

REGENT COLLEGE

**A HARMONY OF *SAPIENTIA*:
ON PROPERLY READING ST. AUGUSTINE'S *DE TRINITATE***

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Introduction

Whether one likes it or not, it is undeniable that the theology of Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430) had a disproportionate legacy on Western Christianity. Naturally, there has been many harsh criticisms against his theology from the East and the West, and especially towards the legacy of his *De Trinitate*, as modern systematic theology recovered its interest in the Trinity. However convenient it might be to use Augustine as a scapegoat, it is one's academic—and spiritual—responsibility to carefully evaluate these criticisms through historical analysis. This paper will explore Augustine's understanding of *persona* as it appears in *De Trinitate* IV, V-VII, and XII-XV, in conjunction with some of his Christological writings, to answer some of the criticisms that are frequently laid against his Trinitarian theology.

Criticisms of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology

Augustine has been a favorite target for many Trinitarian theologians of the past century. A very notable example is the 'de Régnon paradigm,' which argues that Augustine's deviation from the Cappadocians resulted in a Western Trinitarian theology that emphasizes unity as opposed to the Eastern theology that emphasizes the three Persons.¹ Among the many theologians who voiced their dissatisfaction with Augustine's approach to the Trinity, Colin Gunton's critique particularly stands out as representative. In *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Gunton diagnoses from *De Trinitate* that Augustine "has scarcely if at all understood the central point [of Nicene theology]."² His line of argument is as follows: because of his

¹ Michel René Barnes, "De Regnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1995): 51–79. For John Behr's critique of the "de Régnon paradigm" from the perspective of an Eastern Orthodox scholar of Nicaea, see John Behr, "Calling upon God as Father: Augustine and the Legacy of Nicaea," *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, eds. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 153–65.

² Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 40.

Neoplatonic and “anti-incarnational” skepticism of the material,³ Augustine failed to begin from Christology when forming his theology of the Trinity.⁴ Hence, he could only consider relation “as a logical rather than an ontological predicate,” in contrast to the Cappadocian understanding that “the relations qualify [the ὑπόστασις] ontologically, in terms of what they are.”⁵ Since Augustine ruled out relations as an ontological principle of unity, he had to formulate “an unknown substance *supporting* the three persons.”⁶ These misguided theological moves culminate in the analogy of the memory, intellect, and will which constitutes “a kind of supermind.”⁷ Due to his Platonism, Augustine preferred to turn inwards to discover the Trinity instead of contemplating the “‘outer’ economy of grace.”⁸ What results from Augustine’s misconstrued Trinitarian theology is a system of theology where “it is the divine substance and not the Father that is the basis of the being of God, and therefore, *a fortiori*, of everything else.”⁹ Gunton mourns that Augustine’s theological legacy caused “[t]he conceptual and ontological revolution achieved by the Cappadocians ... that God is as he is made known by the Son and the Spirit” to be lost in the Western Christian tradition.¹⁰

Defending Augustine: The Context of *De Trinitate*

Thankfully for Augustine, many historical theologians—such as Michel René Barnes, Lewis Ayres, and Rowan Williams—have come to his defense in the past few decades. These theologians have pointed out that Augustine’s critics have often ignored the context for *De*

³ Many theologians have recently argued that it is unfair to accuse Augustine of being skeptical of the material world, by highlighting his theory of *rationes seminales*. For example, see Simon Oliver, “Augustine on Creation, Providence and Motion,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 4 (2016): 379–98.

⁴ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 34.

⁵ Gunton, 41–42.

⁶ Gunton, 43.

⁷ Gunton, 44.

⁸ Gunton, 45.

⁹ Gunton, 54.

¹⁰ Gunton, 54.

