Re-Christianizing Augustine Postmodern Style

Readings by Jacques Derrida, Robert Dodaro, Jean-Luc Marion, Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayres and John Milbank

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At the end of September, 1997, Robert Dodaro, Vice-President of the Pontifical Patristic Institute in Rome, the Augustinianum, and a member of the venerable Order of Saint Augustine, delivered a paper at a *colloque* held at Villanova University in Pennsylvania, an institution of the O.S.A. The *colloque*, on "Religion and Postmodernity", was organized in large part by John Caputo, David R. Cook Professor of Philosophy at Villanova, a leading figure in its doctoral programme in Contemporary Continental Philosophy, and authorized interpreter of Derrida on religion.[1] Central participants were Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida. The paper, entitled "Loose canons: Augustine and Derrida on themselves," will appear, next year, in the proceedings of the *colloque*. The paper is a reflection on Augustine in the light of Derrida's *Circumfession, fifty-nine periods and periphrases written in a sort of internal margin, between Geoffrey Bennington's book and work in preparation (January 1989-April 1990).*[2] Fr. Dodaro's paper received the enthusiastic approbation of Derrida -- though it is hard to know what that signifies in a philosophy which intends to deconstruct the priority of speech and presence over text and dissemination.[3]

Professor Derrida's book imitates, mimics and intends to deconstruct Augustine's *Confessions*. Looking at the *Confessions* and other writings through *Circumfession*, Dr. Dodaro analyzed the self constructed by Augustine as confessing convert and bishop. The result can be called a deconstruction of the Augustinian self or, better, a deconstruction of the Augustinian self such as it has been constructed for the sake of postmodern Christian

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1 See his Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A conversation with Jacques Derrida, edited with a commentary by John D. Caputo, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), based in a "Roundtable" centered on Derrida when the Ph.D. programme was inaugurated in 1994; also his The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana U. P., 1997) which has Derrida's approbation -- which it seems contradictory that he should give!

2 This is published in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, Jacques Derrida, translated by Geoffrey Bennington, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). It translates a book with the same title published in French in 1991. Bennington's part of the book is entitled Derridabase

3 However, it seems that Derrida gives a special exemption for himself from the principles of his own philosophy; see Richard Wolin, "Preface to the MIT Press Edition: Note on a Missing Text," in The Heidegger Controversy, A Critical Reader, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), ix-xx.

theology. My aim is to understand something of the strengths and limits of the Augustine now emerging.

I begin with an outline of how Augustine is viewed in *Circumfession*, and go on to sketch Fr. Dodaro's deconstruction. There follows a look at Jean-Luc Marion's representation of Augustine as a way into his treatment by postmodern Christian theologians. I come then to an examination of the theological purposes and philosophical character of the rereading of Augustine being undertaken by a group of Anglican theologians: Rowan Williams, John Milbank and Lewis Ayres. They bring us toward an understanding of the new role which is being fixed for Augustine in a postmodern Christian theology. I consider what of Augustine can be and cannot be seen from within this purpose, and from within the postmodern Christianity which is being created. I conclude by comparing their Augustine to Dodaro's Derridian one. I find that the latter, though proceeding in a way which makes God finite and excludes (as do Derrida and his theological fellows) the possibility of "ahistorical" philosophy, is open to more of the dialectic within Augustine's thought than is the postmodern Anglican Augustine.

1. Derrida And Augustine

Circumfession is, like the *Confessions*, an autobiography involving a declaration of a kind of religious faith, an attempt at a reconciliation with the past in which that faith, so far as it is Jewish, was received. Like the *Confessions*, it is part of a quest for "the great pardon."[4] For these and other reasons, Derrida finds in his biography echoes of Augustine's which he takes up in this quasi-autobiography. At a Roundtable at Villanova in 1994, he said about the "marginal notes" which are *Circumfession*:

> On the one hand, I play with some analogies, that he came from Algeria,
> that his mother died in Europe, the way my mother was dying in Nice
> when I was writing this, and so on. I am constantly playing, seriously
> playing, with this, and quoting sentences from the *Confessions* in Latin, all
> the while trying, through my love and admiration for St. Augustine -- I
> have enormous and immense admiration for him -- to ask questions about
> a number of axioms, not only in his *Confessions* but in his politics, too. So
> there is a love story and a deconstruction between us.[5]

Derrida's love for Augustine comes out in *Circumfession*. The personal connections are clearly felt: Algeria; Derrida's mother, Georgette, a kind of Jewish Monica;[6] youthful rebellion; the compromises and troubles of a provincial aiming for success in the metropolis; etc. But there is more between Derrida and Augustine than the personal connections. The Augustinian theological tradition is the quintessence of the Logocentrism which makes Western culture. Derrida's postmodern "nothing outside text"

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4 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 55.
5 Deconstruction in a Nutshell, 20-1.
6 Though definitively not "Saint" Georgette, see Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 16.

is a deconstruction of that Logocentrism, along with the self which was born in, and is at home with, that reason above history and text. So Derrida is deconstructing what is at the heart of the Augustine who is at the center of the Western Christian tradition, religious and secular.

Augustine's fateful identification of God and being in his interpretation of Exodus 3.14 puts him at the origins of Western onto-theology. And, at least for our Anglican theologians, the Augustinian self as intellectual substance, constituted in relation to the divine as a mirror of the divine, and possessing thereby a self-relation which sets it above and over the historical, is the root of all which is to be overcome in modernity. For them, as we shall see, such an Augustinian self who would found the possibility of a knowledge of the logic of reality must be read out of existence, (and out of Augustine), in order to construct a postmodern Christianity. This carries them, (as they intend), beyond Derridan deconstruction, to something more radical, which they think to be harmony and peace.

But, with Derrida, his love of Augustine, as are his loves generally, is simultaneously hate. A duality is essential. His deconstruction centralizes what it depends upon, but determinedly gets around it. This is the method of *Circumfession*.

The form, the method and the message of *Circumfession*[7] are one. The work as a whole was written as a "friendly bet" or "a contract" between friends in which Professor Geoffrey Bennington dared Derrida to let himself be exposed by an essay circumscribing his thought, an account so systematic that it would even anticipate whatever Derrida might write in the future. The wager called for Professor Derrida to read what Geoff Bennington had written, and then to write "something escaping the proposed systematization, surprising it."[8] Bennington's *Derridabase*, circumscribing Derrida in this way, is published in large print, on the upper part of the page, and occupies about two-thirds of it. Derrida's circumfessing attempt to talk around *Derridabase*, is in smaller print below, as befits the position of the humble penitent who makes his confession.

The relation with Bennington is intended to mirror the relation between the self and God in the tradition to which Augustine is central. It is crucial to observe that this relation is approached only in this way. There is no treatment of the arguments at the heart of the *Confessions* about the substance of God and the tight interconnection between Augustine's coming to a knowledge of the divine substance, of his own metaphysical nature and of the nature of good and evil. Nor does Derrida pick up, in respect to his own journey, the necessity of Hellenistic philosophy for the knowledge of natures and substances[9] without which -- Augustine is explicit -- his conversion and his Christian

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7 On "style as enactment," which is crucial to postmodern writing, see Kenneth Surin, "Some aspects of the 'grammar' of 'incarnation' and 'kenosis': reflections prompted by the writings of Donald MacKinnon," in Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald MacKinnon, edited by Kenneth Surin, (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1989), 96 and 109, n.15.
8 Jacques Derrida, 1.
9 However, Augustine's position on these, in its mixture of Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic elements, seems Middle Platonic; see W.J. Hankey, "Ratio, reason, rationalism (ideae)," Saint Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia, edited Allan Fitzgerald, to be published by Eerdmans, in press. Closest to my understanding is that developed by Edward Booth in a series of articles: "St. Augustine's 'notitia sui' related

religion are impossible.[10] In general, a relation to philosophy which would allow Augustine to understand his experience by what is not within the historical is excluded by Derrida.

Only an echo of the result of the Hellenistic metaphysics at the heart of the *Confessions* is present in Derrida's play with the *Confessions*. There is no deconstruction of the theological philosophical center; it has not been entered. In fact, Derrida remains always on the historical side in that movement back and forth between himself and *Derridabase* in which he mimics the movement in the *Confessions* between Augustine's own words and those of Scripture.[11] So far as the *Confessions* is used as map on which to draw Derrida's own journey, this may not be surprising. It is, however, more remarkable that, in this, Derrida is drawn upon by the postmodern Christian Augustinians we are considering. In any case, with whatever falsifications it involves, the friendly bet with Geoffrey Bennington carries, for the purposes of *Circumfession*, the import of Augustine's engagement with God.

In escaping Bennington, Derrida is trying again to "circumvent" the "circumference," "the one that has always been running after me, turning in circles around me."[12] Partly, Derrida is referring to his relation to his Jewishness, his circumcision, which, since childhood, both his parents before him, and then he himself tried to hide as a secret. In addition, "Geoff remains very close to God, for he knows everything about the 'logic' of what I might have written in the past but also of what I might think or write in the future ... "[13] Thus, the capital "G." in the English translation also stands for God, and for Georgette, his mother, whom he partly compares to Monica, just as the capital "D." in Djef, the phoneme of Geoff, stands for "Dieu"[14] The D. must also stand for Derrida so far as his God is self-projection, and the God in *Derridabase* evidently is Derrida's self-creation through another. G. is also the predestinating God of "SA," "*Savoir Absolut*," or Saint Augustine.[15] Of this G., whom he is trying to circumvent, Derrida confesses, "I love him and from the depths of my admiration without memory"; it is he "I prefer".[16]

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to Aristotle and the early neo-Platonists." Augustiniana, 27 (1977), 70-132 & 364-401, 28 (1978), 183-221, 29 (1979), 97-124.

10 Confessions, 5,10 ff.; 7 passim. The solution which Augustine attributes to Platonism answers a multi-faceted problematic built and deepened from the beginning of the Confessions. It includes the problem of the nearness and distance of God, the question of his motive in stealing the pears, his attraction to Manicheism, his refusal of responsibility for his evil acts etc. Platonism and its solutions, in terms of natures and substance, to questions about God, self and evil are central and essential.

11 Caputo, of The Prayers and Tears Jac ques Derrida, 294 is clear about the difference of the "partition" in Derrida's self and Augustine's; but, ultimately, Caputo's Augustine is postmodern in the sense I am developing. Caputo, at 326. writes: "Derrida makes his own the Augustinian sentiment that truth is something you make or do, veritatem facere, not something in whose open clearing you stand, head bared, basking yourself in Truth's Er-agen." This doctrine is the center of postmodern Augustinianism.

12 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 3.

13 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 16.

14 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 13 and 19.

15 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 54, see also 73.

16 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 13 and 31.

