A "Kantian-inspired" Argument for the Trinity

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In this paper I will argue that the Trinity is part of natural theology although it is a contradictory doctrine because, even if all the "solutions" for the Trinity's aporias are unsatisfactory, anyone wondering about the nature of God comes to think in a trinitarian way. Given this theoretical impasse (our reason should state both that God must be Triune and cannot be Triune) a "Kantian-inspired argument" allows us to still believe in the Trinity. This Argument is based on the assumption that we find antinomic situations in the ontological realm of fundamental entities and in the realm of God's nature. This is our common way of knowing and, thus, the Trinity is a plausible metaphysical option. The Argument implies a rethinking of our metaphysics and of our religious epistemology, but it could also inspire new interesting research agendas in contemporary Philosophy of Religion.

Keywords: Trinity, mysterianism, apophatism, antinomy, theism

1. The Trinity as a contradictory doctrine

In his powerful book on the Trinity, Hasker claims that "for a trinitarian theist, the doctrine of the Trinity is an integral part of the metaphysically necessary ultimate structure of reality" (Hasker 2013, 174). If interpreted in a radical way, this claim implies that for a *trinitarian theist* the Trinity is a *hypothesis of reason*, that it is part of natural theology and that it must be endowed with speculative inevitability. This means that Jesus' revelation is not the only means through which we have access to the Trinity: anyone wondering about the nature of God can come, through reason alone, to think in a trinitarian way.[1]

This interpretation of Hasker's claim is the first premise from which I start in this work, and which I defend when point 2 of my Argument is explained (see section 3). However, the Trinity is also often suspected of being

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[1] Welch mentions a few attempts to develop a *philosophical trinitarianism* that would incorporate the Trinity into the programme of philosophical theism. For Welch, however, the doctrine can only be revealed (Welch 1953, 77–85, 243).

Online ISSN: 1736–5899
www.spe.ut.ee
https://doi.org/10.12697/spe.2025.18.02

a contradictory doctrine. In this respect, my starting point is quite unusual: I agree with the view—different from Hasker's *social trinitarianism*, according to which we can give a consistent account of the Trinity—that the sophisticated tools of analytical philosophy, contemporary ontology and logic fail to achieve a coherent account of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity still escapes our "claims to rationality", any attempt to rationally encapsulate it and to avoid contradiction.

Regarding these "claims", the last decades have seen a variety of new formulations of the Trinitarian dogma (see Tuggy 2019). Although we cannot analyse them all, we can mention that, according to many thinkers, the accounts provided so far do not describe an "orthodox" Trinity because they do not entirely satisfy the *minimum* propositions of the "orthodox" dogma (on these propositions, see section 3 below). As for the theologians and philosophers that support the aforementioned accounts, they claim that their opponents do not describe a "true" Trinity. Each part accuses the other of modalism, tritheism, subordinationism, and so on. We could conclude from this endless debate that, if contemporary philosophers cannot find an agreement, it is probably because the agreement cannot be found: no model of the Trinity is consistent with the richness of dogma.

This was the case also in the past: in the Antiquity, the arguments of Trinitarianists took the form of *negative apologetics*, i.e. of answers to specific heresies (Surin 1986, 235–256). Some of these past arguments led to positions that today are sometimes labelled as Latin and Social Trinitarianism (Tuggy 2019). However, neither of these two positions was intended by their proponents as an expression of the entire Trinitarian dogma, which emerges properly only from the antinomic synthesis of Social and Latin accounts. On this regard, Bertini (2015) correctly underlines that the problem of the Trinitarian doctrine is that, in order to be orthodox, one must defend both the divine unity in a robust sense and the triplicity in a robust sense. Every other weak interpretation—although it may be more desirable rationally—is not in agreement with the dogma. Here the role of the dogma is precisely to affirm what must be believed despite the dogma's antinomic propositions and against all rationalist simplifications. For example, Swinburne's social trinitarianism (see more in section 3) can be considered consistent, but according to many of his opponents (van Inwagen 2003; Davidson 2016; Moreland and Craig 2017), his trinitarian account is a form of tritheism. Similarly, Latin accounts are often considered forms of modalism.

