

# *The Mythic Reality of the Autonomous Individual*

with John A. Teske, "Editorial Overview"; Edwin C. Laurenson, "Agency, Freedom, and the Blessings of Opacity"; Phillip Cary, "Philosophical and Religious Origins of the Private Inner Self"; Anindita N. Balslev, "The Enigma of I-Consciousness"; Lene Arnett Jensen, "The Cultural Development of Three Fundamental Moral Ethics"; Amy Banks, "Developing the Capacity to Connect"; John A. Teske, "Externalism, Relational Selves, and Redemptive Relationships"; Kenneth J. Gergen, "From Moral Autonomy to Relational Responsibility"; Steven L. Winter, "Reimagining Democratic Theory for Social Individuals"

## PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS ORIGINS OF THE PRIVATE INNER SELF

*by Phillip Cary*

*Abstract.* The modern concept of the inner self containing a private inner world has ancient philosophical and religious roots. These begin with Plato's intelligible world of ideas. In Plotinus, the intelligible world becomes the inner world of the divine Mind and its ideas, which the soul sees by turning "into the inside." Augustine made the inner world into something merely human, not a world of divine ideas, so that the soul seeking for God must turn in, then up: entering into itself and then looking above itself at the intelligible light of God. In modernity, "ideas" become the immediate object of every act of mental perception, the essential inner objects of the mind's eye. Locke makes the inner space inescapably private, excluding the divine inner light. Postmodern attempts to reconceive the relation of mind and world, rejecting the modern conception of a private inner self, will need to deal with lingering Platonist intuitions about the immediacy of the mind's vision.

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Modern concepts of the autonomous individual are often buttressed by the concept of a private inner space of the self, an inner sanctum or inner world where I am most truly myself, out of view of others. It was not so long ago that you could discuss this private inner world and take it for granted that you knew what you were talking about. Philosophers could write whole

Phillip Cary is Scholar-in-Residence, Templeton Honors College, and Professor of Philosophy, Eastern University, 1300 Eagle Rd., St. Davids, PA 19087-3696, USA; e-mail [pcary@eastern.edu](mailto:pcary@eastern.edu).

books about our knowledge of the external world, as Bertrand Russell once did (1914), on the assumption that we all knew what the inner world is like and that the tough problem was how to build an epistemic bridge from that to the external world. But round about mid-century, English-speaking philosophers like Gilbert Ryle (1949) and J. L. Austin (1962), along with Ludwig Wittgenstein and his British and American followers (Wittgenstein [1953] 1973; Anscombe 1957; Malcolm 1959; Kenny 1963) did a great deal to undermine that assumption and thus eliminate the need for the bridge. Meanwhile, in a very different idiom, Martin Heidegger ([1927] 1962) had already presented an immensely influential analysis of human existence that begins by describing the self as “being in the world” rather than as an inner field of consciousness, thereby undermining the foundational assumptions of the phenomenological philosophy of his teacher Edmund Husserl ([1913] 1998).

Thus in England and America as well as on the continent, it came to seem that there was no need for a philosophically constructed bridge from the private inner world of ideas and consciousness to the external world of tables and chairs, flowers and stars, friends and lovers. People did not have to worry that they were forever trapped inside their own mind, experiencing only the ideas of external things rather than the things themselves. Perhaps it never made much sense to divide the universe into inner and outer worlds in the first place. The burden of proof shifted from those who would establish knowledge of the external world to those who thought we could say anything coherent about a purely inner one.

This shift opens up some interesting questions in the history of Western thought. How did it get to seem so obvious that what is most intimate to us is not our lives with others, our family and friends, nor the ground on which we walk and the air we breathe, but a private world in which each of us is essentially alone, with only our own ideas for company? If the notion is not a natural and obvious one—not part of the inborn cognitive equipment of the human race nor an inherent feature of everyone’s self-consciousness—then where did it come from? Who first started talking about it, and why? The answers to these questions are to be found, I shall suggest here, in the history of the Western religious tradition and its long involvement with philosophical issues, especially (in this case) epistemology. The original motives for constructing an inner space of the self emerge in the context of what one could call theological epistemology, the inquiry into how knowledge of God is possible. The inner self was invented as a place to find God.

