Augustine on Original Perception

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The image of God in the human person is to be found, according to St. Augustine, in the "highest part" of the human mind, to which he reserves the name *mens*.[1] "One's mind [*mens*]," he says, "is not of the same nature as God. Nevertheless the image of that nature which transcends all others must be searched for and found in us, in

1. *Mens* is the superior part of the rational soul. *Animus* or *anima* is the vital principle that gives life to the body (*De Trinitate* 4.1.3). The human soul shares with other souls a capacity for sensible knowledge and a certain degree of consciousness (8.6.9) but is distinguished from animal souls as *substantia spiritualis* (12.1.1 [CCL 50:356.17–18]). The human mind is the seat of knowledge, memory, and imagination. Mind embraces reason and intelligence ("mens, cui ratio et intelligentia naturaliter inest," *De civ. Dei* 11.2 [CCL 48:322.21]). It adheres to the intelligibles and to God (see *Enarr. in Psalmos* 3.3; *De diver. quaest. 83* 7). In some passages, *mens* is identified with *animus* (e.g., *De Trin.* 15.1.1: "quae mens vocatur vel animus" [CCL 50A:460.6]), but Augustine generally considers it as the "caput [animae] vel oculus vel facies" (15.7.11 [50A:475.11–12]). While Plotinus distinguished between *psyche* and *nous* and regarded them as two hypostases, the one deriving from the other through emanation, Augustine firmly maintains the unity of the soul. It is the same spiritual principle, he maintains, that in turn perceives, animates the body, imagines, reasons, and intuitively knows the eternal truths. There is thus considerable warrant for rendering *mens* as "soul" in modern English, but I shall usually retain a distinction between "mind" and "soul" in order to remind readers of Augustine's distinction between *mens* and *animus*.

that than which our nature has nothing better."[2] This does not mean, of course, that the Trinity can be demonstrated from created things, even the highest of them—such as the human mind. It does mean that a hint, an echo, a reflection can be traced from some creatures to the most perfect nature, and that this tracing in some way brings the very notion of the divine nearer to us.[3]

Despite some loose, or even ambiguous, passages, a central thesis in Augustine is that the human being was created in the likeness of the creator, "not according to the body nor to any part of the soul, but to the rational mind [*rationalis mens*], where alone there can be acquaintance [*agnitio*] of God."[4] It is certainly plausible that only the rational mind should have knowledge of God, and that such knowledge should not be had by the body or the lower parts of the soul (which are in touch with what is sensible and so participate in the sensible's blindness towards what is spiritual). But this plausibility does not seem to justify the conclusion that the image of God is present only in the highest part of the soul.

It might indeed seem more logical to think that God, in creating the human person, should have impressed on the whole being, both body and soul, both sensibility and rationality, God's own mysterious image. God's self-exhortation in Genesis, "Let us make humanity in our image and likeness," cannot be readily translated as, "Let us make *the human soul* in our image and likeness." It would seem that this restrictive translation should be rejected not just because "Moses" (or the first author of Genesis) had no knowledge of Platonic thought but, more radically, because the creative action of God relates to global entities, to the totality of beings and not to their constituent elements, however high and embracing.

2. *De Trin.* 14.8.11 (CCL 50A:436.4–7). Compare 12.7.12, in which some texts from St. Paul are brought forward in support of this thesis, not without a bit of forcing. A parallel passage (14.3.6) says, "There ought to be found in man's soul, namely in reason and intellect, that image of the Creator which is immortality inscribed in its immortality" (CCL 50A:428.62–63). Here the immortality of the soul must be understood in the sense that "in every condition of life, even the most miserable, the soul never ceases to live. In the same way, although reason and intelligence may now appear to be quenched in it, now small and now great, the human soul is never other than rational and intellectual" (50A:428.4–8).

3. For instance, *De civ. Dei* 11.26. As it is easy to see in this passage, Augustine implies that the whole human person is the image of the Trinity.

4. *De Trin.* 12.7.12 (CCL 50:336.82–84).

