It is a rare honour to have such a distinguished set of thinkers offering their reactions to my work. I am very grateful.

I tried to find some tidy way to organise these six responses, so as to offer an elegantly unified reply. The rich complexity of each of them, however, and the differences among them in focus and even perhaps genre, make such an organisation difficult. I will therefore take a more flat-footed approach, and simply respond in the order of their appearance, with some comments along the way about elements of coincidence or disagreement amongst them. I am deeply grateful to Brad East for organising the forum and for his generous and vivid introduction to the book.[1]

Andrew Prevot

I very much enjoyed Andrew Prevot's synthesis of the explicit and implicit political theology of my book. He is an unusually gifted reader, and I think his analysis is entirely on target. He develops very fully a point that is also touched on by Tanner and Williams: my most consistent political theme is to do with the politics of theology itself, the way the 'expert' is envisaged in relation to others, the way, in his words, the 'dignity of the people, the laity and the uninitiated' is preserved. I found this helpful. I also found Prevot's exploration of the ways in which my theology is *not* apophatic—in 'discursive style', in starting point, in the sources from which I aim to derive political insight-- particularly illuminating.

There are two essays in *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology* in which I touch on Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Prevot is absolutely right that more could have been said: all that he mentions should of course be acknowledged in order to give a fully rounded picture. I have elsewhere developed my thinking on Balthasar more extensively[2], but it seems to me that even when one writes at full book length, a would-be critic of Balthasar meets a difficulty. Balthasar's own writings are so voluminous, so varied, so learned, so all-encompassing and—it has to be said-- so little preoccupied by questions of consistency or precision, that for any problem one identifies, there is always some *other* point in the oeuvre which provides evidence for the opposite.

I suspect that when it comes to how Catholic theology should receive Hans Urs von Balthasar, there is a certain symmetry between Andrew Prevot and myself: we think, each of us, that we have gone beyond the other. Prevot believes, as I understand it, that contemporary Catholic theology ought to get beyond the temptation to set up an either-or, or a sharp contrast, between Rahner and Balthasar, instead drawing sympathetically—but also selectively and critically—from both. This kind of even-handedness makes sense to me, because it is just what I used to think. Why exacerbate polarisations that plague the church? Surely this is a responsible way to model what it is to do Catholic theology, to heal and move beyond intellectual and other forms of division, rather than repeat and deepen them. And surely there is more than enough room in Catholic thought for the different intellectual styles and theological emphases Rahner and Balthasar represent. I continue to believe this,

[1] East's images of doing theology in the light or the dark do indeed, as he suggests, capture something about what is at stake in my book. The only point at which his account makes me pause, slightly, is in the rather arresting extension of this to doing theology on an alien planet. East does not misrepresent the book, but the image is so vivid that it might lead unfamiliar readers to form the wrong impression. It is perhaps worth saying that the intellectual limits that theologians and other believers encounter co-exist, on my view, with a life of faith in which God is 'closer to me than I am to myself'.

[2] *Balthasar: a (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2012)

to a certain extent, but was myself led in turn to 'go beyond' the studied neutrality that I had previously maintained towards Balthasar by the harm I felt the increasing and more or less unchallenged adulation for his work was causing among young theologians. Nevertheless, in spite of this slight difference in strategy, I find Prevot's own work on Balthasar—and indeed his work on Rahner-- fresh and illuminating.

Prevot's concluding challenge-- shouldn't an apophatic social trinitarianism be possible?—is echoed in different ways in Rowan Williams' and Miroslav Volf's reviews, and I will return to it towards the end of my comments.

Kathryn Tanner

It is a great pleasure to have my former teacher Kathy Tanner contributing a response. As I mention in the book's introduction, it was only when drawing these essays together that I spotted, mostly from the pattern of my own footnotes, what a persistent influence Tanner has been on me, how often I draw on her work, how instinctively I relate my own lines of thought to those she has laid down. This makes it particularly intriguing, of course, when our theological sensibilities diverge. I explore that divergence, indirectly, in an essay entitled 'Grace and Paradox', and she in turn is exploring it, I think, indirectly and perhaps playfully, towards the end of her response.

I am grateful for Tanner's reference to my 'usually very careful effort to distinguish how and why limits are placed on theological understanding in different cases'. This touches on something I should perhaps have highlighted more clearly in the introduction: perhaps one can never legitimately describe systematic theology as 'bottom up', but if it were possible to use this term, I would say this is a book which attempts to explore issues from the bottom up rather than from the top down. It does not begin, that is to say, from a general theory of unknowing or the nature of theological language, and then apply it in a variety of cases. It starts with the cases, with particular issues and problems, and with what we find, if we attend to the Christian tradition, about the limits we reach.

