

Neoplatonism *and* **GNOSTICISM**

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NEOPLATONISM AND GNOSTICISM

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The Noetic Triad in Plotinus, Marius Victorinus, and Augustine

Peter Manchester

Students of the history of the Christian doctrine of divine trinity, among whom I count myself, have long recognized a degree of complicity between the progressive "metaphysicalizing" of the doctrine in the Third and Fourth Centuries and the emergence of triadic conceptual schemes in the new Platonism of Plotinus and his successors. At one time it was commonplace to gesture toward the arrangement of the Plotinian system into three "hypostases" as the speculative counterpart of the Christian triad. Today the naive clarity of this older purported parallel has given way to a vast confusion of triads, differing among themselves, sometimes intersecting with one another, and in general introducing into Christian discussion such complexity of speculative motivation that the older kinds of history of the doctrine have been completely undone. It is not just the historian's reconstruction that has come apart; the whole grand vision of a consolidating universal orthodoxy must be abandoned.

The notion that the Plotinian hypostases were an exemplar for Christian trinitarian metaphysics was often based on crude verbalism: the emerging technical terms for the Greek doctrine were *mia ousia*, *treis hypostaseis*. The term hypostasis however is a very weak basis for comparison, first because in Plotinus it is an editor's convention and not a technical term Plotinus uses for what the One, Nous, and Soul are each "one" of, and second because among the Greek Christian writers it was prized initially for its vagueness and openness to various interpretations. Beyond this misleading verbal echo, excessive weight

was given to the case of Origen's account of the triad in *Peri Archōn*, and that entirely on its subordinationist side that led into Arianism. But even if, in Origen, the Father and the Son can be placed in hierarchical series, in parallel to the One and the Nous in Plotinus (which is not at all clear in *Peri Archōn* or the *Commentary on John*, which seem much more Middle- than Neo-platonist), there is no systematic parallel between the Holy Spirit and the Plotinian Soul, since the former acts in this world only within the circle of the elect, whereas the latter is universal and world-constituting.

The Plotinian hypostatic series never made a plausible model for the Christian trinity even when it held the field more or less alone. But current scholarship in the Second and Third Centuries has shown that a very different type of triad abounded in the philosophical and gnostical religions of the period. Perhaps of Orphic or Pythagorean derivation, it is attested in the Nag Hammadi materials,¹ and became especially influential through the *Chaldaean Oracles*, in the famous proposition that "in every world shines a triad ruled by a monad."² If we call the Plotinian hypostasis series "vertical" and derivational, then this new triad is "horizontal" and structural. It gave rise to a late Platonic speculative development which was not essentially Plotinian and indeed was integrated into the Plotinian series only with difficulty, requiring supplementary complications that were developed in conflicting ways in various schools.

The critical and historical effort to track the evolution of this horizontal triad, from its Second Century invocation, through Porphyry and Iamblichus, into Proclus and Damascius, is well underway. There begins to be careful study of early Christian participation in that development, centering especially on the Fourth Century writers Synesius and Marius Victorinus. But it seems to me that the complications of this scholastic history, which begin to take on near-fabulous dimensions by the time we get to the Athenians, have created a classic forest-and-trees problem. What, after all, is "the Triad" really about? Is it a numerological device? Symbolical in some other way? Is it a dialectical schema? Is it an analytical artifice or in some sense empirical? And finally, is the accommodation of the New Testament themes of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to this philosophical speculation a capitulation or an insight? Does the Christian trinity genuinely belong in this discussion, or is all of that a gigantic kind of category mistake?

My goal in the provisional discussions which follow is to contribute to the clarification of these substantive questions. I am only indirectly concerned with the transmission of ideas through channels of influence

and literary dependency, as experts will already have discerned from the figures juxtaposed in my title.

