Mere Social Trinitarianism, the Eternal Relations of Origin, and Models of God

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ABSTRACT: Social trinitarians are divided on whether the doctrine of the eternal relations of origin (DERO) should be maintained. In this paper, I focus on what social trinitarianism (ST) must affirm and cannot affirm by way of the divine attributes in order to maintain the DERO. First, I offer my own proposal for a mere ST before turning to the DERO, as the ST label currently has many uses and definitions. Second, I turn my attention to ST and the divine attributes. The DERO requires one to affirm other divine attributes of God, such as divine atemporality, divine immutability, and divine impassability. If the social trinitarian desires to maintain the DERO, then they must maintain these other attributes. However, they will have to forgo the doctrine of divine simplicity because it is incompatible with ST. I conclude by bringing this discussion to bear on models of God and the divine attributes, arguing that the DERO-affirming social trinitarian only has one such model available to them.

KEYWORDS: Trinity doctrine; social Trinity; divine processions; eternal relations of origin; models of God; doctrine of God

1. Introduction

Social trinitarians are divided on the doctrine of the eternal relations of origin (DERO). This is due partly to there being no consensus on what constitutes a "mere" social trinitarianism (ST).[1] Some social trinitarians, such as Richard Swinburne (2010; 1994, 170-91) and William Hasker (2013), insist that the DERO is an essential component of orthodox Trinitarianism, and that social trinitarians should maintain it. Others, such as William Lane Craig and R. T. Mullins, argue that the doctrine is problematic both on biblical and philosophical grounds and should be rejected.

In this paper, I focus on what ST must affirm by way of other divine attributes and what it cannot affirm should it desire to maintain the DERO. I do not take a position on whether social trinitarians should maintain the DERO, or whether theologians should maintain ST or the DERO. I only take a position on what social trinitarians must and cannot affirm concerning the divine attributes in order to maintain the DERO.[2] In the first section of this paper, I offer my own proposal for a mere ST before turning to the DERO. As I will show, the concept of ST has a wide variety of applications and definitions, thus making it a difficult concept upon which to land one's finger. Only after I have made my proposal for what I think should constitute a mere ST do I turn my attention to ST and the divine attributes. The DERO requires one to affirm the following divine attributes: divine atemporality, divine impassability, and divine immutability. If the social trinitarian desires to maintain the DERO, then they need

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[1] McCall notes this in (McCall 2021b, 182-85).
[2] For a thorough and sustained contemporary critique of ST, see (Ward 2015).

to maintain these doctrines. However, they will have to forgo the doctrine of divine simplicity because it is incompatible with ST, as I argue. As a result, many models of God and the divine attributes will be unavailable to the DERO-affirming social trinitarian. In fact, only one such model, namely a neoclassical model that affirms divine immutability, divine impassability, and divine atemporality—while denying divine simplicity—is available to such a social trinitarian. But first, I will explicate the various models of ST and identify a version which best captures a *mere* ST.

2. Mere Social Trinitarianism

ST is not a monolithic theory or model of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.[3] Rather, it is a family of such theories and models. As a result, it is not easily defined. Various philosophers and theologians writing on the doctrine of the Trinity, many of whom endorse ST, mean different things by the label, and their respective articulations of the doctrine differ widely and greatly from one another. For example, both Jürgen Moltmann (1993) and William Lane Craig (Craig 2010; Moreland and Craig 2017, 585-94) develop social models of the Trinity, and both argue that ST is superior to Latin, or *classical*, trinitarian models. However, Moltmann's and Craig's respective models of the Trinity vary greatly from one another, though both claim to exemplify ST. Though they are more similar to one another than either is to Craig's model, Moltmann's and Wolfhart Pannenberg's social-trinitarian models also have notable differences from one another (Pannenberg 1993, 1.259-336), and there are many other social-trinitarian models that differ greatly from those mentioned here. As a result of this wide diversity, it is better to understand ST as a family of models of the Trinity rather than a single model. However, this begs the following question: what are the essential features of a social model of the Trinity? Worded differently, what are the necessary conditions that a model of the Trinity must meet in order to rightly be considered a type of ST? What is "mere" ST (Me-ST)?

In his recent book, *Analytic Christology and the Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, Thomas McCall takes up a discussion of this very problem. He notes the following six ways that the term "ST" is used in contemporary theology and philosophy.[4]

1. Socio-Political Advocacy (P-ST): Christian theology that seeks to draw socio-political and ethical implications from the doctrine of the Trinity (McCall 2021a, 141)
2. Eastern vs Western Theology (H-ST): The doctrine of the Trinity that was held by the major pro-Nicene Greek-speaking theologians of the fourth century (especially Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea), particularly where that doctrine is distinct from the 'Latin' or 'Western' theology (especially exemplified by Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas) (McCall 2021a, 142)
3. Social Analogy (A-ST): Trinitarian theology that makes positive use of the social analogy, which posits that God is relevantly and importantly like three human persons (McCall 2021a, 144)
4. Modern Persons (M-ST): Trinitarian theology that makes positive use of modern (as opposed to traditional) concepts of personhood (McCall 2021a, 145)

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[3] See, for example, (McCall and Rea 2010) for various articulations of social models of the Trinity.
[4] (McCall 2021a, 141-150). All italics in the following definitions are original to McCall.

