Trinitarian ontology and the division of being: a rosminianan reflection

di John Milbank

Rosmini articulated a Trinitarian ontology for which being, thought and ethical reciprocally contain each other in terms of a 'grammatical' propositionality. Since this order exists even in God it provides a solution to the problem of how being, though not a genus, can be divided. However Rosmini also provided a Scotist solution to this problem in terms of being as an abstract essence. The second solution is inconsistent with the first and should be rejected along with kindred purely phenomenological and semi-ontologist readings. The first, Trinitarian solution itself only works if it is modified in terms of analogy, paradox and a radically neo-Chalecedonian Christology.

Keywords: Ideology - Theosophy - Being - Grammar - Plotinus - Containment - Category - Paradox

1. Introduction

On the 1st July 2001, the decree *Post Obitum* of the 14th December 1887, condemning 40 propositions of the works of the Nineteenth Century Italian priest, Antonio Rosmini, was finally rescinded. Just six years later, under Pope Benedict XVI, he was beatified, on the 18th November 2007. Fast-tracked, one might say, from dubiety if not disgrace, to exaltation and increased future influence. At last, since that date, Catholic philosophers and theologians have felt fully free to reconsider his enormous literary output, and above all his nearly 3,000 page-long posthumous work *Teosofia,* which articulated a fully-fledged Trinitarian metaphysics or ontology, framed in terms of the outworking of reason, yet also in the light of revelation and the operation of faith.[1]

Antonio Rosmini-Serbati was born on the 24th March 1797 at Rovereto in the Trentino region, within what was then the Austrian Tyrol. He is accordingly sometimes known as 'Il Roveretino' in Italian commentaries on his work. By the time he died at the early age of 58 in 1855, he had not only achieved one of the most impressive metaphysical syntheses of the Nineteenth Century, but had also founded a religious order, the Rosminians or the *Societas a caritate nuncupata,* and made significant interventions in both ecclesiastical and political affairs.[2] Much admired by the great unifier of Italy, Giuseppe Mazzini, he was a moderate constitutional liberal who also opposed the Josephinist doctrine which sought to subordinate the Church to state purposes within the Habsburg lands.

Despite his constant public activity, he maintained a saintly life, based on the dual principle that he would focus on his own contemplative self-sanctification, unless called to outer charitable works by a clear sign from God, but that once so

1 - Antonio Rosmini, *Teosofia,* ed. Samuele Francisco Tadini (Milan: Bompiani, 2011); *Theosophy, Volume I: The Problem of Ontology: Being as One,* trans. Denis Cleary and Terence Watson (Durham: Rosmini House, 2007); *Theosophy, Volume II: Trine Being,* ed. Antonio Belsito IC (New York: Rosmini Publications, 2017). The available English translation is only half complete: it breaks off at the end of Section IV of the Third Book, paragraph 1169. Nonetheless, it includes most of the most crucial bits of the work from the point of view of Trinitarian Ontology. References to the work in both the English and the Italian original are to paragraph numbers given in brackets in the body of the text. For an introduction to Rosmini's Trintiarian thought, see Piero Coda and Massimo Donà, 'Antonio Rosmini: La Trinità come Profezia partorita dalle Viscere delle Rivelazione' in *Pensare la Trinità: filosofia europea e orizzonte trinitario* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2013), 70-85; Piero Coda, 'Antonio Rosmini e l'Ontologia Trinitaria. Un Incontro, un'ipotesa interpretativa, tre piste di ricerca', in *Ontologia, fenomenologia e nuovo umanesimo. Rosmini ri-generativo*, ed. Fernando-Bellelli and Emanuele Pili (Rome: Edizioni CNx, 2016), 39-58. My elucidations and ponderings in this essay are indebted to these previous commentaries, to others later cited and in general to ongoing theoretical discussions with David Bentley Hart.

2 - The Rosminians today have their main English college and centre at Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake, just off the Fosse Way in Leicestershire, not far south of where I live.

called he must suspend his own private concerns, whatever the inconvenience. His order was also founded on this basis, which drove him several times into his own social involvements. Eventually, we will see how this tension between the 'containing self' and the self that is unconditionally 'contained' by external demands, is articulated in Rosmini's Trinitarian thought.

As to his thought in general, it was subject to a remarkable number of influences which inspired Rosmini towards shaping something distinctively eclectic and original. He knew ancient philosophy well and made intensive studies of both Augustine and Aquinas, in particular the latter's *De Veritate.* More generally, he had evidently been instructed in currents of neo-scholasticism from Cajetan onwards that freely blended the Thomist and Scotist legacies. This accounts for the sprawlingly complex technicality and redundant detail of Rosmini's *opus,* which, rather like Henry James's later novels, often seems to offer us a nuance too far, amongst otherwise irreplaceably unique insights.

Yet he was additionally steeped in Italian Renaissance literature and acquaintance with the thought of Ficino led him to a crucial awareness of the historical importance of Plotinus. And he was equally familiar with the modern British thought of Locke, Hume and Reid, besides, and more crucially, the elaboration of Lockean insights by the French 'ideologists' like Destutt de Tracy. This empirical dimension was balanced by a considerable commitment to the rationalist legacy of Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz.

All these currents rendered him extremely wary of Kant, and he was familiar with and sympathetic to F.H. Jacobi's metacritical critique of the latter and its extension into a critique also of Hegel. The *Teosofia* is, in part, a long reckoning with Hegel's thought, besides that of Schelling and Fichte. Insofar as Rosmini concludes that the proper response to German idealism (which he regards as being at once perverse and yet of epochal and unavoidable cultural import, 167, 241)[3] is the articulation of a more realist Trinitarian ontology, this book can well be compared with Sergei Bulgakov's *Tragedy of Philosophy.* Indeed, as we shall see, Rosmini's offers something similar to Bulgakov's grammatical paradigm for Trinitarian *vestigia.*[4]

Rosmini's philosophy soon came under suspicion, mainly because it was regarded as too 'ontologist', after Nicolas Malebranche, meaning that he was

3 - In particular, Rosmini says that the German idealists 'proposed the [ontological] problem in the most explicit form', and 'thus obtained a place of honour in the science of knowledge which will never be taken from them' (241). On the nature of the 'ontological problem', see section 3 below.

4 - See John Milbank, 'Foreword' to Sergij Bulgakov, *The Tragedy of Philosophy,* trans. Stephen Churchyard (New York: Angelico, 2020), i-xix.

thought to say that we have direct insight into the divine mind, and that all our thinking literally coincides with part of the thinking of God. I shall ultimately argue that while this charge is clearly false, that nonetheless the more dubious semi-ontologist aspect of Rosmini's thinking is linked to the more Scotistic dimension of his thought, which I shall further argue tends to dilute his Trinitarian ontology. Once this has been rendered more consistent with a more Thomistic account of analogy and participation, Rosmini's full originality and radical promise can more effectively emerge.

2. Ideology and Theosophy

Rosmini's thought was triply divided between ideology, theosophy and ethics, including political theory. As he realised, this roughly corresponds to the ancient stoic division of understanding into logic, physics and ethics, which Augustine, in the *Civitas Dei* (XI.25), as Rosmini was aware, interpreted to be of Trinitarian significance (38, 732-41). In this context, it is important to see how for him the practical dimension is not just secondary or applicatory (as it might be for a certain version of scholasticism), but rather tends to complete his overall metaphysical reflection.

Rosmini's charge against the idealists was that they had failed to begin with logic and epistemology on their own account, as in the British and French traditions (245-63, 312). To this degree then, he seems to require an *a prioristic* preface to metaphysics, imbued with elements of both rationalism and empiricism (25-7). To the possible problems with this assumption, we will return. But his complaint against Hegel was that an over-hasty failure to sufficiently look at the circumstances of our access to reality only via our own ideas ('ideology') leads him into curiously paradoxical errors. Strangely enough, it would seem, Rosmini accused the great Swabian of being too 'sensualist' a thinker (19-20). This is because Hegel denied that anything is, at the outset, unmediated, and nothing, at the outset, is certain even in its own degree and its own proper place. Thus, for him, there is only, to begin with, the flux of sensory impressions, which reflection is supposed to show are nonetheless false. And yet, Rosmini pointed out, in what is in effect a deconstructive move (in effect aware of how readily Hegel could turn into Marx)[5], the entire Hegelian edifice is to be built upon a supposed sifting of these inherently shifting sands. The very claim to comprehend the infinite is for this reason really an illicit projection of finite fluidity that can only be absolutized by the force

5 - 'The materialism of Hegelian philosophy is clearly shown from the fact that for him matter is only a moment of the idea, so that the idea itself changes into matter' (826.n. 68).

of negation, involving the further error of treating nothing as something, in violation (Rosmini thinks) of the law of non-contradiction.

As an alternative however, Rosmini did not cleave to the Kantian version of finitism, but to something much more within a hybrid Cartesian-Lockean legacy. In this respect, one can compare him to Maine de Biran in France (also much indebted to the ideologists) and endorse the great Catholic philosopher Augusto del Noce's argument that there is an alternative, southern European version of the modern turn to the subject that was able to bypass Kant, and link itself much more to the premodern heritage of metaphysical realism[6] – remembering that this tradition itself ultimately stems from the ancient Socratic turn to the self, and to language and reason as disclosive of being.[7]

In the case of Rosmini's initial work on ideology, two things stand out. First, rather like Biran, Rosmini sees, beyond the empiricist legacy, that we do not *experience* raw physical encounters such as must be posited by the doctor or the scientist. Instead, we experience always feelings, which are inherently 'feelings of' something, possessing what we would now call 'intentionality', even if we only sense things immediately insofar as they are experienced in relation to us (174).[8] Thus Rosmini declares that 'the sentient principle, which would not *per se* have the nature of felt, becomes *felt* in its term' (868). The feeling principle '*has the power to put itself into something else'* (868) and it 'continually penetrates and produces with its act the felt element. Seen in this way it is the container and the felt element is content' (868).

Nonetheless, feeling can only fully be feeling, or the sense of contact with something truly external to us, insofar as it informed by reflexive intelligence, cognitively apprised of the reality of being, that alone puts us at a remove from the things that we encounter: 'if there were no intelligence, a feeling principle could not exist' (868), because 'intuition simply intuits and therefore cannot name the being it intuits. The name itself given to the object, *being,* is a function of reflection, which comes after the silent intuition' (217, 864).[9]

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6 - Augusto Del Noce, *Da Cartesio a Rosmini: Scritti Vari* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1992); Markus Krienke, *Antonio Rosmini: Ein Philosoph zwischen Tradition und Moderne* (Munich: Karl Alber, 2008), 224-7.

7 - See Catherine Pickstock, *Aspects of Truth* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), 245.

8 - Antonio Rosmini, *The Origin of Thought: A New Essay on the Origin of Ideas,* trans. Terence Watson and Denis Cleary [from *Nuovo Saggio sull'Origine delle Idee, Volume II*] (Durham: Rosmini House, 1989), §§ 415, 439, 516.

9 - *The Origin of Thought,* §§ 416, 436. (References to this work from now on are always to paragraph numbers).

Since Rosmini considers, in Humean fashion, that all understanding remains a mode of feeling (174),[10] we can nonetheless infer that this reflexivity is something that occurs to original sensory feeling itself, although this transposes feeling to a higher, more conscious level that alone ensures that sensation becomes manifestation. Despite the fact that Rosmini claimed (as we shall see) that being is given to us initially as an idea, and only by way of the inherent logic of this idea are we able to know both that being is real, and that our sensations are feelings of reality, he also confusingly (and not quite coherently) insisted that this is only possible because 'through experience [we have] … the concept of reality, that is, of reality in general' (174). Despite Rosmini's duality of *a priori* being and *a posteriori* feelings, it would seem that feelings do, of themselves, latently contain for him a universal and reflexive mode of general contact and realistic intention. Feeling already encounters real *action*, even if it does not consciously apprehend this action as being (868). For all the debatable duality, it is insisted that 'feeling and understanding originate from one and the same law and and conform in this that a subjective *principle* apprehends *something'* (868).

In this way, Rosmini's version of ideology took an intentionalist turn which anticipated Twentieth Century phenomenology, but in the most realist variant of that philosophy: insofar as we intend felt things in relation to us, we *also* apprehend their ontological independence from us. There was, in other words, no 'suspension of the natural attitude' involved for the Nineteenth Century thinker. Nevertheless, he was anxious to invoke the modesty of our access primarily to how things appear to us, over against the vauntings of the German idealists who had sought to distil from this appearing an access to the absolute and its unfolding processes in space and time. On the other hand, he equally wished to insist against them on the validity within its own restricted range of this region of finite truth.