In light of this, then, Tanner is right that just because I think the doctrine of the Trinity is the wrong place to look to find a socio-political map, or a set of principles for communal life, this does not mean I think theology as such can never in any way contribute to such a map, or such principles. Consider, for instance, the body of writings known as Catholic Social Teaching: it is a tradition which is imperfect, evolving, sometimes frustratingly vague. Nevertheless, one can find in this genuinely theologically informed tradition—and for those who work on Catholic Social thought, one can help bring out of it and help it to develop-- valuable contributions to socio-political wisdom. [3]

But, of course, I have not written about the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching in this book. Is there, then, any political significance to the emphasis on the limits of theology which I *have* explored? Tanner, like Prevot, helpfully brings out some of what is already present in a scattered way across the chapters of the book, and then she takes a step further, exploring what in her view I *should* have said. The proper analogue to the theological approach I am exploring in this book, she argues, would be a politics where one works for something without expecting any progress whatsoever. One struggles to improve the world without believing one will get anywhere. Just as I resist the notion that theology incrementally diminishes the mystery of God, so I ought to reject the notion that political

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[3] Cf. Anna Rowlands *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming) for a rich and multi-layered exploration of CST which, among other things, draws attention to the range of properly theological resources funding its central principles.

engagement incrementally brings us any closer to the true end of society, which is the (utterly unimaginable) participation in God's own life. Tanner has very cleverly drawn out from my thought conclusions which she knows I will not want to accept. And she knows I will not want to accept them because they align with her own theological sensibility at precisely that point where mine diverges from it-- along what I suggest in the 'Grace and Paradox' essay are Protestant/Catholic lines.

In fact, then, I would endorse just the sort of not-so-radical, rather chastened hopefulness about political engagement that Tanner finds (I suspect) a bit too weak and wishy-washy: it seems to me that our political thought and our political engagement is legitimately accompanied by the hope that, though we are fallible and limited and tend to self-deception and all the rest, we might possibly contribute to making things, in some respect and for some period of time, better. And this rests, I think, on my more Catholic instincts around nature and grace and so my inclination towards a slightly more optimistic theological anthropology. Tanner is trying to make me slide from a kind of pessimism about the difference a certain kind of conceptual theological work can make, to a more general anthropological pessimism. And that is a slide that I don't want to be forced to make.

Katherine Sonderegger

I am delighted that Katherine Sonderegger has focused attention on one particular essay—' Christian Theology, anti-liberalism and modern Jewish thought'—since this happens to be my own favourite. Sonderegger has, out of her own extraordinary learning, thickened and enriched the rather spare, almost minimal –certainly less learned-- argument I presented in the essay.

I am grateful not only for this enrichment, but also for the way Sonderegger highlights the theme of modernity in my theology. She has made me realise, for the first time, that this has indeed been among my recurring concerns—theology's relationship to modernity, Enlightenment, and liberalism. I could not claim to have a grand theory of modernity, and I don't precisely want to place myself in either a liberal or an anti-liberal camp. But I do worry about what is distorted and lost when theologians indulge in blanket dismissals of modernity; and I do also think that a good deal can go wrong when being *not-liberal* is made an end in itself.

Rowan Williams

It is an honour also to have Rowan Williams among the respondents. Williams maintains a greater confidence than I do about the Christian ability to understand something of the nature of inner-divine relations, and to derive benefit from this understanding, and so he finds in my writing, alongside a number of good things (and I am grateful of course for his kind comments) some overreactions and some unfinished business. Before I try to say something about the central difference between us—the difference which I think gives rise to his judgment about unfinished business-- let me make a few comments about two figures who appear along the way, Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

I argue, according to Williams, 'very forcefully that the vocabulary used by Aquinas to map relations between the divine person in the trinity is consciously devoid of informational content'. My argument on this issue is actually not forceful at all but quite gentle: I repeatedly indicate that what I am developing is *one* possibility, *a* reading of what Thomas is doing, that should perhaps be considered. Maybe the impression of forcefulness

comes from the fact that I lay out quite a detailed, exegetically rooted treatment of Thomas, working closely through some key trinitarian texts. In fact both my diffidence in putting forward the proposals and the detail of the exegesis were rooted in my own slightly nervous awareness that what I am proposing here is an *unusual* treatment—it goes against the received wisdom.