Marius Victorinus was the translator of what treatises of Plotinus Augustine knew, and in that sense knew Plotinus himself, but Pierre Hadot has shown conclusively that he took his instigation from Porphyry to a much larger degree.³ Some of the differences this makes will figure in our discussion below (section 2). The movement I propose to track from Plotinus to Marius Victorinus is therefore not in the dimension of literary derivation. Similarly, it seems clear to me (for reasons indicated in section 3 below) that Augustine may not even know, and in any case does not understand Marius Victorinus's trinitarian metaphysics. If he has dabbled in it, as some indications suggest, his conscious attitude is wariness. Where he can be shown to continue and even more to radicalize certain themes from Marius, the relationship is at most unconscious and the material is experienced by Augustine as his own discovery. Once again, the movement of thought is controlled by the substance, the matter itself, and not the paper track.

Or better: it is the thesis of this paper that there *is* a matter of thought underlying speculations about the noetic triad. And the working assumption is that the adaptation of this triad to the Christian trinity by Augustine is natural and appropriate, and therefore instructive about its meaning.

1. Three Triads Distinguished

I have already indicated the difference between the triad we are considering, most properly called the "noetic triad," and the three hypostases of the Plotinian hierarchical scheme. The latter is founded in what we perceive to be Plotinus's innovation, but that he takes to be essential to Platonism, the projection of One "beyond Mind and Being" from which all else originates in a fashion differing from all causation or exemplarity. In this perspective the true and eternal world of familiar Platonism, the Being One which is also Nous, is a Second One, and the All One of its sensible effigy, the world of Soul, is a Third. The directionality of this "one, two, three" is strongly vertical, each succeeding level dependent on its prior for a perfection and a unity which, taken by itself, it lacks or has devolved into powerlessness. I take pains not to speak of "emanation" or of the "chain of being" to give the sense of this verticality. Being, in the first place, is properly ascribed to the second level alone, the Nous. But more than that, the image of emanation suggests that it is outflow or declination alone which makes

each derived hypostasis, whereas it is Plotinus's distinctive claim that it is each level's halt, self-collection, and turning back to its source which is constitutive.⁴ Another way to make the same point is to note that derivation in Plotinus has two phases, *proōdos* and *epistrophē*, and that it is the second phase above all which completes the communication of power.

In the Plotinian scheme, the notorious problem of participation becomes the problem of the derivation of Soul from Nous. At this point there emerged in later Neoplatonism a second triadic schema, again vertical in sense but concerned with relations between hypostases in the overall systematic series. First given explicit formulation in Iamblichus, I call this triad the "schema of participation." According to this formalism, one discriminates among three states of any given element in the hypostasis series:

- i. that factor unparticipated (*amethektos*), "in itself," absolute;
- ii. that factor participated (*metechomenos*), which involves a self-disposition and action by the factor, not a reaction to what participates in it; and
- iii. that factor as *participant* (*kata methexin, en tois metechousi, en schesei*), that is, as enacted in the derived hypostasis and now *its* action, no longer that of the higher hypostasis.⁵

In the end this schema reacted back upon the hypostatic series itself, causing the introduction of additional layers and, in Iamblichus himself, generating the eccentric postulation of an Unparticipated One higher than the Plotinian One, which, because it was the participated One (the noetic One its participant), was now a second. Though in this sense the effect of the schema of participation is to introduce new levels in the overall hierarchy which seem to be of the same kind as the original threesome of Plotinus, I would argue that the two triadic schemas ought to be kept distinct.

The third kind of triad, and the one with which we are concerned in this discussion, emerges from reflection on the relative self-constitutedness of each hypostasis, that inner economy of power which belongs to its own proper truth and unity. Again I emphasize that a derived level in the Plotinian system is not an organized defectiveness or a pure dependency, but a self-gathered life and power, and in precisely *that* way an epiphenomenon of its source. The canonical example of such a triad is the noetic triad, Being, Life, Nous (*on, zōē, nous; esse, vivere, intelligere*). This triad is horizontal in the sense that, in each of its variant developments, it interprets the interior integrity of the Second Hypostasis itself. Even when relations of priority and

consequence are seen among them, when Porphyry for example makes the first moment the "father" or Iamblichus construes them in the dialectical sequence *hyparxis*, *dynamis*, *nous*, they remain moments within the Second Hypostasis and components of its integrity.⁶ It remains a great question in the history of later Neoplatonism whether the noetic triad intrinsically envisions the derived status of *Nous* in relation to the hypernoetic One, but what it articulates is not external reference but self-constitution and completion.⁷

It was in this role that the noetic triad was touched on by Plotinus, in this role that a Porphyrian version attracted Marius Victorinus, and in this role that an analogue worked out in considerable independence by Augustine proved permanently suitable for the trinitarian theology of the Latin kataphatic tradition.

