Wittgenstein, Language, and the Trinity

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Abstract: Theistic religions differ in their conceptions of the nature of God. One philosophical-theological position, the Christian Trinity, stands out as unique amongst theistic religions. If such a position were demonstrated, it would significantly narrow the philosophical-theological gap in discussions of God's nature. I proposed that such an argument in favor of the Christian Trinity can be found in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. It is argued that language is an essentially social phenomenon and that God is a language user requiring God to be an essentially social being. As a result, either polytheism or the Christian Trinity is true. I argue that this divine social nature is best explained by the Christian Trinity.

Keywords: Theism, God, Trinity, Polytheism, Language, Wittgenstein

The doctrine of the Trinity is arguably the central doctrine of Christian theology. Not only does this doctrine's influence spread throughout issues such as the nature of God, the Incarnation, and soteriology but it also makes Christianity unique from other religions. No other religion conceives of God as one being composed of multiple persons, and this contention remains contentious in both religious and philosophical circles. As a result, one is faced with a pertinent question concerning the nature of God and which religion is correct. Can an argument in favor of the Trinity and the Christian conception of God be asserted? I proposed that such an argument can be found in the philosophy of language, specifically that of Ludwig Wittgenstein. One of Wittgenstein's most prominent arguments concerning language is that language is by nature a social phenomenon. If language is a social phenomenon by nature, then such a conclusion would have great ramifications on one's notion of God, who arguably is a language user. I propose that if Wittgenstein is correct, then God must necessarily be a social being due to his possession and use of language. If God is necessarily a social being, then either polytheism is true or God is a being comprised of multiple persons. I contend that polytheism is not rationally warranted; therefore, God must be a being composed

of multiple persons, a concept that can only be found in the doctrine of the Trinity. As a result, Christianity has the correct understanding of God.

Wittgenstein and Language

The idea that language is a social phenomenon by nature goes back to the latter works of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein lays out a new way of looking at language that takes significant departures from his earlier work the *Tractatus.* Wittgenstein argues that languages have rules: a kind of natural law that governs use. These rules have various roles in the language game: they may be an aid in teaching the game, an instrument in the game itself, or they may not be employed in the game or even written down. The rules of language are learned by watching others play. They are read off the players helping distinguish between correct and incorrect play. For Wittgenstein, obeying a rule is a practice. It is not something that people think they do; otherwise, thinking that one obeys a rule would be tantamount to actually obeying a rule (Wittgenstein 1986, I.24, I.202).

From these insights, Wittgenstein makes a crucial claim about language: rule following in the language game is not private in nature. As a result, Wittgenstein rejects the idea of a private language. Language, he says, is public: a social phenomenon by nature. Wittgenstein develops the argument in this fashion. He asks if a person can record the sounds of his own private feelings for his own private use (not simply speaking to one's self). If so, such a record is known only to him and to no one else. Philosophers tend to think that this is possible due to the notion that sensations, like pain, are private. They cannot be experienced and therefore known by anyone else other than the person who has them. Wittgenstein, however, rejects this notion. It makes no sense, he claims, to say that a person knows that he is in pain. He has pain or is in pain, but he does not know that he has pain nor does he learn that he has pain. Other people, however, can know that a person has pain or any other specific sensation to which words are ascribed because of the public use of language and its rules (Wittgenstein 1986, I.243–46; Cook 1990, 457–62). One's sensations, therefore, are not private after all. They may be known by others via language making language a social phenomenon as well.

As Anthony Kenny states, Wittgenstein's argument against private language was to refute the kind of empiricist skepticism which argued that all people can really know are their own inner experiences, not the world as it actually is. Wittgenstein is asking if someone can imagine a private language of vocalizations and markings about private sensations that only that person and no one else can

understand. The answer depends on what one means by the word "private" Kenny contends. The word "private" is either to know something that no one else knows (incommunicable) or to have something that no one else can have (inalienable). Is pain incommunicable or inalienable? According to Kenny, Wittgenstein says no to the first and finds the second unimportant. Wittgenstein rejects that others cannot know that someone is in pain. One can know that people are in pain in an ordinary sense of the word "know." If one means the lack of doubt, then there is nothing to know since knowledge exists only where doubt is possible. It is senseless, however, to talk of doubting one's pain; therefore, it must be senseless to talk of knowing one's pain. Pains are possessed, not known. Are pains inalienable? A person's pains are the ones to which he does or can give expression and not necessarily the ones someone else feels since they could feel pain in someone else's body. It is natural, however, for people to state that they have the same pain if they have the same experience in the same part of the body; otherwise, one would have to say that there are two pains within two possessors or two sneezes within two possessors, which seems absurd. There are not two different kinds of pain at play just as there are not two different kinds of sneezes. There is nothing especially occult about these experiences, so the claim to privacy is tenuous. These experiences are inalienable but not in any special way and not any more private than behavior (Kenny 2006, 142–52). One need not worry about the inalienability of pain.