Trinitate, failing to do justice to his complicated and contextualized arguments. Barnes expresses this frustration quite strongly, that “[s]trangely, it is not just possible but quite common to have a ‘reading’ of Augustine without ever having read Augustine.”¹¹ The criteria that he suggests for a proper reading of a historical text is helpful: considerations of immediate textual context, context of tradition, the larger ‘external’ narrative, scholarship on the text, the author’s logic, conceptual idioms used by the author, and parts within the whole.¹² Thus, Barnes argues that, in order to read *De Trinitate* appropriately, one must first consider the polemical context of the late fourth and early fifth-century Latin Christian theology and the Nicene logic of *inseparable operations*.¹³ Ayres makes the same observation: the importance of the doctrine of inseparable operations within the pro-Nicene polemic against the Homoians, whose substantial presence in North Africa after 410 was a thorn on Augustine’s side.¹⁴ The axiom that *the three persons work inseparably* was central to the anti-Homoian polemics of the fourth-century Pro-Nicene theologians such as Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Marius Victorinus, and Gregory of Nyssa.¹⁵ For these theologians, the Scriptures’ testimony that the Father and the Son always act together (e.g. John 5:17) was a proof of their ontological equality and unity. Ayres highlights *Epistula* 11, written in 389, as evidence that Augustine was indeed an inheritor of this tradition from the earliest period of his theological career.¹⁶ In fact, there are many such works, such as *Sermo* 52 and *Epistula* 120, that show that Augustine should be seen primarily as an inheritor of

¹¹ Michel René Barnes, “Rereading Augustine’s Theology of the Trinity,” *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 145.

¹² Barnes, 150.

¹³ Barnes, 154.

¹⁴ Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 46, 170. In particular, Ayres notes that many Homoians fled from Italy to North Africa after the Sack of Rome in 410.

¹⁵ Lewis Ayres, “Remember That You Are Catholic’ (Serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8, no. 1 (2000): 46–49. See, e.g., Ayres, *Augustine*, 43–59.

¹⁶ Lewis Ayres, “The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, eds. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (London: Routledge, 2000), 55–57.

the Latin pro-Nicene tradition, rather than someone who attempted to construct a Trinitarian theology from his Neoplatonism.¹⁷ Then, reading *De Trinitate* as a work of Latin pro-Nicene theology—albeit a uniquely creative one—one must pay attention to the underlying logic of inseparable action of the divine *personae*.

***Persona in De Trinitate* V-VII: An Apophatic Approach**

Augustine makes the polemical target of *De Trinitate* V-VII evident from its beginning:

Now among the many objections which the Arians are in the habit of leveling against the Catholic faith, the most cunning and ingenious device they think they can bring to bear is the following argument: “Whatever is said or understood about God is said not accident-wise but substance-wise (*non secundum accidens, sed secundum substantiam dicitur*). Therefore the Father is unbegotten substance-wise, and the Son is begotten substance-wise. But being unbegotten is different from being begotten; therefore the Father’s substance is different from the Son’s.”¹⁸

Then, Books V-VII should be read as a specific polemic against the Homoian claim that since the terms ‘unbegotten’ and ‘begotten’ are said substance-wise, the Father and the Son cannot be of one substance. Augustine famously answers this by arguing that the words ‘unbegotten’ and ‘begotten’ are not said substance-wise (*secundum substantiam*) but *relationship-wise* (*secundum relativum*).¹⁹ Before delving into what Augustine means by relationship-wise, we must first note the occasional nature this argument. Ayres notes that, outside of *De Trin.* V-VII, Augustine almost never uses the language of relationship-wise (the adjectival cognate *relative*) when discussing the Trinity.²⁰ Hence, the logic of relational predication does not represent Augustine’s doctrinal understanding of the Trinitarian Persons: it is a specific polemical tool against the

¹⁷ Ayres, “Remember That You Are Catholic’ (Serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God,” 55–72.

¹⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V.iii.4.

¹⁹ Augustine, *Trin.*, V.vii.8.

²⁰ Ayres, *Augustine*, 216–17. “The adverb relative and its adjectival cognates are not only rare in Augustine’s theological contemporaries, they are also used only in very particular contexts in Augustine’s corpus. Of the eighty-one uses that an LLT search identifies, only three do not come from Books 5-7 of the *De trinitate*. The language for speaking of relational predication that Augustine develops stays here.”

Homoians. Its only purpose is to demonstrate that there *is* a way to understand the Nicene language of ‘unbegotten’ and ‘begotten’ without either admitting that the Father and the Son are not equal or that there are changes in the Godhead.

