

INWARDNESS IN AUGUSTINE AND KIERKEGAARD

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Abstract

The paper argues that although inwardness is a key category in both Augustine and Kierkegaard, Augustine sees inwardness as an epistemologically privileged path to the vision of divine truth (Augustine) whereas Kierkegaard sees it as a radical individualization that requires the individual to take full responsibility for his or her existential being in the world. After exploring their respective views, I will show how, nevertheless, *The Confessions* might be read as exemplifying a case of Kierkegaardian inwardness. In conclusion, I offer some reflections on the implications of their views of inwardness for their social thought, specifically with regard to the society of the Church, a society called out (an *ekklesia*) from the ruination brought about by a regnant order of social and political violence.

Key words: Inwardness, truth, Confessions, Augustine, Kierkegaard.

Resumen

El presente trabajo argumenta que, aunque la interioridad es una categoría clave tanto en San Agustín como en Kierkegaard, San Agustín la entiende como un camino epistemológicamente privilegiado hacia la visión de la verdad divina, mientras que Kierkegaard la entiende como una individualización radical que requiere que el individuo asuma toda la responsabilidad para su ser existencial en el mundo. Después de explorar sus puntos de vista respectivos, mostraré cómo, sin embargo, las *Confesiones* podrían leerse como un ejemplo de un caso de la interioridad kierkegaardiana. En conclusión, ofrezco algunas reflexiones sobre las implicaciones de sus puntos de vista sobre la interioridad para el pensamiento social, específicamente con respecto a la sociedad de la Iglesia, una sociedad llamada (una *ekklesia*) de la ruina provocada por un orden reinante del orden social y la violencia política.

Palabras clave: Interioridad, verdad, confesiones, San Agustín, Kierkegaard.

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The second chapter of Part 2 of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is entitled "The Subjective Truth, Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity". In this chapter, Kierkegaard identifies subjectivity with inwardness and ascribes to both a privileged access to truth, especially to the one truth that really matters, namely, the truth of the individual's God-relationship. But whilst it seems that any individual has the capacity to activate their subjectivity in an inward concern for this truth, the *Postscript* make clear that Kierkegaard believes the modern world to have forgotten the meaning of inwardness and by virtue of this forgetfulness to have excluded itself from a truthful relation to God.

All of this could sound Augustinian. If we hold to *The Confessions*, it is clear that, for Augustine, knowledge of God depends on turning our attention away from the things of the external world and looking "within". In Book VII he tells us how, inspired by reading some books of the Platonists, "Into myself I went, and with the eyes of my soul (such as it was) I discovered over the same eye of my soul, over my mind, the unchangeable light of the Lord".¹ This is possible because, as he has already told us in Book III "You [God] ... were more inward than my most inward part" (III.6, 119-21). Moreover, as for Kierkegaard, this inward turn is also the privileged—indeed the sole—way of accessing divine truth.

Yet the apparent analogy between Kierkegaard's and Augustine's respective accounts of the relationship between inwardness and knowledge of God is, I suggest, misleading. To put my argument in its simplest terms, Augustine's approach is shaped by a set of assumptions taken over from those books of the Platonists he mentions reading (principally Plotinus), whereas Kierkegaardian inwardness involves the rejection of precisely those same assumptions. A preliminary indicator of the difference at issue here is that whereas Augustine's Platonic assumptions lead him to adopt a modified version of Platonic recollection as the path towards inward knowledge of God, recollection is flagged by Kierkegaard as epitomizing an approach to truth that is no longer serviceable for 'we moderns'.

¹ St. Augustine's *Confessions*, vol. 1, trans. William Watts, London: Heinemann, 1968, Book VII, Chapter 10, p. 371. Further references will be given in the text in the form: Book (Roman)-Chapter (Arabic)-page number, enabling cross referencing to other editions (Book and Chapter numberings are standard across all scholarly and most popular editions). Because the edition used is dual language, references are to the English text and may therefore appear to skip pages. I have sometimes adapted Watts's 17th century English to fit contemporary usage. The translation is in two volumes and pagination is reset from '1' at the start of Book IX.

I shall return to the question of recollection, but first make some further preliminary remarks about the nature of this difference and its implications for reading Kierkegaard and Augustine together.

