



DAMIANO MIGLIORINI

11.

TROUBLES WITH TRINITARIAN
(RELATIONAL) THEISM: TRINITY AND GUNK

1. *Introduction*

Classical Theism presents considerable theoretical problems. Process Theists or, alternatively, Open Theists, in particular raise a number of objections about the “newness” in God (*dynamic omniscience*) and the God-World relation. Both non-standard theisms propose a dynamic-relational (Trinitarian) account of God in order to solve these problems:¹ God and the World are mutually *really* related (in all the different degrees of pantheistic or panentheistic accounts) because *God is relation* in Himself. The present paper is based on the following assumption: in order to have a God who can “change” – and hence a “coherent” theism – it is necessary to develop a Trinitarian Metaphysics (TM) and a corresponding Trinitarian Ontology (TO).

Hereafter, TM will be used to refer to a metaphysics that situates a Relational Ontology (RO) in a Trinitarian vision of God. It is *not* a metaphysics that discovers arbitrary ternary structures in the World.² The term TO, while currently rather fashionable, does not indicate a ‘systematic theoretical account’³ and is quite vague. We shall therefore replace it with the more precise notion of RO.

-
- 1 Anthony J. Kelly, ‘Trinity and Process: relevance of the basic Christian Confession of God’, *Theological Studies*, 31 (1970), 393–414; John O’Donnell, *Trinity and Temporality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 53; Clark Pinnock et al., *The openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), p. 108. We can mention also the Problem of Evil (Damiano Migliorini, ‘Eternal Immolation’, *IJPT* (2017), online).
 - 2 Colin E. Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993).
 - 3 Alessandro Clemenza, ‘Pensare l’ontologia trinitaria sulla scia di Klaus Hemmerle’, in *Un pensiero per abitare la frontiera*, ed. by P. Coda (Roma: Città Nuova, 2016), pp. 9–14, p.9. In Coda’s opinion, TO is a ‘humanly impossible challenge’, made possible by Revelation grace (Piero Coda, ‘Rivelazione e ontologia trinitaria’, in Id., *Un pensiero per abitare la frontiera*, p. 30).



The contemporary Trinitarian debate largely focuses on dogma defense.⁴ While it is difficult to draw a balance, I am persuaded, along with other authors, that *mystery* is an unavoidable constituent of the Trinitarian doctrine (a *robust trinitarianism* is suspect⁵). In any case, let us assume that a Trinitarian God is the best account of the divine achievable by human reason alone (without the mediation of the Scripture).⁶

Therefore, God is a “we” of love, both a *distinction* and *unity* between Father-Son-Spirit. God is the *eternal event of love*, characterized by a *kind of relation* called “love”.⁷ This social model implies that relations, in God, are not only formal (opposed relations, relative opposition)⁸

4 Thomas McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?* (Gran Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 11–55.

5 Karen Kilby, ‘Is an Apophatic Trinitarianism Possible?’, *IJST*, 12 (2010) 65–77; Thomas White, ‘Divine Simplicity and the Holy Trinity’, *IJST*, 18 (2016) 66–93; cf. Daniele Bertini, ‘Against Trinitarian Enthusiasm’, *Reportata* (2015; last accessed 12 dec. 2017).

6 I have tried to give plausibility to this controversial point elsewhere (Damiano Migliorini, ‘Fondamenti di un teismo trinitario’, *Antoniano*, 42 (2017), 49–83), in the wake of several influential Italian thinkers (Vito Limone, *Inizio e Trinità* (Pisa: ETS, 2013). I am not alone, of course: see for instance Richard Swinburne, ‘A Posteriori Arguments for the Trinity’, *Studia Neoscholastica*, 10 (2013), 13–23. Similar theses have been held by some medieval thinkers (cf. Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 22–31). In my opinion, the “love argument” is insufficient: it is first necessary to show that God is (necessarily) intra-relational, and multiplicity and dynamic (cf. Pascal Massie, ‘The Metaphysics of Primary Plurality in Achard of Saint Victor’, *The Saint Anselm Journal*, 5 (2008), 15–18); from the sum of these (self-subsistent) postulates emerges that God is necessarily a relationship between three persons (*Fondamenti*, 60–68; Id., ‘Trinità per filosofi?’, *Studia Patavina* 61 (2014) 471–82; cf. Charles J. Cassini, Gloria L. Shaab, ‘Transcendentals and Trinity’, *Heythrop Journal*, 48 (2009), 1–10). Cf. the concept of ‘Transcendental Multiplicity’ in Giovanni Ventimiglia, ‘La Trinità vocabolario del mondo’, in *Dio-Trinità tra filosofi e teologi*, ed. by P. Coda and M. Donà (Milano: Bompiani, 2007), pp. 22–24. Maybe God is Trinity because He is an archetypal instantiation of Creativity and Dynamism-Multiplicity (Marc A. Pugliese, *The One, the Many, and the Trinity* (Washington: Cuap, 2011), p.108), but He does not necessarily create the World.

7 David Tracy, ‘Trinitarian Speculation and the Forms of Divine Disclosure’, in *The Trinity*, ed. by S.T. Davis, D. Kendall (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 286.

8 The problem with divine *opposed relations* (Nicolas Jean-Hervé, *Sintesi Dogmatica* (Città del Vaticano: LEV, 1991, vol.1), the highest degree of abstraction that permits the description of the divinity as one and triune, is that they are *real*, while also being *formal* relations (Emery, 96–99; Paul Thom,

but are also real love relations among three persons that are one.⁹ These three persons are distinct due to their mutual relations but, at the same time, they are those relations fully in act (are verbs¹⁰), and one relational essence. Relations are ontologically manifest in the processions:¹¹ *God is the act of generation*.¹² Evidently, Being is here replaced by a *Trinitarian dynamism* of love,¹³ understood as a *relational event*. “Event” re-expresses the static concept of “essence” in a dynamic and personalistic form¹⁴. “Love” links together two apparently irreconcilable concepts: “eternal being” and “eternal event”.¹⁵

The term event, when indicating both the intra-trinitarian self-donation and an activity of God (e.g., His knowledge), is used analogically. “Love” does not only refer to a psychological state of God, to the *activity of Being-Goodness*,¹⁶ but also to the *eternal* ontological event

The Logic of the Trinity (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), pp. 129–42). They are *too less* to generate three divine persons; however, three really distinct persons are *too much* in order to maintain God’s oneness (cf. Friedman L. Russell, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 5–49.

