KLAUS HEMMERLE ON THE TRINITARIAN ONTOLOGY OF THE HUMAN PERSON*

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ABSTRACT

The 20th-century quest for a Trinitarian ontology was associated with a critical reconsideration of the modern philosophy of the subject. However, this reconsideration did not reject the question of subjectivity itself. It rather rejected any narrowed ontological assumptions that would identify the very ground of subjectivity with a univocal eidetic structure of being. In its most advanced forms, the modern and postmodern philosophy of the subject proved to be radically structuralist, relational, or even differentialist. While many attempts at Trinitarian ontology have faced this challenge either by adapting Christian dialogical personalism or reviving older metaphysical traditions and notions, e.g., the analogy, the participation, and the concept of the subsisting person, Klaus Hemmerle emphasised in his *Theses Towards a Trinitarian Ontology* (1976) above all the ontological primacy of the relational self-giving (*Sich-Geben*), explicated phenomenologically. Every subsisting being, including the human person, gains its concrete contour only from within this relational process. But does this relational reappearance of the human person mean its self-alienated completion, or rather its complete alienation? How can this relational account of the human person be related to older metaphysical, theological, and personalistic traditions? Does Hemmerle avoid the dangerous dissolution of the human person as a mere processual moment of the whole community and the world?

Keywords

Klaus Hemmerle; Trinitarian ontology; Trinitarian metaphysics; Trinity; Human person; Substance; Structure; Subject; Relation; Love; Community; Communio; Relational ontology; Christian personalism.

1. Trinitarian Ontology and the Question of the Human Person

From its beginning, the 20th-century quest for a Trinitarian ontology[1] was widely associated with a critical reconsideration of the modern philosophy of the subject as developed in various forms by Descartes (*cogito*), Kant (*Ich denke*), Hegel (*Geist*), Husserl (*das reine Ich*), or Heidegger (*Dasein*). However, this theological critique did not reject the question of subjectivity or being-in-the-world itself. It rather rejected its situating within narrowed ontological constellations dominated either by the idealistic and transcendental hypostatising of being as an eidetic structure a priori, outside the theological real difference between Triune God and his creation, or by the identification of the subject-centred, self-intentionally structured horizon of the phenomenological reduction with the sole *terminus ad quem* of Being's historical self-disclosure.

In its most advanced forms, this modern and postmodern philosophy of the subject proved to be radically structuralist, relational, deconstructivist, or even differentialist.[2] While Fink still acknowledged the importance of grasping the fullness of presence in the midst of an ontologically understood play,[5] according to Derrida, the identifiable presence, this *terminus ad quem* of Being's self-revelation, is always already a metaphysical end of the play. Derrida states that there are 'two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay'. The one (1) seeks to understand the metaphysical and onto-theological truth behind the relational structure, freeplay, and fluctuating order of signs. Such a metaphysical interpretation turns towards the securing and grounding origin and speech which brings the play to its end. The

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[1]   For a brief summary, see Roland Kany, 'Trinitarische Ontologie und Logik,' in *Augustins Trinitätsdenken: Bilanz, Kritik und Weiterführung der modernen Forschung zu De Trinitate*, by Roland Kany, 1st ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 272–78; Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'Being, Relation, and Communion,' in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (New York: Routledge, 2005); Ľubomír Žák, 'Verso una ontologia trinitaria,' in *Abitando la Trinità. Per un rinnovamento dell'ontologia*, ed. Piero Coda and Ľubomír Žák (Roma: Città Nuova, 1998), 5–25; Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, 'Ontologie, Trinitarische,' in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie (Bd. 6)* (Basel – Darmstadt: Schwabe Verlag, 1984).

[2]   Cf. Vernon W. Cisney, *Deleuze and Derrida: Difference and the Power of the Negative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2018).

[5]   'In contrast with the […] futurism of our life, play is characterized by calm, timeless 'presence' and autonomous, self-sufficient meaning…' Eugene Fink, 'The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play,' *Yale French Studies* 41 (1968): 21.

second interpretation (2), instead, 'affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism',[4] and thereby ignites the course of the metaphysically unsecured 'freeplay' through the constant sacrifice of the substantiality of the human person on the altar of the absolute *différance.*