Where the inward turn in Augustine is a turn away from sense-experience towards intellectual vision, Kierkegaardian inwardness not only breaks with empirical, i.e., sense-based knowledge but also with idealism, i.e., intellectual vision—as the opening paragraph of the chapter on subjective truth says quite explicitly. Furthermore, as Kierkegaard goes on to spell out, inwardness is essentially connected with the question of communication and the impossibility of direct communication. As such, it is therefore also a concept that has its *Sitz-im-Leben* in interpersonal relationships and, I suggest, there is a direct line from the thematization of inwardness in the *Postscript* to Kierkegaard's later claims that his authorship as a whole was directed towards weaning the individual away from the crowd. Indeed, the *Postscript* itself already contains some classic moments in which the crowd culture of bourgeois conformism is held up to ridicule as well as accounts of counter-examples in which genuine subjective feeling is in play. In these terms, inwardness has to do less with the interiority of noetic life and more with the singularity of the whole person. Consequently, developing inwardness means acquiring the courage to make our own decisions about good, about evil, about values, and about modes of behaviour, even when these go against the assumptions of the society to which we belong and which most people (it seems) never get around to questioning.²

All this is said by way of distancing Kierkegaardian inwardness from the kind of inwardness about which Augustine is speaking in the passages cited from *The Confessions*. Yet if we follow Kierkegaardian inwardness in the direction I am suggesting we reach a point at which, nevertheless, a striking and interesting similarity between the two thinkers comes into view. For if Kierkegaard can define his task in terms of luring the individual

² Although this analysis is relevant to possibilities of resistance in totalitarian societies, Kierkegaard's more immediate object is what Paul Tillich called 'bourgeois conformism'. This might, as in our own time, be the result of the thorough-going marketization of all human relationships that can be just as tyrannical in its effects as any political dictatorship. What inwardness offers in contrast to this is the courage to take upon ourselves the entire responsibility for who and how we are in the concrete circumstances of our being in the world. For Kierkegaard, that responsibility is to be accepted as 'before God', and if there is also a mystical element in Kierkegaard, his account of what it is to exist 'before God' is more a matter of acknowledging the infinite demand that being God's creature makes upon us rather than of attaining to contemplation of divine truth.

away from the crowd and from its uncritical acceptance of a given societal world-view, the story of *The Confessions* is itself a story of a young man and his friends learning to break with the assumptions of their society, including assumptions about the nature of human being, about virtue, about happiness, and, of course, about God.

Like the majority of Christian theologians from Paul onwards, Augustine sees this break with the surrounding society as involving entry into a new kind of society, the society of the Church, a point that raises further questions about how far Augustinian and Kierkegaardian thought is compatible, and I shall briefly consider aspects of these questions in my conclusion. My main focus here, however, is the issue of inwardness in its twofold forms of (a) inwardness as the epistemologically privileged path to the vision of divine truth (Augustine) and (b) inwardness as a radical individualization that requires the individual to take full responsibility for his or her existential being in the world (Kierkegaard). I argue that in *The Confessions* Augustine explicitly endorses (a) but that this is a view equally explicitly rejected by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard, for his part, explicitly affirms (b). Augustine does not affirm (b) as an explicit theoretical position, but the narrative of *The Confessions* itself exemplifies what (b) might look like in the specific historical moment of Augustine's own life.

Does this mean that we can make a clear-cut division between the Platonic and existential dimensions of *The Confessions*, rejecting the one and keeping the other? That would be neat, but it is almost certainly an overly simplistic distinction. To the extent that Augustine is what Heidegger might have called an essential thinker, his essential thought, inclusive of its epistemology and metaphysics, belongs to the very constitution of his existential position. This does not mean uncritically accepting, in this case, Augustine's Platonism (or, for that matter, his version of Christianity), but it does mean that an existential interpretation of his work must be an interpretation of his thought and not just of his biography. To continue in a Heideggerian perspective, this might (for example) mean finding possibilities in that thought that Augustine himself did not pursue. The same applies to Kierkegaard and, to anticipate, these possibilities include the possibility of a utopian transformation of common life in the moment when a given order (individual, social, or metaphysical) breaks or is broken down.

In the light of these reflections, my procedure in this paper will be to consider, first, Augustinian inwardness, then, secondly, Kierkegaardian inwardness, thus illustrating the difference between them. Then, thirdly, I

will show how, despite this difference, *The Confessions* might nevertheless be read as in its own way exemplifying a case of Kierkegaardian inwardness. Fourthly, and finally, I offer some concluding reflections on the further differences between Augustine and Kierkegaard as social thinkers, specifically as thinkers of a society called out (and thus an *ekklesia*) from the ruination brought about by a regnant order of social and political violence.

