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God and Self in *Confessiones* IV and Beyond: *Therapeia*, Self-Presence, and Ontological Contingency in Augustine, Seneca, and Heidegger

1. Introduction

This article examines the account of the death of Augustine's close friend recounted in the fourth book of the *Confessiones* from the perspective of classical philosophy as a form of therapy. In the first section, I provide an overview of this therapeutic approach to philosophy, beginning with some of the earliest Greek philosophers and moving into Latin antiquity. Then I turn to the central focus of this study, namely the relevant passage of *Confessiones* 4. After summarising this passage, I analyse three key themes in Augustine's narrative. First, I investigate how Augustine's misery and his attempts to avoid it reveal to him the truth that he is always present to himself. Secondly, Augustine is able to identify in retrospect the subjective features of his experience that caused him such suffering, in particular the improper love of worldly things. In ontological terms, Augustine had failed to understand the finite and contingent nature of mundane reality. I consider the psychological effects of this position on Augustine's own state. In exploring these two points, I relate Augustine's treatment of these themes to his classical predecessors and philosophical posterity, in particular Seneca and Heidegger, respectively. Finally, I turn to a distinctively Christian theme, bringing to light a less

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obvious aspect of this passage, namely the interplay of divine presence and absence. The events of Augustine's life bespeak God's activity and presence therein.

The upshot of this research is an exercise in *cogitare cum Augustino*, a philosophical meditation on metaphysical truths lying hidden in plain sight. Though open to observation, these truths are often only recognised in light of an exceptional event. Such intense "contrast experiences" are not aberrations, but rather represent more intense realisations of being which one has overlooked or forgotten. The reflection on lived experience constitutes a therapeutic pedagogical programme whereby the soul arrives at a proper understanding of the world.

Before proceeding to the text of the *Confessiones* itself, let us briefly consider Augustine's place in the broader scope of the history of philosophy. This will allow both allow us better to understand the content of the relevant location and to situate it within its appropriate intellectual context, namely philosophy as *therapeia*.

2. Classical Philosophy as Therapy

The first task of this article is to situate Augustine within the context of classical philosophy. Through a consideration of scholarly experts, I shall demonstrate not only that classical philosophy understood itself in therapeutic terms, but also that Augustine himself should be situated in this tradition. On this basis, I shall argue that the relevant portion of *Confessiones* 4 should be read as an instance of such *therapeia*.

Thanks to the research of Pierre Hadot, it has become clear how classical philosophy, at least as early as Socrates (469-399 BCE), was construed primarily as a way of life[2]. Robert Cushman, former Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Duke University's Divinity School, confirms this interpretation of early philosophy, in particular in Plato's corpus[3]. Indeed,

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[2] D. Praet, *Augustine of Hippo and Michel Foucault's History of Sexuality*, in: *Nos sumus tempora: Studies on Augustine and his Reception Offered to Mathijs Lamberigts*, ed. A. Dupont – W. François – J. Leemans, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 316, Leuven – Paris – Bristol 2020, p. 213-235, here p. 225. See also W. Löhr, *Christianity as Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives of an Ancient Intellectual Project*, "Vigiliae Christianae" 64/2 (2010) p. 160-188.

[3] R. Cushman, *Therapeia: Plato's Conception of Philosophy*, New Brunswick – London 2002.

as the title of his monograph suggests, Cushman construes Plato's philosophy as a form of *therapeia*. He explains how Plato understood the human soul as trapped in a disordered state, with the desire for inferior, material reality dominating. Plato realised that to convince others of their error, he needed more than mere intellectual argument[4]. According to Cushman, Plato articulates his philosophical-therapeutic model to address the challenge presented by the confused state of human nature[5]. In other words, Plato called for a renovation, indeed, a *conversion* (*metastrophe*) of the self, which involved ethical and affective transformation.

As Cushman explains, Platonic philosophy – in particular dialectic – is *therapeutic* to the extent that it disabuses one of false beliefs and leads one to truth[6]. For Plato, philosophy is the therapy necessary to correct one's incorrect perception of reality. This comprehensive therapeutic process can be described as conversion[7]. Plato recognises that proper knowledge requires a full renovation and reorientation of the mind. Hence philosophical education is without exaggeration a form of *therapeia*[8].

According to Plato, one grows in knowledge, and indeed, knowledge of self, by engaging in a full reflection on one's experience and the implications thereof[9]. Ultimately, introspective philosophical investigation leads one to realise one's errors and brings one to a crossroads: either one will remain in intolerable contradiction with oneself, or one will renounce one's quondam false beliefs and open oneself to growth. This latter step, continues Cushman, involves an *ethical* choice and requires humility[10]. I contend that in locations such as *Confessiones* 4, Augustine is doing precisely this, namely drawing out the implications of his experience through a reflective narration.

Before continuing, I would like to note two further links between Cushman's discussion of Plato and Augustine. According to Plato, writes Cushman, knowledge depends upon the mind's correct disposition towards reality[11]. As Augustine relates concerning his mental state ca. 375/376, he held a flawed understanding of the world, which was only corrected

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4 Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 71, 144, 150, 298.
5 Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 298.
6 Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 300.
7 Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 147.
8 Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. xxi.
9 Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 236.
10 Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 71, 147, 233, 235, 236, 298, 299.
11 Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 147.

through a confrontation with the phenomenon of loss and grief. In addition, Plato himself acknowledges the limitations of his own philosophical pedagogy. This focus on philosophy as therapy involving conversion, as well as the apparent necessity of extrinsic assistance, further motivate a consideration of Augustine. Indeed, in the final section of this article, I shall consider Augustine's understanding of the rôle of *conuersio* in his own life, especially in the *Confessiones*.

As Dany Praet states, through a programme of ethical and intellectual praxis, philosophers of antiquity addressed not only life's various challenges, but also the challenge constituted by life itself[12]. According to Cicero – who was a key figure in mediating Greek philosophy to the Latin world in general and Augustine in particular[13] – the soul may experience great suffering in this life. Unlike physical ailments, the causes of and solutions to which originate outside of the body, the soul is the source of its own suffering. However, as Johannes Brachtendorf writes, the capacity to counteract such pain also lies within the soul's power, namely the *therapy of philosophy*[14].

Other philosophers in the Latin tradition engaged in introspection and dialogue to deal with the challenges posed by the fleeting and unstable nature of human existence[15]. One of these was Seneca, who, according to Christopher Star, devoted significant attention to the problem of the self and even developed a unique vocabulary to discuss it[16]. Notably, John Rist claims that Seneca was a source for Augustine's conception of self-care[17], although the connection of these two thinkers remains relatively unexplored[18]. In any case, Seneca's philosophy focused extensively on the self. He advocated a life of contemplation and introspection[19]. Furthermore, Seneca was active during a period in which the lived experience of philos-

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[12] Praet, *Augustine of Hippo and Michel Foucault's History of Sexuality*, p. 225.

[13] M. Foley, *Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues*, "Revue des Études Augustiniennes" 43 (1999) p. 51-77, here p. 53.

[14] J. Brachtendorf, *Cicero and Augustine on the Passions*, "Revue des Études Augustiniennes" 43 (1997) p. 289-308, here p. 289-290, 295.

[15] A. Michel, *Dialogue philosophique et vie intérieure: Cicéron, Sénèque, Saint Augustin*, "Helmantica" 28 (1977) p. 353-376, here p. 365.

[16] C. Star, *Seneca*, London 2017, p. 33.

[17] J. Rist, *What is a Person? Realities, Constructs, Illusions*, Cambridge 2019, p. 47.

