

APPENDIX I: Is Jesus God for the Transcendent Monotheist?

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Is Jesus God for the Transcendent Monotheist?

Some have charged (and will continue to charge) that Transcendental Monotheism does not hold that Jesus is fully God. (Therefore, it is a "dangerous" heresy.) This is false. The purpose of these notes is to clarify what the issues are and to explain how and why it is in fact the case that Transcendental Monotheism DOES hold the view that Jesus is fully God, even though it holds a view that differs somewhat from Orthodox Trinitarianism.

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We need to begin by making a distinction: we can speak of an *affirmation of identification* (by which is meant an affirmation of PERSONAL identification); and we can speak of an *affirmation of classification* (by which is meant an affirmation of ONTOLOGICAL classification).

Question:	Answer:	Type of Answer:
WHAT IS JOHN DOE? What sort of being is John Doe? [This raises an issue of ontological classification.]	A human being	John Doe is human = Affirmation of Classification
WHAT IS JANE DOE? What sort of being is Jane Doe? [This raises an issue of ontological classification.]	A human being	Jane Doe is human = Affirmation of Classification
WHO IS JOHN DOE? Who is the individual we know as John Doe? [This raises an issue of personal identification.]	John Doe, the individual with social security number 999-xx-9991	John Doe is John Doe = Affirmation of Identification
WHO IS JANE DOE? Who is the individual we know as Jane Doe? [This raises an issue of personal identification.]	Jane Doe, the individual with social security number 999-xx-9992	Jane Doe is Jane Doe = Affirmation of Identification

Notice that the question "What is John Doe / Jane Doe?" receives exactly the same answer with respect to both John Doe and Jane Doe. In contrast, the question "Who is John Doe/ Jane Doe?" receives a different answer with respect to both of them. John Doe

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and Jane Doe are the same with respect to the sort of being they each are, but John and Jane are different individuals.

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Some affirmations are clearly "affirmations of classification" and not "affirmations of identification." Others are ambiguous. Taken as an affirmation of identification, they assert one thing. Taken as an affirmation of classification, they assert something very different.

ASSERTION	TAKEN AS STATEMENT OF IDENTIFICATION...	TAKEN AS STATEMENT OF CLASSIFICATION...
Jack is the son of Dale and Linore.	This statement would specify which individual person Jack is.	
Jack is clumsy.		This statement would specify that Jack belongs to that class of people who are clumsy.
Peter is Satan. (As when Jesus, speaking to Peter, says, "Get behind me, Satan!")	This statement would specify which individual person Peter is; namely, he is the very person of Satan himself.	This statement would specify that Peter belongs to that class of beings who are in fact devilish (Satan) with respect to the nature and essence of their very being. -or, in the historical case- This statement would specify that Peter belongs to that class of people who act like Satan insofar as they embrace his lies and embody his values.
Jesus is God.	This statement would specify which individual person Jesus is; namely, he is the very person of God himself.	This statement would specify that Jesus belongs to that class of beings who are in fact divine (God) with respect to the nature and essence of their very being.

Notice, the two questions are independent of one another. Jesus could be God with respect to the sort of being he is without being God with respect to his personal identity.

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And, at least in theory—if we can make any sense out of it—one could be God with respect to his personal identity without being God with respect to what sort of being he is.

Notice that the bare affirmation “Jesus is God” is ambiguous. We cannot tell from the affirmation alone whether it is intended as a statement of identification or as a statement of classification. That is, we do not know whether it is answering the question “Who is Jesus?” or whether it is answering the question “What sort of being is Jesus?” In other words, we do not know whether the affirmation is telling us which individual person Jesus is, or whether it is telling us to what class of being Jesus belongs.

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Both Orthodox Trinitarianism and Transcendental Monotheism agree on the data that one finds in the Bible. Specifically, both agree that all of the following are affirmed by the Bible’s teaching:

- (1) Jesus is a human being.
- (2) Jesus is the Messiah.
- (3) Jesus is God.

[Transcendental Monotheism confesses (3)—that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God. It must be noted, however, that this is not so easily and straightforwardly concluded as traditionalists sometimes suggest. The Bible clearly and emphatically affirms the Messiahship of Jesus. The deity of Jesus is less straightforwardly and emphatically affirmed. Nevertheless, when all the concepts are rightly understood, Transcendental Monotheism believes that there is no doubt that the apostles affirmed that JESUS IS GOD himself. I will just assume this point in these notes; for Transcendental Monotheism and Orthodox Trinitarianism are in agreement on this point.]

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Where the two views differ is with respect to what exactly is the nature of the last assertion—the assertion that Jesus is God. Is it a statement of identification, answering the question WHO IS JESUS? Or is it a statement of classification, answering the question WHAT SORT OF BEING IS JESUS?

