

F. England

Dr. F. England, Honorary
Research Associate, University
of Cape Town.
E-mail: frank.english@uct.ac.za
ORCID:[http://orcid.
org/0000-0001-5903-8087](http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5903-8087)

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CHRISTIAN SELF- FORMATION: AN AUGUSTINIAN CONTRIBUTION

ABSTRACT

Augustine's dense and probing thought about the imprint of the Trinitarian God upon human persons in De Trinitate (AD 399-422/426) provides an alternative spirituality of the self to that of a more individualistic Western liberal search for self-fulfilment through self-discovery. By referring to the Trinitarian images in De Trinitate and recurring to Augustine's self-searching mode in the Confessiones (AD 397-401), his quest may be said to inspire a mode of Christian self-formation that, sub specie humanitatis, rejects the "discovery" of one's "true self" – the sense that one really does possess a stable authentic core self, and that one can find it by following some process of interior self-scrutiny. Rather, for Augustine, it appears that to be human is to pursue the quest of self-knowing in a relational formation that opens into the life of the being who called one into existence. Consequently, the search for God (Confessiones) and for the Trinitarian imprints of God (De Trinitate) appear to raise the more serious questions that inform and shape Christian self-formation: Can one "know oneself"? What does it mean to be founded by a Trinitarian God? How does one know which goods to choose in order to construct a holy life? How would one construe a "Trinitarian life" for oneself?

1. INTRODUCTION

In Augustine's inquiry about the awareness of God's *vestigium* – an imprint or a trace of God as Trinity – upon or in human beings when they are created, with reference to the divine pronouncement in the plural, "Let us ..." in Genesis 1:26, he may

appear less so to seek actual “trinities” within the human person than to generate various “discursive analogies”, to use Ayres’s term (2010:288), that metaphorically bond the human created being to the creator. His inquiry presses the questions about what shapes a human person owing to this “image” of the divine, and it probes the role of love and thought, of memory and will, of mind and understanding within a creaturely life. In pursuing his inquiry, Augustine allows one to ask what constitutes a holistic human life, a life that may be lived justly and in holy responsiveness to the power that created it, and one that desires – thirsts for – its “image” to become a “likeness” of completion and perfection, again a reference to Genesis 1:26. Perhaps one may say that the sheer density of Augustine’s thought about the Trinitarian *vestigium* in *De Trinitate* aches with no less a human longing to reach God than did the more self-exposed *Confessiones*. In the former, however, it is not about cleaving to *pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova* (“beauty so old and so new”, *Conf. X. 27. 38*), but about loosening the bonds of truth and beauty and love so as to ask about their human reflected incarnate presence, and about what may be demanded of the human person etched with them *sub specie humanitatis*. The work appears to extend the acknowledgement of the love that births life in the *Confessiones* into a lifetime’s practice that endeavours to know and love God in God’s own knowing, loving, and action, in such a manner that it views a human life within an arc that proceeds from its inceptive *archē* to its final *telos*. Hence, a human life’s Trinitarian beginning, for Augustine, may be posed as a challenge that addresses the centuries beyond it and, perhaps more especially, the milieu of an individualistic, liberal human subject.

Yet, to the more usual, and probably rather too forthright, charge against Augustine for the damning doctrine of “original sin”, the influential English Reformed theologian, Colin Gunton (1990), brought precisely such an accusation against the Latin Father. In a trenchant critique, Gunton (1990) read the Augustinian self almost as a proleptic self-legislating Kantian. He claimed that *De Trinitate* was abstracted from the late 4th- and early 5th-century context and presented a rational, autonomous subject that reflected a God whose oneness elided the relational Trinity. But, as Barnes (1995:245-250) repeatedly notes, the polemical climate was central to the concerns of the treatise, and the debates were of real “live” consequences, because they were about how to live in order to avoid damnation and to achieve salvation. Gunton (1990) also bemoaned the consequent Western individualism as Augustine’s legacy, and the Bishop of Hippo was charged with a thoroughly inadequate concept of the Trinitarian God’s mission and work of salvation. Gunton’s (1990) accusations, however, met with a measured rebuttal from Green (2007), who demonstrated the creaturely action and involvement of God in the world, a God of whom relations were constitutive, and whose created human person could only be fully human if they were “oriented to and

focused on [their] Creator” (Green 2007:341).¹ For this reason, the Creator-God, in whose image the creature was made, was sought as the believer’s ultimate good.