Wittgenstein constructs several scenarios to buttress his point. Imagine a diary where a person records the sign *S* for a particular sensation of which he wishes to keep track. Wittgenstein argues that this person cannot give a definition of the sign. One would think that he can just point to his sensation as a means of defining the sign, but Wittgenstein argues this move will not work. One's inward reflection does not serve to give a definition because one must remember correctly and be justified in his belief. If he cannot remember correctly or provide justification for his memory, then whatever definition is correct is what seems right to the individual at the time. Since there is no way of providing justification for the memory, then there is no objective standard by which to measure the correctness of the person's memory and the correct use of the symbol *S*. Wittgenstein provides a further example of a table of numbers in their mind, like a table listing times for train departures. A dictionary can be used to help this person understand the terms, but he cannot be justified in the use of those terms unless those terms along with their meaning and use come from an objective source. Again, memory is unacceptable here because it could be incorrect and can neither confirm nor justify any previous memory one had. The person must look to an outward source, like

the newspaper, to confirm his memory. Looking up the table in his memory does not confirm the table (Wittgenstein 1986, I.258 and 265).

Wittgenstein is arguing that one cannot correctly connect a symbol with a sensation in a completely private manner known only to the individual. One assumes the ability to remember correctly, but there is no objective criterion of correctness so that no one cannot talk about what is right in such a situation. There is no way to know if a person really means what he says. Remembering the connection between sign and sensation does not mean always identifying the sensation correctly. Attaching meaning to a name does not imply acquiring infallibility in its use. If one asks the speaker what he means by "S," there are three possible responses. He could say "I mean this" and gesture to his sensation. This move, however, is not a genuine proposition capable of being true or false. What gives the proposition its content is the same as what gives it its truth; therefore, whatever seems right is right. If he refers to something in the past, then he must bring up the correct memory. If he can be incorrect in his memory, then *S* means whatever memory occurs to him, so whatever seems right is right. He cannot really justify what he means by his memory. Lastly, he could connect his sensation with a public phenomenon, but he could consistently misremember the sensation and the public phenomena to which it is connected. Again, what is right is what seems right. What gives an expression its content (the person) cannot be the measure of its truth. A measure of correctness must be independent of what is measured; therefore, there can be no private language because there is no independent measure of what private words mean (Kenny 2006, 143–55; Craig 2001, 127–43; Kripke 1982).

Mere mental association alone is not enough to establish a name of an object for naming out sensations requires one to already have a notion of sensation and thus use language. It is about remembering the meaning of a sign, not making sure I call every instance of *S* "S" in the future. For something like this remembering to be right, the source of its rightness or truth must be different from the source of its meaning. Wittgenstein emphasizes that ostensive definition can only take place under certain circumstances, which a private language does not fulfill. One already possesses language and meaning in order to even do ostensive definition; therefore, ostensive definition is not possible in a private language. In a private language, one must establish a technique in ostensive definition, but one cannot do this without collapsing the meaning-truth distinction and destroying the possibility for making correct judgments. The source of rightness cannot be separated from the source of meaning leading to a vicious circle. How can memory establish the truth of meaning when the very thing that independently established

the memory is now gone? One has no access to what justifies the memory. In fact, there may be nothing determinate to justify the memory. By relying on memory for justification, one is supposing what needs to be established: that there was some independent correlation to be established. This independent correlation, however, is exactly what the memory was supposed to prove. One simply does not know if there was such an establishment. The memory is being used to confirm itself, which is not valid (Candlish 1980, 86–92).

A final argument Wittgenstein uses to buttress his claim is his beetle-in-a-box example. Suppose that everyone had a box into which only the individual can look. Everyone states that they have an object called a "beetle" in their box. Everyone says that they know what a "beetle" is, but everyone could have something different in his box. They might even have nothing in the box. As a result, the name "beetle" has no place in the language game and cannot name something because there is no means of objectively determining what the word "beetle" refers to and who has met the requirement for correct use (Wittgenstein 1986, I.293). Wittgenstein is demonstrating that experiences and sensations cannot be private. If they really were private, no one could talk about their experiences and sensations and they would have no place in the language game becoming irrelevant. Since people do talk about experiences and sensations, such experiences and sensations are not private and are subject to public discourse, not private language (Cook 2001, 472–73).

A Counterfactual Argument

Tyler Burge has developed a counterfactual argument against the possibility of a private language. Burge provides the following thought experiment. Imagine a person who suffers from arthritis in his joints, and he applies the word "arthritis" to this pain with all the normal understandings, concepts, and attitudes developed in life that go along with this word. Now imagine that this person develops pain in his thigh and reports to his doctor that he has arthritis in his thigh. Surely, he is incorrect Burge states since arthritis occurs only in joints, and this error will be pointed out to him. One can also imagine, however, a counterfactual situation where the individual possesses the same physical and non-intentional mental history in the previous illustration yet he comes to use the word "arthritis" to refer to pain in the thigh, and his use of the word is acceptable by the community. His misuse is now standard grammar so that when he states that he has arthritis in his thigh he cannot be charged with falsehood or error. Burge claims that there is a change in the attitudes and mental contents of the individual between the

counterfactual situations, and the only way to account for the difference in the meaning of "arthritis" is to look outside the individual to his social environment. One cannot look at the physical history of the individual since it is the same in both situations (Burge 1979, 77–79).