2. Plotinus and Marius Victorinus

When a threefold is a form of completeness, and its counting-out a return to unity, it proves invariably to be some kind of dialectic. In particular, if two terms comprise a difference, the remaining term will work a mediation. It is therefore a natural question about Being, Living, and Knowing (I would like to use "knowing" for *noein/intelligere* as a matter of pure convenience and euphony, asking it to bear the sense of "intellectually apprehending" or "understanding"), which of the three is the middle or mediating factor.

The juxtaposition of Plotinus and Marius Victorinus immediately makes this a puzzlement. In the first place, Plotinus very rarely cites this threesome, either nominally (*on*, *zōē*, *nous*) or verbally (*to einei*, *to noein*, *to zōein*), in any kind of tightly schematic way, and in discussions where the three can be recognized by implication it is not necessarily clear whether they should be listed in that order. But if we ask about a two-against-one pattern in his thought, it is very clear that Being and *Nous* make an important twosome, and that Life is the third between them. But in Marius Victorinus the principal dialectical movement is the development between *esse* and *vivere* which is resolved through the final term, *intelligere*.

Though it would have its own fascination to map out the role of Porphyry as the intermediary of this dialectical shift, there is more to be learned from directly comparing the patterns as though they were competing interpretations of a single phenomenon. A certain peculiarity of Christian theology is immediately thrown into relief, concerning the way in which the "father" is first principle.

To begin with Plotinus, let us first recall why any sort of structural complication in the Second Hypostasis would become thematic in the first place. Because the hypernoetic One is such a dramatic innovation in the history of Platonism from a modern point of view, our expositions of Plotinus allow themselves to begin with the One much more freely than Plotinus does, and therefore to give the production of the Second and the Third a much more deductive and "causal" account than is justified. Plotinus himself is much more sparing in taking the point of view of the One, seeking reasons for its "overflow," or characterizing what results in that direction. Much more central to his own "logic of discovery" is intuiting, on the level of Nous itself, the evidence of its derivative and secondary nature. Nous after all is eternal, true, and essential being. In it all diversity is embraced by unity, all partiality made whole through interior communion and concentricity. As the domain of ideal being, unity is in a certain sense its very nature; as Aristotle puts it, "the idea explains what it means to be a thing and unity explains what it means to be an idea."⁸ As the domain of perfect transparency and reflective immediacy, Nous is flawlessly "present to itself," *synōn hautōi*, moving always and only within itself as it plays over the intelligible field that it unifies.⁹ Above all, Nous is the primal life and hence *autozōon*, self-living, composed in perfect self-equality, self-mastery, and self-sufficiency. In what possible way is Nous marked within itself as derivative? What distinguishes Plotinus is that he senses and responds to this question in a new and radical way, precisely within his experience of Nous.

It is said too quickly that Nous is manifestly derivative because it is a unity-in-multiplicity, the multiplicity namely of the numbered intelligibles. Many Middle Platonists had felt this problem and resolved it with invocation of Nous as the "divine Mind." In the radical intuition of Plotinus, nous is not just contaminated by numbersomeness but is itself the *origin* of number, which is to say that it is the aboriginal *twofold*. In that very compactness of unity signaled in the two terms cited above, *synōn hautōi*, present to itself, and *autozōon*, self-living, a certain intrinsic *doubleness* is signalled. Nous is both knowing and known, i.e. it is both Mind and Being. The very structure of selfhood is bipolar. The reflexivity of the reflexive pronoun, the self-reference involved in self-identity, requires that what is so addressed be taken twice, in itself and for itself. In the language of contemporary "intentional analysis," which has not just lexical but substantive proximity to Neoplatonic discourse, Nous is both noesis and noema. The unity of Nous is complete, but it is not simple. And so, Plotinus judges, it is not just given, but has arisen, and therefore has a source.