Anticipatory, also, of Twentieth Century thought (and resonant with the late Schelling and Kierkegaard) was Rosmini's turn towards the primacy of the existential rather than the cognitive, again in response to the idealists. He regarded the Fichtean account of self-positing as the original sin of their outlook (260). Where Fichte and his successors thought that we could simultaneously perform, as identical repetition ('I am I'), the subjectivity of which we are apprised (*tathandlung*), Rosmini invoked Jacobi's objection that most versions of the *cogito* forget that an awareness of being precedes even any isolated awareness of self, which is, at

10 - 'all that we know outside feeling (understanding is also feeling) are the terms of feeling'; 'a principle-*ens* is always a *feeling*. If it were not, it would be something dead and inert, which is contrary to the condition of principle. The intellective principle is therefore a feeling' (564).

best, simultaneous with that awareness (245-6, 1753-1770).[11] For this reason, our initial self-knowledge is pre-reflexive and pre-performative. Our intuition of our own existence, along with existence in general, non-foundationally precedes all of our thinking as something unfathomable (25-6).[12]

This opens to view the very core of all Rosmini's philosophy. Apart from the entire morass of our empirical but realist feelings of things, there is for him, in contrast to Kant, but one *a priori:* this is the diffuse idea of being itself, as 'initial being', which we can more abstractively isolate, in contrast to defined essences, as empty 'ideal being', container of infinite possibilities (213-7). As with self-awareness, beyond any discursivity being is directly and immediately intuited, by operation of the highest mode of feeling of all (27).[13] Again, as in the case of empirical feelings, although we at first register being as an idea, this idea also is intentional: initial being as a known 'object' in the old scholastic usage of that term also implies the objective reality of being external to our understanding (25).[14] This is true at once in terms of the law of non-contradiction, whereby what is, cannot also not be (451-2), and also in terms of the application of the ontological argument to the field of ontology itself: the idea of being uniquely assumes the reality of that of which it speaks, otherwise nothing is being said (27). Conversely, 'without the essence of being, no being would be' (177). When, incidentally, it comes to proof of God's existence, Rosmini seems to deploy not so much the ontological argument, as a version of Descartes' argument to God from our possession of the idea of infinity: if, as finite creatures, we have the idea of, abstracted, 'common' being as necessary existence, then this implies an infinitely necessary cause of such necessity (51-2, 196, 298-301, 447). Likewise, our necessary love of finite existence necessarily implies the existence of a causal principle infinitely loving of being itself (2573-2575).

All the same, a key aspect of Rosmini's thought was the priority of the cognitive domain in terms of our access to the real. It is indeed the idea of being that we directly intuit and not being as such.[15] This may well lead us to ask whether Rosmini's turn towards the existential was sufficient, if he sustained such a rationalist mode of access to it. For Kierkegaard, or Heidegger or Louis Lavelle by contrast, one must rather see that we are directly opened up to being by our entire bodily and relational immersion in the world, such that any mere notion of being comes second, even if being is always in some sense apprehended by consciousness. But

11 - *The Origin of Thought, cit.,* 442.
12 - *The Origin of Thought, cit.,* 439-41.
13 - *The Origin of Thought, cit.,* 400-1, 410-4.
14 - *The Origin of Thought, cit.,* 415-7.
15 - *The Origin of Thought, cit.,* 408-9.

for Rosmini, being is certainly only given *a priori* to us as an idea and is not otherwise derivable through sensation or even self-sensation.[16] In this way, he also dubiously sustained a version of the division between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* that marks the complicity of rationalism with empiricism, whose sterile truce was finally signed by Kant. Being, for Rosmini, includes implicitly notions of unity, logical coherence and simplicity (541) and it implies likewise that what exists or occurs must have a sufficient reason or cause, else it would not be adequate to its own occurrence and could not really occur, and so once more (he argued, somewhat tendentiously)[17] the law of non-contradiction would be countermanded. Likewise, being implies for him the notion of substance, since anything particular that exists, must, insofar as it exists (and once more, does not not exist), also cohere in its own self-persisting unity.[18]

No other *a priori* categories of understanding (which are categories also of being, given the real intentionality of the idea of being) are recognised by Rosmini, and certainly not those of space and time to which (in contrast to Aristotle as well as Kant, and in explicit recognition of Plotinus) he does not allow categorial status (180). But since the existential is regarded by him in a primarily cognitive fashion, it also follows that he thinks of being as conceived by us fundamentally in terms of *possibility* rather than of act, as would instead follow if one allowed that our first access to being was itself pre-cognitive, living and existential (104). It is for this reason that a certain rationalism and essentialism informs Rosmini's entire philosophy. Anything possible may be merely contingent in its instantiation, but the structure of its contingency as being sufficiently caused to be just this thing that it is, is itself logically necessitated (53, 427, 455).

On this basis, Rosmini was able to allow a traditional Aristotelian conjugation of material reality into universal essences hierarchically ordered according to genus and species. For in the light of ideal being, all the various empirical evidences fall into these patterns, which reveal not just that each thing had to be the way that it is in order to be just this thing, but also that this determination involves consistent patterns of shared universals and their sub-division, since similarities imply identities in the light of being, which picks out universal simplicities and consistencies (54, 142-3, 394, 535-40).[19]

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16 - *The Origin of Thought, cit.,* 414-66.

17 - An effect, especially a divine effect, might simply be an expressive explication of a principle, in which case the Leibnizian notion of 'sufficiency' lacks application.

18 - *The Origin of Thought, cit.,* 558-569.

19 - *The Origin of Thought, cit.,* 499-503. Edmund Husserl argued that if similarities do not imply identity of species and genus, then we enter into an infinite regress in order to account for the connection that is similitude: *Logical Investigations, Volume 1,* trans. J.N. Findlay (London; Routledge, 2001), II.I., Chapters

This curious empirical expansion of the *a priori* itself would seem to anticipate the approach of Husserl. But it is questionable to the extent that the exact nature of the process of combined cognitive engendering between the universal idea of being and all our particular feelings remains obscure: surely, if universals and the ordering of being are real, they must have a basis not only in our apprehension, but also an emerging or eliciting one from the plurality of things themselves? So one could object to Rosmini that, just as being arises with equal primacy in actuality outside our mind as well as within it, so also the categorial order of things co-arises in actuality, even if our mind discovers a structuring kinship with embodied natural reason.

Despite these objections, we can see how Rosmini's crucial insertion of intentionality into the ideological picture tilted his philosophy towards realism and renders any notion that epistemology was for him foundational thoroughly uncertain, however much he insisted, against idealism, on the need for an independent and as it were agnostic initial moment of epistemological reflection. If we anachronistically describe what he was doing in his earlier work, the *Origine delle Idee,* as articulating a realist phenomenology, then we are confronted with the consideration that any such philosophy implies its own inversion and exit from the realm of the sheerly phenomenological. For the latter concerns only appearances; any claim that in those appearances the real is apparent implies an interpretation of appearances in speculative excess of the manifest, even though our normal gaze may always involve such a 'far-seeing', or seeing also of what does not appear, just as we immediately (to follow Husserl) see an entire house when we see only its front and sides.[20] If what appears is speculatively interpreted as the real, then philosophy (as Maurice Merleau-Ponty eventually recognised) must commence as much ontologically with the real as phenomenologically with appearances.

One to Three, pp. 239-76. Of course, this does not deal with the problem that had already been raised by the British idealist F.H. Bradley: the further infinite regress opened up by the connection between the universal essence and the particular to which it is attached. But the solution to this 'third man' kind of argument might well be to insist, after Plato, on the ultimate transcendent otherness of essences in their ultimate source. See Pavel Florensky, *The Meaning of Idealism: The Metaphysics of Genus and Countenance,* trans. Boris Jakim (New York: Angelico, 2020), 23-32.

20 - For Husserl, however, the three-dimensionality of the house (or any cube) is phenomenologically apparent, curiously 'given' to us in terms of our *a priori* elaboration of the essences of things. Rosmini's ideology, for which ideal being latently contains essences, is in danger of this sort of novel idealism, but his insistence on the need for metaphysics suggests otherwise. Our seeing of the three-dimensional house is a speculative or conjectural seeing of the house really 'out there'. Florensky suggested that this speculatively realist capacity of the mind is a seeing of a 'fourth dimension', or of all the sides of a three-dimensional thing, plus its inside and its outside all at once: *The Meaning of Idealism,* 53-63. Perhaps this suggestion transcends the contrast between Phenomenology and realist metaphysics?

This inversion would appear to be allowed for by Rosmini when he indicates that it is the 'idea' of a thing (in a Lockean lineage) not a thing itself that appears to us, and yet that an idea is indeed a feeling or an intention of the thing itself beyond the appearance. And it is confirmed when he says in the *Teosofia* (looking towards Merleau-Ponty's fusion of phenomenology with semiotics) that any idea of a reality is also a sign or *name* of that reality (6, 42, 181).[21] Knowledge, therefore, is not just for him the registering of the given, but also the reading of the given in terms of what it indicates.

It is this circumstance that demands that ideology be complemented by metaphysics, which is what the *Teosofia* undertakes, even though it does not thereby displace the role of ideology. For Rosmini, the reality of our ideas, which are for him semi-real 'entities', is not foundational, but neither is the reality of the concrete thing, which is a full-fledged *ens* (211-40). Instead, as we have seen, ideology and ontology are two poles of his cognitive enterprise, of which the third is ethics. Viewed from another angle however, his theosophy is itself said to involve a theory of the soul, of cosmology and of God (30-2). The theory of the soul is not clearly distinguishable from his ideology, and the theosophy includes much description of the vital role of ethics, which extends to the extra-human, divine ordering of the cosmos. Since, as we shall see, Rosmini eventually concludes that it is the 'moral bond' that holds together, or 'contains' the reality and ideality of which every single existing thing is composed, besides the cosmos in its entirety, it is (as for Stoicism and Spinoza) the ethical which is the most ontological thing of all. Thus, he claims that 'even the material containership of any vase which holds together the liquids or solids put into it pertains to this kind of [ethical] containership' (186). The 'ontological problem' with which (see below) the *Teosofia* is continuously preoccupied, is therefore said to arise with respect to the ideal and moral worlds, as well as to the real one (62-6).

The *Teosofia* is, in fact, a novel sort of metaphysics which offers a Trinitarian basis for the mutual and circular co-reference of ideology to ontology and of both to ethics and back again. By appealing to the participation of all reality in the Trinity, Rosmini sought in effect to refuse the three philosophical alternatives of idealism, realism and pragmatism, and to deny also their alternative immanentisms. To say that knowledge is a name of the real is actually incomplete: the real is also the name of the ideal; both taken together are names, or signs of their practical link and the practical is in turn the name of their inherent combination. More precisely, Rosmini declared that 'the rule for discerning' the three forms of being, 'residing

21 - See *The Origin of Thought, cit.*, 514, 521, for Rosmini's affirmation of the essential role of language in the formation of ideas.

reciprocally in each other', was as follows: 'The containing form, although different from the form of what it contains, names what it contains' (181). Eventually, we will explore the import of this 'externality' of constitutive definition.

The insight justifying this scheme is that being is only being because it is manifest. And if manifest, then always manifest to mind, because we have no other way to make sense of the notion of manifestation. Rosmini does not go quite as far as Berkeley is taken to have done, since he firmly says that to think being is by definition to think that which stands substantially alone, without our thinking it. Yet he also notes the paradox that the independence of being from mind can only be experienced by thought: 'Being…in its notion essentially involves a mind and hence is essentially *object* of a mind' (862; 863-3). Thus it seems at once that being transcends thought, as if thought were swallowed up or included in the being that it thinks, and yet that, after all, intelligence and thought pertain just as originally to being as does being's self-standing: 'if being is of its nature known *per se,* the knowing principle must be in it. This is precisely the mind…If the knowing subject were outside being or differed from it, being would not be known *per se,* but through something else' (165).[22] In consequence, one can conjecture that being is originally dual: at once both being and the thought of being. In our own experience we know that the reality of our subjectivity precedes our thought, but that our thinking is necessary for the awareness of any particular reality. The thought of things goes by way of the imagining and conceptualising of them as 'objects', but these objects in turn intentionally imply other subjects, in the sense of underlying and coherent 'substances', whether rational and conscious or not.

