Augustine's Confessions *and Interiority*

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1. Christianity from inside and from outside

Today I want to give an external reading of Augustine's *Confessions* as a marker in the social practices we call "Christianity." Thus I'll be using historical, economic, political, sociological categories to analyze certain aspects of a specific social movement: the spread of Christianity across the late Roman Empire. Such an "external" vs. "internal" approach can also be called "materialist," in opposition to "idealist," or even "objective" vs. "subjective," though those last oppositions often provoke misunderstanding. In this case, "materialist" doesn't mean "vulgar money-grubbing," nor does "idealist" mean "starry-eyed wishful thinking." Rather, a materialist analysis looks to explain ideas by reference to processes of production of material objects, including bodily desires (they are, after all, explainable in terms of blood flow, adrenaline release, and so on), while an idealist analysis looks to explain social production in terms of ideas. Similarly, "objective" doesn't mean "true or scientific" and "subjective" doesn't mean "false or illusionary." Rather, an objective analysis looks at Christianity as an object, from the outside, using categories of material processes, while a subjective analysis looks at Christianity as a Christian subject might, from the inside as it were, using personal psychological categories of faith, belief, revealed truth, redemption, etc. Now it should go without saying, but I'll say it anyway, that an external, materialist, objective analysis of Christianity as a historical process is not "anti-Christian," even though it is of necessity **non**-Christian, or **a**-Christian, if such a word exists. Thus it seems to me a person can be a believing Christian and still understand and appreciate external analyses of Christianity. A simplified chart:

external: Christianity from the outside	internal: Christianity from the inside
materialist: use production processes to explain social ideas	idealist: use social ideas to explain production processes
objective: Christianity as an object	subjective: Christian belief

2. Coding, Overcoding, Decoding

To develop my materialist reading, I want to develop a simplified grid for talking about the processes that form social structures which regulate production, distribution, and consumption.

Let us say that while in some sense all social formations code the acceptable behavior of their members, there is a restricted sense of "coding" as such a process that forms a social structure that regulates production, distribution, and consumption. Here I mean that the most common simple (but not "primitive") **coding** is that of the earth, which claims that production is due to the fecundity of nature and that humans are natural creatures. Any surplus production is given back to the earth in the form of feasts and/or sacrifices, which ensure that no surplus ends up in the hands of any one person. The ideal tendency of coding is to form a **tribe**.

Next let's talk about an **overcoding** that takes the credit for production from the earth and gives it to a single being, a lord, a king, an emperor, a tyrant who is, in turn, often the earthly representative of a celestial lord. Any surplus is captured by the lord in the form of tribute, taxes, forced service, and the like, and used for his glory and honor: palaces, temples, tombs, etc. The ideal tendency of overcoding is to form a **State**.

Such overcoding is harried, however, by a **decoding** that would destroy the imperial overcoding, mock the pretensions of the lord, and divert the surplus the lord hoped to capture to an immanently-organized band of "thieving warriors" (who sometimes also go by the name of "capitalists"-with "war" transposed into "competition.") The ideal tendency of decoding is to form a "**war-machine**."

Now we must note that there is no chronology implied here: the tribal coding of production as earthly fecundity, the imperial overcoding of production as due to the lord, and the warrior decoding of production as spoils of war is NOT the progress of history, but processes that can be located on a "map" of possible social formations. Tribal coding in terms of the earth is not primitive, but a sophisticated attempt to preclude imperial States and/or war-machines, while imperial States are themselves attempts to feed off of earthly codings while at the same time closing off the decodings of warrior bands, who in turn rely upon earthly codings and imperial overcodings as their targets. All three are in "mutual presupposition."

We must also note that coding, overcoding and decoding are ideal processes and are never found in the world in their pure form. Any actually existing social system is a mixture of these processes. For instance, a tribal leader may succeed in breaking through the codes and establish his own State, or conversely a warrior band may split off and break away. Also, the warriors are often captured and turned into the Army of a State, but this is always a problem for the State: let's consider Achilles as representing warrior decoding, always threatening to disrupt the plans of Agamemnon, a man of the State, or for a more recent example, Patton the warrior and Eisenhower the administrator in the summer of 1944: stabilize Paris, or push on to the Rhine? On the other hand, roving decoding warrior bands tend to form States of their own in the proper conditions: mythically, consider Aeneas and the Trojans when they finally come to Italy, or historically, the Vandal kingdoms in North Africa in the 5th and 6th C CE. Or the USA, a revolutionary decoding of the British Empire that soon embarks on its own manifest destiny, Monroe Doctrine, and what have you. Or take Microsoft: at first a band of warriors, decoding IBM, and now the Evil Empire itself! And so now the target of war-machines, hackers, spinoffs, software pirates, and so on. Another grid:

process:	coding	overcoding	decoding
pure form:	tribe	State	war-machine
production:	due to earth	due to emperor	due to theft
distribution:	via tribe to earth	to emperor	w/in band
consumption:	potlatch destruction	emperor's glory	warrior honor
desire:	stability	centralization	dispersion
appearance:	territoriality	bureaucracy	innovation
sickness:	neurosis	paranoia	schizophrenia
behavior:	follows tradition	obeys laws	breaks laws
leader:	chief	emperor	gang leader
organization:	"natural"	transcendent	immanent
space:	territory	grid: city/rural	desert/steppe/ocean

A question: to what extent is it helpful, interesting, provocative--or not--to see Jesus' practices as relatively decoding (against the Pharisees and the Romans) and Augustine as relatively overcoding (turning Jesus' decoding into the Church as spiritual "empire")?

