

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

The subject of this study is a literary and philosophical genre which is defined in the writings of Augustine of Hippo as the soliloquy (*soliloquium*). This is a type of rational dialogue (or dialogue with Reason) in which questions are asked and answers given within the mind of a single person.<sup>1</sup> In the pages that follow I examine Augustine's use of soliloquies in the works known as his "dialogues,"<sup>2</sup> as well as in the *Confessiones*, *De Civitate Dei*, and *De Trinitate*.

<sup>1</sup> *Sol.*, 2.1.1; cf. *Retr.*, 1.4.1, where Augustine speaks of an inner dialogue with Reason. For a discussion of types of soliloquies in his writings, see Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> The composition of the "dialogues" can be divided into two phases of Augustine's activity (omitting the lost *De Pulchro et Apto*, from 380–381):

(1) The period between 23 August 386, when Augustine departed from his teaching position in Milan, and 24/25 April 387 (Easter), the date of his baptism by Ambrose in Milan. Works of this period include *Contra Academicos*, *De Beata Vita*, *De Ordine*, and *Soliloquia*, to which he refers as a group at *Conf.* 9.4.7 and *Retr.*, 1.1.1. During this period he probably also wrote *De Dialectica*, *De Grammatica* (possibly surviving as a fragment), and a first draft of *De Immortalitate Animae*.

(2) The period that begins with his sojourn in Rome in 387–388 and, following his return to Africa in 388, ends with his episcopal ordination in 395 or 396. Works of this period include *De Musica* (387–388/390), *De Quantitate Animae* (388), *De Magistro* (388–389), and *De Libero Arbitrio* (387–388; finished by 395); *De Vera Religione*, sent to Romanianus in 391; and *De Diversis Quaestionibus*, which resulted from conversations between 388 and 395 brought together in 395–396.

Cassiciacum, where Augustine and his students met, can possibly be identified with Cassago Brianza, which lies some 30–40 km northwest of Milan; see O. Perler, *Les voyages de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1969), pp. 138f., and 179–176; and his article, "Recherches sur les Dialogues et le site de Cassiciacum," *AG* 13 (1968), 344–352. The alternative site of Casciago, near Varese, is suggested by Luigi Beretta, "Rus Cassiciacum: Bilancio e aggiornamento della vexata questio," in *Agostino e la conversione cristiana*, ed. A. Caprioli and L. Vaccaro (Palermo, 1987), pp. 67–83, and by Silvano Colombo, "Ancora sul Rus Cassiciacum di Agostino," *ibid.*, pp. 85–92. On the friends assembled at Cassiciacum, the classic account remains Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, 2000), pp. 108–120; cf. Serge Lancel, *Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1999), pp. 146–162. For biographies on the participants, see *AL*, s.v.

For an outstanding introduction to the themes of Augustine's early writings, see Goulven Madec, *Saint Augustin et la philosophie: Notes critiques* (Paris, 1996), with bibliography, pp. 12–13. An important review of scholarship for the early period of Augustine's activity is found in Therese Fuhrer, *Augustin Contra Academicos* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 7–12. For the most recent authoritative dating of the dialogues, see *AL*, vol. 1, xxvi–xlii; on earlier chronologies, see Pierre Courcelle,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I am chiefly concerned with one use for soliloquies in these works. This is Augustine's development of a consistent philosophy of narrative between roughly 386 and 400 and the application of that philosophy to his conception of the self. The book's organization is intended to reflect this progressively developing concern with *soliloquium*, *narratio historica*, and personal identity. I begin in Chapter 1 with a review of the influences that shaped Augustine's conception of inner dialogue. Chapter 2 deals with an important example of this type of discourse in his early writings, namely his demonstration of the existence of the self. In Chapter 2 I also introduce the theme of the narrative self, toward which, I argue, he orients his reiterated uses of this demonstration in the years leading up to his conversion to the religious life. Chapter 3 discusses soliloquies and narratives in the dialogues devoted respectively to order and free will, namely *De Ordine* and *De Libero Arbitrio*. Chapter 4, which is theoretical in focus, takes up the topics of words, images, time, and memory as they pertain to the book's major themes.

In the Introduction I would like to touch on three topics which lie in the background of the works discussed in these chapters: the relationship of inner dialogue to Augustine's philosophy of language; his assumption that narrative is a basic feature of human thinking and behavior; and the reasons for his doubts concerning the possibility of progressive knowledge on theological issues concerned with the self.

