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## “INWARD TURN” AND THE AUGUSTINIAN SELF

- Kerem Eksen -

Augustine’s role in the history of the modern notions of “self” and “subject” constitutes a topic of lively debate among the historians of thought. Some significant Augustine scholars argue that Augustine’s philosophy gives an important place to the idea of self-knowledge and contains a *cogito* argument.<sup>1</sup> Another related position puts emphasis on the Augustinian notion of “inward turn” and finds in it the intimations of the modern idea of “inner self.”<sup>2</sup> In his much debated book entitled *The Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor presented a clear account of Augustine’s historical role in which he combined these two ideas: He argued that Augustine’s project played a key role in the development of the modern notion of self, because the idea of “inward turn” led him to give the idea of “self-reflexivity” a major role and made him the forefather of the Cartesian *cogito*.

The major goal of the present work is to criticize some aspects of Taylor’s account and to question his presupposition that the ideas of inward turn and self-reflexivity go hand-in-hand in Augustine. This criticism, however, does not aim at the complete rejection of Charles Taylor’s position. Throughout our study, we will stay loyal to the spirit of his project, since we think that it is useful and illuminating to give a key role to Augustine in the prehistory of the modern self. However, we will argue that Taylor is wrong about the exact contribution that Augustine made to this prehistory: By relating the notions of inwardness and self-reflexivity into one another, Taylor rendered his account of Augustine malleable to serious (and to a large extent legitimate) charges of anachronism. There are, as we will illustrate, powerful criticisms against the view that Augustine’s *cogito*-like arguments foreshadow Descartes and/or other modern thinkers. We think that Taylor’s argument should be revised and amended with the purpose of preventing these objections. For this reason, we will attempt to consider the ideas of self-

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<sup>1</sup> Among today’s scholars, Bermon [2001], Matthews [1992] and Harrison [2006] concentrate on this idea. Jean-Luc Marion, in Marion [2008], criticizes the view that Augustine has a *cogito*-like argument.

<sup>2</sup> Recently, Cary [2000] presented a detailed treatment of this argument. As we will see later on, Emmanuel Housset, in Housset [2008], puts stress on the differences between the Augustinian and the modern conceptions of inward turn.

reflexivity and inwardness separately, and we will argue that Augustine's more direct contribution to the prehistory of the modern notion of self concerns the latter, and not the former.

In order to understand how Augustine's notion of inward turn prefigured the modern conceptions of self, we think that it is of greatest benefit to understand the extent to which his theory breaks with the ancient conception of "turn towards the self" and especially with the theory of his greatest ancient predecessor, i.e. Plotinus. For this reason, our study will begin with an overview of the idea of "turn towards the self" in ancient thought (section 1). After briefly presenting Taylor's and his critics' views pertaining to the transformation that Augustine brought about in this idea (section 2), we will move on to a comparison between Plotinus' and Augustine's notions of interiority and inward turn (sections 3 and 4). Our main goal, in these sections, will be to show that Augustine's novelty concerns the private character of his notion of inward turn.

### 1. The Ancient "Practices of the Self"

We think that Augustine's ethical project can be conceived as a part of the ancient philosophical enterprise dominated by the idea of the "care of the self." Michel Foucault, in his later works, pointed at the centrality of this notion for understanding the particular conception of human experience that ancients had. As Foucault presents it, the Greek "*epimelei heautou*" ("care for your self") and its Latin version "*cura sui*" constitute the key elements of the prehistory of modern conceptions of self, individuality and subjectivity. Foucault argues that the history of this notion can be traced back to Socrates' *Apology* (29d),<sup>3</sup> and that the term, together with the set of notions and practices surrounding it, gained centrality and became a "cultural phenomenon" in Hellenistic times.<sup>4</sup> Through what Foucault calls "practices of the self," various schools of philosophy put forward new modes in which a human being relates himself to his/her acts and to his/her self. Exercises of abstinence, examination of conscience or the conversion towards one's self have been important elements of this new mode of relation. These practices largely inspired the rising Christian culture and shaped significantly what Foucault calls "the history of subjectivity."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Foucault [2005] p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10-11.

