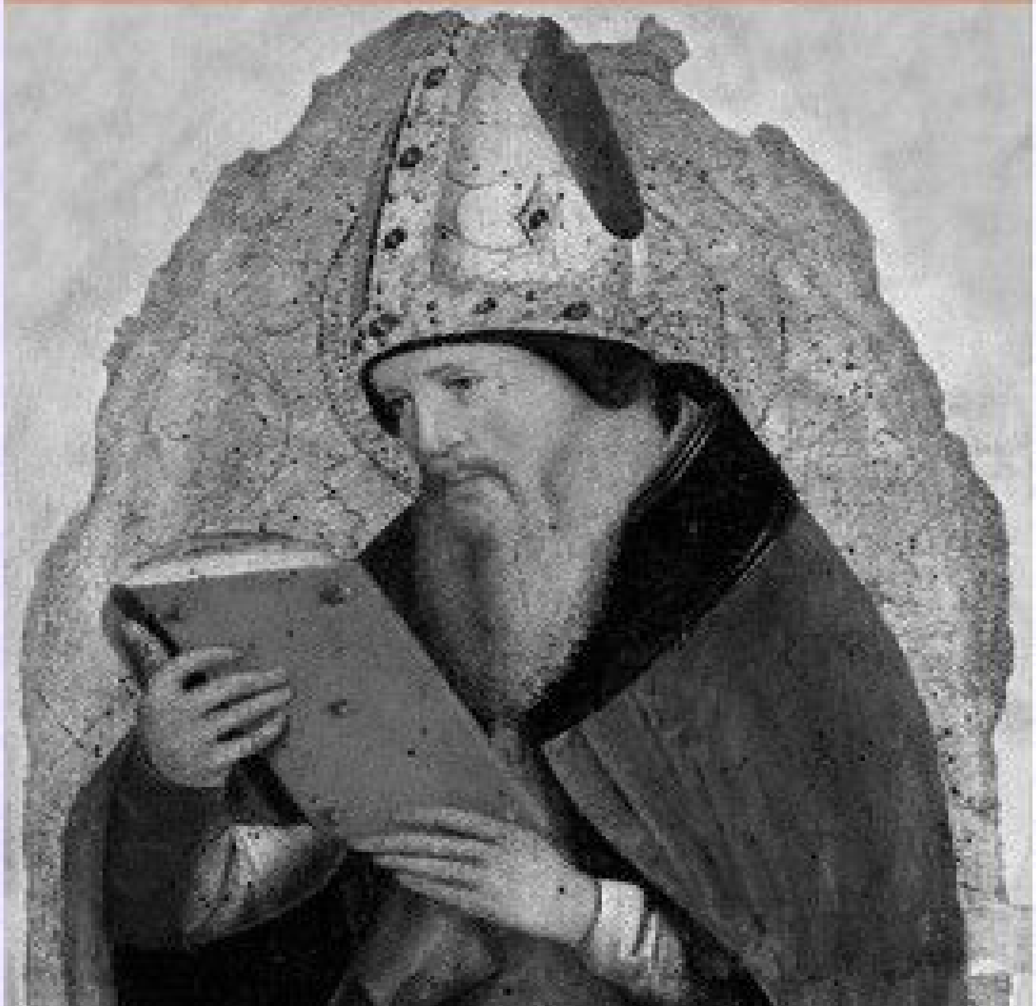
The Cambridge Companion to AUGUSTINE

SECOND EDITION



EDITED BY

DAVID VINCENT MECONI
AND ELEONORE STUMP

The Cambridge Companion to AUGUSTINE

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DAVID VINCENT MECONI, S.J., is Assistant Professor in the Department of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University. His most recent books include *The Confessions: Saint Augustine of Hippo* (2012) and *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (2013).

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AUGUSTINE

Second Edition

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St. Louis University

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For Norman Kretzmann (†1998),
teacher and friend,
and
for John Kavanaugh (†2012),
friend and brother in the Society of Jesus

Contents

Notes on contributors
Preface
List of abbreviations

Introduction
Eleonore Stump and David Vincent Meconi, S.J.

Part I The nature of God
1 The divine nature: being and goodness
Scott MacDonald
2 God's eternal knowledge according to Augustine
John C. Cavadini
3 Augustine on the triune life of God
Lewis Ayres

Part II God's relation to the world
4 Time and creation in Augustine
Simo Knuuttila
5 Augustine on evil and original sin
William E. Mann
6 Jesus Christ, the knowledge and wisdom of God
Allan Fitzgerald, O.S.A.

Part III Human nature
7 The human soul: Augustine's case for soul–body dualism
Bruno Niederbacher, S.J.
8 Augustine on knowledge
Peter King
9 Augustine on free will
Eleonore Stump

Part IV Human excellence
10 Augustine's ethics
Timothy Chappell
11 Augustine's doctrine of deification
David Vincent Meconi, S.J.

Part V Political and ecclesial life
12 Augustine's political philosophy
Paul Weithman

13 Heaven and the *ecclesia perfecta* in Augustine
David Vincent Meconi, S.J.

Part VI Language and faith
14 Faith and reason
John Peter Kenney
15 Augustine on language
Peter King
16 Hermeneutics and reading Scripture
Thomas Williams

Part VII Augustine's legacy
17 Augustine's legacy: success or failure?
Karla Pollmann

Bibliography
Index

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Preface

This volume is a greatly revised version of the earlier *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. The earlier version was co-edited by one of us, Eleonore Stump, together with Norman Kretzmann. When he undertook the project that culminated in the earlier volume, Norman knew that he was dying of cancer; the earlier volume was one of the last joint projects in the long and fruitful collaboration between him and Eleonore Stump. With his death, the field of the history of philosophy lost one of its most accomplished scholars, and we are sad that this revised volume has not had the benefit of his care, thoughtfulness, and expertise.

Nonetheless, the volume has profited from the proficiency of its many new contributors as well as the capable work of previous contributors. It has also benefited from its new editor, David Vincent Meconi, S.J., whose expertise in patristics and the history of theology has been invaluable in broadening the range of this collection. We appreciate the help and advice of Hilary Gaskin as well as the work of all our production team at Cambridge in every stage of the production of this volume.

We would like also to express our great gratitude to Barbara Manning, the administrative assistant for this project; Andrew Chronister; and Joel Archer, the research assistant for the entire volume. Barbara Manning's administrative skill and intelligent management of the complexities of this project were an invaluable help. Andrew Chronister carefully and very competently proofread many of these pages. Joel Archer's patient labor and competent help with the bibliography, citations, and proof-reading were vital for the project's success.

Finally, we have dedicated this volume to Norman Kretzmann and to John Kavanaugh, dear friend, fellow teacher and lover of Augustine, and brother in the Society of Jesus, who died after a short illness some months before it went to press.

Abbreviations

Works by Augustine

Abbreviations	Latin titles	English titles
c. Acad.	*Contra Academicos*	*Against the Skeptics*
adn. Job	*Adnotationes in Job*	*Comments on Job*
agon.	*De agone Christiano*	*On the Christian Struggle*
quant.	*De animae quantitate*	*On the Greatness of the Soul*
bapt.	*De baptism*	*On Baptism*
b. vita	*De beata vita*	*On the Happy Life*
b. conjug.	*De bono conjugali*	*On the Good of Marriage*
cat. rud.	*De catechizandis rudibus*	*On the Instruction of Beginners*
civ. Dei	*De civitate Dei*	*City of God*
conf.	*Confessiones*	*Confessions*
cons. Ev.	*De consensu Evangelistarum*	*On Agreement among the Evangelists*
cont.	*De continentia*	*On Continence*
corrept.	*De correptione et gratia*	*On Admonition and Grace*
dial.	*De dialectica*	*On Dialectic*
div. qu.	*De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*	*On Eighty-Three Varied Questions*
doc. Chr.	*De doctrina Christiana*	*Christian Teaching*

en. Ps.	*Enarrationes in Psalmos*	*Explanations of the Psalms*
ench.	*Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate*	*A Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*
ep. (epp.)	*Epistulae*	*Letters*
ep. Rm. inch.	*Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*	*Unfinished Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*
ex. Gal.	*Expositio Epistulae ad Galatas*	*Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians*
ex. prop. Rm.	*Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula Apostoli ad Romanos*	*Commentary on Statements in the Letter to the Romans*
c. Faust.	*Contra Faustum Manicheum*	*Against Faustus, a Manichee*
f. invis.	*De fide rerum invisibilium*	*On Faith in the Unseen*
f. et symb.	*De fide et symbolo*	*On Faith and the Creed*
c. Gaud.	*Contra Gaudentium Donatistarum episcopum*	*Against Gaudentius, a Bishop of the Donatists*
Gn. litt.	*De Genesi ad litteram*	*On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*
Gn. litt. imp.	*De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*	*On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis, an Unfinished Book*
Gn. adv. Man.	*De Genesi adversus Manichaeos*	*On Genesis, against the Manichees*
gr. et lib. arb.	*De gratia et libero arbitrio*	*On Grace and Free Will*
gr. et pecc. or.	*De gratia Christi et de peccato originali*	*On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*

haer.	*De haeresibus*	*On Heresies*
imm. an.	*De immortalitate animae*	*On the Immortality of the Soul*
Jo. ev. tr.	*In Johannis evangelium tractatus*	*Tractates on the Gospel of John*
c. Jul. imp.	*Opus imperfectum contra Julianum*	*Against Julian, an Unfinished Book*
lib. arb.	*De libero arbitrio*	*On Free Will*
mag.	*De magistro*	*On the Teacher*
mend.	*De mendacio*	*On Lying*
c. mend.	*Contra mendacium*	*Against Lying*
mor.	*De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*	*On the Catholic and the Manichaean Ways of Life*
mus.	*De musica*	*On Music*
nat. b.	*De natura boni*	*On the Nature of the Good*
nat. et gr.	*De natura et gratia*	*On Nature and Grace*
ord.	*De ordine*	*On Order*
pecc. mer.	*De peccatorum meritis et remissione*	*On the Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins*
perf. just.	*De perfectione justitiae hominis*	*On the Perfection of Human Righteousness*
persev.	*De dono perseverantiae*	*On the Gift of Perseverance*
praed. sanct.	*De praedestinatione sanctorum*	*On the Predestination of the Saints*

c. Prisc.	*Contra Priscillianistas*	*Against the Priscillianists*
qu.	*Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*	*Questions on the Heptateuch*
qu. Ev.	*Quaestiones Evangeliorum*	*Questions on the Gospels*
qu. vet. T.	*De octo quaestionibus ex Veteri Testamento*	*On Eight Questions from the Old Testament*
retr.	*Retractationes*	*Reconsiderations*
rhet.	*De rhetorica*	*On Rhetoric*
c. Sec.	*Contra Secundinum Manicheum*	*Against Secundinus, a Manichee*
s.	*Sermones*	*Sermons*
s. Dom. mon.	*De sermone Domini in monte*	*On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount*
Simpl.	*Ad Simplicianum*	*To Simplicianus*
sol.	*Soliloquia*	*The Soliloquies*
spec.	*Speculum*	*The Mirror*
spir. et litt.	*De spiritu et littera*	*On the Spirit and the Letter*
Trin.	*De Trinitate*	*The Trinity*
util. cred.	*De utilitate credendi*	*On the Advantage of Believing*
vera rel.	*De vera religione*	*On True Religion*

Standard editions of Augustine's works

BA	Bibliothèque Augustinienne, *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1949–

CCL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vienna: Tempsky, 1865–
PL	Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina, ed. J. P. Migne. Paris: Garnier, 1844–64
PG	Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca, ed. J. P. Migne. Paris: Garnier, 1857–66

Introduction

Eleonore Stump and David Vincent Meconi, S.J.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of Augustine's work and influence, both in his own period and in the subsequent history of Western philosophy. Until the thirteenth century, when he may have had a competitor in Thomas Aquinas, he was the most important philosopher of the medieval period. Many of his views, including his theory of the state, his account of time and eternity, his understanding of the will, his attempted resolution of the problem of evil, his exposition of God's knowledge, his theory of language, and his approach to the relation of faith and reason, have continued to be influential up till the present time.

Augustine's work is a well-tilled field; but since his literary output is estimated at 5.4 million words, the field of Augustine scholarship continues to yield a bounteous harvest. It has been over a decade since the first edition of the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine* appeared. In that time, reflection on Augustine's life and labors has continued to bear much fruit. While the first edition of the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine* represented excellent historical and philosophical scholarship, significant new studies into major aspects of Augustine's thinking have since appeared, and new work on the themes Augustine addresses has also been done. Additionally, there are many new annotated English translations of his work, as well as new studies of his life and times.

This past decade of research thus occasions a major rethinking of the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. On reflection, we thought that this revised volume might be structured better by having its sections mirror themes more natural to Augustine's own thought than the original volume did. This restructuring regrettably required omitting from this volume some very good essays found in the original. On the other hand, the restructuring did allow us to commission some superb new essays on topics that either were not in the original volume or were handled differently there. The result is this volume, which replaces the now outdated earlier *Companion*. Although some contributions from the earlier volume are reprinted here, some with significant revisions, eleven of the seventeen chapters are new; and nine new contributors have been added.

Aurelius Augustinus was born on November 13, 354 to a Catholic mother, Monica, and a staunch Roman pagan, Patricius. Monica would have had each of her children (Navigius, Perpetua, and Augustine) sealed with the sign of the Christian cross and their tongues purified with blessed salt, as each made their way into the world. Augustine was raised in a small corner of northeast Numidia, in the small town of Thagaste (Souk Ahras in today's Algeria).

The more formative aspects of his early life are well chronicled in his *Confessions*. He attended school first in the prosperous city of Madaura (the birthplace of the influential Roman writer Apuleius). Then, after having spent an idle year back home due to financial restraints, Augustine went to study in the ancient metropolis of Carthage in 370. Here he excelled in rhetoric.

Through his study of Cicero's (now lost) *Hortensius*, which was an exhortation to the love of wisdom, Augustine fell in love with philosophy. Eighteen years old and full of both success and searching, the ambitious Augustine sought not only true wisdom, but human affection as well. He formed a relationship with a woman, whom he took as a concubine, rather than as a wife; and together they had a son, Adeodatus.

Augustine eventually grew discontented with his life in Carthage, where he had been teaching oratory since 376; and, in 383, he sailed off to make a name for himself in Rome.

Once in Rome, he became dismayed by the students there and annoyed at their failure to pay their teacher his duly contracted fees. In 384, he gladly traveled to Milan, where through the influence of the famed Roman senator Symmachus, Augustine had secured a spot as the imperial rhetor.

In all this time, Augustine was on a spiritual odyssey.

He had grown in his interest in philosophy, but he was unable to find a satisfying answer to the problem of evil. Because the Manichaean sect did provide an answer, Augustine was drawn to them while he was still in Carthage. Mani (*c*. 205–74) was a Persian mystic whose eponymous religion maintained that the visible world is the result of an eternal conflict between two equally powerful opposite principles. The *summum malum* and the *summum bonum* have comingled, giving way to a cosmos that is composed of warring opposites – good and evil, light and dark, very heavy material bodies and lighter, ethereal 'bodies,' and so on. In such a world, a Manichaean's chief desire is to be released from such divisions through gnosis and ritual.

Augustine became a 'hearer' of the Manichaeans in 373. Their dualistic cosmogony supplied him with a simple theodicy, and he was an adherent to the Manichaean sect for close to a decade. Nonetheless, his eventful meeting with the much-celebrated Manichean bishop Faustus, as well as Augustine's reading of Neoplatonic books, began to dissipate his belief that the Manichaeans were right.

Through Neoplatonism, Augustine finally came to a belief in the existence of an immaterial order. Whatever Neoplatonic authors he read while serving as the imperial rhetor in Milan, they brought him to a belief that God is not an extended composite being. Not one to make a clean, academic distinction between 'philosophy' and 'theology,' Augustine combined both these aspects of Neoplatonism into his own thought during the same time he heard the sermons of Ambrose (*c*. 340–97), who was the Bishop of Milan at that time. Augustine was in the basilica while Ambrose preached on the opening chapters of Genesis in the early winter months of 385. These sermons provided the searching Augustine an excellent example of how to read Scripture on a much more sophisticated level than he had ever before encountered. Through Ambrose's expositions of biblical texts, Augustine came to realize that the Christianity he had been introduced to as a child was really a mere simulacrum of a faith much deeper and more erudite. He recognized that Ambrose perceived many layers of meaning in the Bible and was able to explain the meaning of the biblical texts with a hermeneutical finesse that Monica and other Christian teachers of his youth were not able to give him. Augustine's appreciation of the power of allegory allowed him to read the Bible with a new depth; and his Platonism gave him the philosophical moorings by which to gauge the philosophical conclusions of his newly embraced orthodox Christian faith.

Although he was on his way to the Christian wisdom he sought, Augustine was still not without his worldly aspirations. He freely allowed the mother of his son to be put aside ("she was ripped from my side, being regarded as an obstacle to my marriage": *conf.* 6.15.25; Boulding 2004, 156) as a mere inconvenience and hindrance to his rising status within the imperial ranks. And then he formed a relationship with another woman until the wife he was promised reached marrying age.

During this pivotal time in Augustine's life, he was filled with inner turmoil. He felt miserable, despite his achievements; in his own view, he was unable to see a way to true happiness. In this condition, he heard the story of Marius Victorinus, another Roman orator, who had left the comforts of imperial office to become a Christian philosopher (cf. *conf.* 8.2.3–8.5.10). He also heard the story of Antony of Egypt, who had left all things behind to serve God in constant prayer and hermetic simplicity (cf. *conf.* 8.5.15). Filled with the power of these narratives, Augustine drew his friend Alypius into his confidence: "What does this mean? What did you make of it? The untaught are rising up and taking heaven by storm (cf. Mt 11:12), while we with all our dreary teachings are still groveling in this world of flesh and blood" (*conf.* 8.8.19; Boulding 2004, 199). Seeking some resolution in contemplation and conversation, Alypius and Augustine went into the privacy of the garden where they were staying in Milan, and suddenly Augustine "heard a voice from a house nearby – perhaps a voice of some boy or girl, I do not know – singing over and over again, 'Pick it up and read, pick it up and read.'" Remembering the story of Antony's being moved by randomly selecting a scriptural verse, Augustine picked up a copy of Paul's letters and chanced upon Romans 13:13–14: "Not in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires" (*conf.* 8.12.29; Boulding 2004, 206–07). This single moment convinced Augustine of God's providential care throughout his entire life. Converted in that moment, he went indoors to find his mother Monica to tell her of his newly found joy and his desire to become a Catholic Christian.

Augustine now knew he had "to withdraw the service of [his] tongue from the market of speechifying" (*conf.* 9.2.2; Boulding 2004, 210). He decided to renounce his secular career and worldly lifestyle. After the autumn holiday of 385 (August 23–October 15), he officially resigned; and, along with Monica, his son Adeodatus, and some select friends, he left the city for a small village outside Milan, Cassiciacum. There, at the villa of his benefactor Verecundus, Augustine spent the months between September 385, and April 386 preparing for baptism. During this quasi-monastic period of his life, he enjoyed the time and leisure needed to contemplate and to write. In the early dialogues that emerge from this time, we see a young philosopher steeped in the tradition of Plato and seeking to make sense of God, the soul, and the human desire for felicity. The titles of the works from this time are revelatory: *Contra Academicos*, *De beata vita*, *De ordine*, *De immortalitate animae*, and the *Soliloquia* (a term Augustine here coined). Baptized by Ambrose on the evening of Holy Saturday, April 24, 387, Augustine (along with Monica and Adeodatus) made the requisite preparations for the journey back to Africa. Due to a maritime blockade brought about by a short-lived civil war, the group was forced to delay their journey; and, at the Roman port town of Ostia, Monica died. Along with Adeodatus, Augustine spent the rest of 387 until August 388 in Rome, where he took up some of his more concentrated attacks against Manichaeism.

Augustine returned to Thagaste with a hope of continuing the life experienced at Cassiciacum, a life of "deified leisure" (*ep*. 10.2). For close to three years (388–91), Augustine, Adeodatus (who would die during this time, around the age of sixteen), and about a dozen other men lived a life of intellectual conversation, prayer and liturgy, and philosophical study. One day, however, Augustine left the community to travel to Hippo Regius in order to interview a possible new recruit (admitting that he thought it was safe because there was already a bishop and supposedly enough presbyters there; cf. *s*. 355.2). Hippo Regius was a coastal town of about 30,000 people, with Catholic Christians competing against Donatist Christians and a strong non-Christian cult. The Catholic bishop, Valerius, was growing old, and his weak command of the Punic dialect had never allowed him to interact with his flock on any real, daily basis. Thus hearing of Augustine's arrival, Bishop Valerius was prepared to ask him to consider presenting himself for priestly ordination. After some inner turmoil and discernment, Augustine did in fact ask to be ordained, and in 391 he was made a Catholic priest. With special permission to preach (a task normally then reserved for the bishop only), Augustine was quickly recognized as a gifted thinker and skilled orator. The aged Valerius wanted to seize the promising Augustine and ensure that he would remain in Hippo. Valerius thus asked for, and received, permission to have Augustine made a co-adjutor bishop in 395. Since two bishops in one diocese was usually forbidden (as outlined in the sixth canon of the Council of Nicaea), Augustine had to win the support of the wider clergy, especially the Metropolitan of Numidia, Archbishop Megalius. So, in order to show that his Christian conversion was real and he was not the pagan sympathizer he had been when he left Africa years before, he set to work on his *Confessions*.

Although no major church council occurred during Augustine's episcopacy, these thirty-five years of leadership stamped Western philosophy more than the tenure of any local bishop since. Church leaders and Roman magistrates alike looked to the Bishop of Hippo for both practical counsel and the approbation or condemnation of various theological positions. His writings during this time were occasional, never systematic, responding to exigencies and questions of supreme importance to many different constituencies around the Mediterranean. He contributed to every area of philosophy, weaving disparate topics in such a way that trying to disentangle them would do violence to his thought. So, for instance, Augustine wrote a great deal on the nature of the will, but his views on the will are also integral to his position on the relation of faith to reason, his account of virtues and vices, his attempted refutation of Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism, and a host of other issues.

Toward the end of his life, Augustine knew he could not lead his people much longer, and he sought to secure the unity and the good of the Church he had worked so hard and so long to foster. On September 26, 426, the aging bishop assembled his presbytery in Hippo’s Basilica Pacis; and, in the way that Valerius had called Augustine thirty years prior, Augustine named the young priest Eraclius his episcopal successor. Then he turned his attention to consolidating his philosophical and theological work. In 428, Augustine sat down with his longtime secretary, Possidius, and laid out the structure of his literary output. In the *Indiculum* and in the more popular *Retractions*, Augustine provided a chronology and summary of all his major doctrinal works and homilies. These days of retrospection quickly came to an end. In 429, the Vandal general Geneseric and his (Arian Christian) army invaded North Africa from Spain. By the middle of 430, they had easily made their way eastward. Hippo came under siege; much of the city suffered, but Augustine’s library was miraculously spared. With the Vandals threatening ever closer, the seventy-six-year-old Augustine succumbed to a fever. He died in Hippo on August 28, 430, reciting the psalms he had written out and posted on the wall adjacent to his bed. Possidius survived the Vandals and was able to use the remaining years of his own life organizing and overseeing the copying of Augustine’s writings, as well as composing the first biography of his teacher and guide.

