

DID AUGUSTINE FORESHADOW PSYCHOANALYSIS?

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As early as 1908, the year of the first international meeting of psychoanalysts at Salzberg and just eight years after the publication of Freud's *Die Traumdeutung*, an English editor of Augustine's *Confessions* noted that Book X amounted to a true and psychological analysis of the phenomena of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind (Gibb and Montgomery 1908).¹ This sentiment was repeated in 1922 by the Benedictine scholar Cuthbert Butler (Butler 1951). The inclusion of a section on Augustine by Dom Butler in his *Western Mysticism* had been an afterthought but he was later to consider it the most valuable portion of his book.

Augustine of Hippo (CE 354–430) was born in Tagaste in North Africa of a pagan father and Christian mother, Monica, and received a Christian education. He studied rhetoric at the University of Carthage in order to become a lawyer but decided to devote himself to literary pursuits. He abandoned the Christianity of his infancy and took a mistress with whom he lived for fifteen years. In 373, while reading Cicero's lost *Hortensius*² he became interested in philosophy and became a *Ciceronianus* 'in a wider and deeper sense than before' (Hagendahl 1967: vol. 2, 488) and a Manichaean. He moved to Rome and then to Milan, where he taught rhetoric and came under the influence of Ambrose. In Milan he became a Neo-Platonist and soon afterwards a Christian. Augustine would be acclaimed by later generations as one of the most gifted Latin writers of his day and his influence on Western thought has been immense (Cross 1963).

While some serious objections have been raised to the view that the *Confessions* amounts to a psychoanalytic study, notably by Schmaltz (1952) and Meserve (1965), who argue that Augustine knew nothing of the unconscious, the similarity between the approach of Freud and that of Augustine continues to be recognised by others. Recent advocates of the latter view include Woolcott (1966) and Elledge (1988). For Gay (1986), the text of Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* operates much like the *Confessions*. By making public the author's internal world and particularly his dreams, it transforms what is an inherently private, personal story into authoritative wisdom.

Freud's masterpiece *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) achieves authority precisely because it contains so many 'confessions'. It reveals Freud's jealousy, petty, sexualised, and hostile wishes, his grandiose ambitions, and his severe neuroticisms. In other words, it reveals a person much like ourselves, the difference being that Freud and Augustine created intellectual modes that permit confession but prevent narcissistic abasement.

(Gay 1986: 64)

Indeed, in his *Écrits* (1977) Augustine was famously described by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan as foreshadowing psychoanalysis (Lacan 1977).

Psychoanalytic studies of the *Confessions*

Psychoanalytic studies of the *Confessions*, which was written for an educated audience and demonstrated the author's exquisite literary sense and deep immersion in the Latin classics, tend to take it for granted that the text is in essence an autobiography (Brown 2000). But, in Marrou's words, '*ne sont pas simplement une autobiographie*' (Marrou 1963: 43) but a theological work. As such it is a text filled with allegory – that is, with things intentionally hidden – and other literary devices, in which one scene after another takes on a symbolic meaning. That is to say, it is not just a collection of recollections but the work '*du rédacteur*' (Courcelle 1968: 159). As such it ought not to be regarded merely as Augustine's autobiography 'for any period or section of his life' (O'Meara 1954: 6). This was brought out in the masterful study, which first appeared in 1950, by Pierre Courcelle (1968). He argued that, in order to understand a text, one must interpret it in the light of the literary genre to which it belongs.³ By focusing on Augustine himself and his psychological makeup, while taking an uncritical position on the nature of the text itself, psychoanalytic studies have invariably been naive and limited, when not directly misleading. For this reason scholars have generally shown little regard for them. Solignac, following Labriolle (1926) and Zepf (1926), explicitly argues against the '*psycho-psychanalytique*' explanation of Legewie (1925), in which he describes Augustine as suffering from '*un désordre des fonctions psychologiques de l'inconscient*' (Skutella 1998: 34 n.1, 1996: 541 respectively).

The psychoanalytic study of Augustine most often cited was made by Kligerman in 1957. It became the model for subsequent studies and, like the study by Legewie, took a naive view of the events described in the text and as a result superimposed on that un-deconstructed symbolism, a further interpretation.⁴ For example, Kligerman argues that, where, in the *Confessions*, we find Augustine identifying with Virgil's story of Dido and Aeneas, we see an identification which contains the nuclear conflict of Augustine's infantile neurosis and that this played 'a most decisive role in his subsequent career' (Kligerman 1957: 472). This reading fails to take account of the fluctuating

use Augustine makes of the *Aeneid*, not just as literary modelling but as a reflection on the relationship between text and reader, which should at the very least put any psychological speculation into context (Bennett 1988).⁵ For Kligerman, Augustine's conflict is explained in terms of his confused identifications with his parents, including a repressed erotic relationship with his mother, which he uses to explain Augustine's more general struggle with sexuality, his sibling relations, his bouts of illness and his flight from Rome (Kligerman 1957). On this view it was Augustine's fear of alienation from his mother due to sexual temptations which was the cause of the illness that affected Augustine's chest and throat.⁶ Legewie (1931) had already suggested that there may have been a psychosomatic element in this period of ill health, which led to Augustine resigning the chair of rhetoric in Milan, but Legewie's conclusion was more tentative.