What is disappointing, then, is that in offering his counter to my reading of Thomas, Williams doesn't in fact engage with the argument—he doesn't indicate any particular points at which my treatment of specific texts goes wrong. Consider for instance the divine processions. Williams points out—as in fact I also do-- that the fundamental reason Aquinas gives for using the language of procession is Scriptural. What I try to trace is how, *after* beginning with the term because it is scriptural, at each subsequent stage in his discussion within Question 27 Thomas takes 'procession' a step away from what we might grasp, and the cumulative effect is to leave us with a word of which we really have no understanding. Williams doesn't specify where he thinks I misread the text: he simply asserts, in general terms, something close to the opposite of the reading I laid out--that Thomas shows us in Question 27 how the use of the word procession in other contexts gives relevance and meaning to its use in relation to God. A similar pattern emerges in our differing takes on subsistent relations—to my concrete textual argument that Thomas does not give insight but serenely lays out intellectual dead ends, Williams opposes his own understanding of subsistent relations, without engagement with the analysis of the texts I offered. It is not fair, of course, to expect detailed exegetical discussion in a book review; but on the other hand to simply reassert received wisdom as a correction to an argument which deliberately and carefully offers an alternative to that wisdom—and to do so without engagement with the argument itself—is not, quite, to advance the discussion.

Jumping forward a few centuries, I found myself rather shocked at Williams' use of the word 'austere' in relation to Hans Urs von Balthasar. I don't understand Balthasar to be an 'austere' thinker at all: I see it, as I argued at some length in a book a few years ago, as both Balthasar's great strength and his weakness that he is precisely an *unfettered* thinker. I should also say that it is in my view inadvisable to put to one side Balthasar's use of sexual imagery and stereotype, as though it were a separable overlay or addendum to the underlying structure of his thought. In some thinkers, in some cases, that may well be the right thing to do. But for Balthasar, on my analysis, the sexual stereotypes actually play quite a substantial structural role—in the doctrine of the Trinity and elsewhere-- and serve, precisely in the unargued and oddly non-traditional way he uses them, as a powerful illustration of the unfettered and idiosyncratic nature of his work.

We differ, then, in our interpretation of some particular passages from St Thomas, and in our broad construal of Hans Urs von Balthasar. But most fundamentally what Williams' response points to is that we differ in our view of whether the doctrine of the Trinity gives some understanding of the nature of the eternal relations in the Godhead. Williams' view, as I understand it, is that while we ought not go too far, and cannot follow what I call the social trinitarians-- and he calls strongly pluralist doctrines of the Trinity-- nevertheless we can still feel our way into some perhaps elusive insight into Trinitarian interrelatedness and its significance for our view of ourselves and our world. And he thinks the reason I fail to see this is that I neglect a key element in the New Testament—Jesus praying to the Father.

I do think the absence of much explicit treatment of especially the Johanine discourses is a weakness of my Trinitarian essays, something which, if I were to write

another such essay, I ought to grapple with. But I wouldn't expect this to lead me to the kind of position Williams outlines. Of course the relation of Jesus to the Father, including the prayers, is part of what gives rise to the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course there are pressures, from here and elsewhere, towards thinking in terms of relationship and otherness in the Trinity. But there are also other pressures, coming from other directions. My own view is not that I understand the Trinity so well that I can confidently rule out mutuality, otherness and relationality in it. It is rather that I don't think any of us truly know how to hold all the things we believe must be relevant together in such a way that, as a whole, they yield any sort of stable insight capable of being put to work elsewhere.

Sarah Coakley

Let me turn now to Sarah Coakley's rather critical review. At heart I think she has three fundamental objections to my book— that I am pursuing a Kantian agenda, that I propose that Christian theology is nonsense, nescience or jabberwocky, and that I am inconsistent. I will try to respond to these major objections, but there are a range of smaller issues to take up first.

Coakley suggests in her second paragraph that my goal is to recapture a more 'pristine patristic or scholastic understanding' of apophaticism. I do not in the book—and would not in fact—describe this as a goal. One of the essays only—on Thomas on the Trinity—is a deliberate exercise in ressourcement. Otherwise, patristic and scholastic thinkers come into my writings as and when they help make particular points. My work is-- I hope-- seriously engaged with the tradition, but it is not for the most part a pure exercise in retrieval.

