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McGrath - Young Heidegger's Problematic Reading of Augustine - JCRT 4.1

The Young Heidegger's Problematic Reading of Augustine's Ontological Restlessness

A review of Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*. Gesamtausgabe, Band 60. Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1995. (Available at <http://www.klostermann.de/>.) An English translation is in preparation at Indiana University Press by Jennifer Gosetti and Matthias Lutkehermolle under the title *Phenomenology of Religious Life*.

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It is a lamentable situation that Heidegger's critique of Scholastic ontology is now better known in continental circles than Scholastic ontology itself. The Heideggerian critique of 'onto-theology' has hardened into a dogma, an unreflectively repeated formula that has lost its moorings in its original sources. We all know that the Scholastics forgot being because they reduced ontology to God. By defining being in terms of that which never comes to be nor changes, that which excludes temporality, the Scholastics made it impossible to think the being that we are. Philosophical theology precludes phenomenological ontology.

So the formula goes. However, with the publication of Heidegger's early Freiburg lectures we are in a position to subject Heidegger's onto-theological thesis to an immanent critique by tracing it back to his first investigations in the phenomenology of religion. In the 1921 lecture course, *Augustinus und der Neuplatonismus*, Heidegger discovers an essential disclosure of the being that we are in Augustine's *Confessions*: the *how* of being a historical self is care, trouble, and self-problematization.¹ In the *Confessions* the disclosure of the self is concomitant with the self's discovery of its ontological directedness to God, the eternal and non-historical ground of being. Nothing in the text of Augustine suggests that this disclosure could happen in a non-theistic context. In his flight from God, the years of rebellion prior to his conversion, Augustine was deeply forgetful of the self. Faith in the non-historical ground of history illuminated the precarious being of his historical existence for the first time. Heidegger attempts to formalize Augustine's restless heart, that is, to extract a transcendental pattern to restlessness, which has non-religious significance: the concept of angst in *Being and Time*.² He argues that the restlessness of the heart is not primarily a religious phenomenon but a human phenomenon; it can be elaborated in purely phenomenological terms. In fact, the theological reference in Augustine ostensibly distorts the disclosure of the historical self. Augustine mitigates the experience of history with the balm of an eternal ground. *Being and Time* builds on the Augustine lecture by endeavouring to think Augustine's troubled self without the God reference. It is my contention that it does not succeed. Heidegger has given us a portrait of the troubled self without that which troubles it. The angst examined in *Being and Time* is primarily religious and cannot be coherently explicated without a religious reference.

The theme of the Augustine lecture is the tension between Augustine's notion of restlessness, the directedness toward God as the relational-sense of the happy life (*vita beata*), and his neo-Platonic theorizing of this phenomenon into a being-toward-eternal-truth (*veritas aeterna*). The

¹Martin Heidegger, 'Augustinus und der Neuplatonismus,' ed. Claudius Strube, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 60: *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995), 157-299. Hereafter GA60.

²Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1996), 172-173.

course examines book 10 of the *Confessiones*, Augustine's epoch-making disclosure of the concrete historicity of human being, in particular, *memoria* and *cura* as primal figures of being-in-the-world. At the very moment of the breakthrough to historicity, Augustine smothers the historical self with neo-Platonic theology: being in its primary sense is the being of the worldless, eternal, uncaused cause. The unique attributes of human being disengaged in Augustine's self-interpretation, restlessness (*cor inquietum*), care (*cura*), the being of the past in memory (*memoria*), and being toward the future (*distantio anima*), become shadows of being, half-real participated being – not positive phenomena, but privations of the fullness of being that God alone enjoys. In its first moments Augustine's religiousness is not the grasp of a *what*. It is not speculative knowledge of the highest possible object. Religiousness is defined primarily by its how; it is a way of being in the world. It has a relational-sense, even if its content-sense is veiled. The enactment of the relationship is concrete and brings about radical changes in the way we perceive the being that we are.³