Kligerman did not rely on a scholarly analysis of the text of the *Confessions* and his assessment of Augustine's psychological makeup is largely based on conjecture. As a result it remains unconvincing. Nevertheless, his study, while not without its critics even within the world of psychoanalysis, has been relied upon by later commentators to a degree which is disproportionate to its true worth. Thus Woolcott writes that, despite the disadvantages inherent in the use of an historical document, Augustine's *Confessions* have certain outstanding advantages for psychoanalytic study 'as has been aptly demonstrated by Kligerman' (Woolcott 1966: 273). Elledge (1988) knew the scholarly background on Augustine. He had even read Courcelle, but strangely follows a similar line to Kligerman, suggesting that Augustine's conversion reconstitutes an ambivalence structured around a symbiotic relationship with his mother. He portrays Augustine constructing a defence against emotional betrayal in a deific embrace. Recently, more sophisticated versions of Kligerman's thesis have been developed, notably by Dittes (1965), Ziolkowski (1995), Barzilai (1997) and by Capps (2007).⁷ All concur with Kligerman that Augustine was the best, if not the first, psychologist in the ancient world (Dittes 1965), because the *Confessions* exhibit 'a psychological astuteness centuries before some of its methods of self-examination and autobiography became institutionalised as legitimate scientific practice' (Elledge 1988: 72). Woolcott simply echoes Dittes' earlier assessment of Augustine as 'the greatest psychologist of his time and probably for many centuries to come' (Woolcott 1966: 273).⁸

In comparison to these studies of Augustine's psychology, the hermeneutic structure and allegorical exegesis which characterise Augustine's thought, and give the *Confessions* its unusual quality, has received relatively little attention in psychoanalytic literature. The exception should be the study by Rigby (1985). He attempted to take into account the theological and literary scholarship on the *Confessions* by explicitly mirroring the hermeneutic approach to Freud pioneered by Paul Ricoeur (1970). But in the end he has little to say that had not already been said by other analysts.

The deeper regions of the self

Although Augustine was first of all a theologian, he was ready to borrow from philosophy a conceptual framework for the purpose of theological argument. Indeed, according to the penetrating study made by Rist (1969), Augustine did not draw a clear boundary between philosophy and theology. The Neo-Platonism of Plotinus and Porphyry had an independence that particularly suited Augustine's approach and provided a dynamic philosophical framework that Augustine was able to utilise in order to make sense of his experiences. As it was not a priori for or against Christian belief, it could be satisfactorily integrated into his theological project (Marrou 1963). Above all else Neo-Platonism gave Augustine the concept of an inner, psychological world (Brown 2000; also see Aubin 1963; O'Connell 1964) and he seems to have assumed that his readers shared this perspective (Theiler 1933).

In its style, the *Confessions* bears considerable resemblance to the *Enneads* of Plotinus. The *Enneads* are a collection of six groups of nine treatises arranged according to their subject matter. They follow a pedagogic path intended to lead the reader through various degrees of knowledge of virtue (Armstrong 1966). Plotinus developed the idea that our perceptual life is in some way unreal. This view, which would be mirrored in Freud's idea that the symptom could be interpreted like a dream,⁹ had earlier been expressed in classical Greek poetry – we find it, for example, in Pindar (Pind. *Pyth.* VIII.95),¹⁰ Aeschylus (Aesch. *Prom. Vinct.* 547ff.) and Aristophanes (Aristoph. *Birds* 685–7)¹¹ – and it was repeated vigorously by philosophers in late antiquity, on the basis of their reading of Plato. Prompted by this Werner Jaeger, in a study published in 1943, described Plato as the father of psychoanalysis.

In order to understand [the character of our desires] we must descend into the subconscious. In dreams, says Plato, the soul casts off the restraining bonds put on it by reason, and the wild and bestial part of man awakens, revealing a part of his nature which he himself did not know. Plato was the father of psychoanalysis. He was the first to disclose that the horrible Oedipus-complex, the lewd desire to have sexual intercourse with one's own mother, was part of the unconscious personality. He disclosed it by analysing the experience of dreaming, and added a number of analogous wish-complexes . . . The unconscious, he says, thrusts upwards in dreams.¹²

(Jaeger 1986: 343)

Plotinus, and to a lesser extent Albinus, Maximus of Tyre and Porphyry, insist that the inner man or interior experience is, within the hierarchy of the various degrees of selfhood, the true self (Dodds 1965).¹³ 'The sum of things is within us' (Plot. *Enn.* 3, 8, 6, 40) and what is real in man is his inner world. Thus, if we wish to know what is real about ourselves we need to look within and

reflect on our mental functioning, for what is within is better (*melius quod interius*).

if we wish to know the Real, we have only to look in ourselves. This self-exploration is the heart of Plotinianism, and it is in the analysis of the Self that he made his most original discoveries . . . He was apparently the first to make the vital distinction between the total personality ($\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$) and the ego-consciousness ($\acute{\eta}\mu\epsilon\tau\varsigma$); in the *Enneads*, as Stenzel observed, 'the ego' becomes for the first time a philosophical term. On this distinction between psyche and ego his whole psychology hinges.¹⁴

Plotinus recognizes . . . that there are sensations which do not reach consciousness unless we specially direct attention to them (4,4,8; 5,1,12), and (anticipating Freud) that there are desires which 'remain in the appetitive part and are unknown to us' (4,8,8,9). The same is true of the permanent dispositions which result from past experiences or mental acts. Such dispositions, he says, can exert the strongest pull when we are least conscious of them.