Although there certainly were influential personalistic attempts at Trinitarian ontology which opposed the modern and postmodern philosophy of the subject but otherwise shared its anti-metaphysical, anti-Platonic, or anti-Hellenistic tendency,[5] most 20th century approaches to Trinitarian ontology have faced this challenge by genealogically pointing to its forgotten metaphysical and neglected theological assumptions and, at the same time, by systematically reviving older metaphysical traditions which intellectually articulated and practically enacted the situation of man in the hierarchical order of being through the notion and the praxis of the analogy, the participation, and the concept of the subsisting person. The contemporary of Heidegger, Jesuit priest, philosopher, and theologian Erich Przywara devoted his central works to the problem of the analogical predication of being, *analogia entis.* In double contrast to Hegel and Heidegger,[6] Przywara's creatural metaphysics articulated the situation of the limited and analogous creatural participation in the gift of being above the contradictory dialectic of nothingness and under the absolute fullness of identity in the Triune God. Although always stressing the moment of *maior dissimilitudo* and warning against any revivals of Joachimite Trinitarianism,[7] he also clearly saw that every creatural metaphysics depends on the

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4   Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,' in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 264–65.

5   Cf. Ioannis Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Recently, the anti-platonic tendency in Gunton was discussed by King-Ho Leung, 'Ontology and Anti-Platonism: Reconsidering Colin Gunton's Trinitarian Theology,' *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 62, no. 4 (December 2020): 419–40, https://doi .org/10.1515/nzsth-2020-0022. The postmetaphysical approach to Trinitarian ontology was also recommended by Christoph Theobald, 'Gott ist Beziehung: Zu einigen neueren Annäherungen an das Geheimnis der Trinität,' *Concilium* 37 (2001): 34–45.

6   See John R. Betz, 'The Analogia Entis in Erich Przywara and Ferdinand Ulrich: Toward a More Catholic Metaphysics,' *Communio: International Catholic Review* 46, no. 1 (2019): 113–14.

7   See Erich Przywara, 'The Scope of Analogy as a Fundamental Catholic Form (1940),' in *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, by Erich

ever greater self-reduction (…) into the 'depths of God,' but thereby into the inner-personal life of God – into, that is, the Trinitarian. Theological metaphysics is here properly enjoined to undertake a renewal of Augustine – though in the medium of the 'holy sobriety' of Thomas Aquinas (…).[8]

Already in the years before the beginning of World War II, the German Catholic philosopher Theodor Haecker dared to proleptically formulate the programme of *analogia entis* becoming *analogia Trinitatis*:

The task of the next decades and centuries will be to explore and to articulate that man, as the image of the Triune God, can most beautifully, truly, and blissfully be known according to *analogia Trinitatis*, and together with man and through man also the whole creation which is through and through a similitude of God.[9]

Haecker's turn to the 'urgent task' of *analogia Trinitatis* was motivated above all by his 'anthropological synthesis of Thomist realism and Kierkegaardian personalism'.[10] He attempted to formulate a 'hierarchical' justification of the human person using the Augustinian and Thomistic conceptual instruments while preserving the difference between the absolute existence of the Triune God and the relative existence of man.[11] Later, Haecker's turn to the 'urgent task' of *analogia Trinitatis* was followed by authors who, for the first time, explicitly called their philosophical and theological endeavour 'Trinitarian ontology' (Clemens Kaliba)[12] or 'Trinitarian metaphysics' (Hans-Edu-

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Przywara, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, Michican: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Company, 2014), 356–60.

[8] Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, Michican: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Company, 2014), 182.

[9] Theodor Haecker, 'Schöpfer und Schöpfung,' in *Was ist der Mensch? Der Christ und die Geschichte. Schöpfer und Schöpfung*, by Theodor Haecker, Gesammelte Werke 4 (München: Kösel, 1965), 431. The translation from German text is my own.

[10] Helena M. Tomko, 'Beyond Reception: Understanding Theodor Haecker's Kierkegaardian Authorship in the Third Reich,' *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 80, no. 4–5 (2019): 341, https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2018.1451357.

[11] Cf. Florian Mayr, *Theodor Haecker: Eine Einführung in sein Werk* (Paderborn – München: Schöningh, 1994), 12. Przywara took a very sceptical view of Haecker's *analogia Trinitatis* precisely because he believed that Haecker relativised this difference hierarchically (thereby neglecting the moment of *maior dissimilitudo*). Cf. Przywara, 'The Scope of Analogy as a Fundamental Catholic Form (1940),' 349.