In that *Life of Augustine*, Possidius says that Augustine’s writings “show us as brightly as the light of truth ever permits someone to see, that this priest, so acceptable and so dear to God, lived virtuously and sanely (*recte ac sane*) . . . and no one is able to read what he wrote about divine matters without great profit” (§31). And Possidius was surely right. Augustine’s writings have been a powerful influence throughout all the centuries since then; and they are a witness to the beauty of truth and to the integrity of a life insistent on wisdom.

Many of the topics of concern to Augustine are treated in the following chapters. The seventeen essays gathered here are divided into six main parts. Each part represents a major area of Augustine’s thought, although, given the nature of his writings and interests, there is some inevitable overlap among the essays. The epilogue maps out his enormous influence upon subsequent generations.

Of all the diverse topics important to him, Augustine maintained early on that he cared to know only God and the soul (*sol.* 1.2.7). The first part is accordingly entitled The Nature of God and contains three chapters examining Augustine’s views on various divine attributes.

Scott MacDonald opens the volume with “The divine nature: being and goodness.” MacDonald shows that the metaphysics that Augustine learned from the Platonic tradition provided a rich structure by which Augustine was better able to comprehend the Christian account of God. At the top of this structure stood the uncreated God, with created immaterial minds just below, and all material things closer to the bottom of the structure. Because of its connection between God and matter, such an ontological arrangement negated the Manichees’ dualism and their deprecation of matter. It allowed Augustine to see all of creation as a participant in God’s own being and goodness.

In “God’s eternal knowledge according to Augustine,” John Cavadini shows the importance of Augustine’s recognizing that God’s knowledge of creatures is eternal, not temporal. For Augustine, because God’s knowledge is eternal, it is perfect and unchanging. Since God’s knowledge of all things is never imperfect, it cannot be added to. Nonetheless, nothing in God’s immutability rules out God’s responsiveness to creatures, for Augustine. Cavadini rightly stresses Augustine’s view that God’s knowledge is concomitantly human aid as well, and he calls attention to Augustine’s interest in God’s foreknowledge of his own self-gift to humanity on the Cross.

According to Christian doctrine, God is not simply goodness or being, but also a Trinity of persons. In his “Augustine on the triune life of God,” Lewis Ayres introduces Augustine as an inheritor of centuries of thinking on the Trinity. With his keen philosophical mind, however, Augustine does not simply inherit a tradition, but advances it by showing that God does not *have* anything, but rather *is* all that God is typically said to have. For example, God does not *have* wisdom or mercy; rather, God *is* wisdom and mercy. In the Trinity, each of the divine persons is what he is only in relation to the other persons of the Trinity; each person of the Trinity is as it were a subsistent relation. For this reason, the three distinct persons still are only one God. As Augustine understood the doctrine of the Trinity, the union among the three divine persons is love. There is in the Trinity a perfect unity of a lover, the beloved, and the love conjoining them. Finally, on Augustine’s view, the Father sends the Son to give the Spirit to human beings, so that those who receive God’s love are able to be united with God forever.

The second part is God’s Relation to the World, and it includes three chapters on Augustine’s views of God’s relation to the world.

The first is Simo Knuuttila’s “Time and creation in Augustine.” Knuuttila focuses on Augustine’s commentaries on Genesis to explain and illuminate Augustine’s influential account of time and eternity. Augustine’s insistence on creation “out of nothing” enabled him to see this world as the result of God’s establishing all things that would ever exist through “seminal reasons,” a doctrine he surely first encountered in Platonism and various forms of Stoicism. As Augustine sees it, before creation, there was no time; but, as a part of creation, time itself is dependent upon the reality of movement and the awareness of rational souls. For that reason, Knuuttila traces Augustine’s psychological theory of time, especially as Augustine appropriates the insights of Aristotle, but also as he appends his own dynamic concepts of the past as memory and the future as anticipation.

The next chapter is William E. Mann's "Augustine on evil and original sin." Augustine struggled with the problem of evil. How could an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God allow evil and its deleterious effects in his world? Mann examines Augustine's reflections on the apparent incompatibility between God's knowledge and the problem of evil. He also takes up Augustine's far-reaching teaching on original sin (a term which Augustine himself coined and introduced into Christian philosophical theology). And he lays out Augustine's conception of evil as the privation of being and goodness. These things together give us Augustine's understanding of a world in which both God and evil exist.

Allan Fitzgerald's chapter "Jesus Christ, the knowledge and wisdom of God" rounds out this section by stressing Augustine's focus on Christ as the redeemer of the evil of the post-Fall world. Responding to the pagan images of Jesus, Augustine argues that Christ is much more than a wise and just man. Rather, Christ is fully divine as well as fully human. As God, Christ is God's wisdom and justice; as human, in his incarnate state, Christ makes available to all human beings the wisdom and justice they need in order to attain happiness. This understanding of Christ's mediation is what provided Augustine with a "spiritual method" (as Fitzgerald calls it) which sees in Christ both the Truth which is God and also the way of truth for human beings. Fitzgerald shows that Augustine's writings on Jesus stress his simultaneous role as God and human, both the giver and given, the destination as well as the way.

The third part, Human Nature, has to do more specifically with human nature.

The first essay is Bruno Niederbacher's "The human soul: Augustine's case for soul–body dualism." Niederbacher points out that Augustine never settled definitely on the origin of the soul, but remained open to various philosophical possibilities. He discusses Augustine's account of the metaphysical reality of the human soul, describing its seven levels of greatness, their respective actions, the soul's relation to the body, and, finally, the soul's immortality. Niederbacher ends by exploring three Augustinian arguments for the soul's immateriality.

Peter King's "Augustine on knowledge" elucidates five major areas of Augustine's theory of knowledge. First is Augustine's critique of skepticism. King lays out Augustine's reasons for thinking it more reasonable to accept that human beings can know the truth than to withhold assent from claims to know. Next, he considers the role illumination plays in Augustine's epistemology and his views of innermost knowledge (the knowledge of one's own cognitive condition). Finally, King explains the importance of empirical knowledge for Augustine and his insights into social epistemology.

In her chapter "Augustine on free will," Eleonore Stump is concerned with Augustine's struggle to understand the nature of the human will's freedom. Well-known controversies have existed over this facet of Augustine’s thought, so much so that it is sometimes hard to believe that their participants can be reading the same texts of Augustine’s. Stump maintains that much of the problem stems from the fact that contemporary theories about free will have formed the lenses through which scholars have read Augustine’s texts, and that these theories are inadequate to capture his position. Her chapter therefore begins with a careful consideration of various theories of freedom of the will in order to outline a theory not canvassed in contemporary philosophy but more illuminative of Augustine’s own position. With this theory, it is possible to produce a more or less irenic compromise among competing interpretations of Augustine’s account of free will.

The fourth part, Human Excellence, examines Augustine’s views of human well-being. It includes two chapters addressing Augustine’s understanding of the nature of a human person’s flourishing. There has been disagreement regarding Augustine’s attitude toward the good life for human beings. His insistence on the human need for grace has led some scholars to overemphasize the gloomier passages encountered in his thought, especially in the later works. But, as these two essays argue, Augustine’s ethical theory hinges on personal relationships, while his understanding of the fullness of human living is explained as an eternal communion with God.

In “Augustine’s ethics,” Timothy Chappell shows that in Augustine’s ethics virtue is a matter of communion and of charity. In the process, Chappell appraises Augustine’s views regarding a just war, the proper ordering of human loves, human sexuality, and the particularly vexed case of truth telling. Chappell argues that Augustine’s moral theory is best characterized as a second-personal ethics, as Chappell characterizes it. Finally, Chappell argues that, for Augustine, ethics has as its source a human person’s longing for God. What motivates a person toward true virtue, then, is not moral bookkeeping or fear of punishment, but love of God.

David Vincent Meconi’s “Augustine’s doctrine of deification” shows that what is usually associated with the Greek fathers is actually at the heart of Augustine’s explanation of beatitude as well: humanity’s appropriation of divinity. To “become God” was the goal of philosophical inquiry throughout late antiquity. Meconi shows that while Augustine may employ the term *deification* sparingly, he nonetheless explains biblical and creedal language by various images of deification. Meconi argues that for Augustine the excellent human life is one of divine adoption, of sharing in God’s nature, and even of “becoming Christ.”

In the fifth part, Political and Ecclesial Life, two chapters examine Augustine’s reflections on the nature of human society.

Paul Weithman’s “Augustine’s political philosophy” shows that, although Augustine never regarded himself as a political philosopher, influential elements of political philosophy are nonetheless found throughout his writings. Recurrently, Augustine is concerned with the proper behavior of political leaders, the role of civil coercion, the use of private property, slavery, Church–state relations, and, perhaps most significantly, the nature of just war. Yet since Augustine's concerns are based on a belief that there is a destination for human beings not found in the terrestrial realm, his political philosophy sees human society as bound together either by the love of self or by the love of God. These two loves yield either the Earthly City or the City of God. For Augustine, these are two mutually exclusive ways of living in this world, two ways of striving for the beatitude all seek.

In his chapter "Heaven and the *ecclesia perfecta* in Augustine," David Vincent Meconi examines Augustine's view of the ultimate goal for human beings, because Augustine's understanding of that goal shapes many of his other philosophical positions. Meconi shows that, for Augustine, heaven is not a simple return to pre-fallen paradise but an authentic amelioration of the original human condition and a final consummation, in which a human person is made eternally perfect. Meconi also explores the thorny questions of Augustine's doctrine of predestination. He ends by arguing that for Augustine heaven is not a distant realm but a living reality that begins even during life on earth.

The sixth part focuses on language and faith. The three chapters in this section explicate Augustine's account of human knowledge of God and human interpretation of God's communication with human beings.

In "Faith and reason," John Peter Kenney investigates Augustine's view that human reason is indispensable to creedal assent. For Augustine, faith is necessary for a good life, but it is not sufficient, because religious faith demands the proper use of human reason. Like many other classical writers, Augustine defined the goal of earthly life as the attainment of divine wisdom. For Augustine, however, wisdom includes the use of reason, reasoned moral discipline, and a rational recognition of a restlessness for God.

Peter King's "Augustine on language" explores Augustine's account of the nature of language. King admits that Augustine does not put forward a "theory of meaning" in any modern sense. But Augustine recognized that meaning is the vehicle of communication relied upon when speakers and hearers are engaged in communication, and he reflected on it in various writings. King explains Augustine's distinction between natural and given signs, as well as Augustine's views on the relation of written communication to oral language. King finishes by elucidating Augustine's views of the inbuilt ambiguity of language and the need for interpretation.

Because an account of the proper principles of the interpretation of language are also important for the reading of biblical texts, on Augustine's views, the last chapter in this part is Thomas Williams' "Hermeneutics and reading Scripture." Williams shows that Augustine thought extensively about the interpretation of any text, but especially about God's revelation in biblical texts. Williams highlights not only the intellectual charity Augustine exhibits when comparing differing interpretations of the same text, but also his view that charity is the goal of all communication.

In her epilogue, "Augustine's legacy: success or failure?," Karla Pollmann traces Augustine's legacy. Augustine himself aimed to control his life story through the composing of his *Confessions*, and he also sought to shape the reception and interpretation of his works through his *Retractions*. The impact of Augustine's works on Western philosophy is impossible to overemphasize. Pollmann shows the enduring power of Augustine's thought by pointing, first, to the large body of greatly popular Pseudo-Augustinian writings in the later medieval period, and then to the many early modern and contemporary thinkers dependent on him. She emphasizes Augustine's political theories in this regard, but she also highlights Augustinian themes in works on sexuality, love, and friendship. Given the vast influence Augustine has exerted through the centuries, Pollmann concludes that his influence is not reducible to a single trajectory. Rather, the vicissitudes of his reception constitute a bumpy legacy that, Pollmann argues, tells us more about the readers of Augustine than about Augustine himself.

Augustine of Hippo has proven to be a key important philosophical figure, from late antiquity through the Middle Ages to the present day. His views of God and God's relationship to the created order, his reflections on the nature of human beings and human excellence, as well as his social and political philosophy, his approach to language, and interpretation of texts continue to influence philosophical thought on these topics. His thought has proven to be so important and far-reaching that trying to represent all of it comprehensively in one concise volume is not possible. Nonetheless, the following chapters make significant contributions to the ongoing project of comprehending and evaluating Augustine's thought.

Part I The nature of God

1 The divine nature: being and goodness

Scott MacDonald

In 386, at the age of thirty-two, Augustine converted to Christianity. As he tells the story in the *Confessions*, the complex and dramatic events that constitute his conversion brought to successful conclusion a search he had begun as a teenager at Carthage with his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*. Cicero had inspired in him a passionate yearning for the sort of immortality that comes with wisdom (*conf*. 3.4.7–8). After more than a decade of fruitless searching, Augustine finally discovered that the wisdom he had longed for was to be found with the God of Christianity. The discovery came in a moment of intellectual vision in which Augustine glimpsed and thereby came at last to understand the divine nature. "At that moment," he tells us, "I saw [God's] 'invisible nature understood through the things that are made' [Romans 1:20]" (*conf*. 7.17.23).[1]

As Augustine quickly learned, however, discovering where wisdom is to be found is not the same as attaining it, and so his intellectual vision of God did not by itself bring his search to an end. In order to be able to cleave to God in love he needed moral healing of a kind that no merely intellectual enlightenment could provide. But whatever else might have been necessary to complete his conversion to Christianity, Augustine is clear that the understanding provided by his intellectual vision of God was pivotal for it.[2] He could not be a Christian unless and until he had become convinced that the Christian conception of the divine nature provides knowledge of the true God. Moreover, he is clear that his intellectual vision of God satisfied that purely cognitive condition. Immediately following the vision he reports: "I was now loving *you* [God], not some sensory image instead of you" and "I had no doubt of any kind to whom I should cleave" (*conf*. 7.17.23).

Intellectual vision of God

In Book 7 of the *Confessions* Augustine recounts his vision of God more than once. Here is the main part of the first of the accounts (henceforth the *first vision passage* [FVP]):[3]

[FVP]

1 Having been admonished by the Platonists' books to return into myself, I entered

> 2 into my innermost self, with you [God] as my guide. And I was able to do it
> 3 because you had become my helper. I entered and with whatever sort of eye it is
> 4 that my soul possesses, I saw above that same eye of my soul an immutable light
> 5 higher than my mind . . . It transcended my mind, not in the way that oil floats on
> 6 water, nor in the way heaven is above the earth. It was higher than me because it
> 7 made me, and I was lower than it because I was made by it. The person who
> 8 knows truth knows it, and one who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it.
> 9 Eternal truth, true love, beloved eternity: you are my God. To you I sigh day and
> 10 night. When I first came to know you, you raised me up so that I might see that
> 11 what I was seeing is Being, and that I who was seeing it am not yet Being. And
> 12 shining intensely on me you shocked the weakness of my sight, and I trembled
> 13 with love and awe . . . I said: "Is truth nothing just because it is not diffused
> 14 through space, either finite or infinite?" And you cried from far away: "No, indeed,
> 15 for I am who am" [Exod 3:14]. I heard in the way one hears in the heart, and
> 16 there was absolutely no room left for doubt.
>
> (*conf.* 7.10.16)

This first report of Augustine's intellectual vision is a good place to begin an investigation of his mature thinking about the divine nature because it gives us a kind of introduction to the main elements and structural principles of his new-found conception of God. Moreover, viewed in its context in the *Confessions*, the account highlights the sorts of philosophical concerns that were particularly important to Augustine, the concerns he thought an adequate conception of God must address.

The first vision passage clearly identifies two of the three most important influences shaping Augustine's mature understanding of the divine nature. First, he makes it clear that the God he has encountered is the God of the Christian Scriptures. Of course the whole of the *Confessions* is addressed to the God of Christianity, and so it is the Christian God whom Augustine addresses directly here. He now sees that that same God has become his intimate guide and helper (FVP lines 2–3), and he attributes the final achievement of his vision to God's activity on his behalf (FVP 10). Moreover, and most strikingly, the God of Augustine's vision identifies himself as the God of Moses, the God whose most intimate name is "I am who am" (FVP 15). From this point on, Augustine never doubted that the Christian Scriptures, properly explicated and understood, present the truth about the divine nature.

The second influence evident in the vision passage is Platonism. Augustine considered his encounter with certain Platonist books a crucial turning point in his path to Christianity. As the vision passage suggests, those books provided him with important methodological principles for his thinking about the divine: they admonished him to look within his own soul and to look with the eye of the mind (FVP 1–5). Indeed, Platonism provided Augustine with a rich repertoire of ideas and arguments that he would use to articulate the Christian conception of God. In this passage the allusions to and echoes of Plotinus are as prominent as the scriptural themes: the God of Moses is the immutable light that transcends the mind, eternal truth, and being itself. The mature Augustine's certainty of the truth of the Christian conception of God was matched by his conviction that the Christian Scriptures require careful theoretical investigation and explication if the truth about God that they express is to be understood. The tools he found most useful in this task were primarily those of Platonist philosophy.[4]

The third important influence shaping Augustine's mature thinking about God is not explicit in the vision passage we are examining. But if we read the passage in the larger context provided by the narrative of the *Confessions*, we can see the clear role that Manichaeism plays in shaping the conception of God that Augustine begins to articulate here. Augustine's first intellectually serious commitments were to Manichaean theology, which remained throughout his life a kind of foil for many of his mature views. While a Manichee, Augustine had believed God to be a luminous mass extended infinitely through space; he now sees that the true God is incorporeal and infinite without extension (FVP 13–16). While a Manichee, Augustine had imagined God subject to attack, corruption, and violation at the hands of a rival power; he now sees that the true God is immutable and incorruptible (FVP 4–5). While a Manichee, Augustine had believed that there are two independent divine substances in conflict with one another; his vision now allows him to see that the true God is being itself, the one source of everything else that exists (FVP 11).

Augustine tells us that his intellectual vision of God occurred in the twinkling of an eye. But the *Confessions* makes clear that the journey leading him to that crucial point was long. To understand what it is Augustine saw in his intellectual vision, and what the significance was of his seeing it, we need to follow the course of his intellectual journey from Manichaeism by way of Platonism to an understanding of the God of Christianity.

Sojourn with the Manichees

According to the *Confessions*, when Cicero had inspired him to search for wisdom, Augustine turned first to the religious tradition of his upbringing, Christianity. But he quickly lost patience with the Christian Scriptures and fell in with the Manichees. Their verbal slickness and self-confident rationalism contrasted vividly for him with Catholic Christianity (*conf.* 3.6.10). Augustine spent the next decade of his life associated in one way or another with them.

Augustine explains his susceptibility to Manichaean persuasions by reference to his intellectual condition at the time:

> I was unaware of the existence of another reality that truly is (*aliud vere quod est*), and when they asked me: [1] "Where does evil come from?" and [2] "Is God bounded by a corporeal form, does he have hair and nails?" . . . it was as if I were being cleverly goaded into throwing in my lot with those foolish deceivers.
>
> (*conf.* 3.7.12)[5]

He thinks of these two questions as Manichaean challenges to orthodox Christianity, intended to expose what the Manichees perceived as the absurdity of Catholic Christian belief. Christianity holds that there is one supremely good God, the creator and source of all existing things. But then, granted that evil exists, Christianity appears incoherent: either evil comes from the supremely good God (which is absurd) or it does not (in which case God is not the creator of all that exists).[6] By contrast, as Augustine understood it, Manichaeism had a ready answer to the first question. There are two ultimate sources of things, a good God and a hostile power independent of the good God. Evil derives not from the former but from the latter and is a consequence of the evil power's success in its cosmic struggle against the good God.[7]

The Manichees' second question ridicules the Christian belief that God created human beings in God's own image (Gen 1:26). Since human beings have finite bodies with heads and hands, it would seem that the God in whose image they are made must have features of the same sort. The Manichees saw themselves as holding a more sophisticated conception of the divine nature: the good God is a kind of light extended infinitely through space.

Augustine's reconciliation with Christianity depended on his discovering or developing satisfactory replies to these Manichaean challenges. But at the beginning of his search for wisdom, his youthful ignorance left him defenseless against them.

> [1*] I did not know that evil exists only as a privation of good . . . How could I see it when my seeing with my eyes went only as far as the body, and with my mind only as far as sensory images? [2*] Moreover, I did not know that God is Spirit [Jn 4:24], not something whose limbs have length and breadth and who has a mass.
>
> (*conf.* 3.7.12)

He gestures here toward the full-fledged replies he will eventually make on Christianity's behalf. But those replies would become available to him only after the intellectual vision recounted in Book 7.[8]

Augustine saw that at bottom each of these two Manichaean questions raised the issue of how to think adequately about the divine nature and, from this point in the narrative, that issue drives the *Confessions* forward. Augustine regularly diagnoses the fruitlessness of his search for wisdom and his own intellectual follies and frustrations as being the result of ignorance or error regarding God's nature. He sometimes puts the point in general terms: "I did not know what to think about your substance or what way would lead me, or lead me back, to you" (*conf.* 6.5.8). More often he gives more specific diagnoses: "I thought that you, Lord God and Truth, were a luminous and immense body, and that I was a bit of that body" (*conf.* 4.16.31); and "When I wanted to think of my God, I knew of no way of doing so except as a corporeal mass, for it seemed to me that anything that was not of that sort did not exist" (*conf.* 5.10.19). Looking back on this Manichaean period of his life, Augustine saw himself as unable to conceive of any sort of non-corporeal reality and, consequently, unable to conceive of God in anything but corporeal terms. The importance he assigns to these conceptual mistakes and limitations is striking: "That was the *most important* and virtually the *only* cause of my inevitable error" (*conf.* 5.10.19).[9]

As these descriptions of Augustine's conceptual difficulties suggest, freeing himself entirely from the errors he had inherited from the Manichees would crucially depend on his learning to conceive of incorporeal reality. We are now in a position to appreciate the transformative effect of Augustine's encounter with Platonism.

Intellectual ascent: approaching God from below

During his Manichaean period Augustine's attention had been focused on the external corporeal world. His thinking had consequently been bound by sensory experience: he could conceive only what he could form a sensory image of. Platonism, however, admonished him to abandon the corporeal world and turn inward, using the eye of his own rational soul. When he did so, he discovered an astonishing new realm. The incorporeality, immutability, and eternity that characterize purely intellectual thought are the clues that led Augustine, by stages, to the divine nature itself.