[18] J. Lagouanère, *Agustín lector de Séneca: el caso de la bona uoluntas*, "Augustinus" 64/252-253 (2019) p. 193-202, here p. 193. However, Stock is less certain of this connection. See B. Stock, *The Integrated Self: Augustine, the Bible, and Ancient Thought*, Philadelphia 2017, n. 21 to the Introduction.

[19] Star, *Seneca*, p. 32, 33, 56.

ophy was paramount[20]. As Star writes, “The practice of philosophy itself came to be not only a process of self-discovery, but also a continual process of *therapy* and self-creation. For the Stoics, philosophy was not simply confined to the lecture halls, but a lived experience”[21].

This survey of classical philosophy is relevant to the present task because it illustrates the understanding of philosophy that Augustine inherited and in some ways transformed. What I want to suggest is that insofar as one is talking about the *Confessiones*, one is speaking of Augustine’s own attempts at philosophical therapy. Indeed, according to Charlotte Köckert, in his early career, Augustine deliberately operated within the classical philosophical tradition of seeking happiness through various practises, a tradition which even in his time was truly ancient[22]. According to Cushman, Augustine inherits the Platonic tradition of philosophy, in particular in virtue of his emphasis on the necessity of moral transformation for the attainment of knowledge[23]. The psychologist Philip Woollcott interprets the *Confessiones* as a form of therapy[24]. He describes Augustine’s work as a “great therapeutic effort” and identifies therein a certain playful spontaneity which, in my estimation, is consistent with contemporary therapeutic methods[25]. In his comparative study of Augustine and Freud, William B. Parsons also characterises Augustine’s *Confessiones* as a form of therapy (I return to Parsons’ treatment of the *Confessiones* in Section 5b *infra*)[26]. These insights indicate, I argue, that the (or at least a) proper hermeneutical framework for the interpretation of *Confessiones* 4 is that of philosophy as *therapeia*.

To summarise the foregoing section, a consideration of secondary literature has demonstrated that classical philosophy was a holistic form of therapy that one could apply to oneself. It served not only to address *ad hoc* concerns arising throughout one’s life, but more fundamentally to help one to deal with life itself. This contextual background informed Augustine’s

[20] Star, *Seneca*, p. 32.

[21] Star, *Seneca*, p. 33; emphasis mine.

[22] C. Köckert, *Augustine and Nebridius (Augustine, epp. 3–14): Two Christian Intellectuals and Their Project of a Philosophical Life*, “Revue d’études augustiniennes et patristiques” 62 (2016) p. 235-262, here p. 239-240.

[23] Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 52-54.

[24] Parsons, *Freud and Augustine in Dialogue*, 15.

[25] P. Woollcott, *Some Considerations of Creativity and Religious Experience in St. Augustine of Hippo*, “Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion” 5/2 (1966) p. 273-283, here p. 283.

[26] Parsons, *Freud and Augustine in Dialogue*, p. 4-5, 25.

own thought. These observations will provide a framework for my reading and interpretation of *Confessiones* 4 as a paradigmatic instance of Augustine performing philosophical therapy.

3. The Death of Augustine's Friend

The account of the death of Augustine's close friend, which occurred ca. 375/376, and thus at least two decades prior to the composition of the *Confessiones*, appears in the fourth book. This book, writes James O'Donnell, is the one most concerned with death[27]. When his friend – whom Augustine leaves anonymous in his account – fell severely ill, Augustine had hastened to see him. Initially he lay unconscious, during which time he was baptised. Afterwards he recovered briefly, enough to speak with Augustine, who attempted to joke with him about his baptism. However, Augustine's friend rebuked him severely, leaving Augustine utterly astonished and discomfited. In his retrospective account, Augustine believes that his friend ultimately died so that he could be safe from the "heretical" Augustine[28].

Shortly thereafter, the friend's condition deteriorated, and he soon expired[29]. As a result, Augustine describes his heart as being "completely darkened" ("contenebratum") with grief ("dolore")[30]. Augustine provides a haunting account of how his entire lived experience was transfigured, resulting in tremendous pain ("cruciatum immanem")[31]. Now everything reminds him of his loss. Whatever he sees becomes hateful to him; it is like "death" because his friend is no longer there. Even his home no longer provides any comfort[32]. (I shall return to this point about God's absence in Section 5 *infra*, for I believe it provides an insight into the deeper theological stakes of this particular passage of the *Confessiones*).

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[27] Augustyn, *Confessiones*, ed. J.J. O'Donnell, Oxford 1992, at 4, 4, 9. Hereafter, when citing O'Donnell's commentary, I use his name and the location in *conf.* on which he is commenting. I have consulted the edition of the text available at https://www.stoa.org/hippo/ (accessed: 31.03.2022).

[28] Augustine, *Confessiones*, tr. F.J. Sheed, ed. M. Foley, Indianapolis – Cambridge 2006, at 4, 4, 8 (herafter referenced as *conf.* with localisation).

[29] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 8.

[30] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9.

[31] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9. The translation "tremendous pain" is mine. Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

[32] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9.

Continuing with the narrative of Book IV, Augustine recounts how at that time he believed in a false God ("phantasma"), and thus his soul would not obey the psalmist's command to hope in God[33]. What one can observe here, I argue, is a deeply traumatic experience of grief which begins to disabuse Augustine of certain false notions he had, for instance about the impermanence of human life and his understanding of God. Furthermore, in combination with his narrative reflection in the *Confessiones*, Augustine came to realise the truth of the immediacy of self-presence. In performing this reflection on his experience, it seems to me that Augustine is engaging in precisely the form of philosophical therapy described above. Indeed, Augustine's own observations support this claim, in particular how his grief and its aftermath led him to become a question to himself[34].

As Augustine's narrative reflection continues, it discloses further psychological insights, which, when properly interpreted and applied, I argue, can have a therapeutic effect. At 4, 5, 10, Augustine considers his own (apparently natural) response to his friend's death, namely weeping. Among other things, he notices that weeping replaced the friend in bringing him any kind of delight. Why, Augustine wonders, did he cry so much? What point did it serve? And why did he cry out to God in particular? According to O'Donnell, Augustine raises several possibilities for why his tears may have been pleasant, but the conclusion appears to be that although they are sweet in relation to the pain one is experiencing, tears are actually bitter[35]. That is, his tears were comforting only to the extent that he was otherwise miserable. Perhaps weeping, Augustine suggests, is, so to speak, *bittersweet*[36]. Augustine ultimately concludes that he resorted to tears because he had not yet learned the appropriate way of loving his friend[37].

In the wake of his loss, Augustine realised other notable aspects of his psychological state. He felt that his deceased friend was his counterpart. O'Donnell notes that the Augustine of 375/376 would have looked at his grief in terms of classical myth[38]. That is, Augustine was afraid to live (as half a person) and afraid to die (lest his friend too be utterly destroyed).

[33] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9.
[34] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9.
[35] Augustinus, *Confessiones*, 4, 5, 10.
[36] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 5, 10.
[37] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 5, 10.
[38] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 6, 11. However, Augustine suggests in his *Retractationes* 2, 6, 2 that even this reference is more sentimental than expressive of Christian love.

Thus he reached an impasse: he was afraid to die, yet hated living[39]. In my estimation, this passage shows that Augustine's false beliefs about the nature of created being, combined with the death of his friend, led him to an unbearable inner state, in particular wanting neither to live nor to die. Because of this incoherence, Augustine tries to escape from himself, rather than confront his inner turmoil. Notably, this reflects the critical point to which Platonic *therapeia* is designed to lead the soul (cf. section 1, *supra*). When one reaches this fork in the road, one has the opportunity to renounce one's false opinions and grow in truth[40]. In Augustine's case, however, he had to await comprehensive moral transformation.

