

Anton Günther's critique of pantheism as introduction to his philosophy of revelation

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ABSTRACT

The ingenious thought of Anton Günther (1783–1863) is rarely mentioned in the annals of nineteenth-century philosophy. However, in the eyes of his contemporaries, Günther belonged to the key thinkers of his age on par with Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Günther was an original writer yet he left many of his insights undeveloped or ambiguously formulated. As a flamboyant and popular debater, he attacked the most influential philosophers of his time. His attacks were aimed especially at what he termed the unavoidable pantheism of these thinkers, a pantheism Günther often identified with monism. Monism, semi-monism, pantheism, and semi-pantheism are recurring charges of Günther against many influential thinkers, including even Descartes, whose thought Günther considered otherwise epoch-making. Based on a reformed Cartesianism, Günther elaborated his antidote he termed dualism. Yet Güntherian dualism turns out to be a synthesis properly termed organicism. On such a basis, Günther carried out a heroic attempt to transcend the horizon of traditional views and open the vista of an I-centered philosophy built on the universal notion of revelation. By re-reading this Bohemia-born thinker, one can have a better understanding of the scope and influence of what we term Austrian Philosophy.

KEYWORDS

Pantheism; monism; dualism; Descartes; Hegel; revelation; Austrian Philosophy

1. Introduction: the always-forgotten Anton Günther

The name of Anton Günther is known to most students of Catholic philosophy from the Denzinger collection of doctrinal declarations where we find the Letter *Eximiam tuam* of 1857 with eight pronouncements against the thought of Günther. 1. Günther offers in his works a “system of rationalism.” 2. He undervalues the unity of the divine substance. 3. His claims about the Incarnate Word are theologically imprecise. 4. The traditional understanding of a human being as the unity of body and soul, intellectual soul included, is not proposed correctly by Günther. 5. He seems to doubt the freedom of God in the creation of the world. 6. He frivolously attributes the authority of the Holy Office to the human mind and philosophy in general concerning the relationship between faith and reason and the unchanging character of doctrines. 7. He writes sarcastically about

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the teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Church, and about “the schools” of Catholic teaching. 8. Finally, the language form of Günther’s writings is most seriously unsound.¹

Beyond these statements, Canon 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* of 1870 is directed against the teachings of Günther concerning the supposedly necessary character of God’s creation, while God’s absolute freedom cannot be doubted, and it is to be confirmed that divine creation aims exclusively at the glory of God.²

Behind the declarations against Günther, one can see the rise of the ever-stronger Neo-Scholasticism of the first half of the nineteenth century.³ While influenced by various sources, the schools of Neo-Scholasticism articulated Thomistic doctrines culminating in the Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris* of 1879, subtitled “On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy in Catholic Schools in the Spirit of the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas.” However, many Catholic currents of the nineteenth century, such as the Tübingen School, the school of Georg Hermes (1775–1831), or the *Güntherschule* of Anton Günther itself, sought a different, more pluralistic Catholic thinking. Günther, belonging to these circles to some extent – especially to the spiritual group around the saintly person of Klemens Maria Hofbauer (1751–1820) – was engaged in the search for a new philosophical foundation of Catholic doctrines, a foundation considering the revolutionary changes of the European culture during the period of modernity. In his search for a new foundation, Günther studied Descartes’s philosophy – a starting point of German Idealism as well – and developed not only a reinterpretation of the Cartesian doctrines but also a trenchant criticism of the philosophies of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. However, Günther acknowledged fundamental discoveries of then-contemporary philosophies, so his views were deeply embedded in the debates around Kant and his followers.

Günther had several opponents, among whom the names of Franz Jacob Clemens (1815–1862), Friedrich Michelis (1815–1886), and Johann Oischinger (1817–1876) are to be mentioned.⁴ His most significant opponent was Joseph Kleutgen (1811–1883), one of the influential figures of the emerging Neo-Scholasticism and Neo-Thomism. Both *Eximiam Tuam* and Canon 5 of *Dei Filius* echoed the criticism of Kleutgen exposed in his works.⁵ Even if Günther accepted the 1857 papal decree with humility and did not publish anything after that point, we see today that his writings were far more complex and ingenious than they appeared to his critics. Here it is not my task to answer all the criticisms referred to above, yet it is important to note that labeling Günther a “semi-rationalist” neglects his reverence for divine mystery reflected in many of his works. For instance, for Günther, “Christ is the sacrament of full humanity.”⁶ The unity of the divine substance is accepted by Günther, while he emphasizes the eternal importance of the second person, Christ, possessing a special relationship to His human personhood. Concerning the problem of the two natures of Christ, Günther proposed a solution to the problem of the ancient notion of human nature (not possessing personhood) by distinguishing between the human and the divine I in Christ, a duality still unified by Christ’s divine nature.⁷ God’s freedom is beyond question for Günther, yet there is a pre-given structure in God’s action that can be conceived by the human mind. Indeed, Günther attributed a special role to philosophy in rethinking and defending Christian doctrines, which was a reaction to the philosophical revolution of German Idealism. Among the most intriguing figures in this movement, Günther certainly belongs among the most original ones.⁸

Due to the judgment of Rome and the repeated charges of “Güntherianism,” the name of Anton Günther almost disappeared from professional philosophical discussions.⁹ In spite of the publication of the collected works¹⁰ and the recurring interest of some researchers,¹¹ the figure of Günther remains in the shadows. While his reception in theology has led to some development,¹² in philosophy properly so-called his name is rarely mentioned.¹³ This is philosophical injustice, as it were, given Günther’s extraordinary talents reflected on many pages of his tremendous output. The collected works – unlike those of the influential authors of the nineteenth century – have not been republished in an updated print. Yet, even after studying his most important books, it may become clear that Günther’s thinking was strikingly inventive.

