

## SAGGIO

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**Ten Strategies for the Trinity: God as Transcendental Multiplicity and *Ipsa Relationalitas***1. *A few preliminary remarks*

In the contemporary debate about the Trinity, one of the points of discussion regards the doctrine's logical consistency. It is not my intention, however, to retrace here the salient points and studies of this debate (for several such overviews, see Morris, 1991, chap. 9; Inwagen, 1998; McCall & Rea, 2009; Damonte, 2009; McCall, 2010; Tuggy, 2003, 2016; Bertini, 2015). I recently proposed (Migliorini, 2019a) – after an evaluation of that debate – to consider the Trinitarian doctrine as contradictory, while also formulating an Argument (which I described as “Kantian-Inspired”) that should still allow us to believe in the Trinity. The Argument runs as follows:

*The Kantian-Inspired Argument*

1. The existence of a Personal God is the best possible explanation for many phenomena. Atheist hypotheses do not hold true, or at least present as many difficulties (contradictions) as the theist ones;
2. If God exists and is One, he *can* and *must* be Multiple = the ‘One-God’ hypothesis is also aporetic;
3. By virtue of 1 and 2, both Unity and Multiplicity must be affirmed in God;
4. In order to affirm God's Uni-Multiplicity, we need the concept of ‘relation’;
5. By virtue of 2 and 4, we must hypothesize a Relational God;
6. Our language about God is apophatic: there is no rational description of the One-Many-Relational God;
7. Every metaphysics is partially apophatic (aporetic);
8. Every ontology is partially apophatic (aporetic) and postulates forms of *relationes subsistentes* (where substance and relation are equally primordial);
9. By virtue of 6, 7 and 8, shall we conclude that God does not exist? No. According to 1, 7 and 8, the existence of God's Uni-Multiplicity (the Triune God) is an option among others. This option is equally reasonable, or at least as reasonable as a philosophical hypothesis can be in philosophy and theology;
10. Conclusion: a ‘path of reason’ and ‘a leap of faith’ allow us to accept the Trinity as a plausible and reasonable hypothesis apophatically describing the nature of the divine.

In the article where the Argument was formulated for the first time, I did not provide a justification of points 2 to 4. This is what I would like to do here. Why are these points important? As I stated in that article, we can adopt the Trinity as a sound belief *if there are not alternatives* (or if the doctrine is as unreasonable as other theistic or atheistic hypotheses). We must therefore show that every theist system faces the problem of justifying the passage from the One of the Principle (whatever that Principle is) to the Many of the world: in other words, the problem of avoiding monism, theological determinism, pantheism, etc. These problems prompt us to introduce various kinds of ‘mediators’ into the One, that is, to construct veiled forms of Multiplicity (and therefore of Trinity) within it. In the following paragraphs, I will describe ten strategies through which we can show the weaknesses of every form of theism, while postulating that the Trinity is a good solution. This approach follows up on Swinburne's claims about the existence of *a priori* and *a posteriori* proofs for the existence of the Trinity<sup>1</sup> (his proofs are part of the sixth strategy). Clearly, these strategies are not “new”: they have been advocated by many thinkers in the past and in the present. I merely revived them, and brought them together in a kind of cumulative reasoning: the strength of the Kantian Argument arises when these strategies are considered together, showing that the Trinity is a reasonable hypothesis

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<sup>1</sup> See Swinburne, 2013, 2018.

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even though it is contradictory. This may save us from the dangerous temptation of excessive *rationalization* of the Trinitarian dogma<sup>2</sup>.

### I. *The One-Many strategy*

This strategy dates back to Plato's *Parmenides* and Plotinus' *Enneads*. It follows from the premise that, given the existence of the Many in the world and the existence of the One, we can pass from the unity of God to the plurality of creation only if God encompasses a kind of original plurality (Massie, 2008). Indeed, a wholly transcendent One could neither emanate from nor have any real relations with its creation. The dialectics of the One-Many found in Platonic and Neoplatonic thinkers therefore arises from the need to include into the One-Being-Good (depending on the systems) that moment in which it "splits" and generates an Intelligence that is in turn capable of ensuring the existence of multiplicity. In *Parmenides*, for example, we find a split between One and Being, to which a triadic structure is added, composed of the 'One in Itself', the 'One-Being', the 'One-Good' (we could also add the 'Soul of the World', where *identical*, *different* and *mixed* are united in the 'One-Good', and the Demiurge; Li Volsi, 2009). In Porphyry's thought, instead, we find a unified Being-One that 'generates' the Demiurge-Intelligence (Santi, 2009, § 3). If the Principle is Being and Thought, "multiplicity" in the One is conceived by any authors as Intelligence or Ideas. A similar development can be found in the *Enneads*.

Trinitarian speculation takes on this challenge, but within a creationist framework: the "break" between the One-Simple-Transcendent and the Multiplicity of the world takes place by means of a *free volitional act* that allows the One to preserve his identity as Simple while generating something different from Him. In this "something", however, God is fully present. The creationist doctrine is known to be internally apophatic on this point: the creative act should be *eternal* and *free*, while following from an *infallible* and *immutable will*, and yet it should manifest its effects over time, in such a way that the world is not a necessary development of the One (and therefore not the One itself). Let us try to better understand this model and attempt to resolve this aporia. Aquinas maintains that the world is caused by God, but he admits that it can be 'eternally caused': in order to maintain the concept of 'creation', what matters is the *dependence* of a worldly entity from its principle (Molinaro, 1990, 612). 'Eternally created' is not a contradictory expression, provided that we can show that creation does not imply a chronological beginning. Creation begins in a 'moment' that is prior to the creation of time, and therefore the world has a logical beginning, but not a chronological one. Acting in eternity, God acts by instantaneous causality, and therefore His action does not temporally precede the caused object, nor is there any contradiction in denying such chronological anteriority. When the cause is God, there is no contradiction in saying that the cause does not temporally precede the effect, nor that the effect does not follow the cause: since God is timeless, cause and effect are chronologically simultaneous, even though they are not logically so. Clearly, the structure that sustains such reasoning is analogical (*ib.*, 616), because a cause that has no chronological anteriority (such as the Supreme Cause) is a cause only by analogy: inferior (worldly)<sup>3</sup> and superior (divine) causalities share only logical anteriority (the order of explanation), not the chronological one (*ib.*, 616).

The thomistic model can conceive of eternal creation. What matters is that such creation be *dependent*, i.e. not self-subsistent. Since such *dependency* does not imply temporality, an eternal

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<sup>2</sup> *Rationalization* here means the attempt of interpreting the Trinity in rational terms. The possibility of rationalizing the Trinity is an ancient topic. See for example Dixon's "nice and hot disputes" (Dixon, 2003; Antognazza, 2007; Lehner, 2011); see also Welch (1953) and Migliorini (2019b).

<sup>3</sup> Worldly causation is only one of the many possible forms of causation (Molinaro, 1990, 617).

world would still be a world that has been created<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, we can prove neither the beginning of the world at a given time, nor the eternity of the universe (which is Aquinas' position: see North, 1987, 245-247). What is essential in order to avoid total immanentism is that God should create *by His will and (therefore) freely*. It is not essential 'when' he did so. Indeed, the substance of the world must be different from the substance of God, and therefore it cannot be necessary. Since God cannot be forced to want His creatures, the existence of these creatures can only follow from a free act of the divine will. Such an act of will preserves the logical order of explanation, and therefore the concept of divine causation. Likewise, it is not contradictory to think that God acts by will but the effects of His action have it 'always been there'. If the act of will is timeless, the multiplicity of creatures immediately follows (in timelessness). Nor is it contradictory that God should want something whose effects are given at a certain moment, if by 'moment' we mean a non-temporal dimension. «Creation is a free act of the divine will and not a necessary process. So, the Creator can want creatures to his liking: as existing *ab aeterno* or beginning "in a time". [...] Our reason is not able to penetrate His will and, therefore, that the world has begun over time remains an article of faith» (Brugiatelli, 2001, 254).

