Universality and the Divine Essence: St. Thomas Aquinas on the Unity Characteristic of the Trinitarian Persons

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Universality and the Divine Essence:
St. Thomas Aquinas on the Unity Characteristic of the Trinitarian Persons

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Divinity

Of the University of St. Thomas

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Brandon L. Wanless

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PART I: INTRODUCING THE QUESTION

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in accord with the endeavors of his medieval predecessors and contemporaries, was heavily dependent upon the Fathers of the Church for his theological inquiries. The greatest of the Scholastic doctors understood himself as a conduit of the wisdom he himself received from earlier doctors of the Church. This medieval method of theology—originating in part with such persons as St. John of Damascus in the East and Peter Lombard in the West—amounted to a synthetic engagement of the patristic theologians with the goal of producing a unified and holistic theological account of the faith. Aquinas speaks of “the authority of the doctors of the Church as one that may properly be used” in sacred doctrine. The insights of the Fathers are integral and indispensable for theological teaching. Aquinas acknowledges, however, that the Fathers are not automatically correct in what they affirm, but that they are merely “probable.” On many occasions one finds discrepancies and even contradictions among the affirmations of various Fathers of the Church. In some ways, the medieval theological method can be said to have arisen in large part in order to address these differences in the patristic heritage.

This present project examines such a disagreement between St. Augustine of Hippo and St. John of Damascus. The former is clearly the single most important Church Father in the West, while it could be argued that the latter (the last of the Greek Fathers) is the greatest from the East. The issue at hand is of central importance for the Church’s faith: the doctrine of the trinitarian God. The disagreement itself regards the proper predication of the relation of the three persons of the Trinity to the divine nature, and whether we can speak of the divine essence as a universal, that is, as a relation of three individuals to a species. In other words, are the trinitarian persons three individuals of the one divine species of

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divinity? Augustine argues in the negative, whereas Damascene speaks affirmatively. The question is important because, depending on how it is answered, it has enormous impact on our understanding of God as Trinity, and thus a proper rendering of the true faith. Various answers could prove to be erroneous and heretical, if they imply division in God such that he is no longer one. Because the relation of the persons to the essence is the most basic element of the Church’s faith in the Trinity, it is also the point at which trinitarian heresies go awry, either positing only one person or, conversely, multiple essences. As will be shown below, the question of the universality of the divine nature, since it concerns that very relationship of persons to essence, has immediate import regarding trinitarian orthodoxy and heresy.

After addressing the specifics of the relative positions of Augustine and Damascene, and their treatment by Peter Lombard in his Sentences in the following chapter, I will spend the bulk of this paper examining Aquinas’s theology of the Trinity in order to determine his position on the matter and the rationale he provides for it. The reason for the use of and emphasis on Aquinas is that he uniquely

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2 With special gratitude to Mr. Scott Fennema, for his paper presented at the 2012 Pappas Patristic Institute’s Graduate Student Conference (Brookline, Mass.) entitled, “Is Your God Universal or Not? Whether the Divine Essence is Ontologically a Universal or Not,” together with my critical response, was the genesis of this present thesis paper.


For secondary literature on the theology of God in general in Aquinas, see also W. J. Hankey, God in Himself: Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologicae (New York: Oxford University, 1987); Christopher Hughes, On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas’ Philosophical Theology (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1989); Rudi te Velde, Aquinas on God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologicae (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).
provides a definitive account of the various concepts needed to thoroughly understand the relation of individuals to a species and its applicability to the Godhead. After rounding out the first part of the paper with a brief treatment on analogy and speaking about God, I move into the first of two main sections of the paper.

The second part of this paper addresses the unity of essence and the plurality of persons in God as understood by Aquinas. The first chapter of part two involves defining what is meant by “essence” and “person” in reference to God, as a way to introduce the most basic concepts and language used by Aquinas in his trinitarian theology. Afterwards in chapter five, the dual concepts of unity and plurality are examined in detail in reference to the divine. Herein I present the first difficulty with Damascene’s position in terms of Aquinas’s articulation of the divine unity, namely that Aquinas affirms not only a specific unity in the Godhead but a numerical unity of essence. Then, in chapter six, I will conclude the second part by readdressing our modes of predication of the divine in order to clarify even further what is meant when attributing various things to him according to his oneness and his trinity. This treatment is arranged according to three conceptual pairs: absolute and relative predications, singular and plural terms, and concrete and abstract names.

In the third and final part, I will directly examine the relationship of species and individuals (in chapter seven) and also the categories that characterize it, namely, universality and particularity (in chapter eight) and communicability and incommunicability (in chapter nine). By examining each of these relationships, I will demonstrate how it is that Aquinas proves on multiple levels that, properly speaking, God cannot be said to be a divine species with three subordinate individuals. This will first entail the proper subjects of generic and specific unities and the extent of such a type of unity. Further, I will explain what is proper to individuals in the strict sense and how it is that the divine persons can only be labelled individuals in a wide sense, building off of material on transcendental multitude in the earlier section on unity and plurality. Then in the eighth chapter, I will focus on the role of participation
in the relationship of universality and particularity and the limited logical extension of particulars in reference to their universal. Finally, I will conclude in chapter nine by noting difference between what is logically common and what is really common, demonstrating that the essence and esse of God is really common (that is, secundum rem) to the three divine persons of the Trinity. At the same time, I will also show how it is that Aquinas recognizes some similarities (and thus allows for Damascene’s position) between the species/individual relationship and that of the divine essence and persons.

Contemporary scholarship on this issue is infrequent, though interest can be found. Most of the discussion largely focuses on the positions of various Fathers of the Church. 4 For example, in a recent article, Adam English proposes reintroducing St. Cyril of Jerusalem’s categories into trinitarian theological discourse, namely referring to God as a genus and each person as a distinct species thereof. 5 Recent authors have also explored the topics in other theologians such as John Philoponus 6 and Bl. John Duns Scotus. 7 In an important article on the topic, the theologian Richard Cross attempts to coordinate the Cappadocian and Augustinian traditions side-by-side and concludes that an account of the divine essence as a universal from Damascene and his predecessors in the East is reconcilable with the Western account derived from Augustine. 8 Finally, there are also the more speculative accounts that consider aspects of the question that will be treated below in their own fashion. 9 Very recently, for

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9 See, for example, Peter van Inwagen, “And Yet There Are Not Three Gods but One God,” in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. T. V. Morris (Notre Dame, IN.: Notre Dame University, 1988), 241-278. Admittedly, more secondary literature in general would be welcome to a topic as important as the right relation of the essence to the persons of the trinitarian Godhead. As much as literature is difficult to find on this precise topic, it is even more difficult to find regarding Aquinas’s thought on it. Herein lies the important contribution of this thesis paper.
example, Fr. Thomas Joseph White, O.P., has restressed the fundamental importance of the principle of
divine simplicity in trinitarian doctrine, especially in regard to the proper articulation of the relationship
between persons and essence in God.\textsuperscript{10} What follows in this paper is a relatively unique Thomistic
analysis of this question, putting to use his trinitarian and metaphysical principles as a way to
understand all the critical implications of a relationship of universality between essence and persons in
the Godhead.

\textbf{CHAPTER TWO: DISAGREEMENT AMONG THE FATHERS}

\textit{St. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430)}

The \textit{De Trinitate} of St. Augustine of Hippo—being a comprehensive and sustained treatment of
the Trinity—stands as relatively unique among the Fathers of the Church.\textsuperscript{11} In it, he proves from sacred
scripture the textual evidence for the dogmatic account of God as both three and one. He then proceeds
to try to explain how it is that that trinity does not contradict the simplicity of the divine unity. He
searches for analogies adequate for conveying the profound unity of God while also accounting for the
distinction of plurality. “When it is asked what the three or who the three are, we seek to find a generic
or a specific name which may include the three together. But we come across none, because the
supereminent excellence of the divinity transcends all the limits of our wonted manner of speaking.”\textsuperscript{12}
Augustine, therefore, in accepting the terminology of the faith’s tradition, notes that “if we say three
persons, then they have in common that which is meant by person.”\textsuperscript{13} Now, this leads him to inquire

\textsuperscript{11} Saint Augustine, \textit{The Trinity}, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1981). For the
\textsuperscript{12} Augustine, \textit{De Trinitate} VII, 4 (7).
\textsuperscript{13} Augustine, \textit{De Trinitate} VII, 4 (7).
that if there are three persons, why does the Catholic faith assert one divine essence and not three? The three are all persons and so what is meant by person is common to them. The divine essence, however, is also common to the three: “For the name essence is just as common to them, so common in fact that each singly may be called essence, as the name substance or person is common to them.”  

14 The answer for Augustine lies in the nature of God himself. “For so, because it is the same thing for Him to be God as it is to be, it is just as wrong to say three essences as it is to say three gods.” 15 Three divine essences necessitates three gods because the essence of God is identical with his existence. Therefore, three essences would mean—beyond a trinity of persons—three separate divine beings.

For this very reason, Augustine, in exploring possible analogies for the Trinity, utterly rejects speaking about God as a genus or a species. “For if essence is the genus and substance or person the species, as some think, I must omit what I have already said, that they ought to be called three essences…” 16 He uses the example of the horse: just as three horses (species) are also called three animals (genus) and not one animal, so three persons (species) of God would be three gods (genus). “I do declare that if essence is the genus, then a single essence has no species, just as, because animal is a genus, a single animal has no species. Consequently, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not three species of the one essence.” Augustine investigates further, taking up the possibility of referring to the divine persons as individuals of a species. He concludes that “the same reasoning would apply.”

If, however, essence is a species as man is a species, but those are three which we call substances or persons, then they have the same species in common, just as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have in common that species that is called man; not as man is subdivided into several men; for this is wholly impossible, because one man is already a single man. Why, therefore, is one essence subdivided into three substances or persons? For if essence is a species as man is, then one essence is as one man is. We say of any three men … that they are one nature. Is it in this sense that we also say in the Trinity three substances one essence, or three persons one substance or essence? 17

14 Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII, 4 (8). Augustine admits that substantia and persona can be used interchangeably in Latin to refer to the three hypostases as they are called in Greek.
15 Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII, 4 (9).
16 Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII, 6 (11).
17 Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII, 6 (11).
In his own roundabout way, Augustine seeks to thoroughly examine the possibility of speaking about the Trinity according to species and individual, such as we speak of three men of one human nature. The key to his conclusion lies in his comment that although we speak of one God made up of three persons, it is “wholly impossible” to speak of one man made up of or “subdivided into” three men. He admits that there is “some kind of a similarity” between how individual men relate to the species of humanity and how the persons relate to the divine essence, but ultimately judges the metaphor to be limited and unhelpful. “Therefore, we do not use these terms according to genus and species…” Instead, Augustine asserts the profound unity of the persons and the essence, so as to dismiss a relation of potency implicit in the analogy of species and individuals:

[W]e do not say three persons from the same essence, just as though essence were one thing and person another. …[W]e say three men one nature, or three men of the same nature, so we can also say three men from the same nature, because three other such men can also exist from the same nature. On the contrary, in the essence of the Trinity no other person whatsoever can exist in any way from the same essence.\(^{18}\)

The divine essence, therefore, is nothing other than the trinity of persons. To be the one simple God and to be a Trinity of persons are fundamentally the same in the Godhead.

\textit{St. John of Damascus (d. 749)}

In his monumental work, \textit{Fount of Knowledge}, St. John of Damascus synthesizes and transmits the orthodox theological tradition of the Greek Fathers of the Church in the section of the text known as \textit{De fide orthodoxa}.\(^{19}\) In the context of explaining the composite union of the Incarnate Word of God, Damascene makes a point of clarifying what he means by the terms used in the Christological formula of two natures or substances in one person. In reference to Christ’s divinity and humanity, he uses the terms nature (\(φύσις\)) and essence/substance (\(οὐσία\)) interchangeably. What he intends by each of them

\(^{18}\) Augustine, \textit{De Trinitate} VII, 6 (11).

is that whereby a thing is what it is. He articulates this whatness as what is common to many, even applying this perfection of commonality to the essence of divinity.

We have repeatedly said that substance (οὐσία) is one thing and person (ὑπόστασις) another, and that substance means the common species (τὸ κοινὸν καὶ περιεκτικὸν εἶδος) including the persons that belong to the same species—as, for example, God, man—while person indicates an individual (ἄτομον), as Father, Son, Holy Ghost, Peter, Paul.  

With this articulation, Damascene asserts that the Trinitarian persons are examples of both persons and individuals, which relate to the essence of God as to a common species. In this analysis, Damascene consciously affirms the relegation of individuals as particulars to the universal species: “Things that are common and universal are predicated of particulars subordinate to them. … For every substance is common to the persons included under it.” Damascene seems unconcerned, however, with the risk of tritheism in this analogy, for he explicitly recognizes the profound unity of the divine persons and thus does not draw too strong a conclusion from his assertion of persons as individuals participating in the divine species.

The same issue arises in Damascene’s *Elementary Introduction to Dogma.* He begins the work by clearly stating that “the incomprehensible Godhead is a supersubstantial substance, and nature, and form,” while “the Father, Son and all-Holy Ghost are hypostases and persons.” That is, each Trinitarian person is “a perfect substance and a perfect person.” He immediately clarifies that relationship of

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21 Damascene, *De fide* III, 6. He does clarify, however, that “a thing is a particular not in that it possesses a part of the nature, because it does not have such a part, but in that it is particular in number, as an individual. … The substance is predicated of the person because the substance is complete in each of the persons of the same species.” On the other hand, he later seems to explain his hesitancy to this partial possession of a nature by concluding that it would mean that each person would effectively be of a different nature: “And it is not possible to find a partial and individuating nature of substance, since it would then be necessary to say that the same persons were of the same substance and of different substances, and that the Holy Trinity was in its divinity both of the same substance and of different substances. Consequently, the same nature is found in each of the Persons.” Instead, each of the Trinitarian persons is perfect God: “Thus, then, we confess that the nature of the divinity is entirely and completely in each one of its Persons.”
22 Cf. *De fide* III, 5: “The three Persons of the Holy Trinity are united without confusion and are distinct without separation and have number without the number causing division … for we recognize that the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are one God.”
24 Damascene, *Dogma* I (p. 4).
hypostases to nature: “So that nature, and substance, and form are that which is common and which contains the hypostases of the same substance. But hypostasis and individual and person are that which is particular, that is to say, they are each of those things which are contained under the same species.”

While Damascene is careful to never include God in the Porphyrian tree of substances in the Fount of Knowledge, he does, however, attribute substance to God in a “supersubstantial” manner in his Elementary Introduction: “Substance, which embraces in a super-substantial way the uncreated Godhead and (embraces) in its concept and content all creation, is the most generic genus. … Bodiless[, intellectual, and immortal] substance embraces God, angel, soul, demon…” Damascene here clearly places God within the genus of substance and includes the divinity as a subaltern species thereof. He then makes this move explicit in what follows: “There is, therefore, on the one hand, hypostasis, the individual, and person; for example the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And embracing them is a species—the supersubstantial and incomprehensible Godhead.” To clarify his classification, he cites Michael and Gabriel as examples of the angelic nature and Peter, Paul, and John as hypostases of the species of humanity, the latter of which are strikingly similar to the same treatment of the divine species in his De fide quoted above.

The first section of Damascene’s Fount of Knowledge—the Philosophical Chapters or Dialectica—constitutes a philosophical introduction to the rest of the work, determining the usage of key terms such as genus, species, individual, and hypostasis. His account here in the Dialectica will help us in our current task of understanding how exactly Damascene employs the terms in reference to the Trinity in the De fide and in the Elementary Introduction. Damascene once again is heavily reliant

25 Damascene, Dogma II (p. 6).
26 Saint John of Damascus, Dialectica XXX, in Writings, trans. Chase (p. 56): “…that which is common to and affirmed of several things … they called substance, and nature, and form—as, for example, angel, man… Form, also, and species mean the same thing as nature. However, the particular [the holy Fathers] called individual, and person, and hypostasis or individual substance—as, for example, would be Peter and Paul.”). For the critical Greek edition of the Dialectica, see Bonifatius Kotter, ed., Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos 1: Institutio elementaris. Capita philosophica (Dialectica), PTS 7 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969).
27 Damascene, Dogma VII (pp. 14, 16).
28 Damascene, Dogma VII (pp. 16, 18).
on Porphyry, especially for the categorization of substances into genus and species as a relationship of logical superiority and inferiority. “For genus is divided into species, is more general than species, contains the species, and is higher...” Just as the species is “substantial and subaltern” to genus, species itself has subject to it either other species (making it also a genus) or several individuals. In regard to the latter, “species is that which is predicated in respect to their common essence of several things which are numerically different.” This numerical difference or distinction arises because the individual (ἄτομον)—a term that has multiple meanings—fundamentally denotes unity and indivision. From this understanding, then, “the hypostasis subsisting in itself means the individual and the distinct person.” Damascene makes this even more explicit when he says that hypostasis “means the existence of an individual substance in itself. In this sense, it signifies the individual, that which is numerically different, which is to say, Peter and Paul...” When the hypostases of the Trinity are referred to as individuals of the divine species later in the Fount of Knowledge, Damascene clearly understands them in a way remarkably similar to the way that individual human persons relate to the species of humanity.

This way of speaking of the Trinity is not unique to Damascene, however. In fact, he inherited the analogy of individuals and species from the Cappadocian fathers. St. Basil the Great explicitly says


30 Damascene, Dialectica IX (p. 30). Cf. ch. X (p. 34): “Again, when the species is divided, it communicates both its name and its definition to those inferior to itself.”

31 Damascene, Dialectica X (p. 31).

32 Damascene, Dialectica X (p. 31). Cf. p. 35: “This last, then, is the most specific species, which comes immediately above the individuals, and which they define by saying that it is a species which is predicated in the category of essence of several numerically different things.” My emphasis. Cf. also ch. XX (p. 50): “Genus and species have this in common: that they are predicated of the essence of several things; that by nature they are prior to those things that come under them; and that each is a whole something.”

33 Cf. Damascene, Dialectica XI (p. 41): “That which cannot be divided or partitioned is called individual, as the point, the instance of the time which is now, and the unit. These are said to be quantitiless (that is to say, without quantity). ... The term individual, however, is principally used as meaning that which, although it is divisible, does not maintain its species intact after the division. ... It is with this latter kind of individual—namely, that which shows the individuality of the substance—that the philosophers are concerned.”

34 Damascene, Dialectica XXIX (p. 54).

35 Damascene, Dialectica XLII (p. 67).
about the Trinity: “The distinction between ousia and hypostasis is the same as that between the general
and the particular; as, for instance, between the animal and the particular man.”36 While Damascene
stresses the fundamental distinction of the Trinitarian persons when he uses suspect language like, “in
the Holy Trinity a hypostasis is the timeless mode of each [eternal] existence,”37 it must also be noted
that, in the end, the last of the Greek Fathers is ever conscious of the oneness of God and his duty to
maintain the orthodox faith. “We believe in Father and Son and Holy Ghost; one Godhead in three
hypostases; one will, one operation, alike in three persons … equal in nature, exceedingly substantial
… one God and not three Gods; one Lord the Holy Trinity discovered in three hypostases.”38

Peter Lombard (d. 1160)

The discrepancy between Augustine and Damascene comes to a head in Peter Lombard’s

Sentences,39 wherein the Lombard sides with Augustine and the Western tradition against using the
terms genus, species, and individual to speak about the Trinity.

…[S]uch is the equality of the three persons and so undifferentiated their greatness that,
when we say that the three persons are one essence or substance, we do not predicate it as
a genus [made up] of species, or as species [made up] of individuals. For the divine essence
is not a genus, the three persons are not a species; neither is the divine essence a species,
nor are the three persons individuals.40

To refute the first possibility, namely of the divine essence constituting a genus of which each person
participates as a species, the Lombard quotes from Augustine’s De Trinitate, a text that I have cited

communion and the distinction apprehended in Them are, in a certain sense, ineffable and inconceivable, the continuity of
nature being never rent asunder by the distinction of the hypostases, nor the notes of proper distinction confounded in the
community of essence.”

37 Damascene, Dialectica LXVI (p. 105). The English translation of Chase reads, “external,” which is surely an error.

38 Damascene, De haeresibus, epilogue (pp. 161-162). For the critical Greek edition of the De haeresibus, see Bonifatius
Kotter, ed., Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos 4: Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica, PTS 22 (Berlin: De Gruyter,
1981). For a brief but excellent introduction to the Trinitarian theology of St. John Damascene, see Brian E. Daley,
“Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus on the Trinity,” in The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church, ed. Khaled

39 Petri Lombardi, Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae (Rome: Grottaferrata, 1971), trans. in Peter Lombard, The Sentences,
Hereafter: Lombard, Sentences Book, Distinction, Chapter (Total chapters), Paragraph; e.g., Lombard, Sentences I, 2, 4 (7),
8.