5. Intra-Trinitarian Love (L-ST): Any doctrine of the Trinity according to which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love one another within the intra-trinitarian divine life (the 'immanent Trinity') (McCall 2021a, 148)

6. Distinct Agency (D-ST): Any doctrine of the Trinity according to which the divine persons are distinct in agency (McCall 2021a, 148)

Due to the extensive number of uses that "ST" has, McCall actually recommends that the term either be dropped altogether or used to designate what he terms "real social Trinitarianism" (R-ST). R-ST is made up of the following conjuncts.[5]

(R-ST1) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are 'of one essence,' but are not numerically the same substance. Rather, the divine persons are consubstantial only in the sense that they share the divine nature in common. Furthermore, this sharing of a common nature can be understood in a fairly straightforward sense via the 'social analogy' in which Peter, James, and John share human nature;

(R-ST2) Properly understood, the central claim of monotheism that there is but one God is to [be] understood as the claim that there is one divine nature—not as the claim that there is exactly one divine substance; and

(R-ST3) The divine persons must each be in full possession of the divine nature and in some particular relation R to one another for Trinitarianism to count as monotheism (where the usual candidates for R are being members of the same kind, the only members of the divine family, the only members of a necessarily existent community, enjoying perfect love and harmony of will, and being necessarily interdependent).

While a comprehensive definition, McCall's R-ST might commit one or more claim(s) than social trinitarians desire, particularly regarding the claim that the persons are not the numerically same substance but hold in common the same divine nature. While many may be sympathetic to this interpretation of ST, it seems to be too developed to qualify as a mere ST. For example, social trinitarians such as Craig and Hasker fall outside the boundaries of ST set forth in R-ST. Both of them seem to affirm that the Trinity is a single concrete substance (i.e., that the three persons are the numerically same substance), which is contrary to R-ST1. So, even on McCall's R-ST, some thinkers who claim the moniker ST would not actually be social trinitarians. A more minimal definition of ST is to be desired.

Though R-ST may not work as a mere ST, there are other candidates for the job, and I suggest that M-ST is the best one. On M-ST, the divine persons are persons in the "modern" sense of the term, considered as distinct centers of consciousness, will, action, and love.[6] But why choose M-ST for a mere ST? First, not every social trinitarian who claims ST aims to draw out any socio-political implications from the doctrine. For example, neither Pannenberg, Swinburne, Moreland and Craig, Yandell, or Hasker say anything about socio-political implications about the doctrine of the Trinity, and one would be hard-pressed to show that their ST is motivated by socio-political agendas. Yet, each of these thinkers claim to affirm ST.

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[5] (McCall 2021a, 149-150). These are direct quotations from these pages in McCall's book.

[6] It is unclear how "modern" this sense of personhood is. McCall, Giles Emery, and Khaled Anatolios all express caution on drawing too drastic a distinction between "ancient" and "modern" notions of personhood. It may not be the case that these understandings of personhood truly differ from one another; rather, the "modern" sense of personhood might simply be explained as developments in the "ancient" understanding. See (McCall 2021a, 146-147), (Emery 2007, 106), and (Anatolios 2011, 153).

So, P-ST won't work. H-ST won't work either because several who affirm ST do not claim such a strong distinction between the Christian East and West on the doctrine of the Trinity. Yandell and Mullins are but two examples who make no claims such as these in their respective Trinity doctrines. Hasker argues that Augustine and the Cappadocians would have agreed on their basic understanding of personhood, though this claim is debatable (Hasker 2013, 40-49). A-ST also won't foot the bill for a mere ST since not every social trinitarian uses a social analogy. This leaves us with L-ST, D-ST, and M-ST.

L-ST is affirmed by many who are deemed champions of Latin Trinitarianism (LT), such as Richard of St. Victor and Thomas Aquinas (McCall 2021a, 165-69). Not only this, but Augustine, who is also deemed an exemplar of LT, likewise affirms that the divine persons love one another. So, L-ST does nothing to distinguish ST from LT.[7] What about D-ST? Many who would also affirm some sort of LT would claim that the persons are distinct agents, but they might deny that this necessarily entails that an agent is a distinct center of consciousness, will, action, and love. Granted, I'm not exactly sure how this works out, but I want to be charitable to the Latin trinitarians who would still claim that the persons are distinct agents. So, this leaves us with M-ST as our last candidate. All of the social trinitarians mentioned up to this point seem as though they would claim that the divine persons are distinct centers of consciousness, will, action, and love. Granted, some social trinitarians will claim that they do not envision persons in this "modern" sense of the term when they emphasize God's threeness. They might claim that they envision something more modest, such as D-ST or L-ST. However, they would need to explain what exactly about these views distinguishes their trinitarian models from Latin-trinitarian models that would affirm the same claims.[8]

Going forward, I will be working with my proposed definition of Me-ST when discussing ST.

> Me-ST = df. Trinitarian theology that claims that the divine persons are distinct centers of consciousness, will, action, and love.

From this point on, I will mean Me-ST when I use "ST." Before moving forward, one should note that Me-ST does not, on its face, commit one to a particular model of the divine attributes, though it might exclude some models. At this point, all that ST claims is the following.

> ST1: There is one divine essence that is three distinct divine persons.
> ST2: Each divine person has the one divine essence.
> ST3: Each divine person is a distinct center of consciousness, will, action, and love.

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[7] Though affirming a contemporary Latin view of the Trinity, Keith Ward goes so far as to deny that there is any real sense in which the divine persons love one another: "Does it follow that there is then no mutual love between Father and Son? It does. There cannot be mutual love between two aspects of divine experience and action. Love only truly exists where there is an 'other' to receive and return love" (Ward 2015, 242). This by no means is to say that every Latin trinitarian denies mutual loving relations amongst the persons. The conjunction of LT and mutual love amongst the persons was well attested amongst medieval theologians and philosophers and has a firm place within the larger Christian tradition (McCall 2022).

