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CONNOTATIONS OF "SELF-LOVE" IN THE EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE ON THE PASSIONS

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Abstract: While the more frequent historiographic tendency is to associate the early modern occurrences of "self-love" in English texts with the Augustinian template (the "infected love" of a postlapsarian "wicked will"), this paper aims to highlight several instances of a different usage. The seventeenth-century writings on the passions it will investigate work with a notion of "self-love" which only formally carries Augustinian echoes but whose content is rather in tune with notions belonging to a Stoic-inspired scenario of a cure of the soul (resistance to cure, failure of self-examination, narrowness of self – to be gradually shed off by means of a discipline of judgment, self and emotions). As such, they are interesting cases of a typical early modern phenomenon of eclectic discourse formation and mutual contamination of traditions of thought, and testify to a generally neglected early modern concern with a doctrine and a practice of the "cure of the soul" which typically aims to graft Christian theology onto ancient philosophy.¹

Introduction

When the early moderns discuss human nature, be they theologians, moralists, philosophers or even natural philosophers, they frequently invoke the vice, or passion, of "self-love". Since such references are mostly aimed at describing man's postlapsarian condition, the connection is readily and only naturally made in the literature with the Augustinian doctrine of the two cities (the city of the love of God and the city of the love of self, cf. *City of God*, 14:13), as well as with the Augustinianism of the European and English Protestants (as in e.g. Levi in the case of moralist and theological literature or Harrison in the case of natural philosophy).

For St Augustine, the love of self is the very condition enabling the Fall, the original sin which turned a God-loving creature into a "self-pleaser", who thereby "disobeys" and "abandons" or "forsakes" God (self-pleasing and self-satisfaction are equivalents of pride, cf. *City of God*, 14:13, 24, 27). Before falling from Eden, the original man falls into a "wicked will", "turns towards himself", and becomes, with a phrase Luther was to build on, *homo incurvatus in se* (Jenson). It is, emphatically for the Augustinians of early modern Europe, only grace that may un-curve man and bring him back to God. God alone, says Pascal, may make the human soul feel that He is her only good, and that she has in herself that fundament of self-love (*ce fonds d'amour-propre*) which works for her perdition and which God alone can cure (*Pensées* 428, Pascal 284).

¹ This paper owes its core inspiration to the seminar on the early modern treatises of the passions organised by the Research Centre "Foundations of European Modernity", University of Bucharest, and hosted by New Europe College in the spring and summer of 2007. I thank Dana Jalobeanu, the main co-ordinator of the seminar, as well as the members of the seminar team for the thought-provoking discussions around this topic. Some of the material here overlaps with some of the material in the forthcoming Corneanu 2009, where it serves an argument about the contours of a discipline of judgment in seventeenth-century English moralist and philosophical texts.

The idea reverberates in some of the early modern treatises of the passions, a body of literature whose relevance for the philosophical, theological, medical or literary thought of the age is only beginning to be fully acknowledged (see the pioneering James, esp. Introduction). For instance, both François Senault, in *The Use of Passions* (1649), and William Ayloffe, in *The Government of the Passions, According to the Rules of Reason and Religion* (1700), agree that fallen human nature is in the grip of the Augustinian “infected love” and thus in a condition of complete disarray. It is not only the body that has rebelled against the soul, but the soul itself, as Ayloffe puts it, “has its Errors and Blindnesses; our Inclinations are inordinate, our Memory treacherous, our Senses deceitful, our Imagination but frivolous, and our Understanding dark” (Ayloffe 42). As such, although reason does have some role in cultivating a virtuous soul, it can only be the work of grace that can restore man’s tranquillity and happiness.

Yet, the references in these texts are significant: St Augustine is there, as one might expect, but so are, perhaps less expectedly, Seneca and Cicero. Anthony Levi comments on the double reference in Senault to Augustine and Seneca and argues that “when Senault comes to define the role of grace he takes a position, later to be popularised by Pascal, which implied that nature and reason can attain a certain ethical level, but that grace was necessary “pour rendre la vertu méritoire”” (Levi 215). In what follows I want to explore this alternative reference. In the first part, I will briefly reconstruct a tradition of thought recuperated by the early moderns in which Cicero and Seneca play an important part and which, interestingly, is divergent from, but also comes to be intertwined with, the Christian, particularly Augustinian tradition. In the second part, I will look at two early modern treatises on the passions which, I will argue, use the Augustinian reference only to fill it with a noticeably different content, indebted to this alternative tradition.

