Augustine in the Twentieth-century Revival of Neoplatonism in France

INTRODUCTION

A retrieval of Neoplatonism is a powerful, widely, and significantly present, but little recognised, feature of twentieth-century French philosophy, theology, and spiritual life. [1] It begins about one hundred years ago with Henri Bergson (1859-1941) with whom also its purposes and the modifications Neoplatonism undergoes in being adapted to the contemporary world begin to show. There are two major characteristics: it is generally opposed to the Western metaphysical tradition insofar as this is understood to determine modernity. It is also generally anti-Idealist, endeavouring to link the sensuous and corporeal immediately with an unknowable first Principle, a descendent either of the Neoplatonic One-Good or what is ineffably beyond that. This second characteristic sets the twentieth-century retrieval in opposition to that in the nineteenth-century and even to the ancient and medieval Neoplatonisms generally. On both accounts this Neoplatonic retrieval has an ambiguous relation to Augustine, to the Augustinian tradition, and to "the unspoken but rampant neo-Augustinianism of twentieth-century French philosophy," which has been identified by Jacob Schmutz.[2]

Before saying anything about the negative aspect in this two-sided relationship, we must note that both the neo-Augustinianism and the retrieval of Neoplatonism of the last century are a "critique of the Western metaphysics of being" and of modernity. Both call, as Schmutz writes:

> for a new form of religiosity that would take the place of metaphysics which had reached its closure, and whose political or "civilizational" function would be to regain or barely safeguard something spiritual against the sensation of emptiness of the modern ponderously administrated world.[3]

The persistence of this neo-Augustinianism may be gathered from Jean-Luc Marion's (born 1946) inaugural lecture as Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Chicago: "*Mihi magna quaestio factus sum*: The Privilege of Unknowing," published recently in the *Journal of Religion*. Set under a text from Augustine, it connects the unknowability of the human to that of God in order to oppose late medieval and modern ontology and the contemporary objectification of human life.

Three stages may be discerned in the relations between this neo-Neoplatonism and this neo-Augustinianism. First, with Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), their projects are identical. Second, with Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), there is a strong criticism of the Augustinian tradition beginning with Scotus, together with an endeavour to hold to Augustine himself as sharply distinguished from his late medieval and modern followers. De Lubac had determined that this Augustinianism was at the origins of the modern atheism for which he was seeking a cure. Third, with Jean Trouillard (1907-1984) and others, there is a criticism of Augustine himself as a source for what is causing the destruction of transcendent

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[1] See W.J. Hankey, "The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism," idem, "Le Rôle du néoplatonisme," idem, "Neoplatonism and Contemporary Constructions," idem, "Why Heidegger's 'History' of Metaphysics is Dead," idem, *Cent Ans de Néoplatonisme,* idem, *One Hundred Years*, idem, "Neoplatonism and Contemporary French Philosophy."

[2] J. Schmutz, "Escaping the Aristotelian Bond": 199, 171 and 186–199.

[3] *Ibid.*: 199–200.

religion in Western Christendom. Jean-Luc Marion's position mixes a number of these moments and his present importance in the trans Atlantic intellectual world makes it appropriate to conclude this lecture with remarks about his work.

ÉMILE BRÉHIER: AN HEGELIAN AND INTELLECTUALIST PLOTINUS

The French retrieval establishes an interpretation of Neoplatonism opposed to that of the nineteenth century generally and to G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) in particular. It is therefore also an admiring criticism of this Hegelian interpretation by the man whose edition and translation of the *Enneads* underlies twentieth-century studies.[4] Émile Bréhier (1876-1952) is also the default twentieth-century French historian of philosophy—occupying something like the place Frederick Copleston has (or had?) in the Anglophone world. Hegel is his pre-eminent guide to Plotinus, but Bréhier does not identify his own position as in any sense Neoplatonist—as an historian he testifies that "Ideas do not, strictly speaking, exist" for him.[5] Moreover he shared nothing of what I have identified as the purposes and character of the Neoplatonic retrieval and of the neo-Augustinianism of the last century. In contrast, his aim was to identify the origins and development of the endangered heritage of Hellenic rationality, whose modern culmination the others were trying to escape. For Bréhier:

> Philosophy received its original impulse in Greece and, from this impulse, it has retained the love and the passion for freedom; I do not deny that philosophy is a rare plant in the whole of humanity, indeed we may even call it a fragile plant....[6]

He stands almost alone as a French thinker of the twentieth century who is positively attached both to Hegel and to Plotinus. The turn to Neoplatonism among French Catholic thinkers is generally anti-Hegelian and this is often linked to its being anti-Augustinian. With Claude Bruaire (1932-1986), we find almost uniquely a French philosopher who both called himself Catholic and positively associated his thought with Absolute Idealism. It is justly said of him: "Nothing is more foreign to the philosophy of Bruaire than apophatic theology which he repudiates as atheism, and which he situates with good reason inside the sphere of influence of Neoplatonic metaphysics."[7] Jean-Luc Marion, when he himself moves from negative to mystical theology, quotes Bruaire: "…apart from the pious sentiments which cover with a sensible outer layer, with religious scraps, the unalterable absolute, sign of the Nothing: negative theology is the negation of all theology. Its truth is atheism."[8] Marion contrasts the "crude assimilation" which negative theology involves to the chapter on "The Ineffable God" in de Lubac's *The Discovery of God*, where the positive is fundamental. Marion supposes—with Bruaire it would seem—that negative theology and Neoplatonism are equivalent and that rejecting one is to be freed from the other. Trouillard, and the quaternity of priests in what I have designated as the third stage of the development we are

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[4] Plotin, *Ennéades*, texte établi et traduit par Émile Bréhier, and idem, *La philosophie de Plotin*.

[5] É. Bréhier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 182.

[6] É. Bréhier, "Comment je comprends," 8.

[7] D. Leduc-Fagette, "Claude Bruaire, 1932-1986": 13. See C. Bruaire, *L'être et l'esprit*, 6–7, 96ff. and X. Tilliette, "La théologie philosophique de Claude Bruaire": 689.

[8] J.-L. Marion, "In the Name," 49, note 8 quoting Bruaire, *Le Droit de Dieu*, 21. Decades earlier, Marion had quoted the same passage of Bruaire for the same purpose in *The Idol and Distance,* 146.

considering, profoundly disagree. Now, however, we must return to our beginning with Bréhier, the secular defender of reason against religion.

On the crucial question for the twentieth-century retrieval of Neoplatonism, namely, the relation of *Nous* and the One, Bréhier determinatively follows Hegel. In mystical elevation, there is not in fact a passage beyond thought, Bréhier judges "Hegel was right in saying that 'the thought of the Plotinian philosophy is an intellectualism or a lofty idealism.'"[9] Nonetheless, according to Hegel, the intellectualism of Plotinus is imperfect; his demand for experience shows that he is a mystical enthusiast as well as an intellectual. For Bréhier, this element does not come from within Hellenism but rather from the Orient.[10] He shapes his history of philosophy so that philosophy and intellectual contemplation, on the one hand, which are for him peculiar to the Occident, and the desire for mystical union beyond thought, on the other hand, which for him belongs to religion and is Oriental, are kept separate. For Bréhier, philosophy remains exterior to religion and increases its own autonomy in the course of history: "philosophy is several centuries anterior to Christianity….She retains an altogether external relation to Christianity, and, if one is able to speak of Christian philosophers, it is hard to see any positive sense which one can give to the notion of Christian philosophy."[11] Bréhier aimed to demonstrate that "Christian philosophy" did not exist. He wrote: "We hope then to show that the development of philosophical thought was not strongly influenced by the advent of Christianity and, to sum up our thinking in one statement, that there is no Christian philosophy."[12] In 1927 and 1928, he initiated the great French discussion as to whether philosophy could qualify itself as "Christian."[13] Opposing Maurice Blondel in 1931, Bréhier asserted: "One is no more able to speak of a Christian philosophy than of a Christian mathematics or a Christian physics."[14] Here we run up against a defining landmark: everything against which Blondel and the neo-Augustinian and Neoplatonic Catholics of twentieth-century France set themselves was represented in this notion that Christian spirituality and philosophy were external to one another.