- 9 In my opinion, Latin and Social Trinitarianism (and their variations) are both indispensable, but insufficient (cf. Dale Tuggy, ‘The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing’, *Religious Studies*, 39 (2003), 165–83; Alan Padgett, ‘The Trinity in Theology and Philosophy’, in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, ed. by Thomas McCall, Michael Real (Oxford: OUP, 2009), pp. 329–35; Daniele Bertini, ‘Che cosa non va nel modalismo?’, *Reportata* (2009; last accessed 12 dec. 2017).
- 10 Thomas G. Weinandy, ‘Trinitarian Christology: The Eternal Son’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. by G. Emery, M. Levering (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. 390.
- 11 Karen Kilby, ‘Perichoresis and Projection’, *New Blackfriars* 81 (2010) 432–45.
- 12 Cf. White, 2016; God ‘just is his act of begetting the Son and of spirating [...]’. The persons are pure relations and thus purely actual as persons. [...] the persons are purely actual ‘receivers’, inscrutable as such a notion might be’ (James E. Dolezal, ‘Trinity, Simplicity and the Status of God’s Personal Relations’, *IJST*, 16 (2014) 79–98, p. 92).
- 13 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Teologia sistematica* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1990), p. 501.
- 14 Cf. Michael Schultz, ‘The Trinitarian Concept of Essence and Substance’, in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology*, ed. by G. Maspero et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 146–76.
- 15 Piero Coda, *Dalla Trinità* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2011), pp. 550–51.
- 16 Cf. Aryeh Kosman, *The Activity of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); an ‘understanding of being as intrinsically active, self-manifesting, and self-communicating’ could be found in Aquinas: cf. Norris W. Clarke, *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993), ch. 1.

of (self)-*distinction*¹⁷ and *unification* by inter-penetration (perichoretic communion); intra-trinitarian love is neither a *state* (like “knowing”) nor an *action*, but a *process* of (eternal) distinction-recomposition, dissimilar to any kind of worldly event.¹⁸ Logically, the terms used to express this event are oxymoronic: *eternal generation*,¹⁹ *relatio subsistens*²⁰ (and *perichoresis*²¹). This God-Event is no longer the *Esse Ipsum*:²² there is a process of mutual donation between persons that are at the center of mutual activity²³ and, as a whole, God in themselves (His nature). We realize that the terms process, love and event can be used to describe the Trinity if these terms are understood in a completely different way from common use. We have *no image of the divine event* (activity).

Nevertheless, perichoresis makes it possible to interpret God as a process. Process Theology (PT) and Classical Trinitarianism (CTr) share the belief that God is essentially “social”,²⁴ but conceptualize this idea differently: in PT, God’s relationality arises *as sociality* with the World; in CTr, on the contrary, relationality is *within* God. According to CTr, PT should not identify the Trinity with the conceptual triads of Process Philosophy, understand the World as a part of the Immanent

17 Cf. Linn Tonstad, ‘The ultimate consequence of his self-distinction from the Father’, *NZSTh* 51 (2009) 383–99.

18 A standard classification of “events”: Roberto Casati, Achille Varzi, ‘Events’, *SEP* (2015), online.

19 Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Born Before All Time?* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Massimo Serretti, *Il mistero della eterna generazione del Figlio* (Roma: Mursia, 1998); JT Paasch, *Divine Production* (Oxford: OUP, 2012). Cf. also Mark Makin, ‘Philosophical Models of Eternal Generation’, in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, ed. by Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Harper Collins, 2017), ch. 13.

20 The term “relation”, as applied by Aquinas to God, loses all its common characteristics and becomes incomprehensible (Karen Kilby, ‘Aquinas, the Trinity and the Limits of Understanding’, *IJST*, 7 (2005), 414–27.

21 For an attempt to rationally explain perichoresis through non-standard mereology, cf. Aaron J. Cotnoir, ‘Mutual Indwelling’, *Faith and Philosophy*, 34 (2017), 123–51. However, the Trinity is never a distinction among “parts” (perichoresis remains a metaphor).

22 On Aquinas’s interpretation of the *Esse Ipsum* as “event”, cf. Giovanni Ventimiglia, ‘«Per modum verbi»: l’Essere sussistente come Evento secondo Tommaso d’Aquino’, in *Un pensiero per abitare la frontiera*, pp. 91–104.

23 “*Duo amantes sed una amatio*” (cf. David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), pp. 54–58.

24 “Social” in different degrees, as the *latin vs social* trinitarianism debate attests (but, as said before, I interpret both as two unavoidable, complementary and necessary faces of CTr).

Trinity, claim that the Trinity is a contingent configuration of God due to Incarnation, consider the members of the Trinity (a society of societies) as an intermediate level – subsociety – of the personally organized “actual occasions”,²⁵ or claim that divine persons emerge from a Creativity Field.²⁶ Equally, in order to be faithful to the intuition of CTr, *process trinitarianism*²⁷ must affirm that God is eternally social (divine persons are eternally the divine essence): before, during, and after the creation.²⁸ PT has the merit of highlighting the relation between God’s “becoming” and His “relationality”: a Relational-God is a Dynamic-God, although it must be stressed that God has His *proper* mode of becoming.²⁹ This means that the World is neither a necessary development of a Relational-God, nor God Himself. Rather, to an Expanding-Relational-God *in Himself* corresponds His mysteriously free will to create and to be in relation with a World of real newness.