The vision passage with which we began provides the barest sketch of the Platonist-inspired inward turn and upward movement that culminated in Augustine's vision of God. In other places he tells us more about the philosophical structure of this redirection of his thinking. His most detailed discussion of it occurs in Book 2 of *De libero arbitrio* where he transforms his intellectual ascent into an elaborate argument for the existence of God.[10]

Augustine begins by establishing a hierarchy that sorts into general categories and ranks the natures that comprise the universe: existence, life, and understanding.

> Therefore the nature that merely exists (and neither lives nor understands) ranks below the nature that not only exists but also lives (but does not understand) – the soul of the non-human animals is of this sort. This nature in turn ranks below the nature that at once exists, lives, and understands – for example, the rational mind of the human being.
>
> (*lib. arb*. 2.6.13)

His strategy will be to argue that there is a nature that ranks above the rational mind of the human being, a nature that he will identify as divine (*lib. arb*. 2.6.14, 2.15.39). In order to discover it, he ascends the hierarchy of natures, turning attention first from bodies (the first and lowest-ranking category in the hierarchy) to the soul (the nature constitutive of both the second and third categories), and then within his own soul from the sensory part (a part found in both human beings and the non-human animals) to reason: "a kind of head or eye of our soul . . . which does not belong to the nature of non-human animals" (*lib. arb*. 2.6.13).[11]

Having ascended as far as reason – that which is highest in us – he focuses on reason's distinctive perceptual capacities and the distinctive sorts of objects they put us in contact with, the objects of pure thought. By way of example, Evodius, Augustine's interlocutor in the dialogue, first suggests that they consider "the structure and truth of number," by which he means arithmetical facts and relationships of the sort expressed by such truths as "seven plus three equals ten" (*lib. arb*. 2.8.20–21). Augustine himself adds the example of the indivisible mathematical unit that is the foundation of all number.[12] He later introduces into the discussion a collection of *a priori* evaluative and normative truths such as "wisdom should be diligently sought after," "inferior things should be subjected to superior things," and "what is eternal is better than what is temporal" (*lib. arb*. 2.10.28). He thinks of these truths as constitutive of wisdom itself and therefore normative for anyone who would possess it. Moreover, anyone who is able to contemplate them will recognize their truth. Examination of these various examples leads Augustine to three conclusions: intelligible objects of these sorts are independent of our minds, incorporeal, and higher than reason. Put briefly, the main lines of his reasoning are as follows (*lib. arb*. 2.8.20–12.34):[13]

1. Intelligible objects must be independent of particular minds because they are common to all who think. In coming to grasp them, an individual mind does not alter them in any way, it cannot convert them into its exclusive possessions or transform them into parts of itself. Moreover, the mind discovers them rather than forming or constructing them, and its grasp of them can be more or less adequate. Augustine concludes from these observations that intelligible

objects must exist independently of individual human minds.

2. Intelligible objects must be incorporeal because they are eternal and immutable. By contrast, all corporeal objects, which we perceive by means of the bodily senses, are contingent and mutable. Moreover, certain intelligible objects – for example, the indivisible mathematical unit – clearly cannot be found in the corporeal world (since all bodies are extended, and hence divisible). These intelligible objects cannot therefore be perceived by means of the senses; they must be incorporeal and perceptible by reason alone.
3. Intelligible objects must be higher than reason because they judge reason. Augustine means by this that these intelligible objects constitute a normative standard against which our minds are measured (*lib. arb*. 2.5.12 and 2.12.34). We refer to mathematical objects and truths to judge whether or not and to what extent our minds understand mathematics. We consult the rules of wisdom to judge whether or not and to what extent a person is wise. In virtue of their normative relation to reason, Augustine argues that these intelligible objects must be higher than it, as a judge is higher than what it judges. Moreover, the intrinsic nature of these objects shows them to be higher than reason. They are eternal and immutable; by contrast, the human mind is clearly mutable. Augustine holds that since it is evident to all who consider it that the immutable is superior to the mutable (it is among the rules of wisdom he identifies), it follows that these objects are higher than reason.

Augustine develops the first two of these conclusions in support of the third. But if we recall his account of the difficulties in which his pre-Christian thinking about the divine nature was mired, we can see independent significance to the second conclusion. In the *Confessions* Augustine reports that his inability to conceive of anything incorporeal was the "most important and virtually the only cause" of his errors. The argument from *De libero arbitrio* shows how Augustine managed, with the aid of Platonist direction and argument, to overcome this cognitive limitation. By focusing on objects perceptible by the mind alone and by observing their nature, in particular their eternity and immutability, Augustine came to see that certain things that clearly exist, namely, the objects of the intelligible realm, cannot be corporeal. When he cries out in the midst of his vision of the divine nature, "Is truth nothing just because it is not diffused through space, either finite or infinite?" (FVP 13–14), he is acknowledging that it is the discovery of intelligible truth that first frees him to comprehend incorporeal reality.[14]

Augustine has made his case thus far by calling our attention to the characteristics of intelligible objects of various kinds. But the conclusion he wants to draw in the end is not that there are many things higher than reason (including the infinitely many numerical truths and the so-called rules of wisdom) but that there is one such thing, Christianity's one God. He needs therefore to argue that the many intelligible objects are in a certain way a single thing. This part of his argument is less than fully explicit, and Augustine himself acknowledges the difficulty in making it clear (*lib. arb.* 2.11.30–32). But we can see him making the crucial transition in the following passage: “It is certainly clear that [wisdom and number] are both true, indeed immutably true. For that reason, [one] cannot deny that there is an immutable truth that contains (*continentem*) all these things that are immutably true” (*lib. arb.* 2.11.32–12.33). It is difficult to know precisely what to make of the metaphor of containment in this last passage, and so to know precisely how to conceive the one immutable truth itself. But Augustine seems to want to move our attention beyond the distinct intelligible truths themselves – the distinct facts or propositions, as it were – and to direct us toward what they have in common, their truth. We recognize that each of them is true, indeed immutably true. Immutable truth, then, is a single thing shared in common by all the different intelligible truths. It is the one over the many, or the one in which the many are contained.

In other passages Augustine prefers the analogy of light to that of containment. When Evodius resists Augustine’s claim that wisdom is a single thing common to all who think, on the grounds that different people seek wisdom in different things, Augustine replies with an analogy: just as the sun is a single thing despite the fact that we see many things in its light, so wisdom can be a single thing despite the fact that different people perceive and pursue different goods in its light. Similarly, Augustine supposes that the eye of the soul is able to see various immutable truths because of the light shed on them by immutable truth itself (*lib. arb.* 2.9.27). In *De libero arbitrio* the metaphor of light remains largely in the background, but in the vision passages in the *Confessions*, it comes to the fore: “I entered into my innermost self . . . and with whatever sort of eye it is that my soul possesses, I saw . . . an immutable light higher than my mind” (FVP 1–5).

Whatever the obscurities in this crucial step in Augustine’s argument, it is clear that he supposes that this inference completes the strategy he has been pursuing in the proof. “I had promised, if you recall, that I would prove that there is something more sublime than our mind, that is, than reason. Here it is: truth itself” (*lib. arb.* 2.13.35).

Divine supremacy: conceiving God in the highest possible way

Augustine’s strategy in *De libero arbitrio* 2 – to prove that God exists by proving that there is something higher than reason – appears to rely on the assumption that what is higher than reason must be God. Evodius, however, spots the unargued assumption and objects to it: “If I could find something higher (*melius*) than that which is highest (*optimum*) in me, I would *not* go on straightaway to claim that it is God” (*lib. arb.* 2.6.14). He insists that Augustine prove not merely that there is something higher than reason but that there is something than which nothing is higher (*quo est nullus superior*). Evodius’ objection causes Augustine some embarrassment in the dialogue (*lib. arb.* 2.6.14). And he is right to be troubled because Evodius is pressing a point to which

Augustine himself is firmly committed. Augustine takes it as a kind of governing principle of his thinking about the divine nature that God must be supreme, that is, that than which nothing is higher or better. In Book 1 of the dialogue Augustine had exhorted Evodius to adhere to just this principle, telling him that "the most genuine root of piety consists in thinking about God in the highest possible way (*optime de deo existimare*)" (*lib. arb*. 1.2.5). In Book 2, when Evodius protests Augustine's proposed strategy for the proof, he is merely insisting on that pious principle.

In *De doctrina Christiana* Augustine suggests that the notion of supremacy is part of the very concept of the divine. He tells us that:

> when the sound of the word *deus* strikes the ears of anyone who knows Latin, that person is prompted to think of a kind of nature that is utterly surpassing (*excellentissimam*) and immortal. For when someone thinks of that one God of gods . . . one thinks in such a way that one's thought strains to reach something than which there is nothing higher (*aliquid quo nihil melius sit*) or more sublime.
>
> (*doc. Chr*. 1.6.6–7.7)

Augustine allows that people can be confused or ignorant about what sort of thing really is that than which there is nothing higher. Hence, there are religions of various kinds. Nevertheless "all agree that God is what they place above (*anteponunt*) all other things" (*doc. Chr*. 1.7.7).

Augustine takes the notions of being supreme (*summe*, *optime*), being that than which nothing is higher or better (*aliquid quo nihil melius sit*), and being the highest good (*summum bonum*) to be equivalent. Hence, he takes it to be a sort of conceptual truth not only that God is supreme but that God is the highest good. Ontological ranking and value ranking therefore coincide – the highest being is the highest good. Moreover, just as all agree that God is that which they place above all other things, so everyone seeks happiness in the highest good. Not everyone understands, however, what sort of thing really is the highest good.[15]

Augustine's own pre-Christian thinking about the divine nature exemplifies these points. Along with the Manichees, he rejected Christianity in part because of its putative belief that God has a corporeal form like that of a human body. Augustine preferred the Manichaean understanding of God, which he thought to be higher. But this same episode from his past reveals the limitations of the principle that God is supreme. During his years with the Manichees Augustine was straining to think of God as highly as possible. But since his thinking was bound by sensory images, his highest thoughts had fallen disastrously short of their mark. If the principle of the divine supremacy was to be of any use in his thinking about God, it had to be supplemented by other principles providing substantive direction in filling out the content of the concept of the supreme God. What sort of nature is in fact supreme? What specific attributes must characterize something than which nothing is higher? Platonism provided Augustine with important supplementary principles of the required sort.

As Augustine reports events in *Confessions* 7, it appears that Platonism began affecting his thinking about the divine nature even before the dramatic events described in the vision passages. At the beginning of Book 7 he reports a positive preliminary development.

> I was trying to think of you . . . the supreme, sole, and true God. With all my heart I believed you to be incorruptible, inviolable, and immutable, although I did not know why and how. Nevertheless I saw plainly and was certain that what is corruptible is inferior to that which cannot be corrupted; what is inviolable I unhesitatingly put above that which is violable; what undergoes no change is better than that which can change.
>
> (*conf.* 7.1.1)

Augustine's new beliefs here were that God is incorruptible, inviolable, and immutable. But what is interesting for our purposes is the kind of reasoning he identifies as grounding them: God is supreme, and since incorruptibility (for example) is better than corruptibility, God must therefore be incorruptible. The same pattern of reasoning, *mutatis mutandis*, yields the divine inviolability and immutability. Indeed, given appropriate ranking principles, the same schema can function as a constructive tool, specifying, attribute by attribute, a determinate conception of the divine nature. (We might call the general pattern *the argument from the divine supremacy*.)

Augustine does not tell us here how he acquired certainty about these particular ranking principles. But it is clear that his progress with Platonism brought him to it. Even if he has not yet ascended to the point of seeing the truth itself that transcends his mind (that comes later in Book 7), he seems to have reached the point of recognizing certain *a priori* immutable rules of wisdom, of which the ranking principles driving these particular inferences are examples.[16]

In Augustine's construction of the hierarchy of natures, comparative ranking principles of the sort required by the argument from the divine supremacy function independently of the principle that God is supreme: existence that is characterized by life is better than existence that lacks it, hence living things rank above inanimate bodies; life that is characterized by understanding is better than life that lacks it, hence human beings rank above the non-human animals. The construction of the hierarchy can proceed without any explicit knowledge of God's existence or nature. But the same comparative ranking principles can also be used in the argument from the divine supremacy. Since life is better than inanimate existence, God must be characterized by life; since a life characterized by wisdom is better than a life lacking it, God must be characterized by wisdom; and since a life characterized by immutable wisdom is better than a life whose wisdom is mutable, God must be characterized by immutable wisdom (*doc. Chr.* 1.8.8).

In Augustine's hands the argument from the divine supremacy yields an impressive list of divine attributes: incorporeality, eternality, immutability, incorruptibility, inviolability, life, and wisdom, among others. His intellectual ascent toward the immutable truth that transcends the human mind identifies many of the same attributes. Augustine naturally supposes that both these approaches converge on one and the same being, that is, that the transcendent truth itself is the supreme God, the topmost being on the hierarchy of natures and the highest good. It remains, however, that the proof in *De libero arbitrio* 2 never establishes that identity. The argument from the divine supremacy can guarantee that the divine nature will include incorporeality, eternality, and immutability. But the argument in *De libero arbitrio* 2 seems to give us no firm assurance that the incorporeal, eternal, and immutable truth that is higher than our minds will also be the one true God than whom nothing is higher.

Being: God's inmost nature

Augustine believed that the sort of piecemeal progress the argument from the divine supremacy makes possible is in a certain way superficial. What he wanted, and what his intellectual vision of God finally gave him, is a glimpse of God's inmost nature, an understanding of the divine that is unifying and deeply explanatory of both the manifold divine attributes and the universe in which God ranks supreme.

We can see the sort of understanding Augustine was after if we look again at the passage from the beginning of *Confessions* 7: "With all my heart I believed you to be incorruptible, inviolable, and immutable, although I did not know why and how" (*conf.* 7.1.1). Augustine here reports progress but also admits to an accompanying lack of understanding. What he means is that he does not yet see how to fit these new beliefs together with his other beliefs into a coherent view of God and God's place in the world. The argument from the divine supremacy shows that the true God is incorruptible. In Augustine's mind, that result exposed the incoherence of the Manichaean theodicy (*conf.* 7.2.3). But the argument from the divine supremacy did not by itself provide Augustine with an alternative account. At this point in the *Confessions* Augustine needs still to discover two things: that there are existing things that are not corporeal; and that God is true being.

We have already seen how Augustine's intellectual ascent led him to the discovery of something that is both incorporeal and clearly existent, namely, immutable truth itself. The vision passages from the *Confessions* also clearly display Augustine's discovery of the fact that God is being itself, that which truly and supremely *is*. Indeed, Augustine presents that discovery as occurring at the pinnacle of his intellectual ascent and as giving him his deepest insight into the divine nature. We can see the paramount importance of his recognition that God is Being by paying attention both to the rhetorical features of the vision passage we have been examining and to the place the passage occupies in the larger context of the *Confessions*.

First, Augustine's recounting of his intellectual ascent toward God reaches its dramatic height with these lines: "When I first came to know you, you raised me up so that I might see that what I was seeing is Being, and that I who was seeing it am not yet Being. And shining intensely on me you shocked the weakness of my sight, and I trembled with love and awe" (FVP 10–13). As Augustine understands it, God had lifted him up with the purpose of showing him that the object of his vision is Being. The vision is in fact a mere glimpse – he could not sustain it and it immediately fell away. But he takes himself nevertheless to have seen God's true nature and to have seen that it is Being. Augustine makes this point clear by connecting his vision of God as true being with the scriptural divine name. God not only raised Augustine up so that he might see that God is Being (*esse*) but also spoke to him, as God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, so that he might know that God's name is "I am who am" (*ego sum qui sum*). Augustine naturally supposed that the most intimate divine name expresses God's inmost nature. His own characterization of God as Being, as that which truly *is*, gives philosophical expression to this fundamental biblical idea.[17]

Secondly, that Augustine understood the vision of God as Being to be the climax of his intellectual ascent is confirmed by the structure the *Confessions* gives to the long search that the vision (in part) concludes. As we have seen, Augustine blamed his ignorance for the misguided intellectual commitments that characterized his sojourn with the Manichees: "I was unaware of the existence of another reality that truly *is* (*aliud vere quod est*)" (*conf.* 3.7.12). This forward-directed confession in Book 3 finds its target in Augustine's vision of God as Being, as that which truly *is*. He tells us: "So in the flash of a trembling glance [my mind] attained to that which *is* (*id quod est*)" and "I was certain that you *are* (*certus esse te*) . . . I was sure that you truly *are* (*vere te esse*)" (*conf.* 7.17.23 and 10.26). Augustine's fundamental ignorance that God is the reality that truly *is* crippled his search for wisdom; his vision of God dispels that ignorance.

For these reasons we should expect the conception of God as true being to be fundamental to Augustine's mature thinking about God. Of all the philosophically charged epithets Augustine uses to characterize the divine nature, we should expect that expressions such as "being" (*esse*), "true being" (*vere esse*), "that which *is*" (*id quod est*), and "what truly *is*" (*id quod vere est*) will take us deeper into Augustine's mature understanding of God's nature than any of the others, deeper even than 'light,' 'truth,' or 'wisdom.' What, then, does Augustine mean when he identifies God as what truly *is*?

Ontological independence and necessity: Augustine's recognition that God is true being is accompanied by the awareness that beings other than God are distinct from God and depend on God for their being. That which truly *is* possesses its being in its own right and independently of other things. It therefore cannot fail to be. Other existing things have being in a way, as is shown by the fact that they exist, but in a way they lack being: their existence is contingent and dependent.[18]

Cosmological monism: Augustine holds that the universe consists fundamentally only of existing realities, that is, of natures or substances that have being (*conf.* 7.15.21). Moreover, that which truly *is* is the source of all being: every existing nature must be either that which truly *is* or the sort of thing that depends for its being on what truly *is*.[19] As Augustine puts it: “If you look for something strictly contrary to God, you will find absolutely nothing, for only non-being is contrary to being. Therefore there is no nature contrary to God” (*mor.* [2].1.1).[20]

Augustine draws important anti-Manichaean conclusions from this cosmological monism (*conf.* 13.30.45). Since God is what truly *is*, there cannot be two independent divine principles. Moreover, if God is true being, evil cannot be an existing nature or substance. If it were, it would depend for its existence on God. But since God is the highest good, God gives being only to what is good. Evil, therefore, can be neither a principle independent of God nor a nature dependent on God for its existence (*conf.* 7.12.18–13.19).

Creation: Augustine develops his version of cosmological monism into a philosophical account of the Christian doctrine of creation. All existing things other than God depend on God for their being. To say that they depend on God for their being is to say that God makes them, that is, causes them both to exist and to be the kinds of things they are. In making things, God requires no aid from any other independent being and uses no preexisting, independent matter or stuff – both possibilities are ruled out by cosmological monism. Moreover, God does not make things out of God’s own substance, that is, the things that God makes are not in any way parts of the divine substance – that possibility would require either that God be corrupted or that mutable, contingent creatures be equal to God. God makes things out of nothing (*conf.* 11.5.7, 12.7.7, 13.13.48; *vera rel.* 18.35–36; *nat. b.* 1 and 24–27; *civ. Dei* 7.29–30). The fact that things are created by God *ex nihilo* explains their contingency, mutability, and corruptibility. God gives them being, but because they are made and made from nothing, they are not true being. They are tinged with non-being, as that which truly *is* is not.

Augustine sees that the doctrine of creation, like the cosmological monism on which he grounds it, is incompatible with Manichaeism. According to the doctrine of creation, the human soul is one of God’s creatures, not a part of the divine substance trapped in matter. Matter, too, is created by God; it is not the tool or vehicle of a hostile divine power. Indeed, everything that exists (other than God) is created by God, and is therefore good insofar as it has being (*conf.* 7.12.18, 13.31.46).

Immutability: The attribute that Augustine links most closely to true being is immutability. He very often discusses them together, and he takes them to be mutually entailing.[21] His understanding of the nature of change provides the conceptual link between them. Augustine conceives of change as consisting in the loss and acquisition of being.[22] That which changes ceases to be what it was and comes to be what it was not.

But what truly *is* cannot lose or acquire being. Hence, what truly *is* must be immutable. Conversely, for something to be immutable is for it to be such that it cannot lose or acquire being. But only what truly *is* can be of that sort. So what is immutable must also be what truly *is*.

The divine immutability and God's true being are thus mutually entailing, but it is clear that Augustine views the conception of God as what truly *is* as the theoretically more fundamental of these two central components of his understanding of the divine nature. The best evidence of this is the fact that the conception of God as what truly *is* unifies Augustine's account of the divine nature and explains its other main components. That God is what truly *is* explains not only the divine immutability but also, as we have seen, the divine independence and necessity, the fact that God is the sole source and creator of all other existing things, and the compatibility of the existence of evil with divine incorruptibility and goodness. That is why his discovery that God is true being brought Augustine unprecedented certainty and understanding: it showed him the single conceptual source out of which the other divine attributes flow and by virtue of which they can be explained and fitted together into a coherent Christian conception of reality. The closely connected concept of immutability does not have the same theoretical fecundity for Augustine's thinking about the divine nature.

Eternity and simplicity: Augustine's conception of change as consisting in the acquisition and loss of being also grounds his understanding of both the divine eternality and the divine simplicity. Augustine supposes that a being that experiences time necessarily changes, for its cognition will be (successively) affected by the temporal modalities of future, present, and past: what one anticipates as future, one will come to experience as present, and then remember as past. By contrast, the divine being, that which truly *is*, cannot change in this way, and so must comprehend all things in the eternal present (*civ. Dei* 11.21). "In the eternal, nothing passes, but the whole is present" (*conf.* 11.11.13).[23] Augustine argues that time itself is among God's creatures and comes into existence with the creation of the universe (*conf.* 11.13.16–14.17).

For similar reasons Augustine holds that what truly *is* must be metaphysically simple. "That nature is called simple which does not possess anything that it can lose and for which the possessor and what it possesses are not distinct in the way a vessel and the liquid it contains, a body and its color, the air and its light or heat, or a soul and its wisdom are" (*civ. Dei* 11.10). Augustine argues that in cases in which a thing's substance and its attributes – what it *is* and what it *has* – are not the same, it is possible for the thing to persist through the acquisition and loss of attributes. But that which truly *is* can neither lose nor acquire being. Hence, God's substance and God's attributes must be identical.[24] "Things are said to be simple which are principally and truly divine because in things of that sort, substance and quality are the same" (*civ. Dei* 11.10).

Supremacy: Finally, Augustine argues that what truly *is* is what exists or has being in the highest possible way. And since to be in the highest possible way is to be supreme, that which truly *is* must be supreme: “Once one has understood [that than which there is nothing higher] . . . one sees at once that what exists in the highest and primary way is what is said most truly to be” (*De moribus Manichaeorum* [2].1.1). At this point, Augustine’s approach to God through the notion of the divine supremacy and his approach by means of intellectual ascent through the realm of intelligible truth to the vision of God come together. His intellectual vision of that which truly *is* finally identifies determinately the nature toward which the principle that God is supreme points.