[12] Clemens Kaliba, *Die Welt als Gleichnis Des dreieinigen Gottes: Entwurf zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1952), 9.

ard Hengstenberg).[15] All of these authors reacted to early discussions concerning the relation between modern transcendental, idealistic, or phenomenological philosophy of the subject and theology by embedding the subjective noetic activity and its ontological grounding into the Trinitarian order of being and thought, 'rhythmised' by *analogia entis.*

   More in the manner of the 'holy sobriety' of Thomas Aquinas, mentioned earlier by Przywara, Christian philosophers and theologians like Gustav Siewerth, Ferdinand Ulrich, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Heinrich Beck developed a robust account of being as actuality of love or *similitudo divinae bonitatis*[14] focusing on the relation between Thomistic real difference and personal receptivity of the gracious gift of being.[15] According to Ulrich, the task of man is to avoid the seductions of univocally possessing being as something juxtaposed to the Triune God and participate at the realisation of the 'pure mediation' of being, which as 'nothing' reveals 'God's loving presence.'[16] Reconstructively inventing the Trinitarian ontology of Thomas Aquinas, Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff also argued for the gratuity of the personal being.[17] W. Norris Clarke emphasised the ontological primacy of the substance-in-relation and interpreted this account of being as a triadic or a Trinitarian ontology.[18] The Trinitarian ontology of John Milbank also has Thomistic connotations.[19] In the context of patristic theology, we find the same emphasis on substance-in-relation in the recent publications of Giulio Maspero.[20]

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[15] Hans-Eduard Hengstenberg, *Das Band zwischen Gott und Schöpfung: Entwurf einer Analogia Trinitatis* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991), 5.

[14] Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 22, 2, ad 2.

[15] Cf. Gisbert Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott: Eine trinitarische Theologie* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 1997), 244–45.

[16] Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*, trans. David C. Schindler (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2018), 22–23.

[17] See Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, 'Trinitarische Ontologie und Metaphysik der Person,' in *Metaphysik und Freiheit: ausgewählte Abhandlungen*, ed. Theo Kobusch and Walter Jaeschke (München: Erich Wewel Verlag, 1988), 143–49.

[18] See W. Norris Clarke, 'To Be Is to Be Substance-in-Relation,' in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 118–19.

[19] 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, Quaderni / Sacra doctrina 1 (Bologna: ESD, 2015), 41–117.

[20] See, for example, Giulio Maspero, 'Life as Relatio: Classical Metaphysics and Trinitarian Ontology,' *Theological Research. The Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, no. 1 (2014): 19, https://doi.org/10.15633/thr.677.

As it seems, philosophical and theological notions like *analogia entis* and *analogia Trinitatis*, creatural participation in the common act of being, non-subsistence of *esse commune* revealing the kenotic character of Trinitarian love, receptivity of receiving the gift of being, and constitutive interpersonal relationality helped to specify and concretise in various forms of the 20th century Trinitarian ontologies their overall critical attitude towards narrowed ontological assumptions of the modern and postmodern philosophy of the subject.

However, as an example of probably the most well-known account of Trinitarian ontology in the 20th century shows, the situation is not so simple. Although also adapting all the mentioned systematic notions and sharing the critical attitude towards the subject-centred philosophy, Klaus Hemmerle (1929–1994), Catholic theologian and philosopher, later Bishop of Aachen,[21] also engaged with some of the most advanced forms of the modern philosophy of the subject which proved to be radically structuralist and relational. In his *Theses Towards a Trinitarian Ontology* (1976),[22] he emphasised the primacy of relational self-giving (*Sich-Geben*), explicated phenomenologically.[23] Recalling with Paul the Apostle that 'love alone remains', he argued that what becomes central is

> the displacement of the centre of gravity from the self to the other, movement (no longer understood in an Aristotelian fashion) and *relatio* (likewise no longer understood as a category or even as the accident weakest in Being) (…). Only one thing remains: active participation in that movement which *agape* itself is. This movement is the rhythm of Being; it is the rhythm of giving that gives itself.[24]

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[21] For a biographical account of Hemmerle's life, see Wilfried Hagemann, *Verliebt in Gottes Wort: Leben, Denken und Wirken von Klaus Hemmerle, Bischof von Aachen* (Würzburg: Echter, 2008).

[22] Klaus Hemmerle, *Theses Towards a Trinitarian Ontology*, trans. Stephen Churchyard (New York: Angelico Press, 2020).

[23] A brief introduction to Hemmerle's *Theses* can also be found by Klaus Kienzler, *Bewegung in die Theologie bringen: Theologie in Erinnerung an Klaus Hemmerle* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2017), 2–21; Michael Böhnke, *Einheit in Mehrursprünglichkeit: Eine kritische Analyse des trinitarischen Ansatzes im Werk von Klaus Hemmerle*, Bonner Dogmatische Studien, Bd. 33 (Würzburg: Echter, 2000), 53–63; Karel Říha, 'K trinitární ontologii,' *Studia Theologica* 5, no. 3 (2003): 9–15.

