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THE TRINITARIAN PROCESSIONS

William Hasker and I have a friendly disagreement over the doctrine of the Trinity. We both reject classical theistic attributes like divine timelessness and divine simplicity. Instead, we affirm that God is temporal and unified. Further, we reject so-called Latin models of the Trinity, and prefer social models of the Trinity. Where we disagree is over the doctrine of the processions of the Trinitarian persons. In this essay, I will articulate some problems for the doctrine of the processions. First, however, I need to set the stage by explaining some of the details of the Trinity and the doctrine of the processions.

1. THE IMMANENT AND ECONOMIC TRINITY

There has long been a tension within Christian theology to maintain a conceptual distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. The immanent Trinity is meant to describe how the divine persons are in and of themselves from all eternity apart from creation. The economic Trinity is an account of the divine persons as they are made manifest in their relation to creation in the economy of salvation (PETERS 1993, 20–24). There is a constant struggle in Christian theology to maintain this distinction without collapsing one into the other with undesirable metaphysical consequences. The immanent Trinity is of more importance for this discussion, so I will spend more time articulating it.

Prior to creation, the triune God existed all alone. The immanent Trinity is a description of the essential (i.e. necessary and sufficient) properties for

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being divine that are displayed during this precreation era and forever after. The immanent Trinity is also a description of the necessary and eternal relations that obtain between the divine persons of the Trinity.

What is the description of the immanent Trinity? There are several desiderata that are necessary for constructing the doctrine of the Trinity. The basic claim of this doctrine is that the Christian God is three persons in one essence. This can be broken down into four claims:

> (T1) There are three divine persons.
> (T2) The divine persons are not numerically identical to each other.
> (T3) Homoousios: The divine persons share the same divine essence.
> (T4) Monotheism: The divine persons are related in such a way that there is only one God, and not three Gods.

I take these four desiderata to be common among Trinitarians of various stripes in the Christian tradition after the development of the Nicene Creed. I must emphasize *after the Nicene Creed* because not all Trinitarians in the early Church were happy with the term *homoousios* when it was first introduced. The way I have stated these desiderata are intentionally minimal so as to allow for multiple models of the Trinity to be articulated and examined. How one unpacks (T1)–(T4) will shape one's overall doctrine of the Christian God. For example, Hasker unpacks (T1) by saying that a person is a center of consciousness, knowledge, will, love, and action (HASKER 2013, 22–23). Since there are three persons in the Trinity, there are three centers of consciousness, knowledge, will, love, and action. Given this understanding of Trinitarian persons, one can see how Hasker can maintain (T2). The divine persons are not numerically identical to each other because there are three numerically distinct centers of consciousness, each with their own unique will, love, and action. Each person is a center of consciousness with a robust first-person perspective. This entails that each divine person has her own *de se* beliefs. *De se* beliefs are beliefs that are unique to individual persons. In the case of the Trinity, only the Father can have the belief, "I am the Father," and only the Son can have the belief, "I am the Son." Though there are three distinct persons with their own wills, the external works of the Trinity are undivided. This is because the divine persons can be united in an undivided ultimate purpose whilst each performing unique acts that contribute to the completion of the ultimate purpose (HASKER 2013, 205–10).

With regards to (T3), there are several ways that a divine temporalist can cash this out. Whichever way this is cashed out, it needs to be the case that

the divine persons all satisfy the basic concept of God. The concept of God is that of a perfect being which is the ultimate foundation of reality. In order to be perfect, God must be extensively and intensively superior to all possible beings (NAGASAWA 2017). God is extensively superior in that God has all of the possible great-making properties. Some great-making properties are degreed properties, like knowledge and power. Of the degreed great-making properties, God is intensively superior in that God has these properties to the maximal degree of intensity. This leads me to posit the following way of unpacking (T3). Call it Minimal Homoousios.

> Minimal Homoousios: The three divine persons are (i) extensively and intensively equal to each other, and (ii) extensively and intensively superior to all other beings.

I take minimal homoousios to be intuitive. If it somehow turned out that one of the divine persons lacked a great-making property that another had, this person would be extensively inferior. That would certainly call into question this person's status as divine.

With regards to (T4), there are several potential ways to unpack this. Hasker claims that the divine persons all are homoousios because they share the same concrete substance (HASKER 2013, chap. 27). This is a standard claim, but I think that more can and should be said about (T4) (cf. CRAIG 2019 and PAWL 2020). Keith Yandell gives four factors that must be satisfied for (T4) to obtain (YANDEL 2009, 168).

> (T4a) For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P exist and either of the other Trinitarian persons not exist.
> (T4b) For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P will what is not willed by the other Trinitarian persons.
> (T4c) For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P engage in any activity in which the other Trinitarian persons in no way engage.
> (T4d) The persons of the Trinity have complete non-inferential awareness of one another.

By "logically impossible," Yandell means broadly logically impossible, or metaphysically impossible (personal correspondence). In other words, it is of the essence of the divine persons to be strongly internally related to one another such that they cannot exist apart from each other (MCCALL 2014, 132). This is important to know since mere logical relations do not capture

the internality or so-called "essential dependence" of the persons on one another (MAKIN 2018, 385). Mere logical relations would be consistent with three independent and necessary beings (HASKER 2017, 230). The claim that it is of the essence of the divine persons to be related to one another is distinct from other kinds of relations like causal relations, which are external and not internal (MAKIN 2018, 387). Further, calling it "essential dependence" is misleading because it is a symmetrical relation, and dependence is asymmetrical. The Trinitarian way of stating this is that the divine persons are perichoretically related to one another.

