Stephen Menn's Cartesian Augustine: Metaphysical And Ahistorically Modern

A Review Article devoted to Stephen Menn. Descartes and Augustine. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998*

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Stephen Menn finds in Augustine the metaphysical foundations of Descartes' philosophy but not because he discovers in Augustine what lies at the origins of modernity. Menn is "anti-historicist" [1] and works within a metaphysical science which "progresses through emulation, criticism, and refinement."[2] He reports that "Gilson and many others think that there is something essentially *modern* underlying Descartes' whole project of thought, and that this modern orientation excludes any real community of intention between Cartesian and pre-modern metaphysics." Though the others include Heidegger and Husserl, Menn "can find no truth in any of this." Having examined Descartes' sources, Menn discovers no "incommensurability between Descartes' 'modern' metaphysical project and the 'pre-modern' projects of his predecessors,"[3] but this is not because he has considered what distances must be spanned or what shapes need a common measure.

Nonetheless, in this hermeneuticly self-conscious moment in scholarship, Stephen Menn's book not only has a refreshing simplicity and directness, but it also balances the historicist, anti-metaphysical and anti-theoretical readings of Augustine which come from postmodern philosophy and theology. By looking at the two readings together, something of the truth about Descartes' relation to Augustine might emerge. I propose in this review essay (1) to outline Menn's representation of that relation. I will, then, (2) revisit my article published in the second issue of this journal, "ReChristianizing Augustine Postmodern Style: Readings by Jacques Derrida, Robert Dodaro, Jean-Luc Marion, Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayes and John Milbank," in order to bring before us the postmodern representation of Augustine. I shall extend my treatment in *Animus* 2 by examining the reading of the *de Trinitate* upon which the Anglican postmodern theological enterprise depends, precisely because it seems "largely an intra-metaphysical"

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[1] Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 400.
[2] Ibid., 397 and see 400-4.
[3] Ibid., 389-99; see 8ff., and 64ff.

work.[4] Finally, (3) I shall attempt to judge between these opposed Augustines by means of a very limited comparison of texts of Plotinus and Augustine, concentrating on those from the *de Trinitate*. The relation to Plotinus is crucial.

Stephen Menn aims for more than a consideration of the relation between Descartes and Augustine. Essential to his thesis is a continuity in spiritual method from Plotinus through Augustine to Descartes. Indeed, in his book, we have before us a large part of the history of ancient philosophy. Menn reads with us a great deal of philosophical and theological text from Plato and Aristotle through the Stoics and Middle and Neo-Platonists to Augustine and within the seventeenth century. The reading is intelligent and sometimes informed, though not by any means weighed down, by the immense secondary literature on almost every question he touches. I cannot examine his whole argument, but I will try to indicate how Augustine appears in his relation to Plotinus from this ahistoric perspective which sees the continuity between Augustine and Descartes, rather than an unbridgable gap

1. Stephen Menn's Cartesian Augustine

Menn finds continuity at the very points where our postmodern Christians place the gaps. What Augustine learns from Plotinus and hands on to Descartes is a spiritual discipline, an *itinerarium* of the soul, and Descartes' philosophical project is a work of Christian piety inspired by the Cardinal de Bérulle. Descartes is responding to the felt need in the seventeenth century to develop from Christian "Augustinian principles a complete philosophy to replace that of Aristotle."

> What Descartes took from Augustine was not, fundamentally, a set of metaphysical theses, but a *discipline* for approaching wisdom, ... and therefore also the series of intellectual intuitions produced by this discipline.

Augustine "makes central use of the discipline for contemplating the soul and God that Plotinus had developed in defense of Platonism" to search for wisdom.[5] Crucially, Augustine's *conversio* is:

> not a change of religious allegiance, but a turning towards God and away from other things. ... Augustine identifies his desire for wisdom with a desire "to fly away from earthly things to" ... God ... "for with you is

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[4] J.S. O'Leary, *Questioning Back. The Overcoming of Metaphysics in Christian Tradition*, (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1985), 166.
[5] Ibid., 393; see, on the role of Bérulle, 24, 47-9.

> wisdom." ... Christianity [and Platonism are] only .. means for achieving
> this flight to God; ...[they are both] means to wisdom.[6]

This absolutely critical point, that both Christian authority and philosophical reason are instruments of the quest for wisdom, is well founded in an interpretation of the *Confessions*, generally, and of Book 3, particularly. Book 3 is Augustine's account of how his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*[7] "enflamed" him and how he could be satisfied neither with crude Christianity nor philosophy without Christ. In fact, the mixture of Christianity and apparent philosophical sophistication drew him to Manicheism. With this Menn is able to bridge the gap, opened by Gilson and by postmodern Christian theologians, between Christianity and autonomous reason.

This gap Menn had already bridged at the other end by his account of the Christian inspiration of Descartes' philosophical project, a bridge he supports with a description of the relation of faith and reason, philosophy and theology, in Descartes. He concludes that the Augustinian and Cartesian "doctrines of faith are the same; and naturally so, since Descartes' doctrine of faith is a consequence of his adoption of the Augustinian doctrine of the free exercise of will in judgment."[8] For both, "some truths are to be accepted on faith," but also, for both, we "are to press on toward knowledge."[9] In this schema, the character of Augustinian *sapientia* and its relation to the spiritual *itinerarium* of Plotinus become the heart of the matter.

Menn's account of Plotinus is very much limited by his project. Neither he, nor Augustine, are interested in "Plotinus' doctrinal innovations" within Platonism.[10] Among these innovations Menn includes things essential to understanding Plotinus. Neither Menn nor Augustine are interested in the relation to the One in its distinction from *Nous*. Theirs is an *itinerarium* of soul to *Nous*. This means that Menn does not notice the Plotinian doctrine of the two (or more) selves, the problems with the continuity of identity in *henosis*, and generally the problem of whether or how human individuality is established. He sees only the positive side of Plotinus' teaching that the real self is the one which is always above.[11] Seeing only this side produces Menn's suggestive, but rough, vague and inadequately substantiated, assertion:

> Plotinus is apparently the earliest philosopher to make rationality essential
> to the soul, and therefore to conceive soul through the "first-person"

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[6] Ibid., 7 4, 132 and 206

[7] *Confessions* 3.4.7-3.5.9 and *de Trinitate* 14.19.26.

[8] Menn, *Descartes*, 333, see, generally, 322-36, especially, 333-36.

[9] Ibid., 334.

[10] Ibid., 99, n. 18; see, conformably to this, Goulven Madec, *Saint Augustin et la philosophie. Notes critiques*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 140 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1996), 18.

[11] E.g., *Enneads* IV.3.12; IV.8.8; V.1.11.

reflection which will be most prominently found, divorced from Platonist
vitalism, in Augustine and Descartes.[12]

The One and the divided self are not small matters or problems within Plotinus. His
teaching on the self will make him a heretic within the Platonic School.[13]

What Augustine found in Plotinus was the spiritual discipline of *conversio* and the
intuitions which belong to that discipline, so that, knowing both himself and God as
incorporeal substance, he was able to become a Christian. Menn maintains that Augustine
took:

> 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).[14]

Since, for both Descartes and Augustine, the central problem in coming to their
intellectual positions is getting free from the corporeal, Menn's Augustine is found in the
Plotinian criticism of Stoicism and the Augustinian escape from Manicheism.[15] Menn
stresses, however, that, for both Plotinus and Augustine, the thesis that "the principles of
physical things are incorporeal" is not just negative, so that it would be compatible with a
scepticism about our grasp of "positive metaphysical knowledge."[16] Rather,

> Plotinus and those around him believed that it was possible, with the
> appropriate moral and intellectual discipline, to come to "see" God with
> the mind. ... [They] directed their philosophical activity, not simply toward
> stating and defending a doctrine, but toward an intellectual vision of the
> objects of that doctrine, the first God and the other incorporeal principles
> of corporeal things.[17]

Evidently, Menn thinks that Augustine followed Plotinus in this discipline and intuition,
that these belong to Augustinian *sapientia*, and that Descartes followed Augustine in the
same discipline to the same intuitions.

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[12] Menn, *Descartes*, 112. A criticism might begin by noticing what A.H. Armstrong calls Plotinus'
discovery of the unconscious and the fact that, for him, we are only intermittently conscious of our true
selves; see A.H. Armstrong, "Elements in the Thought of Plotinus at Variance with Classical
Intellectualism," *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, XVI (London: Variorum, 1979), 14-16.

[13] See Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, (University Park,
Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), 4ff.; for a brief outline of the developments and
divergences in Neoplatonism, see H.-D. Saffrey, "Les débuts de la théologie comme science (IIIe-VIe),"
Rev. sc. phil. theo., 80:2 (Avril, 1996), 213ff., English translation by W.J.Hankey: "Theology as science
(3rd-6th centuries)", *Studia Patristica*, XXIX, edited by Elizabeth A. Livingstone, (Leuven: Peeters, 1997),
332ff.

[14] Menn, *Descartes*, 80, n. 7.

[15] Ibid., 92.

[16] Ibid., 100.

[17] Ibid., 100.