40 Lombard, Sentences I, 19, 7 (78), 1.
above: “If essence is the genus, and person is the species, as some feel, then they ought to be called three substances as they are called three persons.”

Regarding the refutation of those who wish to speak of the divine essence as a species with three participating individuals, he once again resorts to the authority of Augustine. The Lombard sees two distinct arguments in the texts cited above and proffers them in a more direct and paraphrased quotation:

But neither is the divine essence a species, and the persons are not individuals, as man is a species and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are individuals. For if essence is a species, like man, then just as we do not say that Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac are one man, so we will not say that the three persons are one essence.

By paraphrasing Augustine, the Lombard summarizes the main thrust of his argument, namely that to assert that the divine essence is a species would, in effect, result in the contradiction of the article of faith that there is only one God. If the divine essence were a species, there would be three divine essences just as there are three divine persons.

The Lombard returns to this topic of the relation between the persons and the divine essence in invoking the authority of Damascene as an objection to Augustine’s points.

But some things which Catholic commentators on sacred Scripture have handed down in their writings seem to contradict these statements. In these works, they seem to signify that the divine essence is something common and universal, like a species, but the three persons are three particulars, or three individuals differing in number.

The Lombard goes on to name John of Damascus uniquely and quote the two passages from his *De fide* offered above. In reference to the explicit examples of God as “a common and collective species of persons who are similar in species” and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each as a hypostasis that “denotes an individual,” the Lombard reacts:

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41 Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII, 6 (11), quoted at Lombard, *Sentences* I, 19, 7 (78), 2.
42 Lombard, *Sentences* I, 19, 7 (78), 4, paraphrasing Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII, 6 (11).
44 Damascene, *De fide* III, 6, as quoted at Lombard, *Sentences* I, 19, 9 (80), 3.
See how he says plainly that substance is a universal, but hypostasis a particular; and that God is a species, like man, and that Father and Son and Holy Spirit are individuals, like Peter and Paul, and that they differ in number. These words seem to wholly contradict the opinion of Augustine stated above. … We can and must certainly say this, that the words which Augustine has handed down to us above are to be held without any hesitation.45

He immediately judges, however, that the analogy used by Damascene, though misguided, is “capable of a right understanding” but only for “a very pious reader and interpreter.”46 After his attempts at humility stating that he is not the best candidate for an explanation, he proceeds to offer his own explanation anyway.

The Lombard believes that Damascene does not intend to speak of the divine essence as a universal and the divine persons as particulars “as they are taken in philosophical teaching,” but rather “by analogy [per similitudinem]” and “by likeness of predication [propter similitudinem praedicationis].”

Just as in their usage what is predicated of many is called common or universal, and what [is predicated] of one only is called a particular or individual, so here the divine essence is called universal because it is said of all the persons together and of each severally, but each single one of the persons is called a particular because it is not predicated of the others in common, nor of each of the others severally.47

He acknowledges that Damascene sees a likeness or metaphor between the universal and the divine essence as predicated of many and likewise the particular and the divine persons as not predicated of each other. The analogy of species and individual, to the Lombard, according to its proper sense implies contradiction with the Catholic faith, but it can in a limited way reach some truth about God.

And so John, pondering this likeness [similitudinem] between eternal and temporal things, applied to eternal things the terms of ‘universality’ and ‘particularity,’ which properly pertain to temporal things. But Augustine, concluding that the unlikeness between the above-mentioned things was greater than the likeness, refused to apply the above terms to the excellence of the Trinity.48

Thus, the Lombard allows for both Damascene’s assertion and Augustine’s refusal on the grounds that

45 Lombard, Sentences I, 19, 9 (80), 3-4.
46 Lombard, Sentences I, 19, 9 (80), 5.
47 Lombard, Sentences I, 19, 9 (80), 6.
48 Lombard, Sentences I, 19, 9 (80), 6.
Augustine condemns speaking in this way according to the strict sense of what is implied and that Damascene is speaking not strictly but only metaphorically because of the likeness he sees in created things.

CHAPTER THREE: SPEAKING ABOUT GOD

The purpose of this paper is not to extrapolate from Damascene himself all that is needed to have a proper and complete understanding of his own use of the categories of species and individuals in reference to the Trinity, but rather to seek the assistance of St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) for a refined and further systematized conceptual understanding of all the elements involved in the relation of particulars to a species and how that relation is or is not possible of the relation of the divine persons to the Godhead. After a brief discursus on analogy and how it is that we can speak accurately about God, I will turn first to the issue of the unity of the divine essence and the plurality of the Trinitarian persons, and then to the issue of the relation between individuals and the species. Finally, I will conclude by applying what is discussed in the latter section to the relation of God’s unity of essence and trinity of persons.

A Brief Discursus on Analogy

Before departing on an intricate examination of the interconnected concepts used by Aquinas in his theology of the Trinity, it is necessary to note how it is that we can use human language to describe the utterly transcendent deity. Aquinas asserts that we cannot know God directly in our current state of life, but only indirectly as we know the cause from its effects. Therefore, every possible thing that is said of God is always said in relation to our knowledge of creatures, his effects. Every word used to

49 See esp. ST I 2.1.
describe something in or about God is a word first understood and used of creatures, and then applied to God. The theologian Joseph Wawrykow thus cautions us: “When we speak of God and perforce must use terms of God that we know first of all through creatures, we must attend to the ways that God eludes our categories, to the ways that God is not to be reduced to a thing of this world.”\(^{50}\) We have to be very judicious when it comes to our use of language when speaking of God, most especially when trying to speak of his inner trinitarian life. The task of this current project is essentially an exercise in refining the precision of language needed to describe the Trinity, especially the relation of what is distinct and multiple (the divine persons) to what is simple and one (the divine essence).

Aquinas notes the fundamental relationship between language and knowledge when he says that “everything is named by us according to our knowledge of it.”\(^ {51}\) Therefore, “since we cannot name an object except as we understand it (for names are signs of things understood), we cannot give names to God except in terms of perfections perceived in other things that have their origin in Him.”\(^ {52}\) Just as we know God as the first cause of all creatures, whatever perfections we perceive in creatures must be present in God preemminently and to an infinite degree, such that the perfections in God are more unlike than like the perfections in creatures.

Effects that fall short of their causes do not agree with them in name and nature. Yet, some likeness must be found between them, since it belongs to the nature of action that an agent produce its like, since each thing acts according as it is in act. The form of an effect, therefore, is certainly found in some measure in a transcending cause, but according to another mode and another way. … So, too, God gave things all their perfections and thereby is both like and unlike all of them.\(^ {53}\)

Despite the infinite unlikeness, there is still a likeness and thus a relationship between what is in creatures and what is in God. Thus, we know God and—to a limited degree—what he is like “from

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\(^{51}\) *ST* I, preface to q. 13.


\(^{53}\) *SCG* I, 29 (2).
creatures as their principle, and also by way of excellence and remotion.” As God is the first cause of creation, infinitely beyond creation, and unlike created things, we can thus name him from the knowledge attained in this life. Thus, we are able to speak meaningfully about God inasmuch as what we know of him is derived from our knowledge of creatures and as they have a relationship, likeness, and participation in the perfections that are in God preeminently. This way of speaking about God is called analogy.

Analogical naming does not claim to have an exhaustive or even an adequate grasp of what God truly is in his very being. No, instead, analogy holds a middle ground between asserting that whatever we say of God is exactly correlative in meaning as what is said of man and creation (univocal predication) and asserting that nothing at all can accurately be said of God (equivocal predication). Therefore, analogy is a tool by which the theologian and philosopher can speak of realities in God accurately while realizing that God in his transcendence cannot be contained by any of our categories. In this way, then, various terms are used of God not as synonyms, but so as to describe our various intellectual notions about God, “even though they signify what is in reality the same thing in God.”

This is why we can say, for example, that the three persons are the divine essence and yet speak of them under the aspect of multiple distinct relations versus under the aspect of the unity of divine simplicity.

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54 ST I 13.1; cf. SCG I, 30 (4).
56 See ST I 13.1: “In this way therefore He can be named by us from creatures, yet not so that the name which signifies Him expresses the divine essence in itself.”
57 ST 13.5.
58 Comp. 25; see also ST I 13.4.
Because our terminology for God is formed according to our mode of intellection, we must also maintain certain distinctions for speaking about God that reflect our various intellectual notions. In our mode of signification, therefore, we cannot confuse various, discrepant terms as equally or similarly applied to him even if those terms refer to the same reality in God. Thus, some analogous terms are more accurately applied to him than others. In this way, we can say that there are proper and improper terms of analogy for God. The purest and highest perfections in creatures are attributed to God more properly than what can only be said of God metaphorically. “When that which the term signifies is appropriate to God, it is applied to God in its proper sense, for instance, good, wise and the like…”  

Elsewhere, Aquinas asserts that these analogous names for God “express these perfections absolutely, without any such mode of participation being part of their signification as the words ‘being,’ ‘good,’ ‘living,’ and the like, and such names can be literally applied to God [*proprie dicuntur de Deo*].”  

In the reality of being, goodness, life, wisdom, personhood, etc., signified by their corresponding names, the names are applied to God primarily since the realities are most excellently present in him.  

But according to their mode of signification, they primarily apply to creatures.  

This current project requires that these distinctions be kept in mind, since whatever terms we use of God and the Trinity are used according to analogy. In what follows, I will examine some select terms that are central to the question at hand, namely, whether the common essence of the Trinity can accurately be understood as a universal. Most basically, God is spoken of as one in “essence,” “nature,” “form,” or “substance,” with three “persons,” “hypostases,” “supposita,” or “subsistences,” distinct according to opposite “relations” of origin. The use of essence and its related terms will allow us to see

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60 ST I 13.3 ad 1.  
61 See *De pot.* 9.3: “Since whatsoever is most excellent in creatures should be attributed to God, it is becoming that the word *person* should be attributed to God, even as other terms which are said of God properly.”  
62 See ST I 13.6: “Hence as regards what the name signifies, these names are applied primarily [*proprie*] to God rather than to creatures, because these perfections flow from God to creatures…”
the “unity” or oneness of God, while the persons and its related terms will show the manner in which we can speak of “distinction” or “plurality” in him. This relationship between unity and plurality will elicit a second treatment of the manner in which we speak of God, that is, as he is Trinity. Thereafter, I will discuss the conceptual relationship between “genus,” “species,” and “individual,” followed by the more general treatment of “universals” and “particulars,” and finally the “communication” of being implied by these relationships. Moving forward, then, it is critical to maintain the distinction between what is properly said of God and what is only metaphorically spoken of him, as well as the nuance that these absolute perfections are preeminently in him according to reality, while their mode of predication is limited to our creaturely knowledge of the world.
PART II: UNITY OF ESSENCE AND PLURALITY OF PERSONS

CHAPTER FOUR: ESSENCE AND PERSON

For Aquinas, essence and person are the two concepts on which the whole study of God rests. The structure of the treatise on God in the *Summa theologiae*, in fact, proceeds according to two approaches, namely, the unity of God in essence and the relative distinction of persons. The theologian Joseph Wawrykow describes the connection implicit in this division of the text:

In the first part of the treatise on God, Aquinas stresses what the three persons share in common, as one and the same God. In the second part of the treatise, he stresses the distinction of persons. ... The divine essence and the divine persons eternally are, and are identical. There is a certain economy in this order of procedure, going from the common to the proper.  

Aquinas himself explicitly asserts that “in the divine persons there is nothing for us to consider but the essence which they have in common and the relations in which they are distinct.” The nature of what is common and what is distinct is fundamental to our present question of the possibility of speaking about God as a universal. Therefore, in what follows, I will briefly describe how Aquinas uses these concepts of essence and person—and their related terms—in the context of his theology of God. These terms of have real, analogical meaning when applied to God. In reality, everything in God is identical with God, but in our limited understanding, we must be careful to coordinate these logical distinctions with an accurate denomination of what is in God according to our various modes of predication.

*Essence*

When Aquinas refers to the “essence” (*essentia*) of a thing, most fundamentally, he means the principle whereby that thing is what it is. It is the “internal constitution of a thing.”

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64 *ST I* 42.1 ad 4.
66 Bernard Wuellner, *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1956), 42.
beings are composed of essence and existence, whereby a thing’s essence determines or sets a limit on its existence according to a relationship of potency to act. As essence constitutes the intelligible structure of a being, it is thus “that which makes a thing to be a member of a species, held in common by all the members of that species.” So, essence is also that which is or is able to be held in common. In reference to God, our reference to the divine essence symbolizes all that God is (i.e., his “whatness” or quiddity) and so also articulates his absolute unity of being.

In addition to the divine essence, Aquinas will also refer to God’s quiddity in terms of his “nature” (natura) and his “form” (forma). Nature further qualifies essence inasmuch as that essence is the principle of motion and operation in a thing. Thus, “nature in a certain way implies the idea of a principle, but essence does not.” Form, on the other hand, usually refers to a complementary part of a thing as it is paired with matter and therefore is used to refer to the whole only to the extent that it is the principal part in that pair. Since there is no composition of form and matter in God, he is referred to as a separate or subsistent form, “a form complete in itself” that exists “independently of matter.” In fact, Aquinas says that “God is absolute form [ipsa forma], or rather absolute being [ipsum esse].” Basically, for Aquinas, form, nature, and essence all refer to the divinity in the Godhead, the “what” that God is. The emphasis on the use of the essence as common to the three persons of the Trinity is important, however. “Because ‘nature’ designates the principle of action while ‘essence’ comes from being [essendo], things may be said to be of one nature which agree in some action, as all things which

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68 Cf. Wuellner, 79.
69 ST I 42.3 ad 4; cf. De pot. 9.2 ad 11.
70 Cf. Wuellner, 47.
71 Wuellner, 48. Cf. ST I 3.2: “Whatever is primarily and essentially an agent must be primarily and essentially form. Now God is the first agent, since he is the first efficient cause. He is therefore of his essence a form; and not composed of matter and form.”
72 ST I 3.7.
73 Cf. SCG IV, 7 (12): “By the form of God nothing is understood but the divine nature.”; ST I 39.2: “…in God the essence is taken as the form of the three persons, according to our mode of signification.”; ST III 2.1: “We are now speaking of ‘nature’ as it signifies the essence, or the what-it-is, or the quiddity of the species.”
give heat; but only those things can be said to be of ‘one essence’ which have one being [unum esse].”\(^{74}\)

Therefore, because the three persons are one in being, Aquinas typically refers to the divinity as the essence of God because of this unique implication whereby unity of essence means the common esse of the Godhead.

Sometimes Aquinas even uses the word “substance” (substantia) to refer to the divine essence, but this term almost always requires clarification because of its twofold usage. Substance is divided into “first substance” and “second substance.” First substance refers to the singular and individual being, whereas second substance is the general species or form constitutive of those singulars whereby they are what they are.\(^{75}\) The first substance is further understood as a subject that “subsists,” i.e., exists in itself and not in another, and that “substands,” i.e., sustains accidents as inhering in itself.\(^{76}\) Aquinas is clear that, as a simple form, “God cannot be a subject”\(^{77}\) and also that the term substance necessarily implies a distinction between the individual thing and its quiddity.\(^{78}\) In reference to God, therefore, substance is purely an analogical term.\(^{79}\) Insofar as it is limited to that which exists by itself, however, “‘substance’ can be applied to God in the sense of signifying self-subsistence.”\(^{80}\) This limited understanding of a first substance Aquinas calls a “subsistence” (subsistentia).\(^{81}\)

\(^{74}\) \textit{ST} I 39.2 ad 3.

\(^{75}\) \textit{De pot.} 9.2 ad 6; “‘Second’ substance denotes the generic nature in itself absolutely, while ‘first’ substance signifies that nature as individually subsistent.” Cf. \textit{Peri Herm.} I 10.3: “…second substances are only in first substances, i.e., singulars;” English translation in: \textit{Aristotle: On Interpretation: Commentary by St. Thomas and Cajetan}, trans. Jean T. Oesterle (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1962).

\(^{76}\) Cf. \textit{De pot.} 9.1: “Now two things are proper to the substance which is a subject. The first is that it needs no external support but is supported by itself: wherefore it is said to subsist, as existing not in another but in itself. The second is that it is the foundation to accidents by sustaining them, and for this reason it is said to substand. Accordingly substance which is a subject, inasmuch as it subsists, is called ὀὐσιώσις or subsistence, but inasmuch as it substands it is called hypostasis by the Greeks, and ‘first substance’ by the Latins.”

\(^{77}\) \textit{ST} I 3.6 s.c. Cf. \textit{De pot.} 9.1 ad s.c.: “a simple form cannot be a subject”; \textit{ST} I 11.4 ad 2: “…a subject cannot be supremely ‘one,’ because of the difference within it of accident and subject…”

\(^{78}\) \textit{De pot.} 7.3 ad 4: “The definition of substance cannot be applied to God, whose quiddity is not distinct from his being.”; \textit{ST} I 3.5 ad 1; \textit{SCG} I, 25 (10).

\(^{79}\) Cf. Pasnau and Shields, \textit{The Philosophy of Aquinas}, 246: “Sometimes God is counted as a simple substance, although strictly speaking, God is not a substance at all.”

\(^{80}\) \textit{ST} I 29.3 ad 4. Cf. \textit{De pot.} 9.2 ad 13: “…an individual substance is something complete existing by itself … subsist[ing] by itself apart from anything else”; \textit{Comp.} 15: “the divine existence is a quasi-form subsisting by itself, seeing that God is His existence.”

\(^{81}\) Cf. \textit{ST} I 29.2: “For, as it exists in itself and not in another, it is called ‘subsistence’; as we say that those things subsist which exist in themselves and not in another.”; \textit{De pot.} 9.1 ad 4: “Although nothing subsists but the individual substance
In reference to God, Aquinas adopts the tradition of the Church in denominating the three things in the Trinity each as an individual “person” (*persona*). Person is used to indicate the real distinctions in the Godhead. “‘Person’ in any nature signifies what is distinct in that nature.”82 It also “signifies what is most perfect” or complete “in all nature.”83 Aquinas puts to use and clarifies the definition of person coined by Boethius, namely “an individual substance of a rational nature,”84 such that a person is a subsistent thing of an intellectual nature.85 Two features, therefore, constitute personhood for Aquinas: subsistence and intelligence.Person is therefore fittingly applied to God, “as that He is the supreme self-subsisting being, and the most perfectly intelligent being.”86 The three subsistent things of the one intelligent and divine nature are three persons in one God.

Insofar as person indicates an individual subsistence, it can also be termed a **hypostasis** or **suppositum**. The suppositum is “the individual subsisting in a nature.”87 In the same way, hypostasis refers to a subsistent thing or subsistence.88 “Two things are requisite to constitute a hypostasis. First it must be self-subsistent and undivided in itself: secondly it must be distinct from other hypostases of the

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83 ST I 29.3.


86 ST I 29.3 *ad 1.* Cf. resp.: “…this name ‘person’ is fittingly applied to God; not, however, as it is applied to creatures, but in a more excellent way; as other names also, which, while giving them to creatures, we attribute to God.”


88 ST I 29.3 *ad 3.* Cf. Comp. 55: “that which is subsistent and complete.”
same nature.” Hypostasis and suppositum are terms more general than person, since person qualifies the nature of the subsistence as intellectual. Therefore, “a person is nothing other than a suppositum of a rational nature.” The persons of the Trinity are supposita or hypostases, each self-subsistent and distinct from each other though united in the divine essence.

The distinction of persons in the Trinity presupposes an order between them wherein they are perfectly God all together and each individually, but not three gods. The persons, therefore, according to Aquinas are constituted by relations or relative personal properties. “Relation in its own proper meaning signifies only what refers to another [solum respectum ad aliud].” As real relations in God, they are not accidentally adherent in him but simply and solely are understood as reference to another. Because “real relation is where one thing really depends on another … in a certain respect,” the relations in God show relative dependence of origin insofar as there is an order of principle and procession.