[8] Scott Williams has proposed what he calls a "Latin social model" of the Trinity in his paper "Unity of Action in a Latin Social Model of the Trinity." While he denies that each person has a distinct center of intellect and will, he affirms that each person has a first-person perspective with its corresponding *de se* beliefs. However, along with Hasker, I'm skeptical that such a model is all that plausible or coherent. See (Williams 2017) and (Hasker 2018). For Williams's rejoinder to Hasker, see (Williams 2020).

ST4: Each divine person enjoys some relation R to the other two divine persons such that the three divine persons are the single instance of the essence of divinity.

Three of these claims—ST1, ST2, and ST4—are affirmed by all models of the Trinity, and ST3 follows from Me-ST. At this point, there is nothing particularly novel in what I have laid out as ST. In fact, all I have aimed to do at this point is survey the various forms of ST on offer and try to distill a mere ST from that. Having done so, I will now turn my attention to ST, the divine attributes, and the DERO, wherein ST = Me-ST.

3. Social Trinitarianism, the Divine Attributes, and the Eternal Relations of Origin

Before progressing too much on this subject, it is important to delimit some of the divine attributes that I will not discuss here, specifically the omni-attributes—omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, omnibenevolence, and omni-rationality—divine aseity, and divine necessity. The reason that I will not discuss these here is because each of these is entailed in the *concept* of God. Each attribute's details are worked out differently amongst the various *models* of God. There is an important distinction I am noting here between the *concept* of God and *models* of God.[9] The *concept* of God is something that is affirmed by most-to-all models of God. The *concept* of God is that God is a perfect being who is the ultimate foundation or ground of reality (Mullins forthcoming, 64). Various *models* of God attempt to articulate various theories of how the divine attributes all fit together and how each attribute should be understood. Models of God usually have additional qualifiers that they add to the concept of God. These qualifiers are what distinguish each model from one another. Since these attributes are affirmed by all models of God, they are a given for any sort of ST, which presupposes the concept of God. Every social trinitarian will accept those attributes implicit in the concept of God, though they have more latitude on which model of God they will adopt to make the most sense of the concept of God.

3.1 The Doctrine of the Eternal Relations of Origin

The DERO is part and parcel of the pro-Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. As Hasker points out, it is articulated six different ways in the Nicene Creed (Hasker 2013, 146). Hasker has even gone so far as to claim that the DERO is not some aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity that one may choose to do away with; it is essential to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Hasker writes, "But a set of statements about the Trinity that excludes part of what is said about the divine persons in that creed simply cannot pass muster as '*the* doctrine of the Trinity.' What we must say, then, is not that the doctrine of divine processions is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather that it is *included in* that doctrine" (Hasker 2017, 218-19, italics original). Hasker is by no means alone in this. Virtually every pro-Nicene patristic, medieval, and reformation theologian who set out to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity

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[9] Graham Oppy refers to this distinction as between "the concept of God" and "conceptions of God." See (Oppy 2014, 1-29, esp. 14-17, and 19-25). Since this terminological use might lead one to confusion, I prefer to use Mullins's terminology of "concept of God" and "models of God."

included the DERO in their discussion. As such, it has a strong basis in the history of Christianity.

Before discussing the compatibility of ST and the DERO, it will be useful to articulate the content of the DERO. The DERO claims the following propositions.[10]

D1. The Father eternally begets the Son.
D2. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father.
D3. The Father [and the Son] eternally spirate the Spirit.
D4. The Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father [and the Son].
D5. The Father alone is inoriginate and uncaused.

Per most pro-Nicene theologians, the eternal relations of origin are the mechanism by which the Father communicates the divine essence to the Son and the Spirit. It is important to note that the processive acts involved here are *causal* acts (Gregory of Nazianzus 2002, 71; Gregory of Nyssa 2012, 336).[11] To say that x is the cause of y is to say that prior to y's obtaining, x must obtain so as to effect y (Gallow 2022). In other words, y would not obtain if x did not obtain prior to y's obtaining.[12] So, to say that the Father causes the Son is to say that the Father's being and action are necessary so as to result in the being of the Son [and the Spirit]. The Father is the ultimate source of divinity, on the DERO. By eternally generating the Son, he communicates the divine essence to the Son. All that the Son has he receives from the Father.

What exactly is the act of generation? According to Gregory of Nyssa, the act of *generation* is a causal act by which the Father causes the being of the Son but in such a way that the act is distinct from the act of creation, which would imply a temporal beginning to the Son's being (Gregory of Nyssa 2012, 336). The Father causes the Son's being in such a way that the Son does not begin to exist yet relies on the Father's causal act to obtain nonetheless. Had the Son began to exist, then, by definition, he could not have the divine essence since eternity is an essential divine property. Here, it is important to note the qualification of *eternal* when it comes to the Father's generative act of the Son (and subsequently the Spirit). By "eternal," the patristic and medieval fathers specifically meant timeless, or atemporal. So, when the Father generates the Son, he atemporally causes the Son's being. It is worth noting that not every classical theologian prefers to talk of the Father as the cause of the Son. Thomas Aquinas, for

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[10] I bracket "and the Son" so as to facilitate those traditions that accept the *filioque* clause in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. I by no means take a position on the *filioque* in this paper, and such a position has no consequences for my argument.

[11] Some might find the urge to argue that these citations only demonstrate that some of the Greek fathers took the eternal relations of origin to be causal and that such an interpretation is not necessitated by the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. However, as Christopher Beeley has argued, this is to ignore the influence of Gregory of Nazianzus on the theology of the Creed, for whom the eternal relations of origin are indeed causal. See (Beeley 2012, 195-96). Mark Makin notes that there are multiple interpretations of what sorts of relations the eternal relations of origin are, causal being only one of them (Makin 2017, 243-59). A minimal understanding of eternal generation, he argues, is one of dependence relations—the other two being grounding relations and essential-dependence relations. He defines "eternal generation" thus: "Necessarily, the Son depends on the Father for his existence, yet the Son exists eternally" (Makin 2017, 244). While he argues that all three views have hurdles that each needs to overcome, he maintains that each is sufficient to show that the doctrine of eternal generation is at least comprehensible and coherent. However, following the two Gregorys, it seems to me that the most likely candidate for understanding the eternal relations of origin, at least in some sort of classical sense, is a causal relation.