What about RO (or TO), then? Does a Trinitarian God create a Trinitarian World, with which He enters in relation? Is the apophatic-relational-dynamic process of decomposition (*kenosis*: movement of mutual self-giving) and recomposition (*perichoresis*) also the ground of Fundamental Ontology (FO)? Does the “three-person-act-of-loving” have any analogy in the World’s fundamental reality? In his essay on relations, Ventimiglia³⁰ correctly points out that what we can say about God must first be told about reality. A TM – where “divine substance” is the “event-of-love-between-persons” – is achievable if we first have a good RO, i.e. if we can observe various kinds of *relationes subsistentes* and *perichoreses* also in our World. If there is specularity between the Trinitarian-God and the Trinitarian-World, we need to understand how

25 These hypotheses were developed by Boyd, Griffin, Ford and Bracken in: Joseph A. Bracken, Marjorie H. Suchocki (eds), *Trinity in Process* (London: Continuum, 1997). The last one is latently modalist, egalitarian (there is no order of the processions) and seems to imply Quaternity. For a critical assessment: Coffey, pp. 88–100.

26 Pugliese, pp. 117–18.

27 Pugliese, pp. 123–46.

28 Philip Clayton, ‘Pluralism, Idealism, Romanticism’, in *Trinity in Process*, pp. 117–45.

29 Douglas Pratt, *Relational Deity* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002); Bruce G. Epperly, *Process Theology: a guide for the perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), pp. 1–30.

30 Giovanni Ventimiglia, ‘La relazione trascendentale nella Neoscolastica’, *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica*, 81 (1989), 416–65; Id., ‘Le relazioni divine secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino’, *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica*, 82 (1990), 287–99.

relationalism is given in both. Coakley³¹ reminds us that relationality must be discussed carefully in order not to lose the apophatic character that is typical of Trinitarian speculation.

First of all, it is necessary to show that the concepts of “relations” and “individual substances” are not contradictory in themselves. In other words, we must show that there can be separate and interrelated substances. For this reason, it is crucial to investigate the ontological status of relations. However, this is not enough. It is commonly argued that ‘the notion of subsistent relation has no pure analogue in our ordinary human experience’.³² This idea must be challenged. We know the Cause by its effects, and God by His creation. Hence, if the effect is a World of endless perichoretic relations – that is, a gunk-eventist World (cf. par. 3 and 4) – its Cause must be a perichoretic infinite subsistent relation, that is a Trinitarian relation (in a broad sense). According to Hemmerle’s intuitions,³³ RO (or TO) tries to interpret “love” as the ultimate sense of being: the dynamic found at the lowest level of each entity is very similar to the personal gift of Trinitarian love. In light of the existing literature, however, we are at the level of a declaration of intent: a satisfactory RO has not yet been provided.³⁴

The following paragraphs are the summary of a wider work,³⁵ a *research program*. The hypothesis is that if FO is apophatic – that is, if it has the same dialectical nature (relationality-substantiality) as the Trinity – we can accept that Trinity is also apophatic. The apophatic-relational explanation may sound odd, but it is the most honest one, because it does not hide the problems under the carpet. What emerges is a coherent form of Trinitarian Theism – since there is correspondence between the human (un)ability to know the two levels of reality (the World and God)³⁶ – that is based on an inevitable relational-apophatic paradigm. The apophaticism that we see in the Trinity (and in ontology) ensures that Trinitarian Theism can neither be proven nor disproven.

31 Sarah Coakley, ‘Afterworld: “Relational Ontology”’, in *The Trinity and an Entangled World*, ed. by John Polkinghorne (Gran Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 184–99.

32 White, p. 86.

33 Klaus Hemmerle, *Tesi di ontologia trinitaria* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1996), p. 68; Piero Coda, ‘L’ontologia trinitaria: che cos’è?’, *Sophia*, 2 (2012), 159–70.

34 Lewis Ayres, ‘(Mis)Adventures in Relational Ontology’, in *The Trinity and an Entangled World*, pp. 130–45.

35 Damiano Migliorini, ‘Trinity and Gunk’, [draft], in Academia.eu, 2017.

36 We need to affirm an *epistemic humility* (Damiano Migliorini, ‘Lineamenti di cristologia’, *Theologica* 1 (2017), online).

2. *What Kind of Relational Ontology Can There Be?*

RO does not simply imply some kind of relations at some level. In RO, relations are at the same ontological level as substances, equally primitive (co-primal) as the *relationes subsistentes (r.s.)*.³⁷ This is what differentiates RO from similar hypotheses (e.g., process philosophy): *r.s.* are both distinct subsistences *and* relations. The abandon of Substance Ontology shifts the focus to a new, *analogical* concept of substance:³⁸ every entity is already in some kind of relation – or rather: it *is* always *also* a relation – but the “new concept” cannot lose the categorical role of the substance. When we try to interpret the World as a compound of *r.s.*, we cannot forget that even divine *r.s.* have the (paradoxical) function of simultaneously distinguishing and uniting.³⁹ In the World, this function must take place in a specific way.

What do we mean, then, when we say that an object is its own relations? *Power ontology* (in the form of *dispositional monism*, that is a structuralism),⁴⁰ *ontic structural realism*,⁴¹ and various process ontologies accentuate the relational character of fundamental entities.⁴² They all are *pluralistic* in some way, because they do not deny the existence of separate objects⁴³ (powers, structures or structural nodes, actual occasions, or events). They also seek to avoid falling into Bradley’s pitfalls, according to which the deep (internal) relationality of everything leads to the unreality of relations (where

37 In this sense, *relationality* is a *transcendental* (A. Aguilar quoted in Mauro Mantovani, ‘Persona e relazione, tra teologia e filosofia’, *Path* 10 (2011) 5–18, p. 13).

38 Michele Illeceto, *La persona: dalla relazione alla responsabilità* (Troina: Città Aperta, 2008), p. 128.

39 William Mander, ‘Bradley. The supra-relational Absolute’, in *The Routledge companion to Metaphysics*, ed. by Robin Le Poidevin (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 171–80), p.172.