Van Geest (2020:129) observes that, with regard to the *Confessions*, all attempts to describe this particular God who is Trinitarian and whom the Christian seeks, fail – as, indeed, *sub specie humanitatis*, they must. However, a failure to describe God is not a God who cannot be sought on a pilgrimage that employs the inadequacy of words so as to map the journey of one who strives after the wholeness that is of God’s calling. Therefore, for Augustine, the *imago Dei* impels a work to be undertaken. Why? Because human beings are the products of a *creatio ex nihilo* and yet simultaneously are *of the image of the creator*, and endowed with various capacities, including intellect, memory, and will. For Augustine, their development, their desirous seeking, is a project of “becoming the likeness of God”, perhaps one may say. In this respect, although Cary (2000) may aptly receive a modest criticism by Drever (2007:233, n. 2) with regard to his understanding of the person in Augustine, Drever (2007:237) notes Cary’s (2000:114) emphasis on Augustine’s need to recast a Platonic and Neoplatonic creator-creation consonance as a clear distinction, a contrast that, one suggests, “grounds” the human vocation of self-formation. This vocation is appropriated when, in Drever’s (2007:235)² reversal of Gunton’s thesis, the self discovers that it “is most fundamentally made known through the Trinity”, or, less boldly, that God’s founding creative act founds beings who bear the Trinitarian God in some way. In this sense, to inquire after the Trinitarian God engenders the interrogation about what it means to be human as one created in God’s image, as one who possesses the *imago Dei*.

Although, for a different reason, Gunton “also looks to Irenaeus” (Green 2007:332), it is suggested, in this instance, that an appropriation of the biblical and Irenaean “image to likeness” conceit generates a protensive openness of the self’s journey towards the God in whose image one is made. Thus, to ask about God is to ask about one’s own self-presence, and to ask about one’s own self-presence is to ask about the God without whom one could not pose the questions at all! And the various suggestive *vestigia* generate modes of self-fashioning based on the acknowledgement of a Trinitarian God and, in particular, that the human possession of the mind, the ability to think, and the

1 In the later publication of his dissertation, Green (2011) acknowledged that a project to defend Gunton’s claims produced a rather contrary result.

2 The author was made aware of Drever’s (2007) article during the final revision of this article. Its significance and greater elegance recommend it, if not as a replacement, then, in certain respects, as a *prolegomenon* to this article’s focus on, rather more, the ascetic task of self-formation.

employment of one's understanding are appropriated by a self who is memory constituted until this present moment in time of seeking, and a self who is driven by the will, by the love, for that which is ultimate: God, who is Trinity.³

In this context of living Christianly as image-bearing and likeness-becoming, some suggestive questions arise. How may one conceptualise fashioning a human life in conformity to God as Trinity? And if one is imaged in Trinitarian terms – *Et ecce, intus eras* (“And behold, you were within”, *Conf. X. 27. 38*) – what does this conviction demand of one, so that one may be moulded into the more veridical “likeness” of God?

2. OPEN HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY

The title, *De Trinitate*, may assert that the treatise is about God. And it is about God only insofar as it is about the human subject in relation to the Trinitarian God. In this work, Augustine analyses the “grammar of the ‘subject’” (Williams 2016:156) and, *au fond*, he appears to be asking what endowments, capacities, and abilities the created subject possesses so as to make intelligible a relationship with the creator that, according to Genesis 1:26, this creator wills. The subject is scrutinised for the informants that structure the human person as one who seeks, as a person of impulses and desires and intellect, and as one who wishes to know the world and itself as a creature of Trinitarian making. Thus, Augustine is not merely asking about a human person without also asking about a human person as a created being who exists, owing to some form of activity or intervention by the Creator. The task Augustine seems to set for himself is to inquire about how the human person may reflect the divine presence, whose very activity or intervention has resulted in its own human presence, which is its ineradicable grounding, and the presence of other human persons in a creaturely world.

Augustine's Christian conviction is that the inceptive power of all creation is the Trinitarian God who has pursued him, and to whom, through baptism (on 25 April 387), he has pledged his life. To accept that this Christian God exists, or rather “is”, means to think about God in a way that cannot conceptualise God as human, that cannot anthropomorphise God. Augustine's premise of a God who is a Trinity of persons, and yet the persons share in one essence as God, means that God as Trinity cannot consist of separate parts. There cannot be three separate persons who, *at the same time*, do not cohere as

3 Thus, to know is to know as the self who *is* who one is until this present moment - that is, as the content of one's memory – and to *want* to know is to *desire* knowledge of who one is in an intertwined threefold operation of a presently constituted self as *memory (memoria) seeking (voluntate) to understand (animo/mente)*. What is it that one's seeking self seeks to know? It is how and who and what one is because of one's creation by a Trinitarian God.

one single unity. There cannot be a “life” of one of the persons of the Trinity that is separate from the “life” of another person of the Trinity, in the way in which human persons are persons each with their own individual lives. Regardless of this conviction, the human intellect, the mind, struggles to find any definitive mode of conceiving of a being who is one and three, and three in one. Because human persons are individuals in a way in which a Trinitarian God is not a group of individuals – because this Trinitarian God is “of one substance” – rather than look outward to other persons as a possible way of analogising God, it may be more appropriate to look inward. This “us” of God, in Genesis 1:26, has made humankind, not without the impress, the *vestigium*, of the “us-ness”, the threefold nature of this creating being, an imprint that may be conceived in various modes.