I. *Augustinian Inwardness*

Augustine himself invites us to see his account of inwardness as deriving from his reading of the Platonists.³ At the same time, his account involves significant modifications in the Platonist model. Following Plotinus' own analogy of the One as the radiating central point of a sphere, we can identify four main layers in the approach to knowledge of the divine and of the One. At the outermost layer is the world of temporal and sensuous life—what the folk metaphysics of the modern world would regard as 'the real world' pure and simple (the solid bodies we bump into or tread underfoot, the food we eat, the illnesses we endure, etc.). Next, we have the transitional layer of soul. Here there is consciousness of the external sensuous world, but there is also, precisely, *consciousness*, perhaps best thought of as the kind of consciousness an infant or an animal might have. Next is the layer of *nous* or mind. Here consciousness is no longer shaped by the sensuous impressions received by the soul but knows its objects according to their truth, that is, the forms that make it possible for them to subsist at all. In Kierkegaardian terms, we might say that this is rather akin to the objectivity of speculative

³ For a fuller account of the relationship between Plotinus and Augustine, see Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self. The legacy of a Christian Platonist*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, especially Part I "Platonism: A Tradition of Divinity Within", pp. 9-60. Against earlier 20th century tendencies, a strong recent commentarial tradition emphasizes that whilst Platonism played some part in Augustine's development, even his early post-conversion writings are decisively Christian. See, e.g. Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology. An Argument for Christianity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, and John Peter Kenney, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity. A Study in Augustine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. I do not disagree. However, whilst key Christian affirmations such as creation out of nothing and the consequent notion of a defining ontological difference between creature and creator require modification of the Platonic picture, the question remains as to whether these modifications constitute an essential break—a point that has in recent years been debated with regard to the supposed 'ontotheological' assumptions of Christian philosophy.

knowledge, since what *I* know in knowing the form that makes a tree a tree is precisely the same as what *you* know. The concept is not individually variable according to our different experiences of trees we have encountered in the world but is constant and universal in itself. However, Plotinus goes further than Hegel in this regard, since because he regards knowledge as involving identity between knower and known true knowledge of the forms is not knowledge held, as it were, in one individual mind, or not in the way that we normally think of individual minds (your mind, my mind, etc.). Ultimately, there is only one mind and that one mind *is* the truth it knows. In knowing, mind knows itself and is essentially constituted as mind in and by this self-knowledge itself. But if mind is in some sense divine, as Plotinus believes it is, and if human beings are in some measure capable of knowing truth, it follows that there is a layer or dimension within human being that never stops being in immediate identity with the divine and that is itself therefore divine. Knowledge of the divine is not something that has to be constructed but merely discovered and, since knower and known are identical, knowledge of divine truth ultimately means discovering the mind's own participation in God. For this reason, knowledge of the divine can be seen as a kind of recollection since, with or without the mythical accompaniment of a doctrine of transmigration, it is a knowledge that, from the perspective of temporal life, is always already there. However, this is not yet the final step, since, according to Plotinus, the ultimate identity of knower and known and the non-individuated nature of the One means that we finally pass beyond knowledge and beyond being. This final state seems to merit the description that Vedanta calls 'non-duality'. As Plotinus himself stresses, anything we can say of the One, is likely to be misleading so long as we are bound by the objectifying tendencies immanent in language itself.⁴

Even this briefest of sketches raises a mass of questions, many of which were already known to Plotinus himself. For our present purposes, however, we need only to note how this fed into the formation of Augustine's own thought and why and how Augustine needed to modify the Plotinian model.

As we have heard, Augustine, like Plotinus, sees the first move towards knowledge of God as a turn inwards. As he says in a much-quoted line, "You

⁴ As, e.g., when, having said "that One is in itself", he adds "but one who speaks precisely should not say that 'or 'is'; but we run round it outside, in a way, and want to explain our own experiences of it, sometimes near it and sometimes falling away in our perplexities about it". Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, London: Heinemann, 1988, Ennead VI.9, p. 315.

were within me, but I was outside myself, and there I searched for you” (10.27, p. 147), i.e., in the physical material objects of sense-experience. But then Augustine starts to look within and this turn inwards leads the soul to knowledge of God. In a succinct passage previously cited Augustine writes: “Into myself I went, and with the eyes of my soul (such as it was) I discovered over the same eye of my soul, over my mind, the unchangeable light of the Lord”. Famously, from Book 10.8 onwards, he figures this turn inwards as an examination of memory, that is, as an exercise in recollection. Here, it seems that, like Plotinus, he presupposes that God is already in some sense ‘in’ the mind and that to know God it is necessary simply to recollect where in the mind God is. But, at the climax of his enquiry he seems to announce defeat: “Where then did I find you, that so I might learn you, but even in your own self, far above myself? Place there is none; we go backward and forward, but place there is none” (10.26).

