THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

THE TRINITY

Edited by

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CHAPTER 9

AUGUSTINE ON THE TRINITY

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THE account given of Augustine in this chapter will not accord with that still to be found in many textbooks. Those accounts frequently treat Augustine as the paradigm and origin of a distinct western tradition, over-emphasizing the unity of God, claiming to know far too much about God's inner life, forgetting that in all things the Father works through Son and (or 'in') Spirit, and separating reflection on the Trinity from reflection on the God who is revealed in Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection. One of the key sources for this reading in the twentieth century was the nineteenth-century French Jesuit scholar Theodore de Régnon. Although de Régnon's purpose in identifying different 'Greek' and 'Latin' paradigms of Trinitarian theology was to argue for the necessity of both, later scholars tended to take this division as an opposition, and eventually many identified the Latin model as deficient. More recent scholarship has questioned the adequacy of the model as such, and argued that Augustine himself has been grossly misrepresented by it (Barnes 1995). In this chapter I will make no attempt to discuss and refute aspects of this model directly (indeed, it has received no scholarly defence for some decades); instead, I offer a positive exposition of Augustine's mature Trinitarian theology that builds on the best of recent scholarship.

1. FATHER AND SON

From eternity God speaks his Word, the Word in whom he determines all that will be (for the significance of the Father's role in Augustine's theology see Ayres 2010: ch. 7; and Dunham 2007). This Word is also Wisdom ('ordering all things well' as we find at Wisd. 8:1) and Image; as 'God from God' the Word is a perfect image of the Father's nature. To help us understand what it means to speak of God's Word Augustine draws an analogy with an artist who plans in her mind a work of art before bringing it into being externally. We might say she plans through a creative act of developing a knowing of what she wishes to create, or we might say that she plans by bringing to life the skill she has in her

mind. Following this analogy, the Word or Wisdom of God is the Father's 'creative knowledge or skill' or *ars*. The Latin term *ars* gives rise to the modern English 'art', but it has a range of senses that are frequently lost in English. In Latin the term can describe the learned skill of an artist, the set of principles that will lead to the product of her skill exhibiting form and beauty. But, Augustine tells us, the Father's Wisdom or Word is an eternal, living, and active creative knowledge (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 1–3).

Augustine also offers the analogy of what he terms the 'interior word' conceived in the mind of a person thinking and desiring. Augustine speaks not just of any conception or plan present in the mind, but of a 'word' conceived in truth and conceived through rightly ordered love. Such a word—at one point he gives the example of 'God'—is a 'word' we speak internally because of and for the increase of love, and it is a 'word' which orients us to that which is true. It is, as Augustine writes, 'a true Son of the heart' (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 1.9). When we find Augustine also emphasizing that the Father speaks his Word in order to reveal himself, we see Augustine emphasizing that the Father's self-revelation in the Word is necessarily a revelation of who he is (the Son is also Truth) and necessarily a revelation of the Father as a God of Love.

For Augustine God is both intelligible and revealed as mystery: intelligible, because the Father reveals himself in the Son and in the creation (which exists in the Word and thus reflects the Father's self-revelation); but mystery because God transcends all analogies we may offer as created beings and always eludes any final grasp of the intellect. The Father's 'speaking' of his Word is, for example, an eternal speaking unmarked by the temporality that accompanies ours, and the Father's Word exists eternally, distinct, but without dividing God into Gods, being all the fullness of what it is to be God. We can strain our minds toward such a reality but it cannot be finally grasped by us.

The second of the divine three is not only Word and Wisdom and Image, but also Son. The Father generates a Son who shares all that the Father is save being the Father. How should we understand the relationship between Father and Son? What does it mean to say that the Son is 'generated'? Christians came to use this terminology because Jn 1:18 speaks of the 'only-begotten', but its meaning is not obvious. Indeed, one problem for all Nicene theologians during the fourth century was to find a way of distinguishing the Father's act of generation from all acts of creating (because then the Son would not be truly God) and from all acts that give rise to two beings who must be called two Gods (because then the most fundamental confession of Jews and Christians, that God is one, would be compromised).

