# John Macmurray's Philosophy of the Person and the Doctrine of the Trinity[1]

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John Macmurray is the quiet giant of modern philosophy, the most original and creative of savants and social thinkers in the English speaking world. If his thought is revolutionary, as it certainly is, the kind of revolution he has in view is not revolt but the reconstruction of the foundations of life and knowledge with a view to a genuinely open and creative society of the future. His impact has not been as spectacular as that of Ayer or Popper, but it is incomparably greater for it soaks into philosophical, social and religious thought like sunlight upon the earth, with a similar result in living fruit. In what he has done through this teaching and writing there is a longer period between germination and harvest, for his thought penetrates deeply and pervasively into the foundations of human existence; if, then, he has not yet been appreciated as he ought to be, it is because he is something like fifty years ahead of the rest of us.

–Thomas F. Torrance[2]

Thomas F. Torrance attests to the paradox of John Macmurray: original,

revolutionary, penetrating, and yet strangely unsung. Macmurray's thought is radical, not

in the sense of primarily being novel, but in going to the root or core of the cultural

assumptions of modernity. It is his conviction that many contemporary social, political,

and religious problems can be tied directly to modernity's underlying philosophy and its

inadequate egocentric understanding of the person. Thus the pressing question for

philosophy is the correct understanding of the person and the need to discover a logical

form appropriate to the expression of this concept. In order to overcome the inadequacies

of modern philosophy he makes two key substitutions at the foundation of modern

philosophy. He replaces the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* ("I think therefore I am") with *ago*

[1] This paper is a drastic condensation of my Ph.D. dissertation, "God, Humanity, and the Form of the Personal: The Philosophical Contribution of John Macmurray with Particular Reference to Issues in Contemporary Theology" (University of St. Andrews, 2001).

[2] Cited by Kenneth Barnes, Foreword to *Becoming Real: An Introduction to the Thought of John Macmurray*, by Jeanne Warren (York: Ebor Press, 1989), v.

*ergo sum* ("I act therefore I am") and exchanges the egocentric *I* with the heterocentric and mutually constituting *You and I*.[3] These modifications create a definition of person as the *self-as-agent-in-relation-to-Other*,[4] or *persons in relation*, forming the primary core of his thought where "All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship."[5]

## 1.    THE FORM OF THE PERSONAL—SCIENCE, ART, & RELIGION

When one begins from the standpoint of the person, understood in Macmurray's relational and holistic sense rather than the from the typically modern perspective of the isolated thinker, the entire framework of philosophy changes. Philosophy, anthropology, and theology all become highly integrated and mutually informing. While there is insufficient space and time to give a full account of Macmurray's philosophy (not to mention anthropology and theology), a whirlwind tour utilizing Macmurray's understanding of science, art, and religion will serve as an introduction to his overall thought.

While one typically thinks of science, art, and religion as practical activities, Macmurray focuses upon the underlying theoretical aspect of each as it reflects upon

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[3] Similar to Martin Buber's "I-Thou", Macmurray's position was developed independently from Buber. "In a personal letter to the author [Berry] Macmurray admits being influenced by the existentialists, especially Buber, but only as confirming a position he had already reached independently." Cornelius Oliver Berry, "The Concept of the Self in John Dewey and John Macmurray: A Summary Critique," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1971), 217. When Buber was asked about Macmurray's work in comparison to his own he commented that Macmurray's was more philosophical while his own was more poetic. A.R.C. Duncan, *On the Nature of Persons* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 78. For a more detailed discussion of the relation of Macmurray to Buber, see Thomas Patrick McGloin, "The Personalism of John Macmurray: A Study of the Implications of John Macmurray's Personalism for an Appreciation of the 'Dialogical Principle' of Martin Buber," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1975). Although McGloin wrongly attributes the dependence of Macmurray upon Buber, his conclusion is still valid: "One may go so far as to say that Macmurray's careful, cautious, personalistic prose is the philosophical explication of Buber's profoundly magnificent poetry of the personal." McGloin, 251-52.
[4] Macmurray capitalized the "o" in Other in order to emphasize and strengthen the personal (rather than the objective) dimension of the other. This practice is followed by this author.
[5] John Macmurray, *Self as* Agent (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), 15. Hereafter SA.

reality. Each mode of reflection has a basic analogy for its understanding of reality, which Macmurray terms a unity-pattern. And each unity-pattern has a concomitant logical form (or grammar) it uses to model the relationships existing within the particular unity-pattern.

