

Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self
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7

“IN INTERIORE HOMINE”

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On the way from Plato to Descartes stands Augustine. Augustine's whole outlook was influenced by Plato's doctrines as they were transmitted to him through Plotinus. His encounter with these doctrines played a crucial role in his spiritual development. He could liberate himself from the last shackles of the false Manichaean view when he finally came to see God and the soul as immaterial. Henceforth, for Augustine, the Christian opposition between spirit and flesh was to be understood with the aid of the Platonic distinction between the bodily and the non-bodily.

Along with this duality, Augustine took on the full panoply of related oppositions, of course. The higher realm was also that of the eternal as against the merely temporal, of the immutable in contrast to the ever-changing.

And he also took over the Ideas. These are now the thoughts of God and hence can remain eternal even in this new theistic context. Augustine was deeply impressed by the account of the making of the world in the *Timaeus*, for all its important differences with orthodox Christian belief. He stresses the likeness, and was one of the founders of the line of Christian thought that sees Plato as the 'Attic Moses'. The Christian God can still make things on the model of the Ideas, because they are his own thoughts, eternal like him. Augustine can even take over the Platonic-Pythagorean sense of the ontological foundation of creation in numbers.¹

The doctrine of creation ex nihilo is thus married with a Platonic notion of participation. Created things receive their form through God, through their participation in his Ideas. Everything has being only insofar as it participates in God. Augustine, in explaining the Christian notion of the ontological dependence of things in Platonic terms, here as elsewhere makes a synthesis with striking new possibilities. The conception of an order of creation made according to God's thoughts merges with the great Johannine image of creation through the Word, and hence links Platonism with the central Christian doctrine of the Trinity. If everything participates in God and

everything is in its own way like God, then the key principle underlying everything is that of Participation or Likeness itself. But the archetype of Likeness-to-God can only be God's Word itself, begotten from him and of one substance with him, i.e., the Second Person of the Trinity, by whom all things were made.

In any case, whether this synthesis works or not, Augustine gives us a Platonic understanding of the universe as an external realization of a rational order. Things should be understood ultimately as like signs, for they are external expressions of God's thoughts. Everything which is, is good (Manichaean error is totally repudiated); and the whole is organized for the good. Here is another of those crucial junction points where Jewish theism and Greek philosophy can be stitched together. The affirmations of Genesis 1, "and God saw that it was good", are linked to the Platonic doctrine of the Idea of the Good, only the place of that all-structuring Idea is now taken by God himself (either the First or Second Persons of the Trinity). Augustine takes over the image of the sun, central to Plato's discussion of the Idea of the Good in the *Republic*, which both nourishes things in their being and gives the light to see them by; but now the ultimate principle of being and knowledge together is God. God is the source of light, and here is another junction point, linking up with the light in the first chapter of John's Gospel.

So the created world exhibits a meaningful order; it participates in God's Ideas. God's eternal law enjoins order. It calls on humans to see and respect this order.² For Augustine as for Plato, the vision of cosmic order is the vision of reason, and for both the good for humans involves their seeing and loving this order. And similarly, for both what stands in the way is the human absorption with the sensible, with the mere external manifestations of the higher reality. The soul must be swivelled around; it has to change the direction of its attention/desire. For the whole moral condition of the soul depends ultimately on what it attends to and loves. "Everyone becomes like what he loves. Dost thou love the earth? Thou shalt be earth. Dost thou love God? then I say, thou shalt be God".³

Of course, in agreeing with Plato about the pivotal importance of the direction of our attention and love, Augustine alters the balance between these in what turns out to be a decisive way. It is love and not attention which is the ultimately deciding factor. And that is why the Augustinian doctrine of the two directions is usually expressed in terms of the two loves, which can ultimately be identified as charity and concupiscence. I want to return to this below.

For the moment, I only want to bring out the striking elements of continuity between the two doctrines. And that only in order to point out this first important difference, from my point of view here: that this same opposition of spirit/matter, higher/lower, eternal/temporal, immutable/

changing is described by Augustine, not just occasionally and peripherally, but centrally and essentially in terms of inner/outer.⁴ For instance, in *de Trinitate*, XII.1, he distinguishes between the inner and outer man. The outer is the bodily, what we have in common with the beasts, including even our senses, and the memory storage of our images of outer things. The inner is the soul. And this is not just one way of describing the difference for Augustine. It is in a sense the most important one for our spiritual purposes, because the road from the lower to the higher, the crucial shift in direction, passes through our attending to ourselves as *inner*.