There is nothing more offensive to postmodern theological Augustinianism than the centering of being, knowledge and presence which Menn attributes here to what he deems a Platonic tradition.[18] However, it is my judgment, which I hope to substantiate in the last part of this paper, that Augustine's *de Trinitate* shows that what Menn asserts of Plotinus is even more true of Augustine. Further, what makes Augustine worse than Plotinus, (so to speak), is his modification of the Plotinian hypostatic spiritual trinity. This modification, to which he is moved by Christian doctrine and by Porphyry's modification of Plotinus, allows him to draw together self-knowledge and a positive knowledge of God in a way Plotinus cannot do.[19]

In Plotinus, the self and God are known together as we ascend until self-reflexivity and the knowledge of God divide when we turn to the One itself. So 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 turning from bodies to the soul, which is this discipline, is "a turning to oneself."[20]

> For Plotinus, as for Augustine under his influence and Descartes under his, soul's reflection on itself is the necessary point of departure for coming to a ... purely intellectual understanding of the realities underlying sensible phenomena. [21]

Nous is the self-complete life of being and thought. Only as what is "perfect, eternally actual, and prior to soul" could it give rise to soul.[22] What is known in *Nous*, when soul turns to it in turning to itself, is a positive content. So long as self and God can come together in knowledge, there is no division between the knowledge that God is and what God is. Menn sees that the Plotinian *Nous* is Aristotelian, even if Plotinus "denies the Aristotelian thesis that Nous is simple."[23] For, Plotinus "wants to induce actual knowledge of the separate Nous ... [and holds that Nous] '*is* the beings, and that the nature of the forms is there.'"[24] *Nous* "is itself *the things* it thinks."[25] Augustine follows Plotinus here also.

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[18] For Menn, "Augustine and Descartes are Platonists" along with Plotinus, ibid., 397.

[19] On the intermediation of Porphyry and the result in Augustine, see Werner Beierwaltes, "Cusanus and Eriugena," *Dionysius*, 13 (1989), 134, n. 64; idem, "Unity and Trinity in East and West," *Eriugena: East and West. Papers of the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame, 18-20 October 1991,* edited B. McGinn and W. Otten, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies v (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), n. 10, pp. 212-214; 223-24; idem, "Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena," *Hermathena*, 157 (1994), n. 10, pp. 7, 13-14; idem, *Agostino e il neoplatonismo*, (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1995).

[20] Menn, *Descartes*, 110.

[21] Ibid., 112.

[22] Ibid., 117.

[23] Ibid., 119.

[24] Ibid., 114; This touches the argument of Edward Booth on the Augustinian and Aristotelian *notitia sui*. Booth rightly sees the Aristotelian thinking strengthened in Augustine. This is owing at least in past to the intermediation of Porphyry. See Edward Booth, "St. Augustine's 'notitia sui' related to Aristotle and the early neo-Platonists," *Augustiniana*, 27 (1977), 70-132 & 364-401, 28 (1978), 183-221, 29 (1979), 97-124;

So what picture of Augustine emerges when he is placed, as here, between Plotinus and Descartes? He is, first of all, in search of wisdom, *sapientia*. This wisdom is attained, and it is attained in the knowledge of self and God together. Book 7 of the *Confessions* is central to this presentation of Augustine, though its teaching is well supported by Menn from other writings, particularly the *de Libero Arbitrio* and the *de Trinitate*. There Augustine reports that he looked within himself and saw with the eye of his soul the immutable light above his mind. Over and again Menn tells us that this is a positive intuition and that upon this everything depends.[26]

At some points along the way Augustine parts company with Plotinus. Augustine does not remain with Plotinus in the ascent from individual to world-soul "because he was interested in his own soul."[27]

> Augustine's account ... concentrates on the human rational soul; knowledge of *this* soul is the starting-point for our knowledge of God. ... Augustine follows Plotinus' path in order to find the superiority of his rational soul to the bodily senses, and to discover that it has a direct relation to God, as a thing measured to measure and not as part to whole. ... God is the *standard* by which souls and other things are judged. It is crucial that "judgment" here is not simple judging how things are, but judging whether they are as they *ought* to be, *passing judgment* on them in conformity with some standard.[28]

This truth, which is known as standard, and in which all else is properly known and judged, is God as Truth. It cannot simply be a property of propositions "since it is something we *look* to in judging, and serves as a standard of comparison for our judgments."

> Augustine obviously intends his "Truth," as a separately existing Wisdom above the soul to be equivalent to Plotinus' "Nous."[29]

Wisdom is a participation in this Truth, in God, in God's life of wisdom. So Menn concludes:

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idem, "St. Augustine's *de Trinitate* and Aristotelian and neo-Platonist Noetic," *Studia Patristica*, XVI, pt. II, ed. E.A. Livingstone, *Text und Untersuchungen* 129 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 487-490; idem, *Saint Augustine and the Western Tradition*, 11-21 and G. Girenti, *Il pensiero forte di Porfirio. Mediazione fra henologia platonica e ontologia aristotelica*, (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1996). G. Reale, in an introduction (p. 21) remarks: "Si tratta evidentemente di un tentativo di recuperare la teologia aristotelica all'interno del neoplatonismo."
[25] Menn, *Descartes*, 119; quoting *Ennead* V.9.5.
[26] On this sight, see ibid., 139, 64, 81, 185.
[27] Ibid., 146, see also 148-49, 166-67, 395.
[28] Ibid., 149, 146, 151.
[29] Ibid., 154.

God allows the mind to perceive and possess God. ... Wisdom .. is a kind
of truth ... but it is specifically "the truth in which the highest good is
perceived and contained."[30]

Crucially, for Augustine, Plotinus and Descartes, the knowledge of the soul's lack or
need, on the one hand, and the positive knowledge of God, on the other, are not divided
in a postmodern way. Menn quotes the *De Libero Arbitrio*:

"When the mind contemplates the highest wisdom - which is not the soul
for it is immutable - it also contemplates its mutable self, and somehow
becomes aware of itself"; [Menn comments] contemplating itself as the
recipient of truth and God as the source of truth, it can choose either to
love God over itself, or [quoting Augustine] "to imitate God in a perverse
way, as wishing to enjoy its own power; thus it becomes as much lesser as
it wishes to be greater."[31]

Saving union, the wisdom which "adheres to the truth" is possible.[32] To remain in our
creaturely difference is damnation. Our participation in God cannot be reduced to
awareness of need. Menn does not find a different doctrine from this in Book 10 of the *de
Trinitate.*

Considering Augustine's taking up here, (as in other places), the Delphic command,
gnothi seauton, Menn writes:

Augustine's point is not that the mind ... does not know itself - the mind
always knows itself, because it is always immediately present to itself, and
so better known to itself than anything else can be - rather ... the mind
knows itself *confusedly* ... [W]e should not try to *add* anything to what we
already know ourselves to be, but rather to *subtract* what we have illicitly
added. ... [Then the mind] will be left ... with a knowledge of its nature or
substance.[33]

This not only conforms to the doctrine of such works as *de Libero Arbitrio* but also to
Augustine's account of his *itinerarium* in the *Confessions*.

There are problems with Menn's understanding of Plotinus and Augustine as they
appear on the way to Descartes. He neglects the relation of Plotinus and Augustine to
Scepticism in favour of their critical relation to Stoicism and Manicheism respectively.
Because Augustine's teaching on the Trinity seems to Descartes to belong to the
difference between their projects, neither the difference between *Nous* and the One as the
goals of the self emerges, nor do the problems this difference creates for the identity of

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[30] Ibid., 160, quoting *de Libero Arbitrio* 2.9.26.
[31] Ibid., 184, quoting *de Libero Arbitrio* 3.25.76.
[32] Ibid., 188, quoting *de Utilitate Credendi* 14.34..
[33] Ibid., 252; see 396 n. 1.

the Plotinian self appear. There is a further consequence that the Porphyrian mediation of Plotinus to Augustine remains hidden. Menn does not consult later Neoplatonism to understand Plotinus and what is particular or problematic in his teaching. This conceals to him a good part of what in Augustine lies philosophically beyond Plotinus. But what is positive in the intellectual union of the human and divine he has grasped.

2. Postmodern Historicist Refashionings Of Augustine

A. The Derridean Foundations

For Jacques Derrida the Augustinian theological tradition is the quintessence of the Logocentrism which makes Western culture. Derrida's postmodern "nothing outside text" is a deconstruction of that Logocentrism, along with the self which was born in, and is at home with, that reason above history and text. So, in deconstructing Augustine, Derrida is deconstructing the center of the core of the Western Christian tradition, religious and secular. Augustine's fateful identification of God and being in his interpretation of Exodus 3.14 puts him at the origins of Western onto-theology.[34] For postmodern theologians, the Augustinian self taken as secure intellectual substance is the root of all which is to be overcome in modernity. Constituted in relation to the divine as a mirror of the trinitarian divine self-relation, and possessing in that mirrored self-relation at once both a self-identity and a relation to the divine, the self is established in a pure thinking above and over the historical, the communal and the practical. Such an Augustinian self who would found a normative knowledge of the logic of reality in the Cartesian way must be read out of existence, (and out of Augustine), in order to construct a postmodern Christianity.

In Derrida's *Circumfession*,[35] we find the fundamentals of a postmodern treatment of Augustine. For the sake of a postmodern Christian theology it is necessary to deconstruct in Augustine: (1) the union of substance and subjectivity, (2) intellectual individualism independent of communitarian *praxis*, (3) self-presence as rational certainty

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[34] That interpretation occurs repeatedly in the *de Trinitate*, *CCSL*: 50, see 1.1.2; 5.2.3; 7.5.10. At 1.8.16 it is joined with contemplation as the Christian hope for joy so that being, knowing and presence are fully together as goal. The joining at 3.2.8 does not mention Exodus but uses *idipsum* as our goal. *De Trinitate* 2.16.27 & 2.18.34 make clear that vision is of the substance. For a criticism of a negative theology which only delays such a unification in hyperessentiality, see Jacques Derrida. "How to avoid speaking: Denials," *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, eds. S. Budick and W. Iser, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); translating Jacques Derrida, "Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations," *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre,* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987), 535-595. In negative theology he includes: the "Platonic or Neoplatonic tradition", Augustine, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein. He centers on the pseudo-Dionysius and Jean-Luc Marion's treatment of him.