Eventually Nicene theologians came to agree that this act of generation is unique: it fits into no category of generation that we know—however much we can make use of very distant likenesses in the created order. The scriptural language of 'Father' and 'Son' enables us to recognize the continuity of nature that must obtain between the one who generates and the one who is generated (just as it does between human fathers and children). The same language suggests the eternity of Father and Son (if 'Father' may always be predicated of God then the Son must always have been there). The language of Word and Wisdom enables us to push a little further. But all Nicenes are also certain that one of our key confessions about this unique generation is that while it results in a

distinction (Father and Son are distinct and not identical), there is no division of the divine (identifying Father and Son does not lead to the conclusion that now we have two divine beings). Whatever analogy we use, then, at some point we come up against the sheer incomprehensibility of the act for those of us who are created. Augustine's contribution to this tradition is to reflect on how the paradox of distinction without division presents itself to thought when we consider what it means for the Father to generate a Son who shares all that the Father is within the divine simplicity.

Through Faith toward Understanding

But before we press further into this mystery we must take a few steps back and reflect on Augustine's understanding of the theological task, specifically on the distinction between believing and moving toward understanding. Augustine is convinced that Christian attempts to understand scriptural discussion of God are founded in a rightly formed faith—a knowledge and acceptance of Scriptural imagery, language, and logic. One of the clearest examples is to be seen in his favourite style of Trinitarian summary:

> although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and therefore he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. (*The Trinity* 1.4.7)

This sparse language comes to Augustine from the Latin anti-Monarchian tradition. The Monarchians, flourishing during the early third century, argued that Son and Spirit are no more than names for the Father at work in the created order. Latin Trinitarian theology came into its own against this tradition, with figures such as Tertullian (*c.*160–220) and Novatian (*c.*200–58). Whereas their opponents argued that Jn 14:10 ('I am in the Father, and the Father is in me') implied that Father and Son were the same one divine reality, Tertullian and Novatian argued that the very grammar of Scripture here demands that for one to be 'in' another, one is not the other. Augustine drew extensively on this tradition to articulate his summary statements of Trinitarian belief, finding in this sparse language careful attention to the foundational Scriptural logic of Trinitarian belief.

We advance toward understanding when we gradually grow in our skill at imagining how these words may be understood of a reality which is unmarked by space, time, and the divisions or imperfections of the created order. This is for Augustine partly a discipline of the mind in which we learn to remove from our interpretation of Scripture's logic any temporal or material qualifications, and it is a search for correspondences between Scripture's language and metaphors and the divine realities signified by that language. An example of the former is given below in discussion of generation without division; for an example of the latter see sermons 23 and 53, which were preached on consecutive days, where God's 'hands' and 'face' are God's 'power' and 'knowledge' (Augustine 1990b: 56–65 and 1991: 66–75). These correspondences are often inherited by Augustine from earlier tradition, and where they are new he is

clear that they must follow clues within the text itself. Augustine's account is also shaped by his insistence that the 'missions' of Son and Spirit are intended to reveal their eternal 'processions' from the Father (Ayres 2010: ch. 7; Augustine, *The Trinity* 4.20.27–21.32). We have already seen Augustine reach out through deduction and a loose form of analogy toward understanding, and his sermons are peppered with passages in a similar style (Cavadini 2004). Throughout this chapter we turn again and again to texts where he attempts to push as far as the human intellect is able to reach, even if it must fall back constantly confessing its inability. Throughout our investigation, however, we must bear in mind that Augustine sees such an ascent of thought as fruitful only if it is founded in an ongoing reformation of desire and intellectual life shaped by the work of grace. Only through grace's education and drawing of the intellect and will are we drawn both to transcend the materiality of the fallen intellect and to accept and learn more of the mystery of the divine. This is always an education and a drawing that happens through our incorporation (by the Spirit) into the body of Christ. Christ's human words draw us into the mystery of his divine and transformative presence. In this sense, although Augustine celebrates the gifts of the intellect in those who have them, the smartest in the body of Christ must always learn from the one who is most humble before the divine mystery and most sincerely confesses his or her need for divine aid. In this sense theological thinking begins in the mystery of dying and rising with and in Christ. There is no salvation by Ph.D. alone (and this is one of the places where one sees how closely Augustine relates his account of the eternal processions of Son and Spirit to the work of redemption; see Ayres 2010: ch. 7; Gioia 2008).