- Transcendental Monotheism takes the statement “Jesus is God” to be a **statement of identification**. “Jesus is God” is an affirmation of WHO Jesus is, not WHAT SORT OF BEING he is.
- Orthodox Trinitarianism takes the statement “Jesus is God” to be a **statement of classification**. “Jesus is God” is an affirmation of WHAT SORT OF BEING Jesus is, not WHO Jesus is.

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[Someone who claims to be a Trinitarian might object at this point: "I believe that to say Jesus is God is to assert both. I believe that it affirms that Jesus is God with respect to WHAT SORT OF BEING he is; and it also affirms that Jesus is God with respect to WHO he is." This is to misunderstand Trinitarian doctrine. The creeds are clear: when Jesus died on the cross, God did NOT die on the cross. The creeds are insistent that, with respect to personal identity, we must not think that the one with the personal identity of God be confounded with the one with the personal identity of Jesus. Jesus had his own identity, distinct from the creator God. Indeed, Jesus had his own identity, distinct from the second person of the Trinity of whom he was the incarnation. Jesus was Jesus. As to the nature of his being, he was the "hypostatic union" of a human nature and a divine nature. As to his personal identity, he just WAS Jesus.]

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Here then is a summary of the differences between Transcendental Monotheism and the traditional, orthodox view:

Question:	Answer offered by Orthodox Trinitarianism	Answer offered by Transcendental Monotheism
WHAT IS JESUS? What sort of being is Jesus of Nazareth?	(1) a divine being (2) a human being (these united in a hypostatic union)	A human being
WHO IS JESUS? Who is the individual we know as Jesus of Nazareth?	Jesus of Nazareth	(1) Jesus of Nazareth (2) The transcendent creator God himself

Notice that both views involve a "mysterious" assertion:

The mystery in Orthodox Trinitarianism—

- The traditional, orthodox view must explain how a divine being and a human being can be combined into one nature in a single person without the divine being and human being "mixing" or intermingling with one another, without combining and being synthesized, and without canceling one another out.

This has been a perennial problem that no orthodox Trinitarian has ever been able to solve. The only recourse is to fall back on an appeal to incomprehensible mystery.

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The mystery in Transcendental Monotheism—

- Transcendental Monotheism must explain how one individual—Jesus of Nazareth—can actually be two distinct individual persons simultaneously.

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This problem ("mystery") is solved if one posits that God is an utterly transcendent being who, as such, exists as a person on a totally different level of reality than the level at which human beings live. Because the person of the creator God does not exist on the same level of reality as the person of Jesus of Nazareth, then it is possible for Jesus of Nazareth to be the person of Jesus of Nazareth at the level of human reality while, at the same time, being the embodiment of the PERSON of the transcendent creator God who, in and of himself, exists on another (transcendent) level of reality.

Consider an analogy. Take the meaning of the sentence "I love you." The meaning of the sentence is embodied in and conveyed by the English words and syntax "I love you." Now translate that same sentence into German: "Ich liebe dich." The two sentences have the very same intended meaning—that is, they have meaning-identity—even though they clearly must be classed differently when it comes to phonology. "I love you" does not sound and look like "Ich liebe dich." The two statements are not identical at the phonological level. But they are identical at the level of their intended meaning. When the English sentence is translated into another language (German, for example), the intended meaning can remain what it is, even though it must be translated into a very different phonological entity.

By analogy, if God wants to translate himself—his personal identity—into a different mode of being (for example, into the form of a human being), then the personal identity of who he is in this new (human) mode of being can stay who he is (the transcendent creator God), even though it must be translated into a very different ontological entity.

Perhaps this table can help make the analogy clear:

PARTICULAR ASSERTION	INTENDED MEANING OF THE ASSERTION	MODE OF BEING OF THE ASSERTION
"I love you."	That the speaker loves the addressee.	Conventional signs of the English language.
"Ich liebe dich."	That the speaker loves the addressee.	Conventional signs of the German language.
PARTICULAR INDIVIDUAL BEING	PERSONAL IDENTITY OF THIS INDIVIDUAL BEING	MODE OF BEING OF THIS INDIVIDUAL BEING
The one who revealed himself within history as YAHWEH	GOD, he who is the source and determiner of all of cosmic reality	Divine, spiritual, transcendent, self-existent being
JESUS of Nazareth	GOD, he who is the source and determiner of all of cosmic reality	Human being

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Only one qualification needs to be made. As to his personal identity, Jesus not only has the personal identity of God himself, he also has the personal identity of Jesus. The point of this analogy is to make plausible how two different beings can have ONE personal identity at the same time that they are quite distinct with respect to the nature and mode of their being. They can be, I maintain, in somewhat the same way that two statements can be ONE with respect to their meaning at the same time that they are quite distinct with respect to the sounds coming out of one's mouth. *But this doesn't explain how Jesus can have two distinct personal identities at the same time.* Another analogy is necessary to make sense of that.