In answering this objection, which explicitly opposes the metaphysics of the Bible to that of Plato and the Neoplatonists, we do indeed have to resort to a Neoplatonic doctrine that carries a particular theoretical weight and that had an extensive historical diffusion.[5] In *De libero arbitrio* 2, in his discussion with Evodius, Augustine establishes three basic levels: the level of being (*esse*), of living (*vivere*), and of thinking (*intelligere*).[6] He asks Evodius, "Which of these three seems to you superior to the others?" Evodius answers, "Intelligence." Augustine asks, "Why do you think so?" Evodius's response is synthetic and articulate, providing a compendium of the Neoplatonic point of view. These are his words:

> These things are three: being, living, thinking. A stone exists, and a beast lives, but I do not think that a stone lives or a beast thinks. It is most certain, however, that one who thinks both exists and lives. So I have no doubt in judging more excellent that being in which all these states are present than the being that is wanting one or another of them.

The three basic qualities of reality, of every possible reality, interact with each other in a way that I would call *telescopic*. I mean that the one inheres in, or leads to, the other, in a scale from pure nothingness to that most complex and integrated reality which is the human being. Evodius thus proposes a synthetic, but quite precise, vindication of the superiority of the subject in which all these qualities are simultaneously present. In this subject itself, again, the relative superiority of thought is established so far as it "implies, in those who possess it, being and living."

It is important to observe that the superiority of thought over the other qualities or states is justified, not on the grounds of its specific excellence over living and being, but rather because the presence of thought indicates the fullness of the being to which it belongs.

5. Two examples must suffice. Proclus gives the principle a place of importance in his philosophical teaching. See, e.g., *Elements of Theology* theor. 101–103, 138, and 198; and *Platonic Theology* 3.9, edited by Saffrey and Westerink (Paris, 1978) 35.19–24. And Michael Psellus, in the eleventh century, proposes exactly the same distinction between being, living, and thinking that we are about to state, stressing the excellence of thought as summing up the other qualities or levels of reality. See, e.g., the third opusculum in Westerink ed., *De omnifaria doctrina* (Nijmegen, 1948) 105.18–24.

6. *De lib. arb.* 2.3.7.21–22 (CCL 29:240.18–25), from which the immediately following quotations are also taken.

Thought is excellent because it is the sign and proof of a fullness, not because it in itself is a sufficient fullness. Thought is the embracing principle for the whole of the present world, in which all lower beings—the inanimate and the animate but unintelligent—are held together and transcended.

As thought brings together being and living, so we can assume that the mind is the synthesis (not only potentially, but also actually) of all the qualities that are scattered in the present world. It is only natural, then, that the likeness to the world's creator should be sought in it, a likeness recorded as image or imprint in the beings called to existence by God. Another central theme of the Augustinian vision, in many ways dependent on Neoplatonic theories about the mind's self-knowledge, casts even more light upon this important speculative principle of hierarchical inclusiveness.

Augustine maintains that we do not perceive our being, our knowing, and the love that unites us to both of them,

> with any bodily sense, as we perceive things outside: colors by seeing, sounds by hearing, odors by smelling, flavors by tasting, hard things and soft by touching. Rather we treat images of these sensible things—images very similar to them, but no longer bodily—by thought, retain them by memory, and by their means are solicited to desire them. But my being, my knowing, my loving is most certain to me, not with any images or visions of a deceitful imagination, but certain and free from the deceptions of an imagination.[7]

But how do we perceive these interior realities or subjective facts? Do we perceive them through "reason" or whatever else we may wish to call the higher faculty of the human soul? Augustine does not say or suggest that the original human certainties are known by means of reason alone. All of his arguments, on the contrary, stress that the certainties in question here are immediate, self-evident, indisputable—that they carry in themselves their own foundation and final verification.

According to Augustine every act of existence is self-assertive. The skeptics of the Academy may object: But what if you are mistaken in this foundational certainty of yours? What if you do not exist, while believing that you do exist? After all, you know that your faculties deceive you and make you take one thing for another. To them,

7. *De civ. Dei* 11.26 (CCL 48:345.9–17).

Augustine replies simply, "If I am mistaken, I *am*."[8] The basic certainty about the self's existence is unshakable and inconfutable. Another Augustinian formulation of the same principle is perhaps even more effective:

> If you do not discern what I am saying and doubt whether it is true, discern at least whether you doubt about whether you are doubting these things. If it is certain for you that you are doubting, then ask how it is certain. The light of no other sun will appear to you there but *the true light that shines upon every human being who comes into this world.*[9]

Some may argue, says Augustine, that the certainty of their and my existence is groundless and erroneous, and that I in fact do not exist even while I am sure of existing. But to be sure (even erroneously) of existing, I must exist.[10] In a more general form, we could say, "Every being that acts in a certain way, even erroneously, must exist in order to act." In the hands of Augustine, who fully exploits its dialectical, rhetorical, and existential aspects, the argument from doubt becomes a refined demonstration of the vacuity of objections that have been, and still are, made against humanity's basic certainties, the certainties of being, living, knowing, wanting, loving.[11] These certainties do not need any additional check before being accepted. Their validity is absolute and indisputable in itself, as the Augustinian argument makes decisively clear.[12]

8. *De civ. Dei* 11.26 (CCL 48:345.18), to which compare the ample, important passage in *De Trin.* 15.12.21.

