

# On the metaphysics and economics of the Trinity

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## **Abstract**

In chapter 1 of his *Monologion*, St. Anselm quickly establishes a platonist ascent from all the diverse kinds of mundane goods, to the highest good which is God. It provides a hierarchical metaphysics of the good, quite compatible with a univocal economic and even monetary understanding of goodness. This can give rise to a rather monolithic understanding of the good, because the unity which such a metaphysics of participation provides can at the same time render a genuine understanding of community, diversity and plurality problematic. In chapter 3 he specifically argues why this highest good must be one.

However, one of the counter-arguments he considers could be given a Trinitarian reading, thereby providing us with an interesting metaphysical structure for a ‘communitarian’ metaphysics of participation. The counter-argument is that two highest beings could receive their being from each other. Anselm considers it impossible that A receives its being from B, while B receives its being from A, because even in a relative relation like a master-slave relation, this only holds because of the pre-existing objects.

However, Anselm’s counter-counter-argument doesn’t work as easily in the case of the Trinity. There are no pre-existing divine persons which subsequently enter into a relative relation, nor is there a pre-existing or independent godhead wherein these divine interpersonal relationships are subsequently formed. At the same time, there is indeed only one supreme (Trinitarian) being. This opens up the metaphysical possibility that this supreme oneness is established in, by or through the reciprocal relations among the divine persons – their unity is found precisely in, by and through their reciprocal plurality and diversity as relational persons. There is no lower or higher common root for their unity – that is the way such a platonist metaphysics of participation accounts for the unity of all other diverse beings, but it cannot work in the case of the highest being. Their common being, which is truly and strictly one being, *is one through* their reciprocal diversity, as something they really ‘give’ and ‘receive’ *through* each other.

If this kind of plural and reciprocal oneness is successfully established for the supreme goodness, it enables, through that same kind of participationist metaphysics, a similar kind of reciprocal being among all the other (hierarchical or fractal-wise) levels of being. Moreover, precisely those kinds of reciprocal being would thereby manifest a higher

kind of being by resembling the highest goodness more closely. Two specific forms of being would be a prime candidate for this kind of trinitarian metaphysics, namely the human family, and a non-zero sum economic exchange. In the first case, the father *qua* father and the mother *qua* mother only exist in and through their reciprocal diversity in bringing forth the child as a third, common person. In the case of a non-zero sum economic exchange, if genuine profit arises as a metaphysical increase in goodness, it can likewise be understood as a gratuitous manifestation of that supreme trinitarian goodness.

### **Bibliography**

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