The Influence of Plotinian Metaphysics in St. Augustine's Conception of the Spiritual Senses[1]

Martin Sastri
University of Notre Dame

The preposition in the title of Origen's third-century synthesis of Christian and Platonic thought, *Contra Celsum*, sets the treatise and its readers in opposition to the titular representative of pagan Platonism.[2] Amongst his many objections to the Christian faith, Celsus criticized the scriptural absurdities that followed upon the Incarnation, in which mortal perception was said to have been in direct contact with the divine. Origen's response to the refined incredulity of his opponent consisted in mining both Old and New Testaments for references to a certain divine sense within the human, by which divine realities could be perceived. The exegetical effort was followed by a doctrine which united the extremities of the divided line with stunning intellectual audacity: the unchanging divine causes could be perceived within the changing phenomena of creation, precisely because human sense faculties are commensurate with the natures of both creature and creator.[3]

No more than a generation after Origen, Plotinus would be at work on the same question. Without any inclination towards Christian scripture, Plotinus nevertheless arrived at an essential meeting place within the human soul for the Ideal and the apparent, and for the source of creation and its embodied representatives, which would prove to be essential for the Christian understanding of spiritual perception. In each of his major works, St. Augustine

1. This article is based on my Master's thesis, *The Spiritual Senses in St. Augustine and their Neoplatonic Foundations*, presented to the Dalhousie University Department of Classics in September 2006. For the completion of this project I must thank my supervisor, Dr. Wayne Hankey, and my readers, Dr. Peter O'Brien and Dr. Gary McGonagill. Thanks are also due to Rebecca Coughlin, who made sure that the text came to print.

2. The standard Latin translation intensifies the adversarial tone already present in the original Greek, ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΕΠΙΓΕΓΡΑΜΜΕΝΟΝ ΚΕΛΣΟΥ ΑΛΗΘΗ ΛΟΓΟΝ.

3. *Contra Celsum*, I.48. See the discussion of K. Rahner, "Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituelles chez Origène," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* XIII (1932): 113–45; J. Dillon, "Aisthesis Noete: A Doctrine of Spiritual Senses in Origen and Plotinus," in *The Golden Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1990), 443–49 reaches slightly different conclusions about Origen.

demonstrates a crucial dependence on Plotinian formulations for his own doctrine of the spiritual senses. Although the debt to his pagan predecessor is repaid with silence, St. Augustine's formulation of spiritual perception nevertheless marks a transition from the apologetic and polemic offered by Origen, towards a Christian attempt to understand itself in terms of pagan Neoplatonic metaphysics. The solutions offered by both Plotinus and Augustine to the problem of spiritual perception answer to the Platonic paradoxes proposed in the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*. Both Augustine and Plotinus seek to explain how perception takes place in this world as a consequence of an ideal form of perception which precedes it, and how the creation is continuous in self-knowledge.[4] Since the essential terms of the problem of spiritual perception are entirely Platonic, it will come as no surprise that this problem will mark one of the starting points for a Christian self-understanding within the Platonic tradition.

Plotinus, Aesthesis, and the One

It is the hallmark of the Plotinian theory of perception that spirituality, in the sense of self-transcendence, is held to be inherent to each of the levels of reality it addresses. In the case of what might be called 'mundane' sense perception, in which corporeal objects are perceived as such, Plotinus incorporates these acts of perception into the enforming activity of Intellect upon the natural world contiguous with matter. From this perspective, the human soul, in all of its epistemological capacities, is instrumental to the proper activity of νοῦς, as it continuously converts the natural world to the sphere of Intelligibility. The human soul serves the intelligible hypostasis in this activity of conversion by cognizing the objects of its perception, thereby making them intelligible and like the noetic source of their being.[5] Moreover, this role for human sense perception within the more comprehensive activity of νοῦς is predicated upon an activity of perception that takes place entirely within the intellectual realm. In the early chapters of *Ennead* VI.7, Plotinus articulates a doctrine of αἴσθησις νοητή, in which the Forms in the world of νοῦς are apprehended by the Form of man according to an appropriately ideal mode of perception. It is this doctrine that provides the basis and justification of Plotinus' active theory of perception in the natural world, since the latter represents an activity—that of human perception—acting upon another activity—that of the embodied form of a particular noetic λόγος. The

4. For the original, Platonic formulations of these paradoxes see *Phaedrus* 245c–249d, and *Timaeus* 41a–42e.

5. For the role of νοῦς and the soul in the conversion of the natural world towards intelligibility in Plotinus, see A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 7–10.

product of this confluence of activities must accrue both to the undescended portion of the human soul and to the realm of νοῦς, and so Plotinus concludes that perception takes place within the natural world because it has already taken place outside of time and within the realm of νοῦς.[6] Both αἴσθησις and αἴσθησις νοητή must be understood as spiritual, since the former takes place under the supervision of νοῦς, thereby transcending the natural world, and the latter provides the condition of possibility for the former in an act of noetic self-relation, entirely transcendent to natural embodiment.

Plotinus nevertheless reserves his ultimate reflection on αἴσθησις for the place in his system occupied by the One. In the last analysis, αἴσθησις will have to transcend the sphere of νοῦς entirely, and become an essential meeting between human subjectivity and that of the One, from which meeting every form of apprehension comes into the world. This connection drawn between the soul's immediate experience of the One, and how the One's overabundance ultimately produces the world, brings with it the potential to make any kind of experience one of union. That is, if the moment of becoming One is so closely identified with the productivity of the One, then the products themselves, and our experience of them might equally be considered mystical, insofar as there is the experience of some aspect of the One. Such a reflection arises naturally from the world of Plotinus, wherein the only thing that actually is is the One, and every form of apprehension is, at some level, a mode of the One experiencing itself.

The most basic question underlying all of *Ennead* V.3 concerns the possibility of any kind of knowledge. All movement within the treatise therefore proceeds by skepticism. It is skepticism that leads Plotinus, in his search for the principle of thought, to the first principle of Aristotle in self-thinking thought. Only when thought abides in its own essential simplicity, having itself as object, can it be possessed of certainty and stability.[7] However, wherever thought and being are allowed to live together—as here they must—there can be no rest because there is no absolute simplicity. The determinations of λόγοι in νοῦς must depend upon the endless, self-determining ἐνέργεια of νοῦς, which itself has no τέλος other than this very ἐνέργεια. Further, the ἐνέργειαι determining the natural world according to the λόγοι of νοῦς are themselves dependent upon the endless process of self-determination. According to the principles of Plotinus' skepticism, this would make the endless becoming of the natural world dependent on an endless, though self-directed, becoming in the Intelligible world. From a systematic outlook, this would be no more satisfactory than to say that αἴσθησις in the natural world is somehow explained by an intelligible doublet. Plotinus' move to the

6. *Enneads* VI.7.1; VI.7.3; VI.7.6–7. See also J. Dillon, "Aisthesis Noete," 449–55.
7. *Enneads* V.3.1–9.