We can trace the history of the concept of inner self back to ancient Platonist conceptions of the soul’s inherent divinity, then forward to Christian notions of God in the soul, and then into modernity when the soul is reconceived as a secularized inner space. Key figures in this

history, as I shall sketch it here, are: (1) Plato (c. 427–358) whose concepts of intellectual vision and the intelligible world provided the philosophical resources for the invention of the inner self; (2) Plotinus (c. 205–270), the founder of Neo-Platonism, who presents the first powerful philosophical account of an inner world; (3) Augustine (354–430), the Christian Platonist, theologian, and church father, who first makes the inner world into an individual human world; and (4) John Locke (1632–1704), the modern philosopher and political theorist, who in effect secularizes the inner self, making it a private space of empirical ideas rather than a place for the divine light that illuminates all.

#### PLATO: IDEAS IN THE INTELLIGIBLE WORLD

Plato had no conception of an inner self, and that in itself is an important part of our story. He could talk about thought as a kind of dialogue the soul had with itself (Plato 1997, *Theaetetus* 189e, *Sophist* 263e), but he never pictured the soul as an inner world we inhabit or an inner space we might enter in order to find things. Yet this lack of inwardness did not prevent him from giving the West a rich and immensely influential metaphysical conception of the soul, its incorporeality, immortality, and divinity. For what was new in Plato was not his belief in the soul. In ancient Greece, everyone took it for granted that human beings, like other animals, had souls: what made the difference between a living body and a corpse was the presence of a soul. But what the soul is, what makes the human soul different from the beasts, and what happens to it after death was a matter for myth, speculation, and disagreement. Outside the tradition stemming from Plato the soul was regarded even by philosophers as something corporeal, which is to say a bodily thing, composed of material elements, such as breath or fire. Plato's metaphysics offered an alternative to this materialism, providing an identity, origin, and destiny for the soul that did not depend on the world of bodies. Indeed, it provided the first coherent alternative to the bodily world as such.

Plato gave us another world, in which souls are most at home. It is not an inner world, for the soul does not turn within itself to find it. But it is an alternative to the world we find by looking about us with the eyes in our heads or using any of the five senses. Plato calls it an "intelligible place" (Plato 1997, *Republic* 508c, 509d), in contrast to the visible or sensible places we inhabit with our bodies, and later Platonists called it "the intelligible world" as opposed to "the sensible world," the world available to our five senses. To be intelligible (Greek *noetos*) is to be the object of mind or intellect (*nous*), knowable by an act of immaterial understanding or intellection (*noesis*). To pick up on a key Platonic metaphor, we perceive intelligible things with the eye of the mind, not the eyes of the body. This is much more than mere imagination, which draws its images from things

perceived by the senses. That is indeed the great difference between Plato's intelligible world and previous myths of the afterlife: it is literally not a place we can imagine, for it is not a place in the physical world at all. To find it the soul must investigate "by itself," apart from bodily things and the senses of the body and the imagination that is based on them (Plato 1997, *Phaedo* 65b-67a). To conceive of such a world is to conceive a new identity for the soul apart from all bodily things, giving it a destiny after death in which it no longer looks like a ghost or a shade in Hades.

It is a world of ideas, though in a quite unmodern sense. What the soul sees with its mind's eye is what Plato calls "forms" or "ideas." The former term, *eidos*, gets translated into Latin as *species* while the latter, *idea*, is taken up directly into Latin and later European languages. Both words designate the unchanging essence or essential form of things, which cannot be seen by bodily eyes, yet both are literally words for objects of vision, meaning in ordinary Greek something like the "look" of things, their visible form and structure. In Plato's usage they refer to the *intelligible* look of things, their essential form or structure as understood by the mind or intellect. They are objects of intellectual vision, things the intellect sees, as visible forms are things the eye sees. What they are not is ideas located in the mind. The human mind was not yet conceived as an inner space in which to locate things, and in fact nobody spoke of an *idea* (Latin *idea*, French *idée* or the like) in the human mind until Descartes.

