

**Brian Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue. The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity*.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-521-19031-2, \$85.00.

In his book, S. examines how Augustine utilizes the narrative pattern of the soliloquy or inner dialogue in his early writings as well as in *Confessions*, *De civitate dei*, and *De trinitate*. Following Pierre Hadot's influential book, "Philosophy as a Way of Life" (Oxford, 1995), S. conceives of the soliloquy as a spiritual exercise. According to S., Augustine tried to make progress in the pursuit of happiness primarily by means of inner dialogue. S. demonstrates the specific characteristics of Augustine's spiritual exercise as the combination of soliloquy and narrative (p. 25). Therefore, S. analyzes not only the philosophical and theological, but also the literary function of Augustine's soliloquies.

The book begins with an Introduction examining the basic features of Augustine's philosophy of language, his considerations on the narrative of the self, and his doubts about the possibility of progressive knowledge. Chapter One traces the influences on Augustine's concept of inner dialogue. In Chapter Two, S. addresses the question of how Augustine makes use of soliloquies in early dialogues in order to demonstrate the existence of the self. Chapter Three focuses on Augustine's use of soliloquy and narrative when discussing order and free will in *De ordine* and *De libero arbitrio*, while Chapter Four is devoted to the development of a 'narrative philosophy' in Augustine's writings.

In Chapter One, S. sketches the most influential factors in shaping Augustine's concept of inner dialogue as spiritual exercise. He examines Augustine's reassessment of the ancient tradition of spiritual exercises, thereby concentrating on Academic skepticism, the tension between pagan philosophy and Christian religion, the relationship between body and soul in the Platonic tradition, and Augustine's hermeneutical approach to pagan and sacral texts. S. also illustrates the influence of literature on Augustine's conversion to philosophy: as Augustine's presentation at *conf.* 3.2.4 reveals, it is the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* that leads to his conversion. S. thus makes clear that already at this early stage, literature and inner dialogue are crucial to Augustine's spiritual development.

Chapter Two focuses on Augustine's use of the soliloquy in his demonstration of self-existence. First, S. provides a list of ancient, medieval, and modern authors in whose works soliloquies can be found, particularly emphasizing Plato and Seneca (pp. 63–71). He then concentrates on two examples of soliloquy in Augustine's writings, the opening chapters of *Soliloquia* and the conversion scene in book eight of *Confessions*. S. shows that Augustine viewed the soliloquy as superior to external dialogue, not because it is more 'rational' but because it represents a higher level in spiritual progress "which proceeds from outer to inner word and then to a sense of transcendence" (p. 88).

S. subsequently offers a thorough and convincing assessment of the much disputed issue of the *cogito*-arguments developed by Augustine and Descartes, respectively (pp. 91–95). While acknowledging the apparent similarities, S. stresses the fundamental

differences in the two thinkers' approaches. By affirming self-existence, Descartes lays the foundation for any certain knowledge without theological consideration, whereas Augustine establishes a kind of certainty of subjective knowledge on the one hand, but on the other emphasizes the relation of this subjective knowledge to its transcendent, i.e. divine, source.

In his analysis of Augustine's demonstrations of self-existence in *Soliloquia*, *De beata vita*, *De vera religione*, *De civitate dei*, and *De trinitate*, S. argues for a gradual shift from philosophical to theological relevance. He considers the *cogito*-argument as a meditative prayer whose first two steps presented in the early dialogues, the focusing of attention and the attainment of a state of tranquility, are complemented by a third, essentially eschatological, perspective. Especially since *De vera religione*, Augustine shifts the attention from mere self-existence to the recognition of Christ's presence within oneself. In *De civitate dei* and *De trinitate* the self is more and more incorporated into a historical framework, i.e. it is pictured against the background of the biblical narratives. The soliloquy thus surpasses the capabilities of external dialogue by providing inward, intuitive, non-temporal knowledge, which cannot be expressed in outer words but is, in fact, taught through the "the implantation of God's image and likeness in every person" (p. 119).