Coakley is troubled in various ways by my 'Perichoresis and Projection' essay. It's true that it was first published 'as long ago as 2000'. I chose to include it in this volume for two reasons: first, it begins a fairly coherent sequence, and is usefully read together with the three essays that follow; and secondly, I have the impression that the essay continues to be quite widely used in teaching, so that its availability will be helpful. Coakley also comments that the critique it contains may now be quite familiar, and that it has 'already been a marked feature of the work' of Tanner and of Coakley herself. If this is a suggestion that the essay is derivative, it doesn't quite make sense-- Coakley's critique was first published in 2002, Tanner's in 2003. It is true that there is now quite a weight of writing against social trinitarianism (I think Steve Holmes' book has been particularly influential in evangelical circles), and its period of dominance, at least among systematic theologians, is as Coakley suggests probably over.[4] Coakley is also concerned that my argument against social trinitarianism focuses principally on projection rather than on some other worries—tritheism and false East-West dichotomies. I do actually point to the prominence of these East-West dichotomies in social trinitarians, and raise a question about it, pointing readers to the work of Michel René Barnes, though it is certainly true that I don't dwell on this: the essay was not aiming to be exhaustive, but to pursue its own distinctive critique. It is true, and in a way curious, that I don't in this essay mention the worry of tritheism, since in fact it did and does worry me. What inhibited me was the fear that it wouldn't amount to much more than name-calling, a kind of argumentative dead-end. Where does the discussion go after I say 'this looks like tri-theism' and my opponent says 'of course it is not tri-theism, and

[4] My impression is that it remains a live option in some adjacent subdisciplines--among analytical theologians, for instance, and practical theologians.

only a modalist would see it that way'? In any case, given that it is only an 11-page essay, 'Perichoresis and Projection' seems to me to accomplish a fair bit, argumentatively, and not really to be justifiably criticised for that which it doesn't cover.

In her treatment of the book's third essay, 'Is an apophatic trinitarianism possible?' Coakley once again supposes the goal to be simply retrieval of the Cappadocian original. The chapter uses a sentence from Gregory of Nazianzus as an epigraph, and one of its seven brief sections relates to the Cappadocians. I have not however known any other reader conclude from this that the essay is offered, as a whole, as an exposition of Cappadocian theology. I say this not because I want to distance myself from the Cappadocians, but because if retrieval of their thought had been my central purpose, then it really would be an oddly designed piece of writing. It is an essay in which I set out a position, test it from various angles, and point to various sources of support for it, one of which, I suggest, may be found in its resonance with something in the Cappadocians.

I'm puzzled by the notion that I am *scathing* about recent Thomistic scholarship. I would have said that I am anything but—I write appreciatively of the rereading of Thomas led by French Dominicans and others, and give a brief and positive overview of it before raising one issue on which I wish to diverge from it. Along similar lines, I believe I have treated Miroslav Volf's thought with a good deal of respect—I don't quite think 'excorciate' is the right word.

There are two final small issues to comment on before coming to the central themes of Coakley's critique. Coakley proposes to "leave aside for the moment the issue of whether Cantor's account of mathematical infinity, or Gödel's indeterminacy principle, are *strict* analogies for the divine 'infinity'"-- with a clear implication that I have suggested they are such strict analogies. In fact I spend the first two pages of the essay blocking any sort of analogy between mathematical and divine infinity, making clear that this is precisely *not* the direction of thought I am wishing to pursue.[5] And she makes a reference to the infrequency of my use of the word revelation. According to Coakley I only get around to discussing revelation in my final essay, and in total the word only appears in three places. This I believe gives a really quite misleading impression of the nature of this book. That theology is a response to revelation, that it is engaged in faith seeking understanding, is I think pretty clearly the presupposition of the whole. Never at any stage is the doctrine of the Trinity presented as anything other than something that has arisen from revelation. I was initially shocked to read in Coakley's review that I had use the word revelation so sparingly, but reassured when I looked back at my text to see fairly frequent deployment of terms like scripture, Bible and New Testament. If this volume were either an introductory textbook, or a mini-systematics, it might be fair to ask why I do not somewhere set out an explicit doctrine of revelation as part of a general explication of theological sources and method, but that is simply not the kind of book this is.