40 Shungho Choi and Michael Fara, ‘Dispositions’, *SEP* (2016), online.

41 Elaine Landry, Dean Rickles (eds), *Structural Realism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012).

42 Harold H. Oliver, *A Relational Metaphysics* (Leiden: Nijhoff, 1981); Leemon McHenry, *The Event Universe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2015); Johanna Seibt, *Process Ontology*, in *Metafisica e Ontologia*, ed. by G. Imaguire (München: Philosophia, 2005).

43 Not even in Whitehead’s process philosophy (William P. Alston, ‘Internal Relatedness and Pluralism in Whitehead’, *The Review of Metaphysics* 5 (1952) 535–58).

everything is relation, nothing is relation) and therefore to one of the many possible kinds of monism.⁴⁴

Analyzing the merits and aporias of these ontologies is beyond our present scope. In general, the above-mentioned ontologies have problems defining the ontological status of relations, that is, of defining what a relation is and how it behaves⁴⁵. A satisfactory conceptualization of relations helps us solve the “objections” formulated by or derived from Bradley:⁴⁶ the intra-individual regress (constitution) and infra-individual regress (composition and causation).⁴⁷

The general problem faced by Bradley is how relations relate,⁴⁸ and his arguments aim to establish that we cannot understand how it is possible for *things* to be *related*. The concept of *external relation* is contradictory – according to Bradley – because it generates a regress.⁴⁹ And the situation does not improve if we replace all external relations with *internal relations*: in this case, the *relata*’s subsistence is diminished, because they are somewhat “dissolved” in the relation with their correlates. If there are no *relata*, however, the relation also disappears, and the term “internal relation” becomes little more than a linguistic construction.⁵⁰ We understand why Bradley insists that every relation, in order to be a relation, must be both internal *and* external, and that it is contradictory precisely for this reason.⁵¹ However, in a World

44 I agree with Alston (1952) that Whiteheadians fail to adequately preserve *plurality* from *relatedness*.

45 For example, ‘some process philosophers hold that the notion of dynamicity cannot be defined or even conceptualized’ (Johanna Seibt, ‘Aristotle’s “completeness test” as heuristics for an account of dynamicity’, in *Dynamic Being*, ed. by Vesselin Petrov and Adam Scarfe (Cambridge: CUP, 2015, pp. 2–27) p. 4.

46 Guido Bonino, ‘Bradley’s Regress: Relations, Exemplification, Unity’, *Axiomathes*, 23 (2013), 189–200.

47 Using Chrudzimski’s distinction (‘Internal, External and Intra-Individual Realions’, *Axiomathes*, 15 (2005), 487–512).

48 Pierfrancesco Basile, ‘Russell e il problema delle relazioni nella filosofia di Bradley’, *Rivista di Filosofia*, 90 (1999), 391–416.

49 According to Heil (‘Relations’, in *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, pp. 310–21) “external relation” is a completely impenetrable concept.

50 Jonathan E. Lowe, ‘There are (probably) no relations’, in *The Metaphysics of Relations*, ed. by Anna Marmodoro, David Yates (Oxford: OUP, 2016), pp.100–12.

51 Sushil Saxena, *Studies in the Metaphysics of Bradley* (London: Allen&Unwin, 1967), p. 169.

of internal relations, we cannot avoid some form of monism⁵² (e.g., Schaffer's *priority monism*⁵³). To sum up: relations, *no matter how they are conceived*, lack the power to relate their terms. External relations do not relate; internal relations, on the contrary, are not relations (the *relata* disappear into a monistic night: they relate "too much").

More specifically, by adapting Bradley's arguments, we can identify two types of regress: (r1) *intra-individual regress*: corresponds to the difficulty of imagining the existence of a substance which coincides with its intrinsic properties, but can also acquire new properties; (r2) *infra-individual regress*: is generated when, once we accept the existence of individual substances of any nature, we try somehow to make them interact contingently with one another.

(r1) is solved fairly effectively by the ontology of powers (*non-mereologic hylomorphism*)⁵⁴ – or in any case by Aristotelian ontology, which sees the substance as a way of being.⁵⁵ According to other thinkers, it can also be solved by re-conceptualizing *individuation* or *instantiation* (Armstrong), *non-relational tie* or *nexus* (Bergmann, Strawson), *compresence* (Maurin), *state of affairs* (Parker, Olson), *haecceitas*,⁵⁶ *intensive properties* (Paul), *exemplification* (Moreland), *gluons* (Priest), *U-operator* (Vallicella, Meinertsen), or *relata-specific relation* (Wieland and Betti), to mention just a few examples⁵⁷. The very core of the dispute, here, is *whether* we should accept a primitive in our ontology and, if so, *which one*.⁵⁸

Discussions on "relational" and "constituent" ontologies (cf. Damonte, in this book) address precisely this point. It seems that all pluralistic ontologies must admit the existence of relations, but relegate them to obscure ontological functions (they are called in

52 Brand Blanshard, 'Internal Relations and their importance to philosophy', *Review of Metaphysics*, 21 (1967), 227–36.

53 Jonathan Schaffer, 'The Internal Relatedness of All Things', *Mind*, 119 (2010), 341–76.

54 Anna Marmodoro, 'Aristotle's hylomorphism without reconditioning', *Philosophical Inquiry*, 36 (2013), 5–22; Id., *Power Mereology*, in *Philosophical and Scientific Perspectives on Downward Causation*, ed. by Michele Paolini Paoletti, Francesco Orilia (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 110–28.

55 Kosman, 2013.

56 Cf. Richard Cross, 'Relations, universals, and the abuse of tropes', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary*, 79 (2005), 3–72.

57 Katarina Perovic, 'Bradley's Regress', *SEP* (2017), online.

58 For a very useful overview of this problem, cf. Robert Koons, Timothy Pickavance, *Metaphysics. The Fundamentals* (Oxford: Wiley, 2015), pp. 102–53.

different ways, based on the reference ontology)⁵⁹. The conclusion of Inwagen⁶⁰ seems the most plausible one: no ontology can be entirely non-relational. But, if this dispute – which mainly involves intra-individual regress – partially shows the impossibility of deciding between relational and constituent ontologies,⁶¹ we can expect a similar result for infra-individual regress.

