

TOPICS OF THE TRINITY: ABSOLUTENESS,
OTHERNESS, AND CONTINGENCY
WOLFGANG CRAMER'S 'ABSOLUTE REFLECTION'
AS A PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION
OF THE TRINITY

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ABSTRACT

The Trinity is usually regarded as an exclusively theological topic. If, however, the postulated unity of the dogmatic tracts 'De Deo uno' and 'De Deo trino' is taken seriously, there must be at least a philosophical perspective on the Trinity. This article wants to present the little-known philosophy of the Absolute of Wolfgang Cramer as a possible approach to this problem. It first presents some aspects of Cramer's analysis of the concept of the Absolute. It then argues that, within Cramer's philosophy, the Trinitarian structure of the Absolute is deeply linked to the possibility of contingency. In the last step, it is argued that the meaning of the concept of the Absolute ultimately demands a new methodology without the presupposition of this very concept. Thus it is shown how a Trinitarian approach helps to take the Absoluteness of the Absolute more seriously. The article closes with some remarks on the status of Cramer's claims.

Keywords

Ontology; Trinity; Absolute; Contingency; Metaphysics; Speculative philosophy; Wolfgang Cramer; Klaus Hemmerle

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In his *Remarks on the Dogmatic Tract 'De Trinitate'*, Karl Rahner postulated the unity of the dogmatic tracts 'De Deo uno' and 'De Deo trino'. The doctrine of God should no longer be separated into a philosophical part on the 'one God only' on the one hand and 'the triune God' on the other, which would seem like an obscure proprium of Christian faith.¹ The background of Rahner's claim is surely Neo-Scho-

¹ Original title: Karl Rahner, 'Bemerkungen zum Traktat "De Trinitate"', in *Sämtliche Werke* 22/1b (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2013), 512–568.

lasticism, the mainstream theology of his time, which according to Rahner's judgement, not only treated the topics of God's unity and Trinity separately but also neglected to build bridges between these topics. But building such bridges cannot be a purely self-contained theological discourse. The topic of 'God the One' belongs also to natural theology; according to the definition of Vatican I, God can be known via his creation and by reason alone.² Thus, the task of connecting the two tracts bears a tremendous task for philosophy. If Rahner is correct, and if we do not want to abandon philosophical theology, the Trinity must be made a topic of philosophy as well as theology.

It is not surprising that the renewal of Trinitarian thought after Rahner's diagnosis from 1960 was mainly a renewal of Trinitarian *theology*. Even the more philosophically oriented approaches, like Klaus Hemmerle's *Theses Towards a Trinitarian Ontology*,³ are mainly theologically driven, philosophising under the guidance of divine revelation. What Hemmerle understands under 'Trinitarian ontology' is a phenomenology of divine love as witnessed in Scripture.⁴ There is nothing wrong with this approach – it just seems incomplete as it is not able to trace the Trinity in creation through reason alone.

In this paper, I will argue for the philosophical significance of the Trinity with the help of a still little known contemporary of Rahner, Wolfgang Cramer (1901–1974). Cramer is one of the few philosophers of the 20th century who attempted to form a speculative philosophy of the Absolute.⁵ With some aspects of Cramer's theory of the Absolute, which was interpreted as Trinitarian by many including himself,⁶

² Cf. DH 3004.

³ A new translation of this fascinating and clairvoyant essay was recently published. Cf. Klaus Hemmerle, *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie*, englisch-deutsche Ausgabe (Würzburg: Echter, 2020).

⁴ Cf. Hemmerle, *Thesen*, 17–19.