[35] Circumfession, fifty-nine periods and periphrases written in a sort of internal margin, between Geoffrey Bennington's book and work in preparation (January 1989-April 1990), in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). It translates a book with the same title published in French in 1991.

simultaneously established against and constituting objectivity, (4) the unity of the normative and the rational which holds together knowledge and love, and, (5) the union of self-relation and the relation to God as other. Derrida has, himself, no interest in saving Augustine for Christian theology, but the rest of the project is his own. The difference of interest is important, however. Crucial to the Christian postmodern purpose is preventing the use of Augustine's thinking in order to found an autonomous philosophical reason. So, (6) it will be essential that nothing theoretical can be carried out of Augustine's *conversio*, his *itinerarium in deum*.

At the beginning of an article interpreting the *de Trinitate*, Rowan Williams writes about the representation he would refute:

> Augustine's concern with the self-relatedness of the divine essence (on the analogy of the self-perception and self-assent of the human subject) is seen as one of the primary sources of that pervasive Western European obsession with the individual's sense of him- or herself which has led, in the wake of Kant, to the fundamental illusion of modernity, the notion that the private self is the arbiter and source of value in the world. Augustine stands accused of collaborating in the construction of the modern consciousness that has wrought such havoc ...[36].

With Williams and his English postmodern theological companions, essential to the defense of Augustine against this accusation is a reading of the *de Trinitate* which would prevent comparison with Descartes' *Meditations*. To fill out our picture of what postmodern theology needs, let us connect Williams' point here with the one he makes in another essay specifically directed against a drawing together of Descartes and Augustine:

> Descartes seeks ... to establish that the thinking subject's thought of its own activity is the single foundational principle of all intellectual operations, the most simple and directly accessible and invulnerable epistemological datum we possess. ... Augustine's discussion of the certitude of self-knowledge is better described as an analysis of the grammar of the 'subject' (not simply the intellect) than as a quest for assurance against the possibility of global error.[37]

This distinction will reoccur with Jean-Luc Marion and we will need to consider its validity.

B. Jean-Luc Marion's Cogito, *Étienne Gilson Updated*

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[36] Rowan Williams, "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*," *Collectanea Augustiana. Mélanges T.J. van Bavel,* [=*Augustiniana*, 40:1-4 (1990)], 317.
[37] Rowan 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), 121.

In my earlier article for this journal I considered Professor Jean-Luc Marion's treatment of Augustine. Since my essay was published, Marion's only extended consideration of the relation of Descartes to Augustine has appeared. This and other recent writings should now be taken into account, particularly because Menn and Marion know each other's work.[38] To take this new literature into account, I shall need to repeat myself somewhat.

Marion found in Greek Patristic theology his most direct way into a postmodern theology. His first efforts "to shoot for God according to his most theological name - charity"[39] are in his *L'idole et la distance*, where, in the pseudo-Dionysius, he discovered a genuinely theological relation to the divine names which involves oppositions -- not actually found in Dionysius -- between the divine attributes as names for praise and concepts for thought, between theology and philosophy.[40] While Pseudo-Dionysius persists as the norm of what Marion seeks in pre-modern theology, he increasingly assimilates others to that norm, recently Aquinas, and to a considerable degree also Augustine.[41]

As with the postmodern theologians generally, Professor Marion's reading of Augustine is best understood in the context of his understanding and judgment about the foundations of modernity especially as those are Cartesian. For him, in the seventeenth-century:

> the radical position of subjectivity is replaced by the impersonal
> recognition of transcendence as a point of departure of philosophical
> reflection -- God is now a term in a demonstration, and no longer the
> assumed goal of a journey towards Him. ... [R]ationality [takes over]
> certain problems and concepts previously treated only by revealed
> theology ...

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[38] Jean-Luc Marion, "Formulations augustiniennes et cartésiennes" in *Questions cartésiennes*, *II, Sur l'ego et sur Dieu*, Philosophie d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 37-43. For Menn's treatment of the relations of Augustine and Descartes in the form in which it was presented as a doctoral thesis at the University of Chicago, see 42, n. 52. For Menn on Marion, *Descartes and Augustine*, 341 n., 343 n.

[39] Jean-Luc Marion, *God without being: Hors-texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (Chicago; Chicago University Press, 1991), xxi.

[40] Jean-Luc Marion, *L'idole et la distance, Cinq études*, (Paris; Grasset et Fasquelle, 1977) and revived Dionysius provides an alternative at the origins of modernity, see idem, "The Idea of God," *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayres, 2 vol. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), i, 270-72.

[41] 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*, édités Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997)*,* 414-15; idem, "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; idem, "*Theoria versus Poesis*: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas," *Modern Theology*, 15 (1999), in press.

From Descartes on, the pseudo-Dionysian divine names have become "purely philosophical terms."[42] In contrast, pre-modern philosophical theology, now authoritatively represented by Thomas Aquinas, preserves the analogical gap between the creature and God.

> [T]he gap always remains, even when our knowledge is certain. ... He who
> [is] remains "profoundly unknown, *penitus ignotum*". ... [O]ur knowledge
> of God terminates in inadequate and relative names, names which only
> allow God to be known as unknown.[43]

Marion's study of Descartes aims to show the ambiguities at the origins of modernity; thus, there is a choice for us in getting beyond the modern which equally involves staying with something present in it. What is made of Augustine is at the heart of this choosing.

First, and mostly, Augustine is placed with pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas and the premodern (i.e. pre Duns Scotus, Suarez and Descartes),[44] as maintaining a reason which is always transcendent toward God. So reason is always simultaneously religious and properly theological, e.g. being is known in the *analogia entis*, there is no independent secular reasoning, indeed, really no reason apart from the *itinerarium mentis in deum*. Augustine is set definitively against Suarez, often Scotus, and usually, but not always, Descartes. Descartes may be represented more as the victim of what the theologians did rather than as the worst of the moderns.[45]

Second, Augustine, is seen with Descartes on some matters. For example, they are treated together on voluntarism, but the Cartesian doctrine of the creation of eternal truths is used to distinguish his voluntarism as the more radical. This is a point on which Stephen Menn will differ from Marion -- judging that Marion makes the break with the scholastic and Augustinian traditions more sharp than it is. When, with Menn, the gap is diminished, Descartes "is best understood as .. working out the consequences of the

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[42] Marion, "The Idea of God," 265.

[43] Ibid., 266. Thomas is also represented in as a master of apophatism in Questions cartésiennes, *II*.

[44] Professor Marion, and many others, learned important aspects of their history of philosophy from Gilson, including their suspicion of the Scotistic Thomism of Suarez as corrupting modern thought by tending to a univocity of being which lies at the origin of theology as metaphysics, and, thus, as onto-theology. See, for example, Jean-Luc Marion, "The Essential Incoherence of Descartes' Definition of Divinity," trans. Frederick Van de Pitte, *Essays on Descartes'* Meditations, edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 303-4, idem, "The Idea of God," 267ff.; idem, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1994), 576; Graham Ward, "Introducing Jean-Luc Marion," *New Blackfriars*, 76:895 (July/August, 1995), "Special Issue on Jean-Luc Marion's *God without Being*," 318-21. This analysis is also picked up by Milbank and Catherine Pickstock.

[45] See Marion, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes. Constitution et limites de l'onto-théo-logie dans la pensée cartésienne,* Épiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), 231-33 and idem, "The Essential Incoherence," 303-4 where Augustine is with Damascene, Aquinas and Anselm against Suarez, Scotus and Descartes who are guilty of the "univocist drift that analogy undergoes" (306). Idem, *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes: Analogie création des vérités éternelles et fondement*, edition corrigée et complétée (Paris: Quadrige/ Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), 69ff., 162.

Augustinian conception of God."[46] Marion traces the Cartesian *cogito* to Augustine. However, what Descartes is said to have done with it Marion maintains to be very different from what Augustine was about.

Crucially, Marion points to Descartes' own recognition that Augustine is using the *cogito* as a way to the analogous knowledge of the divine Trinity, and that this is not at all his own purpose.[47] Here he connects with Étienne Gilson's rejection of an Augustinian foundation for Descartes' philosophy. Because faith and reason, grace and nature were so indissolubly linked in Augustine, according to Gilson, his philosophy cannot be detached from religious *itinerarium* for the sake of an understanding and control of the world. As we have seen, Menn's book is substantially directed against Gilson's position.[48]

Further, Marion makes a distinction which seems like that involved in Rowan Williams' contrast between Augustine and Descartes because "Augustine's discussion of the certitude of self-knowledge is better described as an analysis of the grammar of the 'subject'." 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.[49]

Standing behind the Cartesian *ego*, Augustine's *cogito* is placed at the origins of modernity. But because Augustine remains only with the self-identity of spirit, his *ego* is exempt from what would ground the modern turn to the world. In contrast, the Cartesian *ego* is founded in an *alterité*, which might allow it to be used as a certain foundation for universal control of what is other. However, since, for Marion, the Cartesian *ego* is distinct from the identity of thought and being, it is not directly onto-theological. The dreadful modern identity of subjectivity, thought and being is not completed, Descartes' thought remains *indécidée (blanche)*.[50]

Third, Augustine is at the source of the Latin interpretation of Exodus 3.14 identifying God and being. Here, the evaluation of Augustine may, in principle, if his theology is found to be Neoplatonic, subordinating being, go up and down with that of Aquinas. In

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[46] Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, 341 n.; see 343 n. and 395 and Marion, *Sur la théologie blanche*, *passim*; will and knowing in Augustine and Descartes are discussed at 384; idem, "The Idea of God," 273-75.