As mentioned above, in this case words are used by analogy: the world cannot not-exist, if it is an act eternally thought and desired by the immutable God, and therefore the world does not depend on anything; yet, there is an 'eternity' (timeless) of God that 'precedes', is 'more extended than' (and has logical precedence over) the 'eternity of the world' (which is also timeless); this means that God has 'logical (and causal) precedence' but not a 'chronological' one over the world: the creation of the world is 'eternal' in the sense that it is outside of time, since time begins with the world itself<sup>5</sup>. However, the creation is 'eternal' but not in the sense that its existence is conceptually coincident with the existence of God. In the timelessness of God there is no a temporal 'before' or 'after', and therefore the world is as eternal as God; but it is not 'as eternal as God' since the divine encompasses an order of explanation, a causal order (His will comes conceptually *after* His nature or Intellect), and an existential order. This implies that God can exist without the world, but the world cannot exist without God. These problematic *distinctions* between two 'logical moments of God', that is, His nature-existence and His will, allow us to justify the *distinction* between two means of 'eternal', one *independent* (God) and one *dependent* (the world), and the distinction of the quality of their substance (one immutable, the other in becoming; one necessary, the other contingent).

In the model, the world is *multiple, dependent on and other than* God – the three indispensable requisites for the notion of 'creation' – because it proceeds from the (free) will of God, that is, from a logically subsequent moment in God himself. In some respects, however, that very same world could be called 'eternal'. The non-coincidence (or "break") between God and the world is guaranteed by the 'logical' (and not 'chronological') precedence of God over the world and 'logical precedence' of His nature over His will. Thus, the One would be endowed with an intellect and a will that 'previously' (in the logical order of explanation) and 'freely' act in order to create, but do so eternally. The decision to create 'precedes' the creative act and the creation itself, but not in chronological terms: these three 'moments' occur simultaneously from the point of view of chronological succession, and in a timeless eternity (where there is only logical succession). Only in this sense is the world as 'eternal' as God (but dependent on and logically subsequent to Him), even if its eternity is not the same as the eternity of God. Nevertheless, it is clear that this 'logical precedence' must at least correspond to the divine faculties, which must therefore present *a degree of distinction* in the One, among them and with respect to His nature. If God's Simplicity implied the absence of a real distinction between nature, Intellect and Will, the world would not be contingent.

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<sup>4</sup> See *STh.* I, q. 46, a. 2. About this paragraph, see Tanzella-Nitti, 2002. This is why a non-ingenuous creationist model can be adapted to any physical theory on the origins of the universe, including those derived from quantum physics (Isham, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> *STh.* I, q. 46, a. 3.

The crucial point is precisely the possibility to distinguish, within God, the actions that proceed from His nature and those that proceed (in a logical sense) from His will. God being immutable, He can only want for His creatures to exist, which is where difficulties arise. If the world is eternal and if everything that takes place in it is eternally desired, the world becomes as necessary as God himself<sup>6</sup>. The association of ‘eternity’ and ‘inevitable divine will’ makes this ‘eternal world’ quite similar to the one emerging from the Neoplatonic emanative model. The reference to the free will of God, introduced by analogy with the personal will of human, is therefore decisive in certain respects (thanks to Scotus’ notion of ‘instants of nature’, according to which there are logical but no temporal sequences in God). However, this notion also raises new complications and aporias, including those pertaining to timeless causality (Wierenga, 2006, 180). The divine will, in order to be divine, must adopt all the characteristics of necessity. Even when assuming that the world is neither eternal nor necessary (thereby transferring the created Many outside of the One), we still generate a ‘real distinction’ in the One (between intellect and will) and, therefore, a kind of Multiplicity.

In either case, the One is postulated by phenomenological reduction: in order to exist, God must be Simple, lest it cease to be the foundation of reality (Micheletti, 2018). This truth must then be harmonized with the existence of creation: by *analogy*, we can assert that the One creates without becoming multiple. And yet, His Simplicity (which admits different interpretations)<sup>7</sup>, excludes composition and division, but no *real distinction*<sup>8</sup>. Whether the distinction between intellect and will is *real* or *formal* depends on the premises that we adopt as theologians. But in either case, we end up with aporias (we cannot say that the distinction is *real*, but we also cannot say that it is only *formal*). These concepts, however elusive, allow us to incorporate into the divine a kind of Multiplicity that is in agreement with its Simplicity. Such an agreement, however, is ensured by *analogy*, that is, on the notion that we have a *confused* but *legitimate* concept of this distinction<sup>9</sup>.

Moreover, when assuming that the Many are created outside of the One, we must define how the One is present in the Many. In the Thomist creationist doctrine, the distinction between being the *origin* of the whole, being *in* everything, and *being everything* is possible thanks to the analogy according to which there is an ontological difference between the being of entities (essence and existence) and the being of the One (pure act of being), and this ontological difference can justify the presence of such a pure act in the entities as their act of existence, without entirely replacing their creatural essence. This is the doctrine of *participation* masterfully analysed by Fabro (1960). The consistency of this doctrine, however, has often been questioned. According to Berti (2017), for example, in order to avoid monism we cannot affirm that «being, or the act of being, is analogous, because the only difference that is admitted within it is the fact that the being of God is ‘primary’, that is to say ‘essential’, while that of creatures is ‘participated’, that is to say ‘not essential’. But the difference between primary and participated is not a real difference of meaning, inasmuch as the being in which creatures would participate, or would be participated, is the very being of God [...]. In this way the concept of participation does not faithfully translate the notion of creation, and it results, despite of the intention of its supporters, in being the exact negation of that notion» (*ib.*, 101). According to Berti, it is impossible to solve the problem of how there can be entities distinct from the One Being, and therefore not unified in the One (in a monist sense) (*ib.*, 142).

*Analogy* is “the name of *participation*” (Fabro, 1960) and it presents several difficulties. The problem with analogy is that it always remains ‘suspended’. Is an entity’s act of being any different

<sup>6</sup> See Migliorini, 2016a, 2016b.

<sup>7</sup> The current debate about simplicity (see Vallicella, 2018) is quite similar to that occurred in the Late Middle Ages (see Friedman, 2010). According to Hasker (2013, chap. 8) and Hughes (1989; 2009), we must abandon a strong notion of simplicity. Dolezal (2014), on the contrary, believes that is possible to reconcile simplicity with Trinity (see also White, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> The distinction between God and his Word, between the Will and the Intellect, is slightly *more real* than the distinction – for example – between divine attributes. And *must* be *real*, not only formal. See Thom (2012, 99).

<sup>9</sup> See D. Migliorini, *Trinity and Mystery. Three Classical Models: Aquinas, Leibniz, Hegel*, forthcoming.

from the act of being of God? If so, what unifies the entity with its act? Do we need an intermediate entity? Or is God's act of being simply inherent in the act of being of creatures? If creatures possess God's act, what is left of the ontological difference between the creature and the Creator? It seems that, having reached this level of metaphysical speculation, the only thing left to be done is to call the unknown – the way God and the creature are distinct – with a word that “names” it: participation, First Cause or analogy. The explanatory regress is blocked by phenomenological reduction, which stops the questioning when a thinker believes that he has identified the first principles, whose foundation cannot be further explored. Again, however, a hypothetical monist could object that we are calling ‘participation’ what is simply an unexplainable contradiction.

The status of the omnipresence of God in the created entities, therefore, is ambiguous (see Wierenga, 2017). The One *is* and *is not* the many that He created, depending on what we mean by participation and analogy. As noted by many, this implies that even the most classical theism presents elements of panentheism (Brüntrup, 2017). Between God and the world there is a subtle distinction that is based on the creative act (intellectual and volitional) – i.e., once again, on a logical precedence that is not a chronological one – and on an ontological difference. But the consistency of the discourse is guaranteed only by the distinctions that have been proposed, each of which can be considered doubtful. Thus, the creationist model, just like the emanative one, must ‘interrupt’ the continuity between a Transcendent One and the Many of the world through some kind of *transcendental multiplicity*. The ‘interruption’ can be due either to the Intellect and Will of God, or to two kinds of act (*pure act of being* and the *created act of existence*). The latter is still God, but in a different ontological form).