Nevertheless, the occasional nature of the logic of relationship-wise still does not adequately answer Gunton’s concern that Augustine only considers relation “as a logical rather than an ontological predicate.”²¹ For Gunton, this was clearly evidenced by Augustine’s dissatisfaction of the language of *persona*:²²

Yet when it is asked, ‘*what three*’ (*quid Tres*), human speech labors under a great dearth of words. So, it is said three *persons* (*tres personae*), not that it might be [properly] spoken of, but that it may not be left unspoken.²³

But one must not be so uncharitable here. Augustine, a Latin theologian of the fifth-century, did not have access to the twentieth-century theological definition of *person* as substance-in-relation. The Latin word *persona*, originally a theatrical term, was not yet a well-defined theological term in Augustine’s time; and Boethius’ definition of *individua substantia rationalis naturae* did not appear until a century after Augustine’s death.²⁴ That is, a reluctance with the fifth-century concept of *persona* does not necessarily imply a theological rejection of *personhood* as we now understand it. One must make a distinction between the Augustine’s theological understanding of the divine Persons and his analysis of the theological language of *personae*. And to correctly identify what it was that Augustine found unsatisfactory, one must examine his usage of the particular conceptual idiom of *persona*.

²¹ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 45.

²² Gunton, 40.

²³ “*Tamen cum quaeritur quid Tres, magna prorsus inopia humanum laborat eloquium. Dictum est tamen ‘tres personae,’ non ut illud diceretur, sed ne taceretur.*” Augustine, *Trin.*, V.ix.10. Gunton’s translation, “in order that we might be able to give some kind of answer when we were asked . . .,” seems to ignore the context of the previous sentence, where Augustine acknowledges the imperfection of our theological language. Cf., VII.iv.7: “*Itaque loquendi causa de ineffabilibus ut fari aliquo modo possemus quod effari nullo modo possumus . . .*”

²⁴ Boethius, *De Persona et Duabus Naturis*, c.ii.

It is also important to keep in mind Augustine's constant acknowledgement of the inadequacy of any human speech (*dictum*) about God. Indeed, he begins Book V with exactly such a confession: "From now on I will be attempting to speak of (*dicere*) things that cannot altogether be spoken of (*dici*) as they are thought by a human being, or at least as they are thought by me."²⁵ Nevertheless, in VII.iv.9, Augustine says that we must necessarily speak with such imperfect words (*vocabula*) in order to answer the errors of the heretics—in his case, the Homoians.²⁶ And as Ayres points out, Augustine's admission of the fundamental deficiency of theological language is deeply rooted in orthodox Christology.²⁷ Rowan Williams also correctly observes that Augustine's apophatic approach to theology is the natural conclusion of his understanding of language as *signum* which points to the infinite *res* of God.²⁸ In any case, what Augustine is specifically explaining in Books V-VII is that the *language* of Father, Son, unbegotten, and begotten are *spoken* relationship-wise rather than substance-wise. He is *not* implying that there are no ontological relationship between the divine Persons.

But what is it specifically about *persona* that Augustine finds inadequate? We must first understand why Augustine rejects *substantia*—a direct translation of the Greek ὑπόστασις—as an appropriate term to denote the divine Persons. Augustine argues that if, for example, the Person of the Father is properly to be spoken of as a *substantia*, it would imply that the Father somehow *subsists*, that is, 'stands under (*sub-sistere*)' His attributes.²⁹ Hence, he decides to avoid the language of *substantia* precisely because of its implication of a "substance *supporting* the three persons."³⁰ He considers *personae* to be the better Latin term, since the divine Person is at

²⁵ Augustine, *Trin.*, V.i.1. See also: VII.iv.7.

²⁶ Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.iv.9.

²⁷ Ayres, *Augustine*, 142–73.

²⁸ Rowan Williams, *On Augustine*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 42–46.

²⁹ Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.v.10.

³⁰ Against the criticism from Gunton, *The Promise*, 43.

least what the term *persona* conveys; but *personae* is still not an exhaustive definition of who the Persons are.³¹