Cultura animi and early modern contaminations

One extremely influential text of early modern humanist thought is Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* (see Soellner 8-13).² The text was a frequent reference when it came to theories of the passions, to accounts of reason or the virtues of the mind, or to the office of philosophy. It is in discussing the latter that Cicero uses a phrase that has remained famous ever since: philosophy in its true sense is a “cultivation of the soul”, a *cultura animi*.³ The proper work of philosophy, for Cicero, is to “weed out” vices, “till” the soil of the soul, “sow” the good seeds of virtue, and “grow” the harvest of wisdom. Cicero varies the metaphor and also speaks, in medical terms, of the “cure” of philosophy as an *animi medicina*, a “cure of the soul”: virtue and wisdom are the “health” of the soul, and it is philosophy’s office to act as its “physick”, in order to heal what is variously called the “maladies”, “diseases” or “distempers” of the soul (*The Five Days Debate* III.i, III.iii, III.vii, Cicero 148, 151, 159).

The “passions” of the mind are, in their various degrees of severity, the “weeds” or “maladies” to be removed; they are, in a definition Cicero borrows from Zeno the Stoic, “disorders”, “commotions” or “perturbations” of the mind which oppose “right reason” (IV.vi, Cicero 217) and are caused by erroneous “opinion” about good or evil (III.xi, Cicero 165). The right application of reason, called a “kind of Socratick medicine” (IV.ix, Cicero 224), fortifies the mind and is itself the very instrument of philosophy.

Philosophy, then, in this acceptance, is an art of living which performs a cure or culture of the mind. The therapeutic or agricultural metaphors organise a scenario of progress from a “diseased” or

² The Erasmus edition was probably the most frequent reference in English works. An early translation was published in 1561. I will quote here from a later seventeenth-century English edition, *The Five Days Debate at Cicero’s House in Tusculum* (1683).

³ In his classic study of the ancient ideal of *paideia*, Werner Jaeger investigates the cluster of ideas governing the Greek-Roman “education of the soul” (Plato’s “plasticity” of the young soul, Aristotle’s notion that art compensates natural deficiencies, or the Latin *cultura animi*) and traces it back to the sophists’ theory of education. The agricultural metaphor is there from the start, as is the comparison with the sculptor’s activity, visible in the idea of “shaping the soul” (Jaeger 312-14).

“fallow” to a “healthy” or “cultivated” state of the mind. The similitude between this scenario and the Christian story of Fall-and-restoration led to frequent cases of absorption of Stoic vocabulary into Christian accounts of the fate of the soul (see e.g. Todd 1983 on Puritan and Senecan cross-references). A number of early modern texts use Stoic and Calvinist-sounding vocabulary interchangeably when it comes to the ordinary, corrupt or else “fallen” state of man: the English translation of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* (1683) chooses to entitle the first section of Book III, “The Reluctancy of *deprav’d* Man, against his own Cure” (emphasis added). Similarly, Pierre Charron, the French theologian indebted to Montaigne, Epictetus and ultimately to Socratic wisdom, speaks of the “*perverse* nature of man, the roughest and hardest to tame of all the creatures” (emphasis added) and invokes Seneca’s *De Clementia* I for support. The whole famous list of features which make up Charron’s “moral consideration of man” in Book I of his *Of Wisdom* (1606; French edition 1601) – “vanity”, “weakness”, “inconstancy”, “misery”, “presumption” – looks like an Augustinian indictment of fallen human nature, yet his references there are mixed: by the side of Biblical references like Job and Solomon stand Pliny, Democritus, Plutarch and Seneca.

Such mixture of references is made possible by the anchorage of the ancient idea of philosophy as a way of life in an evaluation of ordinary or, to use the Socratic term, unexamined, life in terms of ignorance, error, inner slavery and suffering. In his later work on the “hermeneutics of the subject”, Michel Foucault insists on the centrality of a critical exercise to this philosophical-ethical act, which works on a datum of ignorance, error and deformity of the soul, a *mala mens* as Seneca would have it, which needs to be redressed (Foucault 99). Similarly, Martha Nussbaum argues that in the Hellenistic period, “the central motivation of philosophizing is the urgency of human suffering and the goal of philosophy is human flourishing, or *eudaimonia*” (Nussbaum 15).