When Plato uses the metaphor of the mind's intellectual vision, therefore, he pictures the intelligible things the mind sees as "outside" the mind, just as the visible things we see are outside our eyes. To see with the mind's eye is to see something more real and permanent than your own thoughts. It is like what happens when you "see" something in mathematics. When you're trying to understand the Pythagorean theorem, for example, you may start by drawing triangles on a chalkboard or paper and then spend a great deal of time staring at these quite visible things. But then if things go well, the moment comes when you say, "Aha! Now I see it!" And *what* you are seeing in that moment of intellectual vision is not anything you will ever see literally with your body's eyes. It is not anything you could draw with chalk or pen. It is not even the unchanging nature of changing things (as Plato's student Aristotle would later argue) but rather a reality that is more true, more real than anything in nature, anything visible or sensible or corporeal, because it is more lasting. What you see when you say, "Aha! Now I see it!" is something that will never cease to be, because it never came into being in the first place but simply is, always and forever, unchangeable. It is eternal and, as we might say, "spiritual"—or as Plato does say, divine (Plato 1997, *Phaedo* 80b).

It is among such things—intelligible, unchanging, and divine—rather than in the human body, that the soul ultimately belongs. The soul is kin (*suggenes*) to intelligible things; it began its existence contemplating

them (Plato 1997, *Phaedrus* 246a-248e), which is why it finds the human body to be a kind of prison (Plato 1997, *Phaedo* 81e and 82e), as if it had fallen from heaven to be trapped among bodily things. The body, with all its needs and desires, pains and pleasures, sensations and distractions, is a burden that makes it difficult for the soul to see clearly (Plato 1997, *Phaedo* 64e-67b), as it were, pulling the soul down to its own level.

But even while it is in the body, the soul bears within itself the memory of what it saw at the beginning. This is the famous Platonic doctrine of recollection or *anamnesis*, which is tied to a mythology of transmigration and reincarnation of souls (as if what the soul recollects were something it saw in a previous life), but which relies most fundamentally on the notion of the soul seeing without the body at all, in a pure intellectual vision. Neither the doctrine of recollection nor the mythology of transmigration is as fundamental to Plato's account of the soul as this capacity for intellectual vision. Without it there would be nothing for the soul to recollect and no incorporeal homeland to which it could return after death. What the doctrine of recollection does add, however, is the notion that what we are trying to see with our mind's eye is already in some way present within us, residing in our souls (Plato 1997, *Meno* 85c). This enlargement of the soul, as it were, to include the memory of a primal vision, becomes the precursor to the much later notion of the inner self and its turn to inner vision (Cary 2000, 13–15).

To picture what resources Plato affords for the later development of the concept of inner self, as well as why Plato is not there yet, we can turn to the imagery in his famous allegory of the cave (Plato 1997, *Republic* 514a–18b). It is as if all of us embodied souls were prisoners in a cave away from the sun, bound in chains so that we can only look straight ahead at shadows cast on a wall in front of us by a fire burning behind us. Those who think of nothing but the visible world remain such prisoners, turned away from the light and able to see only fleeting shadows. To see the true intelligible substance of things, we must be freed from our bonds (a necessary liberation from bodily things), then turn away from the shadows (translated into Latin, this turning is *conversio*, conversion) so as to climb out of the cave (an ascent of the soul to higher things) and learn to see the light of the upper world (the soul's true illumination and vision). This imagery of the soul's liberation, conversion, ascent, illumination, and vision has had an immense influence on Western religious thought, but Plato presents it not in religious terms as a kind of mysticism but as an illustration of the nature of education (Plato 1997, *Republic* 514a). Following this upward path is a metaphor for learning how to use your mind, which is like an eye designed to see the divine light. Once we have trained our souls to see, overcoming the dazzling effect the unaccustomed light of higher things has on our mind's eye at first, we will be able to gaze straight at the sun, which in Plato's allegory stands for the form of the Good, the supreme principle, which is

the source and goal of all our understanding, and (as the later Platonist tradition will make more explicit) the source and goal of all being.