## LANGUAGE

I begin by reminding my readers that there has never been any question about the importance of the dialogues within Augustine's *oeuvre*.<sup>3</sup> These works provide an introduction to one of the enduring themes of his writings, namely the search for wisdom (*sapientia*) and the happy life (*beata vita*).<sup>4</sup> They also present thinking of acknowledged originality

*Les Confessions de saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris, 1963) and *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> For a refreshing view of the dialogues with many insights, see Catherine Conybeare, *The Irrational Augustine* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> On the question of continuity central to the thinking of Goulven Madec, see Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology* (Oxford, 2006). The terms *sapientia* and *beata vita* recur frequently in the following pages, and therefore some explanation of what I mean by them is appropriate at the outset. I normally render *beata vita* as "happy life," but there is no adequate translation for the expression in Augustine's writings. In the dialogues the noun *vita* refers both to the awareness of being alive and to the pattern of one's life as a whole, as contrasted with its constituent episodes, while the adjective *beata* makes an implicit distinction between pleasure as a sensory experience, giving rise to good feelings, and happiness or blessedness, which is

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

3

on topics that are of interest in the contemporary study of philosophy, psychology, theology, and literature. Among these are gesture, mimesis, and non-verbal communication; linguistic conventions and the theory of signs; secular and religious (or biblical) hermeneutics; the will, intentionality, and ethics; temporal and spiritual forces in history; and areas of inquiry linking ancient and modern philosophy, such as sensation, perception, imagination, memory, materialism, and the origin of the human soul.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the range and significance of these themes, the dialogues have been a source of problems in Augustinian scholarship for well over a hundred years. One of these concerns arises from the impression of intellectual disorderliness which they create in the minds of those who try to follow their arguments. The lack of disciplined thinking is evident in the content of these works, which sometimes moves from one topic to another without apparent reason, as well as in their literary form, which frequently abandons logical development in favor of dictated views. Although Augustine's model was doubtless Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, his dialogues do not present either pagan or Christian doctrines with the rigor with which Cicero outlines his philosophical positions. In view of their rickety construction, many students of the Augustinian dialogues have asked, as did H.-I. Marrou, whether these writings possess any recognizable principle of organization, or whether, despite their moments of brilliance, they merely reflect the eclectic reading habits of a *lettré de la décadence*.<sup>6</sup>

non-sensory and permanently unattainable in a lifetime. (On Augustine's notion of the *beata vita*, see the bibliography by J. Doignon in *AL*, vol. 1, pp. 623–624; on Stoic notions of “the wise man,” with which his notion of happiness has much in common, see the summary in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 455–456). As it pertains to the life that is lived, Augustine's use of *beata* likewise extends and transforms Plotinus's *Εὐδαιμόν*, which does not mean “happy” but “being in a good state”; cf. A. H. Armstrong (trans.), *Plotinus*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA, 1966), 170n1; this may come about through divine beneficence; see A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, 1986), pp. 4–6, 61–69; 179–184; 196–209. In Plotinus, as in Augustine, this approach to ethics is not only envisaged for the sage but for all seekers of wisdom; see Alexandrine Schniewind, *L'Éthique du sage chez Plotin: Le paradigme du “spoudaios”* (Paris, 2003), pp. 171–197. The most important study of these themes in Augustine's writings remains Ragnar Holte, *Beatitude et sagesse. Saint Augustin et la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne*, trans. de Paillerets, Refoulé, and Sandby (Paris and Worcester, MA, 1962).

<sup>5</sup> On these themes, see the valuable synthesis of Gerald O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (London, 1987). For an assessment of Augustine's influence based on such philosophical insights, see Goulven Madec, “Saint Augustin est-il le malin génie de l'Europe,” in *Imaginer l'Europe: Le marché européen, tâche culturelle et économique*, ed. Paul Kowalski (Paris, 1992), pp. 279–290.