A central aspect of the culture of the self has been the overvaluation of the human soul as opposed to "external" beings. On this basis, the idea of turning towards one's self has become a common theme in various practices of the self since Plato. Two important characteristics of this idea of turning towards the self should be reminded so that Augustine's contribution to this culture may be discussed in clear terms:

i. The turn towards the self did not always take the form of an "inward turn."<sup>6</sup> In most cases, the preoccupation with the soul was not grounded by a categorical distinction between the inner and outer aspects of the human experience and by the related suggestion that the "inner" provides access to a higher ontological realm. And, as we will show later on, in those cases in which the language of inwardness played a role (as in Plotinus), it did not lead to the institution of a personal inner space. What was critical for these practices of the self was not the opening up of an inner world of experience belonging to the agent, but rather a meticulous preoccupation with the soul considered as an objective component of the human being.<sup>7</sup>

ii. In many significant cases, caring for the self was not considered as the ultimate goal of the turn towards it. In an article<sup>8</sup> in which he presents his reaction to Foucault's theory of "practices of the self," Pierre Hadot criticizes the Foucauldian overemphasis on the notion of self, or more correctly on a "certain conception of the self."<sup>9</sup> Evidently, Hadot (whose notion of "philosophical exercises" had a significant influence on Foucault) has no intention to undermine the importance of the idea of the "turn towards oneself," which, according to him, was especially central for the Stoic and the neo-Platonist schools. He is in agreement with Foucault in that the goal of the turn towards the self was the liberation from exteriority, the prevention of a wrong mode of attachment to objects and pleasures, and the maintenance of the required degree of self-possession. But Hadot thinks that this turn had other goals than the simple well-being of the self. He says:

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<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to see how in one of his seminars Michel Foucault hesitated to name the turn towards one's self as an inward turn: "Being concerned about oneself implies that we look away from the outside to... I was going to say 'inside'. Let's leave to one side this word, which you can well imagine raises a host of problems, and just say that we must convert our looking from the outside, from others and the world etc., towards 'oneself'." (Foucault [2005] p. 11).

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, in his article entitled "The Individual within the City-State," compares the Platonic notion of the soul and the concept of "ego" that will later be introduced: "The *psuchê* is truly Socrates but not Socrates' "ego," not the psychological Socrates. The *psuchê* is in each of us an impersonal or suprapersonal entity. It is the soul in me and not my soul." See Vernant [1991] p. 330. On this subject, see also Daraki [1989] p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> "Réflexions sur la notion de culture de soi" in Hadot [2002] p. 323-332.

<sup>9</sup> Hadot [2002] p. 324.

I [...] think that this movement of interiorization is inseparably linked to another movement, whereby one rises to a higher psychic level, at which one encounters another kind of exteriorization, another relationship with "the exterior." This is a new way of being-in-the-world, which consists in becoming aware of oneself as a part of nature, and a portion of universal reason.<sup>10</sup>

Hadot's remarks are of prime importance for our purposes, since they underline one significant aspect of the ancient conception of the self as well as the theories and practices that sustain it: The idea of "turn towards the self" is a central part of some of the ancient ethical projects, but the ultimate goal of such a turn is the realization of the commonness of one's nature with that of what is beyond. In a sense, the true objective of the turn towards the self is the ultimate incorporation of it to a higher principle.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Augustine and the Culture of Self

For different reasons, neither Foucault nor Hadot present an extensive account of the changes that the rise of Christianity caused in the existing conception of the turn towards the self. Nevertheless, we think that Foucault's description of "culture of self" and Hadot's criticism of it should be kept in mind in order to have a good grasp of Augustine's position in the history of ethical enterprises. The different philosophical schools that dominated Augustine's age and that largely contributed to his intellectual development proposed various strategies through which the acting agent cares for his/her self. And there would be no mistake in considering the Augustinian thought as a project aiming to reform and to criticize some key aspects of the existing schools.

