

Aubry, G. and Ildefonse, F. (eds.). 2008. *Le moi et l'intériorité*. Paris: Vrin, pp. 384, PB, 26 Euro, ISBN 978-2-7116-2166-8.

The volume singles out two notions for the purposes of historical enquiry in terms of which we conceptualize ourselves since modernity: the “I” and inwardness or interiority. The collection contains 18 studies, all in French except for an Italian paper, that were presented at two conferences at the Centre Jean Pépin of the CNRS, as well as separate introductions to both sub-topics.¹ The focus is on ancient philosophy, but the material is neither chronologically nor thematically entirely homogeneous. The volume does not aim to cover the whole range of philosophical speculation relating to the two notions in antiquity; the contributions mainly deal with Plato, Imperial Stoicism, Plotinus and Augustine. I'm going to proceed by the topics just mentioned.

But let me first tell a few words about the conceptual underpinnings of the collection. The contributors treat the concepts of the “I” and of interiority as historical-cultural constructs rather than as notions capturing fundamental and universal features of human experience.² Aubry (1) distinguishes between the “I” (*le moi*) and the self in that the latter may also designate the *soi*, that is to say, the impersonal and essential identity of man, but she grants that problems relating to the “I” are frequently discussed under the heading of the “self”. We may thus roughly say that the volume addresses specific aspects of the history of the notion of the self. Aubry sets out from a description of the “I” in terms of unicity and

¹) The volume comprises the following papers (henceforth, I'll refer to the studies by the number given here): 1. Gwenaëlle Aubry: Introduction; 2. Daniel Loayza: Notes en marge d'une histoire de la solitude; 3. Myles F. Burnyeat: La vérité de la tripartition; 4. Michel Narcy: En quête du moi chez Platon; 5. Frédérique Ildefonse: *L'idion hégemonikon*, est-ce le moi?; 6. Christopher Gill: Le moi et la thérapie philosophique dans la pensée hellénistique et romaine; 7. Gwenaëlle Aubry: Un moi sans identité? Le *hèmeis* plotinien; 8. Wilfried Kühn: Se connaître soi-même: La contribution de Plotin à la compréhension du moi; 9. Gerard O'Daly: Le moi et l'autre dans les Confessions d'Augustin; 10. Carine Mercier: Ce que pourrait être une réponse foucauldienne à la question de la présence du moi dans l'Antiquité; 11. Serge Tribolet: Le sujet lacanien pour lire Plotin; 12. Frédérique Ildefonse: Introduction; 13. Frédérique Ildefonse: Questions pour introduire à une histoire de l'intériorité. Une histoire des problématisations de l'intérieur; 14. Catherine Darbo-Peschanski, Deux acteurs pour un acte. Les personnages de l'Iliade et le modèle de l'acte réparti; 15. Gwenaëlle Aubry, Démon et intériorité d'Homère à Plotin: esquisse d'une histoire; 16. Luc Brisson, L'intériorité chez Platon; 17. Riccardo Chiaradonna: Plotino: il <<Noi>> e il NOYΣ (*Enn.* V 3 [49], 8, 37-57); 18. Alexandre Surrallés: Intériorité, cœur et âme en Amérique indienne; 19. Isabelle Koch, <<Interior intimo meo>>. Y a-t-il une intériorité de l'intériorité chez Augustin?; 20. Philippe Büttgen, L'envers de l'intériorité. Martin Luther.

²) R. Sorabji (2006) 17-53 takes the latter approach to the self with due qualifications.