Thinkers like Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor maintain that this perichoretic inseparability is what distinguishes the Trinity from tritheism.[1] John Duns Scotus argues that this type of inseparability is what allows for the divine persons to be the same being without being identical to each other.[2]

Traditionally, Christian theologians have wanted to say more about the immanent Trinity than this. Traditionally, theologians have claimed that the divine persons are also immanently distinguished by their causal relations of origin. This is sometimes referred to as the doctrine of the divine processions. To get a better understanding of these Trinitarian terms, one must look to the early patristic debates and ecumenical creeds. What is sometimes called *conciliar theology* is an explication of what the seven ecumenical councils taught. The first ecumenical council at Nicaea in 325 sets the context for understanding these terms in subsequent theological debates. The Creed of Nicaea of 325 states that the Son was "begotten of the Father … begotten, not made." The terms 'begotten' and 'made' are both causal. As Alasdair Heron explains, the term 'begotten' (Greek: *gennetos*) in the Creed is intended to denote "that which has a cause or source outside itself." This causal source could be a something, or in the case of the Trinity, someone. This need not involve the begotten thing coming into existence according to the pro-Nicene theologians. The term 'created' or 'made' (Greek: *genetos*), however, is intended to denote "that which has come into being" (HERON 1981, 60–61). The creedal teaching affirms that the Son is caused to exist by the Father, but in such a way that the Son never came into being. Whereas

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[1] Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations*, 5.4; Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Chapters on Love*, 2.29.

[2] It is a type of sameness without identity that is different from the material constitution accounts of the Trinity on offer today (CROSS 2012, 713–22).

the Father alone is unbegotten/uncaused (Greek: *agenetos/agennetos*), and is the source and cause of the Trinity.[3]

The Creed affirms that the Son is of the same essence of the Father. The teaching of the Creed is that if the Son is begotten of the Father, He can be of the same essence as the Father. If the Son is made or created, He cannot be of the same essence as the Father. According to Origen, Eusebius, the pro-Nicene theologians, and later classical Christian theologians who affirm the Nicene Creed, this relation of begottenness is a communication of the divine essence from the Father to the Son (HASKER 2013, 223). This is because the Father is the source, or fount, of divinity who *causes* the Son to be divine.[4] The Father alone is the self-subsistent divinity by nature; God from no other source than Himself (SIJUWADE, forthcoming, 3). It is the Son's derivation from the Father that causes the Son to exist and be divine (BEELEY 2012, 70–71).

What is important to note is that this causal concept was at play in the East and West in both the early and medieval Church (cf. BARNES 1993; CROSS 2009; FOX 2006, 56). Current patristic scholarship points out that there is no fundamental difference between the East and the West over the doctrine of the Trinity, expect with regards to the *filioque* controversy (HOLMES 2012, 129–31, 146). This is a later debate over whether or not the Father alone causes the Holy Spirit to exist, or if the Father and the Son together cause the Holy Spirit to exist. According to Stephen Holmes, what all sides agree upon during the patristic era is that "within the divine life, the Father is the sole cause, begetting the Son and spirating the Spirit" (HOLMES 2012, 146–47). I will simply state it as

> (T5) Processions: The Father causes the Son and Holy Spirit to exist.

(T5) is said by the orthodox to ensure (T3), yet it is controversial if this is coherent. According to Philip S. Cary, the doctrine of the processions is developed within the context of Neoplatonism. Within Neoplatonism there is the One supreme being from which all else emanates. Every emanation from the One is a lesser, subordinate being. On its face, that does not seem like the sort of thing that would help one ensure (T3). Cary writes,

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[3] Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations* 3.3. Cf. DURAND (2011).

[4] For a thorough discussion of this issue see GILES (2012, chap. 5–7). The claim that the Father's causal activity explains the Son's existence and divine essence goes back at least to Origen. Cf. BEELEY (2012, 23, 90–93).

> In a nutshell, the pro-Nicene theologians used the Platonist concept of eternal generation while denying the consequence any pagan Platonist would affirm: that everything generated is ontologically inferior to what generates it. It is a case of a conceptual resource too rich to be swallowed whole. (CARY 2022, 36)

Despite this serious problem, a very different concern of the patristics seemed to carry more weight. The worry is that without this causal sequence from the Father, there would be three first principles, or three Gods (BEELEY 2012, 110; cf. AYRES 2010, 264–65). The Father alone is the first principle. As Lewis Ayres explains, the Father is "the cause and source of the Trinitarian communion" (AYRES 2010, 264). As Holmes makes clear, the claim is that "the Father is the personal cause of the Son," and because of this "they share the same nature" (HOLMES 2012, 113). Somehow the Father's volitional activity to bring about the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit is such that the Son and Holy Spirit perfectly share in the divine nature. Somehow the Father's causal activity guarantees the full divinity of the Son and Spirit, as well as the unity of the three such that there is one God and not three gods.

As I discuss below, (T5) entails a kind of subordination that is affirmed by orthodox and heretic alike. Below I shall discuss the different kinds of subordination that are said to be orthodox and heretical. For now, I shall simply state that the ecumenical councils affirm

(T6) Subordination: The Son and Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father.

