SELF AND CERTAINTY: SAINT AUGUSTINE AND PROCLUS

The Choice of Subject. In this discussion of the *Cogito* argument used by Saint Augustine, my aim is to focus attention on a particular certainty which at first sight may not appear to be specially important. There are many who would be able to think of various other certainties which have a greater and richer content than that of the one considered here, and a more explicit relation to Divinity than this one appears to have. However, the answer to such doubts can be found by identifying the main classes of certainty which we are commonly aware of.

The broadest distinction is the one between objective certainties and those of a subjective or personal kind. Both metaphysics and natural science contain certainties in objective fact, regardless of whether or not they are also certain for oneself or for any number of other persons. What is certain in such cases is known firstly on authority, following which it may be made certain for oneself. Conversely, there are many subjective certainties, which carry a personal conviction regardless of how well they could meet the test of objective truth.

The kind of certainty to be considered here is not specifically a member of either of the above categories, because it contains intrinsically something which belongs to both. It necessarily partakes of objectivity and personal conviction equally, and for this reason it can be taken as the central paradigm among all other certainties. In relation to the classes, 1) Objective but not necessarily personal, and 2) Personal, but not necessarily objective, it is therefore 3) Necessarily both objective and personal. This is why Augustine gave it the special status which will be enlarged upon in what follows.

However, the above criteria alone also define a very large class of certainties, mostly in arithmetic, starting from relations as simple as two twos are four. None of these belongs among the “primal” kind because of two factors, firstly, that numbers are not on the highest and most universal level, because they are on an intermediate level, below that of the Forms, and above that of instantiations. Secondly, numbers are not conceptually primal, because they are known through processes of inference which start from unity. As a result they cannot have the property of directness which is requisite for an ideal certainty.

Consequently, the ideal certainty must have not merely the balance between objective and subjective certainty, it must also have universality and directness, and these factors point necessarily to the self as the locus in which it must be found. Some will say that God must be the primal certainty, not the self, but this can be seen to be mistaken in the light of the above: firstly, the certainty of God is first and foremost an *objective* certainty, which is seldom matched by any corresponding certainty in the subjective realm. Secondly, it can be shown that the certainty of God cannot be a direct one for us, because it requires an inference from our own state of being. On this basis it would appear that it is right that the most complete certainty should be based on the self, and it must now be seen how that can be more fully justified.

In what follows, it may appear that the words “self,” “mind,” and “soul” are being used interchangeably, but in fact “self” and “mind” are used here to denote the soul under two different aspects. Mind will mean the soul as the bearer and user of intelligence in cases where the soul’s other properties would confuse the issue. As a self, the soul is to be understood as a power of agency, and a centre of freely-willed activity. This is morally neutral, since self thus understood can be good, as where someone is said to be self-disciplined, or self-educated, or self-employed, or bad, as in “Don’t be selfish!” The self-denial of self can thus be right on a moral level, but if it is understood in any deeper sense than that, it could only mean a choice of vegetative passivity.

Augustine’s Originality. The *Cogito* argument has been a part of the Western philosophical tradition ever since Saint Augustine originated it. Besides being a source of metaphysical certainty, the *Cogito* argument is a vital element in the discovery of personality and its spiritual nature, which is distinctively Christian, in regard to both the persons of the Trinity and man himself. Many thinkers have thought beyond Plato in relative matters, but Augustine is one of the few who have thought beyond him in something of fundamental importance like personality. The *Cogito* is therefore of equal importance for both philosophy and spirituality, and can be the basis for the spiritual role of philosophy for those who are willing to see it.

Augustine’s discovery was one of transcendence in the

immanent, a reality which complements that of the Forms. The resulting “immanent transcendence” is a reality of major importance in the composition of the self. For Christians, this is the theoretical possibility which was historically manifested in the Incarnation, and it is one which Plato had already found in the Forms, which are both transcendental and immanent in their instantiations which we perceive. But the equivalent property in the soul was, for Plato, confined to its being immortal, while it was in other respects immanent among the Forms and their manifestations. In neo-Platonism, the idea of immanent transcendence was taken further by Proclus, with the idea of the soul’s self-conversion, but he treated this from a purely ontological point of view, and so did not identify it with conscious self-reflection. That was the step taken by Augustine, who saw its importance as the ultimate basis for certainty.

Self-certainty, based on the act of self-reflection, is what should be expected of a being who is by nature spirit as well as body, because this kind of act can effect something outside the possibilities of natural causality. On the natural level, one thing acts on another by means of the action of some parts of one thing on some parts of another, whereas in the self-reflective act the whole being acts on itself without the need for any means or mediation. Such an act is the act of an entity which is partless, unlike natural things which are always combinations of parts, and of parts within parts. I would add that the significance of this property is not exclusive to Western thought, because the soul’s self-reflective power is used in Dvaita Vedanta as the basis for its opposition to the monistic Vedanta of Shankara.