Thinking is thereby ecstatic, insofar as it achieves identity with what is known through a process that Rosmini calls 'inobjectivisation' (867-77). When we fully know something we lose self-awareness, and become contained in what is known, which now assumes the position of subjectivity: 'in the act of knowledge the subject is excluded and, as it were, annihilated; all that remains is being *in se,* object and seat of the act' (866). Therefore, 'the subject with its knowing act leaves and abandons itself in order to enter into something else' (867). This is fully and entirely the case with other spiritual persons (and one can see an anticipation of thinkers of the co-priority of the other person, like Buber and Levinas here), yet Rosmini suggests that any substance whatsoever, by relationally registering the other as object, passes through the ideal realm of abstract objectivity (in some way

22 - There is some resemblance here to Whitehead's refusal of 'the bifurcation' of nature'. Our felt reponses to the natural world our also part of that world, just as our awareness of being is also part of being: Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (London: LLC, 2014).

imperfectly 'knows' the other things that it relates to) in a way that seems to anticipate Whitehead's notion of 'prehension' (867, 870).[23]

Conversely to the moment of inobjectivisation, if we simply know something at the level of ideal abstraction, possibility, generalisation and imagination (a moment of knowledge which remains essential) then this other reality is nonetheless 'contained' by us as an object. Any subject can entirely contain its object and any real object can (in the mode of subject in the sense of substance) reciprocally contain what was originally the knowing subject, although these two processes cannot coincide, just because knowing is either an 'objective' momentary negation of the real existence of the known thing, or, in its ethical term of unification with the known thing, a kind of *self*-denial and annihilation (867). We can see how this metaphysical oscillation corresponds to the alternating serenity and openness to interruption of Rosmini's elective charism.

Everything then, but supremely spiritual creatures, resides always, but always in fluctuation, within two entirely overlapping but not coinciding worlds of respectively things and ideas, somewhat as for Spinoza. Everything is entirely within thought, but thought is entirely within the real world. The only thing that can connect the two is the third sphere of reality which is the ethical realm of judgement and action where the ideal is somewhat realised and the real is somewhat idealised. Rather as for Maurice Blondel later, it is therefore in action that, for Rosmini, one completes the speculative performance: we decide or conjecture, through a constant connecting *addition* to both the ideal and the real, on their ultimate import and mode of participation in transcendence, by also sustaining and continuing through the additive process this very participation. Being, it turns out, is not only dual, but also triple.[24]

One can plausibly connect this triple ontology with Maine de Biran's discussion of the *troisième vie,* or third mode of human life. Biran, also, pondered the paradox that existence is somehow at once both internal and external, without any assign-

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23 - Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 19-20.

24 - One senses a consonance with Vico's Trinitarian *verum-factum-bonum* here. Rosmini referred to Vico with respect to history, which he also took to be triply co-driven by 'real, ideal and moral', or material, conceptual and ethical processes. He cites Vico's *storia divina e fatidica* as an example of the role of what we would now call 'mentality', but one could also argue that Vico himself, in contrast to either Hegel or Marx, construed historical causality in terms of this sort of balance. The three things fuse most at the level of ritual or liturgy, which allows the kind of merging of ethnography with the philosophy of history pursued by a later Catholic metahistorian like Christopher Dawson. See Silvio Spini, *La Sapienza dell'Essere: Ontologia Triadica e Trinitaria Metafisica nella Teosofia di Antonio Rosmini* (Rome: Aracne, 2013), 172.

able priority between the two all-encompassing perspectives.[25] Beyond Rosmini, although in keeping with the latter's sense of the mediating role of corporeally-instantiated feeling, he realised that the site of their coincidence is the body, which is at once the location of the 'I' and yet the very beginning of the objective world beyond the self. Biran considered, after but beyond the ideologist Condillac, the way in which, within ourselves, we also feel, both passively and by active resistance, the work of external forces, whether in terms of pleasure or pain or of shifting moods.[26] He conjectured that if, in our experience, inner and outer are so inextricably fused, then there must also be an 'interiority' in the external world, just as Rosmini concluded that every reality is in some sense living, feeling and psychic – 'subjective' as well as 'substantial' - because being is never without manifestation and mental cognisance.

In the case of both thinkers, one can see the notable contrast with Kant. Since, for the latter's epistemological circle of correlation, categories only exist to render coherent sensory intuitions and vice-versa, we are thereby confined within the narcissistic claustrophobia of the world of thinking alone. But for the modern Latin alternative (though it was close to the thinking of Goethe), if sensation and thought coincide within us, then both point ineluctably outwards and without any imposable finite restriction.

For Biran, the interiority within the external world is 'the third life', but since we experience inwardly and spiritually physical externality, then it equally follows that we *experience inwardly the spiritual inwardness of the physically external*. This is precisely and literally for the later Biran, in the wake of Malebranche, Fénélon and others, the experience of grace – wherein we sense in our mental experience not just that we are overcome by physical forces but also by spiritual ones, as when we are suddenly inspired, or a mood of elevation or depression comes upon us with a specific vividness, accompanied by an imagistic apparatus.[27]

For Rosmini, also, any specific content to our intuition of the divine as the source of being was the work of grace, which alone fully beautifies the world (490,

25 - Maine de Biran, *Journal, Tome II* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1955), pp. 125-6, 152-3, 317-8, 399; *Mémoire sur la decomposition de la pensée* in *Oeuvres, Tome II* (Paris: Vrin, 1988). And see Jean-François Bordron's extremely illuminating discussion, 'Maine de Biran et le Diagramme de la Subjectivité' in *L'Iconicité et Ses Images: Études Sémiotiques* (Paris: PUF, 2011), 83-100.

26 - Maine de Biran, *Influence de l'habitude sur la faculté de pensée* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006).

27 - Biran, *Mémoire sur la decomposition,* 321; Bordron, 'Maine de Biran, 95 and 'Bergson et les Images' in *L'Iconicité et Ses Images,* 101-20. But I am slightly more allowing that the third life is a kind of realised synthesis than Bordron does.

688,1123).[28] And while he regarded his perception of the traces of the Trinity in the shape of the three realms of human experience as a rational conclusion, he still thought that it was only available to him through grace, thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit in disclosing the arrival upon earth of the Incarnate Son of the Father (4, 190-4). In effect, the *Teosofia* presents an integrated philosophy that is also a theology, and Rosmini specifically linked this 'arcane science' to the esoteric traditions of the world from the Druids to Pythagoras and the Buddha (32-3), as well as to the greater penetration into the divine mystery opened up through the grace of Christ. He spoke of his enormous volume, whose title indicates that it opens to view the interiority of God, as the more communicable aspect of the Christian secret, which only a few would understand, but whose benefit would nonetheless flow from them to the many. One could suggest that it is for him almost as if Christianity itself is the cautious process of rendering public, liberal and democratic a perennial esoteric wisdom which it also alone fully discloses.

This is the more Renaissance-inspired aspect of his thought, which only occasionally comes to the fore and yet seems crucial, as the very word 'theosophy' tends to suggest.[29] More specifically, he expressed his support for Ralph Cudworth's Seventeenth Century conclusion, in continuity with the Florentine academy, that Plato and Plotinus anticipated the doctrine of the Trinity by speaking of the ultimate Form of the One, the Dyad and their linkage as One-in-Many. Rosmini suggested that the Alexandrian Christians then equalised these hypostases in God to arrive at a fuller speculative enunciation of the nature of the Godhead that the New Testament had revealed (69).

Reality then, for Rosmini, is a participation in the Trinity because it is at once substantive, ideal and ethical. He consciously regarded this as an ontological generalisation of the psychic traces of the Trinity as diagnosed by Augustine. And for him this triplicity applies at once to the entirety of the cosmos, to all the links within the cosmos and to each individual thing within the cosmos. The relation between the three primal forms or *genera* is fundamental because, in reality, no existing thing is really self-contained or self-bounded. He was accordingly scornful of the Kantian notion of autonomy, or self-legislation (732). Nothing can provide its

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28 - See Marco Salvioli, 'Rosmini "dopo" Milbank: Riflessioni sul tema della grazia nell' *Antropologia soprannaturale*', in Bellelli and Pili ed., *Ontologia, Fenomenologia e nuovo umanesimo, cit.,* 77-95.

29 - The term was sometimes used by the Church Fathers and was later deployed in the Seventeenth Century by thinkers in a Renaissance neoplatonic and Hermeticist current, like Jacob Boehme and the American alchemist George Starkey. Even though Rosmini's theosophy obviously has nothing to do with that of Madam Blavatsky, commentators tend to overlook the fact that he does advertise the term's esoteric resonance.

own order, whether physically, ideally or ethically, since every containment, or ordering, involves difference, externality and relation.

If this implies that the subject is never a pure *arche,* then the same principle of liberal metaphysical an-archism (a different, more constitutional, less individualist liberalism, one could say) inversely implies that no order can be purely objective. On this basis, Rosmini linked his critique of Kant to a symmetrically inverse critique of Hegel. Where Kant wrongly claimed self-legislation, Hegel wrongly claimed an objective genesis of the subject, which is indeed, in a sense, a reflective 'non-being', from a hypostasised nullity that can only be something through a negation of its own negation, forgetting that negation is never anything more than a subjective gesture from the outset (1737-40). In this way, Hegel concealed the reality that, like Kant after all, he was placing autonomous subjectivity, which wills only to will, both at the outset of metaphysical and historical unfolding and at its end.

Instead of the primacy of the auto-affirming subject or of logical negation, Rosmini offered the irreducible primacy of relation as constitutive of every finite becoming, and yet eternally in excess of such becoming. For him, as later for Bulgakov, there can be no human subject prior to the objective feeling, imagining and conceptualising of reality which is predicative and propositional 'naming' or 'containing', nor to the process of kenotic inobjectivisation which is the ecstatic passage to being 'named' or 'contained'. As with Biran, but in a Trinitarian way, this 'ideological' experience should naturally, if speculatively, prompt us to read all of ontological reality in these terms -- with the margin of indeterminacy between how things evidently are and how they ideally might be (which alone reveals them to us at all in the first place) always bridged by the active affection of love realised in action. This can once more be seen as corresponding to the way in which Rosmini thought of his own religious calling in terms of a peaceful contemplative containing of things endless interrupted by the call to being contained by the ever-varying demands of charity.

Beyond previous tradition, Rosmini transferred the idea of 'subsistent relation' from the Creator to the Creation, reasoning that if what exists, what is thought and what is done only exist at all in relation to each other – such that being is manifestation, thought is ecstatic, both are only fused by action, and action is only ever the binding of notion and thing together – then there is a dimension of all finite phenomena that only exists at all through connection (903, 959). This does not, however, render them equal to the Trinitarian persons, because there is in finitude a surplus of the subject over any particular objective expression, and of an idea over any particular invocation; likewise, an action characterised as the connection between such and such an ideal goal, and such and such a specificity, is still generalisable, so as to be equitably applicable by analogy to other instances. It is also the

case that within the created order any ideal, objective conception does not of itself ever become fully subjective or personal, as must be the case for God, in whom there is no inequality or subordination (940).

Rosmini additionally recognised that, while in physical reality subsistent or substantive relations might be symmetrical, in intellectual reality they were asymmetrical: only of known thing to the knower, even though this asymmetry tends ecstatically to reverse itself in the process of inobjectivisation (937-41, 950-1). Nevertheless, he also thought that *all* relations, including physical ones, do actually traverse the link between the real, the formally ideal and the ethically active, simply because all being only exists as manifestation and all manifestation only exists as some sort of recognition. For this reason, he concluded that finite substantive relations could only be composed in a manner that was participatory of the Trinity: of the substantive Paternal origin, the Filial word and the Spiritual gift or active bond of love.

In other words, there is no real, radical relation that does not involve *meaning,* and that does not involve *charitable exchange.* It is appropriate to invoke here the American novelist and literary theorist Walker Percy's gloss on C.S. Pierce: every inherently and irreducibly triadic relationship must exceed the mechanistic or efficient causality of a duality, since it must involve interpretation and significance.[30] Percy provided the example of the giving of a gift, but in a Rosminian spirit one can also invert his point in a complementary fashion: not only is gift an example of meaning, meaning always involves donation. For if triadic action involves the uncertain reading of a sign, then every positive response of understanding amounts to the receiving of what is invisibly indicated as a gift, and the response must itself be one of generosity, or of counter-gift, if this interpretation is to be charitable and thereby proffered as a true one.

