

Recurrrens in te unum: Neoplatonic Form and Content in Augustine's Confessions

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Since Henry Chadwick's translation appeared in 1991, readers of the *Confessions* in English can be in no doubt about its Neoplatonic content.¹ His introduction also gives very helpful indications about what Neoplatonism contributes to its structure.² Augustine testifies at the very centre of the *Confessions* that he read "some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin" by Marius Victorinus,³ and Dr Chadwick makes the effects thoroughly evident. These books are the instrument of the central of the three fundamental (and bookish) conversions Augustine confesses—the other books are the *Hortensius* of Cicero and Paul's Epistle to the Romans.⁴ Chadwick's references to the words and doctrines of Plotinus and Porphyry supply detailed precisions. However, they do not go beyond what Augustine himself told us. After all, what more could be said than Augustine's identification between almost all of the Prologue of John's Gospel and what he read in those books "not of course in these words, but with entirely the same sense (*idem omnino*)," and with the advantage of being "supported by numerous and varied reasons"?⁵ In the end, inquiries into Augustine's Neoplatonism come to whether we believe what he himself wrote about the matter.

Chadwick's footnotes make clear that Augustine's overloaded rhetoric at the absolutely crucial point when the Platonic books admonished him to return into himself, and became the means of God's own guidance,⁶ disclose, rather than conceal, the substantial truth. What he saw on that interior journey, described in Plotinus' language, finally gave him the positive conception of incorporeal substance which he required to move beyond Academic Skepticism.⁷ Immutable light—that is to say, unchanging and unchangeable knowing—was both the means and the content of the vision he describes. The identity of knowing and being which is *NOUS* as what underlies and makes possible the changing ratiocination of soul's knowing,—as Plotinus puts it⁸—, or the light of the eternal Word illumining his mind,—as Augustine called it, following St John and Philo Judaeus—, gave true knowledge of the incorporeal, eternal, and immutable God, and, consequently, of himself, as immortal, incorporeal, but mutable soul. This knowledge enabled solving the problem of evil in a Platonic, rather than in a Manichean, way.⁹ As Augustine told his readers repeatedly, without the positive intuition of incorporeal substance, he had been unable to complete his movement to Christian faith. Seven, the book at the centre, together with its "books of the Platonists," are thus the hinges on which the *Confessions* turn. However, Dr Chadwick's footnotes do more than prevent our doubting Augustine's testimony that Providence guided him through his reading of Neoplatonists at this crucial point.

Many scholars have questioned the specifically Neoplatonic character of his conversion by what Augustine says "love knows"¹⁰ in Book Seven because God here, and elsewhere in the *Confessions*,¹¹ is seen and mystically touched as Being (*esse*), the "I am, who I am" of Exodus 3:14.¹² Plotinus, following the Chaldean Oracles, also apprehends the First by "intellect in love"¹³ but "the One" is the name by which Plotinus designated the First, and it is the One-Non-Being with whom he has intuitive and erotic

union. As a result of the work of scholars, primarily French, like Pierre Hadot,¹⁴ Pierre Aubenque,¹⁵ and Jean-Marc Narbonne,¹⁶ this doubt has evaporated. Plotinus lies at the origin of two traditions of Neoplatonism. One, coming to Augustine through modifications Porphyry and Marius Victorinus made to Plotinus, results in a “a metaphysics of pure being” and, besides the Bishop of Hippo, this tradition includes Boethius, Anselm, Aquinas, Pico della Mirandola, as well as the Arabic Neoplatonised Peripatetics, among its notable adherents. Its logic, laid out in an *Anonymous Commentary on the Parmenides*,¹⁷ which substitutes an infinitive “to be,” with neither subject or predicate, for “the One,” is evident in Thomas’ *Summa Theologiae*, where the identity of essence and existence in God is made a consequence of his absolute simplicity.¹⁸ The other tradition, with the First as One-Non-Being, culminates among the pagan Neoplatonists in Proclus; its Christian examples include Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Eriugena, the Rhenish mystics, and Nicholas of Cusa. However, the *Confessions* has henological moments and they are both doctrinally and structurally important.

When Dr. Chadwick translates the passage in Book Twelve which I have used as a title (*recurrens in te unum*), he renders it in a way which inescapably carries our minds to the One/Good of Plotinus as the ultimate source and end of all else. Crucially, for considerations of the structure of the *Confessions*, Augustine is writing here of creation, and we recollect that the first nine “autobiographical” books are completed by the last three books interpreting *Genesis*. Augustine testifies that all things “return to you, the One,”¹⁹ in a way which gives creation the form his younger Neoplatonic pagan contemporary, Proclus, will systematize as the structure of everything except the One: all things remain in the One as source, go out from, and return to the One as perfecting end. Some features of Augustine’s development of Neoplatonism are better compared to those of Proclus and Iamblichus than to Plotinus and Porphyry.²⁰ He and his fellow Christian Platonists, Greek and Latin, are so thoroughly within the Neoplatonic tradition that they, as much as the pagans, contribute to and move within its evolution. Thus, Proclus, in his *On the Existence of Evils*, against and explicitly criticizing Plotinus, along with Augustine against the Manichees, judge that matter is not evil. Nonetheless, in the passage we are considering, Plotinus comes to mind. Augustine asserts that all things are created out of nothing as from a formless dissimilarity (*ex nihilo dissimilitudinem informem*) to which God stands as the form of all things. Chadwick notes that this passage interprets “‘out of nothing’ to mean out of next to nothing.”²¹ This formless Plotinian matter, which has its origins in the *Timaeus*, will remain part of Augustine’s imagination of the creation, reappearing in *Confessions* Thirteen. There, formless matters, both spiritual and physical, fundamental dissimilarities, are created as the first stage of making the cosmos.²² However, another point in the same note has more structural import.