The invention of the inner self requires that this source and goal be reconceived as belonging within the soul, together with all the intelligible things on which its light shines. To see how this happens, we must turn to Plotinus.

#### PLOTINUS: THE DIVINE WORLD WITHIN THE SOUL

Plotinus turns the intelligible world into an inner world, but not a private world. He does this by locating Platonic ideas in the divine Mind (*Nous*) and locating the divine Mind (which we can also call “the Mind of God” or simply “God”) within the soul, so that the soul seeking to understand intelligible things must turn and look within itself to see them. This inward turn does not lead to a private inner self, because what the soul sees by looking within is what all souls have in common. The ideas a soul finds within are not its own individual thought processes, but Platonic ideas, the unchanging intelligible essence of things eternally contemplated by the Mind of God. This eternal Mind is not a person or personality or process, but an unchanging act of pure understanding—not at all like a human mind learning, thinking, or figuring things out, but like an eternal “aha!” moment that embraces every intelligible form in pure intellectual vision, changelessly understanding it all forever, never having to learn because it has always seen (Plotinus 1966–1988, 5:1 and 5:9). This is the inner world that the soul finds by turning to look within itself—not something private but the unchanging realm that is the same for all souls. In essence, they all share one and the same inner space.

Plotinus gives us a picture for this, which it is useful to compare with Plato’s allegory of the cave. Think of the soul as a kind of gigantic hollow sphere, rather like one of the transparent celestial spheres, which bear the orbiting planets in Ptolemaic astronomy (Plotinus 1966–1988, 5:8.9). This divine and immortal Soul (it will be helpful to capitalize it from now on) is really all souls, for at their core all souls are one. Our many individual souls are in reality just partial instantiations of the one Soul, diminished and drawn from that primal unity by their diverse interests in particular bodily things (including most prominently their own bodies), which cause them to look outward at what we can call “the external world”—we have now come upon the first thinker who gives us something for which we can use that label. So imagine, Plotinus suggests, that this sphere of Soul contains a myriad of faces on the outside, all looking out into the dark, away from the intelligible light that shines from within (1966–1988, 6:5.7). They are like the people in Plato’s cave, bound in place so that they can only look straight ahead at the shadows, which symbolize bodily things. In Plato’s allegory, education begins when the bonds are broken and the soul turns

around to look at the light. In Plotinus's picture, this means that one of the faces turns "into the inside" and looks at what lies within. What it sees then is nothing less than the Mind of God and its contents—the eternal, intelligible ideas that give form and being to all changing things. To see this is to see also that all souls are truly one, because at their inmost they are no different from the eternal Mind, that is, God.

We can complete a sketch of Plotinus' account of the relation of the soul to the divine by filling in more details of this picture, starting from the inmost center. "Center" is in fact a recurrent image Plotinus uses for the highest divinity of all, corresponding to the sun that shines in the intelligible realm above the Cave, which Plato called "the Good" and which Plotinus more often calls "the One" (Plotinus 1966–1988, 6:9.8 and 5:1.11). It is One because in Plotinus' metaphysics unity is prior to multiplicity, whole prior to parts, identity prior to difference. So the divine One is pure unity without multiplicity, simple integrity without parts or composition of any kind, identity in which there is no internal differentiation. Thus it is a center in another sense also: like the center of a circle in geometry, a point without dimensions or parts or internal structure. It is inmost because there is nothing different inside it, but also because all things flow out from it, as all geometrical figures are defined by their relation to an initial point.