Through a careful analysis of Augustine’s Porphyrian logic in VII.iv.7-vi.11, Richard Cross convincingly demonstrates that it is the lack of particularity and relationality in the Latin concept of *persona* that led Augustine to his apophatic conclusion.³² To unpack, in VII.iv.7-8—following the examples of the Cappadocians—Augustine attempts to analyze *persona* in terms of *genus* and *species*.³³ At first glance, *persona* seems to be a *genus* term, since it can be used to denote both divine and human persons.³⁴ But he quickly concludes that *persona*, when used to refer to the divine Persons, cannot be a *genus* term; since Father, Son, and Spirit must then be the corresponding *species* terms, which would imply that there are three essences (*tres essentiae*).³⁵ A similar issue arises if one attempts to say that *essentia* is the *genus* term and *persona* is the *species* term: one is led to say *tres essentiae*. On the other hand, if *essentia* is a *species* term and *personae* are its instances, one would be forced to say that there is only one *persona*.³⁶ Hence, Augustine concludes, analyzing the Trinity in terms of *genus* and *species* is impossible.³⁷ The point of this complicated—and perhaps arcane—reasoning is that however one attempts to categorize the term *persona* philosophically, one cannot avoid doing injustice to the unity and irreducibility of the divine Persons. Specifically, if one employs Porphyrian categories, one

³¹ Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.vi.11.

³² Richard Cross, “Quid Tres? On What Precisely Augustine Professes Not to Understand in De Trinitate 5 and 7,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100, no. 2 (2007): 223–29.

³³ In fact, Cross argues that *Trin.* VII.iv.7-vi.11 is Augustine’s response to Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa who had described the Trinitarian οὐσία and ὑπόστασις in terms of *genus* and *species*. On the one hand, Basil is comfortable with “the analogy of a common genus and an individual instance of a species to explicate the relation between the divine essence and a divine person.” On the other, Gregory of Nyssa observes that this might imply that there are three Gods—as Augustine also did. Nevertheless, Gregory concludes that “[s]ince the analogy is good, it must follow that our understanding of species nouns in general—as count nouns—is mistaken.” Interestingly, Gregory of Nazianzus instead arrives at a similar conclusion to Augustine’s. Cross, 229–32.

³⁴ Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.iv.7.

³⁵ Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.iv.8. See also, Cross, “Quid Tres,” 222-25; and Ayres, *Augustine*, 219.

³⁶ Because one *essentia* cannot be subdivided into multiple instances, there can only be one instance of the *species*. Augustine, *Trin.* vi.11.

³⁷ Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.vi.11.

always ends up with a generic understanding of *personae* that either blurs the distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit or disregards Their essential unity. Instead, Augustine suggests an analogical approach that enables one to imagine a principle of indivisible commonality between particulars: a common material (*communem materiam*).³⁸ But, lest one imagine that the Trinity are “three things consisting of one material,” Augustine quickly clarifies that “there is nothing else of this *essentia* besides that Trinity.”³⁹

Furthermore, he points out that since the Father cannot be the *persona* of the other, and vice versa, *personae* cannot be a relationship-wise term; it is instead a substance-wise term.⁴⁰ That is, each Person is a *persona* by the virtue of being Oneself, not by reference to Another. But as Augustine has shown in Book V, Father, Son, and Spirit *are* relationship-wise terms: the Son is the Son by virtue of His relationship with the Father.⁴¹ Hence, *personae* cannot be a complete description of who the Trinitarian Persons are, for it cannot account for Their fundamental relationality. Far from rejecting the ontological predicate of relation between the Persons, Augustine is demonstrating here that the term *persona* fails to capture the inherent particularity and relationality of the Trinitarian Persons. Thus, *De Trin.* V-VII is primarily an *apophatic* approach to understanding the divine *personae*: a clarification that how the theological language of *personae* is insufficient to fully describe the divine Persons. Moreover, his logic of *secundum relativum* was an occasional and polemical argument directed against the Homoians to demonstrate that Father, Son, and Spirit are indeed *una essentia, tres personae*. Therefore, from these books alone, we cannot not learn much about what Augustine thinks a *persona* is in a

³⁸ This analogy also has precedence in Basil of Caesarea, *Contra Eunomium*, 2.4. *Viz.*, Cross, “Quid Tres,” 227-28.

³⁹ “*non enim aliquid aliud eius essentiae est praeter istam Trinitatem.*” Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.vi.11. It seems to me that this statement is a direct refutation against anyone who criticizes Augustine for conceiving of a divine nature independent from the three Persons.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.vi.11. Hence, Augustine would reject the definition of *persona* as pure relation.

⁴¹ Cross, “Quid Tres,” 217.

positive sense. Nevertheless, through this apophatic approach, we are able to glimpse into Augustine's theological understanding of the Trinitarian Persons, as intrinsically relational and irreducible.

