

# HASKER ON THE DIVINE PROCESSIONS OF THE TRINITARIAN PERSONS

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**Abstract.** Within contemporary evangelical theology, a peculiar controversy has been brewing over the past few decades with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. A good number of prominent evangelical theologians and philosophers are rejecting the doctrine of divine processions within the eternal life of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> In William Hasker's recent *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, Hasker laments this rejection and seeks to offer a defense of this doctrine. This paper shall seek to accomplish a few things. In section I, I shall first set the stage for a proper understanding of the discussion. Section II will articulate the basic Trinitarian desiderata that must be satisfied by any model of the doctrine of the Trinity. This will help one understand the debate between Hasker and the procession deniers. Section III will offer an articulation of what the doctrine of divine processions teaches. Section IV will examine Hasker's defense of the doctrine point by point. I shall argue that his defense of the doctrine of the divine processions fails.

## I. FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

In order to have a proper understanding of the debate contained within this paper, I need to set the stage. In particular, I need to limit the focus of this debate in order to make it easier to engage. Also, I need to explain a key term — Social Trinitarianism.

### *Limiting the Focus*

Anyone familiar with contemporary Trinitarian discussions within theology and philosophy of religion will know that there are many different issues, positions, and debates to be considered. For ease of exposition, I must limit

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1 For a full list of such evangelicals see Kevin N. Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 30–33.

the focus of my paper. I will treat Hasker and those who deny the doctrine of divine processions as all committed to Social Trinitarianism. In other words, I shall treat this as an in-house debate between Social Trinitarians. Though not all procession deniers are Social Trinitarians, one of Hasker's main dialogue partners is — i.e. Keith Yandell. For the purposes of this paper, call any view of the Trinity that denies the doctrine of divine processions the Yandellian view. The substantive agreements and disagreements between Hasker and Yandell over how to understand the basics of Trinitarian doctrine shape Hasker's defense of the doctrine of divine processions, as well as shape the dialectic of the debate. Throughout the remainder of this paper, I shall focus on this disagreement between Hasker and the Yandellian view. I shall argue that the Yandellian view is preferable to Hasker's view because the doctrine of divine processions is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity.

#### *What is Social Trinitarianism?*

In contemporary theology, Social Trinitarianism has come to be associated with a whole assortment of theological doctrines, political ideologies, and ecumenical propositions.<sup>2</sup> However, Social Trinitarianism need not be, and perhaps should not be, associated with any particular sociopolitical agenda as it so often has in the past.<sup>3</sup> Hasker and Yandell agree that Social Trinitarianism is, at its core, a purely metaphysical and theological doctrine. So for the purposes of this paper I shall treat Social Trinitarianism solely as a metaphysical and theological claim.

What is this metaphysical and theological claim? More will be said on this below, but for now it will be helpful to get a short answer to this question. Hasker explains that Social Trinitarians believe in three robust divine persons. By this he means that there are three centers of consciousness, each with their own unique will, within the Godhead. The term 'robust persons' has become a phrase used by Social Trinitarians to distinguish their view from other models of the Trinity. For instance, on Barth's model of the Trinity the divine persons are simply modes of God. Another example comes from various classical models of the Trinity where there is only one mind and one will

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2 Gijsbert van den Brink, "Social Trinitarianism: A Discussion of Some Recent Theological Criticisms", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014).

3 Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Eerdmans 2010), 224–27.

in the Godhead.<sup>4</sup> Also, Social Trinitarians wish to distinguish themselves from certain Thomistic models of the Trinity where the divine persons simply are relations; not persons or things that stand in relations, but simply relations.<sup>5</sup>

Hasker and Yandell both agree that a proper doctrine of the Trinity must involve three robust divine persons. Further, both agree to a basic set of Trinitarian desiderata that must be satisfied by any model of the Trinity. These desiderata will be discussed in the next section.

## II. TRINITARIAN DESIDERATA

In order to understand the debate between Hasker and Yandell, one must understand a few things first. In particular, one must understand the basics of the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as the doctrine of the divine processions. In this section I shall consider the basics of the doctrine of the Trinity, and leave the doctrine of divine processions till the next section.

What are these Trinitarian desiderata? 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) Homousios: 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 *homousios* when it was first introduced.

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4 E.g. Keith Ward, *Christ and the Cosmos: A Reformulation of Trinitarian Doctrine* (CUP, 2015). The Socinians referred to such views as “Nominal Trinitarianism.” See Stephen Hampton, *Anti-Arminians* (OUP, 2008), 165.

5 Paul S. Fiddes, “Relational Trinity: Radical Perspective”, in ed. Jason S. Sexton, *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Zondervan, 2014), 159.

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 the purposes of this paper, I am primarily interested in how Hasker and Yandell understand these desiderata.

How does Hasker understand (T1)–(T4)? How does he seek to satisfy the Trinitarian desiderata? Hasker unpacks (T1) by saying that a person is a center of consciousness, knowledge, will, love, and action.<sup>6</sup> 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.

Hasker notes that Social Trinitarians are divided on how to cash out (T3) and (T4). One such way to cash out (T3) is to take the divine essence to be an abstract set of properties. This is the approach taken by Yandell. This can be stated as

(T3’) Homoousios: Each divine person has all of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine.

Hasker notes that another possible way to take the divine essence is to conceive it as a concrete particular. On this conception, there is one divine substance that somehow gives rise to three distinct centers of consciousness, each with their own distinct will.<sup>7</sup> This position would agree, in part, with (T3’), but would add an additional qualifying claim.

(T3’’) Homoousios: A) Each divine person has all of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine, and B) each of the divine persons shares in the one concrete divine substance.

Hasker opts for (T3’’), and criticizes those who only go for (T3’). How one cashes out (T4) will depend on if one opts for (T3’) or (T3’’). For Hasker, (T4) is best captured by (T3’’). There is one immaterial substance that sustains three distinct persons. This plus the doctrine of the divine processions, says Hasker, is enough to secure a type of divine unity that is compatible with the monotheism of the New Testament. Someone like Yandell will hold to (T3’), and explain

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6 William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (OUP, 2013), 22–3.

7 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, chapter 27.

that (T4) can be secured without appealing to the doctrine of the divine processions. Yandell gives 4 factors that must be satisfied for (T4) to obtain.<sup>8</sup>

(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. 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.<sup>9</sup>

Hasker is in agreement with much of what Yandell has to say here. However, Hasker disagrees with Yandell on (T3’). This will be relevant later with regard to Hasker’s disagreement with Yandell over the doctrine of divine processions. Again, Yandell denies the doctrine of divine processions, whilst Hasker affirms the doctrine. Hasker thinks that the divine processions somehow secures *homoousios*. Further, Hasker claims that somehow *homoousios* and the divine processions entail (T4). Throughout the remainder of this paper I shall focus on this disagreement between Hasker and the Yandellian view. As stated before, I shall argue that the Yandellian view is preferable to Hasker’s view because the doctrine of divine processions is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity. In particular, the doctrine of divine processions violates both the (T3’) and (T3’’) renderings of *homoousios*, and (T4). Before arguing this, it must be made clear what the doctrine of divine processions is.

8 Keith Yandell, “How Many Times Does Three Go Into One?” in eds. Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea, *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity* (OUP, 2009), 168.

9 Thomas H. McCall, “Relational Trinity: Creedal Perspective”, in Sexton, *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 132.

### III. WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE PROCESSIONS?

The doctrine of divine processions seems largely misunderstood among contemporary philosophers of religion prompting a recent book length treatment of the doctrine.<sup>10</sup> Here is an attempt to clear up the confusion. The doctrine of divine processions can be broken down into two different claims. First, the Father eternally generates the Son. Another way to state this is that the Son is eternally begotten by the Father. Second, the Father, or the Father and the Son, eternally spirate the Holy Spirit. Another common way of stating this is that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father, or the Father and the Son.<sup>11</sup> This much is well understood. What does not seem to be well understood in contemporary philosophy of religion is what these terms mean. What do ‘begotten’ and ‘proceed’ mean in this context?