9. *De vera relig.* 39.73 (CCL 32:234.25–235.30), with the allusion to John 1.9.

10. Compare the accurate analysis in Bruce Bubacz, *St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge: A Contemporary Analysis* (New York: E. Mellen, 1981), pp. 39–55.

11. See *De Trin.* 10.10.13–14, particularly 10.10.14.

12. A pregnant passage in the dialogue between Augustine and Evodius states the problem clearly (*De lib. arb.* 2.3.7.20 [CCL 29:239.6–240.10). Augustine addresses Evodius: "In first place I ask you . . . whether you exist. Do you perhaps fear to be led into error by this request? But, certainly, if you did not exist, you could not be mistaken in any way." Evodius simply answers, "Proceed to other problems . . . ," as if to say that Augustine's considerations are obvious. But the reading required by such a text, as by *De civitate Dei* and *De Trinitate*, is very different from the pragmatistic reading by Bubacz. He likens Augustine's teaching in one passage to a "cognitive Darwinism" (*St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 218). But in place of a fortuitous outcome of interactions between experience and the world, Augustine offers a theory of the soul and its knowledge based on the naturalness of consciousness, that is, on the facts that its testimony is anterior to any other and that the ensuing certainty is indisputable.

The same certainty that presides over the self-assertion of being presides over knowing and loving and whatever other states may be singled out as belonging to the original human self-experience. In every case, it is a question of immediate perceptions that cannot be contradicted. Together these make up the ontological "platform" of human nature, which Augustine identifies with the mind. The knowledge of minds, our own and those of others, is connatural and immediate to us.

We love the Apostle Paul, Augustine says, when we get to know him by reading his letters. We make for ourselves a sensible image of him in imagination. This image differs from reader to reader and is always different from the Apostle's true visage. But that is not what really matters to us. What matters is to know that Paul participated in our human nature. We do not know what his actual features were, even when we try to imagine them. But we know what a human being is because we ourselves are human. "We do of course believe about him what we know of ourselves in species and genus," that is, according to the logico-metaphysical definitions of human nature elaborated in the ancient philosophies. But there is a kind of knowledge even more natural and original than that. We love the mind of Paul, not because we have recourse to the conceptual instruments of genus and species, but because we "know" what a mind is.

> And we do not say inappropriately that we know what a soul is, since we too have a soul. We do not see the soul at all with our eyes, nor create for ourselves a notion of soul according to genus or species by comparing many of them as seen by us, but we know it rather . . . because we too have a soul. What is so intimately known, and perceives its own existence [*seque ipsum esse sentit*], as that by means of which all other things are perceived, the soul itself?[13]

Augustine's punctuating question, which is less rhetorical than philosophical, suggests briefly what the following passage of *De Trinitate* gradually unfolds. In order to understand it, one false impression must be set aside at once. It might seem obvious to a modern reader that when Augustine speaks of the soul's knowledge of itself and of other similar souls, he must be speaking of an evidential knowledge. But the "intimate knowledge" that he is describing is in truth a sort of perception or apprehension. In fact, in Augustine's language it is

13. *De Trin.* 8.6.9 (CCL 50:279.9–15).

always joined, as in a hendiadys, to the "perception of its own existence." This fundamental complementarity is taken up again and again, being explained and specified by the whole context.

All animals, both rational and irrational, partake of a natural and spontaneous advertence to the vital principle that animates other living beings. There is a perception of likenesses between the movements of our body and those of others. In fact, we move our bodies in ways that we see other bodies move. We might imagine that when another living body moves, an interior channel or "window" (different from the sensible faculty, though naturally involving it) opens for the living observer, who feels that in the body that he or she perceives there is something similar to what moves his or her own body, namely, life and soul.

