

“Where Does the Trinity Appear?” Augustine’s Apologetics and “Philosophical” Readings of the *De Trinitate*

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Introduction

One persistent strand of commentary treats Augustine’s *de trinitate* (*trin.*) as most significantly an apologetic intended to demonstrate Christianity’s completion of and superiority to the classical philosophical tradition.¹ Scholars in this tradition begin by identifying a particular nexus of argument within ancient tradition as a fundamental aporia and then show how Augustine pushes beyond any earlier “solution.” In most cases, those who argue thus see Augustine’s success as his development of a “philosophical” foundation on which discussion of God and human selfhood can proceed. In many cases, Augustine’s status as a predecessor of some form of idealist thought is overtly identified as his achievement. In my recent monograph *Augustine and the Trinity*, I made no comment on this scholarly tradition, largely because I had decided to focus on a positive statement of what I see as Augustine’s Trinitarian vision. In this paper I want to offer some comment on the tradition I had ignored, but to do so at something of a tangent. At the same time, this paper fills another lacuna by sketching one of the key themes I would use to frame a more extended account of *trin.* 11–13, books that received little comment in my monograph.

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1. I am very grateful to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz for discussion of the ideas in this paper at an early stage and for the help of Mark DelCogliano and James B. Wallace. I would also like to thank those who participated in the discussion at Villanova, and those who discussed a subsequent version of the paper at the University of Nottingham.

We cannot, however, make progress without a little more clarity about the scholarly tradition mentioned above. In order to avoid too many generalizations, let me describe two distinct arguments, the first that of a Cambridge doctoral dissertation written in 1975 by Fr Edward Booth OP and published as a series of articles in *Augustiniana*, the second Roland Kany’s 2003 Bochum habilitation. The trajectory that shapes Booth’s analysis begins with a tension in Aristotle’s account of knowing and the intelligible objects of knowing.² In *De anima* 3, *nous* creates intelligible realities, and desire plays no role in knowing; in *Metaphysics* Λ intelligible realities pre-exist *nous*; moreover, they attract and actualize *nous*.³ This tension is exacerbated by Aristotle’s assumptions about the continuity between knower and what is known in intellectual knowing—what is the status of the individual *nous* in relation to *nous* as a whole?—and by his uncertain attitude toward human self-knowing and consciousness—is there permanent central self-consciousness, or is the human being only intermittently involved in self contemplation?⁴ Having outlined these uncertainties, Booth leaps forward to Plotinus who is taken to offer a radical solution to these Aristotelian dilemmas. Although the One cannot be involved in thinking, *Nous* is able to think and to comprehend the multiple because of its unitary self-presence. Human knowing is an act of participation in the life of *Nous*, and thus when it is realized, the human *nous* is fully absorbed.

Booth’s Augustine writes *trin.* against the background of the intellectual challenge presented by Neoplatonic pagans arriving in Carthage. Some of these embraced “Arianism”—for Booth, a theological position halfway between Platonism and Christianity—and, thus, Augustine writes to show the contradictions of Neoplatonism and then to reconstruct its insights into a new vision.⁵ In sum, Augustine’s solution is to take elements of Neoplatonic teaching concerning the One and *Nous*

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2. Edward Booth, “St. Augustine’s ‘notitia sui’ related to Aristotle and the Early Neo-Platonists,” *AugAHI* 27 (1977): 70–132, 364–401; 28 (1978): 183–221; 29 (1979): 97–124; see also idem, “Hegel’s Conception of Self-Knowledge Seen in Conjunction with Augustine’s,” *AugAHI* 30 (1980): 221–250.
 3. E.g., Booth, “St. Augustine’s ‘notitia sui,’” 107, 116, 121 (n.2): “So we are left with divisions and unity: not out of the desire to propose a paradoxical unity in diversity, but because of the insolubility of the questions posed.”
 4. *Ibid.*, 121–132.
 5. *Ibid.*, 184: “It is possible to read every page of the *De Trinitate* VIII onwards as if Neo-platonist thought were in his mind and as if he were deliberately and critically restructuring it to make it acceptable; and in particular to make its reflections on the self-knowing and self-loving of *nous* and the One as the basic metaphysical structure of the individual human mind.” Cf. also *ibid.*, 191: “The neo-Platonism which he wished to combat, to make certain that the superior insight of Christian philosophy would make it the legitimate heir of Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition.”

and combine them in a Porphyrian style triad as the basis of the human *mens*.⁶ The distinction between God and humanity is secured against Plotinus and a (half-conscious) return to Aristotle's conception of the mind's independence is effected, only now with a more satisfying conception of intellectual knowing.⁷

In a parallel fashion to Booth, but with greater historical precision, Roland Kany argues that the second half of *trin.* emerged from Augustine's engagement with the pagan circles around such figures as Volusianus, the circles that had such a fundamental role in the origin of *de ciuitate dei (ciu.)*.⁸ Kany then isolates what he presents as a central question of ancient philosophy: how can one derive multiplicity from an absolutely unified first principle? If the first principle thinks then it must be multiple, and thus complex. If one displaces the act of thought to a second *hypostasis*, then the original problem remains: how does the One generate multiplicity?⁹ The problem, he argues, remains fundamentally the same through the history of Neoplatonism. Kany suggests one can even trace ways in which this problem shaped debate in fourth-century Trinitarian disputes. While Nicene theologies coordinate *language* about the essence subsisting in three *hypostases*, the philosophical foundations of their position remain unclear; they rely unsatisfyingly on the statement of a necessary paradox, but offer no foundations for exploring that paradox further.¹⁰ Indeed, Kany even reads the first half of Augustine's *trin.* as a "crisis of the doctrine of the Trinity," with Augustine's analysis of his predecessors showing up their failure to ground rational exploration of Trinitarian dogma.¹¹

Kany argues that in the second half of his work Augustine pushes beyond the crisis by taking as his foundation the principle that the Trinity is not an object. In

6. At "Hegel's Conception of Self-Knowledge," 243 (n.2), Booth writes that in Books 9 and 10 of *trin.*, Augustine's triads are "triads of purely speculative thinking" following on from "triads of faith." The observation gives a further sense of how he envisages the character of a successful apologetic aimed at ancient philosophical tradition.

