Robert Crouse and Augustine Ancient, Medieval and Modern: A Response to Wayne Hankey

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Indeed, the concept of *amor* is fundamental throughout the system of St. Augustine, not least in the *Confessions*, which is all about the ordering of love: *pondus meum amor meus*. The problem for institutions, as for the individual soul, is the problem of the ordering of loves, which is ultimately the Trinitarian question of the interrelation of truth and love. That question is at the heart of the Augustinian philosophy.

Perhaps the most perfect medieval vision of the Augustinian *Civitas Dei* is Dante's *Paradiso*, where all finite ends, temporal and spiritual and all particular interests, however mundane or exalted, all earthly and heavenly loves, preserved in their distinctions are viewed united in divine love. —Robert Crouse[1]

The title of Wayne Hankey's generous and sympathetic critique of the scholarship of Robert Crouse points to and articulates the intellectual and spiritual centre of Crouse's scholarly life: the Augustinian principles of *memoria*, *intellectus*, and *voluntas*. These are the three aspects of human personality which properly balanced and integrated, for Augustine, constitute *caritas*, both the highest virtue and the most fundamental reality of the divine life. Certainly, the trajectory of Crouse's scholarly career can be understood to be a continually deepening consideration of the Augustinian standpoint and tradition as essentially determined by this Trinitarian account of human psychology. It is Augustine who, for Crouse, shapes most fundamentally the Western Christian mind. For Crouse, the history of the West is the completion of the development of pagan spirituality and philosophy in Augustine and his medieval disciples. The loss of this completed spirituality in Modernity results in a world no longer capable of mediating the fullness of that Augustinian resolution.

1. Robert Crouse, "The Augustinian Philosophy and Christian Institutions," in *Philosophy and Freedom: The Legacy of James Doull*, ed. David Peddle and Neil Robertson (University of Toronto Press, 2003), 216.

What I wish to do in this paper is not so much contest the account Hankey has laid before us, but rather to reconsider it in a somewhat different light. I propose two tasks. First, we need to clarify what Crouse means by "Augustinian." In doing this I want to bring out why he doesn't share Hankey's view that there is a one-sidedness to Augustine. To do this I will find it helpful to contrast Crouse with Hankey on this point, but also to contrast Crouse with a figure mentioned at the end of Hankey's paper—James Doull. So through these two points of contrast, I hope to better articulate Crouse's position and so locate it more precisely. With this understanding of what Crouse takes Augustinianism to consist in essentially, I want then to turn to our second task, namely, to draw from this account why it requires that the modern be seen as necessarily a falling away from that Augustinian wholeness. In a way, here Hankey and Crouse will be in agreement in their judgment of a failed modernity, but for different reasons.

As Wayne Hankey has articulated so well, for Robert Crouse there is but one common object for all philosophy and all theology, both pagan and Christian: to participate in that science or knowledge by which God knows himself. This is the foundational claim of all Platonisms, so that they have a unity in their differences, which makes them capable of conciliation, synthesis and mutual assimilation. So for Crouse, "It is important to move beyond the conventional paradigm of opposed Plotinian and Procline Platonisms and consequently opposed Augustinian and Dionysian Platonisms."[2] The two positions are, Crouse claims, "complementary and belong to a common history and development." At the heart of this claim is the unity of philosophical theology. It belongs to the very core of Crouse's position not to deny differences, but to relate these differences to one another and a more fundamental unity.

But while this principle of unity in difference is foundational for Crouse, there is a distinction that he seeks to emphasize more and more strongly as his scholarly work develops: that between the pagan and the Christian. So Crouse comes to say against readings of Augustine that seek to assimilate him to pagan philosophy, "St. Augustine is not fundamentally Plotinian or Porphyrian, nor is Pseudo-Dionysius fundamentally Procline: both have rethought the doctrine of God and the doctrine of creation in Christian terms."[3] As Hankey has pointed out in his paper, it is especially in the case of Augustine that Crouse wishes to clarify his break with the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry and speaks of a "conversion" of Neoplatonism in his

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2. Robert Crouse, "*Primordiales Causae* in Eriugena's Interpretation of Genesis: Sources and Significance," in *Johannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics*, ed. G. Van Riel, C. Steel and J. McEvoy (Leuven, 1996), 209–20, 216.