Despite his differences from his Catholic opponents, Bréhier described their enterprise usefully. In one of his last works, *The Themes Current in Philosophy*, when treating "Man and the Transcendent," Bréhier repeats a distinction habitual with him between two ways in which philosophy and Christianity were united in the Middle Ages. He relates these two directions which "affirm a transcendence" to twentieth-century "Neothomism" and "Augustinianism." Neothomism:

> in effect takes up again in its essentials the task which Saint Thomas had attempted to resolve in the XIIIth century; discovering in Aristotelianism…a philosophy which was the autonomous product of a reason not illumined by the faith*,* Saint Thomas had the great audacity to introduce it into Christianity.…The transcendent is entirely different in what I call Augustinianism: it is the principle less of a hierarchy between

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[9] Bréhier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 190–191. Bréhier is quoting Hegel, *Werke*, XV, 39–41.

[10] *Ibid.*, 116–18.

[11] Bréhier, "Comment je comprends," 9.

[12] É. Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy*, ii, 225.

[13] É. Fouilloux, *Une Église*, 151. See *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 38 (avril-juin, 1931), Henri de Lubac, "Sur la philosophie chrétienne," 127, X. Tilliette, "Le Père de Lubac": 193–204, and É. Gilson, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale,* 1–62 together with his "Notes bibliographiques."

[14] É. Bréhier, "Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne?" 162.

the forms of being than of an interior life; it fastens itself to Neoplatonism and to the Greek Fathers…Its essential thesis is that the interior life, communion with oneself, is a way to God, a way to the transcendent.[15]

When we add another characteristic Bréhier ascribed to Thomism, that is "an external relation [with the faith]…the solution of an abstract problem,"[16] it becomes clear that Augustinian and Neoplatonic reactions against such a Thomism are required. In fact, the Neoplatonic reaction will take i) an Augustinian form in Blondel, ii) a Greek Patristic form in followers like the founders of "Sources chrétiennes," and iii) a straightforwardly Neoplatonic form in Jean Trouillard and others.

Bréhier had a negative judgment of most of post-Iamblichean Neoplatonism, an attitude which would be countered in the course of the century. His views did not, however, stem from ignorance, and he was struggling against contemporary academic prejudice. Trouillard paid tribute to Bréhier's audacious "The Idea of Nothingness and the Problem of the Radical Origin in Greek Neoplatonism," of 1919 as a "fine study which…remained an isolated initiative in France."[17] Bréhier understood the basis in Neoplatonism for the religion, mystical theology, and negative henology found there later by scholar priests like the Dominican André-Jean Festugière (1898-1982), the Jesuit Édouard des Places (1900-2000), and Fr. Joseph Combès. These would be joined by a former priest who turned himself into philosophical spiritual director for those without religion, Pierre Hadot,[18] and others like the Sulpician Trouillard, in bringing about the re-evaluation of these aspects of later Neoplatonism. This post-Iamblichan Neoplatonism becomes an alternative to Augustine, precisely because of what Bréhier discerned about its first principle beyond Being when he wrote:

> The origin is not able as such to possess any of the characteristics which are possessed by the beings to be explained and derived, because then it would be one thing among other things, one being among other beings. But, possessing none of the characteristics of beings, it appears to the thinking which wishes to grasp it as a pure non-being.

The distinguished historian of philosophy who made his name primarily because of his studies of Aristotle, but who also plays an important role in what concerns us now, Pierre Aubenque (born 1929), commented on this judgment:

> It remains that the relativisation of ontology, and the correlative necessity of passing beyond it, are logically inscribed in the question, considered radically, of the Being of the existent [*l'être de l'étant*].[19]

Aubenque has found in Bréhier both what will provide a basis for a radical Neoplatonic criticism of Augustine's theology and anthropology and also what will prevent Marion and

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[15] É. Bréhier, *Les thèmes actuels*, 42–3.
[16] Bréhier, *La Philosophie du Moyen Âge*, 434.
[17] J. Trouillard, "Préface," Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie*, 10.
[18] See W.J. Hankey, "Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians?"
[19] P. Aubenque, "Plotin et le dépassement," 103, quoting from É. Bréhier, "L'idée du néant," 248; see also his "Mysticisme et doctrine chez Plotin," (1948) 225–31.

others from adopting this alternative. The positive reappraisal of Iamblichus and his followers occurs at the cost of a negative re-evaluation of Augustinianism as adequate to the transcendence which Bréhier insightfully identified as the preoccupation of contemporary French Catholic thought.

MAURICE BLONDEL: AUGUSTINIANISM AND NEOPLATONISM AT HOME TOGETHER

According to Jacob Schmutz, Maurice Blondel reproduces "a gesture that, broadly speaking, can be described as 'Neoplatonic,' against the ontological and scientific type of metaphysics inherited from Aristotle and his medieval commentators."[20] Bréhier's description of the reaction against "immanentism" gives a place to start when locating Maurice Blondel's: "It is precisely against this pretension of Idealism that religious philosophy is protesting when it affirms a transcendence."[21] Certainly, Blondel opposed "the illusion of a speculative idealism"[22] and, having initiated the defence of Christian philosophy against Bréhier, [23] his is a religious philosophy eschewing the oppositions and separations of traditional metaphysics. For Blondel, with whom, as Goulven Madec puts it, the texts of Augustine "seem to spring up out of his own memory," and for whom, as Henri Gouhier writes, the history of philosophy was "the opportunity to deepen his study of a metaphysical problem and to make his own thought more precise," Augustine "always remains a philosopher."[24] Blondel affirms that Augustine's doctrine was "religious by its own spontaneous development and not by accident, and remained essentially philosophical, even while welcoming data inaccessible to reason." Indeed, for him "Augustine…is still the initiator and the animator of 'Catholic thought' and 'Christian philosophy'."[25] He represents Augustine in Neoplatonic categories:

> nothing, indeed, is visible, because nothing is real, except only by God… One divines…the importance and the character of the spiritual dialogue which is achieved only in a unitative contemplation, but not without having passed *per gradus debitos*.[26]

Then he goes on to judge: "We have, not without reason, called Augustine the Christian Plato."[27] Philosophy is essentially connected to both religion and mysticism, a view shared by Iamblichan Neoplatonists.

Evidently, of the two directions affirming transcendance identified by Bréhier, Blondel takes the second, "Augustinianism," which has for its essential thesis "that the interior life, communion with oneself, is a way to God, a way to the transcendent."[28] His writings are filled with statements uniting philosophical and religious language. We can even find an early use of the language of theurgy in *L'Action (1893)*:

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[20] Schmutz, "Escaping the Aristotelian Bond": 171.

[21] Bréhier, *Les thèmes actuels,* 42.

[22] M. Blondel*, L'Action (II),* i. 86; see *The Idealist Illusion*, in Blondel, *The Idealist Illusion and Other Essays,*75–94.

[23] M. Blondel, "Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne?": 599–606.

[24] G. Madec, "Maurice Blondel," 100 and H. Gouhier, "Préface," in Blondel, *Dialogues,* 7, and idem, "Pour le quinzième," in *Dialogues,* 144.

[25] M. Blondel, "Pour le quinzième," 145 and 190. For a good account of Blondel on Christian philosophy, see Trethowan in Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics*, 105–12.

[26] *Ibid.*, 156.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Bréhier, *Les thèmes actuels,* 43.

