conclusions. Let's not kid ourselves, metaphysics *is* highly speculative! It does not follow that it is entirely without rational grounds.' (*ibid.*)

Why include a chapter on epistemology in an account of Jenson's Trinitarian theology and metaphysics? Simply because it is good practice in metaphysics. Jenson's own approach is in accord with aspects of several of these styles. Like Sider, Jenson does not think that he need provide an epistemic justification for his work in advance of making explicit theological claims. However, his metaphysical claims do not have the same tentative quality as those of Sider. Like Armstrong, he does, however, provide a foundation for his metaphysics. That is, his metaphysics flows out of consideration of Christian theology. As we saw in the first chapter, Armstrong limits the kinds of claims that are admitted as grounds for making metaphysical claims. There we noted that, like van Inwagen, Jenson does not believe that the claims of Christian revelation are, in principle, ruled out of the task of metaphysics. However, unlike van Inwagen, Jenson clearly believes that theology ought to form a part of the foundation for metaphysical inquiry. It must do so, for Jenson, because the claims of the Christian religion have metaphysical implications, and so to leave out such claims will of necessity result in an incomplete or inaccurate metaphysics. In short, if we are to reflect on the epistemological grounding of the claims of Jenson's metaphysics, at least a part of that ground will be the claims of Christian theology, although, of course, other considerations will be relevant. Note Jenson's autobiographical conclusion to his essay 'You Wonder Where the Body Went':

> My first grown-up job was teaching introduction to philosophy on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and introduction to theology on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. I recall spending much time trying to discover the gear I was

> supposed to shift each evening but Saturday. I have given up. My recommendation is that we all should. (1995, 224)

This brings us to a second reason to discuss epistemology in this thesis: it is good practice to make some comment on the epistemological status of the theological claims one makes. If, when asked to point to the justification for his metaphysical claims, Jenson can simply point to his theological claims; if Jenson grounds his metaphysics in his theology, we have a further question to ask: does Jenson offer an epistemology for his theological claims? Such questions do not need to be taken as a threat. We can simultaneously ask about the epistemology of a theological claim while denying that such an account is necessary in order to make the claim. We saw above that Sider did not believe it was necessary to provide an epistemology for metaphysics before engaging in constructive metaphysics. Indeed, he confessed that he was unable to do so. There is no reason to think that theology is any different here. This being the case, why might a theologian want to offer comment on the epistemological status of their claims? To quote St. Paul, 'All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial.' (1 Corinthians 12:23) While it might be possible and even acceptable, to write theology without reflection on epistemology, it might be beneficial to include such reflection. This is especially the case in a project like Jenson's, which situates theology within the apologetic mission of the church. (Jenson 1997, ix) Just as in the previous chapter we saw Jenson giving an account of the meaningfulness of Christian speech, while simultaneously assuming that such speech is meaningful, so it would contribute to Jenson's project to provide an account of the rationality of Christian claims, even while simultaneously assuming that such claims are rational.

Even so, we might anticipate resistance from Jenson here. He has explicitly disavowed modernist theological prolegomena for their attempts to give an epistemological foundation for theological work. (*ibid.*, 6) On the other hand, as we shall see momentarily, Jenson both provides some comment on how knowledge of God happens, and also gives us reason to think that he would be sympathetic to at least some forms of contemporary religious epistemology.

II Jenson on Knowledge of God

In his *Systematic Theology*, Jenson's comments on the knowledge of God come at the end of the first volume, immediately following his comments on the 'being' of God. They re-present ideas developed in earlier works, and yet the systematic placement emphasizes Jenson's belief that doctrine concerning the knowledge of God is properly subsequent and depends on a wealth of already established theological claims.

As we shall see in a later chapter, for Jenson, one of the features of being is knowability. Jenson takes this to be a claim of classical metaphysics that he adopts in his own system: 'to have being is to be knowable,' (Jenson 1997, 224) and 'we attribute being to God, and so attribute knowability to him.' (*ibid.*) The question then becomes, how is God knowable? What does it mean to say that God is knowable? Jenson begins his account by ruling out what he sees as a flawed answer to these questions. We should not 'think of God as simply one thing and creatures as another, and then inquire how the second, with its capabilities, could know the first, given its characteristics.' (*ibid.*) Jenson says that if this is our conception, we will likely think

our knowledge of God works causally. That is, God causes creation to be a certain way, and we can read God's characteristics off of these features. This, Jenson thinks, is incorrect. 'God's knowability is not a dispositional property…it is not his possession of qualities that adapt him to satisfy…our cognitive effort. God is knowable because and only because he is in fact known.' (*ibid.*, 227) This last sentence is somewhat perplexing. The best interpretation is that God is knowable *to us* because he is known *to himself.* God's knowledge of himself is not a dispositional property because he always necessarily knows himself, while the fact that we may know God is a property we possess, even if we only possess it because of God's action, such that if we do not know God, this does not mean God has a dispositional property of knowability, but that we do.

Instead of thinking of God as just one thing, and creatures as another, Jenson says we need to think of God in Trinitarian terms. After all, Jenson's epistemology is subsequent to his metaphysics, and his metaphysics are determined by his Trinitarian theology. Jenson discusses the knowledge of God in the context of the medieval-inspired transcendentals in his metaphysics. That is,

> God is truth and goodness and beauty because and only because knowledge and love and enjoyment in fact occur in the triune life. And God's truth and goodness and beauty are his knowability and loveability and enjoyability because the triune life opens to others than the three who are God.' ((*ibid.*, 226)

Quite a bit of Jenson's Trinitarian theology is contained in this pronouncement, and yet in order to give a brief account of his epistemology, we will have to anticipate some things.

'God is first known by himself. It is an aspect of the mutual life of the Father, Son, and Spirit which is God.' (*ibid.*, 227) Our knowledge of God is subsequent to and reliant on this fact, as 'He is then known by us in that his triune life is in its actuality a life with us.' (*ibid.*, 228). 'In its actuality' is not simply verbal filler. We will have cause in chapter seven to discuss what this means for Jenson, but in short, for Jenson, whatever God might have chosen, in fact, God has chosen to create, and to live his life alongside creation; to become incarnate in it. As such, the actual God cannot be described or identified apart from creation. For Jenson there is no God apart from the one involved with this creation. So, the 'triune life is in its actuality a life with us.' (*ibid.*)

To describe Jenson's point here, we venture far into Trinitarian claims to be examined later. (chapter ten) For now, we will simply observe that for Jenson, the way we know God is to live within his triune life: 'As God has introduced himself to us, he is hypostatically present to and in our community. As we in this community know each other, we know God.' (228) The only condition for knowing God, insofar as there is a condition, is being a part of the church, the Body of Christ: God's body. As 'The Son to whom the Father looks is the hanged man on Golgotha,' (*ibid.*, 229) so 'when the Gospel of Christ's resurrection is spoken by and heard in the church, it is the very word of the Father to the Son that we hear.' (*ibid.*, 228) When asked where we find God, such as to make responsible claims about him, Jenson points to the life of the church. If asked to point to a written record of God's life with his people, Jenson will point first to the Scriptures, and then to the traditions, ecclesiastical pronouncements, and history of the church. We may quote at length to summarize:

> It is the *truth* of our knowledge of God: God gives himself to be our object, and the object that he gives to us is none other than the object as which he is given to himself. God says at once to himself and to us: who I am is the Father of that man Jesus. Because he says it first to himself it is true when he says it to us…If we speak of the knowledge of God that is possessed only by God himself and by his perfected saints, it is Christ's self-knowledge that is the identity of God's knowledge of himself and this human knowledge of God...The saints and we, in our temporarily different ways, share Christ's knowledge by the Spirit…the Spirit is the very life of the saints. (*ibid.*, 229)

In anticipation of the following sections, we will give a brief, perhaps overly prosaic, gloss to Jenson's theological claims. In terms of contemporary epistemology, we might say that Jenson's view of the knowledge of God comes down to experience and testimony. That is, within the church we experience God's triune life, and in the voice of the church we hear the testimony of God. This gloss will help us orient ourselves as we consider the ways that Jenson's theology of the knowledge of God can cohere with some aspects of contemporary epistemology.

III The Task and Relevance of Analytic Epistemology

Describing the ways in which Jenson's doctrine of the knowledge of God fits into contemporary epistemology will serve two ends. First, for those more comfortable with the language and concepts deployed in contemporary epistemology, it will make Jenson's claims more comprehensible, or perhaps less incomprehensible. Second, for those more versed in the style of contemporary Trinitarian theology that Jenson employs, it will show how such theology can fit into a wider world, and produce a fairway amenable for dialogue.[2]

[2] For a much more developed instance of such an approach see Diller 2014.

Nicholas Wolterstorff has described the task of much contemporary analytic epistemology in this way:

> Beliefs come with a variety of distinct truth-relevant merits and demerits. They are warranted, reliably formed, entitled, justified, rational, cases of knowledge, fit for inclusion within science, and so forth. Contemporary epistemology in the analytic tradition has been preoccupied, in recent years, with the attempt to offer analyses of such merits as these, and criteria for application. (2004, 2)

Wolterstorff contends that many epistemologists would like to find one unifying truth-relevant merit for beliefs, and so to establish some kind of universal epistemology. However, he claims that it is not necessary to do so in order to make good judgments: 'Theory comes *after* practice, not before.' (*ibid.*, 3) Wolterstorff follows the subject of his book, Thomas Reid, in arguing that there may be no universal criterion for good judgments about beliefs, but that different kinds of beliefs might be made 'good' by various distinct features. This is very much in line with the prolegomenal remarks Jenson makes concerning epistemology. He says that we cannot begin with a universally valid epistemology and then proceed to employ it in our theology, rather, we must work through our theology and, to speak roughly, see what turns up. What we have outlined above is precisely what turns up. Nevertheless, we can find in Jenson's approach some features of beliefs, or some principles, which will point us in the direction of an epistemology that is at least amenable to the kind of approach which Wolterstorff attributes to contemporary epistemology, so long as the various caveats already mentioned are kept in mind.

Even if, in Jenson's Trinitarian theology, we see some features conducive to describing a more analytic-style epistemology, is there warrant in Jenson's overall approach to do so? If, as I have mentioned, it is unnecessary to pursue such an attempt, it might be wisest to simply move on. Although Jenson's main emphasis

seems to be that theologians need not provide such epistemological reflection on their claims, there is some sign that such reflection can be useful, and is indeed present in his writing. In *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, Jenson remarks that 'If 'God is love' is equivalent to 'I need love,' this may be so, but it indeed tells nothing about the conclusion of my life but only of *my* demand that it have a conclusion.' (1969, 136) Jenson's claim seems to be resting on an epistemological principle: that a desire for a claim to be true is insufficient justification for the belief that it is true. Desire that a claim be true is not a truth-relevant merit for that belief, to use Wolterstorff's terminology. Without this implicit claim, Jenson's argument does not hold. Otherwise, we could say: the desire that God exists, and acts in the manner described in the Bible, directly justifies belief in God.

In the rest of this chapter, we will examine one type of contemporary analytic epistemology, 'phenomenal conservatism' and see how it relates to Jenson's work. I have chosen phenomenal conservatism as it coheres with some aspects of Jenson's thought.

IV Phenomenal Conservatism

Although for the purposes of this paper, I will describe Michael Huemer's epistemology, I think it is worth noting that the position he puts forward is very similar to that which Roderick Chisolm has traced back to the ancient world. Huemer himself attributes it to Thomas Reid, a contemporary and opponent of David Hume. In modern philosophy this view, known as 'common sense', is found in the works of

G. E. Moore, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Richard Swinburne, Roderick Chisolm, David Armstrong, and Trent Dougherty.

In his first major publication, Michael Huemer proposed an account of perceptual knowledge intended to avoid the problems of indirect realism and respond to the arguments of skeptics, both general and external-world. He proposed a version of direct, or naïve, realism called 'phenomenal conservatism'. Phenomenal conservatism (PC) is intended as a general epistemological theory that has direct realism as a consequence. Huemer takes the fact that it is a total theory of epistemic justification as a virtue.

Huemer's phenomenal conservatism is a version of foundationalism. This is not the evidentialist 'classical' foundationalism, however. Foundationalism *simpliciter* is the thesis that 'there are certain beliefs, the so-called "foundational beliefs," which we are justified in holding and which do not depend on any other beliefs for their justification.' (Huemer 2001, 98) Huemer, as has been mentioned, is especially concerned with perceptual beliefs, and argues that perceptual beliefs are foundational. However, he develops a broader foundationalist theory. Foundational beliefs do not depend on other beliefs, but that does not mean that they depend on nothing at all. Huemer aims to provide a criterion by which to differentiate 'foundational beliefs from merely arbitrary beliefs.' (*ibid.*, 99) This criterion is phenomenal conservatism (PC). PC is intended to serve as a principle for all foundational beliefs of any kind, rather than simply for perceptual belief.

Phenomenal conservatism is the thesis that 'If it seems to *S* as if *P*, then *S* thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing that *P*.' (*ibid.*,) An instance of seeming-as-if is not the same as believing-that. We routinely judge that some seemings are only apparent, that is, our seemings do not always produce belief. Seemings also come in many different flavours. Huemer is primarily interested in perceptual seeming, however other types include those of memory and intellectual seemings, which philosophers routinely refer to as 'rational intuition'.

Seemings provide *prima facie* justification. For Huemer, this means two things. First, such justification does not rely on other beliefs. Second, *prima facie* justification is defeasible. (*ibid.*, 100) As such, for PC 'the epistemological default position is to accept things as they appear. The appearances are presumed true, until proven false.' (*ibid.*) This is an explicit reference to the 'innocent until proven guilty' principle found in some legal systems, which Huemer thinks provide an important example of PC in action. We have seen that Jenson thinks theological language also operates in a similar way to legal judgments. Specifically, a feature of an 'onlook' is that it has 'verdictive' character. Again: 'when it seems as if *P* and no evidence emerges contravening *P*, it is reasonable to accept *P*.' (*ibid.*) Another way of putting this, to bring to the surface a connection to our description of the various propositions which philosophers take to ground metaphysics, is that all knowledge is grounded in Moorean truths, which are foundational and justified by PC. From this, as we shall see, it follows that '"evidence against *P*" would consist of other things that seem to be the case and that, directly or indirectly, either contradict or render it improbable that *P*.' (*ibid.*)

So far, we have discussed those seemings which give *prima facie* justification, and what this means for foundational beliefs. However, for Huemer, not all seemings produce merely *prima facie* justification. Plausibly, some seemings produce 'incorrigible' justification. Huemer's own example is his belief in the proposition 'for every number x, (x+1) is greater than x.' (*ibid.*, 101) This seems to be true to him, and in such a way that it could not be false. As such there is no possible defeater for the belief. Perceptual beliefs do not have incorrigible justification, but other kinds of beliefs, justified by other flavours of seeming, might.

PC is an internalist principle of justification. As such, what matters are those things which appear to be the case to the subject, rather than all possible relevant facts. PC-justified beliefs are justified from the point of view of a particular person. This means that there can be rational disagreement over the status of a proposition: 'one person may be justified in believing that *P*, while another person is not.' (*ibid.*,114)

How might we employ phenomenal conservatism in the construction of a religious epistemology that meets Jenson's criteria? Huemer's discussion of religious belief, or faith, is largely negative. He discusses a form of belief formation which produces unjustified beliefs: the believer may adopt a belief that *P* for reasons other than that it seems as if *P* to the believer. He names two ways in which this might occur, self-deception and faith, but considers that the latter might be a species of the former. His specific example is that of the Catholic who believes that a communion wafer is the body of Christ, even though it appears as if it is communion wafer, based on the authority of the magisterium. This is an unpromising beginning for anyone wishing to use phenomenal conservatism to give an account of the rationality of religious

belief. Even so, such accounts have been given. Chris Tucker, for instance, argues for a justification of religious belief derived from a combination of Plantiga's proper functionalism and Huemer's phenomenal conservatism. (Tucker 2011)

For our purposes, Huemer's worry can be met in a straightforward manner. If the Roman Catholic church seems to the believer as if it is a reliable source of theological information, then the belief that the church is a reliable source can serve as a foundation for belief in transubstantiation. Transubstantiation does not get to be an epistemically foundational belief, but it can still be justified. That the communion wafer seems to be simply a communion wafer does not lead to the belief that it is merely a communion wafer because this belief is defeated by the non-foundational but, for the Catholic, justified belief that it is Christ's body. In a sense this is simply a way of spelling out the implications of Hebrews 11:1, 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' This emphasizes that, for the religious believer, trust in God, or the teaching authority, must be foundational for accepting theological claims made about reality. But such belief is not thereby unjustified by the standards of PC. So the author of Hebrew's continues: 'By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.' (Hebrews 1:3)

V Jenson as a Phenomenal Conservative

It is my contention that phenomenal conservatism fits Jenson's theological project. This does not mean that if PC ultimately fails to present a plausible epistemology, Jenson's project is on the rocks. It simply means that, so long as PC is defensible, it

can serve as a helpful aid in understanding Jenson. There are at least six places in Jenson's writing and thought that align him with PC. Individually, they would provide only very weak evidence that Jenson can be thought of as a phenomenal conservative. Cumulatively, they suggest that there is some interesting convergence.

First, phenomenal conservatism meets the minimum requirements for an acceptable epistemology that we have derived from Jenson's writings: it allows for Jenson's denial of natural theology. Natural theology is unnecessary for theological claims to be justified under PC. It also gives one overarching epistemological schema, which has various permutations according to the belief in search of justification.

Second, we do find Jenson appealing to rational intuitions, that is, seemings, as weak *prima facia* justification in his own writing. In the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, Jenson focuses on the created world. In a chapter on the nature of created time, he produces an argument that should show this.

Jenson begins his account with book eleven of Augustine's *Confessions*. For Augustine, the past and future only exist in their present manifestation in the soul as memory and anticipation. The result is that time is fundamentally subjective: 'the intrinsic temporality of creatures occurs as such only *within* creatures of one sort, souls made in the image of the divine Presence.' (Jenson 1999, 31) The temporality of created souls analogously reflects the Eternity of the Divine Mind, to whom all time is present. 'Created time for Augustine finally depends for its extension on a space within created images of divine Presence, who would most straightforwardly reflect their Archetype as temporally located but dimensionless points, but are "stretched out"

to let them encompass past and future despite their finitude.' (*ibid.*) This gives us one of the two options Jenson sees for interpreting time in the Western intellectual tradition: that 'time is the inner horizon of human experience.' (*ibid.*) The second comes from Aristotle for whom, according to Jenson, 'time is the metric of external physical movement provided by a standard such movement.' (*ibid.*) Unfortunately, he thinks, neither one of these accounts has proved adequate.

For Christian theology, the Aristotelian account cannot suffice because 'the motions of the heavenly bodies provided the standard measure of the world's processes; just so this motion was approximated to eternity, and the heavens became mediators of divinity. Augustine demythologized the heavens by relocating time in the soul…' (*ibid.*) Augustine's account is also inadequate, because he accepts Aristotle's demand that time is not a motion, but a means of measuring motion, but makes the specious present of consciousness this measure. This specious present is plastic, however, and as such cannot provide a consistent measure: 'In fact Augustine still subliminally assumed an Aristotelian external time line on which the soul is located and on which its extensions are measured – just as we have had to assume such a metric in order even to describe his teaching.' (*ibid.*, 32) Augustine's teaching is incoherent, hence the recurrence of Aristotelian view of time. Jenson thinks this picture is unsatisfying on a phenomenological level: 'it does not account for what is after all the experientially decisive feature of our dealing with time…that we find our experience antecedently and constitutively…shaped by it.' (*ibid.*) As a result, both Augustinian 'subjective' and Aristotelian 'objective' views of time are held together in dialectical tension.

The key issue for us is how Jenson navigates this apparent contradiction. He says that 'surely our primal intuition of time is that it must possess the characters of *both* Augustine's "time" and Aristotle's "time," of both "real" time and "imaginary" time.' (*ibid.*) Jenson's appeal is to what might be described as rational intuition in order to understand the phenomenon of time.

These intuitions seem contradictory, but Jenson works around this. Time is the distension of mind, but not our finite mind, it is the distension of an infinite mind, the divine mind. As such, we recognize in our own minds an analogous temporality which enables experience, while we also recognize a standard of measure which belongs to God, external to our minds: 'God makes narrative room in his triune life for others than himself; this act is the act of creation, and this accommodation is created time…we are within the divine life as *participants* and so experience this metric as a determining character also of our existence as persons.' (*ibid.*) This means that 'time is *both* the inner extension of a life, as for Augustine, *and* the external horizon and metric of all created events, as for Aristotle.' (*ibid.*, 35)

Jenson's evidence can be construed as justified by rational intuitions, seemings, from which he derives an aspect of his metaphysics. Although rational intuitions might be a feature of other epistemological theories, here they seem to operate in a way congruent with PC. These two intuitions are not the self-evident truths of classical foundationalism or of 18th century rationalism. They are defeasible, but give *prima facie* justification such that, if it is possible to construct an adequate theory, for Jenson it is preferable to retain beliefs justified by them.

Third, we find another instance of Jenson appealing to something like PC in his discussion of physical determinism. Jenson claims that, theologically speaking, to be a creature is to be 'freed' (*ibid.*, 41). This view is problematic for persons, he says, because we are taught that the world operates mechanistically. So he says that 'Even most scientists, who know better in their practice, continue to assume in everyday metaphysics that someone who knew all physical laws and the total state of the universe at some moment could predict all future events.' (*ibid.*) That is, the creation is a realm of physical determinism. Jenson, however, denies this. He says that if we 'take our own experience of freedom seriously' (*ibid.*) we cannot accept that we are physically determined. He takes this contradiction to be the origin of 18th and 19th century claims in philosophy and theology that blur the distinction between the Creator and created personhood. Jenson thinks this path is fruitless, and instead says 'Why not take our indubitable experience of freedom as a conclusive refutation of mechanism?' (*ibid.*, 42). Now, Jenson has much else to say about created freedom. However, this should be enough to see his explicit appeal to PC to do theological work. That we are free seems to be true, and so we are justified in believing it. When confronted with a theory that denies that we are free, we can deny it based on the strength of our justification for believing that we are free.

Fourth, one element of Jenson's understanding of theological language is that it is 'verdictive'. Specifically, it makes a judgment on the nature and shape of reality that awaits final verification. In the meantime, given adequate grounds, we are justified in accepting propositions that seem to be the case. This can be taken as an example of Jenson anticipating certain features of Huemer's account.

For the next two pieces of evidence, we need to say something more about how theological claims could be justified by some kind of 'seeming'. In broad terms, we can say that certain kinds of 'seemings' only occur in appropriate contexts. Visual appearances occur when there is light, for instance. Without light there is no vision. Auditory appearances occur only in pressurized spaces, as sound waves require fluid in order to exist and be transmitted. It is at least plausible that there are analogous contexts for religious seemings. Such contexts need not be all-or-nothing. They may admit of gradation. That is, there might be certain situations in which, to anticipate slightly, the fullness of the Christian vision of reality just *seems* true, there may be others in which it does not, or that such a seeming lacks the strength it has in other contexts. For instance, standing in the midst of an Orthodox liturgy on Easter morning might give one a very full sense of the reality of God, while standing in the midst of a central park, a flashing, over-stimulating area fueled by consumer capitalism, might not, although this does not mean such seemings are impossible, but that they might be less frequent or less strong. Such an idea comes up in at least two places in Jenson's writing.

So, fifth, in his essay 'What if it were True?' Jenson describes an experience he has. While attending a church in New York, in the midst of a service, he describes the work of the church organist and says

> While her French-style improvisations are shaking the stones of the building, and my stony heart, when climax upon climax each improbably eclipses its predecessor, I am able to sustain the notion that all God's various holy ones are gathered there with us, that in fact we are praising God, as the liturgy of my church has it, "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" (2014a, 25)

Alternately,

> sitting in front of my computer to write for publication, in what the world decrees is comprehensible fashion, I chicken out, and begin looking for ways to pare down the proposition to what fits the antecedent opinion-stock of someone like myself, an academic of recently professional family and more or less liberal education. (*ibid.*)

How do we account for the experience Jenson describes? If the suggestion for the operation of phenomenal conservatism in various contexts above is acceptable, we can say that different contexts lead to different seemings, which might provide *prima facie* justification for certain of Jenson's religious beliefs. The question for Jenson is which context he will accept as normative as regards his seemings. In other words, do his computer-seemings outweigh his worship-seemings, or *vice versa*? The way of approaching phenomenal conservatism I have outlined, it is my conjecture, makes good sense of what is going on in his experience.

Sixth, in *Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, Jenson remarks that the only way to establish the meaningfulness of Christian language was to stop engaging in academic discussion, and begin preaching. (1969, 23) What is the difference here? It is not unreasonable to think that the difference is the context created by the different activities. The goal the preacher tries to accomplish is to make it *seem* to the hearer that the Christian vision of the world, and, by extension, Christian speech about the world, is *true*. In his academic work, Jenson assumes that acceptance of the meaningfulness of Christian speech is justified, and is justified, somehow, by the activity of preaching. Clearly, this is not a direct affirmation of PC, but we can make sense of what might otherwise be an epistemologically suspect claim by assuming PC.

VI Integrating Jenson's Doctrine with PC

Having come this far in developing an epistemology relevant to Jenson's theological project, some might be unsatisfied with what has been produced. Even granting all that has been said about phenomenal conservatism, assuming that its detractors can be overcome, and that religious beliefs can indeed be justified just in the way I have described, there is something missing. That something is a story about *how* we move from reality, to seemings, to knowledge. Huemer's account of perception has such a story; it is drawn from the current scientific story given to each of our senses, and is quite satisfactory, all else being granted.

Interestingly, Huemer does not give such an account for those seemings he classifies as 'intuitions'. Intuitions need not merely concern logical or tautological truths. We have modal intuitions as well as metaphysical intuitions more broadly. We might easily come up with just-so stories to explain such beliefs, but this would not be satisfactory. For instance, there is a causal story behind sensory perception, which moves from facts about the external world to the production of a seeming to the observer, but we have not offered an equivalent story for rational or religious intuitions. It is possible to offer such a story within confines we have drawn from Jenson.

Jenson does not offer a causal story to give an account of religious 'seemings', however, the doctrine of the knowledge of God outlined above does give us a story that can serve a similar end. That is, if asked to give an account of the 'seemings' described above in Jenson's work, a Jensonian can point to experience in, and

testimony from, the church. The story is one of the triune God who lives his life alongside his people. Why does the testimony of the church seem true, to Jenson at least? Because the church speaks with the voice of God. What is the experience undergirding certain religious claims concerning Christianity? It is the experience of participation in the life of God. What we are left with is a story that, of course, is defeasible. This story does not present us with claims about God that can only be denied on pain of irrationality. However, justification need not be that strong. While Jenson's story might suffer the drawbacks that justification by testimony and experience normally do, such drawbacks have answers, and indeed provide an opportunity for Jensonian theology to enter into vibrant dialogue with continuing work in epistemology.

VII Conclusion

It is both important and common to produce some account of epistemology at the beginning of a work focusing on metaphysics. In place of an account of his own epistemology, at the beginning of his *Systematic Theology*, Jenson provides us with an attack on those theologians who attempt to justify their theology using natural theology or a 'neutral' epistemology. Such an attempt is illicit, unnecessary, and unfaithful. Nevertheless, Jenson does at times attempt to offer some kind of epistemological justification, in what he regards as more appropriate locations. I have attempted to show that there are epistemological options available to Jenson. I have also argued that phenomenal conservatism is convergent with Jenson's own writing and concerns.

In our next chapter, we will examine Jenson's denial of natural theology in greater detail.

4 Jenson's Polemic

This chapter and the following chapter each contain a story. These two stories are woven throughout Jenson's corpus. They each describe a way of responding to what Jenson thinks of as humanity's religious quest. The first, in Jenson's view, is an illicit attempt. The second is not a human attempt at all, it is a description of God's action, and the continuing effort of the church to discern and adequately describe this acting God. These two stories are foundational for understanding Jenson's thought. They form a polemic that informs his every theological proposal. Before we begin the story in this chapter, however, we must first describe humanity's religious quest, according to Jenson. We have, of necessity, already given it partial description in previous chapters, especially under the title 'logical mother' of theological language. It is now time to expand the account.

I Jenson's Theory of Religion

In Jenson's *Systematic Theology*, his description of religion comes in a discussion of how the term 'god' can be used across different religious traditions. He gives a short, two step summary of his argument: 'religion is the cultivation of some *eternity*; *gods* are eternities of a certain sort.' (Jenson 1997, 54)[1]

[1] Jenson is self-consciously dependant on protestant notions of religion. He claims 'Schleiermacher's pioneering analysis of "religion"' as 'systematically central.' (Jenson 1997, 9) There are, of course, other ways of approaching 'religion' that are not dependant on particular religious traditions or modes of analysis. For a useful account,

a Religion is the cultivation of some eternity

For Jenson, eternity is not primarily to be understood in terms of physical time, whether as atemporality or everlastingness. Rather, eternity is understood in relation to the human experience of living in time. Time, says Jenson is 'the metaphysical horizon of specifically human life.' (*ibid.*) We can gloss 'metaphysical horizon' as the context within which our existence, thought, and actions make sense; or the necessary presuppositions for the meaningfulness of the same. For human beings, this context is 'time'. It is important to note that this is not the context for individual substances, natural kinds, or composite objects; it is the defining context for *human* life. Jenson says that all of our action and knowledge is 'tensed' in that 'we can neither know nor act upon our world or ourselves without "will be," "was," and "is."' (*ibid.*, 54-55) The 'past' aspect of all action is the way things have been and occurred, the necessities and determinations of the world as it is. The 'future' is what is intended in freedom, not determined necessarily . Jenson says that this 'occurs at and as the juncture of memory and anticipation. Thus the substance of every specifically personal act is the particular way it rhymes past and future into lived present meaning.' (*ibid.*, 55)

Jenson's language is colorful, but it is also not completely clear. His point seems to be that what makes human action 'human' is its intentional character, and the aspect of choice or freedom associated with this. An event that occurs of necessity cannot count as a human act. This would be an act entirely determined by the past. An action which

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see Pals 2014. That such kinds of study are not superior to tradition-bound efforts is rather Jenson's point.

is taken at random, with no relationship to, influence by, or consideration of, the past could not be the intentional action of a temporal agent, or so Jenson seems to be saying. Thus, the hallmark of a human, intentional, personal agent is to 'rhyme' the past and future in the right way in the present.

Jenson thinks that human beings are confronted with a problem: 'our actions and with them our lives threaten to fall or be torn between past and future, to become fantastic or empty, unplotted sequences of occurrence that merely happen to befall certain otherwise constituted entities.' (*ibid.*) If we do not achieve the right kind of 'rhyme', then the past and future of our lives can fall apart, and we cease to exist as personal creatures. Rather, we just become some kind of composite object that is subject to forces. Our response to this is to seek to guarantee our personhood by positing some kind of 'eternity', that is: 'personal life posits an *embrace* around created time, to clasp its doings or sufferings in dramatic coherence.'[2] (*ibid.*) For Jenson, this feature is labelled 'eternity', because it is specifically the temporal dimension of human life which raises the problem. An eternity is some kind of posited 'embrace' around human life.

Jenson claims that it is appropriate to label an 'embrace' around human life 'eternity' because 'some functional translation of this word appears in any moral-religious language.' (*ibid.*) He further claims that 'In all that we do, we rely upon some or another way in which time's discontinuities are believed to be transcended.' (*ibid.*) Seeking this posited eternity can become the practice of 'religion'. As such, 'there are

[2] For a very similar discussion, discussed in explicitly Christian terms, while substituting 'wholeness' for 'eternity', see Pannenberg 1977, 192-193; also compare Macquarrie 1967, 99-100.

many putative eternities.' (*ibid.*) Among these Jenson mentions tribal cults which practice ancestor worship, Platonic religion, and existentialism. All of these posit some kind of embrace around time which protects against personal disintegration, but they all do it in very different ways.[3] An 'eternity' is that which makes human life, *qua* human, actual.

Although Jenson is not discussing the problem of composite objects in general, there is an illuminating parallel in contemporary mereology. The 'special composition question' asks 'In what circumstances is a thing a (proper) part of something?' (van Inwagen 1995, 21) Jenson might be asking the same kind of question for events. That is, what are the conditions under which a series of events composes one larger event? Jenson's actual question is a little bit more specific than this. He asks, what are the conditions under which a series of events composes an event which belongs to a particular kind – that of human person. That human persons, and indeed all persons, are events is a feature of Jenson's ontology that will be covered in chapter ten. Jenson's response to the question, when phrased in this way, is that a series of events composes a human person just when there is the right kind of relationship between these events, marked by intentionality mediating freedom and determination. For Jenson, this kind of relationship is ultimately only held securely by the power of the triune God.

b. Gods are eternities of a certain sort

[3] On this analysis of religion, compare Thielicke 1970.

One of the first questions to ask of a religion is 'What eternity does it posit?' (Jenson 1997, 55) For Jenson, there are two broad ways of answering this question. There are personalistic religions, where the eternity can be addressed, and in which an answer can be expected, and there are those which do not think of the 'eternity' as personal. The first kind of religion has a god, or gods, the second does not.

As a consequence, the term 'god' functions as a name, or 'term of personal address' in the broader context of the awareness of other religions: 'the initial term of personal address is always some name or identifying description, and the common noun "god" appears when devotees notice that others address other eternities by other names, as a word to cover all such places.' (*ibid.*, 56) The term 'god' is analogical. This is as a result of its derivation from 'eternity', which is a fundamentally analogical concept. It serves to highlight similarity across religious boundaries.

Jenson continues, explaining that the derivation of the term 'god' from the analogous concept 'eternity' gives 'god' a 'logical quirk.' Namely, religious predicates attributed to 'god' are empty until the particular god under discussion is identified: 'if we do not know which putative god is intended, "God redeems" says only that a somehow eternal someone somehow transcends whatever situation that someone regards as undesirable; when we learn that, we learn little enough.' (*ibid.*) Jenson notes sardonically that 'the proposition "All gods save" is indeed indisputable but only because it is wholly empty.' (*ibid.*)

Jenson's claim is that religion is the cultivation of a human projection. He expressly credits this to Feuerbach. The fact that the term 'god' can be used in diverse religious

traditions is a result of its being formally structured by the universality of projection, while its material meaning is given by a particular narrative. This is not the end of the story, however. We should not conclude that god is nothing but projection. Jenson remarks that

> Feuerbach doubtless correctly described the way in which human beings envision deity…in our communal life we discover and live by goods that are in fact valued among us, yet none of us finds fully available to him- or herself; in our consequent longing and resentment, we project the fullness of these goods onto the screen of eternity. (*ibid.*, 52-53)

This is exactly the Biblical critique of idols according to Jenson. Each culture 'validates and enforce[s] the particular human situation, with its structure of values, from which she/he/it is projected.' (*ibid.*, 53) These remarks establish both the continuity and the distinction between Christianity and non-Christian traditions. Christianity springs from Israelite religion, which is distinct in that it does not see eternity as a projection of its own innate and necessary form. For Jenson, Israel's faith is based on historically contingent events. In the Old Testament, Israel is continuously reminded that their 'own' god could have chosen another nation: 'Israel did not envision her God by the needs of her culture, but rather *he* chose Israel, *with* her culture. This God could, he claims for himself, have chosen any other nation or nations, with one or several different cultures, as the very same God he is.' (*ibid.*, 52) This institutes a form of self-critique at the heart of all Biblical religion. While typically religion is the product of culture, for Biblical religion, there is a constant and surprising religious criticism of culture: 'it belongs to the worship of the Lord to be told that the needs that lead us to that worship do not determine its object.' (*ibid.*) In light of what we have already said, this means that our self-understanding, and our understanding of our situation, does not give us license to project a particular eternity to meet our own needs. This is how Jenson's polemic begins – he establishes a distinction between Christianity and all

other forms of belief. It is now important to turn to what he says about the early religious context of Christianity. So begins the story of this chapter.

II The 'Religious' Context of Early Christianity

The religious context of early Christianity is, for Jenson, Hellenistic culture and the intellectual content is ancient philosophy. The impact of this on Jenson's theology is immense. Through the course of his writings he returns more and more to the church Fathers, and as a result, increasingly engages with the philosophical giants that formed their context. In *Systematic Theology*, above all others, this is Aristotle. However, in *God after God*, Jenson describes this intellectual context in more detail, beginning with the pre-Socratics and moving forward.

Jenson acknowledges that *God after God* is 'the weirdest of my books' (Jenson 2010, xi). In it he attempts to expound, explain, and extend on Barth's *Commentary on Romans*. In brief, he sees the *Commentary on Romans* as an attempt to work out and define the religious conflict between time and eternity in terms of a dialectic, along with the correspondence between them. The later works of Barth retain the same structure, but replace the correspondence of time and eternity with the incarnate Christ. Jenson describes this turn as one from the death of the God of past history, to the God of future history. The development of the God of past history, the 'God of the Past', is one which begins with ancient Greek philosophy.

Jenson describes Barth as firmly within the tradition of Socrates, or perhaps, as being the last to stand in the tradition which was formed by, although did not originate with, Socrates. This tradition is one characterized by a 'basic contradiction between time and eternity.' (*ibid.*, 11) Socrates' dialectics in the early Platonic dialogues worked in this way. '"What is justice?" he asked, and dialectically exploded every given answer by showing its partiality and relativity to historical circumstance, and its consequent inability to make plausible the absolute and timeless claim which justice must have on us.' (*ibid.*) Socrates' purpose was not to show the futility of intellectual enquiry, or the inherent meaningless of social institutions, but rather 'Unless Plato has utterly falsified the death scene, Socrates meant by these conversations to wean himself and his hearers from captivity to time and to prepare for the eternal.' (*ibid.*) Socrates attempts to help his hearers make a transition through the basic contradiction of reality by means of making them aware of it.

Jenson sees Socrates as the most influential person shaping this tradition, but Socrates is not the originator of it. Rather, the source is Parmenides: 'Carried by the chariot of the Daughters of the Sun, Parmenides passed from darkness to light – and saw the goddess.' (*ibid.*) What the goddess told him was that he must learn reliable, balanced truth, as opposed to mortal opinion, and 'the knowledge the goddess will give is *saving* knowledge.' (*ibid.*) What is the content of this truth? That what 'is' can be said, and what 'is not' cannot be said. The contrary, that what 'is not' can be said or has meaning, is false, mortal opinion. Jenson wants us to focus not on 'the logical errors involved in this assertion that negations are always meaningless,' (*ibid.*) but on the existential concern evident here: 'On the one hand there can be nothing beyond our grasp, no mystery we cannot transcend by seeing through it. On the other hand,

unreality cannot be experienced and so need not be feared.' (*ibid.*) This is whence comfort comes: 'The enemy is our own unreality, death; salvation is assurance that death is an illusion.' (*ibid.*) This fits Jenson's later analyses of religion perfectly. There is an existential fear in play, death. The response is predication itself. 'if only "is" is a possible predicated, all "that is real…deathless." And time, which is the mode of coming into being and passing away, is an illusion.' (*ibid.*) Jenson continues that 'the content of our first great philosophically conscious religiosity was a call to refuse to believe in death.' (*ibid.*, 12)

We have seen Jenson's description of religion generally as the pursuit of an eternity which lends dramatic unity to the events of our mortal life. Here he defines a sub-class of religion, the religion to which everyone in the West belongs in some way or another, which began with Parmenides, was shaped by Socrates, and, Jenson asserts, ended with Barth's devastating criticism. He defines it thus: 'Overcoming – or evading – death by positing a timeless reality set above our stories in time has remained the structure of what we have in the West called "religion."' (*ibid.*) Parmenides, of course, as the beginning of a tradition, did not end it, and so left important questions open. Chief among them is 'how, if the difference between time and eternity is as absolute as he makes out, we can stand between the two so as to make such a choice?' (*ibid.*) Socrates provided what was needed, he 'taught us how to live there between.' (*ibid.*) While he did not develop a metaphysical system, by his dialectic, he showed 'how we bind the words…by which we grasp the meaning of our lives to partial and passing realities. Just so, each question was a step above such temporal limitations.' (*ibid.*) This opened 'our aspirations to the eternal reality which alone can fulfill them.' (*ibid.*)

In the *Symposium*, Plato portrays Socrates as 'the incarnation of the religious possibility.' (*ibid.*) In that work, Plato has his characters discuss and define Eros, which names 'man's search for completion…Eros *is* religion.' (*ibid.*) Socrates then speaks, and constructs the idea that Eros is 'something midway between mortality and immortality…an unstillable spiritual energy.' (*ibid.*) Eros is the product of ultimate value and fulfillment in eternity, and lack of fulfillment, which is mortality. Eros causes one to seek to transcend temporal and partial goods in pursuit of something higher, the eternal value. Plato then conveys the idea that Socrates is Eros: 'Socrates becomes an icon, of life as the journey from time to eternity, of life propelled on by their contradiction. He becomes the icon of the overcoming of death, which has ever since been on the screen of all western religion.' (*ibid.*, 13)

Jenson moves to a brief discussion of Aristotle. He asserts that Aristotle kept all which he has described intact. Aristotle's great innovation and addition was to describe the God appropriate to this nascent religious tradition. He did this by attempting to understand what it means to be: 'what is the being of beings? What is true of anything that is, just so that it is?' (*ibid.*) The primary characteristic must be, and can only be when the question is phrased this way, 'changeless', it is resistant to time, neither coming to be nor passing away. Jenson asserts here, as he will do again later in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*: 'The hidden unrest in all Greek philosophizing was the question: Can it be that all things pass away? Aristotle answered: No. That in the world which does not cease to be, which does not die, is what grants reality to the world.' (*ibid.*) Just to make things clear, Jenson is saying that Aristotle conflates that which *makes* things real, with that which *is* always real. This rules out time definitively. The alternative would be to say something like, what

makes things real is that they pass into existence, and they cease to be real once they pass out of it. Time is the 'horizon', the 'stage' or the 'place' of real things. In this understanding, without time, nothing can be real. Jenson is taking Aristotle to be asserting the opposite. Things are most truly real when they lack time.

This causes a problem: 'none of the objects of our knowledge and activity satisfies this definition of reality. All of them are subject in one respect or another to change and time.' (*ibid.*) Yet Aristotle cannot draw the inference from our observation that nothing is without time, to no *thing* is without *time*. Instead, he asserts the existence of some thing without time, which is unavailable to direct observation: 'our search for security from time carries beyond nature to God. God is the absolutely *present* being, who satisfies Parmenides' postulate…He is the exemplary fulfillment of the meaning of all beings: never not to be. In him, the denial of death is triumphant.' (*ibid.*) Here we might say that after Aristotle, we do not have the 'God of the Past', the god of past history, built up as a concept. Rather, we have the god of ahistory. In practice, at least in Barth's *Commentary on Romans*, this move from time to eternity cannot happen, and the demi-gods who once made this transition possible now stop it altogether: 'the mortality which the dialectic uncovers running through all things once drove us to seek eternity; now it blocks all such attempts.' (*ibid.*, 14)

The problem is that the 'infinite' which we project is defined only in relation to our own finitude: 'Eros, in all his manifestations, is Not-God, the god of this world.' (*ibid.*) The idea is that when we project infinity, we fail, because we can only project it as a mirror-image of finitude. Infinity is defined against the finite. True infinity would presumably be greater than a simple negation, but in a way which we cannot

conceive. This god Eros is created in man's image; it is again, pure religious projection. 'This god cannot give our life meaning. In his service, man is alone with his own lack of meaning.' (*ibid.*) What is it that turns Eros from saviour to demon? Jenson asserts that it is the adoption of Christianity into the Socratic tradition.

III The Emergence of the God of Past History from the God of Ahistory

The Gospel, in its development from the prophets of the Old Testament, presents a very different picture of meaning of time from that of the tradition so far described. Jenson attributes the malaise in the tradition which he describes to the fact that in Barth's commentary, 'God is not only the God of Aristotle, but also that of *Romans*: the God who "justifies" the "ungodly". And to be justified as ungodly is an utterly different situation of life than the security of being-what-one-was.' (Jenson 2010, 16) The distinction is that to be 'justified' is just to be 'godly', which means that the justification of the ungodly just simply means the affirmation of a contradiction, there is a person who is both ungodly and godly. Aristotle pointed out that contrary properties attributed to one subject can be unified only by time. As such, the justification of the ungodly can only, on pain of logical incoherence, mean that 'the distinction between life and its meaning is the distinction between past and future rather than between time and eternity.' (*ibid.*) This means that, for Christian faith, 'the "Being" which is immunity to change [is] the very prison from which we are set free. It is to hope for a fulfillment of life not determined by what has been…freedom from what has been…' (*ibid.*) And further 'The one thing that the eternal Now, the eternal Presence, cannot do is justify the ungodly. If the justifier of the ungodly is

God, then this Presence is Satan.' (*ibid.*) This is the case because an eternal 'now' cannot unify contrary properties. To be 'projected' into eternity is, for a human person, precisely to be forever laden with what we are, the product of the past. No freedom from it is then possible. Jenson is confident that the only way to make sense of the function of prophecy in the Old Testament is the separation of the old from the new. God saves by the creation of the new, not by the eternal preservation, or even restoration, of what is past. Ultimately, this vision can only be completed in the Resurrection: 'Only by the *success of death*, only resurrection, can be the act of life from the future free from and for the past. If Jesus is risen, this life is enacted.' (*ibid.*, 18)

If this is right, then how did it come about that Christianity did not always adhere to this vision? The relationship between time and eternity in the Western Socratic tradition, as we have briefly noted in chapter two, is one of resemblance. In the negative, it is stated thus: 'the temporal reflects the eternal exactly by way of what it is *not*…it is when we recognize the temporality, and so nothingness, of temporal realities that they point us to eternity.' (*ibid.* 14) This means that no particular historical event 'can be the union of time and eternity in any exclusive sense.' (*ibid.*) The most significance any particular historical point can hope to have is that it makes possible an awareness of the general structure of reality which is always available to those who know it is there, or to those who reflect on the changing world in the right way. This is precisely the problem with finitude as noted above. Time may be a reflection of eternity, but Jenson is clear that it can be *only* a reflection of eternity. As such, when people attempt to reflect on time as a means to eternity, what they find is that time ceases to be a path, and instead becomes a barrier: 'the mortality which the

dialectic uncovers running through all things once drove us to seek eternity; now it blocks all such attempts.' (*ibid.*) When this situation became the norm in the ancient world, Jenson contends that it led to a desperate search for a means of 'salvation'.

The 'God of the Past' is a synthesis of ancient Greek philosophical religion and Christian faith. Its progeny is the 'Christian Religion', where 'religion' is understood polemically as the human attempt to reach for god: self-justification, which inevitably results in failure. Having said that, Jenson is not as harshly critical of the Fathers as many theologians have been. Jenson says that 'it is neither surprising nor reprehensible that as the church incorporated the life of the ancient world within itself, that it should have interpreted the eternity of Plato as the future of the prophets.' (*ibid.*, 19) Jenson is adamant that the Gospel always comes as an interpretation of some antecedent religious understanding, as such, he says that blaming the fathers for 'Hellenization' is 'simply to blame them, who would have been hellenists in any case, for being Christian. And they did not so much interpret the faith by hellenistic religion, as interpret hellenistic religion by the faith.' (*ibid.*) In other words, in their attempt to grasp the meaning of the Gospel, early Christian theologians not only did what they should have done, they also did it well. However, their appropriation of Christianity was not perfect, and as a result, 'the fathers created something new, something which was neither simply Christian faith nor a normal religion: the Christian religion, a *religion about an historical, temporal event*.' (*ibid.*, 19)

For Jenson, the religious quest of the ancient world, relevant to our narrative, was that of a search for a bridge from time to eternity: 'Men no longer felt able to stand where Socrates stood, or reach God by dialectic, for our language has a grammar appropriate

to time – but God is eternal. Thus the quest of the age was for a bridge between time and eternity.' (*ibid.*, 20) This is the contact point where Christian faith and ancient religion could be brought together, and Christian theologians exploited it. Jenson mentions two, Origen and Augustine. For Origen, Jesus Christ became the demi-God Eros, the one who could bring a person from time to eternity. Christ is an historical figure, so the method of doing this must be appropriate to an historical figure. As such, dialectic is replaced with the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, the search for reflections of the eternal in an historical narrative: 'Here transcendence is the *goal* of history, rather than its eternal cancellation. Here the opening to transcendence is done by interpreting biblical *history* as the image of its own goal…' (*ibid.*) Rather than the Bible as a narrative of the overcoming of the past by the possibility of the future brought about by God, the record of history in the Bible itself was projected into eternity. Jenson seems to be saying that in the Biblical scholarship of Origen, precisely that which was to be overcome in the narrative of the Bible is projected as what will always be present as an eternal now. Augustine gave similar 'aid' in his *Confessions*, which Jenson sees as an almost purely Platonic document that creates a doctrine of man as humanity on its way to an eternal home. This eternal home is only found in history however, where in reality: 'what he missed was the event in history; this he found only in the Scriptures.' (*ibid.*, 21)

Now we finally come to what we have hinted at many times. This synthesis, or accommodation, is what created the 'God of Past History'. 'If God is at once God of history and changelessly eternal, he must be *the* God *of past history*, and this is what he became in the history of Christian religion.' (*ibid.*, 22) This is clear from what we have already seen. If time unites contrary properties, and there is no time in eternity,

then God cannot be God of both the determining events of the past and the free future without contradiction. This means that 'the God of past history is the *moralistic* God, who holds us to what we *have* done and so *are*, over against whom we are defined by the permanent part of our temporality, the past. His meaning for us is guilt.' (*ibid.*) This God had to be, and has to be, overcome by the God of the Gospel, 'who *both* accuses and promises, condemns and accepts; he is the justifier of the ungodly, of those he has judged.' (*ibid.*) Identifying this God with timeless eternity, according to Jenson, strips God of the future member of these pairs, so that he just accuses, condemns, and judges. Overcoming this God by identifying the God of the Future is Jenson's task in the rest of *God after God*, but also throughout the rest of his theological career.