Let one very famous line stand for many: "Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas" ("Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth").⁵ Augustine is always calling us within. What we need lies '*intus*', he tells us again and again. Why this striking difference from Plato?

The short answer is that inward lies the road to God. But it is extremely valuable for my purposes to unpack this answer at greater length.

I pointed above to the parallel between God and the Idea of the Good, in that both provide the ultimate principle of being and knowledge; and both are portrayed with the same central image of the sun. Part of the force of the image in both philosophies is that the highest reality is very difficult, indeed in a sense impossible, to contemplate directly. But for Plato, we find out about this highest principle by looking at the domain of objects which it organizes, that is, the field of the Ideas. What we saw above in the image of the eye of the soul was the doctrine that the power of seeing doesn't have to be put into it; rather it just has to be *turned*. Facing the right field is what is decisive. We may have to struggle to rise to this, but the struggle is over the direction of our gaze.

For Augustine, too, God can be known more easily through his created order and in a sense can never be known directly, except perhaps in a rare condition of mystical rapture (such as Paul experienced, for instance, on the road to Damascus). But our principal route to God is not through the object domain but 'in' ourselves. This is because God is not just the transcendent object or just the principle of order of the nearer objects, which we strain to see. God is also and for us primarily the basic support and underlying principle of our knowing activity. God is not just what we long to see, but what powers the eye which sees. So the light of God is not just 'out there', illuminating the order of being, as it is for Plato; it is also an 'inner' light. It is the light "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). It is the light in the soul. "Alia est enim lux quae sentitur oculis; alia qua per oculos agitur et sentiatur; haec lux qua ista manifesta sunt, utique intus in anima est" ("There is one light which we perceive through the eye, another by which the eye itself is enabled to perceive; this light by which [outer things]

become manifest is certainly within the soul").⁶ The link between Plato's light metaphors and St. John has brought about an important turning.

Augustine shifts the focus from the field of objects known to the activity itself of knowing; God is to be found here. This begins to account for his use of the language of inwardness. For in contrast to the domain of objects, which is public and common, the activity of knowing is particularized; each of us is engaged in ours. To look towards this activity is to look to the self, to take up a reflexive stance.

But this understates the case. There is a less radical kind of turning to the self which was a relatively common topic among ancient moralists. Foucault has mentioned the importance of the theme of "the care of oneself".⁷ The call to a higher moral life could be phrased in terms of a call to give less concern to the external things that people normally care for: wealth, power, success, pleasure; and more concern for one's own moral condition. But 'care of self' here meant something like the care of one's soul. The point of call was to show how foolish it is to be very concerned about the state of one's property, for instance, and not at all about the health of one's own soul. It is analogous to the comment someone might make today to a busy executive who is driving himself beyond all limits: "Why try so hard to make an extra million when you'll give yourself a heart attack in the process?" This advice might also be couched in the terms: "Take care of yourself".

This injunction calls us to a reflexive stance, but not a radically reflexive one. The stance becomes radical (this is a term of art I want to introduce here) when what matters to us is the adoption of the first-person standpoint. This could perhaps take a bit of explaining, in view of the place it will hold in my argument.

The world as I know it is there for me, is experienced by me, or thought about by me, or has meaning for me. Knowledge, awareness is always that of an agent. What would be left out of an inventory of the world in one of our most 'objective' languages, e.g., that of our advanced natural sciences, which try to offer a "view from nowhere", would be just this fact of the world's being experienced, of its being *for* agents, or alternatively, of there being something that it is like to be an experiencing agent of a certain kind.⁸ In our normal dealings with things, we disregard this dimension of experience and focus on the things experienced. But we can turn and make this our object of attention, become aware of our awareness, try to experience our experiencing, focus on the way the world is *for* us. This is what I call taking a stance of radical reflexivity or adopting the first-person standpoint.