(T6) is a consequence of the doctrine of divine processions. It is curious how (T5) and (T6) can be consistent with minimal homoousious. Call this the Problem of Subordinationism.

The Problem of Subordinationism is quite serious for Christians. A central element of orthodox Christian thought is that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all homoousios—of the same essence. The Arian controversy in the 3rd and 4th centuries called all of this into question. Arianism is an incredibly fuzzy label applied to a broad and diverse group of thinkers in the early Church (cf. LYMAN 1993). Despite the diversity within Arianism, there seems to be one consistent theme that unites them—a denial of homoousios. Arians hold that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all divine, but deny that they are of the same essence. This is because the Father alone is God. The Son and Spirit are lesser, subordinate, divine beings. For the Arians, all of this follows from the doctrine of the divine processions. The Arians held to a

form of subordination when they affirmed that God the Son was created. Since the Son is a creature He is not homoousios with the Father. An early, popular Arian slogan is that "there was a time when the Son was not." Other forms of Arianism do not rest upon this slogan, but are in full agreement that the Son and Father are not homoousios because the Son is a created being (GAVRILYUK 2004, 117). On Arianism, the Son is highly exalted, the firstborn of creation, but is a lesser divine being due to being caused to exist by the Father. Orthodox Christians saw this as soteriologically detrimental to the faith since it entailed that the incarnate Son was not fully human and fully divine. The orthodox also saw this as a denial of the Trinity. The early Church fathers engaged in fierce debates with Arians over various issues related to biblical interpretation and philosophical theology (cf. PARVIS 2008). These debates eventually led to the development of the Nicene Creed in 325 and the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381.

2. FOUR KINDS OF SUBORDINATIONISM

Clarity is needed to understand what kind of subordinationism is in view that would be a problem for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The historian Mark Edwards identifies four different kinds of subordination within the history of Trinitarian thought: ontological, aetiological, axiological, and economic (EDWARDS 2020, 1).[5] Each one focuses on a different way in which the Son and Holy Spirit are subordinate to God the Father. Some of these types of subordination are affirmed by conciliar theology whilst others are not. Before discussing which kinds of subordination are conciliar and which are heresy, it will be best to define these terms. I start by defining the terms as Edwards does. Then I shall try to nuance and tighten up the definitions as best as I can for the purposes of developing the problem of subordinationism.

For ease of exposition, Edwards focuses on the relation between the Father and the Son. According to Edwards, a subordination will be "ontological when it ascribes to the Son a substance, nature, or essence which is inferior to the Father's" (EDWARDS 2020, 1). The subordination will be "aetiological when it asserts the Son's posteriority in the order of causation." The Son's subordination will be "axiological when it degrades him in rank or status without denying his equality in nature." And finally, the Son's subordination

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[5] Thanks to Andrew Hollingsworth for pointing out to me that this is different, though related to, the contemporary debate over so-called eternal functional subordination.

will be "economic when it dates the subservience of the Son to the Father from some point after his origin, most commonly from his voluntary assumption of human nature" (EDWARDS 2020, 1).

I believe that Edwards' taxonomy accurately tracks different concepts in the history of Trinitarian thought, and interested readers can look to his paper for the details. In what follows, I shall offer some of my own reflections on these kinds of subordination in order to tighten up the definitions, and fill out the concepts. I will start with ontological subordination. I shall define it as follows.

> Ontological Subordination: The Son is subordinate to the Father in that the Son has an essence which is inferior to the Father's.

Ontological subordination is a kind of subordination ruled out by the Council of Nicaea because it would violate the homoousios doctrine. What would it look like for the Son to be ontologically subordinate to the Father? As I understand it, there are at least two ways for the Son to be ontologically subordinate to the Father. In each case, the Son would not have the same essence as the Father because the Son would be a distinct, and lesser being. First, the Son could be intensively inferior to the Father. Perhaps the Son is less knowledgeable than the Father. In order to build a case for this, one might point out that the Son is ignorant of certain things that only the Father knows (e.g. Matthew 24:36).

Second, the Son could be extensively inferior to the Father. In this instance, one would be saying that the Son lacks one or more essential great-making properties for divinity. For example, if the Son lacked the property of *eternality*, the Son would have a different essence than the eternal Father. In which case, the Son would be ontologically subordinate to the Father. An example of this is the old Arian slogan: "There was a time when the Son was not."

As noted already, ontological subordination is denied in conciliar Trinitarian theology. Yet, the next kind of subordination is affirmed by orthodox and heretic alike. This is aetiological subordination. I define it as follows.

> Aetiological Subordination: The Son is subordinate to the Father in that the Son is caused to exist by the Father.

As Edwards points out, the Council of Nicaea affirms that the Father is the cause of the Son (EDWARDS 2020, 5). The Father alone does not have a cause for His existence, whereas the Son is eternally caused by the Father.

The causal relationship between the Father and Son is widely affirmed by theologians who are considered to be orthodox and heretical such as Origen, Arius, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Eunomius, and Augustine (cf. ANATOLIOS 2011, 190–91; BEELEY 2012, 23 and 90–93). The aetiological subordination of the Son is most certainly part of the conciliar deposit.

The next kind of subordination is axiological subordination. Based on comments from Edwards, I take it that axiological subordination is supposed to be something like the following.

> Axiological Subordination: The Son is subordinate to the Father in that (a) the Son is equal to the Father in essence, but (b) is inferior in rank or status.