To have a better grasp of his work, it is worth putting his thinking in the framework of what is termed Austrian Philosophy.¹⁴ As I argued elsewhere, besides Bernard Bolzano (one of Günther’s professors) and Franz Brentano (one of Günther’s avid readers), Günther is the third important author in the Austrian tradition or Austrian Theism.¹⁵ While Günther received important influences from German Idealism, his critical attitude bears the mark of an enlightened Catholic criticism of the age.¹⁶ Günther’s specialty is that he built his criticism on the foundation of a reformed Cartesianism enlarged into an overall critique of Western Platonism and Aristotelianism fermenting pantheism throughout the ages up to the works of Hegel. As opposed to this pantheism, Günther proposed what I term *organicist dualism* based on the central importance of the human I in understanding the world, ourselves, and God. This latter notion reappears under the title of intentionality in Franz Brentano’s view of “inner perception,”¹⁷ which points to the rise of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and through him to further developments.¹⁸ Günther belongs therefore to the lineage connecting Austrian Philosophy and phenomenology and possesses his proper place in this circle of philosophical ideas. As one of his followers wrote in 1857: “The scientific merits of Günther are so enormous that only the coming centuries will be able to appreciate them properly.”¹⁹

2. Günther’s method

As an intellectual schooled both in Scholasticism and modern philosophy, Günther was aware of the importance of method. His entire work can be approached from the methodological point of view according to which the history of philosophy had demonstrated two fundamental conceptions: one based on induction from particular objects of the world to general truths; the other based on direct insight into the truth of being in the form of self-consciousness. The first approach is termed objectivism by Günther; the second, subjectivism. Historically, the methodology of the first approach began with Plato and Aristotle and dominated philosophy up to the epoch-making discovery of the principle of *ego cogito* by Descartes. The second approach started with the work of Descartes and determined the period up to Günther’s age. It seems that Günther considered his own philosophy as the beginning of a new epoch, that of the correction of the biases of the second period (most importantly pantheism) in terms of his dualism understood as organicism.²⁰ Günther considered these distinct methodologies valid for philosophy as well as theology, even for the doctrine of the Trinity. The fundamental epistemological principle is the direct insight of the mind into its existence as finite; through this understanding, we see our dependence on the absolute being, God.²¹

There are a few significant terms through which we can assess the importance of the methodology of Günther. In his understanding, the proper discernment of some pairs of terms – such as idea and concept, spirit and nature, God and man, faith and reason – is decisive in sound philosophy. Already the fact that Günther works with conceptual pairs highlights his methodological commitment: reality is of dual nature with antithetical elements forming, through their contrariety, a higher synthesis that does not abolish polarity but gives them a unified form. The synthesis, ultimately, is self-consciousness entailing the I as its center – a view demonstrating Günther’s indebtedness to German Idealism. It is important to note, nevertheless, that Günther often leaves important lines of thought unfinished, and while he repeatedly offers summaries, these are about thoughts interesting in themselves yet not directly related to the preceding argument. In what follows, I will offer the basic outlines of Günther’s key terms and highlight their methodological importance.

2.1. *Idea and concept*

As Oischinger notes in his critical review of Günther’s work, the latter’s distinction between notion (*Idee*) and concept (*Begriff*) has a fundamental role in his work.²² The distinction is between the subjective character of a concept, produced by the mind, and the absolute or objective character of an idea originating in divine knowledge. We acquire ideas directly through intuition using the faculty of the intellect or *Vernunft*; concepts, however, are worked out from an empirical basis and in a logical fashion by reason or *Verstand*.²³ Ideas are the contents of what Günther terms “self-conscious” or “fundamental” thinking, while concepts are produced by formally schematic procedures.²⁴ Self-conscious thinking is intuitive where intuition is what discloses reality in its fullness. The constructive rational thinking of *Verstand* can never reach this plenitude; it remains the product of the mind. Pantheism results from falsely attributing fullness to the achievement of reason, an achievement deemed to be identical to God’s absoluteness.

Accordingly, the main mistake of Hegel was that he confused *Begriff* and *Idee*, which led to the confusion of sound philosophy with pantheism. As opposed to this false identification, the real unity of idea and concept is given in the realm of self-consciousness, i.e. the fact of the I.²⁵ The I conceives various ideas, the common feature of which is their essential belonging to the self-consciousness of the mind; it is this self-consciousness that guarantees the ultimate objectivity of the ideas. However, self-consciousness is not identical to the direct consciousness of God, so the danger of pantheism can be again avoided. The I is *dependent* on God as the creature is dependent on the Creator, and this fundamental relationship of dependence can be recognized in our self-consciousness.

2.2. *Spirit and nature*

Spirit (*Geist*) is the invisible realm of reality corresponding to the intellect. In contrast, nature (*Natur*) is the visible creation and object of reason. As Günther formulates it: “Spirit is the invisible Nature and Nature is the visible Spirit.”²⁶ The reality of the spirit is freedom; the reality of nature is necessity. Yet necessity is objective freedom and freedom is subjective spirit.²⁷ Both are independent principles and yet related to

one another in an organic fashion, as Günther writes, i.e. in such a way that their difference and correlation are put into the form of unity also called *life*.²⁸ The immediate unity of spirit and nature is the human being itself, a being termed by Günther the immediate self-revelation of God.²⁹