Emanating from this center and finding its eternal coherence in it, the divine Mind is a secondary level of divinity, an intelligible realm that is both one and many, one Mind and many ideas, eternally united by understanding. Indeed, the divine Mind and its ideas are eternally identical for Plotinus, who here adopts Aristotle's theory that the intellect's knowledge of intelligible forms is in fact a kind of identity with them. In Plotinus, Platonic ideas are found within this Aristotelian Mind of God because intellectual vision means being one with what is seen (Plotinus 1966–1988, 5:5). And since the eternal Mind has never been ignorant and therefore never had anything to learn, it has always been identical with the whole intelligible world, embracing all Platonic ideas in one realm of intelligible light. That is the inner world in Plotinus.

Revolving around this divine inner world is the sphere of Soul, itself always contemplating the light except insofar as it is fragmented and turned outward in the defective form of particular souls attached to bodies. Only when we descend to the level of Soul (a lesser divinity than Mind, which is lesser than the One) do we find movement (a sign of incompleteness, imperfection, and fragmentation) as well as attachment to bodies, which lie in the irregular world outside the divine spheres of intelligibility. The task of philosophy is to turn souls back into the inside, away from the external world of bodies where birth and death, time and change, division and dissolution reign. It's colorful and beautiful out there in the external world and thoughtless souls are captivated by its sensible pleasures, but

every joy and beauty there is mortal and transitory, a mere shadow of the true Beauty within, the immutable Beauty and Good to which the soul must turn in order to find true happiness and divinity.

#### AUGUSTINE: THE PRIVATE INNER WORLD

You can see why Plotinus' metaphysics might be deeply attractive to the spiritually minded. Indeed, there is little in Western spirituality that does not owe something to Plotinus. Augustine, the most influential Christian Platonist of all, is certainly no exception. He is deeply attracted to the Plotinian inward turn, but as a Christian he finds he cannot simply accept the inner divinity of the soul, as if deep within us there was no real difference between the Creator and the creature, between God and what he has made. So Augustine devises a different picture, reflecting a substantial modification of Plotinus' metaphysics of the soul. I here summarize a complex story that I tell at much greater length in *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* (Cary 2000).

The crucial modification Augustine makes to Plotinus' metaphysics of soul is that the inner space of the soul is not divine. In pictorial terms, this means that turning within is not all that is needed to see what is intelligible and divine. Augustine pictures the journey to God as a movement first in, then up—a turning inward then looking upward. He describes himself carrying out this twofold movement of the mind after being admonished by what he read in “the books of the Platonists” (Augustine 2006, 7:10.16), which probably included writings by Plotinus and his student Porphyry. He enters his inmost self, not without the help of God, and then turns his mind's eye to look at the immutable divine light shining into him from above his own mind—“above,” he says, “because it made me” (ibid.). He thus marks the difference between the divine and the human as the difference between Creator and creature as well as between eternal and temporal.

The twofold movement, in then up, leaves an intermediate conceptual space that was not there in Plotinus: for the space of the soul that one enters when one has turned inward but not yet looked upward is not the eternal realm of the divine Mind but the changing inner world of the individual human soul. Here for the first time in Western history we find a private inner world of the self. To add to our series of pictures, we can use the image of an inner palace (Augustine 2006, 10:8.12). When you enter within, you find yourself in a vast courtyard into which the sun is shining, with the same immutable light that shines in the intelligible realm above Plato's cave or in the intelligible world within Plotinus' Soul. This is an inner space with no roof, open to the light above. Indeed, it is the only place from which to get a good view of the Sun, the supreme Good and



source of all light, because outside the soul it is as if it were always cloudy, the sunlight diffused and never direct.