Self-Reversion or Conversion. The theoretical background of the *Cogito* can be seen in the way in which Proclus discusses this property of the soul in the *Elements of Theology*, where he says the soul is “converted to itself” or “reverts upon itself.” What he says about this self-reversion is relevant to the *Cogito* argument, despite the fact that he does not use it for that purpose. The Augustinian and Proclan accounts of the mind need to be taken together for the sake of a fuller idea of the reality involved, and for this reason I will include an account of the ideas of Proclus on this subject before going further with those of Augustine.

For Proclus, the most essential attribute of the soul is its ability to relate to itself. This attribute is presented in the *Elements of Theology* (props.15-16) as a proof that mind is incorporeal, and that it is separable from the body. Accordingly it is stated that the whole mind is “converted” to or “reverts” upon the whole mind itself, with no separation of parts.

This conversion or reversion means that the mind can both divide and reunite itself without suffering any disruption or confusion, because its possibilities of division and combination far exceed those of material things. The latter suffer division, only to be reduced to mutually-exclusive pieces, while they can only be united at the price of losing the separate identities of the things united. Because of this property, material things can only interact through parts which are in direct contact while excluding all the others. Thus there is no

way in which a whole material thing can be joined to itself or to another. (see Proclus, E.T. prop.15).

Another essential property of the soul is its power of self-motion, and Proclus relates this also to its self-conversive function, because in either case the whole being must act partlessly upon the whole: “mover and moved exist simultaneously as one thing.” (E.T.prop.17) Acting-on and turning-towards depend on the same relation, whence self-aware consciousness and self-directed activity are inseparably one. As source of activity in this way, I refer to the soul as “self.”

The mind’s self-conversive act does not merely exceed what corporeal things can do, but does something in a different category from anything they can do, however deeply mind or soul is united to its body. This union is never deep enough either to enable the body to share in the mind’s self-conversion, or to prevent it, no matter how much it may hinder it by an excess of sensation over thought. The intellectual act as such is therefore in no way dependent on the body, even though the senses provide occasional causes for it. This is why mind or soul must be essentially separable from the body, and from this it would follow that even when they are separated, the complete person could not then exist. Augustine saw the answer to this in the doctrine of the resurrection where the body acquires a nature directly subject to the spirit.

Proclus supports this view of body and soul with an argument from the distinction between a being’s essential nature and its activity. Its activity is dependent and derivative in relation to the being which exerts the

activity, and therefore what has been said as to the independence of the mind's activity from the body must apply *a fortiori* to the substance of the mind itself. It is in this way a substance which can exist separately from its body even more readily than its self-reflective power can.

There is nothing accidental about their relation, however. The relation between body and soul comes from their being adjacent members of a universal hierarchy of being which Proclus summarises as follows:

"Beyond all bodies is the soul's essence; beyond all souls, the intellective principle; and beyond all intellective substances, the One." (E.T. prop.20)

In this hierarchical structure of being every intelligence is said to know not only itself but also the beings superior to itself and those that are inferior, even though this cannot be in the same mode for each of the three cases. Accordingly, things subordinate by nature to the mind, i.e. things in the sense world, are not known as they are in themselves, because the mind "can only know the impress produced upon it by the object. For it knows its own, not the alien;" (E.T. prop.167). We know our experience of the world, not of the world as such. This is often summed up in the idea that whatever is known is known according to the nature of the knower.

Knowledge and Representation. This conclusion about knowledge shows that in antiquity the idea that knowledge of the external world is by means of individual

representations existed along with the theory of Forms because the instances of the Forms must be known in a manner suited to them. While the sensory objects are instantiations of Forms, the mind's representation of them takes them one stage further from their Forms. They are thus doubly derivative, firstly *qua* instantiations, and secondly *qua* mental representations.

[This is the idea which was taken to an extreme in modern times by Kant, when he separated the object and its mental representation so completely that there was no longer any reason why we should think of it as a representation of anything. The analogy of natures between the noumenal Forms and their phenomenal instantiations was ignored. According to Kant, the power by which the objective reality causes the sensations which we have of the world is beyond the range of our minds. The result was to make the external world effectively *causeless*, because for practical purposes, the difference between the unknowable and the non-existent is insignificant.]