Accordingly in God we find the origin of one from another … without prejudice to the unity of the essence. For whenever one thing originates from another there must be a real relation. … [In God, the relation is] on the part of both [things], when to wit that which originates attains to the nature of its principle…

In this way, “the divine persons [are multiplied] solely by the relation of some procession” of one coming forth from another. Further, because nothing in God can be other than identical with the divine essence itself, the relations themselves are self-subsistent just as God himself is subsistent. In

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89 De pot. 8.3 ad 7.
90 Cf. De pot. 9.1: “Person adds a definite nature to the hypostasis, since it is nothing more than a hypostasis of rational nature.”
91 De unione a. 1, resp.
92 ST I 28.1. As reference to another, relation is fundamentally a species of opposition. Cf. De pot. 7.8 ad 4.
93 Cf. ST I 28.1; SCG IV, 14 (11).
94 De pot. 8.2: “…relation is not defined with regard to its nature as an accident, for it is described not as being in a subject but as having a respect to something extraneous.”
95 De pot. 7.1 ad 9.
96 De pot. 8.1.
97 Comp. 56.
98 Cf. De pot. 8.3 ad 7: “Although the divine relations constitute the hypostases and thus make them subsistent, they do this inasmuch as they are the divine essence: because a relation as such neither has nor can give subsistence, for this belongs to a substance alone.”; ST I 29.4: “…relation in God is not as an accident in a subject, but is the divine essence itself; and so it is subsistent, for the divine essence subsists.”
God, “relation has no other existence [esse] than that of the substance.” Thus, the identity of relation and God’s substance allows the relation to constitute something subsistent and not merely relative. “Relation as such distinguishes the hypostasis: while as identical with the divine essence it constitutes the hypostasis, and does both inasmuch as it is both relation and divine essence.” Real relations of origin in God both distinguish the hypostases as personal properties and constitute those properties as subsistent persons. In God, therefore, the persons are “subsistent opposite relations.” The persons are both identified with the divine essence and also distinct in their very relativity to each other.

**The Identity of the Persons and the Essence in God**

Aquinas asserts that “the Godhead is wholly and perfectly in each of the three persons according to its proper mode of existence” such that the persons themselves are not simply relations but also “the essence which is not spoken of relatively.” In other words, “in God essence is not really distinct from person; and yet … the persons are really distinguished from each other.” The persons—individually and collectively—are really the same as the divine essence. So, while on the one hand, the persons “in reference to one another” are “regarded as mutually distinct not as united together.”

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99 *De pot.* 8.1 ad 4. Cf. SCG IV, 14 (12). See also *De pot.* 8.2 ad 11: “In God there is no being [esse] save that of the essence… Wherefore it can nowise be granted that in God the being [esse] of the relations is distinct from the being [esse] of the essence.”
100 Cf. *De pot.* 10.3: “For we consider relation as constituting the person: and yet it does not do this quâ relation… But in God relation constitutes a person inasmuch as it is a divine relation: because it is identical with the divine essence, since in God there cannot be any accidents: wherefore relation being in reality the divine essence can constitute a divine hypostasis.” See also *De pot.* 8.3 ad 8.
101 *De pot.* 8.3 ad 9.
102 See *Comp.* 61: “In the case of God, the personal properties are the subsisting persons themselves.”
103 See *Comp.* 55: “Since distinction in Godhead is accounted for by relations that are not accidental but are subsistent, and since among beings subsisting in an intellectual nature personal distinction is discerned, it necessarily follows that personal distinction in God is constituted by the relations in question.”
104 *De pot.* 9.5 ad 15. Cf. *ST* I 29.4: “A divine person signifies a relation as subsisting.”
105 *De pot.* 9.5 ad 23.
106 *De pot.* 8.3 ad 1.
107 *ST* I 39.1.
108 Cf. *ST* I 39.6: “The divine essence is not only really the same as one person, but it is really the same as the three persons.”
109 *De pot.* 7.1 ad 10.
on the other hand, they “are not distinguished from each other so far as they are identified with the essence,”¹¹⁰ for “the same essence, which in the Father is paternity, in the Son is filiation.”¹¹¹ The personal relative properties in God are really distinct from each other but really identical to the divine essence. The persons, while really identical with the essence, are logically distinct from the essence such that we must speak of each according to the mode of our understanding, as the terms signify either what is absolutely united in quiddity or what is relatively distinct.¹¹² “In so far as relation implies respect to something else, no respect to the essence is signified, but rather to its opposite term. Thus it is manifest that relation really existing in God is really the same as His essence and differs only in its mode of intelligibility; as in relation is meant that regard to its opposite which is not expressed in the name of essence.”¹¹³ To treat the persons as three individuals of a species, then, may prove to stretch the relative distinctions too far. The persons are only distinct in reference to each other by relative personal properties. If the relations are subsistent precisely because they are really identical with the divine essence, then the persons would need to be distinct not only by mere relation but also numerically so (i.e., in the absolute sense), thus negating the identity of person and essence. As will be demonstrated later, the relationship of species and individuals requires that the individuals are distinct from each other even on the basis of their individual essences. In other words, the three divine persons would not be identical with one simple divine essence, but each would have a distinct instantiation of the common essence. There would need to be three essences for the three divine persons, the unity among them no longer one of identity. What follows will help to illuminate this problem further.

¹¹⁰ ST I 39.1 ad 1.
¹¹¹ ST I 42.4 ad 2. Cf. 42.5: “…as the Father’s essence is in the Son, the Father Himself is in the Son; likewise, since the Son is His own essence, it follows that He Himself is in the Father in Whom is His essence.”
¹¹² Cf. De pot. 8.2 ad 2: “Substance and relation differ logically and in that which is God something corresponds to both: yet not a different thing to each but one and the same. Moreover it is most appropriate that one thing should correspond to two points of view, when its nature comprises that thing perfectly…”
¹¹³ ST I 28.2.
CHAPTER FIVE: UNITY AND PLURALITY

After treating the notions of essence and person as applied to the Trinity, we naturally must inquire further into their relation inasmuch as there is only one essence but three persons. Because God is truly distinguished in hypostases by relative personal properties, we must ask whether a true plurality in hypostases is opposed to the unity of the divine essence. The trinitarian problem of the one God and the many divine persons is akin to the old question regarding “the one and the many” in philosophy. Aquinas explains the classical take on the one and the many: “There is nothing to prevent a thing which in one way is divided, from being another way undivided; as what is divided in number, may be undivided in species; thus it may be that a thing is in one way ‘one,’ and in another way ‘many.’”¹¹⁴ The one and the many in philosophical debate concerns how it is that the many individual beings that possess the same essence though in distinct supposit are united in species. This quotation perfectly raises the question whether God is a similar case of the one and the many according to the unity of species and multiplicity of participants in that species.

God is One and Three

Everyone who professes the Catholic faith accepts that there is both unity and plurality in God. The Fathers of the Church and the great doctors who came after them are in agreement on this point. Aquinas, too, readily admits that there is oneness (unity) and threeness (trinity) in God without contradiction. “[I]n the Godhead there is something threefold which is not opposed to the unity and simplicity of the divine essence.”¹¹⁵ He also acknowledges that the divine being as one and three is an article of divine and Catholic faith that positively reveals something about the nature of God: “What is of faith cannot be false. But some affirmative propositions are of faith; as that God is Three and

¹¹⁵ Comp. 50.
One.”\(^{116}\) The Athanasian Creed contains a brief yet wonderfully rich formula that has informed the theological tradition. It says that God is to be venerated, “trinity in unity and unity in trinity \([\text{trinitas in unitate et unitas in trinitate}]\).”\(^{117}\) St. Gregory Nazianzen has a similar expression: “For they are divided without division, if I may so say; and they are united in division. For the Godhead is one in three, and the three are one…”\(^{118}\) Augustine states that “we even speak of the Trinity itself as God alone,” meaning that the Trinity is the one and perfectly simple God.\(^{119}\) The one true God is Trinity, therefore, and the Trinity is the one true God. What is plural in God is perfectly identifiable with what is one in God. In fact, this unity among the divine persons is the greatest unity possible or even conceivable. St. Bernard of Clairvaux states that “among all things called one, the unity of the Divine Trinity holds the first place.”\(^{120}\) The threeness of God is also the greatest oneness.

How, then, is God three? What constitutes his threeness as distinct from his oneness? Aquinas answers: “To those who ask, ‘Three what?’ we answer, with Augustine, ‘Three persons.’”\(^{121}\) The three divine persons make up the Trinity. This word “trinity” goes beyond positing plurality in God in that it determines the exact number of that plurality, namely, three. God is not only plural (i.e., many persons), he is precisely three. “The name ‘Trinity’ in God signifies the determinate number of persons. And so the plurality of persons in God requires that we should use the word trinity; because what is indeterminately signified by plurality, is signified by trinity in a determinate manner.” \((ST \ I \ 31.1)\) In other words, we can speak of a plurality in God, but to speak of a trinity qualifies that plurality and determines it so as to reflect the exact number of the three persons revealed to exist as one God.

\(^{116}\) ST I 13.12, s.c. Cf. De pot. 8.1: “The catholic faith teaches that there are in God three Persons of one Essence.”


\(^{118}\) St. Gregory Nazienzen, Orations, no. 39.

\(^{119}\) Augustine, De Trinitate VI, 7 (9).

\(^{120}\) St. Bernard of Clairvaux, De Consid. V, quoted by Aquinas at ST I 11.4, s.c.

\(^{121}\) ST I 30.2 s.c., quoting Augustine, De Trinitate VII, 4 (7).
Now, while all who adhere to the Catholic faith accept that there is not only unity in God but also plurality according to a trinity, the real question to answer is how to distinguish the unity and the plurality and, thus, to see how they do not contradict each other. The implications for the proper understanding of unity and plurality in God are fundamental. If we err in our understanding of the relationship between how God is unity and how he is trinity, we risk falling into opposing heresies. Augustine is quick to warn about the error of tritheism, which stresses the plurality of the Trinity so far that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are no longer one God but three distinct and separate gods. On the flip side, the Unitarian error arises from emphasizing the unity of the Trinity to the point that the three persons are reduced to the solitary individuality of one person. While tritheism neglects the unity of God, unitarianism totally neglects God’s plurality. Aquinas asserts, therefore, that both unity and plurality in God need to be maintained for the proper, orthodox understanding of the Trinity, which strikes a balance between these opposing errors: “solitude is excluded by plurality, and the plurality of gods by unity.”122 To properly understand the relationship between the unity of God and the trinity of persons, we must first understand how it is that God is one.

Numerical Unity and Transcendental Unity

Aquinas speaks of two types of unity or oneness. “One” is either numerical as the principle of number or it is transcendental, that is, as a property of being as such. Insofar as “one” is described as a unit of measurement, it is the principle of number. Aquinas calls this “one” numerical unity. It is fundamentally linked to matter insofar as there is something to be measured, since nonmaterial things cannot strictly speaking have magnitude (e.g., volume, mass, length, etc.). Numerical unity, then, is predicated only of material things and is only abstracted from matter in idea by our minds but is never really separate from matter. In this way, we can speak of numerical unity being in the genus of

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122 ST I 30.3 ad 3 (contra the sed contra).
mathematics.\textsuperscript{123} This numerical unity always exists “in some subject”\textsuperscript{124} and thus adds “a reality to ‘being,’” as it “belong[s] to the genus of quantity.”\textsuperscript{125} The “one” that is the principle of number always refers to material substances that are quantifiable.\textsuperscript{126}

This raises the question, then, as to whether we can in any way speak of number in God. Aquinas makes a distinction that is necessary when speaking of number and God, namely between number itself and what is numbered. “In the divine Trinity is to be understood both number and the persons numbered.”\textsuperscript{127} When we speak about number in reference to God, we need to make clear, therefore, that there is a difference between number itself and the things numbered.

Number is twofold, simple or absolute, as two and three and four; and number as existing in things numbered, as two men and two horses. So, if number in God is taken absolutely or abstractedly, there is nothing to prevent whole and part from being in him, and thus number in him is only in our way of understanding; forasmuch as number regarded apart from things numbered exists only in the intellect.\textsuperscript{128}

Number taken in a simple or abstracted sense can be thought of in God, but only in our limited mode of understanding. In other words, simple numbers insofar as they are numbers (as “two,” “sixteen,” “one hundred,” generally speaking), exist only in the mind. Therefore, we can say number is in God inasmuch as we recognize that it has no real bearing as units of measurement applied to God as he exists in reality. As God exists in reality, there are persons numbered, but without any measurement. “A determinate number, if taken as a simple number, existing in the mind only, is measured by one. But when we speak of a number of things as applied to the persons in God, the notion of measure has no place, because the magnitude of the three persons is the same…”\textsuperscript{129} If we cannot speak about the things

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} Cf. ST I 11.3 \textit{ad} 2.
\item \textsuperscript{124} ST I 11.4 \textit{ad} 2.
\item \textsuperscript{125} ST I 11.1 \textit{ad} 1.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Cf. De pot. 9.5 \textit{ad} 8: “The number which is a species of quantity is caused by a division of a continuous quantity; wherefore just as continuous quantity relates to mathematics, because it is separated from sensible matter logically and not in reality, so also number which is a species of quantity is the subject-matter of arithmetic the principle whereof is unity that is the first measure of quantity.”
\item \textsuperscript{127} ST I 31.1 \textit{ad} 4.
\item \textsuperscript{128} ST I 30.1 \textit{ad} 4.
\item \textsuperscript{129} ST I 30.2 \textit{ad} 5.
\end{itemize}
numbered in God according to measure, we can only number God according to our mode of
knowledge, that is, as abstracted in our intellect. Properly speaking, God has no number. Unity
considered as the principle of number and as a principle of measure is, therefore, not attributed to God.

Besides the unity that is the principle of number (number as measured by one), Aquinas speaks
of another type of unity. “One” is not only a unit of measurement but also metaphysical or
transcendental inasmuch as “each thing is ‘one’ by its substance.” Unity in this transcendental sense,
in contrast to numerical unity, refers to a metaphysical entity whose unity is independent of matter. It is
called “transcendental” because it is convertible with being. Each being is unified in itself and is one
being. All beings are unities. In reality, nothing distinguishes a being and its unity; it is a unity simply
by its being. Of course, the signification of unity differs from that of being in our intellects, insofar as it
adds to the notion of being a further understanding. “The unity that is convertible with being adds
nothing to being except the negation of division; not that it signifies indivision only, but substance with
indivision: for one is the same as individual being.” As God is perfect and infinite being, he is also
perfectly simple and thus perfectly one and undivided. The unity of God is the greatest unity possible.

Aquinas proves that there is and can be only one God. Divine simplicity requires it. The
nature of God as pure act and the perfect identity of essence and existence requires it. Bernard Wuellner
categorizes the unity of God as a real, natural, metaphysical, simple, and unique unity in being and in
essence. God is not numerically one but metaphysically one insofar as he completely lacks division.

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130 ST I 11.1 ad 1.
131 De pot. 9.7; cf. ST I 11.1.
132 Cf. esp. ST I 11.3; SCG I, 42.
133 Wuellner, Dictionary, 129.
“One” which is the principle of number is not predicated of God, but only of material things. For “one” the principle of number belongs to the “genus” of mathematics, which are material in being, and abstracted from matter only in idea. But “one” which is convertible with being is a metaphysical entity and does not depend on matter in its being. And although in God there is no privation, still, according to the mode of our apprehension, he is known to us by way only of privation and remotion. Thus there is no reason why a certain kind of privation should not be predicated of God; for instance, that he is incorporeal and infinite; and in the same way it is said of God that he is one.  

The fact that God’s essence is identical with his existence informs every other divine attribute, including the unity of God. God is Perfect Being and therefore is Perfect Unity. The unity of God follows upon his perfect being. “But [God] is supremely undivided inasmuch as he is divided neither actually nor potentially, by any mode of division; since he is altogether simple. … Hence it is manifest that God is ‘one’ in the supreme degree [maxime unus].” This supreme unity of God is founded precisely in his esse, his “existence” or his “to be.” God’s essence is identical with his esse and thus we can say that God has one perfect and infinite esse, which is identical with his nature and with himself. Aquinas states that “whatever is one in species and form in the Godhead cannot be multiplied numerically.” God’s essence is his existence, one infinite esse, which cannot be multiplied even with several distinct hypostases. Therefore, “the divine persons have one being [esse].” The absolute unity of the Godhead is not negated by the several supposita, for the three are one in essence and, thus, even in their very being.

Unity as Opposed to Plurality by Division

Transcendental unity is opposed to division as its privation. “Unity signifies absence of division.” We saw above that this unity is convertible with being precisely as it is undivided. Aquinas

134 ST I 11.3 ad 2.
135 ST I 11.4.
136 See De pot. 7.2 ad 5: “God’s being is individualized and distinct from every other being by the very fact that it is self-subsistent being, and is not something additional to a nature that is distinct from its being. Now every other being that is not subsistent must be individualized by the nature and essence that subsists in that being; and of such beings it is true that the being of A is distinct from the being of B by the fact that it is the being of another nature…”
137 Comp. 1, 56.
138 ST I 30.4 ad 3. See also 41.6 ad 1: “…Father and Son have the same being [idem esse sit patris et filii]…”
139 ST I 92.4.
states that plurality\textsuperscript{140} and number\textsuperscript{141} follow upon division, or at least distinction.\textsuperscript{142} In this way, “plurality is opposed to unity”\textsuperscript{143} and “multitude proceeds from some unity.”\textsuperscript{144} Unity is the privation of division, while multitude is a result of division. Therefore, unity is opposed to plurality by division.

“Plurality comes about only through withdrawal from unity. But something withdraws from unity only through division, for something is said to be one from the fact that it is undivided.”\textsuperscript{145} Just as something is one insofar as it is undivided, something can be labeled a multitude to the extent of its division.

“Something is called many from the fact that it is divisible or actually divided.”\textsuperscript{146} In relation to “one,” plurality can be said to be a privation inasmuch as it lacks indivision, for it is always the case that “the removal of unity is founded in some one thing.”\textsuperscript{147} The inverse—that unity is a privation of plurality—is also true: “‘One’ is opposed to ‘many’ privatively, inasmuch as the idea of ‘many’ involves division.”\textsuperscript{148} Unity is opposed to plurality and plurality is opposed to unity according to the presence or absence of division.

Since we can only predicate transcendental unity to God, we also must be limited to predicking its opposed plurality to him, that is, if we are even able to assert a true multitude of him at all. While it is clear that we cannot attribute a numerical unity to God (nor thus a numerical multitude according to measure) as he is absolutely infinite and immaterial, we are constrained, however, to predicate a real plurality in the Godhead if we are to recognize three really distinct persons in the Trinity. Since,

\textsuperscript{140} ST I 30.3: “Plurality derives from division.”
\textsuperscript{141} Comp. I, 51: “Number always follows division.”
\textsuperscript{142} De pot. 8.1: “Now number results from some kind of distinction.” Comp. I, 60: “Number follows upon distinction of some sort.”
\textsuperscript{143} Peri Herm. I, 8.12.
\textsuperscript{144} SCG I, 42 (19).
\textsuperscript{145} Super Boethii De Trinitate 4.1, s.c. 3. See also ST I 11.2: “‘One’ is opposed to ‘many,’ but in various ways. The ‘one’ which is the principle of number is opposed to ‘multitude’ which is number, as the measure is to the thing measured. For ‘one’ implies the idea of a primary measure; and number is ‘multitude’ measured by ‘one,’ as is clear from Metaphysics X. But the ‘one’ which is convertible with ‘being’ is opposed to ‘multitude’ by way of privation; as the undivided is to the thing divided.”
\textsuperscript{146} Sup. Boethii D.T. 4.1. See also Comp. I, 60: “Just as unity is indivisible or undivided, so plurality is divisible or divided.”
\textsuperscript{147} ST I 11.2 \textit{ad} 1.
\textsuperscript{148} ST I 11.2 \textit{ad} 4.
therefore, “all plurality is a consequence of division,” we must inquire into the way in which it can be said that God is both absolutely one and somehow divided into three persons. Generally speaking, division implies “separation into parts.” For this reason, Aquinas rejects predicating any division in God. “But lest the simplicity and singleness of the divine essence be taken away, the terms ‘separation’ and ‘division,’ which belong to the parts of a whole, are to be avoided…” At the same time, Aquinas grants that division can be understood in God, in a certain respect.

