

Communication of Being Ad Intra
The Trinity as Origin, Medium, and End of the Divine
Emanation and Remanation

Human participation in God through divine self-communication *ad extra* is grounded in Edwards's doctrine of self-communication *within* the Deity. How does he conceive of this divine self-communication *ad intra*, both among the divine persons and between the divine essence and persons? We shall begin by examining the latter part of the question.

DO THE DIVINE PROCESSIONS INVOLVE A COMMUNICATION OF ESSENCE?

With the mainstream tradition, Edwards affirms a perfect being theology and the consubstantiality of the divine persons.¹ He is thus explicit in his rejection of tritheism and, with that, any form of ontological subordinationism.² In siding with the Catholic tradition, Edwards holds that the origination of a divine person is coterminous with a communication of the divine essence.³

*COMMUNICATIO ESSENTIA: EDWARDS'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN ABSOLUTE
BEING AND RELATIVE BEING*

Echoing the Augustinianism of John Calvin, Edwards conceives of the divine persons as internal essential relations, as the "union of several divine persons *in* one Essence."⁴ Yet, in a late, untitled fragment on the Trinity, Edwards comes across as undeniably Nicene: "The Son derives the divine essence from the Father, and the Holy Spirit derives the divine essence from the Father and the Son."⁵ Flatly contradicting Calvin, he insists that the Son is "begotten by him [the Father] from eternity and continually through eternity."⁶

However, in a sermon written just a few years earlier, Edwards appears to deny the *communicatio essentiae*.⁷ In the divine generation, the Son "in some

sense is derived from the Father yet he is not a dependent being though his subsistence be from the Father yet his essence is from none and chief.”⁸ That a divine person is “God of himself” or *autotheos* seems to be at odds with the notion of *communicatio essentiae*, which assumes that a divine person has being from another.⁹ In what way, then, can the Son’s divine essence be understood as both derived and underived?¹⁰

Edwards frames his response in terms of a twofold distinction of the divine essence: being or relative being, derived or underived, independent or dependent. Here, he follows the Reformed scholastics, such as Turretin, who modified Calvin’s strict interpretation of the *autotheos*.¹¹ With this distinction, Edwards subtly shifts the terms of the debate. No longer are the divine persons directly referred to as *autotheos*, for the term is now predicated of the divine essence. Or, as Edwards himself presents the issue, how can *communicatio essentiae* meet the objection that “the divine essence” should be “undivided and independent,” and not “in any dependence or by derivation”?¹²

The divine essence is thought of as absolute or underived because its *esse* and *essentia* are self-positing.¹³ The divine essence has “relative being” or is derived when it is contemplated in the distinction of persons, or as “belonging to such persons.”¹⁴ Hence, the Son is said to be derived insofar as he eternally receives this same divine essence from the Father.¹⁵ But when, *in abstracto*, “the divine essence [is] in itself considered,” it is *autotheos*.¹⁶ In fine, the Son is God from himself (*autotheos*) because of being or having the divine essence, yet the Son is not Son from himself since the divine essence is received not from himself, but from the Father. Clearly, derived personhood, for Edwards, is not opposed to consubstantiality precisely because the perpetual communication of the divine essence is coincident with the divine processions.¹⁷

To discount any ontological subordinationism, Edwards evacuates the *communicatio essentiae* of any idea of volitional derivation. The Son and Spirit receive the divine essence by “a necessary, essential, and so an independent communication.”¹⁸ Edwards echoes the orthodox divines in refusing to speak of the divine processions as willed by another divine person, in order to maintain the distinction between created and uncreated.¹⁹ The *communicatio essentiae* is necessary yet unforced just as God must will good with utmost freedom.²⁰

In other words, the divine processions come under the freedom of nature and not of the divine will.²¹ God’s natural will means that the Trinity, of absolute necessity, exists as Will-to-Love, which cannot not be.²² God’s free will, on the other hand, wills things God can choose not to will, but once actualized, a created entity may be considered relatively necessary.²³

In summary, Edwards's version of the *autotheos* incorporates the idea of the communicability of the divine essence within the Trinity. For a divine person to have a derived essence is to possess relative being by natural or absolute necessity. How is the divine essence instantiated by the divine persons in the *actus personales*?

GOD AS MIND, IDEA, AND LOVE: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TRINITY

Edwards uses a range of Trinitarian models for the ontological Trinity, ranging from the unipersonal to the tripersonal.²⁴ However, he focuses on a psychological description of the divine processions and, in particular, the Augustinian bipersonal model of the Trinity.²⁵ In the following, I will argue that Edwards's various Trinitarian models may be fruitfully integrated through a conceptual *exitus-reditus* framework.²⁶

Seen in context, Edwards's first entry on the Trinity in his private notebook is hardly original: traditional Western filioquism is restated with an eighteenth-century confidence in rationality.²⁷ In his fuller Trinitarian account, Edwards describes the two divine processions as self-ideation/self-image and self-love/self-operation within God.²⁸

When we speak of God's happiness, the account that we are wont to give of it is that God is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself, in perfectly beholding and infinitely loving, and rejoicing in, his own essence and perfections. And accordingly it must be supposed that God perpetually and eternally has a most perfect idea of himself, as it were an exact image and representation of himself ever before him and in actual view. And from hence arises a most pure and perfect energy in the Godhead, which is the divine love, complacency and joy.²⁹

Clearly, this sort of psychological account of the Trinity was not absent in Edwards's earlier writings.³⁰ Yet, Edwards's development of this Trinitarian model is, in some sense, novel.