To get a better understanding of these Trinitarian terms, one must look to the early patristic debates and ecumenical creeds. 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.” It affirms that the Son is of the same essence of the Father. The Creed denies that the Son is a created, or made, thing. Further, it denies that there was a time when the Son did not exist. The Creed makes a distinction between ‘begotten’ on the one hand, and ‘made’ or ‘created’ on the other. 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.<sup>12</sup> This is because the Father is the source, or fount, of divinity who *causes* the Son to be divine.<sup>13</sup> The Father

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10 I.e. Giles, *Eternal Generation*. Other than Hasker, I am aware of a few notable exceptions among contemporary philosophers of religion who seem to understand the doctrine. In particular, Richard Swinburne and Paul Helm. See Swinburne, *The Christian God* (OUP, 1994), chapter 8. Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time*, 2nd Edition (OUP, 2010), chapter 15.

11 Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book I*, XI-XIII.

12 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 223.

13 For a thorough discussion of this issue see Giles, *Eternal Generation*, chapters 5–7. The claim that the Father’s causal activity explains the Son’s existence and divine essence goes back

alone is the self-subsistent divinity by nature; God from no other source than Himself. It is the Son's derivation from the Father that causes the Son to exist and be divine.<sup>14</sup>

It should be emphasized that the concept of 'begotten' at play in this creed and in the early Trinitarian debates is causal, not metaphorical. For instance, Gregory of Nyssa in *On Not Three Gods* states that, "The principle of causality distinguishes, then, the Persons of the holy Trinity. It affirms that the one is uncaused, while the other depends on the cause."<sup>15</sup> Terms like 'begotten' and 'made' are both causal, but there is a slight difference that quickly became obscured in these early debates due, in part, to the similar spelling in the Greek. 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."<sup>16</sup> So the credal 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 the Father alone is unbegotten/uncaused (Greek: *agenetos/agenetos*), and is the source and cause of the Trinity.<sup>17</sup>

This causal concept is not only contained in the Creed of Nicaea, it is also in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed or Nicene Creed of 381. As Christopher Beeley points out, the Nicene Creed that is developed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 bears a close resemblance to the theology of Gregory of Nazianzus. This is understandable since Gregory was the presiding president of the Council.<sup>18</sup> In Gregory's Trinitarian theology, the Father alone is the unoriginated or uncaused being. The Father timelessly causes the Son to exist such that the Son is also timeless. Even though the Son is caused to exist, the Son does not begin to exist because the Son is begotten and not created or made.

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at least to Origen. Cf. Christopher A. Beeley, *The Unity of Christ: Continuity and Conflict in Patristic Tradition* (Yale Univ. Press, 2012), 23, 90–93.

14 Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, 70–71.

15 Cf. Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Baker Academic, 2011), 190–91.

16 Alasdair I. C. Heron, 'Homoousios with the Father', in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance, (Handsel, 1981), 60–61.

17 Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations* 3.3.

18 Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, 195–96.

Since the Son is eternally begotten, the Son is co-eternal with the Father.<sup>19</sup> Gregory's theology here is deeply traditional, and goes back at least to the Alexandrian traditions of Origen and Eusebius.<sup>20</sup> This is the understanding of 'eternally begotten' that is agreed upon by the Council of Constantinople, and written into the Nicene Creed. As Stephen 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."<sup>21</sup>

The second ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381 not only affirms that the Father is the cause of the Son. It also extends this teaching to the Holy Spirit. The Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 adds that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. The idea here is that 'proceeds', like 'begotten', does not mean made or created. It is intended to be an affirmation that the Spirit is of the same essence as the Father and Son. 'Proceeds' with regard to the Holy Spirit functions metaphysically the same way as 'begotten' does. The Holy Spirit is caused to exist in such a way that the Holy Spirit never began to exist, but instead eternally exists.

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.<sup>22</sup> Current patristic scholarship points out that there is no fundamental difference between the East and the West over the doctrine of the Trinity, except with regards to the *filioque* controversy.<sup>23</sup> 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 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."<sup>24</sup>

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19 Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations* 3.3.

20 Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, 23, and 90–93.

21 Holmes, *Quest for the Trinity*, 113.

22 See Richard Cross, 'Latin Trinitarianism: Some Conceptual and Historical Considerations', in M. Rea, Th. McCall, *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*. Michel R. Barnes, 'The Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Language', in eds. Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (T&T Clark, 1993). Rory Fox, *Time and Eternity in Mid-Thirteenth-Century Thought* (OUP, 2006), 56.

23 Stephen Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 129–31, and 146.

24 Holmes, *Quest for the Trinity*, 146–46.



The concern of the patristics is that without this causal sequence from the Father, there would be three first principles, or three Gods.<sup>25</sup> The Father alone is the first principle. The Father is “the cause and source of the Trinitarian communion.”<sup>26</sup> 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.

On all this Hasker seems to be in agreement. He maintains that “God the Father eternally communicates the totality of the one undivided divine nature to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and in so doing brings about the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>27</sup> The Father brings this about through His own causal activity.<sup>28</sup> Further, Hasker shares the worry that without the doctrine of the divine processions we would have three “ultimate sources of being.” This, according to Hasker, would violate the monotheism of (T4).<sup>29</sup> However, there is one area where Hasker deviates from the traditional doctrine of the divine processions — divine eternity.

Anyone who is familiar with Hasker’s work knows that Hasker rejects divine timelessness.<sup>30</sup> As such, Hasker must interpret the divine processions in a way that is compatible with divine temporality. This is not something that Hasker attempts to do. In fact, Hasker seems to be unaware of this challenge; but it most certainly is a challenge.

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25 Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, 110. Cf. Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (CUP, 2010), 264–65.

26 Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 264.

27 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 220.

28 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 220. In footnote 14, Hasker says that his use of “brings about” is a general term for an agent actualizing a state of affairs. He says that causation is one species of bringing about. He doesn’t specify what another species of bringing about is, so I assume that he intends causation to be the meaning of his usage of “bringing about.” However, he does offer a quote from Louis Berkhof where Berkhof says that the Father is the ground of the Son. So it is possible that Hasker could mean some kind of grounding relation that the Father brings about. If Hasker means this instead, he should clarify. I address the possibility of the Father grounding the Son below.

29 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 161.

30 William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1989).

Paul Helm has argued that divine temporality is incompatible with the doctrine of the divine processions because it entails Arianism.<sup>31</sup> Part of the argument focuses on one of the central complaints of divine temporalists against atemporalists — the impossibility of timeless causes. As Helm rightly points out, the doctrine of eternal generation rests on the possibility of timeless causes with timeless effects in order to secure the claim that the Father and Son are co-eternal. Following Richard Swinburne, Helm notes that a common claim from divine temporalists is that all causes must be temporally prior to their effects. So if the Father causes the Son to exist, the Father will be temporally prior to the Son. What this means is that there will be a time when the Son did not exist, which is one early version of Arianism! Elsewhere I have offered a full examination and refutation of Helm’s argument.<sup>32</sup> I’m not certain how Hasker will respond to this sort of argument. I do know that Hasker cannot help himself to my solution to Helm’s objection since my solution involves rejecting the doctrine of divine processions.