Burge concludes that language is social in nature since meaning and use is ultimately determined by the community. Misuse of words is common, Burge states, and those misuses can become common usage. Burge's argument, however, does not rely on misunderstandings of definitions. In the counterfactual situation, the definition is different because the social use is different and accepted as conveying correct information. Burge contends that propositional attitudes, even those affected by incomplete understanding, depend for their content on social factors independent of the individual. If the social environment had been different, then the content of those attitudes would have been different. Social differences affect the content of the subject's attitude and infect mental phenomena Burge claims (Burge 1979, 80–87).

Burge also contends that language must be social by nature in that interaction with another person is psychologically necessary to learn language. One cannot learn language alone. Further, language is social in that it is shared by a specific social group. When studying language, one assumes that there is common ground among many speakers rather than focusing on the individual or small group. Researchers look at how the language or word has been historically used, which suggests that social patterns have a key role in language.[1] Burge argues that language and thought are affected by the environment in which one lives since people process information that comes from their environment and the properties it possesses. As a result, thought supervenes and depends on both the nature and history of our body as well as the environment in which one resides (Burge 1989, 175–81). People use words to explain their environment, but they can be mistaken in the meaning that they attach to such words. People can discover counterexamples that lead them to refine the meaning of their words, and this circumstance often comes via other people who point out such examples or who

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[1]Burge further contends that one cannot deny that individuals do not share the same vocabulary and meaning within languages probably due to the connection between language and belief-experience-psychological structures. Since these things are varying, the words that comprise those beliefs will also vary in meaning to some degree. It is probable, therefore, that no two individuals speak exactly the same language. Burge, however, believes that while it is correct to speak of a universal grammar, this study of universal grammar requires the idealizations of an individual with universal language structures and linguistic abilities detached from the actual presence of others.

correct the misuse of a word possibly due to superior knowledge and experience. Further, people can mentally expand the definitions of words by considering possible states of affairs in which the word is used. These examples are public, and no one has privileged authority over them though people do share the same perceptual and inferential equipment to sort out these examples. One's access to these examples is either partially or fully through others who are already using the word in a specific manner so that people are dependent on others for their linguistic abilities. In learning words, people look to others in their community to help set standards for the legitimate range of examples and the background information necessary to use words. If others in the community had introduced someone to different examples of word use in a different environment (or even in the same environment), then those concepts and word-uses would have been different (*Ibid.*, 185–87). As a result, Burge concludes that language is a social phenomenon and cannot be carried out by a lone individual in a social vacuum.

Based on Wittgenstein and Burge's arguments, there is good reason to concluded that there cannot be a private language. Even if some semblance of a private language was developed, objective rules of meaning and use cannot be established for the private language. A private language is like someone saying that they know how tall they are and proving it by placing their hand on their head (Wittgenstein 1986, I.279). There are simply no possible instances of a person who possesses and uses a language by himself in a social vacuum. There must always be multiple persons for language to exist and thrive.

Language and God

Based on the preceding arguments, the social nature of language will have a major effect on the nature of God. There is no question that God is a being who uses language. All theistic religions reference a divine being that speaks to people and reveals himself in this manner. This point is most vividly seen in the Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. In creating the universe, the divine speaks everything into existence. Further, he reveals himself in speech to certain individuals who record his words and parlay them to others. In Christianity, Jesus Christ is even referred to as the divine Logos, or Word: the final revelation of the divine to man.

God, however, is unique in his language possession and use. What all theistic religions express is that God possesses and uses language prior to the existence of any contingent language users, like angelic beings and humans. As the creator of contingent language users, God is not dependent upon these creatures to possess

and use language. Language is not something he acquires. This fact can be seen in the traditional divine properties of the divine power and the divine knowledge, which are more commonly known as omnipotence and omniscience in western religions. In its most basic form, omnipotence states that a being has all powers; however, such a definition is considered highly simplistic when it comes to God. First, there are some powers that are considered impossible, such as making a square circle or creating a rock so heavy that an omnipotent being cannot lift it. Second, there are many powers that are considered inappropriate for the divine nature, such as the power to sin. A more nuanced definition is needed. Omnipotence, it can be said, is the possession of all powers that it is logically possible to possess. In other words, God has no non logical limits. He can do whatever is logically possible and consistent with the divine nature (Kenny 1979; Mavrodes 1963; Plantinga 1974; Wierenga 1989). One of those logically possible powers that God can possess and utilize is language. There is nothing from a logical standpoint to suggest that God cannot use language nor is the use of language incompatible with the divine nature. Even if one does not accept a western interpretation of the divine nature and its power, there is no logical reason for any theist to conclude that God does not or cannot possess and utilize the ability to use language. One may conclude that God possesses and expresses the power to use language as part of his omnipotence.