This love is mutual and, indeed, Derrida depends for his identity and motive force on it. All of Derrida's activity in *Circumfession* is related to the astonishing interest of G. in him, his desire to write about him, his circumcising or circumscribing him in an idea. But *Circumfession* with its relation to Geoff, is but a metaphor for Derrida's whole life. He seems to have a G. filled life. In *Circumfession*, he writes relative to "what G. will have written up there, beside or above me, on me, but also for me, in my favor, toward me and in my place ..."[17] But, generally, this interest and love are presupposed, and also the need for them.

No philosophical justification is given for this presupposition. Either a contingency of his personal relation to Bennington and Georgette is transferred to reality absolutely -- I evidently write *hors-texte* -- or, Derrida assumes the religious revelation of God as good (in which case his theology is more than "nonknowledge") or, he even assumes the assimilation by Augustine of the Biblical revelation and the Neoplatonic teaching about the Good.[18]

Derrida's form of discourse, "style as enactment" and endless assimilation of the given text to the free associations of its reader, permits this assumption at the heart of his life and work, as these are represented in *Circumfession*, to remain without philosophical or theological justification. And this assumption cannot be the content of Derrida's faith or of his religion as he describes them. Professor Marion's work, in contrast, is fundamentally concerned with the justification of this assumption. His revision of phenomenology in terms of the "gift" is designed to face philosophically the problem of the good or charity. From this residue of necessary reliance of theology on philosophy, arises the critical treatment of him by Dr. Milbank, the exclusive theologian par excellence.[19]

The strength and weakness of Derrida's approach to philosophy is seen in his relation to G. He has a positive relation to the whole history because even its metaphysical center is so deeply assumed that his philosophical activity is entirely dependent on it. However, as assumption, Derrida's thought is already always outside the reason which constitutes it. This problematic haunts postmodernism generally.

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17 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 26, see also 222 and 268.

18 Against which see the polemic of Caputo, The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida, 12 and 344, n. 13. For Caputo, Derrida is a Jewish Augustine, 283-86, 312, and he wants to make Augustine's Christianity Jewish, not Platonic. Partly this has to do with Caputo's opposition to the Hellenic Heidegger (311 with note 25, 326). It would not be difficult to deconstruct this binary opposition.

19 See Jean-Luc Marion, Rduction et donation. Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie, (Paris: P.U.F., 1989) where he adds a fourth principle to phenomenology, "donation." See also Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale, 96, 1 (1991) devoted to the discussion of this work. For Milbank, see "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," New Blackfriars 76, No. 895 (July/August, 1995), "Special Issue on Jean-Luc Marion's God without Being," 325-43, (republished, newly edited, in The Word Made Strange, 36-52), my references are to the New Blackfriars text; idem, "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," Modern Theology, 11 (1995), 119-61.

Whatever the justice of G.'s assumed knowledge and love, Derrida's existence depends both upon assuming and then, crucially, circumfessing them. If he could not "surprise" G., write around him, his acts would be without purpose:

> if G., as I believe he has a right to do and has done impeccably, has made this theologic program capable of the absolute knowledge of a nonfinite series of events properly, not only the enunciation of this law can ultimately do without me, without what I wrote in the past, or even what I seem to be writing here, but do without foreseeing or predicting what I could well write in the future, so that I am deprived of a future ...[20]

Success will not only give him a future, it will restore a freedom to his past:

> if I succeed in surprising him and surprising his reader, this success, success itself, will be valid not only for the future but also for the past for by showing that every writing to come cannot be engendered, anticipated preconstructed from this matrix, I would signify in return that something in the past might have been withdrawn ...[21]

So the wager is serious. Derrida's doing anything both depends on a self which is defined by G.'s knowledge and love, and upon his escaping that. He does not, we may say, cannot, desire to break the machine, in which G. inscribes his *Derridabase*: "I love him too much."[22] It is not too much to say that this very serious play is the character of his entire work. In that *jeu*, Derrida, more conservatively than the postmodern Christian theologians we shall consider, moves back and forth, neither winning nor losing,[23] between the "theologic" which gives form to culture and the deconstruction of theology. He is waiting, he writes, for

> the great pardon which has not yet happened ... which is why I am addressing myself here to God, the only one I take as a witness, without yet knowing what these sublime words mean, and this grammar, and *to*, and *witness*, and *God*, and *take*, take God, and yet not only do I pray, as I have never stopped doing all my life, and pray to him ...[24]

By this means, by placing his life in the context of prayer and tears, in the end, Derrida produced the surprise that Bennington says he intended all along to "provoke and welcome."[25]

The surprise is shown to us by Derrida in the narration of his relationship to Judaism. Derrida's readers have not known about his religious struggle, of his coming to terms

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20 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 31.
21 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 32
22 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 36.
23 Derrida in Jacques Derrida, 44.
[24] Derrida in *Jacques Derrida*, 55-56. That Derrida prays distinguishes him from Heidegger, and Caputo is right to regard it as of the greatest significance; see note 28 below.
[25] Bennington in *Jacques Derrida*, 1.

with his broken covenant, of his 'religion' 'without religion and without religion's God'. By confessing his 'faith' in this way, Derrida surprised by writing a text which, while it remained consistent with his previously published thought, demonstrated the inadequacy of attempts, such as Bennington's, to circumscribe that thought, to imprison it within the confines of a predictable system or method.

Derrida's "surprising" religion -- in fact, for the 20th century, there is no surprise, since this is the least surprising religion for the sophisticated -- he partly likens to negative theology, though sharply distinguishing *Différance* from negative theology. His religion is ultimately a "nonknowledge" in which he is "having a great time."[26]

> ... that's what my readers won't have known about me, the comma of my breathing henceforward, without continuity but without a break, the changed time of my writing, graphic writing, through having lost its interrupted verticality, almost with every letter, to be bound better and better but be read less and less well over almost twenty years, like my religion about which nobody understands anything any more than does my mother who asked other people a while ago, not daring to talk to me about it, if I still believed in God ... but she must have known that the constancy of God in my life is called by other names, so that I quite rightly pass for an atheist, the omnipresence to me of what I call God in my absolved, absolutely private language being neither that of an eyewitness nor that of a voice doing anything other than talking to me without saying anything, nor a transcendent law or an immanent *schechina*, that feminine figure of a Yahweh who remains so strange and so familiar to me ...[27]

Augustine, as it seems is everything else important, is for Derrida both that from whom he must escape and that with whom he associates his own enterprise. Augustine is a special friend, a compatriot, and, evidently, an exemplar. Augustine is even an exemplar in his circumvention of G. For Derrida is clear that Augustine is genuine in his puzzlement as to *Cur confitemur Deo scienti*, his question as to why he confesses to someone who knows it all already. Not only does he judge Augustine's question to be genuine, but he supposes that as an act of love, Augustine does what Derrida is undertaking, making something new, which will, so to speak, surprise God, and lead to that to which Derrida has also come, a "learned ignorance."

> He knows everything in advance, which did not stop my compatriot from going beyond this *Cur confitemur Deo scienti*, not toward a verity, a

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[26] Derrida in *Jacques Derrida*, 44 and 141-3; see Jacques Derrida. "How to avoid speaking: Denials," in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, eds. S. Budick and W. Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), for a carefully worked out presentation of Derrida's relation to negative theology in which he includes: the "Platonic or Neoplatonic tradition"; Augustine (indirectly, so far as he is quoted by Eckhart - 8, 44, 52 - and as mediating the Platonic *khora* -51); and Wittgenstein. He centers on the pseudo-Dionysius and Jean-Luc Marion's treatment of him. The French is Jacques Derrida, "Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations," in *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre*, (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987), 535-595. See also Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 6 and much else.
[27] Derrida in *Jacques Derrida*, 154-55.

severity of avowal which never amounts merely to speaking the truth, to making anything known or to presenting oneself naked in one's truth, as though Augustine still wanted by force of love, to bring it about that in *arriving* at God, something would happen to God, and *someone* would happen to him who would transform the science of God into a learned ignorance ...[28]

However, recruiting Augustine in support of this circumvention is deeply problematic.

Derrida assumes what we may call the Hellenic Augustine of the *gnothi seauton* , whose confession and gathering of his dispersed self depended upon a movement inward and upward both in and toward God (the Word as mediator is both in and above the human). In short, he assumes the Augustine who must be understood in a transmuting relation to Plotinus.[29] The Augustine of the *Confessions* came to know God, himself, good and evil, and, by way of this knowledge, was converted. The autobiographical books are confession as praise because they show that the movement of his life is contained within the patterns God in his Word imposes on the creation.[30] In the confession as self-examination and repentance of Book 10, he comes to judge himself by the Truth which turned him around. As the concluding books interpreting *Genesis* make evident, he understands his conversion in relation to the logic of the universal *logos*, a logic which is before history and determinative of it.[31]

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[28] Derrida in *Jacques Derrida*, 18. This is the Augustine of Caputo who would make truth (*The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 326). If Caputo turned Derrida into a Jewish Augustine and Augustine into a Jewish, as opposed to a Hellenic, Christian, he would seem to bind Derrida to a binary opposition. As I have indicated, this is for the sake of radically setting Derrida against Heidegger whose Hellenism and Nazism Caputo puts together. Caputo's book is correct in finding in Derrida a religion. Indeed, Derrida speaks of himself as capable "of founding another religion" (222). Its character is indicated in "How to avoid speaking: Denials." He explicitly does not speak, there, about "negativity or of apophatic movements in ... the Jewish or Islamic traditions" (31, 53). In his criticism of negative theology, he considers after the Greek, and the "Christian without yet ceasing to be Greek" paradigms for apophasis, Heidegger's paradigm which is "neither Greek nor Christian" (53). This paradigm proposes to speak of God without speaking of being and thus to be a theology as "science of faith or of divine speech, such as it manifests itself in revelation which is not onto-theology." Derrida does not judge Heidegger to have succeeded in this theology without Greek philosophy, but he seems to look for religion in this direction, a religion which prays as Heidegger does not (60).

[29] See Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 294.

[30] So the *Confessions* begin with an account of his infancy in respect to that in which it is the same as all infancies, and go on, once he has enacted the Fall, to deal with the problem of sin as adolescent rebellion - in the story of the theft of the pears - and to treat his adult life as the movement through a series of positions which can be related in terms of moves from one philosophical and religious form after another.