Generation and Simplicity

In order to follow Augustine's reflections on how we can understand the Father generating a Son in the context of the divine simplicity, we need, first, to think about how Augustine understands the divine as such. For the mature Augustine there is only one truly simple being, God: all that we know in the created order is to some degree composite, composed of parts. Some things are composite in purely material senses, many are the subject of accidents. In its simplest usage an 'accident' is an attribute that is not essential to a being: a car may be purple or orange; a person may be wise or foolish. Accidents thus involve distinguishing between the essence of a thing and that which qualifies it (Augustine knows that some ancient philosophers argued for a category of accidents that were inseparable, but he dismisses the idea that we could make use of such an idea in the case of God). For Augustine, however, God cannot be conceived in such terms because God is the fullness and source of all such qualities—God is Wisdom, and Beauty and Justice and Goodness itself. Indeed, in Trinitarian discussions, one of Augustine's favourite ways of describing God's simplicity is just to say that God 'is' what God is said to 'have': when we say that God lives or is good we should understand that as meaning that God is life itself or goodness itself.

Divine simplicity is, thus, not only a doctrine about God, it is also a doctrine about the nature of the created order and its relationship to God. Augustine sees the created order as constantly sustained by Word and Spirit, the divine fullness played out for us through the changeable beauties of this world. For all in the created order to be informed by the same dependable perfect source, God must be this unique transcendent fullness, a unity which precedes all number. It makes no sense to speak of God, this transcendent fullness, as changing, as potentially losing that status, or in any sense needing to achieve it (Acts 17:24–5). But we should not assume that Augustine envisages God's immutability as simply the opposite to the dynamism and action that we often see as the attributes of change. Of the nine categories that Aristotle discusses, Augustine states that action is the only one that can without qualification be applied to God. At the same time, Augustine takes from Ps. 121:4 the term *idipsum*—the identical or the selfsame—to describe God (Ayres 2010: ch. 8; Marion 2008; Augustine, *Sermons* 7.7), but he is clear that for God to be this is for God actively to remain so from eternity.

When we ask about Augustine's Scriptural evidence for this account we must point not only to texts which speak directly of God's unchangeability (Mal. 3:6, James 1:17) but also to texts which speak of God creating through the Word who is immediately present in all things (Jn 1:3–4, 10; Wisd. 7:24, 27), of the creation as revealing the glory of God (Ps. 19:1; 104:24), of the existence of all in God (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 6:8; Wisd. 11:21; Isa. 6:3). Scriptural material is certainly here drawn together by a set of themes adapted from earlier Christian thinkers and non-Christian Platonists, but one can also say that resonances within and between a host of Scriptural texts are drawn out and highlighted through careful adaptation of those themes to Christian ends.

Now that we have seen something of what Augustine means by the expression 'God is what God is said to have', we can return to how Augustine articulates the mystery of the Father generating the Son without division. We must, for Augustine, speak of the Father as generating another, a Son who is his Word and Wisdom, because Scripture demands it. And, yet, if the Son possesses all that it is to be God, then the Son, like the Father, must be the one undivided source of all and there seems to have been no division of that one source. Thus, if we try to speak of the Father generating one who shares all that the Father is then we are drawn inevitably back to confessing the inescapable unity of God. Thus we can speak of generation, but we must also speak of that which generates being one with the one who generates.

Under the conditions of created existence this can only seem a paradox. Seeing that it might logically be so under the conditions of divine simplicity does not enable us to comprehend God's existence, but it does help to refine our sense of what may and may not be said about God and the ways in which God's existence transcends our created understanding. To undertake such a task is to move our hearts, minds, and imaginations through the creation toward the Creator. Through this discussion of the Son's generation Augustine develops an argument that is uniquely his, and yet he does so at the service of highly traditional Nicene language—the Son is eternally God from God. This is a combination we shall see again.

'Only what he sees the Father doing...'

Augustine's mature exegeses of Jn 5:19 ('The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing...') offers us an excellent point of departure for seeing in more positive terms how Augustine thinks we can speak of the relationships between Father and Son. Naturally enough, Augustine refuses the idea that the Son sees the Father performing an action and then copies it. Such an interpretation would not only import temporal and spatial differentiation into the relations between Father and Son, it would also contradict Jn 1:3 ('All things came into being through him'). Augustine's solution is simple:

