

SUBJECT AND SUBSTANCE: SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN AUGUSTINE'S *ON THE TRINITY*

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Resumen: A pesar de su afirmación de que la mente tiene cierto conocimiento de sus estados subjetivos (su así llamado argumento del *Cogito*), Agustín trata de demostrar en su *Tratado sobre la Trinidad* 9 y 10 que la mente incorpórea, su autoconocimiento y amor de sí misma son sin embargo sustancias y, paradójicamente, son también una sustancia individual (por analogía con la divina Trinidad). Para elucidar esta afirmación, él aduce el concepto de Aristóteles (en la *Categorías*) de correlativos recíprocos. Se discuten y se desechan las explicaciones inadecuadas, incluyendo la introspección, el conocimiento de la mente de su propia mutabilidad. Por contraste, el autoconocimiento es posible por el acceso de la mente a las Formas eternas. Sin embargo, el autoconocimiento, aunque intrínseco a la mente, necesita ser buscado. Como un complemento al argumento del *Cogito*, Agustín desarrolla un argumento de la Presencia para explicar el autoconocimiento de la mente *qua* sustancia. La presencia de la mente ante sí misma debe ser reconocida, es autoevidente pero no espontánea, porque es una consecuencia de la reflexión.

Descriptores: Mente · Sustancia · Autoconocimiento · Amor de sí mismo · Correlativos

Abstract: Despite his assertion that the mind has certain knowledge of its subjective states (his so-called *Cogito* argument), Augustine seeks in *On the Trinity* 9 and 10 to demonstrate that the incorporeal mind and its self-knowledge and self-love are nonetheless substances, and paradoxically are also a single substance (by analogy with the divine Trinity). To elucidate this he adduces Aristotle's concept (in the *Categories*) of reciprocal correlatives. Inadequate accounts of self-knowledge are discussed and dismissed, including introspection, the mind's knowledge of its own mutability. By contrast, self-knowledge is possible because of mind's access to the eternal Forms. Yet self-knowledge, though intrinsic to the mind, must be sought. As a complement to the *Cogito* argument Augustine develops a Presence argument to account for mind's self-knowledge *qua* substance. Mind's presence to itself must be realized, it is self-evident but not spontaneous, for it is a consequence of reflection.

Keywords: Mind · Substance · Self-knowledge · Self-love · Correlatives

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1. AUGUSTINE'S *COGITO* ARGUMENT

Augustine has been described by Myles Burnyeat as perhaps the first philosopher “who picks out as something we know what are unambiguously subjective states, and picks them out as giving certain knowledge *because* they are



subjective states”.¹ Burnyeat is referring to the argument that we know what appears to be the case in *Against the Academics* (*Contra Academicos*) 3.11.26:

I know that this presents itself to me as white; I know that this delights my ear; I know that this has a sweet smell for me; I know that this has a pleasant taste for me: I know that this feels cold to me (...) even though I were dreaming, it [a pleasant taste] would still delight me.²

My perceived world might, on this argument, be no more than the totality of such appearances, but I can be said to know it none the less. Burnyeat suggests that Augustine does not give this knowledge a privileged status in *Against the Academics*.³ But Augustine's argument here and earlier in the work⁴ is a version of an argument to which he reverts on a number of occasions. It has been labeled his “Cogito argument” in discussions that compare it with the Cartesian Cogito, and I shall use the label in this paper, though I have nothing to add to the substantial modern literature on the similarities and differences between Augustine and Descartes. Rather, I shall concentrate on the way in which Augustine develops one apparent Cogito argument in Books 9 and 10 of his *On the Trinity*.⁵

Let me begin by recalling some features of the Cogito argument in Augustine. Its most frequently cited version is in *City of God* 11.26:

(...) I do not have to fear the arguments of the Academics when they say: ‘What if you are mistaken?’ Now, if I am mistaken, I exist. For one who does not exist cannot in any way be mistaken ... there is no doubt that I am not mistaken in knowing that I exist. But it follows also when I assert that I know that I know, I am not mistaken (...).⁶

¹ Burnyeat (1982), p. 28. See also Burnyeat (2012), pp. 245-274.

² Hoc mihi candidum uideri scio, hoc auditum meum delectari scio, hoc mihi iucunde olere scio, hoc mihi sapere dulciter scio, hoc mihi esse frigidum scio (...). Sed me tamen illud in somnis etiam delectaret (Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.11.26, lines 59-61, 75, ed. William M. Green, CCL 29: 50). The translation is from St. Augustine, *Against the Academics*, trans. John J. O'Meara, pp. 128-9.

³ Burnyeat (1982), p. 33.

⁴ For instance in 3.9.19, where it is argued that it would be absurd to claim that one does not know whether one is alive or not.

⁵ On Augustine and Descartes' Cogito see, apart from Burnyeat (1982), Gareth B. Matthews (1992); Stephen Menn (1998); Emmanuel Berman (2001), the fullest discussion of Augustine, also containing detailed comparisons with Husserl; Richard Sorabji (2006), pp. 212-29 (a particularly important discussion of *Trin.* 10).

⁶ Nulla (...) Academicorum argumenta formido dicentium: quid si falleris? Si enim fallor, sum. Nam qui non est, utique nec falli potest (...) procul dubio in eo, quod me noui esse, non fallor. Consequens est autem, ut etiam in eo, quod me noui nosse, non fallar (Augustine, *De ciuitate dei* 11.26, lines 17-19, 22-4, ed. Bernard Dombart and Alphonse Kalb, CCL 48: 345-6). The above translation is mine, as are, unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this paper.