I find myself uncertain how the Son could be equal to the Father in essence but inferior in rank or status. Edwards demonstrates that this is a view that is affirmed by various thinkers in church history. I just find myself at a loss how to grasp the concept. To explain my confusion, consider the following. If the Son and Father are equal in essence, I take this to mean that the Son and Father are extensively and intensively equal. The Son and the Father have all of the great-making properties, and have all of the great-making properties to their maximal degree of intensity. I don't understand where an inferiority of rank or status can sneak into this picture. The only way that I can think to establish a subordination of rank or status would involve the Son being extensively or intensively inferior to the Father. In which case, the notion of axiological subordination would collapse into ontological subordination, but various theologians will wish to resist this collapse. Perhaps the idea is that the Son is of an inferior rank because He has a cause for His existence, and is caused to have the same essence as the Father. I gather that this is the basis for some theologians to claim that the Son is axiologically subordinate to the Father.

For now, I wish to move onto the economic subordination of the Son. This is another form of subordination that appears to have wide affirmation among orthodox and heretic alike. From what I understand, this fourth kind of subordination is unique from the others. The first three kinds of subordination refer to immanent, eternal, and essential relations between the Father and Son apart from the creation of the universe. For example, a Eunomian theologian will affirm the ontological and aetiological subordination of the

Son by saying that the Father eternally causes the Son to eternally exist.[6] Whereas a Nicene theologian will affirm only the aetiological subordination of the Son by saying that the Father eternally causes the Son to eternally exist. In the eyes of a Nicene theologian, this aetiological subordination is an eternal and essential relationship between the Son and Father that somehow does not entail ontological subordination.

Things are quite different with economic subordination. This fourth kind of subordination refers to a subordination relation that obtains after the creation of the universe, and within the economy of salvation. This kind of subordination is an accidental, or non-essential, relationship between the Father and the Son. This kind of subordination only obtains when the Son becomes incarnate. Hence, I define it as follows.

> Economic Subordination: At some point in time, the Son became accidentally subordinate to the Father via the voluntary assumption of a human nature.

Again, I emphasize that the economic subordination is accidental and not an essential subordination relationship. This is so because God did not have to create a universe, nor did the Son have to become incarnate. In fact, a fairly traditional stance within Christian thought is that any of the divine persons could have become incarnate (CROSS 2002, 179). Hence, the incarnation is accidental and not essential to the Son.

With these different kinds of subordination relations identified, I can return to articulating the proper notion of subordination within (T6). When it comes to discerning the kind of subordination at play in (T6), the conciliar view is aetiological subordination. The Son and Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father in that the Father is the cause for the Son and Holy Spirit. Yet the conciliar view wishes to deny that there is ontological subordination. Ontological subordination is what the Trinitarian needs to avoid. With this in mind, I can delve more deeply into the problem of subordinationism. I will discuss two versions of this problem. The first I call the Inconsistency Problem. The second is called the Ontological Subordination Problem.

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[6] For more on the thought of Eunomius, see EUNOMIUS (1987).

3. THE INCONSISTENCY PROBLEM

In contemporary Trinitarian discourse, the charge of ontological subordinationism is leveled against any view that entails a denial of *homoousios*. Another way of stating this is to say that a view is subordinationist if it entails that the divine persons are not equally divine (SENOR 2013, 336). A view entails ontological subordinationism if it says that the Son and Spirit are of a lesser divine status than the Father. If the Son or Spirit are eternally ontologically subordinate to the Father, then the persons are not of the same essence. One can argue that the doctrine of divine processions entails ontological subordinationism. In other words, the claim is that the divine processions entails that (T3) is false.

Hasker tries to argue that the processions in no way imply ontological subordination, but instead guarantees the equal status of the divine persons. There is precedent for this within the Christian tradition. Origen claims that the generation of the Son guarantees that the Father and the Son are equal. How does generation guarantee this? Origen does not explain how eternal generation guarantees this. Instead, he punts to ineffable mystery, and this becomes the standard move throughout Church history.[7] In Church tradition, appeals are even made to Isaiah 53:8 to justify this use of ineffable mystery. The early Church fathers translated this passage as "who can speak of his generation?" (HOLMES 2012, 41). Set aside the tenuous exegesis of Isaiah. I take it as obvious that simply asserting that the divine processions guarantees the full equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit does nothing to assuage any concerns of subordinationism. I think it is incredibly telling that Origen's appeals to ineffable mystery did nothing to stem the coming tide of subordinationist theology in subsequent generations. The doctrine of eternal generation was one of several major motivations for subordinationist theology in the early Church.

One might claim that it is perfectly appropriate to play the ineffable mystery card at this junction, however, I demur. Timothy Pawl points out that one cannot play the ineffable mystery card when faced with a derived contradiction (PAWL 2016, 89–90). In what follows, I derive a contradiction, thus preventing cheap appeals to mystery. Call the first argument the Inconsistency Problem (IP) because it seeks to derive a contradiction from minimal homoousios, aetiological subordination, and fairly standard Christian

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[7] E.g. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 3.8; Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XV.47; Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book I*, IX.2.1.

claims about God. This argument starts by recalling the minimal homoousios doctrine.

> (IP1) Minimal Homoousios: The three divine persons are (i) extensively and intensively equal to each other, and (ii) extensively and intensively superior to all other beings.