Let me turn, now, to what I take to be Coakley's three main criticisms. The first is intellectual capture by Kant. Now I should say that I find Kant a rich and fascinating figure, and suspect I have not learned as much from him as I ought to. But I don't think the pattern of my thought in this book is fundamentally Kantian. There is a superficial similarity: I am concerned with the limits of our theology, and Kant is concerned with the limits of all our knowledge, including knowledge of God. But Kant's concern is to work out general principles

[5] Actually I cannot quite imagine what it would mean for Gödel's incompleteness theorem (which is what I think Coakley is referring to under the phrase 'indeterminacy principle') to be taken as an analogy for divine infinity.

which make clear in advance where limits lie: the limits can be determined a priori. My own approach is exploratory, 'bottom up' as I somewhat hesitantly suggested above: where and at what point, on particular theological topics, do those who operate within a broadly classical tradition of Christian theology come up against limits, and what kind of limits are they?

A particular reason for supposing me Kantian that Coakley gives is my use of Rahner in the final chapter of the book, where one of Rahner's articles is used as an illustration of a certain patterning in theology. Coakley writes 'For it is Rahner, says Kilby, who showed her that one should in no way appeal to 'revelation' *propositionally*…'. But I very clearly *do not* say that. Rahner does reject propositionalism, and I do, it is true, *mention* his rejection of it, but I do so without any sort of judgment one way or another. Indeed, I am really very clear about that: 'my interest here is not in whether Rahner is right…The interest rather is in the structure of what he is doing…' (152).

More generally, am I influenced by Karl Rahner? Certainly. I continue to find his thought rich and fascinating, often wise, and very often still misrepresented by a too-easy dismissal as itself captured by modernity and Kantian or post-Kantian philosophy. I suspect in *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology* the strongest way in which his influence manifests itself, though, is not in any kind of dogmatic adherence to his positions on my part, but in the very style and freedom of the essay writing genre.

What about the accusation that I represent Christian belief and the theological tradition as a bunch of pointless nonsense, that the creeds are on my account nothing but incomprehensible ululation, and theology is a useless exercise in jabberwocky? Well, I have to say that I don't really recognise my position in the renditions Coakley gives of it, which tend I think towards caricature and distortion. When I suggest that particular kinds of insight and understanding should not be sought from the doctrine of the Trinity, I am not suggesting the doctrine is therefore useless, but instead redirecting where we look for its use-- in the way it structures the whole of Christian faith and life, shapes and protects our reading of the Bible, enables us to go on praying.

Finally, I count up to 20 references to *inconsistency* in Coakley's response to my book—I slide and wobble, giving lots of different and perhaps incompatible answers to the same question, and execute a major volte-face in the final chapter. While, again, I don't think all this is fair, I do think it raises an interesting question about the essay genre in which the book is presented. In one sense self-standing essays are friendly to a reader: come and think with me, for a few pages, the essay invites, and perhaps you will end up with something worth pondering. There is a kind of modesty to the essay genre, willing to offer something without answering everything, which I have always admired in Rahner. But in another sense, essays like this do also impose a certain burden on the reader. If I had rewritten them into a more explicitly interconnected whole, into a more standard monograph, then I would have taken it upon myself, rather than partly leaving to my readers, to lay out the interconnections and relations among the parts. And so although in my view the book does not contain the wild and sloppy inconsistency of which Coakley accuses it, it also does not *exhibit* its consistency as clearly or effectively as would have been possible had it been reconstructed in another genre.

Miroslav Volf

I very much enjoyed reading Miroslav Volf's essay, which is simultaneously a reply to me and a beautifully laid-out overview of his own Trinitarian theology, as it has been

articulated across a number of works and as it has changed over time. I find it an elegant essay, and *almost* irresistible.

Volf objects to being treated as a 'generic social trinitarian'. It is certainly a fair point that there are many differences among social trinitarians, and Volf's own mapping of the distinctions between Swinburne, Moltmann and himself is illuminating. In my original characterisation of social trinitarians in 'Perichoresis and Projection' I pointed to three elements that I saw repeated across a number of otherwise diverse thinkers: first, a sense that the technical trinitarian word 'person' is not so very discontinuous from our current ordinary use of the word; secondly, a particular contrastive East/West reading of the development of trinitarian thought; and thirdly, an enthusiasm 'when it comes to accounting for how the three persons in God are one', often expressed as an enthusiasm about the concept of perichoresis, both as a description of the attractiveness of the inner life of God and 'as having positive implications for that which is not God'. At most, I suppose, Volf can be said to fit only half my original criteria[6]. Perhaps this is why I use the oddly cautious phrasing in my later essay, that he 'finds a place on most people's list of social trinitarians.'