Perhaps the most graphic and dramatic portrayal of the noetic double as arising from its source, the simplex One, is as follows:

The One, perfect because It seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing overflows, as it were, and Its superabundance makes something other than Itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and so becomes its contemplator, Nous. Its halt and turning toward the One constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, Nous. Since it halts and turns toward the One that it may see, it becomes at once Nous and being.¹⁰

If, as Plotinus sometimes does, we take the image here of overflow another step and ask about the "stuff" or substrate, the "intelligible matter" which pours forth from the One, we could not do better than to call it, with A.H. Armstrong, an "indeterminate vitality."¹¹ It is this "life" which becomes determinate in the noetic twofold, functioning therein both as medium of its derivation and as mediator of its unity. And so Plotinus can refer to

that world There where there is no poverty or impotence, but everything is filled full of life, boiling with life. Things there flow in a way from a single source, not like one particular breath or warmth, but as if there were a single quality containing in itself and preserving all qualities.¹²

This background helps us understand the one passage where Plotinus seems consciously to advert to the noetic triad of *on*, *zōē*, *nous*, chapter 8 of VI 6 [34] "On Numbers." The derivation just reviewed is embedded in the opening propositions:

There is a living being (*zōon*) which is primal and by consequence self-living (*autozōon*); there is both Nous and there is Essence, actually being (*ousia hē ontōs*).¹³

It becomes clear this primal *zōon* is the Nous, and that precisely because it is self-living in the noetic dipole it can be addressed correctly by the noetic triad:

Now first all sensation is to be put away; by Nous is Nous contemplated. And it is to be taken to heart that in us is Life and Nous, not in mass but in massless power, and that true essence has given away mass and is power founded upon itself, not some feeble thing, but altogether most living and most intelligent — nothing more living, nothing more intelligent, nothing more essentially real. . . .

If being (*to einai*) is sought, it is to be sought especially in what is most being; and if wholly knowing (*to noein holōs*), then in what is most Nous; and so too of Life itself.

So if one needs to take primal Being as being first, and then Nous, and then the living being (for this already seems to contain all things), then Nous is second (for it is an activity of essence).¹⁴

Plotinus here strongly registers the fact that considerations of *order* attach to discussions of the noetic triad, but insists on a revisionist arrangement. Being is first, second Nous, third Life. The third term is the mediating and unifying factor, and in this respect Plotinus gives the triad its canonical dialectical form. But he has reversed the second and the third moments with regard to the "content."

It is worth pointing out that because Plotinus is here so plainly commenting on the horizontal *on*, *zōē*, *nous* triad, it is clear that the "Nous" which is accounted second is not the Second Hypostasis in distinction to the First, but that hypostasis taken in relation to itself, as *autozōon*, and hence at first Being, and then Nous. Neither is there any exceptional designation of the First One as "primal Being." The series *on*, *nous*, *zōē* seems to be a conscious and deliberate adaptation of the more celebrated Chaldaean order.

Like Plotinus, Marius Victorinus has reasons of his own for considering the noetic triad, and does not merely take it up because it is a famous topic. His context is the effort of Christian theology to lay out some horizontal dialectic for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the wake of the catastrophic wrong-headedness exposed by the Arian controversy. Arianism is simply a vertical dialectic rigorously imposed. The error of Arianism is not subordinationism, if that means that the Son is second after and dependent upon the Father, because an asymmetry of this kind is built into doctrine by the New Testament. The error of Arianism is to think that the systematic question of the distinction between First and Second in the Neoplatonic hypostatic series has anything to do with the "three hypostases" of the Christian trinity. There is a deep question in trinitarian theology that is structured according to the ontological difference between the First One and the Being One — the question namely whether beyond the divine life which is Father, Son, and Spirit there is an absolute Godhead — but this is *not* the question that led Latin trinitarianism to adapt Neoplatonism. That question, which arises in the dialectic we have called "horizontal," asks about *mediation* within the structure of *self-constitution*.

Whether the structure of self-constitution is itself "derived" is not, in the Christian theological sense, a trinitarian question.