[47] Marion, *Sur la théologie blanche*, 384, n. 22 on the *cogito*; see also, idem, *Sur le prisme métaphysique*, 138-41, 147.

[48] Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, 6-17, 393 and 398-99.

[49] Marion, *Questions cartésiennes*, II, 41; "Formulations augustiniennes et cartésiennes" here at 37-43 is Marion's most extended treatment of differences between Descartes and Augustine on the *cogito*.

[50] Géry Prouvost, "La tension irrésolue: Les *Questions cartésiennes*, II, de Jean-Luc Marion," *Revue thomiste*, 98:1 (1998), 97: "Marion refuse ainsi d'inscrire Descartes dans la tradition ontothéologique ... la pensée de Descartes reste une pensée indécidée (blanche)."

L'idole et la distance and in *Dieu sans l'être*, Aquinas was placed with the onto-theologians because he made being the first of God's names. But in the "Preface to the English Edition" of *God Without Being*, and in "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie," and later works,[51] the teaching of Thomas has been Neoplatonised by Marion as a *théo-onto-logie*, for which God is before being which he gives even to himself. Aquinas is shifted toward Dionysius and Proclus. So far as Augustine is not also a theo-ontologian, he would be set against pseudo-Dionysius, and would need to be overcome.[52] Marion's doctrine here resembles that of Plotinus in *Ennead* VI.8, where the One freely gives himself being. Moreover, Marion's Cartesian *ego*, standing before the identity of thought and being, is close to the Plotinian One.

Finally, Augustine is placed with Bérulle and Pascal (and thus against Descartes) in the Christian reaction within modernity for the mystery and infinity of God against its tendency to univocity.[53] In contrast, it is crucial to the argument of Menn that Descartes is inspired by the Cardinal de Bérulle.

With Marion, the transcendence toward God is crucial. Marion, and our Anglican postmodern theologians, are above all opposed to the "univocist drift" in the Scotistic transformation of scholasticism by Suarez which leads in Descartes to "a rationality not theologically assured by Christian Revelation, but metaphysically founded on the humanity of 'men strictly men'."[54] Thus, philosophy is to be transcendentally oriented to theology, (which is religious life rather than science), or separated altogether from theology. Theology's independence from philosophy is what they demand above all. And though their programmes resemble that of Karl Barth, they are derived from Heidegger.[55]

We can conclude that, in common with Williams, Marion reads Augustine so that any horizontal self-completeness of the interpenetration of being, thinking and loving in *mens*

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[51] *Revue Thomiste*, 95:1 (1995), [*Saint Thomas et l'onto-théo-logie*], 31-66, the *retractio* is at 33 and 65; for Marion's shift or "recantation" here, see Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 150-52 and Prouvost, "La tension irrésolue," 99-101. For later treatments of Aquinas, see Marion, "The Idea of God," 265-67.

[52] In *God without Being*, 73-74 [=*Dieu sans l'être*, 110]: Augustine is placed with Thomas, but the Greek Fathers are absolved because being, for them, "returns to the Son, it could not in any way determine the triune divinity which therefore exceeds Being." At this point Marion, in a note (51, p. 215) quotes with approval the remark of Derrida: "as a linguistic statement: 'I am he who am' is the admission of a mortal." At n. 50, he subscribes to the argument of J.S. O'Leary who finds Augustinian thought at the origins of the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics.

[53] See Marion, *Sur la théologie blanche*, 140-60; idem, *Sur le prisme métaphysique*, 313, 349; idem, "The Idea of God," 272 and 292 and the conclusion of W.J. Hankey, "Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation in John Colet, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker and the Cardinal Bérulle," in the *Actes* of the Kolloquium "Augustinus in der Neuzeit. Von Petrarca zum 18. Jahrhundert," edited by Kurt Flasch and Dominique de Courcelles, Editions Brepols-Turnhout, 1998, in press.

[54] Marion, "The Essential Incoherence," 297 and 306 and "The Idea of God," *passim*.

[55] Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant Donné. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*, Épiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 329; John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," *The Word Made Strange. Theology, Language, Culture*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1997), 36-37. See Hankey, "*Theoria versus Poesis*."

which might be exploited for philosophy independent of revealed theology, is excised.[56]
This excision is for the sake of the transcendent relations of a radical charity, relations
which are simultaneously toward a communitarian *praxis* and toward God.[57]

C. Rowan Williams' Reading Of The De Trinitate

This transcendence, established against knowledge, is the perspective determining
Rowan Williams' interpretation of the *de Trinitate*. For Williams the limits of theory are
set because the appropriate response to the unresolvable problems of theodicy is
communitarian *praxis*.[58] His position is radically worked out by John Milbank as
"postmodern critical Augustinianism" for which theory occurs as a necessarily
incomplete moment within *praxis*.[59] Milbank's theological writing is "composing a new
theoretical music."[60] Theory belongs to composition and is not separable from it. The
requirement that we join in the *poesis* means that there can be no theoretical distance or
objectivity. The "event of reconciliation must be not merely believed in, but actively
realized as the existence of a community in which mere 'self-immediacy' is infinitely
surpassed."[61] With the surpassing of interiority and self-immediacy, we also pass beyond
theology as *theoria*:

> Unless it reflects upon the singularity of Christian norms of community,
> theology has really nothing to think about. ... [I]f Christians ask what is

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[56] Marion, *Étant Donné,* 11: "lorsque enfin nous opposons l'adonné à la subjectivité transcendentale, nous
ne suggérons *pas* que le "sujet"' renaît dans la donation." A return to Augustine will not be for the sake of a
metaphysical or transcendental subjectivity.

[57] See Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolégomènes à la charité,* 2nd edition (Paris: Editions de La Différence, 1991)
and *Dieu sans l'être*, 197ff. By means of a Dionysian theology of the divine names, and because the
Eucharist is the site of his theology of charity, communitarian *praxis* is not set against but in contemplation.

[58] Rowan Williams, "Trinity and ontology," *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald
MacKinnon*, edited Kenneth Surin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 87: The tragic (or
absurd) requires as its response a *praxis,* a "'seeing' of the Cross, and through it of the world, .. concretely
made possible through the existence of 'reconstructed relationships' - not an internal shift of attitudes but
the coming into being of a community with distinctive forms of self-definition."

[59] Milbank, "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short *Summa* in Forty Two Responses to Unasked
Questions," *Modern Theology*, 7:3 (April, 1991), 231-35; see also idem, "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing,"
The Word Made Strange. Theology, Language, Culture, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1997), 79-80.

[60] Milbank, "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism'," 227 & 237; idem, *The Word Made Strange. Theology,
Language, Culture*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1997), 4. For his development of the notion that Christian
faithfulness will require a poetic surrender to the musical flow which, as against static spatialization,
stresses "'temporal occurrence through us'" (*The Word Made Strange*, 44 and 142), Milbank relies upon
Catherine Pickstock. See especially Milbank, "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing," 83, n. 62 for the
interpretation of Augustine's *De Musica* which is required and Catherine Pickstock, "Ascending Numbers:
Augustine's *De Musica* and the Western Tradition," *Christian Origins : Theology, rhetoric and community*,
edited by Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, Studies in Christian Origins (London: Routledge, 1998), 185-215.
Milbank's position on the *ego* in Augustine resembles that of Susan Mennel, "Augustine's 'I': The 'Knowing
Subject' and the Self," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 2 (1994), 291-324.

[61] Milbank, "The Second Difference," 184-86.

> God like? then they can only point to our 'response' to God in the
> formation of community. The community is what God is like.[62]

I do not intend to treat John Milbank's position in this paper. To do so would require describing his postmodern substitution of a new linguistic ontology created in the wake of Derrida. To consider whether such a new metaphysics solves the problems of the ancient and modern ontologies founded in substance and in the subject would reach beyond our purposes here.[63] His most recent treatment of Augustine sketches his reading of Augustine's *de Trinitate*. As we would expect, for Milbank, though time, (as the dimension of the *itinerarium*),[64] is privileged over space, Augustine radicalizes "a stress that we only have participatory access to the eternal by *remaining within* the structures of space, time and human language." "Because for Augustine to know oneself *genuinely* means to know oneself as loving ... not interiority but radical *exteriorization* is implied." "Augustine's use of the vocabulary of inwardness is not at all a deepening of Platonic interiority, but something much more like its subversion."[65] Milbank acknowledges his dependence on Rowan Williams and Lewis Ayres to establish this view of Augustine and so to Williams, the teacher of Ayres, we turn.

The first of his two relevant articles, "Sapientia and the Trinity," is largely occupied with refuting the charge made by Eastern Orthodox theologians, generally, and by a wide range of western theologians, of whom we may take Karl Rahner as representative, that Augustine separates the treatment of the divine essence from the personal relations of the trinity in such a way as to make the essence the subject of a knowledge of God prior to and independent of revelation. This is associated among Augustine's critics with his continuing attachment to Neoplatonism. Williams is right in his rejection of this criticism which is based in misapprehensions of how the divine essence and relations are connected in Augustine, of Neoplatonism, for which there is no rational knowledge of the One, and of the history of Latin theology, which derived the distinction between the *de deo uno* and the *de deo trino* not from Augustine but from the Pseudo-Dionysius.[66] I entirely agree with the direction of Williams' argument on this point, but note what is

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[62] Milbank, "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism'," 228.