⁵ The main topics of Cramer's philosophy are subjectivity and the Absolute. The material on the latter can be found mainly in Wolfgang Cramer, 'Aufgaben und Methoden einer Kategorienlehre,' *Kant-Studien* 52 (1960/61): 351–368, doi: 10.1515/kant.1961.52.1-4.351; Wolfgang Cramer, *Gottesbeweise und ihre Kritik* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2010); Wolfgang Cramer, 'Das Absolute,' in *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe*, ed. Hermann Krings et al. (München: Kösel, 1973); Wolfgang Cramer, 'Das Ich und das Gute. Eine Grundlegung der Philosophie,' *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 27/28 (1988): 1–49; Wolfgang Cramer, *Die Absolute Reflexion. Schriften aus dem Nachlass* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2012); Wolfgang Cramer, *Das Absolute und das Kontingente* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2019).

⁶ Cf. Falk Wagner, 'Theologie. Die Theorie des Absoluten und der christliche Gottesgedanke,' in *Rationale Metaphysik* 2, eds. H. Radermacher, P. Reisinger and

I want to show how the topic of difference in the Absolute is in particular connected with the question of true otherness or the contingency of finite beings on the one hand and the absoluteness of God⁷ on the other. My main thesis is that the existence of contingent beings as well as the absoluteness of the Absolute can only be thought adequately if the Absolute is thought as Trinitarian.

There is an important limitation of such a purely philosophical approach. The doctrine of the Trinity is a complex of various ecclesiastical definitions. The Trinity, by definition, is a theological concept. Thus, the identification of a philosophical theory with the Trinity can only be stated by theology. What I will present here is Cramer's concept of the Absolute, which displays an internal structure. Whether or not this structure resembles the Trinity will be discussed at the end of the essay.

1. Wolfgang Cramer's Conceptual Philosophy of the Absolute

First, let us clarify some of the central concepts. What I call 'conceptual philosophy of the Absolute' is the part of Cramer's philosophy wherein he presupposes and explicates the meaning of the word 'absolute'. It will be shown how this philosophy in the end turns against its own methodology: the semantics of the 'Absolute' contradicts such presuppositions. Still, it is reasonable to start this way to gain more clarity on the task of philosophical theology.

'Absolute', from Latin *absolutus* – 'detached', etymologically means 'independent'. In this sense, one could say 'A is absolute to B' if and only if A is ontologically independent from B. '(Ontological) independence' here means: even if B is not or not anymore, A could still be. Something we call '*the* Absolute' should not only be independent from some entities but from all. We define:

J. Stolzenberg (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990). Cramer clearly interpreted his philosophy in the same way as can be seen in: Cramer, *Absolute Reflexion*, 303.

⁷ A remark on the terms 'the Absolute' and 'God': Cramer uses primarily the term 'the Absolute', sometimes the Latin *Deus*. It is clear from some sources that he was personally convinced that his 'Absolute' is identical to the Christian God. Still, 'the Absolute' or *Deus* (coming from Spinoza) marks the God of philosophers, the term 'God' belongs to religion. As I am coming from theology and proposing Cramer's theory as a philosophical approach to the Trinity, I implicitly acknowledge Cramer's 'Absolute' as a philosophical concept which comes close to the God of faith. Thus I usually stick to the term 'the Absolute' but will not be as strict as Cramer in his writings.

Def. 1: The Absolute is that which is ontologically independent from everything else.

Now it can be shown that there can be just one Absolute.⁸ Let there be two candidates for the Absolute, A and B. If there are these two entities, there must be a common ground, an order, which enables them to exist in relation to each other. Such a correlating order is, for example, spacetime in the case of physical entities,⁹ although A and B are most likely not physical.¹⁰ Then, this order O necessarily determines both entities A and B. It follows that neither one of them is the Absolute, as they are both determined by something foreign. For without the order O, A and B could not exist. Alternatively, the order O is identical to either A or B or is a necessary ‘moment’ of one of them. In this case, that one is the Absolute, whereas the other depends on the first thus is not the Absolute. In both cases, we do not have two Absolutes.

In this argument, the expressions ‘moment’ and ‘the other’ appeared. Both deserve some clarification. A moment of an entity E is something which necessarily determines E or which is necessarily a part of E. In the case of the Absolute, this could mean that the Absolute necessarily differentiates itself into moments. Then it would be impossible that there is the Absolute but not its moments.