Science is the pragmatic mode of reflection which reflects upon the Other in as isolated a manner as is humanly possible—as the *It*. Scientific reflection is done primarily for instrumental purposes. Science is utilitarian, economic, and technical in its orientation, perceiving the World-as-means. It is an intellectual form of reflection that deals with matter of fact. Science understands reality according to a substantial or material analogy, where things are abstracted and generalized towards the ideal of the unit—completely interchangeable and capable of being analyzed into its most basic elements. Science sees the whole as the sum of the parts utilizing an analytic or mathematical logical form.

Art is the contemplative mode of reflection which reflects upon the Other in terms of its environment—as the *I-It*. Whereas science pragmatically considers the Other merely as something to be used, the contemplative orientation of art sees the Other as having intrinsic value. Art perceives the World-as-ends. Rather than analytically breaking down an entity into components, art reflects on the unity of the Other.

Art is an emotional form of reflection that deals with valuation. It considers reality from a basic organic analogy. This organic analogy addresses one of the most glaring inadequacies of material thought: its inability to accurately represent organic life.

Rather than an ontology of substance, the organic needs an understanding of teleological

process for "In fact, life never *is* at any moment. It is always *becoming*."[6]

In addition to the need for incorporating process, art and the organic unity-pattern

has a holistic quality which science lacks. Macmurray uses a painting as an example of

the logic of artistic reflection.

> The technique by which this adequacy of the image is achieved is one of
> selection, modification and organization. The image, if it is to present the object
> in its individuality, must itself be self-contained. This is what is meant by saying
> that a work of art is an organic whole. The elements of which it is composed are
> not merely arranged; they are organized. They are functionally or purposively
> related to one another, so that they give the impression of necessity. What this
> secures is that the composition of the image is such that the elements refer us to
> one another, and so are seen as constituting a completed whole, which needs
> nothing beyond itself for its apprehension. Its formal characters, therefore, are
> rhythm, proportion, balance and harmony.[7]

The organic unity of art is a dialectical unity of difference. It is not a mathematical

summation as in scientific thought, but a balance or harmony between differences.[8]

Organic unity is felt not calculated; it is emotional. The logical form corresponding to the

organic unity-pattern is the dialectic, typified by Hegel.[9]

Art (the valuational mode of reflection) is constituted by science (the factual

mode of reflection) since valuation (emotional) necessarily refers to an object and the

object must be determined as a matter of fact (intellectual). Both art and science as modes

of reflection are activities of knowing; yet scientific knowledge seeks to know the Other

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[6] John Macmurray, *Interpreting the* Universe (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), 109. Hereafter IU. Emphasis
in the original.
[7] John Macmurray, *Religion, Art, and Science: A Study of the Reflective Activities in Man* (Liverpool:
Liverpool University Press, 1961), 39-40. Hereafter RAS.
[8] Similarly, Susan Langer in *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art.*
(New York: Mentor Book, 1948) sees art as being its own non-discursive symbolic activity (71-78) with
music functioning much like mathematics as the "symbolization of emotion" (82) and as the "logical
expression of feeling" (176).
[9] Macmurray does not limit this to Hegel but includes all organic type philosophies. The continuing
influence of this logical form is seen in that modern idealism, realism, and even process thought rely upon
this organic analogy and its dialectical logic.

in general while artistic knowledge seeks to know the Other in particular. Macmurray goes to great length to argue that both are valid forms of reflection and both are rational in that they have external referents and therefore may be either rational or irrational based upon their objectivity.[10]

Religion is the communal mode of reflection focusing upon the Other as persons constituted by relations—as the *I-You*. The personal aspect of religion includes within it the factual determination of the Other (the *It*) and the valuation of the Other (the *I-It*) while surpassing them both by considering the constituting nature of relations (the *I-You*). Religion perceives the World-as-persons. Religion is the integrating form of reflection that deals with personal interaction and mutuality.