The point here is clear and reflects Augustine’s own Christian assumptions about the relationship between creature and Creator. Plotinus asks of his readers only to turn within and find the point of identity with the divine that is always already given. But the Christian position excludes such a point of identity. Although God is more inward than our most inward part God is also above and beyond us, ‘it is He that has made us and not we ourselves’ (Psalm 100). But, for Augustine, this does not entail simply abandoning the Plotinian model. The inward turn does not bring us to knowledge of our identity with the divine but it does bring us to the point at which we are able to see the divine light of truth illuminating us from above: “Into myself I went, and with the eyes of my soul (such as it was) I discovered *over* the same eye of my soul, *over* my mind, the unchangeable light of the Lord” (VII.10, p. 371)— “in yourself, above me”, we might add. The Augustinian movement becomes a double-movement, inwards-*and*-upwards, though we should add that even with regard to the upward movement, God is always greater and, as one prominent reader of Augustine would put it, God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived and, as such, will always ontologically transcend whatever can be thought.⁵ In terms of the existential narrative of *The Confessions*, the clearest instance of what this might involve is the account of the farewell conversation between Augustine and Monica:

⁵ The reference is to Anselm of Canterbury and his paradigmatic statement of the ontological argument for the existence of God.

Yes, we soared higher yet, by inward musing, and discoursing upon thee, and by admiring of thy works; and last of all, we came to our own souls, which we presently went beyond, so that we advanced as high as that region of never-wasting plenty, whence You feed Israel for ever with the food of truth, and where life is that wisdom by which all these things are made, both which have been and which are to come. And this wisdom is not made; but it is at this present as it has ever been, and so shall it ever be ... And while we were thus discoursing and panting after it with the whole effort of our heart; and we sighed, and even there we left behind us the first fruits of our spirits enchained to it ... (IX.10, p. 49).

The passage is strongly Platonic in mood, recalling the vision of the Elysian field in Plato's own *Phaedrus* and arguably in tension with the more explicitly philosophical passages of *The Confessions*, hinting at a possible persisting unity between the soul and the divine. This might, for example, be inferred from the comment that they left the first fruits of the spirit joined to the timeless wisdom of God, since if this unity is really unity with what is timeless, then it cannot be dated to a particular moment of ecstasy and what is known in such a moment is really, in itself, outside of time.⁶

What is known in such a moment is not simply eternal or timeless truth; it is also universal truth. If Plotinus represents knowledge of divine truth as the self-knowledge of God in which all conscious beings participate in some measure, Augustine holds to the perspective of a purely human knowledge—and yet what each of us knows in knowing divine truth is ultimately the same. That is to say, it is the one truth that teaches all the truth we know: “Everywhere, O truth, you give audience to those that ask counsel of You, and at one dispatch You answer all, though all ask for diverse counsel” (10. 26, p. 145). Or, as he says in the dialogue “The Teacher”, “Our real Teacher is he ... who is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ, that is the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God. To this wisdom every rational soul gives heed, but to each is given only so much as he is able to receive, according to his good or evil will”.⁷ There is individual variation in how truth is received, but the truth that is known is in itself one and the same.

⁶ Paul Henry's *The Path to Transcendence* specifically interprets the ecstatic experience shared by Augustine and Monica at Ostia against a Plotinian background; see Paul Henry, *The Path to Transcendence. From Philosophy to Mysticism in Saint Augustine*, trans. Francis F. Burch, Pittsburgh PA: Pickwick Press, 1981 [1938].

⁷ In Augustine, *Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. John Burleigh, London: SCM Press, 1953, p. 95.

II. *Kierkegaardian Inwardness*

All of this is very different from what we find in Kierkegaard. Clearly, “inwards and upwards” could also be seen as a leitmotif of Kierkegaard’s religious writings. Not only in the *Postscript* but in many of the upbuilding discourses the self is engaged in “strengthening in the inner being”, detaching itself from the moods and passions by which it is governed in its natural state, and becoming attentive to the inner self. Also, as in Augustine, this inward journey leads to a recognition of the God who speaks to us “from above” and in such a way that God always remains sovereign in all our dealings with Him. Yet whilst Augustine can gloss our relation to the God “above” as a relation of knowledge or vision, this is not how Kierkegaard typically sees it. Rather, God remains veiled, hidden in darkness, like a spectator in the theatre or like the goal towards which a rower turns his back even as he rows towards it. We are the object of God’s gaze, not he of ours.