[31] See R.D. Crouse, "'In Aenigmate Trinitas' (Confessions, XII,5,6): The Conversion of Philosophy in St. Augustine's Confessions," *Dionysius* 11 (1987), 61: "Existence, knowledge of the truth, and the voluntas which is their bond of union: that is the trinitarian paradigm which informs the thought of the Confessions. whether in the autobiography of Books I-IX, or in the doctrine of the soul's conversion in Book X. But it is in the final three books that the pattern is disclosed in its metaphysical dimensions, as grounded in, and dependent on, the triunal activity of God, in the descent and return of all creation from and to its principal. It is within that broader context of *conversio* that the conversion of the rational creature, in its knowing and its willing, has its deepest meaning." This view of the *Confessions* which would draw experience into a philosophical pattern is profoundly at odds with the postmodern Augustine.

Ultimately, Augustine places his becoming, and all becoming, within that universal logic, and, crucially, knows his relation to it. This knowledge is, for him, the condition of his being able to interpret *Genesis*. Augustine is drawn back into the creative knowledge by which he is known, the *Savior Absolut*; -- he knows now as he is known[32] -- rather than contractually excluding this return. For Augustine, this return, the conversion to origin is everything. Augustine is not trying to circumvent the divine predestination and knowledge, but rather to demonstrate the divine logic which moves all things and to praise it, to confess it.

Derrida's *Circumfession* intends to have the opposite character. He takes up his writing from this assumed Augustine. Derrida endeavours to deconstruct this assumption by means of a *Circumfession*. But to understand the power in that deconstruction -- and equally what it lacks -- it is critical to notice that what constitutes the assumed is never considered. We are always already outside it. G. has already written, his text is fixed above the page, Derrida writes on the margin below and outside. In that respect Derrida's *Circumfession* goes nowhere, and does nothing, it ends where it already began. It cannot return, as Augustine wills to return, to the *Savoir Absolut*, which can never truly be, for Augustine, any more than for Boethius or his other successors, a finite temporal before or spatial outside.[33]

The Derridan Augustine is in this external relation to a finite God. There he is condemned to a never ending search in an never ending examination of his experience. This would be an Augustine for whom the *exitus* which conversion assumes cannot be taken into the divine self-differentiation; but where, rather, the divine has passed into the historical. This is not only the Augustine of Derrida, but of postmodern Christian theologians, for whom the Christian mediation, as Patristic orthodoxy understood it, has been inverted.[34] This Augustine, Fr. Dodaro deconstructs. Or rather, since deconstruction belongs properly to that which is deconstructed, Dodaro shows, correctly, that if we look at Augustine in his relation to God in the same way in which Derrida relates to the G. of *Derridabase*, the result is the same.

2. Dodaro's Derridan Augustine

Before embarking on a review of Fr. Dodaro's paper, it is important to give notice that it was not intended to be a exposition of Augustine in himself -- if such an enterprise were even conceivable in this company. It was rather an exercise fixed by the parameters of the *colloque* for which it was presented. It is answer to a question -- just as

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[32] *Confessions* 10, takes up the Hellenic "Know thyself," so that he judges himself by the truth by which he is judged, and shows that he has been moved by the Truth. The book is governed by I Cor. 13: 12 with which it begins.

[33] *Confessions* 11 which mediates between the self knowledge of Book 10 and God's knowledge of creation in Books 12 and 13 shows this in respect to time.

[34] Augustine comes to an understanding in which, as an historical individual, he discovers and so possesses, as well as being possessed by: his own objective foundation; or, in philosophical language, his principle; in theological language, God. This Christian knowledge is excluded for the postmodern Augustine.

Circumfession was the response to a friendly bet. What can be made of Augustine if we read him as Derrida reads? I report here just the part of the paper (about half of it) which deals with the *Confessions*.

Fr. Dodaro notes the similarity between the relations of G. and Jacques, on the one hand, and Augustine and God, on the other. The interconnection of love and knowledge are essential in both cases. Equally, just as Derrida takes into account the *Derridabase*, moving, as we the readers do, back and forth between it and his own text, so, in the *Confessions*, God's discourse, the text of Scripture, interpenetrates Augustine's own text. For Dodaro: "These intertextualities" as well as the interconnection of knowledge and love, "remind the reader of the structure of self-knowledge for Augustine."

> For Augustine can only know God in as much as -- and in the manner that -- he can love God, and he can only know himself in so far as he knows God's knowledge and love for him. In the end, this is why Augustine must confess to a God who already knows everything about him. The pretense of the *Confessions* is that God doesn't need to know Augustine; Augustine needs to know himself. And he can only know himself by coming to know concretely how, in what manner, God knows him and loves him. Confession is thus Augustine's tried-and-true mode of self-discovery because it involves a minute and attentive recollection of his history, a recollection in which he is revealed to himself within the providential love of God which he gratefully and painfully recalls to have been present at each significant juncture of his past and present life.

There is much here which is evident from the *Confessions*: knowledge and love are indissolubly interconnected, to know ourselves as God knows us is required, such knowledge belongs to the self-examination which is essential to repentance. But something more is asserted (or, better, denied): self-knowledge is resolutely historical, never achievable as ideal result, nor given as philosophical content. As Dodaro puts it: "For Augustine, self-knowledge ... is also always provisional and contingent."

This side, present in the *Confessions*, Fr. Dodaro develops. There is a risk that the divine gift of self-knowledge will be a poison, a *simulacrum* of himself which passes away just as he abstracts or distills it, just at the precise instant in which he 'knows himself' through God's revelation of himself to himself within his memory. Even the experience of pardon, of divine acceptance and presence, which is enclosed in each grasp of himself painfully and gratefully attained through confession, becomes also an occasion of sin, of pride.

It is not hard for Fr. Dodaro to show from the text of the *Confessions* that this "provisional and contingent" self-knowledge is illusion, that it passes away the moment it seems to be achieved.

At the beginning of the tenth book, Augustine is confident that the God who reveals him to himself will enable truthful confession.[35] But by the end of the book, Fr. Dodaro reports:

> while discussing sins against the sense of smell, Augustine has already established the pattern of contradiction that characterizes the remainder of his confession. His admission that he could be self-deceived in his examination of conscience parallels his earlier assertion that his griefs (his sins) are at battle with his joys and that he does not know to which the victory will fall.[36]

He finds the same pattern and "composite of claims in conflict" in Augustine's discussion of concupiscence of the eyes. By the time he examines himself on the sin of pride, all complacent confidence that he has been successful in his battle over sin or in his striving for true self-knowledge is gone.

So, while he confesses that God has 'crushed his pride' (10.36.58), he acknowledges that 'the temptation to want veneration and affection from others' may have some hold upon him (10.36.59).

What is in doubt here is self-knowledge at all. Dodaro quotes the *Confessions*:

> I am sorely afraid about my hidden sins, which are plain to your eyes but not to mine. In other areas of temptation I have some shrewdness in self-examination (*facultas explorandi me*), but in this matter almost none.[37]

He comes to the point where the whole enterprise of self-knowledge is threatened. He asks: "Is there nothing left to say, but that I am deluding myself and not acting truthfully with heart and tongue in your sight?"[38] Augustine concludes:

> ... I have taken stock of the sickly state to which my sins have reduced me, and I have called upon your right hand for saving help. I have seen your blazing splendor, but with a wounded heart; I was beaten back, and I asked, "Can anyone reach that?" I was flung far out of your sight. You are the Truth, sovereign over all. I did not want to lose you, but in my greed I thought to possess falsehood along with you, just as no one wants to tell lies in such a way that he loses his own sense of what is true. That was why I lost you, for you did not consent to be possessed in consort with a lie.[39]

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[35] *Confessions* 10.1.1.
[36] We are pointed to *Confessions* 10.32.48 and 10.28.39
[37] 10.36.60.
[38] 10.37.62.
[39] 10.40.65-41.66.

Fr. Dodaro draws this conclusion from Augustine's:

> "You did not consent to be possessed in consort with a lie," he finally
> admits to God, thereby acknowledging a self-delusion that he could really
> ever be free from the sway of pride in its many, insidious varieties. The
> consequence of these last words of the bishop's confession at the close of
> Book 10 is the denial that the Augustinian self can ever be known in
> abstraction, that is, known in-itself, known apart from those fleeting
> moments of insight wherein a true taste of oneself occurs in the
> interpenetrating knowledge and love of God ... The more that the content
> of moral self-knowledge reveals itself to be instable on account of the
> necessarily on-going nature of conversion that this self-knowledge
> requires, the more instable the assurance of the metaphysical 'self' in
> Augustine. The 'self' that he can posit, situate, is both there and is not
> there. It exists in what he knows of himself in the revealing love of God
> which he has experienced in the moment of 'self'-revelation, in the act of
> loving and being loved, in a recollection which is also a presence, a real
> presence, a pardoning, reconciling presence. But it cannot exist as an
> abstraction of that experience, for it is an experience which, if clung to,
> reveals itself to be illusion, to be pride.

And so, writes Fr. Dodaro, there is a surprise at the conclusion of Augustine's
Confessions making them into a circumfession also. "He knows himself and yet knows
no 'self', understood as an abstract datum of knowledge."

The analysis of these texts given by Fr. Dodaro is not only correct, it is also
profoundly revealing of a moment that remains within the movement of Augustine's
introspection. However, there is another side of Augustine which disappears: the
Augustine for whom self-certainty, the knowledge both that I am and what I am, is
established in doubt, in being deceived.[40] This Augustine lies at the foundation of
Cartesian modernity. Charles Taylor puts it this way in his chapter on Augustine in
Sources of the Self, "In Interiore homine": "On the way from Plato to Descartes stands
Augustine."[41]

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[40] However, there is a lot of this Augustine. Reason is established against the Skeptics in a step Augustine
took early and which remained decisive. See *Contra Academicos* 3,9,19; *De beata uita* 2,7; *Soliloquiorum*
2,1,1; *De immortalitate animae* 1,1; *De libero arbitrio* 2,3,7; *De trinitate* 15,12,21; *De ciuitate dei* 11,26. It
is important that the self-certainty of our existence as reasoning life remains essential to us, belonging to
the nature of immortal mind, even when our being, understanding and loving are directed to God, and act in
and by God's own trinitarian life (*De trinitate* 14,14,18; 14,19,26; 15,15,25). Augustine has a carefully
worked out description of the self in philosophical categories. There is, for him, always a "metaphysical"
self in these terms (*anima*, *ratio*, *mens*, *ratiocinatio*, *scientia*, *sapientia*, etc.) worked out in the most
technical way, continually refined and qualified from the beginning of his writing until the *Retractationum*.
[41] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University
Press, 1989), 127. It is important to note that Taylor is dependent for this Augustine on Etienne Gilson,
who found a philosophy in Augustine. Taylor cites repeatedly *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*.
Lewis Ayres, "The Discipline of Self-Knowledge in Augustine's *De Trinitate* Book X," *The Passionate
Intellect. Essays on the Transformations of the Classical Traditions*, Presented to Professor I.G. Kidd,

In opposition to Platonic - Augustinian - Cartesian interiority, postmodern historicising of Christian theology has now pushed from view the substantial self. The self which is for the pure self-relation of thought and will, a self there for us even in doubt, self-certainty established in response to ancient philosophy and by its tools, and which might found a Christian philosophy, but one independent of theology, is its enemy. By means of this careful forgetting, Augustine will no longer belong at the origins of modernity but of its postmodern deconstruction.