A second property that is traditionally ascribed to God in western traditions and which has a major impact on the divine use of language is the property of omniscience. In its most basic for, omniscience states that one knows all things. Such a definition, however, is also considered highly simplistic and in need of nuance. It can be stated that an omniscient being justifiably believes the things he knows iff those things are true (Kvanvig 1986, 33–36). God must have not only a justification for what he knows but also right reasons for knowing it. God could never hold justified knowledge on non-justifiable grounds. Omniscience also requires the knowledge of any truth along with the awareness and disavowal of any falsehood (Wierenga 2009: 130). It is implausible to think that a being knows something while believing it to be false. If one knows all truths, then one will also know all falsehoods while not assenting to these falsehoods. As a result, God is an inerrant knower. Further, a being with greater cognitive powers than God is impossible (Taliaferro 1985 and 1993; Kvanvig 1989). Since God is the highest and most perfect being, God must have unsurpassable cognitive power. Knowledge also implies power, particularly cognitive power, and there are different degrees of power. A being that knows all truths directly and immediately without the need for an intermediary is greater than a being that is informed of all truths by an

intermediary. Not only God's ability to know but also how he knows is what makes him cognitively excellent.

As a result of being omniscient, one can conclude that God possesses and uses language. If God possesses knowledge of all truths directly, then he certainly possesses knowledge of linguistics in all its varied forms. God would be aware of concepts which are couched in language, such as all potential languages and the possible meanings for the words in those languages as well as the rules of grammar for each language. This knowledge requires God to possess and utilize language directly prior to the existence of any other language user since omniscience is considered an essential divine property. Even if one rejects the notion of omniscience described here, there is still no reason to conclude that God would not know language both generally and specifically and be able to exercise that knowledge. The ability to understand and utilize language, therefore, seems to be part of the divine knowledge and divine nature.

These two properties appear to establish not only that God possesses and uses language but they also indicate that God possesses and uses language prior to the existence of any contingent language user. Both omnipotence and omniscience are essential properties of the divine nature that God possesses in virtue of who he is rather than acquiring them. God possesses these properties with all their implications prior to the existence of any contingent creature. If God failed to create anything, he would still be omnipotent and omniscient. As a result, God's use of language is something God possesses and uses prior to the creation of any contingent language user. This claim has major implications on the divine nature when combined with the previous arguments regarding the social nature of language. Since the ability to use language is a social phenomenon and God has the ability to use language by nature, then God must be essentially a social being. This conclusion raises a provocative question. How does one understand the essential social nature of God?

Confronting an Assumption

Before exploring that question, there is another to consider. Perhaps this argument has assumed too much. There are those who would potentially take issue with my application of Wittgenstein's claims to God. A potential criticism is that I have assumed that language use by God is the same (i.e. univocal) with that of human beings regarding the need of a social nature. God, however, is a unique and different being compared to humans (as I stated in the previous section) such that one can argue that it is incorrect to assume that God exists and operates in the

same manner as humans. Our understanding of human language possession and use might be different from God's in this crucial aspect; therefore, it is not evident that the divine being logically requires a social relationship.

This appeal to the concept of univocal versus equivocal terms, however, is problematic. The criticism of the unwarranted application of univocal terms applied to the divine can be asserted against any theological or philosophical argument involving God rendering any rational study of the divine moot (Aquinas 1975: 33.5). God is simply too different for our human terms to encompass. It seems, however, that God must be similar to humans in some ways so that he may be comprehended. If one is to accept that God is different from human beings regarding language possession and use such that Wittgenstein's claims do not apply, then an alternative explanation concerning divine and human language use must be made. What would such a proposal be?

Using Aquinas' claim that God is identical to his essence (Aquinas 1964, 1a3.1–8; 1975, 1.21–24), one could propose that God's language use is not the same as humans regarding a social nature. God's possession and use of language it could be claimed is essential and therefore identical to him just like his being and goodness. Humans merely share or participate in their language use and in a deficient way compared to God (Aquinas 1975, 29.1–6, 30.1–3, and 32.7). One could then argue for innate, non-social based language use within the divine being such that Wittgenstein's claims do not apply. Just as God possesses knowledge of all things without being given that knowledge through any intermediary, God simply possesses the ability of language use without having social requirements as an intermediary. Since this ability to use language is innate to the divine being, one may dispense with any social requirements on the divine being. Human language use is not like God's; therefore, a social relationship is logically unnecessary.

I believe, however, there is a counter-proposal that undermines this potential criticism of my argument by upholding Wittgenstein's claims while maintaining divine uniqueness. Aquinas also states that creatures are like God since God is understood via understanding creation; therefore, one must use analogical language concerning God due to this similarity (Aquinas 1975, 29.5 and 34.1–6). What then is the similarity and deficiency in an analogical account is the question? It could be that the similarity is the inherent social nature of language rather than it being the deficiency. One can argue that God innately possesses both knowledge of and the power to use language as outlined above; however, one can also claim that a social nature is a logical prerequisite to the innate possession and use of

language.[2] For example, the possession of knowledge has the logical prerequisite of the possession of a mind. The existence of the mind is logically prior to and logically necessitated by the existence of the knowledge for without a mind there can be no knowledge. The same could be said of God's innate ability to use language along with the social requirements of language. A divine social nature logically precedes and is logically necessary for God's innate possession of the ability to use language. Without this social nature, God cannot innately possess and utilize language. The deficiency between God and human beings is that humans must learn how to actualize their ability to use language whereas God does not. As a result, this counter-proposal provides an analogical account of similarity and deficiency regarding divine and human language use that maintains both Wittgenstein's claims and God's uniqueness.