3. Categorisation and the Ontological Problem

Although Rosmini developed a triadic theory of being, he equally insisted on its 'Parmenidean' unity, as should already be clear.[31] This renders him more a theorist of Triunity, than simply one of Trinity. We have seen that he thinks the unity of abstract, 'empty' being, taken as a plenitude of possibilities, rather than as Hegelian 'nothing', is the first thing of which human beings become reflectively aware, in

30 - Walker Percy, 'Towards a Triadic Theory of Naming' in *The Message in the Bottle* (New York: Farrer, Strauss and Giroux, 1982), 159-88.

31 - See Nicola Ricci, 'Ispirazione sapienzale e metafisicità dell'uomo. Differenza Teologica e differneza ontologica nel pensiero metafisica di Rosmini' in *Ontologia, fenomenologia e nuovo umanesimo: Rosmini Ri-Generativo, cit.,* 169-85, esp. 176-9.

response to the immediacy of initial being (our experience of which is, however, already cognitive and *a priori*). He was, accordingly, obsessed with the ancient issue of the way in which the One becomes the Many, which he took to be the most basic form of 'the ontological problem'. In his own formulation, this was the issue of 'How to reconcile the *manifestations of ens* with the concept of ens' (70).

At this point we arrive at one of the two most strikingly original aspects of Rosmini's philosophy: the way in which he connected together a series of traditional *aporiae* about being and treated them as aspects of a single question of the categorisation of being. The second most original aspect is the way in which he tried to answer this question in terms of the Trinity.

Roughly speaking (to summarise long and tortured technical discussions), Rosmini joined together the issues of the One becoming the Many; the question of the relation of something to nothing; the sufficient reason for the existence of particulars; Aristotle's problem about how being can be divided if it is not a genus; Aristotle's problem about whether substance is primarily essence or concrete thing, and Plotinus's problem about how Aristotle's categorisation can be universal if it does not apply to purely intelligent beings – or, if it does so apply, how it can coherently subordinate the analogical hierarchy of intelligent over material substance to a univocity of substance whose paradigm is essentially material (41-72, 116-22).

As if this collapsing together of ontological dilemmas were not enough, Rosmini also affirmed that the problem of the 'equation between intuitive knowledge and knowledge by predication', which would appear to be epistemological, is in fact another way of expressing one and the same 'ontological problem' (55- 61).

In the case of the first five ontological aporias,[32] one could say that Rosmini anticipated Heidegger in suggesting that the primacy of the question of being had been forgotten. As we have already seen, this was the main gist of his response to German Idealism: before we think, we exist, and the existence of our thinking is in excess of our grasp of our own thinking. He indeed spoke of 'the ontological difference' and the way in which this far exceeds any difference between being and being and one category of being and another (2049). In approaching the question of how the one, universal being becomes the many, and that of the sufficient reason for this transition, he focussed firmly on the non-generic character of being. If 'more' is to be said than just being, then something must be added to being, but that is impossible, since whatever might be added would also equally exist (see also 831-3). This more to being must be 'something' and yet anything other to being, or 'what is', 'is not' and so is 'nothing'. The question of how to multiply being

32 - This is my ordering, not Rosmini's, though derived from his text: he numbered and classified the *aporiae* he lists rather differently.

is essentially the question of how to categorise being, as though, impossibly, it were after all a *genus,* and any classification involves some quality or criterion in terms of which the classification is to be made: if we divide a *genus* we do so in terms of species and specific differences and finally individuations, which are all qualities in addition to the simpler generic notion – which, says Rosmini, is always easier for the mind to grasp (39). But in the case of being, any specifying qualities would be still also and absolutely ones of modes of existence and therefore not additional, as seems to be required. How can being divide itself in terms of itself? It is, in fact 'impossible' as Rosmini outright declares (111).

And yet clearly we know that, in reality, in our minds and in our ethical actions, this impossibility is carried through. Rosmini asks whether perhaps this could be in terms of a single causal principle, which is involved in sufficient reason, or in terms of elements, of which plurality is composed (135-7). But if the principle is being, then it cannot be distributed and so cannot after all 'principiate' reality: this, for him, explains the monistic leanings of the pre-Socratics and their conclusion that plurality must be an illusion. If, on the other hand, the mediating factor is the element, then this fails to include the cause itself. Any mode of physical elementalism, including atomism, is thereby disintegrative and fails to save the appearances of order which are manifest everywhere. For this reason, Anaxagoras suggested that we require both principles and elements, but did not explain how they might be coordinated (68).

The philosophy of the West really began, according to Rosmini, when real explanations of this coordination were attempted, with Plato and Aristotle (69). This is no longer in terms of either principles or elements. It is instead in terms of categorisation – already attempted by Plato in the *Sophist* and then in a different way by Aristotle. One is tempted to add to Rosmini the gloss that a certain, quite different, an-archic account of order, situated in the participatory middle, is here already being attempted (even if Trinitarian thought radicalised such anarchy).[33]

Rosmini was crucially alert to the way in which the option of categorisation involved already a certain implicit subjective turn: a semi-awareness of how the question of the division of being is reflexively the question of what we may *predicate* of being and how we are able to do so. The semi-awareness becomes more conscious insofar as the question of the categorisation of being is treated by both Plato and Aristotle as being equally one of grammar and dialectics: an issue then also pertaining to thought (and for Plato at least, one could add, also one pertaining

33 - I am indebted here to discussions with Conor Cunningham, of the University of Nottingham, about the ontological and natural scientific priority of the *mixis.*

to ethical and political action). Nonetheless, Rosmini affirms that it remained for them primarily a question of ontology and this was because Plato now taught that 'dialectics is the sole source of ontological language' (128). Plato considered that being can only be divided in terms of word and idea, rather than in terms of principles and elements, just because (we can explicate) he had realised that being is always that which manifests itself as *dynamis* which is the power to affect, and therefore manifests itself as mind: *dynamis* as also the power to be affected.[34] Therefore, Rosmini declared that 'ontology can speak about being only in so far as being is made known and according to the way it is made known. The very power of making itself known pertains to the nature of being…' (128).

This mode of access to being only via grammar and logic therefore suggests that grammatical and logical articulation are themselves the factor of mediation between the One and the Many, the way in which the two are constantly woven together, including the mediating role of universals whose unity is more restrictive than the absolute unity of being itself -- whether we are talking about Platonic Forms or Aristotelian species and genera. For this reason, Rosmini thought that the problem of the ontological difference is repeated at a lower level as the problem of the difference between substance as universal essence and substance as embodied thing (41-3, 54-5): here he seems to anticipate the explorations of later Twentieth Century British philosopher-theologians like Donald Mackinnon and Edward Booth.[35]

Thus Rosmini declared that 'essence and subsistence (the latter is simply the realisation of essence) are primal forms of ens'. Therefore 'an antinomy [arises] between the concept of being and the supposition that a being exists which lacks essence', when 'in fact the concept of being implies precisely that that form (reality) is not and cannot be without an essence' (55). In other words, how is it that essence as sufficient abstract substance is added to by instantiation, if it is the all-sufficient form of such instantiation (in matter of some sort), rather as we ask how Being can be added to if everything exists solely through existence? Meanwhile, the grammatically-revealed circumstance that essence (genus or species) as category is neither a principle nor an element reveals to us that it hovers in the uncertainly aporetic middle, such that our 'essential knowledge of an *ens* is defective, and not equal to both the ens itself and to everything predicated of it' (54). We are mortally caught in a constant shuttle between an inadequate knowledge at

34 - See Michael René Barnes, '*Dynamis* in Plato's Philosophy', in *The Power of God: the Role of* Dynamis *in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2001), 54-93.

35 - Donald Mackinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1974); Edward Booth OP, *Aristotelain Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983).

once of things and of the universals which they instantiate, and this is exactly why it was uncertain for the ancients whether categorial divisions are divisions of the *entia* themselves, or rather divisions of their logical principles (119). This is once again a restricted and yet inherently repeated version of what Rosmini named as 'the first form' of the ontological problem, namely 'how to reconcile the apparent modes of *ens* with the concept of being'. Our more fundamental conceptual shuttle is between the mystery of being and the mystery of particular existences, to neither of which our 'idea of being' is ever adequate.

Yet it is just at this point that we can see how Rosmini was able to argue that the seemingly epistemological problem of how we are to predicate intuited universal being and universal essences of sensorily intuited particular things was after all a reiteration of the single ontological problem and, furthermore, the key to its solution.

We have already seen in part why this should be so. If being is only being as manifest and known, then the way in which we (problematically and inadequately) know being and its linkage to beings belongs originally to the question of being as such (rather in the way that Heidegger sometimes affirmed such a thing of *Dasein*). But we have also already mentioned how, for the same reason, Rosmini considered the question of the division of being to be a question of predication. He was not at all asserting, like Kant, that the issue of the categories is solely the finitist one of how we know being, and not a question of being in itself. Nor was he even saying (or at least, not consistently saying) that we must first approach the question of understanding and then turn to the question of reality. For it has already been explained that, for him, theosophy (metaphysics) is just as fundamental a starting point as is ideology (epistemology or phenomenology).

Instead, Rosmini made the extremely subtle move of arguing that the reflexivity involved in posing the question of the predication of being must be regarded as an intrinsic part of that very question. Thereby, the turn to the subject remains within the space of ontology and is even demanded by it, insofar as ontological science requires the primacy of grammar and dialectics if it is not to collapse either into mystical monism or physicalist atomism.

What this means is that the categorising of being has to include the one who is categorising, who is, after all, herself part of being: not an accidental part, but a transcendentally coinciding part, if being is always both manifest and known. Another way of putting this would be to say that Rosmini's solution to the ontological problem of the categorising of being is to claim that being itself is, of its most fundamental nature, self-categorising, self-articulated or self-predicated. To be, in fact, is to predicate.

It then becomes possible to conclude that even infinitised being involves the three primal forms of subjectivity, objectivity and morality – though for reasons we have seen, in God the second two poles will themselves be subjectivised or personalised. And this allows us to realise that the question of the categorisation of being, or the predication concerning being, is not, after all, a question arising after our Parmenidean intuition of being's unity, or a question that demands, initially, an *addition* to being, because it turns out, once revelation and faith have provided it with the Trinitarian clue, that elevated reason can see that unified and infinite being of itself is predicamental and categorised by the three primal forms or *genera*.

Insofar as these *genera* entirely overlap with being then, one might say that, for Rosmini, they have the status of transcendentals. But insofar as they also distinguish different (and yet paradoxically undivided) aspects of being, they can also genuinely be described, as he consistently does, as 'categories'. They hover between the status of transcendentals and categories precisely because they are substantive relations, which exhaustively characterises infinite being, unlike finite being -- even though the latter includes and is in fact held together by the substantive relationality between the three primal forms in their finite mode.

One can also extrapolate (and just because of his prolixity, Rosmini often seems to invite more succinct extrapolations) that if being is inherently predicamental, it follows that the existential and the copulative meaning of being are equally fundamental and ultimately coincident. To be means 'to exist', but to exist also always means 'to be this', even if it simply means to be being, or to manifest and be recognised as being.

Although Rosmini's ontology is explicitly Christian because Trinitarian, it is also a means, as he clearly elaborates, of accommodating Plotinus's *aporia* regarding intellectual substance, in respect of Aristotle's categorial division of being (120-1). For he significantly affirms Plotinus's appraisal of the pre-eminence of intellectual substance and its primary role in the declension of reality. But the problem with Plotinus's conception, for Rosmini, was that he was unable to explain how the pure One communicated itself as intellect: while he affirms at one point the coincidence of the One with pure will, the primacy of the emanation of the intellect over that of the soul would seem to preclude any willed or personal account of this communication (156-60, 163-5). Today we can say that this ignores the mediating and primary role of *life* for Plotinus,[36] yet the main point of Rosmini's Trinitarian solution can still

36 - Pierre Hadot, 'Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin' [with discussion] in *Plotin, Porphyre: Études Néoplatoniciennes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010), 127-174.

stand: replete being communicates itself because, after all, and beyond paganism, it was originally communication and reception (knowledge and life, or life and knowledge)[37] at the level of the eternal and unbounded.