To give a rough but adequate distinction, we can say something like this: the procedure for knowing the 'God of the Past' is inference from effect, the world as it is, to cause (God). Jenson wants to deny this method; that the primary apprehension of God is under the category of cause. Rather, God must primarily be referred to as 'infinite'. Only this denial of category is adequate to the freedom of the God of the Gospel. Jenson, following Gregory of Nyssa in his *Systematic Theology*, says that divine *ousia* can only be understood under the pseudo-category 'infinite'. (Jenson 1997, 215-216)

Pannenberg provides some evidence in support of Jenson's reading. He says that the method of causal inference could not be accepted by early Christian theologians precisely because the Christian God is not entirely immanent, which is another way of saying that he has 'essential freedom in relation to the world.' (1971, 138) Unpacking

what this means leads to a drastically altered concept of God and of the cosmos. 'The origin that can be deduced by inference from present reality can never be conceived as the ground of something unheard of in comparison with all present reality. That is simply not forthcoming from the procedure of inference from the known back to the unknown.' (*ibid.*) If God is purely immanent, then this world, as it is, is necessarily as it is. It could not be otherwise. If it is pure effect of an inevitable cause, there can be no ground to speak of the world being, or becoming, fundamentally and essentially different than it is. On the other hand, while

> the biblical God is indeed the origin of present reality…the manner and way in which he is this is already decisively determined by the fact that his essence is not exhausted in this function. God, as the origin, is never merely the invisible ground of present reality, but the free, creative source of the ever new and unforeseen. (*ibid.*)

And as such

> This freedom of God in relation to the world necessarily remains inaccessible to the inferential procedure that is fundamental to philosophical theology, neither could it grasp that a special gift of God to men was necessary for knowledge of God… (*ibid.*)

Here we find Pannenberg sounding very much like the philosophical quest for the nature of divinity must be jettisoned from the beginning. The Christian understanding of the freedom of God invalidates inference from causation. It tells you much less about a cause if you learn that its effect was not a necessary effect. Thus the Christian must rely on revelation from God in order to know him. Yet, Pannenberg, unlike Jenson, wants to maintain philosophical theology as a way of demonstrating the universal claims of Christianity, so 'even if the essence of the biblical God is not exhausted in being the origin of present reality… he nevertheless must remain at least conceivable as the origin of present reality.' (*ibid.*, 139) The question is how to maintain the idea that God is conceivable while jettisoning the idea

of causal inference. As we have seen, Jenson clearly does not think that this was achieved.

Jenson traces the impact of this early exchange between Greek philosophy and Christian theology in his description and critique of the development of natural theology.

IV Natural Theology

Jenson's denial of natural theology *in nuce*, is a denial that there are propositions, the truth of which is accessible to human beings apart from revelation, which can ground a system of theology, thereby allowing us to know the truth of the claims of Christian theology apart from accepting the revelation of the Word of God. However, Jenson does more than simply deny that such a natural theology exists, he also seeks to explain, historically, why such an exercise has seemed possible.

In a sense, Jenson's whole theological approach, and his consistent argument for a 'new' metaphysics coming from Christian theology in opposition to, and dialogue with, metaphysics taken from Greek philosophy, can and ought to be understood as a critique of 'natural' theology. However, he deals specifically with natural theology in the beginning of his *Systematic Theology* where he discusses the role of prolegomena in works of theology. The prolegomena with which he has a problem are those which seek to ground Christian theology in more general, non-theological, propositions and arguments.

Jenson begins his account of the rise of 'epistemologically pretentious' theological prolegomena by prefacing it with the observation that they are a 'distinctively modern phenomenon.' (Jenson 1997, 6)[4] Although there is an analogue in the natural theology of 'premodern Western systems,' this natural theology did not function as something that enables theology as a whole. Nevertheless, Jenson considers this natural theology to be the precursor to our modern woes, or as he says, 'the seeds of later trouble are present in classic theology.' (*ibid.*, 7) Jenson attempts to establish this by discussing what it means to apply the term 'natural' to certain kinds of theology. He says that '"natural" knowledge…was thought to be a body of knowledge about God and his intentions not intrinsically dependent on historically particular divine dispositions, and therefore properly the common property of humanity.' (*ibid.*) In other words, natural knowledge of God is the set of propositions about God, which can be known, aside from the revelation of God, within the subject area of theology. Jenson asserts that in fact, the claims typically labelled as 'natural' are exactly as contingent on particular historical circumstance – divine or otherwise - as any theology coming from the Bible, or indeed, Pagan antiquity.

How does Jenson think that this ascription of 'natural' come to be applied to some claims and not others? The description of certain ideas as natural was an attempt to explain overlapping opinions and shared beliefs between the Christianity of the church Fathers and the philosophy of antiquity. Jenson says that, as a solution to this problem, theologians proposed 'a knowledge of God and his works available to human

[4] Compare Helmut Thielicke, a Lutheran of the generation before Jenson, on the distinction between 'Carteseian' and 'non-Cartesian' theology. (Thielicke 1997)

reason by virtue of what makes it human and reason, without an intrinsic need for help from particular divine dispositions.' (*ibid.*) His criticism of this move is to point out that even if such a 'natural' knowledge does occur, there is no reason to think that 'it covers exactly the area in which the fathers found they could agree with Platonic or Stoic or Aristotelian theology.' (*ibid.*)

Pannenberg offers a more positive explanation of the appropriation of natural theology by Christians. In his *Systematic Theology*, he describes the philosophical theology of pre-Socratic philosophy onwards as being concerned with establishing what is true of God by nature (*phusis*) as opposed to in the opinions (*thesis*) of the poets and the officials of the political cult. This is the origin of the term 'natural theology': 'Panaetius used the term for the philosophical doctrine of God as distinct from the mythical theology of the poets on the one side, and on the other the political theology of the cults which the states set up and supported,' (2010, 76) he is searching for 'what is true by nature, i.e., of itself.' (*ibid.*) This theology 'is natural because it corresponds to the nature of the divine or the truth of God in distinction from falsifications in the positive form of religion which rests on human positing.' (*ibid.*, 77)

Pannenberg claims that theological appropriation of philosophical ideas is near universal, and that where early theologians do criticize pagan philosophers, it was for three basic reasons. The philosophers did not know the *whole* truth. Not all philosophical ideas correspond to the truth, and finally, the moral conduct of philosophers was not perfect, which showed that they did not apprehend right philosophy. (Pannenberg 1971, 141) Nevertheless, Pannenberg maintains that there is

an important sense in which these early theologians *ought* to have done what they in fact did. 'We cannot understand [the appropriation of philosophy] if we see in it only an adjustment to the intellectual climate of the cultural world in which they had to proclaim the Christian Gospel.' (Pannenberg 2010, 79) For Pannenberg, the distinction is between viewing 'the Christian God as not just the national God of the Jews but the God of all peoples.' (*ibid.*) Natural, philosophical theology offered a criterion by which to judge whether any particular understanding of God could fulfill the necessary position of a universal God – the Creator of the cosmos. 'Christian theology had to meet this criterion if its claim could be taken seriously that the God who redeems us in Jesus Christ is the Creator of heaven and earth and thus the one God of all peoples.' (*ibid.*) This did not mean that theologians could not revise what philosophers said, but just that they had to justify any revision 'by philosophical arguments if it was to claim the universality with which the one and only God must be declared.' (*ibid.*)

However, Jenson points out a problem with this way of universalizing Christian faith: it 'can become a covert recommendation of this knowledge, and precisely in its distinction from that given by the Gospel.' (1997, 7) For this reason, it is not just the content of the knowledge labelled as 'natural' which is the problem, whether it be metaphysical, religious/spiritual, or ethical, the real problem is the designation and distinction of '"natural" from "revealed" or "positive" theology, as if these lay on different level.' (*ibid.*)

This is Jenson's description and analysis of what he considers the latent problem in pre-modern Western theology. This problem was brought out into the light in the

theological controversies in the West in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Shortly after the reformation, during mutual condemnations by various established churches and conflicts brought about by the beginning of the emergence of nation-states, 'Europe lost trust in the way in which the culture had previously established Christian teaching's plausibility.' (*ibid.*) Jenson tells us that the Roman Catholic church at this point builds walls around its teaching and drops out of the picture, while Protestantism turned to the 'doctrine of scriptural authority' for 'an antecedent basis for theology's claims.' (*ibid.*) The idea is that in order to believe the claims of theology, we must find a firm foundation on which to place them, and that foundation is the Bible itself. But why should we trust the Bible? Here 'traditional natural arguments for the reliability of Scripture came to bear a new load.' (*ibid.*) So Jenson says that 'Seventeenth-century Protestant systems' doctrine of Scripture thus already carried the modern prolegomenal burden.' (*ibid.*)

The nick in the fabric of systematic theology does not become a tear separating natural and revealed theology until the next century, when suspicion of church authority becomes suspicion of all authority: 'The European-North American Enlightenment applied a hermeneutic of suspicion to all received wisdom.' (*ibid.*, 7-8) This is what Kant referred to as the adulthood of humanity. (Kant 2010) Special revelation could no longer be trusted in itself; rather, it has to be established as correct by reference to something inherent to rational beings. People in England and Germany 'thought to find it in that other theology which Christian theology itself had acknowledged: if there is a knowledge of God natural to our being, this knowledge can be the norm of other purported theology.' (Jenson 1997, 8)

Jenson construes this rationalism as the reemergence of Pagan religion, in an 'enfeebled' form, now set above and judging Christianity. The result, he says is that 'it took only a few decades for this misstep to evacuate elite theology of its specifically Christian content and, indeed, to repristinate...the theology of pagan Mediterranean antiquity.' (*ibid.*)

In the 19th century, German theologians 'undertook to restore Christian theology by "overcoming the Enlightenment".' (*ibid.*) Jenson's immediate critique is that they pitched battle on the same field as their predecessors. Instead of creating a formal critique, which would reevaluate the whole project of finding a more certain foundation for Christian theology than revelation, they developed a material critique, in which they searched for an epistemological justification for Christian theology, but maintained that some more certain foundation was necessary. For Jenson, this resulted in the development of 'epistemologically pretentious' prolegomena, mentioned at the beginning of this section. This development comes down to two factors. First, they supposed that they 'had to find a functional replacement for the old natural theology'. Second, they accepted from the Enlightenment that 'the church's specific theology was a problematic enterprise dependent on prior justification by more surely founded cognition.' The result was that 'the replacement was more heavily burdened than the old natural theology had been.' (*ibid.*) The form of systems of theology conducted in the manner Jenson is describing is to place the burden of prior justification of theological claims on an aspect of theology chosen, according to Jenson, for a mere coincidental resemblance to some extra-Christian theology. The relevant material is an area of theology that is arbitrarily chosen. As such, neo-Protestant critics of the enlightenment attempted to replace the 'natural' theological

ground of enlightenment theological endeavor with legitimation of a different kind, rather than dispensing with the antecedent justification of theology altogether. Jenson's primary example of this is Schleiermacher, whom he credits with spurring this, to Jenson's mind infelicitous, development in German theology: 'The archetype of Neo-Protestant prolegomena was provided in 1830 by the first chapter of Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Der Christliche Glaube* together with other of his writings it evokes.' (*ibid.*) The strategy Jenson finds here is that 'the first-level discourse of Christian faith is meaningful and true as it *expresses* Christian religious experience; that this expression requires critical explication for its purity; and that once all this is established, theology can proceed in intellectual respectability as the work of such explication.' (*ibid.*, 9)

Jenson is pointing out two distinct problems with modernist prolegomena. The first is the practice of considering 'philosophy' to be 'more surely founded cognition' than theology. The second is the attempt to ground theology by reference to more general phenomena.

As a result of these two ideas, Jenson asserts that:

> prolegomena have since grown ever longer and more unwieldy, as ever more desperate means are proposed to evade the logic of the situation. The project is hypertrophic because it is hopeless. If theological prolegomena lay down conceptual conditions of Christian teaching that are not themselves Christian teaching, that are more than a formal demand for coherence and argumentative responsibility...the prolegomena sooner or later turn against the *legomena*.' (*ibid.*, 9)

Here Jenson finishes his narrative of the history of bad prolegomena and turns to the importance of equal dialogue with those ideas and claims which had previously been

prolegomena, using the disputes that the church Fathers had with their surrounding culture as a positive example of the way Christian theology can and ought to relate to 'philosophy'.

It is Jenson's assertion that theological prolegomena before Schleiermacher sought to find a firm foundation in philosophy that was chosen because of arbitrary overlap with authentic theology. Metaphysical claims formed a part of this overlap, and so different theologies adopted various pre-Christian, or extra-Christian metaphysics. The modernist turn was to continue attempt to antecedently justify theological claims on a non-theological basis, but to criticize that which earlier theology had sought as a ground: Hellenistic reflection on the most general features of reality, or metaphysics, insofar as it overlapped with Christian claims. If Jenson is correct, then as pre-modern systems focused on what overlapped with Christianity, their foundations retained some Christian focus - in pushing aside these older forms of foundation, modern prolegomena were actually worse than their pre-modern analogues, as they tended to throw out the (Christian) metaphysical baby with the (Olympian-Parmenidian) bathwater. Christian theology which focuses on religious experience while remaining uninterested in the truth of metaphysical claims found in the Christian faith has suffered from this turn.

What we arrive at are two related, but distinct, critiques in Jenson. The first is that when Christians adopted elements of the Greek religious quest into their theology, they brought about a hybrid, the God of the past, which is 'unbaptized', not faithful to the Gospel; the description of which is not true to reality, and as a consequence, does not allow Christian theology to properly articulate the hope the Gospel brings. The

second is that the attempt for more cognitively sure foundations than those provided by revelation resulted in a renewal of religious projection, opposed to the historic reality of God's action at the heart of the Christian faith. In the next section then, we describe a critique of Jenson's theology that accuses him of making precisely the same mistake against which he argues.

V Tavast's Critique

Timo Tavast describes Jenson's theory of religion under the title 'negative natural theology'. Jenson himself gives this feature of his thought a number of labels: 'somehow, God has said to the total human community, "I am the Lord your God, who.... Therefore you shall...." This communication has been variously interpreted through the history of theology as "general revelation" or "common grace" or "natural knowledge" or "law" in distinction from "Gospel"; the differences are...unimportant.' (Jenson 1997, 57) For the sake of clarity, I will refer to this feature of Jenson's thought as 'general revelation'. The question then becomes, can there be general revelation without natural theology? Tavast asserts that there is an immediate tension here. General revelation, we might think, tells us something about God, which is known in advance of the Christian narrative. It has some minimal, positive content and as such constrains what theology can say about God, and yet this is precisely what Jenson seems to deny in his discussion of natural theology. To see if this is the case, we need to examine what exactly it is that Jenson takes to be general revelation.

Tavast notes that 'Jenson's existential analysis of living in time, and his model of negative natural theology are the fundamental prerequisites for the formation of his Trinitarian doctrine.' (Tavast 2012, 156) In fact, Jenson's existential analysis of living in time is the content of his general revelation. How so? Jenson begins with an analysis of the term 'god' as used across the religious spectrum, which is developed at length above.

Tavast asserts that Jenson's existential analysis of living in time is foundational for his understanding of the Trinity. This in itself is not necessarily problematic for Tavast. What is problematic, however, is Jenson's claim to deny natural theology. Tavast thinks this is at odds with his 'negative natural theology' or understanding of 'general revelation'.

VI General Revelation constraining Theology

If general revelation as described by Jenson does in fact constrain the things Christians might want to say about God in their theology, then it might be appropriate to say that there is a tension here in Jenson's thought. Tavast, unfortunately, does not give many clear reasons for thinking that it must so constrain theology, nor does he offer any examples, rather, he simply asserts it three times. (*ibid.*, 157, 158, 162)

Tavast locates the perceived tension in Jenson's thought at a specific point. We have seen that Jenson thinks any theological propositions which attribute a general

predicate to 'god' are, short of identification of the god involved, empty. As Tavast says: 'Without identification of the particular god of a religion, all religious claims are meaningless.' (*ibid.*, 157) What does it mean to say that a particular sentence, and sentences like it, is meaningless, yet indisputable? (Jenson 1997, 56) Given the propositional character of Jenson's theology, it seems plausible to interpret this as the claim that such sentences do not assert a proposition. Failing to assert a proposition does not make a sentence false, it makes it, at least in some sense, meaningless. For a sentence to be disputable means that it makes a claim, which can be assessed as true or false and that it is not self-evidently true. Conversely, for a sentence to be indisputable would mean that it either does not make a claim, or that it makes a claim which is self-evidently true. As such, for Jenson to say that theological claims made in advance of identifying the god under discussion are indisputable is not to say that they are self-evidently true, but rather that they make no claim which can be evaluated as true or false. Why the latter rather than the former? If we interpret Jenson's claim as the former, our interpretation lacks charity, because then there can be claims made in advance of the identification of God that are true, hence natural theology. Once the identification of the putative god has taken place however, the claim can be interpreted as true or false, but now only owing to the emptiness of the predicate, e.g., 'saves'.[5] This type of move is not only made with regard to theological sentences. For instance, Ted Sider considers that sentences in formal languages do not bear truth-values in advance of interpretation: 'A logical truth ought at least to be *true*, after all, and $P \rightarrow P$ isn't true, since it doesn't have a meaning – what's the meaning of P?' (Sider 2010b, 3) Other examples include things like the statement of the law of the

[5] Unless the term 'saves' is illicitly taken to have the meaning it takes on when predicated of the Christian God as Jenson notes, (1997, 56n81)

excluded middle: '($P \wedge \sim P$) is not true even though all claims taking its form, e.g., 'the table is red or the table is not red', are necessarily true, assuming the law of the excluded middle holds.' (*ibid.*, 266)

Nevertheless, Tavast thinks that even this is a step too far for the sake of Jenson's consistency. What is the constraint that Jenson places on Christian theology according to Tavast? Each of the concepts Jenson discusses 'has a certain content based on the universal human experience of living in time – instead of being deduced from any particular religious narrative. This content, even if limited, determines what is possible to delineate by the concepts eternity and God in Christianity too.' (Tavast 2012, 157) The criticism seems to be that there may be things we want to say of the Trinity which do not fit the formal concept of 'god', and as such cannot be said, or that there are things which we might not want to say of the Trinity which are necessitated by use of the term 'god'. These constraints will have to do with the relationship between any putative god and human life, which is necessarily implied by Jenson's derivation of the concepts. 'God', then, may serve as a Procrustean bed, or a rack, by which we must mutilate or stretch what is delivered in the Christian narrative.

It is worth noting that Jenson himself sometimes seems uncomfortable with his own move. What we have described above is Jenson's view of general revelation in his *Systematic Theology*, but if we turn to an earlier work, we get what seems to be a very different position. In *God after God*, while discussing Barth's commentary on *Romans*, he describe the religion Barth is trying to oppose in this way:

> It began with religion, i.e., with man's strange propensity to reach beyond himself and beyond the realities which limit his life to a unity and completion which everything in life drives him to seek but does not provide. Then it tried

> to grasp the faith as a species of this genus. Christianity, said liberalism, is the highest religion. It is the form of religious existence which most appropriately achieves the goal of all religion, continuity of our lives with that beyond our lives which justifies them. (Jenson 2010, 5)

The purpose of Jenson's book is to claim that Barth's theology was an attempt to show that Christian faith is altogether incompatible with 'religion' so understood, and that Barth's attempt fails because it is not radical enough. Jenson then moves to describe Christian faith in an even more radical way. In short, the problem, for both Jenson and Barth, is that 19th century liberal theology 'began with the story of *man-the-seeker*, and then looked for Christ's role in the story.' (*ibid.*)

Jenson also evinces a similar problem in a book of the same year: *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*. For our purposes now, we need only recall the concepts of the 'logical mother' and 'logical father' of theological language, described in chapter two. Both are necessary for meaningful, public speech about God to take place. The logical mother of theological language is general human experience of incompleteness, which 'arises from the experience, inseparable from human life, of the *incomplete* and *obligated* character of our life.' (Jenson 1969, 135) This is an earlier version of what we saw Jenson describing in his *Systematic Theology*.[6] The term 'god' comes into use so that we can articulate our desire for something that isn't contingent, in Jenson's phrasing. Religion, with its god, 'is our demand that what is not, the completed drama of our lives, must be.' (*ibid.*, 136)

[6] Jenson also discusses it in terms similar to Pannenberg cited above: 'I can never…experience my life as a meaningful whole, and yet I must.' (Jenson 1969, 135-136)

It is precisely here, says Jenson, that Christian faith must be distinct from 'religion': 'it is exactly this undertaking of creating and fulfillment of our lives ourselves…that the New Testament calls "works-righteousness".' (*ibid.*) This should be no surprise, as Jenson notes. My wanting some state of affairs to obtain is no evidence that it does in fact obtain: 'If 'God is love' is equivalent to 'I need love,' this may be so, but it indeed tells nothing about the conclusion of life but only of *my* demand that it have a conclusion.' (*ibid.*)

Yet while Jenson proclaims the problems with the term god, and terms which come from human experience generally, at the same time, he recognizes that such use is necessary, and that it does not, in fact, impair what he wants to say theologically. While the 'logical mother' is barren without the 'logical father', so he is impotent without her. The 'logical father' of theological language is 'the interpretation of some concrete reality in experience as divine. It is because we find something about which we are compelled to say what cannot be said without using 'God' that we come to speak theologically.' (*ibid.*, 137)

Jenson notes his own reticence here, he says that 'Were it not for what we must say about Christ, precisely the believer would have every reason to eschew 'God' altogether – its very use is a mark of idolatry. The early Christians were, after all, prosecuted as *atheists*.' Even so, for Christians, there is an event which serves as a 'logical father': for believers, says Jenson, 'the career of Jesus is that event.' (*ibid.*) This transforms the so-called 'logical mother', because this event changes Christianity so that Jesus becomes that 'against which we thus experience our incompleteness.' (*ibid.*)

Likewise, in *God after God*, Jenson qualifies his disavowal of the method described above. The term 'religion' need not only denote something illicit:

If by "religion" one means that fundamental directedness to a purpose beyond our present grasp, which is the essential reality of man, then there is no polemic against religion in Barth. By "religion" he means the phenomena which occur as we enact that directedness, which he claims will inevitably be one or another attempt to evade the realities of time. (Jenson 2010, 7)

The problem is at least somewhat terminological. If by religion we refer to 'idolatrous' attempts to reach some putative 'god' on the basis of our existential desires, it is illicit. If we simply name our existential desires, with no immediate comment on the fact or shape of their fulfillment before considering the revelation of God in Christ, then it becomes licit. General revelation can function, but not to ground natural theology.

This distinction is carried through in Jenson's *Systematic Theology*. He describes the position of 'religion', meant as an inappropriate projection coming from human need and then asserts that 'The Scriptures are a single elaborated contradiction of this comfortable synthesis.' (1997, 50) The joy of conversion described in the New Testament is precisely a break from 'religion'. Jenson says that 'Scripture and the theology of the church sustain the great maxim of the theology of culture, that the soul of every culture is a religion and the body of every religion a culture; the gods are precisely "the gods of the nations."' (*ibid.*, 51) Such religions are 'products of our own religious subjectivity, powers we envision by projection of our own values and needs. (*ibid.*) Jenson notes that the culture of ancient Israel also had such a religion, and yet, 'the claim with which the God of Israel introduces himself is that he is precisely not the

God *of* that culture-religion; that at the heart of this one people's communal existence there is a break in the otherwise prevailing relation between deity and history.' (*ibid.*) How so? The God of Israel claims for himself the possibility of having chosen any nation, there is no necessary connection between Israel and her God other than his choice and the contingent events of history which follow from this choice: 'The Lord, in full antecedent individual identity, is the God of Israel not because of a fit between his characteristics and Israel's values but by historically contingent events.' (*ibid.*) In the outworking of history, this rupture manifests as a continual prophetic critique of Israelite religion in the prophetic corpus; 'the prophets denounced other nations only to prepare for what they had to say about Jerusalem and the temple and the religion of those who came there.' (*ibid.*) This kind of self-critique is a mark of the fact that 'It belongs to the worship of the Lord to be told that the needs that lead us to that worship do not determine its object.' (*ibid.*)

At this point, the argument spanning Jenson's theological career should be evident. Natural theology emerges from projection of our religious need onto reality, but this is not a sufficient reason for accepting the truth of any religious claim, and it obscures the nature of the true God, who reveals himself. Nevertheless, this religious need is a human phenomenon which is productive of the language which we use to talk about what happens in the revelation of God.

VII General Revelation as theologoumenon of Christian Theology

Why wouldn't having to use language seemingly derived from general human experience limit what Christians can say about God? Aside from the extremely ambiguous and analogical character of such language, Jenson has another response. This description of general human experience is in fact itself a doctrinal claim, based in an essential feature of Christian proclamation. The use of the term 'god' productively (when safeguards against misunderstanding are in place) occurs. It is an element of our experience. The doctrine of general revelation is a theory formulated to explain that phenomenon. It does so by an analysis of human life in time, yet this analysis does not arise in a vacuum. Jenson's claim about the status of his existential analysis of human life is explicit. In undertaking such an analysis 'We do not thereby leave the theological circle; the analysis to be proposed is a piece of Christian theology – which need not keep it from being acceptable by other religions.' (*ibid.*, 54) As we have seen, religion is 'a universal human phenomenon.' (*ibid.*) All so-called 'philosophical' claims and analyses have their religions assumptions and backgrounds, according to Jenson, and this is no different. The analysis is a work of theology.[7]

What is the Christian motivation for allowing the use of a general term to talk about the object of Christian worship? It comes across clearly in *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*: it is a necessary condition for claiming that Christian language and proclamation is universally meaningful for both those inside the church, and for those outside who hear it.

[7] For an expanded defense of the idea that general revelation is itself a theolegoumenon, see Jenson 1999, 153-166.

In this chapter, we reviewed the negative side of Jenson's polemic: those things which Jenson feels have gone wrong in the history of theology. These include those developments named under 'the God of the Past' and 'Natural Theology', both of which develop from Christianity's complex relationship to the intellectual world in which it emerged. In the next chapter, we will describe Jenson's account of the other side: the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, first in the Bible, and then in the early church.

5 Trinitarian Doctrine: Roots and Shoots

Up to this point, this thesis has focused on describing Jenson's approach to theology, and the ways in which his general approach can justify his claim that Christian theology is metaphysics. We have also considered some important, but ancillary issues like his understanding of theological language and epistemology. It is now time to move from methodological and general issues to the specifics of Jenson's Trinitarian theology, both in terms of its derivation and his innovative proposals.

The previous chapter described the first of two concurrent narratives: the development of Jenson's so-called 'God of the Past', whose genesis came from the interpretation of Israel's God by Hellenistic thought. This chapter seeks to follow Jenson's account of the genesis of Trinitarian doctrine out of the same concerns that motivated the account in the previous chapter. The difference, for Jenson, is not the absence of Hellenistic questioning and concerns,[1] but simply that the doctrine of the Trinity, rightly understood, is a better response to such concerns, in that it is more faithful to the God of Israel. Finally, the story contained in this chapter is better, to Jenson's mind, simply because its conclusions are more correct.

[1] The notion that Christianity had been unduly influenced by Hellenist thought was certainly a feature of Luther's critique of the church, it became especially influential in 19th century theology. For helpful surveys see Markschies 2012 and Martin 2005. Jenson's position is stated clearly and concisely in *The Triune Identity*: 'I have insisted on the clash of the Gospel's and Hellenism's interpretations of God and have blamed Western theology's Trinitarian enfeeblement on defeat in this battle. It is time to reiterate that I do not intend thereby to decry the "Hellenization" of Christianity or to propose termination of the metaphysical reflection in which the confrontation with Hellenism has involved the Gospel. On the contrary…so long as the Western church endures, it must be Hellenic.' (2002a, 161)

This chapter describes two movements: 'Primary' and 'Secondary' Trinitarianism. Primary Trinitarianism refers to the doctrine of the Trinity as Jenson finds it in the Scriptures of the church. Jenson finds that God, as identified in these Scriptures, answers the need set out in his own, idiosyncratic, definition of 'religion'. That is the only reason Jenson finds to call the agent of the Scriptures 'god' at all. Primary Trinitarianism, for Jenson, concerns the way that the God of the church is identified, and the implications thereof. These concerns are central to the ways in which Jenson believes that the Christian Gospel must reform and reconstitute the antecedent metaphysics into which it has been, and continues to be, delivered.

Secondary Trinitarianism refers to the church's attempt to present God to the cultures that made up Hellenism. For Jenson, this attempt is ongoing of necessity; it has produced triumphs, and has suffered loss. This attempt is itself a story of metaphysical revision in the service of theological clarity and orthodoxy.

I Roots: Primary Trinitarianism

We have seen in Jenson's evaluation of natural theology, and in his description of the task of Christian theology more generally, that the term 'god' takes its meaning in general religious discourse from a fundamental feature of human life, that is, the desire for narrative coherence. The central feature of any theology attempting to describe a religious view of human life must begin with the identification of the god that anchors the rest of the religious system.

a The Identification of God

The function of the doctrine of the Trinity within Christian thought, says Jenson, is to identify God. (1997, 63-89) That is, the doctrine of the Trinity is what makes our various religious and theological sentences meaningful. For Jenson, as we saw in chapter four, sentences like 'God saves' are vacuous until the referent of 'God' has been identified. This means that the identification of God is fundamental to Jenson's theological work, and since God is identified as the Trinity, and by the doctrine of the Trinity, the Trinity is crucial to his work. As Jenson says, 'The primary systematic function of Trinitarian teaching is to *identify* the *theos* in "theology".' (*ibid.*, 60), an insight he attributes to Karl Barth.

The doctrine of the Trinity, however, does not identify God by a series of abstract metaphysical propositions. Instead, it grows out of the way that Christian Scripture identifies God, that is, through narrative. Jenson's most basic statement of the way the Christian faith identifies God is by the statement 'God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt.' (*ibid.*, 63) According to Jenson, claims such as this identify God and as a result 'they have a specific status among true statements about him. The way or ways in which they fit him display how he is a this one who is not that one.' (*ibid.*) We saw in chapter two that, for Jenson, we communicate the referent of a term by means of identification; that is, by describing the referent, often using narrative. This holds true for God as well. That God is identifiable at all, and that he is identifiable in this way, are themselves facts worth remarking upon for Jenson, and form the foundation of his Trinitarian doctrine.

There are three related concepts worth discussing and distinguishing from one another at this point: reference, identification, and characterization. Making these distinctions will give us a better understanding of his key concept of 'identification'. Jenson does not discuss these distinctions in the way I will in the next few paragraphs, however, I believe that the way I distinguish the terms helps make sense of his work.

At the broadest level, reference is a relation between a token and an object. For our purposes, we are looking at a relation between a word and an object, namely 'god' and that to which 'god' refers. What makes it the case that a word 'refers' to a unique object? We need briefly to outline descriptive theories of reference.[2] A descriptive theory of reference holds that a word-token is associated with descriptive content, which uniquely specifies an object or set of objects. That is, the name 'Aristotle' refers to Aristotle because the name stands in for a series of definite descriptions sufficient to uniquely specify the historical figure. This traditional and long-standing theory of reference has come under sustained and powerful critique in philosophy of language since the mid twentieth century.[3] It is important to address this development in philosophy of language because Jenson's 'identification' is very similar to descriptive theories of reference. Identification proceeds by statements that describe the object to be identified in such a way that it is uniquely specified. (Jenson 2010, 134) If Jenson's identification is indeed the same as reference, his Trinitarian theology will be susceptible to critiques coming from contemporary philosophy of language. Fortunately, we can side-step such critiques by suggesting that Jenson's 'identification'

[2] For an alternate view, see Leftow 1995.
[3] Perhaps most famously in Kripke 1991.

is importantly different from 'reference'. In short, identification is the act of communicating an object's token. That is, for instance, when I identify someone, I tell you his or her name, or show you to whom a name applies. My identification does not make it the case that an object so-named is referred to by that name. Identification communicates, but does not fix, reference.

This distinguishes reference and identification. Next we must draw a distinction between identification and characterization. This is important because Jenson's identification takes the form of describing Biblical characters. However, it is important to his theological method that we not merely see the Bible as 'characterizing' god, but as identifying god.

Identification can happen in many ways. One such way, identification by description, is similar to characterization. Jenson credits P. F. Strawson with influencing his views on identification. (*ibid.* 133-134) In both of their works, identification can refer to a range of activities moving from the casual gesture-and-grunt, to Strawson's impeccably precise spatial coordinates relative to the location of the conversation partners. (Strawson 1959, 22-23) Jenson focuses on the large area between these extremes. Specifically, he focuses on narrative identification.[4] Narrative identification is the kind of identification found in the Bible and therefore most useful in Christian faith and theology. What we have in the Bible is, for Jenson, a narrative that identifies God, and this identification is stronger than characterization.

[4] Compare Strawson's 'story-relative' identification 1959, 18.

To characterize someone is to describe her character traits: that is, to offer an account of a person's liabilities to act in certain ways given a specific type of situation. Someone who is brave is liable to act for good in and despite a dangerous situation, for instance. Someone who is irritable is likely to become agitated when faced with a mild annoyance, while faced with the same annoyance someone who is patient will remain calm and collected. People and things can be characterized by means of narrative. We describe a person in a situation and that person's reaction to it, which communicates some aspect of their character. Importantly, their character could be accurately communicated even if the story we tell is false. I could tell a story about what the person would likely do when put in a possible situation, and their character would be described accurately by that story. However, the person would not be identified by it. This is the distinction between characterization and identification by means of narrative. A person can be characterized accurately by a fictional narrative, but they cannot be identified accurately.

That God is identified by means of narrative has implications for what we must say about God. Namely, God is identifiable by narrative. That God is identifiable means, for Jenson, that God is 'hypostatic'. Further, to be 'hypostatic' means that 'we are enjoined to inquire how God also is a this one,' (1997, 63) as opposed to merely some 'sort of' one.

b God's Narrative Identification

For Jenson, the roots of the doctrine of the Trinity are found in the narrative identification of God in the Bible. Importantly, this is as true of the Old Testament as

of the New: 'the church's Trinitarianism is commonly thought to depart from Israel's interpretation of God. This is the exact contradictory of the Truth.' (*ibid.*) So what is it that God's identification in and by the narrative of Scripture tell us about him? The first lesson comes broadly from the form of narrative itself, further emphasized by the particular narrative. The second comes from the specific details of the narrative of God and Israel. First then, God's 'hypostatic being', that is, God's personality, his agency, the thing that makes him capable of being a protagonist in a story, is constituted in 'dramatic coherence.' Jenson says that 'God is one with himself just by the dramatic coherence of his eventful actuality.' (*ibid.*, 64) Jenson takes the idea of dramatic coherence from Aristotle's *Poetics*. (Aristotle 1984, 234-235, 256) A story is a series of events, which develop from one another in surprising ways, but which after the fact appear to be the way things had to happen. By the end of the story there is a unity to the narrative, which is evident once the overall structure is unveiled, but which would not be clear halfway through. Against Aristotle, Jenson wants to take this concept out of the realm of literary theory and transport it to that of persons. (Jenson 1997, 64) This is licit according to Jenson, because people themselves, those capable of being characters, are themselves a series of events, which develop from one another, yet in ways that are at times surprising. (*ibid.*, 222)

Aside from this general feature of narrative, Jenson thinks we must approach the God of the Bible in this way because 'otherwise than dramatically, the Bible's theological descriptions, accounts of divine action, and worshipful invocations are too mutually conflicted to suggest referral to a same someone.' (*ibid.*) The idea is that if God is simply some unchanging substance, a great deal of the Bible makes no sense. This is a familiar exegetical problem for theologians. How do we deal with God 'repenting' of

his intent, of changing course and prophecy, if God is as classically described? (e.g. Genesis: 6:6-7; 1 Samuel 15:11; Exodus 32:14; Jonah 3:9-10) Jenson sidesteps this problem by avoiding the classical divine attributes that cause the problem.

Even within the Bible, Jenson sees God himself commanding us to know him in this way. In Isaiah 40-45, Jenson says we find God commanding Israel to know him by his past actions, and to judge his future actions accordingly. Israel is to have confidence in the promises of God because of his past fulfilled promises. They have come to know who God is by what he has done. For Jenson, this means that 'the argument binds jhwh's claim to the contingencies of history: What if the new promises fail?' (1997, 65) As it is with the Exodus, so it is with the crucifixion. God binds himself to history and takes a risk. For Jenson, this is a fundamental feature of Christianity, and any metaphysics which cannot deal with such a real risk-taking God cannot be true (*ibid.*, 48). We will return to this concern in chapter seven.

The second aspect of narrative which Jenson wants to highlight as theologically important is that 'dramatic coherence requires closure if it is to constitute identity.' (*ibid.*)[5] We can only know the end of a character's life when that life has ended. As with narrative characters, so with people according to Jenson, including God himself. Further, as in the Bible we have the story of God bound up with the contingencies of his creation, 'God's story is committed as a story with creatures, And so he too, as it is,

[5] Jenson attributes this insight to Heidegger in philosophy and Pannenberg in theology, but something very like it is found near the roots of Western culture. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the final word spoken by the chorus is 'Wherefore being a mortal, and waiting to behold that final day, pronounce no man happy before he has passed the goal of life without any misfortune.' (1865, 44) Aristotle attributes this opinion to Solon, and dismisses it as absurd in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. (I.10-11)

can have no identity except as he meets the temporal end toward which creatures live.' (1997, 65)

This concern is not drawn purely from the form of narrative, but from the specific narrative told in Scripture. Jenson's exegesis is compelling, but for our purposes we need only note a few of the major themes he draws out. First, as we have seen, the God of the Bible identifies himself by contingent events in the history of Israel. Second, these events are often the unsettling of an established worldly order: Abraham is called out of settled life in Ur to travel in Palestine; the Patriarchs are called from Palestine into Egypt; the nation is rescued by God from settled existence in Egypt to dessert wandering. Even once they again settle in Palestine, there is notable opposition in Scripture to the idea of a monarchy that will establish a settled political order. Even this political order is broken down first by the Assyrians, and then the Babylonians. At each step in this process Israel and her progenitors are drawn forward by the promises of God. The implication Jenson draws is that the reality of Israel, rather than anything found directly in the narrative, or any historical nation, is an intention of God; that is, it is located in the future as a goal toward which God is working. This reality is known through promises. Third then, the character of the promises changes over time in response to Israel's growing awareness of God's intent. At first, the promise seems to be for settled worldly ends: promises for increase in descendants, for land that enables prosperity, for safety from attack, and for national pre-eminence. However, by the time of the Babylonian invasion, and after, a new genre is required in order to articulate the new vision of what is promised. This is the genre of Apocalypse. (*ibid.*, 69-71)

Why this turn to apocalypse? For one, God is always pictured in the Bible as death's opponent. God saves by overcoming death. The dead do not know God, and there is no life in death. To overcome death involves a radical change in the worldly order however. This is so tied up with God's identity that Jenson says 'the Lord's resolve to meet and overcome death and the constitution of his self-identity in dramatic coherence are but one truth about him.' (1997, 66) That is, the end toward which God is directed in his identity in dramatic coherence just is the overcoming of death.

Second, what Israel hopes for is 'righteousness'. Jenson defines this as 'the vigor of the entire network of communal relations within which participants divine and human live.' (*ibid.*, 72). That righteousness is not a present reality is an aspect of, perhaps even the core of, the Biblical concept of 'sin'. Although earlier in the narrative, there is a clear hope that the Kingdom of Israel could properly embody righteousness, through time it became clear that this was not to be, and indeed, could not be without radical change of the kind envisioned by apocalypse. Jenson notes that these two aspects, two things God is to overcome, are of course related.

If God is known by, and even defines himself by, the story of his involvement with Israel, does this mean that God himself is constrained by his creation? In other words, what of God's aseity under Jenson's account of Trinitarian development in the Bible? Jenson is sensitive to this problem, even if his solution may not be satisfying for many theologians. Jenson himself does not evince concern for typical 'philosophical' divine attributes like aseity. He does, however, want to maintain God's 'freedom' or 'sovereignty', which although more nebulous than aseity, may serve the same purpose.

c Divine Agents in Scripture

We have seen that for Jenson, for God to be hypostatic in the story of Israel means that God is a protagonist in this story, and as a result, an agent in history, understood not as a series of random events, but as a story enfleshed: a history leading to an end. Jenson notes that a story must have more than one agent, and even if we dispute this generalization, we might simply note that as a matter of fact the scriptural narratives do have more than one agent. Does this mean that God is simply one agent among many in the Bible? If this is the case, Jenson thinks we must choose between two unattractive alternatives: 'Either God's identity would then be determined extrinsically by creatures or it would at some depth be after all immune to the Gospel events.' (*ibid.*, 75) The second alternative has already been ruled out by the foregoing account of God's hypostatic being. The first is ruled out by an appeal to God's freedom and sovereignty, as noted above. As a result, Jenson concludes that 'if his identity is determined in relation with others, just so those others cannot be merely extrinsic to him.' (*ibid.*) This entails, in broad outline, something like the doctrine of the Trinity laid out in and as a narrative.

Jenson describes two agents in the story besides 'God' or 'the Lord': the Son and the Spirit. These two agents come up in the discussion of a good deal more divine characters. The Son is a character in both the Old Testament and the New. Jenson says that he is certainly a continuous feature of God's identity in the Old Testament. The Son is 'another by and with whom God is identified, so that what he does to and for this other he does to and for himself.' (*ibid.*, 75-76) This is a relationship of which Jenson says a parent/child relationship is a created analogue. As a character in the

narrative, the Son of God can often refer either to Israel or to a specific individual within Israel, such as the King. It can also refer to a more direct presence of God in Israel, as when the Shekinah was said to journey with Israel in the wilderness. So Jenson says that 'what the Lord does to Israel he does to himself, in that the Shekinah shares Israel's *lot* and the Lord's *being*.' (*ibid.*, 76). In short, the Shekinah is God participating in Israel's story. For Jenson, 'Shekinah' and 'Son', although distinct names, refer to the same character. Indeed, the Son has many alternate names, including 'Word', 'Servant', 'Name', and 'Messiah'. Each has its own peculiar emphases and place in the narrative, but the reality they point to, the agent they denote, is in each case the same.

For Jenson, calling Israel the Son of God is not merely a trope. This will sound strange against the development of technical, or secondary, Trinitarianism. However for Jenson, this strangeness will simply serve as evidence that primary Trinitarianism has been occluded by later developments. Before any technical formulae, 'Son' does not denote the simple divine nature, but, even for Jesus, represents a claim made by referring to God as 'Father'. That God is present in Israel, and that what happens to Israel happens, concurrently, to God, means that in some sense Israel is God's Son. Jenson takes this result to mean that the doctrine of incarnation is anticipated in the Old Testament, rather than being a result of developments in the New. The question of how a creature can be divine is firmly secondary. (*ibid.*, 78)

Another character that appears in the Biblical narrative is the 'Word'. The Word appears as a means by which God is present with Israel, His word is sent to them, and dwells with them. It also denotes agency. God's Word accomplishes what it is sent out

to accomplish, it does not return to Him empty. More than this however, 'God's word is actual as conversation with certain creatures.' (*ibid.*, 79). The mark of God's involvement with Israel is that he speaks to specific people, and they respond. This conversation, even argument, is the faithfulness of God's people. This is true from Abraham to Moses and beyond.

The ambiguity, or fluidity, for the referent of 'Son' between Israel and an individual within Israel is likewise the case for the title 'ebed', the servant, or member of the household, of God. Jenson's primary text for unpacking this title is Isaiah 40-55. He says that the servant is 'best described as a figure by which now Israel, now someone within Israel is picked out.' (*ibid.*, 80) What this servant does is bring about that eschatological peace and righteousness for which Israel hopes. This is the primary focus of agency attributed to this character. That it is God acting shows the quasi-incarnational role of Israel as a nation, and of some individual within Israel. This is enhanced by the description of the servant in Isaiah. Jenson describes him as 'a prophet whose personal memory encompasses all past prophecy who thus would have to be something very like an incarnation of the Word.' (*ibid.*, 81). Even further, something like resurrection seems to be in the offing for this servant.

Although there are many names that denote the same reality identified by 'Son', the Scriptures are less profligate with titles for the Spirit. The Spirit is the breath, which is just to translate the root of 'spirit', of God. That is, the Spirit is the '*liveliness* that agitates whatever he [God] turns toward.' (*ibid.*, 86) Put another way the Spirit is God's 'life as he transcends himself to enliven other reality than himself.' (*ibid.*) This can take the form of either creation or destruction as God sends forth or withdraws the

Spirit. There are two facets of agency that Jenson highlights. The Spirit is the historical agent of Israel's leadership, and the agent of prophecy. The eschatological hope of peace and righteousness held by Israel will be brought by the Spirit. This is so in two ways. The Spirit will enliven the whole community of Israel, and he will cease to be a special endowment of a chosen few. Further, this hope is not just for Israel, which is not just to bear the Spirit, but, as the *totus puer*, to use Jenson's term, to be the giver of the Spirit.

In the New Testament, Jesus comes as the one who bears the Spirit. This is shown in his baptism, and in many events that recall acts of the prophets. As the bearer of the spirit, Israel in one person, he also gives the Spirit. Jesus giving the Spirit is seen by Jenson as the constituting event of the church, the step between Israel as the *totus puer* and the church as the *totus Christus*. This step involves a transformation, but importantly, not a replacement.

Jenson concludes his account of primary Trinitarianism by noting that his restriction of persons to Son and Spirit is already built on the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. He observes that

> In Israel's Bible, the God of Israel is characteristically "in the beginning"; his Spirit is his power from and toward the End, and the Shekinah, in all its modes, is the mediation of the two. The difference of past and future, and their meeting in a specious present, is the one unavoidable fact, the fact of our temporality. (*ibid.*, 89)

One further reflection is needed. The God or Lord of whom we have spoken in relation to the Son and Spirit is himself a character of the Bible, he is identified by Jesus 'as the Father *of* the Son and sender *of* the Spirit.' (89) The God of Israel himself appears as a character in the Biblical narrative as related to the Son and Spirit.

The purpose of Jenson's tracing of the divine characters in the Bible is to show that the Bible has a very particular vision of God. God is free and sovereign, but he is not distant or disconnected. When Jenson insists on God's 'hypostatic being', he is insisting that what we find in the history recounted in the Bible is a true story of God being involved with his people, Israel, with the particular person, Jesus Christ. Through them, God is involved with the whole world, which is his creation. God's involvement entails certain claims about God. God has chosen to be himself in involvement with creation, that is, creation makes a difference to God.

This section provided us with the skeleton upon which Trinitarian doctrine must be hung, according to Jenson: the Trinitarianism of the Scriptures and traditions of the church. In the following section we examine Jenson's secondary Trinitarianism, those developments of Trinitarian thought which come from reflection on the Trinitarian faith and enflesh it. We will begin with Jenson's account of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, then move to his own questions, the ways in which he answers them, and the critiques they have conjured.