The argument that Augustine employs here is based on our awareness of our mental activities, but it is not employed to establish a concept of consciousness or the self. Its role is rather to make epistemological claims about the attainability of certainty, that is to say, it is an anti-skeptical strategy. It deals typically with such questions as, do I doubt that I exist, how do I know whether I am not now dreaming, am I morally responsible for what I think and do in my dreams, and so on. The “I” of such arguments is simply a reflexive use of the pronoun “I”.⁷ Yet it is undeniable that, especially in Book 10 of *On the Trinity*, Augustine uses a similar argument to elaborate a concept of the self-thinking subject that is totally present to itself, and this would appear, at first sight, to be a significant development of the Cogito argument. At the same time, Augustine insists that what this self-thinking mind knows, when it knows itself, is its own substance or essence.⁸ His use of the term “substance” seems to signal an objective element in Augustine’s subjectivity when he discusses the mind’s self-knowledge here.⁹ Let us examine his claim.

2. SELF-KNOWLEDGE, SELF-LOVE, AND SUBSTANCE

The analysis of the argument of Book 10 of *On the Trinity* (hereafter *Trin.*) must begin with Book 9, for it is there that Augustine lays the foundations upon which Book 10 is constructed. Book 9 is the start of a new phase of Augustine’s argument, concentrating on the human mind after the attempt to understand divine substance in Book 8.¹⁰ Augustine’s project is announced with some caution: “so that we may find clearly what we are now seeking, as far as is possible in such matters, let us deal with the mind on its own” (9.2.2).¹¹ The starting-point (taking up the theme from the final chapters of Book 8) is love and what it entails, but because he has narrowed the investigation to the “mind on its own”, Augustine focuses upon the mind’s self-love. This entails self-knowledge, “for how can it [the mind] love what it does not know?”

⁷ See Matthews (1992), pp. 1-10, who calls it the “I* pronoun”.

⁸ *Trin.* 10.10.16. On the interchangeability of *essentia* and *substantia* as translations of Greek *ousia* see *Trin.* 5.2.3; 5.8.9.

⁹ For a wide-ranging philosophical analysis of the issues relating to self-knowledge in *Trin.* see Christoph Horn (2012). Two further papers in the same volume deal with self-knowledge in *Trin.*: Beatrice Cillerai (2012), and Charles Brittain (2012).

¹⁰ See *Trin.* 15.6.10; Oliver O’Donovan (1980), pp. 76-84. For a different view of the role of Book 8 in Augustine’s argument see Lewis Ayres (1995), pp. 265-268. Ayres’ paper also interprets Book 10 in its context in *Trin.*, but emphasizing the place of the theme of self-knowledge in the development of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology, whereas the present paper focuses on the dynamics of self-knowledge *per se*. For his comprehensive theological interpretation of *Trin.* see Lewis Ayres (2010). See also Luigi Gioia (2008).

¹¹ *atque ut haec quae nunc requirimus quantum in his rebus possumus liquido reperiamus, de sola mente tractemus* (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 9.2.2, lines 19-21, ed. W. J. Mountain and Fr. Glorie, CCL 50: 295). All references to texts without work title in this paper are references to *Trin.*



(9.3.3).¹² Our knowledge of other minds likewise presupposes knowledge of our own, for the mind is not like the eyes, which see other bodies without seeing themselves.¹³ Self-knowledge is not like knowledge of physical things, of our own or other bodies known through the senses. Mind knows itself through itself, because it is incorporeal (9.3.3), that is to say, it collects knowledge of all incorporeal things through itself. Augustine is here assuming what he has attempted to demonstrate elsewhere, that the mental activities of imagination and memory entail an incorporeal mind.¹⁴ If imagination and memory depend on incorporeal images stored in an incorporeal mind, then the mind's self-cognition must also be the activity of an immaterial subject.

But at the same time, Augustine insists that, like the mind, knowledge and love are substances (9.2.2; 9.4.5). He does not elucidate this assertion, but presumably he means that knowledge and love have an ideal existence, as Platonic Forms do.¹⁵ He distinguishes between love as substance and love as the activity of a loving agent: there is no love, in the latter sense, if there is no one who loves (9.2.2).¹⁶ Now, in the case of the mind's self-knowledge and self-love, both knowledge and love are in the mind.¹⁷ But they are not in the mind as qualities or quantities are present (Augustine must mean: accidentally present) in a subject: as, for example, color or shape is in a body. So they must be present substantially or essentially. Augustine argues this by observing that the material quality of a body "does not go beyond the subject in which it is (9.4.5)".¹⁸ By this he means that the color or shape of a particular body is specific to that body, and cannot also be those of another body. But in the case of the self-loving mind, its love can love something beside itself, and its knowledge can know other things beside itself. Augustine believes, unconvincingly, that this is because love and knowledge are themselves substances (he might have argued that they are activities, rather than qualities). In order to explain how knowledge and love are none the less in the mind, Augustine tries an analogy with friendship. The mind and its love or knowledge are perhaps like two friends: that is, two substances, who are said to be friends in a relative

¹² *Mens enim amare se ipsam non potest nisi etiam nouerit se. Nam quomodo amat quod nescit?* (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.3.3, lines 1-2, CCL 50: 297).