It is obvious that not all reflexivity is radical in this sense. If I attend to my wounded hand, or begin (belatedly) to think about the state of my soul instead of about worldly success, I am indeed concerned with myself, but not yet radically. I am not focussing on myself as the agent of experience and

making this my object. Similarly, I can muse in general terms about there being a dimension of experience, as I did in the previous paragraph, without adopting the first-person standpoint, where I make *my* experience my object. Radical reflexivity brings to the fore a kind of presence to oneself which is inseparable from one's being the agent of experience, something to which access by its very nature is asymmetrical: there is a crucial difference between the way I experience my activity, thought, and feeling, and the way that you or anyone else does. This is what makes me a being that can speak of itself in the first person.

The call to take care of oneself as emanating from an ancient sage, or as addressed to a modern executive, is not an appeal to radical reflexivity. It is a call to concern ourselves with the health of one very important thing (our soul for the ancients, the body for the modern) as against being completely absorbed in the fate of something much less important (our property or power). But in either case, what this leads us to focus on, i.e., the causes and constituents of (psychic or bodily) health and sickness, bears no special relation to a first-person standpoint. Thus we today have a science of what it is to be healthy which is impersonally available, and in no way requires for its understanding that we assume the first-person stance. A similar point could be made about the ancients' lore of the soul. Of course the identity of knower and known is very relevant to my *caring* about the soul/body in question: the whole point of the appeal is that it points up the absurdity of my not caring for my own soul (or body). But this identity is of no importance in learning and defining what it is to care for this soul (body).

Augustine's turn to the self was a turn to radical reflexivity, and that is what made the language of inwardness irresistible. The inner light is the one which shines in our presence to ourselves; it is the one inseparable from our being creatures with a first-person standpoint. What differentiates it from the outer light is just what makes the image of inwardness so compelling, that it illuminates that space where I am present to myself.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that it was Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought. The step was a fateful one, because we have certainly made a big thing of the first-person standpoint. The modern epistemological tradition from Descartes, and all that has flowed from it in modern culture, has made this standpoint fundamental—to the point of aberration, one might think. It has gone as far as generating the view that there is a special domain of "inner" objects available only from this standpoint; or the notion that the vantage point of the 'I think' is somehow outside the world of things we experience.

For those of us who are critical of the modern epistemological tradition, it may on one hand seem that Augustine has a lot to answer for. And for those

still captured by this tradition (and the two classes overlap considerably), it may on the other hand be hard to appreciate his achievement, since we tend to read *all* reflexivity as radical. But somewhere between these two reactions lies a just appreciation of the change he wrought. This was to make a turn to the self in the first-person dimension crucial to our access to a higher condition—because in fact it is a step on our road back to God—and hence to inaugurate a new line of development in our understanding of moral sources, one which has been formative for our entire Western culture.

In reaction against what we have thus become, particularly through the reified and self-focussed forms of modern subjectivism, we may depreciate this; or in our imprisonment within modern subjectivism, we may fail to notice it. But Augustine needs to be rescued from identification both with his successors and with his predecessors. And that is what I am trying to do in placing him between Plato and Descartes. Augustine makes the step to inwardness, as I said, because it is a step towards God. The truth dwells within, as we saw above, and God is Truth. One way in which this shows itself is in our attempt to prove God's existence. Augustine offers us such a proof in the dialogue *On Free Will*, Book II. He tries to show his interlocutor that there is something higher than our reason, which thus deserves to be called God. The proof turns on the insight that reason recognizes that there is a truth which is criterial for it, i.e., a standard on which it regulates itself, which is not its own making, but beyond it and common to all.

One can imagine making a proof of this kind without recourse to the first-person standpoint. Someone today, for instance, might argue for the existence of binding inter-subjective standards on the grounds of what we actually accept in argument. The proof would point to our habits of discourse and the standards we appealed to and accepted there. This kind of argument is common among the followers of Wittgenstein. Augustine, however, does couch his argument reflexively. He appeals to our first-person experience in thinking.