Those Patristic thinkers, like Gregory of Nyssa, Marius Victorinus, Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius who had already made this adjustment to the neoplatonic legacy, nevertheless still sustained the Plotinian view of descending emanations within the order of Creation: first came the realm of the pure intelligences, now identified as that of the Biblical angels. But Rosmini, with fatal significance, as we shall see, suppresses this moment of finite hypostasisation of the intellect. Instead, he implausibly rebukes Plotinus for having failed to see that the primacy of the intellect was in reality that of *a priori* ideal and abstracted being which our finite intellects are equally able to recognise and embody (117-21). In other words, Rosmini after all presses neoplatonism into a modern and dubious subjective idealist mode, even while appearing to endorse Plotinus's realism as superior.

Nevertheless, as we shall now see, the most significant moment of all in Rosmini's thought occurs when he deploys the Plotinian/Trinitarian consideration of the ontological status of intelligence to resolve the entire ontological problem, the complete multifaceted question of how being, although it is not a genus, can nonetheless be divided and distributed.

4. The Plotinian/Trinitarian Solution

In the light of the Trinity, we are able to say that unlimited being is itself distinguished and distributed through substantive relationality and personhood. Being as thought is co-original with being as such, and being as thought, or being as 'object', both indicates and contains being as independent self-standing reality, or being as 'subject'. The reverse is also true: being as subject both indicates and contains being as object.

The perfect mutual reference of the two is not the prerogative of either of them, such that being commands knowledge (realism concerning God) or that knowledge commands being (idealism concerning God). Instead, we can only account for their linkage in terms of a third moment of action which is the attempt to realise the ideal and to idealise the real, and is thus inherently moral. Equally, the ultimate

37 - Rosmini follows Augustine in associating the Son with Knowledge and the Spirit with life, yet it may make equal sense – and is more in continuity with the mediating role of life in Plotinus and Porphyry, to follow Victorinus and Eriugena in associating the Son with life and the Spirit with completed understanding.

non-compulsion of thought for reality, whereby we can think being as without thought, and the non-compulsion of reality for thought, whereby it can always perfectly well think of something other than the real (possible, or seemingly impossible - one might add to Rosmini) means that the connection of the one to the other is only the gratuity of love. And both ethical action and love are personal.

Although each person of the Trinity is entirely constituted by substantive relation, the surplus of person over relation (sustained by both Augustine and Aquinas), which alone ensures that relation does not dissolve into a personless blur, is recognised by Rosmini to the degree that he allows that, when the subject fully contains the object (which in God is personal), or the object fully contains the subject, or the moral fully contains them both and vice-versa, then what is contained (which puts it in the 'object' position in all four cases) is not, in that instance, fully personal (1122, 1140-3). In finitude this means that personhood, or subjectivity, arrives in an oscillating manner: even my knowledge of another person suppresses her full personhood to the extent that I am merely cognising her in reflective and abstracted consideration (a moment I must pass through in order to know her at all) despite the fact that my intentional knowledge reaches further towards ecstatic 'inobjectivation', which reverses this suppression in the direction of a kenotic submersion of my own personhood in another subject (whether fully personal or not: I may become grass and stone as well as another man or an angel). In the case of God alone (and our subsumption into God – see below), the three personhoods are always fully present. Yet this does not mean the denial of the alternation of containing/containment which always operates a switch between subjectivity (personhood) and objectivity: it is just that with God this alternation is unimaginably constant, simultaneous and coinciding (1142).

To put this in slightly more traditional terms: the Father in knowing himself in the Son or Word (which term brings to the fore the objective dimension) is fully God simply as Father, such that his constitutive relation to the Son adds nothing to him whatsoever. In a sense then, the Son as known by the Father is not in that instance an independent person. And yet inversely and at the same time, the Son is fully God in his own all-sufficient personhood, even though he is only God as relational image of the Father: the very perfection of this relationality in a sense suppresses the Father as personal origin: the an-archic dimension. And yet, of course, the Father's simultaneous 'suppression' of the Son as subject is *not* thereby suppressed. We can carry out the same sequence of reasonings with regard to the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

Rosmini tried to explicate this complex account with a diagram of the 'order in divine being':

A	=	a	=	a
Λ	=	V	=	V
b	=	B	=	b
V	=	V	=	Λ
c	=	c	=	C

He gave the key to the cryptogram in the following words: 'upper case A, B and C represent the three divine persons as containers and *persons*…Lower case a, b and c represent the same forms as content. The pointed end of the symbol 'v' points to being as container, its open end to being as content. The equal sign indicates identity' (991). And he then further explained: 'In the diagram. A = a, B = b, and C = c, which means that each of the three forms is a container and content. However, these two respects do not remove each form's identity. Consequently, the three divine forms do not become nine. Each, although identical, is considered in three inseparable ways (although our mind can separate them): in one respect, each is considered as a container, and under this respect is a supreme form in itself; in the other two respects, each is considered as content, in which case it is present to and in the other two forms'. Thus, we can see from the diagram that the originating Father contains Son and Spirit as objects; that the Son is first contained object and then containing object of the Holy Spirit; that the Holy Spirit is first object of both the Father and the Son and finally in himself subject and Person. However, the scheme works also in reverse, and all the equal signs are naturally reciprocal and symmetrical: the conclusion can be taken in a sense also as origin; the Son also contains the Father as object and the Spirit contains objectively both Father and Son.

This gives Rosmini's account of the 'order' in which infinite being intrinsically consists. The ontological problem concerned the difficulty that there is no criterion other than being for dividing being and therefore being appears to be indivisible: monism looms and the possibility that multifariousness is illusion. Rosmini suggested that even though order within infinite being is its own criterion, this can still serve as the missing elusive criterion for the distribution of being (992). For without modifying the order of relational containment, we can see how it can apply also to a finite order which thereby limits the existential. A being is still fully being; so what is its additional mark of finitude? Being as such does not supply this mark, but being as *order*, in terms of a moment of objective containment that may (in the infinite) or may *not* (in the finite) be simultaneous with its reversal into containment by another subject, and in terms of specific substantive relationships that may (in the infinite) exhaust, or may *not* (in the finite) exhaust the identity of their subjective poles, *can* supply this mark. Although it can be restricted in consistency with

itself, the criterion of order comes entirely from original, unrestricted being, which is no longer (as Plato already half-affirmed) inherently alien to plurality and dialectical connection.[38]

Another way of putting Rosmini's point would be to say that participation in being becomes conceivable if one thinks of infinite being as of itself infinitely relational, since, as he himself affirms, participation is a radically asymmetrical mode of relationship, such that creatures are exhaustively substantive relations to God (1090).[39] This, of course, nicely connects the external emanation and return to God of the Creation to inner Trinitarian generation and procession, and Rosmini notes that, for Anselm and Aquinas (citing his *De Veritate*), the generation of the Son was the *ratio* for the outgoing of the Creation: indeed, from the simple divine perspective the latter is included in the former (471).

It is therefore possible to see order or relationality as the Trinitarian solution to the conundrum of being. This does not imply any univocity of order, just because it is clearer in the case of order than in the case of being (which seems to be either univocally present or not, always in the same manner) that the order of containment can operate in analogically different ways at different ontological levels (especially between the material and the angelic), and that infinite order is inconceivably different from the finite. This difference is less obvious if we say to ourselves that God, however infinitely remote from finite normality is at least existentially 'there'.

A further appropriate gloss upon Rosmini at this point would be to say that analogy as the analogy of being is also analogy of order or relation and is thereby inherently Trinitarian, as Klaus Hemmerle affirmed in the Twentieth Century.[40] For analogy always says or expresses one thing in terms of another and is therefore realised both relationally and personally -- if we apply Rosminian reflexivity which 'adds back' the subjective consideration of ontology into ontology itself. It then follows that finite things are 'like' the infinite which is God through their participation in an infinite process of mutual interpersonal 'likening' and 'making like' which is also an infinite reciprocal 'liking' or 'love'.

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38 - It may be possible to read Aquinas also in terms of the priority of *ordo,* rather than of the priority of *esse,* and to link this with a Trinitarian metaphysics that is really fundamental to his thought. See John Milbank, 'Manifestation and Procedure: Trinitarian Metaphysics after Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas*',* in *Tomismo Creativo: Letture Contemporanee del* Doctor Communis, ed. Marco Salvioli OP (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2015), 41-11.

39 - On participation as a mode of relation, see Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: the Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids IL: Eerdmans, 2012), 113-54, 246-57.

40 - Klaus Hemmerle, *Theses Towards a Trinitarian Ontology,* trans. Stephen Churchyard (New York: Angelico, 2020).

Analogy is therefore not a semi-equivocation or approximate univocity which is eschatologically cancelled at its terminus: instead, it is infinitely and unimaginably heightened. For it is supremely true of substantive relations that they transcend the contrast of homonymous with paronymous naming, if to name one thing only in terms of another is radically unsurpassable: just as the historically older mode of human naming was patri or matrilineal. This is the most name that the nameless God can have: not just the Son named after the Father, as with us, but the Father named by his descendant (both *as* 'Son', the new containing subject, and *by* the Son as Father, or perfect contained object). And in the case of what they jointly are, only named by what they do, by their active spiritual role; even though this role can only itself be named inversely by what it expresses: the reality it reveals through realisation eternally to be.

Creatures are therefore doomed to 'infinite naming', not really as a finite fate, but just because infinity itself is infinite circular naming and re-naming.[41] In other words, analogous terms are only 'like' God because analogy itself is like God: finite likeness is like infinite likening. Were this not the case, there would be no real ground for the ontological predominance of analogy, just as it is incomprehensible why monistic Being should distribute and restrict itself. Failing to conceive this ground, we tend to reduce analogy to instrumental approximation.

Of course, none of this reflection upon divine naming is present in Rosmini, and, as we shall shortly see, he tended to block the way to such reflection. It is not even explicitly set forth in the preceding theological tradition, although there is much that points towards it. Nonetheless, Rosmini's core argument that Being as such is as much copulative and therefore linguistic as it is existential, and his argument that all finite participation must be construed from the outset as participation in the Trinity, surely points in this sort of direction.

It is also possible to suggest a further significant gloss. Rosmini's 'Parmenideanism' consistently allows that the question of being is also the question of the One, and while he declares that the three forms are 'names' of each other, the language of containing and containment is inherently arithmetic or geometrical. In this context, it is significantly said by Rosmini that the three primal genera can only be qualified as intensely 'more or less' at an ontological juncture where quality and quantity coincide, since the possibility to be either more or less is as much inherent to transcendental excellences and defining essences as to shapes and numbers. In the case of God, quality and quantity coincide by vanishing, since God is neither qualified nor numbered (550). Nevertheless, this ineffable coincidence is sustained as the discernible coincidence of quality and quantity (as the primacy of

41 - See Daniel Heller-Roazen, *No One's Ways: An Essay on Infinite Naming* (New York: Zone, 2017).

intensity) in the case of the finite instantiation of the three primal forms: 'the only quality we find in them is that of more or less, which does not admit of any measure', since 'quantity and quality are coeval as they appear in existence' (551) (For example, there is no instance of spaceless 'red' and no instance of any discernible space without tincture).

The primal *genera* therefore involve a transcendental coincidence of what can be numbered with what can be characterised (in imitation of the Divine Trinity). We can link this point with the way in which they seem to be numerical ('containing') as well as linguistic ('naming'). As the most fundamental *categories,* these three forms would seem at once to *indicate* and to *include.* It is just this combination in effect of the linguistically semiotic with mathematical 'setting' (or in intra-mathematical terms of connecting 'function' with nodal 'object') that is united in modern mathematical 'category theory', which thereby takes account at the theoretical outset of the fact that what includes is only problematically part of its own inclusion – just as Rosmini says that what names is external and yet inherently related to what it names.[42] In this sense, any category both points away from itself and yet also circumscribes an 'area', just as, for both Plato and Aristotle (in different ways) a universal idea does not entirely belong to that which it is an idea *of*.