¹³ The rejected view expressed in Plato (?), *First Alcibiades* 132c-133b; for it, and Augustine's rejection, see Sorabji (2006), pp. 230-233.

¹⁴ See Gerard O'Daly (1987), pp. 95-96 and pp. 131-133.

¹⁵ On Augustine and the Platonic Forms, see O'Daly (1987), pp. 189-99.

¹⁶ The distinction is implicit in Augustine's argument. As is often the case in these books of *Trin.*, his argument is condensed and must be explicated if it is to be understood. Further instances will be pointed out in the course of this paper.

¹⁷ In 9.4.5 Augustine speaks of the soul rather than the mind, but it is clear that he is referring to our rational faculty.

¹⁸ *Quidquid enim tale est non excedit subiectum in quo est* (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.4.5, lines 31-2, CCL 50: 298).

sense, through they are not humans relatively (9.4.5). But this analogy is found to be not apt, for one friend can cease to love the other, while the other, not knowing this, continues to love. But in the case of the mind's self-love or self-knowledge, love or knowledge cannot cease to exist without the mind ceasing to love or know itself (9.4.6).

Before offering his account of how knowledge and love are in the mind, Augustine disposes of two possible analogies. In 9.4.7 he suggests that the mind may be a whole, but that its love and knowledge are like parts of it, either its two parts, or forming three parts together with it.¹⁹ Mind would then be like bodies that have parts, but cannot be divided. Augustine finds this an inappropriate analogy for the mind. It would mean that the mind cannot know and love itself as a whole; rather, parts of the mind would love and know other parts. But Augustine maintains that the mind's self-knowledge and self-love extend totally through it (9.4.7).²⁰ A second analogy is attempted. Are the mind and its love and knowledge like three liquid substances –wine, water, and honey– blended to form a new substance, but with each constituent somehow contained in the blend? This analogy is found to be unsatisfactory, inasmuch as it collapses mind, love, and knowledge into a single blend. They are, in one sense, a single substance (Augustine should have added: in the self-knowing and self-loving mind). But they do not form a new entity. Augustine tries a third analogy. Three rings made from the same mass of gold remain separate but related, but only by not being blended with each other. This last analogy is the best, but Augustine can only express the relationship of mind to its love and knowledge of itself in logical terms, already hinted at twice in the book (9.4.5; 9.4.7), but developed only in 9.5.8, to which I now turn.

3. SUBSTANCES AND ONE SUBSTANCE; THE CONCEPT OF RECIPROCAL CORRELATIVES

Mind, love, and knowledge form a trinity of substances, each existing in itself, but also in each other. In 9.4.7 Augustine had asserted that when the mind's self-knowledge and self-love are fully realized, the mind knows itself as a whole, loves itself as a whole, and that its love and knowledge extend totally through it.²¹ In 9.5.8 the conclusion is drawn that these three substances are “in a remarkable

¹⁹ Augustine appears to be familiar with the kinds of skeptical arguments found in Sextus Empiricus (*Adversus Mathematicos* 7.283-313) against self-cognition as part (of the mind) apprehending part, or as whole apprehending whole, arguments which Plotinus knows, and to which he responds in *Enneads* 5.3 with his whole-whole version, positing the identity of intellect with its objects: see Sorabji (2006), pp. 209-211; and pp. 215-216. Augustine's argument is discussed subtly in relation to Plotinus, Porphyry, and Paul, 1 Corinthians 13: 9-12, by Jean Pépin (2000).

²⁰ per totum eius est notitia eius (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.4.7, lines 72-3, CCL 50: 299).

²¹ Mens uero cum se totam nouit, hoc est perfecte nouit, per totum eius est notitia eius; et cum se perfecte amat, totam se amat et per totum eius est amor eius (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.4.7, lines 71-4, CCL 50: 299).



way” inseparable, and so together are one substance, but that “each single one of them is a substance”.²² How can this paradox be maintained? Augustine must maintain it, in order to establish the analogy between the human mind and the Trinity, whose three persons are each singly a substance (or, as Augustine prefers in the case of God, an essence), and together one substance (or essence).²³ As with the Trinity, Augustine uses logical categories. Each of the three (mind, love, and knowledge) is a single substance, “while being spoken of in reciprocal relation to one another (9.5.8)”.²⁴ In 9.4.5 Augustine had introduced the concept of reciprocal correlatives, but without developing it, and he there rejected as applicable to the mind correlatives that reciprocate in the way that color and the colored object do. Color has no independent substance: it is in the substance that is the colored body. So this analogy cannot hold for the mind and its love and knowledge, for these are not qualities accidentally present in the mind, as 9.4.5 has already asserted. In the case of the mind’s self-knowledge and self-love, then, we are dealing with reciprocal correlatives that are substances.

4. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND INTROSPECTION

Having introduced the concept of substances that are reciprocal correlatives, Augustine proceeds in 9.6.9 to distinguish between each individual’s introspective awareness of “what is going on inside himself”, and a “specific or generic knowledge” of mind that is not acquired empirically, but by cognition of “the eternal forms”.²⁵ Even if the mind invariably knows itself in this life as something mutable (a view

²² Miro itaque modo tria ista inseparabilia sunt a semetipsis, et tamen eorum singulum quidque substantia est et simul omnia una substantia uel essentia (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.5.8, lines 28-30, CCL 50: 301).