In Chapter Three, S. examines the roles of soliloquy and narrative in *De ordine* and *De libero arbitrio*. According to S., Augustine points out in *De ordine* the limitations of studying the liberal arts in the pursuit of truth, which can only be successful if rational erudition is combined with faith. Since the voice of Christian authority is supposed to be heard mainly through inward self-examination, it is again the soliloquy which proves to be superior to external reasoning. S. therefore concludes that in *De ordine* "dialogue yields to the soliloquy" (p. 142). In his subsequent analysis of *De libero arbitrio*, S. demonstrates how Augustine addresses the issue of free will by combining philosophical considerations with the universal narratives in the bible, particularly in Genesis.

Chapter Four turns to the theoretical implications of Augustine's concept of inner dialogue, which, S. wholeheartedly claims, form "the West's first fully developed narrative philosophy" (p. 181). S. argues that – contrary to previous authors – the narrative and autobiographical element of 'lived experience' plays a major role in Augustine's philosophy and theology (pp. 185sq.). He successively turns to Augustine's attitude toward Academic skepticism, to his theory of images and words, and finally to his reflections on memory and time. In these contexts, S. especially draws upon *Contra Academicos*, *Soliloquia*, *De magistro*, and books 10–11 of *Confessions*.

Let me now add a few critical remarks: S.'s critique of the apparent disorderliness (pp. 3–5. 19–21) in Augustine's early writings seems to be unjustified because, as I would like to object, these dialogues are clearly modeled on the Ciceronian dialogues and thus well-structured. Accordingly, to assert that Augustine often "thought as he wrote, and wrote as he thought" contradicts the thoughtful organization of the dialogues which, of course, "have to be read carefully if any one of them is to be understood correctly and completely" (p. 20). Also, S.'s reading of Augustine's treatment of skepticism in *Contra Academicos* is elusive. S. argues that in Augustine's

view, the major source of uncertainty in philosophical debate rests in rational dialogue itself, which is why Augustine attacks the skeptical position by means of soliloquy. In some sense, S. claims that Augustine overcomes Academic skepticism with Stoic language theory (pp. 186–191). However, studies have shown that Augustine shares the views of the Academics insofar as sense perception is concerned. On the other hand, he rests his argumentation against the Academic claim that nothing can be known with certainty on the Platonic teaching of intelligible knowledge. To put it in another way: Augustine uses Platonism to oppose skeptical as well as Stoic positions (see e.g. D. Doucet, “*Similitudo mater veritatis, dissimilitudo mater falsitatis*,” in: *Archives de Philosophie* 61 (1998), 269–291). However, Stoic language theory does not play a part in Augustine's rebuttal of Academic skepticism in *Contra Academicos*.

Apart from these minor points of criticism, a more serious, methodological, problem in S.'s study lies in its unspecific use of the term 'soliloquy'. Sometimes 'soliloquy' describes a literary genre labeled as 'inner dialogue,' while most of the time the term is used in a broader sense and seems to embrace any inner train of thought (e.g. p. 124: 'thought experiments'; pp. 127. 198: 'internal conversation(s)'; p. 230: 'inner discourse'), even if not made explicit literarily. Hence S.'s thesis often becomes hazy, as he can take practically any of Augustine's arguments into account. In fact, S. himself affirms the vagueness in his notion of soliloquy, when he says about Augustine's early writings that “they are all in some sense dialogues with himself, and, as such, soliloquies” (p. 139). It would thus have served the persuasive power of S.'s study much better if he had confined himself to texts clearly identifiable as soliloquies in a narrow sense. To put it more concisely: if Augustine uses the inner dialogue to gain insights which lie beyond speech, how can these soliloquies be considered as a literary form?

To sum up: the idea that spiritual exercises such as meditation and contemplation play an important role in Augustine's writings has indeed not yet been sufficiently discussed among scholars. S. clearly provides a remedy here (pp. 224–226). His study meritoriously emphasizes Augustine's conviction that there is a superior form of knowledge that cannot be acquired by means of external dialogue, which is deductive by nature, but rather through introspection (p. 124). S. establishes his view by a detailed and convincing analysis of Augustine's theory of signs presented in *De magistro* (pp. 196–211). However, the alleged connection between spiritual exercise and soliloquy as a literary genre remains hypothetical, if not verified by presentation of testimonies. The fatal flaw in S.'s book is exactly this lack of textual proof. Consequently, the citations in the footnotes are often only loosely connected with S.'s remarks and do not always serve his line of argument. Therefore, the question of how Augustine *literarily* presents his use of spiritual exercises still needs to be examined.