This counter-proposal can be bolstered further by appealing to the concept of the *imago dei*. This idea claims that human beings are created in the divine image and have a similarity to him. It can be argued that part of the divine image is the possession and use of language. The reason that humans possess and use language is because God does as well and shares it with humanity. Human beings are unique amongst all creation in their possession and use of language. Even though other organisms can communicate with each other, only human beings use language which arguably comes to us via our special link to God. By appealing to language use as part of the divine image, one can tie language use back to the divine nature and justifiably apply Wittgenstein's claims to the divine nature.

Due to this counter-proposal, I see no reason to conclude that the inherent social nature of language use is something that cannot be applied to the divine nature. Some similarity between humans and the divine must exist, and it is plausible that the social nature of langu is an area of similarity. Further, there is reason to believe that there is a special link between God and humans that involves language use and its social consequences. As a result, the proposed criticism does not appear to succeed, and my argument does not run afoul of the criticism of unwarranted univocal language.

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[2]The argument here is like that of coextensive properties. Such properties are said to logically imply each other. For example, *being triangular* implies *being trilateral* and vice versa. If an object has three angles, then it also has three sides. The argument that I present, however, is slightly different due to the use of logical priority, but there appears to be some overlap with the concept. The argument also utilizes the notion of logical priority as seen in arguments for Molinsm. See (Mann 1983 and 1986; Davis 2001: 69–71; Craig 2000).

Polytheism or Trinity?

The question to consider now is how to understand the divine social nature and with whom God has a social relationship. Since God essentially possesses language and uses it prior to the existence of any contingent language user, then the social relationship of God must be of the eternal, divine variety. This implication leads to only two possible explanations of the nature of God's social relationship. The first is polytheism with its claim that there is more than one divine being. Having more than one eternal divine being would provide the social setting necessary for divine language possession and use. The second explanation is that God is one being comprised of multiple persons. Having more than one person residing within the divine being would also provide the social setting for the possession and use of language. There is currently only one position that claims that there are multiple persons within one divine being and that position is the Christian Trinity. A tripartite being, however, is not necessarily implied in this case. One could posit only two persons or even more than three persons within the one divine being to achieve a social relationship; however, no one has advanced such a position concerning the divine being. Until such a position is formulated, the Trinity is the only viable option on the philosophical table for multiple persons within one divine being; therefore, I shall assume it here. The question to ask and be answered now is which position is the correct position when it comes to the divine being. Are there multiple divine beings or multiple persons in one divine being?

I wish to raise three arguments against the notion of polytheism concluding that polytheism is not rationally warranted. As a result, one is left only with the option that God is one being comprised of multiple persons (e.g. the Trinity). The first argument against polytheism involves the divine property of omnipotence. Richard Swinburne contemplates if there can there be two beings that are both omnipotent. Would not the power of the first divine being frustrate that of the second? Swinburne ultimately concludes that such an issue is possible. Each divine being could choose to bring about a state of affairs which is in conflict with what the other divine being chose (Swinburne 1994, 171–73). For example, one could choose for the Earth to revolve around the sun in one direction while the other chooses the opposite direction. Since each divine being's exertion of power interferes with the other, their exertion of power is negated and both rendered impotent. Such a possibility strikes against the concept of omnipotence.

As a result, Swinburne concludes that there could not be two divine individuals unless there was some mechanism that would prevent interference between the two (Ibid). If so, what is this mechanism? Is it greater than the divine beings such

that these beings are not truly divine? Is the mechanism one of the divine beings making that being truly omnipotent and rendering the other being not omnipotent since he must submit to the former? Does this mechanism render these divine beings less than omnipotent by negating their power in certain circumstances? Perhaps there are circumstances where the two divine beings would never cross each other. If so, what are these circumstances and why would the divine beings never cross each other? Is there any action that these beings could perform or could they always render each other impotent in any situation? Is it just luck that these two beings never cross each other? It does not seem possible that there can be two divine, omnipotent beings that never frustrate each other's actions in any possible situation. It is mere luck that the one being never chooses to frustrate the other. As a result, the omnipotence of these beings and their divinity is called into question. To preserve both omnipotence and divinity, one of these beings must be eliminated in favor of a single deity. One is led to reject polytheism as rationally warranted.