As these considerations show, when God raised Augustine up “so that he might see that what he was seeing is Being,” God allowed him a glimpse of God’s own inmost nature. Augustine harbored no illusions that he had thereby acquired complete and perfect knowledge of the infinite and ineffable God. But he also never doubted that, in that momentary vision, he had acquired a depth of understanding sufficient for this life – sufficient, that is, for grounding a unified, coherent, and philosophically rich account of the divine nature, its place in reality, and its relation to his own soul.

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Endnotes

1 All translations are my own. For the *Confessions*, however, I have consulted and sometimes relied extensively on H. Chadwick’s translation (Chadwick 1991b). For *De libero arbitrio* I have consulted T. Williams’ translation (Williams 1993).

2 The events described in *Confessions* Book 8, culminating in the celebrated crisis in the garden (8.12.28–29), provide the account of what more is needed.

3 There is controversy about the vision passages in *Confessions* 7. For views different from my own, see Courcelle 1968, chapter 4, part III and O’Donnell 1992, 434–46.

4 See Augustine’s reflective assessment of Platonism at *De civitate Dei* 8.3–11. for useful discussion, see Menn 1998, Part I.

5 The passage goes on to mention a third question, about the apparent immorality of the biblical patriarchs, which I leave aside.

6 See *De libero arbitrio* 1.2.4.

7 See *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* (1).10.16; *De moribus Manichaeorum* (2).3.5; *De natura boni* 41–44.

8 The first issue is explicitly settled at 7.12.18–16.22, in the immediate aftermath of Augustine's vision. The second issue is resolved by the vision itself.

9 Augustine's difficulty conceiving of God in non-corporeal terms persists even after he has begun to withdraw from the Manichees; see *Confessions* 5.14.24–25 and 7.1.1.

10 The second vision passage in *Confessions* 7 (17.23) provides a kind of précis of the argument in *De libero arbitrio* 2.

11 See also *De libero arbitrio* 2.3.8–6.13.

12 Elsewhere he appeals to geometrical entities – for example, the geometrical straight line (*conf.* 10.12.19).

13 I use 'intelligible object' to cover all the sorts of examples Augustine appeals to.

14 Compare Augustine's reports of seeing God's *invisible* nature (*conf.* 7.17.23 and 7.20.26) and discovering that God is infinite without being infinitely extended (*conf.* 7.14.20 and 7.20.26). Compare also the argument at *Soliloquia*. 2.2.2 that truth exists eternally.

15 See *De libero arbitrio* 2.9.27; *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* (1).3.5.

16 See *Confessions* 7.17.23; *De libero arbitrio* 2.10.28; and *De doctrina Christiana* 1.8.8. Augustine credits the Platonists with the historical discovery of these sorts of principles (*civ. Dei* 8.6).

17 Exodus 3:14 is especially important for Augustine. See, for example, *De doctrina*

Christiana 1.32.35 (quoted at n. 18 below), *De natura boni* 19 and *De civitate Dei* 12.2 (both n. 21), and *De civitate Dei* 8.11.

18 See *De doctrina Christiana* 1.32.35: “For the one who supremely (*summe*) and primordially (*primitus*) *is* is one who is absolutely immutable and who can say in the fullest possible sense, ‘I am who am’ and ‘You will say, the one who *is* has sent me to you.’ Hence, other things that exist, but could not exist if they were not from him, are good to the extent that they receive their being.” See also *Confessions* 11.4.6.

19 See *Confessions* 12.7.7; *De moribus Manichaeorum* (2).9.14; *De vera religione* 18.35–6; *De natura boni* 1 and 10; *De civitate Dei* 8.6.

20 See also *Confessions* 12.11.11; *De natura boni* 19.

21 For example, *De natura boni* 19: “Therefore our God said to his servant in a magnificent and divine way, ‘I am who am’ and ‘Tell the children of Israel, “The one who *is* sent me to you.”’ For he truly *is* since he is immutable; for every change causes something that was, not to be. Therefore he who is immutable truly *is*”; and *De civitate Dei* 12.2: “God said, ‘I am who am.’ For God is existence in a supreme degree – he supremely *is* – and is therefore immutable.”

22 See also *De Trinitate* 5.2.3 and 7.5.10; *Confessions* 7.10.16, 7.11.17, 11.4.6, and 11.7.9; *De moribus Manichaeorum* (2).1.1; and *De civitate Dei* 12.2.

23 See also *Confessions* 9.10.24 and the extended discussion of the divine eternality at *Confessions* 11.4.6–14.17.

24 See also *De Trinitate* 7.1.1–3.9 and *De civitate Dei* 8.6.

2 God's eternal knowledge according to Augustine

John C. Cavadini

> What human being can know the design (*consilium*) of God? Who will be able to think (*cogitare*) what the Lord intends (*velit*)? For the thoughts of mortals are timid and our attempts at discovery are uncertain. For the corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly habitation depresses the mind as it thinks many things.[1]

This passage from the Wisdom of Solomon (Wisd 9:13–15), here taken from Augustine's citation of it at *City of God* 12.16, is perhaps the best summary of Augustine's teaching about God's eternal knowledge.[2] The most basic mistake that a human being can make, with reference to God's knowledge, is to underestimate the uniqueness and the superiority of God's mind, and to measure it unduly against a human standard. It is the articulation of this uniqueness that is the underlying theme of all of Augustine's discussions of the matter.

For Augustine this will mean, ultimately, the insufficiency even of philosophy, to provide an adequate account of what seems to be an almost uniquely philosophical topic, God's eternal knowledge. This is true despite undoubted areas of agreement between pagan philosophical teachings and Christian doctrine that can seem broad enough at first glance. Therefore, in our discussion of this topic, we have to be careful not to give the impression that what we are doing is separating out a stable body of philosophical teaching that will describe Augustine's thinking on the eternal knowledge of God, and that then, whoever wants to move from philosophy to theology can proceed to what Christian revelation adds to this body of philosophical knowledge.

Agreeing with the philosophers

Of course, Augustine himself tempts us to think this way. After all, who more than the philosophers have identified themselves with the transcendence of God invoked by the Wisdom of Solomon? The Platonists especially offer areas of agreement that evoke Augustine's wholehearted assent:

> These philosophers . . . have been raised above the rest by a glorious reputation they so thoroughly deserve . . . They recognized that no material object can be God; for that reason they raised their eyes above all material objects in their search

> for God. They realized that nothing changeable can be the supreme God; and therefore in their search for the supreme God, they raised their eyes above all mutable souls and spirits . . . It follows that all these alike could come into being only through him who simply *is*.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 8.6)

The Platonists certainly have won their way to an awareness of the uniqueness and superiority of God, including, in some way, his transcendence over all changeable and mutable beings like ourselves. God is transcendent because He is utterly simple: for God, all God's attributes are identical with each other and with God's being, so that "for Him, to exist is the same as to live, to understand, to be happy." The twin hallmarks of the uniqueness of God's being are His immutability and simplicity. "It is because of this [immutability and simplicity] that the Platonists realized that God is the creator from whom all other beings derive, while He is Himself uncreated and underivative" (*civ. Dei* 8.6). God's transcendence over all else that exists constitutes Him as their origin.

This means that there exists in God the "original idea" or "form" (*primam speciem*, *civ. Dei* 8.6) of all things, the first, unchangeable, and therefore incomparable form of all things, the "first principle of things" (*rerum principium*). One could take this as a description of God's eternal knowledge: it is the eternal "idea" for all things that are not God. God is creator because His "idea" or "form" is what gives existence to everything else, insofar as everything must have form or idea to exist.

Participation in this form or idea is also the "light of the human mind, making possible every acquisition of knowledge" (*civ. Dei* 8.7). As the "idea" or "form" of the Good is itself the Highest Good, it is also the proper object of all loves. Plato has thus united all three branches of philosophy – natural, rational (logic), and moral – in the one transcendent source of them all. Accordingly, the Platonists, "acknowledge (*confitentur*) a God above every kind of soul, who made not only this visible world . . . but every kind of soul whatsoever, a God who makes the rational and intelligent soul blessed . . . by participation in his unchangeable and immaterial light" (*civ. Dei* 8.2).

In a sense, then, seeing the physical world and sensing, interiorly, the world of soul and of mind, we are "seeing" the mind of God, the original idea according to which everything sensible has come into existence. We are, in a way, seeing the eternal knowledge of God, and we can "ascend" to a contemplation of God's mind as we contemplate all that is informed by His eternal idea. St. Paul leads us to expect that this would be the case. Augustine characteristically applies to the Platonists what Paul says in Romans 1:19–20: "what is known of God is what he himself has revealed to them. For his invisible realities have been made visible to the intelligence, through his created works, as well as his eternal power and divinity" (*civ. Dei* 8.6). All the more tempting to see, in the doctrine of God's immutable simplicity, in the doctrine of God's 'idea' as informing all of changeable and composite reality, a body of philosophical teaching that is detachable from what is known from revelation as independently true.

Beyond agreement

We should be wary of this approach, however. In the *City of God*, Augustine actually begins his discussion of the Platonist teaching as part of an extensive critique.

He opens Book 8 by announcing his intention to discuss “theology” – and, he says, “I take this Greek word to signify reasoning or discussion regarding divinity (*de divinitate rationem sive sermonem*)” (*civ. Dei* 8.1) – with the philosophers. But his intention is not simply to discuss but to “refute all of the empty opinions (*vanas opinions*) of the philosophers” insofar as they touch on “theology.” This includes all the philosophers who “take it that there is a Divinity and that he cares for human affairs,” among which the Platonists are the prime examples. Nevertheless, all these philosophers “do not consider that the worship (*cultum*) of one unchangeable God is sufficient for the attainment of a life of blessedness even after death, but suppose that for this end many gods are to be worshiped, gods who were created and established by him” (*civ. Dei* 8.1). It seems almost like a technicality, this lack of worship, one easily excised and entailing no inroads into the areas of agreed-upon teaching, namely, the existence of one true unchangeably simple God and his care for human affairs (providence of some sort).

But a little later on in the text, Augustine uses St. Paul again, this time to articulate his critique, continuing in Romans from where he left off in 8.6:

> For while the Apostle says that through his created works God has revealed to them his invisible qualities by making them visible to the intelligence, he says at the same time that they have not offered the right sort of worship to God himself, because they have transferred the divine honors, due to God alone, to other objects, which have no right to them. *Though having some acquaintance with God, they have not glorified him as God, nor have they given thanks to him; but they have dwindled into futility in their thinking (in cogitationibus suis) and their unwise (insipiens) heart is darkened. Claiming to be wise, they have become foolish (stulti) and have exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images representing corruptible man, or birds, beasts or snakes.*
>
> (*civ. Dei* 8.10, Rom 1:21–22)

This analysis offers a more critical assessment of the philosopher’s wisdom, indicating a ‘darkness’ and a ‘foolishness’ belying the claim to be ‘wise,’ a kind of pervasive vitiation of truth into futility and foolishness. There is probably no passage more characteristically associated with Augustine’s critique of Platonism than this passage from Romans, because he saw (on the one hand) their undisputed awareness of the transcendence of God as source of all other beings, and (on the other hand) their willingness to countenance the worship of other gods, as a discrepancy so glaring that it called for closer inspection of the areas of agreement, to see how far there actually *is* agreement. And this is how the argument proceeds in the *City of God*. How close is the actual agreement, when examined from the perspective of biblical revelation?

A test case

It turns out that God's knowledge from all eternity, and its relation to temporal knowledge and events, is a perfect test case. As Augustine proceeds with his discussion of Creation, beginning in Book 11, the issue is raised regarding how the eternal knowledge of God relates to the world of time and change. We have already seen that they are related because the world of time and change is, in a way, God's eternal 'idea' realized in a temporal medium. Looking at it from the perspective of St. Paul, there is a formal, bare-bones accuracy about it, but there is in the teaching only an impersonal correspondence of type to archetype. There is no one to worship and no one to thank, and this "darkens" the truth seen, as though it were corrupted by a vitiating deficiency. As the biblical teaching on creation is exposited, the truth of the philosophical teaching stands out as a capacity to help explain the biblical teaching, to provide understanding of it. The philosophical teaching on its own is like a radioactive element with a short half-life. Its truth is a formality, an 'idea,' which gains material content only as it is used in the explication of revelation. Otherwise, its very formality is unstable and it "dwindles to futility" in understandings that are false.

City of God Book 11: creation

Book 11 begins the discussion of creation with an invocation of the authority of Scripture. Scripture's authority invites our trust concerning things which are out of reach (*remota*) both to our interior and exterior senses (*civ. Dei* 11.3). The mind must be trained and healed by faith so that it may be capable first of enduring, and then clinging to and enjoying the changeless light of God (*civ. Dei* 11.2). The Platonists may know the destination to which we must travel, but faith provides a pathway to the God of human beings through the human being who was God, *the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (*civ. Dei* 11.2, 1 Tim 2.5). The Platonist philosophers are "nearer the truth than the others," but "they are a long way from it" (*civ. Dei* 11.5), and because they are a long way off, they see the only way that someone far away from something can see, without detail and distorted by the distance.

A close reading of Augustine's text shows that it is not, however, the sheer distance in itself that is distorting, but, we could say, Augustine charges the philosophers with an investment in the distance. The absolute difference between God, the eternally unchangeable, and changeable mortal creatures is a distance that it is the job of philosophers, so to speak, to manage. As professionals, as philosophers, they "*claim to be wise*." The very distance is an evocation of the difficulty of what they have accomplished in "*recognizing God*" and their pride in the accomplishment. In this dynamic the Mediator becomes, as it were, a competitor, and so they want to push the

Mediator out of the way as distasteful, unnecessary, or at best one way among others: they "consider that honors of worship should be paid to many gods." Even regarding the Mediator as one possible option among many is to push Him aside. What the philosophers refuse to recognize is that there is no pushing Him aside, because He is actually the goal as well as the way (*civ. Dei* 11.2). Accepting the mediation of the Goal-drawn-close would mean abandoning the prestige of arbitrating the distance: they "*recognize God*," but "*they do not give thanks*." Faith will eventually give rise to vision, but faith-become-vision has the same content as when it was just faith, namely, the Mediator. For one thing, He never loses His humanity, as Augustine explains at length in Book 22. For another, He is always the One eternally characterized by the graciousness revealed in that humanity, which is thus not extrinsic to His person. The graciousness and compassion is part of His eternal essence. Faith in the Mediator does not simply bring us where the philosophers have arrived at by their own effort, or would arrive at by their own effort eventually, because He *is* the content of that vision, and insofar as it is a vision of the eternal knowledge of God it includes that gracious character, inextricably tied to the Incarnation. It is a vision of the kind of God that willed to become Incarnate.

Continuing with the discussion in Book 11, the basic point the philosophers see is that God's 'idea,' His knowledge, is eternal and immutable:

> It is not that God's knowledge varies in any way, that the future, the present, and the past affect that knowledge in three different ways. It is not with God as it is with us. He does not look ahead to the future, look directly at the present, look back to the past. He sees in some other manner, utterly remote from anything we experience or could imagine . . . He sees all without any kind of change.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 11.21)

This means that God's knowledge of temporal things exists independently of time: " God knows events in time without any temporal acts of knowledge, just as he moves events in time, without any temporal motions in himself" (*civ. Dei* 11.21).

In fact, if God's knowledge of creatures were not eternal, perfect, and unchanging, he would not have been able to produce the works he produced in their perfection, because he would not have known if he would have to add something to complete the perfection of his works after they were made (*civ. Dei* 11.21). In other words, you cannot add to God's knowledge, as it is eternally complete. "If God created knowingly, he created things which he already knew," and this has the surprising implication, Augustine says, that "this world could not be known to us, if it did not exist, whereas it could not have existed, if it had not been known by God" (*civ. Dei* 11.10). If there is a formal, philosophical common ground, it is this, though it is important to note that the common ground can be seen as such because the philosophical doctrines of God's unchangeability and simplicity are being used in the service of helping to understand biblical teaching.

God’s consilium: an eternal plan

The passage from the Book of Wisdom (9:13–15) quoted at the beginning of this chapter is a clue of what more is involved here, beyond the areas of agreement. God’s eternal knowledge of the world is not simply the ‘objective’ or ‘disinterested’ knowledge of a living blueprint or a computer program. Augustine’s fundamental starting point is, instead, the biblical notion of God’s *consilium*, his “counsel” or “plan” or “design” in the sense of “intention”: *What human being can know the design of God?* (Wisd 9:13). He appeals to this idea to answer criticisms of the biblical notion of creation.

Augustine mentions, without naming, a Manichaean criticism of the biblical story of creation, which in turn echoes the Epicurean criticism of philosophical versions of creation, such as the Platonic view: “Why did the eternal God decide to make heaven and earth at some particular time rather than before?” (*civ. Dei* 11.4). A Platonist defense, commonly accepted in other philosophical schools that held some kind of doctrine of creation, would be that there is no beginning of creation in time, but that the world, “in a way that is scarcely intelligible, is always being made.” This protects God’s immutability because it protects God from having a change of mind or a sudden new idea, and thus preserves God as Creator while rescuing the divine from the myth.

But Augustine finds this defense inconsistent with the biblical idea of God’s eternal “plan.” If, as the Platonists will agree, the soul now experiences misery from which it needs liberation, the misery, at least, cannot be co-eternal with God and must be a novelty that God’s eternal knowledge must still somehow accommodate. If one resorts to the idea of endless cycles of alternation between misery and liberation, one protects God’s immutability at the expense of holding that there is no true novelty in the world and that everything exists in endless cycles (*civ. Dei* 11.4). But this is to condemn the soul to endless misery, because even in its temporary happiness it must look forward to a return to misery, or else is ignorant of its return, and thus its ignorance compromises its happiness. But if the liberation is final and complete, then once again there is a genuine novelty to account for.

Augustine uses the biblical idea of God’s “plan” to press forward. If this liberation has no part in “God’s eternal plan” (*in aeterno . . . consilio*), then God is not the author of happiness, or else He just changed His mind. Thus, just as this genuine novelty could be part of God’s eternal plan without altering its immutability, so the world could have been created in time “without any change in his eternal purpose and design” (*aeternum consilium voluntatemque*). The issue, then, is not simply God’s knowledge, but God’s intentions, God’s “plan,” God’s integrated act of knowing and willing, reflected in a temporal world where genuine, permanent loss and gain is possible, where the soul can persevere and move permanently from mortal misery to immortal happiness, the world of history as we see it in the biblical narratives where God’s plan is played out. Augustine in this long passage does not argue his way toward the existence of such a plan, but uses philosophical argumentation to help generate understanding of what such a plan might mean.

The philosophical defense stemming from cycles preserves the dependence of the world on God as a dependence on an eternal "idea," by imagining the world reproducing, in temporal modality, as an infinite series of cycles of the same events, the eternity of the idea. But, Augustine asks (using an analogy from space rather than time), what does this defense really gain over the Epicurean idea that the world is a mindless series of atomic combinations (*civ. Dei* 11.5)? Its very rationality, ironically, its attempt to abstract from history to protect God from the mythological depiction of a powerful divine agency who is changeable, acting within the world of time and space as part of that world, deprives that world of a true "plan" or story. But this is only something that can be glimpsed when one has a true "plan" with which to compare it. Augustine had insisted at the outset of the whole discussion that the belief that God made the world is nowhere better attested than in the Holy Scriptures (*civ. Dei* 11.4). This is not a throwaway line. The biblical notion of creation is one not simply of derivation from a transcendent source (something one can see in its sheer beauty, *civ. Dei* 11.4), but rather of an intentional plan, a true act that can be narrated (however mystically), the "beginning" not just of time and space but of a story, which, just as it had a true beginning, has a true end.

Augustine goes on to explain that, indeed, when the Bible says, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth" (*civ. Dei* 11.6), the word "beginning" indicates the creation of time itself – but not just as a formal condition of existence of something that is not God, but time as part of a *plan* where there will be genuine "stories" which will be brought to fruition in God's "rest," and in that rest we will be able to see how God's works have fulfilled the prophetic promise implied in the very notion of God's mysterious rest (*civ. Dei* 11.8). Time is thus not a byproduct of declension from eternity, but intended, planned, as the substrate of true history.

The issue available, then, for philosophical analysis is not simply the relation of eternal knowledge to temporal reality, but whether there is a real story to be told anywhere, and what that story might be. If a rational creature ever fell into misery, and was ever permanently restored by God to happiness, and if the philosopher will agree to this teaching, as Scripture proclaims, then the philosopher, Augustine says, will also agree, as already noted, that this happened "without altering the immutability of God's plan," meaning his "eternal plan" (*civ. Dei* 11.4). Thus there is no myth, since the divine nature does not change. But because God's eternal knowledge, his "idea," is not simply an abstract impersonal awareness, but, by contrast, a "plan," there is no reduction to endless cycles.

Who? How? Why?

Augustine goes on to comment that, to the three questions regarding the creation of the world – Who? How? Why? – the answers from Scripture are "God," "Through his

Word," and "It was good." Plato sees this: "the most valid reason for creating is that good works should be effected by a good God," and Augustine opines that he may have learnt this from reading Genesis, or simply, as Romans 1:20 says, by seeing the invisible things of God from the creation. But Plato's understanding of what "good" means is abstract, or, we might say, philosophically constrained. This is clear if we follow out the Trinitarian implication of these questions, as Augustine does later in Book 11:

> It was, of course, the Father of the Word who said, "Let it be made." And since creation was effected by his speaking, there can be no doubt that it was done by means of the Word. And the statement, "God saw that it was good" makes it quite plain that God did not create under stress of any compulsion, or because he lacked something for his own needs; his only motive was goodness; he created because his creation was good . . . Now if this goodness is rightly interpreted as the Holy Spirit, then the whole united Trinity is revealed to us in its works. Hence comes the origin, the enlightenment, and the felicity of the Holy City constituted by the holy angels on high.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 11.24)

The Word of God is identical with God's Wisdom, the "idea" through which all things were made (*civ. Dei* 11.4, 7, 10). The Trinitarian account of creation reveals the absolute freedom of God in creating, against such views as the Manichaean myth, which amounts to a declaration that God needed to create in order to restrain and contain incursions against Him by a primeval evil power (*civ. Dei* 11.22), as though God somehow matured through the process of combating evil. Nor did God need anything but His co-equal Word, nor have any other reason for creating than His own goodness, in the person of His Spirit (see *civ. Dei* 12.18 on how it is incorrect to speak of God's having or being in a "condition" [*disposition*] as though something could be added to him).