EDWARDS'S HISTORICAL SOURCES AND INFLUENCES: AUGUSTINIAN, THOMISTIC, AND REFORMED TRADITIONS

Edwards stands against the mainstream of Reformed scholasticism in his speculative amplification of the distinctive personal properties of the Son and the Spirit, and within the tradition of appropriating Augustinian psychological metaphors for the Trinity.³¹ In fact, Edwards comes closer to Aquinas's

trinitarianism based on a metaphysical examination of the immanent acts of the mind than Augustine's psychological analogy based on the human soul.³²

Here, he could be accused of moving away from the apophatic reserve exercised by patristic and mainstream Reformed theologians, who refused to positively define the difference between the eternal *generatio* and *spiratio* as analogous to the immanent operations of the human intellect (*per modum intellectus*) and volition (*per modum voluntatis*).³³ With the medieval Schoolmen and the marginal Reformed scholastic thinkers, Edwards obviously does not regard such a posteriori demonstration of the divine processions as *alogon*—that is to say, scripturally and rationally unfounded.³⁴ Edwards regards the biblical expressions “God is Spirit”/“God is Love” and “God is Light” as having pneumatological and christological import, respectively.³⁵ For him, as with Aquinas, the names Idea and Love are not merely appropriations applied to the Son and Spirit, but proper personal names.³⁶ Such medieval influences found their way into Edwards's psychological Trinity through Chevalier de Ramsay, a convert to Catholicism.³⁷ The divine essence, according to Ramsay, is analogous with “an infinitely active mind that conceives; or as an infinite idea that is the object of this conception; or as an infinite love that proceeds from this idea.”³⁸ This infinitely active mind is God the Father.

FIRST DIVINE PERSON AS THE UNSOURCED SOURCE OF THE DIVINE IDEA AND THE DIVINE LOVE

Edwards notes that since the biblical use of *Theos* is primarily in reference to God the Father, Christian tradition rightly names God the Father “the fountain of the Godhead,” wherein “all is from him, all is in him originally.”³⁹ “The Father,” as Edwards describes in another place, “is the deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated and most absolute manner, or the deity in its direct existence.”⁴⁰ Though he distances himself from Augustine on this point, Edwards's identification of the Father as *arche* must not be understood to make his theology more Greek than Latin.⁴¹ This personalism does nothing to undermine the Latin influences on his theology.⁴² Both traditions, as Richard Cross has argued persuasively, affirm the monarchy of the Father and subordinate the essence to the person.⁴³

Even though Edwards does not emphasize (as did Aquinas) the personal distinctions in terms of Father-Son language, the Father is not self-positing apart from the Son. The Father's unoriginatedness or inascibility is the negative counterpart of that which is derived.⁴⁴ Furthermore, unengenderedness has a positive content because it implies fecundity.⁴⁵ As such, it is a relational term

since the person who “neither is begotten or proceeds” is only so in relation to the Son and Spirit.⁴⁶ As the “Deity without distinction,” the Father is the *plenitudo fontalis* from whence the other two divine persons are produced.⁴⁷

However, Edwards is careful to qualify that the processions of the Son and Spirit are not “natural” or “voluntary,” whereby their “being or well-being” is dependent on the Father’s will.⁴⁸ Though the Father has a “priority of subsistence” and “though one proceeds from another, and so may be said to be in some respects dependent on another,” this does not imply any superiority of nature and essential glory, as the Son and the Spirit are perfect self-repetitions of the Father’s entire being and excellence.⁴⁹ Therefore, as much as the Son and the Spirit are dependent on the Father in their eternal relations of origin, they are constitutive of the Father’s personhood as self-knowledge and self-love.⁵⁰

The Father, in two distinct reflexive exercises of the divine essence, repeats the divine actuality in the “forms” of divine self-consciousness and self-love, thus generating the Son and spirating the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ Edwards explains: “God is glorified within himself these two ways: (1) by appearing or being manifested to himself in his own perfect idea, or, in his Son, who is the brightness of his glory; (2) by enjoying and delighting in himself, by flowing forth in infinite love and delight towards himself, or, in his Holy Spirit.”⁵² This would seem to imply a Photian monopatrism, which would contradict Edwards’s explicit defense of the Western filioquist position: that the Spirit “derives the divine essence from the Father and the Son.”⁵³ The primacy that Edwards gives to the first divine person explains, in part, why Edwards seems to favor conceptions of the Trinitarian *hypostaseis* as analogous to the distinction of mind, knowledge, and love and like the sun, its light, and its heat.⁵⁴

However, he also asserts that God’s “love” and “knowledge of everything possible” must be thought of as rationally prior and so identical to the Father, or “the essence of the Godhead in its first subsistence.”⁵⁵ Edwards’s contrast between a mind’s “mere direct consciousness” and its “reflex or contemplative idea” is analogous to the Father–Son distinction.⁵⁶ He regards the divine knowledge of all possibilities, as part of God’s natural knowledge, to be prevolitional.⁵⁷ Is Edwards implying that the Son should be God’s knowledge of everything actual? This seems to be the case, since all knowledge in God must be rationally thought of as *a fieri* unless the Son is “actualized” in the divine generation.⁵⁸ The Father is the “author or generator” of “divine wisdom.”⁵⁹ In that one simple act of divine generation, God beholds God’s own wisdom and omniscience with greatest clarity.⁶⁰

The Father cannot exist without the Son, and so the Father must have actual knowledge in perpetual generation yet immanent in the Father. Edwards

explains, “[I]t cannot be that Christ is called the wisdom of God only in a figurative sense . . . but that he is the real proper wisdom of God.”⁶¹ And God’s wisdom and omniscience—the Son—must include God’s knowledge of other necessary truths (apart from all possibles) and free knowledge of all contingents.⁶²

WHERE IS THE FATHER-SON RELATION?