(Dodds 1960: 5–6)

According to Neo-Platonism the analytic withdrawal into the psyche demanded an examination of unconscious desire, which amounted to a therapeutic process. Plotinus described this withdrawal as a kind of catharsis – a breaking through the ego to get in touch with excluded, disassociated parts of the self. Hence Dodds considered Plotinus the first writer to recognise that the psyche includes dispositions 'of which the ego is normally unconscious' (Dodds 1965: 88 n.4; cf. also Schwyzer 1960). In this tradition of inwardness the notion of being turned-to-oneself became a paradigm of the philosophic life. Thus, Plotinus and Proclus urged their disciples to continually look within. This view also came to permeate Christian circles¹⁵ and we find echoes of the Plotinian vocabulary in Greek patristic writers including Gregory of Nyssa, who refers to the illusion of the material world as a kind of sorcery (Daniélou 1944).¹⁶ On this view the spiritual realm was not somewhere else but was to be found in the deepest level of the self – at a level that was deeper than rational thought; a region that, while normally remaining unconscious, periodically invades the field of consciousness. That is to say, for Plotinus, consciousness is a point of view, a perspective. What we are is something of which we are unconscious and we will not fully be who we are until we gain some understanding of the different levels of the self. By directing our attention within, to the interaction between the conscious and unconscious levels of the self, we become aware of the spiritual life we are somehow already unconsciously living. The reason this is thought to be therapeutic is because it amounts to a uniting of the self, a healing of the split between consciousness and the unconscious (Hadot 1973).

In one passage in the *Confessions* Augustine writes that there is something in man, something about himself that he does not know – ‘*tamen est aliquid hominis quod nec ipse scit spiritus hominis qui in ipso est*’ (Aug. *Conf.* X.5.7). This hidden part is a psychic faculty but it is larger than consciousness.

I cannot totally grasp all that I am. Thus the mind is not large enough to contain itself: but where can that part of it be which it does not contain? Is it outside itself and not within? How can it not contain itself? [How can there be any of itself that is not *in* itself]
(Aug. *Conf.* X.VIII.15)

According to Dodds, in Augustine’s description of the *abyssus humanae conscientiae* we get a glimpse of his notion of the unconscious – a notion that is fundamentally Gnostic in character (Dodds 1965), similar to the Valentinian mysterious primordial deep (*butbos*) where all things originally dwelt unknown, and to the *pbragmos* (barrier) in Basileides, described by Origen in his *Contra Celsum*, where the world of conscious experience is cut off from unconscious inspirations (Dodds 1965; cf. also Blanchard 1954; Quispel 1947). Dodds was undoubtedly on to something, but Augustine’s abyss may better be described as the ontological potentiality for consciousness. The psychic foundation of human subjectivity (Mills 2004).

According to Taylor (1989), although we already find the language of inwardness in Plotinus, Augustine gave it a more central place by introducing the idea that our inner world was not just unconscious but something fundamentally hidden (Cary 2000). This meant that we need to do more than just turn away from what is outside, but ‘search’ within and disentangle various mechanisms that resist the process of bringing unconscious material into awareness (Taylor 1989: 537).¹⁷ This idea led to what has been described as Augustine’s invention of the inner self (Taylor 1989; cf. Cary 2000).¹⁸

Let one very famous line stand for many: ‘*Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas*’ (‘Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth’). Augustine is always calling us within. What we need lies ‘*intus*’, he tells us again and again.

(Taylor 1989: 129)

The deceptive nature of consciousness

One of the reasons why Augustine thought that the depths of the personality were not to be found in consciousness was because he considered that one of the functions of rationality is to hide the truth of the personality. In this sense he saw consciousness as fundamentally deceptive, wrapped up in *figmenta* and

therefore unreliable. A state in which 'the possibilities in me are hidden from myself' (Aug. *Conf.* X.XXXII.48). Thus he concludes, 'my [conscious] mind . . . feels that it cannot lightly trust its own report' (Aug. *Conf.* X.XXXII.48). In contrast, the hidden part of the mind, once accessed, reveals the truth and consequently enquiry into the unknown inner region of the mind was, he thought, one of the highest activities for man. At times Augustine describes the unconscious as the dead part of a person, a dark shadow encircling consciousness which, while belonging fully to the subject, nevertheless remains out of sight (Brown 2000; cf. also Holte 1962). On his view, knowledge of what is unconscious is equivalent to knowledge of one's feelings (*affectus*), particularly of one's desire which includes but is not synonymous with one's past desires (Aug. *Conf.* X.XIV.21). Although some hidden things, he observed, could be recalled immediately, other things took longer. Some, he said, are blurted out in slips of the tongue while we are looking for something else.¹⁹ Speaking in a figurative way, he refers to the mind as a vast palace, a storehouse with different levels – some deeper, less accessible and some more secret. Indeed, some things are so repressed in its uttermost depths he considers them unreachable. They are, as it were, buried in a remote recess, thrust away so far back they are practically unsearchable, unless drawn forth by someone else. Without the Other, 'I might never have managed to think of them at all' (Aug. *Conf.* XI.21). Yet, even with the help of another, it may be that repressed material can only ever be penetrated as deeply as is possible at a specific moment. For researching the unconscious is a process that, for Augustine, had no end.

Bringing these hidden things back by remembering and thinking them out seemed to Augustine analogous to the way chewing the cud, for the cow, brings food up from the stomach. And yet, once repressed material is accessed, if we stop being aware of it, it quickly becomes repressed again and 'falls away into the more remote recesses of the memory' (Aug. *Conf.* X.XI.18). Should we want to re-access these things we need to 'think them out afresh' (Aug. *Conf.* X.XI.18).

in other words they must be collected out of dispersion, and indeed the verb *to cogitare* is named from this drawing together. For *cogito* (I think) has the same relation to *cogo* (I put together) as *agito* to *ago* and *factito* to *facio*. But the mind of man has claimed the word *cogitare* completely for its own: not what is put together anywhere else but only what is put together in the mind is called cogitation.