The personal unity-pattern is one which organizes and unifies the conception of persons and their relationality. It is commonly observed that humans are social beings. But according to Macmurray this must never be associated with some type of organic *herd instinct*, for persons essentially lack instinct;[11] however, one's very nature is constructed socially through thoughts, ideas, culture, and beliefs. Without the Other there can be no self—no person—for, "we need one another in order to be ourselves."[12] It is not that persons are merely in relation but that persons are constituted by their relationality. Personal knowledge of the Other (as material, biological, and personal) is

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[10] Macmurray defines rationality as the ability to interact with the Other in terms of the Other, rather than in terms of the self.

[11] "The need to communicate, we should note, is itself a natural characteristic, not, like speech, something that we learn as we grow up. It is, indeed, our only original adaptation to the environment into which we are born. We have no true instincts. What may seem such are no more than physiological automatisms." RAS, 51. For the most detailed discussion of this lack of instinct see John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), 48-60. Hereafter PR.

[12] RAS, 53. See also IU, 137; PR, 44-45. Persons are mutually constituted—hence the title of the second volume of the Gifford Lectures, *Persons in Relation*.

united in finite personal experience, a finite experience of infinite person—God, the personal absolute.[13]

Macmurray notes that the material unity-pattern is unable to deal with differences between the *You* and *I*, while the organic cannot maintain the individuality of particular persons who do not exist as complementary elements in a larger organism.[14]

> It would seem, therefore, that the unity-pattern of psychological thought must somehow succeed in combining the characteristics both of organic and of mathematical thought. It must express at once the independent reality of the individual and the fact that this individuality is constituted by the relationship in which he stands to other independent persons who are different individuals. To put it in the familiar terms of modern controversy, mathematical relations are external to the term they relate. Organic relations are internal to their terms. But personal relations are at once internal and external.[15]

The need to express this mutuality, which is simultaneously internal and external, individual and communal, necessitated the development by Macmurray of a new logical form, a Personal logic. Personal logic is a hierarchical polar integration of a positive that is constituted by its own negative without extinguishing or modifying the negative, but where the negative exists only for the sake of the positive. As an example, consider the case of belief and doubt. Belief is positive; doubt is negative. One cannot doubt until one has at least minimally entertained the existence of the possibility of the thing, belief. Doubt therefore cannot exist independently of belief. Yet belief cannot exist

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[13] If one maintains the epistemological principle active throughout Macmurray's philosophy that the infinite is grasped in the finite and apply this to persons then one sees Macmurray's definition of God as the term symbolizing infinite person. Furthermore, Macmurray links this to the doctrine of the incarnation for the personal infinite can only come through an awareness of finite personality. IU, 124. See also John Macmurray, "Objectivity in Religion," in *Adventure: The Faith of Science and the Science of Faith,* ed. Burnett H. Streeter, et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1928).

[14] Since mathematics deals with identical units and dialectical moves toward a synthesis eliminating the individual elements which created the synthesis.

[15] IU, 140 Note Macmurray's early use of *psychological* for the personal unity-pattern. This paper has preferred the term *personal* because psychological is often perceived in individualistic mental categories which subvert Macmurray's intention to think of this in terms of heterocentricity and agency. In addition, SA, 37, refers to scientific psychology and personal philosophy as parallel modes so it would appear that the Macmurray moved in this direction himself.

independently of doubt, for doubt gives shape to belief because belief without the possibility of doubt is something other than belief—it is fact or reality, but not belief.[16]

Religion does not require the suppression of valuation (as does science), nor the suppression of mutuality (as does art), but involves the totality of the person. It is important to remember, according to Macmurray, the rationality of religion does not negate that of science or art for it is possible to be partial, or limited, in one's rationale without being in error. A rationality limited to the material unity-pattern leads to science, while a rationality limited to the organic results in art, and both are included within religion and the personal unity-pattern.