Chadwick refers us to “the region of dissimilarity” from which we have just departed in Book Seven, where he has provided a reference to the *Enneads*.²³ There, Plotinus likens the fall into vice to entering “the region of dissimilarity” where the soul goes on sinking into the mud of darkness. When, in Book Seven, after he has found his sight too weak to abide the shock of the strong radiance of the First which Plotinus also describes,²⁴ Augustine confesses that “I found myself far away from you ‘in the region of dissimilarity’.”²⁵ Thus, for both of these neo-Platonists, the return of the self out of

division, ugliness, weakness, chaotic lack of control, and moral turpitude into the unity, beauty, power, life, and goodness of the One, and the conversion of all creation to the same, belong together. God, as the One, is origin and end of the self, and of the whole creation.²⁶ The *exitus* and *reditus* of both must be seen simultaneously if either is to be understood by us. So, for example, in Book Nine, we find Augustine crying from the bottom of his heart: “‘O in peace! O in the self-same’,” I shall have my repose because “in you is rest which forgets all toil because there is none beside you, nor are we to look for the multiplicity of other things which are not what you are. For ‘you Lord have established me in hope by means of unity’.”²⁷ This is the doctrine of Plotinus for whom the self-identity of the One is a rest which transcends the opposition of rest and activity. This is exactly the character of the Sabbath rest which concludes the *Confessions*, as we shall see later.²⁸ Again, in Book Eleven, because his “life is a distension,” Augustine asks God to look at him in the mediator “between you, the One, and us, the many, . . . so that I might be gathered to follow the One.”²⁹ Although here we have touched on the fundamental structure of the *Confessions*, something to which we must revert, we are not yet finished with the hints our title passage, as annotated by Chadwick, gives us about its Neoplatonism.

For Augustine, while all things return to “you, the One,” what, on the other side of the teleological circle, gives existence to all things is the immutable divine will “which is identical with your self.” Chadwick provides here a reference to *Ennead* Six, where Plotinus says that God’s will is his substance.³⁰ Indeed, the *Ennead* goes on, “He himself is primarily his will” so that, as Augustine also says, there is nothing before his willing.³¹ The identity of the First, either as One or as Being (*esse*), with what our dividing reason improperly attributes to it, is standard Neoplatonic doctrine. There is something else in the same *Ennead*, which is at the heart of Augustine’s theology, and is crucial for the content and structure of the *Confessions*. Plotinus declares of the One that “he, that same self, is loveable and love and love of himself.”³² High up among the trinitarian analogies in the *De Trinitate*, this doctrine reappears when Augustine understands God as “the Trinity of the one that loves, and that which is loved, and love.”³³ In the *Confessions*, it occurs most strikingly, and with structural power, at the beginning of Book Two, that is, in the midst of the first three books, which I take, as a matter of emphasis only, to be primarily concerned with love—the next three primarily concern knowing, although Three provides a transition. Books Seven through Nine combine the two, and, as we shall see below, the decisive movement of will to which Eight is devoted completes his conversion to philosophy as love of wisdom in Book Three.

Whether or not the first three books are, in fact, centered around love, Augustine wants to leave us in no doubt as to what Book Two concerns. The rhetorician is at work. The first two paragraphs look like a grammatical exercise in declining and conjugating *amor* and *amare*. Augustine testifies: “I remind myself of my past foulnesses . . . not because I love them, but so that I may love you, my God. It is from love of your love that I make my act of recollection.”³⁴ He goes on in the next paragraph: “The single desire that dominated my search for delight was simply to love and to be loved.”³⁵ We encounter here perhaps the most paradoxical, and the most fundamental, doctrine of the *Confessions*: what sustains us, even in our opposition to God, and what brings us back to him, is the divine trinitarian love as constituting our own loving. For Plotinus, we are drawn back to the One because our being is the One in us—all being depends on unity.³⁶

This unity may equally be called goodness or the love of love. The same notion also is found in these passages of the *Confessions*. By love of God's love, Augustine tells us, he is collecting himself out of his dispersion. He is able to do so because "You gathered me together from the state of disintegration in which I had been fruitlessly divided. I turned from you the One to be lost in the many."³⁷

That the pull of love by the One/Good, constituting human being and the being of all creation, is prior to our consciousness of what is moving us is a doctrine common to Augustine and the pagan Neoplatonists. For the latter, this follows from the fact that the One is not an object of knowledge (when it becomes an object, it is being for the knowing which constitutes *NOUS*). Iamblichus is explicit: "For an innate knowledge about the gods is coexistent with our nature, and is superior to all judgement and choice, reasoning and proof. This knowledge is united from the outset with its own cause, and exists in tandem with the essential striving of the soul towards the Good. Indeed to tell the truth, the contact we have with the divinity is not to be taken as knowledge."³⁸ The doctrine is found throughout the *Confessions*, and is most completely developed in Book 10: "How then am I to seek for you, Lord? When I seek for you, my God, my quest is for the happy life....How shall I seek for the happy life? Is it through an urge to learn something quite unknown...Is not the happy life that which all desire, which indeed no one fails to desire? But how have they known about it so as to want it?"³⁹