II Shoots: Secondary Trinitarianism

The beginning of Jenson's historical account is the move of the Early Christian faith into a more thoroughly Hellenistic cultural milieu. For Jenson, the key to understanding the development of heresy and the orthodox response is to see that the antecedent understanding of divinity driving heterodoxy was an insistence on the

atemporality of God. The purpose of the doctrine of the Trinity according to Jenson is to 'recognize and adhere to the biblical God's hypostatic being,' (*ibid.*, 90) described in the previous section. In the New Testament, Trinitarian development and logic works implicity out of an Old Testament background in which God's hypostatic being is clear and primary, so far as Jenson is concerned. While the New Testament is written in a Hellenistic context, it is written by people steeped in the Jewish tradition. The distinctive conceptual break between the New Testament and the writings of the early church is that, as Jenson says, those reflecting on the Gospel come from a Hellenistic background, having been first formed by Hellenistic culture.

Jenson asserts that the implicit Trinitarianism of the New Testament is contained in a 'logic' or perhaps better, set of rules for speech, which is evident through various texts, although never explicitly stated. Each statement of the rule by Jenson is accompanied by numerous examples of New Testament texts that appear to follow it, and as such, the rules he enumerates are plausible. Jenson says that in the New Testament, talk of Christ is talk of God. Recalling Jenson's way of describing 'sonship' in his account of primary Trinitarianism, he says that 'the Resurrection concentrated God's identification with Israel in this one Israelite.' (*ibid.*, 91). In Paul the outworking of this is that 'Theological predicates take God or Christ or both simultaneously as subject.' (*ibid.*) Of course, the Old Testament images and title used for Jesus in the New Testament are eclectic and diverse, but for Jenson, they are united by this: 'Christ's relation to God is such that God himself is identified *by* the relation and *as* the one related.' (*ibid.*) Jenson draws on Athanasius to get at the full rule undergirding New Testament Trinitarianism: 'when the specific relation to God opened by the Gospel is thematic, God the Father and Christ and the Spirit all demand dramatically

coordinating mention.' (*ibid.*, 92) The final claim Jenson wants to assert is that the prayers of Jesus, especially those of John 17, are the inner Triune dialogue. That is, they do not merely reveal, imitate, or ape, divine dialogue. They are such dialogue, and in this same way, Jesus is the Son.

As we have noted, for Jenson, such implicit Trinitarianism was not easily drawn into light in the context of the early church. This is because the culture into which the Gospel came had a set of antecedent assumptions about God and modes of intellectual inquiry that were largely foreign to the Gospel's first recipients. It would not be overstating the matter to say that the study of the outworking of this conflict is the driving force behind all of Jenson's theological work.

In the last chapter we encountered Jenson's analysis of antecedent Mediterranean religious and philosophical understanding, but it is worth briefly returning to this. In Jenson's analysis, the fundamental feature of classical pagan religion is that temporality is equivalent to death. The divine is immune to death, and as such, strictly atemporal. Further, divinity is a property that things can have, and, according to Jenson, this means that divinity can be possessed in degrees. Timeless deity orders the world, and so can fulfill the religious quest that we wrote about earlier, but it is utterly different and distant from everyday life. As such, normal life is precisely what cannot be completed by this deity, and so the religious quest may not be capable of fulfillment under this scheme after all. In response to this postulated difference between the temporal world in which we live, and the atemporal perfection of divinity, classical religion began to postulate semi-divine mediators, and this is the point where we may continue our story of the development of Trinitarian theology.

a A Question Posed by Hellenism

Jenson thinks that the early apologists came to the Christian faith and imported some unhelpful pagan ideas of deity into their understanding of the Gospel. Chief among these unhelpful ideas was divine atemporality. The incompatibility of this kind of deity with the hypostatic God Jenson finds in Scripture is manifest. In order to reconcile their understanding of God with the narrative of Scripture, there were two options that early theologians employed. The first is modalism. In modalism, the Trinitarian persons are 'roles that God adopts in chief stages of salvation history.' (*ibid.*, 96) This is unacceptable, says Jenson, because God is in fact not known in these adopted roles, which are totally unlike God as he would be in himself. As such, rather than reconciling the Biblical narrative to theological presuppositions, it betrays the portrayal of the hypostatic God, in attempting to distinguish atemporal divinity from the divine characters acting in Scripture. The second option for reconciling atemporal deity with the narrative of Scripture is subordinationism. In subordonationism, the Father is identified as the atemporal god of Hellenism, while the Son and Spirit function as semi-divine mediators between the Father and the temporal world.

Under subordinationism, the apologists developed logos-theology to understand the place of Jesus Christ in relation to the Father, understood as the properly atemporal God. 'Logos' was taken to refer to the timeless ordering of the cosmos, the structure of reality ordained by atemporal divinity. As it was related to God as his idea, or reason, and to the world as its structure, 'Logos' referred to a something perfect for taking on a mediatorial role between God and creation. Christ was then identified as the Logos.

This step seemed to claim Biblical support, from John 1, and other passages. However, this is not the Biblical use, which refers to God's spoken Word, found as an agent in the Old Testament, which we discussed in the section on primary Trinitarianism. (cf. Torrance 2008, 37-38) Jenson notes that there was not really any place for the Spirit in this conceptual scheme. What was necessary was a mediator, which could be a single being, or a multiplicity. There was no conceptual necessity to there to be two divine subordinates. However, he says that 'what kept the apologists religiously Trinitarian was not their theology but their church's liturgical life.' (*ibid.*, 98)

Soon after the time of the apologists, Jenson says the church could claim its first truly great theologian: Origen. According to Jenson, he perfected Logos theology, synthesized it with Trinitarian liturgy, and ultimately, because of his rigour and clarity, if not his intention, subordinationism, and so logos theology, was overcome. For Origen, 'the Father gives being to all creatures, the Son opens the knowledge of God to creatures capable of knowledge, and the Spirit performs the purification by which some of these latter are enabled actually to know God.' (*ibid.*) This effected synthesis gave a place to the Spirit within the mediatorial schema of Logos theology, but it proved unstable. Jenson explains this instability in terms of the disparity between the atemporal divinity of antiquity and the hypostatic God of the Bible. He says that apologetic theology had asked how divine the Logos is on a scale between temporality and atemporality, whereas the Bible has a very different idea of the distinction between God and everything else, that between Creator and creation. In contrast to possession of the property of divinity in Hellenistic thought, the distinction between Creator and creature in the Bible is not one which admits of degrees.

The question which subsequently arises, and which becomes the focus of later Trinitarian controversy, is whether the Son is God or a creature. The question comes to a head with the presbyter Arius. Jenson acknowledges that it is difficult to know exactly what Arius thought, but that it is straightforward enough to construct the position against which the church came to stand. Arians insisted strictly on God's atemporality and, as such, on God's distance from temporal creation. However, they saw clearly that in the Bible, only a God who was involved with humanity, who could suffer, could save. They adopted the Hellenistic view that deity admits of degrees, and as a result, said that the Logos can save as a lesser divine mediator. However, they also acknowledged the Biblical Creator/creature distinction, and so made the obvious deduction, that as less than fully divine, the Logos must be a creature. The immediate and obvious objection was that, if the Logos is a creature, and Christians worship the Logos, then Christians are idolaters. (*ibid.*, 99-101)

The Arians made their stand around two claims about the Logos, that 'there was when he was not' and that 'the Son is neither unoriginated nor belongs in any way to the Unoriginated.' The purpose of these was to state clearly that the Son is a creature, and is not fully divine in the sense of divinity attributed to the Father. (*ibid.*, 101) The Council of Nicaea, called by the Emperor Constantine to unify the fractious church, put together a statement that the Arians could not sign, with statements like 'true God from true God' and 'homoousious with the Father'. However, aside from its anti-Arian intent, Jenson claims that it was not at all clear what these declarations meant. They were taken up and used by Athanasius, who subsequently imbued them with meaning in the decades of controversy that followed. (*ibid.*, 102-103)

According to Jenson, there were two possible, but unacceptable, ways of understanding the term 'homoousious'. To say that the Son is homoousious with the Father could mean that both share the same being, or the same divinity. Another interpretation would be to say that they each have the same 'kind' of being, to speak loosely. In other words, the Father and Son either have the same trope of divinity, or the same type. Each alternative is unacceptable because, in the first instance, there is then nothing to distinguish Father and Son. In the second, there are two gods. We are posed with an alternative between something like modalism or even monism, and polytheism. (*ibid.*, 103)

Athanasius responded by working out a new meaning for homoousious. For Jenson, Athanasius' solution is to say that 'the Son's status as image is taken as itself constitutive for the being of God.' (*ibid.*, 103) Or again, 'the relation of the Son to the Father belongs both to what it means to be God and to the fact of there being God.' (*ibid.*) It is not altogether clear what this means. Jenson seems to be saying that although the Son is the image of the Father, and thus distinct from the Father, the Son's divinity is the same trope of divinity as the Father's. This reading of homoousious does not really solve the problem mentioned above, but it does have the virtue of creating some kind of conceptual space between the two unacceptable options. For Jenson, what Nicaea accomplishes is a clear and important distinction between the God of Christianity and the atemporal divinity of Hellenistic theism: 'the true God needs, and the Gospel provides, no semidivine mediator of access to him, for the Gospel proclaims a God who is not in fact distant, whose deity is identified with a person of our history.' (*ibid.*) In other words, for Jenson, Nicaea shows that the

atemporal divinity of Hellenism cannot be the Trinitarian God of the Bible. Nevertheless, the decades of virulent controversy following Nicaea showed that there was still much work to be done. The question described above still needed to be answered, 'how one could without simply worshipping three gods, truly differentiate the three *otherwise* than by ranking them, how one could avoid both polytheism and modalism otherwise than by subordinationism.' (*ibid.*, 104-105) was the next Trinitarian task.

b The Trinitarian Answer

A preliminary answer to this question comes with those known as the Cappadocian fathers. Jenson first deals with the development of terminology. In God there is one *ousia*, and three *hypostases*. *Hypostasis* refers to an entity[6] as it is distinct from other entities, as 'an identifiable individual.' (ibid., 105) *Ousia* refers to 'what such an individual is with others of the same sort.' (ibid.) Anachronistically, we could think of *ousia* as the nature, or essence. We should note that these are not the original denotations of these terms, which prior to the Cappadocian development were less precise and largely synonymous. The *ousia* is deity, which is common to all the three *hypostases* of the Trinity. The example that Gregory of Nyssa uses is that of three humans.[7] Peter, Paul, and Barnabas are distinct *hypostases*, but they share in human nature, *ousia*. This does not seem like a promising start to resolving the problem. After all, despite sharing the same *ousia*, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas are distinct. They are not one in the way we want to say that God is one. Jenson says that such examples

[6] I owe my selection of this term to Owens 1963.
[7] For the following, compare Gregory of Nyssa 1893. For further discussion, see Zachhuber 2005a, 2014; Cross 2002.

show *hypostases* that are 'differentiated from each other by characteristics adventitious to' (*ibid.*) *ousia*, such as height, colour, or shape of nose. It is by such features as these that individual humans are differentiated from one another, by which they are distinct *hypostases*.

God, however, does not have adventitious characteristics, so the analogy with human beings breaks down. Rather, 'the characteristics that individuate "instances" of *God* must belong to singular Godhead itself.' (*ibid.*, 106) The *hypostases* of the Trinity are identified by relations to one another 'with respect to their joint possession of one and the same deity.' (*ibid.*) Such that 'God is the Father as he is the source of the Son's and the Spirit's deity; God is the Son as he is the recipient of deity from the Father; God is the Spirit as he is the spirit of the Son's reception of deity from the Father.' (*ibid.*) For Jenson, the significance here is that the divine persons, or 'identities', are distinguished from one another by their relations to one another, and these relations are named by events, that is, begetting and proceeding. Events populate time, and as such, Jenson believes that the God properly described by the Cappadocian developments in Trinitarian theology cannot be consistently understood to be fully atemporal. In this, for Jenson, their Trinitarian theology is faithful to Scripture.

Although most of the preceding Trinitarian controversy concerned the place of Christ in God, by the time the church came to formally defining the role of the Spirit, much of the heavy work had been done. The Cappadocian consensus was applied to the Spirit as well, with the result that the church affirmed, according to Jenson, that 'the true God blesses and the Gospel agitates no religious dynamism not identical with God's own active presence.' (*ibid.*, 107)

The Cappadocian Fathers worked out what became the orthodox view of the Trinity. Nevertheless, Jenson thinks that, despite their great achievements, they were still lacking in some respects. First, they still assumed that deity is impassible. Second, the Biblical understanding of the Logos as divine speech, rather than reason, was never recovered. Third, the doctrine of the Trinity only acknowledged the relationships of origin for the three *hypostases*. (*ibid.*, 108) For Jenson, this omits an essential element of the hypostatic God. There is as yet no eschatology integrated into the doctrine of the Trinity. For Jenson, as we shall see in chapter six, this is a deficiency of pneumatology.

C Western Malappropriation

Following from Jenson's account of the development of the Trinity up to the Cappadocian Fathers, we must now turn from his account of the highs of patristic Trinitarian thought to the lows of the understanding the Trinitarian God in relation to his creation. This forms a further important part of the central reparative metaphysical revision that Jenson wants to instigate in Trinitarian doctrine. He finds in the Cappadocians a revolution not fully implemented, and, in the Latin West, actively denied. Here we will outline Jenson's view of the *opera ad extra*, before moving on to some other central Trinitarian questions concerning the unity, impassibility, and eschatology of God.

Jenson says that the Trinitarian *hypostases* are '*personae* of the story that is at once God's story and ours.' (*ibid.*, 110) From another angle, 'the triune history as our

history is the creature of the triune history as the history that is God.' (*ibid.*) Is the difference between creature and Creator then merely one of perspective? The important clarification here is that the triune identities are agents of the narrative or history: 'As Father, Son, and Spirit are three, they are three agents of what the one God does with creatures.' (*ibid.*) They make up one 'united agency' and so one God, not three. As agents, they create creaturely history, although this history is simultaneously their own.

How can God be one if Jenson wants to describe the three *hypostases* as three agents? Elsewhere, he skirted around this language. (Jenson 1975) Here, he returns to the Cappadocian fathers. He attributes a rule to Gregory of Nyssa: 'the undividedness of the *opus dei ad extra* is constituted by a perfect *mutuality* of Father, Son, and Spirit each in his triune role. (1997, 110) For Jenson, this can only mean that there must be 'eventful' differentiation in God.

According to Jenson, this begins to unravel in the Latin West.[8] Augustine misunderstands and even denies this Cappadocian 'mutuality'. He has, what Jenson considers to be, an unhelpful emphasis on divine simplicity. Jenson says that Augustine's understanding of simplicity is that '*no* sort of self-differentiation can

[8] Jenson refers to Gunton 1990 for a 'presentation of the case against Augustine' (1997 111n144). In contrast to the so-called 'De Régnon thesis' (Barnes 1995), more recent scholarship has been kinder to Augustine, and has minimized the distance between his work and that of the Cappadocians. (e. g. Ayres 2006) As we are concerned not with Jenson's historical scholarship, but with his positive development of doctrine, the accuracy of his historical scholarship is of secondary importance. However, while we note that Jenson's understanding of Augustine may be flawed, his translation of Cappadocian concepts into modern idiom has been praised by Morwenna Ludlow as, 'almost shocking in their clarity.' (2007, 41) As Jenson seeks to extend Cappadocian insights, it is more important that he understands these than that he accurately critique Augustine's work.

really be true of [God]' (*ibid.*, 111) The *opera ad extra* cannot therefore be mutually composed, all the work of the Trinity is simply numerically identical: one. The consequences of this are, for Jenson, that Augustine cannot take seriously the differences between agents of God described in the Bible. So, 'the Son's appearances in Israel could as well be called appearances of the Father or the Spirit.' (*ibid.*) Likewise, the primary Trinitarian datum of the baptism of Jesus becomes an interaction between the Trinity on the one hand, and the human Jesus on the other, rather than an event taking place between the Father, Son, and Spirit. For Jenson, this is a sign that the doctrine of divine simplicity has come into direct conflict with the primary Trinitarianism we have described, especially when used as an hermeneutic tool. The idea here seems to be that divine simplicity as Augustine construes it is a consequence of uncritical acceptance of divine atemporality, or more broadly, Hellenistic opinions concerning deity. That God is simple provides a basis for rejecting 'eventful differentiation' and thus evacuating the important gains made in Trinitarian theology. This has the result of rendering Christian theological speech meaningless: 'The Augustinian supposition that there is no necessary connection between what differentiates the triune identities in God and the structure of God's work in time bankrupts the doctrine of the Trinity cognitively, for it detaches language about the triune identities from the only thing that made such language meaningful in the first place: the biblical narrative.' (*ibid.*, 112) We have already seen that the meaningfulness of theological language is a pressing early concern for Jenson, and any doctrine which renders meaningful speech about God impossible must simply be self-defeating.

This is a central area where Jenson thinks Western tradition must be revised, and revised in this way: 'The distinction between the triune story as it is about God and as it is about creatures is not a distinction between the simplicity of timelessness and the differentiations of temporality: eventful differentiation is real on both sides.' (*ibid.*, 113) As we have seen, without this, Jenson thinks that Trinitarian formulae become meaningless, and so 'we communicate nothing at all,' (*ibid.*) and 'If propositions about God's immanent triunity are denied cognitive content, they cannot function in the life of the church or elsewhere in the system of theology.' (*ibid.*) To put it in perhaps a stronger way, for Jenson, we must choose between a strong doctrine of divine simplicity and the systematic and exegetical importance of the doctrine of the Trinity.

In this section we have reviewed Jenson's presentation of the development of Trinitarian doctrine in the first centuries of the church. This involved an initial misstep, leading to the heights of Cappadocian Trinitarianism, and then, in Jenson's view, the problematic thought of Augustine and the Latin West. The theme which runs through these developments is the church's intellectual negotiation with pre-Christian Hellenistic notions of deity, in particular, divine atemporality. For Jenson, the doctrine of the Trinity, in its finest and most developed form, is a rejection of strong forms of divine atemporality in favor of an appreciation for God's work in salvation history. Developing this doctrine of the Trinity involved significant reworking of metaphysical claims in the history of the church. Of particular note in this chapter has been the development of the distinction between '*ousia*' and '*hypostasis*', as well as the critique of the concept of deity that admits of degrees. We now turn to Jenson's positive development of Trinitarian doctrine in response to

certain central questions. This development will bring up various metaphysical themes and claims to be evaluated later.

6 Trinitarian Doctrine: Implications and Innovations

The previous chapter was taken up with Jenson's account of the implications of the narrative form of the Christian Scriptures for the Christian doctrine of God, the purpose of the doctrine of the Trinity that follows from these implications, and the way in which he interprets early Trinitarian controversy through this lens. This chapter describes some of the implications of the method described in the previous chapter, as well as some of Jenson's innovations. It will not give a full account of Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity fully pervades all of Jenson's writing, and as such to offer a full account would be to explore every detail of his thought. This is beyond the scope of this study. As such, I will focus on some aspects of Jenson's Trinitarian theology that are innovative, and that lead to the metaphysical claims that are the proper focus of this thesis.

I will focus on two areas: divine unity and divine 'futurity'. Jenson's account of divine unity depends on the development of a new kind of 'psychological' Trinity, which aims at harmonizing the Trinitarian accounts of the Eastern and Western churches and draws on contemporary philosophical perspectives on personhood. Jenson's account of divine futurity focuses largely on pneumatology. Examining Jenson's pneumetology will also lead us to a more involved discussion of Jenson's views on Trinitarian relations.

This chapter will conclude by examining some of George Hunsinger's critiques of Jenson's Trinitarian theology.

We have already surveyed several innovative aspects of Jenson's theology in this thesis: his understanding of theological language, which is almost entirely neglected by commentators, and which is yet fundamental to understanding Jenson's other innovations; his understanding of 'religion' and the 'God of the Past'; his views on natural theology; his epistemology; and, of course, his views on narrative.

I Divine Unity

Jenson's preferred term for the *hypostases* of the Trinity is 'identity'. Jenson imbues this term with a very particular meaning, intended to express what was productive and unique in the Trinitarianism of the Cappadocian Fathers. His use of this term, and his interpretation of the Cappadocian Fathers, has earned him praise.[1] Nevertheless, Jenson does not abandon the terms 'person' and 'personal'. Indeed, he spends a considerable amount of time asking what it means that some thing be personal, and whether and how this term can be properly applied to God. His conclusion, and the work he puts in to explaining it, are highly creative, if at times difficult to follow.

[1] 'At several points he proves himself able to see through the Cappadocian's complex style to grasp the essential point and re-express it in contemporary English—sometimes in terms which are so direct and non-technical they are almost shocking in their clarity. In particular his discussion of Gregory's account of the nature of the relations within the Godhead captures the elegance and the power of Gregory's solution: Jenson is notable among systematic theologians in distinguishing clearly between the persons (or identities) of the Godhead (*pragmata, hypostases*: Father, Son, and Spirit) and the characteristics which distinguish the persons (*idiōmata, gnorismata*: Fatherhood, being begotten, and proceeding).' (Ludlow 2007, 41)

a The 'Patrological' Problem

Jenson approaches the question by way of what he calls the 'Patrological problem'. He states this problem in three distinct but related ways. First: 'The Father is the God of Israel; the Father is one among the three identities of the God of Israel. How can both of these propositions be true?' (1997, 115) Alternately, we might ask, 'Wherein is the triune God one?' (*ibid.*) Divine unity can be found in two places. We might locate it in the one '*ousia*' of God, or alternately we might find it in the monarchy of the Father. The question then becomes, which of these two has priority? Jenson maintains that both must be true. He says that 'The East has located the oneness of God in the Father's monarchy, interpreting the oneness of God's being as constituted by the Father's sheer givenness as a person who is just the single source of all being, the being of Son and Spirit first and foremost.' (*ibid.*, 115-116) The problem here is that it seems to verge on Arianism. That is, 'sheer givenness' is an attribute of deity, and if it is only possessed by the Father, then the Son and Spirit lack deity as such, and possess it either only in an attenuated fashion, or not at all, as merely the highest and first creatures. Alternately, 'The West has located the oneness of God in a posited utter simplicity of the divine *ousia*.' (*ibid.*, 116) This, however, can begin to seem like modalism, as the being of God makes appearances under the three persons of the Trinity. As such, neither the 'Eastern' or 'Western' approaches can be satisfactory on their own.[2] Jenson attempts to answer this problem under a third form of the question, whether the Trinity itself is personal. Jenson notes that Wolfhart

[2] Jenson assigns these views to 'East' and 'West'. For our purposes, it is not necessary to ask whether Jenson is right in this description. We are interested not in the historical – or regional – claim, but it the substantive matter it is supposed to represent.

Pannenberg has made a well-argued case that the Trinity is impersonal. (*ibid.*, 116n4) However, for Jenson, to say that the Trinity is impersonal is unacceptable, and will similarly tend toward a modalism which holds the true 'deity' to be some sheer impersonal being, which manifests under three persons. To avoid this negative consequence, Jenson will maintain that the Trinity is personal. The problem here is obvious, Jenson thinks. If we hold that God is one being in three persons, and that the Trinity is personal, we are in fact left with four persons, and turn the Trinity into a Quaternity.

b An Attempted Response

Jenson seeks to avoid this four-personed doctrine of God, or alternately, to make it more palatable. These alternatives might seem quite distinct. However, a consequence of Jenson's response to this problem is that, for him at least, they are not. That is, Jenson ends up saying that there are four 'persons' in God, but in his thought, 'person' does not translate '*hypostases*'. Instead, 'person' is a more flexible term that can encompass both an *hypostasis* and that which the three *hypostases* together compose. Jenson first defines 'person'. A person, says Jenson, 'is one with whom other persons – the circularity is constitutive – can converse, whom they can address.' (*ibid.*, 117) He offers this as a modification on Boethius' traditional definition: a person is 'an individual entity endowed with intellect.' (*ibid.*)[3] He remarks that we can conceive of things that meet this definition which we would not want to call 'persons'; as such the definition is incomplete, and Jenson's use of conversation is supposed to capture what

[3] This is Jenson's translation. The typical translation is 'an individual substance of a rational nature.'

is missing. He then avails himself of three concepts, previously discussed in his work. The first is *hypostasis*, which is 'something that can be counted and to which characteristics can be attributed, some of these characteristics generic for all *hypostases* of the same *ousia*, and some differentiating the *hypostasis* from other *hypostases* of the same *ousia* and so making it countable among them.' (*ibid.*) Jenson points out that an *hypostasis* need not be a person. This is clear under either definition of person above. According to Boethius' definition, an *hypostasis* is merely an individual entity, and need not have intellect. Under Jenson's definition, an *hypostasis* is also a person if it can converse with other persons.

The next concept which Jenson wants to employ is '*tropos hyparxeos*', way of having being. He remarks that a Trinitarian *hypostasis* is

> differentiated from other instances of the same *ousia* so as to be enumerable by the different way in which this instance of deity has deity: the Father by being unbegotten and not proceeding, the Son by proceeding from God the Father in the way of being begotten, the Spirit by proceeding from God the Father in some ineffably other way.' (*ibid.*, 118)

He remarks that differentiation by 'way of having being' can be understood in two different ways. Either, a Trinitarian person

> is a *hypostasis* whose differentiation from the others happens to be by the way in which he has common divine being' or 'does it more drastically mean that his hypostatic being *is* nothing other than a certain way of having being? So that the reality of a triune *hypostasis* is, so to speak, *adverbial*?' (*ibid.*)

Jenson, following Western scholasticism, chooses the second. That is, a Trinitarian *hypostasis* is a 'subsistent relation'.

Jenson remarks that his term for the *hypostases* of the Trinity, 'identities', was chosen with 'person' in mind. He says that 'it construes self-identity on the horizon of *time*,

as *hypostasis* does not. Yet its logic does not quite demand application only to persons.' (*ibid.*) This last is crucial for the constructive project which Jenson is preparing.

Finally, the term 'person' comes, not from the high intellectual Cappadocian philosophical theology of the East, but from the Latin West. Jenson remarks that

> a *persona* in Tertullian's sense is a subsistent social relation. It was in this very way that Tertullian distinguished and related the three, in and by their mutual exchanges in the Biblical narrative. The phrase so much used earlier in this book, *personae dramatis dei*, precisely fits Tertullian's sense of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and was indeed devised with him in mind.' (*ibid.*, 119)

The Latin '*persona*' is not, Jenson observes, equivalent to the Greek '*hypostasis*', even as developed and modified by the Cappadocian Fathers. Nevertheless, it is an appropriate word for Trinitarian theology, and according to Jenson, is felicitous in church history, as it provided a concept to which the Cappadocians did not have access. That is, for Jenson, *persona* is what the Cappadocian Fathers would have said, if they could.

Employing '*persona*', Jenson asks, if 'we think of personality ontologically and not as mere role-playing, and even if *persona* is then an immediately appropriate word for the three of biblical narrative, must one identity always be one person or one person one identity?' (*ibid.*) This is the innovation Jenson will explore in order to answer his 'patrological' problem. Of course, the Trinity cannot be an 'identity', in Jenson's language, or Jenson would be forced into modalism. Nevertheless, 'must the Trinity therefore not be personal, or even "a" person, by some twist of the indefinite article?'

(*ibid.*) Continuing in this vein: 'there may be *more than one way to be personal*, even to be "a" person.' (*ibid.*, 120)

Jenson is not content merely to let this enticing suggestion hang. As a suggestion, it displays a certain kind of argumentative method, one which Jenson himself acknowledges as typical in his theology. He remarks that his solution takes 'a plain phenomenon of the Gospel's narrative that causes difficulty in certain conceptual connections and remove[s] the difficulties by adjusting not the narrative but the connections.' (*ibid.*, 124) Writ large, this is his whole metaphysical project: to see theological difficulties as evidence of underlying metaphysical problems, and to take the Gospel at face value while adjusting the metaphysics, rather than *vice versa*. Nevertheless, we turn back to his resolution of this specific problem.

What stands in the way of the move Jenson wishes to make, the decoupling of identity and personhood? He says that 'the apparent one-to-one correlation between identity and personality is imposed in Western conceptual tradition by the usual Western interpretation of the self.' (*ibid.*, 120) Jenson thinks that this standard view of the self includes three phenomena relevant for his purposes. First, 'the sheer *focus* of consciousness that constitutes a consciousness as consciousness.' (*ibid.*) Jenson says that this is what Kant refers to as the 'transcendental unity of apperception.' Second, the 'I', that is 'the diachronically identifiable individual.' Third is 'freedom', which Jenson says is 'the mysterious relation between these two, in which focused consciousness finds itself in the "I" whose consciousness it is.' (*ibid.*) The impediment to Jenson's argumentative strategy is what he calls the standard Western association of these phenomena, which 'posits a primal identity of the "I" and the focus of

consciousness: in finding its "I," the transcendental focus of consciousness does not achieve anything it was not all along. Freedom is then a relation internal to a fundamental self-enclosed entity and is thus a possessed faculty.' (*ibid.*) This standard reading of the 'self' has been demolished according to Jenson: 'the attempt of consciousness to identify itself as antecedently its own "I" always, in fact, fails. The "I" appears always *within* the field of consciousness, as one of consciousness's objects and not its perspectival focus.' (*ibid.*, 121) The idea seems to be that the image of ourselves we hold in conscious thought, identified by Jenson in God as Christ, is not identical with the thinking subject (the Father), but rather stands within the field of view of this subject. Nevertheless, there is a free relation between these two, which Jenson identifies as the Spirit. This Spirit-filled demolition of the identity between thinking subject and conscious image, Jenson thinks, can be productive for Christian theology.

Jenson wastes no time in applying this deconstruction to Trinitarian doctrine. He says that

> it should always have been apparent that Father, Son, and Spirit could not each be personal in quite the same way. Thus, for example, the Spirit, just as he is indeed spirit, is inherently *someone's* spirit, so that he cannot be an autonomous someone…we shall have to conceive a Freedom whose "I" and whose focus of consciousness are outside himself as nevertheless in his own way personal. (*ibid.*)

Such an application of this deconstruction has very interesting implications for debates between social and so-called 'anti-social' Trinitarians, this will have to wait for the moment however.

With this dismissal of the traditional view of the self at hand, Jenson turns to consider his initial question. A person, he reiterates, 'is one whom other persons may address in hope of response.' (*ibid.*) Within Christian practice, when God is addressed, it is the Father towards whom we direct our speech. Nevertheless, within Scripture and liturgy, both Son and Spirit are also addressed, and so Christian Scripture and practice treat Father, Son, and Spirit as persons according to Jenson's definition. Jenson original complex of questions asked whether the Trinity as a unit is personal, and having answered in the affirmative, he began an inquiry into how this could be so without there being four divine persons. Now the question has become this: it is possible to address the Trinity as an association of persons, to address the Father, Son, and Spirit in parallel. Is it also possible to address the Trinity as a community? Jenson says that 'it is the Trinity as *community* that might be a personality.' (*ibid.*, 122)

It is the possibility of address and expectation of response that Jenson believes defines a person. In the case of a community, he says that 'there must be someone who can be addressed *as* the community.' (*ibid.*) For the Trinity, Jenson says that this 'someone' is the Father. As such, the question of the personhood of the Trinity depends on whether the Father can be addressed in two ways: as a hypostatic member of the Trinity, and as the representative of the triune community. Jenson believes that there are two such modes of address. To the first, he says that 'in the primary pattern of Christian speaking with God, we stand before the Father speaking in community with the Son and, just so, impelled by the spirit. We are enveloped by God, and only so able to speak with him.' (*ibid.*) That is, in prayer, we participate in the inner triune conversation. In this, we address the Father as hypostatic member of the Trinity. To the second, Jenson says that

> in pure doxology, we may and do address the Father *as* the begetter and breather of the Son with whom and the Spirit in whom we appear; we may glorify him simply in his triune role as *arche* of the deity into which we are taken up.' (*ibid.*) When we do this, we 'praise the Father precisely as the unity of equal Father, Son, and Spirit, within which we stand. (*ibid.*)

This is the second way in which we might address the Father, that is, addressing him as the Trinity. To reiterate what Jenson hopes to achieve by this move. He is searching for a way to say that the Trinity is personal, even a person, without saying that there is an *hypostasis*, or identity as he puts it, in addition to the three identities of Father, Son, and Spirit. Here he says that 'The Trinity is not thereby posited as another identity than the Father, and yet the Father as Trinity is otherwise personal than he is hypostatically.' (*ibid.*) As such, he believes he has answered the demand he has set for himself, so long as 'the last paragraphs [do] not depart the limits of the meaningful,' (*ibid.*) a possibility to which he is open.

There is one final question which Jenson feels he must address. He asks whether 'this duality is imposed by the reality of God and is not merely our device'. (*ibid.*) That is, 'can we interpret the different personalities of the Father as the Father, and of the Father as the Trinity, ontologically?' (*ibid.*) What is involved in this question is whether this distinction between the differing 'personalities' of the Father is something merely conceptual, without grounding outside of the mind of the theologian or Christian, or whether this conceptual distinction represents some aspect of the reality of God.

To take a smaller scale example, if I speak to my toaster, and I imagine that my toaster responds to me, if I accept Jenson's definition of personhood, I ought to conclude that

my toaster is a person, and given what we have said about a possible epistemology for Jenson, I may even be justified in believing that my toaster is a person. However, this still leaves the question of whether I am correct or not. We can approach this question in two ways, which I will call 'conceptualist' verses 'realist'. If we understand personhood along conceptualist lines, we might say that the fact that I attribute personhood to something is all there is to it, there is no fact of the matter concerning the personhood of my toaster. As such, insofar as I address my toaster, and believe that I get a response, I am correct in my assessment that my toaster is a person. If we interpret personhood along realist lines, I can either be correct or incorrect about the personhood of my toaster, regardless of my justified or otherwise beliefs concerning it. The question is whether my toaster actually responds to me, not whether it seems to respond to me.

To return to Jenson's question, he has identified two ways in which the Father might be personal. He is enquiring whether this dual personhood is merely conceptual, or is real. Absent the conceptual construction of the theologian, is it the case that the Father exhibits such dual personality? And can it be the case 'on the scheme we have described, of transcendental unity of consciousness, ego, and freedom?' (*ibid.*) Jenson thinks that the answer is yes, but notes once more that 'all suggestions at this point must have an arbitrary air, as we again strain against the limits of language.' (*ibid.*)

How is it, finally, that the Father might really exhibit such dual personality as Jenson describes? Jenson attempts to do this by ascribing distinct properties to the Father as Father, and the Father as Trinity. He says that 'were he not, contrary to the primal fact of his own being as God, the Father of the Son, he would be a sheer transcendental

consciousness, unidentified and unidentifiable also to himself.' (*ibid.*) The Father has this counter-possible property of being 'sheer consciousness'; this is the Father as Father. For the Father as Trinity, no such counter-possible exists, as the Trinity, and as such, Trinitarian relations, are presupposed: 'we do not therefore start with the posit of a mere consciousness. The Father of the Son and breather of the Spirit, only as such himself a unity of consciousness, knows his "I" exactly as the *arche* of Son and Spirit, as the oneness of the Trinity.' (*ibid.*, 123) The distinction seems to be that the Father as Father possesses a counter-possible state of existing as 'sheer consciousness', without the begetting of the Son, while the Father as Trinity does not possess such a state. It is counter-possible, rather than simply possible, because Jenson has accepted the view that the identities of the Trinity simply are their relations to one another, as such, the existence of one person of the Trinity, in this case the Father, without the others is not possible, but if it must be spoken of, it is counter-possible. Again, Jenson has left open the possibility that his proposed solution is both unnecessarily speculative and meaningless.

Such is Jenson's answer to his own 'patrological' problem. The Trinity is a person, but it is not an *hypostasis*, or an 'identity' in Jenson's terms. The Father is *the* person of the Trinity, but understood in distinction from his personhood as *hypostasis*. As such we might say, although Jenson does not, that there are indeed four persons in the Trinity, but the 'tri' in Trinity refers to identities, not persons. Further, this 'fourth' person does not independently participate in the triune converse, but is addressed by creatures in doxology. In describing this solution, we have passed over many assertions and assumptions which invite question, and we cannot delve into all of

them. Instead, we will draw out some of the larger themes and ideas important for this thesis.

First, Jenson's consideration of this problem has helped us to get further insight into his key concept, 'identity'. Identity is his translation for *hypostasis*, but is importantly distinct from 'person'. Second, we have gained insight into Jenson's conception of the unity of the Trinity. The Father as *arche* is where the unity of the Trinity is to be found. Finally, Jenson's method in working through this problem, regardless of the viability of his solution, is instructive. As we have already noted, his method has been to think through the claims made by the Gospel and the church, and when a metaphysical principle stands in his way, that of the one-to-one connection of personhood to identity, he finds it prudent to attempt to deny the metaphysical principle and see what fruitful theological and metaphysical work can develop from this. Although Jenson's claims regarding the nature of personhood might be questionable, the metaphysics of persons is not a direct focus of study for this thesis, and as such further exploration and explanation is here curtailed.

II Divine Futurity

Robert Jenson fits firmly in the 'futurist' movement in late twentieth century theology. He is a coauthor of the book *The Futurist Option* (Braatan and Jenson 1970) and repeated arguments against the so-called 'God of the Past' and his claims surrounding the nature of the Jewish and Christian religions and the doctrine of God show his sustained interest in this way of thinking. F. LeRon Shults claims that

futurism, that is, 'the intuition that eschatology and ontology are intrinsically linked has always been latent in the Lutheran theological imagination' (Shults 2003, 42), and that even though it is Lutheran theologians who have described futurism explicitly, there are futurists outside of the Lutheran tradition. (*ibid.*, 46)

Shults provides several definitions of divine futurity, in aggregate, they can help us to understand what it is that Jenson is attempting in his pneumatology, besides providing answers to classical and persistent questions within Christian tradition. The first explanation we find in Shults is that God is 'the power of the future in relation to the world.' (*ibid.*, 39) This is somewhat opaque. Normally we think of entities having power, not aspects of dimensions. Another way to approach this question is to ask what it would mean for a theologian to be a futurist. Shults' proposal here is a little bit more helpful. He says that a futurist theologian would 'argue for an explicit link between eschatology and ontology vis-a-vis the doctrine of God.' (*ibid.*) Within Christian theology, it is generally fairly clear what eschatology means. Ontology is a somewhat less clear term. However, Shults does give us some further explanation of 'eschatological ontology' which he describes as 'the general intuition that creaturely *being* is constituted by the coming kingdom of God, by a final future that has already arrived but is not yet fully consummated.' (*ibid.*, 40) We can break down this claim even further by paraphrasing it in this way: perhaps what Shults is getting at is the idea that any answer, satisfactory for Christian theology, to the question of what it means to be a creature will necessarily make reference to what God has accomplished in Christ, and the results which that accomplishment will bring.

Shults' comments on Jenson's futurism focus on Jenson's conception of causality. He says that 'Jenson is particularly critical of the abstract notions of causality that have plagued Western theology.' (*ibid.*, 43) The result of such 'abstract notions' is to remove the causal relationship between God and the world. According to Shults, Jenson replaces it with '*narrative* causation, which is real for God and creatures; however it is not a reality determined beforehand by a first cause, but the unfolding of the story of God, in which creatures are included.' (*ibid.*) This sounds very much like Jenson's claims about divine agency that we will examine in the chapter eight.

For now, we will turn from Shults to examine Jenson's pneumatology, which brings together many strands of Jenson's futurism and puts them to use in developing answers to several theological dilemmas, and shows some of the kinds of metaphysical results which are the focus of this thesis.

a Encountering the Spirit in Narrative

The phenomenon with which Jenson is dealing is the character of the Holy Spirit as found in the biblical narrative. Echoing Genesis 1, Jenson says that at the most basic level, the Spirit is 'the Lord's *breath*, the whirlwind of his *liveliness* that agitates whatever he turns toward.' (1997, 86). More broadly, the Spirit is God's 'life as he transcends himself to enliven other reality than himself.' (*ibid.*) Jenson says that because God is portrayed as the absolute agent of the biblical narrative, the Holy Spirit's action is likewise absolute, that is, the work of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the Bible is always either creation or destruction. This creation and destruction impacts

on living beings directly. Jenson says that 'as the Lord's breath blows through us, we too live,' (*ibid.*), or, indeed, as it is withdrawn, we die.

There are two contexts particularly in which Jenson finds the Spirit mentioned in the Bible. The first is in the context of God's 'historical agency through Israel's leadership.' (*ibid.*) Consistently, whether it be the appointment of judges, kings, or other leaders, the rule is authorized as a result of God's spirit being 'upon' them. Second, the Spirit is the agent of prophecy: 'prophecy is speaking God's own word, and the Spirit is the freedom to do this.' (*ibid.*, 87) The Spirit enables prophecy. Jenson says that it is important to identify the same Spirit in both these contexts. He mentions the story in which Moses appoints leaders over Israel to help him administrate the nation. This is described as giving them portions of the Spirit, and the result of this transfer of political leadership is that the new leaders prophesy. (Numbers 11:17-30)

Later on in the story of the Bible, says Jenson, 'the coming of the Spirit that brings the Lord's promises became also their content.' (1997, 87) That is, the Spirit enabled the promises of God to be spoken, and what that word promised was the coming of the Spirit. The coming of the Spirit becomes the eschatological hope. So Jenson: 'the very ground of eschatological hope is that the Lord gives Spirit, and so is the God of life and not of death.' (*ibid.*) As such, the Spirit who carries God's agency through the leadership of Israel, and enables the promises of prophets to be God's word, is also the enlivening Spirit that brings creation. This means that the eschatological hope of the Spirit is hope for new creation.

Jenson highlights two further aspects to the character of the Spirit in the biblical narrative. The first is the importance of the 'identity of the experienced creative and prophetic Spirit with the promised eschatologically outpoured Spirit.' (*ibid.*) This outpouring has two aspects. It is messianic, in that the promise is that people will be gathered together by a final bearer of the Spirit. It is also communal: 'there will be new life because the Spirit will cease to be a special endowment.' (*ibid.*) The Spirit will come to all people, not just to a chosen few prophets. Second, this promise is 'hope for a people, all of whom have the prophetic Spirit because they are gathered by a messianic prophet, because among them is a *bearer* of the Spirit whose prophetic mission is to be the *giver* of the Spirit.' (*ibid.*, 87-88) All of these claims about the character of the Spirit come from Jenson's analysis of the Biblical narrative as presented in the Old Testament. By the time these things have been said, Jenson finds little more to add from the New Testament.

As should be clear, in the New Testament, the messianic bearer of the Spirit who gives the Spirit to the community is Jesus. The primary piece the New Testament adds is to provide some answer to the question of how this happens, what exactly it looks like. The key link is the resurrection. Jenson mentions Peter's speech in Acts: 'This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.' (Acts 2:32-33) The pouring out of the Spirit happens after the resurrection. Jenson takes this to mean that the outpouring of the Spirit is enabled by the resurrection of Christ. The New Testament provides a new detail about how the promises of the Old Testament will be fulfilled by God. Jenson says that 'the outpouring is to be "on all flesh"; one who is to

do this must somehow be beyond the community even while belonging to it, so as to be related to the entire community as such.' (1997, 88) This appears to be Jenson's attempt to explain why it is that the coming of the Spirit is posterior to and dependent on the resurrection. Whether this constitutes a credible explanation is somewhat beside the key point that, in some sense, Pentecost depends upon Easter. The final thing Jenson has to say about the character of the Spirit in the New Testament is this, that 'as the Spirit shows his face, the church appears.' (*ibid.*, 89)

b Motivation behind Jenson's Pneumatological Exploration

Jenson presents his pneumatology, not as an explanation or expansion on the tradition, but as a radical departure. In this section, we will explore his motivation for this departure. That is, what are the questions, unresolved in the tradition, which lead him to his radical reformulation of pneumatology? There is no one question which Jenson seeks to answer, nor could there be. Here, perhaps more than anywhere, the systematic nature of theology becomes evident: a reformulation of this key doctrine will have knock-on effects throughout one's theology. As a result, the reformulation of a doctrine can be motivated by a desire to answer a multitude of distinct questions.

The motivation for Jenson's pneumatology revolves around an attempt to address four questions or issues. First, he asks, if God is Spirit, and Spirit is what the three persons of the Trinity are together, 'how, then, is one of the three specifically "the" Spirit?' (*ibid.*, 147) Second, the persons of the Trinity are identified by their relations to one another, but no relation is apparent in the name 'the Spirit'. Instead, 'a relation only appears when the Scripture says the Spirit is *given by* the Father or the Son.'

(*ibid.*) Third, simply 'Do we really think of the Spirit as a person?' (*ibid.*, 149) Finally, what are we to make of the *Filioque*? These questions are all related, and the remainder of this section will be devoted to explaining the questions and seeing how they bleed into one another in Jenson's view.

As Jenson says, the first problem is motivated by the Bible, specifically by Jesus' reported words: 'God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' (John 4:24) Yet in the same Gospel, the Spirit is a distinct character from the Father and Son: in John 1, John the Baptist says that 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove…' (John 1:32) Thus, in thinking through John's Gospel, we are prompted to ask about the relationship between God, who is spirit, and the Spirit. Jenson relates this to the life of the church: 'Is the invocation of the Spirit anything distinctive over against invocation simply of God?' (1997, 146) Jenson thinks, yes, but how are we to navigate this?

The second problem derives from the theologically developed notion of a Trinitarian *hypostasis*. That is, if a person of the Trinity is identified by their relations to the other members of the Trinity, or identified with these relations such that a Trinitarian person is properly understood as a 'subsistent relation', as we have already seen Jenson affirm, then what is the relation or relations that constitute the Spirit? Jenson maintains that there is no such analogous problem with the 'Father' and 'Son', whose names simply are names of relations. 'Spirit', however, is not a relation. Jenson follows his reading of Augustine and says 'there could conceivably have been a

monadic God who as such was spirit and holy.'[4] (*ibid.*, 147) Augustine's way of resolving this apparent problem is to say that, in the Bible, the Spirit always appears as '*given by* the Father or the Son; therefore the distinguishing predicate of the third triune identity must, he says, be "Gift of God."' (*ibid.*)

This sets up an instance in which Jenson's theology is in conflict with the tradition. That the Spirit is viewed as a gift causes a problem for Augustine. Jenson summarizes it in this way: 'if the identity of the Holy Spirit is that he is the Gift of God, how, Augustine asks, is he a divine identity when there are no creatures for him to be given to? How is he hypostatically eternal, if he is dependent for his identifying relation on the existence of Israel or the church?' (*ibid.*) Jenson's response is in keeping with his already stated views: 'Augustine's problem, strictly as stated, must be disallowed.' (*ibid.* 148) Why? Because we only know God as he has, not merely revealed himself, but constituted himself in the Gospel narrative: 'we should no more want to specify an identity of the Spirit without reference to Israel and the church…than we should want to specify an identity of the Son without Jesus. That we cannot say *how* the Spirit could have been the "gift of God" apart from the existence of creatures is only proper.' (*ibid.*) The question about whether Jenson's theology is committed to the claim that God must create in order to be who he is once again brought up only to be delayed to a further chapter devoted to this topic.

[4] Jenson seems to attribute metaphysical necessity to the Trinity, as we shall see in chapter seven. As such, if a 'monadic' God is conceptually possible, then Jenson will have to commit to the claim that there are conceptual possibilities that are not metaphysically possible.

Nevertheless, Jenson does think that there is an important question here that cannot be simply dismissed. Jenson asks 'what exactly *is* the relation by which the Spirit is an identity other than the Father?' (*ibid.*) The question is important, according to Jenson, because it impacts directly on Christian practice. If we accept that the only difference between members of the Trinity that we can assert are relations of origin, then members of the Trinity are identified by their relations of origin. Jenson further seems to think that we cannot invoke the Spirit unless we can 'linguistically identify the Spirit.' (*ibid.*) As such, combining traditional Christian teaching about Trinitarian persons and Jenson's views on invocation of the Spirit, we cannot invoke the Spirit unless we can identify the Spirit by a relation of origin; hence the importance of the question.

Unfortunately, tradition does not help here: 'The ancient recourse that the Spirit proceeds from the Father in a way *unknowably* different from that in which the Son proceeds from the Father only restates the difficulty; the concluding scholastic formula, that the Spirit's relation of origin is "anonymous," is mere resignation.' (*ibid.*)

Jenson's third question concerns the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Jenson comes to this question by way of Augustine's description of the Holy Spirit as 'gift'. The gift given by the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself. The Holy Spirit, and so the gift, is love – specifically the mutual love between the Father and Son, but also the love by which God loves us and we each other. Jenson claims that although this teaching was accepted by Peter Lombard, it was not widely held by the scholastics which came after: 'The doctrine that the Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son

remained the chief axiom of subsequent Western pneumatology. But later theology did not generally follow Lombard and teach that this same bond is also that which binds us to God and one another.' (*ibid.*, 149) Jenson attributes this lack to a failure to take the Spirit seriously as a person.