Despite his various attempts to flee from himself and his own unbearable state, Augustine was unsuccessful. It remained the case that he was constantly reminded of his loss by the absence of his friend, and only groaning and tears could provide any relief, however partial. Ultimately, Augustine changed his surroundings and moved to Carthage, for at least in this new place his eyes were not accustomed to seeking his friend[41]. In the following section, I shall discuss the work of Seneca on self-presence, the purpose of which is to illuminate how in fleeing to Carthage, Augustine is still engaged in the misguided and ultimately unattainable desire to escape himself.

4. Immediacy of Self-Presence

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
Milton, *Paradise Lost* I, 254-255

The sudden and irrevocable rupture in Augustine's relationship with his friend reveals to him what was always already the case, namely that he is ineluctably with and present to himself. In *Confessiones* 4, Augustine carries his wounded soul like a burden ("portabam enim concisam et cruentem animam meam impatientem portari a me, et ubi eam ponerem non inueniebam")[42]. Augustine tries to place his soul somewhere where it can find rest, but it only falls down upon him again[43]. He could neither stand to

39 Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 6, 11.
40 Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 71, 147, 233, 235, 236, 298.
41 Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.
42 Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.
43 Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.

be with himself, nor could he escape from himself[44]. Augustine relates his unsuccessful attempts to find refuge in sense pleasures, with which he was already familiar[45]. As O'Donnell states in his commentary on *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12, Augustine had rested in the "concupiscentia carnis" and subsequently the "concupiscentia oculorum"[46]. However, when confronted with the death of his friend, these distractions no longer sufficed as an escape from life's challenges[47]. Thus Augustine becomes for himself an "infelix locus": No matter what he did, he could find no rest, no peace. Indeed, where could one go, Augustine wonders, to escape from oneself?[48] In this negative way, I argue, Augustine is confronted with the truth of the immediacy of self-presence.

4.1. The Immediacy of Self-Presence in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*

Seneca discusses this theme of immediate self-presence in one of his two philosophical *opera magna*, the *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*. According to Star, though Seneca's philosophical works are generally difficult to date with any precision, it is fairly clear that these letters, which are mostly extant, were composed between 62 and 65 CE[49]. They may seem autobiographical, but as Star writes, the *Epistulae* are "conscious literary and philosophical constructions"[50] intended as a model for others to emulate[51]. They are also an example of spiritual exercises[52]. As Alain Michel observes, in his missives to Lucilius, Seneca is teaching his friend how to manage the vicissitudes of life, and indeed, how to die[53].

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[44] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12: "ego mihi remanseram infelix locus, ubi nec esse possem nec inde recedere. quo enim cor meum fugeret a corde meo? quo a me ipso fugerem? quo non me sequerer?".

[45] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.

[46] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.

[47] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.

[48] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.

[49] Star, *Seneca*, p. 55, 56.

[50] Star, *Seneca*, p. 60.

[51] Star, *Seneca*, p. 60-61.

[52] Star, *Seneca*, p. 61.

[53] Michel, *Dialogue philosophique et vie intérieure*, p. 368.

Seneca directly addresses self-presence in two of his *Epistulae Morales*, numbers 28 and 104. He opens the former with a rebuke of Lucilius, stating that in the attempt to flee from oneself, one is nonetheless present[54]:

> Do you think you are the only one this has happened to? Are you amazed to find that even with such extensive travel, to so many varied locales, you have not managed to shake off gloom and heaviness from your mind? As if that were a new experience! You must change the mind, not the venue. Though you cross the sea, though "lands and cities drop away," as our poet Virgil says, still your faults will follow you wherever you go[55].

In other words, no amount of movement will make any difference until one addresses the source of one's turmoil, one's own self. One must acquire knowledge and skills for the mind, and this cannot be accomplished through travel[56]. In both *epistola* 28 and *epistola* 104, Seneca quotes Socrates to the effect that one always travels with oneself, and indeed, all of one's spiritual and mental burdens[57]. One overcomes one's inner problems not by local motion but by changing oneself and one's character[58]. Seneca, I contend, has here presented a therapeutic lesson for his readers.

In these letters, Seneca takes a further step, arguing that travel undertaken for the sake of escaping one's problems may actually make matters worse. He likens the burdens of the mind to the cargo of a ship, which is tossed around and may cause a ship to capsize[59]. In addition, he suggests that such movement from place to place is harmful because it is like "jostling someone who is sick"[60]. The various trips one takes are vain attempts to distract oneself from difficulties one is experiencing, and their success becomes increasingly ephemeral[61]. Indeed, the novelty simply irritates one further and makes one want to leave the new place as soon

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[54] For a further discussion of *Confessiones* IV in light of Latin literature, see Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.

[55] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, ed. R. Gummere, London 1917-1925; Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letters on Ethics to Lucilius*, tr. M. Graver – A.A. Long, The Complete Works of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Chicago – London 2015, *ep.* 28, 1, p. 96-97 (hereafter cited with localisation and page numbers in the translation).

[56] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 19, p. 415.

[57] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 2; 104, 7; 17-18, p. 96-97; 413; 415.

[58] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 8, p. 413.

[59] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 3, p. 97.

[60] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 3, tr. Graver – Long, p. 97.

[61] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 13, p. 414.

as one arrives[62]. Seneca's text suggests that this continuous avoidance, though present in the form of movement from place to place, can also be realised in the form of a constant shift in one's attention. Even in calm places, one finds a way to distract oneself[63]. In my estimation, Seneca's observation in this context is noteworthy, insofar as it radicalises the presence of self to self. Moreover, he continues the therapeutic emphasis on relieving one's inner turmoil.

Furthermore, one can locate in Seneca's text a distinction between proper travel on the one hand and wandering on the other[64]. When one's soul is in turmoil, one is really searching for happiness, but this is not a place, but a state of mind[65]. I would argue that one sees a similar dynamic in Augustine's restless and frantic search for security and peace in the various distractions and pleasures of the flesh, and ultimately his movement to Carthage. In doing this, Augustine intensified his *auersio* from himself and from God (for more on *auersio*, cf. section 5a *infra*), yielding only greater unhappiness. I interpret Seneca as arguing that wandering becomes a form of avoidance, in particular the ineluctable aspects of the human condition. No movement in space, he counsels, can remove the burden of anxiety that comes from the improper approach to human existence[66].

4.1.1. Qualifications of Seneca's Position

Seneca's argument therefore is that through travel one may learn and perceive interesting things in the world, yet "it will not improve [one], either in body or in mind"[67]. In light of Seneca's claims, I would like to play "devil's advocate". Any reader, but especially a contemporary one, may question Seneca's account in the following manner. Seneca seems to speak like a radical dualist, as if the mind and the body were entirely separate. Yet the Stoics acknowledged that human persons are somehow a unity of body and mind[68]. If that is the case, then how can Seneca maintain strictly

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62 Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 14, p. 415.

63 Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 7, p. 413.

64 Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 16, p. 415.

65 Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 5, p. 97.

66 Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 19, p. 415-16.

67 Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 15, tr. Graver – Long, p. 415.

68 See, *inter alia*, C. Gill, *The Ancient Self: Issues and Approaches*, in: *Ancient Philosophy of the Self*, ed. P. Remes – J. Sihvola, Springer 2008, p. 35-56, here p. 52.

that one's location has no bearing on one's mental state? It seems fairly intuitive and unobjectionable to suppose that going to different places has a salubrious effect on the mind. In the midst of the day, one leaves one's home or one's office to "get some fresh air", and ideally one takes a holiday from time to time to escape the stresses of one's daily life and recharge. The spiritual benefit of changing one's location seems so obvious that it hardly requires argument. In general terms, how can one account for the apparently counterintuitive claim that one's mental state can and should be regulated apart from one's spatial location?