Edwards certainly regards paternity and filiation as *propria* of the Father and the Son respectively.⁶³ Though he rarely uses the term “paternity,” he conceptualizes the Father under the notions of innascibility and generation. Like Aquinas, these two ideas are encapsulated under the term “principle” or “fountain.”⁶⁴ The divine generation from the principle cannot exclude a communication of essence, for the Father must beget a Son of the same nature.⁶⁵ Because persons act, the Father begets because of being Father; the Father’s identity as Father is not a result of begetting.⁶⁶ Edwards affirms the patristic notion of the *monogenes*—the “natural,” only-begotten Son of the Father.⁶⁷ Hence, “the Father’s begetting of the Son is a complete communication of all his happiness, and so an eternal, adequate and infinite exercise of perfect goodness, that is completely equal to such an inclination in perfection.”⁶⁸ Although Edwards does not apply the property of “paternity” to the first subsistence, he regards begetting to be properly descriptive of the Father. “The Holy Spirit . . . cannot be confounded in God, either with God begetting or [with] his idea and image, or Son.”⁶⁹ Because Edwards sees “generation” as an act of love, the Father-Son relation must therefore include the presence of the Spirit.⁷⁰

FIRST, DIVINE SELF-COMMUNICATION: THE SON AS GOD’S REFLEXIVE IDEA AND SELF-IMAGE

For Edwards, self-intellection involves a duality, since to have in view a perfect idea of a thing is identical to seeing the thing itself.⁷¹ God’s perpetual self-ideation or self-image *is* the Father’s eternal generation of the Son.⁷² In this pure reflex act of knowing, the Father begets “the eternal, necessary, perfect, substantial and personal idea” of God’s own self—the Son of God.⁷³ In that loaded phrase, Edwards recapitulates key Trinitarian assertions along traditional lines.

On the eternity and perfection of the Son, Edwards asserts that neither time nor space is implied in the generation of the Son by the Father.⁷⁴ The Son is said to be God’s substantial and necessary idea because, unlike human intellection,

the Word of God is not a contingent accident of a mind's cogitation.⁷⁵ Yet, the production of the Logos is analogous to the active conception of a human idea; in this sense, the Son may be seen as "an absolutely infinite effect, and object of the absolutely infinite mind."⁷⁶ God, in reflecting upon and beholding God's own self, must generate a perfect self-repetition—the exact image of God.⁷⁷ As Edwards writes, "And joining this with what was observed before, I think we may be bold to say that that which is the form, face, and express and perfect image of God, in beholding which God has eternal delight, and is also the wisdom, knowledge, logos and truth of God, is God's idea of himself."⁷⁸

Using the Platonic notion of *mimesis*, Edwards states that since the "very being" and definition of an idea "consists in similitude or representation," the Son is "not only *in* the image of the Father, but he *is* the image itself in the most proper sense."⁷⁹ Or, as Bonaventure phrased it, the Son comes forth from the Father *per modum exemplaritatis*.⁸⁰ The Son is the Father's eternal self-reflection, "his aspect, form or appearance, whereby God eternally appears to himself."⁸¹ This points to the Son's eternal simultaneity with the Father.⁸² As the Son is begotten of the Father, as idea from mind, so God generates God's own perfect image.⁸³

TRITHEISM AND THE PROBLEM OF INFINITE REGRESSION

Edwards's idealism, especially in relation to his trinitarianism, can be traced directly to Locke's influence.⁸⁴

And though there be a priority of subsistence, and so a kind of dependence of the Son, in his subsistence, on the Father—because with respect to his subsistence he is wholly from the Father and begotten by him—yet this is more properly called priority than superiority, as we ordinarily use such terms. There is dependence without inferiority of Deity, because in the Son the Deity, the whole Deity and glory of the Father, is as it [were] repeated or duplicated: everything in the Father is repeated or expressed again, and that fully, so that there is properly no inferiority.⁸⁵

Edwards is clearly aware that if a similar logic of self-repetition were to be applied to the Son's (as well as the Spirit's) understanding of the Father, one could conclude that "there would not only be three persons but an indefinite number." Nonetheless, he thinks that such an "objection is but a color without substance" and advances a twofold appeal to the doctrine of divine simplicity to overturn the issue of infinite regression.