3. THE INTERIOR JOURNEY AND THE LOVING DESIRE TO KNOW TRUTH

If one is to form a self who is a Christian, then it must entail an endeavour within the constraints of being creaturely and dependent upon the being who has created one, and who, so the Christian faith professes, is of one nature and three persons. Following Augustine, this three-person, one-natured impress is not some “actual” seal that may be found upon oneself or hidden in oneself. One may perhaps say that it is the internal source and impetus of reaching to the “likeness” of one’s creator, a source that impels the quest to become holy. For this reason, it is mistaken to seek this enabling power outside oneself, as Augustine realised in his self-telling narrative to know himself: *intus eras et ego foris, et ibi te quaerebam* (“you were inside and I outside, and there I was searching for you, *Conf. X. 27. 38*). To “look inward” – to pursue the avenue of inquiry into oneself – means that one must engage in a form of self-reflection that involves not only to reflect upon one’s own processes of thought about why one did this or said that, and whether or not it was right. Rather, and more profoundly, and to phrase this process rather awkwardly, it is also to examine, to try to raise into consciousness, what contributes to one’s thinking about how to act and to speak, and about the informing modes that shape one’s engagement with others in one’s endeavour to “know oneself” (*De Trin. X. v. vii*). For it is this prior “framing” of one’s mindset or world view that construes both oneself and the “world” in which one participates. It is, thus, not surprising, if annoying, that Augustine, in this kind of internal inquiry, interrogates not what the mind may know, but what it means for the mind to know, and what it means to know the mind. These troublesome complexities relate to how one knows what one knows, and to the ancient and ever-contemporary puzzle,

raised in both Plato's *Meno* (80c-86c) and the *Phaedo* (73c-76a), of how the knowledge that one wishes to acquire already is, or seems to be, known.⁴

Of course, Augustine's inquiry ultimately cannot be satisfied by knowing the things of this world. Rather, the fundamental desire or thirst of being human in a Christian way is to recur to the God who lies at the foundation of desiring or loving knowing, and who calls one to holiness – an unfolding process of calling one into an awareness of the loving attentiveness of knowing – that only may be founded upon and found in God, which is accompanied by that paradoxical re-cognition (already known) that one's wholeness is incomplete unless, or until, it knowingly loves the being of its own inception.⁵ This knowledge, if it is foundational – already “there”, as it were – cannot be other than the truth, because it is the truth about one's grounding possibility of knowing anything at all. For the Christian, therefore, it must be about the God without whom there would be no self – a self who, subsequently, desires to know the source of its own possibility of knowing what it knows, and who, in *De Trinitate*, is imaged in God's image and called to God's likeness. If it is knowledge that is sought *sub specie humanitatis*, then it requires the necessary constituents of facilitating its acquisition, which include the faculties of memory, pivotal to Augustine's confessional seeking, and understanding. These are present in any endeavour to know whether the intentional concept about which one seeks knowledge is speculative and notional, and where the activity of seeking to know is an internal process of the mind itself, or a consequence of sensory experience. For Augustine, the want to know, the desire to acquire knowledge, is an activity of love. It comprises being engaged in an intentional and loving quest, because the mind, in its quest for knowledge, is driven by its desiring of knowledge and, as moving towards and wanting to know, so the mind is *desirous* of knowledge. In *De Trinitate*, this desire and the impulse to learn receive considerable attention, and where that source of desiring knowledge is God, and where the ultimate end of knowing is God, the intentional activity of seeking to know, not infrequently, is conceived of as the activity of love.⁶

4 D'Arcy (1957:178-179) helpfully sets out Augustine's thought in relation to the *Meno*. For a very brief and lucid account of the “Doctrine of recollection”, see Levitt (1981:239-243).

5 *Fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te* (*Conf.* I. 1. 1).

6 In this respect, Murdoch (1970:88-89, emphasis added) also conceives of the acquisition of knowledge. Beginning with the attractiveness of “good art”, its demand of one's attention and its redemptive quality, she states that “[w]e surrender to its *authority* with a love which is unpossessive and unselfish”. This sense of attentive abandonment, perhaps one may call it, is also applicable in intellectual disciplines, and it engenders “the ability to sustain clear vision, [of] love as attachment or even passion without sentiment or self”. She explains that, when “learning a foreign language, for instance, Russian, I am confronted by an authoritative structure which commands my respect. The task is difficult and the goal is distant and perhaps never entirely attainable. My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists

Perhaps, then, what one may say about knowing the mind, for Augustine, is less so that one knows an object called “mind”, and rather more so that one is aware of a capacity that is of one, and which one may conceptualise as employing a desirous or loving activity in its seeking of knowledge.