I mention this problem because it helps illuminate the theological context of the doctrine of divine processions. In the Creeds, and in church history, the doctrine of divine processions is couched in terms of divine timelessness. Kevin Giles points out the role that divine timelessness plays in the doctrine of the processions.<sup>33</sup> For example, one of the early Arian arguments is that all causes must have temporal effects.<sup>34</sup> The Father is timeless. The Father causes the Son to exist, so the Son must be temporal. So the Son and the Father cannot be *homoousios* because they have different essential properties. This is also closely related to the popular Arian slogan, “There was a time when the Son was not.” The move made by Athanasius, the Council of Nicaea, and those at the Council of Constantinople is that the Father timelessly causes the Son to exist in such a way that the effect is also timeless. When the Nicene

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31 Paul Helm, ‘Eternal Creation,’ *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (1994). Helm, ‘Time and Trinity,’ in *Questions of Time and Tense*, ed. Robin Le Poidevin (Clarendon Press, 1998). Helm, ‘Is God Bound by Time?’ in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Zondervan, 2002). Helm, *Eternal God*.

32 R.T. Mullins, “divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism,” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016).

33 Giles, *Eternal Generation*, 108. This claim is reinforced at Constantinople II. See Ricard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553, Vol. 1* (Liverpool Univ. Press, 2009), 143.

34 However, Christopher Beeley has argued that Arius in fact held no such thing. It was the invention of Alexander and Athanasius. *The Unity of Christ*, 110–124.

Creed of 381 states that the Son was “begotten of the Father before all ages”, it is affirming that the Father timelessly causes the Son to exist in such a way that the Son is also timeless. It is affirming that the Father-Son relationship is a timeless cause with a timeless effect. Recall from above that to be ‘made’ is to be caused to exist in such a way that one begins to exist. The doctrine of eternal begottenness is intended to avoid this Arian pitfall. Since Hasker rejects the doctrine of divine timelessness, it is not clear how he can avoid this Arian pitfall if he remains committed to the doctrine of the divine processions.

That said, I think that the doctrine of divine processions can be summarized as follows. The doctrine of divine processions states that the Father is the source or fount of divinity. God the Father causes the Son to exist in such a way that (a) the Son is fully divine, (b) the Father and the Son are the same essence, and (c) the Father and the Son are of equal ontological status. After the *filioque* controversy, Western Christians hold that the Father and the Son together cause the Holy Spirit to exist such that (d) the Holy Spirit is fully divine, (e) the Holy Spirit is the same essence as the Father and the Son, and (f) the Holy Spirit is of equal ontological status with the Father and the Son. In the East, Christians deny the *filioque* addition to the creed and say that the Father alone causes the Holy Spirit to exist such that (d)–(f) obtain. Again, this is all framed in terms of divine timelessness.

#### IV. CRITIQUING HASKER'S DEFENSE OF THE DIVINE PROCESSIONS

##### *Why Does Hasker Want to Defend the Doctrine of the divine Processions?*

Why would Hasker want to defend the doctrine of divine processions? Hasker disagrees with the typical reasons that Yandellians appeal to in their rejection of divine procession which focus on biblical and philosophical arguments.<sup>35</sup> He claims that the doctrine of the eternal processions in God is crucial to

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35 There are two broad types of reasons that Hasker notes. First, Yandellians claim that the doctrine has an incredibly weak biblical basis. Second, Yandellians claim that the doctrine of divine processions is unintelligible and impossible. For the biblical arguments see John Feinberg and Harold Brown, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Crossway Books, 2001), 488–92. Also my, “divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism.” For arguments of the second sort, see the rest of this paper.

developing the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>36</sup> Hasker offers three broad reasons for why Christians should continue to hold to the doctrine of divine processions.

First, Hasker claims that the doctrine of divine processions is needed to establish the unity of the divine persons such that (T4) obtains. He argues that without the doctrine of divine processions, the Yandellian cannot offer a satisfying account of divine unity. Second, Hasker argues that without the divine processions, the Yandellian cannot explain why there are only three divine persons instead of 4 or more. Third, Hasker argues that a providential God would not allow the Church to get something as fundamental as the doctrine of divine processions wrong. The Yandellian, according to Hasker, must explain how a providential God would allow the Church and the ecumenical creeds to botch up the doctrine of the Trinity.

In what follows below, I shall develop Hasker's thoughts and argue that Hasker is mistaken. The doctrine of divine processions is not needed to develop the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, I shall argue that the doctrine of divine processions prevents us from satisfying the basic Trinitarian desiderata.

*Are the Processions Needed to Maintain the Trinity in Unity? No,  
it Destroys divine Unity Because it Entails Subordination.*

Within Trinitarian discourse, subordinationism is another term for Arianism. Arianism is an incredibly fuzzy label applied to a broad and diverse group of thinkers in the early Church.<sup>37</sup> 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. To be clear, the Arians are in full agreement with the Orthodox that the Father causes the Son and Spirit to exist. The difference between the two positions is over the entailments of the doctrine of divine processions. Not all Arians hold to the claim that there was a time when the Son was not. Later Arians were in agreement with the Orthodox that the Father eternally generates the Son such that the Son is co-eternal

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36 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, chapter 26.

37 Rebecca Lyman, "A Topography of Heresy: Mapping the Rhetorical Creation of Arianism", in eds. Barnes and Williams, *Arianism After Arius*.

with the Father.<sup>38</sup> So the Nicene distinction between begotten and made is of little value when it comes to avoiding the arguments of later Arians that came after the development of the Nicene Creed.

In contemporary Trinitarian discourse, the charge of 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.<sup>39</sup> A view entails 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.<sup>40</sup> A Yandellian will argue that the doctrine of divine processions entails subordinationism. In other words, the claim is that the divine processions entails that (T3), (T3'), and (T3'') are false.

Hasker tries to argue that the processions in no way imply subordination. His arguments are a bit quick and odd. First, he tries to assuage any concern that the processions imply subordination by pointing out that the fathers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries did not seem to be concerned with establishing the full equality of the Son.<sup>41</sup> Then he asserts that the doctrine of divine processions is what guarantees that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal. He offers very little by way of argument for this claim.

I have two brief comments at this point in the discussion. First, it is false that the fathers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries were not concerned with establishing the full equality of the Son. For instance, Origen made significant efforts to establish the full equality of the Son with the Father in light of various contemporary heresies.<sup>42</sup> Origen, like Hasker, 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.<sup>43</sup> In Church tradition, appeals are even

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38 Paul L. Gavriluk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (OUP, 2004), 117.

39 Thomas D. Senor, "The Doctrine of the Trinity is Coherent", in *Debating Christian Theism*, eds. J.P. Moreland, Chad Meister, and Khalidoun A. Sweis (OUP, 2013), 336.

40 McCall, *Which Trinity?*, chapter 6.

41 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 218–19.

42 Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, chapter 1.

43 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 3.8. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XV.47. Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book I*, IX.2.1.

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?”<sup>44</sup> Which brings me to my second brief comment. Second, 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.

Hasker seems somewhat aware of this fact since he considers some objections to the *homoousios* doctrine from the late Arian theologian Eunomius.<sup>45</sup> Eunomius developed several clear objections to the *homoousios* doctrine based upon the divine processions.<sup>46</sup> However, Hasker’s discussion of Eunomius’ arguments is a bit quick. He basically just asserts that the Cappadocians defeated Eunomius’ objections to the *homoousios* doctrine, and refuted Eunomius’ claim that subordinationism is true. Then he asserts that we have to hold to the doctrine of divine processions lest we be tritheists.<sup>47</sup> This is a standard assertion in contemporary theology, but I shall argue that the assertion is dubious at best.

Hasker considers two of Eunomius’ objections, and offers an insufficient reply to each. In this section I shall consider the first Eunomian argument, and save the second Eunomian argument for a later section.