<sup>6</sup> H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la culture antique*, 4th edn (Paris, 1958), p. 337; cf. Marrou, *Décadence romaine ou Antiquité tardive* (Paris, 1977). An excellent reassessment of the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

In the pages that follow I argue that there are essentially two sources of disorderliness in Augustine's early writings. One of these results from failures of reasoning on the part of Augustine or his interlocutors, which have frequently been the subject of comment. The other is deliberately introduced by Augustine as a part of the dialogues' literary and philosophical design. The purpose of this calculated decentering is to illustrate the sorts of problems which arise when philosophical or theological questions are discussed in an open forum. Augustine proposes that these difficulties can be eliminated, at least in part, when the external dialogue is replaced by the soliloquy or inner dialogue. This thinking becomes clear if we follow his criticisms of the open dialogue through his early writings and take into account his extension of interior reasoning to an ever widening circle of issues.

The contrast between outer and inner dialogue provides Augustine with a way of dramatizing his attitude towards exterior and interior words, and this theme is presented more systematically in his philosophy of language. This philosophy is principally introduced into his early writings in *De Magistro*, and, after a series of restatements and modifications, is summarized in the later books of *De Trinitate*. In book nine of the latter work he observes that "we use the term 'word' in one sense when we speak of words which fill a determined space of time with their syllables, whether they are spoken or simply thought; in a different sense when everything that is known is called a word impressed on our mind, as long as it can be brought forth from memory and defined."<sup>7</sup> Speaking of the same subject in book fifteen Augustine further suggests that the unspoken words of thought are the intellectualized designs, even, one might suggest, the intentions, of spoken words, which issue forth in specific languages, such as Latin, Greek, or Punic.<sup>8</sup> On the nature of this functional interior speech he asks:

What is that which can be a word, and, therefore, is already worthy of the name of a word? What, I say, is this word formable and not yet formed, except something of our own mind which we cast this way and that by a kind of revolving

philosophical issues in such an evaluation is John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> *De Trin.*, 9.10.15: "Aliter enim dicuntur uerba quae spacia temporum syllabis tenent siue pronuntiantur siue cogitentur; aliter omne quod notum est uerbum dicitur animo impressum quamdium de memoria proferri et definiri potest." For an outline of types of speech in Augustine, see Christopher Kirwan, "Augustine on the Nature of Speech," in *Companions to Ancient Thought 3: Language*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 188–211, from which this trans. is taken; cf. Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London, 1989), pp. 55–59.

<sup>8</sup> *De Trin.*, 15.10.19.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

motion, according as we think now of this and now of that thing, just as they are found, or as they occur to our mind? And it then becomes a true word when that which we cast, as I have said, by a revolving motion, arrives at that which we know ... And, therefore ... something of our own mind is already to be called a word which can be formed from our knowledge even before it is formed, because it is, so to say, already formable.<sup>9</sup>

It follows that there is a hierarchy of types of words leading from spoken words to the interior words of thought, and finally to the Word of God, as he observes later in the same discussion:

Hence, the word which sounds without is a sign of the word which shines within, to which the name of word more properly belongs. For that which is produced by the mouth of the flesh is the sound of the word, and is itself also called the word, because that inner word assumed it in order that it might appear outwardly. For just as our word in some way becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in which it may be manifested to the senses of men, so the Word of God was made flesh by assuming that in which He might also be manifested to the senses of men.<sup>10</sup>

In a philosophical context the lowest level in this scheme is occupied by the indiscriminate use of words in conversation, just as, in the dialogues, the lowest level of argumentation is represented by the students' verbal disputations in the presence of their master. In both cases what Augustine has in mind is the disorderliness that can be created by the unreflective use of language. His students move in an undisciplined manner from point to point, as long as their thoughts are carried forwards by their verbal exchanges, until at length they realize, as does Adeodatus in *De Magistro*, that interior instruction is the only way to get to the bottom of their problems. For Augustine, this admission is the beginning of wisdom, since the starting point of all self-understanding "is an inner knowledge by which we know that we live."<sup>11</sup>

## THE SELF AND NARRATIVE

Augustine proposes, then, that the best way to do serious thinking is not by talking to others but by talking to oneself. As my last quotation suggests, the first thing that he learns when he is engaged in such inner conversation is that he exists.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.15.25, trans. Stephen McKenna.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.11.20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.1.2.21.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

In one of his earliest compositions in dialogue form, the *Soliloquia*, he draws attention to the connection between the form of his discourse, which is carried on in the first person within himself, and the product of that interchange, which is the assertion of self-existence. On reading his statements on this theme, it is tempting to think of the bishop of Hippo as a precursor of Descartes, who, possibly echoing his views, more famously states “*Cogito, ergo sum.*”<sup>12</sup> But, (as I point out in Chapter 2) this temptation must be resisted. For one thing, Augustine and Descartes have different attitudes towards Scepticism, which is what their statements concerning self-existence are intended to refute. Descartes’ is a thorough rejection, without compromise, while Augustine refuses one part of the Sceptical position while accepting another. For Descartes the “proof” of the self’s existence is the starting point for gaining certain knowledge about objects in the external world. Augustine is “proving” nothing: he is just saying that his self-existence is something of which he is undeniably aware but that the source of this awareness is not traceable to his formal knowledge. In a similar way, in book eleven of the *Confessiones* he argues that he has an awareness of time even though he cannot say that he knows what time is.