In the way of reply, the polytheist might note that perfect goodness is also an essential property of divinity. Any divine being would always love, choose, and do that which is good. It might be argued that part of this goodness is to recognize and respect the wishes of others so long as those wishes are not evil. If true, then any divine being would respect the perfectly good wishes of any other divine being. If divine being A wants the Earth to rotate east to west, then divine being B would recognize that wish and acquiesce to divine being A should divine being B's wishes be different. Any frustration would be neutralized. Such a claim, however, would mean that divine being A also should acquiesce to the wishes of divine being B so that neither being could act if their wishes were contrary to each other. In fact, it seems that neither divine being would ever develop wishes in the first place as one would wait for the other to develop a wish so that there would be no frustration between the two. It is like two polite men unwilling to enter the door first because they always acquiesce to the other. Both beings, consequently, are rendered impotent and the retort fails.

The polytheist might also attempt to respond by claiming that such situations fall under the category of logical constraints on the divine being as noted in the definition of omnipotence outlined earlier. One might point to the property of perfect goodness and the divine's inability to sin as an example of logical limits to divine omnipotence. It is not counted against a divine being that he is unable to perform evil acts due to his essential perfect goodness. Why not consider Swinburne's scenario to be such a logical constraint that does not count against divinity? Divine beings simply cannot frustrate each other because it is not

logically possible. The problem with this reply is that it would eviscerate divine freedom. In the previous example, the divine's choices are limited to a range of morally good options. In the polytheist's response, all divine beings would be forced to choose the same to avoid frustrating each other and becoming impotent. The resulting divine determinism is simply not plausible. There is no reason to think that the divine is incapable of choosing may different scenarios. For example, it is perfectly rational to conceive of the divine making the Earth rotate east to west as well as west to east. There is nothing illogical with either scenario; therefore, why believe that only one scenario is logically possible to prevent divine frustration?

Each of these responses by the polytheist also leads to a further problem for divine omnipotence. It was stated previously that the property of omnipotence is an essential property of the divine nature; yet, in each response, the expression of the property has been subjugated by the existence of another divine being. By having a divine being's ability to act subjugated, the essential property becomes a contingent one. The property cannot be expressed unless certain conditions are met; therefore, a divine being is only possibly omnipotent at any given time or in any state of affairs. If the conditions are not met, then the divine being is unable to express the property and is rendered both impotent and not divine. Since a divine being cannot cease to be divine, such a being can never be rendered impotent. As a result, it is not rationally warranted that there be two divine beings with the ability to frustrate the will of each other and render one or both impotent at any time or in any situation.

A second argument against polytheism comes from the concept of divine aseity. This concept asserts that God alone is necessary and eternal, that God does not depend on or submit to anything outside of himself for his own existence, and that God is the ultimate source of all reality either directly or indirectly. God has no historical or substantial dependency as he never comes into or fades from existence nor does he receive any part of his being from something outside of himself. As a result, God is supremely sovereign over all of reality and has significant freedom over what exists and continues to exist (Mann 2005, 35–58). At its core, the concept of divine aseity at its strongest asserts that if anything exists it is either a part of God's nature, is created by God, or is produced by a creation of God making God the ultimate source of everything that exists in some fashion.

If the divine being is the ultimate source of all reality, then it can be argued that there cannot be two sources to all of reality. It is logically unnecessary to have two sources of reality; therefore, polytheism would be a logical redundancy. Further, neither divine being would be truly *a se* as defined previously if polytheism were

true. There would be something in reality (i.e. another divine being) that exists distinct from the divine being but does not find its ultimate source in that being. Each divine being would exist independent of the other rather than one finding its source in the other for existence. This problem would be enhanced if each being chose to affect reality independently in some way, such as each creating a universe. As a result, each divine being would not be the ultimately source of some aspect of reality which violates the concept of divine aseity. If the divine is *a se*, then there can be only one source of all reality, not two.

The polytheist could reply to this argument by rejecting divine aseity by accepting Platonism. Plato claims that reality is divided into two realms: the realm of the Forms (often referred to as universals or abstract entities in modern philosophy) and the physical realm. The Forms are eternal, unchanging entities that are only known by reason, and they function as blueprints for all possible objects giving them shape, structure, and function. Opposite the Platonic realm of the Forms is the physical realm of which all is exemplified from the Forms as an architect exemplifies a blueprint to make a house. Since physical entities are exemplifications of the Forms, Plato concludes that physical entities are less real than the Forms which are ultimate reality (Plato 1977, 27d–30b; 2009, 72e–80b, 100b–105e). The polytheist could claim that the divine being is a possible object; therefore, there is a Form that defines the divine being. Further, Forms can be exemplified and shared amongst many objects, such as the Form of a dog. It could be that the Form of the divine being is exemplified and shared amongst more than one being. Such a claim would undermine the concept of divine aseity as the divine being would be dependent on something outside of itself (i.e. the Forms) in order to be what it is and the divine being would not be the ultimate source of all reality. This acceptance of Platonism and rejection of divine aseity would allow for multiple divine beings. The Forms would do the metaphysical heavy lifting instead of the divine being. One, therefore, need not conclude there is a single divine source to all reality when the divine being is not that source in the first place.