One as the condition (not to say the principle) of knowledge arises from his application of the Aristotelian criticism of Plato against Aristotle himself. A principle, or better, a hypostasis, of thought and being cannot explain the condition of possibility of the manifold beings and processes of thought that emanate from, and depend on, this very hypostasis. For Plotinus, such a principle only explains the how, but not the why (or even ultimately the whence), of things through a reduplication of meticulous and unimpeachable eminence. In order to wholly explain the enforming of matter, there is need of a principle as ubiquitous and unformed as the endless potentiality of matter, that is somehow also relentlessly and mysteriously the opposite of this potentiality.[8]

The state of possession by the One of the soul is clearly a subjective experience transcending rationality and, moreover, it is a subjective experience that abides for the soul, once it has been acknowledged for what it is. In expressing the difficulties of articulating the nature of the One, and of its attendance upon the human soul, Plotinus insists that it is nevertheless this presence of the One that cannot be denied, as when one has been possessed by a god. Such an experience resists identification or classification, but the fact that it takes place is irrefutable and of the utmost certitude to the subject.[9] To know the precise nature of the entity that produces the experience, the subject must know it in terms of its radical difference from, and comprehensibility of, all things that are not this entity—to know this in the most intense and irrefutable form would be to attain to mystical union. Within the experience of *unio mystica*, every ontological and epistemological distinction is eradicated by transcendence. The same experience also brings the realization that all forms of knowing and being lie within the unified subject of *unio mystica*. Unification with the One is therefore an essentially paradoxical state, in which the self is at rest with both otherness and identity. This eminent way of experiencing the One does not, however, cancel out all other encounters between the One and the subject. On the contrary, mystical union simply provides the basis for recognizing the different ways in which the One abides ineffably within the self, depending on the relative proximity or distance of the subject from the divine.[10]

For all that the One transcends every other hypostasis, the activities of perception and intellection are not removed from the presence of the One any more than they are removed from subjectivity. The Plotinian system is profoundly subjective at every level, with each successive mode of cogni-

8. *Enneads* V.3.10-13.

9. *Enneads* V.3.14.

10. At V.3.14.19–20, Plotinus lists the forms of human apprehension and states that they are all given by the One.

tion or activity being determined by a prevailing mode of subjectivity. An hypostasis can only determine what is below and inferior insofar as it determines itself, and these two ἐνέργειαι issue from a single essence, which, in its moment of complete self-identification, consists in self-knowledge. The One, however, is never absent from anything, and its presence to subjectivity is made explicit through a moment of introspection that goes beyond self-knowledge while at the same time grounding its possibility. It is after mystical union that the self realizes that it is at all times possessed by a god, and that every experience is subjective insofar as it represents some mode of the One experiencing itself.

Beyond the implications that this divine grounding of all subjectivity must have for perception and the senses, which will be addressed more explicitly below, something must be said about the sensual language used to describe the mystical experience at V.3.17. It comes as no surprise, given the foregoing characterization of mystical union as the sudden possession by a god, that union is here described as happening suddenly, and through no effective agency on the part of the subject. It is of the greatest possible significance, however, that the union is described in terms of light seeing itself. Such a metaphor has obvious resonance for the Plotinian critique of Aristotle, who, at the beginning of the *Metaphysics*, states that philosophy ensues primarily from the delight taken in the sense of sight when it encounters the luminous bodies of the planets, the ordered regularity of whose movements men have no power to change.[11] What does in fact determine these orbits is the self-thinking thought of the divine. At V.3.17, however, we are in the presence of a single, and truly simple, source of light, into which, moreover, the self has become one. The reflexivity of light seeing itself is purely metaphorical and intended only to describe the experience as one which a determinate self 'has.' In any case, this reflexivity is soon confounded, as one encounters the apparent absurdity of "touching light." For Aristotle, the sense of touch, while not customarily associated with thought or rationality, does provide the fundamental basis for all other forms of sensation and apprehension, and so there seems to be an agreement between Aristotle and Plotinus concerning the grounding of experience.[12] At the end of V.3, Plotinus signals the perfect union between subject and One—which will abide hereafter through every form of mundane experience so long as the soul acknowledges its possession by the One within—through the sense associated least, by Aristotle, with thought. The simplicity of the One must triumph altogether over the apparent simplicity of self-thinking thought.[13]

11. *Metaphysics* A, 980a.
12. See *De Anima* III.435a11–435b26.
13. *Enneads* V.3.17.

Ennead VI.7 also addresses the problem of the restless alliance of thought and being represented by νοῦς, and of how its discrete self-constitution must be grounded by a prior simplicity. In this respect, the treatise represents a prefiguration of V.3, which seeks to establish the basis and possibility of thought. The movement of VI.7 is guided by the question of how the creation can be a rational, self-sustaining totality, and it is therefore no mistake that the treatise is also a commentary on the *Timaeus*. Here, the notions of self-knowledge and completion are one, since the manifold completion of the sensible creation results from the complexity of interrelated λόγοι, which are themselves resolved in the self-constituting ἐνέργεια of νοῦς. The internal consistency of this system breaks down, however, when νοῦς, precisely in the moment of its self constitution, derives its own proper identity from a principle that is wholly other than being and thought. In fact, this recognition of otherness only arises after νοῦς has become what it properly is. If the totality of the world can only arise from its internal identity, Plotinus must now explain how the principle of this identity fashions itself in apparent defiance of a primordial and ineluctable otherness. Plotinus' answer, since it bears upon every relation within the self-knowing creation, will have consequences for the relation of αἴσθησις to αἴσθησις νοητή.

In V.3, the constant possession of the self by the divine is granted after a consideration of the One itself and its relation to νοῦς. The complications of such a possession for the manifold varieties of apparently mundane, subjective experience are not addressed, except by the general statement that interiority and subjectivity penetrate far deeper than intellection or self-thinking thought. In VI.7, however, the consequences of divine possession cannot be ignored, from αἴσθησις onwards, since the subject of the treatise is precisely how the creation truly knows itself at every stage. It is now clear that αἴσθησις cannot simply be grounded in, or explained by αἴσθησις νοητή. This would represent an explanation by reduplication of the kind that Plotinus explicitly criticizes Aristotle for, in V.3, in the latter's attempt to explain the variety of thoughts and beings in a being that eternally thinks itself. Instead, the relation that obtains between αἴσθησις and αἴσθησις νοητή will have to be resolved into a simplicity that is wholly other. In a logic similar to V.3, where the resolution of the endless activity of νοῦς appeared to consist in the endless potentiality of matter (although, of course, the One is entirely opposed to matter in not being receptive in any way), the resolution of αἴσθησις νοητή will appear to privilege αἴσθησις, in terms of the latter's bodily proximity to its objects. In the case of what we might call αἴσθησις ἑνότη, however, the notion of proximity will be carried so far beyond itself as to cancel its own implicit problematic of the inherent duality, or multiplicity, that must obtain in any consideration of proximity.