Gunton (1993) underlines the importance of the notion of ‘God’s Will’ in order to defend the particularity and contingency of entities from monistic drifts, precisely because this notion makes it possible to affirm the notion of ‘creation’. The Trinity is also central in Gunton’s system, because the trinitarian model is based on *transcendental relations* and *transcendental plurality*, both of which are achieved through a trinitarian analogy of being (*ib.*, 141). If the analogy of being defines the entity’s degree of proportional participation in the act of being, this act of being may have its own degree of multiplicity, analogous but not identical to the multiplicity of the substances found in the world. The same reasoning applies to relationality. The Trinity must be considered, according to Gunton, as the first *Idea* from which all the other ideas evolve (*ib.*, 144). Trinity is not a transcendental: it is an *Idea*, a way of saying how God exists. Following Coleridge, Gunton (1991) believes that the Trinity is the *transcendental of the transcendentals*, which serves as the *Idea Idearum* that regulates all the other truths. The Trinity generates transcendentals, i.e. ways of looking at things. It must be kept – without simplifying it<sup>10</sup> (Hegel proposed this simplification, in the modalist sense: Gunton, 1993, 149) – as a model of distinction and unity. Otherwise, Gunton claims, the Parmenidian outcome cannot be avoided, not even in the Trinity. Gunton also proposes to treat the concept of perichoresis as transcendental, meaning by it the relation of the divine persons. Reality is a dynamics of relations, a dynamics similar to the Divine Persons, even if we must recognize that perichoresis is different in our world because we are spatially and temporally divided. Nonetheless, by analysing our knowledge of quantum physics, Gunton argues that today’s worldview looks just like a web of relations (*ib.*, 172).

Thus, Trinitarian speculation provides a model in which the objects, although separate, are in a perichoretic relation with one other (*ib.*, 179). How is that so? Gunton believes that the universe is

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<sup>10</sup> «In God we can neither derive the plurality of persons from the unity of the divine essence nor Interpret the unity of the divine essence as the sum of the being of the three persons. Unity and plurality are eternally co-equal in that the same relations which constitute the three persons in their personal particularity also constitute their unity as personal communion. Neither the One nor the Many has priority over the other in three divine persons in communion. This is one of the reasons why Christian trinitarian theology always came close to collapse when it attempted to explicate trinitarian belief in the pluralist conceptual framework of Platonism or in the monist conceptual framework of Aristotelianism or Neo-Platonism» (Schwöbel, 1998, 324).

held together by God. The fundamental concept is that of the ‘Spirit’ (*ib.*, chap. 7), because it ‘unites all things’ and crosses their boundaries while preserving their particularity: according to Gunton, from a Trinitarian perspective, substance and relations are one, and absolute relationality is not possible (*ib.*, 194). The Spirit makes perichoresis possible among the things of the world, and thus the transcendental of the perichoretic unity indicates a union without eliminating the distinction. In my opinion, this notion is hardly new: such an understanding of the Spirit is not very different from the Neoplatonic ‘Soul of the world’ or from thomistic ‘participation’. Gunton does not think that everything is Spirit (that would be a form of Hegelianism or Stoicism, where the Spirit is the matter of reality), but he believes that the Spirit is also a transcendental. If this were the case, however, this view would bring nothing new with respect to classical theism. Relations, perichoresis and Spirit are all ways of expressing the transcendental One, but they are simply the God present in the entities through first causality and participation.

It is also essential to address the following concern (we will see this point in par. X): when we multiply the transcendentals, we risk generating contradictions among them (with Kantian undertones, Gunton calls the Trinity a *regulatory idea*). We must therefore interpret them apophatically (although transcendentals seem to be necessarily and univocally predicates of the world and of God), or accept the idea that some of them are dipolar (such as the One-Many, One-Triune, Substance-Relation transcendentals): «If God is caught in the perennial dipolarity of One and Many, as the One opposed to the Many, he cannot claim real independence [...]. He is defined by reference to another principle than himself, is included together with the plural world in a broader totality – he is correlative » (Blocher, 1996, 119).

The strategy outlined above is based on emanatist and creationist hypotheses. It underlies the postulation of a Principle and a Beginning in which Unity and Multiplicity must in some way coexist as transcendentals in order to be able to account for the multiplicity of the world (in its unity). This strategy, however, should also be applicable to Spinoza’s pantheistic monism, but we cannot address this challenge here. Let us just mention that even Spinoza’s monist substance allows for forms of plurality (attributes and modes).

## II. The “Self-Thinking-Thought” strategy: self-knowledge

This strategy is quite similar to the *Verbum Mentis* analogy in all its variants throughout the history of Western thought. It is based on the idea that the distinction in the Principle occurs by virtue of the fact that it has a sentient and spiritual nature and therefore some form of self-knowledge that carries a kind of real distinction. The strategy could work, but with several clarifications: the Word that proceeds from the Intellect is God himself, not an object outside of him (just like knowledge of the human intellect is an intellect in potentiality that passes into actuality): God thinks through Himself. However, since we can speak of the Word, we can place a real distinction in the “unspeakable” nature of the analogy. In God, the act of being (realised essence) and the act of the intellect (known essence) coincide. When God knows Himself, He “produces” Himself: if there is (real) intellection in God, there is also (real) distinction, and then a procession (the same process happens for the Will). The Franciscan school occasionally resorts to the same kind of reasoning. Gray (1993) believes that Bonaventure provides a kind of ‘proof’ of the Trinity through this analogy. Naturally, the relative strength or weakness of such a strategy depends on the extent to which we consider the reality of the distinction between the faculties in God. And, conversely, on the extent to which we consider the faculties of the human soul and their product (the intellect and the thought, for instance) as distinct<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> In Leibniz, for example, if the mind exists, there must be a real *discrimen* between the person who thinks, the thought itself and the act of thought; therefore, in God there must be some kind of plurality, due to the existence of *distincta* that

This strategy could be strengthened by attributing to God the notion of self-awareness. Human self-awareness presents a few characteristics: in order to be self-aware, humans must to some extent be able to observe themselves from the outside. The soul, in order to be self-aware, must go beyond itself and then return to itself. If God too is capable of some kind of self-awareness (at least by analogy), we can imagine (again by analogy) that in order to be aware of Himself, God too must “self-duplicate”. The ensuing Other, however, would still be God, and this would allow us to think about eternal generation. In some respects, this idea overcomes the Aristotelian objections to the *Verbum mentis* analogy (a Thought that thinks Itself does not need to “split”). Catterson (2015) brought this insight even further by showing that, in order to be omniscient, God must have ‘first-person and ‘second-person experiences’ that can never be reduced to each another.

### III. *The strategy of “the Beginning”, or “Heideggerian strategy”: self-giving*

This strategy also starts from the assumption that there is a world: if the Being is the condition of possibility for the existence of the world, Being must have generated the world. If He has given the world, the essential structure of God is a creative-giving one. Let us examine Cacciari’s Heideggerian<sup>12</sup> and Schellingian considerations about (1996), where the world appears as a ‘fact’ and a ‘gift’ offered to reason (see also Ambu, 2008, 18). By recognizing the given as a gift, we go back to the Beginning which is an act of giving.