7. Booth, "St. Augustine's 'notitia sui,'" *AugStud* 28 (1978): 220 (n.2): "Augustine's conception of self-knowing in the *De Trinitate* is in fact a resolution of the Aristotelian problematic whose transcendent side had come down to him in the completely rigorous and all-inclusive form of neo-platonism." (Cf. similar statements of Augustine's accomplishment on 213–214.) Perhaps because he assumes that the *aporia* he describes in Aristotle looms so large in ancient thought, Booth also tends to assume that parallels in doctrine indicate dependence. E.g., at *ibid.*, 197 Booth writes that Augustine is familiar with debate over *Metaphysics* L and *De Anima* 3 on the basis of parallel doctrinal elements found in Augustine.

8. Roland Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken. Bilanz, Kritik und Weiterführung der modernen Forschung zu "De trinitate"* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 420 and 424.

9. *Ibid.*, 446–456.

10. *Ibid.*, 466–467.

11. *Ibid.*, 506.

dialogue with *Ennead* 5.3, Augustine develops an account of a necessary *se nosse* that defines the human *mens* and is, in some sense, true of the divine. This self-knowing is both an undifferentiated unity and can only be represented as threeness.¹² Kany knows well that Augustine does not think he has arrived at a formal analogy, but he suggests Augustine has laid out a rational structure that can enable progress toward the mystery of God.¹³ In that sense, ancient philosophy is consummated in a “radiant failure.”

The arguments of Booth and Kany certainly differ, yet both are concerned to see analysis of the individual self as partially founding a rational discourse about the divine, and both see this achievement as constituting Augustine’s apology for Christianity against ancient philosophical traditions.¹⁴ There are many ways in which one might engage this scholarly approach. One could examine the particular construals of philosophical history that these scholars offer, or ask about the plausibility of their accounts of the Augustinian “solution.” My own approach in what follows will take a far more oblique path. I will agree that Augustine’s concern is, in part, to offer an apologetic, but I want to offer a rather different account of that apology’s form. I want to suggest that Augustine’s central concern is not so much to offer a philosophically robust account of human and (possibly) divine thought, as it is to argue for the philosophical necessity of a community and communal discourse that rests always on a language held in faith and on belief in transformation through divine grace.

I

Before proceeding to Augustine, however, I want to sketch a few key themes found in a treatment of Augustine’s apologetic strategy recently made by John Cavadini.¹⁵ Cavadini’s essay identifies a parallel trajectory in *trin.* and in *ciu.* 8–12, and suggests that the use of this trajectory in the overtly apologetic *ciu.* enables us to understand a little more about the apologetic aspect of *trin.* Allow me to summarize just a few aspects of Cavadini’s complex argument as a foundation for my own exploration.

12. *Ibid.*, 518.

13. *Ibid.*, 534.

14. Both also are engaged in a dialogue with German idealism and its critics, though Booth’s sense of a continuity between Augustine and the Hegelian tradition is far stronger (and may perhaps be seen as bearing a family resemblance to the work of such scholars as Wayne Hankey and Werner Beierwalters).

15. John Cavadini, “Trinity and Apologetics in the Theology of St Augustine,” *Modern Theology* 29 (2013): 48–82.

For Augustine, in *ciu.* 10, the Platonists are fundamentally inconsistent: they say the divine is ultimately one and yet endorse an economy of polytheistic worship. Augustine offers his theology as more persuasive, as accepting with full seriousness the unity of the divine, and as meditating on the relationship of Creator to creation that surely follows. Because of his unity with the Father, Christ acts as the unique mediator (and thus Trinitarian theology is necessary in order to articulate Christ’s mediatorship) and brings to us the possibility of true worship. But, at its heart, this worship is an act of sacrifice: the sacrifice of the contrite heart before God, the sacrifice of the works of mercy in community, and, in all cases, a participation in Christ’s own self-giving to the Father. Therefore, faith’s importance is that it enables us to participate in Christ’s own sacrifice.

In *ciu.* 11, the end of the creation is found in true and everlasting worship of God, a worship in which creation becomes “God’s rest.” Platonist uncertainty about the body creates a system of worship in which we seek to escape embodiment and hints at a divided view of the created order—with lesser realities responsible for the physical creation. Thus, only Christian faith can deliver an account of the unified creation in a relationship of true freedom under the one God.