I contend that the foregoing observations – some of which Seneca himself seems to anticipate – help to clarify the true sense of his argument. Seneca is certainly aware of and even acknowledges the importance of one's environment. In this context, however, he himself adds some qualifications which I would like to emphasise. For one, the individual development of the person must be taken into consideration. While some souls are strong and able to manage in difficult situations, others are weak, and require greater serenity in their surroundings[69]. Though external factors, such as the company one keeps, can cause one harm or move one to evil, in such a case the vice already has established a place in one's soul[70]. Moreover, even a sound mind should not go in search of distraction. The wise person does not seek the tumult of political life, but endures it if necessary[71]. Nonetheless, one can and indeed must preserve some mental quietude even in the midst of the frenetic activity of the city[72].

On the basis of the foregoing observations from Seneca's text, I interpret him as arguing that one's happiness is a state of the soul, and thus to achieve it the soul itself must be treated. Seneca himself suggests that in certain cases, local motion could be foreseen as practically necessary, though always as a means to the end of philosophical-psychological therapy: "Where you go matters less than who you are when you go"[73]. The more one acknowledges this truth, the more one is able to maintain one's peace of mind in a variety of circumstances, even very difficult ones[74]. This acknowledgement also opens one to a greater contact with one's fellow human beings and the world as a whole, allowing one to embrace a tru-

[69] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 6, p. 97.
[70] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 21, p. 416.
[71] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 7, p. 98.
[72] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 7, p. 413.
[73] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 4, tr. Graver – Long, p. 97.
[74] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 4, p. 97.

ly cosmopolitan spirit, according to which one's "homeland is the entire world"[75].

4.1.2. Seneca's Suggested Programme

If one reads Seneca's account as a form of therapy, his diagnosis of one's condition has been clarified. From this the question of treatment naturally arises. Quoting Epicurus, Seneca states that the first step to healing is the acknowledgement of one's faults. Only then can one even consider improvement[76]. Furthermore, Seneca suggests that a major fault is the failure to regulate one's desires[77]. In particular, one must free oneself from the love of wealth and pleasure, which continue to burden the soul by making it vulnerable to the changes in the world[78]. (I argue that this point in particular, namely the suffering caused by one's concern about life's vicissitudes, is also reflected in Heidegger's understanding of the fear-structure in Dasein.) Instead, one must value the goods of the soul above everything else[79], the accomplishment of which requires careful training. Seneca recommends the disciplined study of classical authorities on *sapientia*, which will gradually liberate the soul[80]. Such a programme will provide the necessary lessons in what is intrinsically good, just, and desirable[81]. The most valuable lesson for one's studies is how to be resilient in the face of the tribulations of human life: "There is only one haven for this stormy and turbulent life of ours: to rise above future events, to stand firm, ready to receive the blows of fortune head-on, out in the open and unflinchingly"[82].

This is by no means an easy task, but Seneca believes it is entirely possible. He looks to the precedent of historical figures, namely Socrates and Cato, to substantiate his claims. Both of these men maintained their equanimity of soul in the midst of political upheaval and personal suffering[83]. As Plato suggests through the character of Socrates in the *Apology*, Seneca

[75] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 4, tr. Graver – Long, p. 97.
[76] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 9-10, p. 98.
[77] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 20, p. 416.
[78] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 34, p. 419.
[79] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 34, p. 419.
[80] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 16, p. 415.
[81] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 16, p. 415.
[82] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 22, tr. Graver – Long, p. 416.
[83] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 27-33, p. 417-19.

states that there is a certain freedom of soul, even when one is bound[84]. Socrates and Cato demonstrate that when one ceases to fear misfortune, one can become resilient in the face of all kinds of external trouble[85]. These paradigmatic figures of classical history, according to Seneca, are extraordinary precisely in the sense that they are fully human. It is proper to human nature not to seek the safest condition in terms of bodily needs, but rather to live in an honourable manner[86]. Seneca believes that anyone can achieve great things, overcome hardships, and complete apparently impossible missions. The question is whether one is willing[87].

4.2. Heidegger's Reception of Augustine concerning Immediate Self-Presence

The approach to philosophy as a form of therapy, described *supra*, which integrates the ethical, the intellectual, and the experiential, is central to Augustine, who in turn has become a source for numerous subsequent philosophers. One of these is Heidegger, who, according to Sophie-Jan Arrien, understands philosophy as possessed of an enormous "practical" significance[88]. Through philosophical praxis, one can address and deal with the condition of one's existence[89]. In due course we shall see how this "therapeutic" (my gloss) conception of philosophy occupies a central place in Heidegger's thought and is informed by Augustine.

In this section, I shall spend a moment focusing on Ryan Coyne's treatment of Heidegger in the former's 2015 monograph from the University of Chicago Press, the published version of his dissertation. According to Coyne, Associate Professor of the Philosophy of Religions and Theology at the University of Chicago and former doctoral student of Jean-Luc Marion, Heidegger revisits the ontological identity of the self for the first time in modern philosophy[90].

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[84] Seneca, *Epistulae* 28, 8, p. 98.

[85] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 34, p. 419.

[86] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 23, p. 416.

[87] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 25-26, p. 417.

[88] S.-J. Arrien, *Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu: Heidegger lecteur d'Augustin*, "Esprit" 1 (2013) p. 68-80, here p. 71.

[89] Arrien, *Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu*, p. 71.

[90] R. Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of Being and Time in St. Augustine and Beyond*, Chicago – London 2015, p. 54.

I closely focus on Coyne's treatment of Heidegger for three particular reasons. First, he closely connects Augustine's thought – in particular in the *Confessiones* – with that of Heidegger, especially on factical life. Secondly, he shows how Augustine informs Heidegger's own understanding of Dasein as inherently reflexive; in other words, under Augustine's influence, Heidegger articulates the fundamental truth of immediate self-presence. It will become clear that the apparent truism that one is always with oneself is possessed of profound philosophical significance. Finally, and following from the second point, Heidegger proceeds to identify the nature of Dasein as a question to itself, the very idea that we find in Book IV of the *Confessiones* ("factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio")[91].

As Coyne explains, Heidegger wishes to acknowledge the fundamental insights of Descartes while also correcting what he sees as the latter's errors. According to Heidegger, argues Coyne, Descartes correctly identifies the presence to self that is inherent in human life. However, Heidegger holds that Descartes fails to distinguish conscious or rational life as a distinct form of being from that of things in the world, mere objects. For Heidegger, the insight of Descartes' *cogito* is that thinking is always reflexive[92]. In his own work, Heidegger argues that Dasein is characterised by an inherent self-presence[93]. However, Heidegger thinks that Descartes conflates human existence ("Dasein") with thinghood ("object at hand")[94]. As Coyne writes, Heidegger wishes to revise Descartes' *cogito*, a task which leads him in 1921 to a sustained study of Augustine[95].

