

An Ambivalent Trinitarian Economy Trading in “A Properly Political Love”

Michael Hardt, Lauren Berlant, and Jürgen Moltmann

Lisa Gasson-Gardner

Drew University

I propose a trinity without the Christian God—a trinity that holds together the relationship between love as pre-discursive affect, as human actions, and as ethical consequence. Drawing these three aspects of love into an always-becoming relationship, I argue, facilitates the “properly political love” sought by Marxist philosopher Michael Hardt. For Hardt, an economy of love is an alternative to the damaging relationships generated by an economy trading in money. Love, he claims, touches not only the intellect, but also “the passions,” blurring the lines between the intellectual and the affective, the personal and political. Love is a “muscle” that humans can strengthen, relating to others in transformative ways. Hardt is not an affect theorist—so he writes in deliberate dialogue with Lauren Berlant. Berlant challenges Hardt’s assertion that “narcissistic love” can be separated from the “transformative love” that is harnessed for political good. If love is to have anything to do with desire, which it must in order to be recognizable as love, then it cannot simply avoid narcissism. Love is human reaching out for objects, which is fluid and likely to attach to a variety of objects with both positive and negative results. Love is therefore ethically ambivalent—and tends towards destabilization, rather than towards the “security of surety.” This points to Berlant’s engagement with more than one stream of affect theory: first the line coming through

object-relations theory—and then the lineage that sees affect as prediscursive.

Prediscursive love is pure potential; yet pure potential is always manifest through human thinking and acting. I suggest that this pure potential that is never purely experienced might be understood as a kind of immanent transcendence. It is at this point that theology might offer insight to Hardt's engagement with affect theory: the trinity, as articulated by Jürgen Moltman, offers an economy that holds together love as pure potential (God the Father) with the human experience of suffering (Jesus) and an ethical call to action (the Spirit). Making use of a trinitarian economy facilitates the properly political love that Hardt seeks: in this economy, God is not a salvific outside, but rather a marker of the ambivalence of love. The potential and risk of love cannot be separated—contrary to Hardt's claim—but a trinitarian economy accounts for this ambivalence, while also holding this ambivalent love in relationship with human experience and ethical claims about the world.