But the usual correlative to the *mala mens* idea is the optimistic positing of the existence of elements in the mind which can be worked on in order to start off progress. The usual images used are those of the “seeds” or “sparks” of virtue and wisdom which are still there in the mind, despite the bad habits of mind acquired by commerce with the “mob” and bad teachers, or else, in the Christianised version, despite the wreckage of the soul due to the Fall (*The Five Days Debate* III.i, Cicero 49; see Horowitz, Chapter 1). Continuous with the “seeds/sparks” metaphor is the idea that the mind is divine, or an image of God: again a short-circuit between Stoicism and Christianity. The soul’s powers, says Cicero, are “great” and “divine” (*The Five Days Debate* Lxxviii, Cicero 49; Cicero refers at length to the theory of the soul in the *Phaedrus*). The progress of the mind will thus be often translated in terms of “becoming like God” (or, as like God as is humanly possible), which is equally a Stoic, a Platonic, and a Christian task (for Plato and Seneca, see Russell). Alternatively, the mind’s progress is conceived as an act of piety, a “sacrifice” to God. In the words of Guillaume du Vair, the French supporter of a Christianised version of Epictetian Stoicism who was well known in England at the time, “The wise man is the only true Sacrificer of the great God, whose Spirit is his Temple, whose Soul his Image, whose affections his Offering, whose greatest and most solemn Sacrifice is his Imitation” (Du Vair 91).

Thus, the understanding of the philosophical activity as a cure/cultivation works with a vocabulary which is consonant with (and as such invited frequent contamination with) the Christian anthropological story of Fall/sin-restoration. Yet, while the cross-fertilisation of, say, “Socratic” and Christian vocabulary is a fact, the more markedly Augustinian/Protestant stress on total human depravity and the necessity of grace for restoration is superseded here by a more optimistic programme of a human training of the mind which dubs proficiency in this both an “imitation of” and a “sacrifice to” God.

In what follows, I discuss a couple of treatises on the passions which, I argue, reformulate Augustinian “self-love” much in the sense of the alternative tradition I have presented (for a general assessment of early modern moral thought in light of this tradition, see Schmidt).

Self-love reformulated

Thomas Wright recommends his tract *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1601, 1604) to a large number of possible beneficiaries – the divine, the moral or natural philosopher, the preacher, the

physician of the body, as well as both the good Christian and the civil Gentleman and “prudent Politian” (Wright 2-6) – and announces its subject to be “the chief object that all the antient Philosophers aymed at, wherein they placed the most of their felicitie, that was *Nosce teipusm*, Know thy selfe” (6).

Wright’s treatise starts out with a definition of the passions that insists on their inordinate effects on the soul of man. They are defined both as (scholastic) “acts of the sensitive power of our soul” and as (Stoic-Christian) “perturbations”. The latter term is fitter, Wright says, as “they trouble wonderfully the soule, corrupting the iudgement, & seducing the will, inducing (for the most part) to vice and commonly withdrawing from vertue, and therefore some call them maladies, or sores of the soul” (8). The understanding is blinded by the conjoined action of passions, imagination and a seduced, or else wicked, will. Both the imagination and the will work together to find out and present the understanding with reasons for passions, thus placing “green spectacles before the eyes of our witte” (51).

As remedy to the passions, Wright insists on a discipline of judgment (rather than on grace, say). In the middle of his discussion of the effects of the passions on the understanding, Wright offers an example of a remedy that has all the colours of the Stoic genre of advice: if we are to console a bereft woman, we should offer her all sorts of “perswasions [which] tende to no other ende, but to rectifie her iudgement” (53; see the very similar episode in Cicero’s *Five Days Debate* III.32-34). Similar advice, including the exercise of judgment, constant examination of the work of one’s passions, as well as the practice of a knowledge of when and how to “refrain consent” to the immediate representations offered by the passions, is the matter of Book III, devoted to remedies and means of fighting the passions.

An interesting moment of Wright’s treatise is his account of the “defects of our understandings” in Book VI. Here Wright proposes two sorts of defects: ignorance, from which “floweth vice”, and error, responsible for “heresie” (295). Yet his development of the chart of defects is hardly as neat as that. Explicitly under error, Wright places errors regarding “the last end” and the “means”; presumably, these are heresies against the revealed truth of Scripture. As for “ignorance”, Wright thinks, with a scepticism typical of some Renaissance trends of thought, that we are in the dark concerning not only God and, at the bottom level of creation, the “base creatures”, but also concerning our own souls and bodies. Interestingly, though, there is actually a third category of defects in Wright’s list: a sort of corrupt tendencies of the intellect, not easily amenable under the categories of “ignorance” or “error” in his strict sense. It is this category that features an interesting notion of *self-love*.