The philosophical danger appears when one element of the twin concepts is overemphasized. If the importance of the spirit is exaggerated, we become idealists without a plausible understanding of nature. If nature is overstressed, we become materialists, a contradictory view for Günther as the *notion* of matter cannot be matter. The third option, however, is that we confound nature and spirit and thus the result is the inorganic absolutism of Hegel, pantheism *par excellence*, where the lack of proper distinction leads to a formless disorder. The accurate view of the twin notions of nature and spirit is that they both are the expressions, self-communications, i.e. revelations of God. They are related to God in this way, and they are correlated to one another as well. However, their correlation is hierarchical: it is the spirit that stands on a higher level of reality, while nature is dependent on the spirit. They cannot be dissolved in one another, and their formal synthesis is based on their intrinsic contradiction. The synthesis is realized in God's self-revelation, where they are properly related to one another as form and matter.³⁰

2.3. God and man

God is absolute Spirit; he is at the same time an organic whole centered around his own self-consciousness in the form of the Holy Trinity.³¹ The most important term in Günther's description of God is his absolute self-revelation *ad intra*. God is revelation. More precisely, he is genuine self-revelation, infinitely realized or actualized self-consciousness of himself in the form of self-knowledge as absolute *ego* or I. The Trinity is the ternary expression of this absolute self-knowledge in the three Trinitarian persons. *Ad intra*, the three divine persons are in an absolute self-communication with one another; this entails their own self-negation because the Father is *not* the Son or the Spirit, the Son is *not* the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is *not* the Son or the Father. While divine self-negation is central to God, it is infinitely overcome in the form of the absolute unity of the divine substance.³² The central feature of negativity has an important role in the assessment of the significance of Günther in our contemporary thinking (see the section on Radical Revelation below).

Human beings are similarly organized around their self-consciousness, leading to concrete self-knowledge in the form of the I. A human being is God's self-revelation *ad extra*, i.e. in the form of the external realization of what is internally or absolutely conceived by God. A human being is always God's self-expression in the created form of the realization of the absolute idea of the concrete human person. Every human person is related to God's absolute idea of that human person as the created realization of the idea in the form of the human being as a "living synthesis" of spirit and nature.³³ Human beings know of God in the form of their own self-consciousness, which is conceived directly as something finite. Through this negativity of finitude, human beings directly realize the overall reality of infinity as that which determines their finite being, the negative of God's absolute self-consciousness. The I of human self-consciousness and the I of divine self-consciousness form a duality synthesized in unity.³⁴

It is important to see that, in assessing the metaphysical structure of reality, there is a dimension rarely touched upon by Günther: the eschatological realm of human beings fulfilled in the eternal bliss of God in the afterlife. Yet it follows from Günther's views that, even in that state, human beings remain syntheses of spirit and nature elevated into God's eternal and absolute community. This elevation, nevertheless, is due to Christ, in whom human and divine consciousness are put into the form of the second person of the Trinity, the highest synthesis of the created and uncreated reality.³⁵ For some authors, when Günther strongly emphasizes the perfect human nature, i.e. also self-consciousness of Christ, he gets close to a Nestorian dyophysitism. In the interpretation of Pritz, however, this is not the case.³⁶

While the clear and unambiguous expression of the Trinity is due to the special revelation of Christ, and through him to the doctrines of the Church, the entire created universe is marked by the Trinitarian God in such a way that humankind was able to conjecture the existence of the Trinity in various, often obscure forms of pre-Christian religions. Since, however, the human self has not reached the level of self-consciousness made possible by the incarnation of Christ, pre-Christian religious forms never reached the clear understanding of the Holy Trinity. In Islam, this understanding was already available, but the Quran expressly rejects the Holy Trinity and thus the possibility of reaching self-consciousness as the revelation of God.

Günther is unambiguous that it is God's self-consciousness that is expressed in human self-consciousness; and while the former is the source of an inner emanation, its counterpart in human beings is due to God's free creation. Man is God's image and, at the same time, God's anti-image (*Ebenbild* and *Gegenbild Gottes*),³⁷ which expresses the difference and unity between God and human beings. God as an infinite or absolute person expresses himself in the finite personhood of human beings in a direct way merely by the fact of a human being's being a person, an *ego*, more properly an *Ich* (a deeper understanding of the *ego* or the *je*).³⁸ This self-revelation is the matrix in which anything is conceived by human beings, in which truth is understood, so, both concerning God as well as to nature, it is this fundamental or original self-revelation that serves as the genuine basis of all knowledge.³⁹

2.4. Faith and reason

Günther accepts the traditional definition of faith as the assent of the intellect to divine truths.⁴⁰ He also points out that this definition is rejected by Cartesian rationalism. Günther shows that Cartesian rationalism is only partially true because, in certain cases, rational insight and intellectual assent cannot agree. Knowledge is needed in certain areas where faith cannot be applied; concerning God's self-revelation, faith as intellectual assent cannot be substituted by rational knowledge. Intellectual assent has a rational form, but its content is direct and unified; knowledge, nevertheless, is discursive and gradual. However, Günther offers a common ground for faith and knowledge: while it is true that faith is needed concerning divine truths, offered by the authority of the Church in the form of the dogmatic tradition, it is also true that faith is based on the certainty that is given in the fact of self-consciousness. This latter is close to rational knowledge, while, as mentioned, it has a unitary and direct character.