> In your flesh you hear in one place, you see in another; in your heart you hear there where you see. If the image [does] this, how much more powerfully [does] he [do it] whose image this is? Therefore the Son both hears and the Son sees; and the Son is the very seeing and hearing. And for him hearing is the same as being, and for him seeing is the same as being. But for you seeing is not the same as being, because even if you should lose your sight, you can still be, and if you should lose your hearing, you can still be. (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 18.10)

The Son's being is identical with his seeing of the Father, and the Father is identical with his showing to the Son. In the 23rd of his tractates on John Augustine emphasizes, again, the failure of any bodily analogy for speaking or showing: 'simplicity is there. The Father shows the Son what he is doing and by showing begets the Son' (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 23.9). This last sentence is an important one: the Son is identical with his seeing of the Father, but Augustine does not envisage a sequence in which the Son is generated from the Father and then 'sees': the Son's being 'shown' is the same as his being generated, and the Son's seeing is his being.

Augustine's exegesis here fleshes out more positively how he sees Father and Son as each simple, as each act, and how he envisages a Trinitarian order grounded in the Father's eternal act. Note also that this more positive picture enables Augustine to be attentive to the text of Scripture in his account of the relations between Father and Son, but it also allows him to enter more deeply into the mystery of Scripture using human terms to speak of God's unique mode of existence. And thus we see here something of the movement from faith to understanding, but a movement always also into Scripture's depths.

2. The Holy Spirit

For Augustine Scripture and the inherited faith of the Church tells us that the Trinity consists of Father, Son, and Spirit. Father and Son are each named in many unique ways that provide us with obvious points of reference when we try to understand their eternal characteristics and mutual relationships. In the case of the Spirit, Scripture tells us much

about the activities and roles of the Spirit in the life of Christ and the Church, but does not give us anything like the set of unique titles we have for Father and Son. The Spirit is, most importantly, named as the Holy Spirit, but this is a combination of terms that surely must also be true of Father and Son? However, Augustine's mature pneumatology takes the character of Scripture's naming of the Spirit not as a failing for which later doctrinal development must make up, but as an invitation to the Christian heart and mind, an invitation to see why the Spirit is so named, an invitation to come slowly to understand the heart of the Christian life and the nature of God (for Augustine's mature pneumatology see Ayres 2010: ch. 9; Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John* 6.9–14; and *The Trinity* 15.17.27–19.37).

At the foundations of Augustine's account lies Rom. 5:5: 'the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us'. Augustine reads this verse as asserting that the Spirit gives us love, but the Spirit gives us the Spirit and thus the love that we receive *is* the Spirit. This love is also the Father's Gift (Acts 8:17–20). Indeed, 'Gift' is for Augustine the one unique title accorded the Spirit but, as he says, the Spirit is named Gift because the Spirit is love. The Spirit may even be understood as eternally gift, as a love eternally waiting to be given. Augustine is also especially attentive to the New Testament's naming of the Spirit as the Spirit 'of' the Father, of truth, of God, of Christ (e.g. Rom. 8; Gal. 4:6; Jn 15:26). The Spirit is 'of' both Father and Son and thus is necessarily 'something common'. Scripture, then, names the Holy Spirit in an allusive manner so that we will be drawn slowly to recognize, first, that the Spirit is not simply a third *beside* Father and Son, but one who is the Spirit *of* both. Second, we are drawn to recognize that the Spirit who is given and who is the heart of the Christian life is the love who joins Father and Son—in receiving the Spirit we are thus drawn into the divine life itself.

We will, however, miss much if we stop here and do not explore how Augustine sees this Spirit as also fully possessed of and being all that it is to be God, fully an irreducible divine 'person'. In his *On the Trinity* Augustine writes:

> Nor because they give and he is given is he, therefore, less than they, for he is so given as the gift of God that he also gives himself as God. For it is impossible to say of Him that he is not a master of his own power, of whom it was said: 'the Spirit breathes where he will'... there is no subordination of the Gift and no domination of the givers, but the concord between the gift and the givers. (*The Trinity* 15.19.36)

Alongside this bare but precise statement that the Spirit gives himself, we should note Augustine's mature exegesis of Acts 4:31–2 ('they were all filled with the Holy Spirit... and the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul'). Augustine uses the function of the Spirit within the Christian community as an analogy for the Spirit's eternal role in the Trinity:

> [if] many souls through love are one soul, and many hearts are one heart, what does the very fountain of love do in the Father and the Son?... If, therefore, 'the love of God [which] has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' makes many souls one soul and many hearts one heart, how much more

> does [the Spirit] make the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit one God, one light, one cause? (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 39.5)

We should read such statements against the background of Augustine's exegesis of Jn 5:19, which presented the Son as identical to the intra-divine acts that Scripture predicates of him. The Spirit is understood as love, as identical with love itself, as the eternal act of love. Just as God's Word is not insubstantial like our words, but eternally spoken and eternally existing, so too the Spirit as love exists eternally and distinctly, eternally given by Father to Son and Son to Father, eternally breathed by the Father as the one who constitutes the divine unity.