Heidegger begins the lecture course with a brief overview of Dilthey's effort to trace descriptive psychology, 'lived experience,' the foundations of the human sciences, back to early Christianity and Augustine.⁴ Driven to find a new language with which to articulate the kingdom of God not of this world, the inner world of the historical self, early Christianity gave expression to phenomena that were marginalised by the Greeks, the structures of personal, self-conscious existence. The inner life of the person is not static, but dramatic, being that enacts itself through time and only comes to know itself through the narrative recounting of its own history. Augustine's polemic with ancient scepticism pivots on this heightened awareness of inner life. The historical situatedness of the Augustinian self distinguishes Augustine's self-reflective argument against scepticism from Descartes's *cogito ergo sum*. Augustine says that he cannot doubt that he *lives* because he is in fact living.⁵ Self-certainty for Augustine is not an immediate grasp of a worldless ego, but the knowledge and love of an en-worlded existence. Heidegger comments: 'Self-certainty can only be interpreted from out of factual being, it is only possible in faith.'⁶

For Augustine *cura*, takes one of two directions: it is either dispersed among the things of the world or recollected in a concentrated love for God; in both cases, we are what we desire.⁷ The burden of directing *cura* makes human existence a trial (*tentatio*), a state of being troubled over

³The distinction between the content-sense, relational-sense, and enactment-sense is the heart of the young Heidegger's phenomenology of the fore-theoretical. In any comportment or fore-theoretical intention, I can distinguish the *what* of the comportment, that toward which I am oriented, the *how* of the comportment, the way I am oriented to it, and the *enactment* of the comportment, the historically differentiated living out of the comportment in different life situations. The *what* and the *how* are fore-theoretical figures for Husserl's *noema* and *noesis*; the notion of an enactment-sense to a comportment that would be different from its content and relational senses is unique to Heidegger. See Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 61: *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*, ed. Walter Bröcker and Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), 52-53. Hereafter GA61.

⁴GA60 164. See Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, trans. Ramon J. Betanzos (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1988), 1: 229.

⁵GA60 164, 298. Heidegger comments on Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), Book 11, Chapter 26, p. 459: 'We do indeed recognize in ourselves an image of God, that is of the Supreme Trinity. It is not an adequate image, but a very distant parallel. It is not co-eternal and, in brief, it is not of the same substance as God. For all that, there is nothing in the whole of God's creation so near to him in nature. . . . We resemble the divine Trinity in that we exist; we know that we exist, and we are glad of this existence and knowledge. . . . In respect of those truths I have no fear of the arguments of the Academics. They say, 'Suppose you are mistaken?' I reply, 'If I am mistaken, I exist.' A non-existent being cannot be mistaken; therefore I must exist, if I am mistaken.' Dilthey comments on the same text. Cf. Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 1: 234.

⁶GA60 299.

⁷Heidegger acknowledges the relationship of his notion of care to Augustine in *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 302: 'It was seven years ago, while I was investigating these structures in conjunction with my attempts to arrive at the ontological foundations of Augustinian anthropology, that I first came across the phenomena of care.' See also *Being and Time*, 404, n. 4.

oneself (*onerimea sum*).⁸⁹In *cura* the self occurs to itself as a question: 'In your eyes I have become a problem to myself, and that is my sickness' (*in cuius oculis mihi quaestio factus sum, et ipse est languor meus*).¹⁰ To become a problem to oneself, to be troubled and to question oneself, is not a reflective relationship. Augustinian self-examination is not Cartesian or Husserlian introspection. Augustine's self only comes to know itself in action; it is fundamentally opaque to itself and only has its self in the provisional and fragmentary revelations of itself that occur in living. As Heidegger puts it trouble (*molestia*) is the *how* of factual life.¹¹ In the Augustinian God-relation, every detail of *cura* becomes significant. The self-knowledge acquired is not demonstrative and apodictic, something with public validity; rather, the self is always capable of deceit, even at the most interior levels of existence. The process of recollecting and properly directing *cura* must be surrendered in 'fear and trembling' to the grace of the God who alone sees into our hearts. The self is hidden from itself, but transparent to its Creator. Augustine writes: 'I have great fear of my secrets which your eyes know but mine do not' (*multum timeo occulta mea, quae norunt oculi tui, mei autem non*).¹²