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Here is the analogy that helps one understand the possibility of a dual-identity in Jesus:

Suppose that I author a novel. For some reason, I decide that I want to actually be present within my novel on the same level and on the same basis as all the other characters I have created. Obviously, as I exist in and of myself, I cannot exist in the reality of my novel. In order to be present within it, I must create a character within the novel that I have specifically chosen to BE ME. So suppose I create a character, Alfonso, to be me. Two things can be asserted about Alfonso with equal validity. (1) Alfonso is Alfonso; and (2) Alfonso is Jack. Alfonso actually has a dual identity. He was created to be a character in his own right—hence, he has the identity of Alfonso. He was also created to be the embodiment of all that I (the author) am as well—hence, he can be meaningfully claimed to have the identity of Jack.

If God is a transcendent creator who purposed to write himself into the script of human history by actually becoming a human actor in the midst of human history, then it reasonably follows that the human being whom he created to serve that role (Jesus) will have a "dual" identity exactly analogous to the dual identity of a character within a novel who just IS the author of that novel.

Consider the respective answers that would be offered by Orthodox Trinitarianism versus Transcendent Monotheism with respect to Alfonso and his creator Jack—if each view were to answer the respective questions in exactly the same way they do with respect to Jesus:

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Question:	Answer offered by Orthodox Trinitarianism	Answer offered by Transcendent Monotheism
WHAT IS ALFONSO? What sort of being is Alfonso?	(1) a real human being (2) a fictional, imaginary being embodied by marks of ink on a page (these united in a hypostatic union)	a fictional, imaginary being embodied by marks of ink on a page
WHO IS ALFONSO? Who is the individual we know as Alfonso?	Alfonso	(1) Alfonso (2) Jack, the author of the novel

Hopefully it is clear in this case that Transcendent Monotheism is more plausible and reasonable than the traditional, orthodox view. The traditional view is contrived. It must "invent" a hypostatic union of a real human being and an imaginary human being in the very same person. My contention is that the traditional, orthodox view is just as contrived and implausible when it comes to explaining how Jesus is God.

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Perhaps one more analogy will prove helpful. Consider a song sung vocally. Now consider the lyrics of that same song printed in poetic form in a book of poetry to be read silently. Can one reasonably say that the song is the poem and that the poem is the song? There are many differences in the mode of their existence. The song is sound waves traveling through the air. The poem is ink marks on a page of paper. The song has melody; the poem is devoid of melody. The song involves noise; the poem exists completely devoid of any noise. The fact of the matter is, there is something about the song that remained when the song was translated into another form, another medium. The content of the lyrics remained, but in terms of the mode of its being, almost everything about it is different.

This is exactly what I am saying with respect to Jesus. God exists as the particular, transcendent, self-existent God that he is. God "translated" himself into the medium of human existence (as the man Jesus). The mode of being of this man Jesus is strikingly different from the mode of being of the transcendent, self-existent God himself. Do those differences mean that Jesus is NOT God, or that it would be wrong to affirm that this man Jesus is God? No. Not any more than it would be wrong to call the above poem the song that had been sung. Not all that God IS translates into who Jesus is. To call Jesus God is not to suggest that there is no remainder; it does not mean that there is not something of who God is that is not reflected in the mode of Jesus' being. (Just like the melody of the song did not get preserved in the poem, for example.) Nor does calling Jesus God mean

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that all that Jesus is is relevant to who God is. The sung song involves nothing of ink and paper; yet ink and paper is absolutely essential to the very being of the printed poem. Jesus is physical, material flesh. His flesh, in and of itself, is utterly irrelevant to who God is, for God is Spirit. And yet, cannot God be translated into and expressed in the medium of a physical, material human being just as surely as a sung song can be translated into the form of a printed poem?

Herein lies the difference between Transcendent Monotheism and Orthodox Trinitarianism: The orthodox view holds (roughly) that God (the second person of the triune godhead) descended from heaven in his fullness and completeness and dwelt *incognito* within the shell of Jesus' human body. Transcendent Monotheism holds that God "translated" himself into another medium, into the medium of human existence. Accordingly, God is not present completely and without remainder in Jesus. That would be impossible. But God most certainly CAN translate or interpret who he is into a human form! The flesh can represent and reflect spirit; but the flesh cannot BE spirit. A human being can reflect, embody, and express the nature and character of who God is; but a human being cannot BE who God is. In other words, a human being can BE the express IMAGE of the invisible God; but a human being cannot be the invisible God himself. To deny that a human being can BE the invisible God himself is not tantamount to saying that Jesus cannot be God; it is only to say that he is and must be God IN HUMAN FORM. That should not be a shocking conclusion; and it is NOT an unbiblical sentiment. If it is heresy, then it is a heresy that the apostles themselves endorse. It is Paul who wrote that Jesus is the *image* of the invisible God. Is Paul "unorthodox" for having so written? Has he diminished the deity of Jesus when he affords him no greater status than being the "image" of God? If Paul is a heretic, then I will wear the label proudly.