To think of God is an action; yet we also do not act without cooperating with Him and without having Him collaborate with us by a sort of necessary *theergy* which integrates the part of the divine in the human operation, in order to achieve the equation of the voluntary action in consciousness. And it is because action is a synthesis of man with God that it is in perpetual becoming, as if stirred by the inspiration of an infinite growth.[29]

In the version of *L'Action* published in 1936, the languages of Augustinian and Dionysian Neoplatonism were united in constructing this *itinerarium in Deum*. Blondel described the:

inevitable trials and errors of the *intellectus irrequietus* and of the *cor agitatum* as an "*itinerarium mentis et animae ad Deum*." Before, and in order to be able to explain, justify, sustain the labour, regressive and elevating at the same time, which allows the linking up and the progress of the second causes to their *primus movens* and their *ultimus finis*, it is good to fix a little our attention and our admiration on this mysterious centre of all truth from whence radiates light, life, and action. Not that we would have the least presumption of seeing face to face, of penetrating, and of capturing the inviolable secret of that which is beyond all finite intelligence and all created power. But what is just and good is, on the contrary, to kindle the feeling for and the reasons of this same inviolability, a conviction which grows to the degree that we perceive a little better what a mystic named the "Great Darkness" in the excess of light.[30]

In this Neoplatonic neo-Augustinianism, Blondel is plagued throughout his life by the Neothomists, although he is not himself hostile to Aquinas. The way he took disturbed them because of its essential interiority and the interpenetration of action and knowing, which do not satisfy their demand for a metaphysics of being. Moreover, he opposed the externality of the relation between philosophy and theology which they maintained.[31] At the Premier Congrès National des Sociétés Françaises de Philosophie held during 1938, in the presence of Bréhier who spoke immediately after him, Blondel exposed "the necessary importance of a philosophy of action, of faith, of human destiny, of the problem of transcendence, under its double aspect: metaphysical and philosophically religious."[32] Jacob Schmutz judges that Blondel's version of "French spiritualism" sought to move simultaneously toward transcendence and a deeper experience which would bring union "with the principle of thought which is itself *beyond* every intellectual comprehension.…[W]e are not in the presence of a metaphysics of understanding or speculation, but in a metaphysics of union with the very first principle. We are closer to Neoplatonism than to Aristotelianism."[33]

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[29] M. Blondel, *Action (1893)*, 325.
[30] Blondel, *L'Action (II)*, i. 113–4.
[31] On which see É. Gilson, *Les Tribulations*, 58–64.
[32] M. Blondel, "Allocution de M. Maurice Blondel," 7.
[33] Schmutz, "Escaping the Aristotelian Bond": 184–5. Schmutz finds the same Neoplatonic structure in the thought of Louis Lavelle (1883-1951).

The Augustinianism of Blondel is clear and well recognised, but for the future developments we must search in another direction. The connection to Blondel's thought of those priests who most radically turned to Neoplatonism as a way out of what in Western modernity they judged must necessarily destroy Christianity as religion is most significant.

Blondel had been studied at length by Henry Duméry (born in 1920),[34] who as late as 1958 had four works consigned by Rome to the *Index of Forbidden Books* for philosophical deviations "of a metaphysical order," involving a "misconception of the analogy of being."[35] Father Joseph Combès (also born in 1920), a student of Jean Trouillard, tells us that with Blondel we find fundamentals of his master. [36] The Passionist Stanislas Breton (1912-2005) has described these three priests—Duméry, Combès, and Trouillard—as "the Neoplatonic triad of France" developing a "Neoplatonic radicalism." [37] Breton might well have made French priestly Neoplatonic radicalism a quaternity by placing himself within it. Both Duméry and Trouillard saw in Blondel's thought something of Neoplatonism. Duméry writes of how Blondel unifies conversion and procession, ascent and descent, thought and being, will and knowledge:

> When one welds together at every point the ascending and descending dialectics, the two processes of intelligible determinism and of ontogenetic dynamism, they marry and make each other fecund. The will by which we pass beyond essence in order to position it becomes then identical with the law of procession which realises it, that is to say, at the end of the reckoning, with the will by which God himself has produced it.[38]

In another place, Duméry connects this doctrine to Trouillard and Plotinus and goes on to speak of how in consciousness and thought the spirit both touches and springs from the One. [39]

HENRI DE LUBAC: PLATONIC CRITICISM OF THE AUGUSTINIAN TRADITION

Blondel desired a mystical way in philosophy and theology, one oriented to inner knowledge, union, action, and transcendence. Moreover, in his correspondence with Alfred Loisy (1857-1940), concerned with the relations of history, dogma, and philosophy, he had discovered "philosophical gaps within critical exegesis."[40] His questions about how history and philosophy were done within the Catholic Church, and about their relations with theology, had a strong effect upon the Jesuits at Fourvière where they helped inspire the great series of Patristic and Medieval texts, "Sources chrétiennes," founded there.

This return to sources was not theologically and philosophically neutral. Partly it was a reaction, inspired by Blondel's "method of immanence," against the divorce of Scripture and tradition and of truth and history. [41] Partly it reacted against the walls Neothomism had

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[34] See H. Duméry, *La Philosophie de l'action*, which contains a "Bibliographie analytique" of Blondel's works; idem, *Raison et religion*; idem, *Blondel et la Religion*.

[35] Fouilloux, *Une Église,* 35 quoting *L'Osservatore Romano* July 6, 1958 columns 841 and 842.

[36] See J. Combès, "Néoplatonisme aujourd'hui," 354–5.

[37] Breton, *De Rome à Paris*, 31 & 152–3.

[38] Duméry, *La Philosophie de l'action*, 113–4.

[39] H. Duméry, *The Problem of God,* 96, note 35, quoting Trouillard, *La purification plotinienne*, 96.

[40] É. Poulat, "Maurice Blondel": 52 quoting Blondel to Loisy.

[41] See Peter Casarella's Introduction to de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, xvii–xix.

erected between philosophy, theology, and spirituality. Insofar as these separations and rationalism were thought to characterise Latin Medieval scholasticism, it was a turn back to the Fathers of the ancient church. It was also, however, a turn towards the Greek Fathers as against the unilateral privileging of the Latins, and especially of Augustine.[42] Henri de Lubac tells us that "'Sources chrétiennes'…dates back to 1940. The initiator of the series, which at first was to include only the Greek Fathers…in an ecumenical spirit,…saw it as an instrument of *rapprochement* with the Orthodox Churches."[43] There was even a *rapprochement* with the far Orient: ultimately, de Lubac will quote with approval words of a priestly colleague suggesting that the union of philosophy, theology, and mysticism in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa anticipates "the Indian form of Christian thought."[44] De Lubac and his Jesuit confrere Jean Daniélou (1905-1974) felt themselves to be one with Blondel in opposing a scholastic philosophy which was logical and metaphysical to the detriment of an *itinerarium* simultaneously philosophical, theological, exegetical, and mystical.[45] However, rather than undertaking a new metaphysics in imitation of Blondel, their way to his end was historical study retrieving what existed before the modern dualisms, separations, and oppositions.

The most important, influential, and initially controversial work of de Lubac was his historical and theological study of the supernatural which traced the development of modern Augustinianism. It stretched over more than twenty years and culminated in the publication of *Surnaturel* in 1946. [46] Louis Dupré "confidently" calls it "*the* most significant study in historical theology" of the entire twentieth century. [47] De Lubac reports that at his Jesuit Scholasticate he had been urged "to verify whether the doctrine of St. Thomas regarding this important point [the idea of pure nature] was indeed that claimed by the Thomist school around the sixteenth century, codified in the seventeenth, and asserted with greater emphasis than ever in the twentieth."[48] Obediently, he thoroughly investigated the genesis of the separation between "pure nature" and the supernatural and showed that it was essential to modern Neoscholasticism. Equally, however, he demonstrated the separation both to have been absent from Augustine and Aquinas and to have derived from Duns Scotus. In a later continuation of these studies, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, de Lubac defended the Jesuit theology of Suárez and Molina against the charge of having authored "the theory that sees human nature 'as a closed and sufficient whole'," and judged instead that the Dominican "Cajetan is, if not quite the first initiator of it, at least its patron and leading authority." [49] Dupré, with no institutional loyalties at stake, distributes the blame equally between Dominicans and Jesuits: "the man who developed the conception of the two orders into a full-fledged theology" was Cajetan; "Suárez gave the theory its definitive form." [50]

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[42] Fouilloux, *Une Église,* 184.