Self-consciousness, even if not the source of faith, grounds the act of faith and so the acceptance of its contents in the form of certainty.⁴¹ This highlights two characteristic features of Günther's thought: on the one hand, he emphasizes the importance of the theological understanding of faith (as act and content); on the other hand, he stresses the common ground of faith and philosophical knowledge in subjective or I-centered certainty. Both the certainty of faith and philosophical certainty are based on the direct awareness of self-consciousness.⁴²

This understanding of faith and reason is both dualistic and unified, while it remains open to various criticisms concerning the philosophical interpretation of faith. Generally speaking, Günther's thought is a philosophical theology, which unifies theological dogma and philosophical consideration.⁴³ It is important that Günther considers the history of philosophy decisive for the right form of theology, and so philosophical knowledge becomes crucial in theological reasoning. The philosophical revolution of modernity – from Descartes to German Idealism – is critical for the proper understanding of the Christian dogmas, even for the faith in them. Günther thus presupposes – and makes it explicit as well – that the genuine meaning of the Christian dogmas was not properly understood before the ego-centered epistemology of modernity, which Günther claimed to have improved so that pantheism can be avoided.⁴⁴

2.5. Methodology

The fact that Günther arranges his most important insights around pairs of notions, such as idea and concept, shows the peculiarity of his methodology. He repeatedly emphasizes the importance of Descartes not only in the history of philosophy in general but even more so in his own views. Below I will describe in more detail the main enemy of this dualistic understanding, namely pantheism. Here I want to clarify the general methodological background of Günther's polemics against pantheism, a background closely connected to his philosophical construal of the Holy Trinity.

As Günther explains, the proper understanding of God's nature required a certain period of reflection, which lasted in its main thrust from the ecumenical council in Nicaea (325) to the Constantinople council (381). During the coming centuries, however, the Latin Church worked out a more precise formula by adding the word *Filioque* to the ecumenically accepted creed. The original Creed of Nicaea and Constantinople declared that the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father," without additions of any kind, such as "and the Son." Later some Latin authors added the words "and from the Son" (*Filioque*) to the description of the procession of the Holy Spirit. The inclusion was incorporated into the liturgical practice of Rome in 1014 but was rejected by Eastern Christianity. The Latin Church, nevertheless, argued that the equality of the Trinitarian persons requires that the Holy Spirit should be recognized as derived both from the Father and the Son. In Günther's view, by adding the *Filioque*, the Church succeeded in clarifying that the three divine persons are both different and equal in the unity of the one substance.

The intrinsic network of relations in the unity of the divine substance is considered by Günther as the pattern of all organisms in the created order. The Trinity is a transcendent or absolute organism in the sense that, in the unity of substance, a certain difference among the divine persons and their relations to one another is systematically arranged. When Günther terms this system an organism,⁴⁵ he also emphasizes that its basis is to be

found in God's divine self, in his infinite self-consciousness realized in the *ego* of God. God is not merely a substance in the sense that created entities are substances, but an infinite substance, i.e. a substance possessing infinite self-consciousness and thus *personhood*. Personhood is the highest form of self-consciousness realized in self-knowledge. Thus, God is the self-conscious and self-knowing substance, which is expressed in the equality and difference of the three persons of its infinite being. The difficulty that God's unity would be a fourth person, so to say, is dismissed by the emphasis that the personhood of God is actual only in the three persons without producing a fourth person of the substance defined as absolute self-consciousness. The absolute self-consciousness of God is self-revealed in the three persons as the concrete contents of self-consciousness.⁴⁶

Being (*ens*) is organism, i.e. a system of substances arranged around, centered on, and proceeding from the source of self-consciousness. The key point here is the activity of self-consciousness out of which an organism develops. According to Günther, this happens through a dialectical process consisting of the production of an intrinsic contrariety and sublating or transcending this contrariety in a higher synthesis. In God, this takes place in terms of absoluteness or infinity so that the three persons of God are infinitely related to one another in an absolute synthesis of the divine "life-dialectic."⁴⁷ Divine self-consciousness is eternally developed into a Trinitarian organism; and this organism, to be absolute self-consciousness, produces the created world both as its opposite, i.e. a non-*ego* (*Nichtich*)⁴⁸ and at the same time as a finite organism centered around the self-consciousness of human beings. This is to say that human self-consciousness is the negation of divine-self-consciousness, but since the latter is absolute or infinite, human self-consciousness is still something; even more, it becomes something as the *Eben- und Gegenbild* of the divine I. This is how God and man form a common organism which is eternally and absolutely preceded by the Trinitarian organism on the one hand and reflected in the created organism of the world on the other hand. Created and uncreated reality in its entirety is a total organism, *a unity and a whole*⁴⁹ entailing, surpassing, and synthesizing the fundamental dualities of the infinite and the finite, God and man, spirit and nature, I and non-I.⁵⁰

As Günther emphasizes, it was not possible to reach this understanding of reality before Descartes's revolutionary discovery of the principle of the *ego cogito*. Traditional, i.e. Platonic and Aristotelian, ontologies cannot account for the precise meaning of human and divine beings and their proper relationship. It is only his organicist philosophy, centered on self-consciousness, that can account for the genuine nature of God and man. This is the methodological and historical foundation of Günther's philosophy.⁵¹ As it is clear, Günther's entire argumentation against pantheism is hard-wired into this organicist understanding of reality, which excludes the undifferentiated and homogeneous unity of monistic pantheism.

3. The argument against pantheism

It is obvious from Günther's methodology that he considers pantheism as the collapse of an organism – the very organism binding together God and man, the Creator and the creation, idea and concept, spirit and nature, faith and reason in the framework of self-consciousness. This allows us to conclude that, for Günther, even God's nature

cannot be properly conceived without this organicist understanding. Without organicism, God would collapse; without organicism, God cannot be conceived as the Holy Trinity; what remains is merely the concept and not the idea of God, i.e. not the genuine, spiritual, unified yet differentiated reality of the divine.