In E.T. prop. 167, Proclus refers to knowledge of this kind, where he says that the mind can only know the material world from "the impress produced upon it by the object," because it knows only "its own" i.e. psychic reality, not the material as such. Thomas Taylor translates this as: "But it will only know the image of this thing as being generated in itself from it," again because it knows only in terms of the kind of reality

which it possesses. We do not know the material world as such, but rather our experience of it, and the separate nature of materiality is known as an inference from that experience. In Platonic thought, empirical knowledge of material objects always existed alongside the direct knowledge that one has of the Forms.

But if knowledge of the external world is by representation, knowledge of the Forms is immediate. From the nature of its objects, it is essentially self-transcending, or better, ego-transcending, besides its freedom from the confusions and approximations of the sense world. This innate knowledge includes a knowledge of all higher modes of being, and accordingly, Proclus affirms that the mind can know what is above its own level of being through knowing itself.

If the mind knows itself, its own intelligence must be an intelligible object for itself. (E.T. props.168 & 169) This involves a union of an intelligence with an intelligible object, where the two are interchangeable, so that one could say in Proclus' words, that "there is an intelligible in the Intelligence, and an intelligence in the Intelligible," and that in the soul either can be substituted for the other.

Thus the finite mind can only be strictly identical with its own content, and not with what it knows of any other kind of being, because its knowledge of higher or lower beings requires representative ideas of them. The higher-order beings are necessarily different from our ideas of them inasmuch as they are independent

substances. The mind which knows them knows only their attributes, which belong among its range of innate ideas.

These ideas concerning the mind's self-knowledge imply that in this act it knows both what it knows and that it knows. Given that the knower and the known are identical in this case, there is an act-of-knowing between them which is a property of both of them. (E.T. prop.168). For Proclus this means that: "the intellective act is identical with the intellectual subject and the intelligible object. Being the intermediary between the identical knower and known, it must be identical with both." (E.T. prop. 169).

From this it would follow that neither the I-subject nor the me-object can exist without the other. Neither of these two is a substance, because they are both modes of *activity* in the soul, which is the real substance.

Other implications of this conception of self-knowledge are drawn independently by Augustine. From the same data, he showed that the relations between Intelligible Object, Intellectual Subject, and Intellective Act (referred to as "essence, power, and energy" by Thomas Taylor) are translatable as the relations between Being, Knowledge, and the Love of Being and Knowledge. These relations had for him a clear relevance to the relations between the Persons of the Trinity, and it reinforces the doctrine idea that the human soul is made in the image of the Trinity. The account of the soul-substance also makes it clear why

substance as such is defined as being-endued-with-the-power-of-action. Clearly the soul must be a substance on this basis.

Knowledge on Three Levels. Sources for the *Cogito* are to be found in Augustine's *The Trinity*, Book IX, Ch.11, Book X Ch. 10, and Book XV Ch.12. In Book IX, Augustine explains how we are like God insofar as we know Him, even though man cannot know God in the same way as God knows Himself. In human minds, therefore, He is known according to the faculties of a lower kind of being, and therefore incompletely and obscurely. Augustine indicates a corresponding inequality in cases where we know things of a material nature by means of our mental images and conceptions, although material things are elevated above their own level in or knowledge of them.

For the above reasons, material things are elevated to a nature superior to their own in order to be known, so that they are in a sense made like us. Their nature is enhanced in this way, just as the Divine nature is diminished when represented in human minds, no matter how well they are understood theoretically. From these two classes of inequality between knower and known, Augustine proceeds to the middle case, where the human mind knows itself and approves of the knowledge:

“This same knowledge is in such way its word (i.e. its Form), that it is wholly and entirely on a par with it, is *equal to, and is identical with it*,(my italics), because it is not the knowledge of a lower essence, such as the body, nor of a higher essence such as God. And since knowledge has a likeness to that thing which it knows, namely, that of which it is the knowledge, then in this case it has a perfect and equal likeness, because the mind itself, which knows, is known.” (*The Trinity*, Bk.IX, Ch.11)

Thus the mind’s knowledge of itself is a unique case of congruence between knower and known, whence it is rightly a paradigm case of knowledge in general as well as being the basis of the *Cogito* argument.

In Book X,10, of the same book, Augustine states the crucial idea that “every mind knows and is certain concerning itself.” From this it follows that there can be no conclusions more certain than those which follow

from the mind’s knowledge of its own operations. Nearly all cases of error occur where one has tried to explain external things by reasoning on inadequate evidence, that is, evidence which has to be taken on trust, besides failure to recognise Forms where they are instantiated. There can be no such problem in the mind’s relation to itself, whence the effectiveness of the *Cogito* in both Cartesian and Augustinian thought.