(r2) remains indeed a sensitive point among scholars. Even if we can support – not without hesitations – the idea of a *Compositional Pluralism*,⁶² no ontology can explain how relations contingently relate separate objects (= how the causes cause), despite the numerous attempts to do so.⁶³ We can therefore conclude that Bradley’s problem – at least in the case of (r2) – remains unsolved and that many of the proposed solutions simply do not grasp the depth of the problem itself.⁶⁴ In order to make “relations” intelligible, it is necessary to *develop a new system of ontological categories*.⁶⁵ But this seems somewhat arduous, and the attempt to investigate the ontological status of relations remains to this day a great battlefield⁶⁶ where it is still difficult to tell winners from losers. According to Heil’s list⁶⁷ of positions, we can probably be *reductionist* about many “classic” relations (such as “taller_than” or “instantiation”). However, in the case of irreducible relations (such as “causation”), the concept of relation remains aporetic, regressive.

59 Jiri Benovsky, ‘Relational and Substantival Ontologies’, *Erkenntnis*, 73 (2010), 101–21; James P. Moreland, ‘Exemplification and Constituent Realism’, in *Axiomathes*, 23 (2013), 247–59.

60 Peter van Inwagen, ‘Relational vs. Constituent Ontologies’, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 25 (2011), 389–405.

61 Dale Jacquette, ‘Qualities, Relations, and Property Exemplification’, *Axiomathes*, 23 (2013), 381–99.

62 i.e., the existence of *wholes* (Koons and Pickavance, p. 127).

63 Helen Beebe, Christopher Hitchcock (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Causation* (Oxford: OUP, 2009); Anna Marmodoro, ‘Causation without Glue: Aristotle on Causal Powers’, in *Aitia I*, ed. by C. Viano (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), pp. 221–47; Id., ‘Aristotelian Powers at Work’, in *Causal Powers*, ed. by Jonathan Jacobs (Oxford: OUP, 2017), pp. 57–76; Bruno Gnassounou, Max Kistler (eds), *Dispositions and Causal Powers* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1–42. In *Power Structuralism* causal relations are reduce to an ambiguous “ontological dependence” between independent powers.

64 Fraser MacBride, ‘Relations’, *SEP* (2016), online.

65 Sebastian Biceño and Stephen Mumford, ‘Relations all the way down?’, in *The Metaphysics of Relations*, pp. 198–217.

66 Marmodoro, *The Metaphysics of Relations*.

67 Heil, ‘Relations’.

Can we conclude – exactly as Lowe⁶⁸ did – that there are (probably) no relations? The situation seems quite puzzling: in pluralist ontologies, relations are real only in the sense that objects and their properties are real. Relations are reduced to the properties (or powers, mutual dispositions) of their subjects, or at least they become an obscure primitive. On the contrary, in monist or relationist ontologies, relations are not relations. However, we need a concept of *real* relations to give an account of our reality (contingency and existence of individuals) and to articulate a discourse about the Trinity.

The lesson we learned in order to build the RO required by TM can be summed up in two conclusions: (1) There must exist at last one real relation. This relation cannot be reduced (we must be *realist non-reductionists*) and it must have its own ontological status. If Bradley is correct, however, it must be conceptually new. (2) Real relations must be equally primitive with the substances, i.e. they must not dissolve the substantial principle. Can an ontology take all this into account?

Before moving in this direction, let us briefly consider the theological side of the question: the ontological challenge issued by quantum physics – the *structuralist* interpretations – have inspired various theological works, some of which are specifically about the Trinity,⁶⁹ while others aim to define an *Entangled God*.⁷⁰ In both these works, we find the convergence between a Trinitarian-Relational God and relationist ontologies. However, a few problems remain: (1) We do not have a definitive model in physics; (2) A unique philosophical interpretation (aporia-free) of quantum physics has not yet been formulated; (3) absolute relationalism seems to imply a form of Existence Monism or Priority Monism⁷¹ where *real* relations disappear (internal relations disappear *as relations*).

Relationalism is not a good perspective: in order to describe the Trinity, we need to maintain *pluralism* (and avoid monism and processism). We do not need ontological relationalism as *Vestigium Trinitatis*, since in God the substantial element is not eliminated. The specificity of Trinitarian relationalism (apophatic-perichoretic) must be taken into account also when we “search” for it in the World.

68 Lowe, 2016.

69 Polkinghorne, *The Trinity and an Entangled World*; Gloria Schaab, *Trinity in Relation* (Winona: Anselm, 2012).

70 Kirk Wegter-McNelly, *The Entangled God* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

71 Jonathan Schaffer, ‘Monism’, *SEP* (2016), online.

3. *Toward an Event-Infinitive Ontology: Some Key Points*

In a recent contribution, I tried to develop the kind RO that may serve our purpose: by *applying the concepts of gunk-junk to process theory* – understood as eventist ontology – we may be able to create an original form of relationalism, an *Event-Infinitive Ontology* (EIO) that can somehow overcome some of the issues listed above.⁷² It is not possible to elaborate here on the arguments that led to the formulation of this EIO. We shall therefore limit ourselves to describing its key points:

(1) EIO *considers the gunk hypothesis as a good candidate for a Fundamental Ontology (FO)*.⁷³ This means that an extended atom (or an extended simple) is an abstraction: EIO holds that there is *isomorphism* between the nature of objects and the nature of space-time. It follows that if each extended object is conceptually divisible, the only possible atom is the *unextended point*.⁷⁴ However, this kind of (non-extended) atom cannot generate extended objects.