Thus he starts by showing his interlocutor that he does know something, that he does grasp some truth. Augustine feels he must answer the sceptic, because the pivotal argument that our judgements of truth repose on standards binding on all reasoners would be unhinged if the sceptic could prove that we really know nothing. But in order to prove that we know something, Augustine makes the fateful proto-Cartesian move: he shows his interlocutor that *he* cannot doubt his own existence, since "if you did not exist it would be impossible for you to be deceived".⁹ As Gilson points out, Augustine makes frequent use of this proto-cogito.¹⁰

Augustine's use of this is very different from that of his illustrious successor; it doesn't have such a pivotal importance, and he isn't so

concerned to use it to establish mind-body dualism—something Augustine didn't believe needed as much argument.¹¹ But what it does do, besides giving us at least one truth to show for ourselves, is establish us in the first-person standpoint. It is a feature of this certainty, that it is a certainty *for me*; I am certain of *my* existence: the certainty is contingent on the fact that knower and known are the same. It is a certainty of self-presence. Augustine was the inventor of the argument we know as the 'cogito', because Augustine was the first to make the first-person standpoint fundamental to our search for the truth.

Having shown his interlocutor that he knows that he exists, indeed, that he lives, and that he has intelligence, Augustine gets him to agree that there is a hierarchy among these three. Something which exists and lives is higher than something which just *lives*, and something which also has intelligence is higher still. The grounds for this are that the higher in each case includes the lower as well as itself. But later on, another ground for superiority enters, this time allowing us to show the superiority of reason to sense: this is that the higher is the judge of the lower. With our reason, we determine what of our sensible experience is really trustworthy. What judges must be higher, so reason is king. Nothing is superior to reason in human nature.¹²

It is this same principle which will allow us to show that something is higher than reason itself. To bring us to this conclusion, Augustine shows that our particular activities of thinking and sensing bear on a common world of objects. The things in the world we perceive with our senses are examples of such common realities. But there are even higher common objects, those which are available to all reasoners. The truths of number and wisdom are of this kind (these are for Augustine, as a good Platonist, closely linked together). There are truths of wisdom, such that humans ought to live justly, or the worse ought to be subjected to the better, or the incorrupt is better than the corrupt, the eternal better than the temporal, and the inviolable better than the violable.¹³ These are not truths that each person makes on his own; they represent common standards. We do not judge these and ask whether, for example, the eternal ought to be superior to the temporal, or whether seven plus three ought to equal ten; there is no question that one *is* superior, and that ten *is* the sum. "Knowing simply that these *truths* are so one does not examine them with a view to their correction but rejoices to have discovered them . . . We pass judgement on our minds in accordance with truth as a standard, while we cannot in any way pass judgement on truth".¹⁴ Hence we see that there is something superior to the human mind. QED: God = truth exists.

Moreover, this truth is a common reality in an even stronger sense than the objects we see and touch. For unlike the latter, where we may have to

jostle each other to get a good look or shove people aside to touch, truth can be enjoyed by all together. From this store, those who take always leave as much for the others.¹⁵

Augustine's proof of God is a proof from the first-person experience of knowing and reasoning. I am aware of my own sensing and thinking; and in reflecting on this, I am made aware of its dependence on something beyond it, something common. But this turns out on further examination to include not just objects to be known but also the very standards which reason gives allegiance to. So I recognize that this activity which is mine is grounded on and presupposes something higher than I, something which I should look up to and revere. By going inward, I am drawn upward.

But it may seem strange that Augustine goes to all this trouble to establish that there are higher standards common to all thinkers, something which Plato already had laid out in the Ideas. Was it simply that he felt he had to meet a stronger sceptical challenge? This is how we would tend to look at things with our post-Cartesian eyes. But to see this as Augustine's principal preoccupation is to assume that the sceptical challenge of his day was couched in the form familiar to us: How can one get beyond first-person experience and conclude to a world out there? But this was neither how the challenge was put nor how people thought to answer it before Augustine. The relation of historical causation seems rather to be the reverse: the idea of seeing scepticism as the question whether I can get beyond 'my' inner world is much more a product of the revolution which Augustine started, but which only bore this fruit many centuries later.

The reasons Augustine took this path seem to me to be rather that his concern was to show that God is to be found not just in the world but also and more importantly at the very foundations of the person (to use modern language); God is to be found in the intimacy of self-presence. God as Truth gives us the standards, the principles of right judgement. But he gives them to us not just through the spectacle of a world organized by the Ideas but more basically by that "incorporeal light . . . by which our minds are somehow irradiated, so that we may judge rightly of all these things".¹⁶

The idea that God is to be found within emerges with greater force out of Augustine's account of our search for self-knowledge. The soul is present to itself, and yet it can utterly fail to know itself; it can be utterly mistaken about its own nature, as Augustine thought that he himself had been when he was a Manichaeon. So we can search to know ourselves; and yet we wouldn't know where to begin looking or be aware that we had found ourselves unless we already had some understanding of ourselves. Augustine faces the problem of how we can both know and not know, as Plato did in the *Meno*, and he solves it with a similar (and obviously derived) recourse to "memory".