3. Jean-Luc Marion's Augustines

Jean-Luc Marion is a conservative (*Communio*) Catholic theologian, who was a pupil of Derrida at the École Normale Superior. He now teaches philosophy at the Sorbonne, having moved there two years ago, but like Derrida, he holds appointments at North American universities -- notably for Marion, the University of Chicago. In the "Preface to the English Edition" of his *God without Being*, he describes himself as postmodern with a qualification and tells us what he means. His philosophical decision concerning the names of God:

> takes place within the framework, perhaps of what is conventionally called "postmodernity". If we understand by modernity the completed and therefore terminal figure of metaphysics, such as it develops from Descartes to Nietzsche, then "postmodernity begins when, among other things, the metaphysical determination of God is called into question.[42]

In his studies of Descartes,[43] Marion raised such a question when he found that the metaphysical names imposed by Descartes on God "reflect purely metaphysical functions of "God" and hide the mystery of God as such." And so, he writes "my enterprise remains

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edited by Lewis Ayres, Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities VII (New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1995), tells us that he strongly disagrees with an understanding of Augustine's work like Taylor's which finds in it "the key building blocks of the modernist notion of the 'self'." The treatment of Augustine's self most directly confronted (as ahistorical and too Plotinian) by Ayres (note 7, 263-64)is that of Edward Booth. See Booth, "St Augustine's 'notitia sui' related to Aristotle and the early neo-Platonists," *Augustiniana* 27(1977), 70-132 & 364-401,28(1978), 183-221, 29(1979), 97-124; idem, "St. Augustine's *de Trinitate* and Aristotelian and neo-Platonist Noetic," *Studia Patristica* XVI, pt. II, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Berlin, 1985), 487-490; idem, *Saint Augustine and the Western Tradition of Self-Knowing*, The Saint Augustine Lecture 1986 (Villanova: Augustinian Institute, Villanova University, 1989).

[42] *God without being*: *Hors-texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (Chicago; Chicago University Press, 1991), xx-xxi.

[43] See, for example, Jean-Luc Marion, *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes: Analogie création des vérités éternelles et fondement*, edition corrigée et complétée (Paris: Quadrige/ Presses Universitaires de France, 1991); idem, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes. Constitution et limites de l' onto-théo-logie dans la pensée cartésienne*, Épiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986); idem, "The Essential Incoherence of Descartes' Definition of Divinity," translated by Frederick Van de Pitte, *Essays on Descartes'* Mediations, edited by Amlie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 297-337.

'postmodern' in this sense, and, in this precise sense, I remain close to Derrida."[44] However, *God without Being*, is, as against what Derrida would allow to be possible, "*hors-texte*." God as charity is neither pre-, nor post-, nor modern and so Marion's "enterprise does not remain 'postmodern' all the way through."[45] Partly, this postmodernity means that he, and others, (e.g. the Anglican theologians we shall consider), turn again to the premodern to find what they judge modernity has forgotten.

Thus, there is Graham Ward's description of Professor Marion's work on Descartes: "It is in grasping the roots of modernity that Marion's postmodern thinking sees the possibility of returning to the premodern world which de Lubac, Daniélou and Gilson had reintroduced into early twentieth century French Catholicism."[46] However, the thinkers we are treating do not judge that modernity can be, or should be, escaped or leapt over. Marion's study of Descartes aims to show the ambiguities at the origins of modernity; thus, what modernity became involves a choice rather than a necessity. In consequence, there is also a choosing for us in getting beyond the modern which equally involves staying with something present in it.[47] What is made of Augustine is evidently at the heart of this choosing.

Marion seems to find in Greek negative theology his most direct way forward. His first efforts "to shoot for God according to his most theological name -- charity"[48] are to be found in his *L'idole et la distance*, where in the pseudo-Dionysius he discovered a genuinely theological relation to the divine names.[49] His paper at the Villanova *colloque* on "Religion and Postmodernity" was a continuation of his theological reflections on Dionysius and Gregory of Nyssa and a continuation of his dialogue with Derrida on negative theology reflected in "Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations." The Villanova paper endeavours to find a "third way" in respect to negative theology, a way which takes into account Derrida's criticism of it as coming finally to the hyperessential. Nonetheless, because how Augustine is represented lies at the roots of the choices which found modernity, his representation of Augustine is equally, if not, in fact, more important.

I list then Marion's representations of Augustine.

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[44] Ibid., xxi; see Graham Ward, "Between Postmodernism and Postmodernity: The Theology of Jean-Luc Marion," *Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion*," edited Keiran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp, (London: MacMillan, 1996), 192-93.
[45] *God without being*, xxi.
[46] Graham Ward, "Introducing Jean-Luc Marion," *New Blackfriars*, 76, No. 895 (July/August, 1995), "Special Issue on Jean-Luc Marion's *God without Being*," 323.
[47] . Ibid., 320-23, Graham Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 132. The same is true of John Milbank and arises out of his study of Vico. See *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 3. His aim is to trace "the genesis of the main forms of secular reason, in such a fashion as to unearth the arbitrary moments in the construction of their logic."
[48] *God without being*, xxi.
[49] *L'idole et la distance, Cinq tudes*, (Paris; Grasset et Fasquelle, 1977), on his position in that work see W.J. Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation," *Denys l' Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident, Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994*, édités Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 413-16.

First, and mostly, Augustine is placed with pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas and the premodern (i.e. pre- Duns Scotus, Suarez and Descartes),[50] as maintaining a reason which is always transcendent toward God. So reason is always simultaneously religious and properly theological, e.g. being is known in the *analogia entis*, there is no independent secular reasoning, indeed, really no reason apart from the *itinerarium mentis in deum*. Augustine is set definitively against Suarez, often Scotus, and usually, but not always, Descartes. Descartes may be represented more as the victim of what the theologians did rather than as the worst of the moderns. Augustine, then, belongs to the postmodern cure.[51]

Second, Augustine is seen with Descartes on some matters. For example, they are treated together on voluntarism where neither is convicted of the usual offenses, and the Cartesian *cogito* is traced to Augustine. However, what Descartes is said to have done with it Marion maintains to be very different from what Augustine was about. Crucially, Marion points to Descartes' own recognition that Augustine is using the *cogito* as a way to the analogous knowledge of the divine Trinity, and that this is not at all his own purpose.[52] Here, Augustine is placed at the origins of modernity, but exempt from its diseases.

Third, Augustine is at the source of the Latin interpretation of Exodus 3.14 which makes God into being. Here, the evaluation of Augustine may, in principle, if his theology is found to be Neoplatonic, subordinating being, go up and down with that of Aquinas. In *L'idole et la distance* and in *Dieu sans l'être*, but neither in the "Preface to the English Edition" of *God Without Being*, nor in "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie,"[53] Aquinas was placed with the onto-theologians because he made being the first of God's names. Thomas has now been Neoplatonised by Marion as a theo-ontologian, for whom God is before being which he gives even to himself. So Aquinas is shifted toward Dionysius. So far as Augustine is not also a theo-ontologian, he would be set against pseudo-Dionysius, and would need to be overcome.[54]

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[50] Professor Marion, and many others, learned important aspects of their history of philosophy from Gilson, including their suspicion of the Scotistic Thomism of Suarez as corrupting modern thought by tending to a univocity of being which lies at the origin of theology as metaphysics and thus as onto-theology. See, for example, "The Essential Incoherence," 303-4, Ward, "Introducing Jean-Luc Marion," 318-21. This analysis is also picked up by Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 330. This is a commonly accepted analysis and the citations could be vastly multiplied. See W.J. Hankey, "Denis and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot," *Christian Origins: Theology, rhetoric and community*, edited by Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, Studies in Christian Origins (London: Routledge, 1998), 139-84.

[51] See Marion, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes*, 231-33 and idem, "The Essential Incoherence," 303-4 where Augustine is with Damascene, Aquinas and Anselm against Suarez, Scotus and Descartes who are guilty of the "univocist drift that analogy undergoes" (306). Idem, *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes*, 69ff., 162.

[52] Marion, *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes*, 282 on will and knowing in Augustine and Descartes, 384, note 22 on the *cogito*; as also, idem, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes*, 138-41, 147.

[53] *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995), #1, [*Saint Thomas et l'onto-théo-logie*], 31-66; for Marion's shift or "recantation" here, see Hankey, "Denis and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold," 150-52.

[54] Augustine is placed with Thomas but the Greeks are absolved because being for them "returns to the Son, it could not in any way determine the triune divinity which therefore exceeds Being," *God without Being*, 73-74. At this point Marion, in a note (51, p. 215) quotes with approval the remark of Derrida: "as a

Finally, Augustine is placed with Bérulle and Pascal (on different issues) in the Christian reaction within modernity against its distortions.[55]

With Marion, the transcendence toward God is crucial. Marion, and our Anglican postmodern theologians, is above all opposed to the "univocist drift" in the Scotistic transformation of scholasticism by Suarez which leads in Descartes to "a rationality not theologically assured by Christian Revelation, but metaphysically founded on the humanity of 'men strictly men'."[56] Thus, philosophy is to be transcendentally oriented to theology, (which is religious life rather than science), or separated altogether from theology. Theology's independence from philosophy is what all these post-Heideggerian thinkers demand above all -- in this sense, they all derive their programmes from father Heidegger.[57]

A possible route still remaining (when the sovereign independence of theology has been secured -- this theo-ontology attempts) will involve "correlating reason and revelation"[58] in a Latin scholastic way. This is how David Tracy understands Marion's writing. For John Milbank, and his Anglican theological companions who suppose that their theological models come from Patristic -- rather than from scholastic Christian forms -- and who suppose that this prevents doing philosophy and theology at once, Marion's fundamental fault lies here.

Another possible way forward is that Marion might completely separate his theological and his philosophical work. This Graham Ward supposes him to have done.[59]

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linguistic statement: 'I am he who am' is the admission of a mortal." At note 50, he subscribes to the argument of J.S. O'Leary who finds Augustinian thought at the origins of the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics.

[55] See *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes*, 140-60, idem, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes*, 313, 349 and the conclusion of W.J. Hankey, "Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation in John Colet, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker and the Cardinal Bérulle," for the Kolloquium "Augustinus in der Neuzeit. Von Petrarca zum 18. Jahrhundert," to be published in the *Actes*, edited by Kurt Flasch and Dominique de Courcelles, Editions Brepols-Turnhout, 1997.