From (IP1), the following can be inferred:

> (IP2) If the Father and Son are minimally homoousios, then the Father and Son are extensively equal to each other.

The next step of the argument is to assert the conciliar affirmation of the aetiological subordination of the Son.

> (IP3) Aetiological Subordination: The Son is subordinate to the Father in that the Son is caused to exist by the Father.

From here, the argument asserts that aseity is a great-making property, and thus essential for divinity. This is an uncontroversial assertion to make. In discussing the attribute of aseity, Lindsay K. Cleveland says, "Central to the traditional Jewish, Christian, and Islamic understanding of God is the view that God does not depend upon anything apart from Himself for His existence" (CLEVELAND 2021, 165). As she explains, traditional theists like Aquinas, "regard divine aseity as one of the most fundamental aspects of our understanding of God" (165). As I have stated before, a being exists *a se* if and only if its existence is in no way dependent upon, nor derived from, anything external. Consider this the next premise in the argument:

> (IP4) A being exists *a se* if and only if its existence is in no way asymmetrically dependent upon, nor derived from, anything external.

From (IP4) one can infer several different things about the kinds of dependency relations that aseity rules out. To start, causation is widely assumed to be an external, asymmetric dependency relation (MAKIN 2018, 287). As such, it is easy to infer that aseity implies God not having an external cause for His existence:

> (IP5) Aseity implies not having a cause for one's existence.

As I have pointed out elsewhere, there are other kinds of dependency relations that one can exclude as well, such as grounding (MULLINS 2017). Grounding is a kind of asymmetrical ontological dependence relation that is non-causal (cf. CORREIA 2008; CORREIA and SCHNIEDER 2012). Any being with aseity must be an ungrounded being. Any being that has its existence grounded in another will not be *a se*. Hence, aseity implies not having a ground for one's existence:

> (IP6) Aseity implies not having a ground for one's existence.

From here, one can carry on with the argument.

> (IP7) If aseity is a great-making property, then the Father and the Son both have aseity.
> (IP8) Aseity is a great-making property.
> (IP9) Thus, the Father and the Son both have aseity.

(IP4), and its implications to (IP5) and (IP6), is a very common understanding of the divine attribute of aseity. It has a strong intuitive fit with affirming that God is the foundation of reality (CLEVELAND 2021, 165). (IP7) is a plausible inference to make from (IP1) and (IP2). This is because if the Father has a great-making property that the Son lacks, then the Father and Son will not be extensively equal. (IP8) is widely affirmed in Christian thought, with aseity being a standard divine attribute listed in systematic theology textbooks. (IP9) follows from (IP7) and (IP8).
By simplification, one can derive the following from (IP9).

> (IP10) The Father has the property of aseity.
> (IP11) The Son has the property of aseity.

From (IP5), one can infer the following:

> (IP12) If x has a cause of its existence,
> then x does not have the property of aseity.

From premise (IP3), one can infer the following:

> (IP13) The Son has a cause for His existence.

From (IP12) and (IP13), one can derive:

(IP14) Thus, the Son does not have the property of aseity.

From (IP11) and (IP14), one can derive a contradiction:

(IP15) The Son has the property of aseity and the Son does not have the property of aseity.

The Inconsistency Problem has derived a contradiction from minimal homoousios, aetiological subordination, and fairly standard Christian claims about aseity. In order to avoid the Inconsistency Problem, one will need to deny one of the premises in the argument. Perhaps, one can try to deny premise (IP1) by saying that I have articulated a deficient minimal understanding of the homoousios doctrine. I must confess that if (IP1) is false, then I have lost my grasp on the minimal requirements for homoousios. As such, I suggest that one look elsewhere for a premise to reject.

The most obvious candidate for rejection is the aetiological subordination in premise (IP3). Philosophers like William Lane Craig and myself suggest rejecting aetiological subordination because it has no biblical basis and entails ontological subordination. All of the biblical passages commonly used to support aetiological subordination are actually about economic subordination, or about something completely unrelated.[8] We suggest abandoning the doctrine of divine processions altogether. However, philosophers like Hasker are unwilling to give up (IP3). So this won't help out anyone like Hasker who is trying to salvage the doctrine of divine processions.

There might be a way to reject (IP3), but replace it with something that is in the neighborhood of the doctrine of divine processions. Some philosophers are uncomfortable with the causal language in the doctrine of the divine processions, but they are unwilling to abandon the doctrine altogether. What these thinkers do is swap out the causal notion explicitly affirmed in the Nicene Creed for that of grounding (MAKIN 2018; SIJUWADE, forthcoming). The suggestion is that the Father does not cause the Son to exist. Instead, the Father grounds the existence of the Son. The Father alone is the sole, ungrounded thing in existence, and the Father alone is the thing that grounds the existence of everything else (SIJUWADE, forthcoming, 9–13). By my lights, positing an ontological dependence relation does not help the doctrine

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[8] CRAIG (2019, 29); see my *Divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism* (2016).

of processions avoid the charge of ontological subordination, nor does it help with the Inconsistency Problem. Here is why.

On this strategy, one would be rejecting premise (IP3), and replace (IP3) with a grounding relation in order to maintain some semblance with the conciliar notion of divine processions. I gather the replacement would be something like this.

> (IP3*) Grounding Subordination: The Son is subordinate to the Father in that the Son's existence is grounded by the Father.