But Augustine's 'memory' is rather different from Plato's. In his mature

philosophy, it has broken altogether away from the conception of an original vision of the Ideas, crucial to the Platonic theory. In fact, Augustine's concept gets extended and comes to include matters that have nothing to do with past experience, including just those principles of the intelligible order which we have been discussing and which are somehow within us, in the sense that we are capable of formulating them and making them explicit, even though they were never presented explicitly to us in the past. Augustine, by taking the Platonic notion of memory and cutting it from its roots in the theory of prenatal experience (a doctrine hard to square with Christian orthodoxy), developed the basis for what later became the doctrine of innate ideas. Deep within us is an implicit understanding, which we have to think hard to bring to explicit and conscious formulation. This is our *'memoria'*. And it is here that our implicit grasp of what we are resides, which guides us as we move from our original self-ignorance and grievous self-misdescription to true self-knowledge.

But what is at the basis of this memory itself? At its root, constituting this implicit understanding, is the Master within, the source of the light which lights every man coming into the world, God. And so at the end of its search for itself, if it goes to the very end, the soul finds God. The experience of being illumined from another source, of receiving the standards of our reason from beyond ourselves, which the proof of God's existence already brought to light, is seen to be very much an experience of inwardness. That is, it is in this paradigmatically first-person activity, where I strive to make myself more fully present to myself, to realize to the full the potential which resides in the fact that knower and known are one, that I come most tellingly and convincingly to the awareness that God stands above me.

At the very root of memory, the soul finds God. And so the soul can be said to "remember God"—Augustine can give a new meaning to an old biblical expression. When I turn to God, I am listening to what is deep in my "memory"; and so the soul "is reminded to turn to the Lord as to the light by which it was somehow touched even when turned away from him".¹⁷

But the way within leads above. When we get to God, the image of place becomes multiple and many-sided. In an important sense, the truth is *not* in me.¹⁸ I see the truth 'in' God. Where the meeting takes place, there is a reversal. Going within memory takes me beyond.

Here is a striking place where Augustine has built on a Platonic doctrine to a novel purpose. For Plato in the *Meno*, the doctrine of reminiscence, besides answering the difficult question of how you ever know what you seek, underscores the thesis that knowledge of the Ideas isn't put into us by training. The capacity is there. Augustine takes this point up. Properly speaking, we are not taught the important principles of reason; the teacher only awakens them in us. But while for Plato, the 'within' was only a way of

recurring to a 'before', for Augustine, it is the path to an 'above', and indispensable as the road thither. As Gilson put it, Augustine's path is one "leading from the exterior to the interior and from the interior to the superior".¹⁹

So we come to God within. The clear difference between Augustine's imagery and Plato's, for all the continuity of metaphysical theory, reposes on a major difference of doctrine. Augustine takes our focus off the objects reason knows, the field of the Ideas, and directs it onto the activity of striving to know which each of us carries on; and he makes us aware of this in a first-person perspective. At the end of this road we see that God's is the power sustaining and directing this activity. We grasp the intelligible not just because our soul's eye is directed to it but primarily because we are directed by the Master within.

God is behind the eye, as well as the One whose Ideas the eye strives to discern clearly before it. He is found in the intimacy of my self-presence. Indeed he is closer to me than I am myself, while being infinitely above me; he is "interior intimo meo et superior summo meo".²⁰ God can be thought of as the most fundamental ordering principle in me. As the soul animates the body, so God does the soul. He vivifies it. "As the soul is the life of the flesh, so God is the blessed life of the man".²¹