Marius Victorinus expounds the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the Christian scriptures as respectively *esse*, *vivere*, *intelligere*, and therefore as the unitary and creative principle that biblical faith calls God. There is no doubt that, following Porphyry, he has "telescoped" the Plotinian distinction between the One and Nous and, further, that he routinely confuses talk of the Father and the Son with talk about the First and the Second One. But what is interesting is the content of his triad, not its schema. He thinks *esse* and *vivere* make a pair, and that *intelligere* is the medium. What can we make of this?

Being for Marius is a moment of potentiality, not actuality. Of course it is potency, active power, not mere possibility incapable of its own act. But it is not "alone," so to speak, the divine creative principle. Creation is seen above all as a "doing," *agere*, and this requires not just agency but agitation. Being must become doing, and only living being can "do" anything. In the Gospel According to John, God in action is the Logos, and this Logos is "life" and the "light of men." God must "be," therefore, in such a way that life in action is already implicated in that being, and implicated not just in anticipation but in enactment.

From this it follows that the aboriginal divine "substance" (that is, *ousia*, the authentic being) is, as a matter of constitution and structure, eternally in action. In that action, being-as-potency, pure *esse*, is constantly coming into concretion or existence as *vivere*. As the pre-actual "to be" which harbors life as power, the divine substance is Father; as the living actuality which eternally declares and manifests the divine potency, God is Logos and Son. Along with the other "names of God" that Victorinus finds in scripture — Spirit, Wisdom, Nous — Logos designates the same as substance.¹⁵ And yet because that substance is the dyad of *esse* and *vivere*, the Logos "in whom was life" (*John* 1: 4) is the Son of the Father, the image or revelation of the invisible God.

In the Fourth Century the controlling context in Christianity for this kind of analysis was in part the interpretation of the *homoousion* in the creed of Nicaea. The term is notably ambiguous, quite apart from its contrast with the rejected term *homoiousion*, "like in substance." It can be taken to say that Father and Son are one single substance; but it can also imply, as the Latin translation that eventually became current, consubstantial, does imply, that each of Father and Son are equally substantial. Victorinus affirms both:

We hold therefore according to order, with the permission of God, that Father and Son are *homousion* and *homousia* according to identity in substance.¹⁶

Substance itself is the ground of this difference in God, because divine *einai* is both *on* and *zōē*, is internally dynamic in the form of this dyad.

But being and life express only the outgoing procession of divine power, its self-constitution as creative and salvific activity. Within the divine substance this difference is not just action but also contemplation. The very same Logos that is declarative in the Son is also recursive in the Spirit. What proceeds from divine Being as Life also returns upon divine Being as Mind, contemplative knowing or intelligence. Under this aspect, the very same substance that is Logos is also Wisdom, Nous, and Spirit. *Intelligere*, contemplative self-knowledge, is not super-added to the Father and Son as Being and Life, but is the medium of that very distinction. Being and Life are brought back to what they were from the start by the Nous, so that the third moment is again the first, and the gospel denomination "God is Spirit" (*John* 4: 24) identifies the one divine substance.¹⁷

It can be shown that Victorinus has achieved a dialectical analogue for the later Latin orthodox distinction between proper predication of such terms as "principle," "logos," "wisdom," "nous," and "spirit," which all denote substance, and the "appropriation" of such terms to one or another of the relational threesome. It is even possible to show that his handling of the reciprocities among the moments of the noetic triad amount to a functional precursor of the Augustinian doctrine of predication by relation. Our interest however does not attach to the question of his doctrinal orthodoxy, as though the Christian doctrine of the trinity were a formalism stabilized independent of philosophical reflection. The post-Augustinian orthodoxy of substance, relation, and appropriation is itself shaped by philosophical reflection on the noetic triad.

What springs to attention for us is the portrayal of Being and Life as the primary dyad, and of Nous as the mediating moment. For Plotinus, Being and Nous were the dyad, and the medium was Life. Is this difference empty schematism, or is there a corresponding phenomenology? We must turn to Augustine for this question, since it is he who first arrives at the noetic triad by means of an explicit and recognizable phenomenology.