Augustine's search for God is a struggle to remember God, and on the strength of the memory to love God with his whole heart: 'Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new' (*Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova*).¹³¹⁴ Augustine searches the caverns of memory for traces of the God who cannot be found among the things of nature. Memory does not contain an image of God. This presents Augustine with a decidedly Platonic problem: How can he look for God if God is not remembered? How can we look for that which we have never known? Augustine's answer is un-Platonic: to seek God is to not seek that which we once had and have since lost. It is rather to be directed toward an end that makes out present state of existence intolerable. To seek God is to seek a happy life (*vita beata*). The search for God is not guided by the memory of an objective vision, but by a present distress and concern. The happy life is not a remembered content. Rather the happy life is formally indicated in the relational-sense of distress over one's life.¹⁵ We see a recurring pattern in the phenomenology of the young Heidegger: relational and enactment senses assume primacy over content-sense; language becomes necessarily indirect.¹⁶ Theodore Kisiel puts it well: 'How the happy life in the search for it is alive in us will expose *what* is thereby intended. And so Augustine does not get around to defining the *vita beata* contentwise, as he had originally intended. Instead, the question abruptly changes and he confronts the problem of *how he can come to* the happy life.'¹⁷ Because the happy life is formally indicated, indirectly intended, it can be present to the soul in its absence, in sadness.¹⁸ As primarily a relational-sense, the happy life is 'only genuinely there in a context of enactment. It must be existentially manifest . . . in a determinate articulated factual historical context of enactment.'¹⁹

The significance of this point for the phenomenology of religion is profound: God is never

⁸⁹Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book 10, chapter 28, p. 202.

⁹Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book 10, chapter 28, p. 202.

¹⁰Ibid., 10, 33, p. 208.

¹¹GA60 231.

¹²Ibid., 10, 37, p. 214-15.

¹³Ibid., 10, 27, p. 201.

¹⁴Ibid., 10, 27, p. 201.

¹⁵Formal indication is a crucial phenomenological notion in the young Heidegger. Where direct expression is not possible, language can exhortatively point to a phenomenon in the way of expression. Rhetoric and irony are formally indicative. What matters here is not *what* is said but *how* it is said. To grasp a formally indicated meaning I must enact the meaning in my situation. That the longing for happiness formally indicates God means that our notion of God necessarily remains without a content, yet we are given a sense how the content could be enacted. See GA60, 62-5.

¹⁶GA60 195, 197.

¹⁷Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 198.

¹⁸GA60 196.

¹⁹GA60 198.

available for detached theoretical inspection. God is only present in absence. The divine shows itself by not showing itself. We desire beatitude because we never had it. To substitute an objective content, a highest being, or a highest good for the desire for God is to destroy the primary referent of religious language. God does not name a thing but a possibility for being, the directedness of a particular form of life.

According to Heidegger the substitution of an ontic intention, an object, for a purely relational intention is precisely what happens when the disclosures of historicity in Augustine are subsumed into neo-Platonic metaphysics. The restlessness of human existence resolves itself in the *tranquillitas* of the *visio beatifica*, the timeless vision of God. Augustine writes 'What else is it to live happily and blessedly but to possess an eternal object through knowing it?'²⁰ The happy life becomes joy in the truth, the truth becomes the highest good (*summum bonum*) transferred to a realm beyond history. Augustine holds that the highest good is enjoyed (*frui*) never used (*uti*); in this way it is distinguished as higher than all earthly goods. An earthly good is a means to happiness. The highest good is never a means, it is always the end. In Heidegger's reading this argument reduces the primal Christian relational-sense of anxious expectation to the neo-Platonic relational-sense of intuitive possession. Enjoyment of that which does not change, a fundamentally aesthetic and non-temporal comportment, becomes the basic orientation of life. To live a holy life, one must have an order of preferences among goods: things to be used are not to be enjoyed for their own sake, things to be enjoyed are not to be used. Heidegger calls this process 'neo-Platonic axiologization,' the imposition of a hierarchy of values onto the factic, a gradation of goods ascending to the *summum bonum*.²¹ According to Heidegger, that which is experienced in delight is not initially hierarchically ordered. Just as theorizing reifies understanding into knowledge of essences, so axiologization reifies the acts of the will.