interiority, which also seems to include first-person-perspective.³ She argues that the notion cannot be found in ancient thought in this precise form, since the ancient “I” experiences itself through its relations to others rather than as an immediately given inwardness. Aubry sees the specific characteristics of the ancient “I” in its inherent multiplicity, exteriority and lack of a unified centre. I would not go along with her in the direction of interpreting ancient psychological conceptions in terms of the fragmented postmodern “I”. Bernard Williams has argued that the Greeks disposed over the linguistic and conceptual tools required to identify a unified responsible agent since Homer—the interpretation of Homeric man in terms of a collection of disparate faculties/organs that fail to constitute a unified person (B. Snell) is a mirage.⁴ As for philosophical theories, adherents of Platonic or Aristotelian multipartite psychological models and those of Stoic psychological monism equally regarded the maximal unification and coherence of the soul as its natural and normatively correct state. Ildefonse (12, 13) takes as her point of departure a possible modern understanding of the notion of interiority in terms of the special quality of a subject that regards the mental phenomena going on in it *as its own* states or that identifies itself with these phenomena. In her view, this notion does not exist in antiquity. She argues that there is no necessary connection between interiority on the one hand, and the “I” or subjectivity on the other. Ildefonse states that it is in the Imperial Period, from Marcus Aurelius onwards, that some notion of interiority emerges. She does not advance a detailed argument for this thesis, although there is a powerful strand in recent research which questions conceptual innovations concerning the inner self in this period. Notwithstanding the objections I have raised, I think that the attempt to mediate between the modern concepts of the “I” and of interiority and ancient philosophical ideas is legitimate and it may yield interesting results.

The first group of studies deals with Plato. Burnyeat (3) examines the tripartition of the soul in the *Republic*. Setting aside the details of the argument by which the existence of the three parts is established, he focusses on the functions assigned to them. We have an appetitive part because we are animal bodies programmed to survive; the spirited part belongs to us as social animals and is related to status concerns; the faculty of reason that we have as rational animals determines what is best all things considered. Nancy (4) calls attention to the fact that from the beginning of the 19th Century French translators of Plato smuggle the notion of the “I” into their text where there is no direct equivalent in the

³) However, Aubry does not characterize the “I” in purely epistemological terms such as reflexive consciousness. Rather, she invokes “self-constitution by means of the practices of intimacy and singularity” in this connection (p. 11).

⁴) Williams 1993.

Greek. Nancy argues that this is due to the dissemination of Kantian ideas that affected even thinkers hostile to Kant,⁵ and that had an influence on the Plato-interpretation until recently. Nancy also discusses some relevant passages in Plato. Unlike him, I think that *Phaedo* 115c-d and *Alcibiades I* 129b, 130d-e do provide a textual basis for the identification of the soul with the “I” engaging in dialectical exchange with another person. However, Nancy is right in pointing out that the “I” is not detached from the context of conversation in Plato. It is also plausible that the proliferation of the “I”-s in Plato-translations has to do with modern concerns with the subject. Brisson (16) treats Platonic soul and interiority as coextensive, and interprets two aspects of the relationship between soul and body in terms of the relation between the internal and the external.⁶ First, the internal is the mover of the external, because the soul is the principle of bodily motion. Secondly, the external reveals the internal in that every soul is given a particular (human or animal) body in function of its moral quality exhibited in its previous life. Brisson argues that immortality does not involve the preservation of personal identity in the context of transmigration: it is only reason without the individual traits of the person that enjoys immortality.

Let me turn to the studies dealing with Imperial Stoicism. Ildefonse (5) examines how “the governing soul-part proper to us” (*idion hēgemonikon*) in Epictetus and in Marcus Aurelius relates to the notion of the “I”. Stoic ontology postulates the singularity of every individual, including human beings, and this is likely to extend to the governing part, too. The *idion hēgemonikon* is accorded a self-designing capacity and it is contrasted with the body, the governing part of others, and external things. At the same time, it is embedded in cosmic order, and it houses a transcendent force, our daemon, within. The personal emotions are not privileged, and the emphasis is on the injunction to identify ourselves with universal reason. Ildefonse concludes that the *idion hēgemonikon* is something that belongs uniquely to the subject, but that falls short of an inner “I”, even if Marcus gets closer to such a notion. Mercier (10) raises the issue of the presence of the “I” in antiquity in the framework of Foucault’s historical-philosophical construct concerning the history of moral subject. She argues that the “I” emerges

⁵⁾ The earliest example of the phenomenon is Joseph de Maistre, a bitter critic of the Enlightenment, who renders the phrase *hekastos hēmōn*, “each of us” (*Laws* 959a6 f. and 959b3) by *le moi* in his paraphrase of Plutarch’s *De sera numinis vindicta* in 1816.