[24] Hemmerle, *Theses (Trans. Churchyard)*, 35.

From within this process, the human person gains himself radically anew as an origin, a pole of plural origination (*Mehrursprünglichkeit*).[25]

In addition to all the older traditions mentioned, by explicating the phenomenon of self-giving in this radically relational manner, Hemmerle draws significantly from the work of the Freiburg philosopher Heinrich Rombach. In his structural ontology (*Strukturontologie*), Rombach identifies persons with structural moments embedded into the whole dynamism of the structure's self-organisation and self-creation.[26] Similarly, in his *Theses*, Hemmerle defines persons as poles crystallising from within relational being-together. But does this relational reappearance of the human person mean its self-alienated completion, or rather its complete structural and functional alienation? How can this radically relational account of the human person be related to other forms of 20th century Trinitarian ontology and older metaphysical traditions? Does Hemmerle avoid the existentialist, structuralist, or even differentialist dissolution of the human person as a mere moment of some phenomenologically fundamental (*Grundphänomen*), but ever-changing immanent processes?

After these introductory notes on the relation between various forms of 20th century Trinitarian ontology and modern and postmodern philosophy of the subject, I will briefly describe the traditional Christian metaphysical account of the human person and subjectivity. On the background of this exposition, I will formulate the specific character of Hemmerle's phenomenological approach towards the Trinitarian ontology of the human person. Based on the analysis of his phenomenological rereading of the traditional personalistic metaphysics in his *Person and Community* (1993), the most disturbing questions concerning his radically relational account of the human person will be addressed. Their clarification could prove important not only in view of the different ways of interpreting Hemmerle's Trinitarian ontology but above all in view of the ever-deepening modern and postmodern tendency of the structural functionalisation of all reality, personal reality included.

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[25] Ibid., 38–41. As for the concept of *Mehrursprünglichkeit*, cf. Böhnke, *Einheit in Mehrursprünglichkeit*, 72–79.

[26] Heinrich Rombach, *Strukturontologie: Eine Phänomenologie der Freiheit*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Alber Verlag, 1988), 28.

2. Being the Person: Christian Metaphysics of the Inner Man and Phenomenology

Without a doubt, the question of the human or divine person, of a personal being, is one of the fundamental questions of Christian philosophy and theology. Adapting the thinking of the Platonic Academy and the Stoa, Christian philosophers have been concerned with the peculiar reality of the human person from the very beginning. This interest was fundamentally motivated by the encounter with the theological mystery of the person of Christ and the mystery of the Trinity. Christological and Trinitarian discussions of the Patristic era had a decisive influence not only on the development of the theological concept of person but also on its legal and anthropological or philosophical variant.[27]

According to the German historian of Christian philosophy Theo Kobusch, it was initially Origen[28] who pursued the revision of the older ancient Greek essentialist determination of the human person and converted the one-sided logic of this determination: neither nature nor essence should determine personal freedom (προαίρεσις), but personal freedom, participating in the Good, should determine the nature, the essence.[29] This Origenian tradition was then developed further by the Greek Church Fathers (such as Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom). Augustine deepened it by stressing the problematics of the inner man (*homo interior*),[30] especially in the Trinitarian context.[31] Theo Kobusch interprets this patristic development as the epochal discovery of free subjectivity within a metaphysics of the inner man. According to Kobusch, the modern philosophy of the subject was most importantly influenced precisely by this Christian tradition.[32] Despite its substance-ontological formulation, this tradition also includes Boethius's formula of being a person: '*Persona est naturae*

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[27] Cf. Piero Coda, *From the Trinity: The Coming of God in Revelation and Theology*, ed. William Neu (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 461–62.

[28] Cf. Origen of Alexandria, *Homiliae in Lucam*, 11.

[29] See Theo Kobusch, *Selbstwerdung und Personalität: Spätantike Philosophie und ihr Einfluss auf die Moderne* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 211–16.

[30] Ibid., 84.

[31] Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X.

[32] Kobusch, *Selbstwerdung und Personalität*, 95–97; Theo Kobusch, *Christliche Philosophie: Die Entdeckung der Subjektivität* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 71.

rationalis individua substantia.[53] Here, too, a clear distinction can be made between the essential principle of nature and the principle of free, albeit still substantially expressed, individuality.