The journey inwards, then, does not lead us to a better place with regard to “seeing” God. Parenthetically, I would argue that it is not a matter of blind faith either—the notorious Kierkegaardian “leap”. Although Kierkegaard states in the *Postscript* that “a direct relationship between one spiritual being and another, with respect to the essential truth, is unthinkable”,⁸ I take this to mean simply that it cannot be directly articulated in terms of thought or knowledge.⁹ Many of the upbuilding writings suggest that there is indeed a direct presence of God to the self and of the self to God, which we might call a mystical element in Kierkegaard.¹⁰ However, the presence of God to the self is not a presence that can be articulated as knowledge or “objectively”, but solely, as Kierkegaard puts it, in the act of adoration. In his own terms, this is not a “direct” but an “inverse” relationship in which God is all and we are nothing. Yet, if we follow Kierkegaard in taking the story of the sinful woman in Luke 7 as a paradigm of such adoration it is, in its way, a direct relationship, in which worshipper and worshipped are present to one another in a manner conformable to their respective modes

⁸ CUP 221.

⁹ CUP, 247 / SKS 7, 224.

¹⁰ For discussion of Kierkegaard’s mysticism see my article “Kierkegaard, Martensen, and the Meaning of Medieval Mysticism” in *Estudios Kierkegaardianos*, Number 3, 2017, pp. 65-80; also, George Pattison and Kate Kirkpatrick, *The Mystical Sources of Existential Thought. Being, Nothingness, Love*, London, Routledge, 2019, Chapter 1 “Kierkegaard: Annihilation in Love”, pp. 24-41.

of being; they both love, but whilst he looks at her, she expresses her love only in the thorough-going ambiguity of silence and tears.

But whilst she says nothing (Kierkegaard insists on this), what her behaviour and her tears do reveal is her passion, illustrating the connection made in the *Postscript* between inwardness, passion, and subjectivity. To experience something in the mode of inwardness, according to Kierkegaard, is to experience it as fully engaging the passion of subjective life. It is, in other words, ineluctably first-person; it comes from within. However, as the example of the sinful woman, as well as the examples given in the *Postscript* itself of the idolater who prays to his idol with infinite passion or the bereaved father whose voice reveals the depth of his loss show, inwardness is not entirely lacking in external expression. As coinciding with passion, it can even be manifest in the revolutionary passion of the 1790s, as Kierkegaard seems to argue in his *Literary Review* of Mme Gyllembourg's novel *Two Ages*. In *Works of Love* inwardness is also connected to love and, specifically, works of love. To paraphrase a comment of Mark Wynn in another context it is a matter of inwards-*and-outwards* or, to factor in the Augustinian dimensions, inwards-upwards-and-outwards.¹¹

Why, then call it inwardness? Because, I am suggesting, the first-person quality of passionate commitment (whether to God or to revolution) is not immediately available for scrutiny by others. Two people may speak and behave in near-similar ways, but for one it is merely going through the motions, for the other it is grounded in inner self-commitment. The sinful woman may weep at the Saviour's feet, eliciting only the scorn of the Pharisees, while the actress playing Hecuba may weep so as to move the entire audience to tears. Yet in the one case it is for real, in the other it is only acting. Likewise, one person may commit to the revolution through passionate conviction, another solely in the cause of cynical self-advancement. And, as Kierkegaard argues in chapter 1 of *Works of Love*, the same work done by one person in love might be done by another for entirely other reasons. Love must manifest itself in works, as Kierkegaard's title already indicates, but the subjectivity and passion that inform their action are not available for third-party inspection.

It is easy to see why, in the *Postscript*, themes of subjectivity and inwardness lead to the question of communication and why this discussion leads into the survey of his own authorship thus far that he offers under the

¹¹ See Mark R. Wynn, *Renewing the Senses. A Study of the Philosophy and Theology of the Spiritual Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

title “A contemporary effort in Danish literature”. The God-relationship has to be a first-person relationship. It is unsubstitutable. You can’t have my God-relationship for me and my faith won’t save you. And the same applies to our relations to other spiritual beings, that is, to other human beings. These too are ineluctably first person. You can’t do my works of love for me; only I can do the works of love that are mine to do, and if I don’t do them then I cannot claim them as my works of love (although, if I really am motivated by love, I probably won’t be interested in claiming credit or getting recognition for them). Of course, there may be aspects of human relationships where substitution is possible: you can go to the shops for me and you can paint my house for me. But such actions leave the spiritual meaning of the relevant relationship undecided. Perhaps you are going to the shops for me because you love me, or perhaps it is because I have forced you to do so. As Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love*, there is no work that cannot be excluded from being or becoming a work of love, and no work that, simply as such, is definitively a work of love.¹² That is, of course, arguable and there may well be limit-cases where we would want to disagree. But even though we are likely to be sceptical when the inquisitor tells us that he is torturing the heretic to death out of love, we certainly can envisage cases where tough love is indeed love, even if it is not in the first instance accepted as such by the recipient. Everything depends on the particular complex of circumstances and intentions.