Division as Diversity, Difference, and Distinction

To understand how it is that there can be division in the Godhead, we must first inquire into the different modes of division. Aquinas states, “For since division causes plurality and indivision unity, we must judge of one and many according to the various kinds of division.” Fundamentally, division can be understood in three ways: diversity, difference, and distinction. Since the essence is identically the same for all three persons, there can be no diversity in God. “Diversity requires a distinct substance in the sense of essence. Thus we cannot say that the Son is diverse from the Father, although He is another [alius].” Further, strictly speaking, the Trinitarian persons are one in that there is no otherness or difference between them. “‘Difference’ implies distinction of form. There is one form in God. … Therefore the term ‘difference’ does not properly apply to God…” Clearly, then, there is neither diversity nor difference in God according to their proper significations. Both such divisions are

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149 ST I 30.3.
150 Some theologians on this point note that there cannot be a true plurality in God because all plurality is founded upon division. See, for example, Douglas C. Hall, *The Trinity: An Analysis of St. Thomas Aquinas’ Expositio of the De Trinitate of Boethius* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1992), 84: “Since the Boethian source of plurality is ‘otherness,’ there is no intelligible manner in which the One Essence of the Divine Persons can result in plurality.”
152 ST I 31.2.
153 De pot. 9.7.
154 ST I 31.2 ad 1. Armand Maurer comments on diversity among the persons. See Armand Maurer, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Thomas Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I-IV of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987), xxvii: “If they were diverse, God would contain the primary opposition between being and non-being.”
155 ST I 31.2 ad 2.
156 See also Maurer, xxviii: “The terms ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ in their strict usage have to do with forms or essences, and so they are not applicable to the persons of the Trinity, which have the same divine essence.”
founded upon separation of the essence, partition, or even inequality among the persons.

Insofar as difference is taken relatively, however, and not absolutely, we can speak of division in God according to distinction. Distinction is in this limited way “a sort of otherness between two notions or things.” Armand Maurer notes that “Thomas finds the general term ‘distinction’ most appropriate to express the otherness of persons in the Trinity.” The otherness in God is only understood as distinction, not as a diversity or even difference in its proper sense, for it is not a distinction of essence or being but arises only according to the relative opposition constitutive of the three persons. Aquinas calls this distinction “in respect of a mere relation” the “distinction of the slightest kind,” for “the more prior a distinction is, the nearer it approaches to unity.” The persons are distinct from each other, related by opposition to each other in an order of origin. “In immaterial

Cf. Hall, The Trinity, 84: “There is no way in which plurality in the Trinity can be based on divisibility of essence or species. There also cannot be plurality in the Trinity on the basis of divisibility or actual division of substance, or matter, or form. The Divine Persons cannot be distinct in themselves in that the One Form is rendered distinct in three different individuations in matter; likewise the Divine Persons cannot be distinct on the basis of accidental dimensions, and they cannot be considered ‘species’ in a ‘genus’ of God, and they cannot be considered to occupy a ‘space’ to the exclusion of one another.”

See De pot. 7.3 ad 2: “Diversity is absolute and is applied to things which are not the same: whereas difference is relative, since that which is different differs in a certain respect.”


Maurer, xxviii. See esp. De pot. 9.8 ad 2: “Although some doctors of the Church use the term difference in reference to God, it should not be employed as a general rule, or enlarged upon: because difference denotes a distinction of form, and this is impossible in God since God’s form is his nature according to Augustine. But we must explain the term difference as standing for a distinction of the slightest kind: since some things are described as distinct in respect of a mere relation… Again if we meet with the term diversity in connexion [sic] with God, we must explain it in the same way… Yet in speaking of God we must be more wary of using the word diverse than the word different, because diversity refers more to an essential division: inasmuch as any multiplication whatsoever of forms causes a difference, whereas diversity arises only from substantial forms.”

De pot. 9.8 ad 2. See also 9.5 ad 2: “…relative distinction is the least of all distinctions just as relation itself of all the genera has the least being.”

ST I 40.2 ad 3.

See SCG IV, 24 (7-8): “For among things, with the material distinction gone (and in the divine Persons such can have no place), one discovers no differentiation except by some opposition. For things which have no opposition to one another can be simultaneously in something identical; thus, no distinction can be caused in them. … But it is not a distinction of affirmation and negation, for such is the distinction of being from non-being. Nor is it the opposition of privation and habit, for such is the distinction of the perfect from the imperfect. Neither is it the distinction of contrariety, for such is the distinction of diversity of form. … Therefore, the conclusion remains that one divine Person is not distinguished from another except by the opposition of relation: thus, the Son is distinguished from the Father consequently to the relative opposition of father and son. It is because in the divine Persons there can be no relative opposition except, consequently, on origin. … And thus, in accord with the origin of the Son from the Father, there are two relations, one in originator, the other in the originated: to wit, paternity and sonship; and there are two others in reference to the Holy Spirit: to wit, spiration and procession. Therefore, paternity and spiration do not constitute two Persons, but pertain to the one Person of the Father, for they have no opposition to one another. … But there is no opposition to assign save that by way of origin.”
substances there can be no distinction except that of order. But in the divine Persons who are entirely immaterial there can be no other order than that of origin.”163 This order of natural origin in the divine persons Aquinas calls the “order of nature.”164 It is in this sense that he says that there are two principles of distinction in the Godhead, origin and relation, with the latter best capturing the intrinsic form of each supposit.165 Thus, relation is distinctive of each person. Diversity and difference imply a division of essence, whereas distinction in God is predicated solely on account of the order of relative opposition.166

These relations in God do not import any composition in God since each is truly identical with the divine essence.167 Relation is constitutive and distinctive of each person, such that the persons are the subsisting relations themselves. The purely relative mode of distinction between the persons, however, is a real distinction just as the relations themselves are real and subsistent. “...[T]hat which is proper to a real relation, namely opposition and distinction, is really in God.”168 This real distinction between the divine supposits is sometimes referred to as a “difference” between them on account of the “quasi-form” that each possesses, namely their personal properties (paternity, filiation, and spiration) but not on account of any difference of essence.169 “Though the same nature is in Father and Son, it is in each by a different mode of existence [alium modum existendi], that is to say with a different relation. Consequently that which belongs to the Father in respect of his nature does not of necessity belong to the Son.”170 Aquinas refers to this distinction in mode of existence between the persons a

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163 SCG IV, 24 (13).
164 ST I 42.3, esp. ad 3: “The order of nature means not the ordering of nature itself, but the existence of order in the divine Persons according to natural origin.” Cf. ST I 31.1 ad 2: “Two things are implied in a collective term; plurality of the supposita, and a unity of some kind of order. For ‘people’ is a multitude of men comprehended under a certain order. In the first sense, this word ‘trinity’ is like other collective words; but in the second sense it differs from them, because in the divine Trinity not only is there unity of order, but also with this there is unity of essence.”
165 See ST I 40.2.
166 See ST I 31.2; De pot. 9.8.
167 See De pot. 9.5 ad 15.
168 De pot. 8.2 ad 3. Cf. ST I 40.2 ad 4: “Relation presupposes the distinction of the subjects, when it is an accident; but when the relation is subsistent, it does not presuppose, but brings about distinction.”
169 See ST 31.2 ad 2.
170 De pot. 2.1 ad 13.
“formal distinction” inasmuch as the relations are opposed to each other and therefore “constitute a plurality of mutually distinct supposita, since plurality follows distinction: and formal distinction arises from opposition.” This formal distinction between supposita is not, however, properly speaking an otherness or a difference, though such terms are at times used to stress the distinction between them.

This relative distinction, however, is a division in the Godhead, but according to the slightest kind. Aquinas notes that this least possible distinction “cannot regard anything absolute” and thus maintains the absolute unity of divine essence. Further, since the divine essence is identical with the divine esse, the persons are not distinct in being. “Since plurality of units is caused by a distinction, if this distinction be one of being [esse] the units must differ in being [esse]: but where the distinction is one of relation, the units that compose the number must differ only relatively from one another.”

Accordingly, Aquinas notes that “there is a kind of division which altogether transcends [i.e., is more universal and comprehensive than] the genus of quantity, and this is division according to formal opposition which has nothing to do with quantity.” The plurality in the Godhead, then, has nothing to do with quantity or the unity that is in the genus of quantity. Instead, since “any kind of distinction suffices to cause a plurality of like kind,” the relative distinction in the Godhead must imply a relative plurality that transcends the genus of quantity and maintains the absolute unity of the divine essence.

171 De pot. 9.5 ad 16.
172 If by “otherness” distinction according to relative opposition of origin is understood, then as Maurer says, “This gives us another and unexpected verification of the Boethian principle that ‘otherness is the source of plurality.’” Maurer, “Introduction,” xxix.
173 Aquinas notes at Super Boethii De Trin. 4.1 that “division does not require that both of the items divided one from another be a being.” In other words, a division can be relatively minor, since it can be found even in some one thing united in being. Therefore, while the division in the Godhead is among subsistent relations that are each a being (ens), they are not divided, however, but are identical in being (esse), since they are the same being (God).
174 De pot. 8.1.
175 De pot. 9.5 ad 4.
176 De pot. 9.7.
177 De pot. 9.5 ad 5.
Transcendental Multitude

Aquinas states quite generally that number is “multitude … measured by one.”\textsuperscript{178} While number as a species of quantity has no place in God, he notes that there is also a number that corresponds to the unity convertible with being. Strictly speaking, unity is opposed to division and subsequently to multitude by division.\textsuperscript{179} The unity found in the Godhead, namely transcendental unity, is not directly opposed to multitude, but to the division of essence and being. That multitude predicated of several material creatures measures number according to discrete quantity. In immaterial things, however, there is a “multitude that is opposed to the unity that is convertible with being: and this is caused by formal division which is into opposite forms whether absolute or relative: and such is number in God.”\textsuperscript{180} The relative quasi-forms of the personal properties that constitute the divine supposita also constitute a multitude of unities.

The unity of God corresponds not only to the essence absolutely speaking, but also to each person of the Trinity. “In God \textit{one} is common to essence and relation: thus we say that the essence is one, and that the Father is one.”\textsuperscript{181} The transcendental unity predicated of both essence and person signifies the indivision of each.

So we when say, the essence is one, the term “one” signifies the essence undivided; and when we say the person is one, it signifies the person undivided; and when we say the persons are many, we signify those persons, and their individual undividedness; for it is of the very nature of multitude that is should be composed of units.\textsuperscript{182}

Each of the supposita, identical with the divine essence, is undivided in itself. Aquinas states that “when we speak of many things, multitude in this [transcendent] sense points to those things as being each undivided in itself.”\textsuperscript{183} Corresponding to the transcendental unity of God is a transcendental

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\item \textsuperscript{178} \textit{Peri Herm.} I, 8 (6).
\item \textsuperscript{179} See \textit{ST} I 30.3 \textit{ad} 3: “‘One’ does not exclude multitude, but division, which logically precedes one or multitude. Multitude does not remove unity, but division from each of the individuals which compose the multitude.”
\item \textsuperscript{180} \textit{De pot.} 9.5 \textit{ad} 8.
\item \textsuperscript{181} \textit{De pot.} 9.4 \textit{ad} 14.
\item \textsuperscript{182} \textit{ST} I 30.3.
\item \textsuperscript{183} \textit{ST} I 30.3.
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multitude wherein the multitude is established simply on the basis of many things that are undivided in themselves and distinct from each other.

[The plurality that corresponds to this [transcendental] unity [convertible with being] adds nothing to the many things except distinction, which consists in each one not being the other: and this they have not from anything added to them but from their proper forms. It is clear, then, that one which is convertible with being posits being but adds nothing except the negation of division. And the number corresponding to it adds this to the things described as many, that each of them is one, and that each of them is not the other, wherein is the essence of distinction.\textsuperscript{184}

Aquinas adds that this transcendental multitude only adds two negations: that each thing is undivided in itself and that each thing is not the other. In other words, transcendental multitude does not positively add anything to the several units of which it is predicated. Therefore, to predicate a transcendental multitude in the Godhead does not introduce any composition in him. “Such a multitude is applicable to God.”\textsuperscript{185} In this way, then, multitude does not remove unity from God, but solitude, for “if plurality of persons did not exist in God, He would be alone [solus] or solitary.”\textsuperscript{186} Instead, the one God is an eternal communion of three interrelated persons. This transcendental multitude seems to be what Damascene has in mind when he says, “…yet the number does not introduce division. … And number is not by nature a cause of division or union, but is, rather, a sign of the quantity of the things numbered, whether they be united or divided.”\textsuperscript{187}

The indivision relevant to transcendental multitude is the indivision of those singulars that—collectively taken—constitute a multitude.\textsuperscript{188} Aquinas says as much: “Transcendental multitude does not add anything to those things of which it is predicated except indivision regarding singulars.”\textsuperscript{189}

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\item[\textsuperscript{184}] De pot. 9.7.
\item[\textsuperscript{185}] ST I 30.3 ad 2.
\item[\textsuperscript{186}] ST I 31.3 ad 1.
\item[\textsuperscript{187}] Damascene, De fide III, 5.
\item[\textsuperscript{188}] On this point, I am directly indebted to the language and insights of Dr. Stephen Hipp, my advisor for this thesis paper.
\item[\textsuperscript{189}] ST I 30.3 ad 2, translation mine.
\end{enumerate}
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unity of the Godhead is reminiscent of the relationship between individuals of a species, that is, one of many units collectively unified in what makes them all essentially the same kind of thing. The individuals that are united in species, however, are not merely distinct according to relation (like the divine persons), but are divided by a true diversity of being. As will be shown later, a species is a logical unity that does not have any true unity in reality outside of the abstract essence of each real being distinct in esse. The divine essence, however, is really identical with each person. As Douglas Hall observes: “There is no way in which plurality in the Trinity can be based on divisibility of essence or species.”

Speaking broadly, Aquinas refers to the unity of the divine essence as a “numerical unity,” not as the principle of measure found in material things but according to the singularity of being. In this way, transcendental unity is sometimes referred to as a numerical unity precisely as it indicates the unity of the unique existent supposit in contrast to that unity that categorizes a species. “A thing is said to be the same identically [idem numero] according to suppositum, but the same specifically according to form.” Aquinas goes on to call this sameness in number a numerical unity [unitas numeralis]. In this way, numerical unity is also called numerical identity. The three persons of the Trinity, moreover, are united and identical according to number as they are absolutely one in Godhead, essence, and being. Therefore, their unity is not only one of species, but even of numerical identity.

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190 Aquinas seems to indicate, in fact, that diversity presupposes a plurality of distinct beings. See *Super Boethii De Trin.* 4.1: “Diversity [requires] that both items [which are divided one from another] be a being” such that “it presupposes plurality.”

191 Hall, *The Trinity,* 84.

192 *ST* III 50.5 ad 2.

193 Stephen Hipp, in private correspondence, notes that this distinction is possibly derived from the species/individuals relationship itself. “The expression ‘numerical unity’ is often used to express unity at the level of primary substance, in the way in which it is commonly said, for example, that ‘the divine persons are not merely one in a specific sense, but one numerically.’ In this instance of the use of ‘numerical unity,’ the idea of matter cannot be included. Thomas uses the expression ‘numerical unity’ to indicate ‘unity of the supposit’ as distinct from unity of the species (e.g., *Sum theol.*, IIP, q. 50 a. 5 ad 2). Can the expression ‘numerical unity’ be employed irrespective of the presence or absence of matter? Arguably, the answer is this: ‘numerical unity’ is properly said only of material substances, which, as individuals of specific natures, enjoy both a specific unity and the unity of supposit, so that the expression ‘numerical unity’ represents a level of unity exceeding that of specific unity. Since the species-individual distinction obtains only amongst material substances, the concept of ‘numerical unity,’ properly speaking (i.e. when understood in contradistinction from specific unity), applies only to individuals of the material order. In an extended sense, however, it can be used to refer to any instance of supposital
CHAPTER SIX: SPEAKING ABOUT GOD AS A PLURALITY OF PERSONS

God is said to be both one in essence and being and also a multitude of three really distinct persons. Despite there being a seeming contradiction to our human mode of understanding, Aquinas asserts that there is absolutely no contradiction between God as One and God as Trinity. “A proposition can be said to be unintelligible in two ways. In one way on the part of the knower who lacks understanding. An example is the proposition: ‘In the three divine persons there is one essence.’”\textsuperscript{194} Just because there are two ways of speaking about God, that does not imply that God is twofold in being.\textsuperscript{195} Rather, there are multiple modes of predication when speaking about God. “Real relations must be the divine substance, yet they have not the mode of substance, but receive another mode of predication differing from those things that are predicated of God substantively.”\textsuperscript{196} When we speak about the one divine essence, we signify God according to his substance. On the other hand, when we speak about the divine persons, we signify God according to his three hypostases. In both modes of predication, God is signified, but according to different aspects, united in reality but distinct in our understanding. Therefore, we must be carefully attentive regarding exactly what is signified, or, rather, how terms applied to God signify him according to the mode of the essence or to the mode of the supposit. “When we consider the proper way of expressing ourselves, the mode of signification must be considered no less than the thing signified.”\textsuperscript{197}

\textsuperscript{194} Super Boethii De Trin. 4.3 ad 1.
\textsuperscript{195} See De pot. 8.2 ad 11: “Wherefore two definitions of a thing do not prove that it has a twofold being, but that it can be said in two ways of that thing that it is…”
\textsuperscript{196} De pot. 8.2.
\textsuperscript{197} ST I 39.4.
“Trinity”

The word that tradition has handed down to speak about the three divine persons that are united in essence is “Trinity.” Aquinas explains that this term can refer to both the three persons and the one essence in which they are united.

In its etymological sense, this word “Trinity” seems to signify the one essence of the three persons, according as trinity may mean trine-unity. But in the strict meaning of the term it rather signifies the number of persons of one essence; and on this account we cannot say that the Father is the Trinity, as He is not three persons.198

Aquinas proceeds to note that according to the proper signification of the term, “Trinity” refers to the three persons, not to the relations by which they are constituted. We can say that multitude in God refers to both persons and relations, but the word “Trinity” signifies the three persons who are united in essence. Regarding the beautiful Athanasian phrase, *trinity in unity and unity in trinity*, Aquinas comments: “So when we say, ‘Trinity in Unity,’ we do not place number in the unity of the essence, as if we meant three times one; but we place the persons numbered in the unity of nature. … On the other hand, we say ‘Unity in Trinity’; meaning that the nature is in its supposita.”199 The relation of the unity of essence to the Trinity of persons is always the most fundamental question in trinitarian theology, and their confusion is at the root of the two most common trinitarian heresies.

Aquinas notes that the opposite heresies of Arianism and Sabellianism are founded upon the same error of equating person and essence, where each signifies the other. “Now, in treating of the Trinity, we must beware of two opposite errors, and proceed cautiously between them—namely, the error of Arius, who placed a Trinity of substance with the Trinity of persons; and the error of Sabellius, who placed unity of person with the unity of essence.”200 The mode of predication regarding the unity and distinction of persons in God has real import. The distinction between signifying persons and

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198 *ST* I 31.1 *ad* 1.
199 *ST* I 31.1 *ad* 4.
200 *ST* I 31.2.
essence is not a baseless logical abstraction, but has real significance for a proper understanding of the realities of unity and plurality in God.

**Absolute Predications Versus Relative Predications**

As seen above, Aquinas clearly asserts that there is only one divine *esse* shared by each of the three persons of the Trinity. As to whether there is only one *res* in God, however, he is a bit more ambiguous. Certainly, God is only one *res* or thing; otherwise, there would be several gods. And, yet, Aquinas states that “there are several realities subsistent [*plures res subsistentes*] in the divine nature,” meaning of course the three subsistent relations. This warrants a distinction: in God, there is one *res* absolutely but three *res* relatively speaking. “Hence we must reply [against a logical distinction of the persons] that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three things [*tres res*], provided thing be taken for a relative thing: for if it be taken as absolute, then they are but one thing.” Thus, there is both one thing and three things in God, depending on the respective mode of signification.

Along these same lines, Aquinas asserts that “in God there are only two modes of predication, namely substantive and relative,” and that all trinitarian discourse always employs these two modes in an interconnected dialectic. Just as “the essence … is not spoken of relatively,” so too “nothing that is said of God absolutely can be understood as distinguishing and constituting the hypostases in the persons.” Aquinas elaborates on the nature of signification, and the mode it implies in reference to its object.

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201 ST I 30.1.
202 *De pot.* 9.5 ad 14. Cf. ST I 39.3 ad 3: “This word ‘thing’ [*res*] is one of the transcendentals. Whence, so far as it is referred to relation, it is predicated of God in the plural; whereas, so far as it is referred to the substance, it is predicated in the singular.”
203 *De pot.* 8.4, s.c. Cf. ST I 11.2 ad 1: “…[O]pposite is not predicated of opposite; forasmuch as one is absolute, and the other is relative… [L]ikewise what is absolutely ‘one’ is relatively ‘many,’ and vice versa.”
204 *De pot.* 8.3 ad 1. For an insightful example, see *SCG* IV, 18 (4): “[Scripture] says that the Holy Spirit ‘proceedeth from the Father’ and that He receives from the Son. And this cannot be understood of the divine essence, since the divine essence neither proceeds from the Father nor receives from the Son. One must, then, say that the Holy Spirit is a subsisting Person.”
205 *De pot.* 8.3.
The essential attributes not only signify that which is the divine essence, but they also signify it in a certain way, since they signify something as existing in God: and for this reason a difference in respect of anything absolute would reflect on the divine essence. On the other hand the divine relations, though they signify that which is the divine essence, they do not signify it by way of essence, since they do not convey the idea of existence in something, but of reference towards something else.206

Absolute predication signifies the divine essence “in a certain way,” namely as something existing in God pertaining to the essence. Relative predication also signifies the divine essence, but not according to something existing in the essence but relation *ad aliud*, and so only pertain to the personal supposit of the divine essence.