Günther emphasizes the strong connection between God and the creature, especially human beings. Human self-consciousness is the self-revelation of God, yet precisely in this self-revelation an unbridgeable difference appears between divine (infinite) consciousness and human (finite) consciousness.⁵² Indeed, Christianity emphasizes the fact that God became man “so that man may become God,” but this ancient thesis is not the affirmation of pantheism in Günther’s view. On the contrary, this message is a clear confirmation of the difference between the Creator and the creature, because it is only through difference that genuine unity is built.⁵³ In this way “the history of the universe cannot be changed into a natural history of God.”⁵⁴ Only if we accept the reality of transcendence can we avoid the danger of pantheism.⁵⁵

Pantheism, according to Günther, is the “most pernicious” error:

Nothing would be more superfluous, more grotesque in world history than the historical appearance of Christianity as God’s direct institution for the salvation of mankind in the wonderful because direct positing of a second Adam as an ideal human being in the hypostatic union of the Logos of God with human nature *if* that Christianity established a pantheistic or semi-pantheistic relationship of the spirit to God.⁵⁶

The pantheistic philosopher is like an alchemist, a gold-maker, a swindler that cannot keep the promise of producing gold, yet he abolishes the real gold for human beings, the *difference* between the Creator and the creature as the very possibility of *genuine* unity. Günther also claims that pantheism entails naturalistic monism,⁵⁷ as can be seen in Ludwig Feuerbach’s philosophy of Christianity. Atheism is the natural consequence of pantheism, and the further consequence of the former is “communism” as an ideology and social practice. Here Günther’s acumen is shown in that he writes that “Communism is the reaction of poverty to the absolutism of the aristocracy of money and property.” Further:

Theopantism or autotheism as the pantheism of immanence without any transcendence, which rejects the Beyond and retains the Mundane alone – the content of which is nothing other than deified natural life –, is consistently combined with communism in the sphere of social life. For the spiritless nature does not know anything about the spirit and God, nor does it know anything about rightful property.

And, as Günther remarks, “German Philosophy leads necessarily to atheism and communism.”⁵⁸

Günther defines pantheism as the kind of monism that logically leads to naturalism. As he argues, genuine spiritualism or transcendentalism, where the spiritual reality of God is fully recognized, cannot be conceived monistically. The intrinsic reality of the divine requires that it freely differs from its creature. The notion of creation is crucial here as it means, for Günther, the highest expression of the free spirit. Insofar as the free spirit is infinite, its creation is necessarily finite. This relationship is to be understood only in terms of a kind of duality. If, then, monism as the abolishing of this foundational duality appears, it is necessarily naturalistic. Naturalistic monism leads to atheism, and the further consequence of atheism is “communism.” Communism abolishes not only

the notion of the transcendent God in individual and communal life, but also the notion of property, state, and ultimately the notion and the reality of human beings.⁵⁹

Günther uses interchangeably the expressions pantheism and monism, spiritual monism, and speculative pantheism. When he criticizes pantheism, he also refers to atheism, naturalism, and repeatedly communism. By pantheism, therefore, he never understands the doctrine of the entire universe being substantially or formally divine. It is precisely the idolatrous misunderstanding of God that leads to pantheism, a doctrine based on an undifferentiated monism. Günther also talks about the “Protean nature” of pantheism to point out the difficulty of defining it in any simple way. He emphasizes that, as a reaction to criticism, representatives of pantheism change their position, or, as Hegel shows, leave open the possibility of non-pantheistic interpretations of their views.⁶⁰ An important feature of Günther’s understanding of pantheism is that all kinds of negativity are eliminated from it. A pantheistic system, such as that of Spinoza or Hegel, bears an inner structure but presents itself ultimately as a homogeneous unity that dissolves all differences, negativity, or arrangement. Pantheism presents absolute homogeneity, which for Günther betrays the fundamental problem that evil, sin, the fragmentary nature of human beings, and the world cannot have a proper place in such a synthesis.⁶¹

In a negative way, Günther terms pantheism all actual and possible views that do not stress the *absolute difference* between the creator and the creature. The creator is absolute *ego* or self-consciousness; the creature is a non-*ego*, a *Nichtich*, so it is *prima facie* non-self-consciousness. Since God is absolute, its contradiction cannot be purely absolute; it is not a real contradiction but a contrariety, a limited contradiction to the infinite. God is an *ego*, so man is an *ego* as well, not an absolute but a finite contrary to God. This means, nevertheless, that human beings, *ultima facie*, are *egos* too and possess self-knowledge through their self-consciousness. Although Günther did not explain this point in depth, logically speaking there is no full contradiction to infinity or absoluteness. The only possible contradiction is the one-sided limiting of the absolute, a finitude cut out of infinity. It is due to God’s absoluteness that a special kind of contradiction can be formed against it, i.e. the limited contradiction of the creature in the form of negativity.

A certain mysticism attempts to reduce all self-consciousness or *ego* to an ultimate natural unity. Günther explains, however, that behind such a mysticism we find an egoless naturalism that dissolves the human and the divine self in a formless natural substance. Yet this natural kind of monism (also, a kind of natural pantheism) is present in several mystical movements striving to discard the human and the divine *ego*. Günther terms this monism *Einerleiheit*, homogeneous oneness.⁶² It is not sufficient to suppose that human self-consciousness, as given naturally, is the maximum one can reach. For Günther, it is beyond any question that higher level self-consciousness, which is analogous to God’s *ego*, can develop if and only if one receives Christ, i.e. the second person of the Trinity, in baptism and proper Christian life; ultimately in a kind of thinking in which divine absoluteness can be recognized as the Holy Trinity.