The fact that there is no agreement regarding the rational description of the Trinity is not a proof in itself, but it certainly indicates a difficulty unresolved in centuries of discussion. Indirectly, therefore, past and present debates seem to confirm a suspicion: when a model is consistent (as in the

case of Swinburne), it is not entirely orthodox; and when it is orthodox, it is not consistent. I will treat this position as axiomatic: I do not believe that any future speculation can ever challenge it. After all, if there is no proof that the Trinity is consistent, it can be assumed that *with some probability*, it is contradictory: one could say that believing in the Trinity amounts to believing in a contradiction.[2]

This premise, namely the acceptance of the Trinity as an inevitably contradictory doctrine, is obviously quite controversial, and most of the authors who are currently participating in the analytical tradition of philosophical theology are unlikely to agree with it (see for example: (Inwagen 2022); but, against Inwagen, see (Vohánka 2013b)). For example, Vohánka (2014) asks whether we can know that the doctrine of the Trinity is logically possible, and argues for a Weak Modal Scepticism about the Trinity Doctrine: "it is psychologically impossible to see evidently and apart from religious experience that the Trinity doctrine is logically possible" (Vohánka 2014, 86). However, Vohánka does not say that this proves that the doctrine is contradictory.

In this respect, my position differs. In addition to the above-mentioned observations about the inconclusive Trinitarian debate that has developed over the centuries, helpful arguments to "certify" the contradictory nature of the doctrine can be found, for example, in (Beall 2021), (Beall 2023), (Branson 2019), (Bertini 2015), and (Kilby 2010). But, again, consensus will probably never be found on this point. Therefore, I would like to try the following mental experiment: if we accept the hypotheses, that (a) all the "solutions" for the Trinity's aporias are bound to prove unsatisfactory, and (b) the Trinity is a contradictory doctrine, can we still believe in it? Will a *Kantian-inspired argument* allow us to still believe in the Trinity despite all odds? This begs another question: all things considered, can we say that the Trinity is part of natural theology even if it is a contradictory doctrine? In the following sections, I will argue that we *can* and *must* say so.

My position, in other words, is a kind of *positive mysterianism*,[3] according to which the doctrine is composed of understandable statements that are contradictory when taken together. But this is actually a merit, according to *positive mysterianism*: it is precisely when we solve all the contradictions about God that we free ourselves from orthodoxy.

[2] This means that, although future new waves of rationalization—or new accounts—may give the illusion of progress ("rationalization" here means the attempt of interpreting the Trinity in rational terms), they are destined to crash against the epistemological limits of human speculation.

[3] Negative and positive mysterianism are meta-theories about the Trinity. For a synthesis, see (Tuggy 2019).

2. Mystery, Apophatism, and Hyperphatism

In the theological tradition, the Trinity is usually described as a *mystery of faith*, a doctrine that we cannot entirely explain with argumentative or logical tools. In this sense, the Trinity should not be part of *rational theology*. What we mean by *mystery*, however, has been the object of extensive past and present analytical debates. According to Wainwright (2009, 87), there are various kinds of theological mysteries:[4] (1) something surprising, disconcerting; (2) an incongruous or inconsistent doctrine (e.g., divine impassivity or omniscience); (3) a doctrine that seems absurd because we are missing some relevant piece of information (e.g., the problem of evil). Wainwright claims that the truths, in case (3), are not mysterious as such, but become clear as soon as the missing information becomes available to us. Case (2), on the other hand, implies that no new information and no empowerment of our intellectual faculties will ever dispel the mystery. This could be the case of two clear truths which, however, we do not know how to compose into a unity (as in the case of the Trinity).

Tuggy (2003, 175–180), for his part, identifies five meanings of mystery: (1) a truth unveiled by Scripture; (2) something that we do not fully understand (God is a mystery in this sense, whether or not He is a Trinitarian one); (3) something that we cannot adequately explain (the challenge, here, is to define what we mean by "adequately"); (4) something unintelligible (but Christian doctrines seem at least intelligible); (5) a truth that seems impossible, absurd and contradictory. According to Tuggy, the Trinity corresponds to all five of these mysteries, but its defining feature is (5). Moreover, he argues that a dogma characterised by (5) *cannot be believed in*. Tuggy's position is characteristic of the classical evidentialistic objection: a fideistic act of adherence to a contradiction is excluded. Tuggy admits that no contemporary theory of the Trinity has overcome this contradiction yet, but he foresees that the contradiction will eventually be solved by further research.