This perceiving faculty, interior and exterior as it is, and exterior insofar as it is interior, is a common endowment of all animals. It consists in perceiving the act of being and living both of oneself and of others. One does not see the other's soul but, rather, is led back from exterior movements to the transcendent principle that gives rise to them. Such a principle is not articulated with rational clearness and distinctness, but is perceived immediately and "with utmost ease by means of a natural affinity" ("statim et facillime quadam conspiratione naturali"). And not only do we "perceive" the souls of other people by analogy with our own, but we can also know what they are by considering our own soul.[14]

Such are the naturalness and immediacy of this inner act of perception, and so great is its difference from formal and explicit thinking, that it may well escape our attention and lie hidden in our minds. There are dimensions of knowledge ignored by the mind itself, in the sense that they are present in it but obscure and not made evident in the light of actual consciousness. Augustine asks himself, How is this possible? "What do we know, in fact, if we do not know what is in our own minds, since we can know all that we know only by means of our mind?"[15]

The specific power of thought is so great that the mind itself, through which all that is being thought is thought, could not face

14. See, again, *De Trin.* 8.6.9 (CCL 50:280.25–30), here paraphrased.

15. *De Trin.* 14.6.8 (CCL 50A:430.29–31), from which the immediately following quotations are also taken (431.5–8 and so on).

itself with itself in any other way than by thinking itself. "How the soul is not in its vision [*conspectus*] when it does not think itself—since it can never be separated from itself, as if it were both itself and the vision of itself—this I cannot discover."[16] Augustine here asks himself how it could happen that the mind should not have a cognitive vision, a full apperception of itself, except when in the act of thinking. That may cause some astonishment, because everything in the mind is unitary, and the mind's "vision" or "sight" is not different from the mind itself.

The most immediate answer, which is also the most incorrect, supposes that the mind sees a part of itself with another part, that an "active" or "actualized" part of the mind sees others that are "passive." Augustine objects:

> Can anything more absurd than that this be thought or said? From where is the mind brought out, if not from itself? And where is it put in its own vision, if not in front of itself? It was not where it was, then, when it was not in its own vision, because if it has been put here, then it has been removed from there. But if it has to be moved to be seen, where shall it stay to see itself? Or does it come to be twinned in some way, so that it is here and there—here to see, there to be seen—in itself contemplating, in front of itself contemplated?[17]

Whoever thinks in this way, thinks according to material imagery. Yet the mind is not a material thing but an incorporeal reality. There is nothing to be said, at least in principle and in view of the mind's kind, except that "it belongs to the nature of the mind to have sight of itself [*conspectus eius*]. When it conceives itself, it turns to its own nature, not as if by a spatial passage, but with an incorporeal turning." But what happens, then, when the mind does not explicitly and actually conceive itself? At such times, which are frequent, the mind does not see itself and is not present to its own sight, but even so it "knows itself as if it were its own memory for itself" ("tanquam ipsa sibi sit memoria sui"). Augustine adds a concrete example: it is like what happens to one who knows many things. What such a person

16. The difficulty is real, and it points clearly to a limit on the Augustinian doctrine about the will, a limit that can be overcome only through a rethinking of body-soul dualism.

17. *De Trin.* 14.6.8 (CCL 50A:431.18–24).

knows is placed "in arcana quadam notitia," that is, in a hidden knowledge called memory.

This example, like every other, holds only so far. Memory is *notitia* not only of images, notions, or ideas held in the mind and stored there but also of the mind's intimate reality, of its pure and essential being. As such, memory is the backdrop, so to speak, for the appearance or manifestation of the mind to itself, which constitutes the mind in some functional way at least, because it is there that the mind lays its own foundations. But while it is a manifestation, and the originating manifestation, the *memoria sui* is also an *arcana quaedam notitia*, that is, a hidden knowledge, mysterious and remote from the knowledge that persists on the surface of explicit consciousness. With seeming contradiction, we can say that memory is at once revelation and concealment, knowledge and ignorance. Memory is that dawnlike contact of the mind with itself and the world kept in itself, where everything is present, but nothing is already explicated.

All this should tell us "that we have within ourselves, in the recess of mind, some knowledges [*notitiae*] of things. And then, when they are thought, they somehow come forth and place themselves as it were more openly in the mind's vision. Then the mind itself finds that it remembered, knew, and loved them even when it did not think them, when it thought of other things."[18] Emerging from the obscurity of the original identification with itself, from the immediacy of perception and the latency of memory, the mind moves towards an ever-growing consciousness of itself and comes ever nearer to the measure of its own specific perfection. At first it has, or better is, only memory of itself. When it begins to think reflexively, it comes to have intelligence of itself and to love itself as well.