Plotinian descriptions of the ineffable moment of contact and union with the One inevitably run up against the limitations of language for describing such an experience. Language is grounded in thought and being, and it is not especially suited to an experience that transcends both. Still, the language of sense and its confutation in the descriptions of *unio mystica*—such as when light is described as being touched—is not to be understood as entirely metaphorical. Plotinus' language here must be understood both in relation to the One, and in the context from which his language has been taken, that of αἴσθησις. Once union has been achieved, the harrowing of subjectivity has been completed, bringing about the recognition that the One underlies the self and its experience.[14] This underlying presence must now be applied to every facet of subjective experience. In αἴσθησις, the self is no longer content to see nothing other than the intelligible principles in natural phenomena. After mystical union, the subject must recognize the very givenness of sensible phenomena, precisely as they are given by the One.[15] The recognition of this givenness consists in an identity between perceiver and perceived, which is neither refined nor extinguished by the intervention of thought. Since the One is constantly present to everything, including the perceiving subject, it must also be transcendently present in every act of perception. The applications of the different faculties of sense, representing as they do the collective enterprise of rendering natural phenomena intelligible to the higher soul, therefore lose their specialized functions in what is at once the most fundamental, and the most spiritual, aspect of αἴσθησις. In recognizing that all things are simultaneously given, and comprehended, by the One, sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell each render the same identity within phenomenality, and to perform one operation is to perform another. Insofar as the One's experience of itself is never mediated by νοῦς, and is purely subjective, what is given to the eyes can be received by touch as perfectly as by any other faculty.

The constant presence of the One to the subjective self, which becomes explicitly recognized after the experience of mystical union, together with the role of the One as the supreme "condition of evidence"[16] for everything that is given to the senses, confers a constant transcendence within immanence for the objects and subject of αἴσθησις. For everything that is perceived, there must be a recognition, not simply of the object's dependence on its noetic

14. Plotinus explicitly states that the One underlies every facet of the soul's experience at *Enneads* VI.9.1.39–44.

15. The One's presence at all levels of reality is the theme of *Enneads* V.2.

16. I owe this expression to E. Perl, "Why is Beauty Form? Plotinus' Aesthetics in Phenomenological Perspective" (unpublished paper presented at the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies Conference, Québec City, July 2006), 13. See also R. Schürmann, "L'hénologie comme dépassement de la métaphysique," *Les études philosophiques* 3 (1982): 333.

correlate within the divine mind of νοῦς, but of the object's ultimate origin in the prior simplicity and unity of the One, as well as of the boundless grace in the overflowing of the One, which is the first cause of the object's appearing to the perceiving subject. Within the same act of αἴσθησις there will also be a recognition by the self of its own origin in the One, which forms the basis of a primordial identity between subject and object of αἴσθησις. It is this recognition that, according to the logic of VI.9, penetrates to the depths of the subjectivity of both the self and the One, culminating in the moment where these two meet, with their centres having been joined.[17] Thus, when the self realizes its identity with an object of αἴσθησις, within the activity of αἴσθησις, and when this realization occurs by means of the subjectivity that unites the soul to the One, subject, object, and One are all united within a certain mode of the One's own consciousness. From one perspective, this mode of the One's consciousness takes place within the sense perception of the human, with the aid of the stimulus of a perceptible object. Since this is also where the One is conscious of some part of itself, αἴσθησις must be understood to contain a spiritual element that transcends even αἴσθησις νοητή. The self that has experienced the One mystically, and has translated the content of this experience to more mundane levels of reality, becomes, in the realm of αἴσθησις, a catalyst for the spiritual unification of subject, object, and One within the act of αἴσθησις. This role of catalyst, however, should not be understood in terms of agency. The perceiving self does not bring about, or effect, any unification that has not already been provided by the One. Instead, the human subject experiences the givenness of this very unity within his subjective depths. In this way, the self and the One are allowed to meet, within a properly spiritual reflection on what the One has given.

There is a double nature to Plotinus' account of spiritual perception, proceeding, on the one hand, from his analysis of perception in relation to νοῦς, and on the other hand, perception in relation to the One. It is from his understanding of the noetic world that Plotinus is able to formulate an active theory of perception in the natural world, which perception is based upon a correlative, eminent activity in the noetic world. From this point of view, αἴσθησις is never simply of natural objects since, in order to function at its highest capacity, it must also sustain a vision of the noetic λόγοι, as well as the conclusions that result from comparisons between natural and noetic objects. It is for this reason that Plotinus is able to say that the act of perception is most fundamentally one of judgement. From the point of view of the One, however, αἴσθησις must transcend even the sphere of νοῦς. Once the human self has experienced the One on its own terms—in *unio mystica*—no subordinate experience of reality is thereafter left unaltered.

17. *Enneads* VI.9.10.16–17.

With respect to αἴσθησις in the natural world, this means that the human constantly encounters the givenness and unity of objects from the perspective of the One, whose generosity is boundless, and who is also the principle of unity. The human has access, within his own subjectivity, to the One's experience of itself in the properly human mode of αἴσθησις. Αἴσθησις is therefore spiritual, insofar as the enlightened subject unifies himself, and the objects of his perception, within the subjectivity of the One, who grants the possibility of all experience.

Augustine, *Confessions*

By the time Augustine came to write the *Confessions*, he had already been thinking about spiritual perception for some time. The autobiography contains Augustine's first mature formulations of this question.[18] Towards the beginning of *Confessions* Book X, Augustine makes the following invocation to God:

> But when I love you, what do I love? It is not physical beauty nor temporal glory nor the brightness of light dear to earthly eyes, nor the sweet melodies of all kinds of songs, nor the gentle odour of flowers and ointments and perfumes, nor manna or honey, nor limbs welcoming the embraces of the flesh; it is not these I love when I love my God. Yet there is a light I love, and a food, and a kind of embrace when I love my God—a light, voice, odour, food, embrace of my inner man, where my soul is floodlit by light which space cannot contain, where there is sound that time cannot seize, where there is a perfume which no breeze disperses, where there is a taste for food no amount of eating can lessen, and where there is a bond of union that no satiety can part. That is what I love when I love my God.[19]

Book X unifies the historical account of Augustine's own existence with the more general reflection on the principles of creaturely procession in the *Genesis* commentary of Books XI–XIII, through an analysis of the contents of the human soul and their relation to the divine. In consequence, this in-

18. J.J. O'Donnell, *Confessions of St. Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1992), vol. 3, 10.6.8, p. 167 identifies references to the spiritual senses at *De Libero Arbitrio* 1.8.18, 2.3.8, 2.6.14; *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* 1.24.42, 2.14.21; *De Duabus Animabus Contra Manichaeos* 2.2; *De Sermone Domini in Monte* 1.12.34; *De Diversis Questionibus* 59.3, 64.7.

19. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. H. Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1992), X.vi.8, 183: *quid autem amo, cum te amo? non speciem corporis nec decus temporis, non candorem lucis, ecce istis amicum oculis, non dulces melodias cantilenarum omnimodarum, non florum et unguentorum et aromatum suaveolentiam, non manna et mella, non membra acceptabilia carnis amplexibus: non haec amo, cum amo deum meum. et tamen amo quandem lucem et quanden vocem et quendam odorem et quendam cibum et quendam amplexum, cum amo deum meum, lucem, vocem, odorem, cibum, amplexum interioris hominis mei, ubi fulget animae meae, quod non capit locus, et ubi sonat, quod non rapit tempus, et ubi olet, quod non spargit flatus, et ubi sapit, quod non minuit edacitas, et ubi haeret, quod non divellit satietas. hoc est quod amo, cum deum meum amo.*

vocation represents, in miniature, a summary and unification of the whole work. There is in these lines a restatement of the Pauline contrast between the inner and the outer man. The implications of such a contrast cannot, however, be understood without reference to some form of Platonic philosophy. In this way, Augustine's scripturally inspired effusions once again lead the reader back to the philosophical certitude upon which his faith is founded and understood.

At X.vi.8, Augustine is witness to an inspired form of sense experience which leads him to investigate the true source of his love. As will become clear over the course of this inquiry, the true object of Augustine's love can only be the source of happiness itself, and this added eudaimonistic tendency imbues Augustine's inquiry with the "logic of quest."[20] Augustine engages the whole of the sensible creation in a dialogue intended to establish the source of its manifold beauty, and, therefore, the source of Augustine's happiness. Nonetheless, all that the creation can 'tell' him through disclosure to his senses is that it is not Augustine's beloved. Moreover, Augustine finds that his very sense faculties, which convey to him the splendid yet derivative beauties of the world, are also not the object or cause of his love. Augustine's ability to turn from the creation, and to withdraw within himself, beyond the purview of his senses, depends upon a faculty of soul which inspires the senses and makes them adequate to a skeptical evaluation of what is without. The creation points beyond itself, and beyond its perceptible constitution, towards the eternal principle that gives it form and beauty. Augustine is only able to perceive this through his senses because he possesses within himself a relation to this eternal principle, which enhances what his sense faculties are able to tell him.[21]

As with any form of skepticism, Augustine can only insist on the nullity of what is presented before him in virtue of a superior principle. The immediate impressions of his senses must therefore be preserved within him, together with his possession of the principles according to which his impressions are evaluated. For Augustine, the seat of this activity is memory, and the quest for the source of happiness will have to be similarly self-reflexive, and be one with self-knowledge. It must now be noted that the skepticism that leads Augustine from externals and towards self-knowledge reflects the movement of *Ennead* V.3. In that treatise, Plotinus found that the only possible source for certain knowledge lay in the simplicity of self-thinking thought. This very reflection, however, gave rise to a further skepticism as to the nature of

20. W. Hankey, "'Knowing as we are Known' in *Confessions* 10 and Other Philosophical, Augustinian and Christian Obedience to the Delphic *Gnothi Seauton* from Socrates to Modernity," *Augustinian Studies* 34.1 (2003): 30.

21. *Confessions* X.vi.9.

absolute simplicity, which required that Plotinus transcend thought itself, in order to account for its ultimate origin in the One. It is this last position that will represent the major divergence of Augustine from Plotinus, since for the Bishop, the principle of the all consists in what is, at once, simple and self-related.

For Augustine, memory mediates within the human between what the senses perceive and the rational principles that give meaning to perceptions, between what is given by the creation and what is given by the creator. Since this twofold activity of memory takes place within the self, in the service of converting the sensible world towards God, the conversion of the self towards the source of its happiness must also lie within memory. This is the substance and meaning of Augustine's endeavours to understand himself in relation to his proximity to, or distance from, God, and it is this reflection that structures Books I–IX of the *Confessions*. In order to tell the story of his life in precisely this way, however, Augustine must not merely have access to what he actually remembers of his past, but also to what he does not remember. As he states at X.viii.14, memory contains both understanding and faith, collecting at the same time what Augustine knows to have happened to him and what he believes on the reports of others.[22] It is only through faith, for example, that Augustine can describe the recapitulation of the earthly paradise in his first infancy. It is not, however, simply out of faith that Augustine presents what he does not know to have happened in the account of his life. Instead, the exercise of autobiography is made possible through the joining, within Augustine's own memory, of his subjective experience to that of God.

The tenth book of the *Confessions* stands apart from the autobiography of I–IX and the scriptural exegesis of XI–XIII. It is in this book that Augustine makes the request of God that he know himself as he is known. The phrase "knowing as we are known" is taken from I Corinthians, where Paul is referring to the eschatological vision of God enjoyed by the blessed. As Wayne Hankey has commented, however, in the Augustinian "self-examination of Book X the eschatological hope becomes a present reality."[23] In his trinitarian psychology—that of thinking, willing, and remembering—Augustine identifies God the Father with memory, since He is the source of the divine ideas that are in the λόγος, or the Son. It is memory, then, that must somehow allow the human access to the divine principles within the soul, and thereby enable a return to God. And yet, Augustine's original state of quietude in God, as represented by the infantile paradise, is precisely what Augustine *does not* remember about his life. Instead, the return to God will require that

22. *Confessions* X.viii.14.
23. W. Hankey, "Knowing as we are Known," 28.

Augustine locate himself, at every point in his autobiography, in relation to the divine standard. Memory is the *sine qua non* of both self-knowledge and knowledge of God, which for Augustine, cannot be present independent of each other. The relation of these two kinds of knowledge is demonstrated, in Book X, by two parallel accounts of memory—one in which God knows through Augustine, and the other where Augustine knows through God.

At X.5, Augustine asks that God restore to him the memory of his life. Not only could this requirement not have been satisfied if God had not been experiencing Augustine's life from within Augustine, but the *Confessions* would also not have been written. Augustine makes the request that he know himself as he is known by God because he requires the present memory of the particularity of his own, individual, historical existence. It is only with the acquisition of this knowledge that the entire project of the *Confessions*, as a statement of the possibility of the existence of a Christian soul in the world, can be achieved. Augustine undertakes the enterprise in this way in order to show how a rational soul, amidst the multiple and particular conditions of the world can discern its true origin and goal in God. The particularity of the world is demonstrated by the idiosyncrasies of the individual self in his search for the rest that is God. Augustine therefore requires that the memory of his own past be immediately present to him in the way that it is in the memory of God. In order for God to endow Augustine with such a knowledge, however, it is necessary for God to have experienced the conditions and events of Augustine's life in exactly the same way as Augustine experienced them. Therefore, within Augustine, God must have experienced everything that Augustine did, or else the particularity of Augustine's individual perspective would be lost, and the *Confessions* would be bereft of the specific nature of such an account. In providing Augustine with the knowledge of how he is himself known, therefore, God is providing Augustine with nothing other than the life of Augustine as God Himself knew it through Augustine.[24]

In another sense, however, the *Confessions* are not merely the account of a particular individual in history, but they are meant to be in some sense paradigmatic of every life. Without reference to some universal standard, the idiosyncratic happenings in the life of the individual lack definition, and are thus unintelligible. In order for the autobiography of the *Confessions* to reach beyond Augustine himself, to express the possibility of the life of any Christian soul, Augustine must gain access to the content of the divine mind, or the ideas. In chapter 11, Augustine asks how one can learn those things that are known not through sense perception, but in and by themselves. It is here that the Saint's Platonism becomes evident. In general agreement with the doctrine of ἀνάμνησις, Augustine states that the eternal ideas govern-