Rosmini further noted that the differences *between genera* incessantly escape numerical inclusion *within* the *genera,* despite the fact that such differences also *are* (142). This is another reason why being cannot be generically divided: the scope of *genera* is not adequate to the scope of being, because the indicative excesses of each *genus* over what they include are themselves exceeded by the non-included differences between *genera.* Since the number of the latter is indefinite and classification is never in principle concluded (while, one may add, even a set of all possible differences between genera would escape inclusion in its own set, further inviting recursion), difference here outreaches generic inclusion. By contrast, such difference does not escape the categorially relational inclusion/indication of the three primal forms: a *genus* or species taken as subject can refer to another *genus* or species taken as object and vice-versa. 'Human animal' includes/indicates 'rational', 'rational' includes/indicates 'human animal'; a thought can include/indicate a non-living material thing like 'stone', a stone can include/indicate the thinker of the stone. And so forth.

It would seem therefore plausible to understand Rosmini's Trinitarian categories in just these modern theoretical terms, as uniting the functions of sign with

42 - See Emily Riehl, *Category Theory in Context* (New York: Dover, 2016).

those of shape and number, in a fashion perhaps always latent to the entire categorial tradition – as Pavel Florensky intimated.[43]

This becomes the more plausible when one looks at the range of finite application of Rosmini's three primal forms. Taken altogether, they sustain the primacy of the notion of *order* also in the finite realm, over either reality, or ideality, or action taken alone. One could validly say that this amounted for him to a political ontology (metaphysics as also divine governance, as with Aquinas) as much as to an ontology which politics must respect in terms of natural law. In terms of full subjective apprehension, which for Rosmini is reflexively part of what is being apprehended, this order is registered as *beauty,* a topic to which a long section of the *Teosofia* is devoted (1063-1139). Beauty was therefore, for Rosmini, a meta-transcendental, close to the single uniting 'essence' of the operation of the three primal forms, whereas truth is appropriated to objectivity and goodness to the bond of action (1012-1062). Subjectivity is of course supremely and originally being itself, unity and thinghood. All the transcendentals are therefore rethought in more personal and relational terms – their overlapping thus becomes as much indicative as inclusive. They are thereby turned into meta-categories, beyond inherited scholastic tradition.

As to the primal forms themselves, they apply within the created order in four respects: first, generally as the linkage of subject, known object and ethical action which alone allows any relation whatsoever to arise, as we have already seen.

Second, recursively *within* each of the three fields. The external real order includes also meaningful intellectual and objectively ethical aspects (Rosmini would have understood the care we now know that trees have for each other). The intellectual order, on account of intentionality, divides between known object and ecstatically reached-for and loved object. The ethical order must both pay attention to the natural law of reality and to our varying and often eccentric personal apprehensions of this reality.

Thirdly, to each individual person and by extension each individual thing: for Rosmini continued to endorse the Augustinian 'psychological' analogues for the Trinity. But viewed through his own metaphysics, this now implies that neither the subject as containing itself, nor the subject as content of itself, is really itself alone, which concurs with Rosmini's refusal, against Kant, of any notion of autonomy. That by which I contain myself is given and inherited; that which I contain passes beyond me as my bodily effluvia, gestures and actions which are all my ultimately uncontrollable offspring.

43 - Pavel Florensky, *The Meaning of Idealism,* 19-30.

Fourthly, also to the relationship between essences and particulars, however unclear Rosmini may have been about this. It is at least apparent that he endorsed a modified version of the Aristotelian/Porphyrian categories as operating within material finitude. Essences were for him just as real 'containers' as were concrete substances, even if these could come fully to contain their essences, suspending any independent universality, just in the way that subjects suspend through objective knowledge (rather like a Husserlian *epoché,* but taken only as a surpassable moment) the independent subjectivity of that which they contain. But prior to their instantiation, Rosmini would seem to have thought of essences as somehow latent within ideal being, while he lacked a sufficient account of their 'elicitation' from the material side, as we have seen.

In each of these four respects we can see how Rosmini rendered substantive relationality the primary category, without thereby displacing the co-primacy of substance, newly rendered (after Fichte, Hegel and Schelling, despite everything) as subject and as person. All the categories subordinate to the primal forms involve instances of relationship which are modifications of the being-knowing-acting inter-relation of these forms themselves: everything *within* the fields of respectively reality, thought and action is first and foremost a matter of linkage; even an individual thing is a problematic relation to itself in order for it to be substantial; essences and particulars are so irreducibly related that neither crude realism nor nominalism is veracious (839-45).[44]

5. The Scotist Solution

Now we must turn towards the more problematic dimension of Rosmini's philosophy. In effect, he offered not one, but two solutions to the ontological problem, even if he failed to distinguish the two, or at least supposed that they were compatible and consistent with each other.

The second solution bears much greater testimony to his scholastic eclecticism and yet, in its most crucial points of emphasis, the inspiration is Scotistic rather than Thomist, as he sometimes makes explicit, even while trying to harmonise the two traditions. The core of the second solution is the notion that being can, after all, become a criterion of itself distinct from itself, allowing dissemination, if we isolate ideal or abstract being from being in all its plenitude.

This move is supposedly warranted by his claim that we first intuit being as ideal and can then reflexively isolate it as an empty *a priori* font of possibility: a

44 - Rosmini was especially anxious to refute the neo-nominalism of Victor Cousin, who had declared that this rendered the doctrine of the Trinity nonsensical (1861).

claim whose dubiety has already been argued. Such a claim requires one to see Being itself, as Rosmini asserts, as an 'essence' with which one can contrast all the other essences which are possible, specific realities (213-7, 265-71, 276-81, 837, 859-65). As with Kant, being is then regarded as merely something added to a possible thing, which in no way changes it, save by adding to it existence. Genealogically, this way of looking of things descended to Kant from the Scotist formal distinction of being and essence (although Scotus never used that terminology in this respect, he implied it) as opposed to the Thomist real one or the refusal of any mode of distinction by Albertists like Dietrich of Freiburg.[45] For Aquinas, specific finite essence really modified infinite participated being (coinciding with infinite essence in God), which in turn *alone realises it as really possible or potential*, but for Duns Scotus essence taken from a repertoire of possibilities was simply combined with univocal being, thereby regarded as a quasi-essence.

Rosmini was trenchant in his endorsement of the univocity of being: without it, he declared, discourse of God would have no rational basis or consistency with the Law of Non-Contradiction and analogy would lack any foundation in ultimate logical assertion (122, 289).[46] He had no sense that this conclusion departed drastically from that of Aquinas, just as he failed to realise that the latter did not locate rational theology within a prior 'ontology' now taken to unequivocally define the metaphysical field: this being a post-Suarezian conception which Rosmini just took for granted (36).[47]

In consequence, one sees how he would have been unable to follow through on the radical implications of his own Trinitarian ontology for the analogy of Being as enunciated above. He also argued that Scotus was right, against Aquinas, to think that the transcendentals and the ultimate specific differences of things, which being as such and instantiated being are never without, formally add something essential to univocal being (Appendix to Book Three, 4 [837]) -- even if they are 'virtually' included within it through formal attachment in the end (as opposed to species

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45 - See John Milbank, 'Afterword: 'The Dissolution of Divine Government: Gilson and the "Scotus Story"' in *Étienne Gilson: Introduction to His Fundamental Positions*, trans. James G. Colbert (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 538-576; 'Manifestation and Procedure: Trinitarian Metaphysics after Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas'.

46 - The Scotist dimension at times also distorts the fundamental personalism of Rosmini's ethics, in the direction of deontological rigidity, as when he suggests that the mark of the ethical is its detached, neutral and impersonal mode of judgement.

47 - For Aquinas, although metaphysics concerns primarily the field of being as *ens commune,* and it points towards God as cause of this field, God is not *included* within it: he does not, as subject matter, fall within the scope of metaphysics at all and so there was for him no 'special metaphysics' regarding God and no 'natural theology'. See J-F Courtine, *Suarez et le système de la métaphysique* (Paris: PUF, 1990).

and genera and haecceity, whose sheerly contingent and equivocal addition to being is nonetheless univocally and outrightly the same as to existence).[48] Aquinas, Rosmini held, was only correct about the containment within being of ultimate difference in the case of ideal difference, since for Rosmini ideality is an inherent mode of being, and only the 'thinking' done by an existing substance can specify it with sufficient distinctness. Yet this would still appear to leave what is thought formally external to the being of what is thought within the ideal level, also on the Scotist account that Rosmini more fundamentally deployed.

What is more serious is that Rosmini's version of the Scotist account appears to subordinate the entire Trinitarian ontology to the formal distinction of being from essence, threatening its redundancy. If essence is just added to being by an extrinsic act of will (as in Scotus's account of law and the ethical), then there is no longer any inherent substantive relationality of the three forms – and, indeed, Scotus did not think that even in God the three persons were so relationally constituted.[49]

But what is still more problematic is that Rosmini projected his already debatable human epistemology also onto God: thus God also is said to be able to double being by regarding it abstractly – as pure existential being in itself, taken apart from his own infinite existential plenitude (451-64).

One can already note here how this isolation of being merely as existential appears to forget Rosmini's Trinitarian contention that being is equi-primordially copulative: to be, since it is always manifestation, is always to be something, even if this is simply to be being (as in the case of God, who defines himself in Exodus as speaking as well as being: 'I am that I am'), besides just to be, period.

And significantly enough, Rosmini places the Scotist solution hierarchically below the Plotinian-Trinitarian one: *before* God (and each creature in his wake) thinks being abstractly, he is already Trinitarian (170-176, 190-4, 465-72). Although the primal forms arise as an implication of originally given 'initial' being (however problematic we have seen this notion to be), they arise before this being in general is considered in abstract isolation and the initial consideration includes an intentional reference to real being – as much for God as for creatures (173).[50] The Scotist solution is only invoked theologically with respect to *Creation.* By isolating being as a pure repertoire of possibilities of what might be, God becomes able to think in terms of finite being and to decide which finite possibilities to instantiate.

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48 - John Milbank, 'Afterword'.

49 - John Milbank, 'Afterword'.

50 - Rosmini actually says 'ideal being' here, when he would seem from elsewhere to mean 'initial' (213-7). He is not really consistent in his usage. At times he speaks of the latter as if it were identical with the former.

Rosmini is here explicit, and (despite what he claims) in contradiction with Aquinas in claiming that the divine exemplars or ideas of created things are other than archetypes unitedly contained in the divine *Logos* or Son himself, even if they are grounded in him (465-72, 1018).

There is more than one reason for calling this conception into question. First, the general problem of confining being to the barely existential and consequently to the possibility of being is that, paradoxically, by trying to isolate being we lose the difference not just between a possible and a real *thaler* (despite Kant), but also between being as such and possibility as such, since being is now itself defined as what *might be* according to sufficient reason. In this way being itself threatens to become nihilistically 'disquotable'. The second issue concerns the Scotist contamination of the divine simplicity that is here involved: surely God only intuits, concretely, everything in all its infinite complexity, which for him is also simple? The academic dignity of abstraction is only for finite professors, not for the eminent dignity of God, any more than for the rounded and level gaze of peasants.[51] By the same token, in the third place, there can be no moment of archetypal understanding in God that is not fully contained in his *Verbum.*

In the fourth place, and most crucially, it seems disappointingly strange that Rosmini could not see that his Plotinian/Trinitarian solution to the ontological problem did the job all on its own, without any distorting Scotist supplement. As we have seen, as soon as one has allowed an expressive and responsive order in the infinite, we have the ground for more limited versions of this expression and response. And there can be no 'abstraction' on the part of God that does not belong to the filial expression. Tellingly enough, in an appendix, Rosmini rebuked Plotinus for supposing that we can only think when we intuit (as later Bergson also thought, in part after Plotinus)[52] in terms of images (Appendix to Book Two, 1 [163]). He curiously failed to see that Trinitarian thought resolves Plotinian aporias (how can the pure One know or will or emanate without images?) by allowing, after the clear words of the Bible, 'image' also within the precincts of the godhead, like an ultimate icon or altar, never with full understanding 'gone behind', even on the sublimest of heights.

If he had followed through consistently on his primary Trinitarian solution, then Rosmini would have seen more clearly that each finite thing only exists as a limited version of the infinite Trinitarian actualities. Instead, by interposing the unnecessarily additional Scotist solution, he implies that things exist primarily as instantiations of abstract possibilities thought-out by the united godhead. The implication

51 - John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 14.