What is difficult here is to establish the character and scope of Augustine's contribution to the existing culture of the self. In his much debated work entitled *The Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor presents one of the most radical arguments about Augustine's role in the history of the practices of the self. Taylor thinks that Augustine's conception of the self -and especially his idea of "inward turn"- had revolutionary consequences for the history of Western thought. Taylor follows Foucault's terminology and admits that the ancient practice of "care of self" con-

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 330. The English translation is taken from Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase, Blackwell, 1996, p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, in the article that we quoted in note 7, continues as follows: "The individual soul therefore does not convey a man's individual psychology but rather the aspiration of an individual subject to become one with the all, reintegrated into the general cosmic order." See Vernant [1991] p. 330.

tained some sort of a "turn towards one's self." However, he thinks, while this ancient notion of care of self leads to a "reflexive stance," it does not lead to a "radically reflexive one."<sup>12</sup> This idea of "radical reflexivity" constitutes the key element of Taylor's assessment of Augustine's role in the history of the notion of self. Taylor thinks that the adoption of the first-person standpoint is the essential component of this radically reflexive turn. As a result of this move, we start to "become aware of our awareness, try to experience our experiencing, focus on the way the world is for us."<sup>13</sup> According to Taylor, Augustine's turn towards the self constituted the first example of such a turn to radical reflexivity.<sup>14</sup> Hence, by grounding his idea of inward turn on this self-reflexive move, Augustine invented the "*cogito*" argument and considered the certainty of self-presence as the starting-point of our assent towards God.<sup>15</sup>

Taylor is by no means the first person to find a *cogito* argument in Augustine.<sup>16</sup> However, he arguably presented the most radical (and by the same token the most popular) version of the view that Augustine foreshadowed Descartes as well as the modern notion of subject that flows from the Cartesian position. This radical attempt, as expected, faced a large number of severe criticisms. In France, Emmanuel Housset condemned Taylor's position for *somnambulisme de commentaire*, while Jean-Luc Marion suggested that even the term "Augustinian *cogito*" contains a contradiction in terms.<sup>17</sup> In the English-speaking world, one of the most severe criticisms came from Michael Hanby, who is against the overall historical narrative (which Taylor accepts unreservedly) that relates Augustine to Descartes.<sup>18</sup> One common characteristic of this brand of criticism is a reaction to the negligence of certain key religious aspects of Augustine's thought: Housset thinks that this distorted reading of Augustine is first and foremost the outcome of an inclination to "de-theologize"<sup>19</sup> Augustine's philosophy. There is no doubt that the idea of inward turn is central for the Augustinian religious and ethical experi-

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<sup>12</sup> Taylor [1992] p. 130 (our emphasis).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 133-134.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, the idea that a parallelism exists between Augustine's and Descartes' conceptions of self goes back to Descartes' time. For a detailed historical survey of this issue, see Bermon [2001] p. 10-23; and Rodis-Lewis [1995].

<sup>17</sup> For these two criticisms, see respectively Housset [2008] p. 31; and Marion [2008] p. 105. Note that Marion's criticism does not directly target Taylor's work.

<sup>18</sup> See Hanby [2003], especially p. 8-11, where he openly criticizes Taylor's work.

<sup>19</sup> Housset [2008] p. 31.

ence. However, Housset thinks, the ultimate goal of this inward turn is not self-reflection and self-knowledge, but a radical movement of transcendence, an act of opening oneself to God. This movement does not belong to an "I," an "ego" that has already reached an ontological and psychological integrity and that aims to reach the knowledge of God through self-reflexivity. Through inward turn, one aspires to be transformed by the eternal light of Truth and to become a "person."<sup>20</sup> Hence the main element of this turn is not introspection but a radical movement of "transcending," as the principle "transcend yourself" from *De Vera Religione* reveals.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, the relationship of the soul with God can by no means be described as that of a full-fledged "subject" with his/her "object." Through inward turn, the self opens itself to that which is "other" and tries to transcend itself in order to listen to Truth.

We think that Housset's criticism should definitely be taken into consideration: Taylor's emphasis on the notion of "self-reflexivity" bears the risk of seeing the Augustinian inward turn through Cartesian eye-glasses and omitting the constitutive role that God plays in the very act of turning towards the inner self. Even though Taylor does not reduce the Augustinian inward turn to a radically reflexive turn,<sup>22</sup> he seems to oversimplify the extremely complex history of the notion of self by arguing that Augustine had already a notion of self-presence and a version of the Cartesian *cogito*.