[12] I do not necessarily mean "prior" in a chronological or temporal sense. Though there is much debate over this point, I, following the majority of the Christian tradition, presume that a cause can be logically prior to its effect without being so chronologically.

example, prefers to talk of the Father as the principle of the Son (Aquinas 1981, Pt.1, Q.42, Art.2).[13] However, it is the language of causality that is predominant amongst the patristic fathers. Regardless, this much is clear in the classical Christian tradition: apart from the Father's generative act, the Son and the Spirit do not exist.[14]

Again, the eternal causal acts involved in the DERO are atemporal acts. To say that x is atemporal is to say 1) that x has no beginning, 2) that x has no end, 3) that x does not enjoy temporal location, and 4) that x does not undergo temporal succession. There is no "now" or "then," or "before" or "after" for atemporal beings or acts. In some sense, an atemporal being or act does not even exist "now"; it simply exists. The reason that the acts involved in the DERO are atemporal, on the pro-Nicene doctrine of the Trinity, is because God himself is atemporal. If God is atemporal, then each of the divine persons are atemporal, since each of the three persons is numerically identical to the divine essence (Aquinas 1981, Q.39, Art.2, Pt.1; Vidu 2021, 91-125). Since the Father is atemporal, then the Father's act of generating the Son is atemporal, as well is the Father's [and Son's] act of spirating the Spirit. Were God temporal, so the argument goes, then the generation of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit would entail that the Son and the Spirit begin to exist. If the Son and the Spirit begin to exist, then they are not eternal, and they are thus not truly divine. In other words, temporal relations of origin result in Arianism.[15] This is especially the case if, as Swinburne argues, causes must temporally precede their effects (Swinburne 2016, 155-66). In this case, the Son's generation temporally follows the Father's generative act. Since I affirm that simultaneous causation is possible (see below) I will not push this line of argument. In his response to Mullins, who does push this critique on Hasker's Trinity model, Hasker claims the following:

> Suppose, following that assumption, that the Father's act of generation at t_1 causes the Son's existence at a slightly later time t_2. (But how much later, one might ask?) Does this mean, then, that the Son does not exist at t_1? Of course not! In that case, it will be true that the Father also exists at a slightly earlier time t_0, and the Father's act of generation at t_0 causes the Son's existence at t_1. And the act of generation at t_1 causes the Son's existence at t_2, and so on (Hasker 2017, 220-21).

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[13] Mullins notes that Thomas's preference for "principle" over "causation" seems to be "little more than a word play because he still affirms that the Son is derived from the productivity of the Father" (Mullins 2016a, 277 n.50). See also (Paasch 2012).

[14] Even if the eternal relations of origin are taken to be some sort of other relation than causal relations, such as grounding relations, this point still holds. As Joshua Sijuwade notes, even on grounding relations, an asymmetric dependence relation obtains between the grounds and the grounded. Without the grounds, that which is grounded does not exist or obtain. See (Sijuwade forthcoming). It is customary, however, to distinguish between full grounding and partial grounding. What has been described in Sijuwade's project would be representative of full grounding, which seems necessarily to be asymmetric in nature. However, some philosophers, such as Chad McIntosh, argue that partial grounding isn't necessarily asymmetric, that there might be cases where symmetric partial grounding obtains. See (McIntosh 2020, 97) for more on this. Though this distinction is worth making here, it does not play out in the argument that I have been developing up to this point.

[15] Both Paul Helm and R. T. Mullins have argued that the DERO's being atemporal does not prevent the problem of Arianism. Whether or not the Father's generating the Son is atemporal or temporal, the result is a form of Arianism, which claims that the Son and the Spirit are ontologically posterior to the Father. The Father is the one true God, but the Son and the Spirit are not. As a result, the Son and the Spirit are ontologically subordinate to the Father. However, I do not intend to engage in this discussion. For the purposes of the argument that I am developing in this paper, I will maintain that the acts involved in the DERO are atemporal and do not entail any sort of Arianism. See (Helm 2010, 284-85) and (Mullins 2016a, 279-80).

Hasker affirms (and as do I), however, that simultaneous causation is possible (Hasker 2017, 221). But as I argue further below, looking to simultaneous causation won't help Hasker's model avoid Arianism. Before I make that argument, however, we should first consider that God's atemporality entails his immutability.

Since God is atemporal, then his eternity entails that he likewise is immutable. Whether one adopts an absolutist or relational view of time, all theories of change entail temporal succession.[16] This is not to say that causation entails temporal succession, though this point is debated amongst metaphysicians. If I were to die, my death would cause my wife to be a widow. My wife's acquisition of the property "is a widow," (i.e., the effect of my death) is simultaneous with my death (the cause of my wife's being a widow); it is not temporally subsequent (i.e., after my death) that she acquires this property. While the effect, in this scenario, is simultaneous with its cause, the actual change in events, my wife's being married to my wife's being a widow, is not simultaneous. My wife's being a widow is temporally subsequent to her being married. Though effects, in some cases, might be simultaneous with their causes, there can be no change from a state-of-affairs x to a state-of-affairs y without temporal succession. Change involves temporal succession. Since God is atemporal in his eternity, it follows that God likewise is immutable. X is immutable if there is no change in any of X's properties, be those properties intrinsic properties or extrinsic properties.[17] So, on the DERO, God is both atemporal and immutable in his nature. It follows that each of the divine persons likewise is atemporal and immutable.