The doctrine of the Trinity properly articulated makes possible a complete doctrine of creation. This includes a doctrine of the human creature that emphasizes freedom in mercy and compassion, and a necessary course of growth and renewal in mercy and compassion that is our growth in freedom. This occurs in true worship, which binds us into the communion of the one Body. The Eucharistic sacrifice is, in fact, ordered toward communion with other human beings, such that growth in freedom is growth in communion and growth in communion is growth in freedom.¹⁶

Cavadini claims that the same basic argument is to be found in *trin.*, albeit in a highly compressed form.¹⁷ But, rather than explore in detail each of the ways in which he connects the two works, I want to focus on Cavadini’s description of how the trajectory he identifies helps us interpret Augustine’s interrogations of the *imago* in the second half of *trin.* Cavadini suggests that the purpose of the exploration of Trinitarian structures that we find there is, first, to show the reader “something

16. *Ibid.*, 73–74. At this point, the reader who has not followed Cavadini’s recent work on Augustine should also consult his “Eucharistic Exegesis in Augustine’s Confessions,” *AugStud* 41 (2010): 87–108.

17. Cavadini, “Trinity and Apologetics,” 70 (n.15): “One moves from a consideration of the economy of salvation, as a series of theophanies and signs pointing to the coming of the Mediator, with concomitant clarification of Trinitarian doctrine, and then to the establishment of true worship in the sacrifice of the true Mediator. The discussion moves on to a more technical articulation of the Trinity in itself.”

they can’t deny,” i.e., the mind remembering, understanding, and loving, and, as a result, possessing a mark that reveals us to be an enigma to ourselves without faith and without true worship. The “inner vision” that we are offered is the result of an application of a language drawn from faith and, if the accuracy of its application be granted, is also an *apology for* that language (an apology aimed at both non-Christian and Christian):

Interior vision, at that point, becomes the awareness of oneself as worshipping God, that is, awareness of oneself as sacramentally bound in a *societas* defined by no other qualification, cultural status or accomplishment which might serve the glory of *imperium*, but rather by Christ’s sacrifice alone. It is awareness of oneself as a kind of question continually being posed, and continually being answered in the immolation of self that is one’s sacramentally conferred identity as incorporated into the one sacrifice of Christ.¹⁸

Within the framework provided by Cavadini’s argument, I want now to make some suggestions of my own about the apologetic argument found in *trin.* 11–13.¹⁹

II

At a number of points in *trin.*, Augustine makes clear that he saw the work as partly apologetic.²⁰ Throughout the whole second half of the work we find many comments regarding two non-Christian groups: Platonists (mostly of a theurgical disposition) and the Skeptical philosophers of the New Academy (at least as they are described by Cicero). His dialogue with theurgical Platonism is particularly clear in the latter half of Book 13, as it had been throughout Book 4, but here the

18. *Ibid.*, 76. Cavadini’s emphasis on this “sacramentally conferred identity” as an identity found by healthy, loving membership within the Church community is seen particularly clearly in his reservation (cf. 81–82) concerning Rowan Williams’s description of the *imago* as being most properly “the mind of the saint—the awareness of someone reflectively living out the life of justice and charity.” Cavadini says, “[Williams’s] description may perhaps . . . slip almost imperceptibly into underwriting a split between the awareness of an inner process of transformation and renewal in faith, and an exterior economy of membership in the Church. One looks for a ‘reflective’ awareness of love and renewal that is somehow additional to and deeper than one’s simple awareness of oneself as a member of the visible *societas* of the Church.” For Williams’s description, see “The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in the *De trinitate*,” in *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum*, ed. J. Lienhard, E. Muller, and R. Teske, S.J. (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1993), 131.

19. One minor difference between our arguments is the weight I place on an anti-Skeptical concern in *trin.* I think, however, that a fuller treatment of the development of Augustine’s apologetic for communal faith would reveal the deep interrelations between his approach to theurgical Platonism and his understanding of Skepticism.

20. For brief discussion of these places see Cavadini, “Trinity and Apologetics,” 80, at n. 97 (n.15).

most space is devoted to the second group. In fact, that dialogue takes center stage from Book 11 through the first half of Book 13.

Book 8 is the *exordium* of an argument that runs initially through to the end of Book 10.²¹ This argument culminates with the discussion of *memoria*, *intellegentia*, and *uoluntas* at the end of Book 10. In the last paragraph of that book, Augustine takes a breath and postpones discussing directly the “highest and supreme essence” (*summa et altissima essentia*) of which the mind is only an image. Before doing that, he announces, we should explore the complex structures uncovered in Book 10 with reference to contexts marked by time, contexts that are easier for those who are a little slower (*tardoribus*) to understand.²² Thus, Book 11 begins again with triadic structures in vision and, from there, we move through the long discussion of the inner and the outer person that takes us toward the second extensive discussion of the *imago* in Book 14. But as usual, what seem to be Augustine’s overt statements of purpose can distract us if we do not attend to the discussions that are interwoven as the argument itself unfolds. To understand the apologetic arguments that are so central here, I will turn first to Book 13 and then look back over Books 11 and 12 in order to see how they develop aspects of the argument that flowers most fully in Book 13.

In Book 13, Augustine spends much time defending the intelligibility of human nature and arguing for the necessity of a communal life of faith if we are to attain those ends that we all seek. While Augustine insists that I cannot doubt my own existence, his central anti-Skeptic argument actually revolves around a Platonized-Stoic vision in which the unity of humanity is such that, although we cannot know what another wills, we can know in certain cases what all will.²³ We are able to conjecture reliably toward this knowledge by some sort of common feeling that is intrinsic to human nature (*de se quisque coniciat, compatiante uel conspirante*)—we do not do this merely by logical deduction, despite Augustine’s insistence that none of us knows anyone else’s soul; we do this by awareness within ourselves of what it is to be human.²⁴ And thus, despite our very different senses of what constitutes blessedness, we can know that all, in Cicero’s words, desire to

21. See Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 281ff.

22. *Trin.* 10.12.19.