The One and the Many «always await reconciliation» (Cacciari, 1996, 16). The theological aspect of the Beginning, still according to Cacciari, is characterized right from the start as Trinitarian. The world was made by the Father through the Son and the Spirit, an idea that evokes the correspondence between the eternal process of divine life and the chronological process of creation. In this interpretation, Cacciari says, Divine Persons’ processions are the reason for the production of creatures. The fact that the Father creates through the universal mediation of the Son means that the world is produced out of nothing as an object of love, as a contingent thing placed in the necessary otherness of what is generated. The process of eternal love is the transcendental condition of possibility for the existence of the creature as ‘other’. The becoming of creatures analogically participates in the becoming of God in Himself. The distinction between the Generative and the Generated allows for the communion between Creator and creation in their infinite otherness.

The Word is the divine expression of the *overflow of the Loving-God*. The divine action in the creation (*Opus Trinitatis ad extra*), according to Cacciari, is therefore to be understood as an index of the creatureliness of the world, of its being in God, in the heart of Trinitarian relations, as a contingent and finite expression of the infinite and necessary procession of the Son<sup>13</sup>. As will be noted, here too – with less scholastic terminology – the argument develops from the distinction between the Intellect and the Will, from which occur the procession of the Divine Persons, and comes to creation as a datum from which the phenomenological reduction is triggered.

According to Cacciari, the trinitarian analysis of the act of creation that took place in Christian culture is absolutely original: the act of creation is placed within the intra-trinitarian communication and its eternal dynamism; while processions are necessary, however, the act of creation is free. Cacciari concludes that only the trinitarian scandal can introduce the Multiple into the One, without division or separation, as it allows us to think of the One as Triune (this argument can also be applied to the first strategy): only the Trinity can give consistency to the world as ‘other’ than God without treating it as separate from or opposed to God; as a consequence, only the Trinity provides reasons for a becoming that is neither appearance, but the full life of the created being in its coming from God

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correspond to the divine persons (Powell, 2001, 28). The mind that thinks itself and has self-awareness brings out the distinction of the Self from the Self (*ib.*, 30).

<sup>12</sup> For a “Heideggerian” reading of the Trinitarian mystery: Coda, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> See Cacciari, 1996, 16-28.

and in its return to God: not outside, but inside the womb of eternal divine becoming (*ib.*, 27). The Trinity is presented as the mystery of the world, as its ultimate and original depth.

The Trinitarian God makes room in Himself for his creatures, self-limiting Himself in the divine *tzim-tzum* (*ib.*, 68-69)<sup>14</sup>. The Father makes room for the Son, in whose infinite receptivity the eternal condition for the possibility of existence of every creature is placed. The intra-divine foundation of the doctrine of self-limitation of the Eternal is made possible by Trinitarian monotheism. The world can exist in God, into the transcendent “space” opened by intra-divine relations. Like a wound in the skin allows the blood to come out – to use a metaphor – so the distinction in God is the “gap” from which the world emerges. The multiplicity of the world comes out of the transcendental wound of Transcendental Multiplicity, in the eternal flow of self-distinction.

#### IV. *Idealist strategy: self-distinction*

This Hegelian-inspired strategy has been used, to various extents, by a number of theologians in the past century. To understand it, we need to consider a few intuitions of Hegel (or at least derived from his thought), leaving aside those that have been associated with his failed ‘great promise’ (Coda, 1987, quoting Barth; Schlitt, 2016, 124), or simply with his rationalistic or pantheistic drifts. It is worth keeping in mind that atheists, pantheists and theists provide different interpretations of Hegel’s thought: it is almost impossible to present his thought without misunderstanding; the reconstruction of Powell (2001), on which I rely, is based on Hodgson, Jaeshke and Schlitt<sup>15</sup>. Other interpreters claim that Hegel never really talked about the Trinity – or that his thought is even entirely incompatible with it (Mura, 2009) – but we will try to gather the insights that seem fruitful to us.

Hegel uses the idea of revelation: God reveals himself, because he is Spirit. In Hegel’s system, the universal denies itself and becomes particular (the natural world). According to Cacciari (1996), the Hegelian conception of the self-distinction and self-identification dialectical process of the Subject – if God is Spirit he must know himself, and to know himself he must be the object of himself – treats revelation as a *necessary and indispensable moment* of divine life and of its relations with the world. Transcendence is melted in the all-encompassing unity of the process of the Spirit: there is no more room for God’s freedom, for the possibility of surprise and openness to a possible novelty. This criticism is opportune, and Hegel’s argumentation must be corrected here, for example by considering the intra-Trinitarian distinction as a given and not as a moment. This is what we will do in par. X through the notion of ‘transcendental multiplicity’. Nevertheless, according to Hegel, the World clearly does not correspond to the Son, since his system involves two moments of particularization: an intra-Trinitarian and an extra-Trinitarian one; the individualization is carried out by the Spirit only in a second time. The moment of particularization and negation is denied and assimilated into universal self-consciousness. The Spirit is the moment when God overcomes abstraction and his own actualization in the particular<sup>16</sup>.

Trinitarian speculation accepts this necessity but, by transferring it in the Trinitarian self-revelation, it avoids affirming the necessity of creation (see Hedley, 1996). As we shall see below, *transcendental multiplicity* is what allows us to say that God is a kind of multiplicity even if He does not *become* the multiplicity of the world (or at least, not entirely).

#### V. *“Effusive” strategy: self-communication and self-disclosure*

This strategy is based on a process of self-differentiation, following Fichte (O’Regan, 2011), Hegel and Schelling’s idealist lines, all of which describe the process of self-theogony, where “the

<sup>14</sup> The idea of ‘limitation’ is also found in Whitehead (1929).

<sup>15</sup> See also Splett (1993).

<sup>16</sup> See Powell, 2011, 104-141.



history” of this ontological dynamics “in the history” has a primary role (clearly reminiscent of Joachim). In Schelling, self-revelation – which has modalist, subordinationist and Sabellian outcomes – is somehow ‘free’ and justified by the fact that God would be ‘less divine’ if he failed to manifest his divine generosity. Obviously, we are not far from the self-diffusion model supported by Cambridge Platonists and by Neoplatonic thought in general (Taliaferro, 2003; see *Enneads* V.2.1). I define this strategy as “effusive” (to avoid calling it “emanative”).

In theology, this model has influenced Rahner, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel. Mariani (2009) points out how Rahner has shown that Western thought was marked by a ‘misunderstanding of monotheism’, since God was not thought as self-communication. Focusing on the fact that God has communicated himself (by creating the world), on the contrary, allows us to rethink His nature. In Rahner’s opinion, other monotheisms find it difficult to explain this communication without resorting to the Trinity. As seen in par. I, the philosophers who privilege the One with respect to the Triune (theism of the One, emanatism, panentheism, participationism...) do not avoid the aporia when they try to explain that God is the creator. Rahner claims that God must mediate himself through himself, otherwise he would remain ultimately “distant” and a non-Creator (Mariani, 2009).

Similarly, in Jüngel’s account (1986), revelation is a ‘repetition’ of God, a revelation that is accomplished: God has been repeated and only in this way do we know the being of God in his differentiation. The object of the Trinitarian doctrine is the interpretation of God’s self-interpretation or self-differentiation. First as Creator, then as Incarnate, God takes form (an image) in his revelation. The revelation tells us that it is peculiar to God to distinguish himself from himself, but that the God who can reveal himself does not necessarily do so: God’s self-revelation remains an act of sovereign divine freedom; but he must reveal himself, since he has done so. The Trinitarian dogma, then, is the adequate expression of God’s being and makes sure that the revelation is not extraneous to the essence of God. God is therefore a being distinct in himself and mutually related. He is a *pure event*, in the mutual donation of the three ‘ways of being’. God is an active subject, a free event, a free act, a being who has the freedom of decision. *The very being of God is his own creative decision*. This conclusion can be problematic from the standpoint of classical metaphysics (classical theism, in particular, maintains a distinction between the action of God and his nature, thanks precisely to the distinction between Intellect and Will and to the ‘logical precedence’ of thought-nature over action-will), but it is inevitable: the being of God has its ontological place in the free Trinitarian and creative becoming.