²³ See *Trin.* 5.2.3; 5.4.5-5.6; 7.1.2-2.3; 7.4.7-6.11.

²⁴ cum et relatiue dicantur ad inuicem (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.5.8, lines 30-1, CCL 50: 301). Augustine is closely following distinctions made in Aristotle’s *Categories* here, especially *Cat.* 6a36-7a31. My translation of Augustine’s Latin here is influenced by Aristotle, *Categories and De Interpretatione*, trans. John L. Ackrill (1963), pp. 17-20. Richard Sorabji points out to me that Aristotle, *Categories* 8b15-21, rules out substances being relatives, and that this ruling depends on Aristotle’s second, stricter definition of relative at *Cat.* 8a31-b15. The looser definition of *Cat.* 6a36-7 had not ruled out a substance being a relative: a man may be a slave, and slave meets the looser definition (*Cat.* 7a31-b1). Augustine is here following the looser definition. On Augustine’s use of the category of relation in *Trin.* 5 and 7 see Gerard O’Daly (2012).

²⁵ Sed cum se ipsam nouit humana mens et amat se ipsam, non aliquid incommutabile nouit et amat. Aliterque unusquisque homo loquendo enuntiat mentem suam quid in se ipso agatur attendens; aliter autem humanam mentem speciali aut generali cognitione definit. Itaque cum mihi de sua propria loquitur, utrum intellegat hoc aut illud an non intellegat, et utrum uelit an nolit hoc aut illud, credo; cum uero de humana specialiter aut generaliter uerum dicit, agnosco et approbo (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.6.9, lines 1-9, CCL 50: 301); *sempiternis rationibus* (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.6.9, line 18, CCL 50: 301). See n. 15 above.

that Augustine frequently asserts²⁶), the self-knowledge that is discussed in *Trin.* 9 and 10 is not to be equated with the introspective awareness (Augustine gives the example of our likes and dislikes, the kind of self-knowledge that another can merely believe or take on trust) just referred to. Neither is self-knowledge in the sense under discussion mere definitional knowledge (“generic knowledge”) of the mind’s nature. But it is possible (just as are our judgments about perceptions) only because of our mind’s access to the forms (that which “subsists in unchanging eternity”, 9.6.9), to “the rules transcending our mind that remain unchanging” (9.6.10), and to the rational inner word (9.7.12).²⁷

5. THE MIND’S SEARCH FOR SELF-KNOWLEDGE

There is one further section of *Trin.* 9 to consider. In 9.12.18 the themes of the mind’s desire for knowledge, of its will to search and discover, are introduced. What is the state of the mind that seeks self-knowledge? It is clearly “knowable to itself”:²⁸ is that all we can say of it? 10.1.1 undertakes to elucidate the implications of the mind’s search and desire for knowledge, and begins by asserting that nobody can desire a thing of which they are wholly ignorant. When, therefore, the mind seeks to know itself, what does it already know and love about itself?

In 10.3.5 Augustine considers and rejects four things that the mind seeking to know itself might know and love.²⁹ The chapter has important implications for what follows. The mind might, firstly, love a beautiful image or idea of itself: it has heard some rumor about itself, as if it were something absent.³⁰ But, Augustine counters, this might be a false image of itself. Even if this image is like the mind, and it thus has a general knowledge of itself qua mind, this knowledge must come from other minds (Augustine’s argument here is highly condensed). But if it knows other minds, why does it not know itself, since nothing can be more present to it than itself? In any case, this notion that the mind knows itself as in a mirror, as we

²⁶ On mutability see O’Daly (1987), pp. 31-38. In 14.14.20 Augustine adds that in the eternal afterlife of the mind united with God, it “will see as immutable all that it sees (...) but now, when it sees itself, it does not see something immutable”(In illa itaque natura cum feliciter adhaeserit immutabile uidebit omne quod uiderit (...). Se ipsam uero nunc quando uidet non aliquid immutabile uidet, Augustine, *Trin.* 14.14.20, lines 91-2, 1-2, CCL 50A: 448-9).

²⁷ incommutabili aeternitate consistere (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.6.9, lines 12-13, CCL 50: 301); regulis supra mentem nostram incommutabiliter manentibus (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.6.10, lines 22-3, CCL 50: 302). On Forms as *regulae* and on the rational inner word see O’Daly (1987), pp. 96-102, and pp. 138-46.

²⁸ sibi ipsa noscibilis (Augustine, *Trin.* 9.12.18, line 33, CCL 50: 309).

²⁹ Detailed and important discussion in Bermon (2001), pp. 80-91.

³⁰ An ei fama praedicauit speciem suam sicut de absentibus solemus audire? (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.3.5, lines 5-6, CCL 50: 317). See Bermon (2001), p. 81 n. 1, on the word-play in *species* here, suggesting “beauty” and “idea” (see Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 1.24.58 on *species* as a translation of Greek *idea*).



know what eyes are by seeing the eyes of others with our own, must lead to the conclusion that the mind will never have any direct knowledge of itself, any more than the eyes can see themselves directly.³¹

Augustine now considers a second thing that the mind might know and love when it seeks to know itself. It might have an ideal concept³² of how fine it is to know itself, and hence desires such self-knowledge. This ideal concept is similar to the concept of mind that Augustine alluded to in 9.6.9 (discussed above). His objection to it in the context of 10.3.5 is that it is absurd to maintain that the mind does not know itself, yet knows how fine it is to know itself. Augustine then moves on to a third consideration. Perhaps the mind has a recollection (Augustine is thinking of Platonic or Neoplatonic *anamnēsis*) of the goal of its own serenity and happiness, and believes that self-knowledge would be the means to this goal or end. Thus it would love the recollection, and seek the unknown self. But, Augustine objects, why should recollection of its own happiness last, and not recollection of itself?