The axiologization of the factic is the volitional / value side of onto-theology. As the temporal meaning of being is eclipsed when beings are causally traced back to an infinite ground, the historicity of values disclosed in average everydayness is forgotten when all goods are traced back to a highest good.²² The historicity of being a self, so vividly enacted in the *Confessions*, is lost; facticity is resolved into eternal truth: 'Thus was the turn to metaphysics brought about: the eternal truths are the ideas in the absolute consciousness of God. A parallel analysis is applied to the experience of will. Knowledge takes on the character of the essence of substance. The human soul is changeable, yet it extends to an unchangeable ground, the inner experience of the existence of God.'²³ For Heidegger, this is the decisive interjection of Greek metaphysics into Augustine's thinking, which blossoms into Scholasticism, the substitution of *contemplatio* for the *expectatio* of Christian faith.²⁴ Augustine replaces the temporalizing being-toward-an-absent-God with the aesthetic enjoyment of an eternal principle and thus initiates both the forgetfulness of history in the Middle Ages and the reign of theory in Western philosophy.

Heidegger does not take up the God-relation in Augustine's understanding of selfhood, nor does

²⁰ Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, trans. David L. Mosher, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 70 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 49-52.

²¹ GA60 259-63, 265, 281-2.

²² At this point Heidegger introduces Luther's *theologia crucis* into the lecture. According to Luther, to presume to possess knowledge of God is to forsake our human lot: historicity, uncertainty, faith. See GA60 282.

²³ GA60 164, 172. Cf. Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 1: 233-237.

²⁴ GA60 259. See also GA60 272: 'The fundamental aesthetic meaning of enjoying (*frui*); that which is enjoyed (*fruentum*) is tripartite, intelligible and beautiful things . . . in corruptible and ineffable beauty' God. *Frui* is the fundamental characteristic of the basic Augustinian comportment to life itself. Its correlative term is beauty; it contains an aesthetical moment, as does the *summum bonum*. ' Therewith a basic dimension of the medieval object of theology (and of spiritual history in general) is determined: it is the specifically Greek concept. The enjoyment of God (*fruitio Dei*) is a decisive concept in medieval theology; it is the main motive that leads to the development of medieval mysticism.'

he comment on its intimate connection to the experience of *cura* and *molestia*. Elsewhere Heidegger insists on the necessity for theological brackets in phenomenology: the question of God cannot be decided phenomenologically because it is not a factual question. Theology draws thinking way from the factic.²⁵ Augustine would passionately disagree: '*Because I am not full of you*'²⁶ In other words, I know I am a burden to myself only because I know that I am not full of you. If I did not know you, God, I could not know the depths of the burden of life. Existence becomes an issue for Augustine only in the horizon of his longing for God. The thought of God in Augustine does not cover Dasein over, on the contrary, it lights it up from within. Contrast Augustine's hermeneutics of the self with the untroubled self-reflection practised by Socrates: the end of the reflective life for Socrates is not trouble, hardship, and self-problematization, but peace, equanimity, and self-transparency.