***Persona* in Augustine's Christology: A Cataphatic Approach**

For Augustine's cataphatic contemplation of *persona*, we must turn to his Christology. Rowan Williams offers an appealing reading of Augustine's Christology where the question becomes 'Who is speaking when the incarnate Christ speaks?'⁴² Williams points us towards Augustine's answer by highlighting an often-neglected text in the dogmatic study of Augustine: *Ennarationes in Psalmos* (*Expositions of the Psalms*). Augustine answers this question through a theology of the *persona*; as Williams puts it: "The two lives, divine and human, are both lived equally fully in Jesus, yet he is always *one voice*; what we encounter is *unitas personae*, a unity of person."⁴³ Although the *persona* that appears in Augustine's Christology is "an analogically complex term," one can understand it as Williams suggests: "identifying a *persona* is identifying who is speaking, whose role is in question in a complex of interchanges, *verbal or otherwise*."⁴⁴ That is, Augustine's *persona* is the *locus of action*, that is, the ultimate and irreducible ground of volition (*voluntas*)—which is none other than *desire* (*desiderium*)—and its expression. In particular, the *persona* of Christ is always the *persona sapientiae Dei*, the divine Wisdom that is the contemplation of God by God. Hence, the divine *persona* is "Wisdom-in-action": the

⁴² Williams, *On Augustine*, 133–34.

⁴³ Williams, 134. [Emphasis added]. He continues: "So that already, half a century before the Church as a whole had settled its definition of one subject and two natures in Christ, Augustine had sketched out the whole scheme by means of this very lucid and fresh analysis in terms of life and voice."

⁴⁴ Williams, 148. [Emphasis added]. Augustine's *unitas personae* refers to much more than the Divine-human union in the *persona* of Christ. Especially in *en. Ps.*, it also refers to the union between Christ the Head and the Church as His Body. In the Psalms, Christ speaks for Himself *and* for His Body as *agere personae*. By the virtue of the Incarnation, both our human words and the divine words of Christ become one voice in the one *persona* of Christ who speaks. See, e.g., Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, CXXII.1.

expression of the divine desire to contemplate God.⁴⁵ And through the incarnate Son's speaking in our *persona* (*in personam hominis*), we are able to participate in the *sapientia Dei*, as our *personae* grow into becoming the expressions of our desire to contemplate God.⁴⁶

But does Augustine's understanding of *persona* in the context of his Christology translate to the context of his Trinitarian thought? For this, we turn to Book IV of *De Trinitate*. Augustine begins this book by calling our attention to humanity's incapability to fulfill its desire of contemplating God due to sin.⁴⁷ He writes, "to cure these and make them well, the Word, through which all things were made, *became flesh and dwelt among us*. Our enlightenment is to participate in this Word, that is, in that *life which is the light of men*."⁴⁸ Augustine then goes on to explain the *harmonia* of the *simplum* (single) and the *duplum* (double), and "how the *simplum* of our Lord Jesus Christ matches our *duplum*, and in some fashions enters into a *harmonia* of salvation with it."⁴⁹ We unfortunately cannot discuss the complexities of the Pythagorean logic in IV.iv.7-ix.12 here, but one passage is especially noteworthy for our purposes:

He did not say "that I and they may be one," though as he is the Church's head and the Church is his body he could have said "that I and they may be" not one thing but "one subject," since the head and the body is one Christ. ... This is what he means when he says *That they may be one as we are one*—that just as Father and Son are one not only by equality of substance but also by oneness of will, so these men, for whom the Son is mediator with God, might be one not only by being of the same nature, but also by being bound in the fellowship of the same love.⁵⁰

In an exegesis of Jn 17:22, Augustine argues—in keeping with his Christology from *en. Ps.*—that Jesus *could have* said "that I and they may be *one subject*," since the Church and Her Head

⁴⁵ Williams, 149.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *en. Ps.*, XXI.i.1.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *Trin.*, IV.i.2.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Trin.*, IV.ii.4.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *Trin.*, IV.iii.5.