3. Crouse, "*Primordiales*," 216.

thought—given the centrality of conversion to Platonism itself, a conversion of a conversion one might say.[4] As Hankey argues, this second conversion is toward an account in which there is a Trinitarian structure in God that is not exceeded by a priority, other than logical, of the Father or of a divinity beyond Trinity.[5] Indeed, Crouse sees Eriugena as correcting just such a tendency in Pseudo-Dionysius.[6] Relative to this divine Trinity is the human *imago* that forms the title of Hankey's paper. As he points out, this kind of Trinitarian personality is understood by Crouse to be the most fundamental solution to the unresolved divisions of pagan Neoplatonism. The loss of this Trinitarian psychology in the late medieval is, for Crouse, the sign of the appearance of a new age, the modern.

I want to clarify or perhaps complicate the term "Augustinian" by pointing to contrasting usages of this term by Crouse and by his colleague, James Doull, who is mentioned at the end of Hankey's paper. The term "Augustinian" for Crouse denotes primarily the presence of this specific account of the divine Trinity and its human *imago*. For Crouse, the *viae*, the methods, as he sometimes calls them, by which this Trinitarian theology and psychology are arrived at, are of secondary importance. The quotation at the beginning of my paper indicates this very point: Dante, in spite of resting on a very different account of both epistemology and ascent from the Augustinian (one largely Thomistic by Crouse's own account), is seen to be the most complete realization of the Augustinian. So Hankey points out that Crouse tends to underemphasize precisely those moments in the post-Augustinian tradition—in Boethius, in Eriugena and so on—that not only are different from, but indeed opposed to what is found in Augustine himself in terms of what mediates knowledge or ascent. For Hankey, who tends to emphasize the points of difference and opposition between what we can call Western (Plotinian) and Eastern (Iamblichan) Platonisms and to de-emphasize the shift from pagan to Christian, this is in two directions a failure to recognize fully what is at work in the history. Crouse evidently recognizes in Boethius, Eriugena and others aspects that are Procline in origin, but, given his account of the larger unity of Platonism, sees these elements of ascent via the external mediation of the cosmos and theurgical purgation as assimilable to, and even developmental toward, a more fully realized Augustinian standpoint. This

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4. Robert Crouse, "*Paucis mutatis verbis*: St. Augustine's Platonism," in *Augustine and his Critics*, ed. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (London and New York, 2000), 37–50, 42.

5. Robert Crouse, "Augustinian Platonism in Early Medieval Theology," in *Augustine From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. J. McWilliam (Waterloo, 1992), 109–20, 116. See also Robert Crouse, "*In Aenigmate Trinitas* (*Conf.* XIII 5,6): The Conversion of Philosophy in St. Augustine's Confessions," *Dionysius* XI (1987): 53–62.

6. Robert Crouse, "The Meaning of Creation in Augustine and Eriugena," in *Studia Patristica* Vol. 22, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Louvain, 1989), 229–34, 233.

primacy and transformative character of Augustinian Trinitarianism means that Boethius, Eriugena, Honorius Augustodunensis, Aquinas, and Dante are all judged to be essentially Augustinian—in a way that neither Plotinus on the one side, nor Descartes on the other truly is.