(2) *Pointy* (atomist) and *gunky Worlds* both involve a certain amount of counter-intuitiveness. Following Kant's second antinomy, it is impossible to decide whether the World is composed of simples (atomism), or each part is complex (gunk); both options are rationally defensible. The atom is unthinkable: we have no image of it (when we "imagine" the atom, we begin to divide it in a gunky way); gunk, however, is also unthinkable, because an endless decomposition would lead us to a bare "continuum", where everything is infinitely dense; to avoid this, the notion of gunk is based on an hypothesis that has many affinities with atomism, namely the *particulate hypothesis*: every reality has parts. But what are these *parts*? If they are infinitely decomposed, they are infinitely small, and therefore "almost" atoms. The fundamental "particles" can not be extended (because they would not be completely divided) and can not be un-extended (because reality could not emerge from them); the fundamental entity, therefore, is "approximately without extension". *Gunk implies infinite divisibility and infinite composition of "parts" which are asymptotically atomic*

72 Is an ontological interpretation of perichoresis different from Gunton's relationality (*The One, The Three and the Many*, pp. 163–179).

73 Schaffer, 'Monism'.

74 For a Trinitarian account starting from *extended simples*, cf. Martin Pickup, 'The Trinity and Extended Simples', in *Faith and Philosophy*, 33 (2016), 414–40.

particles, though they never become atoms; nor can the gunk be “atom-full”, because the infinite divisibility implies an absolute density (continuity), *which is asymptotically a continuity*.

(3) In a gunky World, ground is dialectical, a process of decomposition and recomposition. Our access to fundamental reality is “delayed”: we start from the fact that *we are here* as “objects”, and we move from *here* to “*before here*” (FO). The “before” can elude us, but this does not imply that it does not exist: it only implies that we cannot describe it “from here”. Following Schaffer’s position,⁷⁵ if we eliminate every basic level, each object acquires ontological dignity, and we can consider the existing objects of our World as really existent. I myself might be an infinitesimal object, since “above me” there is an infinitely huge World; hence, conversely, I exist with an infinity of infinitely small objects “inside me”. We do not know *how*, *where* and *when* the grounding chain finishes, or at *which level* of it we are positioned. Nor does it make sense to ask such questions.

(4) If there are no levels in a gunky World, extended substances are what *they seem to be* (apparently). If the levels are relative, an extended entity might be part of something else (*junk hypothesis*).⁷⁶ By exaggerating this relativization (a kind of *junk effect*), we might say that the universe is so small that it is (perhaps) unextended.

(5) A very controversial question is whether two extended substances can “touch” (be in *contact*). It is an ancient problem: if the boundaries between substances can touch, parts of these substances (the boundaries) overlap, and hence the substances can overlap.⁷⁷ EIO claims that the problem of contact has never been adequately solved: any solution that implies a causal transmission through contact between extended separated substances must be excluded or re-thought.

(6) EIO assumes that there are infinitesimal particles *and* a Principle of Aggregation (PoA). As strange as it may sound, every ontology needs a principle that does this job. However, we do not know much about PoA: it could be a point among an infinity of points. The “particulateism” (the focus on particles) proposed by EIO maintains that

75 Jonathan Schaffer, ‘Is There a Fundamental Level?’, *Noûs*, 37 (2003), 498–517.

76 That is, ‘[We] can use the possibility of both gunk and junk as arguments against both Atomism and Monism’ (Koons, p. 142). *Junk* is plausible because, even if God cannot be *encompassed*, He is even so “infinite”, not closed, excess.

77 Dean Zimmerman, ‘Could Extended Objects Be Made Out of Simple Parts?’, *PPR*, 56 (1996) 1–29.

every infinitesimal is infinitely dense and constantly aggregated, so that the particulated reality becomes a continuous reality (asymptotically). Then, space is never empty: it is full of infinite incremental infinities (an endless series of events).

(7) Assuming the *everything-in-everything principle*,⁷⁸ infinitesimal particles, rather than being *bare particulars*, are *well-dressed particulars*: they have the property of being-all-properties. An infinity of infinitely dense infinitesimals corresponds to a property that condenses every possible properties in a point.⁷⁹ This plurality of mereologically infinite infinitesimals, in the appropriate circumstance, is arranged to form cognitively salient *but relative* configurations (adapting Varzi's expression).⁸⁰ However, we do not (and never will) know *how* infinitesimals are organized.

(8) EIO uses the neologism *infinitying* to describe gunky-infinitesimals, because gunk's parts have an approximate "particulate" nature but they *appear to be a process* of decomposition (expressed by the *-ing* form: they are like a verb). The term *infinitying*, of course, is paradoxical. As Inwagen emphasized, however, we cannot say much about *simples*: we feel an *ontological vertigo*⁸¹ when we find that *simples* have to do with a spatial point, and we have little to say about how they meet/clash. In EIO, *simples* are both *infinitying* and gunky: they go far beyond the atomistic conceptualization of *simples*.

(9) According to EIO, the existence of events⁸² and objects is equally primitive. This marks a distance between *pure events*⁸³ (or *process metaphysics*)⁸⁴ and EIO. In EIO, *infinityings* are not only aggregating-events themselves, but also an aggregation of other *infinityings*: there is no precedence of events over objects, nor the elimination of the substantial element. Using the classical classification of events, an aggregated-fundamental-event of *infinityings* is non-physical, homogeneous, culminating, not countable, static *and* dynamic. It

78 Anna Marmodoro, 'Anaxagoras's Qualitative Gunk', *BJHP*, 23 (2015), pp. 402–22.

79 Infinityings are *neutral*, neither physical nor mental.

80 Achille Varzi, 'La natura e l'identità degli oggetti materiali', in *Filosofia analitica*, ed. by Annalisa Coliva (Roma: Carocci, 2007), pp. 17–56.

81 Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 165–66.

82 The notion of event would require a long discussion, impossible to develop here.

83 *The Event Universe*, p.16.

84 Johanna Seibt, 'Process Philosophy', *SEP* (2016), online.

begins and ends, although it is as such the cause of space-time, and is susceptible to change. It is qualitatively different from the divine (Trinitarian) events, but shares their apophatic nature.

(10) The PoA of *infinityings* is primitive: its action is exercised through the *infinityings* (in an infinitely dense World of *infinityings*, each entity is an *infinitying*). The PoA is metaphysical, i.e. it is not a law that we can discover through sciences. Scientific laws derive from PoA: they describe *causation*, which is ontologically based on the passage of *infinityings*.