[56] Marion, "The Essential Incoherence," 297 and 306.

[57] Derrida is right in seeing that Heidegger opposes "Christian philosophy" because it requires a mixing of Greek ontology with a theology which is revelation. A separation of these would avoid onto-theology. However, ultimately, avoiding this mixing requires that neither being nor God can be thought philosophically. Marion thus wants to keep theology from becoming science.. Milbank hopes to regain both science and being for God by eliminating the independence of philosophy. See Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," 55; W.J. Hankey, "Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival," *Dionysius*, 9 (1985), 99-103, 107, 111-112. Note here how Karl Rahner anticipates our postmodern theologians in the turn to the historical as a way out of the emptiness of metaphysics which his following of Heidegger requires. See also Hankey, "Denis and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold," 151, J.-L. Marion, *L'idole et la distance*, 177-243, idem, *God without Being*, 44-52.

[58] David Tracy's Foreword to Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being* x. Milbank judges one side of Marion's position to be still correlational, see "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 325. For a comparison between the relations of theology and philosophy in Marion and Milbank and their premodern models see generally, Hankey, "Denis and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold."

[59] Ward, "Between Postmodernism and Postmodernity," 196, idem, "Introducing Jean-Luc Marion," 322-23.

I consider it premature to judge that there will not be a further integration of the philosophical and the theological work of this fecund scholar who is not afraid to allow his thought to develop even to the point of a recantation. We can conclude, however, that, in common with the Anglican theologians whom we shall consider next, Marion reads Augustine so that any horizontal self-completeness of the interpenetration of being, thinking and loving in *mens* which might be exploited for philosophy independent of revealed theology, is excised. This excision is for the sake of vertically oriented relations which are simultaneously toward history and toward God. For a reading of Augustine more radically pushed this way, we take the Chunnel from France to England.

4. Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayres And John Milbank

When we arrive at our group of Anglicans, we are dispersed immediately. The first of them has returned home to Wales as Bishop of Monmouth, after having occupied the Lady Margaret Professorship of Divinity at Oxford. The second, though English, is a Lecturer in Theology at Trinity College, Dublin, after having (like Robert Dodaro) written a D.Phil. thesis on Augustine under Williams when he occupied the Canon Professorship. Only the third, John Milbank, significantly as it turns out, remains in England, where he occupies a Fellowship at Peterhouse and is a Lecturer in Theology at Cambridge. Like Jean-Luc Marion, both Ayres and Milbank are laymen.

While these British scholars are all Anglicans so far as ecclesiastical affiliation is concerned, at least one of them has given up thinking of himself as an "Anglican theologian." Certainly, none of them is provincially English or Anglican in their intellectual or spiritual scope. But Milbank's refusal to give any substantiality to philosophy is absolutely essential to his theology and, indeed, may be thought to constitute it. He is thus prevented from being a Roman Catholic theologian and is, in fact, self-consciously Anglican. He may regard his supposed following of the Fathers in refusing to do both theology and philosophy as Anglican. For him, as against Marion, "the claim, which would have seemed so bizarre to the Fathers, to be doing philosophy as well as theology" must be given up.[60]

The wide range of Milbank's knowledge and interests is spectacular. His recent engagement with Marion's positions reveals a knowledge of French historical scholarship as it bears on theological and philosophical issues and a detailed engagement with

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[60] John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 340. When his theology was criticized for being Anglican by Aidan Nichols, o.p., in "'Non tali auxilio': John Milbank's Suasion to Orthodoxy," *New Blackfriars*, 73, No. 861 (June, 1992), 330-31, on account of its antiphilosophic " 'hermeticism' ... the enclosure of Christian discourse and practice within a wholly separate universe of thought and action" (327) and its 'theocracy' (331), Milbank replied that Nichol's "Englishness renders him more insular than my (never concealed!) Anglicanism." "Enclaves or Where is the Church?" *New Blackfriars*, 73, No. 861 (June, 1992), 352, note 2."

Structuralist, Poststructuralist (and Postmodern) thought which astonishes.[61] His published study in the history of philosophy on Vico, (his doctoral dissertation), establishes his *bona fides* as a student of the origins of modernity.[62] He has published an impressively encompassing theological statement, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, which has already been the subject of special issues of *Modern Theology* and *New Blackfriars*.[63] In it, he argues for his demand that theology no longer allow itself to be placed from outside by philosophy and by secular thought generally. He endeavours to persuade theologians to get over their "false humility" in the face of modern secular reason whose challenge, he announces, "is at an end, for it is seen that it was itself made in terms of metaphysics, and of a 'religion'."[64] The book's learning and its engagement with the history of theology and philosophy, as well as with contemporary social theory and its origins, surely make it, at the least, as Aidan Nichols writes, "a publishing event of considerable magnitude" for "a British author writing at the end of the twentieth century."[65] *Theology and Social Theory* includes, at least in part, most of his theological arguments and positions developed before or since.

A new collection of his essays, *The Word Made Strange. Theology, Language, Culture*, has just appeared.[66] While only one of the chapters is newly written -- "The Force of Identity" treating Gregory of Nyssa -- they "have all been considerably revised, and can be taken to represent 'What I think now'."[67] The essays have been ordered so that the whole looks like a systematic theology sounding what he calls "the English cadence". The twelve chapters are ordered, two by two, under six headings: *Arche* ("God and Creation"), *Logos* ("God the Son"), *Christos* ("the Incarnation"), *Pneuma* ("the Holy Spirit"), *Ethos* and *Polis* ("Christian life and society"). At the center of this incipient system is, appropriately, his addition to Trinitarian theology, "The Second Difference" which was subtitled "For a Trinitarianism Without Reserve" and, importantly, now appears under *Pneuma*.[68] It is of the greatest significance that this doctrine of the Trinity makes inseparable our identification of God and the practical life of the Church.

The books, when taken together with many other articles in *Modern Theology*, *New Blackfriars*, and elsewhere, exhibit a directed reflection on and engagement with the whole Western philosophical and theological tradition from the Pre-Socratics to Hegel

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[61] John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," idem, "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic." See also idem, "Enclaves or Where is the Church?" 344, 345 and note 1 which is more positive than the two later articles.

[62] *The Religious Dimension of the Thought of Giambattista Vico*, *1668-1744*, 2 vols. Studies in the History of Philosophy 23 and 32 (Lewiston, Maine: Edwin Mellon, 1991-2).

[63] *Modern Theology*, 8, No. 4 (October, 1992), *New Blackfriars*, 73, No. 861 (June, 1992). Milbank tells us ("Enclaves or Where is the Church?" 341) that *Theology and Social Theory*, is "accurately précised" by Fergus Kerr's "Simplicity Itself: Milbank's Thesis," *New Blackfriars*, 73, No. 861 (June, 1992), 306-10. David Burrell, "An Introduction to Theology and Social Theory," Modern Theology, 8, No. 4 (October, 1992), 319-29 provides a fine outline.

[64] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1, 260.

[65] "'Non tali auxilio'," 326.

[66] Oxford: Blackwells, 1997.

[67] *The Word Made Strange*, 4.

[68] The original is in *Modern Theology* 2:3 (1986), 213-34; my references are to the version in *The Word Made Strange*.

and beyond, with social and linguistic theory, with cultural anthropology generally, and with much else. Together they courageously propose a new Christianization of culture, explicitly designated as postmodern. This reChristianization is dependent on a criticism of and opposition to what it judges as the failed modern project, which project, with Hegel, notably, and others, it estimates to have been, partly, an earlier and now rival attempt to Christianize culture.[69] For the problem is not philosophy, metaphysics and ontology absolutely but rather that philosophy which remained "inside the horizons projected by the Greek *mythos*, within which the Greek *logos* had to remain confined."[70]

Milbank envisages "another ontology" which is "another philosophy" and "another metaphysics" [71] which would be properly Christian, inscribed within the Christian rather than the Greek *mythos*. This other philosophy, which does not "position" Christian theology from some pretense to a self-sufficient reason, is prefigured by "the radical changes undergone by ontology at the hands of the neo-Platonists and the Church Fathers: in particular Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite." It was "no longer *exactly* Greek." Because of the character of this transformed philosophy, Dr Milbank lays down, in contrast to Professor Marion, as proper to Christian Neoplatonism, "the Platonic Good, reinterpreted by Christianity as identical with Being."[72]

Before going on to say something more about the role Augustine serves in this reChristianization, and to raise a question about what of Augustine his servitude to a postmodernity opposed to modernity obscures, it is necessary to consider briefly the *genre* of Milbank's writings in order to ask whether my consideration of them is appropriate.

My method is the prosaic one of the historian who merely and miserably points to what is left out or obscured. "Style as enactment" is essential to John Milbank's postmodernity. Indeed, Christian life is for him primarily to be understood as a *poesis*, or more precisely as most like making music. After citing Augustine's *De Musica*, he requires that "Like nihilism, Christianity, should embrace the differential flux." He

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[69] Milbank understands his "transformation of the Greek philosophical *logos* through encounter with the theological *logos*, so that thought itself becomes inescapably Christian, and one is 'beyond secular reason' as "the resuming of .. [an] Hegelian task". He conditions this by arguing that "the Christian transformation of the philosophical *logos* is actually subverted by .. [Hegel's] encyclopaedic, totalizing ambitions." *Theology and Social Theory,* 147. At 183 in "The Second Difference," in *The Word Made Strange*," Milbank writes: "Hegel (*helas*!) is the most profound modern meditator upon the identity of the Holy Spirit." In "A Critique of the Theology of the Right," *The Word Made Strange*, 28 he compares Hegel to Aquinas as "that other Christian Aristotelian." In fact, the criticism of postmodern thought brings a return to Hegel in the circle of English thinkers amongst whom Milbank moves; see, for example, Rowan Williams, "Between Politics and Metaphysics: Reflections in the wake of Gillian Rose," *Modern Theology* 11/1 (1995), 3-21 and idem, "Hegel and the gods of postmodernity," *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernity and Religion*. edited by Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick, (London: Routledge, 1992), 72-80, Ayres, "Theology, Social Science and Postmodernity," 178-79.
[70] *Milbank, Theology and Social Theory*, 295.
[71] John Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?" 152 and 137 with 132 and "A Critique of the Theology of the Right," 29.
[72] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 295-96.

describes his theological writing as "composing a new theoretical music".[73] But theory belongs to composition and is not separable from it. The requirement that we join in the *poesis* means that there can be no theoretical distance or objectivity. Theory occurs as a necessarily incomplete moment within *praxis*.