God, of course, is self-subsistent. But His self-subsistence is self-movement and, as such, God’s being makes Revelation possible. As a self-interpretation of God, Revelation is an expression of this self-movement of God’s being. This means, in other words, that in God, the distinction between being and acting is formal, but not real. If there is no real distinction, the being of God is a mystery that ‘is said’ and ‘revealed’ in the Logos. The fact that God revealed Himself tells us that God’s being is a relational, or rather a doubly relational being: God can enter into relations with the world (*ad extra*) because the being of God (*ad intra*) is a Being in relation with Himself.

## VI. The “love” strategy

This strategy starts from the observation that love is achieved in the world through the communion of persons, and then, if God is love, by analogy it must be an I-You and only-one-thing (We), it must be one and triune (Ratzinger, 2006, 36). This is in order to avoid, as pointed out by Coffey (1999) and Morris (1991, 184), that a solitary love should become a selfish love. In order to make sense and to be somehow analogous to human love, divine love must follow the dynamics of reciprocity. In a sense, the Father’s self-love generates the Son, and this leads to mutual love<sup>17</sup>, i.e. the Spirit. All these insights can already be found in Hegel and in the idealist thinkers (see Schults, 2012; Bubbio, 2014; Mancinelli, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> *Duo amantes sed una amatio* (see Coffey, 1999).

A related argument is the one developed by the Russian thinker Bulgakov (see Papanikolaou, 2011), who formulated a kind of “deduction” of the Trinity. In Bulgakov’s sophiology, *Sophia* (the Son) is the result of intra-Trinitarian kenosis, an event of self-giving and love. The kenosis is a prelude to incarnation and the kenosis of the Cross. God is love, and he can only be this gift of the Self (Father) to Himself (Son). In Bulgakov’s thought, *Sophia* is simultaneously a hypostasis and the very *ousia* of God (hence it is not a fourth entity). Authors such as LaCugna, Moltmann, Küng, Zizioulas, and Greshake argue for a strategy of love similar to the one outlined here.

Of course, this “love strategy” has its roots in the thought of Augustine, Aquinas and Richard of Saint Victor. The last thinker, together with Gregory of Nyssa, is the privileged reference of Social Trinitarianists such as Swinburne, who use the argument of the Lover-Beloved-Love (in its various forms) as an “*a posteriori* proof” of the Trinity, and thereby prove that there are “no more than three” divine persons. Criticized by Leftow (1999, 241), the argumentation allows us to say that, from a philosophical point of view, God includes at least three Persons. One can debate whether these three persons are apophatically infinite in number, and yet it seems that the principle of multiplicity is nevertheless guaranteed.

Swinburne not only defends the reasonableness of the dogma, but argues that the Trinity can be the speculative result of a rational inquiry: we should not distinguish between dogmas of faith and dogmas that are based on natural reason (Swinburne, 2007, 237). According to Swinburne (2018), God, being omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good, is bound to perform the best possible action in every situation, when there is a “best”. If God wanted generate a being equivalent to Him but could not do so, He would be weak; and if He would not want to do so, He would be envious. Therefore, a supremely good God who also is love should perform the best possible action, i.e. generate another God. This is the only action that would fit the nature of God. Any other action leading to a fourth or fifth hypostasis would be the fruit of his Will, and therefore not necessary. It is therefore possible, *a priori*, to establish that God must generate, and that the needed number of things generated is two (Son and Spirit).

## VII. *The strategy of Being-Love-Person*

Clarke (1993) lays out a convincing version of this strategy. He believes that every substance is communicative (today we would say “dispositional”). Every being is an active entity in two senses: it is actively what it is (Kosman, 2013) and, precisely for this reason, it manifests itself by influencing the other entities. Every being is other-oriented: its ‘being-that-thing’ determines an action directed at other entities. This correlativity between entities creates a kind of relational network of ontological dependence or reciprocal influence, similar to the *power structuralist* view (see Marmodoro, 2017). According to Clarke, relationality and substantiality are inseparable ways of reality. Every substance exists and is known for the operation that it is called to perform. Thus, ‘to fully be’ is to be ‘substance-in-relations’. Substantiality and relationality for Clarke are *equally primordial* and necessary dimensions of being. This view is considerably distant from Locke and Hume’s idea of powerless or separate substances. Clarke’s solution to the aporia of the concept of substance is not to reject it (as Bergson or Whitehead do) but to understand it better.

According to Clarke, if every entity is communicative, there is a maximum form of communicativeness: the human person, characterized in an eminent way by self-presence, self-possession, self-consciousness and self-determination in action. The substance that the person is made of implies a specific kind of communicativeness (*thought, love, freedom*). Thus, a person is a ‘being’ to the ‘highest degree’. This communicativeness determines (and in somehow structural to) the social and communitarian nature of humankind. God, the Supreme Being, must be a Person, as He is the perfection of Being. If being a human person implies communicativeness, God as a Person must be open to the other, first to himself and then to the world. God has in himself an Other to whom he can communicate in his own way: *thought, love, freedom*. In short: if there is ‘being’, there is ekstasticity;

if there are beings, there are persons; God is Being and God is a Person; hence, God is ekstatic (rapt out of Himself), that is, He is endowed with self-possession and openness to the Others (Persons), which implies in his case the generation of an Other in himself; therefore, if there is a world and if there are human persons, God can only be Trinitarian. This reasoning *a posteriori* is convincing. It seems possible to pass from the existence of human persons to the existence of divine persons, who mysteriously become One Person: three communicative Persons in communion.

### VIII. *The strategy of “freedom” and “possibility”*

Like the previous strategies, the “Argument from freedom” also arises from the observation of reality, in which we find free human beings who are able to perform free and good actions. *Via eminentiae*, this “freedom for” (only for the good) is expressed by God’s creative choice: the choice of love and expansion of being. Zizioulas (2012) contends that if God is endowed with creative free will, then this free will coincides with His nature. As a result, freedom is part of the very nature of God. However, if God is free, at least in this compatibilistic sense, he must have been “free” even before creation. That is to say that God must possess this “freedom for” as part of His own eternal nature. By virtue of being free, God is also Triune: his “freedom for” is achieved in the Son, who is an expression of God’s substance. The freedom of God is love understood in an ontological sense rather than in a psychological one: it manifests itself in divine generation. Zizioulas concludes that Trinitarian freedom is the ‘ability to be something else’ while existing in the unity of nature.

Gunton (1991; 1993), instead, argues that we can derive the freedom of intra-trinitarian relations from the “freedom” of the world, understood as physical indeterminism. This argument “from the infinite possibility” shows that the openness of God must be thought of at least in apophatic terms. Indeed, “freedom for” is not sufficient to guarantee the contingency of the world. However, along with indeterminism, Gunton calls for the introduction of the notion that God possesses “freedom of indifference” (“freedom of”). This freedom in God is conceivable to us only through strong apophatism, often expressed by postulating a kind of infinite potentiality in God (reminiscent of Cusanus or Schelling’s *Possess*<sup>18</sup>, or Pareyson’s *ontology of freedom*).

Schelling, for example, interprets the Beginning as the infinite totality of possibilities, therefore as the Primary Potentiality<sup>19</sup>, absolute and infinite potentiality, even logically prior to the distinctions between act and potency (Limone, 2013, 14-16 and 39) and between *posse* and *esse*. It is a kind of *actus purus* which is at the same time *pure potentiality*. The Beginning is therefore *posse* ( $\_A$ ) that immediately transitions into *esse* ( $+A$ ) and has always done so (*ib.*, 18). This transition is precisely the generation of the Son (*ib.*, 20), which eternally proceeds from God as his Beginning. God is  $\pm A$ , denial of  $\_A$  and  $+A$ , that is, the third, the Spirit (*ib.*, 24): indeed, it is beyond negation, and therefore  $\_A$ ,  $+A$ ,  $\pm A$  together (*Possess*). It exists as a pure, supra-substantial act (*ib.*, 31 and 174). The Trinity, which is the communion of the divine persons ( $\_A$ ,  $+A$ ,  $\pm A$ ), emerges as their separation (*ib.*, 43). Only in this pure potentiality ( $\_A$ ) can the otherness of the Trinity, the world (B), exist. In this interpretation of Schelling the Trinitarian mystery can therefore be *deduced* (*ib.*, 53): «The Christian idea of God’s uniqueness is not only the completion [...] of any thought about God but it is the only possible way in which God is authentically thinkable and in which God himself simply is» (*ib.*, 149).