23. *Trin.* 13.3.6 (CCSL 50A:387): “est quaedam sane eiusdem naturae uiuentis et ratione utentis tanta conspiratio ut cum lateat alterum quid alter uelit, nonnullae sint tamen uoluntatem omnium etiam singulis notae, et cum quisque homo nesciat quid homo alius unus uelit, in quibusdam rebus possit scire quid omnes uelint.”

24. *Trin.* 13.3.6.

be blessed.²⁵ This emphasis on common human nature will gradually reveal itself to be one of the primary threads uniting Augustine’s apologetic in these books.

As a complement to the argument that our common nature enables conjecture about the desires of all, Augustine argues that the differences in the ends people pursue result not from many being ignorant of our true end—for nobody can will what is entirely unknown. It is more plausible, Augustine suggests, that in our current state of *prauitas*, we prefer to have all that we will, rather than to will all things well.²⁶ Augustine thus offers a two-pronged argument. An anti-Skeptical account of a knowledge stemming from our shared nature is paired with a diagnosis of an equally common *prauitas* as that which accounts for the seemingly most obvious reason to reject the idea of any common knowledge. As we shall see, the second of these arguments has been extensively intimated in Books 11–12.

Out of his opposition to solipsism and Skepticism, Augustine now shapes an argument for communal faith. He argues that faith in God is necessary because the delusions and afflictions of this life divert us from attending to a goal we necessarily have for ourselves. Interestingly, Augustine does not speak of faith in God as delivering, in discrete fashion, simple statements about God. Rather, he assumes that faith delivers to us the belief that all things by which one moves toward blessedness must come from God.²⁷ A true conception of faith thus addresses the problem of our uncertainty in knowledge. It does this not by providing a knowledge otherwise entirely unknown, but by clarifying what we actually do know, by leading us to better awareness of ourselves as travelling in a company and context ordered by divine grace.

Note further that this statement about the nature of faith is surrounded by other assertions that progress in faith occurs through the possession of a growing good will in this life among those who, through grace, are also seeking progress. Thus, the statement is followed by an assertion of the importance of developing a good will in the contexts of mutual human interaction:

The man who rightly desires whatever he desires is near to being happy, and when he gets them he will be happy. . . . He already has one of these good things, one not at all to be underrated, namely a good will, if he does not desire to enjoy any of the good things human nature has a capacity for by committing or acquiring anything bad; and if he pursues such good things as are possible

25. *Trin.* 13.4.7.

26. *Trin.* 13.6.9.

27. *Trin.* 13.7.10.

in this unhappy life with a prudent, temperate, brave, and just mind, and takes possession of them as they are given.²⁸

Because this passage precedes Augustine’s précis of faith’s content, it is immediately followed by the claim that the philosopher who constructs a private vision and who has sought to will only what he or she can offers only a counsel against further misery and an expression of human pride. It is those who endure in patience and with a good will through the evils of this world and *toward* the true end who are in fact already blessed in hope.²⁹ Once again, Augustine complements an anti-Skeptical and anti-solipsistical insistence that we do know common human ends with an account of faith’s function within a communal life constituted by pursuance of goods that may appropriately be attained before the Eschaton.

III

So far I have traced only the argument of Book 13’s first half. Allow me now to suggest ways in which this argument culminates Augustine’s discussion of the relationship between the inner and the outer person in Books 11 and 12. Augustine does not begin Book 11 by looking for illustrations of the Trinitarian life in that which pertains simply to the outer person in the abstract, as in that which pertains to the “decaying” outer man of 2 Cor. 4:16. Augustine tells us that we may find the investigation of Book 11 helpful both because, as created, we think more easily in material terms, and because of a weakness that affects our minds, now so attached to the corporeal.³⁰ Then, discussing trinities of cognition that are supposedly “external,” Augustine reveals to his readers the unavoidable presence of the inner person, her

28. *Trin.* 13.6.9 (CCSL 50A:393, trans. is a modified version of Hill, WSA, *The Trinity*, I/5, 349): “propinquat enim beato qui bene uult quaecumque uult, et quae adeptus cum fuerit beatus erit. . . . quorum bonorum habet aliquid iam id que non parui aestimandum, eam ipsam scilicet uoluntatem bonam, qui de bonis quorum capax est humana natura, non de ullius mali perpetratione uel adeptione gaudere desiderat, et bona qualia et in hac misera uita esse possunt prudenti, temperanti, forti, et iusta mente sectatur et quantum datur assequitur.” For the manner in which Augustine reinterprets the political virtues listed here (possibly following Neo-platonic precedent) see Robert Dodaro “Political and Theological Virtues in Augustine, *De Trinitate*,” *Medioevo. Rivista I storia della filosofia medievale* 31 (2006), 29–48; and idem, “Political and Theological Virtues in Augustine, Letter 155 to Macedonius,” *Augustiniana* 54 (2004): 431–474. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of *trin.* in this essay are adapted versions of Edmund Hill (cf. WSA I/5 and Stephen McKenna (cf. FOTC 45). I have also made occasional use of the excellent Italian translation and notes of Giovanni Catapano and Beatrice Cillerai, *Agostino. La Trinita* (Milan: Bompiani, 2012).

29. *Trin.* 13.7.10.