[63] On him see Hankey, "ReChristianizing Augustine Postmodern Style: Readings by Jacques Derrida, Robert Dodaro, Jean-Luc Marion, Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayes and John Milbank," *Animus*, 2 (1997)," idem, "Denys and Aquinas," idem, "*Theoria versus Poesis*," idem, "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), in press.

[64] See Pickstock, *After Writing*: *On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), *passim*.

[65] John Milbank, "Sacred Triads: Augustine and the Indo-European Soul," *Modern Theology*, 13:4 (1997), 464-65 and nn.

[66] See W.J. Hankey, "The *De Trinitate* of St. Boethius and the Structure of St. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*," *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Boeziani*, ed. L. Obertello, (Roma: Herder, 1981), 367-375; idem, *God In Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 12, 129-35; idem, "Denys and Aquinas," 168-69; Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)*, 169-74; idem, "'Procession and Return' in Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors," *The Princeton Seminary Review*, 13:2 (1992), 147-163.

characteristically postmodern in his theological perspective. Williams wishes to reduce substance to relation, (and thus the individual to the interpersonal), and opposes autonomous philosophical reason.

This fundamental opposition, which comes out of an antagonism to modernity, produces three further oppositions in Williams' representation of Augustine. These are deeply problematic. First, Williams opposes our union with God, on the one hand, to the mental self-relation of remembering, knowing and loving, the image of God in us, on the other. He writes: "The image of God in us ... is realised when the three moments of our mental agency all have God for their object. ... [T]he mind ... will not know itself *truthfully* if it is a self-contained object to itself. ... [T]he mind as independent individuality cannot image God."[67] What, in Augustine, is a choice between good and evil, between *conversio* and *adversio* in respect to God and self, a choice which is only possible because of the three-fold image, has become an opposition so that our knowledge does not have "a truthful basis."

Second, there is an opposition between our *sapientia* and the divine *sapientia*. "Our knowledge is not like God's -- nor will it ever be: it will always and necessarily be a *sapientia* learned or acquired (xv.26), even when it is assured (as it now is not) of a truthful basis (xv.24-26).[68] This means that the human turning to God, which Williams has just demanded so that the image of God in us may be true, can never occur. In fact, we can never know in God. Williams embraces this consequence. The opposition of the two wisdoms remains absolute with the result that the knowledge of the opposition can only be increased. The same is true of the difference between Creator and creature.

Third, then, Williams opposes Creator and creature in such a way that they can never come together. Ours "is a trinitarian life appropriate to the created order, as against the trinitarian life appropriate to eternity."[69] So, "Our *sapientia* ... terminate[s] ... in our recognition of our created distance from God. ... [W]e are ontologically incapable of being *sapientia* as God is."[70]

There is a consequence of these oppositions which is central to Lewis Ayres' treatment of the *de Trinitate*.[71] Because union cannot be realised in *sapientia*, indeed, in any kind of possession and actuality, we must move from knowledge to love and to love as endless quest. Williams writes that the Spirit is "love in search of an object".[72] *Sapientia*, "once we are clear what *sapientia* really means," is "a life that generates relations of love and so

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[67] Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity," 319-20.
[68] Ibid., 326. There is no *de Trinitate* XV.xv.26.
[69] Ibid., 325
[70] Ibid., 326, 327.
[71] Lewis Ayres, "The Discipline of Self-Knowledge in Augustine's *De Trinitate* Book X," *The Passionate Intellect. Essays on the Transformations of the Classical Traditions*, edited by Lewis Ayres, Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities VII (New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 261-96.
[72] Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity," 329.

generates otherness, difference."[73] So the divine self-reflexivity is both "complete in itself" and "also indeterminately in search of an object to love."[74]

Finally, then, self-reflexivity and knowledge, on the one side, and self-othering and love, on the other side, are opposed. Williams concludes: "There is certainly no trace at all here of a Neoplatonic interest in the One."[75] But this judgment of Augustine, as Williams represents him, is profoundly mistaken. In fact, it is Williams himself who has interpreted Augustine in a Neoplatonic way. It is precisely the division, in Plotinus, and in the Neoplatonists generally with the exception of Porphyry, between the absolute First Principle and what has self-reflexivity which separates the Neoplatonists from Augustine. In Plotinus this has the consequences, first, that self-knowledge and the knowledge of the One cannot, in the end, be drawn together and, second, that there are multiple human selves. This second consequence has been recognised as cohering with a postmodern deconstruction of the self-identity.[76]

When we turn to Williams' article explicitly directed against finding Augustine a collaborator in building the foundations of modernity and of the Cartesian philosophy, we have the same interpretative principles at work. In his "The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in the *De Trinitate*," he maintains his great separation in Augustine both of the divine and the human and of their wisdoms. So he rejects the possibility of a substantial human self-identity.

> [T]he mind cannot contemplate eternal truth as an object in itself: it can encounter it only through a particular kind of self-reflection. And this self-reflection likewise cannot be the perception of the mind itself as object: it exists only as an awareness of the mind's working, the mind's movement.[77]

"Created selfhood" is radically incomplete and other-directed. For what it really grasps in knowing is "the lack and desire out of which we live."[78] Finally, for Williams,

> [T]he paradox [Augustine] presses upon us is that a mind intrinsically incomplete, desirous and mobile ... can rightly and intelligibly be said to know itself completely. Self-knowledge is being defined, [therefore,] not

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[73] Ibid., 330.

[74] Ibid., 331.

[75] Ibid.

[76] On which, in useful comparison with Descartes, see S. Rappe, "Self-knowledge and subjectivity in the *Enneads*," *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, edited Lloyd Gerson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 269.

[77] Williams, "The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge," 122. So eternal truth would remain "through what was mutable and corruptible in the soul, as fact, image and language": J.A. Doull, "What is Augustinian *sapientia?" Dionysius*, 12 (1988), 63. Doull's article is directed against such a view of Augustine.

[78] Ibid., 127.

as cognition of a spiritual substance, but awareness of the conditions of
finitude and the ability to live and act within them.[79]

This paradox is of Williams' own making and comes out of his assumptions which
will not allow the most obvious features of Augustine's text to speak to him. Self-
knowledge in Augustine's *de Trinitate* is not simply awareness of the conditions of
finitude and of what we lack. In genuine Augustinian terms, Williams, in fact, condemns
all humans to an eternal Hell by the necessity of their nature. Sometimes, however,
Augustine's text is weakly heard for a moment. So Williams writes: "Augustine is not ...
appealing to some luminous intuition of our spiritual essence, though he is quite capable
at times of using language which comes close to this."[80] This language having been
successfully ignored, Williams is able to claim that the *de Trinitate* is not about self-
knowledge which would constitute a union of self-certainty and substance: "It is an
affirmation of the need at least to begin with the mind's involvement in time and in other
selves."[81] He judges that the love as self-othering to which it is thus moved is not
Plotinian:

> In this mature reworking of the whole theme of 'entering into oneself' to
> find God, the Plotinian *eros* for the One is transformed into an *eros*
> directed to the understanding of *eros* itself.[82]

Once again it is the contrast with Plotinus which gives away the weakness in how
Williams reads Augustine. These Christian theological postmoderns have always a
trouble with the Neoplatonists because what they want to discover in patristic Christianity
is, in reality, more securely found in pagan Neoplatonism than in Christian theology. The
absolute first for Plotinus is equally named by us as the Good as well as the One. The
Plotinian Good is the activity of a free will which is self-productive. Indeed the
productivity or self-othering of this Good is its very nature -- as the Latin medievals said
of it, "bonum est diffusivum sui."[83] But there is a limit to this self-othering. In Plotinus
the One-Good cannot reflect upon itself, when it does so, when it is simultaneously above
and below itself, it is *Nous*. In Plotinus it is, in fact, intellectual self-reflexivity which
moves us down from the first to the second spiritual hypostasis. Significantly, the same is
not true for Plotinus when speaking of the will or love of the Good. He writes that "the

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[79] Ibid., 129.
[80] Ibid., 130.
[81] Ibid., 132.
[82] Ibid., 133.
[83] See *Ennead* V.1 and VI.8; Maria Luisa Gatti, "Plotinus: the Platonic tradition and the foundation of
Neoplatonism," John Bussanich, "Plotinus' metaphysics of the One," and George Leroux, "Human Freedom
in the Thought of Plotinus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, edited Lloyd Gerson, (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1997), 26ff., 55-7, 61-2 and 311-2. I use the text in the Loeb Plotinus,
Enneads, trans. A.H. Armstrong, 7 vols., (Cambridge, Mass./ London: Harvard, 1966-1988). In "Procession
néoplatonicienne et création judeo-chrétienne," *Néoplatonisme, mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard,* Les
Cahiers de Fontenay, 19-22 (Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1981), 6 and "Raison et mystique chez Plotin," *Revue
des études augustiniennes*, 20 (1974), 9, Jean Trouillard posits a Procline origin for the Latin formula.

nature of the Good is in reality the will of himself," he is "choosing himself."[84] He is, as "cause of himself," "lovable and love and love of himself."[85] It is not by turning to love against intellect that we shall move from Plotinus to Augustine.

Rather it is with a reflexive union of being, intellect and love that Augustine, following Porphyry, probably mediated through Victorinus,[86] and submitting to the counciliar definitions of the Church, parts company with Plotinus. The Augustinian trinity, as opposed to the Plotinian triad, is self-reflexive. The Plotinian One-Good is essentially a free, generous, othering, loving activity, but it is precisely not <u>self</u>-othering because, as the Good, it cannot know itself in or as its other. This lack is reflected in the human self which knows the spiritual hypostases by "entering into itself" but which cannot, in the end, hold together self-knowledge and the One. In Augustine we have genuine self-othering and self-reflexivity both in God and in His human image. What is fled by postmodern theology is what makes Augustine's characteristic development of Christian Platonism. It is ironic that the fundamental fault of this would be theological and anti-philosophical reading of Augustine is to reduce almost to nothing the trinitarian structure of the divine and the human for Augustine.

