

BETWEEN AND BEYOND AUGUSTINE AND DESCARTES: MORE THAN A SOURCE OF THE
SELF¹

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Every Neoplatonist can show that the thinking and willing subject must be self-constituted. No modern, conscious of the diversity and connection of its Western forms, will deny that this self-constitution is historical. Some may not have attended to the central role of Augustine in making the Hellenistic move to the subject a foundation of Latin Christian culture. His unrivaled domination of the formative years of Latin mediaeval intellectual life may not be deemed important for the subsequent developments in which there is wider interest. However, no one who regards Descartes as essential to the construction of the modern self can deny the positive role of Augustine in Descartes' revolution. Despite the opposition of anti-Modern Christians, and of their postmodern heirs, to finding in Descartes a true successor of Augustine, my colleague Zbigniew Janowski has just published in a single year two books, *Cartesian Theodicy. Descartes' Quest for Certitude* and *Index Augustino-Cartésien. Textes et Commentaire*, proving the extent of this dependence even to Jean-Luc Marion.

Janowski concludes that before 1630 Descartes had read *De Doctrina Christiana*, and the *De Ordine* and *De Genesi ad Litteram* before 1637. Before 1641 he had read *De Immortalitate animae*, *De Quantitate animae*, *De Libero Arbitrio*, *De Trinitate*, *Confessiones*, *De Civitate Dei*, *Contra Academicos* and *De Vera religione*. The themes essential to the Cartesian metaphysics as presented in the *Meditations* which derive from Augustine include the following: the end of philosophy, i.e. knowledge of God and soul, that mathematics is certain whether we are awake or asleep, the evil genius, the *cogito*, the definition of soul, the notion of extension, the example of the wax, *Inspectio mentis*, that I am a middle between being and nothing, the explanation of the origin of error, that in intellectual vision there is no error, that understanding judges between the data of the senses, the definition of eternal truths, that God creates by the action of his knowing, and Inneism. Janowski determines: "Whatever the final judgment about the true relationship between Augustinianism and Cartesianism, one can safely conclude that even if Cartesianism is not the most faithful interpretation of the thought of St. Augustine, it is certainly a legitimate one"² The affiliation is profound, indeed: "Numerous passages that the Augustinians could recognize in the *Meditations* must have sounded to their ears as if the Saint himself was speaking."³ Moreover, Janowski shows that by means of Augustine, Descartes is transforming the conception of the self inherited from the Scholastics.

In consequence, we must not only praise Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, as many rightly have, for bringing the self to the fore within the Anglo-American philosophical world. In addition, we must recognise that his treatment of the Western self is remarkable in its scope. He has shown the need for a consideration which includes history (or which is, as he

¹ This essay was presented as a communication for the Atlantic Region Philosophers Association 2000 Conference: "Rethinking the Self," held in Halifax, Nova Scotia at the University of King's College in October, 2000. I am grateful to Stephen Boos for welcoming it into the Conference, and to my colleagues at King's: Ian Stewart, Neil Robertson, Zbigniew Janowski and John Duncan for encouraging comments and useful criticisms.

² Z. Janowski, *Index Augustino-Cartésien. Textes et Commentaire*, Histoire de la philosophie (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 162 and 173. This will appear in 2001 in an English edition from St. Augustine's Press.

³ Z. Janowski, *Cartesian Theodicy. Descartes' Quest for Certitude*, International Archives of the History of Ideas 168 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 148, see 90-101, 121-130, 141-149; of particular importance is his discussion of Augustine's influence on the Fourth Meditation at 128-130.

says, “analytical and chronological”⁴). Moreover, in showing us how the modern identity has been made, Taylor has reached back further than many would think necessary. As is required, he has put Augustine at the foundation of Cartesian modernity and of its account of the self. His assertion that “On the way from Plato to Descartes stands Augustine”⁵ is more than a chronological fact. It is a significantly true and necessary statement about our construction of ourselves.

Nonetheless, Taylor’s sketch of the sources of the western self involves problems, problems which are at the center of many present philosophical, historical and theological treatments of the self. My difficulties are not with what Taylor has written, but rather with what he leaves out. We should not be surprised if in the twelve hundred years between the *cogito* of Augustine and that of Descartes, subjectivity found and made for itself other sources, shapes and structures. These also make the modern identity and, just as importantly, belong also to its necessary deconstruction. I propose here to trace, as briefly as it can be done, the way from Augustine to them.

I. TAYLOR AND THE MODERN AND POSTMODERN AUGUSTINES

A. THE POSTMODERNS

By agreeing generally with Taylor’s representation of Augustine, I differ from Taylor’s critics who describe their own positions as postmodern.⁶ They are more or less heirs and imitators of Jacques Derrida.⁷ In their determination to deconstruct the modern self and to use Augustine for this project, they object to Taylor’s stress on Augustine’s move to the subject, and to his making central the interiority and intellectualism, the immediate “presence to self” and the self-sufficiency of Augustine’s *mens*. For example, John Milbank maintains that

What must be argued .. against Charles Taylor and others, is that Augustine’s use of the vocabulary of inwardness is not at all a deepening of Platonic interiority, but something much more like its subversion.⁸

He would prefer that the “radical reflexivity”⁹ of the Augustinian *mens* were left out in favour of what Taylor also notes, namely, that love is ultimate in the triadic *mens* and that the final trinity is that of love. Milbank would enthusiastically affirm with Taylor that “for Augustine the will is not simply dependent on knowledge.”¹⁰ These postmoderns are waging war on behalf of *praxis* and *poiêsis* as against *theoria*.¹¹ Thus, for Rowan Williams, the model of spirit

⁴ C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), x.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶ W.J. Hankey, “The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism in Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank and the Origins of Western Subjectivity in Augustine and Eriugena,” *Hermathena* 165 (Winter, 1998): 9-70 at 46.

⁷ See W.J. Hankey, “Self-knowledge and God as Other in Augustine: Problems for a Postmodern Retrieval,” *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 4 (1999): 83-127, at 84-93 and J. Milbank, “Postmodernité,” in *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, dirigé par Jean-Yves Lacoste, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 916-917.

⁸ J. Milbank, “Sacred Triads: Augustine and the Indo-European Soul,” *Modern Theology* 13 (1997): 451-474 at 465.