Another reason for distinguishing between these pivotal spokesmen on the problem of self-existence arises from their attitudes towards the connection between self-existence and narrative. Put simply, Descartes’ view of the self, as defended by his “*cogito*,” excludes narrative, while Augustine’s version subtly incorporates it. In the three works in which Descartes’ conception of the self is most clearly outlined, namely *Discours de la méthode* (1637), *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (1641), and *Les Passions de l’âme* (1649), there is no serious analysis of narrative (except, in the *Discours*, as the recapitulation of a failed education). By contrast, in the *Confessiones*, personal narrative plays an important rôle in defining the modalities of self-understanding, since the bishop of Hippo is convinced that almost everything we know about ourselves is derived from events recorded and reinterpreted in the memory. When Augustine utilizes soliloquies, therefore, in the context of self-knowledge, he is not only talking to himself about timeless philosophical questions, such as the nature of existence; he is also engaged in an internal conversation about the meaning to himself of the flow of events over time, which the passage of his spoken words illustrates.

<sup>12</sup> The classic statement of the principle is in *Discours de la méthode*, chapter 4 (ed. C. Adams and P. Tannery, (*Euvres de Descartes*, Paris: Vrin, 1969), vol. 6.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

7

Augustine's thinking on these issues has a great deal of novelty but his conclusions can nonetheless be situated within a venerable tradition of thinking on the topic of latent knowledge. In this tradition the highest truths are thought to be concealed in the literary, philosophical, and theological works of a remote period of time.<sup>13</sup> These can be accessed through the patient scholarly unraveling of the secrets contained in such writings, which involves a combination of philology, philosophy, and theology.

Following this line of thinking, many ancient commentators were convinced that Homer and Hesiod communicated the essence of their teachings under the integument of poetry.<sup>14</sup> Christian authors were similarly persuaded that the Bible presents ethical and cosmological doctrines through such literary genres as prayer, historical narrative, and prophecy. Augustine proposes that the Bible has been brought forth by God "like an epic song from an incomparably fine musician"<sup>15</sup> and awaits skilled exegesis.<sup>16</sup> In *De Vera Religione* he makes use of Plato's view that the form of sacred writings can tell us something about the design and composition of the universe.<sup>17</sup> The great Neoplatonic prayer with which the *Soliloquia* begins is a striking example of his belief that poetic prose can be used to describe inner and hidden cosmic harmonies. He is sympathetic to Socrates' view that "every discourse must be organized like a living creature ... [in which the parts] are fitting in relation to each other and to the whole."<sup>18</sup> He illustrates this doctrine in his hermeneutics, in which the "parts" and "wholes" of biblical texts are understood to be mutually supportive. Like many ancient writers he is convinced that works of literature and philosophy can contribute to the mental and moral health of their readers, restoring and maintaining their emotional equilibrium.<sup>19</sup> The lengthy dialogue, *De Ordine*, may be a response to a poem by his

<sup>13</sup> For a review of earlier approaches to this question, see G. R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenic Philosophy: A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 3–27; on its absence before Judaism, see Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), pp. 1–8; on composite notions of wisdom in ancient thought, see George B. Kerferd, "The Image of the Wise Man in Greece in the Period before Plato," in *Images of Man: Studia Gerardo Verbeke* (Louvain, 1976), pp. 17–28.

<sup>14</sup> On the early development of this method, see Glenn W. Most, "The Poetics of Early Greek Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. A. A. Long (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 342–359.

<sup>15</sup> *Ep.*, 138.5 (to Marcellinus in 412): "uelut magnum carmen cuiusdam ineffabilis modulatoris".

<sup>16</sup> *De Gen. ad Litt.*, 12.9.20.