The first Eunomian argument is that to be God is to be unbegotten. The Father is unbegotten, so the Father is God. The Son is begotten, so the Son is not God. Hasker explains that the Cappadocians responded by pointing out that ‘Unbegotten’ only denotes a personal property of the Father, and does not denote a property of the divine essence.<sup>48</sup> This was a poor response when the Cappadocians offered it, and it is a poor response now. The argument is actually quite a bit more powerful than Hasker and many contemporary theologians realize, and it can be strengthened in several interesting ways as I shall now demonstrate.

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44 Holmes, *Quest for the Trinity*, 41.

45 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 219.

46 Eunomius, *The Extant Works*, ed. Richard P. Vaggione (OUP, 1987), 59 and 183.

47 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 219.

48 Ibid.

Recall from above (T3') and (T3''). Both share the condition that no being can be divine unless that being has all of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine. A typical list of necessary and sufficient properties for being divine will include omnipotence, omniscience, eternality, and perfect goodness. But, for the purposes of this paper, I wish to focus on two particular divine attributes — aseity and self-sufficiency. The traditional claim is that no being can be divine unless that being exists *a se* and is self-sufficient.

However, there is sometimes a bit of confusion surrounding these doctrines. The main confusion is that aseity and self-sufficiency are often conflated in contemporary discussions, though they are distinguished in older theological texts. Sometimes the conflation seems to derive from a commitment to the doctrine of divine simplicity which would entail that all of the divine attributes are identical to one another and identical to God.<sup>49</sup> In other words, if God is simple, aseity and self-sufficiency are identical. I think that we have good reason for rejecting the doctrine of divine simplicity. Elsewhere I have argued that divine simplicity is metaphysically impossible, and that it is incompatible with divine freedom, aseity, and self-sufficiency.<sup>50</sup> Further, Hasker and Yandell both deny divine simplicity. So we should not let that doctrine bring about any more confusion within our theology than it already has.

For the sake of doctrinal clarity, aseity and self-sufficiency should be taken as distinct divine attributes. Both express God's ultimacy in reality, as well as establish that God is distinguished from creatures.<sup>51</sup> However, each attribute expresses this in a different way. Aseity is closely related to the necessary existence of God. God's necessary existence means that God cannot fail to exist, or that God exists in all possible worlds. Aseity captures the notion that God not only exists necessarily, but that God is an uncaused being. The word *a se* quite literally means 'from itself' or 'by itself.' A being who exists *a*

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49 Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Zondervan, 2013), 128. Thomas Williams, "Introduction to Classical Theism", in *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*, eds. Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher (Springer, 2013), 96. William E. Mann, "divine Sovereignty and Aseity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright (OUP, 2005), 36.

50 R.T. Mullins, "Simply Impossible: A Case Against divine Simplicity", *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013). R.T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (OUP, 2016).

51 Paul M. Gould, "Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects", in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 1–3.

*se* is self-existent, and in no way has its existence from, nor dependent upon, anything else.<sup>52</sup> Whilst aseity is a claim about God's existence, self-sufficiency is a claim about God's essence. A being who is self-sufficient is a being whose essence, or nature, is in no way dependent upon or derived from anything else. Whilst I think that these divine attributes are necessarily co-extensive, it seems best to me to distinguish these attributes since they are not identical because they are about different things. Again, aseity is about God's existence, whereas self-sufficiency is about God's essence. These attributes can be given the following definitions:

*Aseity*: A being exists *a se* if and only if its existence is not dependent upon, nor derived from, anything outside of itself.

*Self-sufficiency*: A being is self-sufficient if and only if its essential nature is in no way dependent upon, nor derived from, anything outside of itself.

These attributes are necessary for a being to be divine. God, according to Christian theism, is ultimate in reality. Aseity and self-sufficiency capture the Creator/creature distinction and provide a natural way for explicating divine ultimacy. Hasker seems to be in full agreement on this point since he claims that God is a necessary being, and His existence and nature in no way depend upon anything outside of Himself.<sup>53</sup> Instead, everything else that exists depends upon God for its existence and nature.

As noted above, and as Hasker rightly admits, 'begotten' is a causal notion. The Eunomian argument is that to be God is to be unbegotten. Unbegotten (Greek: *agenetos*) means that one does not have a cause for one's existence. To be God is to be uncaused. To be God is to exist *a se*—to not have one's existence derived from, nor dependent on, another. Given Hasker's statements about divine necessity, he is committed to the claim that God exists *a se*.<sup>54</sup> So with the doctrines of aseity and self-sufficiency before us, the Eunomian argument can be restated in a more powerful way as follows.

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52 J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 502–03. Cf. John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 239–43. Gregory Fowler, "Simplicity or Priority?" in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion Volume 6*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (OUP, 2015), 115.

53 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 171–75.

54 *Ibid.*, 173–5, and 222.



One of the necessary properties for being divine is aseity. The Father is unbegotten/uncaused. The Father does not have a cause for His existence. The Father exists *a se*. If in order to be divine a being must exist *a se*, it would seem that the Son and the Holy Spirit are not divine. The Son is caused to exist by the Father. The Holy Spirit is caused to exist by the Father and the Son. The Son and the Holy Spirit have their being derived from the Father. No being that exists *a se*, by definition, has its existence derived from another. The Son and the Holy Spirit have their existence derived from another, and as such are not *a se*. The Son and the Holy Spirit lack the divine property of aseity. Since the Son and the Holy Spirit lack the property of aseity, they are not divine.

If this were not bad enough, the Son and the Holy Spirit also lack the divine property of self-sufficiency. A being is self-sufficient if and only if its essential nature is in no way dependent upon, nor derived from, anything outside of itself. The Father is self-sufficient. The divine essence of the Father in no way depends upon, nor is derived from, anything outside of Himself. As Hasker rightly puts it, the doctrine of the divine processions involves the Father giving the divine essence to the Son and Spirit.<sup>55</sup> When the Father causes the Son and Spirit to exist, the Father somehow causes the Son and the Spirit to have the divine essence. But this violates self-sufficiency. No being that is divine has its essence derived from, nor dependent upon, anything outside of itself. The Son and the Spirit have their essence derived from the Father. The essence of the Son and the Spirit is dependent upon the causal activity of the Father. The Son and the Spirit are not self-sufficient, so the Son and the Spirit are not divine.

Since the Son and the Holy Spirit lack the properties of aseity and self-sufficiency, (T3) is false. The Son and the Holy Spirit are not *homoousios* with the Father since they lack two of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine. This also entails that (T3') and (T3'') are false since each claims that the divine persons have all of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine. The Son and the Holy Spirit do not have all of the necessary and sufficient properties for being divine. Since (T3), (T3'), and (T3'') are false, (T4) is false. The truth of (T4) depends upon the truth of (T3). If the persons are not all divine, the persons cannot form a unity such that there is one God. Contrary to what Hasker asserts, the doctrine of the divine processions does not maintain divine unity. Instead, it crumbles beneath the weight of the Eunomian objection.

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55 Ibid., 220.

*Is There a Possible Rejoinder for Hasker?*

Maybe someone will say that Hasker has a possible rejoinder. What if Hasker decides to part ways a bit with patristic theology and drop the causal notion of generation and procession? In other words, Hasker could decide to deviate from the creedal teachings in order to maintain something *similar* to the creedal teachings that attempts to capture the spirit of the Creed if not the letter. Perhaps he could follow certain medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas or John Duns Scotus who make this move.

Late medieval theologians have several points in common with Hasker, so at first glance this seems like a fruitful line of defense. First, various medieval theologians agree with Hasker that (T3<sup>''</sup>) is the proper way to understand the *homoousios* doctrine. Second, they agree with Hasker that the divine essence is a necessary being that does not have a cause for its existence. The divine essence is not produced by anything *ad extra*.<sup>56</sup> Third, they agree that the Father produces the Son, or makes the Son exist. Somehow this production of the Son makes it the case that the Son shares in the divine essence. Yet they maintain that this production is timeless, and Hasker rejects divine timelessness.<sup>57</sup> However, I don't think that the differences over divine eternity really matter for dealing with this particular Eunomian argument. As noted above, it matters for dealing with Paul Helm's objection to divine temporality based upon the doctrine of eternal generation.