> [P]ractice cannot claim to 'know' the finality of what it treats as final. ... We know what we want to know, and although all desiring is an 'informed' desiring, desire shapes truth beyond the imminent implications of any logical order, so rendering the Christian *logos* a continuous product as well as a process of 'art'. ... Now desire, not Greek 'knowledge' mediates to us reality.[74]

Does the historian's prosaic 'knowledge' have any place here? Or is his question an inappropriate refusal to move with the flux according to the rhythm he ought to discern as he joins in constructing it? Is his work just another form of the pagan, become modern, fearful search to find security in some external objectivity? This search for objective security, with its essential opposite, namely, the supposition of a subject above action and knowledge and providing their structure and foundations,[75] Milbank has taken as his evangelical work as a Christian theologian to expose as anti-, or at least sub-, Christian.

I have written something above about the dependence of Derrida upon the given texts which he proposes to read closely enough so as to find their internal deconstruction. Though Milbank wants to remove what is negative in this (for him) nihilist postmodern return to the pagan *agon,*[76] with its deconstructive "immanent dialectic," nonetheless, his works clearly have a like dependence on what is historically given. Yet, his theological writing must not be historical scholarship as modernity has developed that *genre*; this he calls a "finite idol."[77] Our present is getting over this objectivity:

> 1. The end of modernity ... means the end of a single system of truth based on universal reason, which tells us what reality is like. 2. [T]heology .. no longer has to measure up to accepted secular standards of scientific truth

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[73] "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short *Summa* in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions," *Modern Theology*, 7, No. 3 (April, 1991), 227 & 237, *The Word Made Strange*, 4. For his development of the notion that Christian faithfulness will require a poetic surrender to the musical flow which, as against static spatialization, stresses " 'temporal occurrence through us'" (*The Word Made Strange*, 44 and 142) Milbank relies upon Catherine Pickstock, especially her Ph.D. thesis for Cambridge *Seraphic Voices*, part of which will appear in her *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), in press. See especially "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing," *The Word Made Strange*, 83, note 62 for the interpretation of Augustine's *De Musica* which is required.

[74] "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism'," 231-35. See also "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing," 79-80.

[75] This is his criticism of Marion and Hegel; see Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 327ff., idem, "Can a Gift be Given?" 132 ff. In *Theology and Social Theory*, he writes that one of "Hegel's three great philosophical errors" is that he "retains the Cartesian subject" (154), see also 170-71.

[76] . "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism'," 230: "there is a hidden connection between pre-modern pagan dualism and postmodern dualism. The latter's self-proclaimed paganism ..."

[77] *Theology and Social Theory*, 1.

or normative rationality. ... 4. ... the point is not to 'represent' .. externality, but just to join in its occurrence, not to know, but to intervene, originate.[78]

The theological composition of new theoretical music is a positive embracing metanarrative which only Christian trinitarianism makes possible, a narrative which persuades by what it can subsume and whose persuasive power will lie in its unmatched admission of "genuine positive difference."[79]

Much criticism of *Theology and Social Theory* is a questioning of whether his narrative really embraces difference as it must, or is rather the latest form of powerful closure. In some cases this criticism includes doubts about whether Milbank's account of Augustine does not force out of him what is not there and conceal something of what is.[80] As we shall see, this is the question Robert Dodaro will put to Milbank. It would seem to be a question which he allows as genuine.

At least two of Milbank's essays are attempts to deal with the aspects of Gregory of Nyssa and of Augustine which do not fit into the use he makes of them, and, in one of these, he engages "the best and especially the most recent scholarship."[81] Further he accuses Derrida of that of which he is himself accused, namely, "reading into" a text what the narrative requires.[82] So, despite all, it seems that the prosaic question of the historian may be allowed to interrupt the symphony. Indeed, the composer is always interrupting himself. For, every one of Milbank's numerous footnotes is a stylistic enactment of the doublemindedness of postmodern metanarrative in respect to scientific history. This disturbing self-interruption has been evident ever since postmodernism's grandfather, the Professor of Classical Philology Friedrich Nietzsche, fiercely criticized scientific history in a work he called *The Genealogy of Morals*!

The first suspicion aroused in the prosaic historian by Milbank's style, is that poetic narrative has become an extraordinarily insightful pillage of history. It is a welcome pillage because it finds hidden and disused the very things it takes and restores for its purposes.[83] But it is often rapine because its opposition to modernity requires it to wrest what it takes from the pre-modern out of the contexts in which they contributed both to the making of modernity and to the postmodern reaction. This is not to say that Milbank is trying to restore the pre-modern.

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[78] "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism'," 225-26.
[79] "The Second Difference," 189 and *passim*; also " 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism'," 227-29.
[80] Graham Ward, "John Milbank's *Divina Commedia*," Rowan Williams, "Saving Time: thoughts on practice, patience and vision," in the *New Blackfriars* Milbank special issue, and Romano Coles, "Storied Others and the Possibilities of *Caritas*: Milbank and Neo-Nietzschean Ethics," and Gerard Loughlin, "Christianity at the End of the Story or the Return of the Master Narrative," in the *Modern Theology* special issue are all largely concerned with whether the "metanarrative" of Milbank can or does in fact embrace difference as it must. His answer in "Enclaves or Where is the Church?" is largely a defence on this issue.
[81] "The Force of Identity," *The Word Made Strange*, 194. The other, and, in my view, far less successful, is "Sacred Triads: Augustine and the Indo-European Soul," forthcoming in *Modern Theology*.
[82] "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing," 62.
[83] Perhaps most notable is his dusting off of William Warburton in "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing."

For him, there cannot be a "restoration of a pre-modern Christian position."[84] Nor is he uncritical of patristic and mediaeval thought which "was unable to overcome entirely the ontology of substance in the direction of a view which sees reality as constituted by signs and their endless ramifications."[85] From within "neo-platonic/Christian" systems of late antiquity some elements are to be selected, others left behind. Dr Milbank writes,

> [The] notions ...[which] remain essential for a Christian theological ontology: these are those of transcendence, participation, analogy, hierarchy, teleology (these two in modified forms) and the absolute reality of the 'the Good' in roughly the Platonic sense. The strategy, therefore, which the theologian should adopt, is that of showing that the critique of presence, substance, the idea, the subject, causality, thought-before-expression, and realist representation do not necessarily entail the critique of transcendence, participation, analogy, hierarchy, teleology and the Platonic Good, reinterpreted by Christianity as identical with Being. [86]

To be left behind are those notions which would found the secular reason and autonomous self which characterize modernity. The historian asks how this pillaging of the philosophical and theological past affects our understanding of what we take from it. How does such a poetic relation to the past blind us, and so in consequence limit the scope of our own creativity? I ask whether what in our past is genuinely different is being embraced.

I cannot here fully describe or assess Milbank's project. Nor can I even look at his whole treatment of Augustine, whom all agree to be central to it. Crucially for my consideration, in describing the project, Fergus Kerr writes that *Theology and Social Theory* "is essentially a creative retrieval of Augustine's *De Ciuitate Dei*".[87] Dr. Milbank's own *summa* is an Augustinian one: "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short *Summa* in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions." Graham Ward judges that it begins a "clarification process" relative to *Theology and Social Theory*.[88] It brings out the centrality of Augustine for him and, indeed, provides most of what our consideration of Milbank requires.

We begin assessing the project by noticing that the description already brings us to the problem. For, ironically, given Milbank's purpose, the Augustinian centrality depends upon the crucial role of Augustine in medieval, in *modern*, as well as, in a possible postmodern, Western Christianity. Marion's limited treatment of Augustine has already indicated the critical role of Augustine for the origins of modernity, and makes it surprising that this scholar of Descartes has not engaged Augustine as seriously as

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[84] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory, 2.*
[85] John Milbank, "The Linguistic Turn as a Theological Turn," *The Word Made Strange*, 85. See also "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing," 79 and "A Critique of the Theology of the Right," 7.
[86] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 296.
[87] "Simplicity Itself," 307.
[88] Ward, "John Milbank's *Divina Commedia*," 315.

Milbank has. It increases our respect for Milbank's undertaking that he sees this centrality, even if he seems not to take the irony seriously enough.

Before a word about what Milbank means by calling his project "postmodern," something should be said about the role I have given the other two players in my narrative. Because I am only describing Milbank's project, I am treating Lewis Ayres and Rowan Williams as if they merely serve it. While I think all would agree that Milbank has most prominently and strikingly set this new Augustinianism before the world, I neither understand nor intend to describe the workings of this school, its membership or hierarchy. I have already noted that it depends in part on Catherine Pickstock, and all acknowledge the essential critical contribution of the late and admirable Gillian Rose. It is more likely that the inseminating figure in my triad is Rowan Williams.[89] In any case, Ayres and Williams are participants in the postmodern interpretation of Augustine which Milbank's project requires.[90] Their work will be touched on here only so far as it illustrates the character of that interpretation.

The project as a whole is postmodern, and John Milbank uses that term to describe it. However, he sees also in "the 'new era' of postmodernism (which yet in some ways is but an 'exacerbation' of modernity)" another threat to Christian theology, so that he is strongly critical of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida whose writings he takes "as elaborations of a single nihilistic philosophy."[91] In general, this is because they have escaped neither from the warfare mentality of paganism to which he sees them partly returning, nor from modern foundational subjectivity.[92] So, for example, he accuses Heidegger not only of the obvious paganism but also of having absorbed the metaphysical mentality of late medieval scholasticism, which he studied as a seminarian, and reading it back onto the prior history.[93] In fact, the postmodernity of Milbank both

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[89] Williams appropriately asks whether Milbank's peace is not "totalising and ahistorical" (among the worst faults in this intellectual world), and whether it really faces tragedy, "Saving Time," 323-25. While Milbank prefers looking at evil through absurdity rather than tragedy, it is essentially agreed between them that the tragic (or absurd) requires as its response a *praxis*, a "'seeing' of the Cross, and through it of the world, .. concretely made possible through the existence of 'reconstructed relationships' - not an internal shift of attitudes but the coming into being of a community with distinctive forms of self-definition." This characterizes the Church and in this article Williams welcomes Milbank's "The Second Difference." See Rowan Williams, "Trinity and ontology," *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald MacKinnon*, edited Kenneth Surin, (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1989), 87. Lewis Ayres finds Milbank's ecclesiology "extremely attractive" at "Representation, Theology and Faith," *Modern Theology*, 11:1 (1995), 28 and presents the Church in the same way in "Theology, Social Science and Postmodernity," 181 where he too refers positively to "The Second Difference."

[90] For where Ayres moves with Milbank and where not, see Lewis Ayres, "Theology, Social Science and Postmodernity: Some Theological Considerations," *Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion,* edited Keiran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp, (London: MacMillan, 1996), 174-189; idem, "Representation, Theology and Faith," 23-46. The last section of this paper deals with *eros* and beauty in the *Symposium* so as to suggest "an understanding of philosophical life that can be related to the phenomenology of faith" (41).