4. *Is a Gunky-Power-Eventist Ontology Possible?*

What insights have we gained from EIO?

(a) Infinityings are relations because they are the infinity of relations between the infinitely divided; they are the substantial principle *and* the relational principle. EIO re-defines the concept of substance, rather than dismissing it altogether. If every entity is gunky, there is no *instant* in which it exists: every gunk's part is always *passing* between its parts; but *parts* (and objects) still exist. In this sense, a substance is the activity of being what it is (by PoA): an enduring passage of all its parts in all the others. The aggregation is a continuous event, a process that is never fully accomplished; objects (both micro and macro) are a continuous process of infinitesimal change. But they *are* and *are-not* process: if the instant is relativized, there is not one object in an instant and another in the next; the object is in the instant and already-partially-in the next one, because there is an infinitying between it and the other.

(b) There is at least one real relation: it allows the analogical passage from the World to God (Trinitarian). This relation is the PoA (and maybe PoA is the Love-Law), from which every other causal relation emerges: causation is a processual "transfer" of infinityings, and is an *external and internal* real concrete relation. The relation that should bring two infinityings together is itself an infinitying. This oscillation is due to the intrinsic nature of gunk, which is *particulate* and *continuous*. EIO lends itself to be the basis for a *gunky power ontology*.⁸⁵ *The infinityings are the activity of being all properties, whereas objects are the activity of being those objects, that is, the dominant property emerging from the PoA.*

85 Marmodoro, 2015.

(c) EIO is a paradoxical ontological structure: it claims that reality is continuous and made of parts. *Fundamental reality is an infinitely dense ocean of epistemic contradictions*, but the impossibility to decide between ontological options is the basic feature of ontology (ontology is “possible” in the sense that many ontologies are possible). Gunk-Junk is a chimera, but it may be the best chimera we have. In order to express fundamental reality (just like when we attempt to describe divine nature), we need oxymoronic terms that can maintain the antinomies and, at the same time, “name” them. In EIO, however, rational investigation has a role: even if we need at some point to climb over the wall of our rationality, this does not mean that we do not need the ladder, and that we do not have to climb the entire ladder before jumping. The similarity with Trinitarian theology is clear: we believe various reasonable statements about the Trinity (the “ladder”), but these statements can not be integrated into a unitary image (the “jump”);⁸⁶ the same is true for FO. However, when we clarify how mysterious is an object – to avoid errors⁸⁷ – we have already said a lot.⁸⁸

5. *Event-Infinite Metaphysics: God-event and Apophaticism*

What about reality as a whole, including God? Let us try again to lay down a few points toward an Event-Infinite *Metaphysics* (EIM):

(a) The way in which the event is conceived in EIO can become, by analogy, the donation-event of Three in One in EIM. EIO relativizes the difference between Three and One: the infinityings are merged while remaining distinct.

(b) The analogy is not between finite and infinite, but between infinity and infinity; World’s infinity (gunk) is different from God’s infinity (simplicity), but the two reciprocally refer to each other. The mystery that we find in the way infinityings aggregate (and exist) is the same mystery that we find in the “Three” Infinityings or divine persons: through their mutual interpenetration, they give rise to a single infinity without losing themselves. The activity of Divine Being, therefore, is not only Thought-Thinking-Itself, but also Giving-Itself-Receiving-Itself (aggregation in the distinction: trinitarian kenotic love) of Three

86 Kilby, 2005.

87 Emery, 2007, p. 28.

88 Kilby, 2010.

Infinityings. The sum of infinities is perhaps the best analogy we have for the Trinity⁸⁹ (the sum of three infinities is an infinity).

(c) EIM may be a form of panentheism. The infinityings are similar to a “contracted-deity” but, if God *is* those entities, He is above all of them. The bottom of reality can only be God Himself, although in a contracted form, but God is *non aliud*: He coincides with reality and exceeds it. In EIM, there is an upper infinite limit (God) corresponding to a lower infinite limit (God), because God is the raw “material” of everything⁹⁰. If we cannot say much about FO, this is due to a trivial reason: the fundamental entity is God, and God is everything in everything and overcomes everything. God has created the World within Himself, using Himself as the “matter” of creation (the aporias of the “pointy” powers is due to the fact that “point” is a mystical concept, just like divine substance). In EIO the fundamental reality is temporal *and* eternal, spatial *and* unextended, substance *and* relation.

The World is God who (voluntarily) contracts Himself: God does not create out of Himself, but due to a self-condensation of one “part” of Himself. Pantheism, therefore, is avoided: God *is* everything *in* everything, but *in a contracted form*. Creation is not exactly the body of God, but could more appropriately be described as *a tattoo* on His skin. EIM is a form of *panentheism*, for sure, but we have good reason to suspect that this term is too vague⁹¹ and that every theism is ultimately pantheistic in some way.

89 The Trinity, however, is “composed” of three *metaphysical infinites* (MI), which seems implausible (the MI is *one*, by definition). However, the MI is beyond our understanding and we do not know if it has any characteristic “other” than the mathematical or the metaphysical infinite (MI could encompass both). “Three” (numeric language) is an analogical term when referring to God: ‘While numbered realities seem to appear when we speak of Father, Son, and Spirit, God cannot be comprehended by number’ (Lewis Ayres, ‘Augustine on the triune life of God’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014, pp. 60–78), p. 69). “Infinite” marks the limit of logic (Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function* (New York: Dover, 1953), p. 62). We avoid saying, unlike Bracken does, that divine persons are both *finite* and *infinite* (cf. Pugliese, p.137).

90 ‘God so permeates all things as to be not a quality of the world, but the very creative substance of the world’ (Augustine, *Letter 187*). Cf. Edward Wierenga, ‘Omnipresence’, *SEP* (2017), online.