As it omits some fundamental questions concerning the inner and the outer relationality of personal beings, this subject-oriented theological genealogy of modern philosophy is not unproblematic. It argues that regardless of whether in the context of medieval substance ontology (as in Boethius or Thomas Aquinas) or in the context of the mystical metaphysics of the inner man (as in Origen or Gregory of Nyssa), the premodern Christian prioritisation of the subjective personal life and freedom transformed into the modern philosophy of the subject. Although there indeed are good arguments for stating the systematic connection between premodern and modern philosophical accounts of the inner life of the spirit or mind, as in the case of Augustine's and Hegel's phenomenology of subjectivity,[54] it is also necessary to point out the substantial difference between them associated with the ambivalence of the ontological grounding of the inner relationality of the acts of being, thinking, and willing. This relationality stems either from the gracious character of the gift of being as 'love', contemplated through intellectual participation in the analogical and Christological reduction into the Triune God, or it is based on the inner potentiality of the self-reflexive actualisation of the supposedly a priori eidetic structure of being as, initially, 'nothing'. While Erwin Schadel genealogically proved the latter to be the result of the modern *Trinitätsvergessenheit*,[55] the former option was, at least preliminarily, restored and revived by authors associated with the 20th-century quest for a Trinitarian ontology.

Now, the phenomenological account of the transcendental subjectivity or existentialist *Dasein* and its postmodern structuralist or differentialist variants are bound to this modern subject-centred philosophy. In the self-intentionally structured horizon of phenomenological reduction, relations could only be thematised and grasped as the eidetic

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[53] Boethius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, c. 3.

[54] Cf. Vittorio Hösle, 'From Augustine's to Hegel's Theory of Trinity,' *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 62, no. 4 (2020): 441–65, https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2020-0023.

[55] See Erwin Schadel, 'Introduction,' in *Bibliotheca Trinitariorum: Internationale Bibliographie trinitarischer Literatur (I. Band: Autorenverzeichnis)*, ed. Erwin Schadel (München – New York – London – Paris: K. G. Saur, 1984), XXIII–XXXVI.

mediation of the subject-centred self-intentionality. Hence, Heidegger's analysis of a 'being-together' (*Mitsein*) resulted in its supposedly unauthentic and derivative character (*das Man*).[36] Of course, stressing the role of language and thankful thinking in the phenomenological horizon determined by Being's historical self-disclosure as *Ereignis* enables an ontological shift or conversion towards a phenomenology of the structural intersubjectivity, concerned with fundamental multi-polar phenomena like play, life, or speech.[37] But since these fundamental phenomenological ontologies have no access to the metaphysical grammar of the substance, relation, and their analogical predication, the relationality implied in analysed fundamental phenomena has no real (and symbolical), but only functional (and virtual) meaning. The reality of the constitutive personal relations, at the same time internalising the outside through receptive dwelling in the personal substance and externalising the inside through communicative excess of the innermost gift of being, can hardly be expressed when the persons have no substantial, but only structural meaning. Does this argument imply that the promising but radically relational Trinitarian ontology of Klaus Hemmerle, significantly influenced by phenomenological fundamental ontologies, is losing its theological and philosophical appeal when confronted with the problem of personal being and with its conceptualisation in the traditions of Christian substantial metaphysics, the metaphysics of the inner man, or Christian dialogical personalism?

3. Hemmerle's Primacy of Love and his Phenomenological Approach to Personalistic Metaphysics

Although there are many ways to read Hemmerle's concisely formulated *Theses Towards a Trinitarian Ontology* (1976), the two most prominent approaches dominating in today's scholarship can be distinguished. First, *Theses* can be interpreted retrospectively as the important result of Hemmerle's academic years in Freiburg and Hemmerle's prolific phenomenological engagement with problems implied in

[36] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 19th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006), §26–27, 117–30.
[37] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, ed. Petra Jaeger, Gesamtausgabe 79 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994), 97–114.

the idealistic or phenomenological philosophy of religion.[38] Above all, Hemmerle struggled to find a way how to express being of the Holy (*das Heilige*) by thinking the Holy in a way that the Holy remains holy, and the thinking remains thinking.[39] In this context, Trinitarian revelation, contemplated in Hemmerle's *Theses* in its specific and unique character, rearranges the relation between the subject, addressed by and established through God's self-giving, and being, mediating the same self-giving of the Triune God. This ontological rearrangement reveals that the meaning and intelligible structure of both the subjectivity and being is the relational self-giving, understood actively, verbally, and processually. 'A thing, a subject, or a being can only be understood, and can only be fulfilled, in its action (…). Nothing "is" outside of its action (…).'[40] Whereas the retrospective interpretation of Hemmerle's *Theses* would tend to read this 'action' as a purely relational onto-dynamism, the second most prominent interpretation of this work would suggest that, systematically, this ontological 'action' means an *actus essendi* mediating by its non-subsistence the actuality of being. In this line of thought, the continuity with Balthasarian theology and metaphysics would be sustained.[41] As Hemmerle's *Theses* are based on a birthday letter addressed to Hans Urs von Balthasar[42] and Hemmerle not only explicitly recalls the Balthasarian inspiration of these[43] but also situates the necessity of 'a new, a Trinitarian ontology'[44] into the wider horizon of the whole Christian metaphysical tradition,[45] this 'hermeneutics of continuity' would certainly be appropriate.