⁶⁾ A closer look at Plato’s use of the terms “within” and “without” would interestingly complete the picture. Plato’s default assumption is that the soul moves the animal body from within. However, he considers other possibilities as well in relation to the souls of heavenly bodies at *Laws* 898e-899a. At *Timaeus* 36e, it is the world-soul which contains the world-body: the demiurge envelops the world-body with soul from “without”. At *Charmides* 156e-157c, individual soul is characterized as the broader context into which the body is fitted.

only in Christian monasticism: the interior, personal domain is constituted in the process of assiduous self-examination, the search for the truth about ourselves, and its confession to the spiritual guide. Self-examination in Imperial Stoicism only partially anticipates this practice. Gill (6) discusses the issues of “turning to ourselves” and of philosophical therapy in Epictetus, Cicero’s *De officiis* I and the Epicurean Lucretius. According to his thesis, late Hellenistic and Imperial philosophers remain within the confines of an objective-participative understanding of the self or the “I” rather than groping towards a novel, subjective-individualist conception.⁷ The approach taken by Gill is opposed to Foucault’s theory that has influenced some contributors to the present volume. Gill denies that Imperial Stoicism constitutes a milestone in the process of the emergence of the I/self or interiority. In his opinion, Stoics and Epicureans have a more universalist conception of moral development as compared with Plato’s and Aristotle’s ethics. In their view, ethical reflexion and development is available to everyone at any time; it presupposes neither exceptional endowment, nor a specific upbringing, nor privileged social status. This outlook explains the focus on “turning to ourselves”, which must be understood in terms of shared human rationality rather than a personal “I”, and philosophical therapy we detect in late Hellenistic and Imperial philosophy. Gill argues that 1) the conceptions in question have an interpersonal dimension, and they accord universal reason a privileged position; and that 2) the concepts invoked and the practices recommended are not new and specific to this period.⁸ Let me indicate my stance to Gill’s argumentative strategy. 1) The focus on the self does not preclude an interest in participative ethics. Epictetus, for instance, is concerned with both dimensions. Similarly, the privilege of universal reason is not incompatible with the attention paid to personal traits.⁹ 2) Gill correctly observes that Panaetius’ theory of the four roles or *personae*, preserved in Cicero’s *De officiis* I, or Epictetus recommend the unification of the different layers of personality with the primacy of shared human nature, that is, rationality. However, Classical or early Hellenistic theories do not accommodate personal traits, so even the modest role granted to them by Panaetius and Epictetus seems

⁷ The subjective-individualist conceptions prominent in modernity characterize the self with reflexive consciousness, a subjective point of view and unique individuality. By contrast, the objective-participative theories that prevailed in antiquity interpret the human person in terms of objective notions such as the scale of psychic faculties; in this framework, ethics is bound up with participation in various communities. This distinction underlies Gill’s numerous writings relating to the self, see recently C. Gill (2006) and (2008).

⁸ For instance, Gill emphasizes that the practice of philosophical therapy goes back to Socrates, and that Chrysippus, too, devoted a book to this issue (p. 87 f.). Inwood (2005) insists that there are no theoretical innovations in the period.

⁹ Cp. R. Sorabji (2008) 14-16. Sorabji points out that the terms figuring in Gill’s contrast between objective-participative and subjective-individualist conceptions of the self are not mutually exclusive.

to be something new. Moreover, even if this does not amount to a radical conceptual or theoretical innovation, I can't see any reason to play down the robust and well-attested presence of the practices related to the self or the "I" in Roman Stoicism. These practices may well go back to earlier times, but, due to the lack of evidence, it is no easier to prove than to refute that they existed in the same form.