The difference between absolute and relative predication is founded upon the logical distinction between essence and person in God.207 “In God the absolute and the relative do not differ really, but only logically…”208 Essence and person differ only logically and thus also in their mode of signification. Absolute predication of God signifies his essence. Relative predication of God signifies the persons insofar as the relations constitute the persons. Even though the word “person” is absolute in its usual mode of signification, it signifies a relation in God, for the relations distinguish the persons in the Godhead.209 Ultimately, then, the distinction is between the divine nature considered absolutely versus the divine nature considered relatively as it is in the singular supposit according to the general principle that “whatsoever belongs to the nature [as considered in one particular supposit] does not necessarily belong to every supposit of that nature.”210 At the same time, Aquinas always stresses the fundamental identity between the relations and the divine essence.211 Since we understand a logical

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206 *De pot.* 8.2 ad 4.
207 See esp. *ST* I 39.1 ad 2: “As essence and person in God differ in our way of thinking, it follows that something can be denied of the one and affirmed of the other; and therefore, when we suppose the one, we need not suppose the other.”
208 *De pot.* 7.1 ad 6. Cf. *SCG* IV, 14 (10): “…a relation in divinity is not without an absolute. But a comparison to an absolute in God is other than a comparison to an absolute in created things. For in created things a relation is compared to an absolute as an accident to a subject; not in God, of course—there the comparison is by way of identity, just as it is also in other things which are said of God.”
209 See *De pot.* 9.6 ad 2. Cf. ad 4: “The form signified by the word *person* is not the essence taken absolutely, but is that which is the principle of incommunicability or individuation.”
210 *De pot.* 9.9 ad 2.
211 Cf. *SCG* IV, 14 (10): “…a relation in divinity is not without an absolute. But a comparison to an absolute in God is other than a comparison to an absolute in created things. For in created things a relation is compared to an absolute as an accident
distinction between them, however, such a distinction in thought demands a distinction in predication as human language is always founded upon human understanding.

Moreover, there is a real distinction in God, but only at the relative level and not absolutely.212 “The very nature of relative opposition includes distinction. Hence, there must be real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that which is absolute—namely, essence, wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity—but according to that which is relative.”213 But as we noted above regarding the plurality of God, this relative distinction distinguishes the persons without introducing any kind of essential division in the Godhead. “Now opposite relations in God meet together in the one same absolute and do not divide it.”214 Founded upon this real distinction of supposita, plurality in God is present only at the relative level, and not in regards to anything absolute.215 “The supreme unity and simplicity of God exclude every kind of plurality of absolute things, but not plurality of relations.”216 Distinction and plurality in God are not at the absolute level, but only in regards to what is signified in God relatively. There is no distinction in God regarding the divine essence or esse.

If it were a distinction in esse, as is necessary in a relation of particulars to a universal or of individuals to a species,217 the plurality in God would be at the absolute level, since God’s essence is his existence (esse). But Aquinas reminds us: “The divine persons are not distinguished as regards

to a subject; not in God, of course—there the comparison is by way of identity, just as it is also in other things which are said of God.”

212 See De pot. 8.1: “But this distinction cannot regard anything absolute, since whatsoever is predicated of God absolutely denotes the divine essence, so that it would follow that the divine Persons differ essentially, which is the heresy of Arius. It follows then that the divine Persons are distinct only by their relations.”

213 ST I 28.3.

214 De pot. 9.9 ad 3.

215 See De pot. 9.5 ad 5: “Any kind of distinction suffices to cause a plurality of like kind. Wherefore as in God there is no distinction in that which is absolute but only a distinction of relations, even so in God there is not plurality in respect of what is absolute, but only in respect of relations.”

216 ST I 30.1 ad 3.

217 See, for example, Comp. I, 14: “A number of individuals comprised under one species differ in their existence [esse], and yet are alike in their one essence. Accordingly, whenever a number of individuals are under one species, their existence [esse] must be different from the essence of the species. But in God existence [esse] and essence are identical… Therefore God cannot be a sort of species predicated of many individuals.” This point is taken up at several points throughout this paper, including in the sections on “Unity and Plurality” (above), “Genus, Species, and Individual,” and “Universality and Particularity” (below).
being [esse], in which they subsist, nor in anything absolute, but only as regards something relative.”

The distinction according to relation does not demand a distinction of esse in each singular unity. Aquinas notes that relative predication pertains to the distinction of divine suppositis, which unlike creatures, do not have their own unique esse, but are united in esse and the one essence of the Godhead. The relationship of individuals of a species, taking into account the diverse esse among them, cannot be applied to God, whose one essence is identical with his one esse.

Singular and Plural Terms

Closely following the distinction between absolute and relative predication in God is the distinction between singular and plural terms in reference to God. The latter distinction is a logical extension of that between absolute and relative signification. Singular terms are used absolutely and refer to the unity of essence, while plural terms connote relations. Whereas singular terms are also called essential terms, the plural terms are also known as notional terms in regards to the notions that distinguish the persons. “Unity and number are both attributed to God but not in the same respect: unity in respect of the essence, number in respect of the persons: or unity in respect of absolutes, number in respect of relations.” As observed above, plurality in God is at the relative level, and not in regard to anything absolute. Yet, what is plural in God (the persons) is still identified with what is singular (the essence), but we distinguish them according to their mutual modes of predication, as to what is signified as an absolute unity and what is signified as a multitude of relations.

218 ST I 40.2 ad 2.
219 See De pot. 9.5 ad 4.
220 See De pot. 9.5 ad 19: “It must by no means be granted that there is more than one being [esse] in God: seeing that being always refers to essence and especially in God whose being is his essence. But the relations which distinguish the suppositis in God do not add another being to the being of the essence, because they do not enter into composition with the essence… And every form that adds being to the substantial being enters into composition with the substance, and its being is accidental… Accordingly difference in respect of being follows plurality of suppositis, just as difference of essence in creatures: but neither of these obtains in God.”
221 Cf. De pot. 9.4: “…if [person] signifies the essence directly it should not be predicated in the plural…”
222 On notional terms and acts, see ST I 40.1 ad 3; 40.4; 41.1-6.
223 De pot. 9.5 ad 3.
224 Cf. De pot. 9.4: “…if [person] signifies the essence directly it should not be predicated in the plural…”
Although “whatever is joined to the essential term in God can be predicated of every person per se, and of all the persons together,” Aquinas notes that because of “the unity of essence,” “an essential term applied to the Father does not exclude the Son or the Holy Ghost.” This means that while a singular absolute term can be used particularly of a singular person, it cannot strictly speaking be used plurally, such that there would be three essences or three esse in God. Because of this, an analogy of species and individual could not be unconditionally applied to God, since a plurality of individuals in a species implies a plurality of essence and esse. Only transcendentals like “unity” and res can be predicated either singly or plurally of God referring either to his essence or the constitutive relations.

Concrete and Abstract Names

The final distinction incumbent upon the mode of signification proper to God is between concrete and abstract names. Aquinas explains this final distinction:

We can speak of simple things only as though they were like the composite things from which we derive our knowledge. Therefore in speaking of God, we use concrete nouns to signify His subsistence, because with us only those things subsist which are composite; and we use abstract nouns to signify His simplicity. In saying therefore that Godhead, or life, or the like are in God, we indicate the composite way in which our intellect understands, but not that there is any composition in God.

The concrete nouns signify God according to his subsistence. The abstract nouns, on the other hand, signify God in reference to the simplicity of his essence. Aquinas notes that just as our knowledge of God is drawn from our knowledge of his effects, so, too our vocabulary about God is derived from how we speak about creatures.

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225 ST I 31.3, obj. 2.
226 ST I 31.4 ad 2.
227 See esp. ST I 39.3 ad 3: “This word ‘thing’ [res] is one of the transcendentals. Whence, so far as it is referred to relation, it is predicated of God in the plural; whereas, so far as it is referred to the substance, it is predicated in the singular.” Cf. SCG IV, 5 (8): “Where there is one subsisting supposit, it does not receive a plural predication.”
228 ST I 3.3 ad 1.
All names used by us to signify a complete subsisting thing must have a concrete meaning as applicable to compound things; whereas names given to signify simple forms, signify a thing not as subsisting, but as that whereby a thing is; as, for instance, whiteness signifies that whereby a thing is white. And as God is simple, and subsisting, we attribute to Him abstract names to signify His simplicity, and concrete names to signify His substance and perfection, although both of these kinds of names fail to express His mode of being, forasmuch as our intellect does not know Him in this life as He is.229

Every mode of predication about God will always be imperfect, as our knowledge of him is indirect and limited by our finite minds. To the extent that we can know God in this life, we must accordingly signify him as abstract or concrete.

Aquinas reminds us, as in the other forms of signification, that the abstract and concrete in God do not actually differ in reality. “For, since the divine simplicity excludes the composition of matter and form, it follows that in God the abstract is the same as the concrete, as ‘Godhead’ and ‘God.’”230 Instead, we find one more variation on the ways in which we signify God insofar as we find a logical distinction in him. “In God the abstract and the concrete do not differ in reality, since in God there is neither accident nor matter: they differ only in the manner of signification, inasmuch as we understand the Godhead as constituting God and God as having Godhead: the same applies to Paternity and the Father, for though they are really the same thing, they differ in their mode of signification.”231 As noted in this quotation, abstract names do not directly signify God as subsisting, but God in the abstract, such as we would discuss the divinity, or as he is pure being, wisdom, goodness, etc. If we are to speak about God as we would an abstracted form, then we use an abstract name. On the other hand, concrete names signify the subsistence of God as he is this thing. Aquinas notes that the “concrete essential

229 ST I 13.1 ad 2. Cf. De pot. 8.2 ad 7: “…certain things imply a certain difference from the definition of essence or relation, not in their principle signification but in their mode of signifying: and these are predicated of essence or relation, although not properly: such are adjectives and verbal substantives, e.g. good, wise, to understand, to will: because suchlike terms as to the thing signified, signify the essence; yet they signify it as though it were a supposit and not in the abstract. For this reason good, wise, creating and the like are most appropriately predicated of the Persons and of the concrete essential names such as God, Father; yet they may be predicated, albeit improperly, of the essence in the abstract and not taken as a supposit. Still less properly are they predicated of the relations: because they are applicable to the supposit in respect of the essence and not of the relation: thus God is good or creative through having his essence—not through having a relation.”

230 ST I 40.1 ad 1.

231 De pot. 8.3 ad 10.
names … signify the supposit in general: for instance, God is the one who has Godhead.”

It is important to stress that the distinction between abstract and concrete names is not directly parallel to those of relative and absolute predication or singular and plural terms.

Unlike the previous pairs of modes of signification discussed above, the distinction between abstract and concrete names does not immediately follow upon the distinction between essence and person in God. Instead, it follows upon the distinction between form and subsistent whole, as well as upon the nature of “abstraction of the form from the matter.” The concrete mode of signification can stand for either the subsistent essence, generally speaking, or a divine person or persons.

[T]his word ‘God,’ from its mode of signification, can, in its proper sense, stand for person, as does the word ‘man.’ So this word ‘God’ sometimes stands for the essence, as when we say ‘God creates’; because this predicate is attributed to the subject by reason of the form signified—that is, Godhead. But sometimes it stands for the person, either for only one, as when we say, ‘God begets,’ or for two, as when we say, ‘God spirates,’ or for three…

In fact, the distinction between concrete and abstract names can be applied not only to the divine supposit in general and the divinity in the abstract, but also to each of the divine persons and the constitutive personal quasi-forms which relatively distinguish them from each other. “We must say that there are properties in God. These are designated by abstract terms, being forms, as it were, of the persons. So, since the nature of a form requires it to be ‘in’ that of which it is the form, we must say that the properties are in the persons, and yet that they are the persons; as we say that the essence is in God, and yet is God.” Aquinas reaffirms that the distinctive personal properties and the persons themselves are identical, since the abstract and concrete do not differ in reality. “For personal properties are the same as the persons because the abstract and the concrete are the same in God; since they are

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232 *De pot.* 8.3 ad 11.
233 *ST* I 40.3. Here Aquinas lists the “two kinds of abstraction: the abstraction of the general from the particular, and the abstraction of the form from the matter.” The relation of species and individual is an abstraction of the general from the particular, whereas the relation of abstract and concrete names is founded upon the abstraction of form from matter.
234 *ST* I 39.4. See also *SCG* IV, 14 (6): “There are many things subsisting if one looks to the relations; there is but one subsistent thing, of course, if one looks to the essence. And on this account we speak of one subsisting God, because he is one subsisting essence; and we speak of a plurality of persons, because of the distinction of subsisting relations.”
235 *ST* I 40.1.
the subsisting persons themselves, as paternity is the Father Himself, and filiation is the Son, and
procension is the Holy Ghost.”236 The divine persons and the subsisting divine essence, therefore, are
not related according to the relationship of the concrete and the abstract.

Aquinas notes that there are “two kinds of abstraction: the abstraction of the general from the
particular, and the abstraction of the form from the matter.”237 The relation of species and individual is
founded upon the former, while abstract and concrete names are derived from the latter abstraction, as
noted above. When we speak of abstraction and God, therefore, we do not attribute to him a
composition of the general and the particular, but a logical distinction between his subsistence and his
simplicity. In regards to our present question, then, this distinction has no absolute or direct importance,
since the abstraction we are most concerned with is of the general or universal from the particular as it
is found in the relation of individuals to a species.

236 ST I 40.1 ad 1.
237 ST I 40.3.
Part III: The Relation of Individuals to a Species

CHAPTER SEVEN: GENUS, SPECIES, AND INDIVIDUAL

Genus, species, and individual are categories used to indicate how several things can be united while yet really diverse in being. Aquinas observes that the categories of genus and species are founded upon what is essentially common among beings having the same nature. “Essence must mean something common to all the natures through which different beings are placed in different genera and species, as for example humanity is the essence of man, and so with regard to other things.” Insofar as it is understood as common to many, the essence is universal. Several individuals are united in species according to their sameness of nature. If they are united by identity of nature, they are said to constitute a species. In the same way, inasmuch as different species are identical in some more universally essential way, they are said to be one in genus. The categories of genus and species, then, capture what is universal and common to several individual things. “[T]he many that are contained under one universal, as man and horse under animal, for the name ‘animal’ signifies both, [are understood] not as they are many and different from each other but as they are united in the nature of the genus.” As the essence of things is known in the mind, the essence is understood in terms of what is specifically universal (species) and what is more broadly universal (genus). From a determination of the genus by a specific difference, we know the species and also the definition of the essence.

Relations of the Determined and the Undetermined

Just as what is universal in the species is distinguished in its respective individuals, so also in a similar manner is what is universal in the genus determined in a particular way in its respective species. The genus is specifically determined in each species, and the species is particularly determined in each

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238 De ente I, 3. See also De ente II, 1: “Through its essence a thing is … fixed in its species and genus.”
239 See De ente II, 4.
240 Peri Hermeneias I 12.8.
241 See De ente I, 4: “The definition telling what a thing is signifies that by which a thing is located in its genus or species.”
individual. “[T]hat which comes under a common denomination is related to the common name as the
determinate to the indeterminate…” For Aquinas, the categories of genus and species and individual
are said to differ from each other according to relations of what is “designated” and what is
“undesignated.”

The essence of the genus and the essence of the species [like species and individual] also
differ as designated and undesignated, though the mode of designation is different in the
two cases. The individual is designated with respect to its species through matter
determined by dimensions, whereas species is designated with respect to the genus
through the constitutive difference, which is derived from the form of the thing. This
determination or designation which is in a species with regard to its genus is not caused
by something existing in the essence of the species and in no way in the essence of the
genus; rather, whatever is in the species is also in the genus but in an undetermined way.
If indeed “animal” were not wholly what “man” is, but only a part of him, “animal” could
not be predicated of “man”, since no integral part may be predicated of its whole.

The essence of the species, as Aquinas says, is a perfection “implicitly contained in” and, in a sense,
derived from the essence of the genus. As a determination of the genus, the species fully possesses that
perfection belonging to the genus, and “everything in the species is included indeterminately in the
genus.” Not everything indeterminate in the genus, however, is contained in the species, for thus
they would be completely identical. Instead, the species is a “subjective part” of the genus, meaning
that it is one specific determination of the genus according to its constitutive difference, a
determination that does not fully exhaust the potential determinations of the genus into other different
species. “It does happen that something having one perfection may also possess a further perfection, as

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242 De pot. 9.4: “…man is included directly in the idea of animal as the determinate in the indeterminate… And since that
which comes under a common denomination is related to the common name as the determinate to the indeterminate, that
which was included becomes the thing signified by the addition of a determining word to the common term: thus a rational
animal is a man.”

243 Cf. Armand Maurer, On being and essence, 37 no. 11: “A thing is said to be designated (designatum, signatum) when it
can be shown or pointed to with the finger. This is true of the individual thing but not of the abstract nature or essence. The
latter can be defined; the former cannot be defined but it can only be pointed to. … The undesignated is the undetermined …
undifferentiated.”

244 De ente II, 5.

245 De ente II, 7: “In this way the form of animal is implicitly contained in the form of body, inasmuch as body is its genus.
And such also is the relation of animal to man.”

everything in the species…”
is evident in man, who has a sensitive nature and, besides this, an intellectual nature.” 247 The species, as a determination of the genus, is an additional perfection beyond what is determinately expressed by the genus, and yet implicit and simply in potency in the genus. 248 Similarly, species and its corresponding individuals also differ according to relations of what is undetermined and determined, respectively. “The difference between the essence of Socrates and the essence of man lies solely in what is designated and not designated.” 249 Aquinas notes that this individuation of the species into several singulars is always on account of matter. Still, the same relation holds between species and individual as between genus and species such that, as a subjective part, the individual fully possesses the perfection of the species in a determinate and singular way, but in no way exhausts the fullness of further potential determinations of the relatively indeterminate species.

The unity of the genus and the species depend precisely upon their relative indetermination with respect to subordinate species or individuals, respectively. The addition of a specific difference to the genus or the instantiation of the specific form in singular matter removes the unity of each such that there are now multiple species identical in genus or multiple individuals identical in species.

The unity of the genus comes from its indetermination or indifference, but not in such a way that what is signified by the genus is a nature numerically the same in different species, to which would be added something else (the difference) determining it as a form determines a matter that is numerically one. Rather, the genus denotes a form (though not precisely any one in particular) which the difference expresses in a definite way, and which is the same as that which the genus denotes indeterminately. … It is clear, therefore, that when the indetermination which caused the unity of the genus is removed by the addition of the difference, there remain species different in essence. 250

247 De ente II, 6.
248 Genus, by the addition of the specific difference, becomes determined to a species. In material beings, the species concerns the whole composite of form and matter, with the material side of the whole corresponding to the genus (as “body”) and the specific difference constituted by the form (as “living”). See De ente V, passim, esp. 7. The species, then, is the composite of both (as “animal” is a “living body”). It is important to keep in mind that genus, difference, and species are not parts of the essence which, through composition, constitute a tertium quid, as soul and body do, but instead signify the whole essence, through the signification of the material element (genus) and determinate signification of the material and formal elements together (species). See De ente II, 8: “The genus signifies the whole as a name designating what is material in the thing without the determination of the specific form. … On the contrary, the difference is a term taken from a definite form in a precise way, without including a definite matter in its primary notion… As for the definition or species, it embraces both, namely the determinate matter signified by the name of the genus, and the determinate form signified by the name of the difference.”
249 De ente II, 5.
250 De ente II, 10.
The unity of God, however, is beyond that of a generic unity or specific unity. The divine persons are not merely united in the indetermination of a divine species. In the Godhead, we cannot speak of relations of something indeterminate to something determinate. Although in relation to the other suppositos, the Father is determined by his personal property of Paternity, the Paternity is not a determination of the divine essence. Instead, each personal property is really identical with the essence of God. The Paternity is the divinity, and likewise for the properties of the Son and Holy Spirit. The divine persons are not in relation to the essence as the more determined to the less determined, as is the case between species and a genus, or even individuals to a species. If the divine persons were determinations of an indeterminate divine essence, then there would be some perfection determinately present in each person in a way unlike its indeterminate presence in the essence, thus negating the identity of person and essence in God, in contradiction to his perfect simplicity. More will be said in this regard below.