24. *Confessions* X.v.7.

ing the constitution of reality are not, strictly speaking, learned, but rather recollected. As the argument goes, if the ideas were not already present to the soul, then one would have no means of judging or recognizing the ultimate meaning of the phenomena emanating from the ideas. Memory, then, will serve not only to deliver the particular to our attention, but also the universal by which the former is judged and known.[25]

When viewed from a universal, rational perspective, each stage of Augustine's life stands in explicit relation to God, with varying degrees of proximity and distance. The relation of the ideas to God is contained in the Trinitarian formulation of the origin of the Son, or λόγος, from the Father. God is thus the ultimate source of all truth, and the goal of all aspirants to the truth. It is according to this ontology that the life of Augustine is endowed with a precise structure, such that it consists of a series of periods of life, each leading to the ultimate goal of God. When Augustine asks God for the memory of his past life to be present, therefore, he is also asking that he know his own life as lived through God, the principle and source of truth, and not *vice versa*. With this kind of knowledge, Augustine is able to perceive the precise structure of his life as it relates to the universal goal of the rational soul in God. In this sense, Augustine can be seen to experience his life through God.

It might be objected that the role of memory in composing an autobiography is self-evident, and that Augustine's tendency to locate himself at every moment of his life in relation to God is merely a rhetorical gloss, imposed upon his work out of theological necessity. The arguments about memory and its access to the divine are designed precisely to refute such an objection, and to give coherence to the *Confessions* as a whole. Supporting these arguments, moreover, is the fact that within Augustine's memory of his past life—and, in fact, within his understanding, as opposed to his belief, as to what took place—are no fewer than two mystical experiences of God. These experiences were achieved through a gradual, introspective activity, whereby the confusion and clamour of the appearances of the world were driven out of the mind, so that there remained a direct, though transitory, contact with the divine principle of all. That the memory—itself the principle of contact between human and divine in this life—contains such eminent and ineffable experiences of contact or union, is perhaps the greatest possible proof for Augustine's "realized eschatology" within memory and self-knowledge. This apparent requirement for mystical experience also corresponds to the necessity, within the Plotinian system, of experiencing union with the One, so as to recognize the One within all inferior modes of apprehension.

Owing to the sensory language used to describe Augustine's mystical experiences, in Books VII and IX, we must now turn to consider what role

25. *Confessions* X.xi.18.

spiritual perception plays in these experiences. In the mystical experience and its aftermath, described at VII.x.16–xvii.23, the language of sight dominates. This is entirely appropriate, owing to the customary association of sight with understanding, and the fact that Book VII constitutes Augustine's coming to correct and certain knowledge of the divine. Aided by the providential dispensation of the *libri Platonicorum*, Augustine returns within and upwards, in order to see the divine light by which he, and all creatures, were made. It is by this same light that Augustine is able to see also the entire creation, and to recognize, through this sense of sight, the utter dependence of the creation on the creator. Divine certitude also reaches Augustine through his ears, as he hears the voice of God uttering his name: "Now, I am who I am." It is at this point that Augustine understands that God alone is truly Being and, moreover, that this truth is to be understood from the finitude of inferior beings. Finally, just following this experience, Augustine is left smelling the aroma of what he cannot yet eat. The knowledge that Augustine has acquired exposes the weakness of his will, which cannot stabilize a constant enjoyment of God. There is nevertheless hope, since Augustine's senses have been endowed with a spiritual capacity, which points beyond creatures, towards their source in God.[26]

In the analysis of Bernard McGinn, the language used to describe the mystical experience at IX.x is more "affective", tending more towards the sense of touch and de-emphasizing the role of sight.[27] Given the larger context of Book IX, it might be suggested that this is because Augustine is expressing his relation to God in terms of Being rather than as the Thought of that Being. Having taken baptism, Augustine has now sanctified his previous life in terms of his future devotion to God. The past, present, and future of Augustine's being have thus been united in the sacrament that joins him with the source of being. Moreover, the account of Monica's life gives a practical and complete demonstration of how beings are aligned to the one true Being. Within the mystical experience, both Augustine and Monica seek after their common source and what it means to live and to be amongst the blessed. As the two aspirants reach the heights of their experience, they transcend the temporal limits of their own contingent beings and finally manage to touch eternal Being through the rapt attention of their hearts. It should be noted that what is "touched" is actually described as "wisdom," and this represents the converse of the mystical experience at VII, where true knowledge is attained through contact with the supreme Being. For Augustine, thought and

26. *Confessions* VII.x.16–xvii.23.

27. B. McGinn, "The Language of Inner Experience in Christian Mysticism," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 1.2 (2001): 160–61.

being are inseparably part of the divine, even as they must be transcended, ultimately, for Plotinus.[28]

For Augustine, memory contains both mundane sense perceptions and the manifold variety of spiritual perception which occur in mystical experiences. By virtue of its communion with the divine ideas, memory also has the power to spiritualize mundane sense perception by relating its objects to their divine principle. Since memory is a fundamentally self-related faculty, every form of spiritual perception that it makes possible is revealed in Books I–IX of the *Confessions*, which is a work of self-knowledge. In Book X, Augustine demonstrates that sense perception has no meaning for the human apart from memory. The faculties of sense and of memory must therefore be conceived as one in their common activity of mediating between embodied human nature and the divine. This is the concern that underlies the conclusion of Book X, which identifies the Son as the principle of all true mediation. The source of the divine ideas was made flesh and lived in the world, as was apparent to the senses of all who witnessed Him. The incarnation of the λόγος is the paradigmatic basis for perceiving, through the senses, the divine origin in the things that are made. It is therefore no mistake that for Augustine there is spiritual perception only insofar as the memory has access to the ideas in the λόγος.[29]

Augustine, *De Trinitate*

De Trinitate is fundamentally a work of self-knowledge. In this, the treatise is one with the *Confessions*. In its second half, Augustine investigates the contents, operations, and inclinations of the human soul, together with its relation to the divine, with a rigour and intensity rivalled only by *Confessions* X. Just as in that pivotal and unifying confession, Augustine analyzes, in *De Trinitate*, the psychological faculties underlying sense perception. Similar also to *Confessions* X, Augustine acknowledges in this later work the fact that the human self has the capacity to attain mystical experience of the divine, that the spiritual senses of the inner man are operative in such mystical experience, and that the experience itself is comprehended within the boundless subjectivity of the human. Augustine is concerned here with demonstrating theoretically the conditions that must obtain for the *visio dei*. According to the logic of the treatise, this demonstration will have to consist in an undeniable understanding of the operation, and mutual interrelation of corporeal and incorporeal sense faculties within the trinitarian self. There follows a consideration of how spiritual perception is to be purified if it is to behold the source of the incorporeal light by which it perceives. Finally,

28. *Confessions* IX.x.23–xi.28.
29. *Confessions* X.xlii.67–xliii.70.

it must be noted that the *visio dei* represents a contact, however transitory, between the summit of the rational activity of the human (*acies mentis*), and the divine itself. Given the nature of such an experience, this must constitute the greatest possible certitude to the human that its trinitarian operations are truly imaged according to the Divine Trinity. If, in other words, the Platonic principle that like can only know like holds true, then Augustine's trinitarian self must certainly know, in its moment of mystical contact, that God is triune.