This approach is quite distant from philosophical and theological orthodoxy. First, the Divine Persons seem to be made of different natures, even if God precedes, and is, the three dimensions  $\_A$ ,  $+A$ ,  $\pm A$ , which are the nature of each Person, although they are attributed individually to only one person at a time (Limone, 2013, 175). Second, the language is heavily apophatic. However, a few elements can be retained: we can argue that the *actus purus*, understood in an analogical sense, is also

<sup>18</sup> See Limone, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> The Cusanian *posse* (Monaco, 2010, 89 and 141-144).

*pure potentiality*, i.e. precisely *the activity of being God's own infinite essence*; we can admit that this *pure potentiality* is a way to make room for a form of divine multiplicity; finally, we can conclude that the multiplicity of the world (and the freedom herein contained) arises from this divine multiplicity. The *posse* is understood as 'power', as the infinite capacity to perform infinite actions, a capacity (active potentiality) always in accomplishment. This is, apophatically, the 'place' of the divine "freedom of indifference". Let me repeat that such an argument makes sense only when we recognise that is impossible to distinguish God's nature from God's actions.

Rethinking the infinity of God and His eternity is an ancient theoretical challenge, but this continuous speculative attempt is made necessary by the dilemmas of God's creative act and of the existence of free human beings. By definition, God's 'infinity' embraces all that exists and all that is possible, and overlaps with the concept of perfection. No unit can be added to infinity: the operation ' $\infty + 1 = \infty$ ' is mathematically possible but logically impossible, because the unit, by definition, is already included in infinity, even before being added to it. In order to make this mathematical operation intelligible, we must distinguish the infinity of perfection from transfinity (see Basti, 2012). However, by analogy, this mathematical operation indicates something that is true: whatever we add to infinity, the latter will never cease to be infinite. Infinity is so infinite that it can accommodate anything new. Therefore, can an infinite being (characterized by the infinity of perfection) accommodate something new due to an act (performed thanks to the "freedom of indifference") of the creatures? One possible answer is that if God is Infinite Fullness, we can speak of growth in the sense that God achieves a higher level of being, as in Hartshorne's famous distinction between actuality and existence. None of our free choices, unpredictable for God, even if they are assumed *post factum* in the knowledge of God, can alter His infinity, because He can accept them without impoverishing His perfection (see Viney, 2007). According to O'Donnell, the mutual love among the Divine Persons overflows into endless creativity. This *infinite source of love and freedom* generates every created possibility of freedom (O'Donnell, 1993, 168-169, see O'Donnell, 1998) as well as the kind of indeterminism that is relevant to human free actions (Viney, 2007).

By revisiting a few insights drawn from Pannenberg's work (1990, 446-450), we could say that everything is novelty and freedom in God's infinity. God's *infinity is a transcendental one*, i.e. it is a horizon that welcomes all the other 'kinds of infinities' and yet surpasses them all: it has the capacity for *infinite openness*, rather than pure and simple actuality. In this infinite background, we can imagine that the infinitely infinite incrementals "find space" and become the potentially infinite possible worlds (the infinite series of events). Pannenberg argues that infinity should not be understood as limitlessness, or as that thing that is radically opposed to the finite. Infinity is such only if it simultaneously includes and overcomes its own opposition to the finite. Therefore, infinity is infinite only if includes also the finite. Similarly, God is Infinite precisely because He can contain within Himself the finite contingency of the world, while remaining ontologically distinct from it. The Infinite includes the opposition of the finite, i.e. it includes what is different from it (Pannenberg, 1990, 446-450).

Along with the notion of infinity, Pannenberg invites us to rethink 'eternity' in terms of the unity between Immanent Trinity (IT) and Economic Trinity (ET) (*ib.*, 458). Understood as an eternal act of creative love, infinitely exceeding Himself, IT is the condition of possibility of ET. Eternity is the condition of possibility of time: it is expressed in the process of time, but encompasses and overcomes it. Eternity does not last, because in eternity every infinite series of instants is condensed into an eternal present. However, it is also not timelessness, because the infinite succession is real in the instant. In IT, every Person is perichoretically united to the other Persons while remaining distinct from them; similarly, every moment in God is united to all the others while remaining distinct. Moreover, if in IT (understood also as a loving event of the Three) there is room for novelty and growth, then in eternity there is the possibility of traveling the infinite series in infinite ways, making every novelty and every succession possible. The eternal becoming, here, has nothing to do with the repetition of a circle. The infinite moments, crossed by endless series of instants, can – at least

theoretically – give life to infinite series and infinite combinations of series. God encompasses an infinite succession of an infinite number of states of affairs in an immense instant<sup>20</sup>; and this condition allows for the existence of future possibilities that have not yet been actualised. Taking all this into consideration, together with what has been said about Infinity, underlining for both concepts (eternity and infinity) the ontological difference with respect to the finite, then we can see how, in Infinity, everything is novelty and freedom, according to our shaky categories and words. The infinity of perfection (or the actual infinity) is therefore not the best way to express the infinity of God. Divine Infinity is a dimension of infinity that includes all the others dimensions of infinity, without eliminating them: potential infinity (indeterminate, incremental, and never fully implemented), transfinity (determined and incremental), and actual infinity (determined and non-incremental).

Divine Infinity is a *transcendental infinity*, a capacity for infinite openness, rather than pure and simple actuality. We can imagine that this kind of infinity can accommodate infinite infinite-incrementals, that is, the potentially infinite possible worlds (the infinite series of events). In its radical sense, the category of infinity, added to eternity, leads us to relativize even the definition of God as ‘Pure Act’. Therefore, Aristotle (*Met.* XI, 10, 1066a-1067a) may have been right when he claimed that the actual infinity (the metaphysical One, the metaphysical Infinity, which later, for Christians, will be “God”) does not have an order. The concept of infinity contains everything. Thus, the order (i.e. necessity, reason, intellect, number, eternity...) becomes relative, up to the point to become a ‘freedom of indifference’ in the highest degree. This infinity would be an infinite becoming. But the fact that we lack conceptual tools to describe this infinity does not mean that the latter should not be placed at the basis of reality, if a path of reason forces us to postulate it, albeit apophatically.

This is what we can affirm about infinity and eternity, pushing our expressive capacities to their limits. We do not know how God can inhabit these series and these moments, and at the same time be Simple. We clearly also fail to understand how God can have “free but controlled” will and intellect, if his being consists in an infinity that might even seem chaotic. But in this act of linguistic overcoming we return to the epistemological questions that we have discussed elsewhere<sup>21</sup>, and which seem always decisive. The boundaries of divine attributes are not evident, and we cannot define them in a satisfactory fashion. God is infinite and eternal, but there could be, in Him, a form of temporality and spatiality that is unknown to us and that is not the simple denial of the worldly ones. Therefore, the word ‘eternity’ means much more than ‘timelessness’ or ‘infinite duration’, but evokes a divine condition that is certainly different from human temporality, but is not its complete negation.