30. *Trin.* 11.1.1. Cf. 11.5.8. For a third passage in which Augustine discusses the problem of thinking toward God as resulting from our participation in the decaying of the outer person, slowly “con-

dispositions and failing nature.³¹ Thus, in order to understand the character of those external trinities Augustine meditates upon the links in the inner person between will and image. We may speak of a person possessing a multitude of wills, or acts of will, connected together as a chain:

But all the wills that are bound to each other are good if the end to which all are referred is good; but if it is bad, then all are bad. And, therefore, the series of good wills that are joined together is a kind of road on which there are, as it were, certain steps for those ascending to happiness. . . . Blessed are they who by their deeds and conduct sing the song of the steps. . . . But if something so pleases us that the will rests and finds some delight in it, yet this is not yet the end for which it is striving; but this, too, is referred to something further, so that it may be regarded not as the rest of the citizen in his native land, but as it were the refreshment, or even the lodging of a traveller.³²

The communal structures that support the faithful will as it is being nurtured toward health are only hinted at here, although recognizing whom Augustine indicates in his references to those singing the song of the steps is not difficult! What we saw in Book 13 is here only *in nuce*, but it is here in Augustine's insistence on the importance of travelling together the road that forms our wills. Only thus can a refreshment come that will enable the gradual purification of the mind that, without it, is unable to recognize the character of the *imago Dei* that we are.

The theme unfolds a little further in Book 12. Augustine's extended attempt in that book to read as an allegory the relationship between male and female in 1 Cor. 11:7 and 1 Tim. 2:13–15 ends with an account of the inner person being renewed through the gradual re-ordering of the will in the context of communal life. It is the works of mercy that take center stage in this renewal, because such acts are performed by those who have faith and are ordered by love toward the worship of God. Such acts gradually equip the inner person to govern the outer and reverse the obsession with lower goods and images that has led to our decay.³³ In a move which shows the hints given in Book 11 gradually being filled out toward the fuller account of

formed to this world" (cf. Rom. 12:2). Cf. also *retr.* 2.15, where Augustine comments on 11.5.9 to emphasize the possibility of an appropriate love of that which is seen in the creation.

31. *Trin.* 11.3.6; cf. 11.4.7.

32. *Trin.* 11.6.10 (CCSL 50:346–347, trans. FOTC 45:330): "rectae autem sunt uoluntates et omnes sibimet religatae si bona est illa quo cunctae referuntur; si autem praua est, prauae sunt omnes. et ideo rectarum uoluntatum conexio iter est quoddam ascendentium ad beatitudinem quod certis uelut passibus agitur. . . . beati ergo qui factis et moribus cantant canticum graduum. . . . si autem aliquid ita placet ut in eo cum aliqua delectatione uoluntas adquiescat, nondum est tamen illud quo tenditur, sed et hoc refertur ad aliud; deputetur non tamquam patria ciuis sed tamquam refectio uel etiam mansio uiatoris."

33. *Trin.* 12.8.13.

Book 13, Augustine emphasizes that the obsession with individual possession that marks fallen humanity paradoxically stems from a desire for *more* than “the whole” (*plus aliquid uniuerso appetens*).³⁴ Adumbrating a theme central to the first half of Book 13, Augustine speaks of each of us possessing our bodies as a part of “the whole,” and of laws that govern that “whole.” The “whole” of which he speaks, of which we must learn to be part, whose law we must learn to embrace, is the created order; a little later Augustine insists that the soul’s true destiny consists in following God as its ruler “throughout the whole creation” (*in uniuersitate creaturae*).³⁵ The desire for self-determination and control over one’s environment is thus now relocated as irrational, and the common life of those singing the song of the steps is the context within which we may begin to practice again the communal acting and loving that, as human beings, is the Creator’s gift to us. As Augustine writes a few sentences later:

When, therefore, the soul gives thought either to itself or to others with a good will which aims at grasping interior and higher things, things that are not possessed privately, but in common by all who love them, things that are possessed neither in a limited sense nor enviously, but in a free embrace, then, even if it is mistaken in something through ignorance of temporal matters (for here too the soul must act in time!) and does not hold to the mode of acting that it ought, this is only a “human temptation” (1 Cor. 10:13). It is a great thing in this life, which we travel as if returning on a road, to spend one’s time such that no temptation takes hold of us other than the human.³⁶

Here, looking to “higher things”—a concept rather easily taken as a marker of Augustinian solipsism—is linked to looking at that which is common and at that which consequently must be “grasped” or “understood” only in a “free embrace.” *Castus*, which I have translated as “free,” might be thought to mean only “chaste,” but in English this would fail to grasp the import of the opposition between possessing something with narrowness (*angustia uel inuidia*) and *castus*, which follows

34. *Trin.* 12. 9.14 (CCSL 50:368): “plus aliquid uniuerso appetens.”

35. *Ibid.* Such obedience is, not surprisingly, expressed as a possibility not taken up: “cum in uniuersitate creaturae deum rectorem secuta legibus eius optime gubernari potuisset . . .” This aspect of Augustine’s apologetic has its roots in his early polemic against Manichaeism and Skepticism. There, arguing for an ordered intelligible universe as the context within which any given part fits is central; see, e.g., *c. Faust.* 21.5.

36. *Trin.* 12.10.15 (CCSL 50:369): “Cum ergo bona uoluntate ad interiora ac superiora percipienda quae non priuatim sed communiter ab omnibus qui talia diligunt sine ulla angustia uel inuidia casto possidentur amplexu uel sibi uel aliis consulit, etsi fallatur in aliquo per ignorantiam temporalium quia et hoc temporaliter gerit et modum agendi non teneat quem debebat, humana temptatio est. Et magnum est hanc uitam sic degere quam uelut uiam redeuntes carpinus ut temptatio nos non apprehendat nisi humana.”