There are several issues with this response. First, Platonism itself is a questionable position to embrace. For some, Platonism is unappealing because of the ontological commitments it engenders leading to an appeal to theoretical simplicity. Opponents of Platonism believe that they can give an account of reality without appeals to a horde of abstract entities making for a simpler theory. One might also argue that the notion of multiple exemplification by Platonic universals leads to incoherence. An exemplified abstract entity it is argued occupies two non-overlapping places at once, which is incoherent. It might also be argued that one cannot determine identity conditions between universals to distinguish them from

one another. Universals are supposed to be different, but one cannot state how they are different without appealing to more abstract entities which circuitously implies what is trying to be demonstrated. One might also argue that an appeal to abstract entities like universals is viciously regressive. One must always explain property exemplification with further instances of property exemplification. Finally, such entities endanger epistemology by introducing entities to which one has no cognitive access because these entities are not physical-material entities (Lux 2006, 46–51). There are cogent challenges to Platonism that the polytheist must answer to assert this criticism. Further, some theists reject Platonism despite its historical popularity in religious metaphysics (for example, see Craig 2016). If Platonism is false, then the polytheist's response fails.

Second, many theists have denied that the Forms are separate entities from the divine being. Instead, they have argued that the Forms should be identified with ideas in the divine mind on the grounds that divine ideas are better suited to the metaphysical task the Forms are assigned.[3] Others have argued for the theory of Theistic Activism where the Forms are not divine ideas but instead are necessary creations of God (Gould and Davis, 2014). Even if Platonism could be defended from the previously mentioned criticisms, there are different versions of Platonism on the philosophical table. The polytheist has assumed in his response that the Forms are something separate, distinct, and uncreated from the divine being, and it is not evident that this version of Platonism is correct. The polytheist would need to show that the Forms cannot be part of the divine being or a necessary creation of God for their criticism to succeed.

Third, some theistic philosophers have argued that God is what he is in himself without any derivation from something else like an abstract Form. In other words, God is identical to the divine essence such that it could not be exemplified by another being without incoherence.[4] It is this essence that exists *a se* and from

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[3]See Augustine (1963, 278–81 and 363–67; 1964, 53–57 and 67–69; 1982, 79–81); Aquinas (1952, I.60–62; 1964, 1a.15–16; 1975, 1.2–8, 3.1–2; Plantinga (1982 and 1992).

[4]Thomas Aquinas argues that God is identical to his essence on several grounds: that God is a simple non-composite being, that there are no accidents in God, that God as a necessary entity exists through himself and not an intermediary, that God has no cause to his existence, and that there is no potency in God (Aquinas 1964, 1a3.1–8; 1975, 1.21–24). In fact, the concept of being identical to one's essence appears to come from Aristotelian substance theory where Aristotle identifies substance with form/essence (Aristotle 1960, Book Z) Further, one could contend that theistic Platonism not only requires that God be an Aristotelian substance but also that such substances in general are compatible with Platonism (Gould 2013; Gould and Davis 2014, 2017). This comports with my earlier claim that the Platonic theories of divine ideas and Theistic Activism

which all reality flows in some way or another. In fact, the Platonic Forms appear to be what they are in themselves. The Forms are not copied from other Forms. They simply exist eternally without any derivation. In other words, they are identical to their essences. Further, the Forms exist in and of themselves without depending on something else for their existence in Plato's theory. In other words, the Forms look to be *a* se. As a result, the notion that an object can be identical to its essence and the notion of aseity are philosophical positions that the polytheist would need to accept as logically valid if he is to assert Platonism against the monotheist. If the Platonic polytheist must accept these two positions as applicable to entities, then why cannot God be an *a se* being that is identical to its essence like the Forms? There does not appear to be any logical hurdle to applying these concepts to the divine being. What then is the reason for rejecting divine aseity? Without a cogent response, the polytheist's potential reply to my claims seems dubious.

Fourth, the notion of divine aseity implies the very conception of God that has been asserted previously. As the source of all reality, God must be the source of all truth (i.e. omniscient) and logical possibility (i.e. omnipotent). As an *a se* being who does not derive knowledge from an external source, God must justifiably know things if and only if those things are true, have right reasons for knowing those things, and avow only the truth making him an infallible knower. Further, there is no being with greater cognitive powers than God who knows all truths directly and immediately without the need for an intermediary. This implication also means that God must be the source of all modal truths as well. As the source of all reality including modal truths, God must be able to establish which modal truths become actual and which do not; therefore, an *a se* God must be omnipotent as well as omniscient. As a result, God is the ultimate source of all contingent reality that exists either because he creates contingent reality or because contingent reality is produced by a creation of God linking that contingent reality back to God as its ultimate source. Divine aseity, therefore, is something the concept of God requires.