Augustine shows that the mind’s essential core of certainty transcends all the accidents and confusions of the external world. Thus, if I do not know something, and it is only a belief, I can always know that I do not know it; if I am deceived, I know that I do not want to be deceived; if I thought that all truth had perished, I would still be claiming that it was true that that had happened. Such are some of the truths which emerge from the self’s act of self-reflection, the certainty of which is not owing to natural phenomena. The objects of this interior knowledge are not physical objects as such, but their Forms as recognised in the mind’s representations.

At the same time he saw that the mind’s self-evidence to itself has consequences which include life and existence as well as knowledge: it is also self-evident that “no one understands who does not live, and that no one lives who is not.” (*Trinity* X, Ch.10) In this way, the *Cogito* includes the existence of the thinker, just as it does in the well-known formula of Descartes, but more effectually.

Along with life and existence, the will and the memory are known for what they are with certainty as a result of

the mind's knowledge of itself. Since one must exist and be alive in order to doubt or to be deceived, there can be no such thing as absolute or complete deception or doubt. When we know that we live we know thereby that we know that we know that we live; this means we now know two things, and the knowledge of that makes a third thing. Thus self-reflective thought can generate *a priori* any number of true conclusions from its own operations, (*Trinity* XV, Ch.12) and all still follow from the mind's certainty about itself.

Between the times of St.Augustine and Descartes, the faculty manifest in the *Cogito* argument was recognised in India by Madhva, one of the three greatest Vedantists, and by the Dvaita Vedanta tradition he founded, where it was used as an argument against Shankara's monism. (see *The One and the Many*, Ch.4). The self-reflective power involved in this is not the kind of thing which is open to pantheistic possibilities of sublation, because the pure immediacy of the mind's self-reflective act means that there is no room for the kind of deceptions which can make us take unreal things for real in the outside world.

Self as Condition of Argument. The continuous existence of the same ego through the successive stages of any argument is necessary for the existence of argument as such. This is one reason why I have argued elsewhere that thought only takes place subject to the mental agency exerted by the "I," even though this may appear to be an uncritical acceptance of common sense. This conclusion is

further arguable, however, because the “I” or rational agent can often be withdrawn, as at times when thought is reduced to the wanderings of delirium during illness, or to the image-sequences in dreams. The effects of drugs can bring a similar sense of loss of agency which is commonly supposed to reveal a higher reality than that of rational consciousness.

This belief is associated with a desire for a selfless kind of experience by those who are not concerned that a supposed transcendence of the subject-object relation can in practice mean a withdrawal into the subjective alone. There is no objective means of distinguishing these two cases, no matter what subjective certainties may be involved.

This was not the issue for Descartes, however, because for him the *Cogito* argument was the answer to a sceptical attack on knowledge, which maintained that there could be no valid arguments, because arguments are always incomplete. The essence of argument is a two-step process, namely, the affirmation of a proposition and a rational connection between it and another proposition which ideally is either known to be true or is at least widely accepted.

Normally, the thing argued for and its premise or supportive proposition are quite separate, so that there is always the possibility of having to argue next for the truth of the premise, and then to argue for the argument used for that, and so on. However, for Descartes, the “I am” and the “I think,” which supports it in his form of the *Cogito*, are so closely related as to be inseparable.

On that basis, he has an argument which is not open to the objection that the supporting proposition needs separate proof, and this clearly agrees with Augustine's conception of the deep union between being, knowing, and living.

However, Descartes took this sceptical argument too seriously, because it too is open to the same flaw that it aims at in other arguments. Thus although "Given X, therefore Y" only proves Y, not X, so that X requires "Given W, therefore X," it too is based on an unproven premise, namely, that premises are never proven or known to be true. This as a matter of fact is not true, so the argument has no chance of universality. It is just a practical rule for a certain class of propositions.

Scepticism about the central role of reason in thought is part of a pluralistic and single-level view of the self, in which reason is one of a number of mental functions with no special status in relation to the others. The result they work for is that of *justifiable belief,* a conception which evades the issue as to whether this belief is *known* to be justified or only believed to be. In any case, the result of this is another example of entropic breakdown, in this case between knowing and simply believing, with a parallel breakdown of the distinction between those who know and those who do not. Such losses of distinction are typical in the development of modern thought with its supposed ideal of equality, and which sacrifices the content of ideas to the pursuit of simplification.

These issues are typical of forms of thought which

have parted ways with the foundational conceptions with which we are concerned here, and illustrate the intellectual unravelling which results from this deviation.