In the first place, since the three divine persons are “the same understanding divine essence,” one would commit the tritheistic error of attributing “to each of them . . . a distinct understanding of their own.”⁸⁶ These two distinct, immanent modes of action (of understanding and love) in God have as their content the numerically identical divine essence.⁸⁷ “We never suppose,” Edwards contends, “the Father generated the Son by understanding the Son, but that God generated the Son by understanding his own essence.”⁸⁸ As such, the Father and Son are two modes of the same divine essence: “It is the divine essence [that] understands, and it is the divine essence [that] is understood.”⁸⁹ This line of reasoning is clearly similar to Aquinas’s notion of the divine persons as subsistent relations.⁹⁰

Secondly, the Father’s generation and understanding are not two successive and distinct acts. Analogous to a perfect human concept, the comprehension and production of the idea within God is simple and identical, for “the Father understands the idea he has merely in his having that idea, without any other act.”⁹¹ Since the divine understanding is not discursive but consists in a single, undivided act of the one divine essence, there cannot be multiple acts of understanding within God, and therefore there can only be that one perfect generation of the Idea of God.⁹²

Edwards’s alleged philosophical idealism—that is, his application of Lockean ontology to explain the divine processions—also opens him to the charge of tritheism.⁹³ What, then, does Edwards mean by the word “same” in reference to the divine coequality and consubstantiality in the *actus personales*?⁹⁴ His answer is that commonality (*quidditas* or whatness) and self-identity (*haecceitas* or thisness) coexist in the divine repetition *ad intra*: A perfect idea of a concept is no different from the concept.⁹⁵ Divine repetition is the deity of the Father being “expressed again, and that fully”: it is the divine essence perfectly articulated in another mode.⁹⁶ For Edwards, this notion of divine self-repetition *ad intra* is not philosophically grounded, but is first and foremost a biblical notion.⁹⁷ His use of Locke is an instance of metaphysically explicating the *Trisagion* with the tools of his time.

How does Edwards resolve the question of the Son’s ideation of the Father? The Son’s perception of the Father, he answers, is no different from the Son’s own existence.⁹⁸ In other words, the Son does not generate another Son. That being the case, it is nothing else but the Son. On this same argumentation, wouldn’t the Spirit’s ideation of the Father imply an *ex Patre spirituque*?⁹⁹ For Edwards, there can be no procession of the Son from the Spirit, since the will is, by *ordo naturae*, posterior to reason.¹⁰⁰ As the eternal exemplar, the procession of the Son cannot be mediated, for its existence depends directly on

the prototype.¹⁰¹ Employing a kind of wordplay, Edwards insists that whether it is the Son or the Spirit having a self-ideation, “tis still the idea of the Father.”¹⁰² If the Holy Spirit possesses the divine Idea who derives from the Father, how does Edwards distinguish the Spirit from the other two divine persons?

SECOND DIVINE SELF-COMMUNICATION: THE PROCESSION OF THE SPIRIT IN THREE MOVEMENTS

The Father, Son, and Spirit must be distinguished in a way analogous to the distinction between a human mind, its immanent idea, and the act of love: “The Holy Spirit . . . is certainly distinct from the other two; the delight and energy that is begotten in us by an idea is distinct from the idea. So it cannot be confounded in God, either with God begetting or [with] his idea and image, or Son. It is distinct from each of the other two, and yet it is God; for the pure and perfect act of God is God, because God is a pure act.”¹⁰³ Accordingly, “the Holy Spirit is this act of the Deity, even love and delight, because from eternity there was no other act in God but thus acting with respect to himself.”¹⁰⁴ Just as the Father directly exists in “the most absolute manner” and is thus the origin of Deity, the Holy Spirit “is the . . . most perfect . . . act of the divine nature, wherein the Godhead acts to an infinite degree and in the most perfect manner possible.”¹⁰⁵ Since the Holy Spirit is “that personal energy” of God in infinite and complete exercise, this “perfect act of God must be a substantial act.”¹⁰⁶ With this, Edwards recaps Thomas’s understanding of the Holy Spirit as the “subsistent operation” (*operatio subsistens*) distinct from the Son, who is a “subsistent term” of an immanent procession in God.¹⁰⁷ The Spirit is also simultaneously the disposition of God.¹⁰⁸

Here, the charge of philosophical idealism recedes as Edwards does not portray the procession of the Spirit as God’s self-reflexive love. With most of the Augustinian–Latin tradition, he relies on the Holy Spirit to act as a unifying principle within the Trinity by appropriating to the Spirit the title of Love.¹⁰⁹ However, Edwards’s trinitarianism comes under fire for depersonalizing the Holy Spirit—the well-worn critique of the Augustinian, psychological analogy.¹¹⁰ In his defense, such use of nonpersonal analogies is in accord with Scripture, and Edwards does not hesitate in referring to the Holy Spirit as a divine person.¹¹¹

*FIRST MOVEMENT OF LOVE: THE SPIRIT QUI PROCEDIT EX PATRE TOWARD
THE BELOVED OBJECT*

This psychological analogy is consonant with the first “movement” of the bipersonal analogy in that the eternal Happiness of God emanates from the Father to the Son.¹¹² He states this explicitly elsewhere: “God’s love to himself, that is, to his Son, I suppose to be the Holy Spirit.”¹¹³

The procession of the Spirit, thus, begins from the source of divinity—the Father, who eternally gives to the Son God’s own Spirit. Edwards does not restrict the names Messiah and Christ to the realm of the divine economy. “Christ is the Messiah, or Christ, or the anointed in his divine nature only, without any consideration of his human nature, or his office of mediator.” He is such insofar “as he is the object of the infinite love and delight of the Father, and as the Father doth eternally pour forth the Spirit of love . . . infinitely upon him.”¹¹⁴ Like the patristic writers, Edwards seems to think of the Spirit of the Father not only as resting upon but also abiding in the Son.¹¹⁵