3. Marius Victorinus and Augustine

A particularly sensitive calibration of the degree to which *The Trinity* of Augustine is in conscious conversation with Marius Victorinus can be derived from the question whether the Spirit is the "mother of the Son" and more generally a female principle in the divine. Marius embraces this view with enthusiasm,¹⁸ whereas Augustine, seeming to have Marius's very argument in view but citing it without attribution, reproves the thesis with barely concealed impatience.¹⁹ I judge that Augustine is aware of Victorinus as a theologian in his own right and not just as translator of Plotinus and Porphyry, but that he does not adopt or even consciously respond to the Porphyrian-Victorine analysis of the noetic triad itself. Where he does respond, and even dramatically build upon an opening in Victorinus, is in the thesis that human noetic life is an *image* of the divine noetic triad, and therefore offers a *via interior* for the argument to God as trinity.

That Augustine does not even understand the *esse, vivere, intelligere* triad is evident from his remarks about Porphyry in *The City of God*.²⁰ We know in general how clearly he found a doctrine of the Father and the Son in the "Platonic books,"²¹ and it appears that the theme he so interpreted was the derivation of the Second Hypostasis, Nous, from the First One. When he considered the Porphyrian discussion of the noetic triad, which apparently included the designation of *on, zōē, nous* as "three gods," he immediately assumed that the third term, *nous*, meant the Son, and was then perplexed by how *zōē* signified the Holy Spirit. But from our glance at Victorinus we see that this reading is entirely off the track, since there *vivere* is the Son and *intelligere* the Spirit. It is barely possible that Plotinus, who did make *zōē* the third and mediating term, is part of Augustine's confusion, but the noetic triad is so weakly thematized in Plotinus, compared to the elaborate and explicit application in Victorinus, that this seems to me unlikely.

As I will argue, Augustine comes to a dialectical pattern in the "trinity which is God" analogous to the Neoplatonic noetic triad not at all through a scholarly engagement of "the Platonists," but from a direct intentional analysis of his own noetic experience. The schema of his triad, *memoria, intelligentia, voluntas*, is too eccentric to be an adaptation of any of Plotinus, Victorinus, or Porphyry: *intelligentia* is Nous, and one can think of ways to make the *voluntas* be Life, but Augustinian *memoria* is simply *sui generis*, an expression of his own introspective genius, and even Thomas Aquinas could not understand how it could be the first hypostasis or *esse* of the human mind.

It was not the content of his noetic analysis that Augustine took from Victorinus, but instead the sheer invitation to explore such an analysis as an image of the divine trinity. As Victorinus wrote,

our soul is "according to the image" [*Gen.* 1: 26] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. If indeed Christ is life and Logos, he is image of God, image in which God the Father is seen, that is, in life one sees "to be." For this is the image, as was said. And if Christ is life, but "to live" is the Logos, and if life itself is "to be," and "to be" is the Father, if again life itself is "to understand," and this is the Holy Spirit, all these are three, in each one are the three, and the three are one and absolutely *homousia*. If then the soul as soul is at once "to be" of soul, "to live" and "to understand," if it is therefore three, the soul is the image of the image of the Triad on high.²²

In order to appreciate the innovation involved in this proposal, it is worthwhile to situate Augustine within the history of specifically Christian dogmatic trinitarianism.

It is a remarkable fact, demonstrated at length by John Edward Sullivan,²³ that no major theologian before Augustine had argued that the image of God in man included an image of the divine trinity. To the contrary, since "image of God" meant preeminently the Son, man's being "in the image" meant being "in the Son," called to participate in the Logos. Insofar as an avenue for argument to God was seen to be opened by Genesis 1:26, it concluded to the Son specifically, and then to the Father only "in the Son."

Augustine by contrast argues to the entire trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, first "in an image in an enigma" (*I Cor.* 13: 12), and then by transformation into the image of glory (*II Cor.* 3: 18). In the pre-Augustinian Greek theology, the "vision of God" in the consummation would be a human participation in the Son's vision of the Father; in Augustine the vision is of the entire trinity.²⁴

Coordinate with this innovation in Augustine is his shift in the identification of God the creator. In the New Testament and even still in the Cappadocians, God the creator is the Father. Though he creates through his Logos, which by the Nicene creed is said to be not just equal to God but "God from God," it remains true prior to Augustine that the doctrine of creation is part of the article on the Father, who is strictly identified as the Lord God of the Old Testament. But in four long exegetical books at the beginning of *The Trinity*, Augustine argues in detail that the Lord God and creator is the trinity itself, no longer the Father.