Nevertheless, we think that the project of tracing back the modern understanding of the self to Augustine's notion of "inward turn" is meaningful and worthy of taking the risks that it brings. For this reason, our goal is to find out whether Taylor's overall historical scenario may be revised by developing a more

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<sup>20</sup> According to Housset, Augustine is the inventor of the notion of "person" (and not that of "ego" or "subject"), since he is the first thinker to use the term for attributing unity to an act of speech. "Person," in this sense, does not gain a juridical and ethical signification as it will later do with Locke and, following him, Kant. It appears as a component of the theological debates concerning the nature of the Trinity, and its primary role is to answer the question "Who is speaking?" As such, it refers to a "singularity which is not accidental and which introduces a distinction and not a separation" (Housset [2008] p. 42, our translation). As Housset suggests, this sense of the term does not relate it to a process of self-reflexivity that is implied by the later terms "ego" and "subject." See Housset [2008] Ch. 1, especially p. 32-35 and 41-44. For a broader account of the history of the notion of "person," see Housset [2007], especially the first two chapters on Augustine.

<sup>21</sup> *De Vera Religione*, XXIX, 72: "Do not go abroad. Return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth. If you find that you are by nature mutable, transcend yourself. But remember in doing so that you must also transcend yourself even as a reasoning soul." Goulven Madec describes the situation as follows: "The Augustinian interiority may therefore be seen as a movement of transcendence. [...] One has to be detached from the exterior world and turn to himself, not in order to stay there, but in order to go beyond himself and towards God. Interiority is conversion [...]." See Madec [1994] p. 156 (our translation). On the same point, see also Housset [2008] p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> See especially Taylor [1992] p. 135-136.

solid argument about the role of Augustine in the history of the notion of the self. As we tried to illustrate above, the argument from "self-reflexivity" brings with it a serious risk of anachronism: Although *cogito*-like arguments are found in the Augustinian corpus,<sup>23</sup> it is highly suspicious whether they are the intimations of the Cartesian *cogito* and the resulting modern notion of the self. There is, however, another possible strand of argument that may be built up in order to have a precise sense of the revolutionary role of the Augustinian inward turn. We think that it is possible to focus on one radical difference between Plotinus' and Augustine's ways of conceiving the idea of "inward turn," and to argue that the latter's way of depicting the inner experience represents a break with the tradition that is to shape future generations.

### 3.1. Plotinus' Inward Turn

Both Plotinus and Augustine share the basic Platonist principle according to which the search of the individual soul for truth should not be limited to the material realm. Since the soul -like God- has an incorporeal nature, and since what is incorporeal has a higher ontological status than what is corporeal, the search for truth should take place within the soul itself. This brings about the notion of inward turn, to which Plotinus, and following him Augustine will give a central place in their philosophies. For both thinkers, the possibility of reaching God through inward turn is based on the ontological affinity between individual souls and God. However, the similarity between the two thinkers ends here. The radical differences in the ways in which they describe this affinity and conceive the soul lead them to different ways of conceiving this inward turn.

What is central for Plotinus' notion of individual soul is that it is always conceived as the instantiation of the emanation Soul. In other words, individuality is not seen as an intrinsic characteristic of the human soul, but rather as the consequence of the lower activity of the emanation Soul. As Plotinus says, while the emanation Soul continues to dwell in the *Nous* from which it proceeds, it also has to participate in the sensible realm (*En.* IV.8.7). When individual living bodies are produced by the Soul, each one of them receives an individual "soul," or rather an individual image of the emanation Soul.<sup>24</sup> In this way, "there is one identical soul dispersed among many bodies" and "one soul is expanded in a multiplicity of souls" (*En.* IV.9.4).

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<sup>23</sup> In Bermon [2001], Emmanuel Bermon gives a detailed treatment of certain passages where he finds a *cogito* argument: *De Trinitate* X, *De libero arbitrio* I & II, *Contra Academicos* II & III, *De Genesi ad litteram*, XII and *De musica* VI.

<sup>24</sup> Menn [1998] p. 121.