Similarly, Davis (1983, 141) distinguishes between *contradiction* and *mystery*, believing that the latter can only be an *apparent contradiction*. Davis' and Tuggy's position is similar to Anderson's (2007; 2018), according to which we can believe in an apparently contradictory doctrine as long as it is merely apparently—not actually—contradictory (its paradoxical nature is due to our limited cognitive abilities).

Anderson's position also presents a few similarities with Aquinas': we can believe in a doctrine that is *above reason* (its contradictoriness is not proven) but not *against reason* (demonstratively contradictory). The differ-

[4] We should also mention the theological *mysterium salutis*: the divine will about convenient choices for our salvation.

ence is that, for Aquinas, we can believe in a revealed doctrine only when we have refuted any argument that allegedly shows its contradictoriness (Porro 2017, 127–133).[5] As mentioned above, my intention is to use the notion of mystery in a more radical way, starting from the hypothesis that the Trinity is a contradictory doctrine. This corresponds to point (5) in Tuggy's list, or to point (2) in Wainwright's one. I take it as a starting point, based on the thought of the scholars mentioned above. As opposed to Tuggy, however, I will show that the contradictory nature of the doctrine should not lead us to support a Unitarian position. This also means, contrary to what Davis hopes, that no argumentation (such as *relative identity theories*, subsistent relations, etc.) or analogy (*Verbum Mentis*, Cerberus, statue, etc.) eliminates the contradictions. So, let us accept that contemporary positions fail to provide a real solution to the logical problem of the Trinity and that no future theory will overcome the contradiction: the Trinity is a mystery precisely because *no consistent description* of it can be provided. But, even if the Trinity is and will always be a contradictory doctrine, I want to show that the Kantian-inspired argument can help us explain what allows us to believe in this kind of mystery.

However, before the analysis of the Argument, it becomes essential to define our own epistemological paradigm, that is, where we place the limits of religious language's ability to describe the mysteries of God. Also because this paradigm will be indispensable in one of the passages of the Argument. On this regard, I believe that *apophatism* is a paradigm coherent with the notion of mystery detailed above. Now, the term *apophatism* has assumed different meanings throughout its long, rich and authoritative tradition (Bulhof and Ten Kate 2000), which cannot be possibly retraced here. To outline my position, I therefore prefer to comment the recent and quite helpful proposal of Scott and Citron (2016).

According to them, an apophatist does not claim that two contradictory propositions are true about God, but rather presents contrary propositions (in the sense that they belong to different categories). Propositions about God always create opposites that are reciprocally false. According to these two authors, the work of an apophatist consists in a *process*, that is, in showing the inadequacy of each statement about God, without affirming that the contrary statements are true.

Even if we can agree with Scott and Citron that apophatism is a *process*, it seems to me that the distinction between contraries and contradictions does not work here: there must be at least a few cases in which we must

[5] Of course, Aquinas' position can be considered an unconvincing speculative attempt to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is not against reason, but this issue is too far-reaching to be addressed here.

affirm contradictory propositions about God. For example, that He is ever-changing and immutable, that He is omniscient but He increases his knowledge when we perform new free actions. About this, the case of the Trinity is emblematic: we say that God is and is not one. These examples show that we cannot apply the principle of non-contradiction to several truths about God, if we want to say some things about Him. As a consequence, many divine names should express the process of affirmation, negation, negation of negation and new affirmation.

The *process* of apophatism implies a thesis, an antithesis and a synthesis in which thesis and antithesis are still true. However, in doing this, I think that apophatism becomes a sort of *hyperphatism*:[6] the terms we use need to express the dialectic through the suffix *hyper-*. An example: "God is good", "God is not good" (in the way in which creatures are good), but "God is still good" (in an eminent way), and therefore, we could say that He is *hyper*good. The sentence "God is hypergood" doesn't lead us back to ordinary cataphatic discourse, because the term hypergood expresses the process through the suffix hyper-. This procedure could be repeated both for the dipolar[7] characteristics of the divine (immutability, eternity, infinity, omniscience…) and for those that are not (substance, essence, wisdom…). We should say hyperscient (instead of omniscient), hypertemporal (instead of eternal), and so on.