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[38] Cf. Kienzler, *Bewegung in die Theologie bringen*, 130–50. Kienzler's work represents the most advanced form of this phenomenologically oriented interpretation of Hemmerle's Trinitarian ontology.

[39] Klaus Hemmerle, 'Das Heilige und das Denken: Zur philosophischen Phänomenologie des Heiligen,' in *Auf den göttlichen Gott zudenken: Schriften zur Religionsphilosophie und Fundamentaltheologie*, ed. Heinz-Jürgen Görtz, Klaus Kienzler, and Richard Lorenz, 1st ed., Ausgewählte Schriften 1 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 1996), 113.

[40] Hemmerle, *Theses (Trans. Churchyard)*, 38.

[41] Cf. Coda, *From the Trinity*, 491. Hemmerle is similarly interpreted by Bernhard Körner. Cf. Bernhard Körner, 'Theology Constituted by Communication in Multiple Causality: Klaus Hemmerle's Trinitarian Ontology and Relational Theology,' in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*, ed. Jacques Haers and Peter de Mey (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 255–68.

[42] Hemmerle, *Theses (Trans. Churchyard)*, 7–8.

[43] Ibid., 8.

[44] Ibid., 33.

[45] Ibid., 33 and 49–50.

Indeed, Hemmerle cannot be read as a plainly antimetaphysical author. Although he repeatedly pointed out the limits of the premodern substantial metaphysics, he also criticised the antimetaphysical tendency in modern theology[46] and rejected the seductive but shallow possibility of forming 'shifting alliances with late modern and post-modern models of thought'.[47] Both the substantial metaphysics and the modern philosophy of self-consciousness were for him 'too puny in design to be able to do full justice to the preliminary Trinitarian gift of the Christian understanding of being'.[48] Therefore, his critique of the improper accidentalisation of relations in classical metaphysics, radically expressed in the key §18 of his *Theses* and appropriately accompanied by a critique of the absolutised self-intentionality, does not pave a way towards a purely relational or structural ontology but rather indicates the same theological interest and motivation that led Augustine to revise Aristotelian categories in order to articulate the unique logic of Trinitarian life in books V–VII of his *De Trinitate*. Consequently, as much as Augustine or Bonaventure following him, Hemmerle replenished this reconsideration of metaphysical categories by proceeding *modo interiore*[49] on the phenomenological way of love, *via caritatis*.[50] The restitution of the substantial and enduring unities, under the primacy of love, follows this path: they are themselves as much as they give and as they receive themselves; they are there because of the communication and 'transubstantiation'.[51]

This shift towards the accentuation of the relational unity in its actuality has been confirmed by Hemmerle's later works. After Hemmerle became the bishop of Aachen in 1975, he was no longer able to work out his approach to Trinitarian ontology more systematically, but at various occasions, he delivered an argumentation which supports the

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[46] See Klaus Hemmerle, 'Wandlungen des Gottesbildes seit dem II. Vatikanum,' in *Auf den göttlichen Gott zudenken: Schriften zur Religionsphilosophie und Fundamentaltheologie*, ed. Heinz-Jürgen Görtz, Klaus Kienzler, and Richard Lorenz, 1st ed., Ausgewählte Schriften 1 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 1996), 448.

[47] Hemmerle, *Theses (Trans. Churchyard)*, 22.

[48] Klaus Hemmerle, *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie: deutsch und englisch*, ed. Wilfried Hagemann, trans. Thomas J. Norris (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 2020), 105. In the new translation of Hemmerle's *Theses (Trans. Churchyard)*, from which I usually quote, this important paragraph is not translated correctly. Therefore, I quote from a slightly older English translation here.

[49] Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII, 1, 1.

[50] Hemmerle, *Theses (Trans. Churchyard)*, 50.