3. Augustine's *Confessions* as a marker of interiorization social practices

Besides being a great overcoding: all production, even the fruit on trees and the milk in mother's breasts is due to the Lord, and all desire is to directed to the Lord, the *Confessions* is a, perhaps, **the**, great book of interiority. By this I mean that it is both an index and a blueprint for what we can call the constitution of the Christian subject, or if you want, "the making of the conscience": a reflective, introspective, individualizing, psychologizing, stance toward life. By contrast to this subjectivity whose modern form is still with us--and you need the contrast because you can only understand yourself via a detour of historical or cultural difference, which is why we read the "others"--pagan civilizations, Greeks and Romans, were "exterior" cultures, concerned with fulfilling social roles to win honor or avoid shame through action. The heroes, Achilles, Alexander, were not reflective types. This is of course, history with a broad brush, a caricature: after all, Achilles' heart "is divided two ways" about whether to kill Agamemnon in book 1 of the *Iliad* (187ff), and certainly Odysseus is constantly involved in interior discussion with himself in the *Odyssey* as he struggles to defer the moment of gratification in which he'll avenge himself on the suitors-which is why he's called the "first bourgeois" by some. Nonetheless, it's not too much to say that, *grossomodo*, the Greeks and Romans were not as reflective as the Christians.

Augustine's *Confessions* can thus stand as a marker of and blueprint for increased interiorizing practices: ways of reading Scripture by deciphering hidden depths of meaning, ways of reflecting on one's sins, meditative prayer, remembering and analyzing motivation: creating a conscience. The conscience is made, through social practices--watching and rewarding or punishing people to teach them to watch themselves and regulate their own behavior, as we do with the Santa Claus song: he's watching you, so "you better watch out, for goodness sakes!). The artificial nature of the conscience also explains what we do when we sometimes find sociopaths: people w/o a conscience, people in whom the internal policeman never took hold: so we put them in jail or hospital where we pay others to watch them.

Now writing about the theft of the pears would have been impossible for a Greek. For a couple of reasons: one, lack of interiorizing practices that taught people how to reflect on past deeds--Greeks were ashamed in the eyes of others for failing to live up to social roles as opposed to feeling guilt about sinful psychological motivations; second, because of different social values of the "pagans" as opposed to the "Christians", or better the different values of the empire as opposed to the warriors: theft was a positive virtue! Remember Odysseus, sacker of cities, for witness Spartan boy training: If you're smart and strong enough, you should take it, because that's how the "owner" got it in the first place, before he got fat and lazy and starting writing laws to protect his property and hiring decadent warriors (or better, constructing a culture that tamed and channeled warrior tendencies) as policemen and army soldiers to enforce those laws. (Writ large and taken outside borders, of course, theft [which is only within social groups] becomes conquest, as in Alexander, Caesar, et al., warriors who ended up founding States.)

For another example of differing values, consider three forms of killing: murder, execution, and war. Murder is non-ruler sanctioned in-group killing. Sanctioned in-group killing is execution, justice. Writ large and taken outside, killing is war [Spartan boys did a mixed category: sanctioned terrorism on helot population]. The old sayng: kill one, you're a murderer; kill a million [a million foreigners, that is], and you're a hero [if you win the war, that is: otherwise you're a psychopath, a Saddam Hussein]. In the Hebrew Bible, compare God's reactions to Cain's killing his brother [non-ruler sanctioned in-group killing] to the killing of Onan [sanctioned in-group killing] to Joshua [big-time out-group killing], or any number of "just wars."

Now to tie things together, one can say that Augustine interiorized external social conflicts, between pagan and Christian culture--or more accurately, between the warriors and the citizens of the State, between the decoders and the overcoders, as evil and good forces in his soul respectively. (It was perhaps easy for him to do so, since the conflict in values between his father and mother dramatized this social conflict within his own family-or at least insofar as his father dramatized within himself the conflict within Roman society of warrior and citizen.)

Now when I say "values" (as in "interiorization of conflict of pagan vs. Christian values") that is short-hand for "system of character-forming social practices" as in Spartan boy training for warriors (to take an extreme

example of one strand of pagan society) vs. a "confessional system" that teaches people how to create an interiority via memory, reflection, analysis, interpretation, etc. Having Christian values is the result of going through a certain training, that both selects virtues and interiorizes them. Thus the conscience is a "fold of the exterior," to quote a contemporary French philosopher, Michel Foucault.

The following chart of the pear theft and murder will show that what's an interior psychological category to Augustine reflects various social categories, which are positives to warriors, though not to the citizens of the State (or at least not when done non-sanctioned and in-group):

Overcoding			Decoding
Citizens of the Roman Empire			Warriors
Augustine	Roman law	Spartan boys	Alexander
sin: disobedience of God's law	theft (illegal) taxes (legal)	training	conquest
sin: disobedience of God's law	murder (illegal) execution (legal)	terrorism	war

4. The interiorization of time in Augustine's *Confessions*

As a confirmation of our thesis that the Confessions is a book about interiorization as well as about overcoding, consider Book 11 of the *Confessions*, where Augustine meditates on Genesis 1.1: "In the beginning ..." Augustine will interiorize time, whose prime measure for the Greeks was the movement of the stars. For Augustine, time becomes the *distentio animi*, the distention of the soul. From the cosmos to the soul: a grand interiorization, a folding-in of the exterior.