[91] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 278.

[92] They are "doomed to smuggle back into their philosophies an ahistorical Kantian subject," *Theology and Social Theory*, 279.

[93] John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 331, idem, "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to any Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology*, 11 (1995), 140; on the rationalism of Neoscholasticism, see Hankey, "Making Theology Practical;" 91-2.

assumes the work of the neo-pagan nihilists and thinks to radicalize it by Christianizing it. "There can be no relapse towards pre-modernity; rather any retrieval must assume a post-modern, metacritical guise." Postmodern scepticism is the starting point.[94]

Reality, including the reality of God, is linguistic. So,

> The real cultural issue lies between [postmodern] nihilism and theology. Christian theology has been able, like sceptical postmodernism, to think unlimited semiosis. ... The contrast with postmodernism lies at the level of metasemiotics, where the nihilists seem only able to think of signified absence in terms of a necessary suppression, betrayal or subversion. ... For theology ... alone difference remains real difference since it is not subordinate to immanent univocal process or the fate of a necessary suppression.[95]

By saving postmodern scepticism from the negativity which ruins it, Milbank is:

> both with and against postmodernity, in the belief that the latter is confined by a gnostic myth which turns interpretative indeterminacy into an ahistorically determined fate of necessary arbitrariness and despotic concealment.

By denying, against Hegel, "determinate negation," and with faithful confidence opening oneself to indeterminate infinity, we can travel beyond the modern static subject without postmodern bitterness. We may accept that

> the infinite deferment of self-identity through the mediation of a linguistic work which 'passes away from us' may be originally the mark, not of alienation ... but of our being rhetorically transported through history by the testimony of 'all of the others.'[96]

So we come to art as "modernity's own antidote to modernity," to *poesis*.

For Milbank:

> *poesis* may be the key to ... a postmodern theology. *Poesis* ... is an integral aspect of Christian practice and redemption. Its work is the ceaseless re-narrating and 'explaining' of human history under the sign of the cross.[97]

The model for his Trinitarian logic is "aesthetic-hermeneutic." We arrive here by "dispensing with the Hegelian move beyond aesthetics." Postmodern Christian aesthetic must not be "too 'spiritual' or transcendental" and a sense for the beautiful acquired in a

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[94] "A Critique of the Theology of the Right," 7.
[95] "The Linguistic Turn as a Theological Turn," 113.
[96] "The Second Difference," 189.
[97] "A Critique of the Theology of the Right," 32.

dissoluble listening and composing, (to come back to the musical analogy), will give content to the good.[98]

This too is Augustinian and belongs to his getting beyond Neoplatonism:

> For Augustine, Christianity goes beyond this by conjoining to 'the goal' also 'the way', which means a constant historical determining that desire is well-ordered, not just through its deference to infinite fruition, but also by a particular selective pattern of finite use. The appropriate preferences of eros, the 'right harmonies' within a musical sequence, alone ensure that this sequence 'progresses' towards the infinite goal. For every new act, every new word ... this [progress] can only be registered by the 'fine judgment' which recognizes an aesthetic distortion. (*De Trinitate*).

Part of the interpretation of the *De Trinitate* which would be required here is the work of Lewis Ayres.[99]

Getting beyond neopagan nihilist postmodernity to a postmodern Christianity, not afraid to embrace difference and to create itself and reality in the flux of an endless semiotic *poesis*, requires first of all a mythology, the opposite of the ones assumed by the old and the new paganism. Here Augustine makes his initial entry. With the new mythology comes new politics. Augustine's decisive contribution to this made *Theology and Social Theory* Augustinian. As noted above, Milbank has also attempted to find aspects of his Christianity as *poesis*, his linguistic theory, his subordination of knowledge to desire and even parts of his deconstruction of the modern subject, in Augustine. An examination of his success at these attempts would be worth undertaking but surpasses the limits of this paper. It remains to it to look at the role Augustine plays in giving postmodernity a positive mythology, theology and politics, and then to look at the adequacy of this representation of Augustine.

The elements are all present in two pages of his Augustinian *summa*. The first reference there is to the *De Musica*. What Milbank makes of this is quickly linked to what is fundamental, namely, creation *ex nihilo*. The idea of Christianity now known to us, "the idea of a consistently beautiful continuously differential and open series, is of course the idea of 'music'." In this music the endings and displacements do not imply a necessary violence (as they do for neopagan postmodernity). Milbank speculates:

> Perhaps this is partly why, in *De Musica,* Augustine -- who realised that creation *ex nihilo* implied the non-recognition of ontological violence, or of positive evil -- puts forward a 'musical' ontology.[100]

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[98] "The Second Difference," 187-89.
[99] See the section from his Oxford D.Phil. thesis, *The Beautiful and the Absent: Anthropology and Ontology in Augustine's* De Trinitate," in "The Discipline of Self-Knowledge in Augustine's *De Trinitate* Book X."
[100] "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism'," 228.

From here we pass to community, which, when understood through Christian myth, giving ontological priority to harmony and peace over anarchy, violence and war, provides the basis for the contrast between Christian and secular in *Theology and Social Theory*. Christian community is a *concentus musicus*.[101] So we arrive at ecclesiology which is best done through "the second difference".

> God involves not just the first difference of expressive articulation of content (inseparable from content), but also the second difference of interpretation of expression (inseparable from expression) ... God as Trinity is therefore himself community, and even 'community in process' ...[102]

By the *kenosis* of the Holy Spirit, the "Church perpetuates or renews a Creation prior to all coercion and conflict" and is the divine community where all is external. In the community of reconciliation "'self-immediacy' is infinitely surpassed."[103] And so too is *theoria*.

> 13. Unless it reflects upon the singularity of Christian norms of community, theology has really nothing to think about. ... [I]f Christians ask what is God like? then they can only point to our 'response' to God in the formation of community. The community is what God is like.[104]

And here we come back to Augustine:

> 14. Augustine already put the idea of the peaceful community at the center of his theology; thought of God, of revelation from God, was for him inseparable from the thought of heaven, of words and 'musical laws' coming down from heaven.

For the reader who been lulled to sleep by the beautiful harmony of Christian community, the next section brings a violent awakening. For though he does not acknowledge it, Milbank passes abruptly to something most unAugustinian. The fifteenth response in Milbank's *summa* begins:

> 15. One way to try to secure peace is to draw boundaries around 'the same', and to exclude 'the other'; to promote some practices and disallow alternatives.[105]

The Church, we are told, "misunderstood itself" when it behaved like this. It excludes nothing positive. Violence for it appears as

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 233-34.
[103] "The Second Difference," 184-86.
[104] "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism'," 228.
[105] Ibid., 229.

any stunting of persons' capacity to love and conceive of the divine beauty
... But there is no real exclusion here; Christianity should not draw
boundaries ...[106]

The disturbing trouble is, of course, that Augustine is the Hammer of Heretics, who
not only drew boundaries between orthodox Christianity and heresy, but even used
Imperial coercion against Donatists and Pelagians. In *Theology and Social Theory*,
Milbank attempts to explain away the coercion of Donatists. But Robert Dodaro, looking
through a Derridian logic at the relation between self and other in Augustine, finds that
Milbank has failed to understand the play between interiority and exteriority. This will
not surprise us. For, if Dodaro's restless Augustinian self deconstructs, Milbank has been
trying all along to make it disappear. In this Lewis Ayres and Rowan Williams are his
allies, helping him deal with the relation of the divine and the psychological trinities.[107]

5. Back To Dodaro And Derrida

John Milbank does try to explain away what would have to be for him Augustine's
misunderstanding of the Church in apparently drawing boundaries between orthodox and
heretic. And, as the purposes for which he employs Augustine require, he links this to a
denial of Augustinian interiority -- an area where, as his treatment of Hegel shows,
Milbank will use the excluding language of orthodoxy and heresy.[108] Milbank writes of
Augustine:

> His typological apologetic for accepting Donatist baptism ... shows an
> insistence on the Church as a historical community bound together by a
> historical transmission of signs, whose dissemination will necessarily be
> muddled ... Hence the suspicion in Augustine of drawing over-tight
> boundaries around orthodoxy (or perhaps 'orthopraxis') implies not at all
> that true belief is inscrutably locked within interiority, but something more
> like the very opposite.[109]

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[106] Ibid.

[107] See *The Word Made Strange*, 190, note 4 and 204. In "Sacred Triads," he writes "What must be argued
here against Charles Taylor [*Sources of the Self*] and others, is that Augustine's use of the vocabulary of
inwardness is not at all a deepening of Platonic interiority, but something much more like its subversion."
See Lewis Ayres, "Representation, Theology and Faith," 36; idem, "The Discipline of Self-Knowledge in
Augustine's *De Trinitate* Book X," 261, and Rowan Williams, "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on
the *De Trinitate*," *Collectanea Augustiniana. Mélanges T.J. van Bavel, Augustiana* 41,1 (1991), 317-332.
More generally there is Williams "Interiority and Epiphany: A Reading in New Testament Ethics, *Modern
Theology* 13/1 (1997), which is an endeavour to get beyond modern interiority to "an interiority that is not
to be possessed" (47). Significantly, he finds the same problems about inside and outside in Matthew's
gospel which Dodaro and Milbank are confronting (or not confronting) in Augustine.

[108] *Theology and Social Theory*, 158: Hegel "is 'unorthodox' because he posits a prior 'moment' of relatively
unrealized and merely abstract subjectivity in God. He is also 'heretical' because he conceives of creation as
a negation which results in self-alienation ..."

[109] *Theology and Social Theory*, 402.