The Son has a sort of priority over the Father inasmuch as “the Father depends on him as his object.”¹¹⁶ The Son is not only the subsistent term or eternal Object whom the Father sees, but also the eternal Object of Love. It is in the Beloved that the Father finds the divine love, joy, and happiness. “And therefore the Father’s infinite happiness is in [the Son], and the way that the Father enjoys the glory of the Deity is in enjoying him.”¹¹⁷ The Holy Spirit, as the divine Happiness, actualizes the eternal, beatific vision of God. The generation of the Son is God’s eternal *visio*, but it is only *beatifica* as the Spirit abides in the Son. The Son is perceived as the beautiful object because of an intrinsic divine beauty received from the Father.¹¹⁸ This apparent monopatrism clearly has not accounted for how Edwards integrates the *filioque* into his trinitarianism.

*THE SECOND MOVEMENT OF MEDIATION: THE SPIRIT QUI PROCEDIT EX
PATRE PER FILIUM*

At the Ecumenical Council of Florence, the procession of Spirit *ex patre filioque* was interpreted as *ex patre per filium*.¹¹⁹ The Reformed scholastics were well aware of this ontological *per filium* and Edwards continues its usage.¹²⁰ “And even *ad intra*, though the Holy Ghost proceeds both from the Father and the Son, yet he proceeds from the Father mediately by the Son.”¹²¹

Though Edwards reiterates Aquinas in saying that the Spirit proceeds “from the Father originally and primarily,” they differ in emphasis.¹²² Aquinas regarded the *per filium* from the point of origination, so “the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father immediately.”¹²³ In contrast, since Edwards’s

perspective is from the *terminus*, the “Spirit is from the Son immediately by himself.”¹²⁴

The procession of the Holy Spirit, as the second *communicatio essentiae* from the Father, is indirect and distinguished from the first, which is direct; that is why the Son’s generation can be termed a procession also, albeit an unmediated one.¹²⁵

Though Edwards does not say it overtly, he certainly does not think of the double procession as implying two sources. Although the Spirit proceeds from Father and Son, making them both “infinitely holy and . . . infinitely happy,” they are to be regarded as a single “fountain of holiness” or “fountain of happiness.”¹²⁶ This notion of a double procession of the Spirit from a single principle prevents the Son from being construed as an instrumental cause.¹²⁷

Aquinas understood that because the Son is wholly receptive toward the Father, the Spirit proceeds from the Son, thus signifying the *per filium*.¹²⁸ Similarly, for Edwards, in the first logical movement, “the Son receives the infinite good, the Holy Spirit, from the Father,” and is thus dependent on the Father. Yet, there is a kind of reciprocal dependency for the Father “enjoys the infinite good through the Son.”¹²⁹ Here, Edwards follows the Puritans in regarding the Son as “the middle person of the Trinity,” the one who is the mediator or “intermediate between the Spirit and the Father, or between the third person and the first.”¹³⁰ According to Edwards, then, the Spirit is from the Father “originally and primarily,” and “from the Son,” or God’s reflexive idea, “as it were secondarily.”¹³¹ How, then, is the Spirit “secondarily” from the Son?

As we have seen, by describing of the Son as preexistent within the Father, that is, as the “outward” revelation of God’s interiority, Edwards echoes Marius Victorinus’s analysis of self-ideation.¹³² The Father in seeing himself begets the Son, while the Son in seeing the Father exists. On the one hand, it is in the Father’s self-perception of an Other that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son.¹³³ On the other hand, since the Son perceives the Father in the Son’s own self, the Spirit proceeds from the Son directly.¹³⁴ In other words, it is from the Son and the Father mutually beholding each other that the Spirit proceeds. This completes the third movement of the *spiratio*.

THIRD MOVEMENT OF REMANATION: THE “END OF ALL PROCESSION” AS THE SON’S ETERNAL RESPONSE TO THE FATHER

Edwards assigns a preeminent place to the Holy Spirit as the aesthetic principle in God, the culmination of the Trinity.¹³⁵ The Spirit is “the beauty of the Godhead, and the divinity of Divinity (if I may so speak), the good of the infinite Fountain of Good.”¹³⁶ As God’s disposition is identical to God’s act,

divine Love is in perfect fruition in God.¹³⁷ The Holy Spirit is thus “the end of the other two [divine persons], the good that they enjoy, the end of all procession.”¹³⁸

And the Son of God is not only the infinite object of love, but he is also an infinite subject of it. He is not only the infinite object of the Father’s love, but he also infinitely loves the Father. The infinite essential love of God is, as it were, an infinite and eternal mutual holy energy between the Father and the Son, a pure, holy act whereby the Deity becomes nothing but an infinite and unchangeable act of love, which proceeds from both the Father and the Son.¹³⁹

The virtue and beatitude of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit as “[b]oth the holiness and happiness of the Godhead consists in this love.”¹⁴⁰ The procession of the Spirit makes the Trinity in factio esse.