This account brings with it a multiplicity of problems that continuously preoccupy Plotinus. What is crucial from our standpoint is the following: In Plotinus' account, the link between the individual soul and the emanation Soul does not disappear completely (*En. IV.8.8.*), since the former is in reality an instantiation of the latter. It is true that the individual soul's immersion in material life may lead it to omit its essential affinity with the emanation Soul.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, even when the individual soul is completely immersed in matter, it still has a part that is "permanently in the intelligible" (*En. IV. 8. 8*). Thus, the possibility for the individual soul to regain its "authentic" status by returning to the higher principles is never completely lost. In fact, this possibility constitutes the very foundation of Plotinus' ethics: The ultimate goal of a human being is to enable his soul to realize its true nature and to raise itself to its authentic level of being. The Plotinian idea of ascent is therefore based on this essential affinity between the individual soul and the higher principles.

For Plotinus, inward turn constitutes the starting-point of this ascent. By turning to itself, the soul escapes from the material world in which it is immersed and takes cognizance of its true nature. Following this, the soul elevates itself to the level of higher principles, which constitute its ontological ground. In this sense, the inward turn is primarily the beginning of the individual soul's ascent into higher principles, i.e. Soul, *Nous* and the One. A famous passage from the *Enneads* clearly exhibits this point:

Many times, awakened to myself away from the body, becoming outside all else and within myself, seeing a wonderful and great beauty, believing myself then especially to be part of the higher realm, in act as the best life, having become one with the divine and based in it advancing to that activity, establishing myself above all other intelligible beings, then going down from this position in the divine, from intellect down to discursive reasoning, I am puzzled how I could ever, and now, descend, and how my soul has come to be in the body. (*En. IV. 8. 1*)<sup>26</sup>

Hence, the realization of the true nature of our soul leads us to the recognition that it authentically belongs to the realm of *Nous*. And due to the essential characteristic of *Nous*, this realization takes place beyond the limits of ordinary discursive knowledge. The soul, in this level, does not only know or think of the *Nous*, but it also realizes that it is one with it. And once the level of *Nous* is reached, the soul has the possibility to reach the ultimate principle, which is the One.

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<sup>25</sup> Hadot [1963] p. 23-39 .

<sup>26</sup> We use here the translation that O'meara gives in O'meara [1995] p. 104. The emphasis is ours.

Hence, the Plotinian inward turn is the beginning of a genuine odyssey during which the soul regains its authentic ontological position by having access to the higher foundational principles and by being one with them. As the famous treatise entitled "On Beauty" (*En. I. 6*) suggests, the withdrawal into oneself is also some kind of a flight, the aim of which is to reach "the beloved Fatherland," i.e. "there whence we have come."<sup>27</sup> This is the reason why Dean Inge, in his much-appreciated formula, considers Plotinus' soul as a wanderer, an entity which travels within and across experience, and avoids conceiving it as a fixed center of experience.<sup>28</sup>

### 3.2. Augustine and the "Private" Inner Space

We think that it is almost inevitable to begin the presentation of the Augustinian idea of inward turn by giving reference to a famous passage from the *Confessions*. In Book VII, Chapter 10, Augustine gives the following description of inward turn:

And being admonished by these books to return into myself, I entered into my inward soul, guided by thee. This I could do because thou wast my helper. And I entered, and with the eye of my soul -such as it was- saw above the same eye of my soul and above my mind the Immutable Light.<sup>29</sup>

Here, as in Plotinus, the inward turn marks the beginning of a journey that will ideally end up in some sort of a contact with the Truth. However, Augustine's conception of human soul leads him to a significant deviation from the path of his Platonist master and pushes him to adopt a different understanding of inner experience.

The main reason behind this rupture is the difference in Augustine's way of conceiving the human soul. As we have already noted, Augustine follows the Platonist tradition in attributing incorporeality to soul. However, he diverges significantly from his masters in the way he formulates the nature of the relation between the soul and God. Although some of his early writings are marked by an inclination -probably inspired by Plotinus- to see God and the soul as insepara-

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<sup>27</sup> *En. I. 6. 8*. Note that here, Plotinus refers to Odysseus' return to his homeland Ithaca.

<sup>28</sup> Georges Leroux refers to Inge's formula in Leroux [1996] p. 305. Note that Inge's formula has nevertheless the risk of leading us to conceive individuality as an essential characteristic of the human soul. We think that the soul may be considered as a wanderer only from an all-too-human standpoint, i.e. from the standpoint of the individualized soul.