In this sense, one could say that, as a living being, one is aware of the activity of thought, of its continual movement from ... to ..., and of its reflective examination of this continuous and passing content with regard to what already has been thought and is stored within one’s memory. Coming to know something, therefore, entails assessing the present intentional willing object of knowledge within the remit of the content housed in one’s memory through the activity of thought, which is located in, what may be called, “the mind”. What the mind wishes to grasp is the “truth” of the “content” in its purview, because its “loving” constitutes an active desire to know it, not partially, not defectively or inadequately, but in its truthful state. If that which constitutes ultimate truth is the inceptive power that capacitates one to seek knowledge, and if this being is at all present in one as the power that impels the love to know, then it must be present to and imaged in that which itself desires in love to want true knowledge, and which is called “the mind” – in the threefold patterning of the will to know, memory, and understanding (*De Trin.* X. xi-xii). The mind may thus be defined as a truth-seeking capacity, of which its *telos* is the being who inaugurated the very possibility of desiring knowledge, and thus is also its *archē* – this being empowers the attentive exposing of oneself to itself. Not unnoticeable is the presence of a more deliberate spiritual *ascēsis* that resides in the practice of loving attentiveness when seeking knowledge, because concentrated meditational prayer endeavours to focus on imaged and discursive forms of God’s presence, particularly God’s incarnate presence, so as to give way to a contemplative “seeing”, a coming into the presence of God in a “face to face” encounter with truth itself.

4. THE RISK OF BEING HUMAN

Whatever the object, seeking to know is not without its dangers. Pursuing truths that one will recognise as such involves risk, because the human person who seeks to know – and, in particular, to know ultimate truth – must be open to finding what it too has “forgotten” or “lost” (*Conf.* X. 19. 28) as truthful about oneself through a practice of acquiring truthful self-knowledge. As soon as one seeks to know, one opens oneself to that of which one seeks knowledge, but it is always propi-ate, and falls within the constrained conditions of who

independently of me. Attention is rewarded by knowledge of reality. *Love of Russian leads me away from myself* towards something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal”.

one is in one's own memory and of one's own comprehending capacity. This is because coming to know any one concept or object involves the conveying of extant knowledge from one's memory to the present concept or object that one is seeking to know by employing one's understanding. Subsequently, it may lead one to make a judgement: one could "pronounce" upon what one knows – this object or that concept – with reference to the images and concepts from one's memory that have been brought to bear upon understanding "a new" object or concept through an initial willing activity of wanting to know it.

But none of this operates extrinsically. In a proleptically Kantian perceptual arena, the responsibility of seeking the truth – about oneself, about one's existence as a creaturely being endowed with physical, emotional, and intellectual capacities and presence, and about the purpose of being – begins in relational truth-seeking with regard to what one confronts, or, less directly stated, what is present to one's physical, emotional, intellectual, and self-reflective modes within the "environment" of one's limitations and the "already knows" of one's memory. Of some significance is the realisation that by exercising – and, more importantly, *how* one exercises – these faculties, one is fashioning oneself in *particular* formative ways. It is crucial to realise that how one engages truthfully as a physical, emotional, intellectual, and rationally self-reflective being may engender a self of authentic integrity or not,⁷ either by assisting one "to read" one's own life as truthful to who one is *in via* towards a telic integrity or not.⁸ Thus the right use of the capacity to reason and judge, which is the function of the mind, is pivotal to any progression towards holistic self-formation. Failure in this task may be owing to the mind's inability to forge the necessary connections between and undertake the overarching analysis of one's present experience and thought – whether, *inter alia*, by obsessive self-concern and narcissism, compulsive fixation upon self-appointed desires, emotional self-enthrallment, or intellectual notions that seal rather than open future directions and inquiry. By contrast, an outward seeking of truthful engagement by means of the ongoing development of skilled and disciplined inner capacities of knowing *how* and knowing *that*, within the remit of one's own physical, emotional, and intellectual capabilities and limitations, empowers the practice of forging a self that holds the warrants to speak and to act, and continually deracinates itself of partial biases and an exploitative instrumentality, and rather appropriates what disposes itself to virtuous

7 Or, that possesses an integral authority, a sense of order and control of one's thought, words, and actions within a human and creaturely arena that acknowledges one's deficiencies of judgement and limitations of ability.