One of the most controversial aspects of Augustine's theology—not in his own day, but in medieval and modern debat—has been his argument that the Spirit should be said to 'proceed' from Father and from Son. While some other Patristic figures, Greek and Latin, take a similar position, Augustine offers the most extensive reflections. His account is founded, once again, on the Scriptural texts stating that the Spirit is 'of' the Father and 'of' the Son. Although we always go through or into Scripture using the temporal language of the created order, Augustine sees no temporality in the procession of Son and Spirit: one does not proceed from the Father 'before' the other. Indeed, for Augustine, it is in the eternal act of generating the Son that the Father gives it to him that the Spirit proceed from him—part of what it is to be the Son is to be one who has by nature the Father's Spirit. We need almost to say that when the Father generates the Son from his essence and gives the Son all that he is, what the Father gives is the Spirit. In order for the Son to be one who shares all that the Father is, the Son must have this Spirit. The Son's love for the Father, his loving of the Father, is the Spirit that he is. And thus, from eternity the Spirit comes to be the one who is common to Father and Son, who is the love of both by being 'of' and 'from' both (on Augustine's theology of the Spirit's procession see Ayres 2010: ch. 9; Daley 2001a and 2001b).

We must take one further step. If the Father gives to Son and Spirit all that he is, such that each is truly God, then each must be wisdom, rationality, life, truth, and love itself. We have already noted this, but now we can draw a further conclusion. Each must embody the fullness of what it is to be a 'person' in ways that transcend human imagination—to be fully God involves possessing all the characteristics of the highest form of life in perfection, and thus possessing all that characterizes human personality in transcendent perfection. And thus in Augustine's theology, to assert that the Spirit is God is necessarily also to assert that the Spirit is irreducible divine 'person'.

But the mystery of the Trinity requires us to reflect on the unity of the three whenever we reflect on one of the divine three as individual, and in his *On the Trinity* Augustine uses the analogical language of memory, understanding, and will to speak of the divine life, and writes:

> we should so conceive these three [memory, understanding, will] as some one thing which all have, as in the case of wisdom itself, and which is so retained in the nature of each one, as that he who has it, is that which he has... in that simple and highest

> nature, substance is not one thing, and love another, but that substance itself is love, and that love itself is substance, whether in the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, and yet the Holy Spirit is properly called love. (*The Trinity* 15.17.28–9; Augustine 1963: 493)

Once again, because there is one simple and divine nature, we must be careful not to speak only of each of the divine three as fullness, without also noting that the fullness that they possess in such a way that they are identical with it is the one fullness that is God. I said a little while ago that it is *as if* the Spirit were the essence of Father and Son: we can now see that this statement is not quite right. That the Spirit is named as love should not lead us toward a picture of Father and Son having as their essence something that is not their own. Rather, we must say both that Father and Son are in their essence love *and that* the Spirit is the love of Father and Son even while being fully another beside and in them. But once again the intellect is drawn to a point where it must confess that God transcends its grasp.

3. One and Three

Many readers will have noticed that I have not yet shown Augustine offering any extensive discussion of the language of person and nature or substance (for this section see Ayres 2010: ch. 8 and Cross 2007). Augustine thought that such language could never make logical sense when used of the divine 'nature'. Relying on the logical discussions of the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry, Augustine argued that anything identified by a term which specifies a species can necessarily also be identified by a corresponding genus term and vice versa. For example, if one can say 'Socrates is a human being', one can also say that 'Socrates is an animal', and for any subject, if one can say it is an animal, one can also assign it to a subordinate species. Moreover, if it is true that Socrates and Augustine are two humans, it is true that they are two animals. In the case of the divine three these rules do not obtain. There is no general class of 'divine persons' and the divine nature is not divisible into discrete instances. In the quasi-credal formula 'one nature and three persons' the terminology can be helpful, but not if we think that it isolates a particular set of philosophical terms the rules of which will enable us to understand the divine.