(Aug. *Conf.* X.XI.18)

This process of thinking out repressed material was described by Augustine as hard interior work, as 'toil within myself' (*laboro in me ipso*) (Aug. *Conf.* X.XVI.25). 'Who can analyse this?' he wrote, for 'I have become to myself a difficult soil and of heavy sweat' (Aug. *Conf.* X.XVI.25).

The unconscious as *memoria*

'Augustine had inherited from Plotinus a sense of the sheer size and dynamism of the inner world' and thought that 'knowledge of God could be found in the form of some "memory" in this inner world' (Brown 2000: 172). Butler (1951) had recognised that this corresponded in some way to the unconscious. For the memory was both a part of the mind but at the same time somehow beyond consciousness. It is 'beyond the power by which I am united to my body, and by which I fill its whole structure with life' (Aug. *Conf.* X.VII.11-6-7). In calling forth things from his memory, Augustine was convinced that somehow he would meet himself. For it is only by entering the memory that, he felt, genuine self-knowledge was possible. He was to compare this self-analysis with travel. 'Men', he said, 'go afar to marvel at the heights of mountains, the mighty waves of the sea, the long courses of great rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the movements of the stars, yet leaving themselves unnoticed' (Aug. *Conf.* X.VIII.15).

And so I come to the fields and vast palaces of memory, where are stored the innumerable images of material things brought to it by the senses. Further there is stored in the memory the thoughts we think, by adding to or taking from or otherwise modifying the things that sense has made contact with, and all other things that have been entrusted to and laid up in memory . . . when I turn to memory, I ask it to bring forth what I want: and some things are produced immediately, some take longer as if they had to be brought out of some more secret place of storage; some pour out in a heap, and while we are actually wanting and looking for something quite different, they hurl themselves upon us in masses as though to say: 'May it not be me that you want?' I brush them from the face of my memory with the hand of my heart, until at last the thing I want is brought to light as from some hidden place. Some things are produced just as they are required, easily and in right order; and things that come first give place to those that follow, and given place are stored up again to be produced when I want them. This is what happens, when I say anything by heart.

(Aug. *Conf.* X.VIII.12-20-6)

Here Augustine describes the memory as a hidden reservoir or inner receptacle where memories, thoughts and fantasies (*innumerabilium imaginum*) are put away as if in a limitless and secret place (*ex abditus*) within us (Margretts 1953; cf. also Winkler 1954). Thus Augustine describes the memory as an inner hidden container. Yet *memoria* for Augustine is more than a storehouse of concepts and fantasies, for it has an intimate dynamic relationship with the will, the emotions and interior experience in general. In fact, while describing

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the memory in spatial terms, he insists that it is not really a place at all. In fact, he says, the idea that it can be located inside a person is a ridiculous image.

in my memory too I meet myself – I recall myself, what I have done, when and where and in what state of mind I was when I did it. In my memory are all the things I remember to have experienced myself or to have been told by others. From the same store I can weave into the past endless new likenesses of things either experienced by me or believed on the strength of things experienced . . . in the vast recess of my mind with its immeasurable store of images of things so great.
(Aug. *Conf.* X.VIII.14)

For Augustine the memory is a mental faculty but is also synonymous with the mind.

The mind (*animus*) and the memory (*memoria*) are not two separate things – for when we tell another to remember something we say: ‘See that you have it in mind’; and when we forget something, we say: ‘It was not in my mind’ or ‘It escaped my mind.’ Thus we call the memory mind.

(Aug. *Conf.* X.XIV.16–28)

And ‘no one would say that the memory does not belong to the mind’ (Aug. *Conf.* X.XIV.27–8). In fact, Augustine even describes the memory and the mind as the self: ‘It is I who remember, I, my mind . . . [and] what could be closer to me than myself (*quid autem propinquius me ipso mihi*)’ (Aug. *Conf.* X.XVI.25). In a very real sense, then, the subject is identical with the memory – ‘*et hoc est animus et hoc ipse ego sum*’ (Aug. *Conf.* XVII.26, cf. XIV.21). ‘Great is the power of memory, a thing . . . to be in awe of, a profound and immeasurable multiplicity; and this thing is my mind, this thing am I (*et hoc ego ipse sum*)’ (Aug. *Conf.* X.XVII.12–14).

Augustine notes that the memory is full, not of things in themselves, but of images of things. These include images of material things that have come to us through the senses, as well as the thoughts we think and indeed everything we have experienced – all we have been told, everything we have learned, principles, laws and our feelings (*affectiones*). These *affectiones* include our desire (*cupiditas*), our regrets and our guilt. In fact, for Augustine, everything that a person is, is inwardly present in his memory including, so called, forgotten things: ‘even the thing we remember that we forgot, we had not utterly forgotten. For if we had utterly forgotten it, we should not even be able to think of looking for it’ (Aug. *Conf.* X.XIX.28). Augustine thus considers the memory as something dynamic. We can add to the thoughts we have stored there and modify them by somehow doing things inside ourselves. We can