Relative to this point of assimilation I want to make a corrective to Hankey's account. Hankey speaks of Crouse as arguing that "Augustine's thought was moving in a Procline direction"[7] or "he finds Augustine not opposed to but on the way to Proclus."[8] By my reading of Crouse, I would put this the other way. In general, Crouse sees that Augustine has arrived at the basic resolution of the Platonic pagan problems. So, he argues that the Augustinian solution is confirmed as a general tendency and possibility within Platonism by the similar solutions that are offered up in Iamblichus and Proclus: for instance, in the affirmation of the goodness of matter and of creation generally, as also in the development of triadic mediations to resolve the relation of the one and the many. The developments in the "East" are then parallel to or at least complementary to those developed in Augustine.[9] These are therefore, even in their opposition to Augustinian forms of mediation, assimilable to the Augustinian Trinitarian principle.[10] It is true that Crouse does not, at least as far as I am aware, fully explicate why there is then not only an Eastern development that is distinctive of the Augustinian, but also why in turn that Augustinian solution must draw upon and in part be assimilated to these Eastern Platonic developments. However, I think one can say, that Crouse sees that the Augustinian solution, while not essentially altered in Boethius and others, does recognize the more comprehensive mediation afforded by Dionysius and the Procline tradition generally.[11] So, for Crouse, the term "Augustinian" can be used to describe figures who at crucial moments in their thought present principles of mediation that are, to quote Hankey, "opposed to Augustinian ways of thinking."[12] And, as we shall see, Crouse sees as not essentially Augustinian or only incompletely Augustinian, figures, such as Descartes, that make use of distinctively Augustinian forms of thought and mediation.[13]

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7. Wayne Hankey, "*Memoria, Intellectus, Voluntas*: The Augustinian Centre of Robert Crouse's Scholarly Work," 26.

8. Hankey, 17.

9. Crouse, "Meaning," 231–32.

10. See Robert Crouse, "A Twelfth-Century Augustinian: Honorius Augustodunensis," in *Studia Ephemerides* 'Augustinianum' 26 (Rome, 1987): 167–77, 176.

11. See Crouse, "*Primordiales*," 216; "Meaning," 233; "Augustinian," 109.

12. Hankey, 25.

13. See the references cited in Robert Crouse, "St. Augustine and Descartes as Fathers of Modernity," in *Descartes and the Modern*, ed. N. Robertson, G. McOuat and T. Vinci (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), 16–25, 23–25.

Now, we shouldn't leave things quite in this form: one thing more should be said about Crouse's account of Eastern Platonism, and this will re-emerge in our consideration of Modernity. Crouse is critical of Dionysius and Eastern Christianity generally relative to an Augustinian standard of orthodoxy. He finds specifically in the Procline aspects of that tradition a tendency towards Arianism and Monophysitism.[14] The tendency to posit a One or God beyond the distinctions even of the persons is, especially when this appears in a post-Nicene context, exemplary of an incomplete assimilation of the Trinitarian reconciliation in Christ, a residual paganism. So, while elements or aspects of the Eastern mediation can be taken into and indeed transform the Western Augustinian logic, this element of divine transcendence beyond the Trinity must be corrected. For Crouse, then, the re-emergence in the fourteenth-century in Eckhart and others of a Procline-Dionysian principle exceeding the Trinity, is not the sign of an element unrecognized by Crouse and the Augustinian tradition, but the sign of a lapse from the Trinitarian orthodoxy attained there.[15]

To capture where we have got to let me quote at some length from an unpublished manuscript of Crouse:

> The Augustinian formulation of the doctrine of God as Trinity constitutes a conversion *in principio* of Platonic theology and that doctrine shapes decisively every aspect of Augustinian thought. Thus, while St. Augustine may speak in Plotinian fashion of the procession, formation and return of creation, the doctrine is actually very different: there are no mediating hypostases, nor descending triads of unity and distinction, precisely because the creative knowledge and will of God belong immediately to the Tri-personal unity of the divine substance. There is no tension between ontology and henology, precisely because the hypostases of being, knowing and willing co-eternal and co-equal belong immediately to and indeed constitute the very substance of the One who is God. There is no divine One beyond that divine unity which is the Trinity. And if such a formulation appears as a systematic "simplification" of Neoplatonism, it is not because it is a reversion to an earlier and "simpler" Platonism, rather, it is a formulation that has taken into account the problematic of Plotinian and post-Plotinian Neoplatonic theology and the problematic of post-Nicene Christian theology (in the Arian controversy) and found a resolution. In that sense it might more accurately (if somewhat cumbersomely) be described as a post-Neo-platonic and post-Arian Christian Platonism.[16]

So when Hankey asks about the place of Proclus in Crouse's thought, his answer must be understood in two different ways: first, it is a standpoint on the way to that Augustinian tradition and as a form of Platonism, assimilable and complementary to that tradition; second it is already corrected and

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14. Crouse, "Meaning," 233.