‘The other’ or ‘something other’ (*Anderes*) is used by Cramer in a technical manner, defined as such:

Def. 2: *Anderes*, the ‘other’ than the Absolute, means something which is neither the Absolute nor a moment of it.

It is not sure whether there actually is something like this: the world could be the result of a necessary evolution of the Absolute, thus a moment or an aggregate of moments. This view is Cramer’s main opponent when it comes to the question of the relation between the

⁸ The following argument is a slightly altered argument from Cramer. The original version is shown below. Cf. Cramer, *Das Absolute und das Kontingente*, 18–19.

⁹ The example shows that Cramer does not think of a hierarchy of physical entities, in which some depend on other more basic entities (bottom-up constitution, e.g. atoms and molecules). Rather he thinks of meta-principles, which are presupposed for every instance of a given phenomenon (like spacetime for every physical entity).

¹⁰ There are a couple of reasons why the Absolute cannot be a singular physical entity. Singular physical entities do not generate their own determining order (spacetime), which is a condition of the Absolute as shown below. This does not mean that the world as a whole could not be the Absolute. This proof would need further argumentation.

One and the Many, which he calls Spinozism.¹¹ According to this view, the becoming, changing, and vanishing of the manifold is in fact just a change of modes of the One. Hence, there is nothing truly ‘other’ than the Absolute.

However, if we presuppose the existence of something other – as we usually do – then we can learn something about the ‘other’ as well as about the Absolute. The argument is similarly structured as the above argument for the singularity of the Absolute.¹² Let there be the Absolute A and a being x, which is not A and not a moment of A. Then there must be an order O, which makes it possible that x exists and exists in relation to A. This order O necessarily determines both A and x. As A is dependent on nothing else according to Def. 1, O must be A or a moment of A. Thus, the Absolute must have the character of an order *for* contingent beings. Since everything that is stands under this order, everything is determined by the Absolute. If we now take into account that the Absolute A is in principle independent (*absolutus* – ‘detachable’) from x according to Def. 1, we see that x must have the possibility to end. For the isolation from A, from its constitutive order, is disastrous for x. A being other than the Absolute is in principle finite, non-necessary, or contingent.¹³

We are now in a position to state the following corollaries:

Cor. 1: The Absolute is that which is dependent on nothing else and that on which everything else is dependent.

Cor. 2: If the manifold of beings is not a necessary moment of the Absolute, then the Absolute must be an order for the things other than itself.

Cor. 3: A being other than the Absolute is in principle determined by the Absolute and thus finite or contingent.

These corollaries highlight two aspects. On the one hand, it is not enough for philosophical theology to speak about God alone. The Absolute and the relation between the Absolute and the contingent, these two topics are deeply linked to each other. Cor. 1 says that there must be

¹¹ The question whether this is an accurate description of Spinoza’s position is not the main question here. For Cramer’s representation of this position cf. Cramer, *Das Absolute und das Kontingente*, 19–22; Wolfgang Cramer, *Spinozas Philosophie des Absoluten* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1966).

¹² The following argument is taken from Cramer, *Das Absolute und das Kontingente*, 18–19.

¹³ Cf. Cramer, ‘Das Absolute’, 1–2.

a relation of dependence and independence from the one to the other. How can we explain that? In which way is the contingent dependent from the Absolute but still different to it? On the other hand, this implicates a certain way of thinking about God – God as on open order. The emphasis here lies on the fact that the Absolute is the ultimate order of Being itself. There is always the danger in the philosophy of religion to think about God in a certain presupposed frame, for example, in a certain ontology.¹⁴ This might be useful as a bottom-up approach towards the Absolute, but in the end, it should become clear that the Absolute is the source of everything, even of this particular ontology.¹⁵ Treating the Absolute only in a presupposed frame makes it at best a (somehow exalted) entity within this frame but still subjugated to the frame.