Pantheism, in a positive sense, abolishes the fundamental distinction between God and man. This is possible because traditional philosophies and theologies – especially Scholasticism – did not have a proper understanding of God as absolute self-consciousness and self-knowledge, i.e. *ego*, or personhood. Here one sees again the special character of Günther’s understanding of pantheism. We are sent back to the point, emphasized by Oischinger, according to which God is distinct from the created world in a qualitative

way strictly different from numerical and quantitative differences.⁶³ While two created things are distinct from one another individually and quantitatively, God is different from everything else in a higher sense, i.e. qualitatively. Günther calls our attention to the fact that this original difference is easily confused with the numerical and quantitative difference: we tend to conceive of God as a numerically other being or as a being hierarchically standing above all other beings. However, if the former was the case, God would be also a created individual; and if the latter was the case, God would merely be the greatest of all created beings arranged on a hierarchical scale. Yet God is originally different from everything else, and this difference is described as qualitative.

All views ignoring this kind of difference between God and the created world propose a kind of pantheism. Thus, the entire Platonic and Aristotelian tradition with their concepts of God as “beyond being” or the “first mover” is to be evaluated as forms of pantheism. Since Scholasticism follows these thinkers, they are trapped inevitably in a kind of pantheism, or, as Günther sometimes formulates it, semi-pantheism. All philosophies applying the principle of *similis similem cognoscat* – that is to say, all thinking based on the principle of analogy – bear the same fruit. Medieval mysticism leads to Protestantism, which in turn nosedives into the monistic philosophies of German Idealism, especially the thought of Hegel.⁶⁴

Monism and pantheism are two closely related notions for Günther.⁶⁵ He often terms Hegel’s philosophy speculative monism and he understands thereby a self-contradictory, ultimately meaningless structure. It is meaningless because meaning is always related to a distinct element in a structure or an organism, an element embodying the essential center of the system both different and immanent at the same time. God is absolutely different from the world qualitatively, i.e. originally; such an element can only be the origin of meaning for a structure. If Hegel dissolves everything in the same structure, even if he applies the dialectics of differences and oppositions, he is not able to make his system meaningful in the proper sense. It is only Christian theism in terms of Güntherian organicist dualism that can make the structure of our reality and knowledge meaningful.

Thus, Günther’s thesis on pantheism is grounded in organicist ontology. This ontology is based on the incomparable role of self-consciousness, divine and human at the same time. His argument against pantheism is logically strong. His critique of the history of philosophy appears to be consistent since he attributes pantheism, semi-pantheism, and various kinds of monism to ancient, medieval, and contemporary authors. His sarcasm targeted the Scholasticism of his time, which triggered a strong response from authors, such as Matteo Liberatore (1810–1892) and Joseph Kleutgen. The charge of “semi-rationalism” against Günther was originally a retort to Günther’s charge of “semi-pantheism” of authors like Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁶

4. Güntherian dualism

Günther’s dualism is of a special kind (as opposed to the views of others, including Pritz). In his various writings, he calls his standpoint Cartesianism, but what he proposes is both the application and the strong criticism of some ideas of Descartes. Historically, Günther sees the emergence of Descartes’s central idea of the *ego cogito* as closely connected to the theological and scholarly work around the Tridentine Council (1554–1563),⁶⁷ after which Catholic education fundamentally changed so that young Cartesius already received its

influences during his school years. For Günther, the greatest innovation of Descartes's thought was the emphasis on the central position of the *ego*. However, he doubts that the alleged methodological skepticism of Descartes had anything to do with this discovery. The very idea of the centrality of the *ego* is crucial, while the strict and rigid distinction between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa* results in a failed dualism. Indeed, Cartesianism is, for Günther, a failed dualism that hid the germ of pantheism, a pantheism variously expounded by such followers as Spinoza and Leibniz.

In a critical overview of German Idealism, Günther points out the pantheistic nature, variously realized, by Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Günther considers Hegel and Schelling the most ingenious thinkers of his age and allows that the former's discovery of a proper philosophy of nature and the latter's emphasis on the importance of the dialectical process proved to be permanent achievements. In Günther's view, Kant remained a phenomenalist and a skeptical thinker, because he was not able to solve the problem of the relationship between the *Ding and sich* and the phenomenal reality of the mind. In this way, Kant's entire building of the transcendental realm, i.e. the realm of the mind, remains anti-realist and open to skepticism. Further, Fichte was properly charged with atheism because his absolute I merges with the divine I. Fichte, in this way, represents the fundamental connection between atheism and pantheism. Günther praises Schelling for his philosophy of nature yet does not mention the later Schelling's philosophy of revelation very close in more than one sense to Günther's understanding of revelation.

I term Günther's dualism organicist because, by criticizing the rigid dualism of Descartes, he proposes an organic, synthetic, or holistic connection of contrary poles. On the one hand, the poles are each other's negative, thus the world is not-God and God is not-world. On the other hand, the world is God's self-revelation, the created nature is the spirit's self-revelation, reason is faith's self-revelation, and so on. *Vice versa*, if properly conceived, the world refers to God, reason to faith, nature to spirit. This understanding is based on the overall connection of the opposite poles, a kind of universal *a priori* of correlation or *Ineinandersein*.⁶⁸ As Günther puts it: "The created universe, therefore, is rooted in the divine being and the divine self-consciousness and its absolute notion of the I, and it thus realizes the non-I of God's mind."⁶⁹ The divine Trinity is the absolute organism in which a certain emanation takes place, as Günther terms with one expression the various origins of the three divine persons. The created universe is an organism well-arranged around firstly the human mind or spirit, and secondly around God's self-consciousness. In this organicism, the center stands above the periphery in an ontological sense; if there is no center, there is no organism. Thus, whatever exists must belong to an organism. This expresses the principle of life, but also the principle of all existence. Even the seemingly dead planets belong, as Günther suggests, to a living organism; and the human world, with the explicit and Christ-imbued self-consciousness, belongs to the absolute organism of God.