Nevertheless, the central, critical focus of that first essay was on the way certain theologians derive socio-political and metaphysical insight from the idea of trinitarian perichoresis, and broadly speaking this is something Volf has in common with many social trinitarians. In fact, because of this I felt rather uneasy for many years that I had *not* said anything about Volf's position, for he seemed to me the most intellectually powerful and theologically sensitive of those who make this move. By not considering Volf's arguments I was, I felt, making my life too easy.

When I did eventually turn to Volf—arguably still making things a little too easy for myself by focusing on a single essay—the key thing I found problematic is that the 'conceptual correspondences' between the immanent Trinity and human sociality Volf developed using perichoresis became interesting and only at that point –*exactly* at that point-- where he began to draw 'from below', on intuitions deriving from our nature as finite and fallen beings. And in spite of the very compelling presentation of his position in this current essay, something of that worry still lingers with me. Let me explain, briefly.

As Williams does, so also Volf makes me see that there is a clear lacuna in the essays I have so far published –the lack of some serious discussion of the prayers of the Johannine Jesus. I'm inclined to think that when I do fill that lacuna, I may not arrive at *quite* the same conclusions as Volf—he seems to me to find a symmetrical two-way interaction a little too easily here—but let us suppose for the sake of argument that I were arrive at identical conclusions. We then have an indication of inner-Trinitarian interrelation which our own mutual love and 'oneness'—our own sociality-- should in some way mimic. Excellent. But I continue to wonder whether we know enough about what that 'oneness' and 'in-ness' of agency between Father and Son is like so that believing we ought in some way to correspond to it will make any great difference to our social thought. To use Volf's complex but clear scheme, to what extent can what we understand about perichoresis 1 concretely inform how we envisage perichoresis 3? It seems to me that by the time we acknowledge all that we don't know about perichoresis 1, and take into account all the different ways finitude and fallenness might be thought to weave their way into perichoresis 3, we ought

[6] The arithmetically inclined reader may be puzzled by suggesting he fits only half of an odd number of criteria. I am inclined to think that while he may meet my first criterion, and clearly does not meet the second, he only half meets the third.

to acknowledge that almost *any* socio-political vision could be presented as a human correspondence to the divine perichoresis. Perhaps not the socio-political vision of Ayn Rand, admittedly-- but nearly any other. I am a little wary, in the end, of an intellectual procedure which sets out a good deal of complex, technically difficult, even daunting trinitarian argumentation in order to arrive at a social vision which at all its most significant junctures is shaped by instincts imported from elsewhere. I do worry, as Prevot, Tanner and Williams all noticed, about the ecclesial politics of such a procedure, about the kind of disproportionate authority it seems to grant the technically trained theologian.

Do I worry too much about this? Maybe I do. Volf after all makes the comment, at the start of his essay, that the whole can be bracketed by an 'In my opinion', and he makes reference at the end to his kind of social trinitarianism as a 'theological improvisation'. He is in a sense, then, holding his authority lightly.

This is a good point, perhaps, to return to Andrew Prevot's final question: 'Is an *apophatic* social trinitarianism possible?'. The answer to his question, it seems to me, ought to be 'Why not?' If it is not the kind of confident, almost triumphalist building of models that we have sometimes seen; if there is not a claim to have unearthed the single, long-hidden true *meaning* of the doctrine, which can now be presented to a grateful world; if instead it is offered as one among many ways of construing or imagining God as Trinity, something which also needs to be complemented and even displaced by other pictures and other approaches, but which, if it does not determine, may nevertheless in some contexts helpfully motivate or reinforce a Christian social vision—then it seems to me hard to object.[7]

It really has been quite an extraordinary opportunity, to have the combined intelligence of these six theologians focused on *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology*. I have come to know my own thought, including my own political theology, much better as a result. I am quite aware of the selectivity of my replies, of not having been able to respond to all of the points raised, but I imagine there may be other occasions on which to do some of them more justice.

[7] I can imagine a worry here about my consistency, picking up perhaps from the kinds of concerns Sarah Coakley raised. How can I coherently make space for this kind of social trinitarianism if I stand by earlier claims that the point of the doctrine is not to bring insight or knowledge, that we should be content with not understanding? The answer is twofold. First, this kind of social trinitarianism, which would willingly co-exist alongside other ways of imagining God as Trinity which it couldn't absorb or bring into co-ordination with itself, would in fact *precisely be* a form of not understanding. And secondly, to say that such a line of thinking may be unobjectionable is not to say that it becomes the main purpose of the doctrine of the Trinity. It would remain in my view at the level of the secondary: the doctrine does not *need* this sort of interpretation in order to play its proper structural, grammatical and co-ordinating role in Christian faith and theology.