The passages in *De Trinitate* that describe human spiritual perception in the present life are consistent with the overall account of spiritual perception given in the *Confessions*. In *Confessions* X, Augustine elaborated on the complete psychological requirements for enjoying continuous spiritual perception, and therefore experience of God within perception, in the present life. This endeavour is undertaken because Augustine, in order to complete the *Confessions*, needs his self-knowledge to correspond to the way in which he is known by God. This illuminated form of self-knowledge, together with its requisite stability in the human mind, is also intended as a response to the aftermath of Augustine's mystical experience in Book VII, when he found that he was not stable in the enjoyment of God. In order to enjoy such a stability, according to the Augustinian psychology, the will must be properly directed both towards God and towards the objects of everyday experience. It is for this reason that Augustine's frustratingly transitory contact with the divine in Book VII is followed by Book VIII, which details Augustine's labours in gathering together his fragmented self by turning his will, in all matters, towards God. Naturally, a perfectly directed will is also presupposed in the account of the spiritual senses at *Confessions* X.

At *De Trinitate* XI, Augustine describes the process of vision as one in which subject, object, and the power that unites them are combined in a single, unitary experience. Indeed, these distinct entities can hardly be distinguished by human reason, within the actual experience of vision. The reference to the "power" that creates such a profound union, even to the extent of including itself, is explicitly identified as will. It is the will that self-consciously directs the attention of the eye towards its objects, and then unites subject and object within the experience of vision.[30] This self-conscious and intentional process is compounded, over the course of innumerable experiences of vision, to result in a kind of habituation of the self towards its objects of perception. For Augustine, the activity of vision is both active and receptive; the soul takes into herself the images of perceptibles, even as the eye touches these same objects with its visual ray. Insofar as the soul is

30. *De Trinitate* XI.ii.5.

receptive of its objects, there is the possibility that the soul can be shaped by these objects in her experience of them.[31] The perceiving subject must therefore take care to preserve self-consciousness in the act of perception, in order to save the autonomy and dignity of the self, which is imaged on the Trinity, from confusing itself with the images of bodily objects. In order to preserve this hierarchy within the creation, the self must recognize the will as the impetus and fulfillment of every act of perception.

The self, however, cannot be lost in its own infinite self-consciousness, such that this is mistaken for the self-relation of the Trinity. This would be to forsake the very principle of the hierarchy that establishes the soul as superior to her bodily objects. In order to preserve the self, therefore, the will must also be directed to God in every act of perception. It is this relation that, in conjunction with divine illumination, grants the possibility of spiritual perception in this life. Over the course of *Confessions* X, Augustine's spiritual perception evolves as he searches the creation for the true object of his love. This search, which is also the quest for happiness, terminates in God, and it is after this recognition that Augustine is truly able to perceive the spiritual realities of the creation, according to their divine principles. It is because of such an experience that Augustine states, in *De Trinitate*, that spiritual perception must include a cultivation of "longing." It is the experience of longing for the happiness of God, in the act of perceiving the creation, that constitutes the proper direction of the will to God in the act of perception. To long for God while apprehending divine principles in the creation, is also to possess God in love, while these principles are apprehended. Thus, the will, when properly directed, unites the self to God in spiritual perception, since love is "a stronger form of will."[32]

The enjoyment, or love, of God that occurs in spiritual perception in the present life cannot, however, be sufficient. Indeed, the very fact that longing is an ineluctable feature in all human experience, together with the fact that the true object of love is eternal, indicates that there must be a final state, in which the human is in constant enjoyment of its beloved. Augustine states that the human is fundamentally constituted of love directed towards the divine because this is an image of the self-relation of the Trinity, wherein the Spirit directs its love towards the Father. In this connection, it should be understood that the human love for God is dependent upon the divine self-love, which is perfect and eternal, and naturally precedes all human desire.[33] To conclude that the human must at some point enjoy a perfected enjoyment of God because its love is prefigured and dependent upon divine

31. *De Trinitate* X.v.7–8.
32. *De Trinitate* XV.21.41.
33. *De Trinitate* XV.17.31.

self-love, is a reasoning similar to that which led Plotinus to articulate the idea of αἴσθησις νοητή. In *Ennead* VI.7, Plotinus provided a systematic rendering of the Platonic paradox that the human sees because the soul has seen. In the version of Plotinus, the human sees because the soul has seen within νοῦς seeing itself. Augustine returns to this idea of divine self-relation in his explanation of the role of the will, or longing, in spiritual perception. For Augustine, the human can only perceive spiritually because the will has been directed, in love, towards God, who eternally loves himself.

AUGUSTINE, *DE CIVITATE DEI*

De Civitate Dei Book XI contains a remarkable statement about the continuity of the self-knowing creation, which operates within the terms of the paradox first established by the *Timaeus*. This occurs within a restatement, by Augustine, of his doctrine of the fundamental subjectivity that is involved in all human acts of knowing, and the consequent equation of knowledge with self-knowledge. It will also be important to note the context of Book XI, which concerns the origins and ends of both the Earthly and Heavenly Cities. These two principalities, which live together, though according to their respective modes on earth, are distinguished according to the ends towards which their actions incline. Both cities, however, possess the same originative principle in the single act of God's creation. Book XI concerns this very act of creation, and so it does not yet distinguish between the two cities, but instead reflects upon what principles of the creator are given to the creation from its moment of genesis, and precisely how these principles can be inferred from the creation itself. Augustine's inquiry proceeds from the belief that the creator is triune, and terminates, by the end of Book XI, in a rational understanding of the Trinitarian self, which, because it is eminently apparent to human reason, ought to be conceded by the denizens of either City.

At XI.26, Augustine sets out the rational deduction of the human self's Trinitarian existence: Nothing can be more certain to the self than that it exists, that it knows it exists, and that it delights in this existence. The certitude of this inference is guaranteed by the fact that it is entirely self-directed, and therefore not contingent upon external objects. Moreover, external objects can only be perceived and known when their images have been internalized, thereby becoming a part of the self. One can therefore only lead a meaningful life, free from error, amongst creatures when one has first collected the interrelated moments of the self and become aware of their reality and unity. The dialogue that Augustine undertakes with sensible objects in *Confessions* X, and the skepticism that shows these objects not to be the true object of Augustine's love, cannot be turned against the self. If, as Augustine says, he is mistaken in any part of his reasoning, this simply affirms the being of

him who is mistaken. Consequently, this affirmation of existence confirms the knowledge of this existence. Finally, to love even an illusory existence is still an act of love, and so the final moment of the self cannot be denied under any circumstance. Thus, there is no valid skepticism when the self is in dialogue with itself, since the dialogue confirms every essential aspect of the self. Despite such fundamental ontological certainty and his claim that nothing is closer to God in nature than the human self, Augustine nevertheless insists that the self is "not an adequate image, but a very distant parallel." Given such radical proximity to, and distance from, God, Augustine must demonstrate the continuity, within the creation as a whole, of the ontological certainty that is founded and recognized within the human. The vehicle for this continuity will turn out to be the epistemological capacities of the human, in which sense perception plays a vital role.[34]

As Augustine demonstrated in XI.26, the human must first know itself if it is to have any knowledge whatsoever of external objects. Moreover, in order to know sensible objects, their images must be taken into the self, and preserved within the memory. It is through this process that ontological certainty is gained by external objects because they become a part of the unimpeachable existence of the self, which understands the principles of these objects through the illumination of the divine Ideas. Augustine here restates, with great consistency, the doctrine of illumination expressed at *Confessions* X. The concern in *De Civitate Dei*, however, is to preserve the continuity of the creation, the paradigmatic instance of which lies within the human self. Self-knowledge must therefore be distributive. In this connection, there follows a taxonomy of the creation, together with an analysis of how each class of creature participates in human self-knowledge.