[51] Ibid., 44.

reading of his *Theses*, which is more attentive to traditional personalistic metaphysics. In particular, Hemmerle heavily draws on the personalistic substantial metaphysics in his late text *Person and Community* (*Person und Gemeinschaft*, 1993),[52] where he shows how this traditional approach to the question of the human person can be enriched from within by its careful phenomenological reconsideration.

In *Person and Community*, Hemmerle opens his personalistic argument, consisting of seven related steps, by phenomenological identification of the meaning of community (*Gemeinschaft*) as relational being-together, founded upon the freedom and intersubjective mutuality in the existential and historical context (1). Such a social ontology implies that 'whoever speaks about community is in fact also speaking about person'.[53] This community-focused starting point of Hemmerle is undoubtedly related not only to his Trinitarian ontology but also to his service to the Church as an existential, historical, and sacramental community. Nevertheless, Hemmerle paradoxically notes, the theological and philosophical tradition associated with the Church does not mediate the comprehensive and developed speculative account of the relational being-together as it is in the case of the subsisting person.[54] Therefore, although it is clear that 'whoever speaks about community is in fact also speaking about person', it certainly is not clear whether 'whoever speaks about person is also speaking about community'. In other words, does the notion of the person imply the relational being-together?

To clarify this question, Hemmerle proceeds with the analyses of the theological genealogy of Christian personalism by stressing the decisive influence of Christological and Trinitarian discussions of the Patristic era (2). In this regard, the main reason for the development of the concept of the person lies 'in the responsible willingness to understand that whole communion of God with man, in which God is fully involved as God and in which we as people are completely integrated by him and in him'.[55] Although the original theological motivation and

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[52] Klaus Hemmerle, 'Person und Gemeinschaft – Eine philosophische und theologische Erwägung,' in *Die Alternative des Evangeliums: Beiträge zu gesellschaftlichen Fragen*, ed. Michael Albus, Peter Blättler, and Wolfgang Schneider, 1st ed., Ausgewählte Schriften 3 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 1995), 299–314. Translations from German text are my own.

[53] Ibid., 300.

[54] Ibid., 301.

[55] Ibid., 303.

discourse behind the concept of the person implies its intrinsic relational dimension, this concept itself was eventually brought to light by means of the philosophical category of the substance (3). Quoting the classical formula of Boethius,[56] Hemmerle points out that the concept of the person starts from self-being, subsisting, standing-in-oneself. Medieval speculation deepened this intellectual grasp of the subsisting person by identifying the innermost core of the person with the *incommunicabilis substantia*.[57] This does not mean that the person should be unable to communicate, to share itself. Rather it communicates itself precisely by communicating its essence in difference to itself and by communicating itself in difference to the other. Thus, the subsisting person cannot be exhausted by any communication or *assumed* by the other, and at the same time, it overflows with communication. Therefore, as Thomas Aquinas puts it, '*excluditur a persona ratio assumptibilis*'.[58] Bonaventurian radicalisation of this problematics confirms the pattern just described: precisely as the subsisting self-being, as *privatio communitatis*, the person opens itself to the relational fullness, the overflow of the unity.[59] Paradoxically, '*privatio illa in persona magis est positio quam privatio*'.[60]

After identifying this inner depth of the subsisting person, Hemmerle makes the preliminary conclusion that self-being or subsisting as a person, which is '*perfectissimum in tota natura*',[61] is not just one way of being alongside other ways of being (4). In the person, in the *individua substantia naturae rationalis*, there is the existential relation to being as being.

> Because the person cannot be assumed and taken over by the other, but stands in itself, the person stands in relation to everything, everything stands in it; because its relation to everything is based on its relation to being, it is related to itself and thus vis-a-vis to everything. In this condition, however, a rapprochement between person and community begins.[62]

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[56] Ibid., 303–4.
[57] Ibid., 304. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, 1 *Sent* 30.
[58] Hemmerle, 'Person und Gemeinschaft,' 305. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I. 29. 1 ad 2.
[59] Cf. Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, XI, 8.
[60] Hemmerle, 'Person und Gemeinschaft,' 305. Cf. Bonaventure, 1 *Sent* 25. 2. 1.
[61] Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I. 29. 3.
[62] Hemmerle, 'Person und Gemeinschaft,' 307.