*The Multiplication of Individuals in a Species*

Within a species we find numerous individuals such as several donkeys or several tulips. What accounts for the many distinct individuals of the same nature and in the same species? Aquinas explains that since “everything [composed of matter and form] is individuated by matter and located in a genus or species through its form,” material creatures are multiplied in their respective species on account of a multiplicity of matter. Maurer observes, “St. Thomas always maintained that matter and its quantitative dimensions account for the existence of many individuals in the same species.” Aquinas notes that something can be multiplied in three ways. The first form of multiplication is through the addition of a difference, like in the way a genus becomes several species. The third regards the

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251 On these points, I am greatly indebted to the guidance of my thesis advisor, Dr. Stephen Hipp.
252 *De ente* VI, 6.
253 Armand Maurer, *On being and essence*, 37 no. 12.
distinction between a separate form and a form received in something, such as a hypothetical Platonic form. The second mode of multiplication he lists, however, is “by the reception of a form in different parts of matter (as a specific nature is multiplied in different individuals).”\textsuperscript{254} The relationship of several individuals to one species thus only concerns material creatures since matter alone can multiply a single species into several subjective supposit of that species.

In immaterial beings (i.e., intelligences or angels), on the other hand, the species is a form individuated of itself. “But since the essence of a simple entity is not received in matter, it cannot be multiplied in this way. That is why in these [separate] substances we cannot find many individuals in the same species; there are as many species among them as there are individuals.”\textsuperscript{255} Aquinas says that the reason why separate (immaterial) substances “are not limited from below”—that is, from matter—such that they multiply individuals in the same species is “because their forms are not limited to the capacity of a matter that receives them.”\textsuperscript{256} This does not mean, however, that the categories of genus and species do not apply to them. No, instead, the real distinction of esse and essence of all creatures allows for such categorization, but it is different for the angels than for material creatures.

“Furthermore, because the quiddity of these substances is not identical with their being, they can be classified in a category. For this reason they have a genus, species, and difference, though their specific differences are hidden from us.”\textsuperscript{257} The categories of genus and species apply to the angels, such that each angel is its own species. There are as many species as there are individual angels. The forms of the separate substances are individuated of themselves, for they are limited from above by the reception of esse within the limitations of their essences. Substances composed of matter and form, however, “are limited both from above and below” such that they too do not have identical esse and essence, but they are also limited in the “division of designated matter,” which allows not only for the categories of

\textsuperscript{254} De ente IV, 6.
\textsuperscript{255} De ente IV, 5.
\textsuperscript{256} De ente V, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{257} De ente V, 6.
genus and species, but the multiplication of individuals in the species.\textsuperscript{258} The trinitarian persons, contrary to both angelic and material substances, are limited in relation to the divine nature neither by the distinction of \textit{esse} and essence nor by the division of matter. In sum, on this account the categories of genus and species can only be improperly applied to the Godhead.

\textit{Individuation}

Properly speaking, the individual cannot be defined, as it transcends the order of essence and no universal idea of individuality can be formed.\textsuperscript{259} Aquinas does, however, offer some indications of what is meant by the “individual.” First he says that to refer to a thing as an individual indicates a certain “individual mode of existence” pertaining to that thing.\textsuperscript{260} Further, Aquinas states that “\textit{individual}, being a negation, does not imply composition through being added to a substance.”\textsuperscript{261} By this he means that “individual” indicates a mode of existence as not being predicated of another and thus self-subsistent. In other words, “the term ‘individual’ … signif[ies] the mode of subsistence which belongs to particular substances.”\textsuperscript{262} Finally, since an individual is a subsistent, particular substance, it constitutes a distinct unity. “The individual in itself is undivided [\textit{indistinctum}], but is distinct from

\textsuperscript{258} \textit{De ente} V, 10. “A multitude of individuals in the same species is also possible in their case because of the division of designated matter.”


\textsuperscript{260} \textit{De pot.} 9.2 ad 5.

\textsuperscript{261} \textit{De pot.} 9.3 ad 4.

\textsuperscript{262} \textit{ST} I 29.1 ad 3.
Aquinas shows us that the individual is a distinct unit, self-subsistent in its mode of existence and not predicated of another.

A distinction is required, however, between individuality in the strict sense and in a wide sense. Strictly speaking, the individual typically refers to the division of the species into its logical inferiors, as when we say that several individuals are united in species. This first type of individuation H. D. Gardeil calls logical and says that it refers to the “ultimate subject” that is “in no way predicable.” The wide sense of “individual” Gardeil calls metaphysical “in the sense of supposit” which refers to a “being as endowed with its own incommunicable subsistence.” Individuality in this latter sense refers to the numerical unity and distinctive existence of a real being. According to the first sense, a being is individuated according to the composition of form and matter, with the matter individuating the common form. In the second sense, individuation simply signifies subsistence and does not necessarily imply a composition of matter and form.

**Individuality and God**

In reference to God, individuality in the strict sense cannot be predicated of God, but only in the wide sense. “God cannot be called an ‘individual’ in the sense that his individuality comes from matter; but only in the sense which implies incommunicability.” God is pure spirit, a self-subsistent form, with absolutely no composition in him. Aquinas refers to God, who is pure form, as a form individualized of himself. “[I]n things not composed of matter and form, in which individualization is not due to individual matter—the very forms being individualized of themselves—it is necessary [that] the forms themselves should be subsisting supposita. Therefore suppositum and nature in them

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263 *ST* I 29.4. Cf. the “opinion of some” that Aquinas cites at 29.4 *ad 2*: “But where ‘individual’ is added, the idea of assumptibility is excluded…”


266 *ST* I 29.3 *ad 4*.

267 Cf. *De ente* V, 2: “…the first cause, which is pure being, is individuated through its pure goodness.”
are identified.”⁶⁶⁸ He goes on to say that God is such a form, and further, that God is his own supposit, essence, and esse. God is an individual in the metaphysical sense that the divine form is individualized of itself, such that God is self-subsistent esse, transcendently distinct from all creatures.

Aquinas elaborates on this distinction between metaphysical and logical individuation, and their respective applicability to God.

In created things the principles of individuality exercise two functions. The one is that they are the principle of subsistence (since the common nature does not subsist by itself except in the individual): and the other is that they distinguish the supposit of the common nature from one another. But in God the personal properties only distinguish the supposit of the divine nature from one another, while they are not the principles of subsistence of the divine essence (since the divine essence is subsistent in itself) but on the contrary subsist by the essence… And hence it follows likewise that the divine essence is not numerically multiplied by reason of the multiplicity of its supposit, as happens here below. Because a thing is multiplied on account of that which gives it subsistence: and although the divine essence is so to speak individualized by itself as regards its self-subsistence, yet though it is itself one in number there are several supposit in God mutually distinct by subsistent relations.⁶⁶⁹

In other words, the personal properties—which distinguish the persons into a multitude—do not cause God to be subsistent, but rather the divine essence is a form individualized of itself. The persons are subsistent because they are identified with the self-subsistent divine essence, and not the other way around. Therefore, the divine essence, individualized of itself, remains fundamentally one despite a plurality of suppositis. The persons, which are not principles of individuation in respect to the common nature, cannot be called logical individuals of a common species, but only metaphysically as they are subsistent supposit of the self-subsistent divine essence. For the trinitarian persons to be logical individuals of a species would imply that they are diverse in esse⁶⁷⁰ in order for them to be understood as common in essence. If they are one in esse, however—which they are—they are also numerically identical with the divine nature, and not logical individuals that imply individuation with respect to a

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⁶⁶⁸ ST I 3.3.
⁶⁶⁹ De pot. 9.5 ad 13.
⁶⁷⁰ “Some ‘difference’ would have to account for the logical contraction implied” in a relationship of logical individuals to a species. Stephen Hipp, e-mail message to author, December 16, 2015.
common essence. Metaphysical individuality—tellingly referred to as individuality in the *wide* sense—does not imply such a relationship of diverse individuals to a species but simply signifies subsistence (regardless of the principle), a predication no Catholic theologian denies of the trinitarian persons. This distinction between metaphysical and logical individuality, however, does not exhaust the reasons that Aquinas gives against predicating the genus/species/individual relationship of the Godhead.

*God Transcends Every Genus*

Aquinas vehemently argues that God—whose essence is his existence—cannot be contained within a genus, neither as a species nor as a principle. “A thing can be in a genus in two ways; either absolutely and properly, as a species contained under a genus; or as being reducible to it, as principles and privations.”271 Something is in a genus absolutely and properly speaking as a subordinate species, like man is in the genus of animal. In this way, God “cannot be a species of any genus,” for three reasons. If God were a species within a wider genus, it would imply a relationship of matter and form or at least potency and act, for a species is constituted of genus and difference.272 Further, if God were a species, the divinity would be in the genus of being [*ens*], for it is impossible for *esse* to be a genus. Finally, “in every member of a genus, existence and quiddity must differ,” such that genus regards the essence of the thing and not the *esse* pertaining to each member. The *esse* or existence of an individual thing cannot be universalized or placed in a universal category. As God is *Being* itself [*ipsum esse*], he

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271 *ST* I 3.5.

272 See also *De ente* IV, 6: “It is clear that being is other than essence or quiddity, unless perhaps there is a reality whose quiddity is its being. This reality, moreover, must be unique and primary; because something can be multiplied only [1] by adding a difference (as a generic nature is multiplied in species), [2] by the reception of a form in different parts of matter (as a specific nature is multiplied in different individuals), [3] by the distinction between what is separate and what is received in something [such as a hypothetical Platonic form]. … Now, granted that there is a reality that is pure being, so that being itself is subsistent, this being would not receive the addition of a difference, because then it would not be being alone but being with the addition of a form. Much less would it receive the addition of matter, because then it would not be subsistent, but material, being. It follows that there can be only one reality that is identical with its being.”
therefore cannot be contained in a genus.\footnote{ST I 3.5. Cf. \textit{De ente}, V, 1: “There is a reality, God, whose essence is his very being. … From this it follows that he is not in a genus, for everything in a genus must have a quiddity in addition to its being. The reason for this is that the quiddity or nature of a genus or species does not differ, as regards the notion of the nature, in the individuals in the genus or species, whereas being is diverse in these different individuals.” See also \textit{De pot.} 7.3; \textit{Comp.} I, 12.} In the same way, then, God cannot be defined, for a definition, in articulating the specific essence, is made up of genus and specific difference.\footnote{See \textit{De ente}, VI, 10: “…the universal concepts of logic” are not related to “the first cause, which is absolutely simple. Because of its simplicity, neither the notion of genus nor of species, nor consequently the notion of definition, applies to it.”}

Moreover, Aquinas shows that God cannot be reducible to a genus as its principle. \textquotedblleft That God is not in a genus, as reducible to it as its principle, is clear from this, that a principle reducible to any genus does not extend beyond that genus… But God is the principle of all being. Therefore He is not contained in any genus as its principle.\textquotedblright\footnote{ST I 3.5. See also \textit{De pot.} 7.3.} If God were contained within a genus (or even every genus) as its principle, he would be limited to whatever that genus contains. Instead, his infinite being and power are manifest in the fact that he is the principle of every being and thus beyond every genus. “God is not related to creatures as though belonging to a different ‘genus,’ but as transcending every ‘genus,’ and as the principle of all ‘genera.’”\footnote{ST I 4.3 \textit{ad} 2.} God transcends even the categories of the universals.

Aquinas offers an additional argument against God being contained within a genus in his \textit{Summa contra gentiles}, especially pertinent for our current question.

Whatever is in a genus differs in being [\textit{esse}] from the other things in that genus; otherwise, the genus would not be predicated of many things. But all the things that are in the same genus must agree in the quiddity of the genus, since the genus is predicated of all things in it in terms of \textit{what} they are. In other words, the being [\textit{esse}] of each thing found in a genus is outside the quiddity of the genus. This is impossible in God. God, therefore, is not in a genus.\footnote{SCG I, 25 (4).} In other words, since God’s essence \textit{is} his existence [\textit{esse}], he cannot be in a genus, for to be in a genus requires a real distinction between the universal quiddity of the genus and the respective \textit{esse} of each thing that is found within the genus. Furthermore, if God is not contained within a genus, but rather transcends all genera as infinite principle of being, then neither is the divinity itself a genus. That is, if
the three persons of the one God were three species within the one genus of divinity, differences regarding their essence or form would engender specific differences between them. Likewise, if they were individuals united in a divine genus, each person would possess his own distinct *esse* and therefore each would be really distinct from the common divine essence. But since God is his essence, none of the persons—on account of their diversity of essence or *esse*—could be God. This obviously does not follow, for God cannot be a different species for each divine supposit nor can there be multiple divine *esse*. Instead, the truth is that each person of the Trinity shares perfectly the one divine *esse* in the unity of a singular essence such that they are individually and collectively the one true and perfect God.

*The Divine Species?*

Presently, we proceed into the very heart of our initial question, namely, whether there is in God something like species and individual. Simply stated, Aquinas answers in the negative: “God is neither a species nor an individual.”278 At times, Aquinas does, however, speak about the divine essence as if it were a species, like when he says that “nothing that is one in species can be more than one except by reason of matter: for which reason there can be but one essence in God, because the divine essence is utterly immaterial.”279 His position on this question is obviously nuanced. Strictly speaking, there is no species in God, but we can speak of the divine essence as if it were a species, but of course in a metaphorical sense. His allowance for this metaphorical language is not simply a privilege he grants to the Fathers, but Aquinas himself even speaks this way. “One also finds in other things a likeness of the divine Trinity, so far as anything in its substance is one, formed in a kind of species, ordered in some fashion.”280 If we recall Lombard’s earlier treatment on this topic, we will remember that he too

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278 *De pot.* 7.3. See also *SCG* I, 32 (4): “Nothing is predicated of God as a genus or a difference; and thus neither is anything predicated as a definition, nor likewise as a species, which is constituted of genus and difference.”

279 *De pot.* 9.9 *ad* 1.

280 *SCG* IV, 26 (8).
granted a metaphorical similitude between the divine essence and a species predicated of individuals, but with the stress on the Augustinian tradition which rejects such an analogy.

Aquinas usually follows suit in this Augustinian tradition and stresses that, strictly speaking, we cannot speak about God as a species and individuals. “God cannot be, as it were, a single species predicated of many individuals. Various individuals that come together in one essence of a species are distinguished by certain notes that lie outside the essence of the species. … This cannot occur in God, for God Himself is His essence…”281 Aquinas even goes as far as to say that those individuating notes outside the essence are material in origin, for genus and species are categories used of material creatures. “The very essences or quiddities of genera and species are individuated through the designated matter of this or that individual… But the divine essence exists through itself as a singular existent and individuated through itself, for … it is not in any matter. The divine essence is predicated of God, therefore, so that we may say: God is His essence.”282 His typical reasoning for why God cannot be a species is the identity of the divine essence with the divine esse, or at least with the divine supposit in general. The individuals of a species are identical in essence, but not in esse. “A number of individuals comprised under one species differ in their existence [esse], and yet are alike in their one essence. Accordingly, whenever a number of individuals are under one species, their existence [esse] must be different from the essence of the species. But in God existence [esse] and essence are identical… Therefore God cannot be a sort of species predicated of many individuals.”283 As observed above in the section on unity and plurality, the multitude of individuals united in a species is caused by a diversity of esse, whereas in the Godhead the division is only one of relative distinction. Therefore, the unity of the species among natural substances is merely logical and not a real unity of being. Aquinas calls this unity accidental and the division of individuals absolute. “[I]f [something] be

281 Comp. I, 14.
282 SCG I, 21 (4).
283 Comp. I, 14.
undivided accidentally, and divided absolutely, as if it were divided in essence and undivided in idea or in principle or cause, it will be ‘many’ absolutely and ‘one’ accidentally; as what are ‘many’ in number and ‘one’ in species...”\footnote{ST I 11.1 \textit{ad 2}. Cf. Armand Maurer, “Introduction,“ xxxiii. Maurer notes that the relation of individuals to species implies a numerical diversity, and that is the reason why such categories are problematic for the Trinity.} In other words, if the divine essence is a species, God’s unity of essence—that is, the unity among the three persons—would simply be accidental and not absolute. Instead, the plurality of persons would be absolute, each with his own diverse \textit{esse}. If we say that three persons of the Trinity are individuals of the species that is the divine essence, then we are predicating three gods that are only united logically or accidentally. This is exactly what Augustine affirms and why Lombard follows him so closely.

On a few occasions, Aquinas explicitly responds directly to Damascene’s analogy of the divine species and trinitarian individuals. An objection in the \textit{Summa theologiae} cites the authority of Damascene on this topic in order to assert that “the names of the persons cannot be predicated of this name ‘God,’ except in an accidental sense,” since “this name ‘God’ as regards the three persons is as a general term to inferior terms.” Individuals are only predicated of a species accidentally, “for it is accidental to animal to be man.”\footnote{ST I 39.6, \textit{obj. 2}.} In his response to this objection, Aquinas rejects both the conclusion of accidental predication as well as the reasoning that there is a divine species. “When we say, ‘God,’ or ‘the divine essence is the Father,’ the predication is one of identity, and not of the lower in regard to a higher species: because in God there is no universal and singular. Hence, as this proposition, ‘The Father is God’ is of itself true, so this proposition ‘God is the Father’ is true of itself, and by no means accidentally.”\footnote{ST I 39.6 \textit{ad 2}.} Because of the predication of identity between each person and the divine essence (or even the divine supposit in general), it is clear that a relationship between a species and individuals cannot apply to God, for individuals cannot be predicated of their species except accidentally.
In his second commentary on Lombard’s *Sentences*, known as the *Lectura Romana*, Aquinas directly responds to Damascene’s position twice. In the first instance, Aquinas allows for the similitude that Lombard grants to Damascene’s analogy. While the objection—based on Damascene’s language—claims that “this name, ‘God’ is predicated of three persons in the plural” such that “the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are three gods,”287 his reply notes both the similarity and dissimilarity of the multitude in the Godhead to a multitude united according to species.

To the first, therefore, it is said that the saying of Damascene is similar according to the distinction of persons in one nature, because just as these three men are distinguished in human nature, so also three persons are distinguished in the divine nature. But it is dissimilar because in men nature is not numerically one except according to species; for numerically distinct are the humanities of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, to the divine persons in common is numerically one nature, which is the absolutely simple and maximally one divine nature.288

The objection plays right into Augustine’s principal reason for rejecting predicating a species of the divine essence. Aquinas navigates well, however, the way in which, according to our human mode of understanding, we can see something akin to a multitude of individuals in the Godhead. His response offers further explanation as to the rejection of the species/individual analogy. While there is specific unity among the individuals of the same nature, there is a greater unity found among the three persons of the Trinity (in fact, the greatest unity). The divine persons are numerically united in essence. There is really one essence in common *secundum rem*; individuals of a species have three distinct essences that are logically united and not numerically one.

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287 *Lectura Romana* 2.3.2, obj. 1: “It seems that this name, ‘God,’ is predicated of three persons in the plural. For Damascene says that this name, ‘God,’ is common to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, just as ‘man’ is common to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, also the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are three gods.” My translation. “*Videtur quod hoc nomen ‘Deus’ praedicetur de tribus personis in plurali. Damascenus enim dicit quod hoc nomen ‘Deus’ ita est commune Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto, sicut ‘homo’ est commune Abrahae, Ysaac, et Iacob. Sed isti sunt tres homines. Ergo et Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus sunt tres di.”

288 *Lectura Romana* 2.3.2 ad 1. My translation. “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod dictum Damasceni est simile quantum ad distinctionem personarum in una natura, quia sicut isti tres homines distinguuntur in natura humana, ita et tres personae distinguuntur in natura divina. Sed est dissimile quia in hominibus natura non est una numero sed tantum specie; alia enim numero est humanitas Abrahae, Ysaac et Iacob. Personis vero divinis est una natura numero communis quae est natura divina simplicissima et maxime una.” Cf. *ST* I 31.1 ad 4: “…we place the Persons numbered in the unity of nature; as the *supposita* of a nature are said to exist in that nature.”
In his second interaction with Damascene in the *Lectura Romana*, Aquinas considers “whether this [saying] is true, ‘God is Trinity’ or ‘God is three persons.’” Immediately, he cites in the first objection the authority of Damascene, who “says that this name, ‘God,’ is common to three persons, namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, just as this name, ‘man,’ is common to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” His answer is brief, for it puts to use the same explanation in the section cited just above. “To the first it is said that it is not similar—to the extent that something is similar—because in God divinity is numerically the same in three persons, and God is his own essence; in men, however, humanity is not numerically the same, nor is a man his own humanity.” While it essentially repeats the same reasoning as his previous reply, here Aquinas uses what seems to be clearer language. Humanity is not numerically identical in several human persons, but divinity is numerically identical in the three divine persons. He adds that “God is his own essence,” which shows in one way what he means in his usual reasoning against Damascene’s analogy, namely that the identity of supposit, essence, and *esse* in God preclude an application of the species/individual relationship.