While this survey is all too brief, hopefully it has provided the reader with at least the basic flavor of Macmurray's thought and the manner in which religion, art, and science inform Macmurray's personalist philosophy.

## 2. DAVID CUNNINGHAM'S RHETORICAL AUGUSTINIAN TRINITARIANISM: A MACMURRIAN CRITIQUE

In recent theology the concept of person as a relational term has received a good deal of attention. In fact, the most prominent references to Macmurray in recent literature come from various trinitarian theologians who seek a non-individualistic, relational concept of persons for use within their trinitarian formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity. Typically this amounts to a description of Macmurray's anthropological definition of persons in relation which is then used as a springboard to the relational

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[16] Thus we see the definition of faith (belief) employed in Hebrews 11:1. Some may want to argue that this violates the injunction against being double minded in James 1:5-8. It can be argued that this is an injunction against dualism, or the primacy of doubt over faith, not the eradication of doubt or its proper subordination to belief.

discussions of God found in Athanasius or the Cappadocian Fathers.[17] However, other than introducing this relational concept, Macmurray's fuller thinking on persons has not been applied to the broader questions about the nature of God. In the final chapter of the doctoral thesis from which this paper is drawn, the conclusions of the philosophical, anthropological, and theological analyses of Macmurray's thought are applied critically to five recent theologians who have relational doctrines of God: Geoffrey W.H. Lampe, David S. Cunningham, Thomas F. Torrance, Colin E. Gunton, and Jürgen Moltmann. Rather than attempt to give a synopsis of each critical engagement, this presentation will focus solely upon David Cunningham's *Rhetorical Augustinianism*, providing a basic summary of his position followed by criticisms of Cunningham stemming from Macmurray's philosophy. These criticisms deal with logical form, substantial ontology, and natural theology.

David Cunningham's recent work, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*,[18] reflects a contemporary effort to rehabilitate the Augustinian-Thomistic doctrine of the Trinity and its attendant doctrine of the *vestigia trinitatis* using

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[17] See the following: British Council of Churches, *The Forgotten Trinity*. Vol. 1, *Report of the British Council of Churches Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (London: British Council of Churches, 1989), 19; Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 255-60; John D. Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of The Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution," in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 59.

The use of Macmurray in this fashion raises an interesting question: what is the relation of anthropology to theology? The fact that these trinitarian theologians do not immediately move from Macmurray to a description of God implies that they are wishing to avoid the perception that anthropology in some way determines theology—defusing the common charge that theology is guilty of anthropomorphic projection. Yet for one reason or another he is still introduced into the discussion and must therefore provide some benefit to the discussion of the Trinity which a direct entry into Athanasius and the Cappadocians does not provide. Even while wishing to deny an anthropological determinism of theology the inextricable linkage between one's understanding of God and one's understanding of humanity is reaffirmed by the presence of Macmurray's anthropology. The nature of this linkage is the unresolved question.

[18] David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

rhetorical strategies.[19] His rhetorical method has several advantages which commend it. Historically it allows him a certain latitude in employing both Augustine and Aquinas; he does not feel constrained by their very words but attempts to convey what they were expressing given the restrictions of their time, place, and audience. Rhetorical theory also provides him with justification for modifying the root metaphors of trinitarian theology. He seeks to replace the traditional terms of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with terms he believes will be heard by present-day audiences in a functionally similar way as these traditional terms were heard by their original audience. To achieve this effect he suggests *Source*, *Wellspring*, and *Living Water* as contemporary alternatives.[20] Furthermore, the rhetorical strategy may be seen as a way of incorporating elements of the Barthian discussion of revelation but expanding it from a monological model to a more complex relational model which acknowledges the important role of the listener in the communicative process.[21]