One of the many treasures in Gary Wills' *Saint Augustine's Childhood* is an explanation of the working of a triad terminating in love. Measure, number, and weight hold together the *Confessions*, because this trinity has forms in the human self, the physical cosmos, and in God. Its most well-known appearance is in Book Thirteen where its context is a question about the moving of the Holy Spirit, and the quest for rest and peace. These, as Chadwick notes, both Plotinus and Augustine locate in a good will.⁴⁰ Love and God's "good Spirit" lift us to rest and peace. Will is weight in physical things. In Augustine, because he is a rational being, "My weight is my love. Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me." Will is also "carried" for Plotinus.⁴¹

Gary Wills helps us to understand how this triad works in Book One, where, just after Augustine's notorious exposure of the viciousness of the jealous infant,⁴² he speaks of the coordinating unity which sustains the child despite its wickedness. This is the good on which evil is parasitic, to use the language of Proclus.⁴³ Wills writes: "the third endowment of the baby is a coordinating unity in all its different components' actions, the binding together in love that is a prerogative of the Third Person of the Trinity."⁴⁴ So we find of the infant: "You, Lord my God, are the giver of life and body to a baby...endowed it with senses...co-ordinated the limbs. You have adorned it with a beautiful form, and, for the coherence and preservation of the whole, you have implanted all the instincts of a living being."⁴⁵ The conclusion of Book One picks up again the instincts of a child, this time in the form of love of itself, as the working of God's unity, his love of himself, in us: "I existed, I lived and thought and took care for my self-preservation (a mark of your profound latent unity whence I derived my being). An inward instinct told me to take care of the integrity of my senses..."⁴⁶ Wills' translation of this triad of mode, number, and weight reveals more: "I preserved myself—by an echo of your mysterious oneness."⁴⁷ This is the point from which Book Two departs. In Book Three we move towards a greater emphasis on knowing, by way of Augustine's first conversion, which like that in Book Seven, depends upon a philosophical book, a work of

the stoicized Platonism (or platonized Stoicism) out of which Neoplatonism emerged.

Books Three and Four seem to work in terms of the conversion in the Cave of Plato's *Republic* understood through Plotinus.⁴⁸ Be that as it may, Three begins like Book Two with forms of *amo*. In Carthage, for Augustine "a cauldron of illicit loves," he had not yet been in love and he longed to love. "I sought an object for love, I was in love with love."⁴⁹ He does indeed fall in love, and with God, but by what may seem astonishing means. He read Cicero's *Hortensius*, an exhortation to philosophy, taking it up because, for a rhetorician, Cicero was *the* pre-eminent model, but in this case he stayed for the content.⁵⁰ He writes that this book literally "changed my feelings."⁵¹ It changed his experience, religious practice, values, and desires in respect to God himself: "It altered my prayers, and created in me different purposes and desires."⁵² Inflamed by philosophy, Augustine repented his vain hopes; in their place, he writes: "I lusted for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardour of the heart." Now his conversion begins, and he represents it, in language Neoplatonists use, as the return to the divine source: "I began to rise up to return to you."

Augustine describes his new love, the love which is philosophy, the love of wisdom, the wisdom which itself is God. He continues to employ the language of passionate feeling: "How I burned, my God, how I burned."⁵³ This representation of himself as an erotically inflamed lover of philosophy is not one which Augustine will repent later. At the point in Book Eight, when he is about to describe the *Tolle lege* conversion, he recollects the conversion to philosophy which enabled, and is completed, by the decisive new movement of his will in the Milan garden. He writes that he had been "excited" to the study of wisdom by reading the *Hortensius*.⁵⁴ What lies between the conversion of Book Three and that of Book Eight is a long philosophical journey which reached its positive result in the Neoplatonism described in Book Seven. While, with our distinctions within the new Platonisms between Middle and Neo Platonism, we locate Cicero in a different category than Plotinus, Augustine may not have done so. Certainly the work of another Middle Platonist, Philo Judaeus, has a massive, if largely unexplored, influence on Augustine's allegorical interpretation of Genesis in Books Twelve and Thirteen, and Cicero reappears through his *Tusculan Disputations* in Book Seven. Phillip Cary puts it like this:

It contributed to both the language and the conceptuality of Augustine's inward turn, as Augustine himself signals by using Cicero's own words to indicate a key step in the inward turn in *Confessions* 7. The reasoning power of the soul, Augustine says, rises up to examine its own intelligence as it "draws thought away from habit," by withdrawing from the contradictory crowd of phantasms...in order to look at the mind alone, illumined by the immutable light.⁵⁵

The quotation from Cicero occurs in the second of the ascents the mind makes in Book Seven. Having risen from bodies to the soul, from the soul to its inward force, and from that to reasoning, he says that this mutable power "withdrew from the contradictory swarms of imaginative fantasies, so as to discover the light by which it was flooded."⁵⁶ Here Cicero is supplemented by Plotinus, who supplies not only the illumination of reason by an intellectual light above it, but the "flash of a trembling glance" in which "it

attained to that which is.”⁵⁷ This language of union is well beyond Cicero.