Will following the medievals help Hasker? No. Consider Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of divine procession first. For Aquinas, the Father does not cause the Son to exist because that entails subordinationism. Aquinas considers a couple of ways to understand this, and associates each with a particular heresy. For instance, one is the Arian understanding. "Some have understood it in the sense of an effect, proceeding from its cause; so Arius took it, saying that the Son proceeds from the Father as His primary creature, and that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son as the creature of both."<sup>58</sup>

However, even though Aquinas denies that the Father causes the Son to exist, he still maintains that the Son's existence is derived from the Father because

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56 J. T. Paasch, *divine Production in Late Medieval Trinitarian Theology: Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham*, (OUP, 2012), 17–20.

57 Paasch, *divine Production*, 28–9.

58 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.Q27.1.

the Father is the ‘principle’ of the Son. Aquinas complains that the Greeks use the term ‘principle’ and ‘cause’ indifferently when speaking about God, whereas the Latins only use ‘principle’ to refer to God. As Aquinas explains, ‘principle’ has a wider meaning than ‘cause.’ Aquinas worries that ‘cause’ denotes a diversity of substance, and would attribute some sort of inferiority to the Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup> So Aquinas prefers to say that the Father is the principle of the Godhead — the one who produces the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father produces the Son. The Son receives His existence from the Father in such a way that the Son is equally divine with the Father, and in such a way that the two share the same substance.<sup>60</sup> Aquinas does the same with regard to the Holy Spirit. He says that the term “unbegotten” applies to the Father alone since only “He is not in any way derived from another.” The Holy Spirit cannot be unbegotten because the Holy Spirit is derived from the Father by procession. Aquinas even echoes the concern of Nicaea that I noted above — if the Father is not the sole principle of the Trinity, we will have multiple Gods.<sup>61</sup>

What we have here in Aquinas, then, is the claim that the Father is the principle of the Son and Spirit. The Father alone does not have His existence derived from anything or anyone. The Son and Spirit, however, have their existence derived from the Father. So there is nothing here in Aquinas to defeat the objection. This does not solve the problem specified in my version of the Eunomian argument. Again, no being that is *a se* derives its existence from anything outside of itself. Aquinas maintains that the Son and Holy Spirit’s existence is derived from the Father. So the Son and Holy Spirit are not *a se*. The Son and Holy Spirit are not divine.

So it appears that Aquinas is of no help to Hasker in answering my revamped Eunomian argument. Perhaps Hasker can look to other sources such

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59 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.Q33.1.

60 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.Q27.2. “Not everything derived from another has existence in another subject; otherwise we could not say that the whole substance of created being comes from God, since there is no subject that could receive the whole substance. So, then, what is generated in God receives its existence from the generator, not as though that existence were received into matter or into a subject (which would conflict with the divine self-subsistence); but when we speak of His existence as received, we mean that He Who proceeds receives divine existence from another; not, however, as if He were other from the divine nature. For in the perfection itself of the divine existence are contained both the Word intelligibly proceeding and the principle of the Word, with whatever belongs to His perfection.”

61 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.Q33.4.

as John Duns Scotus to develop a rejoinder. According to Richard Cross, Scotus denies that the Father causes the Son and the Spirit to exist. Instead, Scotus seems to be saying that the Father has some sort of ontological priority such that the Son is ontologically dependent upon the Father.<sup>62</sup> Cross points out that Scotus does little to explain what this ontological dependence means. JT Paasch notes, however, that Scotus is still affirming some sort of production. The Father produces the Son from His own essence such that the Son exists and shares in the divine essence.<sup>63</sup> Since this divine production in terms of ontological dependency is left rather vague, it might seem that this will be of little help to Hasker. However, it might be possible to state this ontological dependency in terms of the contemporary concept of grounding. So, one might say that the Son's existence is grounded in the Father such that the Son's existence depends upon the Father, yet the Father's existence does not depend upon the Son.<sup>64</sup>

It is not clear how this will help Hasker. One can easily imagine a ground of being theologian modifying the Eunomian argument in the following way. A ground of being theologian will cash out aseity in terms of grounding. To be divine is to be the ground of being of all other beings. To be divine is to be ungrounded. The Father is ungrounded, and is the ground of all other beings. As such, the Father is divine. The Son's being is grounded in the Father. As such, the Son is not divine. Again, we have done nothing to defeat the Eunomian argument.

Perhaps the medieval deviations from the credal deposit are not radical enough to avoid the Eunomian argument. Maybe Hasker could look elsewhere to develop a rejoinder. John Calvin's discussion of aseity and the Trinity has garnered attention in recent years as it seems, according to its proponents, to be an important extension and clarification of Cappadocian Trinitarian thinking.<sup>65</sup> The move from Calvin, and those who follow suite, is not to deny the causal notion of eternal generation. Instead it is to find another way to preserve the aseity of the Son. The desire is to say that the Father gives aseity to the Son, but that seems to be obviously incoherent. Aseity just is not the sort of thing that one can give to another for the reasons outlined already.

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62 Richard Cross, "Philosophy and the Trinity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Marenbon (OUP, 2012), 724–25.

63 Paasch, *divine Production*, 67 and 159.

64 Senor, "The Doctrine of the Trinity is Coherent", 343.

65 Brannon Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son* (OUP, 2012).

This is one reason why Calvin's doctrine was criticized in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century by Protestant and Catholic theologians. The claim was that Calvin's doctrine is either incoherent, or a poorly stated version of what Trinitarians had long affirmed.<sup>66</sup> However, one should not dismiss this move too quickly.

For lack of a better term, I shall refer to this approach as the Calvinist approach to the doctrine of the Trinity. The reader should not take it to imply any other aspects of Calvinism since it is only the doctrine of the Trinity that is in view. This Calvinistic move points out that we must draw a careful distinction between the divine persons and the divine essence. The Father alone exists as unbegotten, but the Calvinist says that we should not take unbegottenness to be definitive for divinity. In other words, the Calvinist wishes to say that a person can still be divine, yet lack the property *unbegotten*. How is this possible? Aseity is an essential property of divinity, so any being that shares in the divine nature exists *a se*. The Calvinist says that unbegottenness is only a property of the Father; it is a personal property that cannot be communicated to the Son or Holy Spirit. Aseity, on the other hand, is a communicable property according to the Calvinist. So the Calvinist says that the Father can communicate this essential property to the Son and Holy Spirit through the eternal act of divine production. She maintains that the Father causes the Son and Holy Spirit to exist in such a way that the Son and Holy Spirit are able to share in the divine essence. The Calvinist explains that the Father only causes the person of the Son and the person of the Holy Spirit to exist. He does not cause their essence to exist. In causing them to exist, the Father makes it the case that the Son and the Holy Spirit can share in the aseity of the divine essence.<sup>67</sup>

Does this Calvinistic move rebut the Eunomian objection? No. It is incoherent. No being that is caused to exist can share in aseity. The Calvinist is right to point out that we must distinguish the divine persons from the divine essence, but that does not help with this problem. In order for a person to be divine, that person must have all of the necessary and sufficient divine attributes. One of those attributes is aseity. If a person is caused to exist, that person cannot possibly have the attribute of aseity. Even if this person is eternally

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66 Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*, 166–78.