## 2.1    LOGICAL FORM

The first criticism involves Cunningham's choice of logical forms. Cunningham, like Macmurray, recognizes the inadequacy of the common analytic form of logic for describing these more complex aspects of reality. Looking to Augustine's *De Musica* and some comments by Bonhoeffer Cunningham suggests a musical logic of polyphony

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[19] For the general discussion of the vestigia, see Cunningham, 90-107. Note Cunningham prefers the term *trinitarian marks* to *vestigia trinitatis*. Besides the numerous favorable citations of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, one sees such evidence as the 1-2-3-4-5 pattern for the doctrine of God: one God, two processions, three subsistent relations, four real relations, five characteristics. See, for instance, Cunningham, 58-65. Cunningham defends Augustine and Aquinas against current theological attacks as mere "historical scapegoating" (Cunningham, 30-45).
[20] Cunningham, 72.
[21] Cunningham, 101, 108.

where numerous notes exist simultaneously, are distinct, yet united.[22] Cunningham's aim is similar to Macmurray's: overcome individualism through a communal unity without losing particularity. While the metaphor of polyphony has much to commend it, especially over a merely analytic logical form, one must ultimately deem it inadequate for expressing personal reality. Intuitively one associates the idea of a musical logic with art which is contemplative reflection upon the organic unity-pattern. This leads one to suspect that a musical logic will be appropriate to organic reality, but because it is sub-personal it will prove inadequate to address the totality of personal life.

This tentative evaluation is confirmed when one realizes that Cunningham does not in fact claim an integration of the two notes but only claims an "apparent unity" of the notes.[23] There is, in fact, no actual unity of the notes until one introduces an external listener—the one who unifies the sounds is external to the notes themselves. Yet when one introduces the listener one realizes that this model is none other than the contemplation of music—art. But why must one consider artistic contemplation as sub-personal? It is because there is no ability for interaction or mutuality between the notes. While the notes occupy the same aural space there is no interaction between the two notes. One note is not altered or changed in any significant way by the addition or subtraction of any other note. What one has internal to the music itself is merely the juxtaposition of two discrete elements. As already noted, the unity is achieved in the hearing of the external listener. Here the particular arrangements of notes will tend to emphasize or diminish the perception of the notes, but this is an effect, not of the one note on the other note, but on the one perceiving the notes. And as anyone who has

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[22] Cunningham, 130, 133.
[23] Cunningham, 130.

suffered through a child's piano recital can attest, no amount of effort on the part of the listener can change a single note. To further illustrate this aspect of contemplation, consider the case of a person wearing a blue shirt that "bring outs" or draws attention to the person's blue eyes. There is no actual modification of the eyes themselves merely a change in the perception of the eyes by the one appreciating them.

If one considers the actual nature of persons and their interactions there truly is a difference introduced by the presence or absence of various persons. When someone's spouse dies, that person remains a person, yet the person is truly affected. This is attested to by the common statement that the person "just isn't the same" since the bereavement. There is no way to account for this type of phenomenon in Cunningham's musical logic yet there is within Macmurray's Personal logic. In Personal logic the negative (in this case the constituting personal Other) gives shape to the positive (the particular person) without losing the distinction between the two. One therefore concludes musical logic is simply inadequate to fully express personal reality, human or divine.

## 2.2    SUBSTANTIAL ONTOLOGY

A second Macmurrian criticism of Cunningham is that he is employing a substantial ontology. This is particularly ironic in light of the fact that Cunningham clearly states his intention to overcome the limitations of substantial ontology[24] and will not even deign to name the Trinity with substantives preferring instead the neologism, *The Three*, for fear of succumbing to it.[25] Although Cunningham seeks to escape its confines his thinking is so permeated by substantial ontology he is unable to break free. This manifests itself in various ways.