The upshot of Coyne's analysis is to demonstrate that while Descartes' self is characterised by "Vorhandensein," Augustine's is "aus der Hand gegeben"[96]. Whereas the Cartesian subject attempts to eliminate uncertainty and the concomitant anxiety, the fact of *having-* or *being-a-self* implies that anxiety is a constant part of one's existence. Confronted with the disturbing implications of its condition, factical life may flee from its own insecurity, for instance by "caring" for worldly objects in an attempt to escape from itself[97]. In so doing, Dasein falsely thinks of itself as a product,

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[91] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9.
[92] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 58-59.
[93] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 83.
[94] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 56.
[95] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 53.
[96] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 77.
[97] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 80, 84.

which exerts a tranquilising effect on the self[98]. When it ceases to hide from itself, according to Heidegger, Dasein encounters the burden of *having-to-be*, and encounters the uncanny feeling of not being at home in this world, "Unheimlichkeit"[99]. Through anxiety, Dasein confronts its being immediately[100]. Through similar challenging emotions, both Augustine and Seneca realise how the self is confronted with its own presence, even though this is a more fundamental reality that often goes unnoticed.

In my estimation, Augustine was rudely summoned from his erstwhile hiding place in the familiarity of sense pleasures. In Heideggerian terms, I would argue that Augustine's flight from the unbearable pain of his existence represents an attempt to treat himself as an object, a mere thing. However, according to Heidegger, life never fully escapes itself; it still encounters itself even and especially in its disguises[101]. This encounter with self, I believe, is precisely what one sees in the respective texts of Augustine and Seneca *supra*.

Ultimately one experiences oneself as a question, to which there is no final answer[102]. Thus Heidegger concludes that Dasein is essentially "Fraglichsein"[103]. Here Coyne makes a point crucial for this study: Augustine's influence on Heidegger can be seen especially in the latter's understanding of Dasein as inherently *fraglich*. This influence arises in particular from Augustine's unique approach to self-interrogation found in the *Confessiones*. Augustinian questioning expresses the "fact" of having a self. The upshot is a critique of the Cartesian preoccupation with certainty. Questioning becomes the way of expressing a primordial mode of existence in which one is confronted with one's own existence in the world[104]. Because the soul possesses itself to the extent that it relinquishes itself, it must learn to appreciate its nothingness and thus avoid collapsing on itself[105]. In this attempt to prevent Dasein's downfall, I believe that we see a further aspect to Heidegger's therapeutic philosophical praxis.

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[98] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 94.
[99] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 84.
[100] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 84.
[101] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 83.
[102] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 78-79.
[103] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 61.
[104] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 61.
[105] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 76.

5. The Contingency of Being

Augustine's intense grief at the loss of his friend, followed by being plunged into darkness concerning himself, compels him to reflect on the source of his bitterness. In this respect, he provides further insights pertinent both to antiquity and to contemporary philosophy, in particular on the inherently fleeting nature of reality. Augustine had succumbed to the immoderate love of earthly things, as if they were permanent, and thus he was devastated at their loss. In other words, he treated created things as if they were uncreated, as if they could never perish, including his friend. "O madness that knows not how to love men as men!" exclaims Augustine, continuing, "O foolish man to bear the lot of man so rebelliously!"[106]. Moreover, Augustine makes explicit in striking fashion a tendency within human nature to cling to things that one has from the fear of losing them. In his own case, Augustine became especially fearful of death, which could apparently seize one's life at any moment[107]. The particularly disturbing insight from this reflection is that the death of Augustine's friend reveals what is always true of human life, although usually easier to ignore, namely its utter contingency. A major event reveals – at the personal level as well as the global level, and others still – that the world only masquerades as permanent and stable[108]. This insight leads one to a consideration of how Heidegger grapples with this feature of human life.

5.1. Heidegger on the Impermanence of Factical Life

Arrien notes the link between Heidegger's conception of factical life and Book X of the *Confessiones*[109]. Similarly, I contend that the foregoing themes from *Confessiones* 4 anticipate Heidegger's own understanding of "Faktizität". In this section, I would like further to explore a topic pertinent to the concept of factical life, namely the impermanence of human life, or more specifically, Dasein's disposition towards this fundamental truth. A prime example of this idea in Heidegger's thought is located in §30 of *Sein und Zeit* (1927), in which Heidegger treats of the fear-structure of Dasein. In this passage, Heidegger articulates how the complex experi-

[106] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12, tr. Sheed, p. 61.
[107] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 6, 11.
[108] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 80, 85.
[109] Arrien, *Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu*, p. 72.

ence of fear bespeaks the precarious nature of human life. Heidegger distinguishes three aspects of the phenomenon of fear: (1) the fearsome, or the thing in the world that causes fear; (2) the act/experience of fearing; and (3) that about which or on behalf of which we fear, namely Dasein itself. In virtue of being-in-the-world, fearing is always a possible state-of-mind for Dasein[110].

In fact, as Heidegger writes, "Dasein as Being-in-the-world is 'fearful' ["furchtsam"]"[111]. The entire complex of fear bespeaks the nature of Dasein as Being-in[112], and more specifically that through fear, Dasein experiences itself as lacking and needy[113]. By its very nature, Dasein is bound to things and expresses its being in the form of concern. When a thing is placed in jeopardy, one's own being is affected[114]. When one fears about another, one is ultimately afraid about oneself, more specifically the loss of one's opportunity for Being-with another[115].

As I see it, Heidegger's discussion of fear reflects Augustine's phenomenological reflection on this theme in *Confessiones* 4, in particular the way in which fear occurs even if the potential loss or event one fears does not actually occur. As Heidegger explains, one identifies the fearsome even before it draws close[116]. The matter which one finds threatening is not yet in one's immediate vicinity. However, it draws nearer, and in so doing acquires a threatening character[117]. As Heidegger writes, "it can reach us, but it may not. As it draws close, this 'it can, and yet in the end it may not' becomes aggravated"[118]. In other words, that which is feared may continue to approach, yet it may just as well recede and cause no harm. Nonetheless, this constant uncertainty exacerbates one's anxiety: "This implies that what is detrimental as coming-close close by carries with it the patent possibility that it may stay away and pass us by; but instead of lessening or extinguishing our fearing, this enhances it"[119].

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[110] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarie – E. Robinson, Oxford – Cambridge 2001, §30, p. 180.

[111] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §30, tr. Macquarie – Robinson, p. 182.

[112] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §30, p. 181.

[113] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §30, p. 181: "Fear discloses Dasein predominantly in a privative way".

[114] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §30, p. 180-181.

[115] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §30, tr. Macquarie – Robinson, p. 181.

[116] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §30, tr. Macquarie – Robinson, p. 180.

[117] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §30, tr. Macquarie – Robinson, p. 179-180.

[118] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §30, tr. Macquarie – Robinson, p. 179-180.

[119] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §30, tr. Macquarie – Robinson, p. 180.

According to Heidegger, Augustine recognises the crucial truth that human being is characterised by *priuatio/carentia*[120]. As a result, one can never rest in the joys of this life[121]. The happy life remains a "transcendental" horizon for the believer, beyond one's reach[122]. As "metaphysical straddlers" (Kenyon's term), humans exist in a constant tension between the world of time and space on the one hand and that of eternity on the other[123]. One is beset by the constant temptation to fix constituents of the former as if they belonged to the latter, hence the suffering caused by *molestia* is realised both in fear of difficulty and desire for happiness[124]. I argue that Heidegger captures this very dynamic in §30 of *Sein und Zeit*. As Arrien continues, such an analysis discloses the temporal and ephemeral element of each moment of life, revealing facticity's mode as one of waiting or expectation with respect to the future[125]. However, Heidegger stresses that the real danger of factical life consists not in the care itself but in the tendency to dispersion[126]. Heidegger's advice is not to cling to things, but rather to allow them to appear and disappear according to the ebb and flow proper to the natural world. In this way, one can preserve oneself from unnecessary suffering. In Sean Hannan's words, "As shepherds of Being, not of beings, it is not our role to preserve beings in their particularity (thus risking adikia), but to instead remember the rhythm in which they arise and pass away"[127].