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Regardless of which of the two views one finds plausible with respect to the deity of Jesus— Transcendent Monotheism or Trinitarianism—the following points are indisputable:

- (1) The Bible clearly teaches and affirms that Jesus is God; but it does NOT do so in such a way that it clearly and incontrovertibly specifies in which sense it is affirming that Jesus is God. That is, it does not incontrovertibly specify that it is affirming that Jesus is God as a statement of classification (with respect to the nature of his being) rather than as a statement of personal identity. Hence, it is not incontrovertibly clear that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God with respect to the issue of what sort of being Jesus is. It is just as possible—at least—that the biblical teaching that Jesus is God concerns the issue of WHO Jesus is, with regard to his personal identity, and NOT in respect to the issue of WHAT Jesus is, with regard to his ontological classification. [Many Trinitarians will be inclined to dispute this claim. But, they will be hard-pressed to find SOUND biblical

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- evidence. They will cite passages that they claim prove their contention that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God with respect to the very nature of the mode of his being. Upon close, critical scrutiny, however, one finds that they have read their Trinitarian assumptions into the scripture that they cite; they did not derive their Trinitarian assumptions FROM the text they cite. A careful, critical reading of their citation will reveal that it, in fact, either confutes their contention or, more likely, does not specify the SENSE in which Jesus is God. That is, the evidence does not indisputably determine the matter at hand one way or another.]
- (2) Take it as given, then, that the Bible is not incontrovertibly clear that, when it affirms Jesus' deity, it does so with respect to the classification of the nature of his being rather than with respect to his personal identity. Therefore, is it reasonable to suppose that the authenticity of one's faith—one's eternal salvation—hinges on whether one believes and confesses the deity of Jesus with respect to the very nature of his being? In other words, is it reasonable to believe that a person who believes and confesses that Jesus is God with respect to the matter of Jesus' personal identity (rather than with respect to the nature of his being) is going to be eternally condemned—even though they explicitly confess that Jesus is God? Is this reasonable to believe—in light of the fact that the Bible merely asserts that Jesus is God (in a variety of different ways), and that it does not bother to clearly and incontrovertibly spell out its theory for how and in what exact sense Jesus is God?

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The charge has also been leveled against Transcendent Monotheism that it does not believe that Jesus is eternal. That too is false. In case it is not clear by now why this charge is false, let me explain:

Both Transcendent Monotheism and the traditional, orthodox view distinguish between the deity of Jesus and the humanity of Jesus. Here is a table that explains the distinction within each view:

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	HUMANITY OF JESUS	DEITY OF JESUS
Orthodox Trinitarianism	Jesus has a HUMAN BODY (and perhaps soul/spirit) that is the "bearer" of the hypostatic union of divine and human nature that constitutes the person of Jesus.	The divine nature that is joined in hypostatic union with the human nature of Jesus is none other than the second person of the divine trinity.
Transcendent Monotheism	With respect to the nature of his mode of being, Jesus must be classed as a human being.	With respect to his personal identity, Jesus must be identified as none other than the transcendent, self-existent creator God himself.

Now, is Jesus eternal? On the traditional, orthodox view, it depends upon whether you are referring to Jesus' humanity or his deity. With respect to Jesus' humanity, certainly he is not eternal. The traditional view believes that the humanity of Jesus came into existence at a certain point in time in human history—the first Christmas (roughly). It is only with respect to his deity that Jesus is eternal. Jesus' divine nature was without beginning; it has existed eternally.

Transcendent Monotheism says exactly the same thing. With respect to Jesus' humanity, he is not eternal. He came into existence at that same first Christmas. And with respect to Jesus' deity, Jesus is eternal. Jesus' divine personal identity—the transcendent, self-existent creator God himself—is clearly an eternal being who is without beginning.

Jesus is just as eternal for the Transcendent Monotheist as he is for the Orthodox Trinitarian. Granted, Transcendent Monotheism understands the nature of Jesus' deity somewhat differently than does the orthodox view. But it is not a just charge to claim that Transcendent Monotheism denies the eternality of Jesus; for Jesus is no more or less eternal on its view than he is on the traditional view.