Creation does not remedy a need that God has or add to God in any way, and so it is perfectly free to be itself, unconstrained by God's "needs." Creation everywhere bears the marks of the freedom in which it was created:

> Why, even the irrational animals, from the immense dragons down to the tiniest worms, who are not endowed with the capacity to think on those matters, show that they wish to exist and to avoid extinction . . . And then there are the trees and shrubs. They have no perception to enable them to avoid danger by an immediately visible movement; but they send up one shoot into the air to form their crown, and to safeguard this they fix another shoot into the earth to form their root.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 11.27)

These "traces" (*vestigia*, *civ. Dei* 11.28) of the Trinity exist even in inanimate objects "which shoot up aloft or sink down to the depths or hang suspended in between, so as to secure their existence in the situation to which they are by nature adapted" (*civ. Dei* 11.27). They are not free but by their "measure, weight and number," that is, in their having, even at a low level, an individual identity, they still trace out their origin in God's freedom, the freedom to be themselves and not a function of a great cosmic need. Human beings, of course, are not only "traces" but the very image of God's freedom, in created form (*civ. Dei* 11.26, 28). The beauty of the world is not simply the reproduction of an eternal "idea" but is a mark of its nature as a free gift which keeps "appearing" in a seemingly infinite mirroring of jubilant tracery:

> Nevertheless, although there is no kind of real knowledge in the senses of irrational creatures, there is at least something parallel to knowledge, whereas all other material things are called 'sensible,' not because they have senses, but because they are perceived by the senses . . . Yet [plants and trees] and all other material things have their causes hidden in nature; but they offer their forms to the perception of our senses, those forms which give loveliness to the structure of this visible world. It almost seems as if they long to be known, just because they cannot know themselves.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 11.27)

The whole of creation is free to be itself, free for self-expression, and as such is one whole multifaceted refraction of the freedom of God which gave the universe, as it were, to itself.

City of God Book 12

More on the Trinity below, but meanwhile, the problem of God's eternal knowledge and its relation to time comes back again with redoubled force in *City of God* 12, because there the subject is specifically the creation of human beings, and there is no doubt from biblical revelation that this occurred not at the beginning of time, but at a definite moment in time, and so is a genuinely new act of God within time. It begs the question, why did God do this at that time, and not another. Why so late?

Various philosophical solutions include the idea that the human race, like the world itself, is actually eternal, though involved in an infinite cycle of growth and reduction, and so, in each cycle, the human race appears to arise recently from a few individuals at a given time (*civ. Dei* 12.10). In other words, the world itself has no beginning, a position refuted earlier in Book 9 (*civ. Dei* 12.13, referring to 11.5). Another position is that there are, so to speak, an infinite number of beginnings of the world (matched by an equal number of destructions of the world); or that there is an infinite number of beginnings and endings of the same cycle of repeated events in one world (*civ. Dei* 12.15). These are all variations on the cyclic theories that we saw from Book 9 are meant to reconcile the unchanging eternal knowledge of God with the changing events of time.

Augustine responds to this philosophically, at first, by arguing that this would mean that the immortal soul was forever alternating between "false bliss and genuine misery," since the soul that has achieved happiness after death is happy simply in ignorance of its coming return to misery or, even worse, knows the misery is coming, in the next cycle (*civ. Dei* 12.14). Reason, Augustine seems to think, can have a glimmer of the truth – it's not reasonable to think that "happiness" means something when you know there is no permanence or genuine fulfillment, no end to any story, in the universe. Reason can see that a happiness due to ignorance is not really true. But this argument from reason alone is really no proof, but an appeal to reason to see reason, to consider the position of revelation. Augustine builds up to an appeal to Scripture, "For *Christ died once for all for our sins*"; and "*in rising from the dead he is never to die again: he is no longer under the sway of death*" (*civ. Dei* 12.14, citing Rom 6:9). Here is a declaration of an unrepeatable, unique event, the pivot on which all stories turn, as it were. In view of Romans 6:9, we must reject theories of cycles, including facile, philosophical interpretations of Genesis via Ecclesiastes (*civ. Dei* 12.14):

> It is no wonder that those theorists wander in a circuitous maze finding neither entrance nor exit, for they do not know how the human race, and this mortal condition of ours, first started, nor with what end it will be brought to a close. They cannot penetrate *the depth of God* (1 Cor 2:10, *altitudinem*), the deep counsel by which, being himself eternal and without beginning, he started time and man from a beginning, and made man in time, as a new act of creation, and yet with no sudden change of purpose (*non tamen novo et repentino*) but in accordance with his unchanging and eternal plan (*inmutabili aeternoque consilio*).
>
> (*civ. Dei* 12.15)

God's "plan" is not simply his eternal knowledge, but his knowledge as inseparably joined to his will, and in that sense, one could say his purpose or intention, which, as God's and as utterly free, is unfathomable:

> Whose strength avails enough to plumb this unplumbable depth, to scrutinize the inscrutable depth by which God made man as a temporal being, when no man had existed before him, making him in time with no change of purpose (*non mutabili voluntate*) and multiplying the whole human race from that one man?
>
> (*civ. Dei* 12.15)

What one encounters therefore in *any* unique historical event, as such, is a depth of mystery that is unfathomable, resistant to philosophical analysis:

> Let men form their opinions from their own thoughts, and theorize and argue as they please, but *According to your deep design* (*altitudinem tuam*) *you multiplied the sons of men* [Ps 12:8], which no human being can discover (*nosse*). For it

> certainly is a profound mystery (*altum est*) that God always existed and yet willed to create the first man, who had never existed, at a certain time, without having altered his purpose and design (*consilium voluntatemque*).
>
> (*civ. Dei* 12.15)

In the unrepeatable historical event, we find ourselves contemplating a reality which is unfathomable in its depth, because it is a trace or image of something unfathomable in its depth, of the mystery of God's freedom as that is expressed from all eternity in His "plan" or "counsel." This plan eternally contains a promise for human beings, that of eternal life, according to Titus 1:2–3, which – or really, *Who* – is the co-eternal Word of God, eternally predestined to be given to human beings (*civ. Dei* 12.17).

Is meaning dissolved by infinities?

The objection is presented, ultimately coming from Aristotle, that "infinite things are beyond the comprehension of any knowledge (*nulla infinita ulla scientia posses comprehendi*)," meaning that no mind, even God's, can comprehend an infinite series such as the series of numbers, and that therefore God has a finite conception of everything he creates, but, to prohibit any inactivity on God's part, so that God is always active but not creating an incomprehensible infinity, what is created must be a finite set of events that repeats itself endlessly – cycles again (*civ. Dei* 12.18). Augustine says that "faith ought to laugh at these theories, even if reason could not refute them," though he proceeds to show how reason can refute them. The main problem, again, is that these speculators

> measure the utterly unchangeable mind of God (*mentem divinam omnino inmutabilem*), which can embrace any kind of infinity and numbers all the innumerable possibilities without passing them in sequence before its thought – they measure this mind by their own narrow and changeable human mind. The Apostle describes what happens to them: *Comparing themselves to themselves, they fail to understand* [2 Cor 10:12]. When it occurs to their minds to do something new, they change their plans in so acting (*novo consilio faciunt*); for their minds are subject to change. Thus it is not really God whom they are thinking of, in this argument; they find that impossible, and instead they imagine themselves in God's place. And so they do not measure him by his own standard, but *themselves by themselves*.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 12.18)

Apparently, as hinted at the beginning of this chapter, this replacement of God's mind for a more familiar human mind is a projection of which even the most sublime philosophers are guilty.

In any event, God's "rest" and "activity" are the same from God's point of view; God is never the passive subject of dispositions such as "rest," but he "knows how to be active while at rest, and at rest in his activity (*novit quiescens agree et agens quiescere*)," because "he can apply to a new work not a new design but an eternal plan (*potest ad opus novum non novum, sed sempiternum adhibere consilium*)" (*civ. Dei* 12.18). There is no change of will or intention (*voluntas*) because by the very same will that prohibited things from existing at an earlier point, they were brought into existence later. Augustine comments that God demonstrates in a wonderful way, to those capable of seeing it, his free, gratuitous goodness (*gratuita bonitate*) in creating, because he did not need creation before it was created, and it did not increase his happiness once created. We return, then, to the freedom of God as the basis for, and guarantee of, true, unique historical events, and the intrinsic wonder attaching to such events.

Still arguing back from reason, Augustine indicates that according to Plato God created the world using numbers, and Scripture agrees that God has set in order all things "by measure, number and weight" (Wisd 11:20). This implies that "every infinity is, in a way we cannot express (*ineffabili modo*), finite to God, because it is not incomprehensible to his knowledge (*scientia*), and every individual creature, no matter how many there are or how different they are from each other, is contained already in God's eternal prescience (*aeterna praescientia*)" (*civ. Dei* 12.19). In other words, infinities do not defeat intelligibility. They may intimidate us into declaring that all temporal reality is cyclic, but they do not intimidate God, since they are relativized into intelligibility by God's eternal plan. The uniqueness of history does not threaten the "reasonableness" of God, but rather God's reasonableness guarantees the intelligibility of even an infinite number of unique individuals and events.

Augustine continues to argue, again, from the unreasonableness of the position that there can ever be true happiness if there are cycles of alternating misery and release from misery. It is unreasonable, he suggests, to defend God's eternal knowledge of his works by requiring his creatures to conform to the supposed conditions for God to know them and thus endlessly alternate between mortal misery and temporary release. This amounts to saying that our misery is continuous. A happiness that is ignorant of coming misery is false and deceptive. Augustine appeals to reason here, but again, it's not clear that the argument amounts to more than an appeal to the reasonable instincts of the philosophers (recalling the example of Porphyry which he first brought up in 10.30, who seems to have been persuaded by this kind of argument to disagree with what Plato was believed to have taught on the issue). The argument may not be intended to stand on its own, but to try to show at least the reasonableness of turning, against cycles, to the "straight way, which is Christ" (*civ. Dei* 12.21; cf. Jn 14:6), and to the eternal life of the saints, which "refutes [the cycles] completely" (*civ. Dei* 12.20).

Further Trinitarian considerations

In order to realize fully the implications for God's knowledge from all eternity, including

God's self-knowledge, we have to turn back, momentarily, to the issue of the Trinity, beginning with the Incarnation. The Incarnation is one of those things Augustine says we are "incapable of discovering by ourselves" both with our exterior and our interior vision (*civ. Dei* 11.3), because it involves a truth of something God *did*, something God *became*. Augustine had explained already back in Book 9:

> That Mediator, in whom we can participate and by participation reach our felicity, is the uncreated Word of God, by whom all things were created . . . God himself, the blessed God who is the giver of blessedness, became (*factus*) partaker of our human nature.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 9.15)

He remained (*mansit*) above the angels in the form of God, but willed (*voluit*) to be below the angels in the form of a servant, and in so doing he brings us not to the angels, but to the Trinity (*civ. Dei* 9.15). This "willing" is obviously part of God's eternal "plan" or "design," his eternal wisdom.

It is easy to miss the striking incongruities, or seeming incongruities, these passages on the Incarnation contain, exemplified most fully in the uses of the verb *facere*: God, who is unchanging, made the world (*fecit*), but himself is not made; and yet God "was made" or "became" (*factus*) something He had not been before, partaker of our human nature, at a particular point in time. The philosophical language we have seen so far cannot account for this. The God whom good philosophy describes as eternally unchangeable seems to have a narrative, if authoritative Scripture is to be believed. Here, in a nutshell, is an illustration of the way in which a philosophical account is true, namely, insofar as it helps to "understand" the biblical proclamation. In this case, the language of God's immutability serves to indicate, not to dissolve, the magnitude of the mystery of God, because the philosophical language does not have the last word and yet is not discarded. God's nature remains unchanged and unchanging, but there is still a narrative! Some*one* eternal has a narrative even if no eternal *thing or nature* changes. Some*one* eternal becomes something, something actually happens in time to this someone, and thus we come to the idea of the Trinity, and must, as we close, take up some of the relevant discussion in Book 10.

The Mind of the Father

This someone is the Word, the original "idea," the "Mind of the Father" as Porphyry the Platonist would style it, who is some*one* in relation to Father and Holy Spirit (against the Sabellians) but not some*thing* different (*civ. Dei* 10.24; cf. 11.10). He is not a separate "principle" (*principium*), one of three, but, co-equal with Father and Holy Spirit, is *the* principium or first principle. He "assumes" a human nature, including the human soul, "in some unique and ineffable (*ineffabili*) manner," "remaining unchangeably (*incommutabiliter*) in his own proper being (*in se*)," thus giving his love (*dilectionis*) to human beings, by which they might come to him (*civ. Dei* 10.29). God does not change, and yet there is a story to be told, a genuine story, and it is about God's love.[3]

Eternal folly

So are we now in a position to realize more fully what is involved in the eternal knowledge of God? – keeping in mind that creation is accomplished in the eternal Word of God, that very same Word which is not one of three *principia*, but *the principium*, the one God Himself. The Word, equally the *principium* with the Father, *became flesh and dwelt among us* (*civ. Dei* 10.24, Jn 1:14), "stretching out a hand" of compassion and mercy to those who lay fallen, in the offering of his life as a sacrifice in which he was himself both priest and victim (*civ. Dei* 10.20).

What kind of "wisdom" or "counsel" is this? The wisdom of this "plan" is *folly, stupidity, foolishness* (*stultitiam*), as Augustine asserts, making his own the words of St Paul:

> *Where now is the wise man? The scribe? The debator of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God* (*Dei sapientia*), *the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. The Jews looked for powerful signs and the Greeks sought wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks, but to those who have been called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power and wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*
>
> (1 Cor 1:20–25, in *civ. Dei* 10.28)

Augustine immediately goes on to comment that this "foolishness" of God "is in fact grace," "rejected as folly and weakness by those who think themselves wise and strong by their own virtue" (*civ. Dei* 10.28). In other words, it is rejected by those who are proud of the makeshift happiness that really is only an attachment to a denial of misery in virtue of relying on one's own wisdom and strength. But it takes misery, undisguised by philosophical illusion, to see the "folly" of the Cross and to accept it as wisdom, the "grace which heals the weakness of those who do not proudly boast of their delusive happiness, but instead make a humble admission of their genuine misery" (*civ. Dei* 10.28).

Porphyry, Augustine claims, perhaps as the most honest of the philosophers, does recognize the necessity of grace. In a passage commenting on Plato's assertion that no one can reach the perfection of wisdom in this life, Porphyry comments that "after this life, all those who live the life that is according to the intellect (*secundum intellectum*) will receive all that is needed for their fulfillment from the providence and grace of God" (*civ. Dei* 10.29). Porphyry can even see that this will mean a refutation of cycles of alternation between misery and (so-called) bliss, at least for some people (*civ. Dei* 10.31, with Augustine anticipating the arguments against cycles that he will make later in Books 11 and 12).

And yet this philosophical account of grace is, well, philosophical. It falls considerably short of the divine "folly." It is grace configured to the regime of "virtue and wisdom" of self-advancement, it is not "foolish" enough. It is grace for those who, in effect, deserve it, who have lived the life of the intellect, the life according to the "mind or intellect of the Father." We recall that the Platonic version of this mind is not the one first principle together with the Father, nor did it become Incarnate, something which nothing and no one could deserve no matter how virtuous or powerful, the supreme instance of grace and thus of the freedom of God. In this philosophical rendition of grace, the Platonic God is not "free," has no "plan" or design other than an impersonal "idea," no grace that would not undercut the "power and wisdom" of the philosopher, and certainly no such love. This "Mind" is not a "priest," in the sense of one who consummates a sacrifice, let alone the sacrifice too (*civ. Dei* 10.31). Thus the eternal knowledge of God, as Augustine sees it, is, despite formal points of contact, very distant from the unbelieving philosophical conception of it even at its best.

In fact, at its best, the unbelieving philosophical view approaches its greatest distortion of the truth because it attempts to take over from God his freedom by construing that freedom as "folly," not wisdom, and by construing his love as "weakness," not "power," attempting, instead, to control His grace. To put it a different way, it is precisely the historical character of this grace that offends the philosophic sensibility, its opacity precisely as a concrete self-offering in history. "Why just now?" "Why so late?" are the questions posed by the philosophers to the "plan" of the Christian God, which therefore cannot possibly be the sought-after "universal way for the soul's liberation" (*civ. Dei* 10.32) precisely because it is historically specified and located instead of something that is abstractable from time and history and, as such, eternal. Knowing God's eternal knowledge is to know the "great Teacher" (*ille magister*), God, who made himself contemptible in the eyes of the proud who were too ashamed to admit they needed healing and to what extent. To know this God is to know a God eternally, unchangeably, and irreducibly *foolish*, whose "plan," eternally present to himself and immutable, is the "folly of preaching," the Cross of His own sacrifice, a God who is, therefore, eternally willing this sacrifice of his own life in history, as history, because anything else would be less loving, less a self-gift. It would be myth, the suffering of the divine nature. It would be Manichaeism, in which God is not truly free to love, but is rather compelled to create as part of a strategy of self-defense (*civ. Dei* 11.22).

The twilight of the gods

And what about philosophy? Philosophical doctrine, as a way of helping to explain biblical teaching, helps in the critique of mythologies such as Manichaeism presents. But on its own, does it really deliver on its promise of a wisdom that leaves behind mythological accounts of the world in its own reaction against the poets and the gods? In Augustine's analysis, philosophy, at its very best, can banish the poets and critique the mythological depiction of the divine, yet Augustine shows that it does this by dissolving history into endless repetitive cycles of misery alternating with ignorant bliss, in order to preserve an account of God's knowledge that is eternal and unchanging. The price of God's eternal knowledge is the misery of everyone else:

> It is intolerable for devout ears to hear the opinion expressed that after passing through this life with all its great calamities . . . and we have arrived at the sight of God and reached our bliss in the contemplation of immaterial light through participation in his changeless immortality . . . that we reach this bliss only to be compelled to abandon it, to be cast down from that eternity, that truth, that felicity, to be involved again in hellish mortality, in shameful stupidity, in detestable miseries, where God is lost, where truth is hated, where happiness is sought in unclean wickedness; and to hear this is to happen again and again, as it has happened before, endlessly, at periodic intervals, as the ages pass in succession; and to hear that the reason for this is so that God may be able to know his own works by means of those finite cycles with their continual departure and return, bringing with them our false felicities and genuine miseries . . . For this theory assumes that God can neither rest from his creative activity, nor grasp within his knowledge an infinity of things.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 12.21)

The eternal knowledge of the philosophical God is threatened by history, and therefore this God, limited by history, must retreat from history. There is only one place to retreat from history – into myth. He is limited by his own transcendence. He turns out to be a more rarified version of the Manichaean God. History, in its every unrepeatable unique moment, at any time of which everything can be lost, hedges this God in lest he be "contaminated" with it (*civ. Dei* 9.17, speaking of the flesh).

And so the gods, banished from the philosophical light, find themselves perfectly welcome in the twilight, where they are available to receive the sacrifices of theurgic worship. Even Porphyry knows that the benefits of theurgy are marginal at best and that the gods being cultivated are dangerous at worst, and yet the philosophical God is so weighted by his own transcendence that he cannot or will not intervene in history to relieve its misery. Someone has to do it, even as a palliative (not to say, opiate), hence the gods, and the Platonist countenancing of their worship. The philosophers' God turns out to be a projection of the philosophers' own minds. In arguing for cycles, "it is not really God whom they are thinking of . . . instead they imagine themselves in God's place” (*civ. Dei* 12.18). Eager to *claim they are wise*, they imagine a God distant from history, in fact they *keep* him distant from history by their theories, keen as they are to preserve their prestigious status as *wise*, as the arbiters of God’s transcendence through their own virtue and wisdom:

> Thus all those who cannot approach to philosophic virtue (a lofty ideal to which only a few attain) have your authority to seek out theurgists, in order to receive at their hands the purgation of the ‘spiritual’ soul at least, though not of the ‘intellectual.’ The result is, naturally, that since the vast majority have no taste for philosophy, you collect far more clients for those secret and illegal masters of ours than candidates for the Platonic schools. You have made yourself the preacher and the angel of those unclean spirits who pretend to be gods of the ether.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 10.27)

The gods do not go away with philosophy. There is too much of the divine to fit into philosophical theories, and it keeps popping up in the most awkward places. Like the embarrassing involuntary movements of the body resulting from concupiscence (*civ. Dei* 14.16–17), awkwardly belying the myth of self-sufficiency in disobedience to God, so the gods reappear at the edges of philosophy, awkwardly belying the myth of the God hedged in by his own eternal knowledge. It turns out that, far from banishing myth, philosophy is addicted to myth. The project of carving out a pure sphere of intellectual control and self-purification depends upon giving the gods their due as the second-tier access to which lesser souls must resort for succor. As the one God is restricted by the uniqueness of history, and therefore is re-mythologized even in his abstraction, the gods reappear, demanding worship from those who cannot purify themselves by philosophy, and forcing those who supposedly can to pimp for them.

The living flame of love

But the real God pays the price of history Himself, from all eternity, out of pure, active, and generative love. It is not just the thought that counts in this gift, but, as it were, the gift of creation, as a gift, is paid for. Instead of paying for His own transcendence with human misery, God ‘buys’ created freedom with His blood, not out of any necessity, but because he is loving and manifests his power in weakness. Looking at the choices that free agents make in freedom, and trying to ask why, for example, some angels fell and others did not, we receive the answer (*civ. Dei* 12.10) that the ones who clung to God received the grace to do so, while the others did not. At face value it seems as though this God is too involved, micromanaging everything, over-omnipotent, as it were, but the decision not to give auxiliary grace to the devil and his angels is at one and the same time the decision of God to suffer and die in history to redeem human beings from the evil the devil would cause. Pondering why the evil angels fell is the same thing as pondering why God was willing from all eternity to perfectly empty Himself, why God from all eternity had the unchangeable plan of His own self-emptying, and so had the eternal knowledge of Himself as a living, eternal holocaust of love.

Faced with any free action in time and history, we are face to face with the ultimate mystery, the love of God, amazing in its absolute *foolishness* from all eternity. God's foreknowledge of the devil's evil choice is the same as God's foreknowledge of his remedy (see *civ. Dei* 11.17), his own life, his own compassionate love which receives the many "set free from the domination of the demons . . . in a purification in Christ that is full of compassion (*misericordissimam purgationem*)" (*civ. Dei* 10.27). There is nothing that can give an account of that love – it is trackless – *O altitudo!* – Any attempt to track grace is an attempt to be less loving, to avoid, in self-justification, the sacrifice that love is and that love requires.

It turns out, unexpectedly, that God's eternal graciousness, His eternal plan or design, is the precondition for any philosophical account in which history is not sacrificed to God's transcendent knowledge of the world. Instead, God's eternal omniscience is an eternal sacrifice. For God to know everything, timelessly, eternally, immutably, is itself an act of supreme sacrifice. God is not intimidated by infinities because He is not afraid of giving up Himself. His love is not intimidated by even an infinity of infinite series to retreat into a self-enclosed protectorate of transcendence. From all eternity He is aware of his own willingness to give up the most precious thing that exists – Himself.

Endnotes

1 English translations of texts from *City of God* are taken from Bettenson 1972, though in many cases I have felt free to adjust the translation without noting the adjustments.

2 This topic has received excellent treatment in studies whose philosophical depth a brief essay such as this cannot capture. A useful guide to the studies of the issues raised by God's eternal knowledge and its relationship to time as they bear upon the study of St. Augustine can be found in O'Daly, 1999, 135–50. The notes by G. Bardy et al. to Books 8–12 of the *City of God* in BA, *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, volumes 34–35, are still indispensable in themselves, and offer a good guide to literature up to the date of publication, in 1959.