15. Robert Crouse, "Trinitarian Anthropology in the Latin Middle Ages," in *Christian Anthropology: The Trinitaian Theology of Man*, ed. S. Harris (Charlottetown, 1997), 63–74, 72.

16. Robert Crouse, "The Augustinian Tradition" (unpublished manuscript) 9–10.

overcome in the Augustinian tradition, rejected or modified only insofar as opposed to what is essential in that tradition.

Given this account of what "Augustinian" means for Crouse, it is clear how he will respond to Doull's contrasting account. It is certainly true, as Hankey points out, that Doull and Crouse agree against him in the decisive difference that Augustinian Trinitarianism makes relative to pagan and, above all, Plotinian Neoplatonism. For both, Hankey's efforts to assimilate Augustine to Plotinus and Porphyry are to be resisted as missing a crucial logical difference. Here I can quote Doull:

> The limit to this desired concreteness lay, however in the starting point of Neoplatonic philosophy: moving from division to the intuition of an unlimited unity, how there might originate in this unity a dividedness or finitude itself united in its difference and not a falling away from the unity of the principle—such a synthesis of intuition and discursive moments was not possible to this standpoint.[17]

Crouse makes essentially the same point:

> Whatever the sources, the formulation in which the antithesis between ontology and henology is transcended, and God is understood as a unity of co-equal and co-eternal moments of being, knowing and willing, is an original and profoundly important revision of Platonic theology in Christian terms. The logical necessity (and futility) of meditating hierarchies is done away with, and the way is open for an understanding of mediation in which divine and human natures are seen as personally united without confusion.[18]

For Doull and Crouse, Augustinian Trinitarianism is not realized through a Neoplatonic logic—even in "the telescoping of the hypostases" in Porphyry— because for both, so long as the One is ontologically (and not just logically) prior to division, the connection of unity and difference, a realized media-tion, remains impossible. The knowledge and mediation of this Trinitarian ontology required the Word made flesh. For both then, the description of this account as "intellectual," as Hankey suggests, would be inaccurate—rather, both would find in Augustine the demand to hold in integrity intellect and affect, thinking and willing together, in love.

But while we have a certain agreement here between Crouse and Doull in terms of the distinctive importance of Augustine, their views of the term "Augustinian" could not be more opposed. At the heart of this disagreement was a debate about the connection of the Medieval to the Modern. For Crouse, the post-Augustinian medieval development, though developed in and through Eastern sources, above all Dionysius, is still essentially Augustin-

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17. James Doull, "The Christian Origin of Contemporary Institutions Part II: The History of Christian Institutions," *Dionysius* VIII (1984): 53–103, 60.
18. Crouse, "*Paucis*," 42.

ian—and indeed a more realized Augustinianism in figures such as Aquinas and Dante. So the Dionysiized Augustine of the thirteenth century in its more developed integration of nature and grace, temporal and spiritual, philosophy and theology realizes the logic of Augustine in a mediation more complete than was available to Augustine himself. Here, in the high medieval synthesis, the logic of unity and difference that Augustine initiates receives its most complete and comprehensive expression.

For Doull, this is not the fullness of the Augustinian but rather Augustine only so far as assimilated to a Dionysian logic.[19] For Doull, it is only in the Reformation and again in Modernity that one attains, not to a one-sided or distorted Augustinianism (which is what Crouse finds in Petrarch, Descartes and Pascal), but to what is fundamental in Augustine, but now realized more fully than Augustine himself was capable of or was attained in the Platonized Augustinianism of the medieval context.