<sup>29</sup> *Conf. 7. 10. (16)*.

ble,<sup>30</sup> he modifies his position afterwards. Beginning with *De moribus ecclesiae*, Augustine suggests that his creationist ontology does not permit him to conceive God as the "Fatherland" of the soul. According to him, the fact that both human soul and God are incorporeal should not lead us to overlook the rigid distinction of creator and creature.<sup>31</sup> The soul did not "come from" God, but it was "created" by Him.<sup>32</sup> Hence, the abyss that exists between God and the soul is not the outcome of an individual soul's radical illusion, but of its essential ontological status: Unlike its Plotinian counterpart, the Augustinian soul has no divine quality.

The existence of such an ultimate abyss between God and soul has crucial consequences for the goal and the nature of the Augustinian inward turn. The Christian believer may strive to reach his God, but he/she can have no claim to "become" divine by being one with the higher principles:

Following after God is the desire of happiness; to reach God is happiness itself. We follow after God by loving Him; we reach Him, not by becoming entirely what He is, but in nearness to Him, and in wonderful and immaterial contact with Him, and in being inwardly illuminated and occupied by His truth and holiness.<sup>33</sup>

Hence, the goal of the journey is not a return to the Fatherland and the discovery of the authentic, divine nature of the individual human soul, but being closer to the eternal Truth, which is God. On this basis, one can legitimately say that the Augustinian inner world has no gateway that may directly introduce the soul to a divine life. In this particular sense, the inner world of each soul is like a cloister, a "secret place"<sup>34</sup> illuminated by the light of the eternal Truth. This is where one attempts to contemplate God and the ideas located in His mind.<sup>35</sup>

For this reason, Philip Cary suggests that Augustine's search for Truth cannot be accomplished by a single inward movement: Since soul has no divine char-

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<sup>30</sup> In section 10 of *De immortalitate animae* (*On the Immortality of the Soul*), Augustine tries to prove that God is inseparably present in the soul. On this subject, see Cary [2000] Ch. 8.

<sup>31</sup> *De mor. ecc.*, 20.

<sup>32</sup> Cary (2000), p. 112-113.

<sup>33</sup> *De mor. ecc.*, 11.18 (our emphasis).

<sup>34</sup> In *Tr. in Joann. ev.* 23.10, Augustine says: "Descend into yourself; go to your secret place, your mind.", Meagher [1998], p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Note that soul's vision of God is doomed to stay imperfect, in the sense that it cannot see God as He is, but -as the famous Pauline formula suggests- "through a glass in a dark manner." See *Conf.* 10. 5 (7). *Tr. in Joann. ev.*, 18.9-10 says: "Return to your heart. See there what perhaps you may perceive of God, since there is the image of God. Within the inner human being dwells Christ, therein you have been made anew after the image of God. In his own image, recognize its author", Meagher [1998] p. 40 (our emphasis).

acter, the realization of its true nature by an inward turn does not lead one to God. The contemplation of God necessitates a subsequent upward movement,<sup>36</sup> since He is to be looked for both in and above the soul.<sup>37</sup> What is important from our standpoint is that this complex movement does not lead to the supersession of the personal inner space and to the complete incorporation of the individual soul to a higher principle. For Philip Cary, the radical difference between Plotinus and Augustine appears here: Since the Augustinian inward turn does not lead the soul to the recognition that it is a part of a whole, it gains a relatively "private" character.

We think that this notion of "privacy" is of prime importance for understanding the distance between Augustine and his Platonist forefathers. The term may help us to understand the originality of Augustine's inward turn without having recourse to the problematic terminology of "self-presence" that Charles Taylor uses. Hence, we would like to argue that this notion of inward turn as a private experience (and not the idea of "self-presence") constitutes Augustine's major contribution to the prehistory of the modern self.