In some texts, however, Augustine does make important use of the concept of relation. In the *On the Trinity* he offers a good deal of initial discussion, focusing particularly on questions about how we should guard and shape our speech about the Trinity, questions of predication rather than directly questions of ontology. He argues that we should realize the terms 'Father' and 'Son' name 'relations', but not relations that are accidental (any human male called 'Father' became a Father at some point, the title is not his simply by virtue of being human and male). In the Trinity 'Father' names a relation that is eternally true of the Father: there is eternally the Father, and eternally the Son.

A few years later Augustine speaks a little more directly of the ontological reality to which these patterns of predication correspond. In the 39th of his *Tractates on John's Gospel* he distinguishes between human and divine existence. You and I exist and may or may not also be spoken of in relationship to each other. Father, Son, and Spirit are not only spoken of in relationship: they *are* in relationship (*ad aliquid*)—the relationships that the Father establishes from eternity between Father, Son, and Spirit are intrinsic to their being (Augustine *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 4). Augustine is reticent about this technical language and offers it very rarely. More frequently, and as we have seen, he develops this theology in the course of directly exegetical reflection and his accounts of Jn 5:10 and Acts 4:32 provide excellent and key examples of this reflection.

Inseparable Operation

Augustine inherits from earlier Nicene theologians the principle that Father, Son, and Spirit work or operate inseparably: in every action of one of the divine three the other two are also to be found at work. Why? Because the divine three are inseparable; they are not divided spatially or temporally, and there is only one divine will and nature even as Father, Son, and Spirit are each the fullness of that will and nature. The inseparable operation of the three is, however, a difficult principle to fill out without according each a different role in every divine action—and thus reimporting the idea that they are in fact separable! How does Augustine articulate this principle at his best?

In his 23rd tractate on John Augustine considers how the world is created, offering an account that depends on his reading of Jn 5:19. We cannot envisage the Father deciding to create and giving orders to the Son who then does the actual creating. This would be to see both Father and Son as operative in the act, but only by separating out their existence and roles inappropriately:

> What the Father shows the Son, he does not receive from without. The entirety is done within; for there would be no creatures unless the Father had made them through the Son...the Father showed it to be made and the Son saw it to be made, and the Father made it by showing it because he made it through the Son seeing it...Neither that showing nor that seeing is temporal...But the Father's showing begets the Son's seeing in the same way as the Father begets the Son. Showing, of course, generated seeing; not seeing showing. If we could look more purely and more perfectly, we would perhaps find that the Father is not one thing and his showing another, nor is the Son one thing and his seeing another. (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 23.11)

The Father makes all things through the Son (Jn 1:3), and the Father makes by showing all to the Son. But that 'showing' is identical with the eternal begetting of the Son. In the Son as Word and Wisdom all that will be is already contained (he is the true Life of all things) and 'created', merely needing to emerge in the temporal order. But remember that Augustine is not here describing an act prior to the creation of the world: he conceives of time itself as something created. From eternity, in eternity, the Father shows

and the Son sees, our world comes to be and time with it, founded in that eternal action of Father and Son. The acts of the divine three in time are never the result of deliberation subsequent to their generation: those acts always occur from the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, and always simultaneously with Son and Spirit coming from the Father. At the same time, there is always an order to the working of the three, an order established from eternity by the Father. The three work, one might say, in accordance with their inner Trinitarian character and relations: the Father works through Son and in Spirit; the Son works as Word and Wisdom, as the revealer of the Father, as the one in whom all things are what they are; the Spirit works as the one who brings concord and draws together in love (although Augustine never offers a clear statement of principle like this).

Throughout his mature work Augustine consistently emphasizes that the missions of Son and Spirit—their redemptive work in the world—reveal the eternal ordering of the divine life. In other words, missions reveal 'processions', the coming forth of Son and Spirit from the Father. Augustine emphasizes this so strongly both because he trusts that God's love is such that God reveals himself to us truly (even as he transcends what we can understand of him), and because he sees the reformation and redemption of humanity to consist in a restoration of our seeing and knowing of the world in God, as enfolded by Word and Spirit who come from and lead us to the Father.