What about the Trinity? I am convinced that the term Trinity is already hyperphatic, as it is the adjective "Triune" substantivized, which in itself already sums up two dipolar statements: "God is One" and "God is Three" (or "not-One"). Technically speaking, it should be said "hyper-One", but the theological tradition has "hidden" this hyperphatic term in the substantive "Trinity". Moreover, in the case of the Trinity, the process consists in recognizing that God is substance, but also relations, and therefore "beyond" either category (He is *subsistent relations*, another expression that hides hyperphatism: "subsistent relation" means that God is "hyper-substantial", or "hyper-relational"); that He is pure act but also potentiality (the traditional term that hides hyperphatism, here, is "eternal generation"), and so on.

How can God exist beyond two mutually disjoint but jointly complete categories? I think that we can in some cases suspend the Law of Excluded Middle (LEM)[8] (and we also have certain arguments in favour of the existence of true contradictions—see section 4 below). According to Vallicella (2016), we can affirm that God is A and non-A, or something beyond

[6] For this term, see (Zuanazzi 2005).

[7] Dipolarity is also a key concept of Charles Hartshorne's non-standard theism (Pratt 2002).

[8] One such instance of classical logic that suspends the Aristotelian Law of Excluded Middle is *intuitionistic logic* (Moschovakis 2024).

A and non-A. Those who deny this kind of predication are committed to the Law of Non-Contradiction (LNC) and to LEM, in a framework that can be described as *discursive*. But, Vallicella asks, "how could someone working within the framework prove in a noncircular way its absolute and unrestricted validity? How prove that it is not restricted to what our finite minds can think? How prove that nothing lies beyond it?" (2016). The answer is that no one can do so: the *discursive framework* "cannot rationally ground its hegemony over all Being; it can only presuppose its hegemony" and so we "cannot dismiss the reality of the Ineffable by presupposing the hegemony of the Effable". This means that the discursive framework is not absolutely and unrestrictedly valid: when talking about God, we are allowed to use contradictory claims. There are historical precedents: we could say that this is an "Hegelian" position (see section 4 below), indebted to the mystical idea anticipated by Cusanus' "God beyond the contradiction" (Monaco 2010).

Of course, one could say that such contradictions are merely the result of our own epistemological limitations[9] (the nature of God and that of the world are not contradictory as such); however, these contradictions are ultimately what we can say about God's nature. We need to justify, therefore, our belief in this aporetic God that exists "beyond" contradiction. One way to do so is to suspend the *discursive framework*; the second is to show that the Trinity is apophatic (in the sense described above), just like any theory about the fundamental reality of the world.

Hyperphatism is not, of course, the only possible solution. Coffey (1999), for example, criticizes the doctrine of dipolarity—in which we are allowed to affirm two contrary sentences about God's nature—because it is based on a *univocal* use of language. The alternative proposed by him is *analogical* language. However, the possibility of using analogical language to produce consistent positions is highly controversial. In his book on the Trinity, for example, Hasker (2013, 171) observes that "with *analogical language* [...] there is often a *degree of ambiguity* or vagueness concerning the intended meaning". The analogical use of terms removes the evidence of the contradiction by using terms (substance, relationship, one, simple, good, etc.) in an imprecise manner and affirming that this use is the legitimate understanding (Migliorini 2022b) of a reality whose *ontological difference* is radical, thus making the mystery *possible*.

However, such an analogy means accepting the contradiction under false pretences? I think it is, but this is certainly not the place to settle a question of this magnitude. As Micheletti (2018) rightly argued, the analogy-univocity issue is an intellectual challenge for the future, which we can only leave here as an open question. Nevertheless, in hyperphatism the "new terms" (pre-

[9] See (Davis 1983), (Anderson 2007), (Anderson 2018).

ceded by the suffix *hyper-*…) that express the process try to make explicit the analogical use of terms. In doing so, the new terms keep the dipolarity as a moment (not a result) of predication. For this reason, I prefer the more "honest" solution of hyperphatism, in which the process described above is expressed by the terms (*hyper-*…).

Due to its common use in the current debate, I will anyway use the term *apophatism* in my Argument, but it need to be understood in its above-mentioned variant of *hyperphatism*.