I don't wish to investigate too closely Doull's somewhat tendentious account of Augustine: Crouse's critique of that account is readily available.[20] I do want to point out that Crouse, while able to find Eriugena as essentially Augustinian, can find that Descartes "can be called 'Augustinian' only with equivocation."[21] What is the standard of judgment here? It is not the form of the mediation and ascent (seen as fundamental by Hankey); it is not the logic of unity and difference, of intuition and discursive thought, of self-consciousness and its object (seen as fundamental by Doull). The standard is the Trinitarian psychology relative to a Trinitarian theology; it is the presence of this in Eriugena and the corresponding absence or diminution of this in Descartes that makes the one essentially Augustinian, the other Augustinian only with equivocation.

So the Modern for Crouse is the moment that can no longer make sense of this Trinitarian psychological theology where the human soul is understood as realized as a love attained in and through the divine love of the Trinity. Hankey points to the Procline as containing a moment which is unassimilable to this high medieval synthesis and which emerges in figures such as Eckhart and Cusanus. As we have seen, for Crouse, such a recurring Procline moment is post-Augustinian only historically, appearing independently only in and through the collapse of the high medieval synthesis. The positing of a God or One present to intuition but exceeding the logic of the Trinity is a moment not of true excess, but of reversion to elements of a now lost

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19. James Doull, "Faith and Enlightenment," *Dionysius* X (1986): 129–35, 132.

20. Crouse, "The Augustinian Philosophy," 210–18.

21. Robert Crouse, "St. Augustine and Descartes as Fathers of Modernity," in *Descartes and the Modern*, ed. N. Robertson, G. McOuat and T. Vinci (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), 16–25, 23.

synthesis.[22] I want to suggest that Crouse's very under-articulated account of Modernity would affirm much of that to which Hankey points. Crouse also observes that among Dante's contemporaries there is already a turn to Proclus and Dionysius. But is this turn to Proclus a turn to the unthought, to a principle that exceeds what is at work in Crouse's Augustinian tradition (most fully realized in the high medieval synthesis), or is it the appearance of a pre-Augustinian element emerging in the context of a no longer sustainable synthesis, or, finally, is it an indication of something new taking up this older standpoint for its own purposes?

My judgment is that for Crouse this post-high medieval Proclinism is both of the latter two alternatives. The Modern is for Crouse a kind of Hell, a reversion to pagan despair, but it is a Hell that is built not simply on a return to ancient metaphysics, but on a distinctively modern will, somehow both pagan and Christian in equal measures of confusion. So while for Crouse there is certainly a theological collapse as God becomes this transcendent principle that is expressed in various Neoplatonic and mystical accounts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; nevertheless, the governing assumption of this new age is not fundamentally theological, the logic of God, but rather psychological: the appearance in Eckhart of an absolutely unified ground of the self, the primacy of will in Scotus or Ockham, above all the isolated subject of Descartes (to be contrasted with Augustinian interiority). So what is fundamental is not a shift in ontology or theology (as was the case with Augustine) but in the relation of the human to that content – the separation of metaphysics and theology, of philosophy and theology, of reason and faith, of nature and grace that beset this new isolated self. So that even those forms of Renaissance Neoplatonism that seek to heal this breach in the human soul are themselves implicated in it. Crouse states:

> Petrarch was, of course, in some sense an Augustinian; indeed a professed disciple of St. Augustine, and his reading from the *Confessions* on the summit of Mount Ventoux is often hailed as the moment of the birth of the modern world. But his Augustine is the Augustine of the *Confessions* and the *Soliloquies*, and certainly not the Augustine of the *De Trinitate*. No longer does the definition of man as *imago trinitatis* seem to make sense; and for subsequent generations of humanists, if man is defined with reference to God it is (as in Ficino) with regard to his sovereignty over nature, or (as in Pico della Mirandola) with regard to his infinite freedom to be what he wills.[23]

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22. Robert Crouse, "What is Augustinian in Twelfth-Century Mysticism?", in *Augustine, Mystic and Mystagogue*, ed. F. Van Fleteren, J. Schnaubelt and J. Reino (New York, 1992), 401–14, 408.