⁹ Taylor, *Sources*, 137.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See W.J. Hankey, “*Theoria versus Poesis*: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas,” *Modern Theology* 15:4 (October 1999): 387-415.

in Augustine is love “indeterminately in search of an object to love.”¹² “Created selfhood” is radically incomplete and other-directed. Knowledge arrives only at an awareness of “the lack and desire out of which we live.”¹³ Entering into oneself is reworked as self-othering love. Or as Susan Menel puts it:

Augustine’s faith (like Derrida’s deconstruction) is not an autonomous affirmation of a subject, but a response to the other; ... it opposes ... that self-identity that is fabricated on the basis of consciousness.¹⁴

This opposition to Taylor’s Augustine goes with a refusal to lead Augustine to Descartes. In establishing a postmodern reading of Augustine, Lewis Ayers tells us that he strongly disagrees with an understanding of Augustine’s work like Taylor’s which finds in it “the key building blocks of the modernist notion of the ‘self.’”¹⁵ By a reading of *De Trinitate* which would prevent comparison with Descartes’ *Meditations*, Rowan Williams endeavours to defend Augustine against what is for him the accusation that Augustine is a collaborator in “the fundamental illusion of modernity, the notion that the private self is the arbiter and source of value in the world.”¹⁶ Williams wishes to distinguish “Augustine’s discussion of the certitude of self-knowledge” from the Cartesian use of the thinking subject’s thought of its own activity as an “invulnerable epistemological datum.”¹⁷ By his account, Augustine’s refutation of Skepticism “is better described as an analysis of the grammar of the ‘subject’.” Jean-Luc Marion makes what seems to be the same distinction in order to serve a similar end. He proposes that, as opposed to Descartes’ *ego* which is established in

l’interlocution d’un trompeur, ... Augustin déduit l’existence directement du fait de se tromper soi-même ... donc de se penser, par simple identité de soi à soi: se tromper présuppose d’être et y équivaut par tautologie; l’argument augustinienne reste donc dans le cadre de l’identité de l’esprit à lui-même.¹⁸

Susan Menel discovers even less than this identity of the *ego*. She tells us that in Augustine’s exploration of “the boundaries of consciousness” he finds “not the self-present knowing subject of philosophy, but the changeable, unknowable self, deeply embedded in time and language.”¹⁹ However, despite the number and eminence of the interpreters, I judge that

¹² R. Williams, “*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*,” *Collectanea Augustiniana. Mélanges T.J. van Bavel*, [E *Augustiniana*, 40:1-4 (1990)], 331.

¹³ R. Williams, “The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in the *De Trinitate*,” J.T. Lienhard et al., eds., *Collectanea Augustiniana. Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum*, (New York & Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993), 127.

¹⁴ S. Menel, “Augustine’s ‘I’: The ‘Knowing Subject’ and the Self,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 291-324 at 324.

¹⁵ L. Ayres, “The Discipline of Self-Knowledge in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* Book X,” *The Passionate Intellect. Essays on the Transformations of the Classical Traditions*, Presented to Professor I.G. Kidd, ed. L. Ayres, Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities VII (New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 261. The treatment of Augustine’s self Ayres most directly confronts (as ahistorical and too Plotinian) is that of Edward Booth (note 7, 263-64).

¹⁶ Williams, “*Sapientia* and the Trinity,” 317.

¹⁷ Williams, “The Paradoxes,” 121.

¹⁸ J.-L. Marion, *Questions cartésiennes, II, Sur l’ego et sur Dieu*, Philosophie d’aujourd’hui (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 41; “Formulations augustinienne et cartésiennes” at 37-43 is Marion’s most extended treatment of differences between Descartes and Augustine on the *cogito*.

¹⁹ Menel, “Augustine’s ‘I,’” 309.

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these postmodern readings of Augustine are determinedly polemical. They are one-sided in such a way as to declare their self-conscious turn away from theoretical truth.

B. THE MODERN AUGUSTINE

In consequence, it is not difficult to place against the postmodern Augustine other treatments making just the opposite points. Mentioning only other Canadian scholars, there are Stephen Menn in his recent *Descartes and Augustine*,²⁰ or Brian Stock in *Augustine the Reader*, as well as in other works.²¹ Stock finds that Augustine “anticipates ... Descartes,” because, for them both: “Certainty can come only through a type of rational proof.” Stock shows that for Augustine, reason, deepening interiority, and self-certainty unite to *succeed* mere reading, and thus Scripture itself, in providing the necessary certainty. In this he compares Augustine to Descartes.²²

Significantly, for getting to a perspective *beyond* the contradiction between these accounts, both the postmodern interpretations and also those of Menn and Stock bring us back to a figure over whom Taylor skips too lightly, namely, Plotinus. Taylor mentions that “Augustine’s whole outlook was influenced by Plato’s doctrines as they were transmitted to him through Plotinus.”²³ He does not stay to notice, however, that, while Augustine follows Plotinus in the move to the subject as the way to knowledge and union, Augustine has radically conflated the multiple Plotinian selves. The single historical, self-conscious, rational and noetic self, which Taylor finds in Augustine, is the same self which Stock and Menn trace to Descartes through Augustine.²⁴ These interpreters note rightly that Plotinus has been used to found what in Augustine leads to Descartes, but they do not linger over the multiplicity of the Plotinian selves which is left behind.

Stock writes that Augustine’s arguments against Skepticism in the last books of the *De Trinitate*.

view the uncertainties of temporal existence ... against the background of the irrefutable knowledge of the mind’s existence. ... The reader .. reaches a new stage of interpretation *interiore modo* (8.1.29). ... The neoplatonic ascent that is reassessed at 8.2 and 10.5 is thus transformed into a normal method of intellectual progress: ‘Ascending inwardly, so to speak, by steps of contemplation through the soul’s

²⁰ S. Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and see W.J. Hankey, “Stephen Menn’s Cartesian Augustine: Metaphysical and Ahistorically Modern,” *Animus* 3 (1998) an electronic journal at <http://www.mun.ca/animus/1998vol3/1998vol3.htm>.

²¹ B. Stock, *Augustine the Reader. Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 261 ff.; idem, “Intelligo me esse’: Eriugena’s ‘cogito,’” *Jean Scot Érigène et l’histoire de la philosophie*, éd. R. Roques, (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1977), 327-335 at 333-4; idem, *La Connaissance de soi au Moyen Âge*, Leçon inaugurale faite de Vendredi 9 1998, Chaire internationale, Collège de France (Paris, Collège de France: 1998), 14-15. We must note also E. Booth, *Saint Augustine and the Western Tradition of Self-Knowing*, The Saint Augustine Lecture 1986 (Villanova: Augustinian Institute, Villanova University, 1989).

²² Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 261; idem, “Intelligo me esse’”: 334 considers likenesses and differences. See also G. O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind* (London: Duckworth, 1987), 171 with references to recent literature.

²³ Taylor, *Sources*, 127.

²⁴ For references see Hankey, “Self-knowledge and God as Other in Augustine’”: 105-111.

regions, we note the beginnings of an experience ... through which reason, arising in us, permits us to recognize the inner man.' [12.7.88-101]²⁵

For Menn, Descartes is responding to the felt need in the 17th century to develop from Christian “Augustinian principles a complete philosophy to replace that of Aristotle”. To search for wisdom, Augustine “makes central use of the discipline for contemplating the soul and God that Plotinus had developed in defense of Platonism”.²⁶ Augustine found in Plotinus the spiritual discipline of *conversio* and the intuitions which belong to that discipline, so that, knowing both himself and God as incorporeal substances, he was able to become a Christian. Menn maintains that Augustine took from Plotinus “a discipline of intellectual contemplation, understandings of soul and Nous and of the origin of evil ... and ... the essential *difference* between the soul and God (= Nous)”.²⁷ Menn judges that Augustine followed Plotinus in a “moral and intellectual discipline” which enabled him to come to “see” God and the other principles of corporeal things with the mind,²⁸ that these belong to Augustinian *sapientia*, and that Descartes followed Augustine in the same discipline to the same intuitions.