5.2. The Classical Approach to Contingency in Seneca

In a recent article, James I. Porter traces a line of enquiry concerning the self, which begins with Heraclitus and carries through to Augustine. According to this anthropology, which Porter argues is paradigmatic for classical philosophy, especially Stoicism, the self appears as an insoluble if ineluctable conundrum[128]. Similarly, Porter sees an appreciation of the

[120] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, p. 80.
[121] Arrien, *Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu*, p. 77.
[122] Arrien, *Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu*, p. 73.
[123] E. Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue*, Cambridge 2018, p. 156.
[124] Arrien, *Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu*, p. 75.
[125] Arrien, *Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu*, p. 75.
[126] Arrien, *Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu*, p. 75.
[127] S. Hannan, *To See Coming: Augustine and Heidegger on the Arising and Passing Away of Things*, "Medieval Mystical Theology" 21/1 (2012) p. 75-91, here p. 84.
[128] J.I. Porter, *Time for Foucault? Reflections on the Roman Self from Seneca to Augustine*, "Foucault Studies" 22 (2017) p. 113-133, here p. 113, 114.

fleeting character of human life as a unifying feature of Roman accounts of the self[129].

In locations such as *Dialogues* 6, 11, 3 and *Quaestiones Naturales* 6, 2, 3, Seneca gestures towards the utter nothingness of the self lying hidden in plain sight[130]. He does so through his analysis of an "abyssal object", that is, a negation of something, and indeed, one that pushes one to the limits of reason and experience and confronts one with one's nothingness[131]. For example, Seneca's account of the fluid nature of time – which reflects Augustine's thoughts on the same theme in *Confessiones* 11 – pushes him into the abyss[132]. Of course, as Augustine has suggested, death is the abyssal object *par excellence*. Seneca too recognises how the question of death overwhelms one and pushes one beyond the bounds of reason. One is forced to reckon with the fact that human life appears to hover precariously between being and nothingness[133].

5.2.1. Contingency and Finitude Revealed through the Experience of Nature

Elsewhere, Seneca continues his discussion of the impermanence of human life, and in so doing, I argue, continues to sketch a therapeutic treatment for the human soul. In addition to time and death, Seneca's observation of the natural world bespeaks the unstable and precarious nature of human existence. In light of the sheer force of nature, we humans are reduced from subjects to objects, losing the capacity for self-determination[134]. Seneca expounds upon this topic at the beginning of the sixth book of his *Quaestiones Naturales*, which deals with earthquakes. He begins by referring to an actual earthquake that had recently struck the region of Campania[135]. In this respect, Seneca notes how an earthquake is an appar-

[129] Porter, *Time for Foucault?*, p. 130.

[130] Porter, *Time for Foucault?*, p. 122.

[131] Porter, *Time for Foucault?*, p. 122.

[132] On this point in Seneca, see Porter, *Time for Foucault?*, p. 122, 123.

[133] Porter, *Time for Foucault?*, p. 124.

[134] Porter, *Time for Foucault?*, p. 122.

[135] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones*, tr. H. Hine, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Natural Questions*, The Complete Works of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Chicago – London 2010, 6, 1, 1, p. 87 (Hereafter with localisation and page numbers from the Hine translation).

ently distinct form of disaster. Other catastrophes, such as fires, plagues, or wars, are escapable and have a defined scope. Yet the destructive force of an earthquake seems far more fundamental and comprehensive than anything else humans may experience[136].

Seneca uses this event to reflect on the contingent nature not merely of human existence, but of the natural world as well. In the wake of such destruction in Campania, many people fled to live elsewhere. Yet what makes them think, Seneca wonders, that any other place will not meet the same fate?[137]. In addition to the sheer destructive force of this event, the time of year it occurred was also significant, as it happened during winter, a season traditionally considered safe from such natural disasters[138]. One deludes oneself into believing that one can permanently secure happiness[139]. Seneca sees in one's flight a vain search for certainty and stability in a world that ultimately lacks such[140]. "Everywhere shares the same condition, and, if not yet shaken by an earthquake, still it can be shaken. Perhaps this spot on which you are standing too confidently will be torn apart tonight, or today before nightfall"[141]. All parts of the world are susceptible to destruction at any moment[142]. Crucially, the extreme case of the earthquake allows one to perceive the utter contingency and finitude at the root of being. It is not a qualitatively different kind of event, but simply a less common instance of an abiding truth. Thus, the very nature of reality at its foundation is like that of the ground during an earthquake[143].

This insight, rather than cause despair, can actually be a source of hope, according to Seneca[144]. We are very frail and susceptible to harm from many sources, including familiar ones[145]. Why be terrified of earthquakes or other disasters when familiar things can cause death as well?[146]. "How foolish", Seneca thinks, "to tremble at the sea when you know you could be killed by a drop of water!"[147]. We fear large-scale events of nature when the same

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[136] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 1, 6-7, p. 88.
[137] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 1, 10, p. 89.
[138] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 1, 1, p. 87.
[139] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 1, 14, p. 89.
[140] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 1, 15, p. 89.
[141] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 1, 11, tr. Hine, p. 89.
[142] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 1, 12, p. 89.
[143] Cf. Porter, *Time for Foucault?*, p. 122.
[144] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 2, 1–2, p. 89-90.
[145] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 2, 3, p. 90.
[146] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 2, 3-5, p. 90.
[147] Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 2, 5, tr. Hine, p. 90.

result can come from something close to us[148]. "What is more foolish than being afraid of [the earth's] swaying or of the sudden collapse of mountain-sides and invasions of the sea as it races beyond the shoreline, when death is present everywhere and can attack from anywhere, and nothing is too tiny to be able to bring destruction to humankind?"[149]. Regardless of how it happens, death is inevitable for all. A death by one cause is no better or worse than a death by another[150]. One eradicates fear by realising that one should be wary of all things[151]. When one acquires appropriate knowledge about the nature of things, one is able to mollify one's fear and live free of such troubles[152]. I contend that through his critical investigation of the natural world and one's experience of it, one can apply a therapeutic balm to the apprehensive heart.

5.2.2. Time and Flux as Constitutive of Human Life

In *epistola* 104, Seneca addresses the reality of loss in ways which, in my estimation, are congenial both to Heidegger's conception of facti-cal life and to the conclusions Augustine draws in *Confessiones* 4. Seneca writes to Lucilius that one erroneously considers the loss of a loved one a terrible tragedy, when in fact it is like mourning a leaf that inevitably falls from a tree[153]. In this respect, Seneca anticipates an objection from Lucilius, namely that those who are lost are permanently changed. This insight, while true, provides an opportunity to bring to light a more funda-mental if less obvious truth, namely the fact that one is constantly in flux oneself. The failure to acknowledge this fact will cause one only greater suffering: "You will not be conscious of these changes, nor will you be able to remedy the afflictions, but you will nonetheless make trouble for your-self by hoping for some things and despairing of others"[154]. The self is slip-ping away and changing at every moment, though this is easy to overlook, in contrast to the loss of a loved one, which occurs outside of oneself. Thus the loss of another person represents a more conspicuous instance of a con-

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148 Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 2, 6, p. 90.
149 Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 2, 6, tr. Hine, p. 90.
150 Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 2, 7, p. 90.
151 Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 2, 3, p. 90.
152 Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 6, 3, 2, p. 91.
153 Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 11, p. 414.
154 Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 12, tr. Graver – Long, p. 414.

stant reality[155]. The lesson Seneca draws is that all things move and change, they come and go in their due season. One must learn to enjoy things as they are but not cling to them as if they are or could be permanent[156]. If one can appropriate Seneca's insights, I think, one can reduce or even prevent trouble for oneself.