[43] H. de Lubac, *At the Service,* 94. There are bibliographies of his writings in idem, *L'Homme devant Dieu,* iii, 347–56 and idem, *Théologie dans l'histoire,* ii, 408–420.

[44] de Lubac, *At the Service*, 319.

[45] *Ibid.,* 19–20 and 364–5.

[46] See "Schéma génétique des publications de Henry de Lubac au sujet du surnaturel," in idem, *Surnaturel*, xiii–xvi.

[47] L. Dupré in H. de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (2000), ix; J. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 3 agrees.

[48] de Lubac, *At the Service*, 34–5.

[49] H. de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 144–145.

[50] de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (2000), xiii.

In the Preface of *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, published during 1965, de Lubac asserted that "For sixty years now" the positive idea he wished to bring into relief "has been gaining ground again" against the modern dualist or separatist thesis which:

> may be only just beginning to bear its bitterest fruit…in the sphere of practical action…[W]ishing to protect the supernatural from any contamination, people had in fact exiled it altogether…leaving the field free to be taken over by secularism…. Christians…seek to find a harmony with things based on an idea of nature which might be acceptable to a deist or an atheist. The last word in Christian progress and the entry into adulthood would then appear to consist in a total secularization which would expel God not merely from the life of society, but from culture and even from personal relationships.[51]

In describing the directions from which the fresh assaults are launched, summed up "under the generic title of 'doctrines of immanence'," de Lubac takes up the essential Blondelian theme. He judged:

> It is chiefly a question of "historical" immanentism, concentration completely upon history, and envisaging the end of its development as a "universal reconciliation" which, both in itself and in the means needed to achieve it, would exclude everything supernatural…. [T]his immanentism…easily develops a dialectic of transcendence actually within the human being….[52] [F]ar from rejecting Christianity, it claims at last to fulfill perfectly the hopes awakened by Christ in men's hearts…. [53]

His writings on "the supernatural" had as their aims both to trace the history of its naturalization in Western theology and philosophy, and also to find how "the faith perhaps legitimately used the universal reason, without which the supernatural order would be naturalised, and the natural order extinguished."[54] This legitimate rationality he associated in the past with Greek Patristic Platonism, and with Latin thought before Scotus. In the present there was Blondel. Because the problem of the relation of the natural and the supernatural is in Western theology a question of the end to which natural desire is ordered, Blondel's "co-adaptation between human will, natural desire, and the Christian supernatural is de Lubac's point of departure and return.[55]

In contrast to this legitimate reason, de Lubac finds that the anthropologised theology of Feuerbach, which involves everything to which he is opposed (anti-Christology, the inversion of the *kenosis*, etc.), is the result of the Hegelian Christology. They realize certain tendencies implicit in Western theology which became dominant both in Baroque Scholastic Augustinianism and in modern philosophy.[56] This diagnosis is worked out most

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[51] de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xxxv.

[52] This is in fact what Pierre Hadot does when he turns from Neoplatonism to Stoicism as a philosophical way of life for contemporaries, see Hankey, "Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians?" 193–204.

[53] de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, xxxv.

[54] X. Tilliette, "Le Père de Lubac": 195 quoting de Lubac, *Théologies d'occasion*, 104–5. Tillette's article gives a good summary of de Lubac's relation to Blondel.

[55] Tilliette, "Le Père de Lubac," 195.

[56] For considerations of de Lubac's understanding of Hegel, see O. Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme": 208, J.-Y. Lacoste, "Le désir et l'inexigible," and B. Pinchard, "Sujet théologique."

radically by Trouillard, who does not, however, surpass the forcefulness of de Lubac's language about totalitarian humanism; this Olivier Boulnois describes as "truly more violent than that of Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism.*"[57] Nonetheless, we cannot understand the coherence of de Lubac's intellectual project unless we are clear that for him contemporary atheism is positive and attractive because it realises something in the Western development of Christianity—which he knew to be Augustinian through and through. In the 1950 Preface to his *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* he wrote:

> Beneath the numerous surface-currents which carry contemporary thought in every direction, it seems possible to detect…a sort of immense drift; through the action of a large proportion of its foremost thinkers, the peoples of the West are denying their Christian past and turning away from God. This is not the everyday type of atheism which crops up in all ages and is of no particular significance; nor is it the purely critical atheism…manifestly incapable of replacing what it destroys—its only function being to hollow out a channel for that other atheism which is my real subject. Contemporary atheism is increasingly positive, organic, constructive. Combining a mystical immanentism with a clear perception of the human trend….[58]

Trouillard will agree with the diagnosis but not be content with de Lubac's division between Augustine and Augustinianism—a contrast which aims to prevent the deformities of Latin "separated theology" being blamed on the great Church Father. With Jean Trouillard we have the judgment that the Hegelian dialectic by which the human and divine pass into one another has its source in Augustine. In his and Henry Duméry's following of Blondel, there is a deeper and more explicit turn to Neoplatonic transcendence as against Augustine's interchanges between the divine and the human trinities, as well as to henology as against Augustine's God as *idipsum esse.*

    With de Lubac, the Greek Fathers were retrieved to help overcome the logic impelling Western immanentism. Among them the Christian way was not tightly departmentalised; Latin rigidities, rationalistic confidence, and narrowness had not supplanted spiritual movement; a deductive theology had not been separated from Scriptural meditation. The scientific divisions made by Thomism were associated with its Aristotelianism; Platonism, in contrast, was associated with Greek spirituality. Greek Patristic Platonism possessed the desired integration of philosophy with theology so that both became parts of a mystical *itinerarium.*[59] Among the many French Catholic intellectuals who accepted and developed these criticisms of the Latin tradition, there would come to be a reaction against Thomism, but de Lubac himself was at least as much interested in a return to a true understanding of St. Thomas and Augustine as he was in widening the mentality of the church and the resources available to it. In this desire to use historical studies to retrieve authentic pre-modern understandings, he was working alongside Dominicans like Yves Congar (1904-1995) and Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990), and the laïc historian of philosophy Étienne Gilson (1884-1978). Near the end of his life, de Lubac published a revealingly annotated exchange of letters between Gilson and himself from 1956 to 1975. They disclosed both the closeness he felt to Gilson's work devoted to rescuing Aquinas from

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[57] Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme": 207.
[58] de Lubac, *The Drama,* vii.
[59] Fouilloux, *Une Église,* 182–7.

the Neothomists and his own attachment to the Angelic Doctor. [60] John Milbank comments on de Lubac's drawing together of Augustine, Aquinas, and Neoplatonism:

> The distinct Aristotelian moment in Aquinas remains [for de Lubac] subordinate to an Augustinianism blended with Procleanism (mediated by Dionysius and the Arabs). De Lubac explicitly endorses mid-century readings of Aquinas that stress the neoplatonic and Augustinian dimension, while at the same time his *Augustine* is more humanist and 'Thomistic' than that of the previous run of French tradition. [61]

One cumulative result of such work was an understanding of the Neoplatonic and Augustinian sources and character of the thought of Thomas Aquinas himself, and it is in virtue of this new understanding of Aquinas that, after the death of Neoscholastic Thomism, he comes again to be of interest.[62] This approach to Thomas breaks down the difference between the two directions Bréhier described twentieth-century French religious philosophy as taking when it affirmed transcendence. The possibility of such a *rapprochement* was hidden to Neoscholastic Thomism—what Stanislas Breton calls the "Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy."