Augustine's account of sensible animals possesses certain features in common with Porphyry's understanding of bestial nature.[35] Although he denies reason or intellectual judgement to animals, Augustine does state, in *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, Book XII, that animals share in spiritual perception, insofar as they retain images of the objects of attraction and repulsion.[36] This logically entails that animals have some kind of memory. Unlike Porphyry, sense perception and memory do not, for Augustine, lead ineluctably to reason in its true sense, since animals do not have the capacity to form judgements according to the principles of divine illumination. Without this realization of the self, perfectly imaged so far as nature will allow, upon the Trinity, the animal cannot have perfect self-knowledge. As Augustine says at *De Civitate Dei* XI.27, "Some other creatures may have much sharper vision than we have

34. *De Civitate Dei* XI.26.

35. For the Porphyrian account, see *De Abstinentia* 3.21.5–9.

36. *De Genesi ad Litteram* XII.xi.22.

for seeing in the light of the sun; but they cannot attain to that immaterial light which casts as it were its rays upon our minds, to enable us to come to a right judgement about all these other creatures."[37] Thus, Augustine's account stands by virtue of his intensifying within the human what he takes away from the Porphyrian account of bestial nature. Individual animals use sense perception and memory to preserve their finite existence, but humans use perception spiritualized by illumination, in order to preserve the ontological status of 'animal' within a rationally continuous creation.

In the case of plants, there is no evidence for any kind of cognitive activity, except the instinctive inclination towards nourishment. This activity alone does not depend upon sense-perception, calculation, or memory. Indeed, there is no reason to suppose that a plant is even aware of its own existence. And yet, the organs, processes, and constitutions of plants are all plainly apparent to human perception and discernment. The human can understand, by means of divine illumination, how plants live, and also how they form a part of organic life as a whole. Augustine states that these cognitive realizations, by the human, are undertaken on behalf of plants: "It almost seems as if they long to be known, just because they cannot know themselves."[38]

Human self-knowledge is similarly distributive, even at the level of inanimate objects. Such objects obey the natural laws imposed upon them by their respective weights, and by the corresponding attraction or repulsion exercised by denser or more rarefied regions in the world. In this way, material objects betray their own unconscious inclinations, which in turn demonstrate the rightful homes of these objects within the creation. Once again, the *locus* for these conclusions is the human self, which makes material objects a matter of self-knowledge by internalizing them and knowing their principles through illumination. In fact, in the case of such objects, there is an even more profound demonstration of self-knowledge in *Confessions* XIII. There, Augustine expresses the cosmic itinerary of soul through its "weight of love." The soul finds its rest in God only when its weight of love has carried her throughout the created cosmos, until her love finds a home in its true object.[39] It seems clear from this passage that the self is known through material objects, insofar as the natural laws that pertain to them can be understood as love.

There is also, in the Augustinian distribution of self-knowledge throughout the natural world, a strong reminiscence of the double ἐνέργεια theory, as articulated by Plotinus. In particular, Augustine seems to impose the human's acts of self-knowledge upon the creation in the same way as Plotinus

37. *De Civitate Dei* XI.27.
38. *De Civitate Dei* XI.27.
39. *Confessions* XIII.ix.10.

uses human perception within the continuous, enforming activity of νοῦς upon the sensible world. Both doctrines are responsible for the continuous conversion of enformed matter towards divine principles of procession. By contrast, whereas Plotinus is certain that the laborious and intermittent activity of αἴσθησις is resolved in the constant apprehensions of αἴσθησις νοητή, Augustine, while in possession of the same rational certainty that spiritual perception will finally be resolved in a constant gaze upon the divine, remains somewhat tentative as to the precise conditions of this state. Augustine does, however, derive prophetic intimations of the conditions of the resurrection from scripture. For his account of this glory, we must turn to *De Civitate Dei* XXII.

Augustine's account of the end of the Heavenly City is not a matter of his personal experience, but it is nevertheless a rational inference that can be made from the certainty of self-knowledge. The precise circumstances of the resurrection and the life of the blessed are articles of faith, taken from the testimony of scripture. It must be noted, however, that this notion of 'faith' is highly nuanced by what Augustine does know by experience, and through rational certainty. In the *Confessions*, Augustine described no fewer than two mystical experiences, in which he enjoyed a direct, though transitory, contact with the divine. Moreover, throughout the Augustinian *corpus* there is an insistence that spiritual perception, by means of the divine illumination present to the memory, constitutes an experience of the divine, by the human, while the latter converts the manifold creation through self-knowledge. Further, in *Confessions* X, Augustine showed how mystical experience is itself contained within the memory, and thus becomes a part of the "realized eschatology" of self-knowledge. Within this framework, contact with the divine is both transitory—insofar as human perception is flawed, and therefore not always spiritually inclined—and a matter of rational certainty as the essential basis for selfhood. Given this situation, it is not surprising that Augustine clings so tenaciously to a final, everlasting vision of God, since this would represent the perfection of the most fundamental activity of the self. Augustine has also stated, in *De Trinitate*, that the longing which brings about its own fulfillment in the momentary *visio dei*, is the image of the heavenly love of Spirit, which has God as its object for all time. The human remains an image of the Trinity, and the infinite self-relation of the former depends, for its existence, on the perfection and simplicity of the latter. This is similar to the argument of *Ennead* VI.7, wherein the laborious and similarly self-related process of sight in the natural world was prefigured and substantiated by the simple foresight of the noetic world. And so, even though Augustine must remain tentative about the precise conditions of the life of the blessed—since these are not granted to human understanding but secreted away within the

richness of scripture—the rational certainty that makes him insist on such a conclusion is similar to the reasoning that leads Plotinus to make αἴσθησις dependent on αἴσθησις νοητή.