This doctrine is the basis of Augustine's attempts to discern the image of the Trinity in the soul and its activity.²² The first trinity is that of mind, knowledge, and love (*mens, notitia, et amor*). The mind comes to know itself and, in that, love itself. The same basic idea underlies the second trinity, of memory, intelligence, and will (*memoria, intelligentia, et voluntas*). In this, the basic movement of the trinity in the soul is made even clearer. 'Memory' is the soul's implicit knowledge of itself. Something is in my memory when I know it even though I am not thinking of it or focussing on it. But to make this explicit and full knowledge, I have to formulate it. In the particular case of the soul, the true latent knowledge I have of myself will be overlaid by all sorts of false images. To dissipate these distorted appearances and get to the truth, I have to draw out the implicit knowledge within (which also comes from above). This comes about in the word (*verbum*) that I formulate inwardly, and this constitutes *intelligentia*. But to understand my true self is to love it, and so with intelligence comes will, and with self-knowledge, self-love.

The parallels with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, particularly with the Father's begetting of the Word, need no stressing. But what is striking here for our purposes is that man shows himself most clearly as the image of God in his inner self-presence and self-love. It is a kind of knowledge where knower and known are one, coupled with love, which reflects most fully God in our lives. And indeed, the image of the Trinity in us is the process whereby

we strive to complete and perfect this self-presence and self-affirmation. Nothing shows more clearly than these images of the Trinity how Augustinian inwardness is bound up with radical reflexivity, and they also begin to make clear how essentially linked is this doctrine of inwardness to Augustine's whole conception of the relation of man to God.

We can best see this if we relate this doctrine to another major difference with Plato. I mentioned above that Augustine too sees the soul as potentially facing two ways, towards the higher and immaterial, or towards the lower and sensible. And these two directions of attention are also two directions of desire. Augustine speaks of two loves. But within this similarity to Plato there is a tremendous difference in the way that knowing and loving are related. In Augustine, perhaps inevitably as a Christian thinker, there is a developed notion of the will. Where for Plato, our desire for the good is a function of how much we see it, for Augustine the will is not simply dependent on knowledge.

Two important changes underlay this developing doctrine of the will, and they were taken further by Augustine's successors. The first had already been brought about by Stoic thinkers. They gave a central place to the human capacity to give or withhold assent, or to choose. Humans will have the same sensuous impulses (*hormētikai phantasiai*) as animals, Chrysippus argues, but they are not forced to act on them. They are capable of giving or withholding consent from what impulses urge them to. The wise man will know that pain is to be borne and will not be rushed into seeking relief at all costs. We are not masters of our *phantasiai*, but we do control our all-things-considered rational intention (*synkatathesis*). Much later on, Epicurus developed a similar doctrine using the Aristotelian term '*prohairesis*', which one might translate 'moral choice'. What impulses may impinge is beyond our power, but my *prohairesis* is utterly under my control. Charles Kahn quotes this passage from the *Discourses*:²³ "The tyrant says: 'I will put you in bonds.' 'What are you saying? put *me* in bonds? You will fetter my leg, but not even Zeus can conquer my *prohairesis*'".

The singling out of this power of choice or assent is one source of the developing notion of the will, and there is already an important change in moral outlook in making this the central human faculty. What is morally crucial about us is not just the universal nature or rational principle which we share with others, as with Plato and Aristotle, but now also this power of assent, which is essentially in each case mine ('*jemeinig*,' to use Heidegger's term). Western Christian moral sensibility took up and accentuated this side of Stoic thought. From this, the idea can grow that moral perfection requires a personal adhesion to the good, a full commitment of the will. We shall see later how important this demand became in the early modern period.

The second change emerged out of a Christian outlook and was given

paradigmatic formulation by Augustine. It posits that humans are capable of two radically different moral dispositions. The teleological theory of nature underlying Greek moral philosophy supposes that everyone is motivated by a love of the good, which can be sidetracked to evil through ignorance (the view that Plato attributes to Socrates) or distortive training and bad habits (Aristotle). Augustine's doctrine of the two loves allows for the possibility that our disposition may be radically perverse, driving us to turn our backs even on the good we see. Indeed, that is precisely the predicament of all of us, owing to the sin of Adam. The will must first be healed through grace before we can function fully on the Socratic model.

The further development of the doctrine of the will in Western Christendom and its successor culture weaves together these two master ideas, not without some tension and difficulty: the will as our power to confer or withhold all-things-considered assent, or choice; and the will as the basic disposition of our being. According to the first facet, we speak of people as strong- or weak-willed; according to the second, we speak of them as of good or ill will.