That is why, for Augustine, we must turn away from external things to find God. God, the supreme Good and eternal Beauty and intelligible Truth, is present everywhere, undivided, but in the external world we only see his light diffused and reflected in the fleeting beauty, goodness, and truth of transitory things. To look outward, as we normally do in our sinful state, is to have our backs turned to the inner light (Augustine 2006, 7:7.11). We must turn around, like the people in Plato's cave or the faces on the outside of Plotinus' Soul, in order to see the loveliness of the light itself. It is as if we have lived our whole lives outside the house of our own souls and need to turn at last and enter within. Hence, in a famous passage Augustine addresses God as an inner presence that he has neglected far too long, living outside himself in thrall to external beauties: "Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved Thee! For behold, Thou wert within me, and I outside; and I sought Thee outside and in my unloveliness fell upon the lovely things that Thou has made" (Augustine 2006, 10:27.38). In striking contrast to the modern inner self, Augustine does not have us starting with the world within and then building a bridge to the external world. As fallen creatures separated from God by our own sin and disordered earthly desires, we start outside ourselves, looking away from the inner world at all the attractions of external things, and have to be drawn into the inner place where the true light shines. It takes effort and the help of divine grace to turn away from external things and enter the depths of our inmost self to find God, who is "more inward than the most inward place of my heart and loftier than the highest" (Augustine 2006, 3:6.11).

God is above the inner self in Augustine, but he leaves a trace of himself within. What remains within the soul, even in its darkest depths, is the memory of God. Early on in his career, Augustine explicitly endorsed the Platonist doctrine that all true learning is really recollection (Augustine 1951–1956, 7:2; 1982, 20.34). Though he was never attracted to the Platonist myth of transmigration and later explicitly criticizes it (Augustine 1991, 12:15.24), it seems clear that in his early works he was assuming something like the Platonist notion of the fall of the soul (O'Connell 1968), which means that what we are really recollecting when we learn any unchanging truth in this life is a heavenly vision our souls enjoyed before they first sinned and "fell" into embodiment here in the sensible world.

An attenuated version of this doctrine of the fallen soul remains in Augustine's *Confessions* (O'Connell 1969), especially in book 10, where he specifically identifies the inner space of the soul with memory. This is a vast inner world which is the self: "Great is the power of memory . . . a profound and infinite multiplicity—and this is the mind, and this I myself

am” (ibid., 10:17.26). Of course memory also contains in a way all the world outside: mountains and seas and heavens, the images of which now reside in memory after having once been seen externally (ibid., 10:8.13). Augustine is struck with wonder that people marvel at mountains and seas and skies but not at the world within (ibid., 10:8.15). And the soul’s memory is larger yet, for it contains not only images of external things but the reality of intelligible things, all the unchanging truths it learns in studying the liberal disciplines. When we remember these truths we do not have mere images in memory but the things themselves, *res ipsa* (ibid., 10:9.16). It’s like a little bit of eternity within the soul. When we look for these things, trying to see the truths of mathematics, for instance, we are searching for them in memory, trying to recognize them or rather re-cognize them, to re-collect them from the places they are scattered and hidden within our memory (ibid., 10:11.18). It is as if they were always there but lying in dark places, forgotten for the time being. And so it is even with God: at the culmination of Augustine’s long examination of the inner fields of memory, he suggests that it is there also that we find God as our long-lost happiness (ibid., 10:21.31), taking joy in the eternal Truth we had forgotten (ibid., 10:23.33), which can never be found again outside of memory (ibid., 10:24.25).

Thus the inner space of the soul contains not only individual memories but the intelligible truths that are common to all minds, including “the Truth by which all things are true” (ibid., 10:23.34), which is God himself. For as Augustine put it in an earlier work, God is the “unchangeable Truth that contains everything that is unchangeably true” (Augustine 1993, 2:12), which is another way of saying God is the eternal mind containing all the Platonic ideas (Augustine 1982, question 46). So this inner world of memory that Augustine treats at length in the *Confessions* is not an absolutely private space. Not only does God see all that is within the soul (a point on which Augustine insists throughout the *Confessions*) but his presence within each soul is the same divine light that inwardly illuminates every soul that understands, the same Truth which is available to every mind (Augustine 2006, 10:26.37). Thus in Augustine’s earliest elaboration of the concept of an inner realm of the mind, when he had not yet fully worked out the “in then up” structure of the *Confessions*, he treats the inner realm as a public realm, in which there is but one wisdom common to all, while the external, bodily realm is the place of private property, where what is shared has to be cut up in pieces, because what I have cannot be yours, and vice versa (Augustine 1993, 2:7.19–9.27). Only sin separates us from the public realm of inner wisdom, turning the eyes of our minds away from the indivisible Truth we can all have together and toward the inferior, transitory goods of the external world, the kind of things which must become private property because they have to be divided in order to be shared.