There remains one final hypothesis to test. Perhaps the mind loves the very act of knowing, and so seeks to know itself. So it would know what it is to know, that is, it would know its own knowing. But it is impossible that it should know its own knowing and not know itself. How could I know that I know something, and not know myself? Augustine follows this last objection by proposing in 10.3.5 that when the mind seeks to know itself, it knows itself as seeking. In thus knowing its lack of knowledge of itself, it knows itself in some way. It cannot be altogether ignorant of itself. Indeed, it is more known than unknown to itself. This is a weaker conclusion than that reached later, at 10.10.16, and illustrates the gradualism of Augustine's elucidation of his concept of self-knowledge in *Trin.* 10.

In 10.4.6 Augustine (referring implicitly to the argument of 9.4.7) rules out that this knowledge might be (the mind) knowing itself in part, and unknown to itself in part.³³ Whatever the mind knows, it knows with the whole mind. So if it knows anything about itself, it knows itself with the whole mind. It does not necessarily know everything: it knows something about itself.³⁴ These observations complement those of 9.4.7 on the mind's fully realized self-knowledge of itself as a whole. Augustine now develops the last point. Since the mind knows with the whole mind anything

³¹ See n. 13 above.

³² "Or does he, guided by eternal truth, see how fine it is to know oneself (...)? (An in ratione ueritatis aeternae uidet quam speciosum sit nosse semetipsam (...)? *Trin.* 10.3.5, lines 18-19, CCL 50: 317). For the meaning of *ratio* here see *OLD*, *ratio* 11.

³³ See n. 19 above.

³⁴ Non dico: totum scit, sed: quod scit tota scit. Cum itaque aliquid de se scit quod nisi tota non potest, totam se scit. Scit autem se aliquid scientem, nec potest quidquam scire nisi tota. Scit se igitur totam (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.4.6, lines 48-51, CCL 50: 318-19).

it knows about itself, it knows itself as a whole.³⁵ Augustine appears to collapse the distinction between the mind knowing something about itself and its knowledge of itself as a whole. It cannot know anything about itself that is not about itself as a whole. This is not to maintain that any knowledge of itself is tantamount to total knowledge of itself: Augustine seems to want to keep a place for the gradual realization of self-knowledge, even if it is difficult to distinguish between degrees of self-knowledge without subscribing to the dismissed part/whole model of self-knowledge.

6. THE COGITO ARGUMENT INTRODUCED: WHAT DOES THE MIND THAT SEEKS SELF-KNOWLEDGE ALREADY KNOW?

Augustine now (10.4.6) develops a new point. When it seeks itself, the mind knows that it lives and has understanding, and it knows that it is the mind (otherwise it would not know that it seeks itself). This is the beginning of the Cogito argument that Augustine will develop later in *Trin.* 10. To it he adds the argument that, if we abandon the concept of the mind seeking itself with the whole mind, we are left with discrete part seeking discrete part, and thus with no self-seeking at all.³⁶ It is no more convincing to suggest that the mind can forget itself in some way, and then recall what it has forgotten: “but how could the mind come to mind, as if it were possible for mind not to be in the mind?”³⁷

It appears that Augustine has argued that the mind always knows itself, even when it seeks itself. Why are we therefore instructed to know ourselves? In 10.5.7 he suggests that it is an exhortation to the mind “to think about itself” and live according to its nature, “that is, strive to be ordered according to its nature”, to accept its proper place in the hierarchical scheme of things, under God, but above those things to which it is superior.³⁸ Being led by the wrong kind of desire, the mind becomes somehow forgetful of itself. The misguided attempt to achieve a divine perfection and self-sufficiency leads the mind in, so to speak, the opposite direction, so that it “turns away from him (God) and moves and slips into less and less, believing it to be more

³⁵ Cum itaque aliquid de se scit quod nisi tota non potest, totam se scit (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.4.6, lines 49-50, CCL 50: 318-19).

³⁶ See n. 19 above.

³⁷ Sed quomodo mens ueniat in mentem quasi possit mens in mente non esse? (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.4.6, lines 25-6, CCL 50: 319-20).

³⁸ Vtquid ergo ei praeceptum est ut se ipsa cognoscat? Credo ut se cogitet et secundum naturam suam uiuat, id est ut secundum suam naturam ordinari appetat, sub eo scilicet cui subdenda est, supra ea quibus praeponenda est; sub illo a quo regi debet, supra ea quae regere debet (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.5.7, lines 1-5, CCL 50: 320).



and more”.³⁹ The wrongly self-absorbed mind, intent on unstable pleasure, and on a self-deluding sense of security, believes that it cannot lose itself. But it becomes absorbed with bodily things, and the images of these come to dominate it: “for it gives to the forming of them something of its own substance”.⁴⁰ This is a familiar analysis of Augustine’s, but it is important to realize how subtly he here relates the language of love and desire, of misguided imitation of God, of order and its subversion, and of the soul’s turning away from the divine and its fall, to the theme of self-forgetting and self-discovery.