What is the connection between the idea that the Spirit's love binds us to God and the full acceptance of the Holy Spirit as a divine person? Jenson's argument at this point is compressed, but it will aid comprehension to expand it. He begins with a conditional claim: 'If the Spirit is a truly personal being, he finally *has* only himself to give.' (*ibid.*) But why should this be true? A general principle, that if a being is personal it can only give itself, seems plainly false. I am a personal being, and I can give things that are not myself: for instance, I can give a rock to my pet dog. I am not a rock; therefore the general claim is false.

What does Jenson think is true of the Spirit that makes his specific claim credible, even if the general principle is not? We might think that the middle step is an implicit claim about divinity, that is, the only gift a divine person can give is that divine person. This could derive from God's existence as Creator. That is, apart from creation, there is literally nothing else to give except for God. In order to give something other than God, God must create. And yet the triune God does create through the persons of the Son and Spirit, as Jenson has affirmed. He has further argued that theologians ought not abstract from God as revealed in creation and so consider what God might do and be in abstraction from the created Gospel narrative. The constraint that the Spirit, in giving a gift, must give himself, is unlikely to derive from his divinity.

A second, and perhaps more promising proposal, is to locate the justification for Jenson's conditional in the nature of the gift given by the Holy Spirit: Jenson adds that 'The notion that the Spirit could give gifts of love without giving himself betrays an impersonal conception of the Spirit.' (*ibid.*) Confusingly, Jenson seems to think that an impersonal being can give gifts of love, but surely love is always love of someone or something by someone? If the Holy Spirit is impersonal, it is not his love that he gives. As such, if the gift is love, it must be someone else's love. The key idea must be that when a person gives a gift of love, in some sense, she gives herself. A conditional narrower than the broad one I gave earlier, but more expansive than Jenson's specific claim could be that, if a being is personal and that being gives a gift of love, then it can only give itself, might be more persuasive. The idea that this claim trades on is that, while many distinct objects might be given, insofar as the gift is a gift of love, it communicates something about the giver, and also commits the giver to the recipient in some way, such that they could be said to 'possess' the giver. For instance, if my dog really loves rocks, and I decide to give a rock to my dog, expecting this to please my dog, I communicate, to other humans present if not to my dog, something about my own attitudes toward it. I might also communicate my dedication to the animal. If I see that my dog wants something, and I judge it will be to my dog's benefit, and it is within my capacity to give that something, then I will. This, surely, is some kind of possession. Jenson's argument could be made much clearer and more convincing with some more explicit discussion of what he means by 'possession'. The end result of Jenson's discussion is this: if we do not think that what the Holy Spirit gives, in love, is the Spirit himself, then we do not think that the Spirit

is a personal being. I have indicated that there is some form of this claim which, once expanded upon and clarified, is likely plausible.

The final complex of questions that Jenson wants to address surrounds the *filioque* clause inserted into the Nicene Creed by the Western church. He specifies exactly what he wants to discuss concerning the *filioque* by briefly situating his discussion in an historical context, and then describing two discussions in which he is not engaging. First, he acknowledges emerging ecumenical consensus that the Western church should not have unilaterally inserted the text of the *filioque* into the Creed. However, the legitimacy of the Western Creed is not his primary interest. The truth of the *filioque* is a distinct question from that of its place in the Creed: 'We are concerned about the phrase's theological function, in and out of the creed, and with the Eastern church's more strictly theological objections.' (*ibid.*, 150) Second, Jenson says that, historically, the purpose of the *filioque* was not to say something about the Spirit, but about the Son: 'Against christological speculations originating in the Spanish church that were judged to mitigate the Son's deity, the Western church adopted the Augustinian theologoumenon to guarantee the Son's originality in deity with the Father.' (*ibid.*) Nevertheless, says Jenson, the *filioque* has its own meaning outside of the use to which it was put in opposing Christological error in the Spanish church.

Jenson is unambiguous in his support for the theological assertion of the *filioque*, if not for its place in the creed. His argument is succinct, and builds upon his convictions about the purpose of Trinitarian theology already evinced. His argument, in brief – and it is brief- is that in the text of the biblical narrative, 'the Spirit indeed comes to us not only from the Father but also from the Son…The *filioque* reads this

giving into God himself, and just therefore must be maintained.' (*ibid.*) To reiterate what he has claimed so many times up to this point, Jenson says that 'it is the very function of Trinitarian propositions to say that the relations that appear in the biblical narrative between Father, Son, and Spirit are the truth about God himself.' (*ibid.*) That is, we only know that the Son is begotten of the Father because in the text of Scripture, the Son is begotten of the Father, and this is true of God himself, not merely a created apparition. If this is true of the Son, it must also be true of the Spirit, and in the Gospels, the Father sends the Spirit to the Son, but likewise the Son sends the Spirit into the world, and onto the church.

Nevertheless, this is not all there is to say on the matter. The West has a developed and complex Trinitarian tradition, and the Orthodox churches of the East likewise have their critiques. Jenson thinks it is worthwhile to venture through some of this territory, although in brief. He begins the venture by outlining Thomas Aquinas' teaching on Trinitarian relations, then taking Vladimir Lossky as a reliable representative of Orthodox opposition.

Jenson says that Thomas' defense of the *filioque* stems from the constitution of divine identities. That is, the Spirit cannot be distinct from the Son unless the Spirit proceeds from the Son. Divine identities, for Thomas as for Jenson, 'are distinguished only by their relations.' (*ibid.*) Thomas further asserts that the only way for a relation to distinguish identities from one another is by 'opposition'. Why so? 'If the relations distinguished identities simply by being different, the Father would be two identities, for he has one relation to the Son and a different one to the Spirit.' (*ibid.*) The relations need to be mutually exclusive. Begetting and being begotten are mutually

exclusive, but "being begotten" and "somehow otherwise proceeding" are not thus "opposed". (*ibid.*) The relations to be employed must be 'opposed', but the set of relations is also constrained: in the tradition Trinitarian relations are supposed to be relations of origin. As such, the relations available are begetting and proceeding. For there to be a distinction between the Son and Spirit, there must be a relation distinguishing them from one another which is the right kind of relation of origin. This leaves two options. The Son is begotten of the Spirit, or the Spirit proceeds from the Son. The first is quickly dismissed as not finding representation in the tradition. As such, Thomas thinks we ought to hold that the Spirit proceeds from the Son, as well as the Father.

Although materially Jenson agrees with the conclusion of this argument, he does not like the argument itself. He says that 'in Western teaching as brought to perfection by Thomas the Trinitarian relations' capacity to distinguish triune identities depends in large part on sheer geometry.' (*ibid.*, 151) Jenson finds this pattern in Western Trinitarian teaching before Thomas as well. Specifically, he cites Augustine and Peter Lombard. The critique, only implied at this point, is that the argument ought to be based in the Gospel narrative, rather than in abstract 'geometrical' considerations. The further question is whether this disagreement about argumentative style matters if both kinds, Jenson's and Thomas's, end up at the same conclusion, that is, is there really a substantive difference? Unsurprisingly, Jenson thinks there is.

To display the substance of his critique of Thomas' 'geometry', Jenson turns to Vladimir Lossky's work on Western Trinitarianism. Lossky, like Jenson, believes that 'statements of triune relations are only to display what is sheerly given in the

Christian revelation: the ultimate mere facts of God's "personal diversity" and essential singularity.' (*ibid.*) The processions of Son and Spirit are at the foundation of Christian thought as found in the Scriptures, they are not deduced from prior principles. And yet, in the West, so Lossky's critique goes, 'an impersonal principle has become determinative'. (*ibid.*) The result of this is that an 'impersonal divine *nature*' becomes determinative. Why must this be the case? In traditional disputes, both East and West argued that there can be only one source of deity. For the East, lacking the *filioque*, this is simple enough: the Father is the source of deity in the Trinity. For the West, this is a problem. If the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, there appear to be two sources of deity in the Trinity. The solution to this proposed was that the Father and Son together constitute one source, and yet

> what two divine persons are together is the divine nature. Thus in the Western scheme either the Spirit proceeds not from the Father and the Son as identities but from their divine nature, or what proceeds from the Father and Son is not a person but a sort of manifestation of the other persons' nature. (*ibid.*)

Jenson finds this line of argument convincing. The conclusion is that classical Western Trinitarianism will have difficulty holding onto either the claim that there the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son – rather than the divine nature – or the claim that the Holy Spirit is fully a divine person. While Jenson believes Lossky's critique of the West has teeth, he does not find the Eastern solution convincing. Instead, he believes that the East must be guilty either of subordinationism, or of modalism as he has defined it.

The charge of subordinationism is one that Lossky himself notes and to which he responds. Jenson describes the charge and response. The charge is simple. If the Father 'in his identity *as* Father' (*ibid.*, 152) has the unique role of being the source of deity,

does this not make the Son and Spirit subordinate to him? They are both, within deity, derivative, while the Father is not. Lossky's response, according to Jenson, is that terms like origin, procession, and begetting, are words taken from created, that is, temporal reality, and only inappropriately applied to God's eternal reality in which there is no beginning or change. Jenson finds this response to be wildly inadequate:

> The Trinitarian propositions in their Eastern use fail to describe the Father's subordinating of the Son and the Spirit, we discover, only because they do not describe any action at all; in which case, given their semantic foundation and content, they can mean nothing whatever, also not as items of negative, "apophatic" theology.' (*ibid.*)

Here once again we see Jenson's understanding of theological language, developed early in his career, show itself at a key moment as determinative for his theological judgment. In short, theological claims should be clearly meaningful, and if a theological proposition can only be retained if we evacuate it of meaning, we have made a faustian bargain, which theologians especially ought to avoid.

Jenson continues: 'Trinitarian teaching's underivable starting point in revelation…turns out to be *not* the biblical narrative, but rather some other revelation of God,' (*ibid.*) a revelation which holds God to be timeless and unchangeable. The source of this 'aberration', according to Jenson, is not Lossky himself, but as we have seen before, a long tradition of alien metaphysics inappropriately influencing Christian thought. Jenson notes its role in the thought of Gregory Palamas, for whom 'the *ousia* is not the deity *of* the identities and their mutual energies, but has become "God himself," the chief referent of discourse about" (*ibid.*, 153) the triune God. Divine *ousia* understood this way, thinks Jenson, is not as the Cappadocian Fathers intended it, as we have already seen. Instead, rather colourfully, he says that 'theology has here concocted yet a new lump for the familiar old leaven [of immutability and

ineffability] to hide in. This entity is immune even to the life of the creature who is hypostatically one with the Son; also the events of the Gospel narrative do not touch it.' (*ibid.*) This is precisely what Jenson has earlier defined as modalism. There is an unknowable and eternal divinity, which appears under guises throughout the Gospel story, which guises do not allow us to truly know God himself. As such, for Jenson on the one side Orthodoxy becomes subordinationist, and only avoids this by falling into modalism.

This concludes the description of the manifold problems that Jenson hopes to resolve with his own doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit. In brief, how are we to understand the Holy Spirit? Is he a divine person? If so, how does he relate to the other divine persons? Ought we to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son?

c Jenson's Proposal

To start, if Jenson agrees with Lossky's critique of Western Trinitarianism, but does not accept what the East has to offer, where does that leave him? The crux of the issue for Jenson is the idea that Trinitarian persons, divine identities, are only distinguished from one another by their relations of origin, and are constituted by these relations of origin. Recall that for Thomas Aquinas, the reason the Spirit must process from the Father and Son is that relations of origin are all that are on offer, and as such the *relata* of the Spirit's procession, in particular that from which the Spirit proceeds, must be distinct from the Son. If we are not willing to simply state that the difference between being begotten and proceeding is a brute fact which cannot be explained or

further analyzed, this must be the only option. Jenson's response is to reject the claim that the only relations within the Trinity are relations of origin, and instead make an addition, which he calls eschatological, as opposed to protological, relations. The lack of eschatological relations, says Jenson, causes problems answering the questions enumerated above: 'traditional Trinitarian teaching deprives him of his Archimedian [sic] standpoint, of the place from which he might himself move the life he lives with the Father and the Son.' (*ibid.*, 156)

What are the 'Archimedean' standpoints for the divine persons? For Jenson, 'the tradition rightly acknowledges the Father as the sole *source* of deity.' (*ibid.*) In this way, the Father is unique such that 'the Father in his way stands over against the Son and the Spirit.' (*ibid.*) The Son likewise has such a standpoint as he 'is not only God but as God also a creature, and so an other than God.' (*ibid.*, 157) While the Son might not have been incarnate, he is incarnate, and as such he 'in his very different way as Jesus of Nazareth, stands against the Father and the Spirit.' (*ibid.*) The tradition does hold that the Spirit, in Jenson's idiom, stands against the others, that is, is rightfully regarded as a fully divine person. However, Jenson thinks that good reasons to hold this position are rare. He proposes one, based upon his analysis of the character of the Spirit in the Bible: the Spirit stands 'at the End of all God's ways because he *is* the End of all God's ways. The Spirit is the Liveliness of the divine life because he is the Power of the divine future.' (*ibid.*) Doubtless there are several ways in which Jenson's exhibition of the distinctions between divine persons might be critiqued, nevertheless, for the moment, let us focus on the ways in which his claim regarding the Spirit might solve the problems he has already described.

The first question Jenson poses is how, if God is Spirit, is one of the three identities of God peculiarly known as 'Spirit'. If God is love, how is one of the three identities of God peculiarly known as love? The Western response has been that the Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son. And yet this makes it difficult to see how the Spirit is a person. Jenson believes he can now address this concern. He says that 'the Spirit is himself one who intends love, who thus liberates and glorifies those on whom he "rests"; and *therefore* the immediate objects of his intention, the Father and the Son, love each other, with love that is identical to the Spirit's gift of himself to each of them.' (*ibid.*, 158) We might wonder how this is distinct from the classical claim that the Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and Son, and of course, in a sense it is not. Rather, Jenson has shifted the emphasis. Traditional claims can make it seem that the Spirit is the love between Father and Son personified, but which would exist otherwise were that love not personified. It is not persons, after all, which require personification. As such, the question is that if my mother's love for me is not a person, why ought we to think that the Father's love for the Son is a person, aside from as a literary device? Jenson's response begins with the person of the Spirit, who in some sense produces, and is, the love between the Father and the Son, in evincing the character that he is in the Bible, that is, by liberating and glorifying. As such, God is love in virtue of the divinity of the Holy Spirit who is love. Similarly, God is Spirit in virtue of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. This latter claim is perplexing if we take 'spirit' to mean something like 'immaterial substance', but this is not how Jenson uses it, and if we are to follow Jenson's argument, this is not how the term 'spirit' is used in the Biblical narrative either. Rather, as we have seen, 'spirit' is the 'power of the future', or that which makes it possible that history be unleashed from the iron fist of the past. God is Spirit, that is, Freedom, in that the Spirit, who is Freedom, is a divine person.

This leads us into the next complex of questions that Jenson has sought to address. Trinitarian persons are identified by their relations to one another, indeed, Jenson agrees with Thomas, by relations which are oppositions: begat/begotten, spirate/proceed. And yet, there does not seem to be a clear difference between having been begotten of the Father, and proceeding from the Father, so how is it that the Son and Spirit, if they are subsistent relations, are distinct? Jenson thinks this is 'only a problem if we are restricted to relations of origin.' (*ibid.*) As we have seen, Jenson wants to add relations of ending, which are indeed still relations of opposition. As such, 'the Spirit liberates God the Father from himself, to be in fact fatherly, to be the actual *arche* of deity; and so is otherwise originated from the source than is the Son.' (158) He further adds, 'the Spirit so proceeds from the Father as himself to be the possibility of such processions, his own and the Son's.' (*ibid.*) The Spirit, then, is distinct from the Son not merely as a result of their relations of origin, but because of his distinct status within another set of relations, relations of ending, which are themselves warranted not by systematic need, but by the descriptions of the divine life provided by Scripture.

Finally, where does this leave the *filioque*? That is, how does this 'futurist' option for Trinitarian relations help the problems which Jenson has discerned on both sides of the *filioque* dispute? Jenson says that 'the life that the Spirit enables as the divine life has its plot from the Son's relations to the Father and to the Spirit; it is Christ who gives the Spirit to Israel and the church, that very Spirit who does *not* derive his being otherwise than from the Father and who is in himself the perfection, the liveliness, of the divine life.' (*ibid.*, 159) How does this help the dispute? Recall that the Western

critique of the East was that there was no distinction between the Son and Spirit with regard to relations of origin. The East's own position, in Jenson's telling, begins with nominal fealty to the Biblical narrative, but is stymied by allegiance to an alien immutability which evacuates Trinitarian language of meaning by distancing the language from action and narrative. Loosely speaking: the Trinitarian relations are verbs, and if God is immutable, verbs cannot apply. As such, the theological innovation which will resupport the *filioque* is not so much the 'futurist option' itself, but that which leads to it, Jenson's reappraisal of the systematic resources to be found in the text of the Biblical narrative. There are more relations to be found than relations of origin, and so the distinction between the Son and Spirit can be grounded otherwise than in these. The procession of the Spirit through the Son need not be grounded in abstract speculation, but in the fact that in the biblical text, the Spirit does in fact proceed into the church and world through the Son. Jenson reprises a way that some Orthodox theologians express appreciation for the *filioque* to express this: 'only the Father is the source of the Spirit's *being*…but the Spirit's *energies*, his participation and agency in the divine life, come to him from the Father through the Son or, it can even be said, from the Father and the Son.' (*ibid.*, 158) This is all to say, that while the Spirit of course originates in the Father, his role in the story of God is distinct from that of Father and Son, and if such narrative relations other than relations of origin may be employed in systematic work, the *filioque* presents us with a true proposition, and yet need not fall pray to the problems which in the past have been presented. In sum, Jenson deploys a slogan from the Cappadocian Fathers: 'the Spirit receives his *existence* from the Father, but *lives* eternally with and in the Son.' (*ibid.*, 159)

This work on the Holy Spirit concludes Jenson's section focused on the doctrine of the Trinity. He returns to where he began his discussion: the narrative revelation of God in Scripture. He argues that his construction of the doctrine of the Trinity, and especially as it bears on the Holy Spirit, represents an important achievement. The achievement is the final overcoming of the pagan legacy of classical antiquity of the doctrine of God. That is, the idea of 'being as persistence.' (*ibid.*) He briefly recapitulates how this idea has impacted on the doctrine of the Trinity, especially as regards the privileging of relations of origin: 'to be is to remain as one began; therefore to be the *arche* in some realm is the one great ontological distinction…nothing is real that has no origin, except the *arche* himself.' (*ibid.*) This carries into the 'realm' of divinity, with the result that 'the tradition's supposition that, having specified origin, we have said the one thing needful, is a mere prejudice.' (*ibid.*) Jenson's contention is that 'The Father is the sole *arche* indeed; having said that, we have *not* yet interpreted the reality of the triune God.' (*ibid.*) Instead, the reality of the triune God is found in the narrative of Scripture, which indeed contains relations of origin, but many other relations as well.

Returning to the theme of narrative, Jenson reiterates that 'The order of a good story is an ordering by the outcome of the narrated events.' (*ibid.*) He again asks, whether such a story can be true, not just of the world, but of God? That is, 'whether this ordering may be regarded as its own kind of causality.' (*ibid.*) This is important because, both within the triune God and within created reality, Jenson understands the Holy Spirit to be the end, or the goal. The Holy Spirit is, we might say, final causation: 'To say that the Holy Spirit is without qualification "one of the Trinity" is

to say that the dynamism of God's life is a narrative causation in and so of God.' (*ibid.*, 160).

Jenson's final summary of his doctrine of the Holy Spirit seeks to establish how we might understand the personhood of the Spirit, based on his framework of understanding personhood set out in his 'patrological' problem. That is, to ask how the Holy Spirit is truly personal is to ask 'How a transcendental focus of consciousness and an "I" and freedom are related to constitute his selfhood.' (*ibid.*) Jenson believes his work on the Spirit allows him to answer these questions. First, the Holy Spirit's transcendental focus of consciousness is the same as the Father's, that is, is the Father, because the Spirit is the spirit of the Father and proceeds from him. Second, the Spirit's "I" is the same as that of the Father, that is, the Spirit's "I" is Jesus Christ. However, because of the Spirit's unique place in the narrative of God, rather than the historical Jesus of the Gospel, the Son which serves as the "I" for the Spirit is the eschatological Christ, the *totus Christus* into whom the church has been gathered. Finally, the Spirit himself is the freedom uniting the transcendental consciousness which is the Father, to the *totus Christus*, and so constitutes the Trinity as goal of God's story, and so life.

Finally, returning to the question of relations, how do we understand the Trinity if we accept Jenson's proposals? He gives this summary: "The Father begets the Son and freely breathes his Spirit; the Spirit liberates the Father for the Son and the Son from and for the Father; the Son is begotten and liberated, and so reconciles the Father with the future his Spirit is. Neat geometry is lost, but life is not geometrical.' (*ibid.*, 161)

III. Hunsinger's Critique

Many critiques of Jenson's Trinitarianism focus on one issue: his Trinitarian doctrine seems to make the created world necessary for God to be who he is. It is this critique on which we will focus in the next chapter. In this chapter, we will focus on critiques from George Hunsinger. Hunsinger greeted the publication of Jenson's *Systematic Theology* with a withering review. Hunsinger, like David Bentley Hart, sees too much influence of the philosopher Hegel in Jenson's writing. Ultimately, Jenson's alleged dependence on Hegel, in Hunsinger's eyes, is a symptom rather than a cause of his manifold and varied heresy. We will see what Hunsinger takes the cause of Jenson's heresy to be in due course. However, it is worth giving an overview of Hunsinger's critiques before moving to exposition in greater detail of a relevant few. In short, Hunsinger thinks that Jenson's Christology has monophysite, adoptionist, and Arian tendencies. Curiously, he also thinks that Jenson's Christology is coherent, if unorthodox. Quite how a Christology alleged to imply that Christ possesses one nature that is an amalgam of divine and created natures, and that Christ's nature is purely created can be coherent is left unexplained by Hunsinger.

Hunsinger's assessment of Jenson's Trinitarian doctrine is similar. He claims that Jenson's doctrine contains influence from Hegel, who contributes historicism and so-called 'dialectical identity', which Hunsinger takes to be a bad thing. He also attributes several ancient Trinitarian heresies to Jenson, especially subordinationism and tritheism. Again, Hunsinger seems to find Jenson's Trinitarianism both coherent and unorthodox. We will discuss aspects of Jenson's Christology in chapter nine. Here, we will focus on Hunsinger's Trinitarian critiques.

Hunsinger offers an 'interpretive hypothesis', he remarks that 'it is very difficult to draw Jenson's piecemeal (and often compressed) remarks together in order to gain a proper sense of the whole.' (Hunsinger 2002, 179n32) This observation is fair. Hunsinger's 'interpretive hypothesis' attempts to make sense of Jenson's remarks, and in the course of doing so, Hunsinger often ends up attributing some heresy or other to Jenson. In reviewing Hunsinger's critique, I will attempt to offer alternative readings of Jenson. In doing so, I will render Jenson less heretical, if not completely innocent.

a Hegelian Critiques

The Hegelian criticisms are more easily dealt with than the attributions of ancient heresy. As I note in chapter seven, merely asserting that a theologian is Hegelian is not a critique. Nor need it assert dependency. Jenson himself denies such dependency. (Jenson 2007, 49) It simply invokes a comparison, that in some respects Jenson's thought is like Hegel's thought. However, until Hegel is proclaimed irredeemably heretical by the church Universal, this of itself is not a problem for Jenson, given his claims regarding the nature and status of dogma. The comparison with Hegel delegitimizes the work of an ecumenical theologian only insofar as the aspect of Hegel's thought to which they are shown to be committed is clearly at variance with the ecumenical tradition. In such a case, Jenson himself would have to acknowledge that his theology had erred. The point of my claim here is that, in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of Jenson's theological system, comparisons to Hegel are irrelevant other than for the purposes of illustration. So far as Jenson is concerned, for

the purpose of evaluation, what matters are instances of incoherence, or variance from proclaimed dogma.

This being said, it is still worthwhile to look briefly at the criticism of Jenson's Hegelianism that Hunsinger puts forward. I will address these under two headings, as does Hunsinger. These are, dialectical identity and Jenson's historicism.

Hunsinger faults Jenson for the 'dialectical identity' between God and creation found in his writing. In order to avoid confusion, it is important to state immediately that 'dialectical identity' is not 'identity' as commonly understood at all. Rather, the claim is that 'God needs the world in order to be fully actual as God, [although] God is free to posit just which world it is that will serve to meet this need.' (Hunsinger 2002, 176) It should be clear at this point that Jenson does indeed support something like this claim. The question to ask is exactly how like this claim is the thing Jenson supports. The next chapter of this thesis will be devoted to this question, as, that Jenson asserts that the world is necessary for God's existence, is perhaps the most common critique of his Trinitarian theology.

Hunsinger defines historicism as the claim that 'God's being will in some sense be constituted by temporal events…the temporal constitution of God's being will not be fully actual apart from the *telos* of history.' (*ibid.*, 175-176) It is not immediately clear that Hunsinger's application of 'historicism' to Jenson is licit, simply because the relationship between the referent of 'God' and God's 'being' is somewhat ambiguous, as we shall see in a later chapter. However, if we replace Hunsinger's term 'God's being' with 'God's identity', this claim is nearly identical to a claim that Jenson fully

endorses. With that caveat granted then, Hunsinger's accusation stands. The question is whether this matters for Jenson's thought. More to the point, is this a reason for Jenson to abandon this aspect of his theology, or for a third party to Jenson and Hunsinger's discussion to disavow Jenson on this point? Jenson grounds his theological claims in scriptural witness and his interpretation of the church's tradition. Insofar as these are found to be compelling, the answer to both these questions, at least in lieu of further argument on Hunsinger's part, is no. Hunsinger gives scant further argument relating specifically to his accusation of historicism, or rather, why such historicism is problematic. He merely says that 'the metaphysics is a version of panentheism and therefore tends toward monism.' (*ibid.*, 175) The battle as to the problematic nature of Jenson's historicism will therefore, following Hunsinger, be fought on the pitch of monism.

The substance of Hunsinger's accusation of monism is that Jenson elides the distinction between Christ and the church. He offers three examples of this fact. First, Jenson identifies the church with the physical body of Christ. Saying that for Jenson: 'the only real body he either has or needs is *identical* with the church and the eucharistic elements.' (*ibid.*, 196) This is an accurate portrayal of Jenson so far as it goes. What it misses is Jenson's idiosyncratic yet clever redefinition of 'body'. That is, a person's body is their availability toward others. In this sense, as Christ is available now through the church, and through the eucharist, these institutions are Christ's body. Jenson takes his lead from Lutheran scholastic discussion of the Eucharist. He says that 'someone's "body" is simply the person him or herself insofar as this person is *available* to other persons and to him or herself.' (Jenson 1997, 205) As a result, 'the entity rightly called the body of Christ is whatever object it is that is Christ's

availability to us as subjects; by the promise of Christ, this object is the bread and cup and the gathering of the church around them.' (*ibid.*) Hunsinger's second example is Jenson's claim that the church is identified in some way with Christ's ego, that is, that Christ sees and knows himself in the church, as the Father sees and knows himself in the Son, according to the Trinitarian view sketched above. Hunsinger's third example is that, for Jenson, the *totus Christus* is the eschatological gathering of the whole church into unity with Christ. Hunsinger acknowledges that Jenson does not intend to melt the church into God, but nevertheless, he thinks that 'the question is acute: can the logic of his metaphysical commitments allow Christ and the church to remain properly distinct in the midst of their inseparable unity?' (2002, 197) Hunsinger thinks this is unlikely, given Jenson's commitment to the idea that we not only participate in God, but that we are identified by the events of his life, just as God himself is identified. (*ibid.*) I believe that there is a convincing answer to the question Hunsinger puts forward. One aspect of it, God's necessity, is, at best, underdeveloped and unhelpfully framed, while another, God's absolute agency, is explicit in Jenson's writing, In the next two chapters I will address each of these in turn.

What are the consequences if, in the next two chapters, we cannot offer an answer to the substance of Hunsinger's charges? In short, Hunsinger thinks that ultimately Jenson's theological innovations collapse creation into God so that there can be no compelling distinction between God and creation. As such, our response to Hunsinger's charges should offer clear distinctions between God and creation which are either drawn from, implied by, or consonant with, Jenson's writing. Leaving the response to Hunsinger's charges to the next two chapters, we will now move on to his accusations of ancient heresy: subordinationism and tritheism.

b Classical Critiques

Classically, subordinationism is the view that the Father is fully divine, while the Son and Spirit are, although divine, less divine than the Father. It relies on the assumption that deity is an attribute that can be possessed in degrees. We have already seen Jenson's historical explanation of subordinationism. He claims that subordination comes about when Parmenidian divine attributes are attributed to the God described in the Scriptures; resulting in the claim that the Son and Spirit cannot fully possess these attributes because of those activities they are described as undertaking in salvation history. As such, the Father is held to be fully divine in fully possessing these attributes, while the Son and Spirit are less fully divine in possessing these attributes to a lesser degree.

The subordinationism of which Jenson is accused is not the classical variety. However, we can abstract from the classical view to a more general one, in which subordinationism is the claim that one member of the Trinity is more fully God than another. That is, that a member of the Trinity is subordinate in deity to one or two other members. Hunsinger's view is that the defining characteristic of deity in Jenson's theology is freedom, and that in Jenson's Trinitarian doctrine, only the Spirit is perfectly free, while the Father and Son are not. The Father and Son are brought to freedom by the work of the Spirit. This is an exact inversion of classical subordinationism, in which the Father is unoriginate and eternal, while the Son and Spirit are eternal, but rely on the Father as their origin and so are not fully divine. In favour of Hunsinger's claim that Jenson is subordinationist is the fact that freedom is

a property that is both characteristic of deity, and can be possessed in degrees. As such, it is the kind of property that, if it solely characterizes deity, would leave one susceptible to charges of subordinationism, depending on how it is developed in one's theology.

Jenson does not answer Hunsinger's charge in any publication, and he develops his theology in such a way as to stringently avoid the classical subordinationist heresy, not the modern variant of which he stands accused. How might Jenson answer Hunsinger were he to respond? First, Jenson insists that deity is not a property admitting of degrees. This is consistently and strongly maintained throughout his description of the 'baptism' of Hellenistic philosophy. For Jenson, the movement toward the doctrine of the Trinity is also a movement away from a concept of deity admitting of degrees. This responds to a necessary condition of the general charge. What of Hunsinger's specific case? Jenson can claim that although the Spirit brings freedom to the Father and Son, freedom is not in fact a defining characteristic of deity. Insofar as deity is, in Jenson's work, understood to be 'temporal infinity', there is a sense in which there can be no defining characteristic of deity, other than the negative claim that deity can have no definition or limit. If this answer does not satisfy, Jenson can point to his religious concept of 'god', a god is a personal eternity, where eternity is understood as that which 'harmonizes' past, present, and future. As such, Jenson can appeal to his concept of perichoresis, in which the triune God, where the Father is in some sense the divine past, the Son is the divine present, and the Spirit, as freedom, is the divine future, is united. That is to say, Hunsinger's critique relies on the claim that 'freedom' is the primary characteristic of God. Jenson can simply deny this, in favor of the claim that the narrative rhyming of past, present, and future, in the particular way found in

salvation history, is the primary characteristic of God. Understood in this way, all members of the Trinity are equal in deity as being necessary to bring about this harmonization, which is god. We will say more on this when we turn to chapter nine on eternity and time.

To conclude this response, we should note that this move runs parallel to a move made in patristic thought. The Son, though begotten, is uncreated. As such he is as divine as the Father, who is both unbegotten and uncreated. The move is this. One property, that of having or not having an origin, is removed as a defining characteristic of deity; it is replaced with being uncreated. To be divine is to be uncreated, but one can have an origin without being created.[5] Just as in classical thought the Father is not superior to the Son and Spirit by being their origin, so in Jenson's thought we might say that the Spirit is not superior to the Father and Son by being their end.

The final critique we will consider from Hunsinger regarding Jenson's Trinitarianism is the charge of tritheism. In short, Hunsinger's critique is that the kinds of divine unity which Jenson offers are not sufficient to substantiate the claim that God is one, or that the persons of the Trinity are *homoousios*. This critique is neatly encapsulated by Hunsinger's dictum, following the work of Brian Leftow (1999), that 'Any Trinitarian doctrine will tend toward tritheism as the unity of the Trinity is not substantial but merely volitional.' (Hunsinger 2002, 194) Even this bite-sized summary leaves a number of avenues in which Jenson might reproach Hunsinger. First, there is a sense in which Jenson cannot offer a substantial theory of divine unity, because, as we will see in chapter 9, Jenson critiques and excises the category of

[5] For a helpful account, see Heron 1981.

'substance' from his ontology. He replaces it with the category of 'event', and as such, that divine unity is 'eventual' – to coin an unfortunate but accurate term of art - rather than 'substantial' is, within his system, parallel to claims of substantial unity. In both cases, God is as 'one' as it is possible to be, whether God be one substance or one event. Second, for Jenson, this unity is not, as Hunsinger puts it 'merely volitional', it is, again, eventual, or – linguistically even more unfortunate – actional. Consider: one of Jenson's Trinitarian claims is that God is 'three identities of one action'. (Jenson 1975)

Action is, we might say, an event brought about by the will of an agent, and so volitional, and yet still Hunsinger's 'mere volition' is not an accurate description of Jenson's intent. Hunsinger seems to be suggesting, in the context of the rest of his response to Jenson's system, that because this unity is in some sense volitional, the persons of the Trinity might have chosen otherwise than to be 'one', as such God's unity is not necessary. This is the only way I can grasp of interpreting Hunsinger's contrast between the 'strong' divine threeness, and the 'weaker form of 'narrative' of the divine oneness.' (2002, 194) And yet if this is what Hunsinger is hinting at, it need not be the case that in Jenson's system the divine unity only happens to be actual. Consider the distinction between the will with which the Father begets the Son and the will with which God creates his creation. That the Father wills to beget the Son is not taken to imply that the Father could have failed to beget the Son, and yet God, traditionally, could have failed to create. As such, claiming that something is 'volitional' is not grounds to claim that it is accidental.

Finally, Hunsinger seems committed to the view that no conception of divine unity that does not also adopt divine simplicity can be adequate to safeguard the oneness of God. This lies underneath his critique of Jenson's model of unity through mutual action. Hunsinger says that 'For Augustine and the Cappadocians…divine simplicity and inseparable operation went hand in hand. Identity of operation mean identity of substance.' (*ibid.*) Jenson, as we have seen, replaces identity of operation with mutuality of operation, and denies divine simplicity. Hunsinger's case, to quote at length, is that

> Mutuality without simplicity, supratemporal unity without identity of substance, or, conversely – strong dependence on temporally constituted agencies as the presupposition of perichoresis – still arguably leaves us with divine threeness at the expense of divine oneness. It leaves us with a conception of divine unity as no more than mutual volition among three discrete agencies in a common narrative. (*ibid.*, 194-195)

However, *homoousios*, for Hunsinger, must be 'substantive and not merely volitional.' (*ibid.*, 195) I have already argued that it is simply not accurate to describe the unity of God on Jenson's account as 'merely volitional'. To restate: if *ousia* is to be roughly understood as what a thing is, and God is event, then Jenson can respond to Hunsinger's charge by arguing that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the same event, even if, because he denies the existence of 'substance', they are not the same substance. The key claim Jenson must rely on is that *ousia* and substance do not denote the same thing.

Hunsinger's charge seems to be stronger however. He appears to be claiming that divine simplicity is the same as divine unity, and consequently without simplicity, there is no divine unity. If Jenson accepts this, and denies divine simplicity, then naturally he cannot have an adequate concept of divine unity and his theology will

tend toward tritheism. It is fortunate then that Jenson does not understand divine unity in this way. We have already described above Jenson's view of divine unity. In short, Jenson finds two primary ways of articulating divine unity in the traditions of the church. The so-called 'Eastern' approach, which locates the unity of God in the monarchy of the Father, and the so-called 'Western' approach, which finds this unity in the one being of God. However misguided this is as a piece of historical analysis, or even labeling, these are still two possible ways to understand the unity of God. In Jenson's psychological Trinity, he attempts to harmonise these 'Eastern' and 'Western' ways, and so appeals to both. That is to say, in fact Jenson does not appeal to 'mere voluntarism', but to a creative reworking of the kinds of answers Christian theologians have always given to the basic question: 'how can you say that God is one?'

In this chapter, we have seen the way Jenson employs his Trinitarian doctrine to address traditional problems faced by Christian theology. We have also seen strident critique of Jenson's Trinitarianism from George Hunsinger, and attempted to reply to Hunsinger's points of query from Jenson's own work. In the following two chapters, we bring up and attempt to address several powerful critiques of Jenson's Trinitarian theology. If these critiques are successful, then the metaphysical revisions which he attempts to draw out of his Trinitarian innovation will look dubious.

7 Is Creation Necessary for God?

The motivating question for this chapter is whether, in Jenson's system, God could have been God without the creation; particularly, the Gospel story as it takes place within creation. This question, perhaps more than any other, lends itself to a focused examination and critique of Jenson's method in developing his doctrine of the Trinity. It is an inevitable question given the way he sets out his views on the Trinity. However, for most critics, the answer provided in his *Systematic Theology* is unsatisfactory. Jenson's claim, as David Bentley Hart rightly summarizes it, is that 'we must say that God could have been the very God he is without creatures, but we cannot say how.' (Hart 2004, 162) Against this, Hart asserts that 'it is simply prima facie false that if God achieves his identity in the manner Jenson describes, he could have been the same God by other means, without the world.' (*ibid.*, 162) The task of this chapter will be to unpack the criticism found in Hart and others,[1] given Jenson's doctrine as already described in previous chapters. In particular, we will see what brings Jenson to this problem, and examine how his development of Trinitarian relations deepens the problem.

I Introducing the Problem

In brief, the problem comes of Jenson's desire to maintain two claims. First, he says that the purpose of the doctrine of the Trinity is to say that God as encountered in

[1] For instance, Farrow et al. 1999, 95-97

salvation history, and as recorded in Biblical narrative, simply is God. That is to say, God encountered in history is not a manifestation of some otherwise eternal and ineffable God, but God himself; the actions of God in history are not illustrative of God, but constitutive of him:

> a conceptual move has been made from the biblical God's self-identification *by* events in time to his identification *with* those events…the whole argument of the work depends on this move…Were God identified by Israel's Exodus or Jesus' Resurrection, without being identified *with* them, the identification would be a revelation ontologically other than God himself. The revealing events would be our clues *to* God, but would not *be* God. (Jenson 1997, 59).

In addition, all that can be known truly of God is what we know from this narrative and history. Jenson's contention is that claims made about God on other grounds, in particular regarding divine atemporality, conflict with what we know through narrative and history, and as such should hold no sway in the theology of the church. We have explored these ideas in previous chapters. They amount to the claim that God's identity is found in the Biblical narrative. God's identity is both that by which we know him, and that which God is in himself: as such, the doctrine of the Trinity, with the purpose described above, is intrinsically involved with God's identity.

Jenson's second claim is that God could have been God without the creation:

> Presumably God could have been himself on different terms, established in his identity without reference to us or the time he makes for us, and so without confronting the death which closes our stories in that time. But of this possibility, we can assert only the sheer counterfactual; about *how* God would then have been the same God we now know, we can say nothing whatever. (*ibid.*, 65)

However, if God simply is as we have seen God to be in the Gospel, and the Gospel takes places within created history, then it seems to follow that God could not be God as he is; that is, God could not have the identity he has, without created history. This is the critique that Hart and others bring to Jenson. Jenson's response is, initially, as we

saw Hart describe it above: we simply cannot know about how things might have been, had they been otherwise. We can only know how things are.

There are two features of the apparent paradox that Jenson's work generates that it is important for us to consider. Working through them will both complicate the problem, and clarify the issues at stake. The first is the modal status of God, and of the created world. That is, we must briefly explore the concepts of necessity and contingence. The second is Jenson's rejoinder: that we cannot know how things might have been. This is an epistemological claim that becomes more complicated after considering divine and created necessity and contingence.

The philosophy of modality is the study of necessity and possibility. This is a vastly complex subject area. In part, this is because there are many varieties of modality. For our purposes, we need only set out a brief account. First, modality can apply to both propositions and, more controversially, things. The modality of a proposition is the way in which that proposition relates to its truth or falsity. That is, a proposition that is necessarily true is one that could not have been false. A proposition that is contingently or accidentally true is one that is true, but could have been false. For instance, the proposition, 'I am wearing a blue shirt today' is true, given relevant referents for the indexicals involved. Nevertheless, there is a straightforward sense in which it could have been false. I could have put on a black shirt today. However, there are some propositions that are necessarily true. For instance, 'five is greater than three' is a proposition that could not have been false. The same considerations apply for propositions that are contingently or necessarily false. A third term also comes into use: possibility. A proposition is possibly true if it is not necessarily false, likewise it is

possibly false if it is not necessarily true. More expansively, if a proposition is possibly true, then it could be necessarily true, contingently true, or contingently false, and *vice versa*.

Many philosophers also apply modality to objects, especially with regard to their existence and their possession of properties. For example, an object that exists necessarily is an object that could not have failed to exist. An object that exists contingently could have not existed, while a possible object might exist necessarily, contingently, or contingently fail to exist. Further, some objects might have had properties other than they do in fact have. For instance, any tree might have had a different number of leaves.

In contemporary philosophy, modal claims are often explained in terms of 'possible worlds'. Possible worlds are used to clarify the meaning of modal claims, and also allow philosophers to ask more subtle questions in pursuit of an understanding of modality. There are various ways of understanding possible world semantics,[2] however there is also a straightforward, commonsense approach in which a possible world is just a way the world might have been. For our purposes, the most important feature of these semantics is that when a proposition is held to be necessarily true, this is understood as meaning 'true in all possible worlds'. When a proposition is possibly true, this means 'true in some possible worlds'. The world could not have been such that 2+2=5, but it might have been such that I am wearing a black shirt, and it is actually such that I am wearing a blue shirt. Finally, when a proposition is contingently or accidentally true, it is 'true in some possible worlds, including the actual world.' Similarly, if something

[2] For a basic explanation see van Inwagen 2009, 126-132.

exists necessarily, this is taken to be equivalent to 'exists in all possible worlds', and so on.

The purpose of running through these terms is to try to help us understand what Jenson is claiming, and why some people find it to be problematic. Jenson wants to claim that God exists necessarily, that is, that God exists in all possible worlds. Jenson even appeals in several places (e.g. 2002b, 219; 1999, 36) to Aquinas' formula, that God's essence is his existence, once to draw a distinction between God and the world. This formula is usually taken as a claim about God's necessary existence. He also seems to be committed to the view that in all possible worlds God is triune. That is, there are no possible worlds in which God has chosen not to live as the Trinity. (1997, 65) So far, this sounds orthodox, and yet orthodoxy also maintains a claim about the creation: all that exists that is not God, exists contingently. In terms of contemporary modal metaphysics, to exist contingently is to exist in some possible worlds, including the actual world, but not to exist in all possible worlds.

Here we return to the problem already described, with greater insight. Hart remarks on Jenson's view of preexistence that 'the preexistence of the Son therefore consists in his eternal presence to the Father as God's eternally willed Logos: God has chosen from all ages to unite himself to this man, and, as God *is* his act of choice, he is, as the event of this choice, the man Jesus.' (2004, 162) Note that God is this choice, and this choice is an event in the actual world. The man Jesus actually exists, but actually existing things exist in one of two modes, necessarily or contingently. If the man Jesus exists necessarily, then the creation, without which Jesus could not have existed, must also exist necessarily. If the man Jesus exists contingently, as human beings usually seem

to do, then God's choice, and perhaps God himself, must be contingent. That is, Jenson's own Trinitarian logic seems to force a decision between the contingency of God and the necessity of creation.

Can God's identity really consist in the narrative of the Gospels? If it does either that narrative, taking place in the created world, is necessary, or God is not. If God exists necessarily, and the world, and so the Gospel narrative, is contingent, then God's identity does not consist in the Gospel narrative. God can be identified very simply without it: God is that which exists necessarily. If God does not exist necessarily, or if the creation does exist necessarily, this proposition cannot adequately identify God. Otherwise it can.

II Jenson's Inadequate Responses

Jenson's offers two responses to the puzzle produced by his project. The first is to say that we simply cannot know what might have happened, that is, how God could be triune otherwise than he is. We only know that God would have been otherwise triune. However, Jenson, perhaps recognizing the inadequacy of the first response, offers a second response, which is simply to declare the question we are addressing in this chapter meaningless. I will discuss Jenson's two responses in turn.

Jenson's first response is to claim that we simply cannot know how God would have had the same identity, had God not created, or had God created something different, just that he would have been the same. The way of approaching modality outlined

above can help us think through this claim. Hart does not find this rejoinder sufficient, and there is room to expand upon why it is not sufficient. This can be set out rather briefly with the semantics outlined above. Jenson says that God exists necessarily, and exists necessarily as Trinity. So in all possible worlds, God exists as the Trinity. Jenson also says that God could have existed as Trinity otherwise than he actually exists as Trinity. This claim entails that the created world is not necessary. As such, the created world does not exist, or does not exist in the same form, in some possible worlds. When asked the question, 'how could it be the case that the God exists as the Trinity when the created world either does not exist, or exists differently?' a problem brought about by Jenson's own system, Jenson's response is that we simply cannot know about other ways things might have been. The reason this epistemological response seems flawed is two-fold. First, Jenson's modal claims inherently imply knowledge of other ways things might have been, that is, of other possible worlds. The claim that there is a possibility that God could have been God without the created world, is a claim about what the world would be like had God acted differently, that is, a claim about alternate possible worlds. As such, he would need to provide some justification as to why the distinction between one kind of knowledge of alternate possible worlds, e.g. God's necessary existence, is licit, and why knowledge of other modal claims, e.g. the identity of the Trinity had God not created anything, is illicit. Without such justification, this distinction in what can be known seems *ad hoc*.

Second, an epistemological response seems like the wrong kind of response. The question, on the face of it, is one of simple logical consistency. It might be set out in this way:

1. God exists in all possible worlds as Trinity.

2. That God exists as Trinity means he is as he comes to be in the actual created world.

3. The actual created world does not exist in all possible worlds.

It seems that these three claims cannot all be true. 1 and 2 imply that the created world necessarily exists. 2 and 3 imply that God's existence as Trinity is contingent. 1 and 3 imply that God can be Trinity in a way other than that found in the actual world. This tension can be resolved by maintaining the truth of 1 and 3, but focusing our efforts on how to understand the second claim. My efforts to elucidate the second claim are aided by Jenson's own theology, although he does not explicitly put it to use in the way I propose. My claims is that that my own 'Jensonian' solution is better at maintaining the integrity of Jenson's system than either of Jenson's responses to this problem. However, before I outline my alternative, we must first examine Jenson's second response, which he offers as a retraction of his first response.

Jenson's second response is, in effect, to recognize the inadequacy of his first response, and to replace an epistemic response to the problem with a semantic one. His retraction is brief, and so is worth reproducing in full:

> 'How would the Trinity have been the Trinity if God had not created a world, and there had therefore been no creature Jesus to be the Son, or had let the fallen creation go, with the same result?' is often taken for a real question. And here I do have a retraction to make. In the past I have sometimes responded to the supposed question, saying that God would presumably have somehow been the same triune God that he is, but that we can say nothing further about that 'somehow'. I now think that even this response concedes too much to our unbaptized notion of time, by supposing that the collection of words quoted at the beginning of this paragraph actually makes a question which one can answer, however sparingly. It has now dawned on me that the putative question is nonsense, and so therefore is my previous attempt to respond do it. (2011a, 131)

Jenson offers us an alternate response to the question raised by his own system: that the question is meaningless, and so any attempt at an answer will be meaningless. He offers an explanation as to why the question does not appear, on the face of it, to be meaningless: that an 'unbaptized' notion of time makes it seem so. To take the second of these claims first, the question is concerned with modality, not time. As such, it is unclear why a problematic conception of temporality would be relevant to understanding the question. Without further explanation, it is hard to see why we should agree with Jenson here.

However, the more substantial, and important, aspect of the retraction is that the initial question, and so the response to it, is meaningless. Here too, we would benefit had Jenson explained himself further. The most helpful elucidation Jenson could offer would be to specify in what way the question he poses is meaningless. This is necessary because, as he notes, it certainly does not seem meaningless. In broad terms, he asks how a state of affairs would have obtained if some element considered to be integral to the state of affairs were absent. Consider a similar kind of question: 'how might we have a barbeque if we have run out of charcoal?' This question doesn't appear meaningless on the face of it, and were someone to assert that it were meaningless, we would expect some words of explanation from them.