Edwards’s use of the unipersonal analogy leaves him with the difficulty of portraying the divine persons as three truly relational agencies in the Trinity.¹⁴¹ However, he also appropriates Augustine’s bipersonal analogy of the Trinity and imbues it with a sense of aesthetic relationality, or consent between persons.¹⁴² Nonetheless, while this love is internally dual or reciprocal, it is never social in the full sense.¹⁴³ Unlike Richard of Victor, Edwards does not describe the Spirit as *condilectio* in God; there is mutual, but not shared, love in the Deity.¹⁴⁴ Since the *propria* of the Son and Spirit are Beloved and Love, respectively, the Holy Spirit may only be improperly said to be loved with the love of complacency.¹⁴⁵

For Edwards, God must be social because God is fundamentally self-communicative as well as beautiful. Firstly, there must be an Other to which the Father can communicate the entire divine goodness.¹⁴⁶ Secondly, the Son must exist in perfect concord with the Father if there is to be infinite consent within God.¹⁴⁷ And this infinite and eternal consent is

the act of God between the Father and the Son infinitely loving and delighting in each other. . . . It is distinct from each of the other two, and yet it is God; for the pure and perfect act of God is God, because God is pure act . . . so that the Scripture has implicitly told us, that that love which is between the Father and the Son is God.¹⁴⁸

Edwards’s modification of the unipersonal-psychological analogy permits him to affirm both intersubjectivity within God and Augustine’s *filioque* clause—the latter placing him squarely in the Western tradition.¹⁴⁹ However, this

configuration ironically grants a special significance to the third person—as the common Spirit of the Father and the Son—thus according to the Spirit the status of unifying principle in this analogy.¹⁵⁰

Drawing from the Augustinian well within the Reformed tradition, Edwards sees the Spirit as “that infinite delight there is between the Father and the Son.”¹⁵¹ In this way, the Spirit is the *vinculum caritatis* or *amoris* “between the Father and the Son: for their love is mutual.”¹⁵² God as Spirit is not only the bond of love (*vinculum caritatis*) but also the “vehicle of eternity (*vehiculum aeternitatis*).”¹⁵³ The eternal movement of love within God does not culminate in the Father’s gift of the Spirit to the Son, for the Spirit is mutually returned to the Father by the Son, in order that the Spirit might be “the end of the other two . . . the end of all procession.”¹⁵⁴ This, then, may be interpreted as the eternal “emanation” and “remanation” within the divine life—the perfect reciprocity of love between the Father and the Son. The psychological Trinity modeled after an individual is transcended, for love creates communion.¹⁵⁵ Because mutual love is greater than mere loving, God the Father “must have an object on which it exerts itself . . . into which it flows, and that flows back to it again.”¹⁵⁶ For Edwards, self-love and mutual love are not antithetical, as he unifies all his Trinitarian models under the rubric of divine love.¹⁵⁷ He explains, “From hence also it is evident that the divine virtue, or the virtue of the divine mind, must consist primarily in love to himself, or in the mutual love and friendship which subsists eternally and necessarily between the several persons in the Godhead, or that infinitely strong propensity there is in these divine persons one to another.”¹⁵⁸

Though Edwards could speak of the “social” Trinity and a “society of persons,” his predominant imagery is that of a bipersonality of Father and Son.¹⁵⁹ Hence, the Father, Son, and Spirit are the eternal Subject, Object, and Act within the divine Being.¹⁶⁰ In this final “movement” of the Spirit’s *processio*, the Son is both the object as well as the secondary subject of the Father’s love. The Son is receptive in relation to the Father but is both receptive and active in relation to the Spirit (of the Father and Son). However, the Father is solely active in relation to the Son’s being.¹⁶¹

TWO HANDS OF GOD: THE COINCIDENT PROCESSIONS OF IDEA AND LOVE

The two processions, as the two “hands” of God, are the simultaneous exercise of the fundamental twofold powers or faculties in God.¹⁶² Does Edwards conflate the eternal generation of the Son with the emanation of the Spirit when

he asserts that “the Father’s begetting of the Son is a complete communication of all his happiness”?¹⁶³ What he is implying here is that since God is *actus purus*, there is only one immanent act (in two modes) whereby God is differentiated as three persons.¹⁶⁴ In other words, the generation of the Son is not without the procession of the Spirit. But where is the Son in the Spirit’s procession?

In a remarkable statement, Edwards exclaims, “Understanding is in the Holy Ghost because the Son is in Him, not as proceeding from Him but as flowing out in Him.”¹⁶⁵ Just as the Son exists as an object through the Father’s ideation while remaining immanent in the Father, the Son is present in and with the Spirit’s procession. In short, the Son flows out in the Spirit’s procession. Although divine Love is posterior to, and so proceeds, from the divine Idea, the Spirit remains in the Son in procession.¹⁶⁶ The Son is not only the eternal object *of*, but also *in*, the Father’s love.¹⁶⁷ In the procession or flowing out of the Spirit from the Father, the Son’s generation is not excluded. In God, then, there is no “blind love” but rather a “seeing and understanding will,” or, as Aquinas phrased it, “a sweet knowledge.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, there is a double self-communication of the Father, which, though distinct, is never separable, whether ontologically or rationally.

Is this similar to Gregory of Cyprus’s idea of an eternal “shining” forth of the Spirit *per filium*, appropriated by modern theologians to distinguish communication of essence and energy *ad intra*?¹⁶⁹ The case is quite the opposite. For Edwards, as we have seen, there is no procession of the Spirit that involves a *communicatio essentiae* from the Father alone; his is a Western ontological construal of the *ex Patre per filium* within the ambit of an *ex Patre filioque*. Rather, it is the Son who is the (ontological) epiphany of the Father. In being begotten, the Son not only mediates but accompanies the Spirit in procession.