The third group of studies is devoted to Plotinus. Aubry (15) gives an overview of the notions relating to daemons from Homer through the tragic poets, Empedocles and Plato to Plotinus. In these authors, she discerns a process of interiorizing the daemon which culminates in Plotinus. Aubry (7) scrutinizes Plotinus' concept of the "I" in another study.¹⁰ In her view, the Plotinian "I", which is characterized by reflexive consciousness, cannot be identified as a substance or as a function. The "I" lacks any definite identity; rather, it is a subject of possible identifications. It is characterized by the duality of the "man in the intelligible world" and of the "living body", or more precisely, it potentially contains all psychic layers from the vegetative faculty through discursive thinking to the level of noetic understanding. Its actual identity is determined by consciousness: it occupies the level of which it is aware. In this way, the "I" is not so much the subject of self-knowledge as the subject of self-constitution: its fundamental characteristic is freedom or the capacity of self-determination. In my opinion, Aubry underlines an important and innovative aspect of Plotinus' theory, when she focusses on the dynamic, active centre of consciousness which is not a substance or objective structure. However, this "shifting" subject *presupposes* the objective hierarchy of the levels of reality (and that of the layers of human souls) in that it oscillates along that scale.¹¹ Furthermore, it is not clear how the description of the "I" in terms of a "container" of psychic faculties is compatible with the stress on its non-objective character. This formulation suggests that the "I" is a multi-layered substance with consciousness, that is, the capacity of actualization, as one of its functions.¹² Kühn (8) points out that self-knowledge and individuality—the two features which characterize the "I"—do not go hand in hand in Plotinus. Individuality, which is a property of the soul and has to do with memory, is relegated to a secondary position. The soul on its return into the intelligible world only potentially possesses individual characteristics because the object of its self-knowledge is an impersonal, noetic self. The main subject of Kühn's paper is the ideal, paradigmatic form of self-knowledge characteristic of Intellect. Unlike discursive thought, Intellect grasps its own contents rather than objects external to it. Kühn calls attention to

¹⁰ Plotinus usually refers to this notion in the plural (*hēmeis*, "we").

¹¹ Chiaradonna 282-284 raises similar objections.

¹² Dodds (1960) 385 identifies the "I" with "the fluctuating spotlight of consciousness" which he distinguishes from the scale of psychic faculties.

two facets of Plotinus' theory. First, Intellect knows itself *as a knower* (V.3.5, 10-15 and 38-47); secondly, intellection *constitutes* Intellect (VI.7.41, 17-22). Chiaradonna (17) focusses on a passage (V.3.8, 37-57) which raises the question of how *we*¹³ come to know universal Intellect. Plotinus argues that our knowledge of Intellect cannot be a product of our discursive reason; rather, its source is Intellect itself. In order to get access to Intellect, the soul must be assimilated to it and engage in non-discursive thought. Chiaradonna sees the way in which the cognition of Intellect by human subjects is described as part of a comprehensive strategy: in his view, it is crucial in Plotinus' methodology that the categories of discursive thought must not be transferred to intelligible reality. As for the latter, general claim, I think there is a good deal of continuity between the levels of reality characterized by discursive thinking and intellection, respectively. Soul is an image of Intellect, and as such it provides valuable clues for the cognition of the latter.

Two studies discuss Augustine. Koch (19) reminds us that interiority comes in degrees in Augustine: the representations produced by external sensible objects qualify as less interior than reason that judges them. Augustine develops two accounts of what is innermost in us. 1) At *Confessiones* III.6, 11, he states that God is deeper within than his innermost part (*interior intimo meo*). The standards which make for reason possible the fulfillment of its proper function, judgement, are immutable and eternal, and, as such, they cannot be the products of changeable human reason. Divine Truth is present in human interiority, and provides it with a metaphysical foundation. 2) At *De Trinitate* X.10, 16, Augustine argues that nothing is more present to the mind than mind itself, since the thinker knows with indubitable certainty *that* he thinks. This knowledge is immediately given with every operation of the thinking mind, so there is no need to search for it. In Koch's view, the latter conception establishes a connection between interiority and subjectivity. O'Daly (8) propounds the thesis that the discourse about the "I" in Augustine never has its end in itself; rather, he examines the "I" in religious or moral contexts involving relations to others, be it God or the fellow man. O'Daly sets out to show that the aspects of Augustine's thought that have been understood in terms of building-blocks of his notion of the "I" do not form a unified conception.¹⁴ O'Daly's constructive account of Augustine's approach to the "I" concentrates on memory and friendship. He points out that Augustine's ethics presupposes an agent who is necessarily related to others. In my opinion,

¹³ Chiaradonna identifies the Plotinian "we" with the conscious centre of the soul which in ordinary (non-philosophical) persons coincides with discursive thinking.