I want to suggest that Seneca's observations also yield the following insights concerning the previous discussion of the *Confessiones*. In his *auersio* from God, Augustine failed to perceive this fundamental truth about the ephemeral nature of things, the ignorance of which caused him great pain. It is to this topic that we now turn.

6. Encountering God in *Confessiones* IV: Divine Presence-in-Absence

In this final section, I would like to come full-circle, returning to the central text of this article. In *Confessiones* 4, Augustine suffers acutely from the bitterness of God's absence[157]. Augustine's soul should have been healed by God, but he lacked both the desire and the strength[158]. Indeed, in describing the darkening effects of grief, Augustine suggests the opposite of God's inner presence in the form of divine illumination ("quo dolore *contenebratum* est cor meum")[159]. According to O'Donnell, grief has an inherently restless character throughout the *Confessiones*, which stands in opposition to the *requies* of, e.g., *Confessiones* 1, 1, 1[160]. We have seen how after the death of his friend, everything is transfigured in Augustine's sight, becoming a constant torment[161]. As Marie-Anne Vannier notes, in *Confessiones* 4, 10, 15, Augustine writes that one feels pain in all things that are not God, even in good things when they are not enjoyed in relation to God[162]. O'Donnell characterises Augustine's description of his grief at 4, 4, 9 as "almost literally God-less"[163]. He still believed in a pseudo-god,

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[155] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 12, p. 414.
[156] Seneca, *Epistulae* 104, 11, p. 414.
[157] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 6, 11.
[158] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.
[159] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9; emphasis mine.
[160] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 6, 11.
[161] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9.
[162] M.-A. Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine's 'Confessions'*, ed. T. Toom, Cambridge 2020, p. 63-74, here p. 64.
[163] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9.

a "phantasma", merely imaginary and completely lacking in substance[164]. Thus not even prayer could provide any relief for Augustine; a false god was no source of consolation in the face of a true loss[165].

6.1. The Dialectic of *auersio* and *conuersio*

As O'Donnell suggests, the Augustine of this location in *Confessiones* 4 – i.e. 375/376 – remained in a state of restless wandering from God[166]. In addition, he had not yet encountered the *libri platonicorum*, which taught him of God's incorporeality, a truth crucial to his conversion[167]. Augustine's bitterness, coupled with his inability to find any relief from God, invites one to consider a theme of fundamental significance not only for the *Confessiones* but for Augustine's entire life and thought, namely the dialectic of *auersio a Deo* and *conuersio ad Deum*[168]. According to Vannier, this original theme appears first in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (388/389), is developed in the final three books of the *Confessiones*, and is also present in *De Genesi ad litteram*[169]. In the earlier *Soliloquia*, *auersio a Deo* results in foolishness and misery[170]. As Vannier writes, in *Confessiones* 4, *auersio* is "synonymous with dispersion, suffering, and precariousness"[171]. Later in the *Confessiones*, *auersio* is interpreted in terms of *distentio*, a kind of disintegration and distance from God[172]. The thematic interplay of aversion and conversion represents "the result of [Augustine's] personal experience of first painfully facing his separation from God and, after that, finding in his conversion"[173].

Above we saw how various classical philosophers presented their thought in terms of *therapeia*, not least of all Plato. However, as Cushman argues, Plato himself recognised the inherent limitations of his therapeutic

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164 Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.
165 Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9.
166 Cf. Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 7, 12.
167 Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 66.
168 Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 63, 65.
169 Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 64.
170 C. Tornau, *Ratio in subiecto? The Sources of Augustine's Proof for the Immortality of the Soul in the* Soliloquia *and its Defense in De immortalitate animae*, "Phronesis" 62 (2017) p. 319-354, here p. 344.
171 Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 65.
172 Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 73.
173 Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 64.

approach to philosophy: Philosophy endeavours to make people good, but only people who are already morally good will be open to doing philosophy[174]. In light of this observation, Cushman suggests that the Platonic theory of philosophy as therapy eventuates in the need for some sort of divine help or grace. Indeed, Augustine himself appropriates Platonic elements and incorporates them into his theological conception of one's personal interaction with the divine. God supplies the necessary aid to complete Plato's philosophical-therapeutic programme; God draws the soul in a way that dialectic cannot[175]. This idea – namely that God is the *sine qua non* of successful philosophical therapy – was, as Cushman writes, "the impulse and the ground for [Augustine's] own *Confessions*"[176]. Following Cushman, I would like to suggest that the portion of the *Confessiones* under consideration constitutes just such an example of early Christianity's distinctive addition to classical philosophy, namely that God is always implicated in one's pursuit of philosophical therapy, completing the conversion process.

The (re)turn to God, writes Vannier, the essential activity of human life, combines ethical, intellectual, and ontological aspects[177]. In Augustine's case, conversion "required his intellectual and volitional transformation and his acceptance of God's plan for his life – a 'full' renovation, which was both *epistrophe* [intellectual conversion] and *metanoia* [moral conversion]"[178]. Indeed, Plato understood his *therapeia* as involving a *metastrophe*, or conversion[179]. As Vannier continues, the activity of conversion is essentially a cooperative activity between the soul and God, or more specifically, the free human response to the initiative of divine grace[180]. The importance of *gratia* is present even in the early works of Augustine, including the Cassiciacum works. It also recurs throughout the *Confessiones*, e.g., 8, 12, 30[181]. Essential to Augustine's conversion was the encounter with Christ, which cleansed him of his pride, leading him to humility[182].

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[174] Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 150, 301.

[175] Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 301.

[176] Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 301.

[177] Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 63, 68.

[178] Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 70.

[179] Cushman, *Therapeia*, p. 301. See also G. Stroumsa, *The New Self and Reading Practices in Late Antique Christianity*, "Church History and Religious Culture" 95 (2015) p. 1-18, here p. 6.

[180] Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 63-64.

[181] Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 70.

[182] Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 66.

6.2. The "Apophatic" Dimension to *Confessiones* IV

Furthermore, I argue that if *auersio* and *conuersio* obtain in a dialectical relationship, then present within the text of *Confessiones* 4 lies an indication of divine presence, even in Augustine's *auersio a Deo*. One finds some warrant for my claim in the previously quoted passage from O'Donnell, in which he continues to suggest that God is still present in some sense in this experience: "The depiction of grief [at 4, 4, 9] is almost literally God-less: only in a vain attempt to enjoin hope does God appear"[183]. Norbert Fischer presents a similar observation, stating that this painful event, to the extent that it moves Augustine to look for God, becomes a kind of contact with God, albeit oblique: "Die schmerzhafte Erfahrung des Todes eines Freundes wird ihm zur Berührung Gottes, zur Anregung ('excitatio'), auf Gott hinzudenken"[184]. My claim is that through such experiences recounted in the *Confessiones*, Augustine experiences a faint and fleeting contact with the divine, which invites him to continue to search for it ever more vigorously[185].

Recent scholarship has acknowledged a similar dynamic at work in another part of the *Confessiones*. In the Ostia vision, Augustine attains a fleeting glimpse of God, but he cannot sustain this due to his carnal habit[186]. According to Parsons,

> we can detect a distinct *therapeutic* effect of the visionary experience on Augustine's life, understood as an ancient form of therapeia. This effect, mediated through and shaped by the language of Neoplatonism and Christianity, instilled discernible shifts in Augustine's character and helped cultivate specific dispositions, virtues, and capacities, as well as occasional insights into the nature of the soul that anticipated psychoanalytic theory[187].