3.2 The Eternal Relations of Origin and the Divine Attributes

At this point, some implications arise for the social trinitarian who wants to maintain the DERO. Up to this point, I have not argued for or against any model of the divine attributes for ST. In what follows, however, I shift gears to do just that.

Social trinitarians who want to maintain the DERO must adopt a model of God that affirms that God's eternity is atemporal; otherwise, Arianism looms large.[18] It seems obvious to most that if God is temporal, then the DERO results in the Son and the Spirit being creatures, especially since all that seems to distinguish the causal acts of "generation" and "creation" in the classical tradition is the atemporal aspect of the Father's generative act. However, there are some social trinitarians who would desire to affirm ST, the DERO, and that God is temporally eternal. To say that God is temporally eternal is to say 1) that God has no beginning, 2) that God has no end, 3) that God enjoys temporal location, and 4) that God experiences temporal succession. Richard Swinburne and William Hasker are two examples of

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[16] The absolutist theory of time characterizes time as a substance that can exist apart from change. The relational theory characterizes time as contingent on change; in other words, change (in events) is the source of temporal moments. On the absolutist theory, time itself is the source of temporal moments and what makes change possible. See (Craig 2001b, 144-49) and (Mullins 2020a, 232).

[17] By mentioning "properties," I am not presuming any sort of realist or anti-realist theory of properties. What I say here is equally applicable to trope theory and other theories. I simply mean the term "properties," in a non-metaphysically committing way.

[18] In his critique of Hasker's maintenance of the DERO, R. T. Mullins notes that Hasker's view implies Arianism and argues against it. See (Mullins 2017, 192-97). One likely would be able to maintain the DERO and that God is temporally eternal if they took the relations involved in the DERO to be grounding relations rather than causal relations. On such an account, there simply would be no point in time at which the Father is not the grounds for the Son and that the Father (and the Son) is (are) not the grounds for the Spirit. See (Sijuwade forthcoming). However, such a view of the DERO is not in view of the pro-Nicene fathers, who took the relations to be causal, and thus falls outside the scope of my argument.

social trinitarians who affirm ST, the DERO, and God's temporal eternity (Swinburne 2016, 228-31; Swinburne 2004, 137-44; Hasker 1989; and Hasker 2017). According to both, there is never a time when the Father does not beget (or is not begetting) the Son, and there is never a time when the Father (and the Son) does (do) not spirate the Spirit. At each moment of time, the Son and the Spirit are being begotten and spirated.

Initially, this might seem like a plausible view. However, there are some serious questions surrounding it. First, Swinburne's and Hasker's views seem to involve the possibility of traversing an actual infinite. As William Lane Craig and others have argued, traversing an actual infinite, as well as reaching infinity by addition, seems to be a metaphysical impossibility (Craig 2001a, 256-67). More so, the existence of an actual infinite seems to result in metaphysical absurdities. Craig, in particular, uses the example of Hilbert's Hotel to make his argument. Suppose there was a hotel (that belongs to a man named Hilbert) that had an infinite number of rooms and suppose that all of the rooms were occupied. Suppose then that all of the guests occupying the even-numbered rooms checked out and vacated their rooms. How many rooms in the hotel are now vacant? An infinite number of rooms are still vacant. But this seems absurd. How is it that half of the hotel occupants check out and yet the number of occupied rooms remains the same? This seems to be a metaphysical absurdity. If the existence of actual infinities is metaphysically possible and plausible, then Hasker needs to better demonstrate this in order to show that there is no problem with his temporal understanding of the DERO.[19]

Suppose, however, that the existence of an actual infinite is no problem, and that Swinburne and Hasker are able to demonstrate this without any logical inconsistency. There still remains another problem for their view of the DERO, namely the completion of the Son's and the Spirit's being.[20] According to the classical tradition, that God possesses all of his being is a divine perfection. In fact, such is part of the motivation in Boethius to claim that God is atemporally eternal (Boethius 1999, Book V). In other words, the following question arises: Are the eternal relations of origin ever completed actions? Some action A may be considered complete when its effect E has obtained, and A will no longer continue to obtain. Take for example the action of my writing this paper. Let A stand for my writing this paper. A is complete when the effect of A, namely the completed paper (E) obtains, thus resulting in A no longer occurring or obtaining. Once E obtains, A is brought to an end. When I have completed this paper, I will no longer be performing the act of writing this paper. I may continue writing on another project, or I may begin to write another paper, but *this* particular action A is complete and will no longer continue to occur as a result of E's obtaining. In so far that this paper is incomplete, then I will continue to write it. In so far that I am still writing this paper, the paper and the action that is my writing it are not complete; A is incomplete because E has yet to obtain. The problem that this poses for Swinburne's and Hasker's views of the DERO should now be evident. If the Father is generating the Son at each and every moment of time, then is there ever a time wherein the Father's generating the Son is a completed action? Based on the example that I have just given, the implication would seem to be that the Father never completes his act of causing the Son's being, which then calls into question whether or not the Son is ever a completed being. If the Father is eternally causing the Son to exist, then the act of causing the Son's existence is never complete. The causal act never begins and never ends, and acts that never end never come to completion. So, if the Son

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[19] It is worth noting that this is a problem for any model of God that would claim temporal eternity of God, not just ST.