distinguish things found in the memory and weave into the past new experiences. And we can fantasise. For Augustine, one of the key dynamic aspects of the *memoria* is what Solignac calls totalisation (Skutella 1996: 559–60). This means bringing together and ordering interior experience. He describes this dynamic bringing together of things 'scattered and unarranged' (*quasi colligere atque animadvertendo*), collected out of dispersion, as a process central to the acquisition of self-awareness, characterised as it is by the integration of conscious and unconscious material. Without this dynamic process of integrating the unconscious part of the mind, we cannot, he argues, totally grasp 'all that I am' (*nec ego ipse capio totum, quod sum*; Aug. *Conf.* X.VIII.15.6–7). We may note here a similarity between Augustine and Lacan, who described the unconscious as a sort of register of memory (Lacan 1993). In fact, in his *Écrits* Lacan goes so far as to say that 'what we teach the subject to recognise as his unconscious is his memory' (Lacan 1977: 52).

Infirmitas, insania and discordia

Augustine diagnosed and described his conversion in psychological terms. The account he gives of himself comes to its climax in Book X of the *Confessions*. Here it is made clear that, far from being cured by his conversion, the author is still in mid-treatment (Dodds 1927–8). The medical image is drawn explicitly by Augustine himself (Brown 2000). He speaks of an inner crisis, akin to a fever in which he is somehow trapped in the past, in the habits of a lifetime (Brown 2000). Indeed, he considers that these habits are so ingrained in him that they have become compulsive. This leads him to conclude that his past – including his childhood – is very much alive in the present. It is something from which he cannot escape.

In Augustine's view a fundamental dislocation permeates the human subject. He described this as *discordia* (discordance) – a concept later to be introduced into psychiatry by Chaslin and into psychoanalysis by Lacan. It was Cicero, Augustine's 'chief informant' on Pre-Socratic philosophy (Hagendahl 1967: 588), who had first used the term to describe a state of being in which a person was in discord with one's own self (*discordans secum*) (Lanteri-Laura and Gros 1992).²⁰ (According to Augustine each person seeks to restore, in some way, a balanced, undivided whole (*concordia*) within himself (Brown 2000). For the subject, Augustine considered, was made to be reunited with him or herself through a 'cure' (Brown 2000: 368). Augustine viewed sexuality as an outstanding example of *discordia*. This was due in part to the way he ties together his conception of the libido, which applies to many passions not just to sexuality, with that of the will. For Augustine the will (*voluntas*) is not the decision-making part of the psyche but the psyche itself. For this reason he considered it synonymous with the basic core of an individual. Thus, man 'is himself *voluntas*' (Rist 1969: 422) and cannot, therefore, claim he was not responsible for an action or behaviour because if he did it, in

some way he must have willed it. Psychological compulsions are, for Augustine, not really compulsions at all, because to be compelled suggests that a person has not willed to act as he has. Augustine understood that desire was split off from his conscious intentions.

In keeping with the Neo-Platonic philosophy in which he framed his thought, Augustine saw the internal, mental world as fundamentally more significant than behaviour. As he looked back on his own sexual life, he was acutely aware of the frailty of sexual relationships, with their disturbing, compulsive and disruptive desires. Like Freud, he came to understand that sexuality, while being at the core of the personality was 'not fully available to consciousness' (Brown 2000: 422).²¹ Augustine concluded that there was a profound disjunction between his understanding of the purpose of the sexual drive, as something harmonious and what he saw within himself, particularly in his dreams. Here a split (*discordia*) not harmony prevailed. The problem lay not in the existence of the erotic *per se*, but in the fact that sexual feelings can all too easily become uncontrollable and overwhelming. Exactly the same problem – namely, lack of control – he concluded, was the basis of impotence (Brown 2000). Unlike his contemporaries he viewed impotency and frigidity, quite logically as psychosomatic symptoms, the cause of which lay 'deep within the self' (Brown 2000: 418). In the fourth century this was a novel point of view. Rather than considering sexuality as primarily a physical thing, Augustine shifted it to the psychological level. In his exegesis of Genesis, he described the life of Adam and Eve in paradise as a fully sexual life, because in his view sexual desire indicated at its most basic that man was fundamentally enrolled in the symbolic, a subject continually driven towards intercourse with others (Brown 2000). This included sexual intercourse but also conversation and the bonds of friendship and intimacy, for the real importance of individual sexual pleasure lay, for Augustine, in its social nature (Brown 2000). Indeed, he saw that sex, when ordered, could drive a person towards harmony (*concordia*), not just at a physical level but more importantly at a psychological level.

Interpreting dreams is like reading scripture²²

Augustine, like Freud, placed considerable emphasis on the interpretation of dreams. He saw dreams as a psychic mechanism of intricate signs which convey a powerful and direct meaning, capable of interpretation (Pépin, 1958; cf. Näf 2004). This view was not unusual in late antiquity and we find antecedents of it among pagan philosophers (Festugière 1975; also cf. Dodds 1951). But Augustine comes far closer than did his pagan predecessors to the views of Freud.²³ In fact, Peter Brown comments that Augustine takes up a position analogous to that of Freud in the way he assumes that 'the proliferation of [dream] images is due to some precise event, to the development of some geological fault across a hitherto undivided consciousness' (Brown 2000: 258), the difference being that the mythical story on which Augustine

hangs the origins of the psychic mechanisms at work in repression was not Oedipus but Genesis. For Augustine it was the fall that made the symbolic the inevitable realm of human relationships (Duchrow 1961).