67 John Webster, "Life in and of Himself: Reflections on God's Aseity", in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Rutherford House, 2008), 116.

caused to exist such that the person never came into being, that person is still not *a se* since that person is not self-existent. Further, such a person cannot have the attribute of self-sufficiency. A person cannot be self-sufficient if her essence is dependent upon something else. The Son's ability to share in the divine essence is dependent upon the Father's generative activity. So the Son is not self-sufficient.

At this point it seems that Hasker is out of possible rejoinders. The doctrine of divine processions simply does not maintain the divine equality of the persons, nor their full divinity. Instead, this Eunomian argument shows that the doctrine of divine processions entails subordinationism.

#### *A Brief Note on Subsistent Relations*

Before moving on to consider the second Eunomian argument, I must briefly discuss the Augustinian-Thomistic doctrine of subsistent relations. It might be thought that the doctrine of subsistent relations will help Hasker out of this first Eunomian argument since this doctrine could possibly help explain how the divine persons are *homoousios* even though they are produced by the Father.<sup>68</sup> I find this suggestion doubtful for several reasons.

To start, the doctrine of subsistent relations is motivated by simplicity, and as already noted, Hasker denies divine simplicity. Without divine simplicity, I see no reason to posit subsistent relations. The doctrine of divine simplicity says that God is not a composite being in any sense. God does not have any properties, nor any potential. All of God's attributes are identical to each other, and identical to God. God is pure actuality, and as such lacks all potential. All of God's actions are identical to each other such that there is only one divine act. This one divine act is identical to God as well. On the doctrine of divine simplicity there is just the undivided divine substance that lacks any real distinctions.<sup>69</sup>

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68 Thank you to a reviewer for suggesting this issue to me.

69 Steven J. Duby, *divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 81–89. Duby continually affirms that distinctions of reason can be applied to God. However, this is of little help for Christian theology since distinctions of reason don't have any extramental grounding in reality. These are distinctions that exist in our mind alone. Further, several major proponents of divine simplicity explicitly deny that conceptual distinctions can apply to God. Proponents like Gregory of Nyssa, Anselm, Avicenna, and Descartes say that whatever can be divided in the mind, can be divided in reality. So they explicitly deny that even conceptual distinctions can be applied to the simple God. See my *The End of the Timeless God*, chapter 3.

When it comes to trying to figure out how to distinguish the divine persons, things become tricky to say the least. divine simplicity explicitly denies that God has any properties at all, including accidental properties.<sup>70</sup> So the divine persons cannot be distinguished by any properties. The idea behind the Augustinian-Thomistic doctrine of subsistent relations is to say that the persons are not distinguished by properties, but are distinguished by relations of origin.<sup>71</sup> One way to try to understand this claim is to say that the divine persons just are identical to their acts of procession. The Father just is the act of *begetting* or *paternity*, and the Son just is the act of *being begotten* or *filiation*. James Dolezal is a recent proponent of this proposal.<sup>72</sup> This proposal, however, runs into a serious problem since it violates (T2).

(T2) states that the divine persons are not numerically identical to each other, but this proposal entails that the persons are in fact identical to each other. The doctrine of divine simplicity explicitly states that all of God's actions are identical to each other such that there is only one divine act. Further, this one divine act is identical to the divine essence. In other words, a simple God is identical to His one act. On Dolezal's account of subsistent relations, each divine person just is identical to an act of procession. Since all of God's acts are identical to each other such that there is only one simple act, these acts of procession are identical to each other. So we no longer have any distinction between the persons. This clearly violates (T2), and so will be of little help to Hasker.

There is another reason why the Thomistic doctrine of subsistent relations will be of little help to Hasker. Hasker has also argued that the doctrine of subsistent relations violates (T2). I find his argument fairly persuasive, so I shall briefly restate it here. According to the metaphysics of proponents of divine simplicity like Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Aquinas, relations are not real items in the mind-independent world. They are items of reason alone. Given this, Hasker argues that it is incoherent to say that the divine persons are subsistent relations. Hasker argues as follows.<sup>73</sup>

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70 See my *The End of the Timeless God*, chapter 3.

71 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 5.3–5.5.

72 James E. Dolezal, "Trinity, Simplicity and the Status of God's Personal Relations", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014), 91–93.

73 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 36–39.

- (A) The only real constituent of each divine person is the divine essence.
- (B) The divine persons are distinguished from each other only by the relations between them.
- (C) Relations are not real items in the world but are rather mind-dependent.
- (D) For any items  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  differ only in some respect that is mind-dependent, then  $x$  is identical with  $y$ .

(A)–(C) are claims that are explicitly affirmed by Gregory, Augustine, and Aquinas. Hasker takes (D) to be a necessary truth. Given (A)–(D) we get an unwelcomed conclusion that violates (T2).

- (E) The Father is identical with the Son, and each of them is identical with the Holy Spirit.

So, for these reasons, I find it doubtful that Hasker will see anything within the doctrine of subsistent relations for avoiding my first revamped Eunomian argument. With that being said, I now turn to the second Eunomian Argument.

#### *The Second Eunomian Argument and divine Freedom*

Hasker considers another Eunomian argument, but states it in a rather weakened version. I shall present the stronger version of the argument. It is a dilemma, and goes like this. Does the Son exist by will or necessity? If the Father necessarily causes the Son to exist, the Father's actions are not free. Surely one will wish to say that the Father has free will. The pro-Nicene theologians were quite adamant that the Father freely causes the Son to exist. The eternal generation of the Son was not some involuntary overflow or emanation of the divine nature.<sup>74</sup> Why? During the early patristic era there seemed to be a widespread assumption that generation from the being of the Father entailed subordination, whereas the orthodox maintained that generation from the volitional will of the Father did not.<sup>75</sup> So saying that the Father necessarily causes the Son to exist does not seem to be a desirable option.

So the dilemma should push one to say that the Father freely causes the Son to exist. Of course, the point of the Eunomian dilemma is that the orthodox option does not seem desirable either. If the Father freely causes the

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<sup>74</sup> Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 112.

<sup>75</sup> See Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, chapter 2.



Son to exist, the Son will be a created contingent being because the Father could have freely done otherwise. No being that is divine has its existence contingently. To be divine is to be a necessary being. Since the Son exists contingently, the Son is not divine. This seems to be a rather difficult dilemma. How might one respond?

Hasker responds by saying that the Father necessarily causes the Son to exist, and that the Father's causal activity is free. The Father freely causes the Son to exist, but the Father could not have done otherwise.<sup>76</sup> Given Hasker's staunch defense of libertarian freedom over the years, it seems rather odd for him to say that the Father freely causes the Son, though the Father could not have done otherwise. Hasker does not offer much by way of explanation, so it is not clear to me how he successfully escapes the dilemma.

If Hasker is going to escape the dilemma, it seems to me that he must answer a few questions. What necessitates the Father's will to generate the Son? How does this necessity not fall victim to the first horn of the dilemma? How is the Father free in the act of generating the Son if He is unable to do otherwise? It is important to note that I am not here claiming that Hasker has no way to answer these questions. Nor am I saying that Hasker has no way out of the dilemma. Instead, I am merely saying that it is unclear how Hasker can successfully avoid the Eunomian dilemma. As I shall discuss below, Hasker does have more to say on this issue as it relates to divine love. For reasons that will soon become apparent to the reader, I still think Hasker has some explaining to do.

### *The Second Eunomian Argument and divine Love*

Hasker uses this Eunomian dilemma to segue into an objection directed towards the Yandellian. What the second Eunomian argument raises is the issue of divine will in the doctrine of processions. Hasker, like most orthodox in the Christian tradition, maintains that the Father freely causes the Son and Spirit to exist. This leads to a puzzling question. Why did the Father only cause two divine persons to exist? The Father is free in some sense, so it seems like He could have caused more than two divine persons to exist. It seems like He could have caused only one, or perhaps chosen to cause none. Why did the Father stop at two divine persons? Why is there a Trinity of divine persons?