IS THE DIVINE ESSENCE OR GOD THE FATHER SELF-COMMUNICATIVE?

We now return to Edwards’s understanding of the divine essence. Clearly, he does not have a generic conception of the divine essence; that is to say, it is not a genus or species.¹⁷⁰ The divine essence is indivisible “for God is not made up of parts for he is a simple pure act.”¹⁷¹ Edwards’s conception is clearly Western: the divine essence is a particular singularity wholly resident in each and all three persons simultaneously.¹⁷² “The Son,” he explains, “has the same, not only specifically the same or the same in kind, but numerically the same individual glory so that [Father and Son] have but one glory that is common to both.”¹⁷³ There is no difference in essential glory as their understanding is identical.¹⁷⁴

Nonetheless, Edwards gives the impression, at times, that he propounds a bare derivation model of the Trinity, whereby the divine essence is simply identified with the Father.¹⁷⁵ On occasion, his sloppy attribution of processional terms to the Godhead seems to confirm the case.¹⁷⁶ Classical theology has held that the divine essence is communicated by the person, not begotten nor spirated.¹⁷⁷ Is Edwards here guilty of positing a self-generative essence, some sort of emanationism?¹⁷⁸ Can the distinction of absolute and relative being be applied to the Father? Edwards himself seems to waver on this account—a tension clearly reflected in secondary studies.¹⁷⁹ Interpreting Edwards's trinitarianism from the perspectives of *in fieri* and *in facto esse* accounts for his apparent fudging of the absolute/relative distinction of the divine essence as well as the monopatrism and egalitarianism of this theology.¹⁸⁰

Like Aquinas, Edwards believes that the Father is the one *archē* within God; there is shared *triadikē archē* of the Trinity only *ad extra*.¹⁸¹ Although he, like the Cappadocians, conceptualizes the divine processions as a movement from one to three, he sides with the Western tradition by denying that the Father is *causa* of the other two persons.¹⁸² The Son and Spirit are not dependent on the will of another divine person for their being. They possess the divine essence independently because the *communicatio essentiae* is necessary and independent.

While the Father is the originator of the divine persons, the “first person” of the Trinity is not ontologically prior to the other two.¹⁸³ Edwards, in contrast to Augustine, thinks that the Father is not wise without the Son. Though the Son is causally dependent on the Father for existence, there is a relation of counterfactual dependence of the Father upon the Son.¹⁸⁴ An ontological Trinity *in fieri* can only exist in thought, for the Trinitarian processions are ontologically foundational. And this leads to another issue—Edwards's apparent conflation of the personal and essential attributes in the Trinity.

PROPRIETAS PERSONALES ET ESSENTIALES: DID EDWARDS PROPERLY DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE TWO?

In the history of theology, an undue emphasis on the simplicity of the divine essence has had the effect of undermining the divine attributes.¹⁸⁵ A pure nominalism of the divine attributes would leave only a simple, unknown, bare divine essence.¹⁸⁶ Reformed theology, by and large, upheld a virtual/modal distinction between the essence and attributes of God.¹⁸⁷ Yet, how the multiplicity of the attributes relates to the simple divine essence is not often delineated but instead is simply affirmed, at best, as antinomical.¹⁸⁸ More rarely

still have the divine attributes been thought to derive from the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁸⁹

Edwards stands out as an exception to the rule, although his is not a completely consistent account.¹⁹⁰ There are instances where he veers toward nominalism.¹⁹¹ Frequently, he recaps the simplicity tradition: all the essential attributes belong indistinctly to the three divine persons.¹⁹² Nonetheless, he does not accept without qualification the simplicity axiom: “everything that is in God is God.”¹⁹³ For Edwards, excepting the two “real attributes” of idea and love, all other divine perfections are but “mere modes or relations of existence” of the *essentia*.¹⁹⁴

Applied notionally, God’s Idea and Love are, respectively, the Son’s and Spirit’s *propria*.¹⁹⁵ But when used essentially, love is specially appropriated to the Spirit.¹⁹⁶ Comprehended under the divine idea, then, are the divine understanding, wisdom, and omniscience as its various modes. Similarly, God’s holiness, justice, goodness, mercy, and grace are modalities of the divine love. Clearly, on this take, Edwards stands with the minority view within the West.¹⁹⁷

In his earlier writings, however, Edwards listed three basic attributes in God—omnipotence, knowledge, and love—which he seems to appropriate to the divine persons.¹⁹⁸ In his later “Discourse on the Trinity,” however, he asserts that there are “three distinct real things in God” but lists only two real attributes—“his understanding and love . . . for Deity subsists in them distinctly.”¹⁹⁹ Why is the first divine person not classed a *proprietas* but only an *aliud*?