For the Fall had been, among other things, a fall from direct knowledge into indirect knowledge through signs. The 'inner fountain' of awareness had dried up: Adam and Eve found that they could only communicate with one another by the clumsy artifice of language and gestures.

(Brown 2000: 258)

Augustine's allegorical reading of the scriptures, with its runs of free association, formed the basis for an approach which amounts to an attempt at a self-analysis or self-examination.²⁴ He suggested that the person seriously intent upon grasping deeper levels of meaning could grapple with the text, which, he believed, had been veiled in order to exercise the reader. The philosopher was someone not content with the literal meaning of the text, but one who could grasp its deeper meaning in much the same way the disciples of Pythagoras sought to unravel the deeper meaning of his apophthegms or *symbola* (Dillon 1976).²⁵ This language of signs was made necessary by the dislocation (*discordia*) between our conscious and unconscious world. Progress in self-awareness was measured by his understanding of the scriptures and as he meditated on the text the effects of the therapy he had undergone was illustrated (Brown 2000). This perspective led Augustine to outline what amounts to a therapeutic methodology founded on the motif of *confiteri* (Verheijen 1949).²⁶ It was the act of confessing which was the dynamic form that this treatment took and in this act of opening up lay the possibility of generating psychological insight by descending into himself (Dodds 1927–8).

In the act of writing the *Confessions* and verbalising his memories, Augustine was consciously engaging in a process that he hoped would be curative. Drawing up into words his unconscious thoughts and feelings and analysing them was, he considered, an act of truth. Thus he opens Book X with the words 'he that *does the truth* [*facit veritatem*] is enlightened,²⁷ I want to do it through confessing . . . in writing' (Aug. Conf. X.1.1).²⁸ He thinks that people may enjoy reading the *Confessions* in order to know what he was really like ('*ubi ego sum quicumque sum . . . quid ipse intus sim*'; Aug. Conf. X.3.4). For here he will not lie about himself but endeavour to be at his most transparent and most authentic. He described, for example, how it felt to end the relationship with his mistress and examined the complex unexpected emotions and the changes that had taken place within him when his mother died. He was surprised to find that he felt numbness, an unnatural self-control and shame at having wept so little (Brown 2000). Through this self-analysis of his present feelings the idealised figure of his mother, which had haunted his youth, was transformed into an ordinary human being.

Conclusion

'Turn your eyes inward, look into your own depths, learn first to know yourself!' (Freud SE 17: 144). These are Freud's words and they situate his work within the history of self-consciousness and spirituality. For Augustine, the way to a more spiritual life is precisely to turn inward (*in te redi*) and to attend to the self, for this is where truth lies. This reflexive position introduces into Western thought, the 'language of inwardness' (Taylor 1989: 131) that was previously associated with Plotinus.²⁹ In other words, for Augustine, the truth about ourselves is to be found, not just in the world, but more importantly in the intimacy of self-presence. It is hard not to see this inward turn foreshadowing Freud. This is particularly the case when we see that his understanding of memory (*memoria*) includes more than just past experiences. In memory he explores the paradox of the unconscious – the things about ourselves that can seem both known, and at the same time unknown and out of reach. As Taylor puts it:

Deep within us is an implicit understanding, which we have to think hard to bring to explicit and conscious formulation. This is our '*memoria*'. And it is here that our implicit grasp of what we are resides, which guides us as we move from our original self-ignorance and grievous self-misdescription to true self-knowledge.

(Taylor 1989: 135)

Neo-Platonism, with its insistence on spiritual exercises, orientated Augustine's thought inward. It was an inwardness that focused on mental conflict and his struggle with his own sanity, splitting (*discordia*) and sexuality; an analysis of his dreams and slips of the tongue which revealed hidden, complex and unconscious associations. But what makes the *Confessions* far more than autobiography is not so much Augustine's self-reflection but the tactic that he adopted for uncovering a new view of the subject. It is a hermeneutic methodology similar to that which was later to be adopted by Freud (Langs 1973). That is to say, it is a concerned introspection in which language is especially important (Burton 2007).³⁰ As such it is embedded in an exegetical tradition that has its roots in antiquity – specifically, as we learn from the *Questiones Homericae* of Pseudo Heraclitus, from the allegorical reading of Homer – and not just from Christian Greek writers like Origen or in the rabbinical tradition in Judaism, although both of these were to become important sources for psychoanalysis (Bakan 1958).³¹ Both traditions, Greek and Jewish, favoured allegory and Augustine 'produced a singularly comprehensive explanation of why allegory should have been necessary in the first place. The need for such a language of "signs" was the result of a specific dislocation of human consciousness' (Brown 2000: 258; see also Vecchio 1994). In this tradition the biblical text was seen as a puzzle, a coded message, in

which even the most bizarre incidents in the Old Testament could be taken as signs impregnated with a hidden meaning. A meaning of which one could only become fully conscious when it was verbalised (*confiteri*). This brings Augustine far closer to psychoanalysis than any other writer in antiquity. In his reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Freud was to treat the text in a manner similar to Augustine's treatment of biblical texts and particularly Genesis. No wonder, then, that Lacan, with his emphasis on the symbolic, and on language in particular, was to say to his students that 'everything I have been telling you' has been 'expounded with sensational lucidity . . . fifteen centuries earlier' by Augustine 'in one of the most glorious [texts] one could read' (Lacan 1988: 249).³²