In his "On Christian Philosophy: Reflections in the wake of Debate," published during 1936, de Lubac wrote of a "Renaissance of the reason" full of paradoxes:

> Intellectual life, in effect, does not stop itself at this ultimate step, of which M. Blondel has made so penetrating an analysis, where reason abdicates—rationally—its autonomy, in a recognised powerlessness to achieve by herself the work which she is not able to avoid willing. She dies only to be reborn, and the heteronomy which she accepts restores her to herself more than she has ever been. [63]

At this point he quotes the "*Deus, interior intimo meo*" of Augustine and adds "Then truly begins for her the phase of 'intellect.' *Renaissance of reason*." This may be taken as an essentially Neoplatonic solution with the soul rising through the various kinds and levels of understanding as it moves more and more into a union where philosophy as its means surpasses itself.[64] John Milbank judges that de Lubac produces "a new sort of ontology—indeed, in a sense a 'non-ontology'—articulated *between* the discourses of philosophy and theology, fracturing their respective autonomies, but tying them loosely and firmly together."[65] Nonetheless, ultimately, the Platonism of de Lubac and Blondel is intellectualist and ontological, as opposed to henological, and Augustinian, as opposed to Iamblichan. We are on the way beyond this Platonism.

TROUILLARD AND DUMÉRY: PROCLEAN HENOLOGY CRITICISES AUGUSTINE

Jean Trouillard agreed with de Lubac's diagnosis of Western Christian culture but refused to solve the problem by an opposition between Augustine and Augustinianism.

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[60] H. de Lubac, *Letters of Étienne Gilson.*

[61] Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 19.

[62] See J.-M. Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis,* W.J Hankey, *God in Himself*, 1– 17, idem, "From Metaphysics to History," and idem, "Denys and Aquinas."

[63] H. de Lubac, "Sur la philosophie chrétienne," 144–145.

[64] See J.-M. Narbonne, "EPEKEINA THS GNWSEWS," and G. Catapano, *Epékeina tês philosophias.*

[65] Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 5.

Trouillard's Proclean henology stands sharply against Idealist interpretations of Neoplatonic texts and is developed as an alternative to what he regards as the Hegelian conclusion of the Augustinian following of Plotinus. It is equally an alternative to Thomism and is shaped in part by Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) critique of Western metaphysics.[66]

Trouillard encountered the work of Blondel at the age of twenty-two. For Trouillard, Blondel, searching for the grounds of action, had found it most particularly in the "unconditioned condition." The principle, which "having been laid claim to at the end of the action, must already be found at its beginning." "Such an interior motion transcends all temporal development, because it is this itself which is at issue." On this foundation, Blondel is able to show that "reason, even in its effort to close itself to the supernatural, necessarily postulates it."[67] When he approached Plotinus from within a Blondelian perspective, Trouillard was dumbfounded to discover "a pagan philosopher who posited at the root of mind an implicit union with an ineffable source." [68] It was the Plotinian language of the "ineffable contact," the grounding in what is unthinkable because prior to both *noesis* and *esse*, which attracted Trouillard.

A ground prior to thought and being seemed to provide the right solution to the problem of Western secularization occupying the followers of Blondel. On the one hand, they perceived a destructive modern secularization of Christianity. [69] De Lubac had shown that Augustinian Scholasticism came to regard the supernatural as if it were another nature superadded to the first so that nature made itself total. The Plotinian location of the transcendent ground of nature in what was beyond representation, grasp, manipulation and retrieval seemed to provide a way out.[70] This exit required a criticism of Augustine himself.

In an article by Trouillard on Blondel written in 1960, one finds sharply expressed the problematic governing the turn both from Augustine and from Idealism by French Neoplatonic theology. The character of Blondel's intervention in the debate about Christian philosophy showed that his refusal of revealed theology and philosophy as separated sciences belonged to his profoundly Augustinian spirituality and way of thinking. As the French Jesuit, Xavier Tilliette (born 1921), puts it: "...the Blondelian dialectic is saturated with Anselmian and Augustinian (Bonaventurian) contributions."[71] However, Blondel was not Augustinian only in his spiritual and dialectical style; Augustinian onto-theo-logy was at the center of his reasoning.[72] Trouillard comments on Blondel: "He will think that the Trinity gives him the right to detach the circular movement of mind from the realm of the finite and to sublimate it in the Absolute." He goes on to quote a profoundly Augustinian passage from *Action* speaking both of "the absolute adequation" of being, knowing, and acting in God and also of how this belongs to the structure of all subjectivity, so that "The Trinity is the ontological argument transported into the absolute; there this proof is no longer a proof, but the truth itself and the life of being."[73]

To understand Trouillard's fundamental criticism of Augustine it will help to note historical studies by Paul Henry and Pierre Hadot and then return to Aubenque's

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[66] See S. Breton, "Sur la difficulté d'être thomiste aujourd'hui," 333–46.
[67] J. Combès, "Néoplatonisme aujourd'hui," 355.
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme": 209–22.
[70] Combès, "Néoplatonisme aujourd'hui," 356.
[71] Tilliette, "Le Père de Lubac": 194.
[72] See C. Bruaire, "Dialectique de *L'Action* et preuve ontologique."
[73] J. Trouillard, "Pluralité spirituelle et unité normative selon Blondel": 23.

philosophical analysis to which I referred earlier. When the Belgian Jesuit editor of Plotinus Paul Henry (1906-1984) pointed to what in Marius Victorinus mediated the connection between Plotinus and Augustine,[74] he established the context in which his student, Pierre Hadot, identified Porphyry as the missing link.[75] Hadot showed that an aspect of Plotinus' teaching about the activity of the One and its relation to *Nous* had been exploited by Porphyry and transmitted to Augustine either directly or through Victorinus. In consequence, Augustine's Trinity could be seen as an extension of an alternative within the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Parmenides* of Plato. Porphyry's telescoping of the hypostases, against which Iamblichus and his successors reacted, might then be understood as the founding of the onto-theo-logical tradition in which the First is understood in terms of being so that ontology will be absolute. Alternatively, the same doctrine might be taken as the foundation of an apophatic ontology, "a metaphysics of pure being." Hadot's research leaves us with the possibility of three opposed, or at least different, metaphysics emerging from Neoplatonism: i) kataphatic ontology—traditionally associated with Augustine and Aquinas—, ii) apophatic ontology, "a metaphysics of pure being," or iii) henology.

In 1959 Hadot published a criticism of Heidegger's treatment of Platonism in the course of judging both that Heidegger is "the prophet of this end of Platonism, which is, at the same time, the end of a world" and that "one might be tempted to interpret the thought of Heidegger as a kind of Neoplatonism."[76] Pierre Aubenque's "Plotinus and the Overcoming of Classical Greek Ontology," was not published until 1971. In it he set up the question about the three alternative kinds of metaphysics which might derive from Neoplatonism in the Heideggerian terms which dominated French philosophy in the last decades of the twentieth century—there are at present some signs that an escape from this framework is underway.[77] Aubenque judges that: "The thought of Plotinus and, following it, Neoplatonism, are characterised…by two complementary theses, which take the opposite course to that of traditional ontology. The first is that *being [l'étant] is not what is there from the first, above being [l'étant], there is the One.*"[78] Aubenque goes on to outline what follows from the first thesis: "a negative henology, the always repeated indication of the necessity to pass beyond ontology."[79] He tells us that: "Plotinus has generally chosen the first way." Nonetheless, there is a second way:

> In his criticism of Stoicism, he [Plotinus] seems nonetheless to suggest the possibility of another way…This second way is that which another Neoplatonic tradition will follow, which P. Hadot recently believed himself able to trace back to Porphyry. It will consist of deepening the notion of being, rather than "overcoming" it in favour

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[74] See P. Henry, "The *Adversus Arium* of Marius Victorinus." For Henry's work and bibliography see Jean Pépin's memorial in *Revue des études augustiniennes.*

[75] See P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus.* For a collection of the articles by which Hadot traced the history from Porphyry and Augustine to Western mediaeval ontologies see his *Plotin, Porphyre. Études Néoplatoniciennes*; for a very small part of the discussion see W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle, Being or Unity?":141–6; idem, *God in Himself,* 5–7; A. de Libera et C. Michon, *L'Être et l'Essence,* 29–36; D. Bradshaw, "Neoplatonic Origins of the Act of Being."