3. The Kantian-inspired Argument

In what sense, then, should the Trinity be understood as a hypothesis of reason and not (only) as a dogma? Are we legitimized to believe in something that is not only *above*, but also *against* reason? To answer these questions, let us introduce the *Kantian-inspired argument*:

1. The existence of one God is the best possible explanation for many phenomena;
2. If God exists and is One, he *must* also be Triune;[10]
3. Our language about God is apophatic (any interpretation of proposition 2. that does not imply contradiction is not orthodox);
4. Every metaphysics/ontology[11] is apophatic (the entities that theological and ontological[12] arguments lead us to posit as existing are contradictory);
5. By virtue of 1 and 2, through 3, both Unity and Multiplicity can and must be affirmed in God;
6. By virtue of 1, 4 and 5, the existence of God's Uni-Multiplicity (the Triune God) is an option equally reasonable, or at least as reasonable as a philosophical hypothesis can be in ontology and theology;[13]
7. Conclusion: by 3, 5 and 6 we can accept the Trinity as a plausible and reasonable hypothesis apophatically describing the nature of the divine.

[10] We can say: it is possible to demonstrate that God is one and triune.

[11] I use both terms as there is no agreement among scholars as to whether ontology is a branch of metaphysics or an autonomous discipline: see (Varzi 2007).

[12] In the following paragraphs we will see that when we want to describe fundamental entities, we inevitably encounter contradictions. Therefore, the ontology of the world is contradictory.

[13] The fact that God is a contradictory entity does not constitute an exception in the ontological landscape and is thus not problematic.

Before we explain these seven points one by one, why is this Argument described as *Kantian-inspired*? As is well known, in the section "Transcendental Dialectic" of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claims that the various plausible ways of representing the nature of reality contradict one another, but that there is no way of deciding which one is right. Note that Kant did not conclude that reality should be represented in contradictory ways, but only that metaphysics cannot be a science. In the Argument described above, on the contrary, points 2 and 4 assume that we can only have antinomic descriptions of some aspects of reality and this is how theology and metaphysics work, as specific sciences. This is the first reason why the Argument is (only) Kantian-*inspired*, and not *entirely* Kantian. The second is that Kant did not say much about the Trinity (O'Regan 2011): the Argument described above cannot be found in his texts about the doctrine, and I would not have the audacity to claim that my Argument is based on the only possible interpretation of Kant's thought.

About the seven points: premise 1. prevents hypothetical dissenters from claiming that, if every doctrine about God (One or Triune) is contradictory, the best option is to not believe in God. Although premise 1. will not be sufficiently explained in this work, it is there to remind us that also the Atheistic position, from a Kantian perspective, contains contradictions. As it is known, theists widely agree that atheism has great difficulties in explaining morality, free will, mentality, time, the orderliness of the universe, etc. Premise 1, therefore, affirms a rather common thesis among contemporary philosophers of religion: the existence of God is a grounded, plausible, highly probable hypothesis. If it is not better than the atheistic hypothesis, is at least equivalent to it. Today's debate on this issue cannot be fully described here: we take this thesis as a starting point.

Point 2 relies on the belief that there are arguments that show that any theistic system must postulate a Trinitarian God (thesis in line with the interpretation, proposed before, of what Hasker wrote in his book). This means that the "One-God" hypothesis—that is, a position that rejects the Trinity in favour of absolute divine simplicity—is also aporetic. The formulations of these arguments are more challenging than the search of prefigurations (Li Volsi 2011) of the Trinity carried out by ancient thinkers, especially Cambridge Platonists (Taliaferro 2003). Would be too easy to find those prefigurations, as triadic systems of gods or principles exist in almost all cultures, religious and philosophical theories (Griffiths 1996). The Trinity, however, is quite distinct from other triadic models (e.g., in its rejection of subordinationism), because in its full sense, the Trinity must affirm at least the following *minimum* propositions: a) there is only one personal God; b) God is formed by (at least) three equal subsistences (or hypostases, or persons); c)

each of them is *fully* God, and therefore personal; d) none of them is identical to the others (they are distinct but not divided); e) there is an explanatory and generative order (not subordinationist) between these subsistences; f) there is only one divine substance.