Williams, in flight from an association of Descartes and Augustine, misreads Augustine's relation to Plotinus whom Williams imposes on Augustine at the very moment that he polemically opposes Neoplatonism. Let us see what happens when Augustine is read in a concord between Plotinus and Descartes.

3. Self-Knowledge And God As Other In The *Enneads* And The *De Trinitate*

There are two Augustines before us. For one, at least so far as knowledge is concerned, God is always beyond. If the human and divine come together at all, it is in charity, *praxis* and *poesis*. For the other, self-knowledge and the knowledge of God are so tied up with each other that we may speak of self-presence and rational certainty, of knowledge of God through self-knowledge, of grasp and possession of God, of intuition and understanding of the nature of God and ourselves. Can we decide between these Augustines?

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[84] *Ennead*, VI.8.13.38-40.

[85] *Ennead*, VI.8.14.41-VI.8.15.2.

[86] See Paul Henry, "The *Adversus Arium* of Marius Victorinus, the First Systematic Exposition of the Doctrine of the Trinity, *JTS*, n.s. 1 (1950), 42-55 where what is missing, the mediation of Plotinus by Porphyry, Henry's student, Pierre Hadot, supplied. See Pierre Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* , 2 vols. (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968) and, the recent summary of the state of the question with his own precisions, John M. Dillon, "Porphyry's Doctrine of the One," *Chercheurs de sagesse. Hommage à Jean Pépin*, publié sous la direction de Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, Goulven Madec, Denis O'Brien, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 131 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1992), 356-66. A result is, for example, N. Cipriani, "Le fonti cristiane della dottrina trinitaria nei primi Dialoghi di S. Agostino," *Augustinianum*, 34 (1994), 253-312, on Henry and Hadot: 260ff., which goes beyond Hadot in respect to Augustine's following of Victorinus.

A. Plotinus

I have already indicated that there are limits to what is understood of Plotinus, and thus Augustine, in the modern, anti-historicist and metaphysical perspective of Menn. However, I think that these limits can be surpassed and, when surpassed, his perspective encompasses the postmodern Augustine who turns out to be a pagan Neoplatonist just when he thinks himself to be most distinctively himself!

Crucial for the understanding of Augustine, who is explicit about it, but also for Plotinus, is that both begin in a philosophical movement from Scepticism as well as from the Stoicism emphasized by Dr. Menn.[87] *Ennead* V.1, *On the Three Primary Hypostases*, an *Ennead* to which Menn refers often, begins, not with a criticism of Stoicism, but 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, in fact, dependent upon the sensible below it.

This is the Sceptical 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 it achieved quietude, its always assumed ideal, an ideal it had sought in knowledge of the truth. It now decides that moving in judgment between the true and the false, the good and the evil would not have provided quietude at all.[88] What the self had mistakenly sought in otherness it now possesses better in itself. Plotinus 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 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.

The Plotinian soul is established in a completion of the Sceptical reflexion into self, a reflexion which is carried to substantial self-knowledge. In that self-reflexivity the soul rises, as Menn says it does, to *Nous* and to the knowledge of itself and all else in *Nous*. Because the Plotinian *Nous* is also self-reflexive, the human soul, established in self-knowledge in reaction to a confusion with the sensible, is able to hold together, at the level of *Nous*, self-knowledge and the knowledge of the divine other. Human knowing and its object are together there, just as thought and being are established in relation to each other within the life of *Nous*. However, when the individual reaches that through which both it and all else are ultimately established, the One, the limit of self-reflexivity, appears. Porphyry, in his heretical drawing together of the first and second hypotheses of the *Parmenides* within the First Principle, will exploit the fact that, unlike his successors, Plotinus ascribes *energeia* and *boule* to the One in such a way that it may be said to give itself its freedom and being.[89] However, for Plotinus, being and will do not belong to the

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[87] See W.J. Hankey, "The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism."
[88] Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Bk. I, xii-xiii.
[89] *Ennead* VI.8 generally, see particularly VI.8.7.48ff.; VI.8.8-9; VI.8.13.5-9 & 39ff.; VI.8.16.30ff.; VI.8.20.10-13.

One in an act of self-reflexion. Such an act would divide the One, placing it above and below itself, as if it received itself from itself as from another.[90] What is true of the soul which exists from another, and needs above all to know this alterity, cannot be true of the One.[91] There is no reflexive self-othering within the One.

Since the knowing individual self is established in the One, the fact that a self-reflexive knowing cannot be carried to the root of the self has extremely important negative consequences for self-identity in Plotinus.[92] The best treatments I know leave us with paradox and *aporia*. Gerard O'Daly shows that soul remains, as thinking self-reflexive subject, when it achieves *henosis* with *nous*.[93] But, the principle of the self is the One, love of whom moves the whole *itinerarium* of self-knowledge. Ultimately the One and the individual belong together; returning to the One, the individual returns to itself.[94] But awareness, when we are with the One, is beyond reason and intellectual self-reflexion. There, the individual is returned to itself and also "he is not himself." 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.[95] Plotinus writes:

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[90] *Ennead* VI.8.16; VI.9.6; V.1.6. I accept the argument of A.H. Armstrong at V.1.7.7 n.1 (p.34) rejecting self-knowledge by a return of the One upon itself. In the strong separation of the One and *Nous*, Armstrong is following Jean Trouillard and, in general, the anti-Hegelian Neoplatonism which established itself after Bréhier. Contrast Émile Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin*, Bibliothèque de la Revue des Cours et Conférences (Paris: Boivin, 1928), 180-81 and Jean Trouillard, "Raison et mystique chez Plotin," 12 and idem, "Pluralité spirituelle et unité normative selon Blondel," *Archives de philosophie*, janv.-mars 1961, 24 where he indicates that Augustine leads inevitably to Hegel. Procession and conversion are equally necessary but they must not be united in rational reflexivity: see Joseph Combès, "Néoplatonisme aujourd'hui: La vie et le pensée de Jean Trouillard (1907-1984)," *Études néoplatoniciennes*, 2nd. éd., Collection Krisis (Grenoble: Million, 1996), 355-57.

[91] *Ennead* V.1.3; VI.8.12,1-12; VI.9.1.42-43; VI.9.3.20ff.; VI.9.5.4ff.

[92] See A.H. Armstrong, "Form, Individual and Person in Plotinus," *Dionysius*, 1 (1977), 49-68; Rappe, "Self-knowledge and subjectivity," and R. Sorabji, "Mystical Experience in Plotinus and Augustine," *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, *theories in antiquity and the early middle ages*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 157-63.

[93] Gerard J.P. O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) concludes that the self does not disappear at the intelligible level, indeed, the self is not annihilated but retained even in *henosis* with intellect. O'Daly at p.65 examines *Ennead* IV.4.2, where Plotinus says that the soul, "must of necessity enter into one-ness (*henosis*) with *nous* by reason of its conversion" (line 26). "But this *henosis* does not imply ... that the soul loses its identity": "the two are one, and two" (lines 29-30) "One cannot fail to be struck by the use, once again, of the paradox of self-intellection, now clearly applied to explain how and why the human self, reverting to the Intelligible, *remains itself,* while at the same time being one with the totality of Being." (O'Daly p.65) The paradox is: "all intellection implies self, precisely because it is only in the act of reflexion, which presupposes a subject, that intellection occurs. But ... since this reflexion is upon the very subject of the dualized, intelligizing self, self-intellection does not lessen the unity of being - indeed, it depends for its integrity upon that unity." (O'Daly p.64).

[94] *Ennead* VI.9.1.28ff.; VI.9.2ff.; VI.9.9.56-60 and VI.9.10-11; especially, VI.9.11.39 [these last texts are on both sides of the divide].

[95] *Ennead* VI.9.4; VI.9.7.20-21; VI.9.8.25-30; VI.9.9.56-60 and VI.9.10-11. 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," *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, XXIII (London: Variorum,

> 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.[96]

Significantly for our dialogue with postmodern interpreters of Augustine, this second power is "Intellect in love," *nous erôn*. As Gerard O'Daly wrote: Plotinus "must isolate an instance of *nous* which transcends its characteristic activity of reflexion and attribute to this the vision of the One. ... But the notion of a non-intellectual Intellect is quickly found unsatisfactory." Since neither is given up, Plotinus' thought at this point is aporetic.[97]

> At the human level, the Plotinian higher and lower selves remain irreducibly beside one another because both the One and also the substantial Being of Intellectual self-relation are models and causes of its identity, freedom and authentic existence.[98] A self with two such goals must move back and forth between being and non being, between identity and otherness, between reflexivity and self-forgetful simplicity. Its identity cannot lie in a knowledge which is its own. Of the problems and real consequences for human self-identity of what is ultimate for Plotinus, Menn seems largely unaware.[99] These consequences are welcomed by postmoderns who would deconstruct modern self-identity, but the postmodern theologians place with Augustine what belongs to Plotinus. To find postmodern selves, we should better look to Plotinus than to Augustine, to pagan rather than to Christian Neoplatonism.