Turning Inward

Augustine views the human being as the pinnacle of the created order. Human beings do not only exist as inanimate objects, nor do they only live as do plants and animals, they exist and live intellectually: thinking, judging, creating, and loving. It is thus in our intellectual life that we find the highest form of life we know, and it is here that we find, for Augustine, that in us which is the image of God (the image, of course, of a life which still transcends our ability to understand). For Augustine, because God is Trinity, the image of God in us must be Trinitarian as well (Sullivan 1963). Accordingly, in the latter half of his *On the Trinity*, Augustine reflects on the Trinity as it may be seen in the *imago*, in the mind (on this theme see Ayres 2010: chs. 11–12; Gioia 2008).

In his exploration Augustine both assumes a certain account of the mind as his point of departure, and he examines the mind *in the light of* the Trinitarian beliefs he seeks to explore. In the latter respect, Augustine sees the language of faith as not only revealing something about the nature of the divine existence, but also as revealing to us something about the image: Trinitarian faith is a guide to understand ourselves as well as God. And thus it is wrong to think of Augustine simply as offering 'psychological analogies' for the Trinity: he is not simply analysing the mind to find threefold analogies for the Trinity, but using the language of faith to explore the mind, and using what he finds there to think through how we might imagine the divine three as distinct and yet never divided.

Augustine's view of the soul is taken in part from Plotinus, in part from the Latin rhetorical tradition (particularly Cicero), and in part it is his own, developed in a long

reflection on the power of the memory and desire in the light of Christian belief. Augustine assumes that the human being's mental life is always an active desiring life, always seeking for that which it thinks is its natural home and end. At the same time the mind's seeking and desiring is constantly shaped by its memory. The mind is for Augustine a vast mysterious storehouse—indeed not even a passive store, but an active repository that sometimes thrusts into our conscious minds images and objects of desire that may have been long forgotten. The process of searching and acting on our memories involves the production of an 'inner word', as we discussed earlier in the chapter. This forming of words or images within the mind is not only an act occurring from time to time, it is an act constitutive of the knowing and loving mind.

Augustine differentiates between two modes of the mind's life. The fallen mind seeks to know itself as if it were a distant object to be found elsewhere. This is the mode of knowing with which we (fallen human beings) are most familiar because we have become obsessed with created objects. But this vision of intellectual life as lacking and seeking for what lies without does not well illustrate the perfect knowing and self-presence of the divine life. The mind, however, must know itself in order to seek itself and, Augustine argues following Neoplatonic precedent, in some way the whole of the mind is present to itself simply as mind. The trouble is that even though the mind is necessarily present to itself we cannot stop images of those things that we have come to desire occluding our vision. And thus we can better understand the mind as an image of the Trinity if we can work toward imagining the self-present knowing life that must be ours. But while we can imagine some features of this life (and the language of Trinitarian faith helps us understand), we will only come into a fuller sight of it when we are transformed and purified through grace, knowing ourselves as we are and that we exist in the constantly present Truth who is the Word. The image in us will then shine forth, but not only because it knows itself, but because it will be a threefold life attentive to and enfolded in God's own life, knowing all things in this light. Thus Augustine offers us an account of an image present and yet eschatologically realized.

As a terminology to express the threefold structure of our mental life Augustine makes use of the triad memory, intelligence, and will. This triad originates with Cicero and is part of a wider tradition in Latin rhetorical literature that seeks to describe the different aspects or skills of the attentive and/or well-educated and focused mind. The same tradition also makes use of similar terminologies to describe the different constituent parts of prudence, the virtue lying at the heart of the practical life, the virtue of judging good from evil (and which for Augustine and Ambrose finds its foundation and end in clinging in love to God). Augustine does not use this triad as a standard terminology for the mind, even though his account of the mind as constantly in act appears many times elsewhere. And so, in some ways it is problematic to have spent so much time in this chapter exploring the explorations of the second half of the *On the Trinity*. These reflections are to be found uniquely there, although various aspects of the conclusions are to be found through his later work. They are then not so much representative of how Augustine writes about and teaches the Trinity, but they do constitute one of the most imaginative and fascinating products of Augustine's theological genius.