Based on these arguments, it appears that the polytheist does not have a legitimate response to the claim of divine aseity. The concept is not only rational but also implied by the definition of the divine being as omnipotent and omniscient. Second, the polytheist must accept the concept rather than reject it if he wishes to counter the monotheist's position. Lastly, there is no discernible reason

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imply divine aseity. God must be identical to his form/essence to prevent the divine nature from being the cause of its own exemplification.

that the concept of aseity cannot be applied to the divine being as the polytheist would want to assert. As a result, the polytheist's response falls flat.

A third argument against polytheism extends from the notions of obedience, love, and worship of the divine. One of the central features of theism is that God is to be loved fully, obeyed completely, and worshipped totally. Nothing else is to take God's primary place in the lives of human beings. Everything is to be submitted to God and his will, and all praise and worship is to be directed towards him. This implication flows from the fact that God is both the ultimate being perfect in all his ways and a personal being with whom human beings have a relationship. As creations of God, human beings have a moral obligation to worship God alone and submit all to him as their ultimate sovereign.

This moral obligation to worship, love, and obey God alone poses a problem for polytheism. If there are multiple divine beings, how can an individual decide which being to obey, love, and worship completely? Each divine being will demand totally obedience, love, and worship because it is his right as a divine being; however, it is not possible to give two or more divine beings total obedience, love, and worship. To worship, love, and obey more than one divine being would divide one's worship, love, and obedience. It is like Cordelia's response to Shakespeare's King Lear that she cannot love him totally as her two sisters have promised because she will one day be married and must divide her love between Lear and her husband. Human beings face the same dilemma when it comes to multiple divine beings. They cannot obey, love, and worship more than one divine being without dividing their obedience, love, and worship between the two, which is a violation of humanity's obligation to the divine. Further, it is quite possible that each divine being could make conflicting demands on human beings such that they could not completely obey and submit to the divine pantheon. Suppose that divine being A demands that a criminal be jailed on the grounds of justice while divine being B demands that the criminal be released on the grounds of mercy and grace. One cannot obey and submit to both divine beings in this situation. As a result, one divine being must be disobeyed, which is a violation of humanity's obligation to the divine.

The polytheist's response can only be that the divine beings do not deserve total worship, love, and obedience, and it is complete luck that the divine pantheon never conflicts with each other in their commands to humanity. It is difficult to see why the divine would not deserve total obedience, love, and worship. It is common within the concept of marriage for spouses to demand total love and submission over any other man or woman. Marital infidelity mentally, emotionally, and physically is commonly looked upon as immoral. Why would the

divine deserve or demand less than humanity deserves or demands? Further, luck is not a valid reason to dismiss the possibility of an irresolvable moral dilemma. Moral obligations should be achievable; otherwise, the individual is set up for failure since it would be impossible to carry out one's obligations without fault. This hardly seems fair and just which it can be argued is the essence of a moral theory. If an agent, however, cannot escape fault in these potential situations, then how can he be held responsible at all? Would this conflict in obligations so logically constrain the agent as to release him from liability? These implications raise serious questions regarding the validity of the polytheist's moral theory and an agent's moral responsibility in such situations. Again, the existence of multiple divine beings seems like a redundancy that causes problems which can be avoided by rejecting polytheism. If the problems can be avoided without issue, then why not do so? Why not just reject polytheism as rationally warranted?

Based on the preceding arguments, it seems that one cannot completely love, worship, and obey multiple gods. Human beings would be caught failing to uphold their moral obligations as they will love, worship, and obey one divine being over another. Only one divine being can receive all glory, honor, praise, love, and obedience. As a result, polytheism plunges human beings into what appears to be an irresolvable moral dilemma. There is no possibility for human beings to completely love, worship, and obey the divine beings and escape moral failure and punishment. The only way to escape this dilemma is to reject polytheism in favor of monotheism.

The consequence of the three preceding arguments is to conclude that polytheism is not rationally warranted. Polytheism produces what appear to be insurmountable problems regarding the divine nature as well as human relationship with the divine. In answer to the question of the nature of the divine social arrangement when it comes to language use, one should respond that it is false that there are multiple divine beings in social community. Monotheism must be upheld; therefore, God must be a being comprised of multiple persons. As was stated previously, the only conception of God that fits this position is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Consequently, the Christian Trinity is the correct notion of the nature of God due to the social nature of language and the only position that is available on the philosophical and theological market currently.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the ability to possess and use language requires an individual to be involved in social relationships. As a language possessor and user,

God must be involved in a social relationship of some sort, but it cannot be with any contingent language users since God possesses and uses language prior to the existence of such beings. As a result, either there are multiple divine beings (i.e. polytheism) or there is one divine being comprised of multiple persons (i.e. Trinity). Polytheism was demonstrated to be rationally unwarranted, so God is one being comprised of multiple persons. One should conclude that the Christian Trinity is the correct conception of God and religion.

If the conclusions of my argument are to be avoided, then one must demonstrate that Wittgenstein's claims about the social nature of language are false or that the Trinitarian has no grounds to apply Wittgenstein's claims to God. In absence of such arguments, one must conclude that God is a social being by nature, and this logical requirement of language use is fulfilled by the Trinity. As a result, Christianity is firmly situated alone atop the theistic mountain.

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