Recall that in Jenson's consideration of theological language, we noted that Jenson begins with utterances that seem meaningful, and then moves to explain the meaningfulness, rather than beginning with some claim about how meaning works, and ruling out certain classes of utterance based on that semantics. In other words, the apparently meaningful gets priority. An accusation of meaninglessness must be

substantiated, or it may be justifiably ignored. That a question is inconvenient for Jenson is not grounds to declare it meaningless. Indeed, we have presented the question as a natural outcome of the three propositions described above, all of which seem meaningful. Thus we have already offered a partial account of the meaningfulness of the question.

However, say we are to grant that the question is, in a sense, meaningless. The sense in which it is meaningless is that, plausibly, it postulates a state of affairs that is impossible if God is as God is described in Jenson's system. This could perhaps be understood as a denial of proposition 3 above. However, contra Jenson, questions that are meaningless in this way do admit of meaningful answers. As such, Jenson's claim that any putative answer to a meaningless question is itself meaningless is, without further explanation, inappropriate. Consider this question: 'Can God create a square circle?' The traditional and typical answer is no. God cannot bring about an impossible state of affairs. 'Square circle' refers to an impossible object, and so has no referent. If referring to an impossible state of affairs makes a question meaningless, then the question is meaningless. Nevertheless, it can be given a straightforward and meaningful answer. As a result of these considerations, unless Jenson explains his retraction in much greater detail, it is of little use in attempting to put forward a coherent 'Jensonian' theological picture. As such, in this chapter, I will proceed without reference to Jenson's retraction, having found it to be too little developed. Instead, I will move to develop my own response to the problem posed by Jenson's system.

I will begin this response by discussion what Jenson might mean by the contingency of Creation and the necessity of God's existence. I will then offer more expansive remarks on the way that God is triune. In brief, my proposal will be that Jenson can both maintain that God is by necessity triune, and yet only contingently triune in the way that he actually is. This solution cannot be offered without admitting that there are features of God's existence that are contingent. For many theologians, this will suggest without any further investigation that Jenson's system is not one that the church can adopt. My only response is that this is indeed a problem for Jenson's hope to provide an 'ecumenical' theology.

III Creaturely Contingence

Jenson does not use the language of divine ‘necessity’; however, he does say things that should lead us to conclude that he believes in some form of divine necessity. The clearest indication of this is in his essay 'Creature and Creator', where he evaluates several different ways of drawing the conceptual distinction between God as Creator and everything else as creature. The final way he examines before moving on to his own proposal is one he attributes to Thomas Aquinas. In this way, 'the difference between Creator and creature is that in the case of creatures, existence and essence are distinct, whereas they are not in God.' (Jenson 2002b, 219) Jenson offers the standard glosses on 'existence' and 'essence', i.e., essence is what something is, while existence is 'that' something is. If I ask about the essence of something, I am asking about the features that make it the kind of thing it is, while if I ask about its existence, I am asking whether it is at all. As such, this Creator/creature distinction means that

> we could know absolutely everything about what a putative creature would be, without knowing whether the thing so described actually exists. Not so with God: could we…know what God is, we would merely therein discover that he is. God contains within what he is the reason that he is; we do not. (*ibid.*)

It is important to note two things here. First is that Jenson is generally positive about this way of drawing the distinction between God and creatures, and so positive of the claims made about God and creatures therein. Nonetheless, he is also hesitant. He does not conclude his essay with an affirmation of Thomas, but instead remarks that this distinction is perhaps too abstract, and so moves on to develop his own way of narrating the distinction between Creator and creature. (*ibid.*)

Jenson's approval of the Thomist claims above amounts to an endorsement of the doctrine of divine necessity, as we will see shortly. However, in other parts of his work, Jenson has been at least implicitly critical of this doctrine, so his position is, in the end, ambiguous. How is the claim that essence and existence are not separated in God an endorsement of divine necessity? To see this we need to draw out some of the implicit modal claims in Jenson's summary of Thomas. To know the essence of a creature is to 'know absolutely everything about what a putative creature would be, without knowing whether the thing so described actually exists.' Jenson uses two terms that can serve as our access point to the implicit modal claims. Most obvious is the phrase 'actually exists'. Actually is a modal term, as we have seen above. Describing a creaturely essence is to describe something which might possibly exist, but in actuality does not exist. Here I leave aside questions about the existence of possible objects and stipulate that the relevant distinction for Jenson is that between actuality and possibility. The second phrase is 'putative creature', by which Jenson intends a creature we might imagine or consider, which need not imply any modal assumptions.

However his usage suggests that it might be equivalent to 'possible creature'. I take him to mean following: an essence is a set of attributes, the enumeration of which describes a possible object. Insofar as that object is a creature, existence is not among the set of attributes attributed to that possible object. As such, full knowledge of some compossible set of attributes will not allow us to conclude, for any non-divine object, whether there exists an object that possesses all of these attributes. This, I submit, adequately captures Jenson's gloss on Thomas' position on creaturely existence. At least pertaining to creatures, Jenson here seems in line with the common position in contemporary metaphysics which holds that existence is not primary attribute, that is, a property of objects, but rather a secondary attribute, a property of a set by which we say of some set whose membership criteria is a list of properties, there is at least one object belonging to this set. (cf. Quine 1948)

IV Divine Necessity

In contemporary modal metaphysics, the claim that God exists necessarily is the claim that God exists in all possible worlds.[3] Jenson never says directly that God exists necessarily, nor does he say that God exists in all possible worlds, as this modal idiom is not to be found in his writing. However, Jenson makes two claims that suggest he accepts divine necessity, and one that suggests he does not.

[3] Divine necessity comes up in contexts other than that of contemporary metaphysical work on modality. Of particular interest is Jüngel 1983, 14-34; alongside Pannenberg's memorable response: 'Those who understand the concept of a necessary being will not find Jüngel's thesis that God is "more than necessary" (p. 24) a contribution to critical discussion of the concept. It is meaningful, however, as an expression of God's freedom in relation to the world. God is in fact more than the origin of existence which must be presupposed as necessary for the world. As Creator he is the free origin of the world.' (2010, 83n55)

a Jenson in Support of Divine Necessity

We have already seen above that Hart mentions Jenson's claim that we must say that God would have been the same God had he not created the world, but that we cannot say how. (1997, 65) Jenson makes this claim in a place where we might otherwise suspect that he does not accept the contingence of creation. The claim that God would have existed no matter what can suitably be read as the claim that God exists necessarily, moreover that God of necessity exists in a certain way: as Trinity.

We have also seen that Jenson approvingly quotes Thomas Aquinas' dictum that in God, there is no distinction between essence and existence, that is, that God's essence is his existence. Jenson further explains this by saying that if we knew what it was to be God, we would also know that God must exist. In Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, this denial of the distinction between essence and existence is one way of articulating the doctrine of divine simplicity. (1.3.4) Jenson's own regard for divine simplicity is complex. He does not accept any strong form of simplicity. (Jenson 1997 111-113) If we set simplicity aside, it is unclear what Jenson means by the identity of essence and existence, which is perhaps why Hart dismisses Jenson's appeal to this classical idea (2004, 162). Nevertheless, the claim also amounts to an affirmation of divine necessity, as can be seen in Brian Leftow's argument from Divine Simplicity to Divine Necessity (1991, 69-71). Leftow's argument cannot be directly transposed into Jenson's thought, however, because for Leftow the identity is between God and God's essence, rather than between God's existence and God's essence. How great or small of a difference this amounts to will be left to the reader to determine. Jenson does not

give us enough detail to justify spending much time considering it. Although we should note that Jenson's approach to contingence above allowed his theology to be compatible with contemporary analysis that holds that existence is a second order property, if Jenson really believes that God's essence and existence are identical, and essence is a first order property, then at least for God, existence must be a first order property. However, it is not clear that Jenson would be that strict about the interpretation of the dictum (2002b, 219).

b Jenson against Divine Necessity

While generally Jenson seems to accept the doctrine of divine necessity, and something like the view that God exists in all possible worlds, in order to approach a comprehensive overview, we must also consider Jenson's claim that the drama of the Gospel requires that on the Cross, God is truly risking death, or non-existence (1997, 48). Jenson does not elaborate on this, except to say we must make what 'metaphysical sense' we may.[4] This is notably at odds with other claims about divine necessity. If God exists necessarily, he cannot be in danger of non-existence. It also conflicts with Jenson's claims about God's role in the biblical narrative, which we explored in chapter five. In brief, the divine persons are the agents of the Biblical narrative. If God is truly in danger of being acted on by some outside force, as Jenson here implies he must be, then he cannot be that ultimate agent which Jenson insists God is. As such, we will move past this inconsistency in Jenson's thought, in the awareness that in doing so we prompt a larger inconsistency – the original problem of this chapter. If we were to conclude that Jenson does think God is contingent, then

[4] For a study of the implications of this aspect of Jenson's thought, see Nicol 2016.

the problem of this chapter evaporates, although larger problems, unacceptable to many theologians, may then beckon.

The way Jenson describes the Trinitarian relations makes it seem that, if God exists necessarily, the creation must exist necessarily as well, while if the Creation is contingent, then so must God be. That Jenson seems to hold that God is necessary and Creation is not, is the great problem of this chapter.

V A Proposed Solution: Contingent Properties of Necessary Events

From this point, although we will draw upon Jenson's work, we must deal with the fact that Jenson has not given a satisfactory answer to this problem. Our task will be to discover whether, within Jenson's work, there is a possible solution to the problem that he himself has not yet proposed. At very least, Jenson must maintain that God exists necessarily, but that God might have been other than he is. Jenson's writing is very clear that this is a possibility Christian thought must accept for the sake of the 'drama' of the Christian narrative. That is to say, God has properties he might not have had. We can phrase this in Jenson's own appropriate form for theological claims. The form, recall, is 'To be saying the Gospel, let us say F, rather than G, where F is some example of right speech or metalinguistic stipulation.' (*ibid.*, 17). In this context, the metalinguistic stipulation must be something like 'To be saying the Gospel, let us say that God could have had properties other than those he has, rather than that God could not have had properties other than those he has.'

This is perhaps too unitarian for Jenson's thought, and it might be better to phrase it in a Trinitarian way. After all, Jenson's main contention about divine necessity is that God would have been Trinity, that the triune identity would be the same, even had God not created, and yet this identity is constituted in creation, as such: 'To be saying the Gospel, let us say that each Trinitarian identity could have had some properties other than those he has, rather than that creation makes no difference to God's identity.' Speaking in this way puts a finer point on the problem, and perhaps also suggests a way through.

Jenson has maintained that the only characteristic distinguishing Trinitarian identities from one another are their relations to one another. (1997, 105-106) He has also suggested that a Trinitarian identity simply is a subsistent relation. (*ibid.*, 118) We need to avoid terminological confusion here. When Jenson uses the term 'relation', he is not speaking of a relation understood in terms of contemporary logic drawing on set theory. That is, this relation is not a set of ordered sets. (cf. Sider 2010b, 14-16) Rather, Jenson is talking about the events that bring about such relations. It may be the case that the 'Father of' relation ought to be understood as a set of ordered pairs, each pair consisting of one father and one child, extrinsically defined, but to be related to someone as their father is to have participated in an event, that of the child's 'begetting', or more expansively their origin and participation in their upbringing - the event need have no definite temporal boundary.

However the events internal to the life of God are to be related to the distinct identities of the Trinity, we might suggest that these events, and the resultant identities, are necessary, they could not have failed to occur, and occur in all possible

worlds. How could the divine identities have different properties if they have only one property, a relation, and these are necessary? How then, might we speak of a difference in the way God might be? The solution to this riddle is to note that events too may have properties: the same event can happen in different ways.

VI A Problem with the Solution: God's Adventitious Characteristics

I have proposed that the problem this chapter focuses on could be resolved if Jenson treats aspects of the divine identities which are bound up with the created world as accidental properties of the events which individuate and primarily constitute those divine identities. That is, by arguing that God's existence as Trinity is necessary, but that God might have been the Trinity in different ways, allowing for the possibility of different creations or no creation at all. As I have noted, doing this will require Jenson to abandon some versions of divine simplicity and atemporality, but he does this anyway.

There is, however, one objection that is more biting for Jenson, because it comes from a theologoumenon he explicitly endorses. Jenson claims that God has no adventitious characteristics; this is the primary reason why the divine identities are individuated by their relations of origin, he says. Our proposal, on the other hand, works precisely by claiming that the divine identities do have adventitious characteristics, that is, characteristics they might not have had, and could have done without. If this is the best way to resolve the primary problem of this chapter, then it could undermine the motivation for accepting the understanding of the distinction between divine

identities that makes the resolution itself possible. Surely this would be unfortunate for Jenson's project.

There is a possible response to this problem, which begins by acknowledging that the stated motivation for individuating divine identities by relations rather than adventitious characteristics is not particularly convincing in the way that Jenson uses it. As Jenson tells it, relations individuate divine identities rather than adventitious characteristics simply because 'God cannot be thought to receive merely adventitious characteristics.' (1997, 106) However, a relation is simply a kind of property, or perhaps, a property is simply a kind of relation. The difference, then, is not between adventitious properties and relations, but, if relations are a kind of property, between adventitious properties, and non-adventitious properties. The triune relations are not adventitious.

The solution proposed above necessitates that the divine identities have adventitious characteristics, and characteristics that are not shared, but this seems to be no more than is required by the Gospel: the Son is incarnate, the Father and the Spirit are not; the Son suffers on the Cross, the Father does not; the Holy Spirit descends on the Son, the Father does not. Any enumeration of the events of the Gospel story will of attribute characteristics to one of the divine persons which it does not attribute to others.

However, such adventitious characteristics, while they may constitute an identity, cannot individuate an identity, insofar as the divine identities exist of necessity, that is, insofar as God exists and is triune of necessity. We may thus preserve what is

important in Jenson's Trinitarian theology by maintaining that the triune persons do admit of adventitious characteristics, but, unlike human persons, these characteristics do not individuate the triune persons. Rather, they are individuated by their relations to one another, and would be so related in any possible world.

8 Supralapsarianism and the Karamazov Conundrum

At this the King scratched his head and looked very blank. "That's just like the gods," he muttered. "Drive you to do a thing and then punish you for doing it." (Lewis 1956, 58)

In this chapter, I will outline a potent critique of Jenson's Trinitarian theology, then see what resources his thought offers to help address this critique. I criticize his decision not to engage in theodicy, and develop a theodicy out of Jenson's thought to respond to the problem of evil raised by Hart.

I The Problem

Jenson says that the history of the world is the history of God; that God is the sole agent of history – with whatever Trinitarian qualifications are necessary regarding the term 'sole'. The persons of the Trinity act together to form one divine agent who is the impetus of world history. How Jenson gives account of this has already been discussed in chapters five and six. If it is the case that God is the agent of history, and history contains evils, then God is responsible for evil. This is a straightforward informal deduction which can scarcely be denied, and Jenson does not try to deny it.

In his *Systematic Theology*, Jenson discusses this under the traditional question of whether the Son would have become incarnate if the fall had not happened: 'if we did not sin, would then God, in his identification by our story, not face death? Would God's transcendence of death, his eternity, then have been something other than

victory *over* death?' (1997, 72) Jenson's theological method is such that the question is not straightforward. Theology works by meditation upon concrete actuality, things that have happened. Speculating on possibilities is difficult because Jenson 'refuses to abstract in this way from the actual Incarnation…our not having sinned becomes itself unthinkable.' (*ibid.*, 73) If history is the story of God, then any input into the story by us, which is not somehow also input by the will of God, leaves who God is up to our action; this, for Jenson, is unacceptable.

Jenson takes what he identifies as a 'supralapsarian' line, although he is speaking broadly.[1] He follows the traditions of Luther, Barth, certain medieval Franciscans, and supralapsarian Calvinists for whom 'the goal of God's path is just what does in fact happen with Jesus the Christ, and sin and evil belong to God's intent precisely – but *only* – as they do appear in Christ's victory over them.' (*ibid.*, 73) This is all to say that suffering and evil do belong to the history of God, and that 'terrible prophecy must somehow become true and good in the last fulfillment. And the identity off God must somehow be told also by it.' (*ibid.*, 74) Jenson concludes his section on the 'way' of God's identity with this, and does not discuss it further in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*. However, for more insight, we can turn to his earlier work on the American theologian, Jonathan Edwards.

Jenson's work on Edwards covers many areas of Edwards' thought. He presents it as a 'recommendation' of Edwards, so while in many instances Jenson simply presents his

[1] Jenson speaks perhaps over-broadly. He elides many distinct eras and schools of theology. In the main body of this chapter, we are commenting on Jenson's appropriation of the supralapsarianism of Jonathan Edwards. For an introduction to the complex history of supralapsarianism, see van Driel 2008, 171-176.

own understanding of Edwards without explicitly proposing it as felicitous, it is reasonable to presume that such presentations of Edwards, where Jenson does not state that he disagrees, represent Jenson's thinking as well. The relevant material comes when Jenson discusses Edwards' views of predestination and providence, under the title 'The Offence of God's Actuality'. (1988, 99-110)

Why is God's actuality offensive? For Jenson, it is because 'Edwards' God is an other than you or me, who has his own sense of the heart and whose sense comprises the true idea and the decisive choice.' (*ibid.*, 99) People take offense at, for instance, the doctrine of predestination because 'it is the linked doctrines of providence and election by which God's actuality is insisted upon.' (*ibid.*). This is all to say that, for Jenson, people do not want an actually sovereign God. Yet, as we have already seen, 'the biblical God…is precisely the Agent of history.' (*ibid.*, 100) The only honest alternative to this is 'historical nihilism', the idea that there is no agent behind history. We cannot provide this agency. It is a matter of plain fact that 'we live in history not only by agency but also by patience.' (*ibid.*) That is, 'in history we both act and suffer now and sooner or later will only suffer. What are we to hope about? The correlation of death and God, as enemies to each other but allies against our illusions, has always been a center of Christian understanding.' (*ibid.*) 'Suffering' here has the broader sense of being acted upon, rather than the narrower, common use for pain.

In view of the account of God as the agent of history, clarification must be made regarding the meaning of the term 'predestination'. It can denote some prior decision before God enacts creation which sets ahead of time all things that will happen. This sounds very much like determinism in a mechanistic universe. Events are set and

there is nothing that can be done to prevent their coming about. Creation is like playing a CGI film. God programs it all ahead of time in the depths of his eternity, then sets up the projector that plays it. We might play the part of Woody or Buzz Lightyear, but our actions are determined in advance. Jenson says that this idea 'of God deciding in advance what is to happen and then causing it to come to pass,' (*ibid.*, 103) is wrong.

How ought we to think about it then? Jenson takes two points from Edwards. First, the distinction between a plan for the world, and the actual history of the world, is false. Jenson says that 'God's goodness, which is his will that others be happy and holy, is one thing. His desire to have beings other than himself, to whom to be good, is another thing, for God's goodness is in itself fully exercised within the triune life.' (*ibid.*) In creating and blessing creatures, God does more than exercise an ability, he shows who he truly is. The exercise and communication of himself are not two distinct things, but rather it is this 'unitary "disposition," and so *not* any plan to achieve some "result" or other, which is God's will to his own "glory."' (*ibid.*) Second, 'it cannot be thought that God plans in advance and then works to achieve this plan, since for God, to conceive as actual is to make to be actual.' The effect is that 'the "eternal decrees" are simply the reality in God of his history with us.' (*ibid.*)

The character of this life, and so of history, is known in Christ. Redemption, for Edwards as for Jenson, is a triune event. Jenson says that 'God's primal covenant *about* us is not *with* us, but triunely with himself.' (*ibid.*, 104) In fact, it is an agreement made between the Father and Son, and stipulates the roles of all the triune persons with it. This agreement is 'not primally [sic] a decree about which of the rest

of us shall and shall not be "saved;" it is primarily abut [sic] the destiny of Christ-with-his spouse the church.' (*ibid.*, 103-104) As such 'all is for the sake of Christ. He is the "elect" creature.' (*ibid.*, 105) This then is the statement of the offense of God's actuality. His life is lived as a gift to the world, for the incarnate Christ.

This is precisely where critique of Jenson (and by extension, Edwards as presented by Jenson) strikes. Jenson admits that 'if God rules *this* world, than [sic] his rule is morally opaque in ways the standard Enlightenment cannot acknowledge.' (*ibid.*, 106) We have already seen this in Jenson's exploration of the Bible as a source of God's identity. It is also a clear implication of the view that God is the sole agent of history. What are we to make of evils, both slight and horrendous, under this scheme? Jenson does not try to get himself off the hook. He admits that 'Plainly, a God such as the one asserted in the Gospel could have created a world in which sin and evil had no role; and since no such world exists, either this God is not or he is finally accountable for sin and evil, even if he does not "cause" or "do" them.' (*ibid.*, 107) Jenson even refers to those arguments that attempt to get God off the hook by denying his responsibility for evil as 'pusillanimous atheism'. (*ibid.*) Jenson says that Edwards' own view can be summed up in this way: 'whether we are created with a propensity to sin, or created "able" to remain righteous but in a world in which none have so far succeeded, comes morally to exactly the same thing and makes no difference at all to God's responsibility.' (*ibid.*, 108) Jenson seems to be attempting to make the standard problem of evil, or specifically, the argument from evil against the existence of God, as difficult as possible.

II Hart's Critique of Jenson

David Bentley Hart spends eight pages on Jenson's Trinitarian theology in *The Beauty of the Infinite*. Jenson has responded to this critique, saying 'David Hart does me the honor – and I mean that straightforwardly – of spending eight prominent pages deploring my theology.' (2005, 235) Hart's critique of Jenson's theology is roughly that a misapplication of Rahner's rule removes the analogical distinction between the immanent and economic Trinities, and inevitably sets up something like a Hegelian theological system, with negative results. He says that while Jenson tries not to end up as an Hegelian absolute idealist, if you give Hegel an inch, he will take everything, and the only solution to this problem is to stand resolutely against his metaphysical system.

Shorn of the Hegelian jargon however, Hart finds two negative implications of Jenson's Trinitarian theology. First, he thinks that in viewing God as an event, taking place in world history, Jenson must think that the existence of creation is necessary for God. This falls afoul of a principle Hart takes from Anselm, that Christians must think of God as '*id quo maius cogitari nequit*.' (Hart 2004, 164) A god who relies on the world to be who he is, according to Hart, is not this. Although the principle is taken from Anselm, Hart thinks it is a direct consequence of the Bible's portrayal of God, and cannot be sacrificed. We examined this critique in the previous chapter. The second critique is put forward in a typically long and complex sentence:

> Logically speaking, "absolute consciousness" cannot simply find itself in one object among other objects, even if it includes those other objects secondarily, as its context or ambience, or simply as objects of grace; all other objects, however they are arranged around the unique object of "absolute" attention,

> are implicated in and indeed determine that object and so the contents of the absolute. (2004, 164)

The point is that all events and objects in the created world are in some way connected. If God is an event in history, as Jenson sometimes says, or if the story of God is the story of created history, as Jenson says in other places, then all events of history are relevant as in some way constituting God, even if there is some special relationship to Jesus Christ and the events of his life. For Hart, 'This does not cease to be true even of the most tragic historical consequences of the event of God in Christ.' (*ibid.*) So, for instance, Hart says that the division in Judaism caused, in part, by the resurrection of Christ, led in time to antagonism between Christianity and Judaism, and eventually to the holocaust. Under Jenson's vision, this event too has to be integral to God. It is not merely some evil that is necessary in Jenson's system, 'Jenson's Trinitarian theology cannot work unless one posits not only the necessity of evil, but indeed the necessity of the actual history of evil.' (*ibid.*) We move on to the negative theological consequences of Jenson's thought for Christian faith that Hart describes.

Hart outlines two negative consequences. First, if what Jenson says about God and the history of creation is true, Hart thinks that 'it reduces God to a being whose nature is not love…and one might justifiably wonder if a God who chooses himself so…over against the creatures who suffer the adventure of his self-determination should evoke love in return.' (*ibid.* 164-165). The second part of this critique, that God chooses himself over the wellbeing of his creatures, is questionable given what we have already seen of Jenson's supralapsarianism. There is no distinction between the best end for God and the best end for his creatures. And yet, we might still wonder about the first,

that God's nature is love. Hart's second negative consequence is that 'if God's identity is constituted in his triumph over evil, then evil belongs eternally to his identity, and his goodness is not goodness as such but a reaction, an activity that requires the goad of evil to come into full being.' (*ibid.* 165) Here Hart cites the dilemma posed by Ivan Karamazov: 'If the universal and final good of all creatures required, as its price, the torture of one little girl, would that be acceptable?' (*ibid.*) For Hart, the answer is no. Such a god 'may be a being, or indeed the totality of all beings gathered in the pure depths of ultimate consciousness, but his is not being as such, he is not life and truth and goodness and love and beauty.' (*ibid.*) The claims about being relate to Hart's own development of theological metaphysics, but even without these the point remains. How can we say that God is good? And finally, 'He may include us in his story, but his story will remain both good and evil even if it ends in the ultimate triumph over evil.' (*ibid.*) Hart thinks that Jenson's God ends up as simply 'a myth of necessity, of ultimate grounds, a transcendental reconciliation of all contingent suffering in an ultimate structure of meaning.' (*ibid.*, 166), but for Hart, this is not the Christian God.

This presents as Hart employing the problem of evil against Jenson's vision of God, and yet, Jenson notes a fairly persuasive case that the problem of evil will hold under any form of theism with God as Creator. To repeat: 'whether we are created with a propensity to sin, or created "able" to remain righteous but in a world in which none have so far succeeded, comes morally to exactly the same thing and makes no difference at all to God's responsibility.' (Jenson 1988, 108) The problem of evil to which Jenson admits is wider than his own system of doctrine. Hart notes, apparently approvingly, that 'Jenson…does not write theodicy and never adds his voice to the

querulous choiring of those who want God to absolve himself of his transcendence.' (2004, 160)

Hart's critique from the problem of evil requires two distinct responses: the first, whether creation suffers evil only for the good of God; the second, whether God can be good if evil is necessary to God's identity.

III Jenson on Theodicy

Jenson himself seems to abjure any attempt to reconcile the reality of the world with the goodness of God, which is at heart the work of theodicy. As we have seen, he says that 'Edwards' God is an other than you or me, who has his own sense of the heart and whose sense comprises the true idea and the decisive choice.' (1988, 99) He further strengthens this and says 'Given the creation that is, either there is no God or he is far deeper and quite otherwise hidden than we have conceived. Either there is no God or there is one who can decree evil in order to turn it to good beyond our fathoming.' (*ibid.*, 110) How much of a problem ought we to think this is for Christian theology? The view seems to be that we cannot understand how God and evil can be reconciled, and that we ought not to try. There is some Biblical foundation for this view. The conclusion of the Book of Job essentially consists in God appearing to Job, revealing his power, and saying that as Job cannot compare to God in power and understanding, he should not enquire into what he has done. (Job 38-41) Likewise, in Romans 9, Paul writes

> You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what

> is molded say to the one who molds it, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction… (Romans 9:19-22)

And yet despite this, I propose that within the supralapsarianism Jenson himself puts forward are the seeds of a theodicy.[2]

In claiming such incomprehensibility in his theology, Jenson is abandoning a principle he lays out elsewhere in his Trinitarian theology. We have already seen in our study of Jenson's understanding of theological language that he has little patience for ambiguity in theology. He strongly asserts that Christian language ought not to be ambiguous, and that claims should be clearly meaningful. For instance, in *The Triune Identity*, he accuses much Western Trinitarianism of 'pious mystery-mongering.' (2002a, 126) This is because the language is known to be vacuous, and yet it is 'something we assert because we are supposed to, not knowing even what we are asserting.' (*ibid.*) If this argument applies to formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity, why should the same strictures not apply to language concerning the goodness of God? It seems to fail Jenson's own standards to simply assert that somehow God is good, even though we don't really know what that could mean given the evil present in the world. As such, I suggest that for Jenson to be consistent, rather than shunning the theodical project, he needs a theodicy. Further, his supralapsarianism provides such a theodicy. In order to demonstrate how, I will outline

[2] This is not the first time that supralapsarianism has been put to use in service of theodicy, perhaps most notably by Alvin Plantinga in his chapter "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'." (2004) What follows shares many similarities with Plantinga's account. This is unsurprising given the shared theological tradition to which both Jenson and Plantinga appeal. For critiques of Plantinga, see Adams 2008 and Diller 2008.

how defenses against the problem of evil are constructed, using the work of Peter Van Inwagen.

IV Argument and theodicy

Despite the reluctance of theologians, such as Hart and Jenson, there has been much work done in the contemporary philosophy of religion on the problem, or problems, of evil. In order to develop our supralapsarian theodicy, we will first examine some features of the problem of evil, and describe some distinctions that will prove helpful along the way. Attacking the problem of evil presented by supralapsarianism will require us to deploy clear conceptual artillery. To this end, it will prove useful to abstract from the specific problem and discuss the problem of evil, and responses to it, in more general terms.

In his 2003 Gifford Lectures, Peter van Inwagen argues that it is difficult to formulate one complete and satisfying response to the problem of evil because there is not one simple problem of evil requiring response. Van Inwagen distinguishes between practical and theoretical problems of evil. Practical problems confront theists when they encounter particular evils. Within practical problems, he distinguishes personal and pastoral problems. Personal problems are those that arise when a theist confronts some evil in their lives, or come to know of some evil by which they are affected. Pastoral problems confront those who 'regard themselves as responsible for the spiritual welfare of that person when the person encounters evil.' (van Inwagen 2008, 5). He divides theoretical problems into two categories as well: apologetic and

doctrinal. Doctrinal problems are those faced by believers in virtue of the particular faith that they hold when confronted by evil. Doctrinal responses to the problem of evil take the form of theodicies. A theodicy attempts to 'state the real truth of the matter, or a large and significant part of it, about why a just God allows evil to exist.' (*ibid.*, 6) A theodicy 'is not simply an attempt to meet the charge that God's ways are unjust: it is an attempt to *exhibit* the justice of his ways.' (*ibid.*) The apologetic problem of evil arises when evil is used to attempt to give a reason not to accept the truth of theism.

Van Inwagen is concerned primarily with the apologetic problem of evil, specifically, with atheological arguments from evil: arguments that attempt to move from 'evil exists' to 'God does not exist.' This is important for his method, and it is also important for us to understand in order to construct, not simply a response to the problem of evil, but a theodicy. For van Inwagen, it is not necessary to construct a theodicy in order to respond to the apologetic problem of evil. The respondent need not offer an explanation for evil that they take to be true. It is sufficient that they provide some kind of reasonable doubt. An attempt to provide such doubt is known as a defense, rather than a theodicy. Such a defense may simply offer a plausible story about why God might have allowed some kind of evil, without claiming that this is in fact the reason he has done so. In a sense then, the difference between a defense and a theodicy is that someone offering a defense need not assert that the story they tell is true, simply that it might be true. Someone offering a theodicy is also asserting that the story they tell is a true story. Van Inwagen says that 'the difference between a defense and a theodicy lies not in their content but in their purposes.' (*ibid.*, 7) A defense simply 'has some desirable feature that does not entail truth – perhaps

(depending on the context) logical consistency or epistemic possibility (truth-for-all-anyone-knows).' (*ibid.*) In sum, van Inwagen will pursue defenses against various permutations of the problem of evil. We will be attempting to develop a theodicy for what van Inwagen calls the 'global' problem of evil, and developing a more modest defense against 'local problems of evil; a defense that is compatible with the theodicy we offer.

Van Inwagen divides theoretical responses to the problem of evil into those that respond to 'global' evil, and others which respond to 'local' evils. He prefers this distinction to the more common one between 'logical' and 'evidential' problems of evil. A logical problem of evil 'attempts to show that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of God.' (*ibid.*, 8) An evidential problem of evil 'attempts to show that the existence of evil is strong, even compelling, evidence for the non-existence of God, or that anyone who is aware of the existence of evil should assign a very low probability to the existence of God.' (*ibid.*) The so-called logical problem of evil is no longer much discussed since Alvin Plantinga put forward what many believe to be a convincing defense against it. (Plantinga 1989) Contemporary discussion has therefore shifted to the evidential problem of evil, which has produced a flourishing literature and has led to the development for further questions. (e. g. Howard-Snyder, et al. 2008) Given the state of the literature, van Inwagen's decision not to concern himself with the distinction between the logical and evidential problems of evil seems prudent.

Van Inwagen describes the global problem of evil thus: 'the premise of the global argument from evil is that the world contains evil… Its other premise is (or its other

premises jointly entail) that a benevolent and all-powerful God would not allow the existence of evil.' (2008, 8) In contrast 'local arguments from evil are arguments that appeal to *particular* evils…and proceed by contending that a benevolent and omnipotent God would not have allowed that particular evil to occur.' (*ibid.*) The importance of this distinction lies in van Inwagen's contention that a response to the global argument need not entail a satisfactory response to a local problem. It could be that God is perfectly justified in permitting evil to exist, but some particular evil not be justified, and so, the atheologian would say, God does not exist. Van Inwagen says that 'the following is to my mind a logically consistent position: the fact that there is a vast amount of truly horrible evil does not show that there is no God, but the Holocaust does show that there is no God, and would have sufficed to show this even if there were no other evils.' (*ibid.*, 9) We will develop a theodicy for the global problem of evil which is quite different from the defense that van Inwagen proposes, but will draw on elements of his work to develop our defense against local arguments from evil.

To restate the global argument from evil: 'We find vast amounts of truly horrendous evil in the world; if there were no God, we should not find vast amounts of horrendous evil in the world, there is, therefore, no God.' (*ibid.*, 56) The first point to make is that this argument only works given a certain conception of God. At minimum, God is omni-benevolent, that is, all things being equal, God would prefer there not be evil. The second is often framed as God's omnipotence, he is all-powerful. What omnipotence entails, and whether a Christian ought to affirm that God is omnipotent, are complex questions. We do not need to give a full account here, and it would be difficult to do so within the confines of Jenson's theology. He notes that

he does not offer a separate account of divine attributes in his *Systematic Theology*, as 'fundamentally, the predicates we rightly attribute to God are simply all those that speaking the Gospel may from time to time require.' (Jenson 1997, 223)

For our purpose, we need only note two features of divine power. The first is that, given Jenson's stated respect for logic, we can conjecture that for him, we ought not to say that God can do the logically impossible (strictly, narrowly, or broadly, see Lowe 2001, 1-27). God can be as powerful as he likes, but he cannot make a married bachelor, nor can he make a stone so big he cannot lift it. Second, we need not speculate about the extent of God's power, all we need to say given the Biblical witness is that God's power is sufficient for him to enact his will and bring about his desired ends. Whether this counts as omnipotence or not is somewhat beside the point. If God is omni-benevolent, then it is *prima facie* the case that he would not allow evil, and if his power is sufficient to bring about his ends, then we are left with what is materially the same global problem. Van Inwagen makes a similar qualification concerning divine omniscience. It is not necessary that God be all-knowing for the problem of evil here stated to get off the ground. Even if he only knew as much as we did, he would still know plenty of evil, as such, although we might want to affirm that God is omniscient, it is not a necessary ingredient for the global problem of evil.

Van Inwagen says that a defense is a story about how God and evil could both exist for all we know. A theodicy is a story about how God and evil could both exist which the teller asserts is true. Formally speaking, a defense and a theodicy can share the same argumentative structure; the only difference is the truth claim. Any story about how God and evil might coexist will have this feature, that by allowing or enacting

evil, God brings about some good which could not have otherwise existed, and which is worth the evil suffered. It is not enough that God brings good out of evil, the good must be unattainable without the evil. So van Inwagen says: 'a defense cannot simply take the form of a story about how God brings some great good out of the evils of the world, a good that outweighs those evils. At the very least, a defense will have to include the proposition that God was *unable* to bring about the greater good without allowing the evils we observe (or some other evils as bad or worse).' (2008, 68)

Van Inwagen's defense against the global problem of evil takes the form of a free will defense. This type of argument has a broad history within Christian thought. The idea is that human moral freedom is a great good, but it is not logically possible for God to give human beings such freedom without allowing them to commit evil. Van Inwagen says that 'if I have a free choice between *x* and *y*, even God cannot ensure that I choose *x*.' (*ibid.*, 72) This is because it is a contradiction, and so intrinsically impossible, for an action to be both free and determined in van Inwagen's understanding of freedom. Due to the constraints of Jenson's theology, this is not available in developing a theodicy for the global problem of evil.

V A Supralapsarian Theodicy

In order to construct a theodicy for Jenson, we must look for a story consistent with Jenson's thought, which has this feature: it would be intrinsically impossible for the good brought out of evil by God to exist without the evil. Jenson's supralapsarianism provides us with such a story. Recall that for Jenson, the persons of the Trinity are the

ultimate agents of history. This is the fundamental claim that makes the problem of evil so acute for his thought. God is constituted in the eventful relations between the triune persons. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is not merely revealed to us, God is enacted. That is, God is an event, or the event, of the history of creation. If we conceive of God as some omni-agent of classical theism, these claims are obviously nonsense. However, if the term 'God' denotes the ultimate hope for human lives, it is less problematic. Jenson's further claim is that this is an event which is somehow a person, it, or he, can be addressed. What then, is the theodicy? What is this hope, and how can it justify the evils that have been recounted?

To see how Jenson can answer these questions, we return to his work on Jonathan Edwards. As we have seen, Edwards, like Jenson, does not explicitly attempt to provide something like a theodicy. Nevertheless, they do. Jenson says that in Edwards' work, sin and evil exist because God has use for them. What is this use? For Jenson, they exist because 'our fulfillment as not merely happy creatures but as the "spouse" in the triune life depends on our being rescued not merely from immaturity but from sin.' (1988, 108). This fulfillment has three aspects.

First, without sin, humanity would have attained eternal happiness, 'but it would necessarily have been the happiness appropriate to be earned by a human for other humans.' (*ibid.*) Because of sin, salvation is by 'a "covenant of grace," mediated by God himself…Christ became our corporate head.' (*ibid.*) As such, 'the happiness he wins for us is that appropriate to him.' (*ibid.*) This happiness is that of God. The righteousness given is incarnate, human and divine. This is better than merely human happiness according to this story. In other words, the good for us attained by salvation

is superior to that which would have been available to us by mere sustained human righteousness without a fall.

Second, in the Gospel story as it is, the fullness of God's glory is made manifest. That is, the 'terribleness' of God 'must belong to our vision of God.' (*ibid.*) This terribleness is alternately labelled 'awful majesty,' 'authority,' 'justice,' and 'holiness'. These can only be made manifest, so Jenson says, with the decrees of justice and punishment.

Third, 'Human creatures are to be admitted to nothing less than personal intimacy in God's life.' (*ibid.*, 109) Jenson says that for this reason 'we must be first humiliated in being rescued from failure, lest our elevation blur our consciousness of the difference between us as creatures and God.' (*ibid.*) The idea seems to be that if, as consequence of some future transformation, we become so like God, it is necessary that we have some history of sin and redemption. This serves to anchor us in our creatureliness. The alternative is that we simply be absorbed in God, and thus it is not *me* who is exalted, but simply God.

While this may all seem very strange, Jenson points out that having an account of evil in our theology is important for a number of reasons. For one, 'If we will not believe the monsters too are in God's hand, we must turn from God to other assurances.' (*ibid.*, 110) It is not clear that this is an actual benefit. Knowing who monsters belong to is not a great comfort if they are still free to ravage. Knowing that they are in God's hand really does mean there is no one to turn to. However, Jenson's other point is perhaps more useful. In a classic statement of theodicy, he says that 'given the creation that is, either there is no God or he is far deeper and quite otherwise hidden that we

have conceived. Either there is no God or there is one who can decree evil in order to turn it to good beyond our fathoming.' (*ibid.*) Posing this alternative seems reasonable up until his last claim. He has laid out the goods that supposedly come out of the evil God decrees, so it is at least strange at first sight, although perhaps not incoherent, to then say that it is beyond our fathoming. This seems intended to convey some kind of emotive point, that even if this is the way things are, it is not straightforward to make emotional sense of it, even if it were to work in cogent argument.

All three of the components offered by Edwards via Jenson could serve as the good necessary for a successful theodicy. Jenson says that the third is closest to the heart of Edwards' theology, and also thinks of it as the best of the three. Absent further metaphysical argument, it is not clear why lacking a history of sin and redemption would put the Creator/creature distinction in danger. As such, we will move on to consider the other two goods. The second reason Jenson offers relies on the making manifest of God's majesty for a justification. However, for Jenson, in some sense, in creating the world, God chooses who he will be. There is a voluntarist strain to his theology. God choose that he will be who he is in the Gospel story. If this is the case, then rather than God making something manifest, he is quite literally choosing to be awful. This would be an infelicitous assertion in a theodicy. The strongest point for the purposes of theodicy, is the first: that it is better to be saved by God in the way the Gospel describes than to merely be good. If we take this as the justifying reason for God to decree sin and evil, we are left with an idea that fits the key point of a theodicy. It is not an end that could have been brought about, even by an omnipotent God, without evil. You cannot be saved from evil if there is no evil. What does this

theodicy look like at a basic level? Although *prima facie* it might seem like an omnipotent, benevolent God would not allow evil in his creation, it is better for creatures to be saved than to be merely good. As such, God decrees evil in order that he might save creatures from it.

VI Theodicy and Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy[3]

The first critique of this theodicy can be set out succinctly: according to this story, it seems that the when Revelation says God will wipe every tear from our eyes, (Revelation 21:4) the goodness of wiping-tears-from-our-eyes is itself sufficient to justify the tears being there in the first place. This is similar to the first aspect of Hart's attack on Jenson's problem of evil. The goodness of this action according to the theodicy is that it admits us to some new kind of intimacy with God. Stated in this way, if we take the analogy that sin is like a sickness, it seems like this theodicy is attributing something like Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSP) to God. MSP is a syndrome in which a caregiver to a child engages in behaviors which encompass 'the *attribution* of an illness state to a child…, the *induction* of an illness state…, and the *maintenance* of an illness state.' (Bentovim 2001, 3) The caregiver does this to 'meet their own self-serving psychological needs.' (ibid)

The theodicy I have outlined conforms to this broad description insofar as God as the Creator and sustainer of the world enacts evils both natural and moral within his creation for his own purposes. His purpose being the creation of some new and better

[3] This objection is also discussed in Plantinga 2004.

kind of intimacy between himself and his creation. This analogy, while it may be emotively effective, can be put aside quickly. According to this theodicy, the end state achieved by this suffering is either mutually beneficial to God and creation, or of exclusive benefit to creatures. As such the analogy fails because the motivation attributed to the caregiver in MSP cannot be attributed to God. Hart's critique based on the selfishness of God in making creatures suffer for his exclusive benefit also fails.

VII Can God decree sin?

The supralapsarian theodicy I have outlined tells a story according to which God is justified in decreeing evil. Yet it appears to require a stronger claim than this. The most straightforward reading is that this theodicy requires that God decree not merely evil, but sin.

a Can God Decree *Sin*?

If we understand sin as an action done against the will or law of God,[4] then if God decrees something, it cannot be sinful to do it. It seems to be a matter of logical consistency that it is beyond the capability of an omnipotent God to will something against his will. To respond to this, we need simply say that Jenson does not in fact define sin as an action taken against the will of God. Instead, sin is the rupture of community. Jenson says that 'negative although sin thus is, God's people are from first to last in Scripture given to it, that is, to rebellion against their own communal

[4] The most famous instance of this is found in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* (1998, Book 11)

hope.' (1997, 72) With this definition of sin, it is less clear that there is a contradiction entailed by saying that God decrees sin.

b Can God *Decree* Sin?

However, another possible contradiction can be found once some further definition of sin is given. That is, sin can be understood as a wrong action, or an action breaking community, done intentionally by a morally responsible agent. Sin is punishable, and if an agent is to be punished for engaging in an action, they must be morally responsible for performing the action. The question is whether God can decree that an agent act in a sinful way, and still have it be the case that the agent is responsible for so acting. This is not a special problem for the theodicy we are outlining. Rather, the idea that human moral responsibility for performing some action is compatible with that actions coming about by divine decree is a feature of supralapsarianism. As we are attempting to construct a supralapsarian theodicy, we must assume compatibilism. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile for our project to investigate some of Jenson's claims concerning human freedom, especially as there is some tension between the claims he makes.

We saw above that for van Inwagen, if God decrees that an agent act in some way, the agent is not free in acting in that way. That is to say, Van Inwagen denies compatibilism: that we can be morally responsible for actions that are determined. Jenson, in contrast to van Inwagen, comes across as a compatibilist. He outlines his position in an essay on Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio*. In it, he argues that Luther has a systematic view of freedom that can be found in this work. Specifically, Jenson

attempts to demonstrate Luther's view of God's freedom by describing what Luther denies of human freedom, then attributing that to God. According to Jenson, for Luther, *liberum arbitrium* is a divine name, and so to apply it to creatures is blasphemy. God's freedom is 'his capacity to make and keep promises.' (1994, 248) A promise is a decision concerning the future that will not be changed. Only someone who is sovereign, that is, omnipotent, can truly do this. Our experience of life in the world shows that God is 'hidden' in this power, but 'the free action of God at the cross confronts us with God in the hiddenness of love.' (*ibid.*)

Jenson says that Luther has two reasons to deny *liberum arbitrium* of human beings. The first is that stated above, it is blasphemy as this is an attribute of God alone. The second is that 'the notion of such self-transcendence is in itself incoherent.' (*ibid.*, 249) The question of how an incoherent attribute can be attributed to God must wait for a moment. First we need to ask why it is 'incoherent', as Jenson says. The relevant passage in Jenson is this:

> The freedom that can reasonably be attributed to us is the "willingness" with which we act when we are doing what we have chosen to do…and that should suffice us. We have no powers by which to alter the choices by which our powers are directed. (*ibid.*)

As an explanation, this leaves much to be desired. To simplify, let us consider a hypothetical choice between actions *a* and *b*. The idea seems to be that if an agent confronted with such a choice chooses *a*, then this is an inevitable outcome of the sum of her physical and psychological makeup. The ability to choose *b* would be to stand outside all of these physical and psychological factors. Yet whatever made the choice *b* would still have to do it based on some features of its make-up. If not, choice is merely random, or arbitrary, and this seems not to be free either. To call this freedom would

be like saying that a computer counting up the positive integers is not free in what it will say next, but a computer programmed to speak numbers from a random number generator is free. As a result, Jenson says that for Luther, 'an actual but uncommitted will, is a "dialectical figment".' (*ibid.*) That is, 'will' 'is but a word we use in speaking of our determinate choices to do or pursue some real thing; like logically similar words it does not, merely because it exists, necessarily denote anything by itself.' (*ibid.*) As this is denied of human beings, Jenson, according to his hermeneutic strategy, applies the negative to God: 'God, it seems, *does* choose what to choose, *is* somehow will antecedent to his own determinate will.' (*ibid.*)

So what does it mean to talk about human freedom? There is something by virtue of which it is appropriate to talk about human will, but it can 'only denote a sheer dispositional property.' (*ibid.*). Jenson says, by way of explanation, 'the question, "is X free in this situation?" is meaningful when X is a human whereas it is not meaningful when X is a log or a goose.' (*ibid.*) Whatever we do, unless bound by external constraint, is free in some sense. However, this freedom is only 'actual' freedom 'as I am "*rapt*" (*rapi*) into free action, by *another* than myself.' (*ibid.,* 250) How can Jenson describe this as freedom? He further narrows the definition. In fact, we are only free when it is God directing us. The alternative in Luther is to be controlled by Satan. The relevant distinction between them is that God is truly free, he is relevantly self-transcendent, while Satan, as a creature, is not. Freedom for human beings is participatory, participation in God's own freedom: 'when God "enraptures us" (*nos rapiat*), he frees us by sharing with us his own freedom.' (*ibid.,* 252)

What then is the argument Jenson takes from Luther for his form of compatibilism? The first element is an assertion that *liberum arbitrium* is a divine name, and as such it is blasphemous to apply it to creatures. The second is a kind of philosophical argument for the incoherence of a more libertarian conception of freedom. This is followed by Jenson's own attempt to reconcile determinism with freedom. What should we make of this kind of argument? The argument that it is blasphemous to apply *liberum arbitrium* to creatures, and so to opt for compatibilism, seems too quick. If *liberum arbitrium* means maximal, totally uninhibited freedom, then naturally only an omnipotent being could possess it, and so it is appropriately regarded as a divine name. Creatures do not have the power of total freedom. However, we can say that there are lesser degrees of *liberum arbitrium* in proportion to lesser degrees of power. I am not free to fly unaided, and so my choice is constrained. However, I am free to go for a walk, according to the powers granted me. To deny the first need not entail a denial of the second, but that seems to be the implication of Jenson's claim. Jenson's support for this claim would take the form of the scriptural evidence for God as the sole agent of salvation history in the Bible. However, the scriptural evidence is not quite as clear as Jenson seems to think. (e. g. Joshua 24:15; Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

To Jenson's second claim, we need to understand that an argument for the incoherence of libertarianism is not an argument for compatibilism. We can think of it in this way. The first decision to make is whether we think human beings are free in the sense of bearing moral responsibility for their actions. Compatibilism and libertarianism are both stories which attempt to describe how it is that human beings are morally responsible under distinct conceptions of human action: determinism and indeterminism respectively. As we shall see below, Jenson does believe that human

beings are morally responsible. As such, in this rough way, he is faced with the choice between compatibilism and libertarianism. Although he denies physical determinism, he nevertheless thinks libertarianism is incoherent when applied to creatures, and so must opt for compatibilism.