As Parsons argues, Augustine had glimpsed the divine, yet he needed to train himself to return to and maintain such a vision, something like psychology or therapy over the course of his life[188]. It is precisely this form of

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[183] Augustinus, *Confessiones* 4, 4, 9.

[184] N. Fischer, *Vom Beruhren der ewigen Wahrheit zu Augustins christlicher Umdeutung der neuplatonischen Mystik*, "Acta Universitatis Carolinae Theologica" 3/1 (2013) p. 37-64, here p. 60.

[185] Fischer, *Vom Beruhren der ewigen Wahrheit*, p. 61.

[186] Parsons, *Freud and Augustine in Dialogue*, p. 4.

[187] Parsons, *Freud and Augustine in Dialogue*, p. 25; emphasis mine.

[188] Parsons, *Freud and Augustine in Dialogue*, p. 4-5.

therapy, I contend, that Augustine is practising throughout the *Confessiones*, not least of all in Book IV.

I would further argue that the foregoing analysis reveals that Augustine's thought suggests a nuanced approach to divine presence and absence, which can be discussed in at least two distinct senses. First, as Vannier observes, one's flight from or return to God in this life is always provisional. In the *Confessiones*, *auersio* and *conuersio* enjoy a dialectical relationship, in that one cannot be discussed without the other[189]. Thus the interplay of these two moments is a constant process throughout all of one's life[190]. Secondly, as scholars such as Georgiana Huian note, apart from the consideration of sin, evil, and one's (potentially) voluntary separation from God, the divine nature itself challenges human conventions and demands an apophatic theological method[191]. Indeed, Huian characterises Augustine's theological anthropology as essentially "apophatic"[192]. Apophaticism is not a matter of negating cataphatic pronouncements. It is a comprehensive way of thinking which attunes one to one's own unknowability[193]. Augustine does not have a systematic negative anthropology; rather, certain fundamental commitments imbue his entire thought[194]. As Huian argues, Augustine suggests a view according to which "binary patterns […] have little to no relevance at all"[195]. Thus one can say, "The superlative of hiddenness is the mode of manifestation of God, even in his most intense presence"[196].

In my estimation, the foregoing observations suggest that the question is not so much *God's* presence or absence, but rather the human perspective or disposition with respect to the divine summons. In this case, God simply *is*, but due to the finite and fallible nature of humanity, one projects

189 Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 64.

190 Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion,* p. 64.

191 Fischer, *Vom Beruhren der ewigen Wahrheit*, p. 63; Huian, *The Mystery of the Human Being in Augustine*, 55, 60.

192 G. Huian, *The Mystery of the Human Being in Augustine: In Quest of the Foundations of an Apophatic Anthropology*, in: *New Europe College Ştefan Odobleja Program Yearbook 2015–2016*, ed. A. Pleşu – V. Sandu-Dediu – A. Oroveanu – I. Vainovski-Mihai, Bucharest 2017, p. 53-78, here p. 54. For more on this topic in Augustine, see S. Ticciati, *A New Apophaticism: Augustine and the Redemption of Signs*, Studies in Systematic Theology 14, Leiden 2013.

193 Huian, *The Mystery of the Human Being in Augustine*, p. 77.

194 Huian, *The Mystery of the Human Being in Augustine*, p. 77.

195 Huian, *The Mystery of the Human Being in Augustine*, p. 73.

196 Huian, *The Mystery of the Human Being in Augustine*, p. 60.

an inner dynamic experience onto the divine. My “transcendental” gloss on an Augustinian theme can also be expressed in eschatological terms. As Vannier writes, one’s conversion to God is always a continuous process and is only completed in the afterlife[197].

7. Conclusion

I have argued that the relatively brief account of the death of Augustine’s friend in *Confessiones* 4 opens the possibility of extended reflection on key themes of philosophical significance. As this article draws to a close, let us reflect on the major results of this research and the lessons learned from the investigation of Augustine, Seneca, and Heidegger.

All three of the philosophical figures considered above seem to agree that a major error of human life is to flee from oneself, whether by caring excessively for sense pleasures or other worldly delights, or moving from place to place in the hopes of forgetting one’s troubles. Such efforts are not only destined to fail, but moreover to exacerbate the suffering one may be experiencing. The solution to the distress that causes one to want to run and hide is philosophical therapy. Through learning truths, such as that of one’s immediate presence to oneself, one can begin to overcome one’s troubles, such as grief.

The same pattern can be seen in the realisation of human finitude, flux, and contingency. Augustine realised that he had caused himself suffering by failing to appreciate that all things come and go in their due season. His failure to acknowledge this fundamental truth led him to engage in vain actions, such as fearing the loss of possessions, over which he ultimately had no control. One finds peace and first and foremost by accepting the basic truth of the world, that one is often at the mercy of processes beyond oneself. When one ceases to fight a hopeless and losing battle against the inevitability of natural change, one can learn to live in harmony with the world of time and space.

The crucial truth which relates to both of the foregoing points is that even though they may be realised as the result of an intense and exceptional experience – such as a death or an earthquake – they are not unique, but constant facets of quotidian life. One is just as much immediately present to oneself in pleasant times as unpleasant ones. But if one has not learned to accept and live with this basic truth, one risks intense suffering, grief, and misery. Likewise, permanence, safety, and stability are always provisional

[197] Vannier, *Aversion and Conversion*, p. 65, 73.

and illusory. Such truths are constant but difficult to perceive for those who are not philosophically attuned.

In the final section of this article, we returned to the death of Augustine's friend with new eyes. To speak of philosophy as therapy is to speak of a conversion of the mind; however, it seems that such a conversion cannot be accomplished with one's own resources. Rather, it results from divine activity. Finally, in a specifically Christian theological sense, we have seen how *Confessiones* 4 subtly discloses the transcendent(al) mystery of the divine. Augustine experiences suffering most acutely in God's absence. However, as the dialectic of *auersio* and *conuersio* helps us to understand, God can be said to be present, even and especially in absence. Such an interruption of binary categories places Augustine's thoughts within the context of apophatic and mystical theology. (Juan de la Cruz, for example, suggests that one may experience darkness as a result of being blinded by the most intense radiance of the divine countenance.)

Augustine's own therapeutic philosophical-pedagogical exercises, in tandem with the thought of Seneca and Heidegger, provides a model for critical reflection on the way in which the foregoing themes are treated throughout the history of philosophy, and indeed, how they may be realised in our own lives.

God and Self in *Confessiones* IV and Beyond: *Therapeia*, Self-Presence, and Ontological Contingency in Augustine, Seneca, and Heidegger

(summary)

This article investigates Augustine's reflection on the death of his friend in *Confessiones* IV. A critical treatment of this passage discloses the three key themes which will form the main substance of the analysis: self-presence, the contingency of being, and divine absence. Integrating philosophical and theological methodologies with an historical-critical treatment of Augustine's work, this article relates Augustine's insights to his foregoing classical context and his reception in posterity, with particular attention to Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4 BCE-65 CE) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). This investigation shows that these three figures are connected by an appreciation of how self-presence and ontological instability are constant facets of human life, though easily neglected. Each advocates a curriculum of philosophical training, whereby one learns to pacify the mind by an awareness of the true nature of mundane reality. This research contributes to the renewed appreciation of how the therapeutic aspects of classical philosophy influenced early Christian authors; illuminates a key episode in Augustine's life en route to his conversion to Christianity; and raises questions about the "apophatic" dimensions of Augustine's theology and anthropology.

Keywords: Augustine; *Confessiones*; Therapeia; Facticity; Death; Seneca; Heidegger

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