According to Taylor, the private character of Augustine's inward turn seems to directly imply a process of self-reflexivity: the Augustinian inward turn is also a self-reflexive turn, in which the agent is "present to himself" and "becomes aware of himself." However, we think that the two ideas should be treated separately, so that we can reach a better understanding of Augustine's contribution to the prehistory of the modern self. We may very well take Augustine's turn towards the self as an inward turn and argue that, due to its private character, this experience anticipates the modern notions of "inner self."<sup>38</sup> This, however, does not mean that this private experience of inward turn leads the agent to self-knowledge. The purpose of the turn is not (and cannot be) a direct access to a self-sustaining entity that we can call "the *ego*,"<sup>39</sup> but an effort to transcend one's existing condition by being illuminated by God. The Augustinian imperative "go to

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<sup>36</sup> Cary (2000), p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Note that these spatial references "in" and "above" are used figuratively, as Augustine notes in *Conf.* 7.10(16).

<sup>38</sup> On this point, we agree with Philip Cary who rightly concentrates on the idea of privacy and claims that "our inwardness originates from Augustine" (Cary [2000] p. 140). However, Cary seems to show no effort to distinguish the idea of privacy from that of self-reflexivity. In fact, in the two passages where he refers to Taylor's work, he gives the impression that he follows its main argument. See Cary [2000] p. 168, 186.

<sup>39</sup> On the problematic and paradoxical status of the *ego* in Augustine's work, see Jean-Luc Marion's valuable comments in Marion [2008] p. 98-108.

your secret place" should always be understood under the light of the complementary imperative "transcend yourself."

This being said, one should carefully distinguish between the implications of the Augustinian "transcend yourself" and those of the Plotinian return to the Fatherland. This act of transcendence is not a process of divinization through which a person merges with an impersonal divine principle and becomes one with it. Through the Augustinian inward turn, one tries to "become a person" by listening and responding to the absolutely divine "person," which is God.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, Emmanuel Housset's account seems to be in line with Philip Cary's argument of privacy. Like Cary, Housset thinks that Augustine introduces a "new figure of interiority" which, "far from impersonalizing me, opens me to a dialogue [...], in which my particularity is transfigured without being removed."<sup>41</sup> For Housset, this inward turn is what constitutes the particular "person" by giving it a voice and by holding it intact. Hence, while the Plotinian inward turn leads to the temporary nullification of the individual soul, its Augustinian version engenders the opposite outcome: It institutes the particularity and the "privacy" of the person.

Therefore, if the term "private" is to be used in the context of the Augustinian inward turn, its content should be clarified in the following way: The Augustinian turn is "private" in the sense that it does not lead to the incorporation of the soul to a higher principle, but to the very constitution of a human person. This means that "privacy" is not used here to qualify an act of self-reflexivity that takes place within an independent "I" searching for God. This private inward turn is inseparable from an act of turning towards God and meeting His divine light. For this reason, if Augustine's notion of inward turn is to be counted among the "sources of the self," the emphasis should be on this idea of privacy, rather than the idea of self-reflexivity.

## Conclusion

Given this account of the Augustinian inward turn, one can have a better appreciation of the extent to which Augustine's ethical project represents a break with its predecessors. In the passage that we have quoted above, Pierre Hadot suggests that in various forms of the ancient practice of care for the self, one un-

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<sup>40</sup> Housset [2008] p. 51: "In effect, in the absence of a divine part that belongs to the soul, the absolute being should himself be a person, i.e. a liberty and a goodness, in such a way that man, on the basis of his call, may himself become a person." (our translation) .

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 56-57.

dergoes a "movement of interiorization" and, through an accompanying movement, one "encounters another kind of exteriorization." This seems to be true for Augustine's case, if we accept that the eternal light of the Truth that one encounters in his/her innermost depth is a transcendent being and, as such, constitutes a form of "exteriority." However, the goal of Augustine's inward turn is radically different from -to repeat Hadot's words- "[being] aware of oneself as a part of nature, and a portion of universal reason" as in the case of Stoics or neo-Platonists. For Augustine, we are not parts of the universal reason, but the distinct products of God's benevolent creation. Accordingly, the inward turn is marked by an element of "privacy," in the sense that it aims at a radical transformation through which we try to reach a new integrity, a new "personal" existence. From such a perspective, what is new in the Augustinian ethical/religious experience is the privacy of the experience of inward turn. Hence, the radical novelty of the Augustinian inward turn does not come from its self-reflexive quality as Taylor argues, but rather from its private character.

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