However, there are good reasons to think that compatibilism is, if not incoherent, at least as 'mysterious' as libertarianism. (van Inwagen 2009, 258-271) As such, the mysterious and strange consequences of accepting libertarianism do not constitute a reason to prefer it to compatibilism, since it has similar baggage. This is a kind of *tu quoque* argument. Although this is formally a fallacy, David Lewis has shown how it can be productively used in his defense of penal substitution. If both sides of a quarrel suffer a similar problem, then this problem gives no reason for preferring one side over another. (Lewis 1997, 209) To return to the original question, can God decree sin? Under compatibilism, it seems that he can. Under libertarianism, he cannot.

Jenson offers further discussion of determinism in the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*. Given his compatibilism, his arguments against physical determinism are surprising. Jenson, again drawing on Edwards, discusses the enlightenment mechanistic understanding of the created world. He says that 'The creation, we are taught unthinkingly to suppose, is a realm in which determinism rules.' (1999, 41) Jenson takes this to be at odds with our experience of freedom, and so says that 'we are forced to interpret that experience of freedom as an intrusion into the created order by another order, which is necessarily then an order of *un*created reality.' (*ibid.*) He says that a better move would be to 'take our indubitable experience

of freedom as a conclusive refutation of mechanism.' (*ibid.,* 42) Strangely enough, this is very similar to the position Van Inwagen concludes with in *Metaphysics*:

> I conclude that there is no position one can take concerning free will that does not confront its adherents with mystery. I myself prefer the following mystery: I believe that the outcome of our deliberations about what to do is undetermined and that it is nevertheless…sometimes up to us what the outcome of these deliberations will be. (2009, 270)

This position would very neatly suit Jenson if he had not advocated Luther's position in *de Liberum Arbitrium.* Instead, Jenson does accept a type of compatibilism. Having accepted this compatibilism, it is not clear why our experience of freedom can be compatible with divine determinism as Jenson describes, but not with physical determinism, especially if the workings of the physical world are, as Jenson says, the direct action of God.

For Jenson, we must deny physical determinism in order to affirm our experience of freedom. He cites Augustine discussing an argument concerning divine foreknowledge and human freedom. If we have to choose between them, we need to affirm divine foreknowledge, however, Augustine provided a more elegant solution, according to Jenson, 'the freedom by which we as persons participate in the divine life is the very Spirit that evokes all "life," the dynamic processes of creation.' (1999, 42) As we have already noted, it is not clear that this 'dynamism' could not include physical determinism, however Jenson views this determinism as contrary, not to human freedom, but to the divine freedom of the Spirit: 'we may construct a believing interpretation of natural events that is from the start and in its entirety an interpretation by the triune role of the Spirit who is Freedom.' (*ibid.*)

Theological considerations aside, Jenson notes that the mechanistic interpretation of natural law has to some extent fallen by the wayside. He says that 'it is now well understood that the carriers of change within dynamic systems are events that individually can only be conceived either as spontaneous or as random.' (*ibid.,* 43) He notes quantum indeterminacy and the apparent lack of any strict rules dictating the path of evolution (although see Conway Morris 2004 for an alternate viewpoint). Jenson thinks that if we were only to consider an atheistic metaphysics, or a 'monadic' God, we should interpret such indeterministic systems as random. However, given his Trinitarian doctrine, including the role of Spirit as 'Freedom', we should instead see such events as divine spontaneity, and so 'if the dynamics of creation are a spontaneity, then events happen not mechanistically but voluntarily, just as Augustine said. If this spontaneity is opened by the Spirit, then when we confront any actual or possible event we confront someone's freedom.' (Jenson 1999, 43)

This amounts to the view that divine action in the created world operates by way of the Spirit creating the outcomes of (to us) indeterminate events. However, for us, the question is whether such a view does anything for a meaningful conception of human freedom and moral responsibility. We are as much a part of the created world as anything else, and whether our actions are the results of quantum fluctuations spontaneously decided by the Spirit of God, or of laws declared by the creating God, matters little for our freedom. We saw above that Jenson says our freedom cannot be predicated of waterfowl or logs, but the kind of freedom he discusses here can precisely be predicated of such things. Further, his argument from the 'indubitable experience of freedom' against physical determinism can at least partially be employed against his divine and quantum spontaneity as well. In a physically determined system, we would

not be the ultimate source of our actions, nor would we have genuinely possible alternative actions. Under Jenson's conception, we would have genuinely possible alternative actions, but we would not be the ultimate source of our actions, and as such possible alternatives would not be up to us. Any particular action would be 'up to' something akin to a quantum event, or more broadly the outcome of some stochastic system. Whether this is atheistic randomness or Trinitarian freedom makes little difference. For the compatibilist, this should not cause a problem. For the libertarian, Jenson's theology does not hold much promise, despite his denial of physical determinism.

Either way, God is responsible for every event which happens in the world. Given Jenson's stated views on divine action and human freedom, it is appropriate to hold God directly responsible for all the evils of the world. Human moral responsibility cannot act as a buffer between divine agency and the existence of evils, even horrendous evils. As such, the global theodicy will have to do as an answer for all local theodicy as well. If it cannot fulfill this role, there is further work to be done for which Jenson cannot be called upon as a resource; nevertheless, we will attempt to develop one, again using Van Inwagen's work.

VIII Return to Hart's Critique, and Local Evils

An aspect of Hart's critique was that under Jenson's Trinitarian vision, God is not only responsible for evil, he is responsible for the actual history of evil. We can understand the critique in two ways: either Hart is criticizing Jenson's compatibilism,

which we have examined above, or Hart is wielding the problem of local evils against Jenson. God is not only responsible for evil, he is responsible for each instance of evil. We will employ an aspect of van Inwagen's response to local evils in order to attempt to frame a response Jenson could propose in addition to the supralapsarian theodicy we have developed.

Van Inwagen employs an exceedingly unusual approach to the problem of local evils. He extends it from his own free will response to the problem of global evil, and yet it should extend equally well for our supralapsarian theodicy. His problem can be set out in this way:

1. If some instance of horrendous local evil X had not occurred, the world would be no worse than it is.
2. X occurred.
3. If a morally perfect and omnipotent Creator could have left out a horrendous evil, and the world be no worse, he would.
4. A morally perfect and omnipotent Creator does not exist.

Van Inwagen attacks the third step. He argues that it relies on a moral principle that 'if one is in a position to prevent some evil, one should not allow that evil to occur….' (2008, 100) He uses vagueness to attack this principle. The basic idea is that if God's plan for some great good requires there to be some amount of evil, the actual amount of evil, or perhaps number of evil acts, will itself be arbitrary. It is always possible that some one instance of evil could be removed without a great change to the overall state of the world. However, if this principle is applied across the board, it would result in a world of no evil at all, and thus the greater good cannot come about. He draws this analogy:

> What is the minimum number of raindrops that could have fallen on France in the twentieth century that is consistent with France's having been a fertile country in the twentieth century? France *was* a fertile country in the twentieth century, and if God had prevented any one of the raindrops that fell on France in the twentieth century from reaching the earth, France would still have been a fertile country. And the same of course, goes for any two raindrops, or any thousand randrops, or any million raindrops. But, of course, if God had allowed *none* of the raindrops that in fact fell from the clouds over France in the twentieth century to reach the earth, France would have been a desert. (*ibid.,* 106)

How then can we apply this reasoning to the supralapsarian theodicy? God's plan of redemption required that the world be redeemed from horrendous evil. However, the precise number of evils required is vague. There could have been fewer, and there could have been more. For any particular evil, it is possible to say that it need not have happened for the enactment of God's plan. As such, we can truly say that there is no direct reason for any particular evil, other than, perhaps, the spontaneous freedom of the Spirit (although this is pretty uncomfortable position to hold). However, if there were no evils, God's salvation could not have occurred. The precise number of evils is arbitrary, and God could have allowed or caused fewer. However, the moral principle which states that if God could have caused fewer, he should have caused fewer, falls to van Inwagen's argument. In this unhappy way, the supralapsarian theodicy can be adapted to respond to the problem of local evils.

IX Conclusion: the Conundrum

The title of this chapter promised a consideration of the 'Karamazov conundrum', which is mentioned by David Bentley Hart in critique of Jenson's Trinitarian theology. This chapter has been an attempt to bring together strands of Jenson's thought with Peter Van Inwagen's work on theodicy to develop a response to this

potent critique. At this point, we should remind ourselves of Ivan Karamazov's rejection of salvation:

> Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature -- that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance -- and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth. (Dostoevsky 2007, 229)

Given what we have said, how can Jenson respond to this? First he has to say that the good offered by God is worth the price Ivan names. This is a deal that God does in fact take up. Second, in the actual world, he could say that any instance such as this is not itself necessary for the good God wants to bring about. It is arbitrary, but the intuitive moral principle that says if some evil is itself unnecessary it ought to be prevented collapses under examination. Finally, he would have to say that human beings are responsible for some, although not all, of the evils we encounter, even though God himself has caused them, and so we also bear responsibility. Whether this response is satisfactory will depend on the judgment of the individual reader, but also on the merits of the other theological proposals and solutions which Jenson offers in his Trinitarian reconstitution of metaphysics.

9 God's Time and Ours

In the following two chapters, I will show how Jenson develops his Trinitarian claims in such a way as to attempt interventions into contemporary metaphysical debates. In describing Jenson's positions, the two key areas of focus will be on whether he develops clear metaphysical claims, and on whether his Trinitarian doctrine has the implications he takes it to have. This first chapter will concentrate on eternity and time, or, more accurately for Jenson's thought, divine time and created time. The following chapter will build on Jenson's claims about time, but focus on what we might call fundamental ontology, that is, Jenson's critique of the category of substance, and his substitution of event for substance as the 'primary' category.

There are a number of preliminary definitions and debates with which to familiarize ourselves before coming to Jenson's claims about eternity and time. First, there are a number of ways of understanding eternity that we should describe before continuing. These are atemporality, everlastingness, and what Brian Leftow has called 'quasi-temporal eternity' or QTE. Likewise there are a number of debates to have in mind when approaching Jenson's views on created time. These are A theory and B theory, eternalism and presentism, perdurance and endurance, and three dimensionalism and four dimensionalism. This is not simply a grab bag of issues in contemporary philosophy of religion and metaphysics that we will inappropriately apply to Jenson's work. Rather, most of these terms name issues and debates that Jenson explicitly addresses; the rest are implicit in his discussions. I appeal to contemporary metaphysicians to define these debates because, as I argued in the first chapter on

general method in contemporary metaphysics, Jenson uses these terms and engages these debates. As such, his use should be accountable to that commonly employed in discussions by others engaged in the same work. Otherwise his use of terms like 'A theory' and 'perdurance' is otiose.

I God's Time

That God is eternal is commonplace in Christian theology, and in philosophy of religion focusing on the monotheism of the Abrahamic faiths more generally. The more interesting problems come from attempting to describe what it means to say that God is eternal, and to argue for one understanding of eternity over another. There are two broad ways of understanding 'eternity' that are commonly used of God. I will call these everlastingness and atemporality. There is a third way that is much less common: quasi-temporal eternity. I will describe it simply because Jenson discusses both of the common ways and dismisses them. In the description of each position, I will also comment on how God would relate to our time given the truth of that understanding of eternity.

The claim that God is everlasting is the claim that God is temporally infinite, having no limit in terms of beginning or ending, to his life. That is, God exists at all times; for all times t, the proposition 'God exists at t' is true. This claim is distinct from the claim that, at all times t, the proposition 'God exists' is true. God's life is very much like our lives. He exists in a moment in his life in the same way that we exist in a moment in our lives. The difference is that while you and I must come into being,

and, possibly, cease to be, God neither comes into being nor ceases to be. His life is coextensive with the timeline, so to speak. Another way to make this claim would be to say that God bears temporal relations to all events. We might think that this way of understanding God's eternity makes it easy to see how God is related to time. That is, God relates to time just as we do, we might think. Unfortunately, this is not the case. In the wake of 20th century physics, we now think it is quite likely that events do not have temporal relations to other events merely by virtue of existing at a time. That is, for God to be temporal as we are will mean that God does not in fact bear temporal relations to all events. (Pilbrow 2005) If God does bear temporal relations to all events, then at very least, we cannot say that God exists in time in a way similar to us. This is a fascinating area of contemporary theological research, but does not bear directly on Jenson's theses, so will be pursued no further here.

The alternative to everlastingness common in the history of monotheism is atemporality. That God is atemporal means that God exists, but he does not exist at any time. So, as is the case with everlastingness, for all times t, the proposition 'God exists' is true. In contrast to everlastingness, for all times t, the proposition 'God exists at t' is false. God's life is therefore very much unlike our lives. Likewise with everlastingness, God does not begin to be, nor does he cease to be, but his life is not 'coextensive' with the timeline as we put it above. God exists, but bears no temporal relations to any event. (Leftow 1991, 1-3; Crisp 2007, 27-30)

Jenson labels these two ways of understanding eternity as the ways of Aristotle and Plato, as discussed in chapter three. On the Aristotelian way, time is a line infinitely extended forward and backward, so, for instance, pre-existence would refer to the

existence of Christ on points on the line prior to his incarnation. On the Platonic way, there is a division between time and eternity; eternity is sheer absence of time – timelessness. The question initially then is which of these is appropriate to apply to God. Aristotelian time may well be a correct description of created time, but it cannot be applied to God because, if time is created (as Jenson does want to affirm), then 'linear time preceding creation must be oxymoronic.' (Jenson 1997, 139) As a result of this, Jenson seems to think that much of the past theological tradition has come to rely on Plato, and through the synthesis of Platonic philosophy and the Gospel has said that 'Christ's preexistence would then be his timeless being.' (*ibid.*) However, for Jenson, this too is a grave error: 'This eternity is the very one whose incompatibility with the Gospel we have had so laboriously to trace; as we have seen at every step, it cannot accommodate a triune God, and so of course not Christ's preexistence as a divine Son.' (*ibid.*) As such, Jenson says that 'here is a specific place in which theology must do its metaphysics in a predominately negative relation to the culture.' (*ibid.*) That is to say, Jenson describes two ways of understanding eternity – as temporal or atemporal – but then denies both. This leaves us in a tricky exegetical place. Is Jenson in effect denying the law of the excluded middle, which states that the disjunction of a proposition and its negation must be true? Alternately, does Jenson find a third way to describe God's eternity that avoids a direct denial of classical logic?

a Crisp's Critique

We have already had cause to explore some of Jenson's idiosyncratic views concerning eternity. That is, for Jenson, any putative 'god' is 'eternal' in an attenuated sense. Gods are those things which harmonize or 'rhyme' past, present, and future, in any

religious system. Following from this, Jenson claims that the 'God of ahistory' and the 'God of the past' are both inadequate to the demands of Christian belief in the God of Israel, who is primarily described in narrative as the one who comes alongside Israel in history, and becomes incarnate in Christ. From these negative claims, we have seen Jenson's account of the development of the Trinity, which for him is a continued attempt to take seriously the God of the biblical narrative over against philosophical ideas which would rob God of activity, creating a distance between the 'true' atemporal God who is understood either as the one ineffable being behind the Father, Son, and Spirit of the Bible in modalism; or the atemporal Father standing above the mediating demi-gods, the Son and Spirit, in classical subordinationism. So if we are not to say that God is atemporal, and we do not say that God is temporal as we are, what is left?

In a 2007 article, Oliver Crisp strongly critiqued Jenson's views on the pre-existence of Christ. In the course of this critique, Crisp attempted to summarize Jenson's views on God's eternity. Crisp found that 'what Jenson gives us is a picture that makes very little sense of divine infinity and appears, in the absence of further clarification, to be incoherent.' (2007, 37) Crisp's attempted summary will give us a useful starting point for exploring Jenson's views on divine eternity, and his eventual, more fully developed, critique of Jenson will give us a useful set of questions to address. As such, before we turn to Jenson's own description of his views, we will briefly explore Crisp's account.

Crisp begins by observing that 'Jenson's line on divine eternity is partly to do with a repudiation of metaphysics inspired by what he calls, "the Greeks".' (*ibid.*, 32) As we

have seen 'Jenson claims that classical philosophy is just secularized theology.' (*ibid.*, 33) Moreover, Jenson says that it is the theology of another religion. When it comes to Jenson's own account of eternity, Crisp notes that Jenson turns to Gregory of Nyssa, and to an account of divine infinity: according to Jenson, Gregory 'did not think of divine infinity on analogy with space (infinitely extended) but on analogy with time: God is temporally infinite.' (*ibid.*, 33-34). Crisp speculates that temporal infinity here might mean an everlasting extended succession of moments. And yet, 'paradoxically, this divine duration does not admit of events receding into the past, or coming into reach from the future. God transcends the personal limitations, goals and beginnings that pertain to created beings, although he too is subject to time.' (*ibid.*, 34) Crisp finds this kind of duration odd, but so far thinks Jenson is following in the steps of Barth. However, Jenson does provide something new: 'the eschatological element to divine eternity.' (*ibid.*) That is, the specific association of the Spirit with divine 'future' is Jenson's contribution. This, so far, is Crisp's summary of Jenson's eternity. However, soon enough comes the bafflement.

Crisp asks

> what are we to make of a deity whose infinity is temporal, to whom nothing is past or future, who is future to himself and thereupon past and present to himself, as Jenson contends? What manner of duration are we speaking of here, that is sequential (one presumes) but has no past, no present, no future. (*ibid.*)

Unsurprisingly, Crisp finds that what Jenson 'has to say about divine eternity is rather murky.' (*ibid.*, 35) Even further, 'Jenson's theologizing is somewhat unclear, and perhaps downright inconsistent.' (*ibid.*) For instance, Crisp cites Jenson's claim that divine infinity is temporal rather than spatial: 'God is temporally infinite. This sounds like the view that God endures through time.' (*ibid.*). And yet, as we have seen, Jenson

denies this view, so 'What does he replace it with? A notion that God is temporally infinite, but has no past or future and is past and present to himself because he is somehow future to himself…but what could this possibly *mean*?' (*ibid.*)

Crisp attempts further clarification from Jenson, and finds Jenson's appeal to the concept of narrative: 'God's infinity, according to Jenson, is like the before and after of a narrative. And, like the arrow of time, God's eternity does not reverse itself.' (*ibid.*, 36) Crisp does not think that this explanation helps; rather 'this only makes matters more muddled.' (*ibid.*) It is perhaps worth quoting at length in order to see both Crisp's explanatory attempts and his growing befuddlement:

> God has a narrative-like life that is temporal, and which we may speak of in terms of past, present and future. However, God's past is identical with the Father (who creates?) and his future is identical with the Spirit. Moreover, time, as applied to God, is an analogous concept. In which case, we should take care not to think of past and future as literally true of God…Why should we think that God's past is identical with the Father, or his future with the Spirit? What does that mean exactly? In what sense is one person of the Trinity identical with a particular time in the life of God? Surely if all persons of the Trinity are co-eternal (and necessarily so) it is meaningless to speak of the Father as identical with the past and the Spirit with the future. It may be that co-opting a doctrine of analogy with respect to divine eternity is helpful…but this does not help Jenson a great deal because it is difficult to see what divine eternity is analogous to on his doctrine of divine eternity. (*ibid.*)

Crisp has one further point to illustrate the murk of Jenson's view of eternity before moving to another topic. He asks, 'how can it be the case that God's infinity does not reverse itself, and yet moves in sequence both from past to future and from future to past at one and the same time? Jenson offers no explanation of the matter.' (*ibid.*, 37) Having said this, Crisp concludes 'what Jenson gives us is a picture that makes very little sense of divine infinity and appears, in the absence of further clarification, to be incoherent.' (*ibid.*)

Crisp finds that Jenson's doctrine of divine eternity is murky, unclear, inconsistent, and incoherent. Crisp is not simply dismissing Jenson, but rather attempting to understand him and coming up short. I will not argue with the claim that Jenson is unclear, and perhaps murky. Crisp does not fail to understand because of any deficiency on Crisp's part. We do best if we treat Crisp's article as a source that asks questions of clarification that ought to be addressed. I think it is possible to offer the further clarification Crisp seeks in order to show that Jenson is not inconsistent or incoherent, or rather, that Jenson's views on divine eternity are both consistent and coherent.

The questions to which we will address ourselves are as follows. How is divine infinity 'temporal' if events do not recede into the past or approach from the future? What does it mean to map Trinitarian persons onto temporal moments? How can God's time move in narrative sequence from past to future, but also have past and present affected by the future without reversing itself? Finally, how is God's time analogous to ours? If these questions are answered in a satisfactory way, then all of Crisp's concerns regarding Jenson's coherence should be assuaged. Some of these questions are best addressed directly from Jenson's own work. There are no secondary sources about Jenson which answer Crisp's questions concerning divine eternity. However, I believe that Brian Leftow's work on Boethius, setting out the concept of quasi-temporal eternity, can also help to explicate Jenson and respond to Crisp. I offer justification for this belief in due course. Concerns of Crisp that I cannot easily address from Jenson's own text, I will attempt to address employing Leftow's work.

b Jenson on Divine Eternity

In a sense, this thesis in its entirety has been developing Jenson's understanding of divine eternity. However, it is both necessary and prudent to bring this development to the surface and directly address the problems that Crisp has identified.

Chapter four focused on Jenson's concept of religion and how that relates to divine eternity. The context for Jenson's discussion is the use of the terms 'religion' and 'god' to identify varying systems of belief and practice across cultures. He grounds his definition of religion as some way of 'harmonizing' past and future, and his concomitant definitions of 'god' and 'eternity' in human experience that he takes to be universal, or perhaps better, definitive of what it means for something to be human. Nevertheless, this cannot be a purely existentially grounded claim on Jenson's part if he is to maintain his views on natural theology, as I said in the chapter on Jenson's concept of general revelation. Rather, his concept of religion to be used in inter-religious engagement is itself a product of Christian belief. For our purposes, the important question is whether it identifies the central feature of the Christian faith, as Jenson thinks it does. The concept of eternity Jenson puts forth in this context is vague and largely empty, as he admits, and even insists. Nevertheless, it can show its utility in its actual use. That is, for Jenson, a 'god' is an entity that harmonizes past and future in the present, i.e. is eternal, and who can also be addressed.

Jenson's theology has a strong critical strain, and we have seen this summarized, also in chapter four. The doctrine of the Trinity we have seen Jenson put forward is from the start a description of how the God Christianity proclaims harmonizes past and

future. In chapters four and five we also saw in part how this God is the god of the future, in Jenson's work on eschatology and the Holy Spirit, and how it is that this God can be addressed, in his work on the 'patrological problem'. Now what remains is to relate Jenson's idiosyncratic concept of eternity to the kinds of concerns that theologians and philosophers usually expect when discussing divine eternity. Questions like, how does God relate to time; does God have time; how do these answers to these questions affect how we might view God's own experience, knowledge, or power are the concerns that motivate Crisp's questions.

We will begin with the simplest question to answer. Crisp asks what Jenson might mean by saying that God's time is analogous to ours. Crisp perhaps thinks that Jenson is using the term 'analogy' to fudge a difficult question. This is understandable, as Jenson does not explain what he means by the term 'analogy' in his *Systematic Theology* as clearly as he does in an earlier essay of 1991, 'Does God have Time?' (Jenson 1995, 190-201) In this essay, Jenson spells out exactly what he means by the claim that God's eternity can be called time analogously. He gives two necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for using the term 'time' of God's eternity. The first condition is that 'there is a *likeness* between an aspect of the specific eternity of the triune God and that aspect of created process called "time."' (*ibid.*, 196) We might wonder if this first condition is clear enough. If he is attempting to set out the rules for an analogous application of a word, surely simply describing a similarity or 'likeness' leaves us where we started in terms of understanding how that analogy functions.

In what follows, I will employ a tentative interpretation of Jenson. That is, there are a number of qualities that temporal objects have by virtue of being temporal. Jenson denies that God is temporal in quite exactly the same way that we are. As such, God must fail to have some of the qualities that temporal objects have. God's eternity is 'like' some aspect of time, I propose, by possessing some, but not all, of the qualities that temporal objects have by virtue of being temporal. This is a common way to understand 'likeness', and in the course of our description of Jenson's eternity, I believe it will be shown to be correct in his case as well.

The second of the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for calling God's eternity 'time' is that 'this aspect of God's eternity [that is like time] be the *Bedingung der Möglichkeit* of created time.' (*ibid.*) That is, God's eternity ought to be the condition of the possibility of created time. In what sense is Jenson using the phrase, 'condition of possibility' here? He rules out one possible reading: "I am not in the midst of a proof of God, I am not arguing that there cannot be time unless there is the triune God, and that there is time. I am engaged only in considering whether, *given* the triune God, the timelike structure of relations we know in him can be considered the *Bedingung der Möglichkeit* for what we otherwise know as time.' (*ibid.*, 198) Perhaps the best reading of these two claims concerning the second necessary condition for using the term 'time' of God is that God's eternity as Jenson describes it is not a necessary condition for the existence of temporality, but that it is a sufficient condition for created temporality. As such, understanding God's eternity ought to help explain why it is the case that the created world has this feature.

Jenson believes that his conditions are fulfilled, and so he is happy to say that God 'has' time, or is temporal. However, he does not consider the term itself worth quarreling over. He says that 'it does not matter whether or not we call God's directed liveliness "time." But it does matter that this liveliness and its directedness are brought to words; that the positive character of the relation to time of the triune God's eternity be grasped; and that this relation be pondered anew.' (*ibid.*, 201 cf. Jenson 1999, 35) As it happens, describing Jenson's views on divine eternity and answering Crisp's questions will allow us to explore exactly these two conditions that Jenson sets out. So although at this point it would be premature to agree with Jenson's contention that according to his criteria God does have time, by the end of this chapter we should be able to revisit this and make a better estimation of the case.

The next question to address is how God's eternity is like time. This will enable us to both answer Crisp's questions and show how Jenson addresses the first of his two criteria set out above. In his essay of 1991, Jenson asks how it is that the triune God fulfills the criteria for 'eternity' which we have already described. He says that ' "God" as such denotes *what happens between* Jesus and the one he calls "Father" and the Father's Spirit in whom Jesus turns to him. "God" simply as such denotes the Father's sending and the Son's obedience, the Spirit's coming to the Son and the Son's thanksgiving to the Father…"God" denotes a life.' (1995, 193) We will have further opportunity to discuss Jenson's claim that God is a 'life', an event, or an action, in the next chapter. For now, let us focus on what this understanding of God does for Jenson's project in terms of understanding the specific eternity of the triune God. Here we see that God is defined as triune. He goes on to say that if there is a divine *ousia*, an appropriate way to describe what it is to be God, it is '"infinity" as such. If

we ask *what* is infinite, so as thereby to be God, we return to the life among the Father, Son, and Spirit.' (*ibid.*)

Jenson steadfastly refuses to define divine essence in the typical manner of the philosophy of religion: that 'God' denotes a being who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. This need not mean that Jenson denies that these are properties of God, in fact he affirms them. Such 'omniproperties' could reasonably be found within the scope of the attribution of 'infinity' to God. Nevertheless, for Jenson, they cannot be definitive of the Christian God. What is definitive for God, and therefore, for what it means to be God, are the narratives which identify God in the Scriptures. Given Jenson's theological interpretation of these narratives, as we have seen, what defines the Christian God is described in the doctrine of the Trinity.

There is nothing particularly innovative in this. When asked to describe the specifically Christian understanding of God, pointing to the doctrine of the Trinity is a natural response. That is not to say that there is nothing innovative in Jenson's work here. For Jenson, the doctrine of the Trinity specifies what kind of eternity God has, just as it defines the way in which God is omniscient (*ibid.*, 1995, 85-94; 1997, 229-230), or omnibenevolent (1997, 230-233), or indeed beautiful (1995, 147-155; 1997, 234-236). These various attributes are not described independently of, or in advance of, the doctrine of the Trinity, but subjected to it in his work. However, due to the centrality of time and eternity in Jenson's work, his Trinitarian description of eternity is particularly important for his theology.

In Jenson's reading, the Father appears in the Bible 'as the "whence" of divine events…the Biblical story about God is summarized in the two "sendings" of the Son and the Spirit; the Father is the Unsent Sender.' (1995, 194) Jenson's contention is that when the church moved to describe God in abstraction from the Biblical narrative, that is, without reference to creation, sending becomes procession. Jenson's description of the Father as the "whence" of the divine life relates to a matter that causes some perplexity with his commentators, as we have seen in Crisp's remarks above. Jenson also describes the Father as the divine or eternal 'past' of the divine life. This too engenders puzzlement in many. However, placed in context of the traditional ascription of the Father as the origin or *arche* of the Godhead, it looks more like a strange use of a term than an heterodox teaching. Consider this: It seems fair to say that my life and current state has in a sense 'come out' of my past. Most likely, there are actions I have undertaken, and well as features of my nature and nurture, which have to a greater or lesser extent led me to be the person I am, and influence the actions I take now. My past self is, in a more relative way, an *arche* of my present self. My contention is that when Jenson refers to the Father as the 'past', he employs the term in this sense. This leads us to consider one of Crisp's objections, that Jenson claims that the Father is the past, but that God has no past. Is this not a contradiction? In such circumstances, we must either admit a contradiction, or claim that the use of the term 'past' is equivocal. It is worth exploring the second of these two options.

My claim is that when Jenson describes the Father as the 'whence' or the 'past' of God, he intends something like the claim that the Father is the origin of the Godhead, the 'Unsent Sender'. However, when he claims that God has no past, he is using the term 'past' in a different way. That is, the 'past' in this second instance refers to that which

passes away. Although among philosophers of time it is controversial, there is some natural intuition that the past ceases to exist, as we will see when we move on to discussing created time. Here I submit that Jenson is appealing to our experience of time, rather than a developed and reflective theory of temporality. Our experience is that past moments are no longer present except in their present manifestation, in memory a la Augustine (2009, 185-186). Naturally, Jenson cannot apply this aspect of the term 'past' to the Father. If he did, he would be a modalist. That is, he would claim that God manifested himself as the Father, and then the Father passes away, he ceases to be in the begetting of the Son. The unity of the Father and Son would then have to be provided by some appeal to a shared divine nature. Jenson explicitly denies this kind of move. Instead, the Father is, we might say, the Unpassed Past to the Son and Spirit. He does not cease to be with the passage of time.

Jenson's description of the Holy Spirit as the 'Future' is harder, if only because by it Jenson intentionally proposes an amendment to traditional doctrine. He says that the Spirit 'appears as the "whither" of God's life…The Spirit is God coming from the future to break the present open to himself.' (1995, 194) Further, 'the "whither" of divine events is not their passive aiming point, but their emergence and activation from the future.' (*ibid.*) We have already seen Jenson's arguments for this way of understanding the Spirit. The first kind of argument rests on Biblical interpretation. In the Bible, the Spirit is invoked as the agent of change. The Spirit of God goes with the people of Israel through the wilderness in the Exodus. In the Psalms and prophets, the Spirit of God can be destructive, withering flesh like grass before a fire. In the New Testament, the Spirit cleanses in baptism, raises Jesus from the dead, and forms the church as an anticipation of the eschaton. It is by the Spirit that the disciples preach,

and exercise supernatural gifts. The second kind of argument is reflected in Jenson's systematic reflections on a range of problems that he claims can by solved by the addition of relations of 'ending' to relations of origin. So in this earlier essay he says that 'as there are two sendings/processions of/in God, so there are two…"liberations," of the Father and the Son by the Spirit. And these liberations are as constitutive of the identity and reality of God as are the processions.' (*ibid.*, 195) Crisp has elegantly stated the apparent problem in this formulation. If Jenson is to insist that there is time for God, and that God's eternity is temporal in having direction from past to future, it seems problematic to assert that the Spirit comes back through time in some way, 'coming from the future to break the present open to himself.' (*ibid.*, 194) As we have seen, Jenson speaks about the activity of the Spirit in creation, but also in the life of God, consistently through his Trinitarian works. The question Crisp raises, and to which we must find an answer, is what it means to talk about the 'activation' of 'divine events' from the 'future'.

In what follows I will assume that Jenson is not employing backwards causation. Backwards causation is, in short, the idea that it is possible for an effect to temporally precede its cause. Typically, we think of causes as either preceding, or possibly being simultaneous with, their effects. This is one of the basic phenomena which prompts thinking about time. Backwards causation might to be what Crisp has in mind when he summarizes Jenson's position thusly: "it is rather as if God exists through time by projecting himself backwards in time from his future to his past and present.' (2007, 35) If Jenson accepts and adopts backwards causation, then this claim about God becomes more comprehensible. However, this is done at a cost. First, Jenson claims that God's eternity is time-like in that '"source" and "goal" are present and

asymmetrical in him.' (1997, 217) However if causation runs both forward from the origin in the Father, and backward from the goal in the Spirit, then it is not the case that source and goal are asymmetrical. Further, backwards causation brings with it a whole host of problems both logical and metaphysical. (Faye 2015) If Jenson feels that the requirements of the Gospel necessitate its adoption, no doubt he would adopt it, but if there were a way to interpret Jenson's theological claims that avoids accepting backward causation, this would be beneficial for the plausibility of his project as a whole.

To attempt to understand what Jenson means by labeling the Holy Spirit the divine 'future' that liberates the Father and Son, and activates divine events from the future, we will begin by asking what it might mean to call the Spirit 'Future', and then consider what sense we can give to the claim that the Spirit breaks open the present to himself. I said above that we can take the claim that the Father is the 'past' to be equivalent to the claim that the Father is the origin of the Trinity, but that he does not 'pass away' and so is the 'unpassed past'. We can make a similar claim about the Spirit. The Spirit does not 'come to be', in the sense that there was a time at which the Spirit did not exist, and a later time at which he does, or will. 'Future' as applied to the Spirit, must mean something else, and there are a number of possibilities that we find in Jenson's work. The Spirit, Jenson says, is freedom. In "Does God Have Time?" this freedom is the freedom for a new order to emerge. In chapter four we saw that the God of the Past is, for Jenson, typified by the idea that 'eternity' means the repristination of a past state of affairs that has ceased to obtain. In contrast, Jenson's vision of the 'God of the Future' is of a God who promises, and brings about, a different, yet better state of affairs. Time is reconciled in eternity not in the negation

of change, and the lapse back into a pristine primal state, but in the coherence of a narrative from an origin to an end, so as the Bible can be understood as a travel narrative from Eden to the New Jerusalem, the Bible itself is the story not just of Creation, but of God. The doctrine of the Trinity abstracts from, but does not supplant this story for Jenson. As such, the doctrine of the Trinity is the story of God, from Father to Spirit. The Father's part in this story is to be origin, the past. The Spirit's part then is to be the end, the future. The relations of origin within the Trinity are relations to the Father. The relation can be clearly stated. The father is the origin of the Son and the Spirit, in that he begets the Son and breathes the Spirit. However, this same fact can ground two relations, as relations need not be symmetric. The fact that grounds the relation 'x is taller than y' also grounds the relation 'y is shorter than x'. It does not ground the relation 'y is taller than x'. Just so my father's act of begetting me grounds two relations: Richard is the father of James, and James is the son of Richard. Similarly, the events in the life of God that constitute the Trinity can be, and Jenson believes, ought to be, described using two sets of relations. Not simply the relations of origin, but also, as he has put it, the relations of ending. The event that grounds the relation, the Father originates (so to speak) the Spirit, also grounds a second relation, for which we do not have an obvious term, but which Jenson has labelled 'liberate': the Spirit 'liberates' the Father.

Jenson didn't simply choose the term 'liberate' at random, and proceed to use it equivocally. As we have seen over and over, he sees liberation as the unique vocation of the Spirit both in creation and in the Godhead. For Jenson, the future represents possibility, change away from the status quo, and, of course, in so far as it is these things, the future represents liberty. Thus in Jenson's theology, the category of

'promise' plays a very important role: Christianity does not make the claim that things will be as they were, because change is always deviation from perfection, rather, Christianity faces the reality of change, and offers security through the promise of God, who brings about this change. The reliability of this promise for the future is grounded in the reality of the Spirit. Perhaps this is the best we can make of Jenson's claim that the Spirit breaks open the present to the future. In the Bible, the Spirit overturns natural certainties, culminating in the defeat of Christ's death. Death is taken to be a part of the deterministic laws of nature and as such is irreversible, but the Spirit brings unlimited possibility, and as such overturns the regular workings of nature in the service of the fulfillment of God's promise. This Gospel story is also God's story for Jenson, but how can we abstract from this in such a way as to say that even within God, the Spirit is the power of the future? Perhaps we can put it like this. Without the begetting of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit, there would be no Trinity. While the Son and Spirit exist only because of their origin in the Father, so the Father exists as Father only in that the Spirit and Son proceed from him. That is, the Spirit 'liberates' the Father to be himself, but this is contingent on the divine events of begetting and spiriation. In a sense, we might say that as the Spirit is the power of the future, brings the future to pass in the created world, so in God the Spirit simply is the future, in that he proceeds from the Father and through the Son. Procession is an asymmetric relation, and its complement is liberation.

Having discussed these two 'moments' in the life of God, the Father and Spirit, how does Jenson understand the Son? For Jenson, we should hold 'the Son of God as his own "specious present."' (1995, 195) Note that the Son is not merely the 'present', but the 'specious present'. While the present might be thought of as an instant

designated by the indexical 'now', the specious present is slightly different. It is the present as experienced, which may or may not be temporally extended (Leftow 1991, 143-144). Thus it is that 'It is Jesus the Christ in whom the Father finds himself, and it is Jesus the Christ in whose resurrection the Spirit's liberating activity is actually accomplished.' (Jenson 1995, 195) That is, the Father knows himself in the Son, and the Spirit comes through the Son. This is the grounds for Jenson's claim that 'If the Father and the Spirit are the poles of the divine eternity, it is then the life of the Son, as God's specious present, in which these rhyme, in which the unity of the divine life is accomplished.' (*ibid.*) The concept of 'rhyming' otherwise called 'harmonizing' central to Jenson's view of eternity seems to be a basic concept for him, and so is not subjected to analysis, but rather described using examples of the phenomenon; hence the appeal to narrative. Nevertheless, the way in which Jesus' life 'rhymes' the Father and Spirit, past and future, is shown in the Biblical narrative: 'Death is time's ultimate act, that God transcends time must finally mean that God transcends death…The way in which the triune God transcends death is by within himself triumphing over it: by the Son's dying and the Father's raising him again. The whence and the whither of the divine life are one, and so the triune God is eternal, in the events of Jesus' resurrection.' (*ibid.*)

There are several important points to note in this passage. The first is the correlation between transcending time and transcending death. I propose that Jenson makes this connection because he thinks of the passage of time as the movement of the present into non-existence, and that death is similarly a kind of annihilation. This is why the resurrection, the defeat of death, also shows that God transcends time. Second, we may wonder whether Jenson's claims here imply that had Jesus not risen from the

dead, God would not be eternal. The discussion of chapter seven is relevant here. That God's eternity is actually constituted in the way Jenson describes, the overcoming of time in the overcoming of death, need not imply that his eternity could not have been otherwise constituted. God can be necessarily eternal, even if the way in which he is eternal is not necessary. Jesus is the specious present of God in that the Father finds himself, or perhaps sees himself, or knows himself, in Jesus. However, Jesus lived a particular life, and died a very particular death, and the aftermath of his death is heretofore unique. Jesus is the present in that he comes out of the past, and continues into the future, just as the occupants, or obtaining state of affairs, of the present moment 'now' always have developed out of past moments or states of affairs, but yet have possibility to take on or lose features. If there is one clear message that comes from Jenson's account of the Spirit as future, it is that the future is not wholly determined by the past, but in some sense has a life of its own, so to speak.

Having covered this ground, we come to Jenson's general claim regarding God's life, which he has repeated in slightly varying forms throughout his work, that

> The life of God is thus constituted in a structure of relations, whose own referents are narrative. This narrative structure is constituted by a difference between whence and whither that one cannot finally refrain from calling "past" and "future," in some strained use of the words, and that is identical with the distinction between the Father and the Spirit. (*ibid.*, 195-6)

One of the instances of this passage bears a great deal of the responsibility for Crisp's puzzlement, and yet at this point we should be in a position to appreciate Jenson's claims here. That the life of God is 'constituted' by a 'structure of relations' should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with Christian Trinitarian doctrine. The persons of the Trinity have always been held to be either individuated by their relations to one another, or to be their relations to one another. The difference in

Jenson is his addition of relations of ending to relations of origin, and yet if this means what I have taken it to mean above, this too should not be as controversial. That is, if Jenson means that one event can ground two asymmetric relations, and in the case of God, does so, it would seem hard to disagree.

What is novel is Jenson's stress upon the 'narrative' element. The sentence, 'the life of God is thus constituted in a structure of relations, whose own referents are narrative,' (*ibid.*, 195) is difficult to unravel on a syntactical level. The best reading is to take 'relations' as the antecedent of 'whose', but even this is puzzling. Do relations have referents? Typically, we think of relations as having terms. Roughly put, a referent is something denoted by a word. The best way out of this is to take Jenson to be using the term 'relations' not in a technical sense, but as a category which includes those things he has attributed to the life of God, such as proceeding, begetting, liberating, and so on. Jenson talks about these things as relations, but they could also denote events, and indeed, the 'referents' are 'narrative'. Taking the referents to be events gets us some way to understanding how a referent can be narrative. A narrative is an event or a series of events with a certain structure, as we have seen very early on in this thesis. A paraphrase that reads Jenson in this way looks like this: 'The life of God is constituted in an event (or perhaps series of events) with narrative structure.'

c What is God's Time Like?

Having described Jenson's claims about God's eternity, and responded to Crisp's critiques of Jenson's claims, we now turn to one final matter. We return to the question of whether God's life is 'like' ours, in a way relevant so that Jenson can fulfill

one of his two criteria for using the term 'time' analogously of God. That is, what is God's eternity like? If God experiences time as we do, then there is a simple answer to this. On the other hand, if God is strictly atemporal, there is also an answer, which is less simple, but well represented in both the tradition and in contemporary philosophy of religion. However, as we have seen, Jenson denies both those options. So where does that leave us? For a third option, we turn to a contemporary account of Boethius's understanding of divine eternity. It is found in Brian Leftow's book *Time and Eternity*; specifically, his development of a theory called quasi-temporal eternity (QTE). QTE is strikingly similar to Jenson's proposals at points.

This comparison suggests itself because of Jenson's search for a third way to understand eternity. Similarly to Jenson, Boethius also does not fit neatly into either a temporal or atemporal account of eternity. Interpreters tend to view this not as Boethius rejecting these two accounts, but rather, appealing to both of them. Leftow says that 'Boethius models eternity explicitly on a "motionless," "standing," instant.' (Leftow 1991, 112) Boethius seems to think that God's eternity is like a life lived all at once, yet even so this life is 'illimitable'. Leftow suggests that 'To say that life occurs all at once suggests that it is instant like, yet that a life is "illimitable" naturally suggests that it endures forever in time.' (*ibid.*, 113) That is, while Jenson denies both temporality and atemporality of God, Boethius may accept both. Either way, the task is to come up with some kind of third option that, in Jenson's case, would be a concept of divine eternity that is neither atemporality nor temporality; in Boethius's case, this third option would be a concept of divine eternity that can somehow be described both as temporal and atemporal.

Leftow's articulation of Boethius' position begins with a general description of life in time: 'As time "runs along," instants of time are successively present, and so time itself is present – not as a whole, but because a point in the temporal continuum is present.' (*ibid.*, 119) Leftow defines eternity in contrast to this picture of time: 'Whereas time is always present, eternity is a present…always: somehow all of it, not just an instant of it, is always present.' (*ibid.*) The contrast between time and eternity can be initially stated by saying that 'The now of time "runs along" in that ever-later temporal positions successively are "now." The now of an eternal life does not run along, then, because in such a life there is no succession between earlier and later positions.' (*ibid.*) On the face of it, this way of drawing the distinction between time and eternity offers little to help Jenson. Without further clarification, this way of viewing eternity appears to be precisely what he denies. However, the same is true for Boethius. The question for Leftow is how Boethius can maintain his claim that God's life is illimitable, in a way which makes it seem like he advocates an everlasting view of eternity.

Leftow answers this question for Boethius, and I suggest this answer can be adopted for our purposes. Eternity lacks succession; Leftow describes two ways in which a life might lack succession. First, 'it could be that an eternal life contains no succession because it contains no earlier and later positions.' (*ibid.*, 120) This is a typical way to understand atemporality. Second, 'it could also be that an eternal life contains earlier and later points, but with no succession between them.' (*ibid.*) This is Leftow's suggested option for Boethius' position. To lack succession while still possessing earlier and later points means lacking the passing away, and coming to be, that such earlier and later points normally imply for us. Leftow describes it as 'like an extension in

tenseless time…it involves earlier and later, and yet none of it "passes away" or is "yet to come," as tensed theories say that phrases of time do.' (*ibid.*) For Leftow, this way of understanding eternity is 'a bit more like a life in time, by asserting that it contains earlier and later positions.' (*ibid.*) As this vision of eternity is not strictly temporal but time-like, Leftow labels it quasi-temporal eternity, or QTE.

Leftow speculates that 'the character of a QTE-being's experience may point to an underlying difference between the way beings with QTE and temporal beings occupy their durations.' (*ibid.*, 121) A temporal being, *pace* four-dimensionalists, only occupies the present moment of its life, whereas 'a QTE-being always occupies its full duration at once; there cannot be a part of its duration which is divided from any other part of it as "not yet" or "no longer."' (*ibid.*) As such, 'no segments of it are past or future in relation to any others, where being past or future entail, in addition to being earlier or later, that some segments of QTE have ceased to be lived or are not yet lived.' (*ibid.*) Although it might appear that Leftow's QTE cannot be usefully employed in Jenson's theology because Leftow denies that there can be 'past' or 'future' in QTE and Jenson insists on the existence of past and future in God, this would be a merely terminological confusion. Leftow defines past as both that which is earlier, and ' no longer'. For Jenson, past simply refers to that which is earlier, the 'whence'. It does not include 'passing away', so we find in Jenson: 'nothing in God recedes into the past or approaches from the future.' (1995, 196) Jenson's 'whence' is not strictly parallel to Leftow's 'earlier', but the 'earlier' would include 'whence'. The relationship between 'future', 'not yet', 'later', and 'whither', would work in a similar way.

My proposal is that it would be fitting to adopt portions of QTE, the position Leftow ascribes to Boethius. QTE maintains that there is a likeness between God's eternal life and our temporal lives, in that both contain earlier and later parts or points. Jenson's remarks are strikingly similar to Leftow's description of Boethius at some points: 'We must indeed say that there are whence and whither in God that are not like right and left or up and down on a map, but are more like before and after in a narrative.' (*ibid.*, 196) God's eternal life and our temporal lives are different, because there is no succession in God, where succession is understood as the ceasing to be of earlier events, and the coming to be of later ones.

II Our Time

There are two distinct ways in which Jenson approaches created time. The first is his argument that God's time is the sufficient condition for time as we know it. This fulfills the second of his criteria for calling God's eternity 'time'. The second is composed of his forays into the discussions of contemporary philosophy of time proper. That is, Jenson takes positions on several questions central to contemporary philosophy of time, and justifies these positions based on his theology broadly speaking, and his Trinitarian doctrine in particular. This is a direct way in which Jenson intends his Trinitarian doctrine to impact on metaphysics. Jenson takes positions on the topology of time, presentism and eternalism, A theory and B theory, perdurantism and endurantism, and three dimensionalism and four dimensionalism.

a Making Sense of Our Experience of Time

We had cause to look at the question we now address briefly in our chapter on Jenson's epistemology. There, we noted that Jenson finds two seemingly incompatible claims compelling: that time is a feature of extra-mental reality, or 'time is the metric of external physical movement' (1999, 31), and that time is a feature of our conscious experience, that 'time is the inner horizon of human experience' (*ibid.*). He labels these the Aristotelian and Augustinian ways of thinking about time, respectively. Prior to this work, Jenson had employed the same distinction using categories drawn from contemporary popular science as represented by *A Brief History of Time*. In his 1991 essay, Jenson, following Stephen Hawking, had labelled these "real" time, that is, the concept of time employed in classical relativity theory, and "imaginary" time, the concept used in quantum mechanics. (1995, 197) The distinction Jenson finds in Hawking leads him to identify "real" time with that of Augustine and also Kant, and "imaginary" time with Aristotle. Otherwise stated, "real" time is time as a feature of experience, or subjective. "Imaginary time" is a feature of the world, or objective. However the dichotomy is labelled, what matters is the distinction between the two positions.