[76] P. Hadot, "Heidegger et Plotin": 539–41.

[77] See Hankey, "Why Heidegger's 'History' of Metaphysics is Dead."

[78] Aubenque, "Plotin et le dépassement," 101 [italics in the original]. For a reflection on this article see G. Lafont, "Écouter Heidegger en théologien": 384, note 35. See also Aubenque's "Néoplatonisme et analogie de l'être."

[79] *Ibid.,* 102.

of some kind of non-being, and, in particular, rising from the "on" [Greek] participle to the infinitive-being [*l'être-infinitif*], that is to say to the act of being [*être*], absolutely simple and undetermined, because it is the foundation of all determination.[80]

By either or by both of these ways, Plotinian thought might escape Heidegger's critique of onto-theo-logy. Aubenque also suggests a positive relation between Neoplatonism and a Derridean deconstruction of ontology.[81]

Trouillard looks at Augustine's trinitarian speculations through this optic. In his view, Augustine was not able to protect the divine transcendence adequately because he remained within the Plotinian-Porphyrian tradition of the exegesis of the *Parmenides*. Adequate transcendence demands the more radical division of the First Principle from *Nous* in the tradition which moves within paganism from Iamblichus to Damascius. In seeking to found self-reflexive subjectivity in the divine, the Augustinian tradition projects the finite unto the infinite. Trouillard writes about Blondel's foundation of human subjectivity in the divine Trinity after the mode of Augustine :

> Lines as seductive as the Trinitarian speculations of Saint Augustine. The danger of both the one and the other is to claim to justify the divine Trinity by some of the attributes or some of the functions which were identified and then to pass beyond these into the divine simplicity. This is also to reduplicate the distinctions inherent in created spirit under the pretext of founding them in the Absolute. One of the weaknesses of the Augustinian tradition is to have remained within this side of the Plotinian exegesis of the *Parmenides* and not to have understood that in this the requirements of criticism and the necessities of religious life converge in order to liberate Transcendence from all that would draw it back within the Intelligible. Outside of this we would perpetually risk the *quiproquo,* as it results in the Hegelian dialectic where no one is able to say if this is of God or this is of man and which plays upon this ambiguity.[82]

From here Trouillard moves to Proclus, and from Proclus we are brought to reflect on another feature of Blondel's thought: the power of negation, the indeterminate, and absence. At this point Trouillard's henology comes into view:

> If then the normative dominates presence and absence both, if it commands both possession and privation, the name *Être* seems badly chosen to designate it. The normative is *une hyperontologie.* The term *One* would be equally inappropriate if we understood it as an attribute. An infinite norm has only characteristics attributed to it as a result of the ways in which it functions. It is *être* inasmuch as it produces what derives from it, but it also imposes on them "*la distance.*" It is *unity* in the sense that it rules the many, but it is equally the source of the multiplicity and variety of what is.[83]

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[80] *Ibid.*, 107.
[81] *Ibid.*, 108.
[82] J. Trouillard, "Pluralité spirituelle et unité normative selon Blondel": 24.
[83] *Ibid.*: 28.

Trouillard concludes with a quotation from Proclus on the foundational transcendence of the One.

When, in 1972, Stanislas Breton published an essay on "The Current Relevance of Neoplatonism," he told us that in consequence of its reference to the One-Nonbeing of the *Parmenides*, Neoplatonism "is constantly inspired by a self-criticism."[84] Essential to this self-critical development, whether ancient or contemporary, is the shift to henology which is also a shift away from Blondel and Augustine. Trouillard's younger associate Henry Duméry made this move in a decisive way. Also occupied with the struggle against atheistic humanism, Duméry judged, as Trouillard had, that the spiritual freedom for humans which Blondel sought could not be secured in Augustinian ontology or psychology but only in an Absolute which was beyond being.

A distance between the One and being is essential to the freedom of the Absolute.[85] Duméry makes this point *vis-à-vis* Hegel and Bréhier. Providing the proper ground for the liberty and creativity of the finite requires a full criticism of anthropomorphism; neither Augustine, who descended "to the level of psychologism,"[86] nor Hegel, nor Husserl, nor Blondel reach this. Duméry agrees with de Lubac and Trouillard that Hegel's divine-human dialectic reduces God: "one does not know if, for Hegel, it is God who needs humans in order to speak his absolute discourse or if it is man, who, swelling with pride, tries his hand at reconstructing the divine knowledge."[87] With henology this conceiving of God is unnecessary: "There are no determinations *pre-posed* in the trans-ordinal God; he has no need to conceive in order to perform. Thus the philosopher need not seek the 'divine plan,' still less the psychology, the secret intentions, or the ulterior motives of the Creator….From God to the intelligible there is no transmission of essences, but only derivation of energy…."[88]

In a remarkable statement which reflects the same connection between contemporary immanentist atheism and Augustine made by Trouillard, Duméry notes the problems implicit in what Augustine did with his Plotinian sources. Equally, together with Trouillard, he points to the Christian successors of Plotinus in the Iamblichan tradition as offering a corrective to dangers in an Augustinian unification of psychology and trinitarian theology. When he considers the construction of the doctrine of the Trinity, he asserts that, although the historian has points to make, the critical philosopher "has also his own word to say":

> He will note, for example, that psychologism risks destroying this metaphysical construction (psychological trinities are not of the same order). He will also point out, we believe, that to give equal weight to the Trinitarian schema and to the transordinal character of God confuses transcendence itself with its modes of apprehension. Neither St. Augustine nor Blondel entirely avoided this confusion. With Scotus Eriugena, and under the inspiration of the Pseudo-Dionysius, it will be

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[84] S. Breton, "Actualité du néoplatonisme": 123.

[85] For an interpretation of Plotinus which makes again the differentiations made by Trouillard and Duméry, in explicit dependence on them see F. Tazzolio, *Du lien de l'un*; B. Collette, *Dialectique et Hénologie chez Plotin* uses Trouillard for the same purposes.

[86] Duméry, *Philosophie de la religion,* 219.

[87] *Ibid.*, 44, note 4.

[88] Duméry, *The Problem of God*, 94.

necessary to repeat that God is more than Unity and more than Trinity. In no case can he be circumscribed by the intentionality which seeks to grasp him. [89]

JEAN-LUC MARION: AUGUSTINE UNITED TO DENYS

The mention of the Pseudo-Denys brings us back to Jean-Luc Marion. We conclude with some remarks about his turn to a Dionysian Neoplatonism and his ambivalent relation to Augustine. Marion's qualified postmodernity is defined by Heidegger and even more by Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), however, he gets beyond metaphysics and ontology not by henology but by a leap *hors-texte* to the Good or charity. This means that his relation to Augustine is sharply ambivalent. On the one hand, Marion's refusal of ontology and metaphysics, especially as developed within modernity, requires a rejection of Augustine or at least of some Augustinian developments. On the other hand, the charity at the heart of Augustine's theology and anthropology invites an embrace.