Notwithstanding the brilliance of his interpretation of Augustine, Heidegger's critique of onto-theology never touches the heart of the medieval notion of God. It works best when dealing with proofs for the existence of God, God as efficient cause, first and highest being etc. Yet this was not the core of Scholastic theology, certainly not the core of Augustine's theology. The essence of Augustine's theology is the notion of *simplicitas Dei*. God admits no composition. Yet every thinkable being is a composite of act-potency, essence-existence, matter-form. This does not relegate God to a dimension of religious experience of no concern to metaphysics.²⁷ God is the *primum analogatum*, affirmed to exist, but never conceptualized or grasped as a content. We can know *that* God is, we cannot know *what* God is.²⁸ God is infinite meaning, the fullness of *esse*. Limitless *esse* offers theory no content. The doctrine of divine simplicity acts as a speculative speed bump in Scholasticism, a crucial reminder that at a decisive point every proof fails to articulate the being of God, and therefore, the meaning of being itself. *Ipsium esse* cannot be characterized as a being. In the unknowing that surrounds it like a blinding light, *ipsum esse* is incalculable, uncontrollable, and indefinable. In a mystical-Scholastic philosophical theology like Eckhart's, the simplicity of God and the relational-sense of Augustine's search for the *vita beata* come together: an absolutely simple being cannot be thematized and defined, but it can disclose itself relationally in the *how* of mystical discipleship, detachment (*Abgeschiedenheit*). 'God' does not name a content, but a life tendency, a possibility for being-in-the-world in a different way. Augustine's 'axiologization' is his effort to work out the details of how the God-relation is to be enacted: we only 'have' God in turning away from transitory pleasure and embracing the pain of a life without God. The move is entirely practical because the God relation has no theoretical sense.

Religiousness is enacted in a variety of *proximate* content-senses: in the life of faith in a church community, in a life devoted to service, to meditation, or even to science. As a relational-sense, the proximate content-sense of religiousness can vary. It may not even know itself as religious. What is characteristic of all religious enactments is *unrestrictedness*.²⁹ Religiousness in its various modes relates itself to its objectives without limit. Faith is trusting *to the end*. Altruism that breaks through to the religious serves the other *unconditionally*. A life of religious silence and meditation places no limit on the value of its goal, *sunyata*, the *uniomystica*. The will to know does not stop short of an exhaustive explanation, absolute intelligibility, where no further questions remain. A factual philosophical theology would phenomenologically show how these modes of religiousness indicate

²⁵See GA61 197.

²⁶Augustine, *Confessions*, 10, 28, p. 202.

²⁷This conclusion is significantly different than that of John D. Caputo in his *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982). See especially p. 247.

²⁸See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 3.

²⁹Cf. Bernhard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 105-106: 'Being in love with God, as experienced, is being in love in an unrestricted fashion. All love is self-surrender, but being in love with God is being in love without limits or qualifications or conditions or reservations. Just as unrestricted questioning is our capacity for self-transcendence, so being in love in an unrestricted fashion is the proper fulfilment of that capacity.'

our primal *being-before-God*, that is, our *being-toward-ultimate-accountability*. This last expression should not be interpreted moralistically. That I am called to give an account of myself does not mean I can only be justified by performing certain actions. It means, rather, that my justification will involve the whole of my temporal existence. All times will be recapitulated in the account. No unguarded moment will be left out. The moralistic interpretation of ultimate accountability, for example, the apocalyptic consciousness of the Middle Ages, is a derivative form of what I am talking about here. We should understand the countless depictions of the Day of Judgment over the portals of Gothic cathedrals as mythological indications of being-toward-ultimate-accountability. The medieval peasant may have believed that he had to earn salvation by his good actions. The belief is materially false, for grace cannot be earned, but formally true: we will indeed be called to give an account.

The being that we are is gripped by a concern for itself *before* God. God is future. God comes to meet us. The promise of this future is that we will be given back to ourselves ' we will be whole for the first time – for we will give account of what we were. Augustine finds himself *on the way* to God, gripped by an anticipation of accountability. He finds that God is that toward which he has been moving all along, and in finding that, he finds himself for the first time.

Notes

Sean J. McGrath teaches philosophy at the University of Toronto, where he also received his Ph.D. in 2002. He is currently preparing his first book for publication: *God and the Being that We Are: Heidegger's Readings of Scholasticism*.

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