Augustine’s emphasis on the common possession of that which is higher. This desire is certainly “chaste” in the sense that it does not grasp, seeking to possess as its own, but it is also free in its desire to think of the whole, to be part of that which is beyond itself.

Thus far, we have considered ways in which Books 11 and 12 lead up to the first half of Book 13. Together, these three sections offer an extended apology for a communal life built on a common faith and in which the good will is nurtured.³⁷

IV

Even if I am right about the direction of Augustine’s apologetic in Books 11–14, how does it help us to engage the sort of arguments that Booth and Kany offer? The first step is to consider how the apology of Books 11–13 relates to the argument of Books 9 and 10. At one level, there is a deep continuity; Augustine’s account of the triads he describes in Books 9 and 10 is persistently concerned not so much with the boundary between the “inner” and the “outer” triads, but with the continuum between them. The triads of “outer” vision and cognition necessarily involve the inner person and draw us toward an investigation of that inner life. Indeed, the more we understand the interrelationship between memory and desire, the more clearly we understand the necessity of a rightly ordered relationship between inner and outer. There is then a deep continuity when, in Books 11–13, Augustine gradually draws out an apology for that communal life in faith and worship that alone can form us and orient us toward right contemplation.

And yet, at another level, there is a rather obvious discontinuity. In Books 11–13, Augustine does not offer an apology for the conceptual language with which he describes the mind in Books 9–10—other than that which is simply the language of the faith itself! Certainly, Augustine does argue in those books for the coherence of the conceptual structures he deploys—and this should probably be

37. If space permitted, we would now turn to the second half of Book 13. In those pages, which are intended to complete the apologetic for the life of faith that he has discussed in detail, Augustine offers a defense of the manner in which the Son became incarnate. In short, the manner of the incarnation is supposed to persuade us of the need for grace and how its reality has truly united us in him. But the literature on that famous discussion is vast. Were it to be integrated into this investigation, it would only serve to distract us. In addition to drawing out this Christological (and Trinitarian) completion of his argument, a fuller treatment would also need to offer an extended discussion of the gradual development of the apologetic arguments I have isolated here. For some helpful starting points, see Cavadini, “Trinity and Apologetics”(n.15); Lewis Ayres, “Christology and Faith in Augustine’s *De trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII–XV,” *AugStud* 29 (1998): 111–139. Note that what I offer in this essay augments and corrects that earlier discussion in a number of ways.

read as in some sense apologetic. But when he directly identifies his task as taking on adherents of non-Christian philosophical traditions, he does not return again to these structures; rather, he argues for his mode of inquiry and for the community of faith that is its home.

How, then, does offering *this* apology help Augustine to strengthen the plausibility of Books 9–10? My first answer is that arguing for the global necessity of a communal life in faith provides more context for, and renders more plausible, the particular modes of thinking in faith that is performed in Books 9–10. And, if we are to see this connection, we must turn for a moment to those modes. In my own most recent treatment of Books 9 and 10, I made central the principle that Augustine analyzes the mind *in the light of Trinitarian faith* even as he does so in order *to illustrate* Trinitarian faith. In the *exordium* that is Book 8, Augustine draws us toward confessing that we know and experience love itself, only in order to demand that this love *must* be Trinitarian if love is God. We cannot yet see with any clarity how it is so, but faith and reasoned interrogation in its light insists that it must be so. Then, in Books 9 and 10, Augustine uses the language of Nicaea to interrogate the *imago* in us on the grounds that the *imago* necessarily illustrates God’s tri-unity. The whole *exercitatio* strains our minds toward Book 15, where, once again and as we shall see in a moment, Augustine repeats the exercise of Book 8, in which he asks whether we can see the Trinitarian structure that, by faith, we know to be true of God. The language of faith is not transcended here because, despite the advances made between Books 8 and 15, we must answer the question similarly: we remain unable to sustain our sight even of what we know to be true.

However, and this is my second answer, if we can see that the communal *life* of faith is the necessary context for that reformation that is necessary for appropriate worship and, hence, for knowledge of God, then we may be a little more clear about how the *language* of faith may aid our interrogation of the intelligible, well-ordered creation. At the same time, throughout Books 9–10, Augustine insists that we cannot understand how we may move toward a deeper understanding and worship of the divine without being ever more attentive to the need for a reformation of the process by which that which he likens to an “inner word” is formed. Now, in Books 11–13, he has suggested with far greater clarity how the communal life of faith aids the process of such a reformation.

However, and thirdly, Augustine is not simply offering an apology for something that he has already said. He is also setting the context within which he will be able to state with new poignancy the importance of embracing our failure to achieve any full understanding in this life. Once one is persuaded of the need to accept the task of living in charity and in faith in the concrete community of Christ’s body so that

the mind’s gaze might be purified, the importance of confessing ignorance, even when exercising distinctive intellectual gifts, becomes clearer.