The first defect or “imperfection” listed in this nameless category is “curiositie in knowing things not necessarie” (312). The interesting thing here is that, besides the more familiar injunction against prying into “mysteries”, Wright also speaks of curiosity as enquiring into other men’s actions at the expense of self-examination. Such blindness to one’s self is actually a form of self-love. The second defect is practically a continuation of the first: people (even “the wisest”) are not only in love with themselves, but idolatrously so, and it is this self-admiration that accounts for a particular vice that made a career in the seventeenth century: obstinacy in opinions, or the “paynes many men bestowe, in confirming their preconceived errors” (317).

The noteworthy thing is that Wright’s reference here is not St Augustine, but Galen’s *Of the Affections and Errors of the Soul*, a work in which the second-century medical doctor is mostly concerned with the therapy of the soul. There, the beginning of therapy is conditioned on one’s realisation of one’s folly – a difficult task, since everyone loves themselves to the point of resisting even the beginning of examination. Galen’s text, a therapeutic treatise equally indebted to Platonic and Stoic thought, is a most interesting companion of the writings on the passions I am analysing. The errors and the passions reinforce each other, and underlying them both is a certain disposition of the soul that Galen calls “insatiability”, the root of “vanity”, and “self-love”. It is on account of such self-love that the mind behaves in a precipitate manner, giving hasty assent to impressions which flaunt either the truth or the value of things (Galen 125, 145-6).⁴ Self-love appears here in the context of a diagnosis of self attitudes

⁴ “Precipitate assent” is a technical term which in Stoic, neo-Stoic and various early modern texts is used to describe the distempered movement of the mind responsible for both intellectual and moral failure.

and mind dispositions which precedes a therapeutic and cultivating regimen whereby these attitudes and dispositions are gradually transformed by means of a life-long discipline of judgment, emotions and self.

Thus, despite Wright's reference to the Augustinian "infected love" elsewhere in the text, it seems that "Galenic self-love" has more weight with him in questions of therapy. Towards the end of his treatise, Wright considers the "impediments to virtue" and decides they are all reducible to self-love and inordinate passions. But, he continues, it is not really original sin that lies at the root of this bad disposition of the soul, but rather the lack of mental exercise: he refers to the lack of prudent meditation, ill education, resignation to present delectation, and incapacity to persevere in a virtuous course of life (Wright 345).

Half a century later, in his *Of Peace and Contentment of Minde* (1657), Anglican controversialist Peter Du Moulin prefers to downplay the "knowledge" (in the sense of "scientific knowledge") component of his investigation and insists on the "government" and "cure" of the mind. In the Preface to his tract, he announces his purpose to be to correct the "book" of man's spirit upon the books of Nature, Scripture, and God's Providence. He is less interested in "anatomising" the soul and speculating about its structure; the task is actually close to impossible, since the spirit of man, like the eye, cannot see itself. More profitable then, and easier, is "to learne the right government" of the soul (Du Moulin 170). It is enough to know for this purpose that our postlapsarian souls are reigned by discord and confusion, and to acknowledge "the blind and rash nature of the spirit of man". To do so is already to prove humble and ready for an education in moderation and wisdom. Du Moulin seems to be referring here to a *topos* indebted to the tradition of the cure of the soul: the cure begins once you become ready for the cure, which is first and foremost to curb your self-love and acknowledge your folly and need of repair.

Du Moulin's treatment of passions and opinions is indebted to Epictetus, Charron and Christian thought. The Stoic philosopher is invoked explicitly several times and is behind Du Moulin's insistence that the key to the peace of the mind is the rectification of our opinions (on Epictetus and his exercises, see Hadot, Chapter 6). Passions are occasioned by opinions, and right opinion is their moderator. The only way to free oneself of them is to "heale the understanding of erroneous Opinions", which comes with a constant exercise in the right valuing of all things (209, 207, 85-7).