As I have said previously, Jenson wants to maintain both of these positions, and yet, he thinks that the temptation is to ask 'which time, "real time" or "imaginary time," is the *really* real time?' (1999, 34) Jenson is asking which view of time is correct, which is the most appropriate as a description of reality? He claims that the two are 'metaphysically contrary", and the import of this is that there is at least an apparent paradox in accepting the truth of both views of time. Nevertheless, Jenson does want

to accept both views: 'Neither temper can be satisfied by itself…our primal intuition of time is that it must possess the characters of *both* Augustine's "time" and Aristotle's "time".' (*ibid.*) As such, what Jenson needs is a conceptual structure in which to embed these two views of time without apparent contradiction. Jenson finds this structure in his already described doctrine of God: 'God makes narrative room in his triune life for others than himself; this act is the act of creation, and this accommodation is created time.' (*ibid.*)

This understanding of creation is supposed to provide the context in which to make sense of two disparate yet intuitive ways of viewing time. Jenson says that 'Time is indeed, a la Augustine, the "distention" of a personal reality, and that just *so* it provides creatures with an external metric of created events.' (*ibid.*) Jenson's claim is that this allows us to understand how time can have both subjective and objective characteristics. "Imaginary" or objective time is real, in that 'the "distention" within which we do this [live] is an order external to us.' (*ibid.*) "Real" time, or time as experienced, as a so-called 'form of understanding', is real in that 'we are within the divine life as *participants* and so experience this metric as a determining character also of our existence as persons.' (*ibid.*) This is the kind of theologizing which has led some, including George Hunsinger, to label Jenson a panenthiest. (Hunsinger 2002, 179-198) Jenson's only pertinent remark is 'If someone wishes to say that I am thus a "panentheist," I have no objection whatever to the label.' (1995, 199fn14)

One of the implications of Jenson's approach to created time is that God's eternity is the sufficient condition for understanding our apparently contradictory intuitions about time. As such, the second of Jenson's two necessary and jointly sufficient

conditions for calling God's eternity 'time' is fulfilled, and Jenson has made his case that we can call God's eternity 'time'. Having made this case however, Jenson characteristically distances himself from the detail. He says that 'it does not matter whether or not we call God's directed liveliness "time." But it does matter that this liveliness and its directedness are brought to words; that the positive character of the relation to time of the triune God's eternity be grasped.' (1995, 201) As such, we will move on to the implications of these ways of understanding God's eternity and created time. Specifically, we will move on to the implications of these views for contemporary philosophy of time.

b. Staking Claims in the Philosophy of Time

In this section, I will describe some of the debates in contemporary philosophy of time, especially those on which Jenson has explicitly sided with one side over another. I will then set out Jenson's reasons for settling on the position he adopts for each debate. Ultimately, I believe that Jenson lands on what is known as the 'moving spotlight' view of time. It is a curious fact that Jenson publishes opinions on debates in contemporary philosophy that often pass without comment by theologians. This is a direct outworking of his view that theology and metaphysics stand on the same footing: that philosophy is not prior to theology. It is one thing to hold this opinion, however Jenson substantiates it in his writing by actually employing theology to stake claims in debates more commonly inhabited only by philosophers.

We will begin with A-theory and B-theory. The terminology of this debate originates with the paper 'The Unreality of Time' by J. M. E. McTaggart in 1908, and has

formed an important part of the discussion of time ever since. For McTaggart, there are two ways in which events in time are ordered: the A-series and the B-series. Positions in the A-series are 'past', 'present', and 'future'. In contemporary discussion, names for properties of events or times that involve one of these three terms are often called 'A properties'. For instance, if my birthday was two days in the past, my birthday has the property of 'being two days past'. Positions in the B-series are strictly relative, as such, the order is determined by 'earlier', 'simultaneous', and 'later'. These are 'B properties'. My birthday then would have the property of 'being two days earlier than today'. The question McTaggart raises is whether events have both of these kinds of properties, only one, or none at all; that is, whether the A-series, the B-series, both, or neither, are true of the world. (1908, 458)

McTaggart's argument was that the A-series is required for time. The B-series on its own is insufficient, in his view, as a description of what we know of time. However, McTaggart also argued that the A-series was incoherent. As such, he concluded, time is unreal. While most remain unconvinced by McTaggar's conclusion, some have been persuaded by his critique of the A-series. In contemporary philosophy, this discussion has also moved into the realm of argument over verbal tense. That is, A theorists are those who argue that verbal tense is irreducible without loss. B theorists believe that language that employs tense can be translated without loss into language that only employs constructions such as 'earlier' and 'later'. (Markosian 2014) As such, an A theorist would claim that something is lost in the translation of 'William was riding his bicycle' to 'William rides his bicycle earlier than the time of this utterance,' while a B theorist might not. As such, A theory and B theory can refer either to claims about the kinds of temporal properties that events have, or whether tenses are irreducible or

reducible to other ways of speaking. While these two sets of disagreements are clearly related, it is possible that they are not the same disagreement. That is, whether talk of temporal properties can be reduced to discussion of tense or *vice versa* is not obvious, to the writer at least.

In volume two of his *Systematic Theology*, Jenson takes sides in the debate between A theorists and B theorists. He says that 'the relation between these conceptions of time [his 'real' and 'imaginary' time] and the conceptions of time labelled…A-theory and B-theory is not clear, at least to me.' (1999, 33fn17) Jenson seems to be thinking primarily of A theory and B theory in the context of verbal tense. He says that 'A-theories insist on the irreducibility of tensed language – or language using devices to the same purpose…B theories insist that A-determinations can be reduced to expressions using no tenses but only the "B-series" constructed by the relation "earlier(later) than".'(*ibid.*) However, given his description of the B-series, it is also possible he intends to refer to the distinction over kinds of temporal properties. Finally, he may simply not distinguish the two. Nevertheless, he takes a side: 'What *is* clear is that theology must take the side of the A-theorists.' (*ibid.*) Jenson believes that A theory has been established on 'overwhelming strictly analytical' grounds by Richard M. Gale. (*ibid.*) However, his claim is not that theologians ought to accept A theory based on the work of analytic philosophers. This would go against the grain of his whole approach to theology. Rather, theologians, we might add, *qua* theologians, ought to be A theorists in Jenson's view.

It is not hard to see why Jenson believes theologians ought to be A theorists. His theology beings with the analysis of characters in a narrative whom he assigns

temporal dimensions on the basis of their activity in that narrative. The Father is irreducibly the Past, the Son irreducibly the Present, and the Spirit irreducibly the Future. We have had cause above to describe what Jenson means by these designations and defend their coherence. Creatures exist by participation in the narrative that takes place between these temporal directions, Jenson takes this to ground the fact that past, present, and future are fundamental to creaturely experience of time.

Nevertheless, this does cause problems for the way I have construed Jenson's understanding of eternity above, for two reasons. First, Leftow describes QTE as a duration in tenseless time, but Jenson does not think time is tenseless. Second, I sought to clarify what Jenson means by translating his speech about Father, Son, and Spirit as Past, Present, and Future, to speech about the Father as earlier than the Son and Spirit, Spirit as later than the Father and Son, and the Son as later than the Father but earlier than the Spirit. That is, I reduced A properties to B relations in order to explain Jenson's view of divine eternity. This perhaps displays my biases as someone who leans toward B theory on strictly analytical grounds. How might I deal with these two problems?

We have already addressed some of the relevant concerns of squaring QTE with Jenson's eternity. For Leftow, it is a feature of the past that it passes away, and of the future that it comes to be. Jenson disagrees with this, and instead assigns different characteristics definitive of 'past' and 'future'. If Jenson were to summarize his distinct understanding of past and future, he might say that the past is that which originates and determines, the future is that which completes and liberates. As such, that Leftow

compares QTE to tenseless time is no reason for Jenson, with his commitment to A theory, to distance himself from it.

The second question concerns my justification for explaining what Jenson means by assigning Father, Son, and Spirit temporal properties by reducing those properties to temporal relations. There concern is that given Jenson's stated commitment to A theory, this way of explaining Jenson is illicit, and not fit for purpose. There are two possible responses to this charge. The first is that Jenson says the theologian ought to be an A theorist in the context of the discussion of created time, and my discussion was of divine eternity. The distinction that makes divine time analogous to created time, rather than identical to it, is that God, as it were, holds on to his past and future, whereas we lose the one and grasp at the other. This might well be a somewhat poetic way of referring to B theory and A theory. We might say that Trinitarian relations as temporal are necessarily organized along a B-series, but the events of the divine life contingently possess A properties because of God's free choice to create. However, it would be odd to talk about the triune identities possessing A properties at all. One of the features of A theory is that events have A properties that change, so that an event starts with the A property of 'being the future', losses this property and gains the property 'being the present', and then loses this property and gains the property 'being the past'. The Father, Son, and Spirit do not alter their properties of being past, present, and future. This is then somewhat like an A-series, in that the triune persons are ordered in series by these properties, but unlike an A-series in that the properties of the events do not change, which is more characteristic of a B-series. This brings me to my second possible response to the initial Jensonian concern. It could be that Jenson is incorrect in claiming that his theology mandates that theologians be A theorists, at

least if we are to be A theorists of divine time. We have already perhaps said enough above. In that the temporal properties that the divine persons possess do not change, they are more like B relations than A properties. Another way to state this is simply to remark that what Jenson means by past, present, and future, is more than what discussion of A theory intend. For Jenson, in God at least, the past is not that which passes away, but that which originates, and the future is not that which comes to be, but that which frees. It is this freedom which gives God his 'liveliness', not a change in A properties.

Jenson claims that theologians ought to be A theorists, but he is not completely clear about what he means by this, or why he says it. The best interpretation of his remarks, given his other claims regarding divine eternity and created time, is that theologians should be A theorists concerning created time, insofar as this time exists in some sense 'in' or as the series that constitutes divine eternity. We now move on to discuss a debate already mentioned in this section, eternalism and presentism.

Eternalism is the view that 'past and future objects and times are just as real as currently existing ones. Just as distant places are no less real for being spatially distant, distant times are no less real for being temporally distant; the ontological significance of distance is thus a respect in which time is spacelike.' (Sider 2010a, 11). Presentism is the view that 'only currently existing objects are real…its guiding intuition is compelling: the past is no more, while the future is yet to be.' (*ibid.*) There are intermediate views between eternalism and presentism. One such view is known as the 'growing block universe' where the past is real but the future is not (*ibid.*, 12). Alternately, there is John Norton's 'burning fuse' model, in which the future is real

and the past is not. (2015) This last is a parody intended to display the emptiness of the term 'real' in such debates as these.

In his work on time, Jenson notes that Augustine is a presentist: 'Past or future things, according to Augustine, have no being *as* they are past or future, but only insofar as they are somehow present.' (1999, 30) This causes no problem for Augustine's understanding of God; Augustine's God is eternally and only present. However, it causes a problem for creatures, 'that is, about the past and future of creatures for themselves, whose present is not infinitely emcompassing.' (*ibid.*) The problem is that 'the nonbeing for creatures of past and future as past and future may even, on Augustine's principles, imply the nonbeing for them also of the present…it seems that there can be a finite present only as an instantaneous transition from future to past, and so as a purely geometrical point between them, which then must itself be temporally null.' (*ibid.*) Augustine cannot accept the nonbeing of creatures, and so develops his understanding of temporality existing in the soul: 'past and future must be there for the soul as they are grasped *within* the soul in the soul's own essential presentness.' (*ibid.*, 31) Jenson's verdict on this positions worth reciting: 'In few products of intellect are profound insight and obvious muddle so mingled as in Augustine's doctrine of time.' (*ibid.*)

Jenson develops the understanding of creaturely time we have described above, a distension in the narrative which makes up God's eternal life, in explicit contrast to Augustinian presentism. For Jenson, the eternal past and future exist as fully as the present. And as the eternal past and future are constituted by the events of the Gospel narrative, taking place in the created world, it seems that we must draw the conclusion

that Jenson is an eternalist. As such, we move on to the next subject of discussion: endurantism and perdurantism

Endurantism and perdurantism are theses about the way that objects occupy time, and identity across time. Endurantism is the view that objects endure through time. To endure through time is to be wholly present, or at hand, at each point of one's timeline. If endurantism is true, objects at a time are identical with objects at another time simply by being the same object. Perdurantism is the view that objects perdure through time. To perdure through time is to have a temporal part at each point in ones timeline, and to be wholly present at no point in one's timeline. If perdurantism is true, an object at a time is identical with an object at another time by each being a temporal part of the same object. Perdurance is analogous to the way objects exist in space. Just as a table can be divided up into parts, each of which has distinct properties, so a time span can be divided into parts, each of which has distinct properties.

Jenson says little about this debate. However, what he does say suggests he favours perdurantism. The direct textual evidence is sparse. In discussing the 'character of creation', what creation is like, Jenson says that "the story of Jesus, as the story of this one man's moral will, is the content of the command "Let there be…," by which the creation comes into being and perdures.' (1999, 27) The indirect evidence is more substantial and comes in the previous and next section. This indirect evidence is simply that eternalism, four dimensionalism, and perdurantism are often associated with one another. Typically, four dimensionalists are perduranists, however, it might be the case that one can be a four dimensionalist and an endurantist. (Parsons 2014) Further, although they can be distinguished, Jenson seems to take four-

dimensionalism and perdurantism as interchangeable terms for the same position, as is not uncommon in philosophy of time as well. As such, given the dearth, but not absence, of evidence for Jenson's views on this issue, we will move on to four dimensionalism.

Three dimensionalism and four dimensionalism are not merely theses about the number of dimensions that exist. Josh Parsons points out that a flat-land dweller who believed in two spatial dimensions and one temporal dimension would plausibly be more like a four dimensionalist than a three dimensionalist. Further, that there exist four dimensions, of which one is time, is a weaker thesis than most four dimensionalists hold. Rather, according to Parsons, four dimensionalism holds a second thesis, which is that time is analogous to a spatial dimension. (2015) How 'strong' one's four dimensionalism is will depend on how alike one holds time to be to space.

Jenson quite explicitly commits himself to four dimensionalism. Recall above that Jenson distinguished between what I have labelled subjective and objective ways of understanding time. Jenson says that in the 'objective' view of time 'Two moments of time, called "imaginary" time, are like points on a map, so that which way the arrow points depends on from which side the two moments are viewed; this time is indeed a "fourth *dimension*" indistinguishable from the other three.' (1999, 33) Note that Jenson's final position on created time seeks to make room for both subjective and objective views of time, and as such he is committed to the view that there is a sense in which time is at least a fourth dimension as described here, even if it is also more than this. Jenson does not merely commit himself to the view that time is a fourth

dimension, but that it is a fourth dimension very like, even, from some perspectives, indistinguishable from spatial dimensions. This is four dimensionalism.

The second piece of evidence to which we appeal is slightly more circumspect. Jenson says that

> The removal of certain distinctions between time and space by relativity theory…precisely reflects the theological fact: God does not create spatial objects that thereupon move through time; he creates temporal-spatial objects, that is, in a more precise language, he creates histories. We must avoid the suggestion of popular appropriations, which in calling time a fourth "dimension" tend to use "dimension" in a pictorial sense, thus obliterating time's distinction from space. (*ibid.*, 46)

This is a statement of four dimensionalism. However, Jenson draws back from complete endorsement because he wants to acknowledge that time is distinct from a spatial dimension. For Jenson, the important distinction is the experience of the directionality of time, which does not have a spatial analogue. The reference to the problems of using concepts drawn from the visual sphere, 'pictoral' concepts, will be mentioned again in the next chapter.

III Conclusion

Robert Jenson's Trinitarian theology, developed in conscious opposition to 'atemporal' views of God, which he thinks are incompatible with the narrative descriptions of God in the Bible, issues in a novel understanding of eternity, which I have argued is similar to Brian Leftow's 'quasi-temporal eternity'. Jenson argues that this understanding of eternity is analogous to time, and can be called time. Created time, in distinction from God's time, is a 'distension' in the life of God. God is,

according to Jenson, a story, or perhaps better, an event or action, which is done by the Father, Son, and Spirit. Creatures exist in that God calls them to be a part of this history. As such, Jenson argues that created time is best described as an A-series. All events exist, whether past, present, or future, just as the divine persons all exist, although designated as Past, Present, and Future. It is likely that Jenson believes that created objects perdure, and have temporal parts. However he does not seem to be strongly committed to this. However, he is committed to a version of four dimensionalism, which holds that time and spatial dimensions have much in common, although they are distinct from one another. The view of time Jenson describes is commonly known as the moving spotlight theory of time, where the 'world' is a four dimensional object, in which the present is picked out as distinct, as if by a spotlight. Events prior to this present exist, and are ordered both by B relation, and by A properties. Events subsequent to this present exist, and are ordered by B relations and A properties. The purpose of running through Jenson's positions in contemporary philosophy of time is to show how Jenson demonstrates his commitment to a claim fundamental to his contention that the doctrine of the Trinity can reconstitute metaphysics. That is, that philosophy is not prior to theology, and that theology, as theology, can and ought to comment on matters more commonly seen as the domain of philosophy.

In the next chapter, we will develop the discussion of the God and the occupants of creation, when we focus on Jenson's critique of substance, and coronation of 'event' as the primary ontological category.

10 God's Being and Ours

There is a sense in which this chapter might simply have been called 'Jenson's Conception of Being.' This is because, in contexts where the being both of God and creatures are discussed, Jenson thinks that the term 'being' is univocal, and as such to describe what it is for God to be, and what it is for creatures to be, is doing double duty. Nevertheless it is useful to separate the two because of Jenson's method. That is, Jenson describes what it is to be with reference to God, and then subsequently applies the concept to creatures. Interestingly, we shall see that to some degree Jenson follows the method of Aristotle concerning fundamental ontology, despite decrying him in ways proper to a Lutheran.

As this chapter concerns fundamental ontology, we will begin by describing Aristotle's method in fundamental ontology both as found in Jenson's work, and in the work of a contemporary commentator on Aristotle. This will show short-comings in Jenson's understanding of Aristotle. Displaying these short-comings at the beginning of our account of Jenson will, in due course, allow us to salvage and reconstruct Jenson's metaphysical critique concerning the being of God and creation. While this reconstructed 'Jensonian' position will still be critical of Aristotle's concept of substance, it will also allow the use of elements of Aristotle's science of being *qua* being. We will then turn to Jenson's account of what it is for God to be, and finally see how he applies this to creatures. In short, for both God and creatures, to be is to be an event, and so to possess the qualities that all events possess insofar as they are events.

I Aristotle and the Qualities of Being

It is understandable if this section puzzles readers familiar with Jenson's work. Jenson, like Luther, is often critical of Aristotle, or rather, again like Luther, dismissive of Aristotle's incorporation into Christian theology. For Jenson, this centres on several concerns. Jenson thinks that for Aristotle, divinity is unchanging, and admitting of degrees. Substance is the primary category of being, and substances are defined by their likeness to Aristotelian divinity. Jenson disagrees with all of these things. Nevertheless, I intend to make the case that at the broadest level, Jenson's ontology bares significant resemblance to that of Aristotle. To make this case, I will begin with Jenson's own description of Aristotle's fundamental metaphysics, and then follow this with an account by Christopher Shields.

Jenson claims that discussion of 'being' begins in ancient Greece. During the first centuries of the church, the Christian church adopted the discussion. The fundamental question concerning being is, 'what is involved in being anything at all? When we say, for example, "x is large and is solid and is…," what besides largeness and solidity and so on do we along the way co-predicate of x.' (Jenson 1997, 207) This is Jenson's brief description of what we will come to call 'Aristotle's science of being *qua* being'. Jenson says that the Hellenic answer to this question was, 'To be is to possess being.' (*ibid.*, 208) That is, 'has being' is predicated of all subjects said to possess attributes. The follow up question then is 'what is being?' (*ibid.*)

Jenson answers this question on behalf of all Greek philosophers with reference to Aristotle, primarily the Aristotle of Joseph Owens.[1] At its heart, Jenson claims that the 'Greek' idea of 'being' is theological. The divinity of this theology is, as we saw in chapter four,

> the timeless *telos* of the interminably temporal cosmos, the timelessly attained *goal* and *perfection*, whether in itself singular or plural, that spans all temporal spans. This "life" is motionless, impassible, utterly self-satisfied, and just so divine…temporal life is the derivative of immortality, and temporal *being* is the derivative of divinity. (*ibid.*, 209)

To further emphasize the theological weight of 'being', Jenson remarks that for Hellenic thought, '"being" is used analogously for the divine and for the likeness to the divine that with nondivinities is…their inner ground.' (*ibid.*)

The qualities of 'being' are as follows. First, 'immunity to time.' (*ibid.*) Again, this is primarily applied to divinity, which is utterly immutable, but it is 'located derivatively in other beings…Being is persistence, to whatever term.' (*ibid.*) Second, being is 'form'. That is, what truly exists is that which can be multiply instantiated, but is unaffected by this instantiation. (*ibid.*) Third, as a result of these first two qualities, 'Being is thus what satisfies the mind's longing for absolute assurance, for transcendence over time's surprises.' (*ibid.*) In that 'being' is 'form', it fits into an ancient model of epistemology, and so being is 'knowable'. Insofar as being is immutable, that which is knowable, or worthy of being known, is that which will never change. As such, Jenson says that 'Being is *knowability*, of a kind that in greater or lesser degree secures us against the advent of the unknown future.' (*ibid.*, 210) Finally, being is an image, the concept developed here functions alongside an

[1] Jenson's most common secondary source for Aristotle was Joseph Owens. (e. g. Jenson 1997, 209n15)

epistemology that takes sight and imagery as its guiding metaphor. For Jenson, sight is primarily related to space, and as such, beings 'simply appear in the present tense of consciousness without inner reference to past or future, as objects in space appear to sight.' (*ibid.*)

It is outside the scope of this thesis to fully examine the accuracy of Jenson's historical claims. However, in what follows, it will become apparent that Jenson's brief description of Greek, and specifically Aristotelian, ontology is significantly at odds with contemporary scholarship. Nevertheless, after a representative piece of contemporary scholarship, I will argue that Jenson's summary is not as bad as it sounds, if we modify and moderate it with a few caveats.

Christopher Shields' account of Aristotle's science of being *qua* being focuses on answering three apparent problems with Aristotle's science. The first is the possibility problem. The possibility problem is simply stated: for Aristotle, 'every science is arrayed over a single genus; there is no genus of being; hence there is no science of being.' (2012, 344) Shields notes that although this question is easily answered by noting that Aristotle proposes no science of 'being', but a science of being '*qua* being', this merely raises further questions; preeminently, how does this circumlocution help?

The second problem assumes a resolution to the first, and asks, 'What, precisely, does the science of being *qua* being take as its object of study?' (*ibid.*) The problem here comes from Aristotle's execution of the study of being *qua* being. That is, the study is to be completely general:

> The science of being *qua* being…contrasts with the special sciences precisely in *not* cutting off any part of being; it considers not living beings, or mathematical beings, or beings subject to motion, but rather *all* beings in so far as they are beings and not in so far as they move or live of exhibit quantitative features. Evidently, then, the science of being *qua* being examines everything there is. (*ibid.*, 344-345)

Even so, Aristotle's procedure does not seem to meet this expansive remit. Instead 'Aristotle focuses relentlessly on what seems to be but one kind of being, namely substantial being (*ousia*), and, ultimately, on just one substantial being, namely the unmoved mover of *Metaphysics* XII.' (*ibid.*, 345) In sum, 'Aristotle announces a perfectly general science, but then evidently proceeds to conduct a special science.' (*ibid.,* 346) While this problem, the 'extension' problem, is widely studied according to Shields, the next problem is not so often discussed.

The final problem is not only less well recognized, it is also harder to describe. Shields takes his lead from the general requirements of any science, and finds the following requirements for a science of being *qua* being:

> (i) it should take as its object being *qua* being…; (ii) it should state the features belonging per se…to being *qua* being; and (iii) it should state the causes…of being *qua* being. (*ibid.,* 348)

The 'problem of intension', so-called by Shields, focuses on the second criterion. For science generally, 'if Φ is the essence of the members of some domain **D**, the science of **D** focuses on the members of **D** *qua* Φ.' (*ibid.)* The intension problem, in short, is 'what might Φ be for **D** when the domain is all beings? …Are beings essentially anything at all, as beings?' (*ibid.)* To restate the problem, the domain of all being does not have an 'essence'. Essences define kinds, but kinds are defined by distinction from one another. The science of being *qua* being does not admit of any distinction. There

is a domain that ranges over all things that exist, but there is no kind or category that does the same; there is no essence of being.

Shields begins his resolution of these three problems, and so his presentation of a coherent Aristotelian method in general metaphysics, with the problem of intension. Jenson says nothing directly about this kind of intension question in ontology. However, Shields' resolution plays out into areas that are of relevance to Jenson, as such it will prove useful to traverse it.

Shields' resolution to the problem of intension is to find a way in which there can be *per se* features of being *qua* being which are not essential features of being *qua* being. To see how this resolution works, Shields thinks we must consider two distinct ways of understanding *per se* predication, taken from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. In the first way, '**Φ** is predicated *kath' hauto* [*per se*] of x if (a) **Φ** is predicated of x; and (b) **Φ** must be mentioned in an (essence-specifying) account of x.' (*ibid.*, 357) In this kind of *per se* predication, **Φ** names an essential property of x: 'any essence-specifying account of [x] will be at best incomplete for failing to mention this property.' (*ibid.*) For instance, in the sentence 'this avocado tree is a plant,' no account of the essence of the avocado tree would be complete without mentioning that such trees are plants. As such, plant is predicated *per se* of the avocado tree.

However, there is a second relevant kind of *per se* predication: '**Φ** is predicated *kath' hauto* of x if (a) **Φ** is predicated of x; and (b) x must be mentioned in an (essence-specifying) account of **Φ**.' (*ibid.*) This second kind of *per se* predication makes no demands on the essence of 'x'. This kind of *per se* predication reverses the second

aspect of the definition. Shields uses this example 'oddness is predicated of a given number; but any account of what oddness is will perforce advert to *number* in its *definiens*. In saying that oddness is predicated of number *kath' hauto* we are highlighting, then, a metaphysically binding reciprocity between subject and predicate, though we are not thereby indicating something *essential* to the subject.' (*ibid.*)

Shields makes the transition from discussion of predicates to properties by way of Aristotelian essentialism, which requires distinction from some contemporary varieties. In what Shields calls 'merely modal essentialism', 'Φ is an essential property of x *iff* if x loses Φ, then x ceases to exist.' (*ibid.*) Such a version of essentialism would render the second kind of *per se* predication useless in metaphysics because a sentence like 'a certain number is odd' now would indicate something essential to 'a certain number', provided we can stretch language enough to say that if 'oddness' goes out of existence, so do numbers. Aristotle believes it to be insufficient as a definition for essentialism because 'some properties are such that the entity which possesses them goes out of existence with their loss even though they are inessential.' (*ibid.*), such properties are called '*idia*'. Aristotle's revised essentialism, which leaves out *idia* says that 'Φ is an essential property of x *iff* (i) if x loses Φ, then x ceases to exist; and (ii) Φ is in an objective sense an explanatorily basic feature of x.' (*ibid.*). The second condition of this definition of essentialism mirrors the second condition of the first kind of *per se* predication described, but not the second. To be an explanatorily basic feature of x is to 'asymmetrically explain other features of its bearer, including even those whose loss entails the non-existence of that bearer.' (*ibid.*)

The result of these maneuvers is that 'if Φ belongs to any random being of necessity, such that in order to explicate what Φ is we must acknowledge that it pertains to all beings just because they are beings, then we have identified a feature holding universally of beings simply because they are beings.' (*ibid.*, 358) This can be done, importantly, without making the claim that there is an essence of beings in so far as they are beings. Aristotle's science of being *qua* being, according to Shields, searches for properties that are, we might say, idiomatic to all beings, but not essential to them.

Briefly then, what are the idiomatic features of all beings in so far as they are beings? Shields names three. First, all beings are 'logically circumscribed.' (*ibid.*, 359) For Aristotle, this means that all things possess 'The attribute *being subject to the principle of non-contradiction.*'(*ibid.*) Second, all beings are 'categorially delineated.' (*ibid.*, 360) That is, all things belong to a category. Third, all things are 'modally enmeshed.' (*ibid.*) All things are either actual or potential. These three characteristics constitute the intension of the set whose extension ranges over all things.

Shields shows how the possibility problem is easily solved by this approach to the intension problem. In short, the formal argument for the possibility problem contains two questionable premises (*ibid.*, 361) It turns out not to be the case that sciences need to be directed toward generic qualities, nor directed to domains individuated by essential properties. Instead, 'A feature may well be predicated of some domain necessarily and invariantly without its being essential…to the members of that domain. (*ibid.*)

We now turn to the problem of extension. Shields summarizes this problem in this way: '(i) the [science] of being *qua* being takes as its extension all beings; (ii) first philosophy, or theology, has as its extension just one being; (iii) the [science] of being *qua* being and first philosophy, or theology, are the same science.' (*ibid.*, 362) These three propositions are clearly inconsistent. Shields solves the problem by denying that (ii) should be attributed to Aristotle. Instead, 'Aristotle does not thereby imply that this science studies *only* that being, or even that it takes it as its individuating object… As a being, of course, the divine substance is an object of first philosophy along with every other being, insofar as it is a being and in no other way.' (*ibid.*, 363) Nevertheless, while this dissolves the logical problem, we still need to ask why it is that of all beings, substance, and more particularly, divine substance, is of special importance in conducting general metaphysics.

Aristotle's focus on the category of substance, contends Shields, flows from his general understanding of the nature of science. That is, a science will investigate the causes and principle of its domain. As such, 'we should have some knowledge of being *qua* being just when, according to Aristotle, we can specify the causes of being *qua* being.' (*ibid.*, 362) As such, Aristotle can study substance to the end of understanding being *qua* being because 'he may yet draw special attention to some sub-class of beings if they are somehow primary as causes or principles of all being.' (*ibid.*, 364) Shields argues that substance fulfils just such a role: 'If substance alone is separate, or self-subsistent, then every being is either a substance or requires the being of a substance to underpin its own being. In this sense, contends Aristotle, the being of substance is a principle…and cause…of the being of all other beings.' (*ibid.*, 366) In brief, all the members of all other Aristotelian categories, for example, quality, quantity, location,

and time, exist only in a substance. There is no redness without some object. The object is a principle of redness, but the object, the substance, can exist without redness. As such the relation is asymmetrical. Further, then, 'first philosophy might yet investigate the divine substance as a principle…or cause…of all beings insofar as they are beings.' (*ibid.*, 364) That is, if the divine being is the principle or cause of all substance, and substance is the principle or cause of everything else, all things may be studied *qua* being by studying divine substance.

This concludes a brief overview of Aristotle's science of being *qua* being according to Christopher Shields, and the promised discrepancies with Jenson's account have emerged. Most prominently perhaps, the features of being *qua* being that Shields describes are significantly distinct from the qualities of being that Jenson attributes to Aristotle specifically, and to all ancient philosophy generally. In addition, although Shields mentions Aristotle's theology in his account, it does not appear to play so large a role as Jenson suggests it ought. These two discrepancies might lead us to suspect that either Shields or Jenson has been misdirected somewhere. Given Shields' position and obvious expertise, this could be a problem for Jenson. Before moving to the next section, I will explain these discrepancies. While Jenson does make some mistakes, he is close enough to the truth that his metaphysical critique of the ideas he finds in Aristotle will still apply. Nevertheless, at the end of this chapter I will argue that Jenson is not so far from some aspects of Aristotle's ontology as he suspects.

We begin with the second discrepancy: Aristotle's theology appears to play a much larger, and more determinative, role in Jenson's account of Aristotle's study of being than in Shields'. The reason for this can be straightforwardly stated. Shields offered a

response to the extension problem in which being *qua* being is studied by way of substance and the divine because these things are beings, so are suitable for the task. They are additionally appropriate because they are principle and cause of all other beings. However, there is an alternative answer to the extensional problem that Shields discusses and dismisses. This answer claims that it is especially suitable to study being *qua* being by way of the divine because there are different kinds of being arranged hierarchically. That is, 'all beings in non-substance categories depend upon substance for their existence… [and all things] finally depend upon the unmoved mover.' (*ibid.*, 350) As such, the study of being must also take account of this asymmetric dependency. In order to account for this dependency however, Aristotle's device of 'core-dependent homonymy offers a framework within which claims about dependence can be rendered precise.' (*ibid.*) In contemporary theology, following medieval usage, core-dependent homonymy, as Shields calls it, has come to be known as the analogy of attribution. This response to the extensional problem is common, and Jenson could have found it in any number of his secondary sources on Aristotle. Nevertheless, Shields is strongly critical of this option. He notes that, even if 'items in non-substance categories depend for their existence on substance…This would do nothing to show that the predicate '…is', as it applies to these members of these various categories of being is anything but univocal. Nor does it suffice to appeal in a vague way to *ways of being* in this connection.' (*ibid.*, 353) After setting out what would be required to defend this answer to the extensional problem, Shields remarks, 'we should not be sanguine that there is a defensible approach to the Extension problem to be developed along these lines…[it] fails to deliver on its initial promise. The best that can be said…is that this approach is unfinished. There is…reason to doubt that this circumstance will be rectified.' (*ibid.*, 354) We should note, the

solution Shields offers suffers none of the same drawbacks, accounting for the dependency of items in non-Substance categories in a different way, and makes more sense of Aristotle's text in the *Metaphysics*. Whatever else may be said in the Aristotelian corpus, Aristotle's science of being *qua* being need not depend on an hierarchy of immutable being as Jenson claims.

The other discrepancy, that Jenson's enumerated qualities of being are very different to Shields, can also be explained, and briefly. Shields offers us the qualities which all things have of necessity insofar as they exist. Jenson takes himself to be doing the same, but instead gives us a list of the qualities of substance. This is understandable given Jenson's approach to the extension problem, and the way of construing dependency between divinity, substance, and non-substance categories found therein. Nevertheless, Jenson is wrong to attribute these qualities to beings *qua* being.

Does this mean that Jenson's revision to ontology fails at the first hurdle? By no means. First, Jenson is describing the position of those he takes to be his opponents. That he misunderstands Aristotle does not mean that Jenson's proposed alternative is moot. Instead, in concluding this chapter, I will argue that Aristotle as described by Shields is somewhat congenial to Jenson.

II Substance and Event

The central metaphysical revision that Jenson advocates, issuing from his Trinitarian doctrine, is to replace substance as the primary category with event. Before we come

to Jenson's argument for this move, we need to understand what is meant by substance, and what is meant by event. In keeping with past procedure in this thesis, we will begin with accounts of substance and event drawn from contemporary philosophy, on the grounds that if Jenson is seeking to enter into contemporary philosophical debates, then he must be using the terminology in a way similar to the terms of such debates. As this approach has born fruit in past chapters, so it will in this chapter.

We turn to Galton and Mizoguchi for a brief account of substance and event. In their 2009 paper, 'The Water Falls but the Waterfall does not Fall: New Perspectives on Objects, Processes and Events,' they argue that neither objects nor events are ontologically prior to the other, arguing instead that they depend on one another. In order to make this case, they define objects and events according to the state of the field, and it is this which will prove useful for us. We should note 'substance' as we are using the term in this thesis, as Jenson uses it, and in Aristotle, refers to the same kind of thing as 'object' as employed by Galton and Mizoguchi.

Galton and Mizoguchi list three differences between objects and events, and three similarities. The differences are 'relation to time', 'nature of parts', and 'change'. To the first, they say that 'An object is present as a whole at each moment of its existence; an event only exists as a whole across the interval over which it occurs.'[2] (2009, 3) For the second, 'An object can have spatial parts, but does not have temporal parts; an event has temporal parts and may or may not have spatial parts.' (*ibid.*) This is similar to the distinction we drew in the previous chapter between three dimensionalism and

[2] For relevant discussion of the nature of events, see Davidson 2013, 103-204.

four dimensionalism, although it can also be labelled endurantism and perdurantism. Finally, as to change, 'an object can have different properties at different times, and is therefore able to undergo change; it does not make sense to speak of an event changing.' (*ibid.*) Galton and Mizoguchi note that these distinctions are connected in that 'it is hard to accept any one of them without thereby also accepting the others.' (*ibid.*) These distinctions draw the line between 'continuants' and 'occurrents', a widely recognized distinction in contemporary philosophy. Note that this distinction features prominently also in the previous chapter, when we outlined Jenson's approach to created time. In the course of this chapter, it will become clear that Jenson's fundamental ontology is of a piece with his approach to time.

Objects and events are not wholly dissimilar however, and Galton and Mizoguchi list three similarities between the two kinds. They also note that these similarities may simply be three ways of naming the same similarity. They are 'discreteness', as 'both objects and events are discrete individuals which may be referred to using count nouns' (*ibid.*); 'non-dissectivity', which states that 'The parts of an object or event are not themselves objects or events of the same type' (*ibid.*); and finally, 'definite extension', 'objects and events have well-defined extensions: an object occupies a region in space, an event takes up an interval in time.' (*ibid.*)

Discussing Jenson's critique of substance, and his advocacy for an event-based ontology will cause us to comment more on these categories, however, for now this should give us an adequate basis to being our examination of Jenson's case.

III Jenson's Critique of Substance

Jenson discusses his critique of substance in his book on Jonathan Edwards. It comes up in the context of Edwards' appropriation of his contemporary science and philosophy; the work of Newton and Locke that spurs Edwards' appropriation of Enlightenment thought. Specifically, Edwards seeks to find a way to appropriate Newton's physical science without accepting a mechanistic cosmology. According to Jenson, however, Edwards' critique of mechanism hides a critique of Aristotelian metaphysics. Jenson says that 'the heart is the unanalyzed assumption that "bodies" are the sort of thing that either can or cannot act "properly by themselves," that is, the unthinking application of the ancient Western notion of *substance* to physics' conception of masses in motion.' (1988, 25)

Before venturing further, we need to confirm that the notion of substance that Jenson is attacking is the same as that described above. Jenson defines substance as 'the supposed hidden, intrinsically potent subject of [an object's] overt attributes and actions.' (*ibid.*) That is, a substance is something that acts and has properties. A substance is that which is subject to change in properties, but does not itself change. Jenson says that 'a substance is a possessor and asserter of its attributes, maintaining itself in being by the security of its grip on them.' (*ibid.*, 26) This fits well enough with Galton and Mizoguchi's 'concurrents', and with Aristotle's substance, allowing for the personification of substance.

The critique of substance is, at base, a religious dispute according to Jenson. He says that applying 'the substance-category to physics' masses in motion was bound to cause confusion both for Christian theology and for thought in general: the category of substance is part of a notion of deity, so that its application elsewhere is either polytheism or mere confusion.' (*ibid.*) Specifically 'we inherit the notion of substance from Greece's attempt to describe its own appropriate God.' (*ibid.*, 26) We have already seen Jenson's critique of the adoption of supposedly Hellenic concepts of deity in chapter 4. It is useful to recall Jenson's critique to understand his problem with substance. Fundamentally, a God is away of 'harmonizing' past, present, and future. The 'god of the past' does this by ensuring either that our situation in the world never changes, or that it will return to some fundamental default position. The God of the Gospel, the future, according to Jenson, does not guarantee anything of this kind, but instead promises a new and different future, which can only be known by accepting God's promise. God himself is constituted in this promise, and in its fulfillment in the world. Jenson's critique of substance becomes clearer then. Substance, as a term, if it need be used, should only be used of God, because nothing is self-subsistent but God. However, 'to say that something is a substance is to say that it possesses and asserts itself against time; the constitutive hopes are of self-retention and persistence.' (*ibid.*) As such 'only immortal entities are fully substances, only the gods or their philosophical sublimations.' (*ibid.*) That is, 'substances' bridge time by being unchanging, even as their properties change, we might say, above them. Substances, to be clear, are for Jenson a, or the, God of the past, just as he claims they were intended to be by those that formulated the concept: 'if Greece's development and use of the category of substance for all real things thus claims potential divinity for all things, that is exactly what Greece meant to claim.' (*ibid.*)

If substances are the demi-gods of ancient religion, then 'Edwards' critique of mechanism is an encompassing piece of demythologizing: there are no little self-sufficient agencies beside God, natural entities are not godlets, and therefore the world harmony is not self-contained.' (*ibid.*, 25-26) This is important, and necessary, as 'Christian theology's adoption of the category of substance was therefore a chief misstep in its delicate and necessary negotiation with Greek religion.' (*ibid.*, 26) The project of demythologization that Jenson sees in Edwards is important, and became especially important in Edwards' time: '"Substance" is a God-concept. In older Christian thought, its use of others than God was tolerable, since all remained within the economy of history and its personal agents, open and correlated to the Gospel's active and purposeful God.' (*ibid.*) However, in Edwards' time, the old cosmology of Christendom[3] was coming apart in the wake of the scientific discoveries of Newton and others. Edwards' critique is not of Newton's physics of masses in motion, but of the appropriation of 'substance' to that physics. Jenson says that 'Christianity can do nothing with a world of rule-obeying, acting and reacting *things*, when these are taken to be timelessly self-contained.' (*ibid.*) One of the sub-surface problems here is that, in a mechanistic, autonomous, rule-following universe understood as a closed system, there can be either no miracles, or miracles only as external super-natural manipulation. Neither of these is a good option for Christianity according to Jenson, for whom the cosmos must be open to the intimate action of God at its centre. Thus Jenson says that 'that atoms or other masses should be, even if created once upon a time, self-possessing in their being and action denies God, whatever else may be asserted.' (*ibid.*, 27)

[3] Perhaps most accessibly and ably described in Lewis 2012.

Following the implications of this critique of the category of substance in Edwards' interpretation of Newtonian physics, as set out by Jenson, will help us to get a clearer impression of the critique and the alternative which is offered. First, Jenson notes that this dismissal of substance is not an attack on his contemporary physics by Edwards. Instead, 'whatever "mass" or "matter," or "space" or "motion," means *within* Newton's laws, they mean for Edwards. It is Aristotle Edwards wants to be rid of.' (*ibid.*) So how does this inform an interpretation of Newtonian physics? Jenson traces it through many different appropriated aspects, but we will follow this trace only through Edwards' atomism.

Atomism, for Edwards, is the thesis that 'all bodies must be "atoms" or "composed" of atoms.' (*ibid.*) An atom is an indivisible body, so the parts of an atom cannot be separated from one another. However, that an atom might have such 'parts' is a curious feature. It comes of a distinction between the rules governing geometry and the physical world. That is, in geometry, figures are infinitely divisible. Jenson, following Edwards, remarks that 'if the parts into which a unit of matter are geometrically divisible are actually inseparable, this is strictly a fact, requiring explanation.' (*ibid.*)

The explanation of this fact comes from further reflection on the definition of an atom. According to Jenson, Edwards says that 'what makes an atom an atom is indivisibility' (*ibid.*), and 'it is essential to matter to have atomic structure,' so 'to divide an atom would be simply to dematerialize it.' (*ibid.*) And so on with bodies composed of atoms. Edwards brings in the concept of solidity. Solidity is 'resistance to

being divided.' (*ibid.*) So if an atom is divided, it ceases to exist, it dematerializes. An atom then just is something unable to be divided, and so 'solidity is the being of atoms and so of body.' (*ibid.*) That is, to be an atom is to be solid. Jenson feels we must ask, '*What* resists the division of some geometrically divisible portions of body? What holds the potential parts of atoms in fact together?' (*ibid.*) He thinks the typical answer would be 'substance', but this doesn't work. Substance is what the body is, but in Edwards' scheme, that is solidity. We are looking for what undergirds solidity however. On what does substance depend? Jenson thinks that here Edwards 'has debunked the godlet hidden in each fundamental mass, posited by the standard language of the time.' (*ibid.*) That is, if we simply stop with 'substance' as an answer to the question posed, we are attributing power to each and every existing atom, and not just power, but infinite power. How so? Solidity, says Jenson, must be power superior to any finite power in order to prevent an atom being divided into its geometrical parts. To be superior to any finite power, or rather, to any possible finite power, solidity must be the result of infinite power. Only God has infinite power, so 'the real God assumes the function.' (*ibid.*) That is, the substance of a body, the solidity of an atom, is an action of God.

In Edwards' work, the whole Newtonian system of motion is translated into this way of thinking. As such, 'the laws of motion are but the regularities of God's spatial resistance-setting.' (*ibid.*, 28) The change in perspective over all, is that mechanism is replaced with harmony; a move, according to Jenson, congenial with Edwards' larger theology, such that 'if God's triunity is the harmony of what God is, the laws of motion are a harmony of what he does.' (*ibid.*) Yet Jenson does not want us to think that Edwards' theological-scientific speculations are bound to the science of his day.

Instead, Jenson thinks contemporary physics has now caught up with the critique of substance, and so there are no 'atoms' in Edwards' sense in modern physics, and yet also 'physics now posits *no* entities that satisfy the concept of substance.' (*ibid.*, 29) Even so, there are theologically relevant questions to ask, above all, says Jenson 'what, finally, are physical equations *about*?' (*ibid.*)

We will not pursue any questions on the relation between contemporary physics and Christian belief or metaphysics. What we set out to accomplish in this section was to understand Jenson's critique of the category of substance. Drawing on Jonathan Edwards, Jenson critiques substance as an import from an alien theology, which conceives of divinity in a way that is antithetical to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, in Jenson's terminology, the God of the Future. One of the failings of this alien concept is the idea of the 'self-sufficiency' of substances, that is, the idea that objects are sufficient of themselves to guarantee their persistence through time. Substances do not pop out of existence because some*one* fails to act. However, for Jenson, the universe, and all that is in it, is upheld, and maintained through time, by the action of God. Substance must go. There is no 'continuant,' which is so, of itself.

We find a second critique of substance, or perhaps better, a second way of describing the same critique, in Jenson's *Systematic Theology*. Here, following Thomas Aquinas, Jenson takes himself to be describing a critique of Aristotle's understanding of being. In fact, as described above, he is critiquing some aspects of Aristotle's view of substance, which is a related, but slightly different critique.

Jenson begins his own account of God's being by casting back to Thomas Aquinas, and describing the distinction between essence and existence. For Aristotle, beings, or perhaps better, some substances, are composed of form and matter. Form, the qualities that make a thing what it is, require instantiation in matter. However, not all 'form' needs instantiation: 'More "noble" forms need no such composition, and therefore, thought Aristotle, are instantiated of themselves; just so, they are divine and fully possess being.' (Jenson 1997, 212) Although Thomas does think that there are entities of this kind, forms without matter, he also thinks 'that a form's lack of need for matter cannot in itself guarantee that it is instantiated, and so does not qualify it as divine.' (*ibid.*) That is to say, Thomas describes a further distinction beyond form and matter: the distinction between 'essence' and 'existence'. Essence is 'form together with the need for instantiation in matter,' (*ibid.*) while existence is the actualization of this essence. As such, 'being is *distinct* from essence…it is what forms may or may not have. Being…is the actuality of essence, its step beyond potentiality. (*ibid.*, 212-213)

This opens up an important distinction between Aristotle and Thomas. Jenson says that 'that an essence's being is other than it means that, even were that essence omnisciently known, the question would still be open as to whether there is anything of which it is the essence.' Thus while for Aristotle, 'in those cases in which we do not have to worry about matter…*what* a "separated" entity is implies *that* it is…entities that truly and unqualifiedly *are* contain within themselves the guarantee of their own actuality.' (*ibid.*, 213) This is the position so adamantly critiqued above. Thomas' distinction between essence and existence is another way to critique Aristotle: 'If essence and being are not the same for *x*, one could have perfect knowledge of *what x* is, if it is, and still not know *whether x* is.' (*ibid.*) That is to say, 'humans and angels

and trees and abstract ideas all genuinely *are*, and yet they have their being from beyond themselves. That is what it means to be a creature.' (*ibid.*) Here Jenson is portraying Thomas on the side of the angels, or at least in line with Jenson's own concerns and critiques.