<sup>17</sup> *Critias* 106a; cf. *Timaeus* 29a–30a; 56a–b. On this theme see Pierre Hadot, "Physique et poésie dans le *Timée* de Platon," in *Études de philosophie ancienne* (Paris, 1998), pp. 278–305.

<sup>18</sup> *Phaedrus* 264c, trans. H. N. Fowler (Loeb); cf. 265d.

<sup>19</sup> On the analogy between sight, insight, and healing, see *De Doct. Christ.*, 1.9.9; 1.14.13; 1.16.15; on the Platonic context, see Anthony Kenny, "Mental Health in Plato's Republic," in Kenny,



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

friend Zenobius on this very topic, suggesting a solution which combines asceticism and the liberal arts.<sup>20</sup>

It is within this tradition that Augustine evolves an original and influential view of narrative,<sup>21</sup> which develops in three directions in his early writings. One of these is outlined in book six of *De Musica*, where he talks about narrative at a microscopic level as it moves from the voice to the mind in a sequence of syllables. In his view, these sounds are lodged in the memory in the order in which they arrive and they can be retrieved in that order by the speaker as words, sentences, or larger units of discourse. Secondly, he speaks of narrative thinking within an interpretative (or exegetical) framework. This conception is well summed up in the term *enarrationes*, which is employed in the title of the lengthy commentary on the Psalms begun during his early priesthood. In its literal context an Augustinian *enarratio* is a description or explanation: a recounting of events, the exposition of a theme, or the interpretation of a text or author (the term *enarrator* in fact representing what we nowadays call a text's interpreter). Finally, Augustine has a conception of narrative which is autobiographical,<sup>22</sup> and this appears to be largely his own invention.

These types of narrative – auditory, expository, and creative – present particular difficulties which are addressed in the pages that follow. However, by way of introduction something has to be said about autobiographical narrative, since this is the source of the largest controversy in Augustinian studies over the past century and is directly linked to Augustine's notion of soliloquy through the *Confessiones*. The problem has arisen because he left differing accounts of the same events in his life, and it is unclear how these accounts reflect what actually took place. The debate on the question reached a turning point in 1950, when Pierre Courcelle published a rigorously argued set of studies, which effectively distinguished between “historical” and “theological” motivations in Augustine's records of his intellectual pursuits down to the time of his conversion to the religious life. Courcelle challenged many statements

*The Anatomy of the Soul. Historical Essays in the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 23–24; on the Ciceronian background, see Stephen A. White, “Cicero and the Therapeutists” in *Cicero the Philosopher*, ed. and intro. J. G. F. Powell (Oxford, 1995), pp. 215–221, 226–233; for insights into Augustine's terminology for emotions and emotional experiences, see Philip Burton, *Language in the “Confessions of Augustine”* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 133–172.

<sup>20</sup> *De Ord.*, 1.7.20.

<sup>21</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, vol. 1, ch. 1 (Paris, 1983 = *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer, Chicago, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> See Georg Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, trans. E. W. Dickes, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1951).



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

9

concerning events related in the *Confessiones* and proposed that a more accurate account of the formative years of the bishop of Hippo could be pieced together from letters, dialogues, and commentaries written before 397.<sup>23</sup>

On the whole historians have accepted his conclusions,<sup>24</sup> but the results of his research have been complemented from two directions. First, in the light of recent thinking on the nature of autobiography, it has become customary to look on Augustine's personal reflections on his life as revisions, rewritings, or reinterpretations, rather than to defend any one version of the story as a factual record.<sup>25</sup> After the Second Sophistic, such accounts frequently take the form of a "weaving" of events and their interpretation.<sup>26</sup> As a result, the view that a life is something in itself has been supplemented by the view that an autobiography consists largely "in the constructing, in the text, or the text making."<sup>27</sup>

Also, in the minds of many historians, it is questionable whether the term "autobiography" adequately characterizes the *Confessiones*. In recent years Augustine's masterpiece has been increasingly viewed as a Christian version of a mental, emotional, and spiritual discipline common to several schools of philosophy, whose earlier history has been patiently reconstructed by Pierre Hadot.<sup>28</sup> Previous work on these "exercises" has

<sup>23</sup> *Recherches sur les Confessions*, 1st edn (Paris, 1950); cf. with useful insights, Joanne McWilliam, "The Cassiciacum Autobiography," *SP* 18.4 (1990), 14–43.