Schaab (2007) and Rice (2007) have proposed an evolutionary panentheistic account based on the Trinity, in which the open and indeterministic evolution of the cosmos is part of God, who encompasses the world (the world is *in* God). However, in order to make sense of this claim and to fully acknowledge its metaphysical and epistemic implications, we can adopt the following solution: *an infinitely potential God is a radically apophatic God*, inasmuch as he is a God who governs the order of the world (as required by classical theism) and directs it (as required by process theism) without ever controlling or forcing it (as required by the hypotheses of indeterminacy and infinite possibility)<sup>22</sup>. With respect to the Trinity, we should emphasize that the transition among the three concepts of relationality, dynamism, and novelty is rhetorically effective, but metaphysically weak, as it implies an unjustified leap between different concepts. The relational God (Trinity) is certainly analogically a “dynamic” of love between three persons, but it is an accomplished and closed process (at least in classical theism). God, understood as infinite possibility, is not equivalent to a Trinitarian God. God can be ‘novelty’ and ‘freedom’ – in the sense required by contingent creation – if

<sup>20</sup> This concept recalls that of the “immense instant” (see Pasqualotto, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> See Migliorini, 2019a.

<sup>22</sup> In Russell’s (1997) words: «Rather than saying that God creates order in place of chaos, from a quantum perspective we could say that God creates order by displaying the properties of chaos. In addition, we can now think of God the Creator as immanent in the world such that events which are physically separate are somehow co-present or coherent to God».

understood as *pure act* in the apophatic sense described above. In other words, God is a mysterious synthesis of infinite potentiality, infinite actuality and infinite freedom: His nature, added to his ‘personal’ character, becomes a *transcendental multiplicity* (that is also a *transcendental infinity*). God has two aspects that are infinite, distinct and yet not divided: potentiality and actuality. These two aspects, however, do not correspond to two Divine Persons, because ‘the infinite actuality that is an infinite potentiality’ is the nature of each Divine Person. What we can say is that, if God is *infinite potentiality*, and thus *infinite freedom* (both in a transcendental sense), it is not impossible for Him to be a *transcendental multiplicity*. Having reached such a conclusion, which leads to *infinite multiplicity*, we now must justify why there are *three and only three Persons*.

### IX. *Process Trinitarianism*

The strategies presented so far are all based on classical metaphysics. The next strategy will be based on process metaphysics. Two such examples are the *Process Trinitarianism* of Bracken (see Pugliese, 2011) or Boyd (1992) and the strategy of the *Entangled God* (Wegter-McNelly, 2011; Schaab, 2012), based on a *Relational Ontology* derived from *Relational Quantum Mechanics*). The problem is that it is unclear whether these ontologies are apophatic, namely whether only relations exist in the world. In a nutshell, it seems very difficult to argue that the world is a set of subsistent relations (as proposed, for example, also by the supporters of *ontic structural realism*); and it is possible to claim this only if we are aware of the apophaticity of the process-relational metaphysics (see Mesle, 2008; Seibt, 2015; Weeks, 2004).

In other words, we cannot claim that the Trinity is possible only because the metaphysics that we adopt – process ontology, for example – implies a few notions that are similar to the Trinitarian ones. If a metaphysics is inconsistent in the same way of the Trinitarian doctrine – and it is well known there are big suspicions that process metaphysics are inconsistent (Pugliese, 2011) – then the only thing that we can say is that the Trinity is possible even if it is contradictory, because we do not have a consistent metaphysics (i.e. a metaphysics that solves the problems of relationships or the Many-One problem). I have argued elsewhere (Migliorini, 2018) that we can avoid some of the problems of process metaphysics by adopting a middle-ground metaphysics between a process-based view and a substantivist one. I argued that the notions of *gunk* and *junk* play a central role in the development of such a metaphysics. If we accept this hypothesis, then God should be a Trinity because no entity can be “only” one. Relationality is a transcendental rather than a category (this is what differentiates my ontology from process ontologies), and therefore each entity, taken singularly, is both one *and* multiple, substance *and* relations (and not only relations, as claimed by numerous relationists).

### X. *The transcendentals of Relationality and Multiplicity reconsidered*

The previous discussion highlights that we need to think of God as both relational and multiple in Himself. This is the starting point of *Trinitarian philosophy*<sup>23</sup>. We must acknowledge the speculative necessity of the One and Triune God. God is undeniably ‘one’ and undeniably ‘multiple’ (Meyer, 2006). However, in the previous sections, we repeatedly claimed that God’s multiplicity and relationality must be *transcendental*. What does that mean? A transcendental is an aspect of everything that exists. It is a property that we find analogically in all substances (it ‘transcends’ the ontological categories) and that has four characteristics: (1) it is analogically applied to all the entities; (2) its meaning does include imperfection, since its source is attributed to God; (3) it is evident to human reason; (4) it is distinct, in its meaning, from other transcendental notions (Aguilar, 2009, 210).

<sup>23</sup> See also Migliorini, 2014, 2017.

Western philosophical tradition has always recognized three transcendentals: One, True, and Good<sup>24</sup>. Let us focus on the first: “One” should not be understood in a numerical sense, but as *indivisibility*. Therefore, it is the opposite of multiplicity<sup>25</sup>: each entity, by its very nature, is also one (*ens et unum convertuntur*), i.e. it is endowed with unity, determinacy and identity, and is distinct from other entities (Berti, 2017, 67). If we imagine a gunky world, each entity is one in this sense (Migliorini, 2018): the gunk-junk hypothesis implies that every entity is infinitely multiple but somehow unified in the different levels of reality. Therefore, God should be Trinity because every entity is one only as the unification of an inexhaustible multiplicity. What is more evident, however, is the fact that the universe, as “an entity” opposite to the divine, is intrinsically multiple. The universe is to be understood as a unitary body in the sense that it has – the uniform characteristic that distinguishes it – a materiality that is different from the divine and is organized in separate entities but interconnected by the same divine causality that permeates and supports it. In this sense, the oneness of the universe taken as a whole is made of correlated entities. Based on the degree of unity that we can attribute to this whole, it is legitimate to think that such “one” is, at the same time, one and multiple.

Aquinas seems derive *multiplicitas* as a transcendental from the multitude of the world’s entities (Ventimiglia, 2014). Similarly, starting from the assumption that God is One and Three, one can use the number and the multiplicity as predicates of Him: «Aquinas affirms that the number can be a predicate of God not in a metaphorical sense but in the proper sense, for the reason that it is not linked only to the material multiplicity but to the transcendental multiplicity which, like the number that corresponds to it, can be said of God in the proper sense» (*ib.*, 319). According to Ayres (2014), Augustine, on the contrary, believes that God is ‘beyond the number’, i.e. being the source of the number: his being ‘One’, therefore, eludes human enumeration<sup>26</sup>. Nevertheless, let us adopt Aquinas’ position: God also coincides with the transcendental of being that is multiplicity. God is *multiplicity* and *unity*, in the transcendental meaning of both concepts.

The proposals of Gunton (1991; 1993), Clarke (1993) and Aguilar (2009), along with the notion of *transcendental multiplicity* that we can associate to Leibniz’s idea of harmony<sup>27</sup>, appear to follow the same direction: they all show the necessity to postulate the transcendentals of multiplicity and relationality that are suitable for God. Process Metaphysics shows in its own way how multiplicity and relationality can go together: we cannot imagine the existence of substances without their relations. Substances and relations cannot be separated: the only thing that exists in the world is a structure of *relationes subsistentes* (and their apophatic description). From this we can conclude that the *Ipsium Esse* (the degree of subsistence) is *Ipsa Relationalitas* (the intimate nature of God)<sup>28</sup>.