8 Perhaps one may describe this as authoring oneself with a self-reflexive honesty, in which a sound mind (or one that refuses pressured rhetoric) may speak in appropriate language that portrays the virtue of impartiality that allows for reason to authenticate and order one's passions and desires.

practices in an autonomy of the self.⁹ The self is then directed to goods that contribute to the final good of a complete and blameless, incorruptible and virtuous self, insofar as this is possible. These (perhaps one may call them) *viaticum* goods are required, in order to sustain a self modally disposed to pursue a good that is one's final, yet always unreachable, good – the approximation to which demands a singleness in the purpose of self-formation in the presence of goodness that is unqualified. Although this final good is unreachable in any integral sense for as long as one lives, it must, nevertheless, be the determinant of the right and proper preliminary goods that one ought to pursue if one is to remain on the path to what really is this unqualified good. But this endeavour to “get it right”, as it were, to ensure that one is acquiring the goods that dispose one to self-virtue, depends on an awareness of what, in Christian terms, has graced one to be at all as one's beginning and one's end. Therefore, a pivotal question relating to the construction or formation of a durable self – that is, one who endures in the practice of seeking to grasp the ultimate good – is pressing: How may one consider goods at all, and how may one consider them *sub specie humanitatis*? To ask such a question is to ask about the telic good of the self in relation to its various contributory goods, and to ask of Augustine to provide some clues in this regard.

5. HOW DOES ONE KNOW WHICH GOODS TO SEEK?

Augustine considers an example of love that one person may have for another person, but it is a love that is evoked by the possession of the quality of justice in the person whom one loves. Perhaps one may re-express and amplify his example. Consider loving another person for the reason that one observes his/her actions to be those of compassionate justice. What one loves then is the person on account of this quality, or this qualified form of justice: compassionate justice. In Augustine's terms, one would say that one loves the person on account of his/her compassionately just soul (*amamus enim animum iustum [et misericordem]*, *De Trin.* VIII. vi. ix). However, the question arises: How is one able to recognise compassionate justice [*justitia misericors*] in this other person when one is aware that one is not compassionately just oneself? Whilst one may love another person as a person because one is a person oneself, and one knows what it is to be a person – or, in Augustine's terms, *sit non incongrue nos dicimus ideo nosse [what an animus – a soul – is]*

9 In this instance, the sense is that of *auto-nomos* – self-legislating – but in an increasingly passive way, owing to the acquisitions of the virtues of one's ultimate good over time, so that, processively, one's own *nomos* is that of what is one's final good.

quia et nos habemus animum – in contrast, with regard to justice, Augustine asks: *Sed quid sit iustus unde nouimus* (*De Trin.* VIII. vi. ix)?

Before confronting Augustine's question, it may be necessary to scrutinise the processes of what it means to love and to know, and to love because of what one knows about whom one loves, by examining the human capacities that are involved in loving and knowing. When loving and knowing, two functions seem to operate: the intentional capacity of desire and the rational capacity of the intellect brought to bear upon what one desires. Desire and its intentionality are evident in examples from the appetitive desires to quench one's thirst or to eat a piece of cake, to the emotional desires for recognition or for physical intimacy. However, unless an appetitive desire is linked to the intellectual interrogation about the desire, one may impair one's health if, as a diabetic, one concedes to the appetitive desire for the piece of cake; or one may destroy one's civil union if, as a married person, one indulges in forms of physical intimacy with a person who is not one's legal spouse. Interrogating one's desires functions to establish the links between the desires and their necessity, their justifications, and the consequences of pursuing them. This is the task of the intellect. In undertaking this task, the intellect endeavours to frame what one seeks to know by means of analogies, of imaginative scenarios, and by employing analytical probing, so as to make intelligible to oneself the worth of one's desire – that is, ultimately, to ask: What does "wanting this" contribute to who one is in the *ascetic* of self-formation?

In raising such a question, one is able to view oneself "advancing through a *history* of affective and attitudinal responses", and to observe whether this temporal process comprises "a series that has some cohesion and consistency to it" (Williams 2016:158; original emphasis). Attention to this "distension" of oneself over time (to employ an Augustinian term)¹⁰ assists one to examine and calibrate the benefit or harm that one's intentionally desirous aims have yielded over the period of one's life until this present moment, and in terms of which this present "want" may be assessed as to its contributory worth to oneself. Not only does such a sense of narrative self-reading provide one with the opportunity of conceding or not to a particular "want" before one, of that which is graspable and in one's presence, it also enables one to re-evaluate the narrative patterning of the person who one is becoming. As a consequence, the intellectual reflective inquiry upon one's distended

10 Although the term "distension" is not without controversy in the interpretation of Augustine, Hausheer's (1937:507) rendition of the term is of assistance and coheres with Williams' (2016:1-2) use: "Augustine means by mental distension the faculty of the mind to know successively the past by memory, the future by prevision, and the present by actual perception, to dilate itself, so to say, by prevision and memory from the remotest future to the most distant past." See, for example, Harrison (2016:XI. xxiii/30, and n. 59).