On this Fr. Dodaro comments:

> Milbank offers this position in the course of contrasting Augustine's
> theory of the church with that of the Donatists. .... In Augustine's view,
> according to Milbank, the Catholic Church differs from the Donatist
> church in as much as the latter attempts 'to base a community entirely on
> an "inward" purity of intention' which 'cuts them off from the main body
> of Christians who share the same basic beliefs and practices'. For
> Milbank's Augustine, the Donatists fail to see that 'the unity and inter-
> communion of Christians is not just a desirable appendage of Christian
> practice, but it is itself at the heart of the actuality of redemption'.[110]

Dodaro discerns that for Milbank the real heresy is interiority: "So for Milbank,
Augustine's *cri de coeur* for unity stands over against Donatist interiority and, hence,
'heresy' or privatization." And then he levels a criticism also made by others who found
problematic the utopian harmony and peace which Milbank ascribed to Augustine's
Christianity.[111] Ontological peace is for Milbank the whole foundation for distinguishing
true Christianity not only from old paganism, but from what modernity made of it and
from postmodern paganism. Like others, Fr. Dodaro asks whether there is not, in fact, a
violence at the heart of Augustinianism:

> One may doubt, however, whether Milbank pays sufficient attention to the
> violence at the heart of what he terms Augustine's quest for 'the unity and
> inter-communion of Christians'. Milbank's treatment of 'Christianity and
> coercion' is limited to the religious coercion of the Donatists (Augustine's
> involvement in the coercion of the 'Pelagians' would, I suspect, have given
> Milbank even greater problems), and he examines even this case
> restrictively, under the rubrics of church/state relations and the ontology of
> punishment (on both of which counts his treatment is superb). As a result,
> his discussion never arrives at the question of the legitimacy of pluralism.
> His account of Donatist ecclesiology is largely dismissive and prejudicial;
> his account of the 'peace' at the center of Augustine's church is apologetic
> and optimistic.[112]

And one might add that as well as "apologetic and optimistic", this peace is absolutely
essential. For, without it. Milbank has no defence against what he regards as the nihilism
of the neopagan postmodernity on which, in fact, his project altogether depends.

Fr. Dodaro's argument is that Augustine, as he reveals and constructs himself in
Confessions, and as he lives out his episcopal office, does not transfer the fleetingness
and insecurity of his own self-knowledge, or the divine forgiveness experienced in his
penitence, to the others whom he confronts. There is an Augustinian dialectic between

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[110] Dodaro, "Loose canons: Augustine and Derrida on themselves," quoting *Theology and Social Theory*,
402-403.
[111] See note 80 above.
[112] Ibid.

interiority and exteriority, and its character often seems to involve establishing the self through drawing "boundaries around 'the same' and exclud[ing] 'the other'." Apparently Augustine's acceptance of the Christian myth of ontological peace, and his archetypal working out of this in terms of community and trinity, did not enable him to live in authentic openness and creativity to the indeterminate and infinite flux. Given the importance of Augustine in providing just the opposite understanding of Christian community for Milbank, this dialectic is obscured in his reading.

It is significant, in contrast, that Derrida's perspective established in *Circumfession*, used by Dodaro as an instrument of analysis in the *Confessions* and elsewhere, better brings the Augustinian dialectic of self and other to light. While a Derridan consideration cannot allow a full Neoplatonic or Augustinian return to self and God, nor a completed knowledge in philosophical language, nonetheless, just because Derrida can move back and forth from interior to exterior, with him we can see what is obscured when interiority is denied altogether. The ontological peace is the problem. It is precisely the positive Milbankian transformation of the postmodern deconstructive *agon* which blinds him to a feature of Augustine's dialectic. Milbank's critics are correct; his peace-making metanarrative excludes. But, there is a further irony: if Milbank is correct about a connection between a cosmic dualism and the positing of the interiority and substantiality of the self, there may be something else in Augustine being missed.

For Milbank, Augustine in *De Musica*, in *De Ciuitate Dei,* and elsewhere teaches what is essential to postmodern Augustinianism in virtue of working out implications of *creatio ex nihilo*. But a problem arises for Augustine just at this point. He found it very difficult, as his many attempts at it indicate, to interpret *Genesis* and its doctrine of creation. Part of that difficulty lay in the problems he had thinking the nothingness of matter and his success in this regard is owed, (as he acknowledges), to Platonism, and almost certainly, (though he does not tell us this), to Plotinus.[113] And, although his Platonism is salvation from the dualism of the Manichees, he does not escape from that negative view of the sensible which goes with the Plotinian remedy -- a remedy Augustine prescribes for himself and others.

For Plotinus, as for Augustine, the remedy for the alienation of the self from its Principle is in a movement inward and upward essential to remembering its origin and its worth. But this turning inward is for both also a turning away, and involves the discipline of showing the inferiority of things which come into being and pass away.[114] So far as the soul is ascending in this way, the material world is for it a negative presupposition, a presupposed flux. Escaping from this negative relation to the material requires the passage from an ascending to a descending logic.

Beginning from the First, what follows must be seen as manifestation of the Good, an establishment of the Good as the highest because the most extensive cause, effective at every level including, (and perhaps especially), the last. So far as the Plotinian ascending logic needs correction by a balancing descending one, which can be, must be, and is more

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[113] See for example, *Confessions* , 7 and 12. 5. 5.

[114] *Enneads* 5. 1. 1, *Confessions* 7. 7. 11, 7. 10. 16 for example.

positive about the material, this is particularly the work of the Athenian Neoplatonism which begins with Iamblichus and which has its Christian fulfilment in the Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena. For it, the Plotinian teaching was a one-sided Platonism, false in its negative view of the material and in its intellectualism.[115] No doubt both sides are found in Augustine, but a full and positive development of Christian thinking about creation as *creatio ex nihilo*, really depends upon the crossing of the Plotinian/Augustinian and the Iamblichan/Dionysian traditions by medieval Christian theologians.[116]

The Platonic Augustine needs for creation a formless matter which is capable of forms, a nearly nothing (*illud autem totum prope nihil erat, quoniam adhuc omnino informe erat; iam tamen erat, quoniam formari poterat*).[117] This begins as the *khora* of the *Timaeus*. On it Derrida has important reflections: "a third species ... this place 'in which', ... neither sensible nor intelligible, it seems to participate in the intelligible in an enigmatic way."[118] Derrida tells us that "Saint Augustine once again assures its mediation" and quotes Meister Eckhart:

> "Augustine says that the superior part of the soul, which is called *mens* ..
> God created, together with the soul's being, a potential .. which the
> masters call a receptacle .. or screen .. of spiritual forms, or of formal
> images." The creation of the place, which is also a potential, is the basis
> for the resemblance of the soul with the Father.[119]

The soul, the *mens*, and the formless substrate: are these also Augustinian? Can Derrida recognise in Augustine something else hidden from sight in the war of Milbank and his fellows against the ahistorical subject?

A Derrida who can include more than Milbank is a real problem, for, as we have seen, Milbank depends upon Derrida but on a Derrida surpassed by something presented as more embracing. A Derrida who can include more of Augustine than Milbank can is even more problematic. And Augustine himself seems to show us that there is a difference

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[115] On the Iamblichan tradition and its correction of the one-sided Platonism of Plotinus and Porphyry, see Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania U.P., 1995), 4ff. and *passim*. On its Christian aftermath, see W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself, Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 7ff and the good remarks of Milbank on Eriugena at *Theology and Social Theory*, 424-26 and at "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing," 79-80.

[116] On their "crossing" see W.J. Hankey, "The Place of the Proof for God's Existence in the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist*, 46 (1982), 379-382, idem, "Dionysius becomes an Augustinian. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* vi," *Studia Patristica*, XXIX, ed. E.A. Livingstone, (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 252-59, in press, idem, "Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation in John Colet, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker and the Cardinal Brulle," *Augustinus in der Neuzeit. Von Petrarca zum 18. Jahrhundert*, edited by Kurt Flasch and Dominique de Courcelles, Editions Brepols-Turnhout, 1997, in press, and the pregnant remark of Milbank, "The Linguistic Turn as a Theological Turn," 91-4.

[117] *Confessions* 12. 8. 8.

[118] Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," 34-35.

[119] Ibid. 51.

which Milbank's postmodernity is less able to recognise and embrace than what the neopagan can.

Real difference in respect to Milbank's cosmos would be constituted by the ahistorical, by philosophy, as ancients, medievals and moderns understood it, and by a self understood in its terms. It would understand that the disrupting endeavour to establish the self in self-knowledge and self-will is a real beginning -- reality made evident by the way Augustine understands the self -- and a beginning necessary for all those who follow Plotinus and Augustine out of scepticism. Milbank recognizes that Descartes stands in relation to an "irreversible 'turn to the subject'."[120] But his insistence that this turn be subjectivised, historicised. textualised and, in fact, remain a scepticism, becomes a self-contradictory dogmatism if it can embrace less of the Augustinian disruptive difference constituted by subjectivity than the postmodernism, which he regards as neopagan, can encompass. What can we conclude more generally about the postmodern readings of Augustine we have considered?

Conclusion

No reading of the overwhelmingly vast opus which Augustine bequeathed us is adequate to its diversity, complexity and contrariety. Partly this is an effect of the seriousness and playfulness of his multi- (almost omni-) faceted teasing, twisting and turning of the objects of his thought and of his own relations to these. His *Retractationes* do not prevent Augustine's writings having already become, even for him, text beyond the control of his logic well before he was dead. Both cause and effect apply to such a degree to both Jacques Derrida and to his ancient countryman that the reader of both sometimes experiences *déja vu* -- we have seen this play before. When to Augustine's text, his tradition is added, the comprehension becomes impossible. Most of the central and always opposing developments of western culture since the early Middle Ages can be depicted as Augustinianisms. Postmodernity increases the incomprehensibility, but only by addition. To imagine itself as belonging to the end game as a new kind of comprehensive metanarrative offends us by the sheer banality of this game and this assertion in the last two centuries. The pretension to finally Christianize culture by return to an exclusivity of theology falsely projected onto the Fathers is both hybristic and fails in the charity which is requisite to the communion with the past upon which all our authors depend.

The postmodern endeavour to equalize the center and the margin, the capital and the provinces, must, if Augustine's thoughts really do move us still, require that its readings will illuminate texts and meanings to which we have been blind. To demand of this endeavour, as if from outside it, a total and consistent reading of Augustine, or any other author, will exclude participation in the intellectual present. But to simultaneously conform readings to our desires and then willfully to refuse some is either cynicism or

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[120] "A Critique of the Theology of the Right," 28.

blindness.[121] If the postmodern *jeu*, either Christian or not, is serious, in it we will leap from margin to center, as well as from center to margin. Movement back to the center, Augustine's center above, before and after history, that through which he achieves the stability he selfishly seeks, will be necessary for all who test the fluctuating margin which appears in the Derridian deconstruction. Derrida is, in this, our Socrates, plunging us into the Heraclitan flux from which we see the need of Parmenidian noetic stability. The search for footing brings us back to those texts of Augustine which medievals and moderns found central. If the rules of play are just, they will provide that we may and must move in both directions.[122]

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[121] Milbank undertakes reading in this way in "The Name of Jesus," *The Word Made Strange*, 166, note 13. He proposes as "An important project for postmodern theology ... to 'Spinozize' Augustine ..."!

[122] I thank James Doull, who provoked and inspired this essay, Ken Kierans, James Muir, and Robert Dodaro with whom and from whom I learned whatever I understand of Derrida, Lewis Ayres who has generously expanded my understanding of Augustinianism, and Ian Stewart without whose critical questions and editorial corrections this paper would be worse than it is.