Self-Reflection Transcends Nature. According to a monistic metaphysics, what we take for a river or a cave or an animal in the outside world would be so many deceptive appearances of a reality which was none of them, no matter how correctly the senses functioned. When the manifest object is identified as an intrinsically false appearance in this way, it is said to be "sublated" to the One, as Proclus and Plotinus call it, or to God, or however the Deity may be named. (see *An Introduction to Madhva Vedanta,* Ch.2)

Thus the very existence of self-reflection contradicts the idea that everything in natural experience is tainted with illusion, because there is in the mind a test of truth and reality which is unmediated and complete. This is more immediate than any argument for a divine or superhuman reality, which must be a matter of inference, as is also the case with the existence of either the body or of any object in the world. In cases like that of one's body, where the inference of its existence is made countless times, it is easy to forget that an inference remains what it is, no matter how often it is made. If that is forgotten, the constant repetition of an inference can make it appear to be equivalent to the mind's self-certainty.

This is a false sense of self-certainty, and others

similar to it occur at the extremes of both materialistic and ultra-spiritualistic thought. Both need to be able to deny the reality of the mind, since they are both forms of monism, and they consequently require immediacy and self-evidence for things other than the individual mind, however untenable that may be. Similarly, these forms of thought require the property of self-existence to reside in finite entities where it is likewise untenable.

The fact that a union between mind and external object is needed to infer the existence of God means that monism is bound to deny the reality of the Divine transcendence as much as of the human in its reduction of all realities to a single level. It should be noted that the process of inference by which mind can know the existence of God and higher spirits is substantially the same as that whereby it infers that other persons also have minds.

Reductionist metaphysic ignores the *Cogito* argument and its implications, so as to reach an impersonalist conclusion which denies the transcendental nature of the self and its consciousness. However, this kind of theorizing does not overcome the difference between one who *possesses* being and one who *is* being, except on a purely subjective level. These two realities are hierarchically related in the relation of dependence and independence. Moreover, man’s ability to know some things by the very nature of the mind alone shows how man’s mind is a reflection of the mind of God, who by definition knows everything in this internal way, and not just a certain class of things, as it is for human minds.

It should be noted that the mind's *certainty* of its existence does not mean that its existence is known to be *necessary*; its existence is something it happens to have, but not necessarily, or else it would be self-existent like God. The mind knows that its non-existence is conceivable, and thus would not involve a self-contradiction. That, however, does not mean that mind or soul exists as a mere contingency like a material body. It partakes of necessity, and therefore of self-causation, or else it would not be immortal, whence one can say that it has a *conditional necessity* which was given with its own being. In this way it is a mean between the absolute self-existence of God, who exists by definition, and the pure contingency of a material entity which has no element of necessity. Only on this basis can the mind or soul have free will and exert an uncaused causality, which is different from all the causal forces which can act through it or on it.

Despite its transcendence in relation to the contingent objects of nature, it therefore has a dependence on a level of being higher than its own. Because its existence is not a natural contingency, like that of a material thing, there are no physical causes that could cause it either to exist or to cease to exist. Its sole dependence is therefore on an order of being having a similar nature to its own, but with far higher powers of creativity or causality. These things result from the mind's immediate self–knowledge, and by no very extended reasoning.

Mind in Relation to Nature. It was said above that the mind has a relative transcendence in relation to nature, such that its existence cannot therefore be that of a contingency like a material object. Minds and souls have an intermediate state which is contingent, but only in relation to God, and transcendent in relation to nature. Just as the creation of the mind is beyond the powers of contingent and ever-mutable natural phenomena, so likewise with the bipolar relation of subject and object. The mind's role as Subject in relation to all manifest things as Object is as much beyond the possibilities of natural entities or forces as is the mind itself; the former are essentially finite and with no possibility of self-reference.

The mind has a capacity for the infinite which excludes it from the natural order as much as does its being non-spatial and non-material. As the mind is certain of itself *a priori,* the first consequence of this is that the mind is not *per se* limited in its range of objects. Thus the infinite appears to man in the finite entities of nature in their endless different forms and degrees of finitude to which the mind's unbounded scope corresponds. This is an infinity of potentiality, even though not of actuality.

According to Thomas Traherne, the "Infinite" is the first thing to be naturally known, "the only *primo et necessario cognitum in rerum natura:"* (2nd. Century, 81), even though it is strictly the second, since the first thing known is the mind itself. That the infinite should be thus given the first place by so luminous a mind as

Traherne's is an early sign of the modern deviation which has increasingly confined knowledge to the universe. Nevertheless, the mind's innate metaphysical knowledge could hardly be better expressed:

"He thinks not of walls and limits till he feels them and is stopped by them. That things are finite therefore we learn by our senses. But infinity we know and feel by our souls: and feel it so naturally, as if it were the very essence and being of the soul."