My main claim is that both of these aspects – the clarification of the Absolute’s relation to the contingent as well as the treatment of the Absolute as an absolute order – are connected with the Trinity. Reflecting on these requirements will lead us to a trinitarian-structured concept of the Absolute.

2. The Trinity and Otherness

In this section, I want to show how the Trinitarian structure in God is linked to him as the origin of contingent beings, that is: linked to true otherness to him. This will be done in two steps. First, it will be shown that difference is primordial rather than secondary. Second, I indicate what this primordial difference is and why it resembles the Trinity.

To show the primordial position of difference, it might be useful to start with the opposite: pure unity.¹⁶ Let us suppose there is an X with no difference in itself. In particular, X does not have any qualities as every quality would bring differences to other qualities with it and, fundamentally, the difference between quality and the qualified. Yet,

¹⁴ An example would be the application of the ‘possible world semantics’ on God. Sentences like ‘In all possible worlds God exists’ subject the Absolute under a certain frame (or all thinkable frames), which is foreign to itself.

¹⁵ Thus Cramer’s goal was to develop a theory of categories out of the concept of the Absolute. Cf. Cramer, ‘Aufgaben und Methoden’.

¹⁶ The following argument is a key step in Cramer’s theory and can be found in slightly different forms in many of his works. The representation here relies on Cramer, *Gottesbeweise*, 85–88. Cf. also Jürgen Stolzenberg, ‘Die Bestimmtheit-selbst. Zu Wolfgang Cramers erster Konzeption des Absoluten in “Die Monade”’, in *Rationale Metaphysik* 2, eds. H. Radermacher, P. Reisinger and J. Stolzenberg (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 194–195.

we mean *something* when we say ‘X is’, although we cannot name positively what we mean. The sentence ‘X is’ (note that it already differentiates ‘X’ and ‘being’) signifies a state S_1 which is *different* to the state S_2 that ‘a, b, and c exist’. Thus, X refers to a frame, an order of possible other states. At the same time, this relation is negated, as X is defined as pure unity, without any relation to anything else. That is obviously nonsense, to which the presupposition of pure unity leads: Pure unity is the exclusion of any difference and any positive quality, yet it is not understandable except as this very negation of difference. It is constituted by this negation; there can be no positive definition of it without this reference. If the idea of pure unity is constituted by difference, by the negation of something other than X, then difference is a primordial phenomenon. Difference must be.

This argument of Cramer is directed against all cosmologies which start with the One, or pure unity. The problem is not that pure unity is beyond our rational capabilities. The problem is that it is an inconsistent concept, a contradiction in itself. Even more: It is infertile. Out of pure unity, nothing could evolve. A first motion from unity to difference seems to Cramer an unthinkable thought, a mere narration, not philosophy.¹⁷ Indeed, it is difficult to see how a first motion without the quality of the ‘power to move’ should be possible. From where does the One get this power? What initiates its first move? These are all open questions which, on the basis of pure unity, can hardly be answered. It seems that already the first principle of Being must encapsulate difference.

Still, this argument does not provide any evidence for a *particular* primordial difference in the Absolute. To narrow down the type of structure, one might consider again what was said in Cor. 2: the Absolute must be an order *for* contingent beings (if there is any). Contingency was defined as non-necessity: If the Absolute exists, it exists, whether or not a contingent being is. Contingent beings are therefore not the product of a necessary evolution of the Absolute, but rather they are *created*.¹⁸ Contingency presupposes freedom and the moment of possibility in the Absolute. The Absolute is *able* to create, but not forced.

Therefore, the Absolute must decide to create contingent beings, which implies that it has knowledge of its power to do so. The Absolute

¹⁷ Cf. Cramer, *Absolute Reflexion*, 224–225.

¹⁸ ‘Creation’ here means: grounded by the Absolute in a non-necessary act.

must know itself as an order of possible beings. Thus, the Absolute must be self-relational.