Conceptually speaking, then, the private inner self is born in sin. When Augustine first conceived it, he saw it as separated from other souls only by its own disordered desires. This is another difference between Augustine's original version of the inner self and its modern descendants, who are endowed with privacy as if by a kind of natural right. For Augustine, the privacy of the inner self results from its unnatural state of spiritual weakness, being captive to external things and turned away from the inner light that is the Truth common to all. Hence in the kingdom of heaven, where the true community of souls is restored in the city of God, nothing is hidden. Developing a notion he found in Plotinus (Plotinus 1966–88, 4:3.18), Augustine explains that we shall see into each other's minds, not dependent on external means like words in order to communicate and learn what is in everyone's soul (Augustine 1951–56, 95:8; cf. Cary 2008, 81–83).

#### LOCKE: THE INNER SELF SECULARIZED

The modern inner self is thus inherited from the long prior history of Augustinian spirituality—but with a difference. To be useful in the politics and epistemology of the Enlightenment, the inner self had to be secularized, emptied of the divine light. The memory of God had to be expunged.

We can see this modern development as it unfolds from Descartes to Locke. Among many other innovations, Descartes makes the stunning move of locating ideas in the human mind, as if they were not divine truths but simply human thoughts. Prior to Descartes, any philosophical essay entitled “On Ideas” would contain a discussion of Platonic ideas in the mind of God (see for example Augustine 1982, question 46; Aquinas 1981, part I, question 15). Descartes turned ideas into something merely human, more intimate to the human mind than any other reality. For an idea, by Descartes' definition, is “whatever is immediately perceived by the mind” (Descartes 1988, 132). As a consequence, I can only think about something outside my mind by having an idea of it immediately present to my mind in consciousness. That is why Descartes can initiate the modern problematic of proving the existence of the external world. What I see with my mind, directly and immediately, is only my own ideas. A great deal of philosophical work needs to be done before I can be assured, with at least reasonable probability, that my ideas reflect what is outside my mind.

The key move in this philosophical work, however, relies on old medieval associations—something close to the Augustinian notion of a memory of God in us. For according to Descartes our minds possess innately, as if stamped upon them from the beginning, one very unique idea which could only come from God. This is the idea of God itself, which we could not have made up ourselves (Descartes argues) because it is infinite, and no finite being can produce something infinite (Descartes [1641] 1993,

Third Meditation). So the idea of God in us must have been produced by an infinite being, and that is sufficient to prove that God, the sole infinite being, exists. Once again, as in Augustine, we have the source of the knowledge of God within ourselves. This inner evidence of the divine becomes the crucial conceptual resource in Descartes' arguments against skepticism and then in his argument for our knowledge of the external world, based on the premise that if God exists, he is good and would not allow us to be systematically deceived about the world (Descartes [1641] 1993, Fifth Meditation).