Compared therefore to the Greek Christian tradition, both the doctrine of God and of man the image of God have been trinitized with a new radicality in Augustine. One of the familiar sticking points in Augustinian interpretation, however, is the question of which of these innovations is the substantive discovery and which is epiphenomenal. The treatise *On The Trinity* itself is divided in two, with the exegetical prelude and the exposition of the logic of substance and relation occupying the first half (Books I-VII), and the argument via the unveiling of the trinity in the mind the second half (Books VIII-XV). Especially as the distinction between Reason and Revelation took on its medieval exclusivity and the trinity became a paradigm "datum of revelation," it was the first half that was regarded as authoritative doctrine, with the second relegated to the position of mere illustration, eventually no more privileged than images like spring, stream, water. In the spiritual theology that ran through Bonaventure the ascent through the interior triad was kept intact, but precisely as a spiritual itinerary, and not the foundation for the truth of doctrine itself.

My own conviction is that the logic of relation in Augustine is *consequent* upon his breakthrough with the noetic triad, or better, that the two halves of his work in *The Trinity* comprise a single intuition. It is important first of all to note that the phenomenology of *memoria*, *intelligentia*, and *voluntas* which he drives to ever greater interiority, transparency, and self-sufficiency is a *noetic* analysis and not, as so often expressed, a "psychology." The three moments, especially when purged of all dependency on external being so as to be pure self-memory, self-understanding, and self-love, are the self-constituted life of the *mens animi*, the *mind* of the soul. They are not, in the medieval or modern sense, "faculties" of the soul, but instead the internal structure of pure spiritual self-disclosedness. The dialectical pattern Augustine finds in them makes the third term, the *voluntas*, the mediating or unifying moment. Mind for Augustine is always retention begetting attention in the unity of an intention. In the way this triad unfolds "in the image," the uniting intentionality on any given level of "conversion to the inner man" is already alive on the next higher level, and as the ascending meditation proceeds we reach at last the level where the freedom of the mind is the Spirit of God itself, as *donum dei* in the subjective genitive,²⁵ and therefore the ground of participation in the trinitarian life. Within the divine life on the other hand, the unification of Father and Son in the one Spirit constitutes the "giveability" of that life, its communicability as life. The noetic triad is mind given and mind received, alike the structure of creative exemplarity and of created imaging.

It follows on my account that God the trinity in Augustine subsists on the level of the Plotinian *second* hypostasis and is an *on*, *nous*, *zōē* structure. This is confirmed in the classic Latin metaphysics for which God is *summum ens*, the highest being, spiritual substance in the sense of mind-like being. It is equally confirmed by the criticism of the metaphysical God in the apophatic tradition as it comes to a head, through Dionysius, in the Godhead beyond the trinity of Meister Eckhart and the author of the "Cloud of Unknowing."

The effect of Augustine's original application of the noetic triad to the doctrine of the trinity was to claim the trinity for an emphatically kataphatic theology, a theology of "horizontal" self-constitution on the level of *Nous*. This theology not only broke with the old efforts to model the trinity in the vertical hypostatic series of Plotinus, but dissolved the hypernoetic and hyperontic One entirely into the mystery of noetic or spiritual freedom. To the Plotinian intuition that even in the perfection of its unity the freedom was derived, not aboriginal, metaphysical trinitarianism would counterpose the "*causa sui*." If the apophatic mystic could not stop with this, he could no longer use the trinity against it.

4. Concluding Observation

What then is the noetic triad about? I would argue that it is about that kind of being which *is* as it is *revealed*, whose very "to be" is disclosedness. In the New Testament Father, Son, and Spirit are the economy of revelation, and in no way speculation about the nature of the divine principle "in itself." No one knows the Father but the Son and anyone to whom the Son reveals him; but no one can confess that Jesus is Lord, or in union with him pray as Son to the Father, except by the Spirit; and yet the Spirit does not speak for itself, but what it hears it speaks, and its presence brings the Father and the Son. This dialectic of revelation, given classic form in the Synoptic Icon (the baptismal scene) and in the Last Supper discourse in the Fourth Gospel (*John* 14-17), does not purport to unfold a divine substance, but only a divine life. If the Father in this scheme is invisible, if exposure to the Father opens an abyss, the abyss is here the revealed abyss, not the hidden one, the abyss experienced in finite and historical memory, not in the search for an ever more transcendently "first" First Principle.