<sup>24</sup> Two important discoveries have supplemented the evidence accessible to Courcelle and his critics: (1) Johannes Divjak (ed.), *Epistolae ex duobus codicibus nuper in lucem prolatae* (CSEL 88 [1981]); on which see Goulven Madec, "Du nouveau dans la correspondance augustinienne," *REA* 27 (1981), 56–66; Henry Chadwick, "New Letters of St. Augustine," *J. of Theological Studies* 34.2 (1983), 425–452 (afterwards referred to as 1\*, 2\*, etc); and (2) *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique: Retrouvés à Mayence, édités et commentés par François Dolbeau* (Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 147, Paris, 1996); on which see F. Dolbeau, *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique (Augustin): Mise à jour bibliographique 1996–2000* (Paris, 2001); cf. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, vii, pp. 501–502.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Richard Sorabji, "Soul and Self in Ancient Philosophy," in *From Soul to Self*, ed. James C. Crabbe (London, 1999), p. 17; on Augustine's notion of the contemplative self, as the development of Plato and Aristotle, pp. 21–22; on the Plotinian contribution, highly influential on Augustine, see E. R. Dodds, "Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus," in *The Ancient Concept of Progress and other Essays on Greek Literature and Belief* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 129–132, 135–139.

<sup>27</sup> Jerome Bruner, "Self-making and World-making," in *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2001), p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> *Conf.*, 10.1.1–10.4.5; see Pierre Hadot, "Spiritual Exercises," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. and intro. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford, 1995), pp. 81–125; *What is Ancient Philosophy*, trans. M. Chase (Cambridge, MA, 2002), parts 1–2. An important study with comparable themes is Anthony Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford, 2002).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19031-2 - Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity

Brian Stock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

been concerned chiefly with their philosophical implications; however, in Augustine, they regularly unite philosophy and rhetoric and become in themselves a novel literary genre which effectively combines self-talk with self-narrative. In this respect, Augustine doubtless intended the *Confessiones* to stand beside, if not to rival, Vergil's *Aeneid*, the canonical text of Roman moral education which he and his students were studying together in Milan and at Cassiciacum.<sup>29</sup> His rhetorical talents are deployed in persuading the reader that such an exercise, involving a reinterpretation of one's life, can provide counsel on how to reach the ancient goals of wisdom and happiness.

In this book I attempt to show how Augustine engages in a traditional programme of spiritual exercises while at the same time writing about that program in a literary and narrative form which is clearly addressed to an audience. As a result of these experiments involving soliloquy and narrative, he becomes the first person in the ancient world to contrast the psychological and historical notions of the self (as illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3).<sup>30</sup> The psychological configuration, which is non-narrative, is built around the fact of self-consciousness, and this is defended by different versions of the anti-Sceptical statement, "*Si fallor, sum.*"<sup>31</sup> The historical configuration, which is a narrative construct, derives ultimately from the story of the creation of man and woman "in God's image and likeness" in the book of Genesis. This notion is introduced into his thinking on the subject as early as 390 in *De Vera Religione*; it is subsequently elaborated in the *Confessiones* and *De Civitate Dei*, in the one through the history of the individual, in the other through the history of mankind.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> For interesting reflections on Vergil's influence with an extensive review of the important contributions in German, see Sabine MacCormack, *The Shadow of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* (Berkeley, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Like other Latin and Greek authors in the period, Augustine has no specific term for the self, frequently expressing what he has in mind through pronouns; e.g., *Sol.*, 1.1.1: "*Volventi mihi ... ac ... quaerenti memetipsum ...*, ait *mihi ... sive ego ipse sive alius quis*," my italics; cf. 7.1.2: "*ego nec mihi met ipse uel ipse conspicuus.*" The discussion of the self at *Alcibiades* 129b, ff., which can be conceived as a precedent to late ancient thinking on the subject, is unknown to Augustine; however, he utilizes the analogy of the mirror image, which he may have acquired through Plotinus; on this topic, see below, Chapter 1. Another ancient theme with which Augustine is concerned is the relation between self-knowledge and self-care; cf. Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst, MA, 1988), pp. 25–26; for a revised and more extensive statement, see *L'Herméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France 1981–1982* (Paris, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> *De Civ. Dei*, 11.26. <sup>32</sup> See *Conf.*, 4.12.29 and *De Civ. Dei*, 11.1.