B. Augustine

In turning to Augustine we shall not be able to separate what is philosophical from what comes from the Christian Scriptures and the authority of the Church. It is just Augustine's theological transformation of the Plotinian divine triad with its necessarily subordinated and unequal second and third hypostases that allows him to unify the self and to bring it together with God in self-knowledge more completely than Plotinus did. In these unifications, as compared to Plotinus, to post-Plotinian pagan Neoplatonism, and to

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1979). In this Armstrong is explicitly following Trouillard. One may also compare the treatment of the Plotinian mysticism by Pierre Hadot: "Si on 'le' voit, dit Plotin, on se voit soi-même identique à lui et on ne voit pas l'Un comme différent de soi, mais on est soi-même devenu un autre, on n'est plus soi, ni à soi, l'on n'est plus une essence particulière, mais comme le Bien de Platon ..., on est au-delà de l'essence." *Annuaire École pratique des hautes études Ve Section - sciences religieuses*, 79 (1971-72), (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1972), 273; see also his three treatments in the *Annuaire du Collège de France:* 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1990-91, pages 459-65, 501-5 and 481-91 respectively.

[96] *Ennead* VI.7.35.20-23; with the second kind of seeing he "mingles his seeing with what he contemplates."

[97] *Ennead*, VI.7.35.24; O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy,* 88.

[98] *Ennead* VI.8.6-7; VI.8.9; VI.8.12-13; VI.8.16-24.

[99] Menn, *Descartes*, 111, n. 26 recognizes some of the problems but seems to have forgotten them by the following page. See also 122, n. 33. The problems are well brought out by Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, 159-61 and O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy*, 82ff.

postmodern Augustinianism,[100] Augustine "assigns an enhanced scope to intellect."[101] But, then, philosophy and Christian authority were both necessary to Augustine's trinitarian doctrine.[102] As scholars like Edward Booth, Werner Beierwaltes and Salvatore Lilla have shown, Porphyry and Aristotle are crucial for what Augustine thinks.[103] When, from the resulting self-knowledge, a principle for autonomous philosophical reason is developed, there is no betrayal.

As with his representation of Plotinus, I judge that Stephen Menn's picture of Augustine should be augmented with a greater recognition of his relation to Scepticism as well as to Stoicism and Platonism. On his way from Manicheism to Platonism Augustine passes through Scepticism.[104] That this passage is indispensably important is testified not only by the *Contra Academicos*, but by his account of *mens* with its indubitable union of being, thinking and loving, the account so troubling for a postmodern retrieval of Augustine. Augustine also begins from the Hellenistic desire for peace, rest, or quietude, [105]and finds his way there by a reflexive movement into the self as against the sensible. The fundamental difference between Augustine and Plotinus is that Augustine is able to carry this self-reflexivity all the way through. It is carried further within the individual self so that reflexivity becomes a positive relation of remembering, knowing and loving on which much else can be established. It is also carried through to the absolute First

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[100] See, on the second comparison, Hankey, "*Theoria versus Poesis.*"

[101] R.D. Crouse, "*Paucis mutatis verbis*: St. Augustine's Platonism," *Augustine and his critics,* edited R.J. Dodaro and G.P. Lawless, London and New York: Routledge, in press. Crouse goes on: "Certainly in pagan Platonism, *nous* has a high place in the divine hierarchy and in the human soul, yet the ascent to God demands a faculty of soul beyond intellect, where union is sought by way of the religious *praxis* of the mysteries, above understanding." On the "flower of *nous*" in Plotinus, see O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy*, 86-7. Sorabji found what Crouse also finds, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, 170: "For Plotinus the highest stage of mystical experience was never intellectual ... for Augustine the highest stage always remained intellectual, since it always involved a vision of the truth."

[102] *de Trinitate* 2.1: "substantiam dei siue per scripturam eius siue per creaturam"; 8.5.8; 15.1: "diuinae scripturae auctoritate, uerum ... ratione demonstrare"; see Crouse, "St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*: Philosophical Method."

[103] See notes above and Booth, "St. Augustine's 'notitia sui'," 28 (1978), 209-211; Salvatore R.C. Lilla, "Un dubbio di S. Agostino su Porfirio," *Nuovi Annali della Facoltà di Magistero dell'Università di Messina* [Roma: Herder] 5 (1987), 319-331; idem, "Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite, Porphyre et Damascius," in *Actes du Colloque sur Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident,* éd. Ysabel de Andia, série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1997)*,* 117-35; idem, "Neoplatonic Hypostases and the Christian Trinity," *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition. Essays Presented to John Whittaker*, ed. M. Joyal, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1997), 157.

[104] Compare Augustine *Confessiones* 6.16.26.22-26 (considered in the light of 5.10.19, 5.14.25 & 6.11.18) with *Ennead* V.1.1. I owe this comparison to my student Eli Charles Diamond. That the doctrine of the *de Trinitate* stands in relation to the Skeptical Academy is clear from 14.19.26 and 15.12.

[105] The subject of Augustine's *Confessions* is that rest. The book has a subjective beginning: "inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te" (1.1.6-7), and an objective conclusion: "Tu autem bonum nullo indigens bono semper quietus es, quoniam tua quies tu ipse es" (13.38.53.10-11), in this regard. In the midst is "Versa et reuersa in tergum et in latera et in uentrum, et dura sunt omnia, et tu solus requies." (6.16.26.22-24) [*CCSL*, XXVII]. See R.D. Crouse, "*Recurrens in te unum:* The Pattern of St. Augustine's *Confessions,*" *Studia Patristica*, XIV, ed. E.A. Livingstone, *Text und Untersuchungen* 117 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1976), 392 and Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, 169.

Principle so that self-knowledge and our knowledge of God as other do not need to be opposed.[106]

In responding to the postmodern representation of Augustine from within Menn's perspective corrected in the way indicated, I shall look at two questions. First, the character and purpose of Augustine's *cogito* and second the character of Augustinian *sapientia*. It is crucial is that both belong to what we may call "saving knowledge." As much as possible I shall restrict myself to the *de Trinitate*.

However, it is not with the *de Trinitate*, but with the *Confessions,* that I begin, and there with a point at the center of Menn's argument and well established by him. With this one might respond to the notion of Williams and Marion that the Augustinian *cogito* is unlike the Cartesian, because, whereas Descartes wanted to establish that the *cogito* is incorporeal substance, Augustine is dealing with the "grammar of the subject" or "simple identité de soi à soi," "tautologie," "l'identité de l'esprit à lui-même."[107]

Whatever these categories of Williams and Marion signify, it cannot be denied that, for Augustine, the indubitable unity of thought and being in the human mind has content and that this content is absolutely central to his representation of how he came to Christian belief. Augustine cannot become a Christian believer until he can conceive incorporeal substance, until he knows not just that it is but positively grasps its nature. He comes to that conception through reflection on his own thinking which is both incorporeal and indubitably exists. Because of the self-presence with which Book 10 of *de Trinitate* is occupied,[108] in his own thinking Augustine finds together the required knowledge both that incorporeal substance exists and what it is.[109] Using the resulting unity of incorporeal thought and being as a place from which to perceive what is both above and below himself, Augustine arrives at a Platonic hierarchy within which God is the true identity of thought and being, like the Plotinian *Nous*. In that hierarchy, Augustine locates his own thinking. So far as it is mutable, the human *mens* lies between true being above him and sensible "almost non-being" below.[110] The knowledge that the human *mens* is indubitably existent incorporeal substance is thus necessary to Augustine's conversion. [111]It is saving knowledge.

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[106] E.g. Compare Augustine, *De trinitate* 15.15.24-25 as interpreted by Williams, "*Sapientia*,", 325-26 with Plotinus *Ennead* VI.7.35; VI.7.41; & *Ennead* VI.9.7.20-21; VI.9.11.24-25.

[107] Williams, "The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge," 121; Marion, *Questions cartésiennes*, *II,* 41; O'Daly seems to make a like distinction in *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 171.

[108] *de Trinitate* 10.7.10-10.10.16; see also 8.6.9; 9.3.3; 9.11.

[109] *de Trinitate* 10.10.16: "Quapropter dum se mens nouit substantiam suam nouit".

[110] This the argument of *Confessions* 7. The hierarchy of being, with God as the "I am," the most true being, is suggested at *de Trinitate* 5.2.3: "cui profecto ipsum esse unde essentia nominata est maxime ac uerrissime competit." See also 3.2, etc.

[111] The necessity to get beyond a corporeal and sensible picture of reality is repeatedly urged in *de Trinitate*, indeed, we begin there: see 1.1.1; 2.18.54; 3.1; etc. At 10.10.15-16 this is linked with the fact that the mind knows its own substance.

The unbreakable self-reflexive unity of remembering, understanding, and loving has, and must have for Augustine "a truthful basis." Not only does it involve an indubitable certainty,[112] but, establishing that we are rational is, from the beginning to the end of the *de Trinitate*, required to lead us to God. The *de Trinitate* is a step by step deepening of the understanding that we are essentially rational, what this means, what it makes possible, and what it requires.[113] It certainly requires self-attention and the recognition of the goodness of self-knowledge.[114] When Augustine finally reaches the consideration of the inner and superior reason and the image of the trinity which belongs to it, he makes his principle explicit. The image of the trinity has been impaired by sin but not lost:

> Behold! the mind .. remembers itself, understands itself, and loves itself; if we perceive this, we perceive a trinity, not yet God indeed, but now finally an image of God.[115]

When this image does not turn to that of which it is an image, and thus deprives itself of the knowledge which makes it happy, it is foolish and wicked, but its being as image is what places this sin in its power.[116] If the essential incorporeal rationality of the human soul could be denied, nothing in the whole argument would work. This is why Augustine returns to his refutation of the Sceptics in the final book of the *de Trinitate*.[117]

Knowledge is finally for Augustine what makes us happy. We seek union with the Good in contemplation. Vision is the realization of what love seeks; love is a steadfast perceiving.[118] We are made happy by this contemplation because knowledge of ourselves, other persons, and, indeed, all things in the Word is normative knowledge. Wisdom knows the thing and its good, and judges it by its good all at once. Fact and value cannot be separated here.[119]

The contemplation, or wisdom, which makes us happy is knowledge of all things in the divine Word. A progressive identification of the object of beatifying contemplation, so that we come to know its character as the eternal Word, Truth and *sapientia*,[120] and, at the same time, come to know that our capacity and need for just that consummation are essential to us, structures the *de Trinitate*. That need and capacity are bound up with the trinity which belongs to our higher reason and true selves, the trinity which is image of God. The discovery of this trinity, and of the *sapientia* which always belongs to it, is the very heart and goal of Augustine's argument. Its discovery implies that the knowing

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[112] *de Trinitate* 10.10.14; 15.12.21.