Marion's following of Heidegger and Lévinas forced him to detach himself from Augustine's theological ontology to which Blondel had been drawn. This does not mean, however, that he followed Trouillard or Duméry into a Neoplatonic henology; Marion declares:

> I have never been very convinced by the demonstration: to pass from Being to the One, this remains within metaphysics by the simple conversion of the transcendentals. An insufficient evasion![90]

Nonetheless, along with Trouillard and Duméry he locates a corrective to Western onto-theo-logy in what, despite his denials, is, in fact, a derivative of the Iamblichan tradition of Neoplatonism. He attempts theology without ontology by a retrieval of Denys in his first book, *The Idol and Distance*.[91] There, and more and more explicitly as his thought develops, Marion adopts from Denys exactly the mystical theology of an ineffable god who is nothing by excess which the Areopagite owes to Proclus and Damascius. However, having refused metaphysics, from his earliest to his most recent publications and discussions, Marion always rejects assertions that Denys' position—or his own—are Neoplatonic. Despite his protests, inspired by Lévinas to look to the autonomy of the ethical, one may say that it is the Neoplatonic First Principle named as the Good rather than as the One which governs his thought.

In early reflections on Blondel's *Action*, Marion found something in Augustine which blended with what Lévinas enabled him to locate in Denys: the infinity of the will as converted to charity in the Christian tradition leading from Augustine. Thus, Marion's attempt "to shoot for God according to his most theological name – charity,"[92] and to move "hors-texte," transcending the historical conditions of philosophy, is also Augustinian. Augustine's voluntarism attracts him and, like Trouillard, he finds in Blondel "the conversion of the will," or charity, by which he turns to God without metaphysics.[93] His article on Blondel touches on the central theme of *The Idol and Distance*, because Marion

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[89] Duméry, *Faith and Reflection*, 175, note 15 translating *Philosophie de la religion*, 69, note 1.

[90] D. Janicaud, *Heidegger en France*, ii, *Entretiens* 210–27 at 216.

[91] On his move to Denys see Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 150-161; idem, "Self-knowledge and God": 93–8 for his understanding of Augustine.

[92] Marion, *God without being*, xxi; see idem, "The Idea of God," i, 270–2.

[93] J.-L. Marion, "La conversion."

recognises that Blondel is also concerned to find how will transcends "all its objects as so many idols."[94] In fact, Trouillard, Duméry, and Marion meet, because in charity a Neoplatonic move to the One - Good beyond being, and to the will as free beyond the determinations of the *noetic*, are united. The French Canadian scholar of Neoplatonism (and great admirer of Jean Trouillard), George Leroux (born 1944), reminds us of the Plotinian origins of the first as undetermined free good will in his commentary on *Ennead* 6.8, the treatise "*On the Liberty and Will of the One*."[95]

At least initially Marion's refusal of ontology and metaphysics, especially as developed within modernity, forced as well a distance from Augustine. In his *Dieu sans l'être* of 1982, Marion rejected Augustine's theological ontology, judging that Augustine's interpretation of Exodus 3.14 is at the root of the conception of God as *idipsum esse* and that "Augustinian thought…finds itself…explicitly taken up according to the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics."[96] In that work Augustine was joining Aquinas who already in *The Idol and Distance* had been roundly criticised for standing within the tradition of onto-theo-logy, because he made being the first of God's names.[97] In the "Preface to the English Edition" of *God Without Being* published in 1991, and in "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie" of 1995, Marion recants these charges against Aquinas. [98] Aquinas is moved by him in the direction of Pseudo-Denys. Marion's "In the Name. How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'" of 1999 defends the teaching of Thomas against the accusation of falling within onto-theology. He writes:

> Even if Dionysius (or some other) understood the question of God on the basis of Being, this simple fact would not be enough to establish that he is inscribed within onto-theo-logy. That is, as we have tried to show in the privileged case of Thomas Aquinas, if an onto-theo-logy wants to attain conceptual rigor and not remain at the level of a polemical caricature, it requires first a concept of being, next a univocal application of this concept to God and creatures, and finally the submission of both to foundation by principle and/or cause. If these conditions are not met, if in contrast Being remains an inconceivable *esse*, without analogy, indeed *penitus incognitum*, then the mere fact that Being comes up is not enough to establish an onto-theo-logy.[99]

According to Marion, there is for Aquinas an irreducible difference between metaphysics and sacred doctrine which allows Aquinas "to think Being by the unknowability of God."[100] By this means, the doctrine of Aquinas has been Neoplatonised by Marion so

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[94] *Ibid.*: 38.

[95] G. Leroux (éd), Plotin, *Traité sur la liberté et la volonté de l'Un [Ennéade VI, 8 (39)]*.

[96] J.-L. Marion, *God Without Being*, 215, note 50 associating himself with a treatment of Augustine's doctrine of God by J.S. O'Leary. At 73–74, Augustine is placed with Thomas, but the Greek Fathers are absolved because being, for them, "returns to the Son, it could not in any way determine the triune divinity which therefore exceeds Being." At 215, note 51, Marion quotes with approval the remark of Derrida: "as a linguistic statement: 'I am he who am' is the admission of a mortal".

[97] J. -L. Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 142 & 212.

[98] J. -L. Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie": 33 & 65 for the *retractio*; for Marion's shift or "recantation" here, see Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 150–52 and Prouvost, "La tension irrésolue," 99–101. For later treatments of Aquinas, cf. Marion, "The Idea of God," 265–67.

[99] Marion, "In the Name," 30–1.

[100] Marion, "Saint Thomas et l'onto-théo-logie": 65 note 82; see also 33 note 2.

that it has become a kind of theo-onto-logy. God is before being which he gives even to himself. Marion's evaluation of Augustine also might, in principle, if his theology were found to subordinate being to God, follow the same path as his re-evaluation of Aquinas. Indeed, this seems to have happened in "*Mihi magna quaestio factus sum.*"[101] Significantly, this lecture, like "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie" contains a strong criticism of Heidegger's assimilation of Biblical revelation and Greek ontology.[102] Marion convicts him, as others also have,[103] of taking up "the metaphysical distinction par excellence of the *ens* into *finitum* and *infinitum*, introduced by Duns Scotus through to Suárez." He then asserts against human comprehension of itself and of being on the basis of the revelation about creation in Genesis:

> It is precisely the case, however, that what the Scripture says here establishes nothing certain and procures no clear and distinct knowledge whatsoever; on the contrary, its revelation of man as created in the image and likeness of God institutes an unknowing that is all the more radical in that it is founded in the incomprehensibility of God himself.[104]

Marion's recantation of his following of Heidegger remains nonetheless incomplete, especially as compared to the criticisms of Heidegger made by Jean-Marc Narbonne in *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis* which are thorough enough to enable a restoration of the Neoplatonic unification of religion, mysticism, and philosophy. Marion gets around Heidegger through a separation of the religious relation to God from the philosophical, this is, however, an insufficient evasion—if I may permitted to employ his phrase. His separation is of a kind which Augustine, Aquinas, and Denys, together with the later Neoplatonists, would not allow. On this account Marion cannot explain the unknowability of the divine *esse* in these three Christian theologians through a historically accurate embrace of their Neoplatonism. As a matter of fact, Marion has shifted Augustine and Aquinas toward Denys, and all three of them toward their Neoplatonic sources. Werner Beierwaltes has exhibited the Neoplatonic logic operating in the relation between unity and being in the theology of Denys. At its pinnacle Denys' Trinity subsists in the movement between the One-nonbeing and the One-Being of the Neoplatonic commentary on the *Parmenides* attributed by Hadot to Porphyry. This is the same commentary which is used to explain the philosophical origins of Augustine's trinitarian theology.[105] Beierwaltes employs what he supposes is the common filiation of the trinitarian speculations of Augustine, Denys, and Eriugena in order to draw the three together theologically. To put the matter in the language of Aubenque and Narbonne, these Greek and Latin trinities share the logic of a Neoplatonic apophatic ontology, "a metaphysics of pure being."