⁵⁰ "Non dixit: 'Ego et ipsi unum', quamvis per id quod Ecclesiae caput est et corpus eius Ecclesia posset dicere: 'Ego et ipsi' non unum sed 'unus', quia caput et corpus unus est Christus. ... Ad hoc enim valet quod ait: Ut sint unum sicut et nos unum sumus, ut quemadmodum Pater et Filius, non tantum aequalitate substantiae, sed etiam voluntate unum sunt, ita et hi inter quos et Deum Mediator est Filius, non tantum per id quod eiusdem naturae sunt, sed etiam per eandem dilectionis societatem unum sint." Augustine, *Trin.*, IV.ix.12.

speaks in the one voice of Christ. But he goes on to say that what Jesus specifically prayed for was that “they may be one in him,” for “they cannot be one in themselves, split as they are from each other by clashing wills and desires.” Jesus prays that His disciples may be one “by virtue of one and the same wholly harmonious will reaching out in concert to the same ultimate happiness, and fused somehow into one spirit in the furnace of charity.”⁵¹ That is, the prayer of Jesus is that the *duplum* of our *personae* would be harmoniously united in the *simplum* of His *personam sapientiae*—to the degree that we could be spoken of as *unitas personae*. And this reflects the unity of the Trinity, in which the wills and desires of each *persona* are perfectly united into a *simplum harmoniae*.

As he concludes and summarizes his argument in Book IV, Augustine reiterates his main Christological point: “Therefore man was coupled (*copulatus*) and even, in a certain sense, commingled (*commixtus*), with the Word of God as *unitatem personae*.”⁵² He then introduces his main Trinitarian argument that he will set forth in the following books: “I will say with absolute confidence that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God the creator, who are of one and the same substance, the almighty Trinity, act inseparably (*inseparabiliter operari*).”⁵³ We may recall that this is exactly the pro-Nicene doctrine of *inseparable operations*, which Augustine inherited. But he immediately reiterates his insistence from the beginning of the book: the impossibility of contemplating this unity as a sinful creature bound by space and time.⁵⁴ Because the direct contemplation of the Trinity—either by means of the *apophatic* or the *cataphatic* approaches—is

⁵¹ “*vult esse suos unum, sed in ipso quia in se ipsis non possent dissociati ab invicem per diversas voluntates et cupiditates. ... sed etiam per eandem in eandem beatitudinem conspirantem concordissimam voluntatem in unum spiritum quodam modo caritatis igne conflatam.*” Augustine, *Trin.*, IV.ix.12. The unity *in unum spiritum* is a pneumatological unity, since the Spirit is the *bond of love* and the *caritas* of God. This Spirit is the same unity that binds the Father and Son in the union of love.

⁵² Augustine, *Trin.*, IV.xx.30.

⁵³ Augustine, *Trin.*, IV.xxi.31.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *Trin.*, IV.xxi.30.

ultimately limited by our finitude, he presents the famous ‘psychological analogy’ as a way to assist our fallen imagination instead:

And as, when I name my memory, understanding, and will, each name refers to a single thing, and yet each of these single names is the product of all three there is not one of these three names which my memory and understanding and will have not produced together.⁵⁵

Augustine will go on to expound upon this analogy in Books XII-XV. But before finally inquiring into this analogy, let us briefly summarize what we have discussed regarding Augustine’s cataphatic understanding of *persona*. Augustine’s Christological insight was that *persona* is the *locus of action*—the agent of volition and ‘speech’⁵⁶—so, to be one *persona* is to be a distinct origin of action.

Persona as Locus of Sapientia: an Analogical Approach (De Trin. XII-XV)

In order to avoid misunderstanding Augustine’s analogy of *memoria*, *intellegentia*, and *voluntas*, we must first examine the role of analogy in Augustine’s theology. As we have already seen, for Augustine, theological language is a finite *signum* of the infinite *res* of God; and thus, by itself, language can never achieve an exhaustive description of who God is. Furthermore, our efforts to contemplate God is diverted by the inherent limitations of our flesh. Thus, our proper contemplation of God depends on our participation in the *persona* of the incarnate *sapientia Dei*: through His speech, we are able to participate in the pure contemplation of God by God. In *De Trin.* XII, Augustine makes a distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*:

Action by which we make good use of temporal things differs from contemplation of eternal things, and this is ascribed to *sapientia*, the former to *scientia*. ... And what

⁵⁵ “*Et quemadmodum cum memoriam meam et intellectum et voluntatem nomino, singula quidem nomina ad res singulas referuntur, sed tamen ab omnibus tribus singula facta sunt; nullum enim horum trium nominum est quod non et memoria et intellectus et voluntas mea simul operata sint.*” Augustine, *Trin.*, IV.xxi.30.