[20] I work out this argument more in "Divine Temporalism and the Doctrine of the Eternal Processions," which is forthcoming in a future issue of *Faith and Philosophy*.

is an incomplete being, then it is not clear how he could be divine. If the Son is eternally an incomplete being, who is being caused to exist at each and every moment of time, then it is unclear if the Son is "ever" divine or if the Son is some sort of incomplete yet eternal creature. If the Son is a completed being, then I fail to understand what exactly it might mean for the Father to eternally generate the Son. As it currently stands, I cannot conceive of an instance wherein a particular action is completed yet continues to occur, or at least not apart from overdetermining said action's effect. Perhaps the continuing generative act is necessary to sustain the Son's being and existence, but then it becomes very unclear how this does not entail some sort of ontological subordinationism if the Son relies on the Father each and every temporal moment for his sustained existence. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed by Swinburne and/or Hasker. Until such a solution to this problem is provided, I think it best that we, for the time being, reject this interpretation of the DERO.

One may wonder, though, if a model of divine eternity such as William Lane Craig's could consistently maintain both ST and the DERO. According to Craig, God is atemporal *sans* creation and temporal with creation. This is not to say that God is atemporal before he creates; there is no "before" God's act of creation. Rather, this is to say that God is atemporal without creation and temporal with creation. God necessarily becomes temporal at the moment of creation (Craig 2001a, 267-75; Craig 2001b, 233-36). On this model of divine eternity, one might say that the Father generates the Son and (with the Son) spirates the Spirit *sans* creation. This is to say that one could claim that the eternal relations of origin obtain in atemporal eternity prior to God's creative act.[21]

This, however, then raises the question: what comes of the eternal processions at the moment of creation? Do they cease, or do they continue on? Either way, we seem to be faced with the same problem that befalls Swinburne's and Hasker's view, namely that the eternal processions, presuming they continue post creation, are eternally incomplete actions which result in the Son and the Spirit being eternally incomplete beings. For if these eternally generative and spirative acts continue at the moment of creation and onward, then this obviously is no different from the other temporally eternal processive acts. If the processions cease at the moment of creation, then I am still unclear of what to make of the model of divine eternity that Craig presents. It seems to imply that at the moment of creation, the eternal processions are complete and no longer occur. However, if these acts are brought to completion, then how exactly is it that they were atemporally occurring? The Craigian might say something along the lines of the following: The eternal processions are timeless causes with timeless effects, which is what we would see *sans* creation. The Father atemporally causes the Son to atemporally exist. It is a complete act that occurs all at once in God's timeless present. Since it is an atemporally complete act, there is no need for the Father to temporally carry on causing the Son with creation. However, I fail to understand exactly how an action that is atemporal can be described as complete, since the very notion of "complete" seems to entail some sort of process, and processes are temporal. So, such a claim by the Craigian won't satisfy the problem at hand, and we are still left with the same problems of trying to affirm both that God is temporal and that the processive acts are causal. Social trinitarians who desire to maintain the DERO will thus need to reject models of God that deny God the attribute of atemporal eternity in its classical sense.[22]

Not only will social trinitarians who want to maintain the DERO need to maintain that God is atemporal; they will also need to maintain that God is immutable. As I noted above,

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[21] "Prior" in this sense does not refer to chronological, or temporal, priority. Rather, it refers to logical priority.
[22] It is worth noting that Craig rejects the DERO, though he does so primarily on a biblical basis.

immutability is a concomitant of God's atemporality. If a being is unable to experience temporal succession or enjoy temporal location, such a being does not experience change, and this follows regardless of one's view on the nature of time (absolute or relational). Most theologians throughout the history of Christianity have noted that God's immutability entails his atemporality. However, the same entailment works vice versa; God's atemporality entails his immutability. A being who experiences temporal succession experiences change, namely change from one temporal moment to the next. So, as an extension of God's atemporality, then the social trinitarian who wants to maintain the DERO will need to affirm God's immutability as well.

Will the DERO-affirming social trinitarian need also to affirm that God is impassible? When classical theologians have said that God is impassible, they typically have meant the following: 1) God cannot suffer, 2) God cannot be acted upon or moved by someone or something external to Godself, and 3) God does not have passions (Mullins 2020b, 20). In its more elaborate articulations, divine impassability claims that God "does not have the same emotions as the gods of the heathen; that his care for human beings is free from self-interest and any association with evil; that since he has neither body nor soul, he cannot directly have the experiences typically connected with them; that he is not overwhelmed by emotions and in the incarnation emerges victorious over suffering and death" (Gavrilyuk 2004, 15-16). There is a lot going on here in this articulation of the doctrine of divine impassability, but it seems that the DERO-affirming social trinitarian will be required to take it on as well. Here is why. Divine impassability also claims that God exists *immutably* in an undisturbed state of perfect bliss, or what is often referred to as "divine blessedness" (Mullins 2020b, 25). Divine impassability follows from, or is entailed by, divine immutability. Graham Oppy helpfully articulates the connection between impassability and immutability:

> If God is impassible, then God is not subject to change: God remains always or eternally the same. If God is impassible, then there are no causal transitions within God, and there are no external causal impacts on God. If God is impassible, then God does not deliberate prior to creation: there is no succession of states in God that precedes creation. Moreover, if God is impassible, then God is unaffected by anything that happens in our universe, or elsewhere in God's creation. In particular, if God is impassible, then God is not affected by our suffering (which is not to say that God does not know about our suffering, nor to say that God is indifferent to our suffering) (Oppy 2014, 191).

If God is immutable, then whatever state he is in cannot change. According to divine impassability, God's immutable state is one of divine blessedness, of a perfect bliss from which he cannot be disturbed. If God is immutable, then he cannot undergo any sort of change from one emotional state to another, nor can he experience any sort of change from one passion to another, whether such a change be internally or externally motivated. Divine impassability, then, is entailed by divine immutability. Since it is entailed by God's immutability, then the DERO-affirming social trinitarian will have to take on divine impassability as well.