Güntherian organicist dualism emphasizes these three elements: polarity, context, and hierarchy. I recall that philosophies of organism somewhat later arrived at a very similar conclusion.⁷⁰ However, it is misleading that Günther opposes "dualism" simply so-called and "pantheism" without any further qualification. Güntherian dualism is better termed *organicism*, which is not very far from some positions Günther terms "pantheism." Of course, Günther repeatedly argues that real pantheism is homogeneous monism; and that if the difference between God and human beings is not acknowledged, we fall

into the trap of pantheism. However, we have seemingly pantheistic philosophies where the difference between God and the creature is acknowledged in and beyond their categorical difference. For instance, Hegel's dialectical synthesis can be read as an organicist unity. Thus, when Günther claims that "pantheism" is polymorph or Protean, he implicitly accepts that some forms of what he terms pantheism partly overlap his organicist dualism.

5. Günther and radical revelation

The term "radical revelation" is used here in the sense that I explained in my *Radical Revelation*.⁷¹ In a nutshell, this notion describes the origin of divine revelation as the ultimate source of everything and, at the same time, the process of return to itself through the realization of a complete system of ramifications.⁷² As we know, the term revelation and self-revelation became central in and around the works of Hegel and Schelling. It is still somewhat surprising with what energy Günther uses the expressions *Offenbarung* and *Selbstoffenbarung* in his various works. Fundamentally, *Offenbarung* for Günther is identical to *Erscheinung*, phenomenon. While we may construe that he uses *Offenbarung* in a rigid sense, it turns out that *Offenbarung* is not simply the phenomenon of a noumenon but rather the basic mode of being. All being is *Offenbarung* or revelation, precisely because Günther rises beyond a rigid understanding of dualism and emphasizes an organic connection between reality and appearance. Therefore, revelation is being in its fundamental core. To summarize Günther's views, we can say that God as Trinity is the absolute and *ad intra* revelation of itself realized in the three persons of the one substance, while these persons equally reveal themselves to one another in a complex system of inner relations. Moreover, creation is divine revelation *ad extra*, precisely in the form of free and loving creation. Human beings as spirits are the center of revelation *ad extra*; and nature is the content of revelation of the human and the divine mind. Specific or historical revelation aims at the reconnection of God and the creation so that salvation is fulfilled in an overall divine community of God and man in which polar differences fit in with the organic unity of the whole.⁷³

Revelation, therefore, is the fundamental and ultimate notion of Günther's thought. He emphasizes that human beings are the central realizations of divine revelation; so divine revelation can be explored by studying human persons.⁷⁴ At the same time, he considers the Christian dogmas as propositional expressions of revelation that are to be interpreted in the context of human self-consciousness.⁷⁵ While, in the age before modernity, revelation was seen in the framework of externality and passive receptivity, in modernity, revelation must be conceived of as immanent and free. Spontaneity is the essential feature of modernity, which is based on the freedom of human persons. Christian dogmas are to be considered on this basis to reconnect them to their original divine meaning.

Günther's understanding is not only a model of revelation emerging in Austrian Philosophy,⁷⁶ but rather a much deeper and stronger proposal to understand divine revelation as primary and ultimate reality. As soon as we understand that revelation as appearance is the appearance of reality, we also see that revelation is the core of reality in all its modalities – even in the mode of non-being. Non-revealed reality is revealed reality in the mode of non-revealedness, i.e. in one of the modes of being revealed. Non-revealedness or negativity is part and parcel of the original self-revelation of

reality; revelation entails the strongest feature of negativity, a thought recalling the theology of the late Schelling. Günther's emphasis on negativity in divine reality, however, is a philosophical and theological interpretation of the principle of *kenosis* (cf. Philippians 2:6). This principle is further explained by the principle of *refusivum sui* in the framework of what I term radical revelation. Just as Günther points out that divine negativity cannot but belong to God's innermost being, the principle of *refusivum sui* also expresses God's original self-denial, even in the sense of the Death of God.⁷⁷ Yet we cannot conceive of this divine and human negativity – and in general no negativity at all, including Death of God negativities – if not in the perspective of a corresponding renewal, ultimately the absolute renewal infusing God's innermost reality. This latter notion is already beyond the horizon of Günther's thought yet still closely related to it as an interpretation of the full meaning of the negativity of God so much underlined by Günther.

6. Conclusion

A thoroughgoing reading of Günther's texts clearly shows not only the merits and faults of this unique thinker but, even more importantly, the connection of his thought to subsequent developments. As mentioned, Franz Brentano's notion of intentionality centered on the self-awareness of inner perception can be seen as thematically connected to Günther's philosophy of self-consciousness. Moreover, Günther's emphasis on Cartesianism reappears in Husserl's phenomenological Cartesianism, again a critical reception in many ways similar to what we see in Günther's works. Husserl emphasized the importance of the principle of the *ego cogito* and criticized Descartes for a rigid and one-sided dualism, as well as for a misunderstanding of the role of the I in his discovery. Günther's criticism of Descartes follows a similar line when he rejects the rigid dualism and the misunderstanding of the relationship between the subject and the world of Descartes. Günther's critique of pantheism is a critique of naturalism; again, a point that recurs in Husserl's phenomenology where naturalism is the main target of phenomenological transcendentalism. What Günther terms pantheism, i.e. an anti-structure without meaning, can be termed naturalism in the context of Husserlian phenomenology. Finally, Husserl's "universal *a priori* of correlation"⁷⁸ recalls not only the general characteristic of the organicist ontology of Günther but concretely the fundamental role of the polarity of the I and the non-I (intention and content) in an ontological *Ineinandersein* (entanglement).⁷⁹