**Chapter Eight: Universality and Particularity**

The relationship of individuals to a species is one of particulars to a universal. Therefore, incumbent upon the examination of that former relationship is the analysis of the logical relationship

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289 *Lectura Romana* 4.2. My translation. “*Quaeritur utrum haec sit vera, ‘Deus est Trinitas’ vel ‘Deus est tres personae.’*”

290 *Lectura Romana* 4.2, obj. 1. My translation. “*Et videtur quod non. Damascenus enim dicit quod hoc nomen ‘Deus’ est commune tribus personis, scilicet Patri, Filio et Spiritui Sancto, sicut hoc nomen ‘homo’ est commune Abrahae, Ysaac et Iacob, etc.*”

291 *Lectura Romana* 4.2 ad 1. My translation. “*Ad primum dicendum quod non est simile – quantum ad aliquid est simile – quia in Deo est eadem numero divinitas in tribus personis, et Deus est sua essentia; in hominibus vero non est eadem numero humanitas, nec homo est sua humanitas.*”

292 Cf. Wawrykow, 107: “First, as to nature, there is no potential in God; thus, one must guard against imagining, in referring to the divine persons and divine nature, of an actualizing of the nature, or of a person coming to be who realizes a potential for the divine form of life. … Along the same lines, there is no difference between a divine person and the divine nature. The divine persons are identical with the nature, and eternally and perfectly so. While it is helpful to distinguish between identity in species and identity in number when talking of human nature, the distinction is lacking when it comes to God.”

293 Cf. *Super Boethii De Trinitate* 4.1: “Things that are diverse in genus, species or number … ha[ve] to do only with composite beings, for everything in a genus must be composed of a genus and a difference.”
between particulars and the universal of which they participate. Particularity and universality are the properties that characterize individuals of a species. Aquinas describes universality and particularity with reference to a species as follows:

In any singular thing, we can consider what is proper to the thing insofar as it is this thing, for instance, what is proper to Socrates or to Plato insofar as he is this man. We can also consider that in which it agrees with certain other things, as, that Socrates is an animal, or man, or rational, or risible, or white. Accordingly, when a thing is denominated from what belongs only to this thing insofar as it is this thing, the name is said to signify a singular. When a thing is denominated from what is common to it and to many others, the name is said to signify a universal since it signifies a nature or some disposition which is common to many.  

When singulars are spoken of according to what is common among them, a universal is indicated. “What is abstracted from the concrete things is called universal.” Singulars do not necessarily need to be instantiations of a universal, but if they are, they are known as particulars. Conversely, universals do not, in fact, need to be predicated of several particulars, but simply need to be capable of such predication. Thus, to be universal is to be capable of predication of several according to some common perfection, whereas to be particular is to be a singular thing, a singular realization of the universal predicated of it.

The universal is integrally related to its particulars such that the latter serve as the singular instantiations of the former, the existence of which is common to many. Aquinas says that “the universal nature is individuated in the singular.” But because the universal is a logical abstraction of what is common to particulars, no real universal can exist that is not really instantiated particularly in singular beings. Accordingly, then, “the universal can be considered either in abstraction from singulars or as it is in singulars.” In this way, we can also say that the individuals are particular instantiations

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294 Peri Hermeneias I 10.4.
295 ST I 86.1.
296 See Peri Hermeneias I 10.5.
297 Peri Hermeneias I 10.15.
298 Peri Hermeneias I 10.12. See also De pot. 9.4 ad 18: “Although there cannot be a universal without singulars, it can be understood apart from them and consequently signified.”
of the universal species, and that we know that species first as it exists in its individual subjects, but also as logically abstracted from individuals. The relationship between species and individuals, then, is categorized along the lines of what is common to each individual as a universal and what is proper to each individual as a particular.

No Universal and Particular in God

Just as frankly as he denies genus, species, and individual of him, Aquinas also rejects universality and particularity of God. “In God, there [is not] universal and particular.”\(^\text{299}\) Moreover, “God Himself in reality is neither universal nor particular.”\(^\text{300}\) The root principle for this rejection, noted above in regard to individuals of a species, lies in the fact that the particulars of a universal are diverse in being (esse) from each other. “In God relation is not a universal whole, although it is predicated of each of the relations; because all the relations are one in essence and being \([\text{unum secundum essentiam et esse}]\), which is irreconcilable with the idea of universal, the parts of which are distinguished in being \([\text{secundum esse}]\). Person likewise is not a universal term in God...”\(^\text{301}\) In regard to our present question, neither can we say that God’s essence is a universal, since each persons is the same in esse and identical to the divine essence.

Participation

Beyond the division of esse, however, Aquinas also notes another principle at work in the relation of particulars to a universal. Simply speaking, that principle is that the particulars of a universal are considered “subjective parts” of the universal whole insofar as they are subjects in which the universal reality is instantiated. The particular subject is just one of any number of subjects in which the universal can be realized diversely, and, therefore, a part of the universal whole or of which the

\(^\text{299}\) Comp. I 62.
\(^\text{300}\) ST I 13.9 ad 2. Cf. 30.4 obj. 3.
\(^\text{301}\) ST I 42.4 ad 3.
whole is predicable.302 The particulars, then, are said to participate in the universal whole. “To participate is, as it were, to take a part [of something]. And therefore, when something receives particularly that which belongs to another universally, the former is said to participate in the latter.”303 To participate is to receive in a particular fashion what pertains universally to the whole. The Thomist philosopher John Wippel calls this kind of participation logical: “In these cases a less extended intelligible content is said to participate in a more extended intelligible content either as a species in a genus or as an individual in a species. Because intelligible contents (rationes) are at issue, this kind of participation may be described as ‘logical.’”304 Because it is fundamentally a relationship of universality and particularity, the “individual [is placed] under the species by way of participation.”305 Individual participates in species because the individual does not possess the intelligible structure of that in which it participates according to its full universality. No individual exhausts its essential species, lest there be an identity of one individual and its essence, and therefore no universal species.

**No Participation in God**

On several accounts, then, the logical participation of species and individual cannot be predicated of the Godhead. This is, first of all, because of the implication of diverse esse of particulars,

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302 I am indebted to the explanation of my thesis advisor, Dr. Stephen Hipp, on this point.

Gaven Kerr notes that Aquinas lists three modes of participation: to possess in a particular fashion; for a subject to participate in its accidents; for an effect to participate in its cause (esp. if the effect is inferior to the power of the cause). The first of the three concerns universality and particularity. See Gaven Kerr, “Aquinas: Metaphysics,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed September 14, 2015, http://www.iep.utm.edu/aq-meta.

305 ST I 13.5 ad 1. Cf. SCG I, 32 (6): “Everything that is predicated univocally of many things belongs through participation to each of the things of which it is predicated; for the species is said to participate in the genus and the individual in the species.”
as has been noted several times above. Additionally, participation necessitates an impartial possession of whatever perfection indeterminately pertains to the universal. Moreover, such a relationship of participation further implies distinction between the universal and the subject in which it is instantiated. John Wippel notes: “When anything is predicated of something by participation, something else must be present there in addition to that which is participated.” This would require the persons of the Trinity to be really distinct from the divine essence; i.e., the Father would not be identical with his own divinity. Also, it would imply composition in God. Wippel, again: “Participation evidently entails distinction and composition in the participant of a receiving and participating principle, and of that which is received and participated.” Aquinas points out that this composition is one of potency and act. “Everything that participates in something is compared to that which is participated as potency to act: for through that which is participated the participant becomes actually such.” It almost goes without saying that such real distinction and composition have no place in God.

For, if there were many gods, a necessary consequence would be the partition in each of the essence of divinity, just as in two men the humanity differs in number from one to the other; and the more so because the divine nature is not one thing and God Himself another. From this it follows necessarily that, since there exists one divine nature in the Father and the Son, the Father and the Son are one God.

Participation in God, in the end, always amounts to a form of Arianism. On account of the division of esse among particulars plus the imperfection, real distinction, and composition intrinsic to the particular/universal relationship, it is clearly impossible for the divine essence to relate to the trinitarian persons after the manner of a universal.

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306 SCG I, 32 (6): “Nothing is said of God by participation, since whatever is participated is determined to the mode of that which is participated and is thus possessed in a partial way and not according to every mode of perfection.”
308 Wippel, Metaphysical Thought, 107. Cf. De pot. 7.3: “…in God there is no distinction between haver and the thing had, or between participator and the thing participated: indeed he is both his own nature and his own being…”
310 SCG IV, 8 (1).
311 See SCG IV, 6 (1).
312 On the other hand, however, Aquinas does accept that there is a certain metaphorical way in which we can attribute
CHAPTER NINE: COMMUNICABILITY AND INCOMMUNICABILITY

In order to complete our investigation into the possibility of speaking of the divine essence as a species predicated of several individuals, one additional pair of concepts needs to be examined, for it contains the final distinctive element necessary for our analysis. The species is in relation to individuals as a universal which communicates its perfection to particulars. The universal is defined as “that which is common to many” or “can be in many or predicated of many.” The ability to be communicated to many is called communicability. Its opposite, the impossibility of being communicated to many, is called incommunicability. To communicate, broadly speaking, is “to have in common with another” or “to share being with another.” The categories of universality and particularity as well as genus, species, and individual are forms of communicability and incommunicability. Therefore, our inquiry into the relation of persons to essence, in order to answer more fully whether it is after the manner of a universal, must take into account these concepts of communicability and incommunicability.

What is Communicable and What is Incommunicable

Nature or form is communicable by virtue of itself. “Form of itself, unless something else prevents it, can be received by many.” Form and nature as such can be common to many, but when form is received in matter, however, “the form is determined to this one particular thing.” A species, too, understood as universal form or nature, is communicable to many individuals. “Given the idea of a species, it can be understood as existing in many.” The one universal nature, form, or species is

 universality and particularity to God. This tolerance, not coincidentally, is often found in the context of a direct response to one of the citations above from Damascene wherein he speaks of the divine essence as a species and the divine persons as individuals. See ST I 40.3: “Now, although there is no universal nor particular in God, nor form and matter, in reality; nevertheless, as regards the mode of signification there is a certain likeness of these things in God; and thus Damascene says that ‘substance is common and hypostasis is particular.’” In this way, then, Aquinas is comfortable saying that “the hypostasis … is, as it were, a particular [quasi particulare].”

312 Suellner, Dictionary, 128.
313 Suellner, Dictionary, 24.
314 Suellner, Dictionary, 3.2 ad 3. See also De Veritate q. 2, a. 5: “Now, every form is of itself universal…”; Quodlibet 7, 1, 3c; In Meta. 7, lect. 13; Peri Hermeneias 10, prin.
315 Suellner, Dictionary, 3.1.
316 Suellner, Dictionary, 13.9.
communicable to many suppositors or individuals. Communication of a perfection to individuals amounts to that perfection being predicated of each individual. Moreover, communicated along with nature is all that pertains to that nature.\textsuperscript{318} This includes even that which distinguishes the things that communicate in that nature\textsuperscript{319} and, thus, also the mode of existence of those things of that nature, i.e. to exist individually. It does not, however, include the principle of that individuation.

Now just as a nature considered in itself is common, so also is that nature’s mode of existence: for we do not find human nature existing in things except as individualized in this or that man: since there is not a man that is not a particular man… But the principle of that mode of existence, namely the principle of individuation, is not common, but differs in each individual: for this particular thing is individualized by this matter, and that one by that matter.\textsuperscript{320}

The principle of individuation is individually unique to each hypostasis of the common nature. “That whereby a common essence is individuated cannot pertain to many.”\textsuperscript{321} Among material creatures, that principle of individuation is the distinct matter that uniquely individualizes the form.

According to Aquinas, “every form … is individualized” by “existing in [a] singular subject.”\textsuperscript{322} He defines the hypostasis both as “that which subsists in a nature and is distinct from others” and also as “an individual substance, one to wit that cannot be predicated of several,” and is thus “incommunicable.”\textsuperscript{323} The communicability of the singular being is impossible in reality and even in thought. “But the singular, from the fact that it is singular, is divided off from all others. Hence every name imposed to signify any singular thing is incommunicable both in reality and idea; for the plurality of this individual thing cannot be; nor can it be conceived in idea.”\textsuperscript{324}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{318} See \textit{Scriptum super Sententiis} II, d. 1, q. 1, a. 3 ad 2; \textit{De Veritate} q. 27, a. 3 ad 17.
\textsuperscript{319} See \textit{SCG} IV, 24 (9): “When things come together by something common to them, they must, if they are to be distinguished, be distinguished by differences which belong per se and not accidentally to that common thing.”
\textsuperscript{320} \textit{De pot.} 9.2 ad 1.
\textsuperscript{321} \textit{Comp.} I, 15.
\textsuperscript{322} \textit{ST} I 13.9.
\textsuperscript{324} \textit{ST} I 13.9.
\end{footnotes}
properly speaking cannot be defined, since no universal idea can be predicated of several individuals precisely as they are individuals. It is clear, though, that individuality implies incommunicability, and that persons or hypostases are incommunicable. “The form signified by the word person … is that which is the principle of incommunicability or individuation.” That which causes a thing to be incommunicable—the principle of individuation—“cannot belong to several individuals,” since the cause of incommunicability belongs properly to that individual thing. Whatever is proper to a singular thing is unique and incommunicable to any other thing. “[A]n incommunicable person … must be defined in reference to that which is proper.” For composite beings (material and angelic), to each singular being its esse is always proper. “[T]he being [esse] of a thing is proper to that thing and distinct from the being [esse] of anything else: whereas the essence may be common.” Since the essence may be said to be common to its supposit, we could speak of the corresponding genus and species signifying what is communicable to respective individuals. “[A]ll in one genus agree [communicant] in the quiddity or essence of the genus which is predicated of them as an essential, but they differ in their existence [esse].” Understood according to the species/individual relationship, the abstracted essence of each incommunicable individual is common by way of species.

Whereas the individual is incommunicable but can receive what is communicated by the species, the species signifies what is communicable but does not receive what is communicated. Only the supposit can properly be the subject of communication. “[N]o nature, essence or form can receive

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325 See, esp., ST I 11.3: “For it is manifest that the reason why any singular thing is ‘this particular thing’ is because it cannot be communicated to many…” Cf. ST III 77.2: “…it is of the very notion of an individual that it cannot be in several; and this happens in two ways. First, because it is not natural to it to be in any one; and in this way immaterial separated forms, subsisting of themselves, are also individuals of themselves. Secondly, because a form, be it substantial or accidental, is in someone indeed, not in several, as this whiteness, which is in this body.”

326 De pot. 9.6 ad 4. See also ST I 30.4: “the definition of ‘person’ contains the word ‘incommunicable.’”

327 Comp. I, 60.

328 See De pot. 9.9 ad 1: “…that which renders a thing individual and incommunicable cannot possibly be common to several: thus that which makes Socrates to be this particular thing cannot even be conceived as being in others besides.”

329 See SCG I, 42 (13): “Nothing that belongs to this designated thing as such can belong to another, for the singularity of some thing belongs to none other than to that singular thing.”

330 De pot. 9.9 ad sed contra no. 4.

331 De pot. 7.3.

332 ST I 3.5. Regarding these distinctions, see esp. Stephen A. Hipp, “Person”, part I, c. 10 and part II, c. 4, passim.
the addition of something extraneous: although that which has a nature, form or essence can receive something extraneous thereto, thus humanity contains nothing but what belongs intrinsically to humanity." The species is “numerically multiplied” to several things, since it is “predicated of many” individuals. Species, nature, and form differ from person and individual precisely along the lines of communicability and incommunicability. Stephen Hipp observes: “Not only is person individual, but it differs from nature as such precisely according to the lack or presence of individuating conditions.” These “individuating conditions” are the principles of individuation in each supposit (its incommunicable subsistence). As we saw in the quote from Aquinas earlier, form is individuated in a singular subject. Nature as such lacks incommunicability; the subsistent thing can receive what is communicated but cannot communicate its own unique and proper existence.

The Incommunicability (and Communicability) of the Divine Nature

In very general terms, we can say that both incommunicability and communicability can be predicated of God. The former attribute is rather straightforward in that there is and can be only one divine substance. If God were communicable according to his nature or his being, there would be several gods. And yet, God is communicable at the very least among the divine persons, since each communicate in the divine essence. After treating how it is that God is incommunicable, I will turn to address the trinitarian communicability in the Godhead. Aquinas asserts that the name “God” is not univocally predicated of any being but of God alone, as it is “incommunicable according to the truth of

333 *De pot.* 7.4.
334 See *Comp.* I, 56: “That whereby a subsistent thing is *this* particular thing, distinct from other things, cannot be numerically multiplied, for the reason that an individual cannot be predicated of many.”
335 Cf. Maurer, “Introduction,” xxxiii: “A form as such is predicable of many individuals… This is contrary to an individual, which is not predictable of many subjects.”
336 Hipp, “*Person*”, 476, no. 1236.
338 For a deeper examination of the different senses in which communicability and incommunicability can be predicated of God (respectively in Richard of St. Victor and St. Albert the Great), see Hipp, “*Person*”, 165-167, 367-375.
the thing,” that is, according to the divine nature which the name signifies.\textsuperscript{339} The divine nature is not communicable to many; there is and can only be one God. “If an essence is individuated by itself, and not by something else, it cannot pertain to many. But the divine essence is individuated by itself, since God’s essence is not distinct from his existence… Hence God cannot be more than one only.”\textsuperscript{340} The simplicity of the divine essence does not allow for any composition between supposit and nature in God.\textsuperscript{341} Since the divine essence is identical with the divine \textit{esse}, then clearly it is absolutely impossible for the divine nature to be multiplied.\textsuperscript{342} “The fact that the being [\textit{esse}] of God is self-subsisting, not received in any other, and is thus called infinite, shows him to be distinguished from all other beings…”\textsuperscript{343} No creature, then, can “attain to the divine essence and nature.”\textsuperscript{344} Instead, “the divine nature is only communicable [to the creature] according to the participation of some similitude.”\textsuperscript{345} Aquinas notes that the divine nature is a form that cannot be received in matter since it is self-subsisting, and that it is “individualized precisely because it cannot be received in a subject.”\textsuperscript{346} Self-subsistence precludes predication of many, according to a multitude of substances.\textsuperscript{347}

While Aquinas repeatedly rejects the communicability of the divine nature to a creature, he just as often speaks of the divine nature being communicated from the Father to the Son and from both to

\textsuperscript{339} \textit{ST} I 13.9 \textit{ad} 2.
\textsuperscript{340} \textit{Comp.} I, 15. See also \textit{ST} I 11.3: “Therefore, if Socrates were a man by what makes him to be this particular man, as there cannot be many Socrates, so there could not in that way be many men. Now this belongs to God alone; for God himself is his own nature… Therefore, in the very same way God is God, and he is this God. Impossible is it therefore that many Gods should exist.”
\textsuperscript{341} See esp. \textit{SCG} I, 42 (15): “Furthermore, either the nature signified by the name \textit{God} is individuated through itself in \textit{this God}, or it is individuated through something else. If through something else, composition must result. If through itself, then it cannot possibly belong to another, since the principle of individuation cannot be common to several. It is impossible, therefore, that there be several gods.” Cf. \textit{ST} I 13.9: “But if any name were given to signify God not as to his nature but as to his \textit{suppositum}, accordingly as he is considered as ‘this something,’ that name would be absolutely incommunicable.”
\textsuperscript{342} \textit{ST} I 11.3. Cf. \textit{De pot.} 9.9: “For it is impossible that one simple nature be in more than one as principle…”
\textsuperscript{343} \textit{ST} I 7.1 \textit{ad} 3.
\textsuperscript{344} \textit{De pot.} 8.1 \textit{ad} 3: “The creature does not attain to the divine essence and nature, wherefore the divine essence is not communicated to the creature.”
\textsuperscript{345} \textit{ST} I 13.9 \textit{ad} 1.
\textsuperscript{346} \textit{ST} I 3.2 \textit{ad} 3. See also \textit{ST} I 13.11 \textit{ad} 1: “And still [the] more proper [name of God] is the Tetragrammaton, imposed to signify the substance of God itself, incommunicable and, if one may so speak, singular \textit{[singularem]}.”
\textsuperscript{347} See \textit{De pot.} 9.3 \textit{ad} 5: “…from the very fact that a thing is self-subsistent, it cannot be predicated of several.” Predication of many, of course, is not precluded from God as self-subsistent according to many suppositis, of course. That would mean that there is no Trinity of persons numerically united in the divine essence. Each divine supposit is the divine substance. Thanks to my advisor, Stephen Hipp, for his assistance on this point.
the Holy Spirit. 348 “We may say that [the Father] is the principle of the whole Godhead, not as generating or spirating it, but as communicating it by generation and spiration.” 349 Now, Aquinas notes that “that in the divine nature alone nature be communicated in several ways is reasonable,” 350 that is, by generative understanding as Word (or Son) and by spirative will as Love (or Spirit), since “whatsoever is in God is subsistent, wherefore in God the divine nature is communicated in every mode of procession.” 351 In fact, it is the divine esse which is communicated: “The Son receives from the Father identically the same being [idem numero esse] and identically the same nature [eamdem naturam numero] as that of the Father.” 352 Each supposit of the Trinity is identical in essence and esse, and as such are one God. 353 Thus, “the deity is common to several [pluribus deitas est communis].” 354 Since the deity is common, we cannot speak of God in terms of singularity, lest we fall into the error of