The journey from a conversion by the *Hortensius*, depicted in Neoplatonic language in Book Three, to the *Tusculan Disputations*, with Plotinian supplements in Book Seven, heals a division which the conversion to philosophy created, and which Book Three reports. Augustine tells us that, although delighted by Cicero’s exhortation “so that his words excited me, set me on fire, and enflamed me,”⁵⁸ one thing held back his enthusiasm for philosophy from being total: he did not find the name of Christ there. Having drunk in that name with his mother’s milk, he could not be “totally ravished” by any book lacking it.⁵⁹ In consequence, he turned to the “holy Scriptures.” These, however, proved unsatisfactory to his newly sophisticated mind because it lacked a hermeneutic by which the scriptural metaphors could be interpreted. Cicero’s Stoic Platonism did not supply Augustine with that by which “the sharp point of his mind could penetrate their interiority.”⁶⁰

Augustine always thinks within the mutual connection of the subjects and objects of knowledge, which the Platonic analogy of the line images, and which the Neoplatonists modify and elaborate.⁶¹ On the one hand, he writes that “I did not know that God is spirit, not a body whose members have length and breadth”;⁶² on the other hand, he confesses that he dwells outside himself and sees only “with the eye of the flesh.”⁶³ In that subjective externality, he supposes that the words of the Book of Genesis depicting the human as made in the image of God require God to be “confined in a bodily form and to have hair and nails.”⁶⁴ The philosophical method, and the positive philosophical doctrine, which will simultaneously unlock the knowledge of true being and of his own self, and, thus, will enable him to read Scripture as a Catholic Christian, is Neoplatonism—precisely because, as he testifies in Book Seven, and as scholarship agrees, in Plotinian Neoplatonism interior experience and acquisition of conceptual content are united.⁶⁵ As long as Augustine lacks the method of interior introspection, and retains a corporeal conception of God and of himself, a very limited philosophical sophistication holds him to the still more circumscribed Christianity of Manicheism. The sect keeps its long grip on Augustine until after he arrives, in Book Five, at the Skepticism which is the antechamber to the Platonism both of Plotinus and of Augustine⁶⁶—and of their followers like Descartes.

Both Books Four and Five belong to the development of his Skepticism and have to do with knowing. He tells that he “was a teacher of the arts,” discusses the difference between astronomers and astrologers, considers which books are useful (Aristotle is not), gives us his version of the standard Neoplatonic criticism of the Aristotelian categories, judges the truthfulness of natural science, and tells his readers that he had a better mastery of the liberal arts than the Manichean wise man, Faustus.⁶⁷ Book Four, focused around the death of a friend, prepares us for the crucial philosophical move in Book Five. The death brings the expansion of the self with which Skepticism is enwrapped. The ancient Skeptic, frustrated when he seeks truth outside himself, returns to himself through doubt, rather than committing to what is outside by judgment.⁶⁸ In passages of *Ennead* 5.1, Plotinus uses the contradictions involved in this position as a way of moving the soul inward and upward; from language we find especially in Book Six, it seems Augustine had read these. After the friend’s death and, as its result, Augustine tells us: “I had become to myself a vast problem.”⁶⁹ For him, man had become “a vast deep.”⁷⁰ This experience of our vast, labyrinthine, horrifying interior will remain valid for him and is

elaborated in Book Ten.⁷¹ He knew himself in his friend, “another self,” as he calls him.⁷² Because he does not yet believe in God in such a way as to possess his friend in God’s immortal life, when his other self dies, he is thrown back on himself in an intolerable way. He cries: “I had become a place of unhappiness in which I could not bear to be, but I could not escape from myself.”⁷³ This terrible experience is not merely negative. The self has become central, the thing being questioned, and it has been doubled, so to speak.

In Book Five he is still living outside himself: “I had departed from myself.”⁷⁴ What moves him forward here is taking up the science of the external, because his study of physics turns out to be a crucial step towards escaping Manicheism. He writes about a process like that described in Plato’s *Timaeus*, which, having begun with fables about the gods and the universe, arrives at “probabilities” about the physical world “as likely as any others.”⁷⁵ For Augustine and other Platonists, there can only be probability in respect to the realm of *genesis*, where opinion reigns. Nonetheless, it is crucial, at this point, that Augustine finds the stories told about nature within the philosophical disciplines to be *more probable* than the fables of the Manichees. Augustine tells us that he “read many works of the philosophers,” and, having compared them to the “long fables of the Manichees,” he judged what the philosophers said “seemed more probable.”⁷⁶ By “their own minds and ingenuity,” the natural philosophers “have found out much,” and can predict celestial events far in the future.⁷⁷ Here Augustine has discovered a kind of philosophy which is authoritative in its own sphere. For him, as opposed to what the Manichees do with their myths about nature, physics must not be confused with what religion knows. The “mundane things themselves” have nothing to do with religion, indeed it was sacrilegious for the Manichees to have mixed them up.⁷⁸ However, his discovery of this mundane philosophy has religious consequences, insofar as it leads him to take a further philosophical step—Skeptical suspense.

Augustine represents Skepticism as not “making a judgment, but rather doubting everything, and fluctuating between all.”⁷⁹ In his version of Skepticism, which remains a position within the Platonic school (thus the “Academics”), arriving at the required suspension of judgment demands that something positive be set against his negative opinion about the Manichean account of nature.⁸⁰ This positive experience is his encounter with the Neoplatonic interpretation of Scripture by Ambrose of Milan. The attractions of the Bishop were many, and it took some time before Augustine began to pay attention to the content of what he was teaching; however, as with Cicero, he eventually got beyond attending to the rhetoric. Then, he confesses:

I heard first one, then another, then many difficult passages of the Old Testament, interpreted figuratively. After many passages of these books had been expounded spiritually, I now found fault with that despair of mine caused by the belief that there was nothing at all to counter the hostile mockery of the law and the prophets.⁸¹