In 10.6.8 Augustine corrects the vivid image of the mind giving something of its substance to the formation of images of bodily things. It is not really “conformed” to these images, but is so in thought,⁴¹ in that it believes itself to be corporeal. Yet at the same time its power of judging the nature of these images remains, thanks to its “rational understanding” (10.5.7).⁴² It can distinguish between bodies and their images (10.6.8). The various materialist philosophical views about the mind arise, not so much from basic misconceptions about its activities (for they maintain correctly that mind or soul is the ruling faculty, and that it animates the body), as from an inability to conceive of a substance that is not corporeal (10.7.9-10). But those philosophers who have understood that the soul is not a body (Augustine means the Platonists) have also tried to prove that it is immortal (10.7.9). Augustine is implying that understanding the nature of mind is not an abstruse matter, that mind has the ability truly to know itself.

Augustine will continue this theme in 10.8.11, but first he returns (10.7.10) to the principle that nothing is so present to the mind as the mind itself. But what then is “discovery” in the case of the mind? It has something to do with “coming into” what is sought.⁴³ The mind discovers things, not merely through sense-perception (when we might say that things come into the mind), but “through itself”, in the case of things it knows without the use of the bodily senses, when it “comes into” them, finding these things within itself.⁴⁴ Among these are the images of perceived bodily things.

³⁹ *auertitur ab eo, moueturque et labitur in minus et minus quod putatur amplius et amplius* (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.5.7, lines 10-11, CCL 50: 320).

⁴⁰ *Dat enim eis formandis quiddam substantiae suae* (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.5.7, lines 31-2, CCL 50: 321).

⁴¹ *conformatur eis quodam modo non id existendo sed putando* (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.6.8, lines 3-4, CCL 50: 321).

⁴² *rationalis intelligentia* (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.5.7, line 33, CCL 50: 321).

⁴³ *Vnde et ipsa quae appellatur inuentio si uerbi originem retractemus, quid aliud resonat nisi quia inuenire est in id inuenire quod quaeritur?* (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.7.10, lines 44-6, CCL 50: 323-4). Augustine plays upon the meanings of Latin *inuentio* (“discovery”) and *uenire in* (“come into”) here.

⁴⁴ *Quapropter sicut ea quae oculis aut ullo alio corporis sensu requiruntur ipsa mens quaerit — ipsa enim etiam sensum carnis intendit, tunc autem inuenit cum in ea quae requiruntur idem sensus uenit — sic alia quae non corporeo sensu internuntio sed per seipsam nosse debet cum in ea uenit, inuenit* (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.7.10, lines 49-54, CCL 50: 324).

Augustine observes that the question of how the mind seeks and finds itself is an extraordinary one, for nothing is so much in the mind as the mind itself (10.8.11). But he implies that the answer to the question is found in the themes of 10.5.7, to which he now returns. The mind is somehow in what it loves. If it loves bodily things, it cannot be “in itself” without the images of bodily things. These images have somehow cohered with it, so that it cannot separate itself from them and “see itself on its own”. The injunction to know itself should not be understood as a quest for the mind that has been “removed” from itself, that has become somehow absent from itself. The mind should rather “remove” what it has added to itself.⁴⁵ Its attention should be focused on its presence to itself, and it will see that it never ceased to know or love itself, but that “by loving another thing together with itself it has blended itself with it and somehow congealed with it”,⁴⁶ assuming that there is unity where there is diversity.

Thus, if the mind knows what “know” really means, and what “yourself” really means, it knows itself. To understand that it is present to itself is to know itself (10.9.12). With these assertions, and distinguishing self-knowledge from other kinds of knowledge, Augustine completes this stage of his argument, and returns to the Cogito argument adumbrated in 10.4.6, beginning by recapitulating that chapter’s assertion that the mind knows that it lives and understands and exists, and adding that people know that they will and remember (10.10.13).

Thus minds know with certainty about themselves, even if people are uncertain of what substance the mind consists. Nobody doubts that she lives, remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows, judges. Even if she doubts, she lives, remembers why she doubts, understands that she doubts, wishes to be certain, thinks, knows that she does not know, judges that she should not assent rashly. Nobody (that is, not even anybody claiming to be a skeptic) should doubt any of these things, for otherwise one would not be able to entertain any doubt whatsoever (10.10.14).

Augustine embeds his Cogito argument here and in 10.4.6 in his account of the mind’s unflinching presence to itself, and its knowing itself wholly with the whole mind (let us call this account the Presence argument). The two arguments could stand independently of each other. The Cogito argument could be a starting-point in the discussion of self-

⁴⁵ Sed quia in his est quae cum amore cogitat, sensibilibus autem, id est corporalibus, cum amore assuefacta est, non ualet sine imaginibus eorum esse in semetipsa. Hinc ei oboritur erroris dedecus dum rerum sensarum imagines discernere a se non potest ut se solam uideat; cohaeserunt enim mirabiliter glutino amoris. Et haec est eis immunditia quoniam dum se solam nititur cogitare hoc se putat esse sine quo se non potest cogitare. Cum igitur ei praecipitur ut se ipsam cognoscat, non se tamquam sibi detracta sit quaerat, sed id quod sibi addidit detrahat (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.8.11, lines 4-13, CCL 50: 324). For a helpful discussion of *Trin.* 10.8.11 in relation to similar texts in Plotinus, and in particular of Augustine’s use of *detraho* (“remove”) here, see Ayres (1995), pp. 280-287, who pinpoints some important differences between the arguments of Plotinus and Augustine.