At this point, Cramer refers to his theory of subjectivity which in some parts is also applicable to the Absolute. An important result of Cramer's theory, which Dieter Henrich later traced back to Fichte in his famous article on 'Fichte's original insight'¹⁹, is that self-consciousness cannot be understood as intentionality of the I on itself. Rather, the I generates (Cramer says 'zeugt'/'sires') a concept, a representation of itself, on which it directs its intention. If we apply this result on the Absolute, we gain the most basic structure the Absolute must have: (i) the Absolute as generating its representation, (ii) the generated Absolute and (iii) their relation of generating (*zeugen*) and reconnecting (*rückbeziehen*). The Absolute needs its image to know itself as open for otherness.

'Otherness' here means, as was defined in Def. 2, that finite beings are truly separate from the Absolute, rather than moments of an evolving Absolute. It is not identical with the acknowledgment of finite freedom of creatures by God, but it is its necessary precondition. In this section, it was shown that this kind of otherness presupposes a structure of self-knowing via its image in the Absolute. A comparison with the doctrine of the Trinity will be left open here, as Cramer roots the philosophical significance of this structure at an even more basic level.

3. The Absolute Thought as Absolute

In the following section, I will argue that the Absolute can only be thought as truly absolute (in the sense of independent) if it is thought as Trinitarian. The term 'the Absolute' was defined above: The Absolute is that which is dependent on nothing other than itself. 'Dependency' was understood ontologically: If A cannot be without B, A is ontologically dependent on B. However, I will argue that the ontological independence of the Absolute requires epistemological independence as well. We must see that the concept of the Absolute is not our creation and not dependent on our thinking.

¹⁹ This article was published first in the *Festschrift* for Wolfgang Cramer: Dieter Henrich, 'Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht,' in *Subjektivität und Metaphysik. Festschrift für Wolfgang Cramer*, ed. Dieter Henrich et al. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1966).

As a contrast, one could consider the cosmological proof for the existence of God. In its most reduced form, the proof says: ‘If there exists anything, then the unconditional or necessary being exists as well.’²⁰

The proof identifies the necessary being with God. Two entities occur in the proof: at least one finite being (as a premise) and the necessary being (as a conclusion). We can identify two relations between them. Ontologically seen, the necessary being is thought to be the cause of the finite being. Whereas epistemologically seen, the finite being is the epistemological basis for us, how we came to know the necessary being. The ontological and epistemological relations are opposite to each other. This forms an aporia as the entity we aim for is supposed to be ‘necessary’ – necessary in itself. However, all we can achieve with the cosmological argument is a necessity under conditions.

One might object that this is simply due to our approach to divine reality. There is an order of how we get to know things (*ratio cognoscendi*) and an order of how things really are (*ratio essendi*). Cramer would probably agree; his philosophy starts with subjectivity, as the Ego seems to him a natural starting point of reflection. Yet, this does not make the Ego the origin of Being. On the contrary, he tries to show how the I is insufficient in itself, relying on outer ontological conditions. The order of human thought is indeed not necessarily identical to the order of things.²¹ The problem here is different: the proof does not achieve what it wants to achieve. It aims to show that there is a being, necessary in itself, but it is just capable of showing a necessity under conditions. If one argues under premises, full necessity will never be achieved.

If we apply this to the Absolute, the truly independent, we see that its concept requires thinking without premises as well. Clearly, the previous section did not meet this requirement as it presupposed finite beings, just as the cosmological proof. Maybe this requirement is impossible to meet – a chance to remember the truth of apophatic theology, which should be present in any attempts to speak positively about God. Cramer tries to meet the requirement by starting with nothing – the

²⁰ Cf. Cramer, *Gottesbeweise*, 15.