This does not help avoid the Inconsistency Problem. Recall (IP6), which says that aseity implies not having a ground for one's existence. From this, one can infer:

> (IP16) If x has a ground for its existence, then x does not have the property of aseity.
> (IP17) The Son has a ground for His existence.
> (IP18) Thus, the Son does not have the property of aseity.

From (IP18) and (IP11), we once again derive a contradiction:

> (IP19) The Son has the property of aseity and the Son does not have the property of aseity.

This grounding strategy does not help out the doctrine of divine processions, but maybe there are some other options for someone like Hasker to consider. The next candidate premise for rejection is (IP8), the claim that aseity is a great-making property. I suppose that a Trinitarian theologian can reject the assertion that aseity is a great-making property, but this will have some series consequences for ontological and cosmological arguments for the existence of God which often rely on some notion of aseity. What on earth could it mean to say that God is the foundation of reality if God's existence is not *a se*? Hence, rejecting (IP6) comes at a cost of implausibility.

Moreover, I find myself at a loss as to how one could reject aseity as a great-making property. One suggestion is that aseity is not really an intrinsic property, but is instead an extrinsic property. The idea is that only intrinsic properties are great-making properties. If aseity is not an intrinsic property, then aseity cannot be a great-making property (SIJUWADE, forthcoming, 15–17). Hence, the rejection of (IP6).

This is an interesting suggestion, but I cannot make sense of the claim that aseity is an extrinsic property. Intrinsic properties are properties that a thing has regardless of whether or not it is alone or accompanied by other objects (SIJUWADE, forthcoming, 15–16). Ross P. Cameron states the matter like this. "Intrinsic properties are those that an object has solely in virtue of how it is, independently of its surroundings. Extrinsic properties are those that are not intrinsic" (CAMERON 2009, 265). Cameron gives the examples of *having mass* and *being square* as cases of intrinsic properties. For extrinsic properties, he gives the examples of *being the tallest person* and *being watched by a Scotsman*. Since Hasker and I both did our PhDs in Scotland, we well know what it is like to be watched by a Scotsman!

Given Cameron's analysis, aseity is clearly an intrinsic property. God has the property of aseity prior to the creation of the world, and God continues to have this property henceforth. God would have the property of aseity even if God did not create anything at all. There is no possible world in which God can exist and have His existence dependent upon or derived from something else. So the suggestion of making aseity an extrinsic property is a non-starter. The derived contradiction stands.

Joshua R. Sijuwade makes another attempt at explaining why aseity ought to be considered an extrinsic property. He says that the test for intrinsicality is any property that satisfies the Independence Criterion. If a property can satisfy all four conditions of the Independence Criterion, then that property is intrinsic. Sijuwade claims that aseity cannot satisfy all four conditions, so aseity must be an extrinsic property. Here are the four conditions of the Independence Criterion (SIJUWADE, forthcoming, 15).

> (A) It is possible for a lonely object to possess P.
> (B) It is possible for a lonely object to lack P.
> (C) It is possible for an accompanied object to possess P.
> (D) It is possible for an accompanied object to lack P.

Sijuwade focuses in on condition (B). He says that aseity fails to satisfy condition (B), and thus aseity cannot be an intrinsic property. He writes, "For if this property [aseity] were to be independent of accompaniment, then a lonely object must be able to lack this property as well, which is clearly not the case" (16). From there, Sijuwade infers that aseity is an extrinsic property because it fails to satisfy (B). Given that great-making properties are intrinsic, Sijuwade can claim that aseity is not a great-making property. Thus, aseity is not included in the minimal homoousios (16–17).

In reply, I am happy to grant that aseity fails to satisfy condition (B). However, I reject condition (B) as a legitimate test for intrinsicality. This is because condition (B) is inconsistent with the very idea of essential intrinsic properties. Essential properties are properties that a being cannot exist without. Essential properties are intrinsic to their bearers. All cases of essential properties will fail to satisfy condition (B) because it is impossible for a lonely object to lack its essential properties. Consider a case of a square. It is not possible for a square to exist and lack the property *being square*. So the Independence Criterion fails to capture what it is to be an intrinsic property, and thus gives us no reason for thinking that aseity is an extrinsic property. Allow me to illustrate this further.

First, consider all of the electrons that exist in the universe. Each one has the essential property of *being an electron*. I gather that *being an electron* is obviously an intrinsic property. Now consider one electron named Ely. Ely the electron has the property *being an electron* and Ely exists with a plethora of other electrons. Imagine that all of the other items in the universe cease to exist except for Ely. Ely is thus left all alone in the void. Ely will still have the property *being an electron* because that is an essential property. Can Ely possibly fail to have this property whilst being all alone? No. That property is essential to Ely. Notice that *being an electron* fails to satisfy condition (B). Is it really plausible to say that the property *being an electron* is an extrinsic property? I find that doubtful.

Second, consider all of God's essential great-making properties. As Sijuwade agrees, great-making properties are intrinsic properties. Take any essential great-making property you like from the divine nature. Every single one of them will fail to satisfy condition (B). For example, consider God's maximal power. Is it possible for God to exist alone and lack maximal power? No. What about God's maximal goodness? Is it possible for God to exist alone and lack maximal goodness? No. Consider God's necessary existence. Is it possible for God to exist alone and lack necessary existence? No. What about God's free will or perfect rationality? Is it possible for God to exist alone and lack free will or perfect rationality? No. And on we can go with every single essential great-making property. Should we infer that all of God's essential great-making properties are extrinsic? No. That is wildly implausible. Hence, I take it that condition (B) cannot be a condition for intrinsicality since it rules out the very possibility of essential intrinsic properties.