⁵⁶ Again, the ‘speech’ here is a more expansive concept than just verbal expression; it refers to the *expression* of one’s will and desire, that is, the external aspect of action.

among eternal things is more excellent than God whose nature alone is unchangeable? And what is the worship of him but the love of him by which we now desire to see him (*nunc desideramus eum videre*), and believe and hope that we will see him? And however much progress we make, we see now in a puzzling reflection in a mirror, but then it will be “in clear (*in manifestatione*).”⁵⁷

In other words, *scientia* is a practical knowledge of temporal things, whereas *sapientia* is a contemplative knowledge of the eternal. But *sapientia* is not simply a sort of ‘flight of the alone to the alone,’ for it is inseparable from *iustitia*: a contemplation of the eternal good in one’s neighbours, manifested as *caritas*.⁵⁸ In a sense, each *persona* must mature from a locus of *scientia* into a locus of *sapientia*. And an analogical approach is one “in which *scientia* may lead to *sapientia*,” as Ayres puts it.⁵⁹ This is, in fact, God’s gracious provision enabled through the Incarnation, so that “eternal things are mentioned in a commingled manner (*permixta*) with the temporal.”⁶⁰ Analogies are taken from what may be grasped by *scientia*, in order to guide us to contemplation by *sapientia*; or rather, to assist our participation in the *personam sapientiae Dei* who humbled Himself to be known also by *scientia*.

All the analogies of Books IX-XIV serve exactly such a purpose, and they are presented in such a way that the reader would be gradually steered from *scientia* towards *sapientia* as she moves on from one analogy to another.⁶¹ These analogies all have the same form: three distinct and irreducible aspects of reality that operate inseparably towards one purpose, as “source, product, and gift,” to borrow from Williams’ summary.⁶² And all these analogical realities which can be grasped by *scientia* leads one towards *sapientia*, a contemplation of “the Father [who] acts as the source, the Son [who] acts as the one who is from the Father, the one in whom all

⁵⁷ Augustine, *Trin.*, XII.xiv.22.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.vi.9-x.14. See also, Williams, *On Augustine*, 176-78.

⁵⁹ Ayres, *Augustine*, 314.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Trin.*, XIII.i.2. See also, IV.xx.30.

⁶¹ For a helpful summary of Augustine’s usage of Trinitarian analogies, see Ayres, *Augustine*, 275–96.

⁶² Williams, *On Augustine*, 138.

things are planned and through whom all things are, and the Spirit [who] acts as the one in whom all things find their stability and rest.”⁶³

Finally, the final analogy of *memoria*, *intellegentia*, and *voluntas* is that of the soul which is perfected in *sapientia*.⁶⁴ This can only be understood by divine grace, since “without that help we cannot safely investigate these matters or discover anything to do with the *sapientia* that comes from Him.”⁶⁵ Hence, Augustine is not simply inviting the readers to look inwards to search for a trinity, for it is not just any kind of mind (*mens*) that Augustine points towards. Instead, he invites the reader to imagine the mind that is perfectly loving God:

This trinity of the mind (*trinitas mentis*) is not really the image of God because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made. And when it does this it becomes wise (*sapiens ipsa fit*). ... Let it then remember its God to whose image it was made and understand and love Him. ⁶⁶

For only when the mind perfectly contemplates God in *sapientia* by remembering, understanding, and loving Him, it becomes a true image of the *sapientia Dei*. Then, what Augustine is inviting us is not some Platonic self-introspection but rather contemplation of God. Yet, this is indeed also an invitation to genuine self-knowledge, not by *scientia* but by *sapientia*. For a completely truthful self-knowledge is achieved only “when it blissfully cleaves to that [Divine] nature, [when] it will see as unchangeable in it everything that it sees.”⁶⁷ In other words, for the mind perfected in *sapientia*, its contemplation of God is, in turn, its knowledge of itself, and by extension, of others. One is reminded of a passage from *Confessiones* X: “what I know of myself I know only because you shed light on me.”⁶⁸

⁶³ Ayres, *Augustine*, 244.

⁶⁴ For a more detailed and erudite discussion of this, see: Williams, *On Augustine*, 171-90.

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Trin.*, XIV.iv.6.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *Trin.*, XIV.xii.15.