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[24] Cunningham, 35-41, 64, 166-72.
[25] Cunningham, 22, 64, 166-68.

One manifestation of the substantial ontology arises in Cunningham's discussion of relations. He is concerned to eliminate any notion of three agents in the Godhead[26] and therefore rejects the phrase "persons in relation" in favor of "relations without remainder."[27] He is comfortable describing God as communal[28] and mutually constituted,[29] but resists using *person* because it is too individualistic.[30] He is even skeptical of the term perichoresis for he is concerned it too readily evokes the idea of three agents in God and instead prefers the term coinherence.[31] The reasoning behind the preference is most telling; he prefers coinherence because it has a "relatively static quality."[32] So when Cunningham says divine persons are relations, he means divine persons are substantial relations.[33] Alone this example may not be sufficient to justify labeling Cunningham's ontology as substantial, but it contributes to the developing pattern.

Another manifestation of a substantial ontology arises from Cunningham's preference for the term participation. He hesitates to use the terms *relationality* and *fellowship* because of what he claims are negative associations; yet he does not indicate any awareness or concern that participation also carries particular connotations—especially those stemming from Greek philosophy which tend towards static and substantial conceptions of participation.[34] This static tendency is reinforced in the

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[26] Cunningham, 180-81.
[27] Cunningham, 189.
[28] As long as this is not understood analogously to a committee. Cunningham, 243.
[29] Cunningham, 165, 181.
[30] Cunningham, 27-28.
[31] Cunningham, 180-81.
[32] Cunningham, 181.
[33] Cunningham here is following the Augustinian concern about real and accidental relations and is desirous to avoid any attributing of accidental relations to the Godhead.
[34] Cunningham, 25. Ultimately Cunningham uses participation synonymously with perichoresis, coinherence, koinonia, fellowship, and communion. Cunningham, 180, 182. Yet even in the use of these

preference for the category of space (ostensibly because it focuses attention on relationship) over time (which he views as disjunctive and linear).[35] However, while it is possible to map relations in space (and this is necessary) Macmurray would point out that there is no actual ability to actively relate or interact in space alone. According to Macmurray time is the integration of space and is therefore the form of action and fully interactive relationality.[36] Space not integrated in time is static and merely substantial.

The third manifestation of a substantial ontology, and one of great significance, is the substantial orientation demonstrated in the choice of the new root metaphor for the Trinity: water. *Source*, *Wellspring*, and *Living Water* are all sub-personal concepts. Granted water fits his desire for a more dynamic term, but it is still essentially substantial. One may possibly argue that is not purely substantial; that it is a hybrid dynamic-substance or mildly organic substance (*living* water), but at its core it is substantial in nature. Cunningham's illustrations of the Trinity only serve to highlight the sub-personal nature of his metaphor for he inevitably chooses personal illustrations (such as mother-child-placenta) which are actually more capable than his chosen root metaphor. While attempting to free the Trinity from inadequate individualistic terminology, such as *person* which he views as insufficiently participatory,[37] he substitutes something which cannot in any meaningful sense of the words think, feel, or interact.

Macmurray when he does affirm descriptive analogies for God, always insists that personal analogies are the most able metaphors. He would vehemently disagree with the

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terms one still senses the presence of the more static understanding of participation stemming from the Greek methexis in comparison to the more interactive notion of koinonia. See Torrance, *Being in Communion*, 256, 356, n. 104.

[35] Cunningham, 158.

[36] This is also seen in Cunningham's appropriation of McFadyen' definition of persons as sedimented along with the rhetorical definition of the person as a locutionary space (Cunningham, 198-201, 214). See also the prominence of the spatial metaphor in describing a person as the center of agency (Cunningham, 215).