Menn is right that, for Plotinus, the self and the divine are known together as we ascend beyond the corporeal. It is a matter of fact that self-reflexivity and the knowledge of God do not divide until, at the pinnacle of this ascent, we turn to the One itself. Menn reports that “it is in our power, with an appropriate discipline, to understand [a noetic] incorporeal power, because we *are* such an incorporeal rational power”. The turn from bodies to the soul, which is this discipline, is “a turning to oneself”.²⁹ For Plotinus, and for Descartes under the Plotinian influence mediated by Augustine, “soul’s reflection on itself is the necessary point of departure for coming to a ... purely intellectual understanding of the realities underlying sensible phenomena.”³⁰ What is known in *Nous*, when soul turns to it in turning to itself, is a positive metaphysical content. These statements are all correct. They are, however, radically incomplete and are altogether one-sided as accounts of Plotinus’ on the self.

Menn’s account of Plotinus is very much limited by his project. Neither he nor Augustine are interested in what Menn calls “Plotinus’ doctrinal innovations” within Platonism.³¹ However, among these innovations Menn includes things absolutely essential to understanding Plotinus. Neither Menn nor Augustine consider the One in its distinction from *Nous*. There is an *itinerarium* from body to soul and from soul to *Nous*. This means that Menn does not notice the Plotinian doctrine of the multiple selves, or the problems with the continuity of self identity in *henosis*, or, generally, the problem of whether or how human individuality is established. He sees only what, viewed from within modernity, is the positive side of Plotinus’ teaching that the soul is rational and that the real self has access to intellectual reality. But, in truth, the One and the divided self are not small matters or insignificant problems within the thought of Plotinus. His doctrine of the One makes him

²⁵ Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 276-77; see R.D. Crouse, “St. Augustine’s *De Trinitate*: Philosophical Method,” *Studia Patristica*, XVI, pt. II, ed. E.A. Livingstone, *Text und Untersuchungen* 129 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 506-510.

²⁶ Menn, *Descartes*, 393.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80, n. 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 99, n. 18.

the founder of what we call Neoplatonism. Because of his teaching on the self, he becomes both a heretic within the school he is regarded as founding, and also lies behind a rich tradition on the self alternative to that leading from Augustine to Descartes.³²

C. A REVERSAL OF ROLES: AUGUSTINE BECOMES PLOTINUS

I have endeavoured to show elsewhere that, while Menn, like Taylor, neglects in Plotinus what Augustine leaves behind, the postmodern Augustinians make Augustine into a Plotinian precisely at the points where his differences from Plotinus really lie. In their attempt to retrieve Augustine as a pre-modern Christian thinker, they turn him back toward those aspects of Plotinus from which he wished to separate himself.³³ They have combined postmodern positions and Neoplatonism where it moves to the principle beyond thought and being. The apophatic and the theurgic aspects of post-Plotinian Neoplatonism are elevated against intellectual interiority. Augustine is assimilated to this other form of religious Platonism.³⁴

So, for example, Catherine Pickstock, a member of the “Radical Orthodoxy” collective led by John Milbank, celebrates Plato as leading “dialogue ... *into* doxology, which for Plato is our principle human function and language’s only possibility of restoration.”³⁵ In her *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, she seeks to open the self-closed objectified subject, which results from the modern division of subject and object. To this end it is essential that liturgy transform language so that material things are treated as numinous and are addressed as if personal.³⁶ By this means, Pickstock hopes to effect the restoration of a “living subject,” with “a substantive, though not completed identity,” having “a definite but open identity.”³⁷ In this restoration, John Milbank is satisfied that I am correct in linking him and Pickstock with “the [Pseudo-] Dionysian legacy of theurgic neoplatonism.”³⁸

Milbank interprets Augustine so as to draw him toward an apophatic Neoplatonism realised in charity and *poiēsis*. He refuses my “contrast of a Porphyrian Augustine and a theurgic [pseudo] Dionysius.” Instead, Milbank asserts:

Augustine also places the soul within the cosmos and in the *Confessions* finally realises his own self hood through losing it in cosmic liturgy. Nor is the Augustinian *cogito* Cartesian, for in Augustine our certainty of our own being, life and understanding is a certainty of intentional opening to these things, which are taken as innately transcendental realities, exceeding their instantiation in us. Thus no *res cogitans*, enclosed upon itself, is here reflexively established.³⁹

³² Cf. G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), 4-17.

³³ See my “Self-knowledge and God as Other in Augustine.”

³⁴ See Hankey “*Theoria versus Poesis*”: 387-97; idem, “The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism”: 9-33.

³⁵ C. Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 43.

³⁶ Ibid., 195ff.

³⁷ Ibid., 95, 199, 114, 118, 192, 211-12, 214.

³⁸ J. Milbank, “Intensities,” *Modern Theology* 15:4 (October 1999): 485 (“Intensities” is, in part, a response to my “*Theoria versus Poiēsis*” in the same issue.)

³⁹ Milbank, “Intensities”: note 142, 497.

The positive statements about soul within the cosmos are correct. They are, however, only one side of the picture. The rest of what he says is polemic. The Cartesian *cogito* is falsely characterised in order to make the contrast with Augustine sharper than it is and the self-reflexivity of the Augustinian *mens* is forgotten. Milbank goes on to praise Mennel's article quoted above. Her argument depends upon the same false oppositions; the ones needed for the same polemic against philosophy and "the Greek conceptual order" which have often characterised Milbank's own writing.⁴⁰

In my view, both Menn and Taylor are right to hold up the interiority and intellectualism, the immediate self-presence, transparency and self-reflexivity of Augustine's *mens*. However, in neglecting what of Plotinus is not carried into Augustine, Taylor's history of the self becomes seriously deficient. This neglected aspect of Plotinus, the aspect especially taken up by his pagan successors after Porphyry, is left out of our self-constitution. Descartes' revolution is depicted as a radical subjectivizing of Augustine's turn to the self. Augustine's interiorization of the moral objectivism of Socrates is represented as intensified in the modern revolution. Whatever else we made ourselves in the pre-modern past is forgotten. Taylor notes that the Western Middle Ages produced another direction of the self than the one which "starts from 'within'," namely the direction taken by Aquinas, a direction which moves to God "starting from external being."⁴¹ No account of the sources or the authority of this other way is given. The origins and character of what falls outside Taylor's narrow history of the self are lost. In fact, these are also to be found in what Plotinus and his heirs constructed.