In Skeptical suspense between the negative and the positive, Augustine could not continue anything as definite and partisan as his identification with the Manichees. Consistently with his Skepticism, he also refused to make positive judgments; he will not even identify himself with the Skeptics as a school. He does not entrust himself to these

philosophers, for the same reason as before—namely, because, like Cicero, these philosophers were “without the saving name of Christ.” Nor, at the same time, will Augustine move from his state as a Christian catechumen to baptism. What would a genuine positive movement take? Augustine tells us: “conceiving spiritual substance.”⁸² For Augustine entering the spiritual interior of Scripture requires that God be known as incorporeal substance and this is reciprocally connected to discovering his own interiority. Thus the required discovery is not only (1) the finding of a spiritual method, it is also (2) coming to a positive philosophical conception, one which will enable him to understand (i) his own nature and (ii) the nature of God; (iii) the nature and cause of evil; (iv) human freedom; and (v) his own responsibility for his sins. Book Seven reveals how he conceived incorporeal and true being by way of reading the Platonic books, but our passage to them is delayed by Book Six where the uncomfortable, and ultimately impossible, consequences of Skepticism are experienced.

Book Six begins and ends with Augustine still projected outside himself and now in despair of ever finding the truth.⁸³ He cannot remain in this state, where he suffers acute and critical peril,⁸⁴ and which he characterizes as a restless tossing and turning.⁸⁵ During the course of the book, Augustine continues his investigation of Catholicism guided by Ambrose,⁸⁶ who nourishes his mind with Neoplatonic allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament.⁸⁷ Augustine gives his “preference to the Catholic Faith,”⁸⁸ and, in the face of the constant threat of death, tries to turn against secular ambition and to dedicate himself solely to the search for wisdom.⁸⁹ Rhetorically, Book Six is dominated by the language of tossing and turning, the frustration of running about in circles.⁹⁰ It culminates in an analysis of the misery of the “the rash soul” where Isaiah and Plotinus are united.

According to Plotinus, the rash soul, whose *tolma* has projected it into the sensible externality beneath it where it feels a self-deceived mastery, must turn inward and upward to find rest. The requisite disciplines are twofold: one is negative, critical, and purgative, separating us from what is inferior to ourselves; the other, the “leading” discipline, recalls us to the dignity we have in virtue of our divine origin.⁹¹ Augustine concludes Book Six, which looks forward to his reading of “the books of the Platonists”:

What tortuous paths! How fearful a fate for “the rash soul” (Isa. 3:9) which nursed the hope that, after it had departed from you, it would find something better! Turned this way and that, on its back, on its side, on its stomach, all positions are uncomfortable. You alone are repose. You are present, liberating us from miserable errors, and you put us on your way, bringing comfort and saying: “Run, I will carry you, and I will see you through to the end, and there I will carry you” (Isa. 46:4).⁹²

With this Plotinian purgative preparation for the Plotinian knowledge and loving ascents of Book Seven, we have the end of Augustine’s journey before us.

A chapter of this size does not permit a full account of the Neoplatonism of the *Confessions*. In consequence, rather than re-entering Book Seven, I shall terminate with a further reflection on the overall structure of the work.⁹³ This will take us to the beginning of Book One and the conclusion of Book Thirteen. Before going there, I indicate some considerations relevant to Neoplatonic aspects of books I have not treated.

Book Eight culminates in the third conversion with a book at its centre, Augustine's decision in a garden in Milan to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts."⁹⁴ The scene is set, in part, by a quotation from the *Hortensius* and, as a result, his decision to be baptized appears as the completion of his conversion to philosophy recorded in Book Three. It is crucial, then, that Augustine recognizes this turning, as well as the one effected by the books of Platonists in Seven as acts of God's providence: "I did not know what you were doing with me."⁹⁵ Augustine confesses that it is now twelve years since he was "stirred to a zeal for wisdom," and that he had not preferred her to "physical delights," as the *Hortensius* exhorted, and as he, at least from time to time since he fell in love with immortal truth, desired.⁹⁶ He goes on to recreate the Skeptical suspense of Books Five and Six,⁹⁷ this time as "a single soul wavering between different wills,⁹⁸ "twisting and turning,"⁹⁹ until the decision comes through an act of divination using a book of St Paul's epistles. The technique was a sortilege, which as Chadwick's note elsewhere indicates,¹⁰⁰ normally went with a Neoplatonic notion of the internal sympathy of the cosmos.

The height of Book Nine is a mystical experience undertaken in common with Monica. It involves many questions, but I only note that, among Augustine's several descriptions of the ascent to union in the *Confessions*, this one is especially full at the upper end. There, as Chadwick's notes indicate, the characteristics of Plotinian mystical *henosis* recur: "we touched it [the eternal] in some small degree by a moment of total concentration of the heart";¹⁰¹ at that point the mind surpasses "itself by no longer thinking about itself."¹⁰² This "touching"¹⁰³ by means of a flash of mental energy,¹⁰⁴ lasts only for a moment. In Augustine's ascents, as compared to those Plotinus describes, there is a flattening of the goal: God's Being is treated as if it were the absolute One/Good, and the One/Good is treated as if were simple, stable, eternal Being. Accordingly, for Augustine in contrast to Plotinus, there is much more emphasis on human effort in the final stage of the mystical union, less on grace, patience, waiting on the One/Good to give what is beyond human striving. Precisely because of the fleeting character of the union, and its dependence on inadequate human effort, Augustine turns to the need for a Mediator, who stands on both sides of the divine/human divide.¹⁰⁵

Augustine touches and describes eternity in this ascent: "in this wisdom there is no past or future, but only being, since it is eternal."¹⁰⁶ Like that in Book Eleven, the eternity here is Plotinian.¹⁰⁷ God's eternity is where "nothing is transient, but the whole is present."¹⁰⁸ Time is transcended not, as in Aristotle, endlessly extended: "It is not in time that you precede times."¹⁰⁹