The radical singularization that occurs in inwardness therefore disrupts the continuum of public discourse about what is good and what is bad. No guarantees are available and we must each judge for ourselves, in fear and trembling. But if this is so, and once we realize that it is so, then we are separated at a stroke from the crowd which, in Kierkegaardian terms, is not just a noisy mob (and not just a noisy electronic mob either) but exists wherever and whenever we allow ourselves to be determined by the acknowledged or unacknowledged desire to be like the others. In matters of spirit, we simply cannot be like the others and therefore it is futile and self-defeating to want to be so.

It is for such reasons that the appropriate expression of inwardness may well take a contrary or even repellent form, since in order to be true to itself *and to honour the singularity of others* it must resist easy assimilation by the other. “The more complete the contrast of the form, the greater the

¹² *WL*, 13 / *SKS* 9, 21.

inwardness,” Kierkegaard comments.¹³ The inner is not without a relation to the outer but, crucially, it cannot be read off from the outer. Plotinus, as we have seen, already warned that it is far from easy to speak about the One due to the materiality of our language, but if Kierkegaard too argues that the inner cannot become the outer without being transformed into metaphor, analogy, parable, and image (and the more dissimilar to the original the better), this is for very different reasons.

Unlike the Augustinian “teacher within”, Kierkegaard’s God does not give the same teaching to all in such a way that any variation is merely a reflection of the capacity of the one being taught. Kierkegaard’s God is a God who, through governance, has a distinct word for each individual life, a right way that is (perhaps in a manner approaching the Kafkaesque) only for you or only for me, only for each of us. The task of inwardness is, therefore, to find and attend to this unique word and the unique way it calls each of us to follow. This, of course, is a major theme in *The Point of View*, since what Kierkegaard is arguing there is, precisely, that his work as an author is the fulfilment of a direct instruction from God, delivered in the mode of governance. But no one other than Kierkegaard was or could be instructed to write such works, and Kierkegaard himself would not have become “Kierkegaard” if he had not been attentive to the entirely singular task that governance had laid upon him.

It is important at this point to remind ourselves that Kierkegaard’s aversion to the crowd is not just because it is a crowd. The numerical is the manifestation of the depersonalizing element of the collectivity, but it is a manifestation not a cause. The numerical is the product of removing everything that is distinctive to each individual but this, for Kierkegaard, is precisely what makes us who we are. The numerical means denying every individual’s aspiration to be the self that each uniquely is; that is, it is to deny what makes them human. Consequently, the dynamic at work in a collectivity shaped by the perpetual desire to make ourselves in each other’s image is a dynamic that is inherently violent. This analysis is familiar from Kierkegaard’s extensive writing about his own “martyrdom of laughter” at the hands of *The Corsair* and (in a different register) in his comments about how the new nationalist government of 1848 needed a war. But already in *Either/Or*, a careful reading of A’s writing shows that his aesthetic philosophy is, in fact, a response to a perceived situation in which “man is

¹³ CUP, 242 / SKS 7, 220-1.

a wolf to man”.¹⁴ By way of contrast, to go the way of radical individuation is to step outside the cycle of violent reciprocity; it is to immunize ourselves to the contagion of such violence, and if it is not in and of itself a work of love, it puts us in the only position at which works of love become genuinely possible. And here, I think, the Kierkegaardian perspective enables us to see another aspect of Augustinian inwardness that the overt Platonism of the latter occludes.

III. *Kierkegaardian inwardness in The Confessions*

Augustine’s account of inwardness, I have argued, follows the Platonic model of turning away from the external world of sense experience and turning to the inner world of eternal, immutable divine truth. It is in these terms that in the latter part of Book 10 he expounds the perils of sensuous temptation—eating, drinking, smelling, hearing, and perhaps most dangerous of all, “the enticements coming in by the eyes”. “My eyes take delight in fair form, and vanities of them; in beautiful and pleasant colours. Suffer not these to hold possession of my soul,” he exclaims (X.34, p. 169). So quick are the eyes at drawing us outward and downward into the world of sense-experience that they do their work without our even noticing what is happening. In this way, the eyes feed an all-embracing curiosity that is still more dangerous. As Augustine admits, “I no longer watch dogs chasing hares at the games, but if in the field, I by chance ride by, such a sport may, peradventure, put me off even from some serious thought, and draw me after it: not to turn out of the road with the body of my horse, but yet with the inclination of my heart” (X.35, p. 181).