Both of these changes complicate the simpler "Socratic" model according to which we always act for the good we see; and above all, the second introduces a potential conflict between vision and desire. This is not to say that the will is declared quite independent of knowledge, or that Augustine believed in the possibility that we might see in full clarity the glory of God and not respond in love. This kind of limit case is invoked, of course, in the Judaeo-Christian legend of Lucifer, but it has never been attributed by Christian theology as a power to humans. It does mean, however, that in the zone in which we live, of half-understanding and contrary desires, the will is as much the independent variable, determining what we can know, as it is the dependent one, shaped by what we see. The causality is circular and not linear.

For the linear theories which descend from Socrates, as well as for modern rationalists, the phenomenon of weakness of the will—'*akrasia*'—is a major intellectual problem; for Augustine, it was no problem, but rather the central crisis of moral experience. That is why he seized so eagerly on the passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (7:19–25): "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do", as he relates in the *Confessions*.²⁴ In Augustine's Christian outlook, as we saw, the perversity in the will can never be sufficiently explained by our lack of insight into the good; on the contrary, it makes us act below and against our insight, and prevents this from becoming fuller and purer.

This perversity can be described as a drive to make ourselves the centre of our world, to relate everything to ourselves, to dominate and possess the

things which surround us. This is both cause and consequence of a kind of slavery, a condition in which we are in turn dominated, captured by our own obsessions and fascination with the sensible. So we can see that evil cannot be explained simply by lack of vision but involves something also in the dimension of the soul's sense of itself. Reflexivity is central to our moral understanding.

But this is not all. If reflexivity were only the source of evil, then the remedy might easily be to turn away from the self, to become absorbed fully in the impersonal Ideas. Connecting the self with evil and suffering can also lead us in this direction, as Buddhist doctrine shows us. But for Augustine, it is not reflexivity which is evil; on the contrary, we show most clearly the image of God in our fullest self-presence. Evil is when this reflexivity is enclosed on itself. Healing comes when it is broken open, not in order to be abandoned, but in order to acknowledge its dependence on God.

And so the discovery which dissipates the perversity of the will, and which the rectifying of this perversity makes possible, is that of our dependence on God in the very intimacy of our own presence to ourselves, at the roots of those powers which are most our own. We see here that the stress on reflexivity, on the inward path, is not only for the benefit of intellectuals, trying to prove the existence of God; the very essence of Christian piety is to sense this dependence of my inmost being on God. And just as in our perverse condition of sin, our desire for the good was so much less than our insight; in being turned towards God, our love for him goes beyond the measure of any order, however good. When it comes to God, the right measure is to love without measure.²⁵ So both for better and for worse, the will leaps beyond the desire appropriate to a cosmos ordered for the Good. There is something gratuitous in love as well as in the refusal of love; and this, of course, is at the heart of the Judaeo-Christian outlook. It matches the gratuitous creation of the world by God, which is so crucially different from its analogue in Plotinus, the emanation of the lower from the higher, following its own essence.

We might say that where for Plato the eye already has the capacity to see, for Augustine it has *lost* this capacity. This must be restored by grace. And what grace does is to open the inward man to God, which makes us able to see that the eye's vaunted power is really God's.

7.2

We can thus see the crucial importance of the language of inwardness for Augustine. It represents a radically new doctrine of moral resources, one where the route to the higher passes within. In this doctrine, radical

reflexivity takes on a new status, because it is the 'space' in which we come to encounter God, in which we effect the turning from lower to higher. In Augustine's doctrine, the intimacy of self-presence is, as it were, hallowed, with immensely far-reaching consequences for the whole of Western culture. This exclamation from the *Confessions* movingly sums up Augustinian piety: "God the light of my heart, and the bread that nourishes my soul, and the power which weds my mind to my inmost thoughts".²⁶

Some of the consequences are very relevant to our understanding of Descartes and the transposition he wrought in the Augustinian tradition. Augustine is the originator of that strand of Western spirituality which has sought the certainty of God within. There is a certain family of 'proofs' of the existence of God whose basic form is typically Augustinian. The *démarche* which is common to them all is something like this: my experience of my own thinking puts me in contact with a perfection, which at one and the same time shows itself to be an essential condition of that thinking and also to be far beyond my own finite scope and powers to attain. There must then be a higher being on which all this depends, i.e., God. In the version we examined from Augustine, the perfection in question was that of eternal, unchanging truth, which operates as a common standard for our thought. This is both something essentially presupposed in our thinking and yet manifestly not our own product, argues Augustine.