Book Ten is governed by a Platonised Delphic *Gnothi seauton* assimilated to Paul's desire to know even as he is known.¹¹⁰ Students in the Neoplatonic Academy began with the search for self-knowledge. Following Iamblichus, it made Plato's *Alcibiades* the first work they read. This dialogue reaches the conclusion that we must know ourselves as mirrored in God, who is the standard by which we are also to evaluate ourselves. The same is true for Augustine. When he makes his confession of sin, he declares: "You, Lord, are my judge."¹¹¹ Because this requires judging by "the immutable light higher than my mind,"¹¹² showing how he lives in relation to this standard involves another ascent. It includes some of Augustine's most remarkably Neoplatonic statements about the human self: "what is inward is superior,"¹¹³ "the created order is understood by those who hear its outward voice and compare it to the truth within themselves,"¹¹⁴ and

“through my soul I will ascend to him.”¹¹⁵ Many other Neoplatonic aspects of Book Ten might be mentioned, for example, the development of spiritual senses,¹¹⁶ and the crucial role of reminiscence.

As a way of advancing to my conclusion, however, I push on to note the Neoplatonic way in which the desire for the good, the desire for happiness, leads to knowledge (rather than, as in Aristotle, the good being chosen as known).¹¹⁷ Because we all necessarily seek happiness, because “the happy life is joy based on the truth,”¹¹⁸ and because “where I discovered the truth, there I found my God, truth itself,”¹¹⁹ Augustine makes another ascent to what is “immutable above all things” and always present to everyone.¹²⁰ As a result, Augustine is able to pose this rhetorical question about his search for happiness: “Truth, when did you ever fail to walk with me, teaching me what to avoid and what to seek after when I reported to you what, in my inferior position, I could see, and asked your counsel?”¹²¹ Whether we are conscious of it or not, God is, in fact, “the truth presiding over all things,”¹²² by which Augustine evaluated what he ought to seek and what to avoid. Thus, in repentant self-knowledge, Augustine is judged by God’s truth. He knows as he is known. By way of such a Middle, or Neo, Platonic rendition of the governing ideas in the Divine *LOGOS* or *NOUS*, Augustine comes to Christ as the Mediator between God and man. This is a *Christian* Platonism.

We have already noted that the pull of the Good prior to knowing which summons knowledge into existence, is fundamental to Neoplatonism. Such a draw of the Good begins and ends the *Confessions*, functioning by way of the Plotinian desire for rest in the One, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”¹²³ The quest of the *cor inquietum* is not vain. The long *itinerarium* of the soul in the *Confessions* concludes with its fruition in the Sabbath rest, given, as we have said already, in a God, who, like the One of Plotinus, transcends the difference between work and rest. Augustine writes: “we also may rest in you for the sabbath of eternal life.”¹²⁴ God’s is not a rest in opposition to action or work. “You are always working and always at rest,”¹²⁵ in an eternity described in Plotinian terms: “Your seeing is not in time, your movement is not in time, and your rest is not in time.”¹²⁶

The goal which transcends these oppositions is “God, one and good.” Understood, as Plotinus did, “you, the Good, in need of no other good, are ever at rest since you yourself are your own rest,” the First is addressed by Augustine in a way that would delight Plotinus: “*tu vero deus une bone.*”¹²⁷ Thus, at the end, we return to our beginning “*in te unum.*”

¹ This essay is based on a public lecture I delivered for the Center for Catholic Studies at Seton Hall University in April 2008. I am most grateful to Seton Hall and to Mons. Richard Liddy for their lavish hospitality and the fruitfulness of my encounters there. The lecture and this essay are dedicated to the Very Reverend Professor Henry Chadwick K.B.E. who passed away in June of 2008.

² See Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), xx-xxv. Informed by Chadwick’s translation, those in this essay are my own.

³ *Confessions* 7.9.13 (Chadwick, p. 121, note 14). References to Chadwick’s translation

where relevant are placed in parentheses following those to the *Confessions*.

⁴ *Conf.* 3.4.7 and 8.12.29.

⁵ *Conf.* 7.9.13.

⁶ *Conf.* 7.10.16 (123).

⁷ *Conf.* 5.14.25.

⁸ *Ennead* 5.1.3; 5.1.7; and 5.1.11.

⁹ *Conf.* 7.11.17-7.14.20; see Chadwick, "Introduction," xx.

¹⁰ *Conf.* 7.10.16.

¹¹ *Conf.* 9.10.24.

¹² *Conf.* 7.10.16.

¹³ Plotinus, *Ennead* 6.7.35 (Loeb 7, p. 196, l. 24; I use Armstrong's Loeb Plotinus throughout); Cf. I. Perczel, "L' 'intellect amoureux' et l' 'un qui est'. Une doctrine mal connue de Plotin," *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* 15 (1997): 223–264. On the erotic symbolism in Plotinian mysticism, see Chadwick, "Introduction," xxi.

¹⁴ See P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 2 tomes, Collection des Études augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 32 & 33 (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968). 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*, L'âne d'or (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999). For these and other references, see my "Neoplatonism and Contemporary French Philosophy" *Dionysius* 23 (2005): 161–190 at 173–74.

¹⁵ P. Aubenque, "Plotin et le dépassement de l'ontologie grecque classique," in P. Hadot (éd.) *Le Néoplatonisme (Royaumont 9-13 juin 1969)*, (Paris: CNRS, 1971), 101–108 and "Néoplatonisme et analogie de l' être," in J. Trouillard, *Néoplatonisme, mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard* (Fontenay aux Roses: E.N.S., 1981), 63–76.