⁴⁶ sed aliud secum amando cum eo se confudit et concreuit quodam modo (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.8.11, lines 25-6, CCL 50: 325).



knowledge, as it is a starting-point in the investigation of whether we can claim to know anything in *Against the Academics*.⁴⁷ It does not need the Presence argument developed in *Trin.* 9 and 10, nor does the Presence argument need it. But Augustine clearly believes that the two arguments complement each other, and his conclusions in 10.10.16, as we shall see, depend on both arguments and not just on the Cogito. But first, in 10.10.15, he reiterates and combines the earlier criticized and rejected views of 9.4.5 and 10.7.9-10. Corporeal views of the mind assume the mind to be a bodily subject or substance, of which the understanding (*intellegentia*) is a quality. Those who believe that mind is a combination or tempering of bodies maintain that the mind is in the body qua subject, and must therefore conclude that the understanding too is in the body as in a subject.

7. THE COGITO ARGUMENT DEVELOPED; THE PRESENCE ARGUMENT IN RELATION TO THE COGITO

In 10.10.16 Augustine asserts that nothing can be rightly said to be known if its substance or essence is not known.⁴⁸ Richard Sorabji points out that this assertion of Augustine is, as a general premiss, untenable, for one can know something in different ways, including knowing it by knowing some inessential feature.⁴⁹ Now Augustine could have argued that mind knows its essence from its activities — the kind of argument that he in fact often employs.⁵⁰ But he feels entitled to make this strong claim — emphasized by “rightly (*recte*)”⁵¹ — about the mind’s self-knowledge here. He cannot reasonably make it on the basis of the Cogito argument, though he initially appears to do so, in a special application of that argument. For he goes on to assert in 10.10.16 that when the mind is certain about itself it is certain about its substance. But it is not certain whether it is air, fire, or some body or function of body. So it cannot be any of these, that is, it cannot be corporeal. Augustine then complements this negative argument with a positive one, that depends, not just on the Cogito argument, but also the Presence argument. He points out that the mind can only think of bodily things by means of images. The bodily things remain external to it. It cannot think of itself in such a way, as something absent, mediated only by an image. For nothing is more present to it than itself (Presence argument), just as it thinks that it lives, remembers, etc. (Cogito argument). Then, in the final stage of this argument, Augustine attempts to combine the Cogito and Presence arguments. He claims that the Cogito argument underpins the Presence argument. For the mind knows

⁴⁷ See especially *Against the Academics* 3.9.19.

⁴⁸ *Nulla modo autem recte dicitur sciri aliqua res dum eius ignoratur substantia* (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.10.16, lines 62-3, CCL 50: 328).

⁴⁹ Sorabji (2006), pp. 220-221.

⁵⁰ See O’Daly (1987), pp. 21-31 on soul’s knowledge of its incorporeal, inextended, and indivisible nature.

⁵¹ See n. 48 above.

that it lives, etc. in itself, and not in its imagination as a result of perceiving bodily things with the senses. If it detaches the contents of its imagination from its identity, what remains to it of itself is alone itself.⁵²

In the concluding paragraph of the book (10.12.19) Augustine stresses once again that the mind always knows, remembers, etc. itself. How this works in practice he does not explain here. A later discussion in *Trin.* 14 throws some light on the matter. There Augustine argues that when the mind is not actively thinking of itself, it cannot be said not to know itself. He adduces an analogy. Someone who knows different branches of learning, like music and geometry, is not ignorant of music or geometry if he is not actually thinking of them. His knowledge is stored in his memory. If we have not thought of something for a while and need to be reminded of it, in a sense we do not know that we know it. But we have not forgotten it. In fact, we have not ceased to know it. It is the same with the mind's self-knowledge (14.6.8-7.9).

8. SELF-KNOWLEDGE IS SELF-EVIDENT, BUT NOT SPONTANEOUS; HOW TO ACCESS SELF-KNOWLEDGE

But (10.12.19) the mind does not always think of itself as separate from those things that are not itself (a theme of 10.8.11). Thus its memory and understanding of itself are grasped with difficulty. Mind's self-knowledge is self-evident, but not spontaneous. The argument of *Trin.* 9 and 10 has the aim of letting what is self-evident emerge as a consequence of reflection on the nature of the mind. A similar process is observable elsewhere in Augustine. Simon Harrison has drawn attention to the pedagogical purpose of a passage in *On Free Choice (De Libero Arbitrio)*, where an understanding of the will emerges as something self-evident.⁵³ Harrison is discussing the following passage (*On Free Choice* 1.12.25):

Augustine: So I ask you, do we have a will?

Evodius: I don't know.

A.: Do you want to know this?

E.: I don't know this either.

A.: Then ask me nothing more.

E.: Why not?

A.: Because I ought not to give you an answer to your question unless you want to know the answer. And secondly because, if you don't want to attain to wisdom, I

⁵² Ex quorum cogitationibus si nihil sibi affingat ut tale aliquid esse se putet, quidquid ei de se remanet hoc solum ipsa est (Augustine, *Trin.* 10.10.16, lines 85-7, CCL 50: 329).