Therefore, it should not surprise us that the character of our knowing and not knowing in faith takes center stage in Book 15, the book where Augustine finally returns to the task of talking directly about the Trinity in whose image we are made, a task postponed at the end of Book 10, but taken up here and only after his extended apology for the communal life of faith. In Book 8, as I noted above, Augustine calls us to look as directly at love as we are able in order to recognize that true love simply is God. This, in turn, means that, of necessity, it is Trinitarian, even if we fail to see how it is so. Like catching sight of the sun, the divine light is too much for us, and we cannot sustain our gaze long enough to see it for what it is. Now, in Book 15 Augustine begins the first section of his main argument by slowly discussing for us this exact question. He offers a brief account of the divine nature and asserts that each of the characteristics he names is true of each of the divine three. He asks: “Where and how will the Trinity appear?” before again listing several divine attributes.³⁸ Gradually they are reduced to three: eternity, wisdom, and blessedness. Interestingly, the process of thought Augustine performs here is not that of a sluggish mind, but of a mind well able to understand Augustine’s thinking so far; he is, in other words, showing that even the smart must admit they will eventually come to grief along this path. The important question remains: in this reduction have we arrived at the Trinity? No, because, even here, the three may be reduced to one. All such attributes are identical in God and, thus, the Trinity seems to have disappeared yet again. Posing a rhetorical question, Augustine exclaims: “What modes of arguing, then, force or strength of understanding, what liveliness of reasoning, gaze of thought will show . . . that this one Wisdom called God is a Trinity?”³⁹

Regarding Book 8, Augustine notes that the Trinity never actually appeared (*nulla trinitas apparebat*). Even toward the end of the book, when love itself was discussed, “the Trinity dawned only a little” (*eluxit palulum trinitas*). But after the progression of Books 9–10 and the reprise of Books 11–14, he asks again: “Where does the Trinity appear?”⁴⁰

Subtly insinuating the answer that the astute reader might have sensed by the end of Book 10, Augustine answers his question only obliquely. He does so

38. *Trin.* 15.5.7 (CCSL 50A:468): “ubi aut quomodo trinitas apparebit?”

39. *Trin.* 15.6.9 (CCSL 50A:471): “quis itaque disputandi modus, quanam tandem uis intellegendi atque potentia, quae uiuacitas rationis, quae acies cogitationis ostendet, ut alia iam taceam, hoc unum quod sapientia dicitur deus quomodo sit trinitas?”

40. *Trin.* 15.6.10.

by discussing Paul’s image of us seeing through a mirror and in an enigma (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). Gradually, however, two elements of an answer emerge. The first is quite simply that the Trinity “appears” only in moments when the mind suddenly recognizes or judges accurately something in its search to see how the language of faith might correspond to the reality of God’s simplicity. But these moments of recognition and judgment are effective and purifying if they are located within a communal life that is reaching out to God. This life must also embrace the inevitable recognition of divine transcendence as it occurs within a life being formed into the life that is an adoption into Christ’s own sacrificial prayer by the practice and life of common worship.

Allow me to fill out a little more the structure of the intellectual movement Augustine thinks he performed by all his circling around the question initially posed in Book 8, and that has occupied Books 9–14. Let us turn for a few moments to part of his consideration of the Wisdom or Word beginning at 15.11.20. This discussion is one of three concerning Father, Son, and Spirit that are offered in turn. On the surface, each of these seeks to summarize what may be learned from the analogical work that has been undertaken. At 15.11.20, Augustine repeats his exhortation that if we seek to understand the Word of God, we must look to our own “inner word.” But what we seek is carefully phrased: we seek to arrive at the word “through its likeness, *of whatever sort it may be*, in an enigma, the Word of God may *in some manner* be seen.”⁴¹ Augustine’s qualifications draw our attention to the uncertainties of any seemingly positive summary of what has been learnt through the exercising of the mind that has taken place since Book 8. In the paragraphs that follow, Augustine makes an intellectual movement through different ways in which scripture speaks of the uniqueness of God’s Word, and suggests how we may gradually recognize connections between these different statements of the divine reality. We are drawn then to the inner word and meditate on the utter truth and certainty of that which the Father speaks via his Word. Augustine highlights for us likenesses (*similitudines*) between the “inner word” and the divine, but, in each case, Augustine emphasizes ways in which the similarity enables us to make a little more of the progress that we must make toward the perfection of the image.

At the culmination of these sentences, Augustine celebrates the fact that, at this point, the perfected “image” will no longer come via the mirror, but will come directly and simply as we see “face to face.”⁴² Immediately following this he asks: “In this enigma, in this likeness of whatever sort it may be, who can explain how

41. *Trin.* 15.11.20 (CCSL 50A:487): “per cuius qualemcumque similitudinem sicut in aenigmate uideatur utcumque dei uerbum.”

42. *Trin.* 15.11.21.

great its unlikeness is?”⁴³ He then offers a brief anti-Skeptical rehearsal of our own knowing as a preliminary to a series of interrogations in which Augustine explores how what we see in the human “word” fails to describe that which seems to be logically necessary for the Triune God.⁴⁴ In both the positive and negative moments of the movement Augustine performs for us, understanding comes as we gradually learn to make distinctions and to highlight similarity and difference.

But the end of the intellect’s movement is actually narrated before Augustine offers this summary. The passage I have summarized is preceded by an exhortation toward the task of thinking in faith and Augustine tells us that as we recognize our inability to grasp the Wisdom by which God knows all as present, we should come to a point at which we cry out, in the words of Psalm 138:6, *mirificata est scientia tua ex me*, “your knowledge has been exalted above me,” knowing now that I understand (*intelligo*) something of the divine incomprehensibility, *because* I cannot understand myself (*me ipsum*). But in the *exercitatio* of reaching this point, the fire that sustains the search burns out.⁴⁵ It should be noted that desire for God flames out not because one somehow rises toward a seeing of the divine, but in that movement which draws us into moments of positive recognition and toward moments in which we recognize our inability to understand and, thus, back to the life and language of the faith delivered to us. In this manner, understanding is tied to recognition of mystery, to the need for grace, and to the need for us to embrace life within the communal matrix of faith.