Because it developed in dialogue with the Neoplatonic form of the search for the transcendent First, the doctrine of the trinity has come to seem the most intemperate fruit of metaphysical positivism in theology.

But if, like the noetic triad which contributed so much to its historical development, the trinity is simply being, light, and life having dawned on itself, then trinitarian theology can be quite agnostic about Principles and still be faithful to the divine which approaches and withdraws.

NOTES

1. *Allogenes*, CG xi 3, 47, 8-37.
2. Ed. Kroll, p. 18, as cited by R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972), p. 106.
3. *Porphyre et Victorinus* (Paris, 1968). For discussion of Hadot's "maximalism" about Porphyry's role between Plotinus and Augustine, see the "Introduction" to *Marius Victorinus: Theological Treatises on the Trinity* (The Fathers of the Church, 1978), translated by Mary T. Clark, R.S.C.J., pp. 1-10; and also John J. O'Meara, "The Neoplatonism of Augustine," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara (I.S.N.S. at SUNY Press, 1982), pp. 34-35. A "minimalist" position is taken by Robert J. O'Connell, S.J., in *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man* (Harvard, 1962), pp. 286-291, and *St. Augustine's Confessions* (Harvard, 1969), *passim*.
4. See, for Nous, V 2 [11], 1.
5. Cf. Wallis, pp. 126-127; also A.C. Lloyd, "The Later Neoplatonists," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (1970), pp. 298-301. My account does not follow Lloyd completely but is taken from Iamblichus's analysis of time in the materials assembled by S. Sambursky and S. Pines, *The Concept of Time in Later Neoplatonism* (Jerusalem, 1972).
6. Wallis, p. 106, is therefore mistaken, I believe, when he sets these two forms of the noetic triad — being, life, nous and subsistence, power, nous — in parallel to abiding, procession, and reversion. There is interaction, but not parallel, as I suggest in section 2 below.
7. An exceptionally lucid and instructive presentation by Jay Bregman, "Trinity versus Quaternity in Later Neoplatonism," was presented in the working group on Platonism and Neoplatonism, annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, December 22, 1983.
8. *Metaphysics* A7, 988b5.
9. That the *energeia* of Nous involves motion, but pure motion (*kinēsis kathara*), was first pointed out by A.H. Armstrong in his 1969 Royaumont paper, "Eternity, Life, and Movement in Plotinus's Accounts of Nous," in *Le Néoplatonisme* (Paris, 1971), pp. 67-76. Perhaps the most dramatic text is VI 7 [38], 13, with its assertion of a noetic *planē*, "*nous en hautōi planēthentos*."
10. V 2 [11], 1, translated A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinus* (New York, 1962), p. 51.
11. "Plotinus," in the *Cambridge History*, p. 241.
12. VI 7 [38], 12, 22-26, as cited by Armstrong, *ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

13. VI 6 [34], 8, 1-2, my translation.
14. Ibid., lines 7-13, 15-22.
15. *Adv. Ar.* IB, 55, ed. M.T. Clark.
16. *Adv. Ar.* IB, 60.
17. Cf. M.T. Clark's discussion, "Introduction," pp. 13-16, especially paragraph (18).
18. *Adv. Ar.* IB, 56.
19. *The Trinity (De trinitate)*, XII 5, 5-6, 8.
20. *Civ. Dei* X 23 and 29.
21. *Conf.* VII 9, 13.
22. *Adv. Ar.* IB, 63. Compare the lines following this citation with Augustine, *Trin.* IX 4, 4-5, 8.
23. John Edward Sullivan, O.P., *The Image of God: The Doctrine of St. Augustine and Its Influence* (Dubuque, Iowa: Priory Press, 1963).
24. Cf. esp. XIV, 10-19.
25. XV 19, 36.