II. THE OTHER NEOPLATONIC SELVES

A. AUGUSTINE AND A UNIFIED SELF

The philosophical point of departure for both Augustine and Plotinus is Skepticism. Augustine is much more explicit about this, and one of his first works, the philosophical dialogue *Contra Academicos*, provides evidence. Though a necessary beginning for his philosophical thought, the refutation of the Academics is not something which can be left behind as he advances into theology. It is repeated in later works and remains essential to the highest reaches of his most developed theology. For the mature writing of Augustine, along with the *Confessions*, his *De Trinitate* is the most important work for understanding what he makes of the self.

The *De Trinitate* is a step-by-step deepening of the conviction that we are essentially rational, what this means, what it makes possible and what it requires.⁴² It certainly requires self-attention and the recognition of the goodness of self-knowledge.⁴³ When, after many steps, Augustine finally arrives at the consideration of the inner and superior reason, and of the image of the Trinity which belongs to it, he makes his principle explicit. The image of the Trinity in humans has been impaired by sin but not lost: "Behold!" he says, "the mind ... remembers itself, understands itself, and loves itself; if we perceive this, we perceive a

⁴⁰ Mennel, "Augustine's 'I'": 291 and see W.J. Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot," *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, edited by Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, Studies in Christian Origins (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 139-184 at 145-161.

⁴¹ Taylor, *Sources*, 143; see also 141.

⁴² Augustinus, *De trinitate*, (ed. W. J. Mountain et F. Glorie, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* 50, Turnhout 1968), lib. II, cap. XVI 27, cap. II, cap. XVII 28; lib. III, cap. II 8; lib. III, cap. X 21; lib. IV, cap. I; lib. XI, cap. I; lib. XII, cap. XV 24; XIV passim; lib. XV, cap. XV 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, lib. V, cap. I 2; lib. IX, cap. XI 16; X passim.

Trinity, not yet God indeed, but now finally an image of God.”⁴⁴ If the essential incorporeal rationality of the human soul were to be denied, and if its immediate and certain possession of the truth in the self-reflexive union of knowing and being could be overturned, nothing in his whole gigantic theological argument would stand. This is why Augustine returns to his refutation of the Skeptics in the final book of the *De Trinitate*.⁴⁵

Plotinus’ move away from Skepticism is no less central than that of Augustine, but, assumed throughout, it appears explicitly only rarely. Though a turn to the unbreakable union of thought and being in the noetic identity of knower and known is common to both of these Platonists, there are profound differences in their approaches. These are differences of the greatest importance for the history of the western self -- and for this paper. For Augustine, the human mind is unshakably certain of its own being at the point where, in pure self-knowing, it finds the unity of being, reason and life (or being, thinking, and willing). Plotinus’ divine spiritual hierarchy and its human analogue are both flattened out within Augustine’s divine and human Trinities. The divine becomes a circular activity of interpenetrating consubstantial hypostases. The human becomes the rational self-relation and certainty of a unified historical and immortal individuality. Human reason holds the self together. It is, for Augustine, simultaneously above and below, intellectual and historical, wisdom and science.⁴⁶

Augustine knows the inherited Platonic hierarchy of the forms of apprehension. The Neoplatonic development of the distinctions in Plato’s line, distinctions elaborated with the greatest of care by the Greek Neoplatonists, especially by those who follow Iamblichus, and central to later Latin thinkers like Boethius, are used by him. He subordinates *ratio* to *intellectus*, which is mind regarded as turned upward toward immutability and simplicity. *Ratio* exists as *scientia*, which, looking to the temporal, considers what is below the soul, even if, in the temporal and mutable, it properly seeks the immaterial and eternal. Reason and science may be opposed both to *ratiocinatio*, below them, as well as to *intellectus* and *sapientia*, above. The *acies* or *oculus* of the mind is the place of higher union.

Equally, however, frustrating scholars, Augustine ignores these distinctions. As Todd Breyfogle puts it: “Employing characteristically inconsistent terminology, Augustine often conflates *intellectus*, *mens*, *spiritus*, *animus*, and *cogitatio*, underscoring the fundamental unity of the soul.”⁴⁷ He speaks interchangeably of the human, and of the human mind, as rational and intellectual, and designates the intellect as *ratio superior*. Reason is not tightly separated from intellect, nor angelic from human cognition. In the contrast with intellectual vision, the mutability of reason and the subordination of reason to intellect’s grasp of changeless divine truth, appear. But, crucially, reason in returning to itself, binds all the relations of the human self together. Reason sees its own mutability and is aware both of its success and also of its failure. It discerns both the eternal and unchangeable above, and also its own inferiority. Because mind grasps its own relation to the superior light by which it estimates its own character and place, its truth and its error, Augustine can demonstrate to reason its dependence on the eternal truth.

⁴⁴ Ibid., lib. XIV, cap. VIII 11 (*CCL* 50), p. 436, 14-16: “Ecce ergo mens meminit sui, intellegit se, diligit se. Hoc si cernimus, cernimus trinitatem, nondum quidem deum sed iam imaginem dei”. Cf. also lib. XIV, cap. XII 16.

⁴⁵ Ibid., lib. XV, cap. XII 21. Cf. also lib. XIV, cap. XIX 26.

⁴⁶ See the notices by W.J. Hankey on “*Ratio*, Reason, Rationalism,” and “Mind,” and by T. Breyfogle on “*Intellectus*,” and R.D. Crouse on “Knowledge” in *Saint Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia*, edited Allan Fitzgerald, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 696-702, 563-67, 452-454 and 486-488, respectively.

⁴⁷ Breyfogle, “*Intellectus*,” 453.

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The Platonic notion of intellect as self-moving in a return upon itself pervades Augustine's thought. He argues that, because it is immaterial, mind is by nature present to itself as a whole. Crucially, for him in distinction from Plotinus, this complete self-presence belongs to human mind. Its result, for Augustine, is immediate self-knowledge. Because of the identity of knower and known, thought and being, present to human thinking, Augustine supposed Skepticism to be refuted. Thus, what appears to other more refined thinkers as confused conflation or inconsistency enables Augustine to draw all forms of apprehension and will into the rational self-consciousness of the historical individual. However, Plotinus addresses a more radical Skepticism than that which Augustine refutes and, as a result, he cannot adopt such a position.

B. THE MULTIPLE SELVES OF PLOTINUS

Ennead V. 1, On the Three Primary Hypostases begins from the audacious soul, thinking itself to belong to itself, delighting in its otherness and illusory independence. Running as far away from its origins as possible, it is, Plotinus judges, dependent, in fact, upon the sensible below it. This is the Skeptical soul which has returned to itself when it found that it was not able to pass from the sensible to the ideal in the Platonic manner. Not able to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, it was thrown back upon itself and discovered there, to its surprise, that it was content. With itself, the soul achieved quietude, an ideal it had sought in knowledge of the truth. Beginning as disappointed Platonists, Skeptics now decide, especially in opposition to their representation of the Stoics, that moving in judgment between the true and the false, the good and the evil, would not have provided quietude at all.⁴⁸ What the self had mistakenly sought in otherness it now possesses better in itself.