The very same Psalm text, 138:6, reappears toward the end of Augustine’s summary discussion of the Spirit;⁴⁶ in fact, it commences the final section of that discussion. In the middle of a conclusion in which he calls those who cannot grasp his explanations to believe in the scriptures and to seek to understand by praying, studying, and living well (*orando et quaerendo et bene uiuendo*⁴⁷) and in which he again celebrates the human *mens* as a site for intellectual exercise (in the light of faith’s language), Ps 138:6 further qualifies the already careful qualifications of this latter celebration. This verse is followed by a change of person and register as Augustine now addresses his soul directly before the prayer that ends *trin.* as a whole. The message of this address to his soul is one we should by now expect: at both the beginning and the end Augustine asks: “Where do you stand until all

43. *Trin.* 15.11.21 (CCSL 50A:490, trans. FOTC 45:480): “in hoc aenigmate, in hac qualicumque similitudine quanta sit etiam dissimilitudo quis potest explicare?”

44. *Trin.* 15.12.21–13.22. Note also that here Augustine refers us to the *Acad.* for more detail.

45. *Trin.* 15.7.13.

46. *Trin.* 15.27.50.

47. *Trin.* 15.27.49 (CCSL 50A:531).

your diseases have been healed by him who is merciful to all your faults? . . . Who, therefore, heals all your diseases, except he who is merciful to all your sins?”⁴⁸ Between these questions, Augustine recognizes that the soul has certainly seen “many true things” (*multa uera*) and he speaks both of the soul making intellectual distinctions in the light that renders such discrimination possible and of that light as actively “showing” the soul these things. But, because of sin, the soul is simply unable to fix its gaze on that which is “seen.” Hence, we are thrown back onto the one doctor who can heal our sickness and on to the prayer for aid that ends the work. In other words, once again, Augustine rehearses the culminating argument of Book 8, not to subvert it but, rather, to hammer it home with ever increasing profundity. Thus, when Augustine writes and performs in his own voice a Christian ascent toward understanding, within which the one thinking not only embraces but also seeks out the experience of being thwarted by the divine mystery—the line of sight along any seemingly clear path toward sight constantly being broken by that mystery—he is showing how the Christian thinker must be constantly drawn into confession and into thankfulness for the way of faith. By extension, he must also be thankful for the faithful community that sings the song of the steps and that knows that all progress rests on grace, on being drawn slowly and appropriately toward the perfection of the will.⁴⁹

V

By this point, a reader could easily be forgiven for assuming that, while I began with the arguments of Booth and Kany, this essay is actually about something quite different. But I do think that this “something quite different” enables us to get some unexpected purchase on their arguments. I will conclude with three observations.

First and perhaps most obviously, I have no objection to saying that Augustine makes use of themes and doctrines from Platonic or other ancient non-Christian traditions in his texts. I do not even have any great objection in principle to arguing that, in a particular passage, Augustine suggests a novel solution to a persistent problem discussed by an ancient tradition. Such an argument could certainly be made without the need to show that such was Augustine’s intention (and thus I do certainly think that offering this sort of argument requires very careful discussion

48. *Trin.* 15.27.50 (CCSL 50A:532–533, trans. FOTC 45:521–522): “ubi stas donec ab eo qui propitius factus est omnibus iniquitatibus tuis sanentur omnes languores tui? . . . quis ergo sanat omnes languores tuos nisi qui propitius fit omnibus iniquitatibus tuis?”

49. Much more could be written here, but I intend for this to nuance and/or deepen my account of Augustine’s Christological epistemology as offered in chapter 6 of *Augustine and the Trinity* (n.21).

of intent). One might well want to argue that the particular ways in which Booth or Kany (or another commentator) construes the shape of an ancient tradition is unpersuasive, but the idea that Augustine might have contributed to such a tradition is not *per se* problematic.

Second, even though I do not think there is anything *per se* problematic about talking of Augustine in this way, the scholarship which does so always seems to have found seductive a move that we should resist, namely, playing down the extent to which Augustine sees his apologetic as a call (a) for the accepting the centrality of a faith held in common and (b) for humility in thought. The more one abstracts Augustine’s “philosophical” contribution from its theological matrix in order to compare it (favorably) with others that have come before, the more one forgets the demands of that matrix. Augustine is not simply claiming that the philosopher needs a supplementary knowledge to achieve more satisfactory results; he is suggesting that the very enterprise of philosophical thinking can proceed coherently only if the very structures of speculation are re-conceived as a movement of the soul into faith and into the reformation that grace makes possible in the community of the faithful. It is this radical re-conception of the nature of thinking, of the nature of belief and interrogation, that I suspect is often hidden from us by the scholarly approaches that have been my foil for this essay.

Finally, while I will grant that Augustine certainly offers to us resources that remain important for any Christian attempting to think the divine, I must qualify this by observing that he does so not only by offering a set of conceptual structures that we may use to show our own superior rationality, but also by insisting that we face essential questions about our approach toward knowing and thinking when redemption is what we need most. In an Augustinian light, the one who attempts to think the divine makes progress only insofar as she or he is bound to the pain, to the loss, and, paradoxically, to the God-given desire to make the sacrifice of the contrite in heart.