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76 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 221–222.

Hasker claims that Yandellian Trinitarianism cannot explain why there are only three divine persons, whereas the doctrine of divine processions can. But Hasker's reply to the Eunomian dilemma is simply that the Father could not do other than cause the Son and the Holy Spirit to exist. Why? Why can't the Father do otherwise? Why is it necessary that the Father cause the Son and the Holy Spirit to exist? If Hasker cannot answer these questions, he has done little to advance his case against the Yandellian.

Hasker advances an argument offered by Richard of St Victor and Richard Swinburne that divine love requires a Trinity of persons in order to be perfect. Call it the 'Richard Argument.' The Richard Argument goes as follows. The Father must necessarily cause the Son and the Spirit to exist so that divine love can reach its perfection. Perfect love requires a perfect object for the love to be perfectly fulfilled. Further, the only perfect object of perfect love could be another divine person. So the Father must cause the Son to exist in order to be perfectly loving. Yet the love of two divine persons is not perfect unless they have a mutual love for a third divine person. So the Father must also cause the Spirit to exist. With three divine persons in existence, two divine persons can always show perfect mutual love for the other divine person. Why stop at three divine persons? Because no great gain seems to be had by causing another divine person to exist. So a community of three divine persons is necessary for perfect love to obtain.<sup>77</sup> Thus concluding the Richard argument.

Hasker notes that this argument is not a proof. Instead, he refers to it as a plausibility argument. The intent of the argument is to make it plausible why there could be three persons. However, he notes that it is hard to decisively refute the idea that a single divine person might have the universe as an adequate object of its love.<sup>78</sup> Unfortunately for Hasker, the Richard Argument is incredibly unpersuasive, for it does little to establish the plausibility of the claim that perfect love must consist of three divine persons.

Consider the case of a single personed God whose adequate object of love is Himself. Is there anything imperfect about this? The self-love of a perfect being is not obviously imperfect since the object of its love is perfect. Further, the self-love of a perfect being would be proportionate to the worthiness of

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 220–21.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 221.

the object. We often consider love to be imperfect if the love directed towards the object of the beloved is disproportionate with the worthiness of the object. (E.g. when a person loves money more than people.) In the case of divine self-love, the object of the beloved is in perfect proportion to the worthiness of the object. So it is not obvious that divine love must generate more divine persons in order to be perfect.

Nor is it persuasive that the divine love must stop at three persons. The claim from Hasker is that adding a fourth person would not be of any great gain to perfecting divine love. Surely that is not obvious. Assume that each divine person is of infinite value, and that each divine person offers perfect love. It would seem that adding another perfect being — an object of infinite value and love — would be a pretty big benefit. The benefit would be infinite. It would seem that an infinite benefit should persuade the Father, the fount of divinity, to eternally generate more than two divine persons. If the gain is infinite, it is difficult to discern why the Father should stop generating more divine persons at any point. So this plausibility argument is unpersuasive. It does not plausibly explain why perfect divine love must stop at three persons.

A proponent of Hasker's view might try to respond by saying that adding infinite value to a world that already contains infinite value does not increase the overall value of the world. The proponent of Hasker's view might conclude that there is no infinite benefit to be had, then, by adding another divine person to the world. This reply, however, will not help much since it seems to undermine any reason that the Father has for producing other divine persons. If the Father is of infinite value, then there is no gain to be had by producing any other divine person.

So where does this leave us with regard to the divine processions? The Yandellian will maintain that Hasker has offered no good reason for holding to the doctrine of the divine processions in the face of the second Eunomian objection. The Yandellian can say that one should give up the doctrine of divine processions in light of this Eunomian objection. Hasker, of course, cautions against denying the divine processions over this issue. Hasker claims that the Yandellian view is impoverished in some way by not being able to appeal to the Richard argument. Hasker's challenge to the Yandellian over the Richard Argument is as follows.

This line of thought [the Richard Argument] cannot, however, be appropriated by a trinitarian conception that rejects the processions. The reasons given for why there is a Trinity of persons are based entirely on the surpass-

ing value of its being so. But value can only be appreciated — can only be valued — *by a person*, that is by a rational agent...But on the no-processions view, at the point at which there is a person to do the valuing, the Trinity of persons is already in place. And so it is as was stated previously: for such a view, the Trinity of persons must be seen as a brute necessity.<sup>79</sup>

How might a Yandellian respond to this challenge? The Yandellian is not bothered by the fact that she cannot appeal to the Richard Argument to explain why there is a Trinity of divine persons. The Yandellian finds the Richard Argument to be not only unpersuasive, but unnecessary. As noted above, the Richard Argument cannot sufficiently explain why there must be only three divine persons nor why there cannot be only one divine person, so Hasker has no advantage over the Yandellian on this issue. Further, the Yandellian thinks that the divine processions entail subordination, so it does not give us three fully divine persons at all. The Father cannot cause other fully divine persons to exist. So Hasker has no advantage over the Yandellian on this point either.

The Yandellian view, on the other hand, gives us three fully divine persons. Perhaps the Yandellian view must appeal to brute necessity as Hasker says. The Yandellian may just have to bite the bullet on this one, but the bullet does not seem to be so bad because she has at least satisfied the relevant Trinitarian desiderata. Hasker's view has not satisfied the Trinitarian desiderata. Even further, the Yandellian is quite happy to concede that at the point at which there is a person to do the valuing, the Trinity of persons is already in place. The divine persons exist necessarily. It could not be any other way. There should not be any point, logically or temporally prior, at which they are not in place. This is exactly what the Yandellian wants, so Hasker's argument fails to persuade.

*Hasker's Complaint: If Eunomius is Right, Tritheism is at Hand!*

Hasker offers a challenge to anyone who thinks that the Eunomian arguments are persuasive.

But if it is inconsistent with full deity for a divine person's existence to be dependent upon any other entity, we will have *three fully independent sources of being and godhead*, and tritheism lies close at hand."

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 221.

This should not be too troubling for the Yandellian. If one truly finds the Eunomian arguments persuasive, she will think that the doctrine of processions entails the Arian version of tritheism. The Arian version of tritheism is one thing the early Church had in mind when it sought to avoid tritheism. The Arian version of tritheism is that there is one God—the Father—and two lesser divine beings—the Son and Spirit. The Yandellian can maintain that dependent divine persons just is a traditional version of tritheism that orthodox theologians sought, yet failed, to avoid.

So, it is not like our options are that great if Hasker is right. Say that Hasker's worry is correct—Yandellian trinitarianism entails tritheism. The Yandellian options seem to be this. Either accept Arian tritheism, or accept Yandellian tritheism. A Yandellian will clearly wish to accept Yandellian tritheism for the following two reasons. First, she can affirm that each divine person is fully divine. Each divine person is *a se* and self-sufficient. So far, the Yandellian is doing better than Hasker. Second, the Yandellian can affirm that each divine person is ontologically equal to the other divine persons since each is equally divine. Again, this is not something that Hasker's view can maintain since the doctrine of divine processions entails ontological subordinationism. It would seem that Hasker's challenge does little to move the Yandellian away from her position.

The Yandellian, however, is not finished. The Yandellian can go on to deny that her view entails tritheism. Hasker must do more than assert that the Yandellian Trinity entails tritheism. Hasker must show that this is the case. Recall that the Yandellian holds that the divine persons are necessarily, strongly internally related to one another such that it is impossible for the persons to exist apart from each other. Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor maintain that this type of inseparability is what distinguishes the Trinity from non-Arian versions of tritheism.<sup>80</sup> 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. It is a type of sameness without identity that is different from the material constitution accounts of the Trinity on offer today.<sup>81</sup> The Yandellian can affirm that this inseparabil-

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80 Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Theological Orations*, 5.4. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Chapters on Love*, 2.29.