¹⁴ In my view, O'Daly goes too far when he questions the very existence of an Augustinian notion of the self as private inner space scrutinized by Cary (2000). For a nuanced critique of Cary see Remes (2008).

the social embeddedness of the Augustinian “I” is an important insight which puts into perspective what we have hitherto known about Augustine’s engagement with inner life without invalidating it.

Let me briefly mention the studies addressing topics more distant from the main focus of the collection. Loayza (2) discusses the poetic representations of solitude in Homer and Menander, as well as the status of the poetic subject from Homer through Hesiodus to the archaic lyrical poets. Darbo-Pechanski (14) examines “shared action” (*acte réparti*) in the *Iliad*, that is to say, the model in which action results from cooperation between two characters, one of whom provides the emotional “matter”, while the other gives “form” to the action by offering a plan or a command. Suralles (18) outlines the understanding of interiority in the American Indian languages of the 16-17th Century, innocent of the Christian soul-body opposition, which assigns the cognitive and the emotional functions to the “heart” or “intestines”, as well as the reactions of the missionaries to indigenous beliefs before and after the Tridentinum. Büttgen (20) calls attention to the pastoral and exegetical context of Luther’s statements about the inner man and conscience, and he argues that Luther’s theoretical achievement in relation to interiority consists in connecting two Pauline motives, the inner man and Christian liberty. Tribolet (11) discerns structural parallels between Lacan’s theory of the subject and Plotinus’ notion of the “we”. The main similarity is that the conscious “I” (in Plotinus, the soul or discursive reason) is an epiphenomenon of a deeper, more fundamental entity (in Plotinus, the Intellect) containing the structures of thought of which we are not necessarily aware.

In recent years, ancient notions of the self have been subject to intense scrutiny. The present volume is part of this trend, and it contains valuable contributions to this topic. The strong point of the collection is that, unlike earlier research, it lays due emphasis on Plotinus.¹⁵ The volume mostly represents the French scholarly tradition, but it also includes contributions by scholars coming from other traditions. I would have been pleased to see explicit discussion of the points where there is serious disagreement between French and English-speaking scholars (for instance, the role of Imperial Stoicism in the emergence of the notion of the “I”). The volume ends with useful Indices. I recommend the volume especially to scholars interested in later Greek philosophy.

László Bene
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

¹⁵ For recent accounts of Plotinus’ notion of the self see Aubry (2004) and Remes (2007).

Bibliography

- Aubry, G. (introd., transl. and comm.) 2004. Plotin, *Traité 53 (Ennéades, I, 1)*. Paris: Cerf.
- Cary, P. 2000. *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self. The Legacy of a Christian Platonist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dodds, E. R. et alii (eds.). 1960. *Les Sources de Plotin*, Genève: Fondation Hardt.
- Gill, C. 2006. *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2008. 'The Ancient Self: Issues and Approaches', in P. Remes and J. Sihvola (eds.), 35-56.
- Inwood, B. 2005. 'Seneca and Self-assertion', in *id. Reading Seneca. Stoic Philosophy at Rome*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Remes, P. 2007. *Plotinus on Self. The Philosophy of the 'We'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2008. 'Inwardness and Infinity of Selfhood: From Plotinus to Augustine', in P. Remes and J. Sihvola (eds.), 155-178.
- Remes, P. and Sihvola, J. (eds.). 2008. *Ancient Philosophy of the Self*. Heidelberg-New York: Springer.
- Sorabji, R. 2006. *Self. Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 2006. 'Graeco-Roman Varieties of Self', in P. Remes and J. Sihvola (eds), 13-34.
- Williams, B. 1993. *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press.