¹⁶ J.-M. Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger)*, L'âne d'or (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2001).

¹⁷ See *The Anonymous Commentary on Plato's "Parmenides"*, translated G. Bechtle (Bern/Stuttgart/Wien: Paul Haupt, 1999).

¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.3; see W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself, Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs / Oxford Scholarly Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 / 2000), 3–6.

¹⁹ *Conf.* 12.28.38 (267).

²⁰ See R. Dodaro, “Theurgy,” in *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 827–828, H. Feichinger, “*OUDENEIA* and *humilitas*: Nature and Function of Humility in Iamblichus and Augustine.” *Dionysius* 21 (2003): 123–59 and S. O’Neill, *Towards a Restoration of Plato’s Doctrine of Mediation: Platonizing Augustine’s Criticism of the Platonists*, PhD Dissertation, Department of Classics, Dalhousie University, 2008.

²¹ *Conf.* 12.28.38 (267, note 26).

²² *Conf.* 13.2.2 and 3 (274).

²³ *Ennead* 1.8.13 (*Loeb* 1, 308, l. 17).

²⁴ *Ennead* 1.6.7 (*Loeb* 1, 252, l. 15).

²⁵ *Conf.* 7.10.16 (123).

²⁶ On this as Neoplatonic, see Chadwick, “Introduction,” xxiv.

²⁷ *Conf.* 9.4.11: ‘*O in pace! O in idipsum*’ ... *tu es idipsum valde, qui non mutaris*.

²⁸ See *Enneads* 6.8.16 and 6.9.11 as indicated by Chadwick at 9.4.11 (162, note 16).

²⁹ *Conf.* 11.29.39 (244, note 11): *ecce distentio est vita mea...inter te unum et nos multos...conligar sequens unum*.

³⁰ *Conf.* 12.28.38 (Chadwick 267, note 25). The reference is to *Ennead* 6.8.21 (*Loeb* 7, 294–6, l. 13).

³¹ *Ennead* 6.8.21 (*Loeb* 7, p. 296, l. 13).

³² *Ennead* 6.8.15 (*Loeb* 7, p. 276, l. 1).

³³ *De Trinitate* 15.5.

³⁴ *Conf.* 2.1.1 (24): *non quod eas amem, sed ut amem te, deus meus. Amore amoris tui facio istud recolens*.

³⁵ *Conf.* 2.2.2 (24): *Et quid erat, quod me delectabat, nisi amare et amari?*

³⁶ *Ennead* 5.1.11 (*Loeb* 5, 48–9).

³⁷ *Conf.* 2.1.1 (24) I have modified Chadwick’s translation here so as to make it more

literal.

³⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*: I.3; see Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, translated and with introduction and notes by E. Clarke, J. Dillon, J. Hershbell (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 13–14.

³⁹ *Conf.* 10.20.29.

⁴⁰ *Conf.* 13.9.10 (278 with note 12).

⁴¹ *Conf.* 13.9.10 (278 with note 13).

⁴² *Conf.* 1.7.11 (9).

⁴³ Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 17.49; see Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils*, translated by J. Opsomer and C. Steel, *The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 94.

⁴⁴ G. Wills, *Saint Augustine's Childhood: Confessiones Book One* (New York: Viking, 2001), 102.

⁴⁵ *Conf.* 1.9.12 (10).

⁴⁶ *Conf.* 1.20.33 (22).

⁴⁷ Wills, *Saint Augustine's Childhood*, 123.

⁴⁸ See especially *Conf.* 3.1.1 (thrust to outward things), 3.2.2 (on the theatre), 4.16.30 (70): “I...read and understood all the books...on the arts they call liberal... I did not know the source of what was true and certain in them. I had my back to the light and my face towards the things which are illumined. So my face, by which I was enabled to see the things lit up, was not itself illumined.” See reference to Plotinus in Chadwick’s note 35 on p. 70.

⁴⁹ *Conf.* 3.1.1 (35): *flagitiosorum amorum. Nondum amabam, et amare amabam...quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare.*

⁵⁰ See W.J. Hankey, “Bultmann Redivivus Radicalised: Augustine and Jesus as Heideggerian Existentialists” *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology*, ed. Craig J. N. de Paulo (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 269–288.

⁵¹ *Conf.* 3.4.7 (39).

⁵² *Conf.* 3.4.7.

⁵³ *Conf.* 3.4.8.

⁵⁴ *Conf.* 8.7.17.

⁵⁵ P. Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self. The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 82.

⁵⁶ *Conf.* 7.17.23 (127, note 25).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Conf.* 3.4.8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Conf.* 3.5.9; reasons why this was so hard are given in R. Teske, "Saint Augustine as Philosopher: The Birth of Christian Metaphysics," *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 7–32 at 19.

⁶¹ See my "Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem: Knower and Known in the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius and the *Proslogion* of Anselm," *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. Inglis, (Richmond [England]: Curzon Press, 2002), 126–150.

⁶² *Conf.* 3.7.12.

⁶³ *Conf.* 3.6.11: *foris habitantem in oculo carnis meae*; see *Conf.* 3.1.1: my soul trust itself to outward things, *proiciebat se foras*.

⁶⁴ *Conf.* 3.7.12.