Beginning from this illusory independence, Plotinus exploits the assumption of an ideal in the Skeptical quest for quietude.⁴⁹ He administers a two-fold discipline to this soul, established in a reflexive relation to the sensible as obstacle. By these disciplines it will know its true origin and worth. One part of that discipline is a contempt for the sensible. The other part is a turning inward to where the individual discovers the three primary hypostases: Soul, *Nous*, and the One.

So far as the difference from Augustine is concerned, it is crucial that the Skepticism of Sextus Empiricus, which I have just described, is far from being based solely on the deceptiveness of the senses. Rather, as Sextus Empiricus says, it opposes appearances to each other, appearances to objects of thought, and objects of thought to each other.⁵⁰ Because Skeptical questions can be raised in respect to thought itself, as Plotinus makes clear in *Enneads V. 3* and *V. 5*, in order to refute Skepticism, it is not enough to move from the deceptive senses to the identity of thought and being in the unity of thought with itself.

Plotinus is in accord with Augustine both that such a move is necessary for the human soul and that it is possible, so far as the soul can move to the identity of knower and known in the noetic. His primary difference from Augustine is that Plotinus regards the identity of thought as derived from a unity which is before and beyond self-conscious thought. Secondly, and consequently, because Plotinus more sharply distinguishes human soul and *Nous* than Augustine does, he does not think that the self-related identity of *Nous*

⁴⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Bk. I, cap. XII-XIII; cf. J. Allen, "The Skepticism of Sextus Empiricus," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Tl. II: Principat, Bd. 36: Philosophie, Wissenschaften, Technik, 4. Tielband: Philosophie (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1987), 2597-2599.

⁴⁹ On the end which the Skeptical quest assumes see Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Bk. I, xii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I, xiii.

can bind together all the forms of the human self. The human individual ultimately has a relation to the One beyond *Nous*. This is its fundamental ground, a ground beyond reflexive self-consciousness.

As to the first step from sense to thought, Dominic O'Meara writes: "To defend the possibility of truth, in Plotinus' view we must reject" the assumption of the Skeptic that "the object known is exterior to (or other than) the subject who knows."

The possibility of true knowledge can be realized if the object known is the same as the subject that knows: "So that [Plotinus writes in *Ennead* V. 5] the real truth agrees, not with another, but with itself, and does not say something else besides itself, but what it says, it is, and what it is, it says."⁵¹

This life of "real truth" is the life of *Nous*, the Intellectual hypostasis, a thinking which knows its derivation from a unity prior to its own subject - object structure and the return upon self of thought. In the immediately following sections of *Ennead* V. 5 Plotinus speaks of the dependence of mind on the "pure real One unrelated to anything else."⁵²

The multiplicity of the Plotinian selves, which this doctrine requires, emerges in his study of self-knowledge in *Ennead* V. 3. As souls, we are connected to and turned toward body, as well as being dependent upon and turning toward intellect above soul. In addition, we are also seeking the simplicity which is the One beyond *Nous*. The Skeptic is able to undermine self-knowledge. O'Meara summarizes the argument of Sextus Empiricus, which Plotinus clearly has in mind, as follows:

If something knows itself, then it knows either as whole or as a part. If it knows as a whole, then nothing is left in it to be the object known. And if knows as a part, then one part of it knows another part of it. But this is not self-knowledge.⁵³

The human soul, with its divided form of knowing (ratiocination), and with its dependence on the otherness of sense and of image, as well as on the intellect above it, moves between states which it cannot hold together in one complete knowing. It can neither be the knowledge which contains the parts in a simple knowledge which is simultaneously universal and singular, nor can it know the whole with the whole of itself. For Plotinus, such knowledge is possible only for separated *Nous*, and yet *Nous* only possesses it in such a way as to point beyond its own simplicity to the absolute identity of the One.⁵⁴

Plotinus writes of *Nous*:

⁵¹ Dominic J. O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 39, quoting *Ennead* V.5.2, 18-20.

⁵² *Ennead* V.5.4, 7-8. My references are to the *Enneads* are to the 7 volume edition and translation by A.H. Armstrong in the Loeb series.

⁵³ O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 40.

⁵⁴ See L. Gerson, "Introspection, Self-reflexivity, and the Essence of Thinking according to Plotinus," in J.J. Cleary, ed., *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 153-173 at 164-165 and Jean-Yves Blandin, "Penser, c'est regarder en direction du Premier," *Études sur Plotin*, éd. M. Fattal (Paris/Montreal: L'Harmattan, 2000), 129-148; and P. Kalligas, "Living Body, Soul, and Virtue in the Philosophy of Plotinus," *Dionysius* 18 (2000): 25-38.

All will be at the same time one: intellect, intellection, the object of intellection. If therefore its intellection is the object of intellection, and this object is [intellect], intellect will then think itself.⁵⁵

Plotinus tells us again and again that this self-objectification remains divided and reflexive. In consequence, he regards it as dependent on a more unified activity. This, which is the “true and pure One,” he compares to the activity of “pure light.”⁵⁶ Therein the unity of what is illuminated and what illuminates is prior to a reflexion which distinguishes subject and object. The One cannot be self-reflexive.⁵⁷ Self-reflection would divide the One, placing it above and below itself, as if it received itself from itself as from another.⁵⁸ What is true of the soul which exists from another, and needs above all to know this alterity, cannot be true of the One.⁵⁹ There is no reflexive self-othering within the One.

These differentiations have consequences. As one result, there must be at least three human selves and they cannot be unified in a single self-consciousness. There is the historical or empirical self, moving between what is below it and above it. There is the *noetic* self, always in contemplation within the life of *Nous*, a contemplation on which our psychic knowing is dependent but of which it is only intermittently aware. Finally, there is what Plotinus calls “erotic *Nous*”, what the *Chaldean Oracles* calls the “flower of the intellect.” This is mind as it turns toward the One which it cannot hold as an object of thought within its self-reflexive knowing.⁶⁰ Awareness, when we are with the One, is beyond reason and intellectual self-reflection. There, the individual is returned to itself and yet “he is not himself.” Such awareness is also intermittent.⁶¹ Certainly, there, self-knowledge and apprehension of the One cannot be held together. We are beyond being and self-knowledge because the One is itself beyond being and reflexive knowing.⁶² Plotinus writes: “Intellect ... has one power for thinking, by which it looks at the things in itself, and one by which it looks at what transcends it by a direct awareness and reception.”⁶³ He refuses to resolve this difference between forms of awareness into one unified thinking.

⁵⁵ *Ennead* V.3.5, 43-45 as quoted by O’Meara at 41.

⁵⁶ *Ennead* VI.9.9, 58.

⁵⁷ See my argument at “Self-knowledge and God,” 113-114.