Why should we say, in order to justify point 2, that reason leads us to necessarily affirm that the Trinity exists, understood according to the points (a)–(f)? This is not the place to detail all the arguments in support of point 2, which lead to accept the inevitability of a Trinitarian vision of God in line with those *minimum* propositions. But I shall briefly summarise one of these arguments, due to the fame of its author, Swinburne (2013; 2018), who claims that there are *a priori* and *a posteriori* proofs of the Trinity: according to him, God is bound to perform the best possible action in every situation. If God wanted to generate a being equivalent to Him but could not do so, He would be weak; and if He did not want to do so, He would be envious. Therefore, a supremely good God, who is also love, should perform the best possible action, i.e. generate another God. It is therefore possible to establish *a priori* that God must generate (Swinburne also explains why the number of persons that must be generated is no more than two—Son and Spirit; but this point is not relevant to the present work). The conclusion of Swinburne's argument is that God *must be a Trinity*: the Trinity is a part of *natural theology*. Other arguments of this sort, which confirm Swinburne's fundamental thesis, have recently been proposed (Migliorini 2019). There are, therefore, good reasons to believe that premise 2 of the Kantian-inspired argument is at least plausible

Let us take for granted—for our mental experiment—that Swinburne's argument, although controversial,[14] is effective. Before proceeding to the analysis of the other points of the Kantian-inspired argument, it is necessary to clarify which problems need to be solved here, that is, to justify why there is still much work to be done in order to accept the Trinity as part of natural theology. The most obvious objection to Swinburne's conclusion that God *must be a Trinity* is that Swinburne does not properly solve the following problem: even if we admit that God *must* generate another God, we still cannot describe how this is possible and how we can have three subsistences (real distinctions) in God. Swinburne's proof demonstrates the necessity of the Trinity but also leads to a potential contradiction, which could be the starting point for a *reductio ad absurdum*: if absurd, the Trinity is impossible, even if we can prove its existence. Moreover, as stated in point 5, there are also good arguments to say that God must be One (absolute simplicity).

[14] Swinburne's proof can also be criticized. See Vohánka (2013a, 73): "It can be argued that if any uncaused divine individual is all-perfect, then any uncaused divine individual may be in no need of another individual in order to be perfectly loving".

Evidently, in order to avoid this impasse, a few additional steps are necessary, and we find them in the Argument.

Point 3, about apophatic language, has been discussed in the previous section (it is connected with point 5 if we agree that, in order to affirm God's Trinitarian nature, we need to accept a contradiction). As we have seen, we need to understand the common term "apophatic" in the sense of "hyperphatic" described above.

About point 4, it is worth remembering that there is some consensus about the fact that some phenomena of our world can only have a contradictory description (infinity, relations, causation, free will, quantum particles…). Point 4 cannot be developed exhaustively here, but, to give an example, when we want to describe fundamental entities, we arrive to some inevitable contradictions. Contradictions that have to do—unsurprisingly—with the same central notion of Trinitarian theology: fundamental realities are, aporetically, *relationes subsistentes* (for a description of this matter, see (Migliorini 2022a), (Migliorini 2018)). Fundamental entities seem to simultaneously be substances and relations, but the two categories are mutually exclusive. In some sense, we can say that point 4 achieves a new *ontological antinomy* about fundamental entities as subsistent relations, which can be added to Kant's famous catalogue of antinomies. This means that ontology presents the same problem as Trinitarian theology and it is apophatic in the same way.

Implicitly, point 4 also rejects the consistency of process metaphysics, which underlies the strategy of process theists.[15] This metaphysics postulates the existence of *subsistent relations* in the reality of the world, and therefore can find a solution to the fact that God has a trinitarian nature,[16] because God is, in process theism, eminently a form of subsistent relationality. However, the problem of process metaphysics, in my view, is that it is just as inconsistent as the Trinity,[17] and precisely because it postulates the existence of the same contradictory entities, namely subsistent relations. The problem, of course, is not the postulation as such, which is as mentioned above, inevitable (point 4). The problem lies in the fact that process philosophers do not recognise the apophatic nature of this postulation.

The Kantian-inspired approach, on the contrary, seeks a convergence between ontology and theology that acknowledges the apophatic outcomes of these two rational fields of knowledge. This is expressed in point 6. Going back to point 5, we see that it combines the previous premises: God exists, he is One and Triune.

[15] Or, maybe, today's *Ontic Structural Realism*, in all its forms (Ladyman 2014).
[16] See for example (Bracken and Suchocki 1997).
[17] For a discussion on this issue, and on *process trinitarianism* in general, see (Pugliese 2011).