Notes

- 1 Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* was first published in November 1899, but an English translation did not appear until 1913.
- 2 This represented a key turning point in Augustine's intellectual development. From now on his thinking became more philosophical and his lasting interest in ancient philosophy was the outcome of the stimulus of reading the *Hortensius*. This is recalled 'in the preface to *De beata vita* . . . largely based on [the] themes of *tanto amore philosophiae succensus sum, ut statim ad eam me ferre meditarer*' (Hagendahl 1967: vol. 2, 488). As well as Hagendahl's study of the influence of Cicero and of the *Hortensius* on the young Augustine, see C. Boyer (1920) *Christianisme et Néoplatonisme dans la formation de saint Augustin*, Paris: Beauchesne; and, by the same author (1937) *Augustin Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* vol. 1, p. 1102, Paris: Beauchesne. More broadly on the relationship between Cicero and Augustine, see the monograph by M. Testard (1958) *S. Augustin et Cicéron*, Paris: Études Augustiniennes.
- 3 Christine Mohrmann (1959) has written extensively on the *Confessions* as literature. See 'Le *Confessionis* come documento autobiografico and La lingua e lo stile delle', *Confessionis Convivium* 3: 1–11 and 129–39. For an examination of the relationship between the literary form of biography and psychoanalysis in the *Confessions*, see J. Litchenberg (1978) 'Psychoanalysis and biography', *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 6: 397–427.
- 4 Labriolle, although critical of him, does admit that Legewie was very thoroughly versed in the opera of Augustine (Labriolle 1926: 39).
- 5 On Augustine's use of the *Aeneid*, cf. H. Hagendahl (1967) *Augustine and the Latin Classics. Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia*, 2 vols. Göteborg: Almqvist and Wiksell; also see the bibliography in W. Hübner (1981) 'Die praetorian memoriae im zehnten Buch der *Confessiones*: Vergilisches bei Augustin', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 27: 245–63.
- 6 'Quin etiam quod ipsa aestate litterario labori nimio pulmo meus cedere coeperat et difficulter trahere suspiria doloribusque pectoris testari se saucium vocemque cloriorum productionem recusare, primo perturbaverat me, quia magisterii illius sacnam paene jam necessitate deponere cogebat aut, si curare et convalescere potuissem, certe intermittere' (Aug. Conf. IX.2.4–10).
- 7 Of these more recent attempts to read Augustine from the perspective of psychoanalysis, that of Barzilai (1997) is particularly interesting. He traces numerous references throughout Lacan's works to the *Confessions*, specifically to the scene in Book I, chapter 7 concerning sibling jealousy.

- 8 Referring to the attentions of modern psychological interpreters, Peter Brown comments shrewdly that it is 'as difficult as it is desirable to combine competence as an historian with sensitivity as a psychologist' (Brown 2000: 19).
- 9 The connection between Plotinus and Freud was discussed recently in a paper delivered by Jacques-Alain Miller at the 10th Congress of the New Lacanian School in London on 3 November 2011.
- 10 'Epamerōi ti de tis; ti d' ou tis; skias onar anthrōpos'. Cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 424.
- 11 This is reminiscent of the psalmist, '~~age de physis Andros anaurobioi phylōn genea prosomoioi; oligodranes, plasmata pēlou, skiocidas phyl' amonima, apīēnes, ephēmerioi, talaiōi brotoi, aneris eikeloneiroi~~'. Cf. Aristoph. *Birds* 198.
- 12 It is likely that Freud would have been interested in one fact of Plotinus' childhood that has been preserved; namely, that he used to run to his nurse, even when he was going to grammar school, until the age of 8, 'uncovering her breasts and craving to suck them' (Edwards 2000: 5). Dodds suggests that the significance of this may fit with Freud's suggestion that mystical experience, with its sense of infinite extension and oneness with the Real, may represent a persistence of infantile feeling in which no distinction is yet drawn between self and other. A feeling which 'could co-exist as a sort of counterpart with the narrower and more sharply outlined ego-feeling of maturity' (Dodds 1965: 9–10; 91 n.2; cf. Freud SE 1930: 13–14). For a portrait of Plotinus and his thought see P. Hadot (1973) *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, Paris: Études Augustiniennes.
- 13 Cf. Aug. *Conf.* X.34.51. Also see Porphyry (Edwards 2000: 22).
- 14 Dodds argues that Plotinus is, with Alexander of Aphrodisias, the 'first writer to formulate clearly the general idea of self-consciousness (συναίσθησις ὀ παρακολούθησις εαυτῶ), the ego's awareness of its own activity' (1960: 6). On the history of these terms, see Schwyzer (1960). The reference to Stenzel is to the final section of his book, see J. Stenzel (1931) *Metaphysik des Alertums*, München und Berlin: Druck/Verlag von R. Oldenbourg.
- 15 For a general review of the longevity of Neo-Platonism, see Edwards (2000: lv–lx).
- 16 On Gregory's anthropology, see von H. Balthasar (1942) *Présence et pensée. Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris: Beauchesne, especially pp. 19–36 and 61–6, where he discusses Gregory's conception of the spiritual, the material (including the notion of desire) and the real (*du réel*) – the incomprehensible realm 'where understanding does not reach'; Grégoire de Nysse *La Vie de Moïse* 46: 8–10, ed. J. Daniélou (1968), Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.
- 17 Brown points out that such a philosophical perspective may have suited Augustine temperamentally, for he was an extremely introverted and sensitive person, prone, as was Plotinus' biographer Porphyry, to bouts of depression (Brown 2000; Edwards 2000). For a discussion of the diagnosis of depression in antiquity, see P. Toohey (1990), 'Some ancient histories of literary melancholia', *Illinois Classical Studies* 15: 143–61.
- 18 For an alternative view, see G. Madec (1988) 'In te supra me. Le sujet dans les *Confessions* de saint Augustin', *Revue de l'Institut Catholique de Paris* 28: 45–63. While it is undoubtedly true that Neo-Platonism was the foundation for his ideas on the unconscious, it is only when Augustine turned to Aristotle that he was able to formulate a fully coherent model for the psyche (Harrison 2006). In relation to Augustine's notion of the will, Harrison notes that the synthesis between Augustine and the Aristotelian philosophy of mind is the work of Thomas (Harrison 2006).
- 19 Quispel refers to 'Freudian slips' made by Augustine himself in relation to his use of the Diatessaron. See G. Quispel (1975) *Tatian and the Gospel of Thomas. Studies in the History of the Western Diatessaron* 60, Leiden: E.J. Brill.