Certainly the things brought to mind by the senses are finite, besides which finitude is an innate idea. On the other hand, infinity appears only symbolically in the sense world, in the form of its endless flow and its endless variations of content. The innate idea of the finite presupposes that of the infinite, of course, but this does not include any objective infinite reality. Consequently, the *objective* existence of the infinite can no more be an immediate certainty for the human mind than the existence of a finite object. Knowledge of an objective infinity can only be obtained by an application of Anselm's Proof to the infinite idea, whence it cannot be primal, however certain.

This issue is relevant to the ideas of René Guénon who, like Traherne, took the Infinite for the primal certainty, even though, unlike Traherne, he never explicitly designated it as being so. (see: *The Multiple States of the Being*, Ch.1) This way of presenting it can make it appear to come to us from outside conscious processes, but that is only in appearance. Nothing

escapes the relation of knower, known, and act-of-knowing, unless it occurs in mysticism, which is not an issue in the above.

The human soul belongs to the order of spirits, and accordingly there are ways in which it “signed” by infinity, so to speak. This appears in the endless range of possible things which it can comprehend, which makes it effectively a counterpart to the universe. A classic definition of spirit is according to its activities, which are those of knowing, loving, and initiating action. Here we see the ternary of knowledge, love and power, which has been shown to be essential to the soul. Besides this, there is the practical consideration that the mind can never be unaware of the finitude of its knowledge and its powers of acquiring it. This is a mark of infinity, for if it were so unaware, it would indeed be wholly finite.

Because of the constant need for knowledge or information through the senses, it is natural to think of material things, including one’s own body and brain, as though they alone were the most truly real, despite the fact that they are only inferences, known *a posteriori*. As such they are a complete contrast to the mind and infinity which are immediate and *a priori*, besides being exempt from the kinds of relationship which govern material entities. As Augustine expresses it, the mind does not occupy a less extension of place with a less part of itself and a greater with a greater part, and so cannot be corporeal.

According to the above distinction, material things are not substantial to the degree that mind is, on the basis that the substantiality of things is proportioned to the clarity and directness with which they are known.

This is what conflicts radically with materialistic theories as to our origins and essential nature, since they depend on the mind's assertion of the greater reality of extra-mental reality. According to Augustine:

"Wherefore, since the mind knows itself, it knows its own substance. But it is certain about itself, as is clearly shown from what we have already said. But it is by no means certain whether it is air or fire, or a body, or anything of a body. It is therefore none of these things." (*The Trinity*, Bk.X,Ch.10,16) The mere fact that none of the materialistic accounts of the mind has immediate certainty brands them all inescapably as human constructions. The case is no different with even the most sophisticated modern materialistic accounts of the mind. Where it is said that the mind knows its own substance through knowing itself, it may sound like a statement of the obvious, but the idea of substance refers to the agent as such, and not the agent's activity. In this special case, however, the activity itself is knowing, but Augustine does not say that knowing knows knowing, but that the knowing grasps the substance of the knower.

Nothing else in the realm of action could so be convertible with the substance from whence it issues. (Love also is beyond the distinction of substance and act, but it cannot be classified as a form of action, if

only because it is the main spring of action). Substance is by definition being with the power of action, and if this action attains the substance itself, the substance must be the power of thought; action and substance are here one thing. Such is the unity of knowing and being which is affirmed by Descartes in his “I think, therefore I am.”

No Natural Origin of Mind. These considerations support the supernatural idea of the self and the idea that all things are supernaturally created, since it allows no room for the origination of the self by means of natural processes. Minds or souls which cannot create themselves or others like them are *a fortiori* not creatable by the transient phenomena which flow through the soul’s representation of its world. It has already been observed that the human mind knows itself to have no necessary existence, no matter how certain that existence may be, and that it therefore requires an origin outside itself. That origin must be of the “top down” kind, since it must include the self-substance as described above along with natural entities as normally understood. The human state as a whole requires creation on different levels at once, since mind and body are different without being physically separable.

One consequence of this unity is that the function of sense perception can be known only by mind and not by sense, since the senses of themselves know nothing. The senses have to be objects in relation to mind as much as do the things visible and audible, and so forth. Against

this, all objections to the idea of mind as a real substance are based on the premise that only objects of sensation can be substances, which appears to be incapable of proof. What is involved is essentially a centre of relatively independent and active being; no one knows why that must be identical with “material object” or “sensation.” Such an identity need only be a question-begging method of restricting the range of reality to suit a materialist agenda.

Stock objections to the idea of substantive mind nearly always rely on the fact that we can do countless things without having consciously to think through the sequence of operations required for them. But such cases mean only that the conscious acts involved have been repeated until they are imprinted on the body’s functions. As soon as any problem is encountered, conscious mental direction returns at once. That alone is enough to show that near-automatic operations, such as walking, writing, or speaking were never really separate from mental control.