But the famous (or infamous) ontological argument of Anselm, which Descartes took over, can also be understood as a basically 'Augustinian' proof. Here we start from the idea in the mind, that of the most perfect being. I think the underlying intuition is that this is not an idea we just happen to have, but one which must occur to us. The notion that the idea must occur is the properly 'Augustinian' intuition: we can only understand ourselves if we see ourselves as in contact with a perfection which is beyond us. But if the idea must be, then the reality must exist, because the notion of a most perfect being lacking existence is a contradiction. The fact that this latter part of the argument scarcely convinces should not divert us from understanding the kind of spiritual stance which underlies it.

And the same spirit inhabits Descartes's own proof, in the third Meditation. I find in myself the idea of a being who is "souverainement parfait et infini". But this is not an idea which I might fail to have, understanding myself as I do. That is, it couldn't be that, understanding myself as finite first, I then constructed by my own powers of conception the idea of a being who would represent the negation of myself and hence would be infinite. On the contrary, it works the other way around. I wouldn't have the notion of myself as finite unless I already had implanted within me this idea of infinity and perfection. But to understand myself as doubting and wanting is to see myself

as lacking in some respect, and hence as finite and imperfect. So my most basic and unavoidable modes of self-understanding presuppose the idea of infinity. "For how could I know that I doubt and that I desire, that is, that I lack something and am not quite perfect, if I had no idea in myself of a being more perfect than I, by comparison with whom I can know the defects of my nature".²⁷

Here is what I described as the basically Augustinian *démarche*: I can only understand myself in the light of a perfection that goes far beyond my powers. How is it that this light is cast upon my thought? It is beyond my powers to have produced it myself. Descartes argues; so it must have come from a being who really enjoys these perfections.

In a sense, we can contrast the temper of these Augustinian proofs with those that Thomas formulated. The latter argue to God from the existence of created reality (or what the proofs show to be created reality). They pass, as it were, through the realm of objects. The Augustinian proof moves through the subject and through the undeniable foundations of his presence to himself. Descartes was not alone in embracing the Augustinian path at the beginning of the modern era. In a sense those two centuries, the sixteenth and seventeenth, can be seen as an immense flowering of Augustinian spirituality across all confessional differences, one which continued in its own way into the Enlightenment, as the case of Leibniz amply illustrates. Indeed, I will argue that its impact is still potent today, and that it in a sense matches the outlook and identity of moderns. But more of this below.

For the moment, I want to mention a few other points at which Augustine anticipated Descartes. I have already spoken of the many formulations of a sort of proto-cogito. But what is also interesting to note is that the word itself is not only used but singled out for comment by Augustine. To focus on my own thinking activity is to bring to attention not only the order of things in the cosmos which I seek to *find* but also the order which I *make* as I struggle to plumb the depths of memory and discern my true being. In the *Confessions*, Augustine reflects how our thoughts "must be rallied and drawn together again, that they may be known; that is to say, they must as it were be collected and gathered together from their dispersions: whence the word 'cogitation' is derived".²⁸ And Augustine goes on to point out the etymological link between '*cogitare*' and '*cogere*' = 'to bring together' or 'to collect'. This understanding of thinking as a kind of inner assembly of an order we construct will be put to a revolutionary new use by Descartes.

There are other points of anticipation as well. As I mentioned above, the conception of innate ideas is already there in germ in Augustine's 'memory'—he even uses the image of the ring whose imprint remains in the wax.²⁹ So is the idea that the soul is better known to itself than the body. And even the

(bad) argument that the soul should eliminate from its idea of itself anything derived from the senses, because it knows these things differently than it knows itself, anticipates a notorious Cartesian reasoning.

But in spite of all this, Descartes brought about a revolutionary change. And the transformation in the doctrine of moral resources from Augustine to Descartes is no less momentous than that which Augustine wrought relative to Plato.