self extends an invitation to consider the possibility of change and revision, of re-direction, and of the promise of establishing more refined forms of knowing one's desirous self with respect to what is good for oneself and what contributes to one's good, so that one may be more adequately equipped to assess and to know that *this* intentional pursuit but not *that* desirous want, *this* personal relationship but not *that* social company, *this* focused inquiry rather than *that* intellectual project contribute, for oneself, to an autobiography that coheres with one's greater good. The task of the mind, then, is to examine the rationality of one's desires – appetitive, physical, and emotional – and to assess one's intentional loves and, significantly, their ordering in the quest to know and, in particular, to understand that what one loves contributes towards an architectonic self in temporal pursuance of integrity – a triple action that questions and moulds the will with respect to who one is in one's memory by the prudential judgement of the intellect. What is present in such a conscientised and durative practice of self-formation is the endeavour to acquire a more disciplined and administered self, one disposed to deliberate and act in ways that contribute to embedding self-mastery. The latter is a form of self-knowing and self-loving that engenders a more probative knowing and loving self who wills the right goods that shape a directed and ordered life into an unfolding future.

Augustine's question, "from whence (*unde*) do we know justice?" (*De Trin.* VIII. vi. ix), may now be placed within the human project of fashioning a self by the rational ordering of one's desire for the good. Assistance in this task resides in what lies before one – that is, what is in one's presence – physically, imaginatively, conceptually – in other persons, in textual, visual, and cultural forms, in social modes of interaction, and in economic and political dispensations. For it is in the language and behaviour of other persons who, in the imaginative construals of textual, visual, and artistic cultural artefacts, and in various other practices and activities, are present to one that one may recognise a lack in oneself of what is present in an exemplar (whether as person or text, whether in visual, tactile, or aural perceptions, or evident in systems of governance and exchange), and a desire, an intention, to acquire what is held out to oneself as exemplary and enriching of a more holistic human person. With respect to a personal exemplar, to hope to be more like Socrates, for example, is to recognise in Socrates a form of living and reasoning that one acknowledges is absent in oneself and yet would be beneficial to oneself. The strangeness of Meno's Paradox is evident: One knows what one wishes to become by not yet *being* that recognisable "life" or mode of being to which one aspires, but which one is able to descry in another life or text, and that one realises would accord with the striving for the advancement of one's own project of self-knowing and self-acting and, as a result, would be integral to one's own good.

The invocation of Socrates, of course, is purposeful, because this self-questioning pursuit within the sphere of acknowledging another person, and/or other forms of exemplary depiction¹¹ that disclose to one what is for one's good, is not dissimilar to possessing an *eidetic* ability to recognise that which, in Augustine's example, is an *animus iustus* (*De Trin.* VIII. vi. ix) – that is, of noticing another person (or soul) as more than another person (or soul) and, rather, a person who possesses a particular *quality of justice*, and who, significantly, possesses a quality that one does *not* oneself possess, but which one is able to recognise as attractive. To employ the example of Socrates allows one also to consider how one is able to perceive wisdom, while simultaneously acknowledging not only that one is not wise and that wisdom is a progressive practice of testing and refining one's thought, just as Socrates recognised and peripatetically enacted it (*Apologia Socratis* 21a-23b), but also, as a consequence, to observe in Socrates the presence of humility in the person who is wise, which is a virtue, likewise, that one does not possess.¹² This capacity to perceive and observe the humility of wisdom and the wisdom of humility in a textual representation of a character cannot reside entirely outside oneself, otherwise the barest initial acknowledgement of them would not be possible. If there is recognition of these qualities and if these virtues and, indeed, how they may be practised in a self-beneficial way, are capable of recognition yet without possession, then they are identifiable, "seeable", imaginable, and subject to conceptual reason within a subject who does not possess them but who wants, who desires, whose love reaches for them. Therefore, it can be no other than the *subject* of desire who possesses these capacities, who establishes the connections between the identification of these qualities and the desire for them. Or, one probably ought to say, observes in the qualities absent in oneself the very desire to incorporate them in the ongoing drafting of the pattern, and the enacting of one's own self-formation.

Although, on occasions, the qualities are intuited as so "obvious" that they *must* be desirable – the mercy of a ruler, the selfless care of a nurse, the courage of a freedom fighter – nevertheless, it may not be infrequent that one's focused scrutiny of certain less obvious virtues and their pressured testing – hesitation, patience, silence – conveys the dawning and incremental realisation that these too would not be insignificant contributions to oneself *in via* towards the good. What cannot be avoided, it seems, is that there is *no other place* from which "to see", to "re-cognise" desirable attributes, to intend

11 Note that Socrates is Plato's textually generated character whom, as a reader, one is imaginatively able to portray, to characterise with a life of words and deeds.