⁵⁸ *Ennead* VI.8.16; VI.9.6; V.1.6. J. Trouillard, “Pluralité spirituelle et unité normative selon Blondel,” *Archives de philosophie* 24 (1961): 22-28 at 24 contrasts this Plotinian position with that of Augustine. For studies bearing on the relation between the question of the consciousness of the One and the identity of the human self, cf. F. M. Schroeder, “Synousia, Synaesthesia and Synesis: Presence and Dependence in the Plotinian Philosophy of Consciousness,” and K. Corrigan, “Amelius, Plotinus and Porphyry on Being, Intellect and the One. A Reappraisal,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Tl. II: Principat, Bd. 36: Philosophie, Wissenschaften, Technik, 1. Tielband: Philosophie (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1987), 677-699, especially n. 40 and Tl. II: Principat, Bd. 36: Philosophie, Wissenschaften, Technik, 2. Tielband: Philosophie (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1987), 989-991, respectively.

⁵⁹ Plotinus, *Ennead* V.1.3; VI.8.12, 1-12; VI.9.1, p. 304, 42-p. 306, 43; VI.9.3, 20-22.

⁶⁰ See I. Perczel, “L’‘intellect amoureux’ et l’‘un qui est.’ Une doctrine mal connue de Plotin,” *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* 15 (1997): 223-264.

⁶¹ *Ennead* V.5.4.

⁶² Plotinus, *Ennead* VI.9.4; VI.9.7, 20-21; VI.9.8, 25-30; VI.9.9, 56-60 and VI.9.10; VI.9.11. This side of Plotinus, with its difference from “traditional Western theologians from St. Augustine onwards” is strongly presented in A. H. Armstrong, “The Escape of the One,” reprinted in: idem, *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London: Variorum, 1979). Compare *Plotin Traité 9 [VI, 9]*, Introduction, traduction, commentaire et notes par P. Hadot (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 40-54.

⁶³ Plotinus, *Ennead* VI.7.35 (*Loeb* 7), p. 196, 20-23, in the second kind of seeing, the intellect in love “mingles his seeing with what he contemplates.”

The problem for self-conscious identity is that both the One and also the substantial being of intellectual self-relation are models and causes of the human self.⁶⁴ The two highest hypostases are both the goals of its quest for freedom and authentic existence.⁶⁵ Ultimately, as Plotinus makes explicit in Treatise VI. 9, which Porphyry placed appropriately at the end of the *Enneads*, the One and the human individual belong together.⁶⁶ The One is “the root of soul.”⁶⁷ In reaching the One, the soul arrives at “itself.” The alone belongs to the alone.⁶⁸

C. MOVING TO AQUINAS

With this conclusion we have arrived at the result of the Plotinian struggle against Skepticism and his solution too soon. By returning to an earlier stage, we shall find our way also to Thomas Aquinas and the tradition other than the Augustinian which emerges within Neoplatonism for viewing the self.

We reach this, in part by means of a chapter by another Canadian scholar, Kevin Corrigan, “L’auto-réflexivité et l’expérience humaine dans l’*Ennéade* V, 3 [49], et autres traités: de Plotin à Thomas d’Aquin.”⁶⁹ Skepticism is not what interests Corrigan in this treatise, *Ennead* V. 3, “On the Knowing Hypostases and that which is Beyond.” Nonetheless, the treatise, in fact, begins with the problems posed by the Skeptics in regard to the self-knowledge of what is complex. Plotinus assumes that the simple is what has the power to think itself by a return upon itself.⁷⁰ But human knowing, so far as it is dependent on sense perception and proceeds by ratiocination, is not simple.⁷¹ We are not intellect, *Nous*, but *dia noia*, reasoning, (the derivation of the word is crucial for him) and *dia noia* is not strictly *ousia* in the way that *Nous* is. Ours is not the being which has complete return. Corrigan follows Werner Beierwaltes in seeing that Plotinus solves the problem posed by Sextus Empiricus by placing true self-knowledge above soul. In opposition to the Skeptic, for Plotinus, the thought which has complete self-return is above the human soul. The simple identity of *Nous* is placed beyond its “pensée morcelée”.⁷² This solution has a high cost, however.

On the one hand, this solution requires that there is a simplicity beyond intellect. In order to stand against one horn of the Skeptical attack on self-knowledge, namely, that “if mind knows as a whole, then nothing is left in it to be the object known,” the intellect must have interior difference. Its activity must involve at least a subject - object distinction, that is, the thought - being distinction. Moreover, *Nous* is self-knowing because it has self-reversion. The consequence of such complexity is that *Nous* must have a prior.

On the other hand, to stand against the other horn of the attack on self-knowledge, namely, that “if it knows as a part, then one part of it knows another part of it,” the self must be divided. Because the human soul is only a participant in the self-identical activity of *Nous*, the human must be divided into several hierarchically ordered selves.⁷³

⁶⁴ See my “Self-knowledge and God”: 114-115.

⁶⁵ *Ennead* VI.8.6-7; VI.8.9; VI.8.12-13; VI.8.16-24.

⁶⁶ *Ennead* VI.9.1, 43-44; VI.9.2ff: especially, VI.9.4, 7-10; VI.9.8, 25-30; *Ennead* VI.9.7, 20-21; VI.9.11, 24-25.

⁶⁷ *Ennead* VI.9.9, 2.

⁶⁸ *Ennead* VI.9.11, 39 and 51.

⁶⁹ K. Corrigan, “L’auto-réflexivité et l’expérience humaine dans l’*Ennéade* V, 3 [49], et autres traités: de Plotin à Thomas d’Aquin,” *Études sur Plotin*, éd. M. Fattal (Paris/ Montreal: L’Harmattan, 2000), 149-172.

⁷⁰ *Ennead* V.3.1 and Corrigan, “L’auto-réflexivité,” 149-150.

⁷¹ *Ennead* V.3.3 & 4 and Corrigan, “L’auto-réflexivité,” 150-151.

⁷² Corrigan, “L’auto-réflexivité,” 155.

⁷³ See, for example, *Ennead* V.1.10 & 11.

If we were to stop with these consequences, we would get what postmoderns like Sara Rappe find and affirm in Plotinus, namely, a vertically ordered series of subjects rather than the single subject-object opposition associated by them with Descartes.⁷⁴ Corrigan puts it thus:

The composed subjects of Plotinus are not then “objects” in the modern sense of the subjective-objective dichotomy, but subjects or substrats -- in the ancient sense of the word -- already anchored in a dialogical auto-reflexivity.⁷⁵

But not all of us may wish to stop here. Certainly the history of philosophy did not. It took one path via Augustine to Descartes. It took another to Aquinas. How do we get from here to Aquinas? How do we come to a self which cannot know itself by a turn *interiore* but rather ascends only through its turn to the empirically perceived other? In fact, the route passes through Iamblichus and his opposition to the Plotinian account of the self, and also by way of Proclus and something of Proclus which derives from Plotinus.