52 - Bordron, 'Bergson et les images'.

of that scheme could be that each thing is just an arbitrarily willed combination of rational possibility with bare existence, not an analogical participation in God and the Trinity at all. Clearly, nonetheless, Rosmini did not think that, and considered instead that by mediation of the divine 'ideal being' a participation in the Trinity was communicated to the primal forms in their finite instantiation. However, the intrusion here of essentially non-Trinitarian divine abstract conceptual being dilutes the vividness of his metaphysical vision. And not merely that: by suggesting that the constitution of the finite is out of a combination of univocal being with finite versions of essences he implies something non-relational, non-analogical, non-participatory and so non-Trinitarian at the very hinge of the transition from God to Creation.

Therefore, the two different solutions are not really compatible. The Scotist one is open to theological critique, unoriginal and uninteresting. By contrast, the Plotinian-Trinitarian one is highly original, subtle, self-consistent and profound.

One further dimension to this contrast must be mentioned. It is ultimately in the Scotist lineage that Rosmini would appear to be tempted towards ontologism. For the ideal being conceived by God is also claimed by Rosmini to stand, like wisdom in the Bible, at the 'beginning' of Creation (489). One can note in passing here how he fails to think this 'sophianic' moment in terms of the 'personifying power' of the divine essence, taken as wisdom, which is not simply to be regarded as 'impersonal', as Sergei Bulgakov rightly taught.[53] Conceived in this way, wisdom as also the first work of creation, the divine immanence, need not be regarded as a diminution of God, which is problematically the case, even already within God himself, with Rosmini's divine abstraction.

Still more seriously, but in a connected fashion, the liminal status of divine ideal being threatens to suggest that we do indeed directly and univocally think God's thoughts, since the abstracted and created 'initial being' of God distanced from his absolute being is none other than the *a priori* initial being which humans first intuit and later reflectively abstract as 'ideal being' (217). Some recent commentators here speak of an 'orthodox ontologism' and celebrate the way in which Rosmini has distinguished a 'Heideggerean' ontological difference from the theological difference of Creator and Creation.[54] The same distinction is seen as conveniently opening up the possibility of confining Rosmini's ontology within

53 - John Milbank, 'Sophiology and Theurgy: the new Theological Horizon', in *Radical Orthodoxy and Eastern Orthodoxy* ed. Adrian Pabst (Basingstoke: Ashgate, 2009), 45-85.

54 - Nicola Ricci, 'Ispirazione sapienziale'; Angela Ales Bello, 'Complessità e stratificazione dell'essere umano: a proposito di antropologia e psicologia. Un confronto tra Antonio Rosmini e Edith Stein'; Cristian Vecchiett, 'Donazione ed essere. Tratti di una relettura fenomenologica dell'apertura originaria all'infinito' in Bellelli and Pili eds., *Ontologia, fenomenologia,* 111-25, 127-49, respectively.

phenomenology, while reserving theology for revelation, which can also become just phenomenologically apparent to us, according to the divine decision and declaration.

But to the contrary, I would argue that Rosmini's semi-ontologism still remains theologically dangerous. It continues to suggest that there is at least some region of knowledge of essential possibilities that we share univocally in common with God. And the very confinement of our understanding to the phenomenological, if this understanding is imbued with certainty and even full reality, grants an absoluteness to human knowledge (for all Rosmini's insightful strictures against Hegel's empiricist scepticism) that it does not deserve and that again looks too divine in status. Our aim should not be the integration of Heidegger with theology, but rather a theological challenge to Heidegger, who always intended most of all a theological subversion: for such a challenge, it is not that the theological difference surmounts the ontological, but that the theological difference is an alternative (and more plausible) way of construing the ontological difference: the ontological as such is not an emptiness, as for Heidegger as much as Hegel, only present (and so not really present, since negated) in the ontic after all, but a self-giving plenitude, the infinite divine, which inheres in itself and thereby lets finite things also fully be (whereas the supposed nothing of idealist and phenomenological being must suck every finite thing back into its primordially pagan maw…)

The Scotistic aspect of Rosmini's thought opens itself up to this compromise with Heidegger, and yet it is a misreading according to his more fundamental Trinitarian intentions. Quite evidently, he thought, as we have seen, that phenomenological intention as 'containing' what is manifest, of itself inverts itself into 'inobjectivisation', and so into the equal primacy of ontological speculation, not out of arrogant overreach, but rather out of the opposite kenotic need to respect the being of the other in its independent integrity which we must respectfully and interpretatively try to conjecture – to the point where, through the miracle of the grace of charity, we really do seem to 'go over' to the other. Thus in the course of this ecstatic reach, we are always already ourselves reached by the divine operation of grace, which does not just confront us through theophanies with new events and new phenomena (though it does that), but also synergically works with and through our imagination and reasoning to raise us always beyond ourselves towards the infinite in our very finitude.

6. Purifying Rosmini I: Trinitarian Ontology and Participation

As I have already intimated, in order to render Rosmini's Trinitarian solution to the ontological problem more consistent and exclusive, we need to link it to Thom-

istic analogy and real distinction (and other, basically similar metaphysical accounts) rather than to Scotist univocity and formal distinction.

The former approach implies that finite reality participates in the Trinity directly, by emanative distribution, without any passage through a neutral moment of abstract and indifferent consideration on the part of God that would involve at once an essentialist rationalism and a voluntarism that have nothing to do with Trinitarian relationality.

With regard to participation in general, Thomistic commentators have divided as to whether divine Being is received by particular beings directly through limitation (L-B Geiger), or rather through the division and composition peculiar to all finite things (Cornelio Fabro).[55] Such composition exists most fundamentally, according to Thomas, between their essential nature and their existential actualisation. This real distinction has a double aspect: things that 'are' might not in fact be instantiated, and actualised things are existentially individuated (through the mediation of quantified matter) in excess of shared universality, like rockiness, treeness, animality and so forth.[56] In favour of the first position of Geiger is the truth that everything that exists, including its divided composition, derives in unmediated fashion from God. In favour of the second position of Fabro is the truth that there is something that is the case for the finite that is not the case for the infinite, and which therefore seems inherently to belong to it alone: most of all its non-simplicity or complexity. If participation is directly by limitation, then, after all, what is it that limits, what is the limiting factor? Can this derive from God if limitation is alien to his nature?

If, however, participation in divine Being is also, as for Rosmini, participation in Trinitarian Being, then there would appear to be a way to resolve this aporia. God, in creating, kenotically gives also that limitation which of itself involves composition, just because he is in himself a kind of unimaginable infinite, or infinite/finite (according to Dionysius) self-limitation through self-manifestation, and so an unimaginable infinite 'composition', without impairment to simplicity, in terms of substantive relation. For this reason, the limitation of finite things is not secondary to a composition that would derive from their nature (as if this were independent of their being created) but rather arrives, directly, as the restrictive expression of Trinitarian 'composition' in finite reality.

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55 - L.-B. Geiger, *La Participation Dans La Philosphie de Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1953); Cornelio Fabro, *La Nozione Metafisica Di Partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso D'Aquino* (Turin, SEI, 1950). For a discussion of this debate see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington DC: CUA, 2000), 124-31 and in general Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics* (Cambridge CUP, 2020).

56 - See Pabst, *Metaphysics,* 201-71.

And while it is wrong, after Fabro, to see the real distinction of being and essence as the primary means of effecting finite reception of what is participated, it is equally wrong, after Geiger, to see finite potential to actuality as the limiting factor (despite the way Aquinas often speaks), as if, once more, potency also was not equally the gift of God, to the extent that (as Nicholas of Cusa realised) we can inversely say that finite actuality restricts the divine potency.[57] Finite things emerge directly from God as limitations: but that means they are immediately composed of Being and essence, and of act and potency, in contrast to Being in itself. Neither composition nor limiting potency can be of finite origin if everything is created from nothing. And yet neither of them exist in God. How does the simple God give also the limitation and explicated composition of himself?

We can enjoy at least a little more insight into this conundrum if we understand God in himself to be a kind of infinite relational self-participation, or even eminently (as for Eriugena) self-creation. Then we can see that there is no receiving ground of being in the finite[58] – neither essence nor potency, nor even the real distinction between them and being in act: instead, as with Cusanus, finite composition is itself a contraction of the infinite 'composed' relating that is the Trinity. In the finite realm, being contains essence and essence contains being, just as act and potency contain each other (following the Rosminian logic of the relation in combination of the real with the ideal). But for a Rosminian perspective this does not just distribute a monistic unity of being as such, it rather distributes an infinite containing/contained that is an unimaginable perfect overlapping of both, despite endless oscillation or *circumincessio* – a term which Rosmini was fond of invoking (992,1141).

It is true that Aquinas, in his commentary on Boethius's *De Hebdomadibus,* spoke of participation in Being as that of particulars in a supreme abstraction, in a way that might appear to correspond to Rosmini's account of Being as primarily ideal and abstracted, outside his Trinitarian framework.[59] However, Aquinas associated this abstraction with participation by causality, as when air receives a measure of sunlight. The fiery plenitude of the sun then suggests that the abstraction Aquinas here has in mind is rather an abstract concretion: a universal generality so complete that it cannot participate in anything further, unlike the 'universals' of a *genus,* as he explicitly says. Therefore, he was speaking in this instance of the divine *esse ipsum,* not of an abstracted 'common being' which, in fact, in the same passage, he identified with *ens commune,* or the categorially shared common par-

57 - Nicholas of Cusa, *De Possest; De Apice Theoriae.*

58 - See Rudi Te Velde, *Participation and Substantialiaty in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

59 - Thomas Aquinas, *In Boeth. De Hebd.* 2.

ticularity of every *ens* insofar as it exists as combined with a defined nature. It is just these instances of *ens commune* which are said to participate being itself. A particular *ens* cannot particularise itself in terms of being, as in the case of a *genus*: all it can do is render finitely concrete being's infinite 'abstraction'. In this respect, the participation of an *ens*, Boethius's *id quod est*, in *esse* differs, as Aquinas says, from the participation of man in animal, or the participation of matter in form and concrete substance in universal accident. Yet Aquinas never turns these contrasts into a sharply divided typology of 'logical' and 'real' participation, as the commentators later did; both these examples, *along with* the participation of effect in cause (the third component of the commentarial typology) are said to be *quasi partem capere,* and even all to be examples of the sharing of something *particulariter* in something *universaliter.* This clearly suggests that, after all, as the sharing of the particular in abstraction they are a sharing in something still more universal than are generic universals.

Rosmini tended to run together Scotist univocal and abstracted Being with the Thomistic *ens commune.* But as we have just seen, this is illegitimate: insofar as common being in Aquinas is spoken of as if it were a kind of immanent and therefore univocal *genus*, it really operates as little more than a heuristic device, allowing him to insist that distributed being as we know it is entirely created and only occurs in individuated and characterised particular instances which are primarily substances and only bearers of accidents as a secondary effect (as Rosmini repeats). The participation of individual thing and of essences in Being for Aquinas is not in *ens commune*, but directly in the *esse ipsum* that is God.

It is true that Aquinas speaks also, in his Commentary on the *Divine Names* of Dionysius, of participation in *esse commune* and of the latter's analogical distribution.[60] But this is in the context of a Dionysian understanding of created Being as the first effect of the divine emanation, followed by those of life and intellect, on a classically neoplatonic scheme. In other words, there is analogous participation in *esse commune,* as there is not in *ens commune,* simply because the former term denotes the participatory descent of *esse ipsum.*[61]

Rosmini made the mistake of rejecting this emanative aspect of the Christian as well as pagan neoplatonic vision, in favour of a Scotistic account of Being as abstract and neutral, not apparently realising that this impaired his Trinitarian ontology. For if the divine descent in Creation is a Trinitarian one (as it can only be if God is a simple triunity) then it must itself be in a Trinitarian mode of outgoing and

60 - Aquinas, *In Dion de Div. Nom.* V.2.

61 - In *Truth in Aquinas* (35) I failed to distinguish between *ens commune* and *esse commune.*

return, finitely restricted. Otherwise, the 'substantive relation' of creatures to God, as affirmed by Rosmini, does not inherently express the substantive relations of God as Trinity.

7. Purifying Rosmini II: Trinitarian Ontology and Paradox

The Scotist dimension in Rosmini was deeply connected to his insistence, as he thought against Hegel, on the importance of the Law of Non-Contradiction.[62] In line with Scotus himself, and nearly all scholastic thinkers in his wake (including 'Thomists') up till Rosmini's own time, he thought that this law tells against any radical account of analogy and against analogy altogether in terms of the fundamental semantics of being.[63]

Insofar as Rosmini understood the law in an ontological fashion as requiring the primacy of a realist bias, whereby even thoughts are 'entities' in some weaker sense, and the self-standing 'thereness' of things can never be negated, one can resonate with his logical insistence. Indeed, as regards the whole of finitude it is essential. However, he failed (perhaps understandably enough) to consider how elements of his own metaphysics in fact put pressure on the LNC.