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Trin.*, XIV.xiv.20.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.v.7.

So, what is the understanding of the Trinitarian Persons that arise from this analogy of the mind in *sapientia*? Going back to Book X, the point of the analogy was as follows:

They are each and all and wholly contained (*capiuntur*) by each, they are each and all equal to each and all, and each and all equal to all of them together, and these three are one, one life, one mind, one *essentia*.⁶⁹

Specifically, this is a *circumincessio* of action: it is in the act of remembering that understanding and willing are contained, and vice versa.⁷⁰ Since this is a mind in *sapientia*, its *memoria*, *intellegentia*, and *voluntas* act in unison for the sake of contemplation. Furthermore, as in all the other analogies, these three are related to each other as *source*,⁷¹ *product*, and *gift*.⁷² But each of these are also irreducible: “each of them is life and mind and *essentia* with reference to itself.”⁷³ Indeed, Augustine clarifies in Book XV that the Father is *sapientia*—through His own *memoria*, *intellegentia*, and *voluntas*—in Himself, the Son is *sapientia* begotten of *sapientia*, and the Spirit is the *sapientia* proceeding from *sapientia*.⁷⁴ But in the end, an analogy always has its limits. Whereas it is one human *persona* who *has* these three things, God does not *have* the three *personae*: “they *are* one God, and they *are* three Persons, not one.”⁷⁵

Therefore, the ‘psychological analogy’ points to a picture of the three divine Persons, who are three irreducible loci of *sapiential* action: a holy desire to enact *iustitia* and pour out

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Trin.*, X.xi.18.

⁷⁰ There is also a *perichoresis* of being that Augustine discusses elsewhere: e.g., *Trin.*, VI.ii.9. See also, Bradley G. Green, *Colin Gunton and the Failure of Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 161–62.

⁷¹ As Breyfogle explains in a discussion of *Confessiones* X, the place Augustine gives to the *memoria* within the mind is that of the “locus of the mind.” *Intellegentia* and *voluntas* flows out from the *memoria*. Todd Breyfogle, “Memory and Imagination in Augustine’s Confessions,” *New Blackfriars* 75, no. 881 (January 1, 1994): 210–23.

⁷² In Augustine’s theology, *voluntas*—interchangeable with *dilectio* or *amor*—is what moves a soul to its ultimate rest. In particular, in *Conf.* XIII.ix.10, this characteristic of *amor* is explicitly connected to the role of the Spirit as Gift: “In your Gift we find rest. . . . My weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this weight that carries me. Your Gift sets us afire, and we are borne upward.”

⁷³ Augustine, *Trin.*, X.xi.18.

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Trin.*, XV.vii.12.

⁷⁵ “*unus Deus est, et tres sunt illae, non una persona.*” Augustine, *Trin.*, XV.xxiii.43.

caritas towards the other, expressed perfectly as the life of the *persona sapientiae*, Jesus Christ.⁷⁶ But these three Persons are one, for they are inseparably united in their common *sapientia* towards Their creatures—particularly towards humanity. Moreover, they are one because of their intrinsic relationship to one another: as Begetter, Begotten, and Gift. This is consistent with the apophatic conclusion from *De Trin.* V-VII—the irreducibility and relationality of the Persons—and the cataphatic conclusion from Augustine’s Christology—of *persona* as the locus of action.

Conclusion

When one reads *De Trinitate* according to its proper historical, philosophical, linguistic, and authorial context, much of the common criticisms against Augustine’s Trinitarian theology can be effectively refuted. In fact, *De Trinitate* provides us with a view of the Trinity which is not only Nicene and Christologically orthodox but also highly imaginative. Furthermore, its implication of personhood as the locus of *sapientia* likely has interesting implications to theological anthropology and spiritual theology, which are yet to be fully explored. But perhaps the most valuable insight that a theologian could learn from *De Trinitate* is Augustine’s contemplative approach to theology, as beautifully expressed in his concluding prayer: “Let me remember you, let me understand you, let me love you. Increase these things until you refashion me entirely.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ In fact, drawing upon a similar theology from John of the Cross, Williams suggests a fascinating ‘erotic’ model of the Trinity as “deflections of desire.” Rowan Williams, “The Deflections of Desire: Negative Theology in Trinitarian Disclosure,” in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, ed. Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 115–35.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *Trin.*, xxviii.51.

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