While the mind is its own first certainty, it exists in relation to a world of natural phenomena in which nothing appears to be certain, and that is the basis of the argument that we could be deceived by everything in the external world without that casting any doubt on what we know from within. Nothing in the natural world is known in the fullest sense, that is, from within, and instead things are judged from the outside with varying degrees of probability. Were the mind produced by natural forces,

therefore, its thinking should be confined solely to registering relations among externals. Otherwise, a production of mind as we know it from contingencies andaccidents would be a production of something from nothing.

If, *per impossibile*, such a discontinuous production did occur, the resulting mind would still not be part of nature, and it would not matter what the context was in which it arose. The mind's essential property, its exemption from all forms of contingency, is a necessary condition for it not to be subject to the possibility of merging with phenomena, or of being transferred from without from one set of external relations to another. The property of permanent self-identity involved in this condition is one which clearly corresponds to the idea of substantiality.

In conclusion, it is taught by Aquinas that the mind's knowledge of the natures of all bodies is enough to prove that it is not itself determined by any of them, and consequently that it has no material nature. (*Summa Theologiae,* Timothy McDermott ed., p.109). This is, of course, another aspect of mind's exemption from the natural order as discussed above.

Self-Aware Consciousness and Free Will. Besides being the distinctively human form of consciousness, self-aware consciousness is also the precondition for any ability to take action in a way which is not merely a reaction to outside forces. Animals "act" in response to hunger or fear, but that is always reaction only, this being the

only possibility for creatures which have awareness without-self-awareness. Thus without self-awareness, one cannot take any kind of initiative, even so as to get up out of a chair, because that would require one to reflect on one’s present state, visualize another one, and choose that in preference to the original.

To be without this sense of self is therefore to be almost completely passive, and thus to be incapable of being either selfish or unselfish. This, however, is what many spiritual writers think that life in Heaven must be like. There is admittedly a problem as to how God can be Himself in relation to created beings who remain themselves, without that impossibly making God into a member of a group, but the solution to such problems is probably not attainable in a state of life lived only in space and time.

Opposition to self-aware consciousness as a basis of value proceeds more from non-religious sources than religious, however, because it clearly conflicts with the idea of materialistic monism which denies the “naturally supernatural” transcendence of the self. On any materialistic basis, the autonomy of the mind in relation to the world could not be possible, because its denial of autonomy follows immediately from its dogma that mind is no more than behaviour, which is necessarily part of the external world. The duality of natures between the autonomous mind and the world is the necessary condition for both freely-willed action and creativity, and that is necessary even for materialistic philosophies.

Appearance and Reality. The conclusion indicated by the foregoing, that the self is the subject of the most complete certainty, is enough to exclude the self from the realm of phenomena in which illusions, distortions and incoherencies abound. However, if that was the only conclusion, the self would be as transcendent as God, whereas in fact it is in direct contact with the phenomenal world, and vice-versa. For this reason, the self's active power can cause changes in the world which reflect its intelligence.

As mentioned already, the present discussion is concerned with a realm where the transcendent is truly present with the immanent, and the positive possibilities of the self clearly exemplify this condition. The soul as "self" therefore does not mean simply activity, but purposeful and constructive activity, because of its close relations with the defectively-real world. This contrasts with a metaphysic for which the self is wholly transcendent, that is to say, transcendent both in its intrinsic nature and in its position in the scale of being. On these terms, there is and can be nothing for it to do; true realities would relate only to other true realities, while in the external world the defectively real would relate only to the defectively real.

In this case, the soul would not have to do anything either by direct action, or even by action of presence, and could only await the cessation of the ultimately unreal if it was aware of that at all. Such a position may appear possibly valid if it is thought of in abstraction, but it involves a rejection of man's

position as mediator between God and the world, or between any higher and lower states of being, a rejection which can only mean a choice of passivity. The mistake involved in treating relations to lower degrees of reality as being unreal as such is a result of ignoring the fact that they are caused by the absolutely Real; one cannot negate the effect without negating the cause. A supposed complete separation of the real from the relatively unreal is in any case incoherent if the world is in fact one world. It could have no unity unless some beings combined in themselves possibilities which are separated in most other kinds of being.

In the present case, the state of being in which appearance and reality are united is of special importance to metaphysics, because the main reason for metaphysics is the need to distinguish between the real and the unreal or quasi-real so as to make known the reality which underlies the deceptive appearances. Such knowledge is thus uniquely appropriate to the human state, given man’s position as mediator between God and the world.

Therefore the importance of the *Cogito* argument extends beyond the unique standard of certainty it provides. It excludes any absolute separation of the real from the unreal, while at the same time excluding the unilateral condemnations of the self as such which can be found in a lot of religious writings. The evils which result from it must, in the light of the above, result only from corruptions of it.