The Neoplatonising unification of Augustine and Denys has its first and, until Bonaventure and Nicholas Cusanus, its unrivalled greatest form, in Eriugena. [106] His absence from Marion and presence with Trouillard reveal something about their relations to

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[101] Marion, "*Mihi magna quaestio factus sum*": 4–7.
[102] *Ibid.*: 20–22; idem, "Saint Thomas et l'onto-théo-logie": 34–36.
[103] See Hankey, "Why Heidegger's 'History' of Metaphysics is Dead": 432–433.
[104] Marion, "*Mihi magna quaestio factus sum*": 21.
[105] W. Beierwaltes, "Unity and Trinity in Dionysius": 3–14; Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 166–68.
[106] See my "*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem*," 141–144 and "Dionysius becomes an Augustinian."

Neoplatonism. For Trouillard the most attractive Christian system is Eriugena's, who is, he suggests, "perhaps more Neoplatonist than Judaeo-Christian."[107] For Eriugena according to Trouillard:

> God does not know himself. And the reason for this ignorance, is that God is nothing.…God…remains…inaccessible to all thought and is communicable only as motion. Therefore we distinguish in God so to speak two levels: that of the Deity, which is an irremediably obscure centre, and that of God the Creator, who by the rays which he projects makes himself known through his creatures.…Our spirit is in itself a silent spontaneity and, nonetheless, manifests itself to the outside and to itself by signs and figures.…Because it is in the image of God, our mind is nothingness, and this is why it expresses the totality of the universe. Becoming the meanings which it emits, it creates itself in them, and nevertheless however refuses to define itself by its own creations.[108]

Like God, and indeed because it is image of God, our mind is incomprehensible to us. This is essentially the doctrine of Marion's "*Mihi magna quaestio factus sum*" and it is remarkable that Eriugena's unification of Denys and Augustine on this point is not mentioned in his lecture—it is impossible that Marion is ignorant of it. Is this because with Eriugena the Neoplatonic foundation of both of these Christian theologies becomes indubitable?

VII.   CONCLUSION

In the history I have traced Augustine has appeared both as a saviour from the deformities of contemporary Western culture and as at least a part of their cause. These are extreme judgments and we would normally suppose that they must come from looking at him from very distant perspectives. In fact, however, we have been circling about Augustine from within a range of views established by the ways in which French Catholic scholars, philosophers, and theologians of the last century took up the pagan and Christian Neoplatonisms developed in the three hundred and fifty years between Plotinus and Denys the pseudo-Areopagite. For me this demonstrates how powerfully the encounter between religion and Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy in late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages remains with us. When we recollect that, with Philo, the Jews had entered this interchange before the Christians had, and that Islam would do so after them, the inescapable necessity of our continuing engagement with what spirit did in that period is manifest. We may be attracted or repelled by the ways in which the French in the 20th-century made those ancient accomplishments actual, but we must be grateful to them for working out alternatives we are compelled to explore and evaluate for ourselves.

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[107] *Ibid.*, 6.
[108] J. Trouillard, "Érigène et la naissance du sens," 268 & 272.

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ABSTRACT

A retrieval of Neoplatonism is a powerful, widely, and significantly present, but little recognised, feature of twentieth-century French philosophy, theology, and spiritual life. It begins about one hundred years ago with Henri Bergson (1859-1941) with whom also its purposes and the modifications Neoplatonism undergoes in being adapted to the contemporary world begin to show. There are two major characteristics: it is generally opposed to the Western metaphysical tradition insofar as this is understood to determine modernity. It is also generally anti-Idealist, endeavouring to link the sensuous and corporeal immediately with an unknowable first Principle, a descendent either of the Neoplatonic One-Good or what is ineffably beyond that. This second characteristic sets the twentieth-century retrieval in opposition to that in the nineteenth century and even to the ancient and medieval Neoplatonisms generally. On both accounts this Neoplatonic retrieval has an ambiguous relation to Augustine, to the Augustinian tradition, and to "the unspoken but rampant neo-Augustinianism of twentieth-century French philosophy" (Jacob Schmutz).

The persistence of this neo-Augustinianism may be gathered from Jean-Luc Marion's inaugural lecture as Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Chicago: *Mihi magna quaestio factus sum*: The Privilege of Unknowing," just published in the *Journal of Religion*. Set under a text from Augustine, it connects

the unknowability of the human to that of God in order to oppose late medieval and modern ontology and the contemporary objectification of human life.

The lecture distinguishes three stages in the relations between this neo-Neoplatonism and this neo-Augustinianism. First with Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), their projects are identical. Second with Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), there is a strong criticism of the Augustinian tradition together with an endeavour to hold to Augustine as sharply distinguished from his late medieval and modern followers. The reason for this differentiation is that de Lubac discovers the late medieval and modern Augustinian tradition to be at the origins of the problems with modernity for which he is seeking a solution. Third with Jean Trouillard (1907-1984), Henry Dumery, Stanislas Breton (1912-2005), and others, there is a criticism of Augustine himself as a source for what is causing the destruction of transcendent religion in Western Christendom. Jean-Luc Marion's position mixes a number of these moments and the lecture closes with some remarks about it.

Figures and Dates

Nineteenth-Century Figures	Twentieth-Century continued
Maine de Biran (1766-1824)	Louis Althusser (1918-1990)
G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831)	Michel Henry (1922-2003)
F.W.J. Schelling (1775-1854)	Jean Pépin (1924-2005) (former priest)
Victor Cousin (1792-1867)	Michel Foucault (1926-1984)
K.L. Michelet (1801-1893)	Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)
Félix Ravaisson (1813-1900)	Claude Bruaire (1932-1986)
	Dominique Janicaud (1937-2002)
	Pierre Hadot (1922-2010) (former priest)
Twentieth-Century	**Currently Alive**
Alfred Loisy (1857-1940)	Le r.p. René Roques, Canon of Albi (born 1917)
Henri Bergson (1859-1941)	Pierre Aubenque (born 1929)
Maurice Blondel (1861-1949)	Henry Duméry (born 1920) (former priest)
Émile Bréhier (1876-1952)	Le r.p. Joseph Combès (born 1920)
Le r.p. Joseph Maréchal, s.j. (1878-1944)	Le r.p. Xavier Tillette s.j. (born 1921)
Le r.p. Pierre Rousselot, s.j. (1878-1915)	Le r.p. Henri-Dominique Saffrey o.p.
Jacques Maritain (1882-1973)	Le r.p. Édouard Jeauneau, Canon of
Louis Lavelle (1883-1951)	Chartres (born 1925)
Étienne Gilson (1884-1978)	Le r.p. Goulven Madec, Augustinian of the
Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)	Assumption (born 1930)
Eric Robertson Dodds (1893-1979)	Le r.p. É.-H. Wéber, o.p.
Le r.p. Marie-Dominique Chenu, s.j. (1895-1990)	Michel Tardieu (born 1938) (former priest)
S.E. Henri Cardinal de Lubac, s.j. (1896-1991)	Jean-François Courtine (born 1944)
Le r.p. André Festugière, o.p. (1898-1982)	Georges Leroux (born 1944)
Henri Gouhier (1898-1994)	Alain de Libera (born 1948)
Le r.p. Édouard des Places s.j. (1900-2000)	Luc Brisson (born 1946)
Arthur Darby Nock (1902-1963)	Jean-Luc Marion (born 1946)
S.E. Yves Cardinal Congar (1904-1995)	Olivier Boulnois
Paul Vignaux (1904-1987)	Philippe Hoffmann (born 1953)
S.E. Jean Cardinal Daniélou, s.j. (1905-1974)	Jean-Marc Narbonne (born 1957)
Raymond Klibansky (1905-2005)	
Le r.p. Paul Henry, s.j. (1906-1984)	
Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995)	

Le r.p. Jean Trouillard, Sulpicien, (1907-1984) Jean Beaufret (1907-1982) Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) A.H. Armstrong (1909-1997) Pierre Courcelle (1912-1980) Le r.p. Stanislas Breton, Passionist (1912-2005) L.G. Westerink (1913-1990)	