With expressions that cannot fail to perplex by their strangeness to the everyday, Augustine says, quite rhetorically: "Let the mind not seek itself as if it were absent from itself. What is there, indeed, so present to understanding [*cognitio*] as what is present to the mind? Or what is so present to the mind, as the mind itself?"[19] The mind, we may conclude, must not leave itself in order to know and love itself. It must remain in itself.

18. *De Trin.* 14.7.9 (CCL 50A:433.19–434.24).

19. *De Trin.* 10.7.10 (CCL 50:323.41–44), to which compare the analogous expressions of 14.5.7.

There are many possible alternative theses about the mind's inward perception of itself, but none is very satisfactory. It might be that the mind loves and desires to know itself by having conceived from external opinions some ideas about itself and its desirability. Or it might be that it makes up a mental representation similar to itself, so that in order to reach itself it must first pass through notions about other minds. Or, finally, it might be that it happens with mind as with bodily eyes, which "know" other eyes better than themselves. But if this is true, then the mind, seeking itself, will never find itself. "The eyes in fact never see themselves without a mirror. Nor should one ever think that such a thing might be used in the contemplation of incorporeal things too, as if the soul could know itself *in a mirror*."[20] Unlike bodily eyes, which must become objects for themselves in order to be able to see themselves, the mind must not go out from itself if it will know itself.

The body's eyes see other eyes, not themselves. Whatever power it is that enables them to see, we do not see that power through the eyes. We see by means of the power, but precisely because of that we cannot see it as such. It is the mind that allows us to understand that the act of vision is accomplished through the intervention of a specific power—and consequently the mind allows the sense of sight to become conscious of itself, not as such, of course, but so far as it belongs to the mind and is immersed in the mind's light of understanding.[21]

Augustine distinguishes three kinds of knowledge, to which there correspond as many kinds of love. In doing so he once again takes over and recreates Neoplatonic doctrine.[22] If knowledge is inferior to what

20. *De Trin.* 10.3.5 (CCL 50:317.15–18).

21. Following a complementary line of consideration, we can also say that if the soul knows itself, it does not know itself as it knows the objects of ordinary experience. Augustine states quite clearly that "if anyone says that the soul believes itself to be like the other souls of which it has experience, on the grounds of a knowledge [*notitia*] made up of genera and species, and that it loves itself in consequence, he speaks most foolishly" (*De Trin.* 9.3.3 [CCL 50:290.2–5]).

22. The trichotomy of knowledge is clearly to be related to the doctrine about the *medietas* of the soul between the intelligible and perceptible or sensible worlds. As is well known, Plotinus teaches that the soul "occupies a middle rank [*taxis*] among the things that exist, for while it shares in the divine, it also finds itself at the lowest point of what is intelligible. In this way, bordering on perceptible nature, it gives to it something of what it has in itself, and receives something in exchange" (*Enneads* 4.8.7 [Henry and Schwyzer 2:246.5–9]). That does not amount in any way to saying

is known (which in itself is fully knowable), it is of course imperfect knowledge. If it is superior, the knowing nature is superior to the known. The knowledge that the mind has of the body, for example, is superior to the body itself. But the mind, knowing itself, "does not exceed itself with the knowledge [*notitia*] that it has of itself, since it both understands and is understood [*ipsa cognoscit, ipsa cognoscitur*]. Since it understands the whole of itself, and nothing else together with itself, its knowledge is equal to itself, nor does its understanding derive from another nature."[23]

In other contexts, Augustine states that

> every thing understood by us coengenders in us the knowledge of itself; the knowledge is indeed begotten by both, by the understander and the understood. Therefore when the mind knows itself, it is the only begetter of its knowledge. It is at once understander and understood. It was knowable by itself, even before it knew itself. But when it did not know itself, the knowledge of itself was not in it. From the fact that it knows itself, then, the mind generates a knowledge of itself equal to itself, since it does not know itself less than what it is, nor is its knowledge another essence, not only because it is the knower, but because it knows itself.[24]

What exactly does it mean to say that the mind, the knowing

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that the soul is an intermingling of corporeal and incorporeal. It is said to be intermediate because, in laying down what is sensible, it pervades and permeates it with itself, without deflecting in any way from the unity of its being. "Remaining wholly in itself, it is divided relatively to the bodies according to their own divisibility, because they are not capable of receiving it in a unitary way. Therefore the division is an affection of the bodies, not of the soul." (*Enneads* 4.2.1 [Henry and Schwyzer 2:6.73–76]).