I conclude that the Independence Criterion gives us no good reason for thinking that aseity is not a great-making property. So the derived contradic-

tion from the Inconsistency Problem stands. Thus, we have good reason for rejecting the doctrine of the divine processions.

4. THE ONTOLOGICAL SUBORDINATION PROBLEM

If this derived contradiction were not bad enough, one can also argue that the Son is ontologically subordinate to the Father. Recall that ontological subordination involves the Son having an inferior essence to that of the Father. Also recall that aseity is the great-making property of not having one's existence asymmetrically dependent upon nor derived from anything else. Call this the Ontological Subordination Problem (OSP). Like the previous argument, this argument will assume minimal homoousios and aetiological subordination.

> (OSP1) If the Father and Son are minimally homoousios, then the Father and Son are extensively equal to each other.
> (OSP2) Aetiological Subordination: The Son is subordinate to the Father in that the Son is caused to exist by the Father.

Upon reflection of ontological subordination, the following is a natural inference to make:

> (OSP3) If the Son lacks an essential great-making property that the Father has, then the Son has an extensively inferior essence to the Father.
> (OSP4) If the Son has an extensively inferior essence to the Father, then the Son is ontologically subordinate to the Father.

In the next stage of the argument, one asserts that aseity is a property that the Father has and that the Son lacks:

> (OSP5) The Father has the property of aseity.
> (OSP6) The Son lacks the property of aseity.

(OSP5) and (OSP6) gain justification from within conciliar Trinitarian theology. As noted above, the Nicene Creed explicitly states that the Father is an uncaused being, whereas the Son is caused to exist by the Father. This is captured by premise (OSP2) of the argument.

The next step in the argument is to assert that aseity is a great-making property. Aseity is widely regarded as a great-making property within natural theological arguments and theology textbooks. So the assertion is incredibly plausible for a Christian to make:

> (OSP7) Aseity is a great-making property.

From (OSP5), (OSP6), and (OSP7), one can infer the following:

> (OSP8) The Son lacks an essential great-making property that the Father has.

From (OSP8) and (OSP3), one derives

> (OSP9) The Son has an extensively inferior essence to the Father.

From (OSP9) and (OSP4), one can derive

> (OSP10) The Son is ontologically subordinate to the Father.

As with the Inconsistency Problem, one will need to avoid the Ontological Subordination Problem by denying one of its premises. If one is attempting to develop a conciliar Trinitarian theology, premises (OSP1), (OSP2), (OSP5), and (OSP6) cannot be plausibly denied.

Of course, one strategy might be to reject (OSP6). There is precedent from within Reformed theology to assert that the Son is caused to have the property of aseity by the Father (WEBSTER 2008, 116). The idea is that the Son is caused to have the divine nature, and the divine nature has the property of aseity (PAWL 2020, 18–19). Hence, the Son has the property of aseity in virtue of having the divine nature (22). However, I find it implausible to suggest that the Son can be caused to exist and still somehow exist without a cause. Aseity is the property of not having a cause for one's existence. No being can be caused to exist in such a way that it does not have a cause for its existence. That is incoherent on its face. Further, it is question begging because it asserts the very thing that has been called into question by the argument, and it does nothing to explain how the Son can be *caused* to have the property of aseity. Given this, I suggest that one look elsewhere for a way to avoid the Ontological Subordination Problem.

One might try to reject (OSP3) and (OSP4) by saying that these premises are not natural interpretations of ontological subordination. If one wishes to

make this strategy to avoid the argument, I should like to see what a more natural interpretation of ontological subordination looks like. This is not to say that there is no other natural interpretation of ontological subordination. It is simply a call for clarity on the exact understanding of ontological subordination.

Another strategy for avoiding the Ontological Subordination Problem is to reject (OSP7). However, as I have stated before, aseity is widely regarded by Christians as a great-making property that is essential for divinity. A Trinitarian is free to reject this assertion if she likes, but as I noted before, it comes at a cost.

At this point in the conversation, I have presented two arguments for rejecting the doctrine of divine processions. Each demonstrates that the doctrine of divine processions is incompatible with the minimal homoousious doctrine. I suggest that Trinitarians ought to reject the doctrine of divine processions in order to maintain the minimal homoousios doctrine. In the next section, I consider a final attempt from Hasker to avoid these two problems.

5. FIDDLING WITH ASEITY

Hasker offers a deeper analysis of aseity that he claims will help him avoid the sort of problems that I have identified for the doctrine of processions. He claims that the true underlying notion of aseity is independence, and he identifies three possible meanings of independence:

> (I) A being Θ is *logically independent* of other beings, if it is not logically necessary that, if Θ exists, some other being does as well.
> (II) A being Θ is *causally independent of other beings*, if there is no causal law or principle which requires that, if Θ exists, other beings also exist.
> (III) A being Θ is *independent of causal input* from other beings if there is no requirement that, in order for Θ to exist, some other being must provide causal input for Θ. (HASKER 2017, 225)

Hasker's position is that (I), (II), and (III) are requirements for the Trinity as a whole, but none of them is a requirement for each divine person (HASKER 2017, 226). In this way, the strategy is to say that the Trinity as a whole is *a se* or independent in some sort of way that avoids ontological subordination. This strategy is clever, but I have my doubts that it makes sense. Here is why.