What is common to both of these critiques is the idea that self-existent things, that is, things that do not rely on God for their continued existence, can play no part in a Christian ontology. The critique taken from Jonathan Edwards goes further in that it also describes a way in which we might explain the continued reliance in God of created things.

IV God is an Event

A number of features of Jenson's thought will become clear, just as a number of themes traced in this thesis will come together. To start, we will simply note the procedure Jenson follows. Jenson believes that the term 'being' is used univocally of God and creatures. He also thinks that the concept of 'being' worked out in ancient philosophy is unacceptable for the Christian view of God, even though the question that leads the concept is admissible. As such, Jenson sets out to describe what it is for God to be. More specifically, he seeks to describe a concept of being adequate to ascribe to God. In doing so, and in working out what it is for God to be, he moves toward a concept of being which can apply to both God and creatures, and so proposes a distinct view of what it is for creatures to be.

Interestingly, Jenson follows Thomas Aquinas in the initial stages of his discussion of God's being:

> God is utterly "simple." Not only does the composition of form and matter not apply to God, but neither does the composition of essence and existence. He needs no prior something in which to instantiate himself; *and* he needs no actualization of his deity, as if he could possibly not have been. (1997, 213)

In the chapter on the necessity of creation, we noted that Jenson adopts the Thomist claim that God's essence and existence are identical, but also found that, given Jenson's dislike for the claim that God is simple, and further, given that for the sake of coherence, his theology must include the idea that God can take on accidental properties, it is difficult to see how he could consistently adopt this particular Thomist adage. Perhaps it is best accounted for by Jenson's own description of the meaning of the phrase, whether it adequately captures Thomas' meaning or not. We previously said that Jenson might think that it is necessary for God to exist as Trinity, but that nevertheless he can take on other contingent features. In this way we can understand Jenson's claim that God exists necessarily, is constituted by events in creation, and yet creation might have failed to exist, or might exist otherwise than it does. We might then say that Jenson accepts that God is simple in some ways, but he is certainly not simple in the strong sense of the term.[4] Perhaps this is for the best.[5] However we might account for it, Jenson does assert that 'God is his own essence. God is his own existence or being. Therefore his existence is his essence. [The essence of God is] an otherwise unqualified act of existing.' (1997, 213) The next necessary task, for Jenson,

[4] The 'strong' sense of Divine Simplicity is perhaps best represented in recent literature by James Dolezal's *God Without Parts*. (Dolezal 2011)

[5] The doctrine of divine simplicity has suffered strong, and my opinion, fatal critique, best represented in a pair of articles. The first proposes that the doctrine of divine simplicity can only be rendered coherent by appeal to truthmakers (Brower 2008), while the second convincingly demonstrates that such an appeal is insufficient to defend the doctrine against claims of incoherence. (Schmitt 2013)

is 'to unpack Thomas's act of being by the lineaments of God's *triunity*.' (*ibid.*, 214) This brings us to the main features of Jenson's doctrine of God's being.

Jenson says that there are several answers to the question, 'what is it for God to be?' (*ibid.*) First, Jenson says that in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian theology, the word 'god' as used in Christian theology does not refer to some *ousia*, used here to refer to an entity or a substance. Rather, 'God' 'refers to the mutual *action* of the identities' divine "energies," to the perichoretic triune *life*.' (*ibid.*) As such, if we ask what "God" is, then we find that "*This* being of God is not a something, however rarefied or immaterial, but a *going-on*, a sequentially palpable event, like a kiss or a train wreck.' (*ibid.*) Thus God is an event. As we have seen, for Jenson God is, because he has chosen to be, the event constituted by the history of creation. Second, the divine identities, the Father, Son, and Spirit, are also called 'God', so what does it mean for them to be God? Jenson says that 'there is a hypostatic being of God that must be distinguished from his act of being, as the antecedence of those who *do* the act.' (*ibid.*, 215) Hypostatic being, in the theology worked out by Gregory of Nyssa, and adopted by Jenson, is just what Jenson has been labeling 'identity'. For Jenson, these divine identities are logically prior to the God they enact in their mutual life and conversation. These three are simply by their relations to one another, relations which are founded on events in God's life. Third, Jenson thinks that we must also describe 'deity', or divine nature. This is a characteristic feature of divine life, or rather, it is the feature which makes this life divine. This characteristic is 'infinity'.

This infinity has been described in the previous chapter. It is what Jenson refers to with his discussion of divine eternity. As a characteristic of God's life, he says that

'What Father, Son, and Spirit have from each other to be three identities of *God*, and what characterizes their mutual action *as* God, is limitlessness. What happens with them accepts no boundaries; nothing can hinder what they enact.' (*ibid.*, 216) The fit with Jenson's other claims about divine eternity is not initially clear, but the idea seems to be that this divine characteristic is that of possessing time, but without limit, such that the past does not pass away, and the future does not come to be. Hence Jenson contrasts his view of infinity with that of 'Greek theology', however apposite the label. He says that they understood 'infinity on the analogy of space: an infinite something would be nothing because it would be dissipated. Per contra, the infinity that according to Gregory is God's deity is *temporal infinity*.' (*ibid.*) As we have already discussed, this is where Christian theology connects with the general definition of religion which has been so important to Jenson's theology:

> the biblical God's eternity is not the simple contradiction of time. What he transcends is not the having of beginnings and goals and reconciliations, but any personal limitations in having them. What he transcends is any limit imposed on what can he be by what has been, except the limit of his personal self-identity, and any limit imposed on his action by the availability of time. (*ibid.*, 217)

Jenson takes this to be a summary of Barth's understanding of God's eternity, but he wants to extend it:

> He is *temporally* infinite because "source" and "goal" are present *and* asymmetrical in him, because he is primally future to himself and only thereupon past and present for himself. It is in that he is Spirit that the true God avoids – so to speak – the timelessness of mere form or mere consciousness. (*ibid.*)

I attempted to explain Jenson's view of divine eternity in the previous chapter, and will leave that explanation as sufficient.

Jenson summarizes his understanding of God's being in four stages. 'First, the one God is an *event*; history occurs not only in him but as his being.' (*ibid.*, 221) All of Jenson's Trinitarian doctrine leads him to this conclusion. Further, God is a particular event: 'the active relation of the triune persons, the event in which we are involved in that the crucifixion and resurrection occur among us.' (*ibid.*) We saw above, that calling God an event requires some kind of hypostatic being: 'Events, of course, happen *to* something. What the event of God happens to is, first, the triune persons. The fundamental statement of God's being is therefore: God is what happens between Jesus and the Father in their Spirit.' (*ibid.*) However, as we shall see, secondarily, God is what happens to the world: 'God is the event of the world's transformation by Jesus's love, the same love to which the world owes its existence.' (*ibid.*)

Second, God is a person. This follows from Jenson's discussion of the patrological problem. Jenson picks out the obvious problem: 'How can an event be a person?' (*ibid.*, 222) His response is simply to identify a person with their life. These things are not truly distinct. As such he says that 'the life of a person is both one event and many events. Therefore, to grasp myself whole, I must grasp the dramatic coherence of events of my life.' (*ibid.*) That is, if a person is not an enduring thing, there must be some provision for the unity of a person across time. In other words, how does a person's temporal parts constitute one thing? If all events which happen are just random, or determined, there is no reason to pick out any particular sequence of events as constituting a natural unity. That there are persons perduring in time is the beginning of a cross-temporal mereological problem.[6] This problem is answered with a

[6] As noted earlier, this problem seems close to a version of Peter van Inwagen's 'special composition question'. (van Inwagen 1995, 21-32)

special kind of property: narrativity. As Jenson says 'I must grasp the *faithfulness* of each of my acts and sufferings to the rest. But as a creature, I do not have this faithfulness in myself; I have it in the coherence of God's intention for me.' (*ibid.*) God does not have this problem, it would seem, and this is how God functions as an 'eternity' in Jenson's idiomatic usage.

Third, 'God is a *decision.*' (*ibid.*) This should be clear already from chapter 6 on divine necessity and creaturely contingence. If God is constituted by the created world, which might have failed to be, or to be other than it is, God is constituted by a decision he makes, to create, and to create in a certain way.

Finally, 'God is a *conversation.*' (*ibid.*, 224) This follows from the being of God as event. Conversation is the kind of event God is, just as creatures are, Jenson thinks, best understood as those things mentioned in divine converse.

All this is to say, that God is an event, and a very particular event. God is not a substance, in that he is himself temporal and possesses past, present, and future. And yet he is substance-like, in that each person of the Trinity does not depend on anything but the other two for existence.

V Creatures are Events

Given what is said about God's being above, that is, that God is 'a fugue, a conversation, a personal event' (1999, 35), what do we say about creatures? Jenson has

denied what he takes to be Aristotle's response, that being is an attribute admitting of degrees, possessed unequally by things according to their place on some sort of ontological hierarchy, with substance at the top, and divinity at the top of that. Moreover, in the course of describing God's being, Jenson already makes some claims about creaturely being. To wit: 'to be, as a creature, is to be mentioned in the triune moral conversation, as something other than those who conduct it.' (*ibid.*) What does this mean in relation to God? Jenson runs through a brief account of Thomas' doctrine of analogy, and says that for most terms used of God and creatures, this understanding of analogy is sufficient, however, Jenson thinks that 'being' is used univocally of God and creatures. The argument Jenson gives is not completely clear, but the idea seems to be that, God exists as conversation, and creatures exist as utterances in this conversation. However, an utterance *is* in precisely the same way as a conversation *is*, and therefore the term must be univocal. (*ibid.*, 38)

Jenson also discusses what it means to be a creature in terms of the Trinity. That is, if to be a creature is to be mentioned in divine discourse, there must be a way in which the creature is mentioned which is peculiar to each member of the Trinity, in that their actions in the world are, for Jenson, not one by identity but by mutuality. As such, Jenson remarks that it is in the converse of the Father that creatures exist: 'insofar as creatures are initiated by the role of the Father, their being is their mere existence' (*ibid.*, 38). In the converse of the Spirit, creatures are contingent: 'insofar as creatures occur by the Spirit's triune agency, their being is therefore their contingency.' (*ibid.*, 41) Nevertheless, contingency does not necessarily mean 'random'. Jenson claims that, in contemporary science, the idea of deterministic laws of nature has passed by

the wayside. Now, with probabilistic science, we ought to understand events as either random or spontaneous. He claims that

> If there were not God, or if there were some monadic God, we would just have described the *randomness* of created events. Since there is the Spirit as one of the Trinity we have been describing the *spontaneity* of created events. (*ibid.*, 43)

Further to this,

> If the dynamics of creation are a spontaneity, then events happen not mechanically but voluntarily…if this spontaneity is opened by the Spirit, then when we confront any actual or possible event, we confront someone's freedom. (*ibid.*)

This fits the peculiar role of the Spirit as the Future, or End, which here seems to imply that the Spirit is the one who brings about change and concludes events. Third, 'insofar as creatures are determined by the *Son's* role in the triune conversation, their being is a material determination of the moral will of God.' (*ibid.*, 45)

Finally, as to be God is to be an event, so, as we saw in the previous chapter, to be a creature is to be an event. That is to say: 'God does not create spatial objects that thereupon move through time; he creates temporal-spatial objects.' (*ibid.*, 46) As per our description of the distinction between concurrants and occurants above, it is events that can have both temporal and spatial parts, that is, can be temporal-spatial objects. As such, in his conversation, God creates events, or perhaps better, speaks them. This explains Jenson's preference for auditory terms over visual terms in metaphysics, as noted in the previous chapter. He thinks that visual terms naturally incline us toward substance metaphysics, whereas auditory terms are more useful for event-based metaphysics. (*ibid.*, 36-41) We see this in practice when he describes the Trinity not as, for instance, three suns converging in one light, but as a fugue: a thrice-repeated and modulated melody mutually composing a single performance.

VI Conclusion

We began this chapter with a discussion of Aristotelian accounts of what it is to be. This discussion focused on the qualities that any thing has, insofar as it exists, rather than insofar as it belongs to any particular category. We saw that Jenson's critique of Aristotle, though understandable, probably does not actually apply to Aristotle's project, except insofar as Aristotle considered substance to be the fundamental category of metaphysics.

However, after the critique, when Jenson comes to offer us his own fundamental ontology, what he in fact offers is a description of what it is for God to be God, and what it is for creatures to be creatures. He does not offer an account of what it is to be. Nevertheless, we can draw out some implications of his thoughts. Fundamentally, Jenson's concern is to deny that either God or creatures, but especially creatures, are substances, and instead advocate that they are events. This does not carry the implication that 'to be is to be an event'. As in Aristotle's system, there are plenty of things which have 'being', but yet are not substances, so in a Jensonian system, if not in Jenson's system, it may be that there are things which have being, but are not events. Nevertheless, what does seem clear is that Jenson would like to replace 'substance' with 'event' as the fundamental category of metaphysics. The question then becomes, could Jenson simply dispense with his critique of Aristotelian ontology?

It is quite possible that Jenson's metaphysical revision does not have an impact on the qualities of being *qua* being enumerated by Shields. The first quality is 'The attribute *being subject to the principle of non-contradiction.*' (Shields 2012, 359) Jenson has no clear objection to this, and would seem to advocate it, in that he accepts the use of logic. Second, all beings are 'categorially delineated.' (*ibid.*) Again, given Jenson's concern to supply the correct category for divine and creaturely being, there is no reason to suspect Jenson would disagree that everything is so delineated. Finally, all things are 'modally enmeshed.' (*ibid.*) Aristotle's modality is focused on the notion of act and potency, applying especially to changes that occur in and with substances, as such, Jenson likely could not accept Aristotle's view of modality. Nevertheless, Jenson does speak of things existing necessarily and contingently, so he does accept that all things are modally enmeshed in some way. The argument would proceed in this way: God exists necessarily, creatures exist contingently, all things are either God or creatures, therefore all things are modally enmeshed.

Conclusion

I have provided a critical account of Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity, and the way in which Jenson believes his doctrine of the Trinity reconstitutes metaphysics. In doing so, I have addressed gaps in scholarship on Jenson, particularly regarding his view of theological language, and his views on theological epistemology.

I have also questioned Jenson's judgment on a number of issues. I have argued that his theology would be well served by putting forward an explicit epistemology, even if such an epistemology is not necessary. I have also questioned his claim that Christians ought not to engage in theodicy. Finally, using the work of Christopher Shields, I have shown that Jenson's critique of Aristotelian metaphysics is slightly off target, that his critique of Aristotle's science of being *qua* being is in reality a narrower critique, of the category of substance. In each case, I have shown that Jenson's theology offers prospects to accommodate my critiques, and I have described a stronger position that Jenson could take on with only minor modifications to his system. Drawing on his work on the doctrine of the knowledge of God, and using Michael Huemer's 'phenomenal conservatism', I provided Jenson with an epistemology which fits within the strictures he sets on the relationship between philosophy and theology, and which aligns with the kinds of implicit epistemological claims that can be found in his work. Using Peter van Inwagen's argumentative framework, I also developed a theodicy for Jenson that draws upon Jenson's own theological claims. Finally, I suggested that although Jenson's critique of Aristotle on 'being' misses the mark, Jenson's critique is still relevant and useful when applied more narrowly to the primacy of the category of

substance. Once Jenson's critique is re-aimed from 'being' generally to 'substance' specifically, it does provide theological, even Trinitarian, reason for a reconstitution of a certain kind of realist metaphysics.

I have devoted considerable attention to addressing critiques of Jenson's work from George Hunsinger and David Bentley Hart, who question Jenson's orthodoxy, and from Oliver Crisp, who questions Jenson's coherence. Hunsinger critiques Jenson's *Systematic Theology* in a number of ways. I responded to these critiques in chapter six. I have only responded to critiques of direct relevance to this thesis: those relating to Jenson's Trinitarianism. Because of the way Jenson constructs his doctrine of the Trinity, there is little, if anything, which does not fall under the wider purview of the doctrine of the Trinity, including Christology. Nevertheless, I did not respond to Hunsinger's critiques of Jenson's Christology, although I do discuss issues relevant to these and other Christological critiques in chapter nine. The critiques I addressed were those relating to Hegel's influence on Jenson, and to accusations of more traditional heresies. I was able to respond using Jenson's work.

David Bentley Hart also critiques Jenson for his alleged Hegelianism, but his critique spreads into two broad areas. The first is that Jenson makes the existence of creation necessary for God, while the second is that Jenson's Trinitarian theology, in finding God's identity in the actual, created world, opens Jenson's work up to an unacceptable problem of evil. I devoted two chapters to addressing these issues. In chapter seven, I addressed the problem that Jenson wants to maintain that God exists as Trinity necessarily, that the God's identity as Trinity is constituted in the created world, and that the created world exists contingently. I explained the problem using ideas from

contemporary modal metaphysics, and then proposed a solution to this problem by arguing that Jenson could claim that the same event can happen in different ways. In effect, that God takes on contingent properties. This solution entails denying any version of divine simplicity that holds that God, or the divine *hypostases*, cannot have contingent properties. It also conflicts with some of Jenson's claims concerning the divine *hypostases*, which I addressed in the chapter. In chapter eight I responded to Hart's problem of evil by developing some ideas within Jenson's work into a theodicy, as described above.

Oliver Crisp argues that many of Jenson's claims regarding divine eternity and temporality conflict with one another, and are simply incoherent. In chapter nine, I defended Jenson's view of divine eternity. I answered Crisp's critiques, and then used Brian Leftow's work on 'quasi-temporal eternity' to describe what God's eternity might be like according to Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity.

When I have appealed outside of Jenson's corpus for clarification, insight, or new argumentation, my appeal has most often been to work in analytic philosophy. In part, this is simply a feature of my own interests and biases. However, it also brings out an element in Jenson's work that is often overlooked. That is, while Jenson was educated in the world of twentieth-century German Protestantism, and while he does make use of post-Kantian continental philosophy, nevertheless Jenson engages deeply and constructively with analytic, or Anglo-American, philosophy. This is clear in his early work on theological language, but also in those instances where he steps into contemporary debates in analytic philosophy and argues for a position based on his

own positive theological claims. That he does so is perhaps one of the most interesting and unique features of his thought.

Theses have already been written on Jenson's relationship to twentieth-century German Protestantism, and in this thesis I have focused on constructive engagement with analytic philosophy. Useful further research on Jenson's philosophy could concentrate on his relationship to the post-Kantian continental tradition. Jenson is considered to be much influenced by Hegel, but research on Jenson's relationship to Heidegger would perhaps be even more illuminative.

Finally, what are the metaphysical revisions necessitated by Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity? The doctrine of the Trinity itself is necessitated by God's revelation of Himself in and through history. The acts and events that reveal God do not do so by means of what I have described as 'characterization,' they do so by 'identification.' The doctrine of the Trinity is first and foremost a response to the way God acts in history. The Bible shows God's action in history in his act of creation, which must broadly include the consummation of creation. God acts in history also in the creation of Israel, and again in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In each of these stories, we are confronted with multiple divine characters, as described in chapter five. In each story, the Father initiates, the Son acts, and the Spirit completes. However, the manner of the Spirit's completion is important. The Spirit agitates and frees. The God described in these stories does not ensure past certainties, but enlivens new possibilities, initiated in the Father, but brought about by the Spirit. When the doctrine of the Trinity comes to describing the relationships between these characters, Jenson's commitment is that we cannot describe these characters in a way which

removes significance from the stories in which we find them. Jenson emphasizes metaphysical innovations which he finds in the Cappadocian Fathers, that is, the distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia*. The *hypostases* of God are those characters found in the Scriptures, whose identities are constituted by their acts in the stories of Scripture. They are distinguished from one another by the ways in which they mutually compose the action, the event, of God. They mutually compose a specific 'eternity', by their status as analogously, but truly, Past, Present and Future. This, for Jenson, has all of the consequences described in chapter nine. Finally, the only proper term for one so constituted is 'event'. To deny God's eventful composition is, for Jenson, to evacuate Trinitarian doctrine of meaning.

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Appendix: Interview with Professor Robert Jenson[1]

Robert Jenson: Oh you know, when I was at Oxford I was sort of a walking ecumenical movement. At that time, Mansfield College where I was attached was a reformed school. And it was, it was actually, it was the Congregationalist church for service to downtown Oxford. Meanwhile, I was the Lutheran chaplain to the university, so three Sundays of the year [month?] I donned black gown and tabs and was an ordained elder of the reformed church, appointed as one. Then I took over on the fourth Sunday for a mostly Lutheran service where I brought out the Eucharistic vestments and candles.

James Crocker: How did they respond to that?

RJ: They simply identified the difference between Lutherans and reformed with candles! And you know, when term wasn't on, neither of these services functioned. So then we went to St Mary the Virgin.

JC: Did you know Father Hugh Wybrew?

RJ: No I didn't.

[1] This interview was conducted at Prof. Jenson's home in Princeton, New Jersey, on 11 August 2014. The transcript has been lightly edited for clarity.

JC: Ok. I was looking through, I went to Mansfield College, and I looked through their archives for material relating to the ecumenical senior seminar that you organized there, and I found – they still have your typed up summaries of the meetings –

RJ: Oh really?

JC: So I found those and read those, and made note of who attended, you know. And I found one that said 'apologies for absence H. Wybrew', and he's a, I think he's in his eighties now. He was the vicar of Mary Mags for 10 years in the 80s I think, but he's now a member of the senior common room at Exeter. I met him there and I was wondering if there was a connection. I noticed some other people there. Dr. Caird was one of my father's lecturers when he was in seminary so that was a nice personal connection.

RJ: Well they had quite a distinguished faculty for a while. I don't know that it is anymore, but it was for a while.

JC: Yeah, I should also say, I was talking to Alan Torrance recently, he asked me to bring you his greetings. He was a professor of mine when I was an undergrad at St Andrews. One area of questions I have has to do with your approach to divine simplicity.

RJ: Oh yeah.

JC: So, I take it you're not a big fan of divine simplicity?

RJ: Well, it depends what you mean by it.

JC: Ok, that would be interesting, what do you mean by it?

RJ: In a piece I just wrote I stole a line from [D] Stephen Long, do you know him?

JC: Yes I do.

RJ: There are two Stephen Longs by the way, this isn't the Catholic, this is a Methodist. Anyway, he says that divine simplicity can be affirmed if it is not affirmed as something different than triunity.

JC: Ok

RJ: And I think that, that, that's cool. I'll go along with that.

JC: Ok, that's interesting, because one of the questions I had following from that is around your understanding of dogma. So in the beginning of your, the first volume of your Systematic Theology you lay out a concept of dogma which is something along the lines of the idea that dogma is a doctrine that the church affirms in such a way that if it gets it wrong, the church ceases to exist from that moment on. And it occurred to me as I was reading that that divine simplicity has been affirmed as dogma by the Roman Catholic church.

RJ: Yeah it has. However, unilaterally.

JC: Ok, yeah.

RJ: There's a problem you see, with the claim of the Roman Catholic church to define ecumenical dogma!

JC: I agree with that. What I was more thinking about was that in volume two of your Systematic Theology you take a lot of time and effort to attempt to create what I would call mediating positions which show for a protestant or reformed world the cogency of things like papal primacy or the sacrifice of the mass, so it seems like you've done a lot of work to overcome certain kinds of boundaries in ecumenical dialogue, and I thought, well, if the Roman Catholic church has already put forward this dogma which you think is wrong, then it seems like…

RJ: Well see, I wouldn't want to say that it was wrong. If they don't understand it, and many theologians don't, as opposed somehow to triunity. As if it's something else. God is on the one hand triune, and on the other hand simple.

JC: Ok

RJ: The two are two different ways of saying the same thing.

JC: Ok, So simplicity is just a way of talking about the unity of the three persons of God?

RJ: Well, look, God doesn't have any bits and pieces.

JC: Yeah, ok. Could you say more about that?

RJ: Well. Is there such a thing as a divine nature? If there is, what it means is, that it is unlike us. Look, you and I can lose different pieces of humanity and still remain more or less what we were. God doesn't have any bits and pieces to lose. Now if that's what's meant by simplicity, I have no problem.

JC: Ok. So, how does this relate to a Thomist idea of the relation between act and potency, you know, the classical thomist description of divine simplicity, I would take it, is that God is pure act. That he has no potency. This sounds quite similar to what you're talking about.

RJ: I rather like Thomas. If I had to name my favourite theologian it would be Thomas Aquinas. I once told my Dominican buddies that if I were ever to join a Roman Catholic order I'd join them. Which I have no intention of doing by the way. In fact, in college when I encountered the doctrine of the double composition of creatures. Where the, the Thomist doctrine, that if you know what a creature is, you don't necessarily know whether it is and vice versa. Where if we could know, which we don't, if we could know the divine nature, what God is, we just thereby know that he is. That was one of the things that turned me on to theology in the first place. That

sort of simplicity, look, the thing about Simplicity is, one doesn't want to handle it as if it were a clear simple notion. It works different ways in different contexts. Where it causes trouble is if it is sort of erected into an axiom as if it were cogent in all contexts, worked the same way in all contexts. Do you know Steve Holmes?

JC: Yes, he was one of my lecturers when I was an undergraduate.

RJ: I think he has a very crude notion of divine simplicity, he uses it like an axe.

JC: That's true.

RJ: That's what mustn't happen.

JC: Ok, alright. Well that leads to my next question which is still about simplicity, and it's specifically about divine simplicity and theological language. So I spent a lot of time over the last few months with your early book *Knowledge of Things Hoped For*. Which is fascinating I think, and specifically, the criticisms of Thomas Aquinas' understanding of language…

RJ: I would like to retract some of them.

JC: Sorry? You would like to retract some of them? I was wondering about that. That's what I was getting to.

RJ: I mean, what I said was just overblown. I think it's a pretty good book by the way!

JC: I do, I like it.

RJ: But, the attack on the analogy principle for example, was just overblown.

JC: Ok, so one of your, you called it the philosophical criticism of analogy as opposed to the theological criticism, the philosophical criticism you said, boils down to the claim was that you can't mean more than you can say. Is that something that you wouldn't agree with anymore?

RJ: Yeah

JC: Really? Ok.

RJ: I wouldn't agree with it.

JC: Ok, that's interesting. And then the theological criticism was that analogy boils down to some sort of, you called it 'epistemological works righteousness'.

RJ: I don't even know what I meant by that.

JC: Well, I've been struggling with what you meant by that as well actually. I can tell you what I've been trying to figure out and see if it sounds something along the lines of what you meant. So, in many of your books, you outline this idea of, that there is a sort of, what you might call, something like an existential analysis of human life. So

human life, insofar as it is human, is always lived in time, in such a way as always to attempt to make some kind of coherence between the past and some sort of anticipated future. Works righteousness comes from thinking that we are able to do this work of bringing the past and future together in the relevant way. So it struck me that epistemological works righteousness could mean, the God you are aiming to describe, is just the God of some sort of culture religion, and insofar as you aim to describe it to fulfil this quest of your life this principle of analogy ends up being works righteousness. That's a very rough way, but I don't know if that would get at anything like what you were thinking.

RJ: Well look. I have a very ambivalent use of the term religion. Most of the time I mean by it what Schleiermacher did. And I think that's useful. There is a need we try to fill and we don't have much choice in the matter. On the other hand, it's we that are trying to do it. This sounds very Barthian by the way.

JC: Yeah.

RJ: So the key to religion as you will find in Schleiermacher also by the way, in Jonathan Edwards, in Barth once he got his act together, is necessary, and I pursue it myself in various contexts.

JC: Yeah.

RJ: Does that help any?

JC: Yeah, so would you see yourself as standing in, sort of, a line with Schleiermacher?

RJ: Well, we all do, stand in some sort of a line with Schleiemacher.

JC: Specifically, in the beginning of your Systematic Theology, it seems like you are criticising him quite a bit, in what you call the epistemologically pretentious prolegomena of modern systems. But I was talking to my supervisor about this, Johannes Zachhuber, and he, when I gave him some of my research on the relationship between natural theology and general revelation in your systematic theology, he seemed to think was pretty much the same as what Schleiermacher was doing. So Schleiermacher's also criticising the idea that you can start with extra Christian…

RJ: Well Schleiermacher says that on the one hand that we're all religious. On the other hand, that there's no such thing as the natural religion. There's a need, which is filled by the positive religions, but there's no, sort of, general essence of religion. Now that seems to me to be pretty close to right.

JC: Well, ok. But if you describe religion as a certain kind of quest, to rhyme past and future as you put it, isn't that a general essence, as you put it?

RJ: No, not necessarily. I can be aware that I like something without being able to say what it is.

JC: Ok, so

RJ: So, look, I'm pretty Barthian at this point. And Schleiermachian. By the way, do you know Bruce McCormack's stuff.

JC: Some of it.

RJ: The book about Barth, the first volume of his…

JC: Yeah, I think I've read bits and pieces.

RJ: On the one hand, the human quest for eternity is unavoidable, but that is to say that we are fallen. If we were not fallen creatures, we wouldn't have to quest, we'd just be there. And since it's a phenomenon of our fallen state, much of what's meant by the word sin, is how religious we are. Does that hang together at all?

JC: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I think I'm broadly in agreement with you, I'm just trying to draw out some ideas. Ok, so, do you mind if we move on to another topic. In your systematic theology and in other works, you talk about event as the primary ontological category. So we should understand God primarily as an event, and from this we should also understand the world as an event, as you say, if we adopt the sort of, the world is a history rather than a…God creates a history rather than a world.

RJ: God doesn't create a thing he creates a history.

JC: Yeah exactly. Which I also found a very similar statement in one of Pannenberg's early works. His book on revelation which he wrote with a few other…

RJ: Well that's no accident.

JC: Yes.

RJ: You know the history with Pannenberg?

JC: I've read your short theological autobiography where you talked about that you took a lecture series from him when you first arrived in Heidelberg.

RJ: It was his first lecture series.

JC: Yeah.

RJ: His first lecturing as a *privatdozent*. An unpaid lecturer. And my first lectures that I heard in Heidelberg, they were the same.

JC: And it seems like you've been corresponding throughout most of your career.

RJ: Yeah.

JC: Which is, which seems to have been fruitful, definitely, because his writing, I think is great. And there are a lot of similarities between his thought and yours. In a review

of his systematic theology, you felt like there was, that you had thought you'd been engaged in the same project theologically as Pannenberg, but that actually, you, after reading possibility the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, you thought that you were actually doing something different, and I wonder if you could talk about that difference.

RJ: It revolves around his concept that he introduces of anticipation. I though that he meant by that an ontologically significant concept. It turns out he means it only epistemologically. We anticipate the end, but we are not determined by the end.

JC: Except insofar as we anticipate the end.

RJ: Yeah.

JC: So you're talking about an ontological idea of anticipation.

RJ: Yeah, I want to make freedom as determinative of the reality of God as…the Spirit, is God's freedom for himself. And I want that to be as determinative as the relationships of origin. Now, so does Pannenberg by the way. He wants those relationships of goal also to be determinative for God. But, maybe it's harder to put ones finger on the difference than I thought it was when I wrote that review. But I think there is a difference.

JC: Ok. So you know there has been a, somebody wrote a doctoral thesis on the relationship between your understanding of time and Pannenberg's understanding of

time. I think it was either at the University of Edinburgh or at King's college London. I don't know if you heard from these people. There was also a doctorate written on time in your thought connecting it with time in Karl Barth's thought.

RJ: Oh really?

JC: One was 2006, one was 2007 I think.

RJ: Who were the authors?

JC: I've forgotten, but I can look it up and send you an email if you're interested.

RJ: I may even have read them and forgotten. Do you know the Douglas Knight stuff?

JC: I don't think so.

RJ: He has a book published with Eerdmann's, it's title I've forgotten. [*The Eschatological Economy*] But it's a remarkable thing. I recommend it.

JC: Ok

RJ: For a theological line that coheres with mine just amazingly. Even though he uses entirely different language. At the conference that was held on the theology of hope awhile back at Aberdeen, I gave a paper, but before I had given that paper, Doug

Knight gave a paper, on me. I said he was saying what I had said. Of course when he was through, everyone looked at me and said 'well, was he right?' And I said, 'Well, it's more like this. That if I'd been smart enough I would have said what he said I said.'

JC: Ok, so, if we can return to thinking of the primary ontological category as event. I was curious when I was reading this. Are you thinking that there is only one kind of thing, and that kind is event, or that there are many ontological categories, and the primary category is event, but there could be others.

RJ: Well, in the systematic theology I go on to [incomprehensible] to even music.

JC: So these are kinds of things that would be subcategories of event?

RJ: Well more like a chain. More like a chain than like genus and species.

JC: Ok, so you were talking about Douglas Knight using different language than you, have you heard of the analytic theology movement, which is involves a lot by people like Oliver Crisp, Alan Torrance is involved in it now, which attempts to take the methods, and some of the conclusions, so far as there are conclusions, of analytic metaphysics and apply it to theology.

RJ: No, well I had a run in with Oliver Crisp.

JC: Yeah, that's right, his article on, yeah, I read that article. What did you think of it?

RJ: Well I once spent a lot of time with analytic philosophy. And I don't regret it. It's like other philosophy however, you don't want to take it first and build theology on it. See, people talk as if, the proper procedure was, there's an array of philosophies out there, an array of ontologies, anti-ontologies, and the problem is to find the right want to build a theology on. That's exactly ass-backwards, sorry for the vulgarity.

JC: That's fine.

RJ: You try to think your way through the Gospel, letting the metaphysical chips fall where they may. In the process however, they make a heap. They amount to something. They add up to something like a Christian philosophy. It won't be because you started out to make a Christian philosophy either. It will be because you started out trying to understand the Gospel.

JC: There's an article by Nicholas Wolterstorff about the contributions of Alvin Plantinga to philosophy and to Christianity. And in the end of it he says that contemporary analytic philosophy has found itself is without a clear criterion for distinguishing what kinds of claims get to be rational, and without a clear criterion outlining what kind of claims get to be meaningful. So when everything has to be done piece by piece, and the situation ends up being one of faith seeking understanding for everyone, that everybody starts with a certain set of beliefs or a story, and they work on that. And they can talk to each other, sort of assuming, you know, granting certain presuppositions or not granting them but at the end of the day, everyone is doing exactly this faith seeking understanding model that has been the model for theology. And Wolterstorff seems to think that this has become the

situation for at least analytical philosophy as well, so there's a nice coherence there. I've actually been using Wolterstorff's description as a way to approach the kind of interdisciplinarity I find in your work. I don't know, would you think that's appropriate?

RJ: I'm a little suspicious of Wolterstorff actually.

JC: Ok

RJ: Just for my part, he's very good, please don't misunderstand me. But he is somewhat given I think, to assuming as self-evident truths, things which aren't self-evident. I remember once, at a conference, it was at St Andrews I think, where he said that colours were atomic facts, so that red, just as red, was a given. To which I responded, if it was just red, as a given, the whole perceptual field would be red, would be one thing. Now that's a philosopher's argument.

JC: Yeah.

RJ: I am disinclined to accept the distinction between theologians and philosophers.

JC: That's actually something I find very attractive in your work

RJ: I, look I think most of the time, not all of the time, but most of the time, and this is in *Church Dogmatics*, not all the time, the way Barth proceeds is, to treat, you know, Heidegger, or Sartre, or whomever, as somebody that's engaged in doing the

same thing he's doing, only they're not doing it very well because they don't know about Jesus. That's sort of how I would like to go at them I think. My favourite of the Fathers on this matter is Clement of Alexandria, against the Greeks, he starts off spending half his book berating them for worshiping the the creature instead of the Creator, but then suddenly he comes to a screeching halt and says, 'On the other hand, there are some among you with whom we can talk, there is Plato…' and then he quotes a passage from Plato, and spends the rest of the time of the book in an interesting discussion with Plato. And that's the way to go. Where you agree you agree, where you disagree, disagree.

JC: So it's not so much interdisciplinarity as realizing that there is one big conversation going on.

RJ: There are no disciplines to be interdisciplinary.

JC: Exactly, the boundaries are fuzzy.

RJ: Yeah

JC: It's something you talk about in your essay 'You Wonder Where the Body Went' which is a very fun, I think, piece of writing. So as a general question, is there anything that you think is most misunderstood about your theology, about your thought?

RJ: Yeah. I have been trying for decades to dismantle the relationship between time and eternity, which conceives of them as contradictories. And to replace it with a different understanding. And all that happens somehow, is that people read that, assume without thinking about it that of course the relationship between time and eternity is as the tradition has presented it, and have resulted in all kinds of preposterous contradictions out of me. Have you read the piece, from the providence conference, which came out of the conference at Providence College?

JC: I'm not sure.

RJ: Edited by White and Keating.

JC: It doesn't sound familiar.

RJ: It was a conference on providence, and Tom Weinandy, he sort of snuck a piece into the book that he hadn't delivered at the conference, which was simply an attack on me. They asked me to reply in the book, so I did, and if you want to know in three pages what I think about my critics, that's the place to read.

JC: Ok, I'll look it up.

RJ: Or, [points to book to hand to him] in shorter compass, this piece. This piece right here. [Jenson 2015]

JC: Ok

RJ: Another thing that's misunderstood. Obviously I spent a lot of time with Barth. I wrote a dissertation on Barth, I've written another book about him, but I am not a Barthian. And people regularly, especially Thomas Joseph White, he's one of the editors, I said White and Keating, he's the White. He attributes all of what he takes to be Barth's errors to me.

JC: So what would you say are your primary, the things that distinguish you from Barth.

RJ: Well for one, the doctrine of election is not the centre of my theology.

JC: It has a very limited role.

RJ: It has a very limited role to play in the systematic theology.

JC: Although there is a piece you wrote on Luther's *Bondage of the Will*

RJ: *De Servo Arbitrio*

JC: Yeah, which is very interesting because it doesn't sound like a lot of the other things you've written. It almost comes from a different perspective. It sounds, very, I suppose you'd say compatibilist, in terms of its understanding of free will.

RJ: I think it'd be easy to misunderstand that piece. Take another look at it. A while back you asked me about spending a lot of time trying to mitigate the difference between Catholicism…

JC: Yes, exactly.

RJ: Well, there is only one significant ecumenical divide, and that's between the Roman Catholic Church and everybody else. You know, Methodists and Lutherans, commune, intercommune without a lot of difficulty. The Episcopal Church in this country, in this country pretty much everybody accepts other protestants. Although when I was teaching there [Oxford] I asked for permission to commune at some of the Episcopal churches, church of England, CofE churches there, and they said no, so it's within my life time it's moved, but anyway. The great ecumenical divide is between the Roman Catholic church and the rest.

JC: So do you see the Eastern Orthodox churches and the reformed churches…

RJ: Between the East and the West the situation is different. To the East everyone in the West is the same thing, we're all Latins. And very wicked. I was a guest once at a conference, a theological conference in Moscow. It was billed as ecumenical. Now why was ecumenical? Because they had invited some Greeks! Anyway, When I gave my paper, and I thought it was my job, I was there as a protestant, particularly as a Lutheran, to try to say something that bridged between Lutheran theology and Orthodox theology. So in this instance I talked about Luther on deification. Which there is a great body of evidence to use. Mannermaa and those guys.

JC: Yeah.

RJ: The only response I got was from the Metropolitan of Kiev who was not separated from them at that point. Who said, 'Why do you bother with these moderns when we have the Fathers?' Meaning among the moderns Martin Luther. That's a different kettle of fish. Now, there was a time when I said if you took Avery Dulles and me, I told a couple students this, I remember doing it, and locked us up in a room and gave us any of the issues dividing the Roman Catholic church from the rest, we could settle it. That's how optimistic I once was about the ecumenical, about the ecumenical possibilities. Well, when it comes to the classical divides, that was true, and in fact, they are settled in one or other document. In the meantime however, new barriers are brought up. The Lutherans have started ordaining women. It will be a cold day, when Rome does that. So, I've spent ten years in the international dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics and I finally got thrown off the drafting commission for too many concessions to the Catholics.

JC: You have a book, the *Unbaptized God*, where you talk about a lot of ecumenical discussions, and about how they really have been resolved and then other issues have popped up, and you attribute this to having an inappropriate concept of God, one that hasn't been…

RJ: Unbaptized.

JC: Exactly, unbaptized. Is this still your view on…

RJ: Yeah

JC: I thought it would be, figured I should check.

RJ: There was to have been a second volume of that, on East and West, but, I ran out of gas.

JC: Ok. You talk a little bit about the Eastern churches.

RJ: Yes. That was the fruit of a remarkable period in our family life. We lived in the attic of [incomprehensible] ecumenique in Strasbourg, and we had unlimited access to their unique archive. We had a table set up in their library. We had no kitchen. So Blanche and I sat, each at our side of the table, reading our way through ecumenical documents, and reading our way through secondary literature, and then we went out to eat in a restaurant every night.

JC: Sounds like a good…

RJ: In one of the greatest places for food in the world.

JC: Sounds like a very good time, how long was that?

RJ: Well we were in the place for just short of a year.

JC: Was that during a time of sabbatical?

RJ: Yeah. And that book is mostly the fruit of the time there, most of the research was done there. See the two of use were doing nothing but reading that stuff.

JC: Yeah. Ok, so we've talked a bit about your, the things that are misunderstood in your theology, and the things that critics get wrong, I was wondering if you have somebody who you think is your most perceptive critic.

RJ: Most perceptive? Probably Molnar. I mean I think he's dead wrong you understand. Now a friendly critic, Molnar's not a friendly critic, a friendly critic would be Joe Mangina.

JC: Ok, I don't think I've read any of his stuff.

RJ: That's because he hasn't published.

JC: Oh, is he here [Princeton]?

RJ: No he's at Wycliffe, in Toronto.

JC: Oh, I was going to say. If he's at Wycliffe in Oxford that makes things easy for me.

RJ: But he was the one who [incomprehensible] me at that conference of the Barth society.

JC: So I've been wondering, on a separate note. You come across in your theology. I suppose you could almost say as anti-paradox. George Hunsinger wrote a 40 page review article of your Systematic Theology, which I gathered you didn't think much of. But in it, he says, he narrows down some of the problems in your thought to you being a rationalist who's against paradox. And it seems to me that he's not completely wrong. He's wrong that, I think he's wrong that being against paradox, that being in favour of reason is a problem, but it seems that he's a little bit right to say that you don't make much of paradox in your writing, you don't use it.

RJ: No.

JC: Some people might see that and say that you're background as a Lutheran, Luther was, you know, a theologian of paradox, and you have that same vein in Kierkegaard.

RJ: Kierkegaard, maybe this is where some of my distrust for paradox comes from. I grew up in the Middle West, going to a Lutheran college, and then to a Lutheran seminary. And particularly growing up, going to the college I did, which was founded by pastors who were, the whole lot of them were Kierkegaard scholars. Being hip, theology, meant being a disciple of Kierkegaard in that whole faculty.

JC: Yeah, still does.

RJ: Well I broke my leg in an automobile accident, and spent off and on probably a year and a half in hospital, in traction so I couldn't do much beside reading. I read my way through the three critiques [Kant], and practically the entirety of Kierkegaard.

JC: That's a lot of reading, even for a year and a half.

RJ: Yep, but I couldn't do anything else. And having done that I gave up on Kierkegaard. He'll drive you crazy. I decided I prefer Kant.

JC: Kant isn't without his paradoxes.

RJ: No, look. I'm suspicious, or I don't know where I just read this. I've been rereading my own books. I have to do that from time to time to remind myself of what I think. I came across the following remark. 'People say, "well that is a paradox".' And I respond 'oh yeah it is, but how do you mean the paradox. It doesn't help any simply to repeat, "that's a paradox."' Too much of the time, we use paradox as a category. 'Oh it's a paradox'. And simply refuse to think about the paradox.

JC: So do you think in principle all paradoxes could be resolved.

RJ: In principal yes. In God there are no paradoxes. As Thomas Aquinas says, from God's point of view there are no miracles. It's just that we can't occupy that point of view.

JC: Yeah.

RJ: From God's point of view there are no paradoxes, there is only freedom. But we don't occupy that point of view, so we're stuck with paradoxes. The point is to try to understand them, not just to sit with them and say 'oh it's a paradox.'

JC: I completely agree and I'm very happy to hear you say that. I always take a paradox to be a sign that, if you come across a paradox it's a symptom that something has gone wrong in your thinking.

RJ: Yeah, I think so too.

JC: So they can be very helpful, they are.

RJ: Well, the impassible suffered. Is that a paradox? Well yes, but we can think about that paradox.

JC: Do you think that God is impassible?

RJ: I think that the famous statement from Origen, *ipse pater non es impassiblis*… even the father is not impassible. With the double negative! He's right on. Or, Cyril's 'God suffers insufferably'. Now that comes out wrong in English, in Greek *apathos pathoi*. The ruling verb of the sentence says that God suffers. The Son that is. But then there's an adverb. It's an adverb mind you, it's not a conjoined verb, it's an adverb. It modifies the whole sentence. He does not suffer the fact that he suffers. He suffers, that's true, and that's the main proposition. But he doesn't do it in such

fashion, as to suffer the fact that he suffers. You could take my whole discourse about the impassibility and passibility, and unpack that from it.

JC: Yeah, just you…

RJ: Or, Origen's notion of a divine way. His exegesis of the allegory of the abandoned Jerusalem, laying bloody by the road. The lord comes along, and finds this infant, picks it up and binds its wounds and so forth. Says Origen, that's clearly a suffering on Jesus part, that's *pathos*. On the other hand, he's impassibily committed to this sort of suffering. You've got to play with this stuff.

JC: Yeah, that actually sounds a lot like the way you…

RJ: Whenever somebody comes along with a concept, simplicity, impassibility, or possibility, and wields it like an axe. You know something's wrong. Being cute sometimes you know, I say, of course God is omniscient. He knows everything, that doesn't prove how he finds it out. Maybe he consults our prayers.

JC: To move to a completely separate realm of discussion.

RJ: Ok

JC: Just briefly, in the chapter on being in the first volume of your *Systematic Theology*, you describe being as a quality. And I was just wondering if you could elucidate that?

RJ: Pardon? I'm sorry

JC: You describe being as a quality.

RJ: Well that's the Greek view of the matter, not mine

JC: Well, I'm thinking a lot of contemporary metaphysics since Frege and Russell has tended to move away from the view that being is a quality that things have because it causes certain philosophical problems, and so they've thought of it as a second order property, or they've thought of it in terms of sets, so to say that a horse exists is to say that there is a set whose members are described by these specific characteristics and to say that it exists is to say that that set is not identical with the empty set.

RJ: Yeah ok, your ontology is controlled by what you have to quantify over.

JC: So do you have a principled objection to that way of doing things, or are you just adopting the Greek way of thinking about ontology and not really worrying about this sort of 20th century move?

RJ: Well look, where I talk about being as a quality I'm describing something I'm attacking! There you've got off on the wrong foot.

JC: Ok, so when I read it, it sounded like, or it seemed to me that you were saying that being is still a quality, but it's not the quality people have thought it is. So to be doesn't mean to be changeless or to be a substance.

RJ: Well in that sense…

JC: But it means to be an event, but it's still a quality that things have.

RJ: In that sense, ok I see what you mean. Does to be mean to persist, or does it mean to anticipate. I set things up like that all the time. If that's what you mean by handling being as a quality, I wouldn't think of that as a quality, but rather as a predicate, which is not necessarily a quality.

JC: Yeah. So in that sense, your discussion of being would just be…

RJ: Commonsensical.

JC: …at right angles to any discussion, so you could be a 'Jensonian' in your theology, and you could accept the Frege/Russell stuff, or you could not accept it and it doesn't really make any difference.

RJ: Yeah

JC: Ok. So you're more concerned with it as a predicate than as a property say.

RJ: Yeah

JC: That's helpful to me at least, as a clarification. Well I think that's all the questions I have for the moment. Is there anything else you sort of, would like to say, I suppose?

RJ: Steve Wright, quotes me as saying something that I can't remember saying, but I believe him. That in some ways the essay form is where my theology comes off best. And I think that's probably true. George Lindbeck, who you, you know who that is?

JC: Yes.

RJ: At a meeting once said, the meeting was about my *Systematic Theology*, and he said 'Well, I'm going to be offensive. I've always said that if anyone could produce a *Systematic Theology* it'd be Jenson, he hasn't done it yet.' I was offended at the time, but I think I know what he meant. I really do like to take a question and just sort of take a run at it, see what happens. I remember when I was writing the *Systematic Theology* I would sometimes call out to Blanche, 'Hey Blanche, listen to this! That'll blow everybody's mind!' Which of course, isn't a very charitable thing to say, but, in dealing with my stuff, you want to remember that about me. I'm not deducing very strictly. I'm taking problems one at a time and trying to deal with them.

JC: I think that's what makes reading your writing fun, the way you address problems, but also I suppose the desire to blow people's minds, and to be controversial. I think is it is quite fun, I think. So, I mean it's one of the reasons I'm writing my thesis.

RJ: Good.