23. *De Trin.* 9.4.4 (CCL 50:297.19–23). The same concepts are illustrated at greater length in 9.11.16. On the intermediate position of soul, see also 12.11.16. The doctrine of the threefold relation or proportion between knower and known is a constant of Neoplatonism. Ammonius of Hermias reiterates it in his commentary on *On Interpretation*, very much under the influence of Proclus, but attributing it to "the divine Iamblichus." He exemplifies the three possible cases of this relationship by saying that (1) when the intellect knows what is particular in the events, referring it to the universal, its knowledge is better than what is known; (2) when it turns to itself and considers its own substance, the knowledge is of the same kind as what is known, and therefore homogeneous with it; (3) when at last, ascending to the summit of its own capacities, it considers the divine ordering of things, the knowledge is without doubt inferior to what is known. See Ammonius, *In De interp.*, ed. Busse (Berlin, 1897) 135.14–32.

24. *De Trin.* 19.12.18 (CCL 50:309.29–34).

principle, does not descend below its own nature when knowing itself, that it remains in knowledge equal to itself? If we compare this remark to others already quoted, according to which nothing can be more present to the mind than the mind itself, we may be tempted to conclude that the mind has a knowledge totally exhaustive of itself, so clear and distinct as not to leave blind spots or uncertainties, a knowledge that possesses itself immediately and totally, that is transparent to itself, a full revelation of itself to itself. The first and most obvious answer to this superficial reading of Augustine is that, if this were so, the mind would be God or equal to God.

Of course, some crucial points of Augustine's speculative thought might be adduced in support of such an interpretation. There is, for instance, the radical transcendence of mind over body, with the corollary that mind is thus necessarily "impermeable" to body. This is the principle that Etienne Gilson calls the "interiority of thought." He explains it in these terms: "Since everything comes to the mind from within, nothing antecedent can be given to it: the mind is therefore its own first object. At the same time, the mind finds in the act by which it immediately takes hold of itself an invincible certainty, the warrant for the possibility of a certainty in general. It is then a principal characteristic of metaphysical Augustinianism that the evidence through which the mind apprehends itself is the first of all evidences and the criterion of truth."[25]

Apart from the fact that the first evidence and criterion of truth do not depend for Augustine on a subjective fact but on the truth's manifestation and illumination within the mind,[26] it can rightly be objected to Gilson that everything depends on how the act of the mind's self-apprehension is conceived. Is it simultaneously an intellectual and vital act (as we have tried to show), that is, a perception of real existence in which being, life, and thought are so intimately united as to mirror in a mysterious, but true, manner the unity-in-distinction of

25. Etienne Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1949), p. 321.

26. It is not out of place to recall *De vera relig.* 39.72–73, one of the profoundest passages in the whole Augustinian corpus. The truth of which Augustine speaks is "summa et intima" (*De vera relig.* 20.38 [CCL 32:210.2]). It is neither a creature nor a projection of consciousness, but an objective reality established and shone forth by the sovereign being (compare *Confess.* 8.10.16).

the Trinity?[27] Or is this act to be conceived as a "pure" thought, in which the quality of thought logically and really precedes being?

It seems that this second reading has been adopted by Gilson on the grounds of a historiographical assumption that sees a historical and theoretical continuity from Augustine to the various Augustinianisms that have flourished so abundantly in modern thought, especially near its beginnings.[28] But what Augustine really says in the passages quoted above, as in others that could be brought forward, in no way permits a Cartesian or subjectivist reading. Augustine only maintains that, when the mind knows itself, its knowledge is on a par with its self—namely, is endowed with a nature and a dignity at the level of the mind's own being.

We must not forget that the mind's operations are consubstantial with itself, given its incorporeal nature. In Augustine's own words, "These things subsist in the soul and somehow unfold, having been enfolded, so that they are now perceived and enumerated substantially or, so to speak, essentially."[29] The knowledge that the mind has of itself is thus an actualization of its own substance. The preceding thesis, that the mind's self-knowledge is at the level of its nature and essence, must be construed in the context of this second statement. The mind becomes equal to itself in knowing itself. This does not mean that it knows its own metaphysical substance as if it were one of

27. On this suggestive theme, which confirms Augustine's friendly adherence to the realistic tradition of ancient philosophy, see, for example, *De Trin.* 9.5.8. It follows that thought (a substance of its own kind) is melted into substantial unity with being and love. That thought is substantially united to being in the distinction of the relative "persons" (if we can adapt theological language to a philosophical theme) is a principle not to be found in Descartes nor in many other modern thinkers. According to Augustine, being is on par with thought and love (as conversely) in the created trinity that forms the human soul. This Augustinian thesis might be considered subordinate and instrumental to his theological reflection on the Trinity. But it is better to consider it as a philosophical principle *pleno jure* that meets a theological position, correlated if independent.