91 Or based on a ‘precarious equilibrium’ (Bracken, *Panentheism*, p. 95). Cf. Douglas Hedley, ‘Pantheism, Trinitarian Theism, and the Idea of Unity: Reflections on the Christian Concept of God’, *Religious Studies*, 32 (1996), pp. 61-77.

In summary, the correspondences between EIO and EIM that underlie the foundation of *Trinitarian Theism* could be formalized as follows:

EIM	EIO
God's essence is a supra-essential dynamic reality in which substance and relations coincide; He coincides with Love (ontological principle), that is, with the event of the perichoretic unity of three Persons that are distinct by their relations but co-existent, because they are eternally generated in the one kenotic divine substance (kenotic principle).	Fundamental reality is a dynamic substance: is the infinityings, the infinitely dense perichoretic relations between infinite gunky events of decomposition and aggregations (by PoA), particulate and distinct powers, but present in one another, generated by contraction of the divine relational substance.

Analogy plays an important role: the intra-trinitarian event is neither like the worldly event nor like the infinitesimal reality event. EIO and EIM are true when they respect the specificity of the analogical speech, the similarity in the dissimilarity: there is an analogical correspondence between the *infinite divine substance*, the interpenetration of (at least) Three Infinityings (lovers), and the *infinite density of the World* in which the infinityings interpenetrate. The Trinitarian figure is the event/process of decomposition and recomposition (both eternal, accomplished) of the Three-in-the-One (perichoresis), and the bedrock of the World is something similar to this Trinitarian event. The Divine Substance (event-of-love-between-persons) is analogous to the *fundamental perichoretic r.s. of the World*, i.e. to fully substantial and fully relational entities. The prerequisites for intra-trinitarian relations, therefore, are the deeper “giving” relations, that is, the infinitesimal ones. The equal primitivity between substances and relations differentiates EIO from process philosophy precisely because EIO does not try to eliminate the substance: substance and relation are the two ontological (indispensable) categories through which we can approximately describe fundamental “entities”. If, according to Bracken, the notions of *perichoresis* and *r.s.* apply to everything,⁹² then *gunk is the best notion in order to discover Trinitarian perichoresis in FO*.

92 Pugliese, pp. 139–40. Whitehead’s concept of internal relatedness must be avoided because it leads to monism.

EIO and EIM are apophatic: the essence of the entities remains unknowable to human beings (*negative ontology*).⁹³ The concept of *infinitying* is a kind of hyperphatic (maybe *dipolar*)⁹⁴ definition because it simultaneously affirms two apparently contradictory truths⁹⁵; this happens because we do not have words to express a hybrid reality such as “divine nature” or “fundamental entities”. Our way of talking about God (*via triplex, apophaticism, hyperphaticism*) reflects our way of “talking” about FO. Can we, however, develop a metaphysics based on a negative ontology? Not only we can, but perhaps we must.

The dialectic between *apophatic* and *cataphatic* speech concerns our knowledge in general: every level of knowledge is apophatic to a degree,⁹⁶ which increases at the top (God) and at the bottom (FO: God again). Hence, EIO is a useful instrument to express Christian truths, if integrated with a hyperphatic (philo)theology. The convergence between RO and TM must be sought in the apophatic-hyperphatic “moment”⁹⁷. “Event” is a proper name for God and for World’s fundamental reality, though we can define neither the nature of this event, nor how it is organized.

In conclusion, it is difficult to establish if EIM can solve the problems of theism listed at the beginning of this paper. Maybe it can, by grasping the *vertigo of the Infinity*: the metaphysically infinite God is the infinity of infinite infinities (in a point)... This progression of words makes us aware that we have no words for infinity, but only a juxtaposition of truths; being aware of what we can “say” of Infinity, we cannot exclude

93 Giovanni Zuanazzi, *Pensare l'Assente* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2005). This seems to be also Leibniz’s position: cf. Maria R. Antognazza, *Leibniz on the Trinity and the Incarnation* (London: YUP, 2007), p. xxv.

94 Or “postdichotomous” (cf. Philip Clayton, ‘The God Who is (not) One’, in *Divine Multiplicity: Trinities, Diversities, and the Nature of Relation*, ed. by Chris Boesel, Ariarajah Wesley (New York: FUP, 2013) pp. 19-37).

95 ‘Contradictory sentences’ are ‘contrary statements’ in this case, due to a categorical incommensurability (cf. Michael Scott, Gabriel Citron, ‘What is Apophaticism?’, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8 (2016) 23–49). I agree with Scott and Citron: “apophaticism” is a cluster of strategies and is a *process* (cf. Damiano Migliorini, ‘Parola e Silenzio, figure di fede e libertà’, *Vivens Homo* 25 (2014), 497–509).

96 Argyris Nicolaidis, ‘Relational Nature’, in *The Trinity and an Entangled World*, pp. 93–106.

97 There are not two “parallel rationalities” between Trinity and the World (cf. Colin E. Gunton, ‘The Trinity, Natural Theology and a Theology of Nature’, in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, ed. by K.J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 103), but two “parallel apophases”.

the existence of multiplicity, real relations, dynamism, newness in God (incremental knowledge of the free future). This “confident silence” is the only possible way to “say”, in silence, that there is (perfect) freedom and newness in God, and that libertarian human freedom is therefore possible⁹⁸ in an infinite-gunky World that freely draws a *tattoo* on God’s skin. God’s relation with the World is similar to the intra-trinitarian one:⁹⁹ it is an apophasis that does not rule out newness.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank prof. A. Marmodoro and prof. F.L. Marcolungo for their fruitful, critical, and constant support, and prof. A. Varzi for the inspired advice he kindly gave me during my visit at Columbia University.

98 Also in PT «freedom is mysterious to us» (Pugliese, p. 113), but ‘finite entities introduce genuine novelty and change into the divine life’ (p. 145).

99 Cf. also Richard Rice, ‘Trinity, Temporality, and Open Theism’, *Philosophia* 35 (2007), 321–28; Gloria L. Schaab, ‘The Creative Suffering of the Triune God: An Evolutionary Panentheistic Paradigm’, *Theology and Science* 5 (2007), 289–304.