²¹ As Cramer sees the question for the conditions of possibility as *the* philosophical question par excellence, one could argue that it is just the opposite: Philosophical thinking is thinking backwards, into the conditions of something. Cf. Cramer, *Das Absolute und das Kontingente*, 57–64; Cramer, *Absolute Reflexion*, 101–108.

thought that there could be nothing. Nothing, pure voidness, is without any difference in itself; it is simply nothing. This leads us to the argument which was presented above, where the idea of pure unity was discussed. Nothing shares with pure unity the exclusion of qualities and differences, a thought, which led to the first absolute truth: there must be difference. This is the start of what Cramer called ‘the absolute reflection’, a line of thought which not only leads to the Absolute but is supposed to be without premises, thus absolute in itself. Only such a line of thought could make sure that the concept of the Absolute is *found* by us rather than created. From a philosophical point of view that is maybe the most interesting point in the ontological proof for the existence of God, in whose tradition Cramer stands: that we can discover something in the realm of thinking which transcends thinking.

But there is a second requirement belonging to the notion of absoluteness. The thought of the Absolute proves to be independent from us only if it qualifies itself as absolute. That the Absolute is indeed absolute was presupposed in the first section. The ‘absolute reflection’, Cramer’s line of thought leading to the Absolute, results in a certain concept of something which is the necessary condition of everything. That this ‘something’ is indeed ‘absolute to everything’ is a qualification. Who qualifies this ‘something’ as ‘absolute’ or ‘the Absolute’? If the Absolute is independent from us, it is surely not our thinking that qualifies the Absolute as ‘absolute’.²² The qualification of the Absolute as absolute must be done originally by itself. Thus, the Absolute must generate its own concept, which we try to imitate with our finite reason – only then does the Absolute not rely on our reasoning.²³ Of course, that in itself is a thought. Yet, if the Absolute was shown to be a precondition of everything, even our thinking, this is no longer an objection. If we hit a bottom of explanation with the discovery of the Absolute and see how it brings forth its own concept, we can also see how we as finite beings can think the Absolute’s concept without bringing it into dependency – it is possible by imitating the Absolute’s thoughts.

Therefore, the absoluteness of the Absolute leads us to the same result as the investigation of otherness: to generate its own concept,

²² Cf. Cramer, *Gottesbeweise*, 91; Cramer, *Absolute Reflexion*, 213.

²³ It can be seen here, why the approach from the ‘conceptual philosophy’ of Cramer leads beyond itself, too. The presupposition of the concept of absoluteness is a pre-supposition which has to be overcome as well. The Absolute must be thought in such a way, that we can see, how the quality of absoluteness comes from itself.

the Absolute must know itself, thus must be thought of as bringing forth a perfect image of itself. Hence, Cramer's Absolute is *essentially* (in its essence) 'Grounding'. The first moment of the Absolute is the ungrounded Ground, the second the grounded Ground, the third the act of grounding and reconnecting (*rückbeziehen*) as their relation.

It seems obvious that this structure resembles a Trinitarian structure. A key is the characterisation of the second moment of the Absolute. Not only does Cramer explicitly call it 'the *logos*'²⁴, especially the language of 'the perfect image' gives a clear hint. A perfect image is identical to the original; the difference is only marked by their relation. It is nothing in itself but just pure representation, as Anselm of Canterbury states.²⁵ The difference between the 'original' and the 'image' or between the 'grounding Ground' and the 'grounded Ground' is only marked by their relation, just as the persons of the Trinity are different only in respect to one another. A closer look at Cramer's later speculative philosophy would reveal the exact role of God's image, the *logos*, in the process of emanation and creation, which could be interpreted as a philosophical reformulation of the *logos*' mediation in creation (*per quem omnia facta sunt*).