348 In the context of explaining the nature of the communication of the divine nature from the Father to the Son, Aquinas uses the language of specific likeness. This language is explained especially at ST I 4.3, where he calls the communication in the same form a “likeness” or similitudo. See also De pot. 8.3 ad 15: “Likeness [similitudo] is sameness of quality in things that differ…” At ST I 4.3 again: if the likeness is between two things that “communicate in the same form” and “according to the same formality,” they share a specific likeness. Specific likeness is communication in a form according to the same formality of the species. If communication is not according to the same formality, the two are “not contained in the same species.” It is a likeness, but it is only generic. A specific likeness, though, arises among things communicating in the same form, according to the same formality, that is, according to what makes the form specifically that form. Now, a common form can be communicated either equally or unequally. Cf. ST I 42.1 ad 1: “For whatever things have a common form may be said to be alike, even if they do not participate in that form equally…” Equal communication is according to the same mode in each individual, while unequal communication is “according to more or less.” See ST I 4.3. Aquinas makes these distinctions primarily to show that the Son shares a specific likeness with the Father, for they equally possess the common form of divinity. Cf. De pot. 9.5 ad 18: “The begetter begets his like in species…” 349 ST I 39.5 ad 6. See also De Veritate 27.3 ad 17: “For it is essential to the sonship that the son have the nature of his begetter. Hence, if God the Father did not communicate to His Son the fullness of His nature, that would seem to be due either to impotency or to jealousy…”; SCG IV, 7 (24): “…the Son has received the divine nature from the Father.”; ST I 42.5: “The Father is in the Son by his essence, forasmuch as the Father is his own essence and communicates his essence to the Son not by any change on his part.”; ST I 42.6 ad 2: “…the Father communicates knowledge to the Son, as he communicates his essence.”; De pot. 9.9 ad 17: “Just as the communication of the divine nature by the Father to the Son belongs to their perfection, so the perfect reception of the communicated nature belongs to the perfection of the Holy Ghost…”; ST I 30.2 ad 4: “So goodness belongs to the Holy Ghost, as derived from another; and it belongs to the Father, as principle of its communication to another.” 350 SCG IV, 23 (13). 351 De pot. 9.9 ad sed contra no. 1. 352 De pot. 10.1 ad 14. See also SCG IV, 5 (5): “…he who begets gives being [esse] to the begotten…” 353 Cf. SCG I, 42 (12): But if [the name God] is used univocally [of two things], it must be predicated of both according to one notion, which means that, in notion, there must be in both one nature [una natura secundum rationem]. Either, therefore, this nature is in both according to one being [secundum unum esse], or according to a being that is other in each case [aut secundum altiud et altiud]. If according to one, there will not be two gods, but only one, since there cannot be one being [unum esse] for two things that are substantially distinguished. If each has its own being [altiud et altiud esse in utroque], therefore in neither being will the quiddity be its being [esse]. Yet this must be posited in God. Therefore, neither of these two beings is what we understand by the name God. It is, therefore, impossible to posit two gods.” 354 ST I 31.2.
Sabellius who rejected the plurality of persons.\textsuperscript{355 }Instead, the deity is truly communicated to three persons. Yet, the divine essence cannot be communicated beyond the three persons of the Trinity, for it is only communicated via relations of origin which must be only three.\textsuperscript{356 }

\textit{The Incommunicability of the Divine Persons}

Even regarding the inner trinitarian life of God, a further distinction is necessary as to what in God is communicable and what is not. Aquinas notes that while “all that is absolute is common and undivided,” “the only thing that is distinct and incommunicable in the divine nature is relation,” meaning that what is peculiar to each person cannot be common.\textsuperscript{357 }“The Father and the Son, unity of essence considered, do not differ save in this: He is the Father and He is the Son. So, anything other than this is common to the Father and the Son.”\textsuperscript{358 }The persons are utterly united in the unity of the common divine nature. “The essence of each … is one essence.”\textsuperscript{359 }The divinity is communicable to three hypostases. However, the hypostases, despite their identity of essence and \textit{esse}, are incommunicable. Thus, God is both communicable and incommunicable in that he is the Trinity. Aquinas notes that “nothing prevents contradictory statements being verified about one same thing from different points of view… Wherefore since essence and property are the same in reality but differ logically, nothing prevents the one being common and the other incommunicable.”\textsuperscript{360 }The divine essence is common to three incommunicable persons.

Aquinas observes that the word “person” was introduced to describe each distinct supposit of God precisely because it refers to a subsistent, incommunicable thing of a nature. “The word \textit{person} signifies one that subsists in the divine nature distinctly and incommunicably.”\textsuperscript{361 }

\textsuperscript{355 }\textit{ST} I 31.2. See also \textit{De pot.} 9.8.
\textsuperscript{356 }See \textit{SCG} IV, 26 (5).
\textsuperscript{357 }\textit{De pot.} 9.4.
\textsuperscript{358 }\textit{SCG} IV, 24 (14). What is common to the Father and the Son even includes being the principle of the Holy Spirit. See \textit{ST} I 40.1 \textit{ad 1}.
\textsuperscript{359 }\textit{SCG} IV, 9 (7).
\textsuperscript{360 }\textit{De pot.} 7.1 \textit{ad 5}.
\textsuperscript{361 }\textit{De pot.} 9.6 \textit{ad 4}.
incommunicable mode of existence proper to a person, moreover, in God corresponds to the relations in the Godhead. “Distinction and incommunicability … are due to the relative properties in God.”

These “relative properties” constitute the persons insofar as whatever is proper to each thing is what makes it incommunicable. “The Father is not constituted an incommunicable person otherwise than by Paternity which belongs to him as begetting.”

Aquinas elaborates on the identity of property and essence in God, as well as the distinction between them: “And just as Paternity, although it is the divine essence, is not common as the essence is: even so although the Father is the very same thing as God, he is not common as God is, but proper. Accordingly God the Father as God is something common as having the divine nature, and as Father is something proper and distinct from the other persons.”

Each property must be proper and not common, lest distinction in God be in regard to something absolute, which is contrary to the divine unity. Since distinction is on account of relative personal properties, however, there is no contradiction between the divine unity and the multiplicity of divine supposits.

Finally, Aquinas notes that while the divine essence is common to three hypostases, there is also a commonality in the persons in as much as each is a person, thus sharing what it means to be a person, i.e. to be a distinct subsistence. “The Father is someone and is the Father on account of the relation: but he is someone on account of the relation considered in general [relation as common]: while that he

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362 De pot. 9.6 ad 3.
363 See Comp. I, 60: “For a divine person is constituted by the properties, not in the sense that He is constituted by several of them, but in the sense that the relative, subsisting property itself is a person. … Accordingly, the notions constituting persons are three in number: paternity, filiation, and procession. And these notions must be strict properties. For that which constitutes a person must pertain to that person alone; individuating principles cannot belong to several individuals.”
364 De pot. 9.9 ad 2.
365 De pot. 8.3.
366 Cf. De pot. 9.9 ad 18: “As we have already observed, that which makes a person incommunicable cannot be common to many. Hence the result of sharing therein would be not enjoyment but the destruction of the distinction of persons.”
367 See De pot. 9.9 ad 1: “Hence if in God filiation were common to several (Persons) it would not make the personality of the Son incommunicable, and thus the Son would have to be made an individual Person by something absolute, and this is incompatible with the unity of the divine essence.”
368 Cf. ST I 30.4 ad 2: “Although person is incommunicable, yet the mode itself of incommunicable existence can be common to many.”
is a particular someone is due to this particular relation [as proper] which is Paternity.”

The relations considered in general are common “in idea”: “Now this is common in idea to the divine persons, that each of them subsists distinctly from the others in the divine nature. Thus this name ‘person’ is common in idea to the three divine persons.”

On this point, Aquinas says that “person” is not really common to each, but is only common logically. “Now it is clear that this [i.e., that this term ‘person’ is common to the three] is not community of a real thing, as if one essence were common to the three; otherwise there would be only one person of the three, as also one essence.”

The essence is really common to each person, while the mode of incommunicability is only common logically.

**Logically Common Versus Really Common**

What is communicated becomes common to the many things it is predicated of either logically (that is, according to the abstraction of the mind) or really (according to the reality of the things). “Now that which is common logically and not really is common after the manner of a universal.”

Universality—the relationship of a species to its corresponding individuals—is logically common to its particulars, but in reality is only abstracted from what is really present diversely in the latter. Aquinas directly responds to the analogy of Damascene precisely along the lines of this distinction between the logically common and really common.

Damascene uses the word species metaphorically and not in the strict sense. God’s name (i.e. God) is like a species in that it is predicated essentially of several distinct individuals: but it cannot be called a species strictly speaking, since a species is not identically the same in each individual but only logically: whereas the same identical divine essence is common to the three Persons: wherefore Father, Son and Holy Ghost are one God, but Peter, Paul and Mark are not one man.

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369 De pot. 8.4 ad 2.
370 ST I 30.4.
371 ST I 30.4.
372 De pot. 9.4, obj. 5.
373 De pot. 7.3 ad 1.
Logical identity and logical commonality belong to the relation of species and individual. The persons of the Trinity, however, are not only logically one in essence, but share the divine essence as really common and absolutely one. “The unity or community of the human nature is not a reality [non est secundum rem], but is only in the consideration of the mind. …whereas the form signified by the name ‘God’—that is, the divine essence—is really one and common [una et communis secundum rem].” 374

Because the divine nature is one according to esse, Aquinas calls this really common essence the same numerical nature. “…God begotten has the same nature numerically as the begetter.” 375 There can only be one divine nature, and yet there are several supposit of that nature; therefore, the nature is numerically identical in each supposit. “For, if in the Son there is the divine nature, and if the divine nature cannot be multiplied … it follows necessarily that there is numerical identity of nature and essence in the Father and the Son.” 376 The essential unity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not simply a logical community of species (like human nature), but, moreover, is a community of identity, as there is only one and same essence among them. 377 Therefore, there cannot be a divine species communicated to several divine individuals. There is no universal in God. 378

374 ST I 39.4 ad 3. See also SCG IV, 14 (14): “…although God is substantially predicated of the Father and the Son, it does not for all that follow that, if the Father and the Son are a kind of plurality, they are a plurality of gods. For they are many by reason of the distinction of subsistent relations, yet one God, nevertheless, by reason of the unity of subsistent essence. This does not happen among men, of course—that is, that some plurality is one man—since the essence of humanity is not numerically one in each of the plurality, nor is the essence of humanity subsistent; that is, humanity is not a man.”
375 ST I 39.5 ad 2.
376 SCG IV, 7 (20).
377 See ST I 41.5 ad 1: “Since the divine generation is most perfect, that by which the Begetter begets, is common to Begotten and Begetter by a community of identity [idem numero], and not only of species, as in things created.”

Cf. SCG IV, 11 (12): “But the nature of God is not in the Word of God thus: it is one in species and differs in number … The Word, therefore, has the divine essence itself; has it with an identity not only of species but of number. A nature, again, which is one in species, is not divided into a numerical many except by reason of matter. But the divine nature is entirely immaterial. It is, therefore, impossible that the divine nature be specifically one and numerically different. The Word of God, therefore, has a nature in common with God and his it with numerical identity. For this reason the Word of God and the God whose Word He is are not two gods, but one God. For the fact that among us two who have human nature are two men hinges on the fact that human nature is numerically divided in those two. But … things which are divided in creatures are in God simply one being; thus, in creatures the essence is one thing and the act of being another; and in some creatures even what subsists in the essence is one thing, and its essence or nature another; for this man is neither his humanity nor his act of being. But God is both His essence and His act of being.”
378 See De veritate 2.6: “…for every form as such is universal, unless it happens to be a subsistent form.”
Since a species is only logically common to its subordinate individuals (and not common according to reality), it cannot be applied to the divine essence. However, since Aquinas grants that personhood is logically common to the three divine suppositis, it raises an interesting and unexpected question whether “person” is common to them after the manner of a universal. Aquinas himself seems to speak exactly in these terms:

Although in God nothing is really common save the one essence, there is a logical community in the divine persons in the fact that each is a supposit of the essence. This community is indicated in all concrete essential names that signify the supposit in general… Accordingly it is logically common to the three Persons to be a supposit of the divine nature, although the three persons are not one supposit, but three: even as Socrates and Plato are two men although it is logically common to them to be a man.379

It is logically common according to the manner of a species that two men share what it means to be a man, that is, that they have human nature. Even as distinct and incommunicable individuals, then, multiple beings can share something in common, such as the universal nature, but seemingly even the notion of what it means to be a person. Replying to this claim that since “person” is logically common in God and thus like a universal,380 Aquinas responds: “In God there are no differences of being [esse] since there is but one being in him [ibi sit tantum unum esse]. Now this is incompatible with the idea of universal, wherefore there is no universal in him, although there is in him one thing logically and not really [licet sit ibi unum secundum rationem, et non secundum rem].”381 Therefore, just because personhood is logically common to each divine person, those persons are not a community of a universality. He explains that this is true even in regard to created persons.

We must therefore resolve that even in human affairs this name ‘person’ is common by a community of idea, not as genus or species, but as a vague individual thing [individuum vagum]. … The vague individual thing, as ‘some man’ signifies the common nature with the determinate mode of existence of singular things—that is, something self-subsisting, as distinct from others.382

379 De pot. 8.3 ad 11. Cf. also 9.6: “Since then there are several properties which cause a distinct and incommunicable being in God [proprietates facientes esse distinctum et incommunicabile in divinis sint plures], it follows that person is predicated of God in the plural, even as it is predicated of man on account of the manifold individualizing principles.”
380 See De pot. 9.4, obj. 5.
381 De pot. 9.4 ad 5.
382 ST I 30.4.
Therefore, the divine persons are not individuals of the species “person,” although “person” is logically common to each, since each have the property of incommunicability. The individual, properly speaking, cannot be defined; neither, then, is individuality or personhood composed of genus and specific difference. Instead, persons are logically common inasmuch as we know all incommunicable supposita to be individuated in a vague sense.

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The species/individual relationship, like the relation of the divine essence to the divine hypostases, is one of the communicable and the incommunicable. “In God, of course, there are neither matter and form, nor universal and particular. Nevertheless there is in the Godhead something that is common, and something that is proper and that supposes the common nature. In our human way of thinking, the divine persons are to the divine essence what individual supposita are to a common nature.” Aquinas grants that the similarity is strong according to our human mode of understanding, for in the material, created things that we know, all commonality of the individual beings is by way of species. Just as a species is communicable and the individuals thereof are incommunicable, so too the divine essence is communicable to three incommunicable supposita. Communicability is not, however, identical to universality. While the divine essence is communicable, it is not a universal or a species, since the latter two are constituted by individual things that are diverse in esse and not numerically one. A species is a logical commonality among actually diverse beings. The divinity, on the other hand, is really common to three persons and numerically identical among them.

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383 Comp. I, 62.
384 Thanks to my advisor, Stephen Hipp, for the language on this point.
385 Cf. ST I 30.4: “But there is this difference—that the term ‘some man’ signifies the nature, or the individual on the part of its nature, with the mode of existence of singular things; while this name ‘person’ is not given to signify the individual on the part of the nature [for that would be signified by ‘some god’], but the subsistent reality in that nature.” Here, Aquinas offers some clarification regarding the use of the term person pertinent to our discussion. He shows that person does not necessitate a relationship of an individual to a nature with the individual having a mode of existence whereby it is distinct in esse from other persons, but instead merely refers to that subsistent thing in any given nature, whatever its mode of existence. In this way, a person of the Trinity is not an individual of a species nor a particular of a universal but instead is simply a subsistent reality in the divine nature.
CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

This paper has set out to provide the Thomistic reasoning behind the applicability (or lack thereof) of the species/individual relationship to the relationship of the divine essence and three persons of the Trinity. The question originated in part, of course, as a matter of indirect disagreement between Augustine and Damascene, the first arguing at some length against the analogy, while the latter affirming it in passing at numerous instances. Peter Lombard is the first to attempt a conclusive resolution to the disagreement, siding with Augustine, while allowing for a metaphorical (that is, according to similitude) reading of Damascene’s assertions. The philosophical rigor of Aquinas’s trinitarian theology uniquely positions him to provide not only a second opinion on the matter, but more importantly a thorough analysis and subsequent ratio underpinning both the rejection of the species/individual analogy, but also a nuanced acceptance of Damascene’s position.

The rejection of the analogy of species and individual for Aquinas consistently rests on the identity of essence and existence in God. “God is not only His own essence, but also His own existence [esse].”386 Because everything in the Godhead is identical in esse—even the three suppositis—there can only be one divine esse, just as there is only one divine essence, and only one divine ens. God is absolutely one in essence and esse, but relatively distinct in three suppositional units. “[T]he divine persons have one being [esse]; whereas genus and species and every other universal are predicated of many which differ in being [esse].”387 Although the divine essence is communicable to three incommunicable divine suppositis, it is not communicable after the manner of a universal, which presupposes a nature logically common, but not really common or numerically identical. Since the logical participations of universals and particulars (and thus genus and species) are founded upon several distinct beings which all differ in esse, God cannot be spoken of as a universal.

386 ST I 3.4. The foundation for Aquinas’s reasoning is derivative from, or at least in concert with, Augustine’s emphasis on the identity of essence, being, and supposit in God. See De Trinitate VII, 4 (9): “For so, because it is the same thing for Him to be God as it is to be, it is just as wrong to say three essences as it is to say three gods.”
387 ST I 30.4 ad 3.
Moreover, I showed above how the divine unity is not contrary to but beyond that of a specific unity that is founded upon its indetermination to its subordinate individuals. Neither is God material or even composite; therefore, “species” can only improperly be applied to him. The divine persons are not strictly speaking individuals, but only insofar as “individuality” connotes subsistence. Further, God transcends every genus as Creator of every genus of beings. The unity of the species is accidental and the plurality of its subordinate individuals is absolute; the inverse is the case in God: his unity is absolute, while his plurality—though not accidental—is only on account of the opposition of relation and so we predicate of the Trinity a transcendental multitude. Since there is really one divine essence *secundum rem*, we can say that the essence of God is really and numerically common to three suppositors, as opposed to the logically common essence found in the unity of a species. The numerical identity of the common essence of the three divine persons is manifest even in their common *esse*. The three divine suppositors share the singular divine *esse* just as they share the singular divine essence, since essence and existence are identical in the divine. The absolute simplicity of God, then, precludes predicating any universality of him—especially that of a genus or species—on all these accounts.

Aquinas, then, consistently follows “the Master” Lombard in siding with Augustine. He also adopts the position that Damascene can be read in continuity with the Augustinian position if we understand Damascene’s way of speaking to be metaphorical. “Although strictly speaking genus and species, universal and particular, are not predicated of God, nevertheless as far as it is possible to compare God to creatures, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are distinguished from one another like several individuals of one species, as Damascene says.”388 The strict mode of predication pertinent to the species/individual relationship precludes positing it of God, due to its problematic implications. According to the limited mode of our human understanding, however, the relationship of individuals to a species maintains a unique similitude for the human mind to catch a glimpse of that profoundly

388 *De pot.* 10.2 *ad* 12.
inaccessible mode of essential unity found only in the God whose essence, *esse*, and suposit are identical. Since the category of universality introduces us to what it means to be communicable, it can be a first stepping stone to knowing that mode of existence that is beyond universality where, except for relation, all in God is really common and absolutely one.


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