Augustine proceeds, in *De Civitate Dei* XXII, to refute those who criticize belief in a bodily resurrection as absurd. These passages are most striking, since they recapitulate the original polemic, by which the spiritual senses entered the Christian world. It will be remembered that Origen apparently first proposed the five spiritual analogues to the senses, in response to the criticism of Celsus the Platonist, who objected that the divine cannot be perceived with the eyes of the body. The underlying basis for this objection was that the corporeal, or material, could not be mixed fruitfully with the ideal. According to the Platonic maxim, like can only be known by like, and there can be no meaningful perception of the divine by bodily senses. Augustine resumes the quarrel against the Platonists and their representatives, such as Cicero, by pointing out that the corporeal and the incorporeal are already in fruitful communion, one would hope, in the human. In fact, without the mysterious, yet natural, animation of body by soul in the human, no form of knowledge would be possible whatsoever, whether of the sacred or the profane. The Augustinian *corpus* is emphatic on the certainty of the operations of immaterial soul within body. If, Augustine argues, such a mystery is a matter of rational understanding, why should his critics withhold their belief in a bodily resurrection?[40]

At XXII.11, Augustine contends with the objections of natural science to the bodily resurrection. The substance of these objections, as he summarizes them, is that the material elements keep to their proper regions of the cosmos, as ordained by natural law, and so the translation of a material body to the celestial heaven is impossible. It is revealing that Augustine identifies this objection as originating from the *Timaeus*; still more revealing is the fact that Augustine replies from a logic internal to the *Timaeus*. Plato stated both that the physical elements are designed to succeed one another according to their respective natures, but also that no one element can extinguish another. This last requirement guarantees the interrelated harmony of the natural world, and preserves the appearances of seemingly incongruous instances. Accordingly, Augustine exploits such instances of apparently displaced elemental bodies, which are nevertheless consistent with the natural order. It cannot, therefore, be objected that bodily resurrection is unnatural. In this way, Augustine merely answers a Platonically inspired problem with a Platonic solution.[41]

Augustine's quarrel with natural science is also prefigured in the *Confessions*. In that work, Augustine described his dalliance in this field in terms of

40. *De Civitate Dei* XXII.4.
41. *De Civitate Dei* XXII.11.

falling prey to a "likely story"—the exact appraisal of Socrates to the lengthy creation account of Timaeus. Augustine's objection to such a story lay in the pride of the natural scientists, who did not recognize God as the source of the order they appraised, or as the ultimate source of their knowledge itself. The natural scientists could not understand anything of the divine within the things that are made.[42] In short, they were insufficiently Platonic in their incapacity to see the ideal causes in the natural world, and Augustine himself can only come to this understanding after his reading of the *libri Platonicorum*. The corrective to Augustine's preliminary natural science comes, after he has found God within his self and after the physics of the creation have been converted to a function of self-knowledge, at *Confessions* XIII. There, as has been noted above, Augustine identifies the true force of natural inclination in the movement of love towards its true object. As Augustine reflects at *De Civitate Dei* XI.27, material objects are only known through human self-knowledge and, as he says at *Confessions* XIII, the self gravitates according to its weight of love.

Having Platonically resolved the difficulties of the *Timaeus*, Augustine proceeds, at XXII.26–27, to fashion a syncretistic Platonism, in agreement with bodily resurrection, from the sentences of Plato and Porphyry. Plato, once again in the *Timaeus*, stated that there were subordinate gods created to exist in imperishable bodies. Porphyry, for his part, insisted that once the soul returns to her home and Father, she will never again seek a perishable body. Augustine combines these sentences, with the supplement, from Plato, that a soul cannot exist forever without a body, in order to arrive at the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. This represents an endorsement by Augustine of the great claim of Platonic philosophy to truth, but it does not go the entire way to explaining Augustine's Platonic motives. Everything in Book XXII preliminary to the actual description of the blessed is dedicated to accounting for the possibility of such a condition. Thus far, Augustine has defended this possibility in ontological terms. The creation is so constituted as to be both self-knowing and, through this self-knowledge, capable of divine contact. The resurrection must therefore be possible because it is the perfection and end of what the created human is in this life. Evidently, Plato and Porphyry lend support to such a notion. So far, however, Augustine has not argued from the epistemological side of this question. Since the creation only truly is when it is self-knowing, and since the human is the *locus* of self-knowledge owing to its communion with the divine, then, once self-knowledge is completed with the conversion of the entire creation, the human will behold only God. It is striking that Augustine does not make this argument, and thereby recapitulate the parallel between thought and being expressed in the

42. *Confessions* V.iii.3–iv.7.

two mystical experiences of the *Confessions*. If he were to make this argument, however, Augustine could simply join Plato with Plotinus, combining the doctrine of the *Phaedrus*, that the soul has seen the forms, with the doctrine, proceeding from *Ennead* VI.7, of αἴσθησις νοητή.[43]

The Augustinian eschatology of *De Civitate Dei* XXII is a virtual restatement of the Plotinian account of self-constituted νοῦς, at the moment of its self-constitution following its initial procession from the One, but before the procession of its own spiritual matter. Naturally, the life of the blessed is for Augustine the final moment of return, and there is no further need, or cause, for procession. Just as in the Plotinian account, however, the defining activities of the Augustinian eschatology are thought and being. Moreover, these two activities are only conceptually distinguished, since the contemplation of God is the very essence of the life of the blessed. There is an apparent differentiation of thought/being, inherent in the fact that this is an apparently communal enterprise, undertaken by all of the resurrected. In fact, such a differentiation is specious, since the object of the activity of the blessed consists in the absolute simplicity of the divine and, since this activity has been perfected, then such thought and being must be one and the same for all. The crucial difference between Plotinian νοῦς gazing upon the One and the Augustinian blessed gazing upon the divine within one another, lies in the relation between divinity, on the one hand, and thought and being, on the other. Unlike Plotinus, Augustine never explicitly states that God, or the Trinity, is beyond thought and being. The life of the blessed can be identified with νοῦς insofar as its activity is both self-directed and directed towards God. However, God can also be identified with νοῦς, wherein there is a perfected and everlasting relation between the divine, which is the eminent and final form of νοῦς, and the blessed, who retain their subordinate state as creatures, even though they are now perfected. This is Augustine's final statement, tentative as it is in its details, on the final resolution of the self-knowing creation. In order to reach this point, Augustine must rely on his faith in the transcendent being that he cannot entirely comprehend through self-knowledge, and which is therefore other. That the divine is a transcendent otherness is, at any rate, a statement with which Plotinus can agree.

The Augustinian account of spiritual perception directly addresses the Platonic paradoxes of the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*, of how sight comes as a result of foresight, and how the creation is continuous in self-knowledge. Augustine's solutions to these paradoxes also betray a marked dependence on the metaphysics of his pagan Neoplatonic predecessor, Plotinus. Moreover, this dependence is acquitted with a noticeable and uncharacteristic lack of anti-pagan polemic. The explanation for all of these features of Augustine's

43. *De Civitate Dei* XXII.26–27.

account lies in the fact that the dialogue that gave rise to spiritual perception was entirely internal to Platonism and, like the very process of spiritual perception, self-directed. The heat of the original dispute between Origen and Celsus had cooled by Augustine's time. For Augustine, Celsus had been surmounted by the more elaborate systems and syntheses of the Neoplatonists, such that he could be included within these syntheses, and therefore be in agreement with the one true faith.