An open and notoriously difficult question is the question of the status of the Holy Spirit. From a theological point of view, one might object that the Spirit is again determined as purely relational, thus seeming to have no right on its own – a typical problem of Western Trinitarian theologies along the line of St. Augustine.²⁶ Yet, at least it seems not implausible why the relation between the first two moments in the Absolute is counted as a third: the first two are relationally determined as well. The criticism seems to presuppose a difference between autonomous substances and their accidental relations, a difference which is not yet developed. In Cramer's theory, where the Absolute is 'Being as Grounding' (which is a relational determination and marks the Absolute at the very beginning as an outset), this difference will be developed later, but it only applies to singular beings. The Absolute in itself is a unity with three inner moments, and none of them could be

²⁴ Cf. Cramer, *Absolute Reflexion*, 226.

²⁵ 'Verbum namque hoc ipsum quod uerbum est aut imago, ad alterum est, quia non nisi alicuius uerbum est aut imago.' Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion*, 38.

²⁶ Cf. Peter C. Phan, 'Systematic issues in trinitarian theology,' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: University Press, 2011), 13–29, doi: 10.1017/CCOL9780521877398.002.

without the other. Only because the Father is the grounding Ground, he necessarily implies the Son as the grounded Ground and the Spirit as Grounding.

These few remarks on the structure of the Absolute in Cramer's theory should at least motivate why it is a promising philosophical model for the Trinity. Whether it is fully compatible with orthodox theology of the three hypostases and their one ousia is an open question and a task for further scholarly efforts.

Conclusion

A few remarks on the epistemological status of the presented arguments shall conclude this essay. Cramer saw the question of the conditions of possibility as the main question of philosophy. This makes him a transcendental thinker. His argumentations stay in the realm of the *a priori* to reach the bottom of explanation. This bottom must be the Absolute, which was shown to be an order for everything else. This methodology brings with it a tight restriction. Everything is treated not in the fullness of its own being but insofar as it is a condition for the phenomenon on the level above. This means that Cramer never states that his philosophy is a complete theory of the Absolute. Rather, he simply wants to investigate the minimal conditions of everything, that which is necessary in itself.

Evidence for this can be seen even in the small selection of Cramer's thought which was presented here. His thoughts on the Absolute and contingent beings were motivated by the question: what must be given so that it is possible that there are finite beings, something other than the Absolute? If we use the term 'creation' for a non-necessary grounding of finite beings by the Absolute, then we could say: Cramer tries to prove the *possibility* of creation, the moment of freedom in the Absolute. The actuality of creation can never be proved *a priori*, but can only be seen by our own existence.²⁷ There are more places in Cra-

²⁷ It would be interesting to compare this character of Cramer's philosophy to the relation of negative and positive philosophy in Schelling. Broadly speaking, it is clear that there are many similarities between Cramer and the late Fichte and Schelling, which was observed by himself as by commentators.

mer's writing where he clearly sees the limits of his method and points towards other, *a posteriori* sources, even towards faith.²⁸

Still, what he has developed is not a small achievement. From what I called 'conceptual philosophy of the Absolute', we could learn that the Absolute must be thought of as an order for everything else. This triggers the question of otherness: how could it be possible that there is something truly other than the Absolute? I argued, as did Cramer, that this presupposes self-relation and self-knowledge in the Absolute, which is a hint for a Trinitarian structure. Lastly, I tried to show that even the Absolute's absoluteness cannot be considered without such a structure. If we take into account our act of thinking, we see that we cannot be the first to generate a concept of the Absolute. An Absolute which is truly independent must bring forth its own concept. Thus, Cramer's speculative philosophy shows that the 'distinctively Christian' Trinitarian theology is not an obscure speciality of Christian faith but rather a key for a consistent theory of the Absolute. Cramer's theory helps fulfil Rahner's claim for a connection between 'De Deo uno' and 'De Deo trino', yet building the bridge not from the side of theology as has been done by many beforehand, but rather from philosophy's shore.

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²⁸ Another example would be the phenomenon of love, which he is not able to explain, other than moral law, from the transcendental structure of consciousness. Thus the source of love is laid (which means here: postulated) in God. Cf. Cramer, 'Das Ich,' 47.