What about the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS)?[23] Traditionally, Christian thinkers who have affirmed God's atemporality, immutability, and impassability have done so due to

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[23] I have in mind here the classical understanding of the DDS, which is affirmed by Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Many contemporary thinkers, such as Joshua Sijuwade, refer to this classical version of the DDS as a strong account of the doctrine, contrasting it with a weak version of the doctrine. I do

the motivation to preserve the DDS. To say that God is simple is to say that 1) God lacks all composition and is made up of no parts, whether those parts be physical or metaphysical, 2) there exist no distinctions in God, whether those be distinctions between essence and existence, act and potency, substance and attribute, essence and accident, genus and differentia, or form and matter, 3) God is identical with all of his intrinsic features, and all of said features are identical with one another (Rogers 1996, 165-186; Rogers 2000, 24-39; Rogers 2020, 308-322; Dolezal 2011, 2; and Duby 2016, 2).[24] Not only this, but virtually all of the pro-Nicene theologians writing on the doctrine of the Trinity presumed the truth of the DDS (Ayres 2004, 286-88; Holmes 2012, 97-120; Vidu 2021, 91-125). But is it necessary for the social trinitarian who wants to maintain the DERO to affirm the DDS? It does not seem that this is the case. While immutability, impassability, and atemporality may be entailed by simplicity, it does not follow that these entailments are symmetrical. So, theoretically, the social trinitarian could get away without having to affirm the DDS.

However, one may wonder at this point if a denial of the DDS leads to a denial of God's aseity. If God has parts, so the traditional argument goes, then he depends on those parts for his being. Since the doctrine of divine aseity claims that God does not depend on anything for his existence or essence, then it does not seem to be the case that God could have any parts, including metaphysical parts, that would be responsible for his essence. Hence, the DDS claims that all that is in God is identical to God, and that God therefore does not have any actual distinct attributes or properties. However, as I have shown elsewhere, there are ways for the Christian to affirm that God enjoys aseity without having to be simple—simple in the sense that I'm discussing in this paper.[25] Gregory Fowler and Matthew Baddorf are two philosophers who have developed possible ways that one can affirm God's aseity without the DDS. Both point out that most who claim that God enjoys a dependence relation to his parts do not specify what type of dependence relation they have in mind. Fowler highlights four types of dependence relations, though only one is of interest for my purposes here, namely counterfactual dependence.

> Counterfactual Dependence = df. The type of dependence that obtains between x and y just in case if y hadn't existed then x would not have existed (Fowler 2015, 121).

Baddorf looks to the example of Socrates and his singleton set to show how a counterfactual-dependence relation works: "Consider Socrates and his singleton set. Since his singleton set exists in every world where Socrates does, Socrates could not exist without his singleton set. The set could also not exist without Socrates to be its member" (Baddorf 2017, 409). We can conceive of God's relation to his attributes in this counterfactually dependent way. Yes, it is the case that God depends on his attributes for his own being; he would not exist without his attributes. However, the converse is also true: God's attributes would fail to exist should God fail to exist. In this way, God depends on his attributes for his being but not in such way that

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not have in mind here weaker accounts of the DDS, only the classical strong account. It very well may be that an account of the DDS, such as Sijuwade's aspectival account, is perfectly consistent with ST. However, space here does not allow me to consider these different variations of the DDS. For more on alternative accounts of the DDS, see (Sijuwade 2022). In fact, Sijuwade's own account of the Trinity, which he terms a monarchical model, takes on a social understanding of the persons. See (Sijuwade 2021, 7).

[24] It is worth noting that several authors define the DDS in multiple ways. See (Mawson 2019, 51-56) for a brief summary of these views on the DDS. The version that I affirm here is that associated with Augustine, Thomas, and Rogers, as cited in the parentheticals, which Mawson refers to as an extreme view.

[25] See (Hollingsworth and Steffaniak 2021, 262-66).

threatens his aseity, and he certainly does not depend on them in any sort of causal sense. These "non-causal dependence relations . . . are often referred to as grounding relations" (Baddorf 2017, 410).[26] Baddorf makes this point even more clear when he points out that there are alternative ways of conceiving of properties.[27] He refers to the more classical way of conceiving of properties as the explanatory view, which claims that properties provide "a kind of explanation for the way a substance is" (Baddorf 2017, 411). When considering a red brick, the brick's redness property explains the brick's property characteristics, namely its being red. If the explanatory view of properties is true, then it does seem to be the case that God's dependence on his attributes does conflict with his aseity (Baddorf 2017, 411). The other view, and the one that he opts for, is the identity view. On this view, properties are "identical to the ways that substances are." They are "not items which grant substances their character" (Baddorf 2017, 411). When we couple this way of conceiving of properties with the notion of counterfactual dependence, then we can see that a rejection of simplicity does not necessitate that we reject God's aseity. On this view, God's attributes simply are the ways in which God is; they are not things that grant God his character. God does not exist apart from the ways that he exists. To say that God is eternal is to describe a way that the divine substance is; God's eternity is not something external to God that attaches to him to grant him his eternity. This approach developed by Fowler and Baddorf provides the social trinitarian with a plausible way of rejecting God's simplicity without forgoing his aseity.