81 Cross, "Philosophy and the Trinity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, 713–722. Cf. Paasch, *divine Production*, 68–76.

ity is enough to avoid tritheism. However, the Yandellian account of divine unity also involves (T4a)–(T4d). Hasker needs to offer an argument for why (T4a)–(T4d) does not preserve divine unity, and why it entails tritheism.

Hasker gives some comments in this regard.<sup>82</sup> It seems that his argument primarily rests on the assumption that the divine processions is the only way to guarantee divine unity, but I have argued that it can do no such thing. Hasker complains that (T4a)–(T4d) cannot offer a deeper explanation for divine unity without the doctrine of the divine processions. Since the doctrine of the divine processions cannot give us a deeper explanation, Hasker will need to specify what this deeper explanation might look like. I'm not certain what deeper explanation would be needed other than that it is of the essence of the divine persons to exist together, and the Yandellian already has that claim. As with the argument in the previous section, Hasker is worried that the Yandellian is simply positing a brute necessity at this point. As I stated above, the Yandellian may in fact have to appeal to a brute necessity here, but it should not worry the Yandellian because she has at least satisfied the relevant Trinitarian desiderata.<sup>83</sup>

### *The Historical and Providential Argument*

Hasker offers the most peculiar defense of divine processions at the end of his chapter. He notes that no one in the early church questioned the eternal processions.

In fact, it is reasonable to assert that the developmental process [of the doctrine of the Trinity] *could not have occurred* in anything resembling its actual shape, without that assumption.<sup>84</sup>

Hasker is correct in asserting that the doctrine of processions played an integral role in the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity. However, he goes on to argue that one cannot give up this doctrine because of this historical fact.

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82 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 159–161.

83 The Yandellian can say more. In the earlier version of Yandell's paper, he goes on to use (T4a)–(T4d) to articulate an account of composition as identity for the Trinity that is similar to that offered by Scotus. This would give an even deeper account of monotheism. However, Yandell was forced to cut that material for the final published version of his paper. The material lives on in McCall, "Relational Trinity: Creedal Perspective", in Sexton, *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 131–132. As far as I know, Hasker is understandably unaware of this material from Yandell. He does not comment on it in the *Tri-Personal God*.

84 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, 222.

But if one views that history as an (otherwise) orthodox trinitarian, yet rejects the doctrine of processions, there is a rather large problem. One is then endorsing the main results of a developmental process *that had at its very heart a fundamentally wrong assumption* — the assumption that the being of Son and Spirit is derived from the Father. Somehow — by luck, or by divine providence — this distorted and misguided process managed to reach an essentially correct conclusion! But luck is surely unacceptable as an explanation here, and it would be very strange to suppose that divine providence had guided the Church through a process which essentially involved such a fundamental mistake. If we view the other results of the process as correct, and as arrived at with divine assistance, I believe it would take an extraordinarily powerful objection to justify rejecting the doctrine of processions.<sup>85</sup>

There are several different types of issues in here that need unpacking. First, I concede that anyone who rejects the doctrine of processions needs powerful reasons for so doing. I have offered several theological and philosophical objections here. Elsewhere, others have argued that the doctrine of processions has no biblical basis.<sup>86</sup> Second, I also concede that anyone who rejects the doctrine of processions must say that the doctrine of the Trinity developed through a process that essentially involves a fundamental mistake. Further, a procession denier must offer an explanation as to why a providential God would allow Christian doctrines to develop in this way. I shall not offer such an explanation here because others have done so elsewhere.<sup>87</sup> Instead, I shall argue that Hasker is subject to his own criticism. As such, Hasker should not hold too tightly to this line of reasoning. Hasker seems to think that this is a special problem for the Yandellian, but I shall now demonstrate that this is not a special problem since Hasker is subject to it as well.

Throughout his book, Hasker rejects divine timelessness and divine simplicity.<sup>88</sup> These are integral issues in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity.

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85 Ibid., 223.

86 John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 488–92.

87 Jordan Wesseling, “Christology and Conciliar Authority: On the Viability of Monthelism for Protestant Theology”, in *Christology: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Zondervan, 2013). C. Stephen Evans, “Catholic-Protestant Views on Justification” in *The Redemption*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (OUP, 2004). Ultimately, I fail to see the force of this providential/historical argument. If Christian theists are willing to say that God is still providentially in control during the atrocities of the 20th Century, she should not be too bothered by a few unbiblical doctrinal errors along the way.

88 This is to say nothing of his open theism which cuts deeply against the traditional view of God’s providence.

It was through these divine attributes that the doctrine of the Trinity was developed. Hasker believes that these doctrines are deeply mistaken, and must be rejected.<sup>89</sup> He is even quite clear that we do not have to give canonical status to the favored philosophical constructions of the patristic theologians.<sup>90</sup> As such, I maintain that he too should believe that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity proceeded on the back of fundamental mistakes.

Simplicity plays an integral role in the development of the *homoousios* doctrine and the assertion that there is one concrete divine nature as enshrined in the Nicene Creed. It plays such an integral role in the developmental process of the doctrine of the Trinity that the historical theologian Stephen Holmes claims that one cannot have the doctrine of the Trinity without divine simplicity. divine simplicity is “the heart of Trinitarian doctrine.”<sup>91</sup> As noted above, Kevin Giles’ work highlights the role that divine timelessness plays in the development of the doctrine of divine processions. Again, one of the early Arian arguments is that all causes must have temporal effects. The Father is timeless. The Father causes the Son to exist, so the Son must be temporal. So the Son and the Father cannot be *homoousios*. The move made by Athanasius, the Council of Nicaea, and the Council of Constantinople is that the Father timelessly causes the Son to exist in such a way that the effect is also timeless. When the Nicene Creed states that the Son was begotten before all ages, it is affirming that the Father timelessly causes the Son to exist in such a way that the Son is also timeless. It is affirming that the Father-Son relationship is a timeless cause with a timeless effect.<sup>92</sup> The fifth ecumenical council (the Council of Constantinople II) affirms this teaching, and is very explicit that the Father timelessly causes the Son to timelessly exist.<sup>93</sup>

Hasker rejects both divine timelessness and divine simplicity. These divine attributes are the basis, the starting assumptions, for the developmental process of the doctrine of the Trinity. Since Hasker rejects these attributes, he must say that the developmental process of the doctrine of the Trinity proceeded from a fundamental mistake. Hasker has some explaining to do. He is subject to his own historical/providential criticism.

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89 Hasker, *Tri-Personal God*, chapter 7.

90 Ibid., 168–70.

91 Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 200.

92 Giles, *Eternal Generation*, 108.

93 Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553*, 74.



## CONCLUSION

I have argued that Hasker has failed to defend the doctrine of divine processions. In particular, the doctrine runs afoul of *homoousios* on multiple fronts. For all of those evangelicals who reject the doctrine of divine processions, this will be good news.<sup>94</sup> It will give those particular evangelicals an affirmation of their position. For other theologians, however, this is not good news. Those who wish to defend the divine processions will need to offer a new defense of the doctrine.

It might be the case that another defense of the divine processions is possible. Such a defense, however, must offer substantive responses to the Eunomian objections articulated above. Theologians can no longer make appeals to the Cappadocians as if they defeated Eunomius' arguments. The Eunomian arguments can easily be rehabilitated and rearticulated. As is always the case, we Christian theologians must find new ways to defeat the arguments of the heretics, and defend the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>95</sup>

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94 My intent here is not to limit this discussion only to evangelicals. I'm simply not aware of anyone outside of evangelical theology who denies the divine processions. If anyone from other Christian theological backgrounds wishes to deny the doctrine of divine processions, they are free to do so without being evangelical.

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