⁶⁵ *Conf.* 7.10.16 (123): examples of the scholarship include, S. Breton, "Actualité du néoplatonisme," reprinted in idem, *Études néoplatoniciennes* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1973): 110–26 at 110–111; A.H. Armstrong, "Tradition, Reason and Experience in the Thought of Plotinus," reprinted in idem, *Plotinian and Christian Studies XVII* (London: Variorum, 1979).

⁶⁶ 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): 83–123 at 111–22, "Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self," *Augustinian Studies* 32:1 (2001): 65–88 at 77–80; and D. J. O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 39–41.

⁶⁷ *Conf.* 4.1.1; 4.3.6; 4.16.28 and 29; 5.3.3; 5.7.11.

⁶⁸ See 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 35–37.

⁶⁹ *Conf.* 4.4.9: *eram ipse mihi magna quaestio.*

⁷⁰ *Conf.* 4.13.22 *grande profundum est ipse homo.*

⁷¹ See *Conf.* 10.17.26: “an awe-inspiring mystery... a power of profound and infinite multiplicity. And that is my mind, this is I myself” *magna vis est memoriae, nescio quid horrendum deus meus profunda et infinita multiplicitas. Et hoc animus est, et hoc ego ipse sum.*

⁷² *Conf.* 4.6.11: *quia ille alter eram.*

⁷³ *Conf.* 4.8.12.

⁷⁴ *Conf.* 5.2.2.

⁷⁵ Plato, *Timaeus* 29d2.

⁷⁶ *Conf.* 5.3.3.

⁷⁷ *Conf.* 5.3.4.

⁷⁸ *Conf.* 5.5.8.

⁷⁹ *Conf.* 5.14.25.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Conf.* 5.14.24 (88).

⁸² *Conf.* 5.14.25: *spiritalem substantiam cogitare.*

⁸³ *Conf.* 6.1.1; 6.16.26.

⁸⁴ *Conf.* 6.1.1.

⁸⁵ *Conf.* 6.3.3.

⁸⁶ *Conf.* 6.3.3 and following, especially 6.5.8.

⁸⁷ *Conf.* 6.3.4 (94) with Chadwick’s note 7.

⁸⁸ *Conf.* 6.5.7.

⁸⁹ *Conf.* 6.11.18; 6.11.19.

⁹⁰ *Conf.* 6.3.3; 6.4.5; 6.6.9; 6.6.10; 6.8.17; 6.11.18; 6.11.19; 6.11.20.

⁹¹ *Ennead* 5.1.1 (*Loeb* 5, 10).

⁹² *Conf.* 6.16.26; for an analysis of how *tolma* functions for Plotinus and compares it to Augustinian *superbia*, see D. Majumbar, “Is *Tolma* the Cause of Otherness for Plotinus?” *Dionysius* 23 (2005): 31–48.

⁹³ I consider aspects of the Neoplatonism of Book Seven, and of the mystical ascents in the *Confessions* generally, in Hankey, “Bultmann Redivivus Radicalised,” 276–288.

⁹⁴ Romans 13:14, quoted in 8.12.29.

⁹⁵ *Conf.* 3.4.8; see 7.7.12–7.10.16.

⁹⁶ *Conf.* 8.7.16.

⁹⁷ *Conf.* 8.11.25.

⁹⁸ *Conf.* 8.10.23.

⁹⁹ *Conf.* 8.11.25.

¹⁰⁰ Note 7 bridging pages 55–56; Iamblichus’ *De Mysteriis* gives the classical justification.

¹⁰¹ *Conf.* 9.10.24 (171).

¹⁰² *Conf.* 9.10.25 (172).

¹⁰³ *Conf.* 9.10.24 (171).

¹⁰⁴ *Conf.* 9.10.25 (172).

¹⁰⁵ See Hankey, “Bultmann Redivivus Radicalised,” 284–287.

¹⁰⁶ *Conf.* 9.10.24 (171).

¹⁰⁷ See Teske, “Saint Augustine as Philosopher,” 20.

¹⁰⁸ *Conf.* 11.11.13 (228).

¹⁰⁹ *Conf.* 11.13.16 (230).

¹¹⁰ I Corinthians 13:12. See W.J. Hankey, “‘Knowing As We are Known’ in *Confessions*

10 and Other Philosophical, Augustinian and Christian Obedience to the Delphic *Gnothi Seauton* from Socrates to Modernity,” *Augustinian Studies* 34:1 (2003): 23–48.

¹¹¹ *Conf.* 10.5.7.

¹¹² *Conf.* 7.10.16.

¹¹³ *Conf.* 10.6.9 (184).

¹¹⁴ *Conf.* 10.6.10 (184).

¹¹⁵ *Conf.* 10.7.11 (185).

¹¹⁶ *Confessions* 10.6.8 (183), on which see M. Sastri, “The Influence of Plotinian Metaphysics in St Augustine’s Conception of the Spiritual Senses,” *Dionysius* 24 (2006): 99–124.

¹¹⁷ *Metaphysics* 12.7 (1072a).

¹¹⁸ *Conf.* 10.22.32 (199).

¹¹⁹ *Conf.* 10.24.35 (200).

¹²⁰ *Conf.* 10.25.36 (201).

¹²¹ *Conf.* 10.40.65.

¹²² *Conf.* 10.41.66 (218).

¹²³ *Conf.* 1.1.1 (3): *quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te* with Chadwick’s note 1.

¹²⁴ *Conf.* 13.36.51 (304).

¹²⁵ *Conf.* 13.37.52 (304): *semper operaris et semper requiescis*.

¹²⁶ *Conf.* 13.37.52 (304).

¹²⁷ *Conf.* 13.37.53 (304).