Since the social trinitarian has a way of rejecting the DDS without rejecting divine aseity, we might ask if there are other features of ST that would prevent them from affirming the DDS. ST does seem to have features that do so. According to Latin-trinitarian models that maintain the DDS, all that distinguishes the divine persons are the eternal relations of origin (Augustine 1990, 190-95; Vidu 2021, 91-125; Duby 2022, 51-96). What distinguishes the Father is that he is inoriginate; what distinguishes the Son is that he is begotten of the Father; and what distinguishes the Spirit is that he is spirated of the Father (and the Son). Since all three persons on LT are the numerically same center of consciousness, will, and action, then nothing else distinguishes them from one another. On ST, however, the persons have more distinguishing features, namely their own centers of consciousness, will, and action. As a result, each of the persons will have their own *de se* beliefs. For example, the Father will believe "I am the Father," the Son will believe "I am the Son," and the Spirit will believe "I am the Spirit." However, the Father will not believe "I am the Son" nor "I am the Spirit;" the Son will not believe "I am the Father" nor "I am the Spirit;" and the Spirit will not believe "I am the Father" nor "I am the Son." On the DDS, God is identical to his beliefs since there is no distinction or divisions within the divine essence.[28] Since God is identical to his beliefs on the DDS, and since there are no distinctions in God, then God cannot have multiple distinct beliefs such as these *de se* beliefs. These beliefs would somehow have to be one and the same belief. However, this is not possible since the propositional contents of each belief are clearly distinct from one another. The propositional content of "I am the Father" cannot be identical to the propositional content of "I am the Son" unless one were willing to also affirm that "The

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[26] See also (Fine 1994) and (Rosen 2010, 110-112) for more on grounding and grounding relations.

[27] Baddorf uses the language of "tropes," but even he acknowledges that his project does not depend on this interpretation of properties versus others. He only refers to them as tropes for the sake of offering a deflationary account of the matter (Baddorf 2017, 406 n.11).

[28] I am aware that not all theologians or philosophers would affirm that God has beliefs. My point does not rely on this statement. I could just as easily say that God is identical to what God knows. My statements involving "God's beliefs" are not intended to be committal.

Father and the Son are identical with one another," which is strictly denied in any Trinity doctrine. It seems, then, that the social trinitarian cannot affirm the DDS.

4. Conclusion: Social Trinitarianism, the Eternal Relations of Origin, and Models of God

Since ST is not compatible with the DDS, then the social trinitarian who aims to maintain the DERO will be unable to claim adherence to the model of God known as classical theism. *Classical theism* is best defined thus.

> Classical Theism = df. A model, or family of models, of God that, while affirming those attributes implicit in the concept of God, uniquely affirm the following divine attributes: 1) divine simplicity, 2) divine immutability, 3) divine impassability, and 4) divine atemporality (Mullins 2021, 85).

Since the DDS is an essential component of classical theism, the social trinitarian will not be able to claim classical theism as its affirmed model of God. But what about neoclassical theism? Mullins defines *neoclassical theism* as follows:

> Neoclassical Theism = df. A model (or family of models) of God that rejects one or more of the classical attributes (Mullins 2020b, 25).[29]

ST is compatible with neoclassical theism. While many neoclassical theists reject all four of the classical attributes, not all do. For example, Linda Zagzebski affirms the DDS, divine immutability, and atemporal eternity, but she rejects divine impassability (Zagzebski 2013). She would qualify as a neoclassical theist, as a result. Outside of rejecting one or more of the classical attributes, neoclassical theists are not united much on anything else (Mullins 2020b, 25). Since the neoclassical theist is free to reject one or more of the four classical attributes, they are free to deny the DDS. In fact, most do. They are not free, however, on whether to maintain divine immutability, divine impassability, or divine atemporality, since these are necessitated by the DERO. So, since they cannot affirm the DDS, and since they need to maintain the other three classical attributes, social trinitarians can be quite at home within a neoclassical model of God. However, not all versions of neoclassical theism are available to those DERO-affirming social trinitarians. Any version of neoclassical theism that would deny immutability, impassability, or atemporality of God would not be an option for them.

Open theism likewise is not an option for the DERO-affirming social trinitarian because it is inconsistent with divine immutability, divine impassability, and divine atemporality, which are essential for the DERO. According to open theism, God comes to know some things that he did not previously know. Since God undergoes a change in his knowledge, he is mutable and thus temporal, which is not allowed on the DERO. In fact, any model of God that denies

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[29] The classical attributes are those four referenced in the definition of *classical theism*. Some theologians and philosophers have preferred to refer to this view as a "moderate classical theism" or a "modified classical theism." Examples of this view include, but are not limited to, Augustus Hopkins Strong (Strong 1907, 243-303), John Feinberg (Feinberg 2001), Anthony Thiselton (Thiselton 2015, 53-79), R. T. Mullins (Mullins 2020), J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig (Moreland and Craig 2017, 510-39), William Abraham (Abraham 2018, 54-68), and John Peckham (Peckham 2021).

any of the attributes of immutability, impassability, or atemporality of God will be unavailable to the DERO-affirming social trinitarian. These models, along with open theism, include panentheism, pantheism, and any form of process theology. Again, any model of God that would reject any of the classical divine attributes, except for the DDS, will be incompatible with the DERO.

It seems then that the DERO-affirming social trinitarian is left with only a single option for a model of God: a version of neoclassical theism that rejects the DDS but holds to the doctrines of divine immutability, divine impassability, and divine atemporality. Classical theism, since it requires the DDS, is inconsistent with ST, and any model of God that rejects any of the other three classical attributes will be inconsistent with the DERO. The DERO-affirming social trinitarian is left only to affirm this narrowly defined neoclassical theism. This is not to say every social trinitarian needs to affirm such a model of God; only the one who would affirm the DERO. Social trinitarians who do not affirm the DERO are free to affirm any version of neoclassical theism that—at minimum—dispenses with the DDS, open theism, panentheism, pantheism, or even process theism. However, since ST is not compatible with the DDS, no social trinitarian may affirm classical theism.[30]

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