3 Famously, Augustine points out that the Platonists, in seeing in some way the Father and the Mind of the Father, as well as a third being between them, "see, to some extent, though from afar off and with clouded vision (*utcumque, etsi de longinquo, etsi acie caligante*), the fatherland in which we must find our home; but do not keep to the road (*via*) along which we must travel" (*civ. Dei* 10.29; cf. 10.23–24). They do see something, in the manner in which you can see something very far away and with distorted vision, but they could not give an account of the Trinity, the God who is absolutely free to love, to have a story and yet remain the true unchangeable God. Their pride distorts their vision because they have an investment in keeping God distant, so that their accomplishment in glimpsing him remains a marker of their prestigious wisdom. That is why they do not "recognize the grace of God through Jesus Christ," God drawn near to us. They "see" God but do not "recognize" him.

3 Augustine on the triune life of God

Lewis Ayres

Scripture and the origins of Trinitarian theology

The classical Trinitarian theologies of the fourth and fifth centuries – those of Athanasius, Augustine, Basil of Caesarea, Ephrem the Syrian, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen, and many others – are deeply rooted not simply in those texts that Christians took to be scriptural, but in a particular manner of reading those texts. And so, when we seek to explore Augustine's own account of the Trinity, we can do worse than to begin by thinking about the ways in which Christians of his time viewed the New Testament as a Trinitarian text (they certainly also saw the Jewish texts incorporated into the Christian canon as the Old Testament as revealing aspects of Trinitarian doctrine, but for our purposes we can consider only the texts of the New Testament).[1]

The New Testament is in some ways very clear in what it says about the nature of God. The earliest Christian gospel insists that the God of Israel, the one God who is the source of all, sent Jesus, and that through Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection, salvation comes. Similarly, different texts insist that after his resurrection and ascension Jesus continues to be present, as is his Spirit. The narrative here is reasonably clear. But in other ways the text is often ambiguous and seems only to hint. How, for example, should one interpret any of the titles used of Christ: Son, Image, Word, Power, and many others? How, centrally, should one interpret the language of a relationship between "Father" and "Son" without thinking of these two as beings separated in space like human parents and children? What does it mean that the Father and Son are "in" each other (Jn 14:11)?

Indeed, these texts are particularly difficult to interpret when they speak of that which was present in Christ, and of the relationship between God/Father and this reality who becomes flesh. Thus, for example, Jesus is introduced by emphasizing that in him was the Word who was with God in the beginning (Jn 1:1–3); he is described as the image of God's nature (Heb 1:3), as the one in whom we see the likeness and glory of God (2 Cor 4:4), and as the one through whom the world was created and in whom it holds together (Col 1:15–17). These different texts make use of earlier Jewish traditions to explore how we may comprehend what they believe to have happened in Christ. Some of those traditions spoke of a secondary divine being, or the presence of God as a reality beside God; now those traditions are invoked to explore how we can best speak of the immediate presence of God in Christ. But the terminologies used here also create ambiguities; apart from their own inherent ambiguities, they are often used in new ways and in combinations that are otherwise unknown to us. They certainly suggest bounds to our interpretive capacity, but within those bounds many options seem possible.

Discussion of the Spirit is also, but perhaps differently, enigmatic. In some places the Spirit is narrated as a clearly distinct entity; thus in John 14 and 16 the Spirit is the "other comforter" who will come when Christ has departed. In some texts the situation is far more complex. Thus, for example, in Romans 8 the Spirit is again a separate entity, consoling Christians and teaching them how to pray. And yet, notice also that when Paul describes the resurrection – that of Christ and of Christians – the Spirit is "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ." Is the Spirit here a possession of Christ or of God, or is it a separate entity? Moreover, God himself is just described at John 4:24 as "Spirit" – how do we distinguish "spirit" and "the Spirit"? Indeed, one of the interesting features of pneumatological texts in the New Testament documents is what remains unsaid. The Spirit is named by a term that is also used of God, is named in relationship to Father and Son, and is identified as the author of various aspects of the Christian life; but there is little to parallel the dense terminologies and metaphors used of the Son: Word, Wisdom, Glory, etc. Each of those provides resources for thinking about the eternal character of the Son; there is little to parallel this in the case of the Spirit. There is, then, a somewhat different ambiguity in the naming of the Spirit.

How should the interpreter respond to this mix of clarity and ambiguity? How one answers this question depends on what one understands as constituting good interpretation. One very popular modern response, rooted in the approaches of modern historical-critical biblical study, has been that this ambiguity most importantly reveals the inchoate character of Christian thought in its first couple of generations. In this light we might, for example, catalog all the terms used of Christ, say a little about their background, and try to see how they are used by different authors or texts. Doing so reveals something of the complex symbolic worlds on which early Christians drew, but it is to treat the text primarily as a historical witness to a religious phenomenon and community.

Early Christians certainly thought that the texts of the New Testament contained much that was a historical record. But, at the same time, they believed that those texts were ordained for instructing and forming the minds and imaginations of Christians, they believed that the different parts of the New Testament should be read as parts of a single book with a consistent teaching, and (hence) they believed that close comparison of the different terminologies used of Christ could lead to a deeper understanding of the text. Thus, early Christians understood these texts to contain depths of meaning not immediately apparent, depths that may be revealed to the attentive and faithful reader, depths that the Christian community may only over time come to appreciate. This did not mean that early Christians believed the meaning of the text to be impenetrable to all but a few experts, but rather that the text spoke to those with different levels of intellectual and spiritual capacity, revealing to all the mystery of God's love. For early Christian theologians, then, Scripture's ambiguities *should* be explored, links between them drawn, and an attempt made to reach toward the mystery they describe.[2]

Augustine's contexts

Such a vision of what it meant for these texts to be considered scripture resulted in significant disputes breaking out between Christians over how they should interpret scriptural discussion of Father, Son, and Spirit. The fourth century, in particular, saw Christians embroiled in a deep controversy over how to envisage the relationships between Father, Son, and Spirit. It was during this century that Christians gradually came to articulate the fundamental positions that would constitute Nicene orthodoxy. "Nicene" here refers to the creed promulgated by the Council of Nicaea (325) and refined at the Council of Constantinople in 381, but the term also refers to a range of principles for interpreting that creed that are not directly stated by it. In a variety of ways Christians articulated the principle that there were three irreducible realities – Father, Son, and Spirit – but that the communion and unity between them was such that the primary confession of God's unity remained. Christians also articulated the principles that the Son or Word was eternally born from the Father, sharing all that the Father has, and that the Spirit was eternally breathed by the Father.[3]

A variety of different terminologies were used to summarize some of these principles: eventually, it became common in Greek to say that God was three *hypostases* in one *ousia*, and in Latin that there were three persons in one nature. At the same time theologians, in Greek and Latin and Syriac, insisted that the unity between Father, Son, and Spirit was such that they were one will and one power. In every action that one of the divine three performed, the other two were also acting. One of the results of these formulations was a deepened attention to the sheer mysteriousness of the divine life. Some of the principles articulated here cannot but seem paradoxical to those who think only in the categories of created beings, and at the heart of Nicene theology was a belief that the reality of the divine life escapes the human intellect's grasp. For Gregory of Nyssa, famously, that mystery is not even solved after death; even then the purified intellect undergoes an eternal journey into God. Insisting that the divine being remains mysterious to us also shaped how Christians saw the text of Scripture. The belief that Scripture draws the intellect toward God by encouraging our reflection and interpretation of its titles and terminologies was promoted by this century's controversies, but with an increased sense that a final and certain perception of the divine reality beyond the text was impossible. The text guides our thought and yet also guides us toward recognition of our incapacity.

Augustine converted to Christianity in 386, and composed his first writings as a Christian author in the winter of 386–87. Already in those writings he reveals himself to be a Nicene Christian, influenced by Ambrose of Milan (by whom he would be baptized the next Easter), Marius Victorinus, and Hilary of Poitiers. In subsequent years he would come to know many other Nicene authors, Latin and Greek (many of the latter in translation, but eventually some also in Greek). But Augustine did not just inherit the results of the fourth-century controversies as a fixed deposit of doctrines. He also recognized that the defense of Nicaea, and the exploration of Christian faith and life in a Nicene light, was an ongoing project. In the case of the Spirit, for example, Augustine openly recognizes that there is much more to be said. In other contexts he reads, interprets, and attempts to advance on his predecessors without open acknowledgment.

Augustine also thinks about the Trinity against the background of particular ancient philosophical traditions – and against the background of other Christian engagement with those traditions. It is rather difficult for us to understand the relationship between "philosophy" and "theology" envisaged by Christian writers of Augustine's time. He certainly speaks of "philosophy," and he assumes that there is a tradition of ancient thinkers who have articulated views of physics, ethics, and logic. He finds some of the positions that these "philosophers" have articulated very persuasive, others far less so. The Platonic tradition was particularly influential on Augustine. He was able to read some of the third-century thinker Plotinus, and knew a little about the history of Platonic thought from summary accounts. Eventually he also read Plotinus' disciple Porphyry. But he was also influenced by Christian authors who had imbibed much from the same non-Christian traditions; here Ambrose was again important (to see the confluence of themes one might read side by side Plotinus, *Ennead* 1.6 and Ambrose's *On Isaac or the Soul*).

Augustine was also greatly influenced by Cicero, the great Roman orator, rhetorical theoretician, and explorer of Greek philosophy. Cicero provided Augustine with a great deal of material for his own reflections on rhetoric and on what constituted human happiness. Cicero's tendency toward skepticisim about the possibility of certain knowledge – especially about the afterlife – partially motivated Augustine's deep interest in arguing for the possibility of knowledge and the rationality of faith. Indeed, one of the main attractions for the young Augustine in the Platonic conception of an ordered and intelligible cosmos is that it seems to offer a basis for showing that knowledge is possible.

Augustine does not, however, think that even the good thinking done by the Platonists has saved them – in fact, he is pretty sure it has left them overly prideful. Augustine certainly thought the Platonists had rightly seen that the material world is not all there is, that the cosmos is ordered and intelligible and has one eternal divine source. But a knowledge of the Trinity would not just add an extra layer of true beliefs to a set rightly grasped; in some sense they must even be wrong about what they have seen as they missed the triune nature of that divine source. Augustine also thinks that non-Christian philosophical traditions are in various ways irrational, despite their claims. In arguing for reincarnation, for the impossibility of knowledge, for a materialist view of the world, an ancient tradition is arguing something incoherent because it is out of accord with reality.

And so, Augustine sees Christianity as the true philosophy, because in this context ideas can be properly brought to their ends and a life formed that will appropriately form a person for attention to truth. Thus, Augustine does not see "philosophy" as a rational pursuit uninfluenced by faith commitments, or "theology" as founded on faith and willing to trample the demands of reason whenever required. Human thought in all its forms is greatly benefited by God's revelation. The history of Israel and the teaching and ministry of Christ have provided us with a narrative within which we may understand the world's course and end; the text of Scripture may guide our intellectual choices, and be itself the subject of careful and precise examination, shaping the mind toward contemplation of God.

In the light of these observations, we may view Augustine's theology as an extensive witness to the early Christian assumption that the text of Scripture was both perspicacious and an invitation to rise toward contemplation. But before we can see this model of thinking in action, we need to note one further cultural influence on Augustine. In his earliest writings Augustine was entranced by the idea of the "liberal arts." Roman and Greek culture had long valued the ideal of a fully rounded education that would lead a young man (in these cultures it was almost always a young *man*) through a series of different disciplines. The philosophically minded saw all these disciplines as culminating in philosophy and contributing toward shaping the mind of one able to comprehend the ordering of this world and think carefully about the one who was its source. Augustine seems to have thought that some such educational syllabus and process would be of great value for Christian thinkers, and he began the project of writing a book introducing each discipline. He soon came to see problems in his vision of a highly complex educational program that would be comprehensible only by a few, and the grand project was abandoned. But a number of intellectual practices that emerged from Augustine's vision of how the liberal arts may train someone to think about that which transcends the material and the created are fundamental in his vision of what is involved in attempting to interpret what Scripture says about Father, Son, and Spirit. His belief in making careful distinctions between terms, and in the slow exercising of the mind toward apprehending spiritual realities: both of these stem from this context. However, the mature Augustine gives a special cast to these practices of thought by emphasizing that the language given to us by Scripture remains foundational and that the divine realities of which it speaks can never be grasped in this life. He also recasts these practices by emphasizing that the Christian progresses in understanding as she or he grows in humility and acceptance of the need for grace. There are definite limits to any training of the intellect.

Working together

When Augustine speaks about the work of the Son and the Spirit in the Christian life he often attributes to them the same functions.[4] For example, when he speaks about how God imparts virtue into the human soul he sometimes says it is accomplished by the

Spirit, sometimes by the Son. Sometimes a particular scriptural verse provides a point of departure for his reflections, sometimes a particular sermon focuses on Son or Spirit and that seems to guide his statements. But this practice raises a question: does this lack of a clear distinction reveal a failure to think clearly about the distinct roles of Son and Spirit?

This ambiguity is found also in Scripture itself, and Augustine reflects that ambiguity in one of the most fundamental principles of his Trinitarian theology. To see that principle I will turn to Augustine's *Sermon* 71, a long text discussing Matthew 12:32, "whoever speaks a word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven." The text was interpreted in many ways in the early Church; Augustine argues that there is in fact only one sin against the Spirit that cannot be forgiven: remaining unrepentant in the face of God's constantly offered forgiveness. But exploring what this means provides him with an occasion for a mini treatise on the Spirit, and on the Spirit's place in the triune life.

Commenting on the voice that appears from heaven when Jesus is baptized in the Jordan – "you are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" – Augustine writes:

> Although this miracle of an audible word from heaven belongs to the Father alone, we do not deny that the Son and Holy Spirit cooperated in producing it. After all, just because the Son, clothed in the flesh, was then going about with other human beings on earth, it doesn't mean that he wasn't also in the bosom of the Father as his only-begotten Word, when that voice came from the cloud. Nor can it be wisely and spiritually supposed that God the Father excluded from the transmission of his audible words the cooperation of his Wisdom and his Spirit . . . Thus too we very truly say that it was only the Son and not the Father or the Holy Spirit who took flesh to himself; and yet anyone who denies that either the Father or the Holy Spirit cooperated in this incarnation which belongs to the Son alone is not thinking along the right lines . . . Thus it is the Trinity that performs the works of each of the persons in the Trinity, two of them cooperating in the work of the other, harmonious action characterizing all three.
>
> (*s*. 71. 27)[5]

Augustine takes two examples here of actions that seem to be the work of only one person. When the Father speaks from heaven we should not think that the Father alone works. Similarly, although it is the Son who becomes incarnate, we should not think of the Son alone at work in this act. Augustine's concern is to emphasize that the divine three are not separate agents in the way that human agents are separable. The unity that they share results in a constant harmonious cooperation. The unity between Father, Son, and Spirit is such that they are all working together in each thing that any undertakes (we should note that Augustine's principle was shared by Nicene theologians of his day). And thus, because the three share this cooperative fellowship and unity, Augustine allows himself a great deal of freedom in attributing various aspects of the Christian life to Son or Spirit (although where Scripture consistently attributes a term or an action to one of the divine three, so does Augustine).

Of course, this vision of their inseparability in action only poses further questions: Do we imagine the divine three as cooperating in the manner of human beings cooperating? Do we see them as analogous to parts in a machine, each contributing something toward one unified act? The same vision of inseparability also sets an agenda for how to interpret what Scripture says about the three: that Scripture does attribute distinct actions to each provides us with warrant for doing so; that Scripture also teaches us about the divine unity forces us to think about how that narration of distinct actions is only a point of departure for our reflections on the divine communion. To take us further I want to look at a sermon that contains one of Augustine's most well-developed accounts of the unity that the divine three share.

Existing in relationship

The thirty-ninth of Augustine's tractates (expository sermons) on John's Gospel begins by commenting on John 8:25. When the Pharisees in the Temple ask Jesus who he is, Jesus replies, "the beginning, for so also I say to you" (Augustine's version of the text was a little different from modern translations from the Greek). Augustine asks whether, if Christ is "the beginning," is the Father also "the beginning"? It is absurd, he suggests, to think otherwise; the Father is the source of the son, and is thus "the beginning." But can there be two beginnings? His answer is to parallel the language of "beginning" with the language of light, as in the creedal phrase "light from light." The phrase shows us that, somehow, in God a term that might seem only to apply to one unique reality can be said of each of Father, Son, and Spirit. But how can we understand the idea that Father and Son are both the beginning, are both light?

Augustine's answer begins by making the tension between plurality and unity a little more stark, and then explores how our knowledge of the world will help. He begins by stating with clarity that each of the divine three is distinct:

> Therefore, as Catholic ears have been instructed upon the breast of mother church, although he who is the Father is not the Son, nor is he who is the Son the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son either the Father or the Son, nevertheless, we do not say that there are three Gods; although if someone asks about them individually, we must admit about whichever one we are questioned that he is God.
>
> (*Jo. ev. tr.* 39.2)[6]

This statement emphasizes logical distinctions between the three, drawing on principles articulated in the late second and early third centuries. In that context, against those who thought that belief in one God could be maintained only if the distinct realities of Son and Spirit were interpreted as temporary manifestations of the Father, Christian writers emphasized that when Scripture narrates three characters, three characters there are. But, of course, however precise these statements of individuality are, our questions remain. In fact, Augustine suggests an obvious line of questioning which might follow such a statement. Someone might ask three questions, "is the Father/Son/Spirit God?" and the Christian should give three identical answers: "yes." But if the three are distinct, then surely the Christian is implying that there are three Gods?

The question, Augustine suggests, stems from thinking about the invisible reality of the divine, whose characteristics are unfamiliar to us, according to the conditions that are true of the visible realities with which we are familiar. But how, then, should we talk about these invisible realities? Augustine turns to the manner in which we talk about family relationships. We commonly speak of two men as individually a man "with respect to himself" but perhaps also "Father" and "Son" "with respect to each other." These two ways of speaking about human beings provide not a direct analogy to the situation in the divine life, but with a point of departure for thinking further.

Augustine explains that in God the same is true, but with one difference. The Father may indeed be termed God with respect to himself, and "Father" in respect of his relationship to the Son. But the difference comes because in the divine existence, while numbered realities *seem* to appear when we speak of Father, Son, and Spirit, God cannot be comprehended by number. When human beings think, the act of dividing and numbering is a constant and natural tool. But if we are attentive to the realities on which we reflect, then we must remember that in the case of God there is no number. "There is something ineffable there which cannot be explicated in words." Why?

One of the main ways in which Augustine speaks about the divine existence is to speak of God's simplicity. He puts his understanding of simplicity in just a few words: God simply *is* anything we are tempted to say God possesses. If we are tempted to say that God possesses goodness or wisdom or truth, God just is these things. In more philosophical parlance, God does not have anything as an accident. An accident in this sense is something that characterizes a reality but which is not essential to it. Human beings may be tall or short, or have skin of many different hues, but none of these qualities is of the essence of being human. Similarly, a human being may have degrees of being good – virtue is something that may increase or decrease. In God, for Augustine, this is not so. Goodness is what God is. In his mature work Augustine is clear that only God is simple, and thus while we can talk about simplicity, setting out what must be true and not true about it, we have no experience of this mode of being, we have no direct sight or knowledge of it. Augustine complements this account of God's simplicity by suggesting that God is beyond number. For a number of ancient philosophical traditions true unity, the unity of that which is the source of all, is the *source* of order and number in the world, but cannot be itself numbered. Augustine uses such a view to emphasize the distinction between the divine life and our own. Thus Scripture's insistence that there are three divine agents, Father, Son, and Spirit, tricks the untrained human mind into numbering, but in reality there is no increase: God is one.

At this point it is vital to note that for Augustine there cannot be any direct analogy between the nature of God and the world that we know – either the material world or the world of the mind – because the divine reality is the unique source of all that escapes the categories intrinsic to the creation. For Augustine the term "analogy" refers to relationships of proportion; we can say "that house is bigger than this" because we can understand the proportion between them. In the case of the relationship between God and anything created we cannot grasp proportions and thus there can be no analogies. Thus when Augustine offers what we easily term his "analogies," he uses a variety of terms, often calling them *similitudines* or "likenesses," which in Latin is a broad term covering almost anything that is in any way "like" something else. The more we see how Augustine thinks the divine simplicity is beyond our comprehension, the more we see why he thinks that only vague "likenesses" to the divine life can be found in our world and experience.[7]

The divine simplicity reveals itself to be very important when we think again about the principle that the Father (for example) is named in relationship the Son. For human beings, relationships are not of their essence. Relationships may well have a significant effect on forming our characters – their effects may be lifelong – but if relationships with others come to an end we continue to exist. This is because they are, in the philosophical terminology introduced above, accidental. The relationships that Father, Son, and Spirit have toward each other are not so; they are essential, eternally constitutive of what it is to be them. Just as the Father is God "in himself" he is also eternally "in himself" defined by being in relationship to the Son. Centuries later theologians would define this form of existence as a *relatio subsistens*, a subsisting/existing relation. The phrase is not Augustine's though, even if he comes close. Thus, each of the divine three exists as a related reality: for example, the Father is defined from eternity by being the Father of the eternal Son and the one who breathes the Spirit on the Son (and at the end of this chapter we will think a little about what this means for an understanding of divine fatherhood).

But let us return to the thirty-ninth tractate on John. After Augustine has spoken about God's transcendence of number, he offers a further example of how the divine three exist toward each other, this time reflecting on Pentecost. The disciples were filled with the Spirit and brought into unity. Scripture says of them that "they had one soul and one heart" in God. They were many, but because of the Spirit they became one soul. Augustine then offers us this striking statement:

> If, therefore, "the love of God has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us," makes many souls one soul and many hearts one heart, how much more does it make the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit one God, one Light, and one beginning?
>
> (*Jo. ev. tr.* 39.5)

Underlying the language of this passage is Augustine's belief that Father, Son, and Spirit are eternally the acts that Scripture attributes to them as eternally theirs. This is only to say from another perspective that they exist eternally in relation, but the sentence requires some explanation.

Augustine thinks that Love is a term Scripture uses of the Spirit in order to tell us something about the Spirit's eternal nature, not simply to explain to us what the Spirit does in the economy of salvation. What is the essence of love? Love joins, it is active, dynamic, unifying. At the same time, for Augustine, in God there is no lack and no achievement of perfection, as if perfection were not already there. If there were, then it would be possible to conceive of God as imperfect in loving, and as learning to love. As human beings should know well enough, learning to love is in many ways wonderful, but always carries with it the darker presence of promises unfulfilled, misjudgments, and heartbreak caused. This we surely do not wish to predicate of God?