⁵³ Simon Harrison (2006), pp. 69-72. There is a brief earlier presentation of his interpretation in Harrison (1999), pp. 195-205.



ought not to discuss such things with you. And finally because we cannot be friends unless you want things to go well for me. But you yourself consider now whether, as regards yourself, you have no will that your life be happy.

E.: I admit that it cannot be denied that we have a will. Go on, let us now see what follows from this.⁵⁴

Harrison argues that his passage is not just a trivially obvious assertion that we have a will. Evodius claims first not to know that he has a will, but by the end of the questioning process, he knows that he has. Harrison's point is that Evodius "knows that he has a will, not because it is self-evident knowledge which one cannot fail to have, but because it is self-evident knowledge that one *can* fail to have".⁵⁵ The argument is epistemological, and it is a "cogito-like" argument, in Harrison's phrase.⁵⁶ Augustine makes similar claims about our knowledge that we have a will in *Confessions* 7.3.5: "I knew myself to have a will just as much as I knew I was alive".⁵⁷ I would argue that Augustine wants to say the same about the mind's self-knowledge in general. It is self-evident knowledge that one can fail to have, and that is why I have called it above a *consequence* of reflection.

How can I access self-evident knowledge that I can fail to have? Clearly by philosophical analysis and, in particular, by self-scrutiny. That is what the argument of *Trin.* 9 and 10 purports to demonstrate. But in its concept of mind, this argument is heavily indebted to Neoplatonic accounts in both Plotinus and Porphyry, as modern scholarship has abundantly demonstrated.⁵⁸ The framework of Augustine's argument, including the Cogito argument, would be unthinkable without these antecedents, even if his elaboration of the argument is distinctive and independently coherent, and in no sense a reproduction of any particular source or a *montage*

⁵⁴ A. Nam quaero abs te, sit ne aliqua nobis uoluntas. E. Nescio. A. Vis ne hoc scire? E. Et hoc nescio. A. Nihil ergo deinceps me interroges. E. Quare? A. Quia roganti tibi respondere non debeo nisi uolenti scire quod rogas. Deinde nisi uelis ad sapientiam peruenire, sermo tecum de huiusmodi rebus non est habendus. Postremo amicus meus esse non poteris nisi uelis ut bene sit mihi. Iam uero de te tu ipse uideris, utrum tibi uoluntas nulla sit beatae uitae tuae. E. Fateor, negari non potest habere nos uoluntatem. Perge iam, uideamus quid hinc conficias (Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* 1.12.25, ed. William M. Green, CSEL 74: 24, line 25-25, line 7). I adopt above the translation in Harrison (2006), p. 69, with some minor modifications.

⁵⁵ Harrison (2006), p. 113.

⁵⁶ Harrison (2006), pp. 131-150.

⁵⁷ tam sciebam me habere uoluntatem quam me uiuere (Augustine, *Confessiones* 7.3.5, lines 18-19, ed. Luc Verheijen, CCL 27: 94). See Harrison (2006), pp. 72-78.

⁵⁸ Willy Theiler (1966), the earliest extended discussion of the influence of Porphyry on Augustine, and at pp. 213-225 especially of *Sententiae* 40 on *Trin.* 10 and other texts; Pierre Courcelle (1974), pp. 149-63; Dominic O'Meara (2000), Pépin (2000), Sorabji (2006), pp. 212-229. Among the possible sources identified are Plotinus *Enneads* 5.3; 5.5, and Porphyry *Sententiae* 40-41.

of sources.⁵⁹ Augustine does not explicitly point to these sources of his thought in *Trin.*, as he does, in general terms, elsewhere.⁶⁰ But in a passage in *Trin.* 14 he testifies to the kind of persuasiveness that philosophical readings can have, and it is a persuasiveness of the same degree as philosophical analysis itself. In 14.7.9 we read that books can have the role of reminding us of what we always know:

Books that have been written about these things can also bring it about [that is, make us discover that we know what we thought we did not know], things that the reader, with reason as guide, finds to be true; not the things that he believes to be true, through trusting the writer, as is the case with history, but those which he himself too finds to be true, either in himself, or in the mind's guide, truth itself.⁶¹

The arguments of *Trin.* 9 and 10 exemplify by implication the persuasiveness of books that reveal to our minds what we know to be true of them.⁶²

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⁵⁹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the similarities and differences between Plotinus, Porphyry, and Augustine on the mind's self-knowledge: see the studies listed in n. 58.

⁶⁰ See *Against the Academics* 3.18.41; *On the Happy Life (De Beata Vita)* 1.4; *Confessions* 7.9.13.

⁶¹ Id agunt et litterae quae de his rebus conscriptae sunt, quas res duce ratione ueras esse inuenit lector, non quas ueras esse credit ei qui scripsit sicut legitur historia, sed quas ueras esse etiam ipse inuenit siue apud se siue in ipsa mentis duce ueritate (Augustine, *Trin.* 14.7.9, lines 29-33, CCL 50A: 434).

⁶² An earlier version of this article was read at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, by kind invitation of the Faculty of Philosophy. I am grateful to the participants in the discussion that followed, as well to Emmanuel Bermon and Richard Sorabji, who commented on a subsequent draft: all have improved the article in many ways.



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