This applies first to the entire logic of containing/contained where what contains belongs and yet does not belong to what is contained: it includes it only by also somehow pointing towards it in a substantively relational fashion. But the substantive character of the relation implies that the container is defined by the contained which it is not, and vice-versa.

To the extent that any including boundary defines a set of contents, it defines them as relatively restricted and therefore the boundary becomes, in terms of that relation, relatively in-finite and universalising: this is why the boundary of a horse appears to coincide with the universal idea of any horse whatsoever.[64] The logically problematic character of bounding and containing is therefore inherently connected to the fact that here, already, the question of the infinite and its relationship to the finite has been touched upon. But the LNC assumes not just actuality but restricted actuality, which alone guarantees existential exclusivity: as soon as we venture upon the question of the constitution of restrictions and discover that this

62 - Gian Pietro Soliani, 'Transcendalità del principio di non contraddizione: Rosmini tra tradizione e modernità in *Ontologia, fenomenologia, cit.,* 151-68.

63 - J.-F. Courtine, *Inventio Analogiae: Métaphysique et ontothéologie* (Paris: J.Vrin, 2005), 283-90.

64 - Pavel Florensky, *The Meaning of Idealism,* 23-32.

already broaches the question of the infinite, its range of application becomes less certain.[65]

In Rosmini's case he insisted that what contains is so substantively related to what is contained that its subjective containment tends, of itself (and without Hegelian dialectical development) to invert through 'inobjectivation' into being objectively contained. Therefore, to reiterate, substantive relation appears to involve the coincidence of opposites.

The question of the relation of a container to its contents involves not just a kind of infinity but also a kind of recursion: instead of taking the apples one by one, we reflect on what it means to take them all altogether in a heap.[66] Can this second mode of taking just be folded back into the first mode and what is the implication of doing that? Does the numbering of apples remain amongst the apples or does it transcend them?[67] Or, alternatively, is the single apple that we think about in continuity with the apple that we bite into? Can contemplation of the apple be folded back into its succulence? Do we taste also the ideal and universalizable apple? But as we have seen, Rosminian metaphysics depends for its originality on a gigantic gesture of recursivity and of problematic folding back: namely, his inclusion of thinking about the ontological problem, and even performing the ontological problem, within the ontological problem itself. And he does so in a way that implicitly acknowledges that this inclusion is and is not impossible: he thereby converted the ontological problem into another one in order to resolve it: that of the infinite relationship of subject to object and their linkage. He also argued that the ultimate form of such linkage is always practical and ethical: if things hold together at all, then they can only possibly hold together by love.

As later with Bulgakov, the ontological problem of the unity and multiplicity of existence becomes in this way also the ontologically grammatical problem of predication or the ontologically logical one of propositionality and thereby in addition the practical existential one of what should a subject come to be, to have and to appropriate as his characteristics? All being, one might venture, has been vitalistically sexualised: for the co-equality of the copulative with the existential implies a joining and a generation even in the absolute.

In more prosaic terms, Rosmini recognised that the subject as knower is both within and without the field of being as objective (in the sense of both real and

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65 - See Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Oxford: CUP, 2002); *One: Being an Investigation Into the Unity of Reality and of its Parts, including the Singular Object which is Nothingness* (Oxford: OUP, 2016).

66 - See Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought; One.*

67 - Of course this lies close to traditional 'Third Man' arguments.

known) by speaking in classically orthodox terms of substantive relationality. Yet he failed to allow the irreducible paradoxicality of such a conception, beyond the range of the LNC, which is why Scotus and later the nominalists tended to shy away from this Patristic legacy.

Furthermore, the re-thinking of the analogy of being as also analogy of the Trinity, as earlier argued to be more consistent with Rosmini's deepest thoughts, altogether disallows any notion that analogy is a kind of makeshift, on its way to univocity in the end, but forced to dally with equivocity on the way. And therefore, in part univocal as to the expression ultimately aimed at, but in part equivocal as to expression for now. For if analogy is truly a third way between the exact and the ambiguous, then it must be like and unalike in just the same respect, thereby calling us tensionally back to God within and as our very finitude, as Cusanus suggests. It once more has to imply the coincidence of opposites. Exactly that coincidence is involved in the Trinitarian ontological notion that we are like something else and supremely like God by being related to them, such that we cannot better achieve this similarity by abandoning this relation: by forsaking either ourselves or the alterity of others. This sort of *mimesis* can never renounce the complementary aspect of participation which is a sharing-in. Thus, Rosmini himself spoke not just of our being contained by God, through our inobjectivsation into Christ (898), but also of our containing him when we are becoming deified (1122). No distant, objectively and externally measurable likeness to God can be involved here, for all that Rosmini formally confined analogy to proportionality (289).

In this radical passage (1122), he goes so far as to describe 'the supernatural order' as 'the participation of the absolute in the relative'. He applies his entire horizontal ontology of containing/contained (which pertains both to an infinite and to a finite horizon) also to the vertical relationship of the Creation to the Creator and vice-versa. In the case of both divine and created persons (and therefore of all created things which are in some degree subjects or persons) 'person is essentially container and its nature is that of feeling'. God as three-personal feels and contains each created person within this mutually affectionate ordering. Although not 'properly related' (as Aquinas says) to creatures, nonetheless through the Incarnation, creaturely persons are fully taken up into the Trinity, just because, through Christ, God has become after all related to them or reciprocally contained by them. It is, significantly, the inter-relation of deified human persons that completes the beauty of the cosmos (1123). A distance between God and creatures is still preserved, because, in keeping with the usual rule, the containing of us by God and our containing God are mutually exclusive moments. And yet, the mark of our being drawn into the supernatural order is that, as within the Trinity, they do now 'exist contemporaneously' (1122). In other words, they cannot and yet they do oc-

cur together. However unaware Rosmini was that he had thereby flouted the LNC in an extremely paradoxical manner, he clearly affirmed that the impenetrable incomprehensibility of the Trinitarian unity through relation is also the incomprehensibility of ourselves and the cosmos, just insofar as they can only be understood in relation to God.

All of these conclusions suggest that Rosmini was somewhat too hasty in his criticisms of both Hegel and Schelling; it would seem, after all, to be true that, for a Trinitarian ontology, we are what we are not, if we are radically related at the core of our being, both to God and to other creatures. We can resonate with Rosmini's rejection of Hegel's hypostasised original nullity and the consequent primacy of negation as propelling the becoming of reality. Yet the core of the problem here is surely not any rejection of the LNC: to the contrary, Hegel's desire to unravel every paradox as a 'contradiction' is just what leaves a pure nothing univocally alone at the origin and demands that the supposed nullity of original being be fully and eschatologically realised as the pure random contingency of particulars, now at peace in their formal shared isolation.[68]

A revised Rosminian embrace of paradox does not then return us to Hegelian dialectics. But does it imply that if something can also be its opposite, then that something is also nothing, rendering nothingness in some sense real and more than just a subjective gesture, as Rosmini supposed? At this point we are likely up against the unfathomable, but as Piero Coda has suggested, it seems advisable to advert to the perspectives of Plato's *Parmenides* and *Sophist*.[69] There exists no gulf of nullity on its own without any constituting sides and yet we seem to traverse an empty gulf when we affirm that 'this is not that' and still more when we affirm that 'this thing is also relationally the opposite of itself' or 'this think is defined by a container that does not exactly belong to itself'. As Coda explicates, such a gulf is traversed even in God, if he is Trinitarian difference and relation: the Son is not the Father, but he is also and exhaustively his generation by the Father, and so on. Both the gulf of difference and the gulf of self-denial in favour of the other appear to be traversed here, and surely this is the kenotic ground in God himself for Creation, Incarnation and the Cross.

Here we are forced to note that, even if the Trinitarian secret of participation is the restriction of what is absolutely participatory or relational in God, we are still after all left with the paradox that the unrestricted God gives restriction. Yet the nullity which we have now seen to be involved in the passage of Trinitarian differ-

68 - See Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ* (Cambridge MS: Harvard UP, 2011).

69 - Piero Coda, *Dalla Trinità: l'avvento di Dio tra storia e profezia* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011), 553-83, esp 567-83.

ence suggests that God as absolute Being is also *absolute* nullity (although inseparable from positive difference) and thereby an absolute restriction deeper than any finite restriction which God is thereby able also to donate.

Naturally this only postpones aporia further down the theoretical line, even while deepening a certain sense of theoretical resolution: how can relative nullity or restricted restriction result from absolute nullity or unrestricted restriction? At this point, the only further resolution may be Christological: God has always infinitely assumed finitude, which is the restriction of the absolute restriction of Trinitarian difference, besides being the restriction of divine infinitude. The Incarnation is therefore the inner ground for the seeming impossibility of Creation which must be, as Eriugena put it, 'created God'. It is also by virtue of this eternal bond with the Creation through the God-Man that God was able to assume and overcome that refusal of participation by creatures which is death. As Coda argues after Bulgakov, its negative nullity can be incorporated because it is infinitely less than the positive nullity of Trinitarian difference which is love. The Devil was here deceived into supposing that differential suspension over the gulf of alterity could ever, for God, be a rift.[70]

Yet we must recall that Trinitarian ontology was supposed to be the answer to the aporia of the impossible division of being. If there always remains a problem of how created restriction, however much conceived as the relational restriction of infinite relation in God, can derive from God, then this solution looks after all imperfect. How can restriction of the Trinity be added to the Trinity if is infinite and all-encompassing, any more than restriction added to Being?

It would seem therefore that the Christological addition is required on the plane of ontology, besides that of theology: being that distributes itself infinitely as the three primal forms can only distribute itself also finitely as their more restricted interplay, if being as such is kenotic: has also crossed the ontological divide of difference distinguishing it from beings, while yet in no way destroying or suspending that difference. But we can only know of the truth of that if it has really occurred or been manifest to us as an event, of exactly and only the kind which the Chalcedonian formulas articulate.

The same manifestation reveals to us that Being as such both includes and exceeds a moment of the obliteration of finite existence, in which infinite existence, being as such, is necessarily and unfathomably implicated, if all existence derives from God and God does not will death.

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70 - I am putting things here in what I take to be Bulgakovian rather than more dubious Balthasarian terms.

All this opens up, beyond Rosmini, and in the wake of Piero Coda, the further truth that a Trinitarian ontology will be also a Christological and a Staurological one. While such an expanded theological ontology must affirm that there exists no pure nothingness on its own, not even one immediately demanding its own negative dialectical reversal into actuality, it must also affirm that there is a nothingness that paradoxically coincides with being itself, if being itself is Trinitarian in character.

8. Conclusion

I have argued in this essay for the importance of releasing the orthodox radicalism of Rosmini's Trinitarian Ontology from the overlay of a neoscholastic framework that otherwise tends to inhibit its import for today. The temptation can be to try to hold together, in keeping with Rosmini's own intentions, the Plotinian/Trinitarian aspect with the Scotistic one that is much more rationalistic, and just for this reason promotes a semi-ontologism. But the latter should not be repristinated in a phenomenological guise that also seeks too much to divide Rosmini's philosophy from his theology, in this case against his intentions.

If, instead, we read the *Teosofia* as an integral Trinitarian metaphysics, then we come up against an explicit or implicit deployment of notions of name, number, category, predication, recursivity, inclusion, relationality and participation that are incipiently *avant-garde* in the very daring of their orthodoxy. Rosmini can then be put into conversation with the Russian sophiologists like Bulgakov and Florensky who similarly sought a Trinitarian critique of the German Idealists and came to some remarkably parallel conclusions, tending to a revision at once of the Idealist perspective and of foregoing theological tradition. Like them he did not simply criticise modern subjectivism, but also appropriated from it a dimension that validly points towards a more personalist, and therefore more Christian philosophy.

In any such conversation, Rosmini's contribution, especially when re-expressed in terms of analogy and paradox, should surely be acknowledged to have been particularly searching as well as technically refined. Noone else has quite so boldly and precisely argued that Trinitarian thought resolves the very core of our inherited philosophical perplexity.

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