In beginning his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* with an extended criticism of the Cartesian theory of innate ideas (Locke [1690] 1975, book 1), John Locke is completing the modern secularization of the inner self, eliminating all traces of the divine from the soul. There is more reason for this than just Locke's well-known empiricism. He has religious motives for the secularization of the self. He wants to show why "enthusiasm," which in the eighteenth century is a pejorative term rather like our term "holy roller," has no rational basis (Locke [1690] 1975, 4:19). For Locke, the most prominent examples of enthusiasm were the Quakers, who claimed that every believer benefited from an inspiration equal to the Bible's, based on an experience of divine inner light. Though lacking Augustine's philosophical foundation in Neo-Platonist intellectualism, the Quaker doctrine of inner light clearly did have a certain rhetorical advantage, in that the Western conception of the inner self, which virtually everyone in modern Europe accepted, was invented precisely as a place to see the light of God. Locke's version of the private inner self was shaped in large part by his efforts to neutralize this rhetorical advantage by constructing an account of the inner self that excluded the divine light. In effect, he put a roof on the inner self.

Locke provides us with a picture that serves us as a striking illustration of this secularization. He describes the inner self as a "dark room" (Locke [1690] 1975, 2:11.17), implicitly comparing it to the recently invented *camera oscura*, which of course is Italian for dark room (think: "chamber obscure") but is also the source of our word "camera." The *camera oscura* in fact had the same structure as a camera but on a larger scale: it was a dark chamber, which allowed no light in except through one lens, which projected visual images from outside and could focus them on an inner wall. Those images, Locke suggested, were like our ideas, which following Descartes he defined as the immediate objects of all our thoughts (Locke [1690] 1975, 1:1.1). We can only perceive the world outside our minds by looking at the ideas within them, just as someone within a *camera oscura* could perceive what was outside only by looking at images on the inner wall. This is a cave no one gets out of. One can't even look outside. And there is no light from above, no sun shining in, unless it be by extraordinary miracle (such as happened to Biblical prophets, Locke admits, but not to

contemporary Quakers). From this point on, the “way of ideas” in English-speaking philosophy means that everything we directly think about is really an idea within our mind. Thus arise lasting philosophical problems about how well our inner ideas correspond, if at all, to things in the external world (see Locke [1690] 1975, 4.11).

#### POSTMODERN DISSOLUTIONS

Postmodernism in English-language philosophy, which can be traced in large part to the work of the later Wittgenstein, has the effect of undermining the mythic reality of the private inner self. If, as Wittgenstein argued ([1953] 1973, §§243–309), the notion of a private inner language is incoherent, then it evidently follows that the notion of a meaningful inner world of ideas is incoherent as well. This at least is the lesson that many grateful Wittgensteinians took from his work: it is as if it restored them to the real world (Anscombe 1981, viii–ix). But of course it also unsettled some very old conceptual habits and created new problems about how to reconceive the relation of mind and world—including the relation of individual minds to the social world—which we are not done with yet. It is not for philosophy alone to solve these problems, though philosophers have a part in the conversations among linguists, psychologists, sociologists, and neuroscientists, in which we all work at them together. But in conclusion let me draw attention to one key concept, older than the inner self, which is likely to haunt us in various ways as the conversation proceeds.

The concept I have in mind is intellectual vision, the seeing with the eye of the mind or intellect (*nous*) that Plato insisted on as an alternative to the literal seeing with the eyes of the body. The two Platonists I have discussed here, Plotinus and Augustine, were both enthusiastic advocates of the possibility of intellectual vision, seeing it as essential to our knowledge of the divine. But even Locke, who is hardly a Platonist, retains a conceptual descendant of this concept in his insistence that ideas are always the immediate object of the mind whenever it thinks (Locke [1690] 1975, 4:2.1). This modern notion of immediacy, of our direct perception of the ideas in the inner space of our own mind, is dependent on philosophical intuitions about the unmediated presence of things to our vision that are owed to the Platonist tradition and are not likely to survive well without it. Yet it is so deep a part of Western thinking that I can confidently predict that it will turn up many times still in the future, bedeviling and confusing attempts to reimagine the mind’s place in the world. It will present itself as a religious idea and will indeed have deep religious meaning for those who believe in it, but it will be helpful to recognize that its ultimate provenance, like that of the inner self, is not the Biblical gospel but Platonist metaphysics.

## NOTE

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