23. Crouse, "Trinitarian," 72.

For Crouse, what leads to Modernity is certainly a collapse—but it is not primarily a theological collapse. The theology of Augustine's mediation, of Augustinian pilgrimage into the mind and love of God, is always available and is for a time recovered in the Reformation, at least in certain forms, such as the spirituality of Cranmer, Jewel and Hooker and above all the *Book of Common Prayer*. All of these make available in an effective fashion the *consensus fidelium* that Augustine so powerfully articulated. In these and other sources that *consensus fidelium* abides even to this very moment. What the Modern is then is a kind of forgetting that is also a kind of asserting. As Hankey brings out, it is the assertion of a set of assumptions—above all it is the assertion of the primacy and completeness of human personality, of the self prior to and apart from the inner and outer Trinitarian mediations. It is this self that takes up the theology of Proclus or Dionysius or, alternatively, rejects them in Ockham or Descartes. It is this self, this isolated subject, this self-will, that in words of T.S. Eliot, Crouse was fond of citing, "connects nothing with nothing."

Crouse's account of Modernity must be affirmed: the claim that the Modern begins with such a non-being in human personality is an utterly necessary insight. This self, the subject of Ockham's nominalism, of Petrarch's poetry, of Marlowe's plays, of Montaigne's *Essays*, is the central truth of the late-Medieval and the Renaissance periods. Its character is to be fundamentally indeterminate—ultimately skeptical and nihilistic in its result. But, against Crouse, I want to make the claim that the standpoint attained in Descartes of a fully or completed modern self overcomes this negativity and so the modern self is not simply the collapse and loss implicit in the late-Medieval and Renaissance developments.[24] The modern self begins in this collapse, but, in its full development, also overcomes this negativity and attains positive result and gain. We see this logic played out in Descartes' *Meditations*.[25] So I would resist—and here he is in a large company of recent scholars—Crouse's assimilation of the modernity of Descartes and Hobbes to this late-Medieval or Renaissance self. This latter self does carry within itself a kind of Procline transcendence that exceeds and perfects the order of creation through what can be seen as a new and ambiguous *potentia*—both power and potentiality. This new *potentia*, both divine and human, not only transcends the world, but makes and transforms it in a thousand different ways. However, it is the claim of a fully modern self, exemplified in the Cartesian *cogito*, to have

24. For a fuller account of this claim see Neil G. Robertson, "Milbank and Modern Secularity," in *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy*, ed. W.J. Hankey and D. Hedley (Aldershott, 2005), 81–97.

25. See Neil G. Robertson, "Introduction: Descartes and the Modern," in *Descartes and the Modern*, 1–14.

built on the basis of this very negativity, the very self-annihilation of this *potentia*, a self-relation and infinite self-possession such that a new kind of substantiality of self, world and God can emerge and thereby realize precisely the Trinitarian Augustinian standpoint that Crouse has done so much to bring to light. This modern Augustinianism, the fully modern self, is not to be confused with either the late-Medieval and Renaissance self nor with the existentialized, historicized and naturalized contemporary self—both of which result in forms of skepticism and indeterminacy. The claim of this self is that it realizes, now in forms of consciousness and self-consciousness, the very creative Trinitarianism that animates the thought and spirituality of Augustine.

Certainly Crouse would utterly reject such a claim. He is perfectly correct that this realized or modern Augustinianism would be for the original Augustine a monster of contradiction: finding truth, not sin, in an independent secularity and freedom. So this is where I must part ways with Robert Crouse, and also, I suspect, Wayne Hankey. I see the modern in Descartes and Hobbes and Pascal and Rousseau, in Kant and Hegel, not as the loss of the tradition of Augustinian Trinitarianism, but as its most inwardly realized truth. However one judges Modernity, to confront it reflectively, requires of us, as Robert Crouse continually taught, a recollection that gathers up that very history of Augustinian Trinitarianism in which we, whether consciously or not, are formed and shaped in our deepest aspirations and purposes.

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