The most important element in Günther's thought is his criticism of notions of God as different from the world merely by degrees. As Günther emphasizes, if God is *summum ens*, we are in a naturalistic and pantheistic schema of understanding of the divine. God is totally different from the hierarchy of being, a difference Günther terms qualitative. This insight closely resembles Martin Heidegger's critique of ontotheology and prefigures the emerging notion of God as totally different.⁸⁰ While we may say with Heidegger that Günther remained in the framework of subjectivism, we need to understand his notion of self-consciousness. The self of Günther is not a temporal or historical subject but, rather, the very source of all reality in God and human beings. The human self is organically connected to the divine self and shares its organizing role through its created form. But even if we consider Günther the child of his age, i.e. a representative of philosophical Romanticism with an unusual emphasis on the importance of divine and human self-consciousness, we can still admit that a number of his insights

were deeply original and served to find new ways of thinking during the decades after the act of his silencing in 1857.

Notes

1. Denzinger and Hünermann, *Enchiridion*, §§ 2028–31.
2. Denzinger and Hünermann, *Enchiridion*, § 3025.
3. Cf. Coreth, Neidl and Pfligersdorffer, *Christliche Philosophie*.
4. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 46–67.
5. Kleutgen, *Die Philosophie der Vorzeit I*, 134–41; cf. Oischinger, *Die Günthersche Philosophie*; Clemens, *Die speculative Theologie A. Günthers*; Michelis, *Kritik der Güntherschen Philosophie*.
6. Günther, *Der letzte Symboliker*, 214–36 (if not noted otherwise, the translations are from the author of this article).
7. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 105; cf. Günther's formula in Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 226–8.
8. Cf. Günther, *Die Juste-milieus in der deutschen Philosophie gegenwärtiger Zeit*; Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 139–40.
9. Cf. Coreth, Neidl and Pfligersdorffer, *Christliche Philosophie*; McCool, *Nineteenth-century Scholasticism*.
10. Günther, *Gesammelte Schriften*.
11. Orbán, *Theologia Güntheriana et Concilium Vaticanum*; Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*.
12. Winter, *Anton Günther*; Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*; Bunnell, *Before Infallibility*.
13. Cf. Mezei, *Religion and Revelation after Auschwitz*.
14. Smith, *Austrian Philosophy*; Mezei and Smith, *The Four Phases of Philosophy*.
15. Mezei, *Religion and Revelation*.
16. Bunnell, *Before Infallibility*.
17. Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte*, 40–3.
18. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, Part II; Mezei, *Apocalyptic Phenomenology*.
19. Quoted by Mann, *Zwischen Tradition und Moderne*, 172–3.
20. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 134.
21. Günther, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8, 26 sq.
22. Oischinger, *Die Günthersche Philosophie*, 40.
23. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 229.
24. Günther, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8, 294; cf. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 79.
25. Günther, *Späte Schriften*, 101.
26. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 21.
27. Günther, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8, 285–94.
28. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 137.
29. Pritz, “Offenbarung”, 259.
30. Günther, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8, 285–94.
31. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 110 sq.
32. Cf. Pritz, “Offenbarung”.
33. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 161.
34. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 167–9.
35. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 227.
36. Cf. Pritz, “Offenbarung”, 263.
37. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 36.
38. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 97.
39. Mezei, *Radical Revelation*, Chapter 3.
40. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 226.
41. Günther and Pabst, 237.
42. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 125.
43. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 129.

44. Cf. Kleutgen, *Die Philosophie der Vorzeit I*, 158–66.
45. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 393, 406.
46. Günther, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8, 362–3.
47. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 406.
48. Cf. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 168.
49. Cf. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 141.
50. Cf. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 144–9.
51. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 124.
52. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 167.
53. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 385.
54. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*.
55. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*.
56. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*.
57. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 386.
58. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 387–8.
59. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 386.
60. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*.
61. Cf. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 209–13.
62. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 407.
63. Oischinger, *Die Günthersche Philosophie*, 219–20.
64. Günther, *Süd- und Nordlichter*, 151.
65. Günther, *Süd- und Nordlichter*, 110.
66. Cf. Oischinger, *Die Günthersche Philosophie*, 298.
67. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 132.
68. Cf. Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*, § 71.
69. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 186.
70. See especially Whitehead, *Process and Reality*; Bertalanffy, *General System Theory*.
71. Cf. Mezei, *Radical Revelation*, Introduction.
72. Cf. also Mezei, “Phenomenology as Philosophy of Revelation”; Mezei “Apocalyptic Phenomenology”.
73. Pritz, “Offenbarung”.
74. Pritz, *Glauben und Wissen*, 174.
75. Günther and Pabst, *Janusköpfe*, 137.
76. Mezei, *Religion and Revelation*, 93–111.
77. Mezei, “Death of God”.
78. Husserl, *Die Krisis*, 161–3.
79. Husserl, *Die Krisis*, 259 sq.
80. Mezei, “The ‘Return of Religion’ in Martin Heidegger’s Work”.

Acknowledgment

The present article has been written without any external funds. Yet I owe thanks to the Hesburgh Library of the University of Notre Dame (Indiana) for keeping Anton Günther’s *Gesammelte Schriften* untouched until I had the chance to find and cut up these old books and realized the importance of the author as an intellectual hero of his time, closely connected to later developments in Austrian Philosophy and phenomenology.

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