Perhaps, as with many of the sins with which Augustine reproaches himself, we find this not such a serious matter. But the example might also put us in mind of another earlier episode in *The Confessions* that is, I think, truly horrific, even by contemporary post-Christian standards. This is the story told in VI.8 of how Augustine’s friend Alypius becomes addicted to the spectacle of gladiatorial games. Initially, Augustine tells us, Alypius had been ‘utterly against’ such spectacles and ‘detested’ them. But one day, a group of friends persuade him ‘with a familiar kind of violence’ and despite his ‘vehemently denying and resisting them’ to go along with them to the

¹⁴ There seems to be a clear allusion to this phrase in A’s essay on ‘The Rotation of Crops’. See *EO1*, 288 / *SKS 2*, 278.

amphitheatre. He goes, but protests that though they can bully him into going along he is not going to look at the show. 'I shall therefore be absent even when I am present and so I shall overcome both you and them too', he confidently states. And so, Augustine tells us

When they were come thither, and had taken their places as they could, all that round grew hot with hideous gloating. But Alypius closing up the doors of his eyes, forbade his mind to range abroad after such mischiefs; and I would that he had stopped his ears also. For upon the fall of one in the field, a mighty cry of the people beating strongly upon him, he (being overcome by curiosity, and as it were prepared, whatever it were, to condemn it even when seen, and to overcome it) opened his eyes, and was struck with a deeper wound in his soul, than the other was in his body, whom he desired to behold: and he presently fell more miserably than the sword-player did, upon whose fall that mighty noise was raised ... For so soon as he saw the blood, he at the very instant drunk down a kind of savageness; nor did he turn away his head, but fixed his eyes upon it, drinking up unawares the very Furies themselves; being much taken with the barbarousness of the sword-fight, and even drunk again with that bloodthirsty joy. Nor was he now the man he was when he came first there, but become one of the throng he came unto; yea, an entire companion of theirs that brought him there (VI.8, p. 299).

Alypius, in short, becomes an addict of the games. Let us be quite clear what we are talking about here: we are talking about the spectacle of human beings killing each other for entertainment, the ultimate theatre of cruelty. The curiosity that leads Augustine to let his eyes follow a hare being chased across a field is not far from the curiosity with which Alypius became addicted to the sight of human killing.¹⁵ And it is such addictions that bind us to a social world shaped by the desire to be like the others (to borrow a Kierkegaardian phrase), with all that that involves of envy, ambition, and the abandonment of self-responsibility.

¹⁵ In this regard it is also striking that A's violent view of the basis of human social relationships serves his own version of a culture of spectatorship. Of course, this may seem a world away from the kinds of temptations present-day philosophers and Christians might experience—but is it? Clearly, the internet provides one 'forum' in which many thousands of our contemporaries every day watch filmed images of people being tortured and killed, not only in ISIS videos or war reporting but in pornographic snuff movies. Unlike in ancient Rome, this may not be a public pleasure, indulged openly and without social stigma, but it is no less real. What the spectator sees may only be a filmed image, but the torture and death of real people provides the ontological condition for those filmed images.

When we have once seen this, then it is clear that the problem is not just the problem of the ideals getting mired in the stuff of sense-experience. Our susceptibility to being distracted by a wandering eye is only a first step in the mechanisms that tie us to a society built upon essentially violent relationships and lead us to become or to remain participants in the never-ending war of all against all. Behind the epistemological questions we start to discern a different and larger set of questions about the nature of our common life and the nature of our happiness. To break with the imperium of pagan Rome and its sustaining violence, it is necessary to be weaned from the crowd, and it is this that the turn within is to bring about—just as Kierkegaardian inwardness empowers us to break with the tyranny of the crowd. In this way, the pursuit of timeless inner truth becomes a cipher for the utopian hope for the transformation of human relations.

IV. *Philosophical and Christian Utopias*

We return to the Platonists. Utopian politics is a notable feature of the Platonic tradition from the beginning. Plato's ideal republic is not just a parable of the functioning of justice in the individual soul but justice in society and justice in the individual soul are essentially entwined. Although it has long been held that this political interest disappears in later Platonism, so that Plotinus becomes Plato without politics, this consensus has recently been challenged by the Plotinus scholar Dominic J. O'Meara.¹⁶ The most obvious testimony to the political element in Plotinus' thought was his project for restoring a city of philosophers, Platonopolis, in Campania, a project for which he sought and seemingly received imperial permission. Although Platonopolis never materialized, the idea bears witness to the fact that whilst the ultimate ascent of the Platonic philosopher may have been from the alone to the alone, this ascent had both a societal context and social consequences. Philosophical ascent presupposed the practice of political virtues and philosophical knowledge sought expression in political practice. Indeed, in terms of the sketch of Platonic inwardness given above, it is clear that if what we know in knowing the good is not just each and all of us knowing 'the same' object but all alike participating in the good's knowledge of itself then the foundation of human relationships is essentially harmonious.