Apparently, since Edwards identifies the first divine person with the *essentia*, or “God (absolutely considered),” the Godhead cannot be reduced to omnipotence.²⁰⁰ That is why he goes on to define God’s omnipotence as the joint exercise of the divine understanding and will in relation to creatures *ad extra*.²⁰¹ The essence of God, as Trinity, is the perfect exercise of the power of God *ad intra*.²⁰² If that is the case, is the Father or “God (absolutely considered)” distinguished from the two real divine attributes only negatively?²⁰³

Attributively, the Father is to be understood (but not really) as the divine power *in fieri*, or the essence of God in latency.²⁰⁴ It is as God eternally exercises God’s essential attributes of understanding and love that God’s Self-Ideation and Self-Love unfold, so to speak, into subsistences distinct from the Father.²⁰⁵ Edwards, like the medieval theologians, considers God’s essential powers of memory and will not only as logically prior to but also the ground (if not the cause) of the divine processions.²⁰⁶ God the “Father,” as the divine essence *in*

fieri, is distinct from yet comprehends (or possesses) God's primal attributes of knowledge and love.²⁰⁷ Hence, the Father knows and loves only by the Son and Spirit.²⁰⁸ Only in exerting this primal understanding in a "reflex act of knowledge and . . . so knowing his own knowledge" does the Son come into subsistence.²⁰⁹ And in God's operation of perpetually loving God's reflex idea, the Spirit thus subsists as the act and bond between Father and Son. As noted earlier, by differentiating the Son and Spirit as subsistent relations, Edwards modulates the grammar of essential attributes or powers (of understanding/idea and will/love) into that of notional properties.²¹⁰

We now return to Edwards's distinction between "being" and "relative being" in one of his later fragments on the Trinity.²¹¹ Here, he attempts an argument for Trinitarian coequality based not primarily on essential identity, but upon a parity of personal otherness.²¹² Based on the distinction of the divine persons, Edwards claims that they each must possess unique *propria*, which he variously terms "personal glory," "peculiar glory," or "personal dignity."²¹³ But this does not commit one to tritheism because the referencing of distinctive properties to the divine persons is not like attributing separate "perfections" or essences to the divine persons.²¹⁴

How can Father, Son, and Spirit be distinct and yet not be three Gods? "Their personal glory," Edwards avers, "is only a relative glory, or a glory of relation, and therefore may be entirely distinct."²¹⁵ Beyond the traditional appeals to identity of *ousia* and *perichoresis*, Edwards points to personal distinction as a basis for their equivalence. What is surprising here is that he seeks to justify their coequality using reciprocal relations of hierarchy. He contends that there are other proper relations of "priority" and "dependence" among the persons to be perceived beyond the traditional Trinitarian *taxis* of origination or "priority of subsistence": Father, Son, and Spirit.²¹⁶

Being the "fountain of Deity" and *principium sine principium*, the Father is "the first person from whom the others proceed, and herein has a peculiar personal honor." The Son exercises a "superiority" over the Father as "the great and first object of divine love," or the Beloved.²¹⁷ From Edwards's perspective, receptivity is more than just a positive perfection, for without it, the *principium sine principium* would remain inactive or purely negative.²¹⁸ The Father is unoriginate *in se* but is only fecund because of the Son; the Father is *sine principium* in the Father's own self but *principium* because of the Son (and Spirit). The Son is not only the object of the Father's love, but also a second subject who returns the Father's love. More precisely, the Son is the mediating subject,

by whom the Father enjoys the Spirit.²¹⁹ Here, the eternal *exitus-reditus* is not denied, but is viewed as a single movement of *processio*.²²⁰

The Holy Spirit, as “the end of the other two in their acting *ad intra*,” has dominance as the governing will of the Father and Son. “In another respect the Holy Ghost, that is, divine love, has the superiority, as that is the principle that as it were reigns over the Godhead and governs his heart, and wholly influences both the Father and the Son in all they do.”²²¹ In other words, the Holy Spirit as personal Love, directs and regulates that eternal *perichoretic* relation between Father and Son, Lover and Beloved.²²²

Edwards imports this idea of reciprocal relations of dependence into the Trinity *ad intra* from the “social” trinitarianism that was common currency in the Puritan-Reformed tradition.²²³ Despite Edwards’s dependence on the psychological analogy, the Boethian influence within medieval theology acts as a strong corrective against the modalistic tendency of this Trinitarian model.²²⁴ This is evident in Ramsay’s account of the Trinity, which influenced Edwards’s own psychological model of the Trinity.²²⁵

ANTINOMY OF ONE AND THREE: *PERICHORESIS*

Edwards uses the psychological analogy to characterize the Father and Son as persons, with understanding and will.²²⁶ However, he admits that describing the Spirit as Love would seem to deprive the Spirit of understanding.²²⁷ He solves this difficulty by appealing to the doctrine of *perichoresis*. The divine persons are not individuals possessing three separate minds but in-exist one in another.

This clearly mitigates the monopatrism and binitarianism implicit in the psychological and mutual-love analogies (the Trinity *in fieri*). The Trinitarian *perichoresis* is concurrent with but logically posterior to the divine processions.²²⁸ On the one hand, the *actus personales* and the *communicatio essentiae* both underlie the divine dynamism by which the divine persons are united and distinguished; here is a *circumincessio* of the divine persons.²²⁹ We thus observe a kind of divine circumambulation or eternal movement of one toward another. On the other hand, the *perichoresis* secures the immanence of these processions as a kind of *stasis*, viz., a *circuminsessio*, or the mutual inhabitation and resting of the persons one in the other.

In the most primal logical configuration, the Son and Spirit are latent and distinguished as the Father’s “faculties” of understanding and will.²³⁰ Edwards describes the acts of God *ad intra* before the creation of the world as “a fire enfolding itself.”²³¹ The two divine processions of the Son and Spirit are