But God's perfection in loving is still a dynamic activity, as is God's unchangeability. In his commentary on Psalm 138 Augustine emphasizes that Wisdom maintains herself the same, she eternally *is* as an active life. Wisdom here is the Son, but what is said is true of the divine life as a whole:

> Wisdom stands firm, if we can properly say that she stands; the expression connotes immutability, not immobility. Nowhere is she other than she is here or there, never is she different from what she is now or was formerly. This is what God's utterance is.
>
> (*en. Ps*. 138.8)[8]

When Augustine speaks of the Spirit as "making" the divine three one, then, he does not mean that there was any time where the three were not one, but that from eternity the Father generates the Son and breathes the Spirit, and the Spirit as love brings the three into perfect communion. This language brings us again to the very edge of what we can say about the divine life. This quasi-personalist and almost narratival language about the bringing about of the unified divine life must be, of course, understood against the background of Augustine's insistence that the divine life is an active eternal perfection. We think we know what it means to "make" something in this world, but that gives us virtually no purchase on what it means for the Spirit to "make" the divine communion. The language of "making" encourages us along some avenues of thought, but then other equally important principles make us able to see that those avenues only disappear from our sight sooner than we had imagined.

Here the Spirit has been our focus; in connection with the Son Augustine comments a number of times on John 5:19, "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." Augustine interprets this verse by arguing that the Son *is* eternally a seeing of the Father, he is what he is by being eternally "spoken" (as Word) and eternally "sees" the one who gave him birth.[9] This "seeing" is a perfect and full contemplation of the Father's being. Once again, the Son is eternally an act, one that scripture describes as part of his relationship with the Father. In the final paragraphs of his thirty-ninth tractate on John Augustine comments on the Son in other language. Here his point of departure is John 8:26, where Jesus says both that "he who sent me is true" and "I am the truth."

From Jesus' words should we think the one who is true greater than the truth? It seems in normal speech as if we would say that "Truth" is greater than any single appearance of something that is true (Augustine betrays his Platonic presuppositions here). But if we thought this, would we then say that the Son is greater than the Father? Well, Augustine continues, this will not do because we know as a matter of Nicene Catholic belief that the Father and Son are equal. We can, however, understand something of what is meant if we remember yet again that in the divine life God does not possess something like truth as an accident: God simply is truth itself. So when we say that the Father is true we actually mean that the Father is truth itself, because this is what it is to be God.

But there is one more step. *How* is God truth? Augustine's answer is again an active one: "God is true, not by participating in but by generating the Truth" (*Jo. ev. tr.* 39.8). How we should think of God or the Father as truth here is not simply put in a contrast between sharing in truth or being it, but in a more complex contrast between sharing in truth and generating it. God is truth itself as and because he speaks his word, as and because he generates that truth who is also another beside him, a Son. For the Father to be truth is for him eternally to speak the Son as another beside him; for the Son to be truth is for him to be eternally spoken by the Father as his Word, generated as his Truth. But in the divine being the unity between the one who generates and the one generated is so great that there is only one divine truth.

These different terminologies – the Father speaking his Truth, the Son eternally seeing the Father, all joined into one by the eternal loving of the Spirit – draw on different scriptural terminologies and point toward a common vision of the divine life in act. In many ways seeing how these different exegetical explorations overlap takes us to the heart of Augustine's vision of the triune life far better than paying extensive attention to the language of nature and persons. Augustine does use that language, but famously remarks that it is primarily used only because there are times when we cannot keep silent and need short formulae for defining beliefs.[10] But he offers little extensive exploration of it, and it rarely occupies a central place in his preaching or expositions of Scripture.

Where does the Trinity appear?

Augustine argues that when we say each of the divine three is God we are saying each of the divine three is the fullness of what it is to be God – each is in some sense the one

God! This argument requires our attention. It comes out particularly clearly in his *De Trinitate*, when Augustine spends a little time thinking about the memory, intelligence, and will as a "likeness" of the Trinity. Three times in Book 15 of the work, which is in part an attempt to sum up all he has accomplished there, he suggests that it is not helpful to think of the Son as like intelligence, say, because *each* divine person is fully all that God is and would have to be their own memory, intelligence, and will.[11]

If God is the unchanging, eternally self-maintaining Goodness and Wisdom who is the source of all, then a reality cannot be described as divine unless it is all that the divine is. At the same time, there can only be one divine life, only one unique source of all, and so we are forced logically to assert the paradox that each of Father, Son, and Spirit must be irreducibly fully God and yet each must also be the one God. And yet each is also inseparably the one God with the other two. We see here again, how a likeness drawn from the created world can only ever be a point of departure for us to approach aspects of the divine life, pointing us toward a point at which intellectual grasp vanishes before us.

Augustine's *De Trinitate* is, in fact, a particularly good example of this principle being slowly played out over many pages. The second half of the work, Books 8 to 15, is an attempt to reflect on what may be known from likenesses in the created order, and especially from our being "in the image of God" – and on the process of reflecting itself. In Book 8 Augustine makes central the claim that from one perspective we ought to be able to understand the Trinity. God is love, Scripture tells us, and Love seems to be something that we know and recognize in ourselves. Augustine presses this point very strongly: when we love truly, the love with which we love is God, and is therefore the Trinity. And yet, when we think of love, we think of one thing: if this is God with us, why do we not see a Trinity in it? The answer is both the character of human minds as created, as failing before the brightness of the divine light, and the fact that human minds now are weakened by sin. But the Christian faith tells us that what we think we see is actually a Trinity, and so we must learn to rethink what we think we know.

In Book 15, as he attempts to sum up what he has found in his extended reflections, Augustine returns a number of times to a more complex version of the same paradox. He lists many attributes of God – eternity, blessedness, and others – gradually whittles his list down to three, and asks, "Is this the Trinity?" The answer is no, simply because this threefold list is also reducible to one: so "Where does the Trinity appear?" The answer is that the Trinity "appears" in small insights into the language of faith on the path toward the next life. The Trinity also "appears" because we are each a created likeness of the Trinity and we know and love *in* God; as we grow in understanding of ourselves before God the more we may advance in our sense of our faith's coherence, and the more we may come to rest in the distance between the fullness of the divine existence and our own limitations.

Augustine's vision of advance and ascent toward God is complex, in part, precisely because it does not involve leaving behind the language of faith in favour of some higher knowledge. This is so in two ways. First, and most obviously, there is no sight of the triune life as an object of our contemplation; there is insight into the language of the faith. That language remains our point of reference. In the second place, Augustine emphasizes over and again through the course of *De Trinitate* that our thinking is only truly fruitful when it embraces our need for redemption and reformation – for grace – more than for knowledge. We must accept not only a need to return to the *language* of faith, but to the community of faith and its life. For Augustine the very enterprise of thinking must be re-conceived as a movement of the soul into the reformation that Christ shapes in the body of the faithful, his body.[12]

Creation and redemption in the triune life

My focus in this chapter has been the divine communion. I have not focused, for example, on what can be said about each of the divine three individually, sketching the main metaphors and terminologies Augustine employs in each case. But I want to end by commenting on the role of the Father and, from there, on the manner in which Augustine's vision of the triune life shapes his account of our redemption.

Augustine consistently views Son and Spirit as acting in the world in part to reveal the Father. In Book 4 of *De Trinitate*, for example, Augustine emphasizes that the purpose of the divine missions is to reveal the one source of all, the Father.[13] And yet, we misunderstand Augustine's thought about God the Father if we think that he sees the Father as more powerful than Son and Spirit, or as giving orders that they then obey. In the first place, such an account misses the nature of the divine communion of love to which from eternity the Father gives rise. This communion of love escapes our intellectual grasp precisely because Son and Spirit are themselves the fullness of God, and the Father from eternity is the speaker of the Word and the sharer of the Spirit (the Father gives to the Son that the Spirit comes also from the Son).[14] There is in such a picture a constant challenge (one raised in fact by all Nicene theologies of the Trinity) to think about the relationship between love and hierarchy in the divine being.

Augustine's vision of redemption is itself founded on this vision of the divine life. If we do not see, for Augustine, that Son and Spirit are perfect mediators who mediate themselves, we have missed something vital about salvation. Christ saves by transforming people through the immediate presence of his divine presence and love, through drawing us into his body, his very person. Christ saves by imparting to people his Spirit, the Spirit who animates the body of Christ, the Spirit who gives as a gift himself. Through the work of Son and Spirit Christians are transformed and drawn to contemplate the Father – a contemplation that is a sharing in the triune life.

Endnotes

1 While this chapter stands by itself, it is also intended to complement another attempt at introducing Augustine's vision of the Trinity: see Ayres 2011a. For other introductions see Barnes 1999 and Dunham 2007. Much of what is sketched here may be found in a fuller version in Ayres 2010.

2 For a more extended account of this vision of scriptural reading see Daley 2012 and Ayres 2012b.

3 For ways into the extensive literature here see Ayres 2004a, Barnes 1998, and then, at more length, Ayres 2004b and Anatolios 2011.

4 See Dodaro 2010.

5 My translation is taken from Hill 1991a, 262–63.

6 My translation is taken from Rettig 1993, 117.

7 Cf. at this point John Cavadini, "God's eternal knowledge according to Augustine," chapter 2 in this volume.

8 My translation is taken from Boulding 2004.

9 See, e.g., *In Johannis evangelium tractatus* 18, 19, and 23; Ayres 2010, 233–50.

10 *De Trinitate* 5.9.10; Ayres 2010, 211–29.

11 *De Trinitate* 15. 5.7, 15. 7.12, 15. 17.28.

12 See Cavadini 2013 and Ayres 2012c.

13 *De Trinitate* 4.20.29; Ayres 2010, 177–88.

14 On this complex question see Ayres 2010, 263–68; Daley 2001a and 2001b.

Part II God’s relation to the world

4 Time and creation in Augustine

Simo Knuuttila

Augustine's most extensive discussions of philosophical and theological cosmology are found in his commentaries on Genesis (*De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*), in the last three books of the *Confessions*, and in Books 11 and 12 of the *De civitate Dei*.[1] The main lines of his view of the creation are as follows. God created both the spiritual realm of angels and the visible world, including the incarnated souls, out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), without any preexisting matter or other things outside God (*Gn. adv. Man*. 1.6.10; *conf.* 11.5.7, 12.7.7, 12.8.8; *Gn. litt*. 1.14.28–15.29; *civ. Dei* 12.1). The creation was based on an eternal free act of God's perfectly good will (*Gn. adv. Man*. 1.2.4; *Gn. litt*. 1.5.11, 2.6.14; *civ. Dei* 11.21, 24). It took place through God's omnipotence without toil, effort, and industry (*div. qu*. 78; *Gn. litt*. 9.17.32; *civ. Dei* 12.18). God created simultaneously all first actualized things and, through "seminal reasons" inherent in them, the conditions of all those things which were to come, up to the end of the world.[2] God is the only creator. Created beings cannot bring things into existence out of nothing (*civ. Dei* 12.26). God created time in creating movement in the universe (*Gn. litt*. 5.5.12; *civ. Dei* 11.6). The story of the six days of creation is a metaphor which helps human imagination (*conf.* 13.29.44; *Gn. litt*. 4.33.52). Augustine sometimes interprets the "beginning" (*in principio*) of Genesis 1:1 as a temporal beginning, but following an established tradition, he also takes it to refer to the Word or the Son of God (Jn 1:1–3): "In this beginning, God, you made heaven and earth, in your Word, your Son, your power, your wisdom, your truth" (*conf.* 11.9.11).[3]

There was nothing radically new in Augustine's conception of the creation. Late second- and early third-century theologians began to stress the idea of creation out of nothing, and it became a standard doctrine of the Church. Some second-century Christian apologists could still accept a literal interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* to the effect that the universe had a temporal beginning and was built out of pre-cosmic matter.[4] Plato's story of the divine world-maker remained a popular theme in patristic thought even later, but the assumption about pre-cosmic matter was rejected as a restriction of divine omnipotence and sovereignty. While the doctrine of independent matter was also given up by Neoplatonic thinkers, they did believe that the world emanated from the highest principle without a temporal beginning.[5] Augustine stated that the Christians should not understand the universe's being created as its being dependent upon God without a temporal beginning (*civ. Dei* 11.4). He regarded it as an objective truth that fewer than 6,000 years have passed since the creation (*civ. Dei* 12.11).

Augustine was very fond of associating the conception of simultaneous creation with the doctrine of seminal reasons (*rationes seminales* or *rationes causales*) which was found in slightly different forms in Stoic and Platonic philosophy. He was not the first to regard this as a theologically significant conception, but he systematized it more than his predecessors.[6] According to Augustine, the members of the natural kinds which unfolded later on their own were created in seminal form at the beginning, but the seminal reasons also involved the seeds of all miraculous deviations from the common course of nature. In this way God remained the ultimate creator of every new being (*Gn. litt.* 6.10.17–11.19, 6.14.25–15.26; *Trin.* 3.8.13–9.16). Augustine held that all human beings were seminally in Adam, though their individual forms were not yet existent (*civ. Dei* 13.14, 22.24). He did not accept the view that immortal human souls were created in the beginning to wait for later incarnation, but it remained unclear whether they were embedded in the seminal reasons.[7] Augustine distinguished between God's instantaneous creative act and God's conservational and providential activity. The existence of the created order is continuously dependent on God (*Gn. litt.* 4.12.22; *civ. Dei* 12.26).

Before discussing some philosophical themes associated with Augustine's conceptions of time and creation, let us have a closer look at the structure of the created world. According to Augustine's Trinitarian view, the Son is a perfect image and resemblance of the Father and, as the Word of God, the seat of the models of all finite beings which could serve as partial imitations of the highest being. The models of the minor resemblances are called the ideas (*Gn. litt. imp*.16.57–58).[8] They exist as divine thoughts and their contents refer to possible actualization in the domain of mutability.[9] God is absolutely immutable. Created things are mutable because of their compositional structure, which involves form and spiritual or corporeal matter. God simultaneously created the forms of things and the matter as the possibility of their being formed (*Gn. litt.* 1.15.29; *f. et symb.* 2.2; *conf.* 12.9.9). In his later works, Augustine takes "heaven" and "earth" in Genesis 1:1 to refer to spiritual matter and corporeal matter respectively (*Gn. litt.* 1.1.2–3). Spiritual matter is the substrate of angels which were created when God said: "Let there be light." It was formed into angelic spirits through turning into a vision of divine intelligibility (*civ. Dei* 11.9).[10] This account of the creation of spiritual beings is influenced by Plotinus' theory of the first emanation, though angels are created by choice, according to Augustine, and are not a result of a Plotinian emanation which actualizes all possible things at all possible levels of being. The lower part of the universe in which material things represent their eternal ideas is also created directly by God; it is not an emanated imitation of the higher sphere as in Plotinus. (I shall return to this question in the next section.)

According to Augustine, time requires change and it is obvious that things in the changing, corporeal part of the world are temporal. In the *Confessions* 12.9.9 he states that the heaven of heaven does not change, though it is capable of change. In later works he assumes that there is some kind of motion among the angels, which are the highest creatures. They may see things as they exist in divine art, or as created. This change of the scope of attention was meant to explain the expressions "Morning came" and "Evening came" in the creation story. The angels came to know the simultaneously created universe in this manner (*civ. Dei* 11.7, 9, 29).[11]

Augustine regarded God as Being itself (*ipsum esse*) and anything less than God as less existent (*Jo. ev. tr*. 38.8–10; *civ. Dei* 12.2).[12] The scale of the degrees of existence overlaps the scale of the degrees of goodness. God is perfectly good (*civ. Dei* 12.1–2). The created beings are more or less good but they are all good because otherwise they would not be included in the created world. When God saw that the created order was very good (Gen 1:31), it was good in the sense that all singular beings were good and the whole formed a good and beautiful order (*ench*. 3.9–10). Augustine admits that there are created things which most people do not consider good at all, such as poisonous animals, but he says that they are useful for some purpose and add to the beauty of the whole. Furthermore, many things cause distress to human beings only because of the corruption of the original human condition. Augustine also registers some structural weaknesses and the potential for suffering among animals, but he says that some things are less perfect than others and, depending on the place that a creature occupies in the great chain of being, its life is better or worse in a relative sense. This is the price for there being a harmonious whole with a great variety of things. "They are unequal in order that all of them could exist" (*civ. Dei* 11.22, 12.4).[13]

What was God doing before he created the world?

In many places Augustine discusses the questions of what God was doing before he made heaven and earth and why the world was created at that moment when it began to be – why not earlier or later (*Gn. adv. Man*. 1.2.3–4; *conf.* 11.10.12, 11.12.14, 11.30.40; *civ. Dei* 11.4–5)?[14] Putting forward queries of these kinds was part of popular criticism of the ideas of temporal beginning of the universe and God as a world-maker.[15] It was assumed in these questions, contrary to the general opinion, that there was time before the universe, but this was not the point of criticism. In his *Timaeus* Plato states that time came into existence together with the universe, but he also speaks about motion before the creation of time. This was taken to mean that one can make a distinction between orderly time, which began together with the ordered cosmos, and disorderly time associated with disorderly matter and motion.[16] Velleius, the spokesman for the Epicureanism in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, refers to this distinction while asking "why the world-builders suddenly awake into activity, after sleeping for countless ages".[17]

The "why not sooner?" argument against the temporal beginning of the universe had already been formulated by Parmenides, and Aristotle applied it in his *Physics*: if the world begins to exist at a certain moment without any other change, there is no reason why this should take place at that particular time.[18] If this beginning was based on a divine decision, there seems to have been no reason why the decision should have been made at that time. Augustine says that some Platonists argued for the eternity of the world in order to avoid the criticism that divine acts are fortuitous and that new ideas come into God's allegedly unchanging mind (*civ. Dei* 11.4). If the decision was not a sudden whim, but God wanted to launch something good, why not earlier? Why was God idle before? If creating the world was taken to add something to God's happiness, how could such a change take place in divinity?[19] Augustine states that some Platonic proponents of God's unchanging goodness thought that it required an everlasting series of identical or almost identical world cycles: God is never idle and, and the cycles being finite and uniform as distinct from an infinitely varying series, are accessible to divine knowledge (*civ. Dei* 12.18; cf. 11.4–5).[20]

In addition to these theological remarks there was a well-known group of conceptual arguments against an absolute beginning. According to Aristotle, when a being begins to be, that is the first moment of its existence, before which it was not existent. Time cannot have a beginning, because there would then be time before time.[21] Similarly, everything which begins to move is moved by something[22] and everything which begins to exist receives its constituents from already existing things.[23]

Augustine's answer to the arguments against the temporal beginning of the world is based on a sharp distinction between time and timelessness. Time depends on movement, and since God is unmoving, there is no time before creation (*conf.* 11.13.15; *civ. Dei* 11.6). The creation is an actualization of God's eternal and immutable decision: to will a change does not imply a change of will. There is no sudden new decision in God's mind (*conf.* 11.10.12; *civ. Dei* 11.4, 12.15, 12.18, 22.2). Similarly the questions "Why not sooner?" or "Was God idle before?" make no sense when God does not precede the created world in any temporal sense. The Aristotelian analysis of the beginning applies only to things having a temporal beginning, not to the beginning of time (*conf.* 11.12.14–14.17, 11.30.40; *civ. Dei* 11.5, 12.16). Its remarks on the coming-to-be from preexisting matter apply to the generation of natural beings and artifacts but not to the creation. (See *conf.* 11.5.7, 12.8.8.)

Augustine's solution was very influential in medieval times. A well-known later application is Leibniz's criticism of Newton's absolutist view of time. Leibniz said that the conception of time which goes on independently of whether anything else exists makes God create without sufficient reason at a certain moment. Leibniz's view was that the existence of time requires that of change.[24] Many contemporary philosophers of religion have dealt with the question of whether the Augustinian conception of God's timelessness is compatible with the doctrines of divine omniscience and voluntary action.[25]

Did God create everything he could create?

In *De spiritu et littera* Augustine gives an answer to Marcellinus, who was concerned about how Augustine could say that something is possible even though there is no example of it in the world. In Marcellinus' opinion, to call such things possible was not comprehensible (*spir. et litt.* 1–2). The question was raised in accordance with the view that all generic possibilities prove their genuineness through actualization. This principle was generally included in the paradigms that shaped the ancient philosophical theories of modality. Whether there are genuine individual possibilities which remain unrealized was somewhat more controversial.[26] Elsewhere Augustine mentions other objections to Christian doctrines based on the view that the ordinary course of nature defines what is possible or impossible (*civ. Dei* 21.7–10, 22.4, 11). Augustine's answer in each case is that things which may seem impossible from the point of view of natural powers are often possible, because God can do them. He also mentions the idea that miraculous events are not unnatural. Our concept of nature is based on observational regularities, but the ultimate nature is God's will or providential design, which provides natural history with all kinds of exceptional events. They are incomprehensible to men and function to demonstrate God's sovereignty to believers (*civ. Dei* 21.8).

Augustine stresses that even though God's immense power is not comprehensible to human minds, God's works are not irrational (*civ. Dei* 21.5). He asserts an eternal set of mathematical, dialectical, and metaphysical principles based on "the principal forms or stable and unchangeable reasons of things, which are not themselves formed and hence eternal and always the same, contained in the divine mind" (*div. qu.* 46). A rational will cannot wish anything unrealizable (e.g. to change unchangeable truths), and it is clear that the power of realization, conceptually distinct from the will, is efficient only as far as the will to which it is attached is rational. When Augustine defined omnipotence as the power to do what one wills (see e.g. *ench.* 96; *civ. Dei* 21.7), he took it for granted that God's will cannot be directed so as to prove that God is not omnipotent.

According to Plato, the domain of the forms exhausts the possibilities of the types of beings and there are no forms without a sometime imitation in the empirical world. Plotinus' version of this view is that the power of being proceeding from the One does not leave any constituent of the maximal universe unrealized. At each level of reality the generic forms are instantiated by particular beings as numerously as possible.[27] In this sense Plotinus asserted an equation between possibilities and their realizations, i.e. he accepted in one form the idea that A. O. Lovejoy dubbed "the principle of plenitude" in his famous book *The Great Chain of Being*. According to Lovejoy the same holds of Augustine, but as for the possible individuals, this is clearly false, and as for the types of being, the example mentioned by Lovejoy can be understood in different ways.[28] Lovejoy and those following him think that Augustine had in mind all possible types of being when he argued that degrees of perfection are required because otherwise not all kinds could be actual. But this can be understood as a remark about the actual world and its kinds.[29] It is not quite clear whether Augustine assumed that there are empty generic forms, but he thought that the number of merely possible individuals is much larger than that of the individuals which occur in the world history. In *De civitate Dei* 12.19 Augustine criticizes the ancient doctrines which claimed that the only consistent notion of infinity is that of potential infinity. According to him, an infinite series of numbers actually exists in God's thought, and God could create an infinite number of individuals and know each of them simultaneously: "If he willed to produce always various new things unlike their predecessors, none of them could be for him undesigned or unforeseen, nor would he see each just before it comes into being, but it would be contained in his eternal foreknowledge."