12 For Plato, the form of justice is apprehensible in the form of just behaviour that one recognises in another person. See, *inter alia*, *Respublica*, Book X.

them and, subsequently, to evaluate them than from the position of one's own living and present presence. Thus, it is only *within* the context of one's own narrative that noticing, identifying, and intentionally desiring what one "sees" and recognises – sensorily, imaginatively, and conceptually – may be provided with any intelligibility as to their relevance to one. As a consequence, when one reflects upon the writing of one's unfolding autobiographical presence *until this moment* of desiring greater wisdom and acquiring humility, one is provided with the opportunity of observing and critically assessing the development of one's *own* person in its intentional quests, and which, in the fashioning of personhood, primarily concerns one's wanting to know and one's need to and for love. And if to want – to intentionally desire – is a capacity of reasoning beings, then what one wants to know and wishes to love requires "a particular kind of alertness to motivation (desire once again)" (Williams 2016:159) and compels an examination of one's motives as they are directed towards these wants. If one were to include basic, natural, desirous needs, then, in this sense, one may consider the physiological process of desire as a self-acquisitiveness that may be conscientised and subjected to moral scrutiny.

6. SEEKING BY SELF-STRIPPING

The importance of this interrogative review of one's narrative self is essential, because the end that one wants confronts one; it centres on the formation of who one is becoming with regard to whom one is imaged in and by whom one may be imaged. However, as noted, what one seeks may convey qualities that could be injurious or beneficial to oneself. Whilst the modes of acquisitiveness – appetitive, emotional, and intellectual – *lie* within one, by examining them with one's intellect, memory, and judging functions, one is empowered to strip the *lies* (to return to this term) about both oneself and, not without central importance, the perception of what grounds one, because what grounds one impels the activity of seeking the goods that contribute to reaching the *visio Dei* – finally "to behold" the being who is one's beginning. To know this grounding as an impress of the Trinitarian God provides a touchstone for interrogating what is required further to fulfil one's "image" moving towards "likeness" (Gen. 1:26), and to discriminate between attractive and harmful qualities. The futures of both possibilities can only be observed from oneself as a desirous being who possesses an *animus*, "the rational principle in human beings".¹³ Therefore, one is empowered with a capacity to ask about the contributory "weight" of what one seeks: Are they for one's own flourishing or not? If so, then with what kind of flourishing may they agree? To

13 Augustine (2002:13 n. 11).

return to the desire for wisdom and humility, these attributes may not only be understood, known, constitute *notitia*, knowledge, which, for Augustine, *uita quaedam est in ratione cognoscentis* (*De Trin.* IX. iv. iv).¹⁴ In seeking them, one is also engaged in an act of attentive loving in the context of the memory of who one is until this present moment. Therefore, following the Augustine of the *Confessiones*, one is engaged in a Trinitarian activity of self-narration, by applying the intellect to assess one's willingness to acquire these particular absent-present qualities. To *know* what one lacks as needful is to *love* what one *knows* is for one's integrity, which is

both to make acts of intellect and will indivisible and to implicate the *activity* of the intellect in the necessary intelligibility of the acts of the will, and – conversely – to make the proper objects of the will intrinsic to the definition of reason (Hanby 1999:114, original emphasis).

It is to embark upon the ever more perfectly attuned pitching of oneself to the perfectly pitched God who is a relationally attuned unity, and to respond to the calling of oneself to partake of that final doxological harmony. As Coakley (2013:279, original emphasis) asserts:

Augustine's mature trinitarian theology (expressed in his *De Trinitate*) is ... a theology of cooperative, harmonious, *ordered* mental activities in God. Just as memory, understanding, and will operate, or should operate, harmoniously and cooperatively in the human subject, and the body be subject to the will, so too – at a higher and perfected analogical level – the divine persons are mutually and harmoniously cooperative, one with another.

7. CONCLUSION

It will not be unnoticed that a Platonic framework, which was particularly present in Augustine's *Cassiciacum Dialogues*,¹⁵ is not without significance, at least as explored in this article. Perhaps one may propose that, first, there is an ability to recognise external depictions (widely interpreted) of desirable qualities that are absent, although they cohere with who one is at present. Secondly, as a result of this recognition, a directed impetus arises for the acquisition of these absent qualities. Thirdly, this intentionality of returning them to oneself (possibly, one may phrase it) engenders a critical practice that discloses and examines the identifiable "traces" of "present absences"

14 This is a particular kind of life that is present in the faculty of understanding.

15 These works, influenced by his reading of Platonic texts, were written at the villa of Verecundus outside Milan in late AD 386, after his conversion, but prior to his baptism at Easter in the following year.