Point 5 and 6 together, then, lead to point 7, the conclusion: it argues that the Trinity can be defended as reasonable, showing that any hypothesis similar to that of the "One God" presents a few theoretical aporias. The "One God" must be thought also as Triune, because whoever believes in the "One God" introduces many elements of the "Triune God", and conversely. God must be One and He must be Triune. The Trinity, thus, manifests itself as a reasonable hypothesis *in the absence of alternatives*.

A Trinity "of reason", then, should show only that in God there *must be* relationality and multiplicity, and an abstract form of relationality that generates all the worldly relationalities.[18] The Trinity is philosophically relevant because the only possible conclusion about God is that He is One *and* Triune. Believing in two contradictory truths (the One God and the Trinity), for which we can provide reasonable arguments, leads to a Kantian-inspired result: the Trinity can be seen as an antinomy concerning the nature of God, of whom we can speak in an antinomic form precisely because, being divine, it escapes human understanding.

This *theological antinomy* can be expressed by two sentences: "God *must* be a Trinity" and "God *cannot* be a Trinity". If we accept the paths that led us to consider both statements as true (despite their controversial nature, our thought experiment assumes, somewhat *ab auctoritate*, that they are both true), then we find ourselves in an unprecedented situation in the recent literature on the Trinity: we have a *theological antinomy* (concerning the nature of God) that corresponds to an *ontological antinomy* (concerning, for example, the nature of fundamental entities).[19]

This situation, however, is also the solution: once we admit that the Trinity and, in general, any metaphysics or ontology, cannot exclude contradictions, we can conclude that it could be a good choice among many options. For this we need to get to point 7 through point 4. If we add that atheism also produces antinomies, all these apophatic outcomes do not lead us to a pliant *credo quia absurdum*, but rather to an active choice between inevitable absurdities: our reason has led us to this choice. The Trinity is *against reason* (because it is and will remain contradictory), but accepting this fact does not amount to pure fideism, but to a rational choice, because this corresponds to our way of knowing (according to point 4 and 6) in many fields.

A small concluding note, to prevent a fundamental objection: many of the premises of the Argument are hypothetical and controversial and, as noted above, need to be defended in more details. Each would need to be defended in a separate article. However, I think it is interesting to explore to

[18] See the notion of "transcendental multiplicity" in: (Migliorini 2019).

[19] The apophaticity of ontology has been put at the service of the faith in the past: see (Fogelin 1988, 47).

what conclusion—inevitably hypothetical—a *mental experiment*, in which certain assumptions are taken as true, may lead us to.

4. Believe in contradictions? A few hypotheses

The question of how we can accept contradictions goes back to Hegel. According to him, contradiction is the soul of reality, which is why he calls for a new, non-Aristotelian logic (see (Powell 2001); we cannot say with certainty that Hegel accepts contradiction. However, this is at least one of the possible interpretations: see (Illetterati et al. 2010, 117–122)). Hegel posits that Aristotelian logic is the logic of the *intellect*, whereas dialectics is the logic of *reason*.[20] The debate on the validity of Hegelian logic of reason, which accepts contradictions, has been extensive. For example, in *What is Dialectics?* (1940), Karl Popper claims that the Hegelian position violates the Pseudo-Scotus *principle of explosion*, according to which *ex falso sequitur quodlibet*: from a contradiction anything can be derived. If this principle is valid, Popper claims, a theory that has a contradiction—from which any proposition follows—is meaningless and *trivial* (Trivialism is the view that everything, including every contradiction, is true).

In recent years, however, *paraconsistent* logics (see Priest et al. 2022) have rejected the Pseudo-Scotus principle and stated that a theory that accepts contradiction does not necessarily incur trivialisation. According to such logics, the fact of affirming both A and the negation of A does not mean that one can derive any proposition from it (such as "the table is a cow"). There is no risk of "explosion". A more radical theory, in some ways, is *dialetheism* (Priest and Berto 2018), namely the view that there are true contradictions. Paraconsistent logic is sometimes equated to dialetheism, but improperly so: paraconsistency concerns a relation of consequence, whereas dialetheism is a theory about truth. Therefore, the two notions must be distinguished[21] because "the fact that one can construct a model where a contradiction holds but not every sentence of the language holds (or where this is the case at some world) does not mean that the contradiction is true per se" (Priest et al. 2022). Despite this necessary distinction, however, dialetheists and paraconsistent logicians agree that there is no risk of "explosion".