The recognition that the transcendentals of multiplicity and relationality apply to God could contribute to solving the creationist dilemma (the passage from the ‘transcendent One’ to the ‘created Many’). This strategy was outlined by different authors, from the Greeks to Aquinas, Hegel and Schelling (Cacciari, 1990; Ventimiglia, 1997, 2007, 2014; Coda, 2000). Ventimiglia (2007) suggests this path on the basis of his interpretation of Aquinas’ trinitarian doctrine. Without pretending to be exhaustive, let me illustrate Ventimiglia’s reasoning as a possible model. In his interpretation of Aquinas, we can properly use the numbers (one and three) as predicates of God as long as ‘one’ and ‘three’ are understood as ‘transcendental unity’ and ‘transcendental multiplicity’, distinct from the

<sup>24</sup> The specific positions, however, vary widely: Goris & Aertsen, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> It also contradicts it, but only from a certain perspective: when I say “one” and “two” (that is, not-one), if I mean them as numbers, they are contradictory; if I mean “one” as unification, then it might not be contradictory of “two” (two things can be unified), because I am referring to different categories.

<sup>26</sup> Gregory of Nyssa also relativizes the number (Coakley, 1999, 134).

<sup>27</sup> D. Migliorini, *Trinity and Mystery. Three Classical Models: Aquinas, Leibniz, Hegel*, forthcoming.

<sup>28</sup> About this paragraph, see: Aguilar, 2009, 212-214.

numerical multiplicity and unity<sup>29</sup>. ‘Transcendental multiplicity’ is based on a formal division, i.e. on a distinction that does not involve real division between separate substances. According to Aquinas, Coda also notes,

otherness is diversity (*divisio* is the term he uses for the *esse in quantum esse*, *distinctio* the term he favors for the divine *esse*) not only in the created bodies [...] but also in the being as being [...]. If, therefore, the *divisio* and the *diversum*, which is its manifestation, are internal to the *esse qua talis*, and God is the *Ipsium Esse per se subsistens*, the *divisio* or *distinctio* – against the Platonic ones – are internal to the Being itself that is God (Coda, 2000, par. 3).

If *diversum* and *aliud* are transcendentals of being, where there is a being «there is also, at the same time, unity and distinction, the “one” and, together, the “other”» (Ventimiglia, 1997, 245). The conclusion is that our speculation about God occasionally requires us to abandon the ‘jurisdiction of the law of non-contradiction’ (*ib.*, 350). The decisive point is whether the fact that being is *unum* (or *idem*) and *aliud* (or *diversum*) is contradictory or not (as claimed by Ventimiglia; *ib.*, 348). There is probably no final answer. In any case, we obtain a kind of ‘descending scale’: a Transcendental One which is the unity of a Transcendental Multiplicity, i.e. the *relationes subsistentes*, from which the numerical ‘ones’ descend with their earthly multiplicity (substantial distinction, division of substances)<sup>30</sup>. This avoids splitting the One into the Dyad (as in Platonism) and, at the same time, allows us to justify the creation of worldly multiplicity through the existence of a different ontological multiplicity in the One (Ventimiglia, 2007, 22- 23). It is worth noting that, if the world is *gunky*, multiplicity and relationality are not only in the universe as a whole, but in every single fundamental entity (see Migliorini, 2018)<sup>31</sup>. Divine *relationes subsistentes* correspond to created *relationes subsistentes* (the fundamental entities) and to constantly interrelated substances (every kind of objects).

Let us recapitulate: we recognize that if the Beginning must be the Transcendent One, given an indeterministic world made of multiplicity, then the One must also be multiple and free. Nonetheless, the multiplicity of the One cannot be like the multiplicity of creation. God *is* and *is not* One, *is* and *is not* Multiple in the ordinary senses of the terms. Of course, the two transcendentals seem contradictory between them. However, when reason shows us that a duality must be affirmed – in God and in the fundamental entity –, its denial is not mandatory, even if the duality should remain contradictory. The analogical discourse can, in this case, attenuate the perception of contradiction – as seen above. However, this approach presents several difficulties.

Both the simplicity and the multiplicity of the Principle are intrinsic to all monotheistic systems, and both are indispensable notions, despite their insoluble contradictions. Philosophy must have the courage to “inhabit” this insoluble situation. Hegel had probably grasped the necessity of understanding the Spirit as Universal and Particular (that is, precisely the ‘transcendental multiplicity’): *not a denial of reason, but the acceptance that reason leads there for a lack of alternatives*. God must be One, Multiple, Relational, Personal in the One (Person), Personal in the Multi-Relational (divine persons’ communion), and free. This is the basis of a *Trinitarian philosophy*,

<sup>29</sup> *STh.* I, q. 30, a. 3: the plurality in God is transcendental, not quantitative. *STh.* I, q. 31, a. 2: for God we must avoid the terms diversity and difference (*aliud*), and use the term distinction (*alius*) of the subjects (Father-Son). According to Whitehead (1929, 36), «about a thousand years separate the Athanasian Creed from Pythagoras, and about two thousand four hundred years separate Pythagoras from Hegel. Yet for all these distances in time, the importance of definite number in the constitution of the Divine Nature, and the concept of the real world as exhibiting the evolution of an idea, can both be traced back to the train of thought set going by Pythagoras». After “Divine Nature”, in the Italian translation (by Boringhieri publisher, 2015), we find [Trinity] between squared brackets.

<sup>30</sup> In this sense, transcendentals apply to God and to the world in a different way. See the age-old discussion about whether transcendentals apply to God analogically (Aquinas) or univocally (Scotus), even though they are proper names of God (Goris & Aertsen, 2016, par. 4).

<sup>31</sup> In thomistic metaphysics, we find *distinction without division* (real transcendental relation) between *existence* and *essence*: they are “two things”, but are never fully divided (see Ventimiglia, 1989).



which it is not an attempt to express the Trinity in terms excessively rational (what we have called “rationalization”) because the composition of all these characteristics of God remains entirely unknown to us (and here apophatism comes into play).

## 2. Conclusion

The proposed strategies lead to the conclusion that there must exist in God something similar to what we call ‘real relations’ and ‘multiplicity’; and in order for God to be relational, there must exist in Him some “distincts” that relate to one another. This is postulated by philosophical reasoning, not just by Revelation, and regardless of the choice to support a process metaphysics.

Of course, a more precise assessment of the strategies would require further work. However, as Trinitarian theology contains the mystery of eternal generation, the strategies do account for the fact that in philosophy we contemplate the mystery of eternal self-distinction and of all the other ‘self-actions’ of the One. The eternal generation remains mysterious, but it is the idea that best helps us describe how God is (One and Triune) and how he creates the world. Only after having established that the One *must be* Multiple, can we establish that it must be *Three* (assuming that this next step is philosophically possible): perhaps, if used as a predicate of the divine, the number “three” is somehow relativized, keeping in mind that God is also *infinite multiplicity*. Even with this precaution, the relations between the Three Divine Persons must be connoted as an *agapic relation* and this probably passes through the observation that, in some way, God must be personal (in the One), a communion of persons (in the Three), and therefore that it must be beyond all this (in the apophasis).

If we succeeded in arguing for the ten passages of the Kantian-Inspired Argument, the Trinity becomes inevitable. God *must be* Triune in every theistic system. The One God is, as One, also Triune. The Unity-Trinity of the Principle is the only *apophatic* point that we can reach from many quarters. Once autonomous paths of reason have established that God is a Person and Persons, One-Multiple, Creator (communicated), Free, Relational and Infinite possibility, it therefore emerges that our most reliable hypothesis is that of the Trinitarian God.

The Creator is a mystery of freedom and of communion between Persons ‘really distinct but not divided’ (transcendental multiplicity); He is a mystery of distinction without division between Intellect and Will, between Intellect and Word, and between Will and Love. In other words, He is a mystery of communion between persons. God’s freedom implies that in His nature there is a mysterious ‘part’ of infinite potentiality, which is, at the same time, His infinite ability and His infinite ideas (distinct but not divided). God’s ideas taken together are the only possible Intellect, and His infinite free actions are the only possible Will. Thus, if God is Intellect and Will, from their unitary actions proceed the truly Distincts (Trinitarian Persons) in the One, necessarily in a form of relations which, by apophasis, we may call ‘subsistent relations’. Like the corresponding Persons, the infinite acts of the intellect and the infinite acts of love are distinct but not divided in God.

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