that appear to be consonant with oneself. Consequently, a perspicacious and closely “read” inquiry is demanded of oneself, if one is to confront one’s seemingly “present absences” as, indeed, “absent presences”, that is, as “absent”, yet needful and desirable “presences”, so that they may contribute to one’s own unfolding personal integrity. This critical scrutiny of what is required in the course of one’s own self-formation is essential, because the recognition of what one lacks and the intentionality to acquire them would grant to the external images, forms, behaviours, or modes of being human their necessity to the right and proper ordering of oneself. In the case of Socrates, one would be able to conclude that wisdom and humility harmonise with and would enrich and contribute to the work of one’s greater and more holistic self-becoming. This acknowledgement deems them as essential “absent presences”, and their acquisition necessary.

For Augustine, such an awareness of lack and need is revealed by recognising that the incarnational gift of God portrays the fulfilment that one wants. In *De Trinitate* IV. ii-iv, the Christological language of unity-in-duality may provide a model for considering the duality of oneself that is evident in one’s lack of actually being and becoming who one wants, and yet recognises that one ought to be and to become. Invoking John 1:5, human persons may be said to live with darkened minds, obscured by a blind inability to order their desires with a fidelity to truthful self-fashioning after the likeness of God revealed in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ The incarnation provides an opportunity to recognise true human personhood, and this is evident in the incarnate Christ, who is without the human malfunctions that disrupt becoming *fully* human, without, to consider Augustine and evil, the *privationes bonorum* that maim created human persons. The human form divine depicts before an impaired humanity what, quite simply stated, it is to be human, because, for Augustine, absent in the humanity of the second person of the Trinity are the presences that would mar or impede fidelity to God, who is one’s own cause and final end. In the incarnation, there is no separation between “image” and “likeness”, as there is in oneself. Rather, there is the portrayal of *how to avoid* the deflection of the creaturely human progression from being made in the “image” of God to being conformed to the “likeness” of God (Gen. 1:26-27).

The presence of the incarnate second person of the Trinity in time discloses to humanity what is consonant with, and harmonious of a God-shaped life,¹⁷ affirming that *Deus incarnatus est* means to be confronted by what it is to be a human person in inceptive and telic alignment with the Trinitarian God who

16 “Tenebrae autem sunt stultae mentes hominum prava cupiditate atque infidelitate caecatae ...” (*De Trin.* IV. ii. iv).

17 “... conuenientia uel concinentia uel consonantia ... quam graeci harmonian uocant ...” (*De Trin.* IV. ii. iv).

has created one and calls one to Godself. This identification is gifted to one, owing to one's creaturely Trinitarian impress, the "us-ness" of one's creation – that one is a creaturely being with the capacities of memory, understanding, and the willing desire and love to acquire what it is that the mind comes to know is essential to one because one always already knows what is required, one "re-cognises" it. But these are progressive recognitions for beings that are distended in time. Consequently, self-formation, in this sense, is an attempt to fashion oneself in attunement to the God who is one's source of being and one's horizon of being over a lifetime of reflectively shaping one's willingness and desires for what is ultimate. But this self cannot be known in any definitive way *sub specie humanitatis*; it entails a progressive movement from image to likeness. Because the end to which one moves is not creaturely, the *discovery* of oneself will only ultimately be known in a future eternity as the result of the *formation* of oneself. The responsibility of forming a self, on the way to the self who one is in God, is one's own. As for the incarnate Christ, it involved thought and judgement, word and action consonant with a self-narrative of desiring what God wants.

Perhaps in the quest to love God knowingly, one may read Augustine's pressured inquiry of Trinitarian self-imaging and his autobiographical self-questioning as his living before the perennial offer of a grace-filled life ever tantalisingly depicted in the paradoxical assertion at the centre of the Christian faith: Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human. This claim invokes a Trinitarian God – that the Christ is of the Trinity and, likewise, that "as Trinitarian, the *imago* in humans becomes memory-understanding-will (love)" (Tracy 2018:69, n. 1), scrutinised in enacted self-examination in the presence of God as Trinity. Therefore, the daily task of being humanly Christian in Augustinian terms, one proposes, is to live each moment – in deliberation and action – in an awareness of one's "trinitarian constitution" that urges one to pursue Christ-like perfection by actively striving for union with the God whose "us-ness" allows for thought to bear upon desire, so as rightly to love what one knows is one's good, because it is of one's Trinitarian *vestigium*. Because the self cannot be discovered in any coherent and sequestered way in this life of one's creaturely presence, Christian self-formation may be conceived of and practised as fashioning a self who will be found only in the relational loving and knowing Trinitarian being who is one's impressed beginning and one's founding end.

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