[113] *de Trinitate* 2.16.27; 2.17.28; 3.2.8; 3.10.21; 4.1; 11.1; 12.15.24; 14.*passim*; 15.15.25.

[114] *de Trinitate* 5.1.2; 9.11.16; 10 *passim*.

[115] *de Trinitate* 14.8.11: "Ecce ergo mens meminit sui, intellegit se, diliget se. Hoc si cernimus, cernimus trinitatem, nondum quidem deum sed iam imaginem dei." See 14.12.16.

[116] E.g. *de Trinitate* 14.12.15: "stulta est."

[117] *de Trinitate* 15.12.21; see 14.19.26.

[118] *de Trinitate* 8.4.6: "Et quid est deum scire nisi eum mente conspicere firmeque percipere?" See 11.6.10.

[119] *de Trinitate* 8.3.4; 8.3.5; 8.6.9; 8.9.13; 9.6 & 7; 10.1.1; 10.1.2; 10.3.5; 12.2.2.

[120] *de Trinitate* 1.10.20; 4.1.2; 4.18.24; 7.3.5: "cum de sapientia scriptura loquitur de filio loquitur"; 12.14ff.; etc.

which is eternal life begins here. Rather, and better, because *sapientia* is always at least secretly or latently present in our memory, this wisdom has properly no beginning[121] "Human nature has been so formed that never does it not remember itself, never does it not understand itself, never does it not love itself."[122] Neither knowledge nor self-knowledge can be reduced in Augustine to empirical experience. The self which is self-known does not cease to exist when we are not empirically attending to it. This much remains in Augustine of Plotinus' higher soul which is always in contemplation of *Nous*, whether or not the historical self is conscious of this contemplation. In Augustine this higher self belongs primarily to memory. So, Williams is mistaken; *scientia* is "learned or acquired," but *sapientia* is not.[123]

Beatitude in contemplation, the vision of all things in the eternal Word which is their good, is our goal, but that goal is a return to our beginning, or better, to what is before our self-conscious knowing. The triad of memory, understanding and love is present in each of the three activities of mind.[124] So there is a knowing and a loving within memory before knowledge is projected into consciousness. The "before" in this knowing before knowing, so to speak, corresponds in our minds, and in our being, to the priority of the divine Principle. Final contemplation is a return to that gaze of eternal being which belongs to memory and to the fundamental structure of our minds.[125] The joining of that finality with the relation to the Principle which belongs to the before of memory allows reason, in virtue of its access to its source and end, to have its proper self-completeness. By self-reflexion in and through its relation to God as Alpha and Omega, each relation having its appropriate mental character, divine form is given to the human.[126] Moving to that self-completeness is the whole point of Augustine's *itinerarium* from the outer trinity of Books 11 and 12 to the inner trinity of Books 14 and 15. The result is a real

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[121] *de Trinitate* 10.3.5: "quandam occultam memoriam"; 11.3.6; 11.7.11: "ipsa tamen acies non inde exsistit, sed erat ante ista"; 14.6.8; 14.6.9ff.; 14.8.11; 14.14.18; 14.15.21; 15.15.25: "Sempiternum est scire quod uiuit, nec tamen sempiternum est cogitare uitam uel cogitare scientiam uitae suae"; 15.21.40: "illa est abstrusior profunditas nostrae memoriae ubi hoc etiam primum cum cogitaremus inuenimus et gignitur intimum uerbum ..."; 15.21.41. I owe what I understand of Augustine at this point to Michael Carreker.
[122] *de Trinitate* 14.14.18: "Sic itaque condita est mens humana ut numquam sui non meminerit, numquam se non intellegat, numquam se non deligat
[123] Williams, "*Sapientia*," 326. See *de Trinitate* 14.8.11: "quae sciuntur uelut aduenticia sunt in animo". Book 11 both describes the trinity in the outer man, i.e. the trinity in which there is a dependence on the external object and in which memory acquires its content from without, and moves us toward the inner trinity in which these externalities are overcome. The contrast is well drawn in 12.1-3.
[124] *de Trinitate* 14.6.8: "ita sibi nota erat quemadmodum notae sunt res quae memoria continentur etiamsi non cognitentur."
[125] *de Trinitate* 8.9.13: "intus apud nos, uel potius supra nos in ipsa ueritate conspicimus"; 11.7.11; 12.2.2; 12.3.3: "ex illa rationali nostrae mentis substantia qua subhaeremus intellegibili atque incommutabili ueritati"; 12.15.24: "mentis intellectualis ita conditam esse naturam ut rebus intellegibilibus naturali ordine ... disponente conditore subiuncta sic ista uideat in quadam luce sui generis incorporea"; 14.7.9; 14.15.21. Theology and philosophy after Augustine will have to sort out what are put together here: the existence of the human in its cause, memory, the structure of mind, etc.
[126] *de Trinitate* 14.12.15 & 16.

participation in eternity, an overcoming of the alterity of mind turned to the historical.[127]
Ultimately, the result is blessedly ahistorical.

4. Conclusion

Augustine's *de Trinitate* is better understood from within a modern ahistoric stance,
where standing within metaphysics, Augustine is placed together with Plotinus and
Descartes. In fact, within that view, we are better able to understand his difference from
Plotinus than the alternative postmodern perspective can.

To say it is doubtless too naïve, but the problem for postmodern retrievals of the pre-
modern is the text. Intellectually, at least, postmodern reflection is always within the
temporal and has no solution except to deepen our sense of creaturely finitude.
Philosophy as metaphysics is excluded and so we cannot get beyond a historicism which
falsifies older philosophy, both modern and pre-modern. Postmodern theology separates
itself from the texts on which it depends precisely because it reduces them to text.
Theology's desire to become independent of philosophy is determined by its present
philosophical situation and it must live or die within the limits philosophy prescribes for
it. Mostly it seems to die, at least as *theoria*. So far as it remains alive and yet does not
pass totally into *praxis* and *poesis*, Christian theology is assimilated to pagan
Neoplatonism.

The limit of Stephen Menn's metaphysical enterprise is the converse of the
theologians. He does not draw Augustine's theology closely enough together with
philosophy. Modern and premodern philosophy are as dependent on theology as theology
is on philosophy. When what is theological in the Augustinian tradition is correctly
appreciated precisely by identifying more accurately "Plotinus' doctrinal innovations"
within Platonism and how Augustine stands to them,[128] we will understand better how
theology reforms philosophy in Augustine. When that is done, what will found, with
Descartes, autonomous philosophy, will have its foundations more fully secured and
known. That is the paradox of the *de Trinitate*.

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Note regarding Zbigniew Janowski, *Index Augustino-Cartésien*: *Textes et Commentaire*

Since writing this article I have read in Ms Zbigniew Janowski, *Index Augustino-
Cartésien*: *Textes et Commentaire*, just completed, which is to be published this year in
Paris by Vrin. Written in the face of skepticism from Jean-Luc Marion ("Gilson n'a pas
entièrement réussi, vous ne réussirez pas davantage"), but with his energetic assistance,

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[127] *de Trinitate* 14.14.18; 14.15.21.
[128] Menn's statement at 200: "Augustine thinks the Platonists had the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity" is
altogether inadequate.

Janowski's book establishes beyond doubt literary connections between the text of Descartes' *Meditations* and texts from several important works of Augustine. So far as method is concerned, Janowski supplies what Menn lacks: careful philology, attention to historical context and requisite scholarship. While problems remain because Descartes need not have read -- and probably did not read -- the works of Augustine which contained the texts he knew, the two books taken together present a formidable obstacle to anyone attempting a postmodern opposition of Augustine and Descartes.

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 Ciuitate Dei*, *Contra Academicos* and *de Vera religione*. The themes essential to the Cartesian metaphysics as presented in the *Meditations* which are found in Augustine include the following list which I reproduce from Janowski's Ms.

1. *Le but de la philosophie*
2. *La définition de la science*
3. *Les mathématiques sont certaines sive dormi*
4. *La malin genie*
5. *Le cogito*
6. *La définition de l'âme*
7. *La notion de l'étendue*
8. *L'exemple de la cire*
9. *L'Inspectio mentis*
10. *Je suis un melieu entre l'être et néant*
11. *L'explication de l'origine de l'erreur*
12. *Dans la vision intellectuelle il n'y a pas d'erreur*
13. *L'entendement arbitre entre des données des sens*
14. *L'âme est comme un pivot*
15. *La définition des vérites éternelles*
16. *Dieu crée par l'acte de sa connaissance*
17. *L'innéisme*.

He concludes: "Ce qui est indubitable, c'est que, même si le cartésianisme n'est pas la plus fidèle interprétation de la philosophie de saint Augustin, il en est certainement une interprétation légitime."

In my view Janowski's book is a turning point in a long debate. Every serious scholar of Descartes and of the Augustinian tradition will want to examine its evidence, just as every good philosophical and theological library will need to acquire it.

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