KLAUS HEMMERLE ON THE TRINITARIAN ONTOLOGY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Above all, this ontological rapprochement is possible thanks to the transcendental character of being as *bonum* and *verum* (5). The individual personal being enacts the universality of being, and this universality of being, informed by the convertibility of transcendentals, implies the interpersonal conversation and cooperation in being as *verum* and *bonum*. This interpersonal community presents a mutual and common ground through which all relate to the whole, to being, and to persons (6). These remain unique and distinct, *incommunicabilis*. But as they are concerned with the same 'thing', with being, and as language mediates the relationship between person and being, 'words can become common words', 'word-character is inscribed in the personal being as a possibility of mutual exchange between persons about being and in being'.[65] Therefore, not despite, but precisely because the person subsists in radical intimacy of incommunicability, whoever speaks about person is indeed also speaking about interpersonal community.

Now, not only is it the case that the subsisting person cannot be exhausted by any communication or *assumed* by the other, but also it cannot give itself being. The unique incommunicability of the person and its inner word-character express above all a direct and asymmetric relation of the created subsisting person to the very giver of its being, who is also the giver of being (7). In the seventh and last step of his reflection, Hemmerle points out that the ground of the personal being lies in the ontological call of God. The person is called to be in order to be able to answer the call. This answer has to be always already related to the whole of creation. As the creator of the person is also the creator of the whole and of the others, the person is supposed to fulfil its responsibility. The persons 'inevitably stand before God's face and before one another and with one another. The characters of the I, that of the You, and that of the We are inextricably linked in the being of the person. And they are linked in its relation to God and in its relation to everything that is'.[64]

This relational culmination of Hemmerle's argument in *Person and Community* already resembles his Trinitarian ontology. Although from the starting point of a substantial account of the person, Hemmerle identified the relational being-together implied in the radicalised notion of the *incommunicabilis substantia*. However, this constitutive

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[65] Ibid., 310.
[64] Ibid., 313.

being-together does not make the self-being of the person, accentuated by the metaphysics of the inner man, or the subsisting being of the person, brought to the light by the classical metaphysics, redundant or secondary. Rather it confirms that the reality of the constitutive personal relations, based on the communicative excess of the innermost gift of being, can hardly be expressed when persons have no substantial, but only structural, functional, or differential meaning. Although the *incommunicabilis substantia* receives its proper sense from within the relational communication, it does not dissolve by communicating its own essence, as it communicates its own essence to the other only in self-giving difference to itself and the other. According to Hemmerle's Trinitarian ontology, the ultimate reality of this self-giving differentiation is God's Triune love.

Conclusion: Anticipated Integration of Personalistic Metaphysics and Phenomenology in Trinitarian Ontology

The ultimate reality of God's Triune love motivated authors associated with the 20th century quest for a Trinitarian ontology in their attempts to critically engage with the modern and postmodern philosophy of the subject by embedding the subject's noetic activity and its ontological grounding into the Trinitarian order of being and thought, structured by the principles of *analogia entis* and *analogia Trinitatis*. On the one hand, in his *Theses*, Klaus Hemmerle acknowledged the importance of such reconstructive revisions. On the other hand, he proposed to go beyond this metaphysical reconstruction by means of the phenomenology of love and radically relational ontology. 'What is new in the new ontology is its approach to a depth which cannot be disclosed from below: to the threefold mystery of God (…). The mystery of this mystery is love, self-giving. From out of love, all Being, all thinking, everything that happens is disclosed in its own structure.'[65] In the light of this phenomenological disclosure, the human person seems to be a mere moment of relational processes. Does Hemmerle avoid such a structuralist or differentialist dissolution, or does he, for example like Derrida, prefer the antimetaphysical way that 'affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism'?

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[65] Hemmerle, *Theses (Trans. Churchyard)*, 50.

Although there are arguments that prove the significant influence of fundamental phenomenological ontologies, above all, Rombach's *Strukturontologie* on Hemmerle's Trinitarian ontology, there can also be no doubt that Hemmerle does not share the overall antimetaphysical tendency of his philosophical contemporaries. When he adapts methods of phenomenology, he proceeds in a context that has clearly metaphysical contour. This could be said of the reappearance of the subsisting persons from within the self-giving and constitutional relationality in his *Theses*, but more clearly this is obvious from Hemmerle's personalistic argumentation in his later treatise *Person and Community*. Here, Hemmerle discloses the constitutive relationality of the human person from within its traditional metaphysical account as *individua substantia naturae rationalis*, or even *incommunicabilis substantia*. According to Hemmerle, not despite, but precisely because the person subsists in the radical intimacy of its incommunicability, whoever speaks about person is indeed also speaking about interpersonal community. Therefore, Hemmerle's original contribution to the 'urgent task' of *analogia Trinitatis* can be characterised as an anticipated integration of personalistic metaphysics, which realistically situates the subjectivity into the analogical hierarchy of being, and phenomenology of love in Trinitarian ontology.

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