The anti-metaphysical positions which give no place for the *Cogito* argument, can now be viewed in a different light. The commonest among them is of the scientific or materialistic kind, which makes everything equally real in terms of atoms and sub-atomic particles, and which cannot distinguish the unreal from the non-existent. The reality it recognises is of a very low order therefore, too low to include such an entity as a self. Even if the self were counted as a phenomenon, it would not thereby be distinguished from all other kinds of phenomena, and its all-essential cosmic centrality would be excluded.

The other kind of anti-metaphysical thought takes the form of metaphysical systems. In complete contrast to the scientific alternative, it expands the scope of the illusory universally such that the real could not exist except in a wholly hyper-cosmic realm. While such thought is metaphysical on this basis, it cannot truly be a metaphysic because its endlessly-extended idea of the illusory necessarily includes even the individual selves and minds of those who espouse this form of thought. It would therefore be self-contradictory to say that any person knew this doctrine to be true. Nevertheless, it is perfectly logical that the elimination of the self or soul should follow from “all-illusory” thought, just as much as from the “all-real” kind, both of which are simply products of abstraction.

The “all-illusory” position can claim to be a metaphysic because it is intended to discriminate between the real and the unreal, even though its idea of the unreal includes everything except the idea of an absolute

transcendence. However, an alternative to everything and anything that could be named cannot have any attribute, and therefore cannot be distinguished from nothing, according to the Identity of Indiscernibles. Consequently, if this kind of metaphysics involves only a discrimination between all known reality and an empty idea, it cannot be called either a discrimination or a metaphysic, except in the most trivial sense.

If such a kind of thought is adopted, one has but two alternatives, either radical scepticism, or an equation of one's own mind with something hypercosmic, while all other minds are merely parts of the unreal cosmic order. This position obviously does not differ from Solipsism, except in accidentals, since having a mind in a totally different category from other minds amounts to the same as being simply the only one to have a mind. At the same time, the solipsism is sufficiently disguised here to satisfy those who do not want to notice it, and it is as impervious to direct disproof as plain solipsism.

If this thought is compared with that of scientific materialism, it makes the same denial of the reality of soul or self for reasons of its own, i.e. the elementary nature of what it takes for real, thereby creating an identity of anti-metaphysical opposites. Being monistic in principle, they both in their own ways deny any interaction between the real and the apparent or defectively-real: in the one case because the real and the merely apparent have absolutely no contact, and in the other because nothing is taken to be less than real if it exists at all. This distinction is the Platonic one which covers the difference in reality between Forms and their manifestation in instantiated things.

Conversely, the paradigmatic knowledge of the self in its self-reflective power gives the measure of its reality, inasmuch as the reality of a thing increases in proportion to the directness and clarity with which it can be known. This principle is the one which more than any other invalidates anti-metaphysical and pseudo-metaphysical systems. Even for such systems, the truth they purport to contain must be identified and understood, and that can only be done by the individual minds or selves for which they can see no meaning. They ignore for ideological reasons a reality which provides the standard of validity for all philosophy, theology and science, and there is manifestly no substitute for it.

Strictly Formal Certainties. Another well-known class of certainties is that of tautologies, whether they are openly so, or whether concealed. They are clearly the cheapest form of certainty, but have a role to play in definitions. In the form “A is A” or “All batchelors are unmarried,” they are affirmations of identity, and their certainty comes from the necessary identity of the mind with itself in both parts of the identity stated. It has been pointed out that “I think, therefore I am” is really a case of concealed tautology, because “I think” must include “I am thinking,” so that the “I am” is necessarily present in the premise.

The Primal Certainty, unlike the above cases, has real content, since it joins the attribute of certainty to the mind’s relation to itself. Mind and certainty are very far from being synonymous, as mind and certainty are

quite separate in themselves, in view of innumerable cases where the mind is anything but certain. However, in this case a piece of knowledge is conveyed, and the certainty is assured, even if it could not be found anywhere else.

In the general case, tautologous or analytical certainties are true but trivial, even when they serve to expound the content of a definition. They can be about things of ultimate importance, as in “God is good,” or “God is all-powerful,” where they make explicit things present in the definition of God and relate to God attributes known from created things. While “God is God” is simply a tautology, “God is” is a real statement since it affirms actual being to all that is believed about God.

However, where God is understood in a “pantheistic” manner, that is, where He is taken to be real to the exclusion of everything else, the question of tautology remains in an aggravated form, because such a conception leaves no room for attributes. In this case, there could be no reality other than that of God as such which one could affirm of God, so in short one could only affirm that God is God. The unreality of other beings would therefore require them to be referred to God in a way which pantheism gives no place for.