- 20 Early on, in his doctoral thesis, in a translation of a passage from Spinoza's *Ethics*, Lacan had described one aspect of paranoia with the French word *discordance*. In French the term *discordance*, which was introduced in psychiatry by Philippe Chaslin (1857–1923), refers to a conflict between symptoms, particularly in cases of paranoia. As a result, *discordant* is closely associated with the introduction of the term 'schizophrenia'. The French term comes directly from the Latin *discordare* (Lanteri-Laura and Gros 1992) and translated as both 'splitting' and 'dissociation' (the German *Spaltung*) (Roudinesco 1993). What Lacan did was to equate the French term *discordance* with Freud's *Ichspaltung*, the 'splitting of the ego'.
- 21 In relation to Freud, Merkur (1994) and Bakan (1958) have demonstrated convincingly how this view of the sexual stems directly from the Jewish mystical tradition.
- 22 Freud was to say that interpreting dreams was like reading sacred scripture (*einen heiligen Text*) (Freud SE V: 514).
- 23 Here we see an example of Augustine sharing the ideas of his contemporary Evagrius Ponticus, who understood the dynamic influence exercised on dream activity, by the emotions a person experiences during the day and by the role of memory in mental life. See the excellent study by M. Dulaey (1973) *Le Rêve dans la vie et la pensée de saint Augustin*, Paris: Études Augustiniennes.
- 24 The unusual quality of Augustine's *Confessions* has led at least one scholar, Asmussen, to suggest that it was based on a Manichaean prototype of the examination of conscience but Hadot (1995) argues that the *Confessions* are an anti Manichaean theological polemic. Cf. Asmussen, *Xu ASTV ANIFT. Studies in Manichaeism. Acta Theologica Danica VII*, trans. N. Haislud, Prostant apud Munksgaard: Copenhagen; P. Hadot (1995) *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Oxford: Blackwell. On the Manichaean background, see W.H.C. Frend (1953) 'The Gnostic-Manichaean Tradition in Roman North-Africa', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 4: 13–25; J. Ries (1957–8) 'Introduction aux études manichéennes', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 33: 453–82 and 35: 362–409; and A. Adam (1958) 'Das Fortwirken des Manichäismus bei Augustinus', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 69: 1–25.
- 25 The strong similarity between the Christian examination of conscience and that of the Pythagoreans, which had a psychological and therapeutic character, has long been recognised. See the articles by H. Jaeger and J.-C. Guy (1961) 'Examen de conscience. Le monde gréco-romain and chez les pères de l'église', *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 32: 1792–94 and 1801–7.
- 26 As if to justify this, Augustine writes, '*An congratulari mihi cupiunt, cum audierint, quantum ad te accedam munere tuo, et orare pro me, cum audierint, quantum retarder ponere meo? indicabo me talibus*'; Augustine *Conf. X*, 4.5.
- 27 Lacan understood psychoanalysis in similar terms, and in Seminar I he refers to the subject finding the truth of himself in the process of the analysis (Lacan 1988).
- 28 For an alternative view, see G. Schmaltz (1952) 'Das "veritatem facere" des Augustinus als Wesen des Reinfungsvorganges', *Psyche* 6(6/5): 304–19.
- 29 Tertullian may be the only earlier Latin writer to come near to Augustine in terms of his interest in the inner, subjective life of man. In his *De Anima* he stresses the importance of human psychology. Cf. J. Daniélou (1980), *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, trans. David Smith and John Austin Baker, vol. 3, p. 466, London and Philadelphia: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- 30 On Augustine's use of language and on his contribution to language theory, see Solignac in Skutella and Solignac (1998: 207–33, 264–5).
- 31 On the allegorical exegesis of texts Professor Jaeger, tracing the exegetical line from Homer and Hesiod through Virgil to Islamic commentaries on the Koran,

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suggests that it is at the moment 'when the literal meaning of the sacred books had become questionable but when the giving up of those forms was out of the question' that allegory emerges, as the reason for the continuation of the literature was not primarily intellectual but sociological; W. Jaeger (1961) *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, pp. 127–8 n.6 (cf. pp. 47–52).

32 The text in question being the *De Magistro*.

Abbreviations

Works by ancient authors are cited as follows:

- Aesch. *Prom. Vincit.* Aeschylus. *Prometheus Bound*, ed. and trans. A.H. Sommerstein. Loeb Classical Library 145. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- Aug. *Conf.* *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, vols 13 and 14, ed. M. Skutella, intro and notes A. Solignac, trans. E. Tréhorel and G. Bouissou (1996–8). Paris: Études Augustiniennes.
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