D. THROUGH IAMBlichUS TO AQUINAS.

Because, for Plotinus, part of the soul always remains above in noetic contemplation, soul and the historical self will not come together more than temporarily. The continual thinking in the realm of *Nous*, which would give a self-conscious identity to the self, must remain mostly hidden to “the other man,” the historical one. Iamblichus judged that if we were always so conscious, we must all always be happy. A Stoic confusion of the universal and the individual would be permanent. He wrote:

If when the best part of us is perfect, then the whole of us is happy, what would prevent us all, the whole human race, from being happy at this moment, if the highest part of us is always enjoying intellection, and always turned towards the gods? If the Intellect [*Nous*] is this highest part, that has nothing to do with the soul. If it is a part of the soul, then the rest of the soul also must be happy.⁷⁶

The opposed way to bring self and soul together is to have the whole soul descend, none of it remaining above.

This way Iamblichus and Proclus took.⁷⁷ It unites psychology and experience and effectively shifts, against Plotinus, as Augustine also shifted relative to him, the continuing identity of the self to the side of historical self-conscious experience. Gregory Shaw writes:

The Iamblichean soul has two lives, but because of its embodied condition it could only know one of them. ... The “one person” that Iamblichus knew himself to be ...

⁷⁴ S. Rappe, “Self-knowledge and subjectivity in the *Enneads*,” *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L. Gerson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 250-274 and idem, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*, (Cambridge, Cambridge U. P.: 2000), 28ff.

⁷⁵ Corrigan, “L’auto-réflexivité,” 161.

⁷⁶ Iamblichus, *In Platonis Dialogos Commentarium Fragmenta*, trans. J. Dillon (Leiden: Brill, 1973): (Frag. 87), 201. On the Stoics, see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 73.

⁷⁷ E.R. Dodds, ed., Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), xx; Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 109. For a fuller treatment see my “The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism”: 53-57.

was the completely descended soul identified with its particular mortal body. Indeed, the *self*-consciousness of any soul was rooted in this identification.⁷⁸

This shift makes possible saving the historical human individual. But salvation requires theurgy's turn to the material media.

Iamblichus' soteriology as theurgy was most significantly distinguished from the soteriology of his predecessors because "theurgy promised salvation to the soul without relieving it of its self-alienation."⁷⁹ The return of the Iamblichean-Procline totally-descended soul toward the One demands that what is above be accessible to the alienated individual and operate graciously toward it. Grace, not an effort to lift the self towards its higher intellectual life, predominates: "the soul's access to the divine must come 'from without' (*exotben*) which was one rationale for the practice of rituals given *exotben*, from the gods."⁸⁰ With Iamblichus and his successors, the saving ascent is not possible in virtue of a division of the self and a move *interiore*. Rather a move to the external is possible and necessary because of a hierarchical and hieratic division among humans. A god-like, entirely purified priest takes the place of the Plotinian noetic soul always above.⁸¹ In the Iamblichean Neoplatonism, there must be, and there is, a mediatorial hierarchy. In working out this mediation, psychology coheres not only with a theology, a soteriology, the structure of the spiritual community but also with an ontology, a cosmology and a mathematics.

This alternative to the Augustinian solution to the Hellenistic quest for salvation has its Christian future in great part through the Pseudo-Dionysius. Pseudo-Dionysius blessed the turn to Aristotle and the empirical in the Thirteenth century. In his *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, the fruit of his first teaching in Paris (1252-1254), Thomas judged *Dionysius autem fere ubique sequitur Aristotelem, ut patet diligenter inspicienti libros eius*.⁸² Though he later detected a Platonic style and thinking in Dionysius, attention to the last articles of the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*, as well as much else, will attest that, for Thomas, Dionysius still gave Christian authority for the turn to the sensible in the ascent to God.⁸³

E. BY WAY OF PROCLUS TO AQUINAS.

⁷⁸ Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 108-9.

⁷⁹ G. Shaw, "The Geometry of Grace. A Pythagorean Approach to Theurgy," *The Divine Iamblichus. Philosopher and Man of Gods*, ed. H.J. Blumental & E.G. Clark, (London: Duckworth, 1993), 116 and *Theurgy and the Soul*, 64ff.

⁸⁰ Shaw, "The Geometry of Grace," 118.

⁸¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* I.11, 41.4-11; V.15, 219-220, [Iamblique, *Les mystères d'Égypte*, éd. Édouard des Places, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1966), 62, 169-71]; see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 51-7, 108-10; idem, "The Geometry of Grace," 116. Compare Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* I.2 372D and *Letter 8*; see Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 92-4.

⁸² Aquinas, *In Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, vol. 1 (of 8), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, ed. R. Busa, (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann - Holzboog, 1980), lib. 2, dist. 14, quest. 1, art. 2, p. 164. A consideration of the fundamental reasons for this apparently strange association is E. Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers*, Cambridge Studies in medieval life and thought III, 20, (Cambridge: CUP, 1983). On his assimilation of Dionysius and Aristotle, see also F. O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 83-105.

⁸³ See W.J. Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation," *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident, Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994*, ed. Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris, 1997), 422 ff.

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But the Pseudo-Dionysius is not the only “pseudo” at work in forming Thomas’ Aristotelianism. He attributed the *Liber de causis* to Aristotle until the last years of his life. Only in 1268, when he acquired William of Moerbeke’s translation of the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus, did Thomas discover that it was largely excerpted from Proclus.⁸⁴ Corrigan takes us to Propositions 15 and 83 of the *Elements*: “All which is capable of turning toward itself is incorporeal” and “All which is capable of self-knowledge is capable of every form of self-reversion.” He observes:

The immediate self-reflection of incorporeal beings is the essence of self-knowledge ... this does not exclude some inferior forms of self-knowledge, even by means of perception and reasoning, but they are not the essence of self-knowledge. Whence arises the position of Aquinas for whom the incarnate soul does not know itself by its own essence but only by its acts.⁸⁵

A line can be traced from Plotinus through Porphyry, Proclus and the *Liber de causis* which delivers to Aquinas this distinction.⁸⁶ Proposition 15 of the *Liber de causis* states: “Every knower knows its essence. Therefore, it reverts to its essence with a complete reversion” (*rediens ad essentiam suam reditione completa*).⁸⁷ Thomas attributes self-knowledge to incorporeal beings, in virtue of their *reditio completa*. By arguments drawn from the *Liber* and from the Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas shows in the *Summa Theologiae* that God must have self-knowledge. Self-reversion and self-knowledge belong by essence to the simple incorporeal. What is composite must be brought into act by the exterior in order to know itself. In consequence, as Plotinus also did, Aquinas denies to humans both simple being and immediate self-knowledge. Thomas treats human individuality very differently than Plotinus does, and there are many other differences which separate them, but for fundamentally the same reasons, with Thomas self-knowledge does not belong to the human soul essentially. In his reaction against Aquinas and Scholasticism, Descartes turns to Augustine on the definition of the human and the essential self-knowledge of the human soul.⁸⁸ By this leap across twelve hundred years, he can attribute immediate self-knowledge to the *ego*.