¹⁶ See Dominic O'Meara, *Platonopolis. Platonic Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Plotinus' metaphysics is a metaphysics of peace and, as such, diametrically opposed to A's view of a world in which man is a wolf to man. Realization of the essential oneness of all cannot but have political implications. In this perspective, Plotinus' recommendation of abstention from political activity may be interpreted not as an absolute embargo of such activity but as a contextual protest against participation in political life that is precisely not shaped by insight into the fundamental unity of existence.

Augustine, as we have seen, could not endorse the Platonic model of a twofold identity between knower and known that also extended to identity between the knowers themselves. Augustine's God transcends our knowledge of Him; he reveals Himself to us "from above". Yet the revelation is, in a fundamental sense, the same, only differently appropriated by different individuals. As such, it too is therefore potentially the foundation for a new community based on a different view of human nature and human virtue from that on which the current government of the earthly city is based. Perhaps the retreat to Cassiacum was a first experiment in that direction, Augustine's version of Platonopolis, and whilst his later ecclesiology seems to have expanded far beyond the limits of such a purely contemplative community, the Church too, qua city of God, is ultimately a community fulfilled in a transcendent, extra-historical contemplation of God, outwith any actual historical community. This is still the case despite its having to go on living in the world, mixed with the earthly city from which it strives to separate itself. In this regard, it is striking that in the closing pages of *The City of God* Augustine connects the fact that God alone will be the goal and focus of the entire life of the saints with their being absolved from social relationships governed by ambition, flattery, and envy, in other words, by the attitudes that shaped the life of the late imperial society that Augustine himself once aspired to serve and, as a teacher of rhetoric, taught others to practice. Moreover, although Augustine does not speak of the resurrection life as involving identity with the God who is contemplated in it nor entire identity amongst the saints themselves, the entire orientation of his eschatology towards God means that anything that distinguishes the one individual from the other more or less disappears from view.

Of course, we know that, in history, both Platonic utopias and ecclesiastical rulers have contributed to social forms that are very far from harmoniously expressing a freely embraced vision of truth. Karl Popper's claim that such utopias are intrinsically inimical to an open society may be exaggerated, but it is not hard to see why he would say it, and Dostoevsky's

Grand Inquisitor is ever on hand to remind us of what goes wrong when an ecclesiastical society embraces compulsion.¹⁷ Kierkegaard, living nearly a millennium and a half after Augustine, could look back on a history of ecclesiastical development that made him ultimately more sceptical as to the possibility of any historically manifest community operating otherwise than by the politics of envy and ambition. Although Kierkegaardian inwardness aims to put us in a position at which works of love first become truly possible, he seems resolutely to refuse any vision of a society made up of those practicing such love. Kierkegaard has no positive politics although it is arguable that he does have a kind of negative or Socratic politics that is not without implications for common life. And if it would go too far to say he has no ecclesiology, a Kierkegaardian Church that is founded on an inward and therefore entirely individuated belief in God's love and that knows no witness except the witness of being misunderstood, despised, and rejected by the world will scarcely be able to find a stable identity in historical life. At the most, such a Church might exist as a mystical body, a *focus imaginarius*, that can only manifest itself in history as the motor-force of a negative dialectic, "in the tension of contrasting form".

The difference between Kierkegaard's and Augustine's respective ecclesiologies, I am suggesting, is, in the end, entirely coherent with and arguably derives from the differences in their respective accounts of inwardness. In the one case (Augustine's), the path within leads us to a vision of what is common to all, in the other (Kierkegaard's), it leads to what is most individual, most singular. Yet in both cases, this journey within is not just a journey of the alone to the alone since it also offers deliverance from the mimetic contagion that, through the lust of the eye and the transformation of murder into aesthetic entertainment, habituates human societies to the violence by which they are chronically afflicted. Fixing our eyes upon "savageness" we drink up unawares the very Furies themselves, as Augustine said of Alypius. In a time when images of the most horrific acts of human cruelty are accessible through two clicks of a mouse and are accessed many millions of times each day, it is perhaps less important to debate whether it is Kierkegaardian or Augustinian inwardness that offers the better way than it is to see the urgency of the challenge to which both, in their radically different ways, responded.

¹⁷ See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, London: Routledge, 1945; F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book 5, "Pro et Contra", chapter 5 (multiple translations and editions).

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