28. On the very page quoted above, Gilson states that the metaphysical principle of the transcendence of the soul over the body has given origin to a whole series of strictly connected theses: "[They] will seldom dissociate in the course of history, and [their] necessary connection will not appear anywhere with greater evidence than in the doctrines of Descartes or Malbranche" (*Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*, p. 321).

29. *De Trin.* 9.4.5 (CCL 50:297.28–298.30).

the objects that constitute the formal world of thought and experience. Augustine insists many times on this point, and with good reason.

The knowledge that the mind has of itself is completely *sui generis*. It belongs to an anomolous dimension outside the usual modes of knowledge. Speaking loosely, we can say that the mind "feels" itself—though the expression is inaccurate, not only because we are here dealing with what eludes any strict specification, but also because "feeling" must not be interpreted as connected to corporeality or sensibility. The "feeling" is general; it is specified in several fundamental ways. The mind in fact perceives itself as existing, living, thinking, and loving. It knows itself, not in its own objective nature or essence (which would require an external observer endowed with some higher and more comprehensive nature than the mind itself has), but rather in its states and operations, while and so far as it exercises acts of being, living, thinking, loving. The mind takes hold of itself at the very roots of its own being, and it does so dynamically, not statically.

The mind's perception of itself in its own interior activity cannot be said to have only a pragmatic meaning, as if one could not look beyond the operations and the being that grounds them to some dimly seen metaphysical level.[30] Augustine often repeats that the mind has a kind of vision (*conspectus*) of itself—an inward and nonsensible vision, of course. The metaphor should not be understood literally. Augustine wants to say that, as eyes see an object, so the mind sees itself as if "in front of itself" (*in conspectu*)—not as an object, but as being identical with itself. It does not have to go out of itself in order to know itself but need only stay within itself. Staying in itself, it turns towards itself with a "movement" (*conversio*) made possible by its incorporeal nature. It must be said, of course, that these descriptive terms suggest spatial states and interactions and so are unfaithful to the reality that they attempt to describe.

A being that is free from bodiliness does not stay in itself strictly

30. This simple description of internal states and the structures of self-consciousness does not yet imply any particular theory about the soul's nature or, alternately, about the meaninglessness of the concept "nature" and its replacement by a concept of disposition to action. Existential perception and natural self-consciousness are, not theories, but original inner realities, preceding, and having priority over, every possible theory.

speaking (that is, physically speaking), nor does it put itself into its own presence, or see itself, or turn towards itself. The mind has no parts, and cannot double itself into an "in-itself" and an "out-of-itself." These and other spatial images are used only to suggest that spiritual realities have the capacity to see themselves without mediation, that is, to come into direct cognitive contact with themselves, to apprehend and perceive themselves. But this assertion must not be understood to mean that these realities, whatever they are, are able fully to realize their own substances. Divine nature, whose intimate knowledge coincides with its own substance, and in which there is no discrepancy between being, knowing, living, loving, or any other essential determination, is obviously quite different from the human mind, which is a creature, however much it is also a spiritual one.

We have said that the mind does not know "what" it is as a reality, but knows itself as a principle of activity or actuality before and beyond the circuit of objective knowledge, in an intimacy rich with meanings but void of restricted connotations. Being, living, knowing, loving are qualifications to the mind's original perception of itself and so are the authentic roots of human being. As such, and at the same time, they are also the highest perspectives upon reality, within the frame of which objects and their relations appear to the mind. The mind's knowledge of itself is indeed only formal, because it does not display objective contents that would constitute it as such and make its substance accessible.

If we want to say that the original and founding consciousness has contents, let us say (with an appropriate oxymoron) that they are subjective contents, inner determinations of the subject that identify themselves with the subjective principle as knowing and perceiving itself. The mind's self-knowledge is not inferior to objectifying knowledge, as if in lacking objects it lacked something essential. As the very moment of the foundation and opening of consciousness's horizon, self-knowledge is prior to the world and so different from it.