III. CONCLUSION

At least two forms of subjectivity spill from Plotinus into Western philosophy, and their interaction fills the period between Augustine and Descartes. Subjectivity is constructed in the Latin West by the synthesis, opposition and confusion of two contrary traditions originating in but developed beyond and against Plotinus. Far from being an exclusively Augustinian period, in general, the Middle Ages comes to hold self-reflexive knowledge and will within a prior simplicity. Put differently, and in Christian terms, it contains Augustine within the pseudo-Dionysius. More and more the Latins thought in terms of a system of

⁸⁴ See W.J. Hankey, “Aquinas and the Platonists,” for *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period -- A Lexicographic Approach*, edited by Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen and Stephen Gersh, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, in press.

⁸⁵ Corrigan, “L’auto-réflexivité,” 157.

⁸⁶ See Corrigan, “L’auto-réflexivité,” 157-159 and W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself. Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 96ff.

⁸⁷ Aquinas, *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*, ed. H.-D. Saffrey, Textus Philosophici Friburgenses 4/5 (Fribourg: Société Philosophique, Louvain: Éditions E. Nauwelaerts, 1954), 88.

⁸⁸ Janowski, *Index Augustino-Cartésien*, 126-128, 136-142.

total mediation. They agreed with Iamblichus that the immediate access of the Augustinian and Plotinian soul to the divine ideas did not provide an adequate account of human experience.

I quote Gregory Shaw again:

Dodds noted that Iamblichus introduced the “law of mean terms” to the Platonists which allowed him to bridge the gap between the intransigent unity of the One and the dividedness of the Many.⁸⁹ By postulating a middle term, or, as it turns out, middle *terms*, Iamblichus established a continuity between irreconcilable extremes, a principle of mediation that became one of the most important elements in post-Iamblichean Platonism.⁹⁰

In the law of the mean term, we encounter what the West will call the *lex divinitatis*, the divine law of total mediation to which grace and nature both will be submitted by Latin theologians and philosophers at least up to the 17th century.⁹¹ All extremes are mediated, there is no movement from the bottom to the top except through a middle term. By this law of vertical integration, the flattened Augustinian self-reflexive human subjectivity, which immediately knows itself and also mirrors and touches God, is cosmically placed.

In the Iamblichean-Procline scheme, the human has no immediate access to intellection, the knowing in which ourselves and the whole are seen. We can return neither to ourselves nor to the Absolute as if they were always present to us and, so, as if from nowhere. The place of the soul must be known, and we must know how, from that place, return is possible. Its place is, in fact, in the middle, at the horizon of the material and the intellectual.⁹² Placed, as humans are, at the middle, and not being able to return immediately, if we are to return to the absolute source at all, we must turn in relation to the whole, including the material. So, it must both in fact be the case, and also be able to be shown to be the case, that every place may be a way back, provided that every means is used. The result is that system becomes essential to philosophy.

Proclus is the great developer of the *genre* of explicit system among the pagans. Those who unify Proclus and Augustine among the Christians follow him. Boethius is first with his *Consolation of Philosophy* to make its necessity evident.⁹³ Eriugena, explicitly balancing Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius, produces the first total system in Latin.⁹⁴ Boethius and Eriugena, and their blending of the two ways for constructing the self fall between Augustine and a renewal, simplifying and strengthening of the Augustinian pattern in Anselm. His

⁸⁹ Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, xxi-xxii.

⁹⁰ G. Shaw, “Theurgy as Demiurgy: Iamblichus’ Solution to the Problem of Embodiment,” *Dionysius*, 12 (1988): 39-40.

⁹¹ See W.J. Hankey “Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6”, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 64 (1997): 59-93; idem, “Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold,” 164-65; idem, “Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation in John Colet, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker and the Cardinal Bérulle,” *Augustinus in der Neuzeit. Von Petrarca zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Dominique de Courcelles, (Editions Brepols-Turnhout, 1998), 125-165.

⁹² Hankey, *God in Himself*, 32-3; Patrick Quinn, *Aquinas, Platonism and the Knowledge of God*, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996), 52-65.

⁹³ See W.J. Hankey, “*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem*: Knower and known in the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius and the *Prologion* of Anselm”, *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, edited by John Inglis, Richmond [England]: Curzon Press, 2001, in press.

⁹⁴ See Hankey, “The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism”: 62-67.

famous argument, emerging from Benedictine meditation on Augustine's *De Trinitate*, will reappear in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Like the latter, the *Prosligion* will require both a comparison and movement between external and intellectual selves and also that development of the subject - object dialectic which belongs to the unified Augustinian subject.⁹⁵

In new intellectual circumstances, the *summae* emerge. They fall between Anselm and Descartes. In them, both Augustinians and Aristotelians place Augustine in a world which owes as much to the One, the self which mirrors it, and to the consequent Iamblichean and Procline systematizing as to Augustine, even if among Latins, he remains essential. We cannot trace here how the Augustinian self fared in this strange environment, or the result when it reappeared as center in the 17th century, radically transformed by its long journey.⁹⁶ We must not forget, however, that when the Augustinian self and Anselm's argument become central again in Descartes, they will be the roots of a tree of sciences. Cartesian and Augustinian "first philosophy" or "metaphysics" will ground and require a total system. While between Augustine and Descartes, Proclus had contained Augustine, now Augustine will show that he had adsorbed the way taken by the followers of Iamblichus.

It will I hope be enough if I suggest by way of conclusion that the postmodern deconstruction of the modern Augustinian self has opposed features. It is a reassertion with Plotinus that the self is more and less than what is present for self-conscious rationality. We have, in consequence, the escape of the One once more. It is also a recovery of the Iamblichean consciousness of the radical dependence of the human on the external other, especially as we are bound up in the sensible. But it is more still: a reaction against the claims for total inclusiveness made by the self which merges Augustinian self-certain rationality and Procline system. Hegel may usefully be represented as such an Augustinian Proclus.⁹⁷ My colleague Ken Kierans is right to see that postmodernity involves a reaction against Hegel which is equally dependent upon the position subjectivity attained in virtue of his total system.⁹⁸ That is yet another paradox in a history which is full of them.

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⁹⁵ See Hankey, "*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem*."

⁹⁶ I have written something about it in "Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation."

⁹⁷ See W.J. Hankey, "Neoplatonism and Contemporary Constructions and Deconstructions of Modern Subjectivity," a response to J. A. Doull's "Neoplatonism and the Origins of the older Modern Philosophy" for a festschrift for James Alexander Doull, *Situating Contemporary Freedom: A Doull Reader* to be published by the University of Toronto Press, edited D. Peddle and N. Robertson, University of Toronto Press, in press.

⁹⁸ See K. Keirans, "Beyond Deconstruction," *Animus* 2 (1997), an electronic journal at <http://www.mun.ca/animus>.