It is not possible here to expand further on the differences between paraconsistent logics and dialetheism, and on the validity of these positions. For the purposes of our thought experiment, suffice it to say that, if we accept either one of the theories (or both), then Hegelian dialectical logic is justified, or at least plausible. Of course, a reason that accept some contradictions is

[20] For the Hegelian distinction between intellect and reason, see (Illetterati et al. 2010, 120).
[21] Paraconsistency, however, may lead to dialetheism: see (Asmus 2012).

a very interesting challenge, in particular in the context of today's Analytic Philosophy of Religion, and especially when discussing the Trinity. However, "people have inconsistent beliefs. They may even be rational in doing so. For example, there may be apparently overwhelming evidence for both something and its negation. There may even be cases where it is in principle impossible to eliminate such inconsistency" (Priest et al. 2022). In order to believe in a contradictory Trinity, we must insert this belief in a wider metaphysical view that allows for the acceptance of antinomies at least at certain levels of our discourse. Maybe we could adopt *positive mysterianism*, at least in this Hegelian sense (for a brief discussion of the Hegelian position in relation to the Trinity, see (Migliorini 2022b)).

5. Conclusions

The seven points of the Argument need, of course, a larger discussion and explanation. However, for the scope of this article, based on the *mental experiment* described above, if we consider at least plausible the seven passages, the Kantian-Inspired argument allows us to still believe in the Trinity, and to claim that the Trinity is inevitable, is part of natural theology. God *must be* Triune in every theistic system but, once it has been established that the best God that we can have is the Trinitarian God, this does not allow us to say that God is Trinitarian without contradictions: it only tells us that there are good reasons to believe that God must be One (in a strong sense) and Triune (in a strong sense).

An opponent could argue, again, that choosing a contradictory doctrine as our creed would be an unacceptable deviation from our usual way of knowing and believing. This is where points 5 and 6 of the argument come into play. We have an antinomic situation in two realms of knowledge: that realm of the fundamental substance under the objects of our world (the ontological fundamental entities), and that of God's nature. This is our common way of knowing and believing and, as far as we know, if we accept a certain degree of epistemological realism, reality itself really has these characteristics. This position both states that we have good reasons for believing—some, not all—contradictory things (e.g. that God is both One and Triune) and that reality is truly describable, at a certain level of analysis, with some contradictory sentences.

Of course, if we accept these contradictions, many others questions emerge: what does the acceptance of the presence of some contradictions imply for our vision of the world and of philosophy? Is this vision still a form of scientific knowledge? Why can reality be only contradictory at

some point,[22] and what is the advantage, for Christian theism, of believing in a "contradictory God" and in a "contradictory world"? These are, clearly, important and uncomfortable questions, but contemporary Philosophy of Religion should, I believe, address them again in the near future.

The rational description of the Trinity is therefore still today a fascinating and unfinished challenge, for both theology and philosophy. It is no coincidence that, in the most recent bibliography on the Trinity and more generally in philosophical theology, certain topics increasingly emerge as central: the notion of mystery,[23] apophatism, the model of rationality (connected with the question of the contradictory nature of some Christian doctrines),[24] the use of analogy in religious language. The challenge implies a rethinking of our metaphysics and of our religious epistemology: it is evident that points 1–7 of the Argument need to be defended more effectively, but the seven points are all theses that can be found in the current philosophical discussion, they are plausible even if they imply a revision of our ontological and theological models. Listed together, in the form of the Argument, they offer a coherent picture.

In my view, this is an exciting challenge for Christian natural theology, which may inspire new interesting research agendas for the contemporary Analytic Philosophy of Religion. Waiting for this rethinking, the Kantian-inspired argument allows us to believe in the Trinity as a hypothesis of reason. And this, I think, can be considered a point in favour of the Argument itself, and it could help to limit the anxiety (very widespread in the recent analytic debate) to find a logical explanation of the Trinity. As the Argument tries to show, this explanation is perhaps of little use: one can still believe in the Trinity even in its absence.

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[22] Perhaps it is because the ground of created reality is God himself (but this is only a suggestion: see (Migliorini 2018)).

[23] See (Migliorini 2022b), but also (Guillon 2022).

[24] See (Beall 2021), (Beall 2023).

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