4. Sources and Influence

Augustine is a complex figure to interpret, in many ways highly traditional, in others highly innovative. From the first winter after his conversion, even before his baptism at Easter 387, Augustine began reading the great Latin theologians of his age: Ambrose of Milan for certain, probably Marius Victorinus his fellow North African, and soon after Hilary of Poitiers. A number of figures who are slightly less well known such as Damasus (Bishop of Rome 366–84) also soon seem to have figured as authorities. Throughout his long career Augustine returned to these sources at a number of key points. Although a number of these figures—especially Ambrose—drew deeply on contemporary Greek Nicene sources, Augustine himself offers virtually no clear evidence that he ever drew extensively on Greek Trinitarian theology.

While Augustine draws deeply on his predecessors, he is also willing to move beyond them in striking ways. In part this follows from his being of a later generation: despite his mother's experience of participating in Ambrose's public confrontation with 'Arians' in 386, Augustine takes Nicene Trinitarian doctrine as a point of departure for exploration as much as he takes it as something to be proved from scratch (to understand the theology of these Latin 'Arians' see the pamphlet described by Augustine as an Arian 'sermon'; Augustine 1995b: 133–8). He is even able to criticize his predecessors when he sees them as having not taken a logical step that Nicene theology demands. Thus, for example, he finds it natural to extend to Son and Spirit the title(s) of being 'alone true God' that Jn 17:3 accords the Father alone, and which both Ambrose and Hilary find difficult to interpret. At the same time he celebrates the very idea of a mysterious unity of three (who remain undivided) that defeats our patterns of numbering. In this last move we see parallels in some texts of Gregory Nazianzen.

One of the problems with interpreting Augustine is the extent and character of his influence. Over time Augustine was increasingly read in cultural contexts different from his own, and mined for answers to questions that did not yet exist when he wrote or for definitions of terminologies that he (sometimes intentionally) failed to define precisely. The character of some of his more idiosyncratic and speculative discussions was also lost when they were read as if part of a clearly organized and finished theological system (especially if all the Fathers of the Church were thought to agree). Thus, for example, while some later writers follow Augustine in asserting the philosophical uselessness of genus and species terminologies for exploring the divine existence, most present Augustine simply as the most articulate of the Latin Nicene theologians of his period. He is also read in the light of later attempts in Latin tradition to define the now standard Trinitarian terminologies with precision (especially following the work of Boethius (*c.*480–525)). Many medieval and post-medieval theologians—especially in the Thomist tradition after the thirteenth century—also treat the interrelationship between love and knowledge as two necessary moments in intellectual life. In part this development shows the centrality that Augustine's legacy had taken on in Latin Christianity; in part it also

shows how his more tentative ideas and explorations could take on a life of their own in a developing tradition. An increasingly clear and central account of knowledge, love, and the interrelationship between the two enabled, for example, a far clearer and easier analogy for describing the relationship between Son and Spirit than we find in Augustine himself.

Over the very long term the development of this theme also creates resources for those (such as Hegel and some post-Hegelian idealists) who tend to see the life of Spirit, whether divine or human, as having the same fundamental structure. I offer no judgement on these later theologies: their existence reveals both the importance of Augustine as an influence within Latin Christianity, and the complexities and fruitful tensions that may appear within that tradition when it is explored as a diverse and developing tradition, when Augustine himself is separated from the readings of him that later emerged. Far from relativizing Augustine's importance, such a procedure may even increase his importance as historical scholarship continues to give us a more and more richly textured account of the conversations that constitute the Latin Trinitarian tradition (Ayres 2011).

Suggested Reading

Through this chapter I have referred to Augustine's *On the Trinity*, to his sermons, and to his Tractates on John (a tractate is a type of sermon). *On the Trinity* is often treated as a point of departure for understanding Augustine. The work was, however, intended for readers with a good grasp of the fundamentals of Trinitarian doctrine. As a basic reading list of other Trinitarian texts in Augustine I suggest beginning with Augustine's exegesis of John: *Tractates* 1–3 first, then *Tractate* 39 and 19–23. *Letters* 120 and 238 also offer excellent introductions to his basic teaching, and *Sermons* 52, 71, and 117 offer important discussions on various aspects. *City of God* 11.10 and 24–8 offer a succinct and important summary; *Confessions* 12.11.12ff. offers both another (somewhat dense) summary and a beautiful exposition of the role Scripture plays in Augustine's conception of knowing God. For some of these texts there are many translations; all of the sermons and letters are now available in the series *The Works of Saint Augustine*. Below I give full bibliographical details only for those texts quoted in the text of the chapter.

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