The first book of his tract is entirely dedicated to the "peace with God" that we may acquire through exercising faith, hope and charity (the traditional theological virtues), through religious meditation, repentance and prayer (our "conversation with God"), as well as through the study of God's Word (the Scripture) and of God's Works (Nature and Providence). The next three books, though, are devoted, in an openly Epictetian fashion, to man's "peace with himself". The rectification of opinions and the government of the passions belong to this more earthly, yet much more voluminous, regimen, which is conducive to virtue – the subject of the fourth book.

What Du Moulin has to say about virtue is most interesting. In dealing with the "ornaments of the understanding", he works with the Aristotelian distinction between "sciences", which "consider universals", and "prudence", whose objects are "particular things casual and uncertaine" (184). But in a reversal of the Aristotelian hierarchy, Du Moulin places prudence above science: if science is the "husbandry of the soul" and comes first in order, prudence is "above Science in dignity", since it teaches men "to live well and dye well" (177, 178).

Prudence is thus recast in the role of a guide to all the virtues; more than that, it is said to comprehend them all, and is defined as the disposition of being "religious, just, constant, and temperate" (181). It is true, it deals with particulars and uncertainties, and thus is often conquered by our "folly and precipitate rashnesse" (184), but it is the aim, precisely, of the constant examination of opinions to form such a "golden temper" in our minds. The value of prudence as a virtue of the mind, then, seems to lie in the disposition of mind it engenders rather than in the presence or lack of universality and certainty. The invocation of Epictetus in this respect seems to underlie this revaluation of Aristotelian values. Du Moulin's definition of virtue bears unmistakable Stoic echoes: it is a "calme state of the Soul, firme, equall, magnanimous, meeke, religious and beneficiall to a mans selfe and to others" (332) and it is the fruit of right opinion and well governed passion.

Du Moulin all but erases the borderline between moral and intellectual virtues and in the process places *self-love* in a crucial position in his therapeutic story, a position which echoes the similar treatment in Wright (or Galen). If prudence is said to be an intellectual virtue, justice is given as the moral virtue. But “just”, we have seen, is part of the definition of “prudence”, while “justice” is described, echoing the Platonic tradition, as “the equal temper & just proportion of all the faculties and motions of the soul” (332). In addition, the two “vertues of Justice”, meekness (or docility, or humility) and magnanimity (or generosity), are essential ingredients in the “prudent” state of mind. The education into virtue is, for Du Moulin, primarily an education of judgment by examination of opinions: magnanimity makes the mind constant, while humility is crucial to the work of examination of opinions and a defence against obstinacy and pride or self-love: under its guidance, man “will labour to heale himself of all arrogant opinions and obstinate prejudices, being alwayes ready to receive better information and submit himself unto reason” (341, 342). Generosity and humility together are the best defence against pride, or “presumption, and a blinde immoderate love of a mans self”, which is responsible for his “perpetuall unquietness and vacillation” (265).

The man obstinate in his opinions is eloquently portrayed as a spirit inhabiting a narrow, stuffed room (a “small cabine”), afraid of changing views. By contrast, the “great spirits” are like dwellers of large houses, with many chambers and “severall apartements for several Offices”, and are thus accustomed to change vistas (276). The obstinate man is doubly vicious, morally and intellectually at once and by the same token: his pride, narrowness and “timorousness”, and his mismanagement of the faculty of judgment are sides of the same coin. Here, as in Wright, self-love is associated with intemperate judgment and an obstinate narrowness of mind, and inscribed in a scenario of therapy by examination of opinions.

Conclusion

These texts work with a notion of “self-love” which only formally carries Augustinian echoes but whose content is rather in tune with notions belonging to a Stoic-inspired scenario of human cure. This may be apt to add important nuances to the question of the Augustinian cast of early modern English thought. In particular, they develop an account of “errors” and “passions” (recast as “maladies” rather than “sins”) held responsible for the bad conduct of man’s cognitive, emotional, and volitional capacities. Continuous with this account is the development of a notion of “self-love” which describes not so much the Augustinian theological sin of “infected love” as rather a flawed disposition associated with the diseased/uncultured mind: resistance to cure, failure of self-examination, narrowness of self and intemperate movement of the mind. It is responsible for a bad positioning of the self in relation to the true goal of knowledge (the search for truth whereby both God’s glory and man’s felicity are enhanced), to the truth and value of things, as well as to the task of man (of engaging in a cure of his own soul, and of using the “gift of reason” well). This type of “self-love”, moreover, unlike the Augustinian one, is apt to be gradually purged away by human effort.

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