I find it difficult to understand Hasker's position. According to Hasker, only the Father has (III) because the Father does not have a cause for His existence whereas the Son and Spirit are caused to exist by the Father. Also, the Father lacks (II) because the Father necessarily causes the Son and Spirit to exist (226–27). I don't quite understand how the Trinity as a whole can have (I), (II), and (III) and yet the Father lacks (II), and the Son and Spirit lack (III). This strikes me as counterintuitive. If (I), (II), and (III) applies to the whole Trinity, one would think that these would be aspects of the shared divine essence or part of the minimal homoousios. Yet clearly they are not for Hasker.

Furthermore, Hasker's strategy doesn't really seem to get around the objections that I laid out above. The great-making property that I identified is aseity. Once again, aseity is about not having a cause for one's existence, or not having one's existence asymmetrically dependent upon nor derived from anything external. Hasker's strategy is to say that aseity is actually more complicated than what I have described because there are these three different notions of independence, and somehow each of them fits with the divine persons being *a se* in these difference senses. One would think that the divine persons having different kinds of independence/aseity would entail that they are not homoousios but instead homoiousios. That is, having a similar, though different, essence. Homoiousios seems like a more natural interpretation of the persons having different kinds of aseity. Of course, I very much doubt that there is such a thing as *kinds* of aseity. As I see it, there is simply aseity, and (I) and (II) don't capture the notion of aseity.

Hasker will push back at this point. He claims that it would be arbitrary to say that one of these senses is unproblematic for the Trinity whereas the others are problematic (HASKER 2017, 226). Perhaps there is something arbitrary in my favoring one of these three senses as the real aseity. I reply that there is nothing arbitrary at play here in my argument. As far as I can tell, sense (III) just is aseity, whereas (I) and (II) do not capture the meaning of aseity. Here is why.

First, it is difficult to understand how God could be the foundation of reality if God's existence is derived from, and dependent upon, something external. Imagine that I offer you a cosmological argument for the existence of God, and I tell you that this divine person is the ultimate foundation of reality. Say that you ask me for more details about this divine person, and I state that this person's existence is causally dependent upon or derived from some external thing. Surely you would doubt that this person is the founda-

tion of reality since this being's existence is dependent upon and derived from something more fundamental. From this, I take it that if a so-called divine person lacked aseity, that person would not in fact be divine. Whatever the actual foundation of reality is, that being is God. Anything less is an inferior being.

Second, I find (I) and (II) to be unrelated to aseity. Consider a case against (I) capturing the notion of aseity. Imagine a scenario where God does not create anything. The only thing that exists is God and the singleton set {God}. Abstracta like singleton sets logically depend on their members. In this case, {God} logically depends on the necessary existence of God. The relation between members and sets is mutual logical and modal dependence, thus ruling out (I) for God. Yet surely that is not a problem for God's aseity because God's existence is not asymmetrically dependent upon nor derived from {God}.[9] Hence, I find it implausible that (I) actually captures the notion of aseity.

Now consider the case against (II). A panentheist model of God cannot satisfy (II) because God's nature as good or loving entails that God must eternally create a universe of some sort. On panentheism, God always and necessarily exists with a created and causally dependent cosmos. Yet I find it doubtful that this somehow entails that God is not *a se* because God's existence is not dependent upon nor derived from the created universe. On panentheism, the existence of the universe asymmetrically depends on God. Thus, I find it implausible that (II) actually captures the notion of aseity. From this, I conclude that (I) and (II) are not aseity, and the attempts to fiddle with aseity do not avoid the Inconsistency Problem nor the Ontological Subordination Problem.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this essay, I have offered two arguments for thinking that the doctrine of divine processions is inconsistent with the homoousios doctrine, thus giving one good reason for rejecting the divine processions. There might be ways to cogently respond to these objections, and I look forward to seeing those rejoinders in the future.

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[9] Thanks to Chad McIntosh for helping me with this point.

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THE TRINITARIAN PROCESSIONS

S u m m a r y

William Hasker and I have a friendly disagreement over the doctrine of the Trinity. We both reject classical theistic attributes like divine timelessness and divine simplicity. Instead, we affirm that God is temporal and unified. Further, we reject so-called Latin models of the Trinity, and prefer social models of the Trinity. Where we disagree is over the doctrine of the processions of the Trinitarian persons. In this essay, I articulate some problems for the doctrine of the processions.

Keywords: Trinitarian processions; Trinity; eternal generation; subordinationism.

TRYNITARNE POCHODZENIA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

William Hasker i ja toczymy przyjacielski spór w kwestii doktryny Trójcy. Obaj odrzucamy atrybuty przyjmowane w ramach klasycznego teizmu, takie jak boska bezczasowość i boska prostota. W zamian przyjmujemy, że Bóg jest czasowy i zunifikowany. Ponadto, odrzucamy tzw. łacińskie modele Trójcy, preferując modele społeczne. Nie zgadzamy się natomiast w sprawie doktryny pochodzenia osób trynitarnych. W tym eseju przedstawiam niektóre problemy, przed jakimi staje doktryna pochodzenia.

Słowa kluczowe: pochodzenie trynitarne; Trójca; wieczne generowanie; subordynacjonizm.