If we wish to understand more exactly the speculative potential of this Augustinian teaching, we must read it in its natural connection with reflection on the Trinitarian mysteries. This reflection suggests an analogical similarity between the structural elements of the mind, which appear in the acts of its self-perception,[31] and what Christian

31. Augustine enumerates various "created trinities" that exemplify this likeness,

revelation tells us about the mystery of the Trinity, one God in three consubstantial persons. The analogy is real. It does not derive from forced assimilations or fictitious convergences, but from natural references and consonances between the two parallel lines of investigation that reciprocally confirm each other.

The mind's insight first meets itself—not as an intelligible object, but as an opaque, indecipherable mirror of itself that perceives more than it knows and knows by perceiving. In turning toward itself and reflecting upon itself, the mind discovers that its own substance is interwoven with essential orders rooted in itself—indeed, identical with itself. Its interior space, void of objects, is vivified from within by the merging of these articulations of its own consciousness. The mind is conscious of itself so far as it perceives existing, thinking, loving. These forms of perception or apperception qualify the consciousness in its inner reality as identical with and constitutive of it, not as elements joining it from without. The mind is one, but it is also modulated in its unity by figures that define its essential virtualities. Aristotle remarks of the mind's nature, "If its own form is made manifest alongside another, what is inside will hinder and intercept it."[32] For example, if there were a color inside the eye's pupil, that internal color would impede the perception of external ones, because the only color to be perceived would be that internal to the eye. If the mind, similarly, should participate in the nature of any of the substances that it knows, this participated nature, being internal to the mind, would prevent it from knowing any other thing.

Turning the Aristotelian thesis upside down, we might say that it is what is inside the mind that coincides with its own essence, characterizing it and making possible its self-manifestation. The mind can set itself as principle, and understand itself as such, so far as its inside is not empty or undifferentiated but, rather, is framed according to forms with an individuality of their own. Of course, the forms cannot be thought to have the status of objects, and consequently to be in need of definition according to categorical schemes. They are, in fact, precategorical. And even so (or perhaps just for that reason), they

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under different points of view and as ordered to different speculative requirements. See the very precise inventory in *De Trinitate*, vol. 1, Bibliothèque Augustinienne 15 (Bruges and Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1955), p. 571.

32. Aristotle *On the Soul* 3.4.429a20–21.

really do distinguish the mind as it is in itself, just as they also constitute it.

In this way, the vision of the inner eye, glimpsing itself, also glimpses in itself these metaphysical powers. Its communion in them discloses the setting for its reality. This reality, on the other hand, is wholly present in every one of the principles as well as in their totality, because none of them subsists in and for itself, in isolation from that fullness, but in and for it, as it subsists in and for them. For these consubstantial principles of the mind, the name "transcendentals" may perhaps be proposed.[33] Their function and ontological stature are indeed analogous to the familiar transcendentals of being, one, truth, goodness, and beauty. Coessential to the mind, these new transcendentals form its very substance. In the personal subsistence of the mind's transcendentals, in their reciprocal implication and inherence within the common substance that is present in all and unifies everything in itself, the mysterious image of the Trinity shows itself in the human mind.

Augustine says, "When the soul knows and loves itself, the trinity of soul, love, and knowledge remains. And these are not confused by commingling, although each one is in itself, and all are mutually in all, and each one in the other two, and two in one. Therefore, 'all in all.'"[34] In this flowing spiritual life, "the mind loves and knows all of itself, and knows all its love, and loves all its knowledge, when these three are perfect in relation to themselves. In an admirable way, the three are inseparable from each other, and yet each one of them, considered in itself, is substance, and all together one substance or essence, when they are said in relation to each other."[35]

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33. On the role of the transcendentals in our always obscure and imperfect comprehension of the mysteries of the Trinity, see the important paper by Norman Kretzmann, "Trinity and Transcendentals," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, edited by Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

34. *De Trin.* 9.5.8 (CCL 50:300.1–5), with the allusion to 1 Cor. 15.28.

35. *De Trin.* 9.5.8 (CCL 50:301.26–31). This passage and the one just quoted are taken from the beginning and end of the chapter, but the whole text that they enclose—not to say, its context in the whole book—must be kept in mind in order to understand what Augustine will teach about the created unity/trinity of soul, knowledge, and love in the human person.