[37] Cunningham, 27-28.

utilization of sub-personal categories and view Cunningham's suggestion of *Source,*

*Wellspring,* and *Living Water* as retrograde. This failure by Cunningham is particularly

glaring because he is aware of the difficult nature of successfully changing the root

metaphor, evidenced by his discussion of the failure of Creator, Redeemer, and

Sanctifier.[38] Yet he is dismissive towards those who alert him to the inherent dangers[39]

and assumes that he knows the crucial aspect of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which must

be restated. Therefore he reinterprets the Trinity in a manner he confidently presumes is

adequate. In so doing, he chooses a metaphor which cannot even adequately express the

human nature of Jesus, much less the divine triune God of the universe. His choice of

metaphors is an example of his attempt to reinvigorate the doctrine of *vestigia trinitatis*;

for he clearly sees *Source, Wellspring,* and *Living Water* as such a trinitarian mark. This

leads one to be highly suspicious of his entire effort of rehabilitation and his approach to

natural theology.

## 2.3    NATURAL THEOLOGY

The third Macmurrian critique of Cunningham is that his natural theology is

insufficiently aware of its own tendency towards projection. In other words there is

insufficient awareness of the distinction between the Creator and creation. The defense of

natural theology in the face of the Barthian rejection is definitely a component of

Cunningham's rehabilitation of the *vestigia trinitatis*.[40] He carefully places natural

theology within the context of revealed theology and believes, along with Gunton,[41] that

there are serious disadvantages to simply attempting natural theology without first

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[38] Cunningham, 73.
[39] Cunningham, 73, n. 41.
[40] Cunningham, 94-95.
[41] Cunningham, 86, n. 58.

developing a doctrine of God which informs the imaginative construction of (or search for) the trinitarian marks.[42] While one may side with Cunningham vis-à-vis the need to situate natural theology within the context of revealed theology, one does not necessarily have to embrace the employment of trinitarian marks. As seen above, detecting the trinitarian marks is more problematic than Cunningham might think.

Cunningham's discussion of Barth's distinction between interpretation and illustration is instructive regarding the issue of analogy.[43] Cunningham argues the differentiation is unsustainable in practice because the dichotomy cannot be maintained. He cites Barth who acknowledges the distinction is not a hard and fast one. However, it is one thing to argue that the boundaries between interpretation and illustration are not clearly delineated and quite another to eliminate all distinction between them as Cunningham does. If Cunningham had employed Source, Wellspring, and Living Water as an illustration of the Trinity it would raise only minor concern. However, since he is conceptually restating or reinterpreting the Trinity (warranted through the *anologia entis*) his solution must be deemed inadequate and inappropriate. While Cunningham believes he is approaching the doctrine of the Trinity theologically (from above), in actual fact his employment of the *vestigia trinitatis* is one where the earthly image (from below) is controlling the theological.

In evaluating Cunningham's theology one respects the intention behind it while ultimately viewing its execution as deficient. In particular one finds Cunningham's insight into the active participation of the person epistemologically to be a most important contribution. However, he decouples this insight from the objective nature of

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[42] Cunningham, 85-86, 89, 106-07.
[43] Cunningham, 102-04.

the reality he is considering. Reality provides the boundaries and limits of the imaginative constructive process and by failing to pay sufficient heed to that objective reality he comes to adopt a sub-personal logical form and a sub-personal ontology in his discussion of God. Furthermore, through the presupposition of the *analogia entis* he inappropriately collapses the Creator-creation boundary in his natural theology. His basic understanding of God is the same as his basic understanding of human persons—they are both substantial and this is reflected in the choice of metaphor. His conception of person (as substantial being) is applied unconsciously to his concept of God and is then read back into his perception of reality in the trinitarian marks. Moreover, this conception is practically unitarian in its focus on the common substance or being of God.

## 3.   CONCLUSION

Macmurray's Form of the Personal is a project which places priority on the person. Its applicability reaches across the entire spectrum of human experience for it is a way of thinking which clearly intends to address any area of personal life. Here only the barest outlines of this robust philosophical system have been sketched and only one particular application has been demonstrated. It is sincerely hoped that this has served to stimulate your interest in a rather obscure, yet important, figure in Scottish intellectual history.