Augustine qualified the notion of God's power by relating it to other divine attributes, e.g. "God could according to his power, but not according to his justice" (*c. Gaud.* 1.30).[30] In dealing with divine providence, Augustine referred to unrealized possibilities using the slogan *Potuit sed noluit* ("He could, but he did not want to"; see *c. Faust* 29.4; *nat. et gr.* 7). The phrase became well known in early medieval times. It was not introduced by Augustine, but had been used by other theologians before him.[31] When Augustine used this conception in analyzing the freedom of human will, he had in mind an intuitive model of diachronic possibilities. Before a choice is made, it is possible that the act of choice will be this or that. According to Augustine, divine foreknowledge about free choices does not influence them, and God's knowledge about them could be other than it is: "If a man wills not to sin, he certainly does not sin, but if he had willed not to sin, this would also have been foreknown by God" (*civ. Dei* 5.10). The view that real alternatives are open to the will before it makes a choice qualifies the concept of freedom of will. Freedom is not mere absence of external constraint.[32] This is also true of God's will. Augustine regarded God's omnipotence as an executive power between alternatives which is factually limited by God's actual choice. God's free choice is conceptually preceded by knowledge about alternative possibilities. Plotinus sometimes applies the notion of will to the One, but because the One is essentially good, it will realize all possibilities.[33] This is how Plato also characterized the generous divine goodness.[34] Augustine appreciated the Platonic view (*civ. Dei* 11.21), but his conception of divine possibilities contained an intuitive idea of alternatives of which only one is actualized. He thought that God could have made various worlds and hence he saw God's eternal decision as free and voluntary in a manner which was beyond the purview of the Platonic tradition. According to Augustine, God has created the world, because He is good and the world is good, but his goodness could have taken other forms. The world exists because God has willed it, but there is no ultimate answer to the question of why God has willed exactly the actual world of ours (*Gn. adv. Man.* 1.2.4).[35]

Even though Augustine's remarks on the divine will remained sketchy, they gave rise to the conception of God as acting by choice between alternative providential scenarios. It played an important role in the emergence of the intuitive idea of modality as referential multiplicity with respect to simultaneous alternatives. This modal paradigm hardly occurred at all among ancient thinkers. It was introduced in early medieval discussions which were strongly influenced by Augustine's philosophical theology.[36]

Physical and psychological time

Augustine's meditations on time in Book 11 of the *Confessions* belong among the most discussed philosophical parts of his works. His general remark about time is often quoted: "I know what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I would like to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know" (*conf.* 11.14.17). Augustine concentrates on a psychological and subjective account of time in *Confessions* 11, but he does not return to this subject in later writings. Instead, he regards time as a created order associated with the successiveness of things "according to the numbers received non-temporally at creation" (*Gn. litt.* 4.33.52, 5.5.12).[37] This part of his theory includes many ideas about time which are derived from ancient natural philosophy. Since some of the central issues of that tradition were extensively discussed by Aristotle, let us take a brief look at Aristotle's treatment of time in the closing chapters of the fourth book of his *Physics*.

After having formulated some paradoxes of time in chapter 10, Aristotle begins his systematic discussion in chapter 11 with some remarks on the experience of the present time (now) and on the corresponding concept of the present based on an immediate awareness of actuality. When the content of the present now changes we say that there is a new 'now.' Without a change we could be aware neither of distinct moments nor of time, because time is some kind of distance between different 'nows.' Looking at things from the point of view of the actual present time was natural for Aristotle, as can be seen from the above terminology and from his habit of considering temporally indeterminate sentences as paradigms of informative statements in general. Such sentences contain an explicit or implicit reference to their moment of utterance, e.g. "Socrates is sitting (now)," and the same sentence can sometimes be true and sometimes false, depending on how things are at the moment of their utterance. If a sentence is always true, it is necessarily true, and if it is never true, it is impossible. If it is possibly true, it is at least sometimes true. If statements with existential import are true whenever they are uttered, they refer to things that are actual at any moment of time and hence necessary.[38] Necessary beings are omnitemporal, but if there were only such beings without motion, they would not be called "omnitemporal" because there would be no time in a world without motion.

In natural philosophy the present 'now' must be understood as a durationless boundary between the past and the future. Such 'nows' or 'instants' with unchanging content are the limits between which the processes with definite temporal length take place. (In Book VI of the *Physics* Aristotle developed detailed rules of how to set the boundaries of processes and moments of change in a physical theory operating with the doctrines of the categories and continuous time, space, and motion.) Aristotle's conception of the temporal length or quantity (number) of a motion can be described as follows. Let us assume that an object X moves continuously from place A to place B so that there is a last instant M at which it is at A and a first instant N at which it is at B. The instants ("nows") differ from each other because of the position of X in them. There is a spatial length between these positions and there is a temporal length between X's being in these positions. The temporal length is the quantity of the motion "in respect of before and later."[39] To measure is to apply a unit to a whole and to count how many units it involves. A convenient temporal measuring unit is the orbit of something moving uniformly in a circle which can be easily divided into equal parts. The length of a motion or anything in time is measured by comparing it with a regularly divisible simultaneous motion. Celestial motion is the universal clock, but time is not this motion any more than any other motion.[40]

Aristotle found the question of the reality of time cumbersome. The parts of time are the past and the future and neither of them exists. They are divided by the present which is the boundary between the past and the future (like a point which divides a line) and no part of time. As time is never actual as time, does it exist at all? The same question could be asked about motion, the reality of which Aristotle regarded as a basic fact. Time is not the same as motion, but is real as a countable aspect of motion which expresses itself to human minds.[41] It does not exist outside the soul, but has some kind of objective reality. Motion can be slower or faster, but this is not true of time. Time also has a fixed direction. The future changes into the past but not vice versa. The past and the present are necessary; the future is partially contingent.[42]

Insofar as Augustine deals with time as a topic of natural philosophy, his views show similarities to those of Aristotle and his Stoic followers.[43] Like Aristotle and the Stoics, Augustine assumed that time is an infinitely divisible continuum (*conf.* 11.15.20); that there would be no time if there were no motion and no souls (*Gn. litt.* 5.5.12; *civ. Dei* 11.6, 12.16); and that time and motion are distinct even though time is not independent of motion (*conf.* 11.24.31, 12.11.14). In criticizing the view that time is the motion of a celestial body, Augustine states that time would still pass if the sun stood still, and it would not be affected if the heavenly bodies were accelerated. Time as duration is not dependent on any specific motion; but if nothing passed or arrived or existed, there would be no past, future, or present times (*conf.* 11.23.30–24.31; cf. 11.14.17). Augustine also thought that we measure the temporal length of something by comparing it to something, basically to the number of fixed parts of a regular motion serving as measurement units (*conf.* 11.16.21, 11.24.31).

There are some peculiarities in Augustine's physical conception of time. One of them is that he called the present "a part of time" though he assumed that it was without duration (*conf.* 11.15.20).[44] This notion was probably influenced by Augustine's stance in the controversy about the moment of instantaneous change. Aristotle's theory of the limit decision is based on the assumption of a continuous structure of time, place, quantity, and motion. There are no contiguous instants in a continuous time, and therefore the main purpose of the theory is to justify assigning the moment of beginning or cessation of a permanent being, or of a temporal process, either to the last instant of actuality of the preceding state or to the first instant of actuality of the following state. Aristotle's physical model did not include an element which would function as a transformer between the contradictory states associated with beginning and ceasing. In the Platonic tradition going back to the *Parmenides*[45] it was thought that generations and corruptions, or beginnings and cessations, take place at an instant of change at which neither of the contradictory statements describing the terms of change are true. This theory, which involves truth-value gaps and dismisses the law of the excluded middle, is presented in a popular form by Aulus Gellius in his *Attic Nights*.[46] The author tells how his teacher Calvenus Taurus applied it in answering the question of when a person, strictly speaking, is dying. This passage was probably known to Augustine when he discussed the same question in *De civitate Dei* (13.9–11).[47]

Augustine found the question confusing, for before death comes one is not dying but alive, because the soul is still in the body and has not yet departed; and when death has come and the soul has departed one is dead and not dying. Augustine says that the time at which one is dying seems to disappear, and the same seems to happen when the future changes into the past without interval. Like Aulus Gellius, Augustine excludes the possibility that the moment of death could be an intrinsic limit of the period when the soul has not yet departed or of the period when it has departed. He also regards it as absurd that contradictory statements could be true at the same time. What remains is that the instant of death is the Platonic "suddenly" at which the law of the excluded middle is not in force. Augustine does not explicitly state this, but says that it is not possible to give any rational account of the moment of dying.

In Book 11 of the *Confessions* Augustine first deals with God's atemporal eternity, the temporality of the created beings, and the beginning of time and the world at the creation. From 11.14.17 the theme of the book is the measurement of time. Augustine is particularly puzzled by the question of how a measured time exists. We speak of "a long time" and "a short time," but the future is not yet actual and the past is no longer actual. How can something which does not exist be long or short? The present, which is actual, is without duration. It is not long or short (*conf.* 11.15.18–20). Even though time moves backwards so that the present continuously ceases to be present and becomes a part of the past, there is no store out of which the future is issuing to become the present and then be stored again in the past (*conf.* 11.17.22–18.23). Nevertheless, we are conscious of intervals of time and measure them. Augustine argues that the practice of the measurement of time is based on the fact that human consciousness functions by anticipating the future, remembering the past, and being aware of the present through perception. Through this distension of the soul (*distentio animi*) we have in our memory images of things which were present and which we expect to be present. Therefore we have in the soul a present of past which is memory and a present of future which is anticipation or expectation (*conf.* 11.20.26, 11.26.33). In this sense time exists as a distension of the soul.[48] To measure time is to measure temporal extensions between impressions which passing events have made upon the soul and which abide when they have gone. Past events do not exist. When the duration between them is measured, the present consciousness of past events is associated with a consciousness of past measuring motion. The same is applied to evaluating the duration of future events (*conf.* 11.27.35–36).[49]

That time has some kind of existence in the soul had already been suggested by Aristotle, who thought that it is a special aspect of the motion of which human intellect becomes aware in remarking the distance between the presents with different contents. Like Aristotle, Augustine thought that these distances have an objective aspect:

> From the moment we begin to exist in this dying body we are involved all the time in a process which leads to death . . . All are driven on with a similar movement and with equal rapidity. The man whose life was shorter did not pass his days more quickly than the long-lived. Rather, equal moments rushed by for both of them equally. . . If a man spends a longer time on his road to death, he does not proceed more slowly, but has a longer journey.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 13.10)

Even though Augustine's psychological theory of time is not a novelty in ancient philosophy, there is something new in his attempt to illustrate the time sense through the concepts of memory and anticipation. Augustine's terminology is close to Husserl's account of phenomenological time, which is based on a distinction between primal impression, retention, and protention which is associated with the temporal determination of now, past, and future.[50] Augustine assumed that one can imagine a certain duration by using one's memory and evaluate the time of future processes in this way: "Suppose that someone wishes to utter a sound lasting a long time, and settles in advance how long it is to be. He goes through that space of time in silence and then, committing it to memory, begins to utter the sound which goes on until it reaches the set end" (*conf.* 11.27.36).

Our ability to measure times and to evaluate temporal lengths is based on our ability to memorize experienced durations. We become aware of time through experiencing temporal extension. Contrary to what has often been maintained, Augustine does not offer any philosophical or theological definition of time in Book 11 of the *Confessions*. He tries to explain how we are aware of time and how its existence could be explained from the psychological point of view.

Endnotes

1 Solignac 1973; for a concise summary with textual references and bibliography, see Mayer 1996a.

2 For the simultaneous creation, see *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* 7.28; *De Genesi ad litteram* 1.15.29; 4.33.52. For the seminal reasons see e.g. *De Genesi ad litteram* 6.10.17–6.11.19.

3 See also *De civitate Dei* 11.33. For the history of the latter interpretation before Augustine, see Nautin 1973.

4 May 1978, 120–82. For Plato's creationism, see Sedley 2007, 93–131. Plato's immediate followers in the Academy thought that the universe was without beginning. Plutarch and Atticus are usually mentioned as the Middle Platonic representatives of the literal interpretation, but according to Proclus, there were many others. See Dillon 1977, 33, 42, 207–08, 252–54; Meijering 1979, 40; Sorabji 1983, 268–72; Sedley 2007, 107.

5 Sorabji 1983, 313–15.

6 Mayer 1996b, 86–91.

7 Augustine often discussed the question of whether both the material bodies and the immaterial souls are handed down from parents (the traducianist view of the soul's origin) or whether individual souls are constantly created by God (the creationist view). His theological convictions suggested the traducianist view, but he preferred to suspend judgment on this matter. The main reason for bothering about these and some related themes was the doctrine of Adam's original sin and its consequences. See O'Connell 1987; O'Daly 1987, 15–20; Rist 1994, 317–20.

8 See also Gilson 1961, 210–12. The idea of the Word which contains within Himself the ideas of possible things was accepted by practically all the medieval theologians. In Augustine's approach the ideas represented the finite modes of imitating the infinite divine being. The possibilities had an ontological foundation in God's essence. This was the dominating view of the metaphysics of modalities in the thirteenth century. Duns Scotus gave up this habit of thinking by introducing the concept of logical possibility and maintaining that God knows the possibilities as such before comparing them with his essence from the point of view of imitation. See Knuuttila 1996.

9 Rist (1994, 256) states that the ideas are in the Word as the Neoplatonic forms are in Nous, the first sphere of emanation, but the Word is not subordinate and the forms are not equal to the Word.

10 In *Confessions* 12 "heaven" usually refers to the "heaven of heaven" which unchangingly contemplates God and "earth" is the formless matter, but Augustine also mentions as a possible interpretation of Genesis 1:1 that "heaven" refers to the formless spiritual realm and "earth" means formless physical matter (*conf.* 12.17.26). When Augustine speaks about the heaven of heaven as an intellectual entity, it is not quite clear whether the distinction between matter and form can be applied to it. He later preferred to speak about angels as the highest created beings. For the creation of angels, see *De civitate Dei* 11–12.

11 Sorabji 1983, 31–32.

12 See also Gilson 1961, 210–11.

13 According to Plotinus, badness is the price of variety and it is a privation of the good without an independent ontological status (*Enneads* 1.8.3, 3.2.11); for the notion of *privatio boni* in Augustine, see *Enchiridion de fide spe et caritate* 3.11. The fallen world has become a place of suffering through the moral evils which people bring about and through the natural evils which befall us apart from human agency. The fragility of the mental and physical dispositions of the fallen men is penal. See Kirwan 1989, 80–81; Rist 1994, 256–89.

14 See also Peters 1984.

15 For a detailed historical discussion see Sorabji 1983, 232–52, 268–83.

16 Dillon 1977, 253–54.

17 Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 1.21–22.

18 Aristotle, *Physics* 8.1.252a11–19. See Sorabji 1983, 232–38.

19 These points are repeated in the Epicurean criticism in Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.9.21–22, Lucretius, *De natura rerum*, 5.156–180, and Aetius, *Placita* (Diels 300a18–301a7). Effe (1970, 23–31) argues that they derive from Aristotle's *De philosophia*; see also Sorabji 1983, 281–82. The Epicureans believed that the present world order had a beginning and that gods had no influence on it. For Epicurean criticism of philosophical creationism see Sedley 2007, 139–49.

20 Chadwick (1991a, 226–27) remarks that Origen argued against the eternity of the world with the argument that the infinite cannot be known (*De principiis* 2.9.1, 3.5.2, 4.4.8; *Commentarius in Matthaeum* 13.1) and that Porphyry may have answered this criticism with the hypothesis of world cycles. This approach was then used by the pagan antagonists of Christianity mentioned by Augustine. Plotinus argued for the recurrence by referring to the finite number of seminal reasons (*Enneads* 5.7.1–3). See also Sorabji 1983, 182–88.

21 Aristotle, *Physics* 8.1, 251b10–13; *Metaphysics* 12.6, 1071b8.

22 Aristotle, *Physics* 8.1, 251a8–b10.

23 Aristotle, *Physics* 1.9, 192a27–32; *Metaphysics* 7.7, 1032b30–7.8, 1033b19.

24 See the discussions in Kirwan 1989, 162, and Sorabji 1983, 79–80, 256–58.

25 See for example articles in Tapp and Runggaldier 2011.

26 Knuuttila 2008, 507–31.

27 Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.6.

28 Lovejoy 1936, 67.

29 Lovejoy quotes, without giving the reference, *De civitate Dei* 11.22. For similar formulations, see 12.4 and 12.27.

30 Cf. Origen, *Commentariorum series in Matthaeum* 95.

31 See Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* 1.8.2.

32 I do not discuss the problems associated with Augustine's attempt to combine human freedom and theological determinism. See e.g. Brachtendorf 2007.

33 Sorabji 1983, 316–18; Rist 1994, 265.

34 Plato, *Timaeus* 29d–e.

35 Augustine did not defend the thesis that the created world is the best possible. He thought that it is "very good" (*valde bona*; see Gen. 1:31) and that there was no cause for complaint (*ench*. 10–11). See also Kirwan 1989, 67.

36 Knuuttila 1993, 62–98.

37 For psychological and physical time in Augustine, see Gross 1999.

38 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9.10, 1051b9–17.

39 Aristotle, *Physics* 4.11.219a11–220a27.

40 Aristotle, *Physics* 4.12.220b18–24, 14, 223b13–20.

41 Aristotle, *Physics* 4.14, 223a22–9.

42 Aristotle, *Physics* 4.10, 218b13–15, 12, 220a32–b5, 13, 222a10–11, b1–2; *De interpretatione* 9. For Aristotle's view of time, see Conen 1964; Sorabji 1983; and Roark 2011.

43 O'Daly 1981; O'Daly 1987, 152–61.

44 See also O'Daly 1987, 155–56.

45 Plato, *Parmenides* 156c–157a.

46 Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 7.13.

47 See Strobach 1998, 41–45.

48 Augustine's characterization of time as a distention of the soul shows certain similarities to Plotinus' description of the world-soul whose spreading out of life (*diastasis*) involves time (*Enneads* 3.7.11.41). Teske (1983, 1996) and Flasch (2004) have suggested that time is the extension of the world-soul also in Augustine, but the traditional view is that Augustine is talking of the human soul in this connection. See O'Daly 1989, 154; Rist 1994, 83. Augustine's other views about time were also influenced by Plotinus' treatise on eternity and time (*Enneads* 3.7).

49 For Augustine's suggestions about perceiving and measuring time in his earlier treatise *De musica* see Gross 1999, 140–45.

50 Husserl 1966; Ricoeur 1988, 12–59; Flasch 2004; von Herrmann 2008.

5 Augustine on evil and original sin

William E. Mann

Before his conversion to Christianity, Augustine conceived of God as a supremely good being who is “incorruptible, inviolable, and immutable” (*conf.* 7.1.1). At the same time, he was aware of the existence of evil in the world, evil that can be divided into two major classes. First, physical objects have limitations and defects. In particular, the limitations of living things result in hardship, pain, illness, and death. Secondly, there are people who behave wickedly and whose souls are characterized by such vices as pride, envy, greed, and lust.

It would seem that a supremely good God would prevent or eradicate as much evil as he possibly could. The problem of evil, then, is to see whether and how it might be both that God exists and that evil exists. Before his conversion, Augustine grappled with this problem for a number of years and found some intellectual satisfaction in the solution offered by Manichaeism. Manichaeism taught that the world is an arena in which two opposing cosmic forces incessantly contend, one good, the other evil. If one concentrates on the attributes of incorruptibility, inviolability, and immutability, it does not seem impossible for there to be two beings having those attributes in common while occupying opposite ends of the moral spectrum. Manichaeism thus offered a straightforward solution for the problem of evil: God is doing the best he can against evil, but finds himself facing an independent opponent as formidable as he.

Although Manichaeism is dualistic, the dualism is confined within a thoroughgoing materialism. Goodness is identified with corporeal light; evil with physical darkness. The youthful Augustine found this feature of Manichaeism unobjectionable because he antecedently had had difficulty understanding how anything could exist without being corporeal (*conf.* 5.10.19, 7.1.1–2). It was, he says, as if God were a boundless ocean completely permeating the finite sponge of the created world (*conf.* 7.5.7). Taking the metaphor a step further, we can offer on behalf of the Manichaeans the observation that the same sponge is also awash with a supremely toxic fluid; indeed, that the two fluids together not only permeate but *constitute* the sponge.

With his conversion to Christianity Augustine came to think that a proper solution to the problem of evil must depart radically from the Manichaeans in its conceptions of God and evil. He came to see God as a spiritual, not a corporeal, being. Augustine thus rejects Manichaeism’s materialistic dualism but embraces a different dualism between corporeal and spiritual beings, with God, angels, and human souls falling into the latter class.

God’s incorporeal nature is not sufficient to dispel Manichaeism, for a persistent

Manichaean might hold that there is still an ultimate, invincible source of evil, be it corporeal or incorporeal. This alternative is denied by Augustine's insistence that God is rightfully *sovereign* over all other beings. Even if the attributes of incorruptibility, inviolability, and immutability do not preclude their multiple instantiation in antagonistic forces, sovereignty does: no being can be supremely sovereign if there is another being over which it cannot prevail.

God's sovereignty over all other things is grounded in the fact that he created them. Two features of Augustine's account of creation are especially important to his resolution of the problem of evil: that God creates *ex nihilo*, out of nothing; and that everything that God creates is good. It is instructive to distinguish Augustine's claims about creation from Plato's influential account.

In the Platonic dialogue bearing his name, Timaeus argues that the demiurge or divine artisan creates because not to create would betoken a character fault – envy – that a perfect being cannot possess. But freedom from envy does not dictate what kind of universe the demiurge will create. Being supremely good, the demiurge cannot tolerate creating anything less than the best; he wants everything to be as much like himself as possible. So the demiurge imposes order on initially discordant matter, producing a universe that is as good as the nature of its matter allows.[1] There are three components of Plato's account to which Augustine does not give allegiance.

The first feature flows naturally from the artisan analogy that governs Timaeus' creation account; it also comports with Parmenidean strictures against non-being. Matter existed in some inchoate form before the process of creation, providing the raw material on which the demiurge worked. The demiurge's creative performance was thus constrained by the nature of the raw material at hand, about which the demiurge had no say. Augustine rejects this account of creation as fabrication because of its presupposition that matter is coeval with God. In creating the world God brought into existence not only its material inhabitants but also the very material of which they are made.

1. For they [your works] have been made by you out of nothing, not out of you, not out of something that is not yours or that existed previously, but out of "concreated" matter, that is, matter created simultaneously by you, since you gave form to its formlessness without any interposition of time. For although the matter of heaven and earth is one thing and the form of heaven and earth another, you nevertheless made both of them simultaneously – the matter, indeed, entirely out of nothing, but the world's form out of unformed matter in such a way that form followed matter with no gap in time. (*conf.* 13.33.48)
2. Thus when I ask of you, from whence the whole of creation has been made, which, even though good of its kind, is nevertheless inferior to the creator, so that the one is always immutable and the other mutable, you will not speak falsely if you respond that you confess it to be made entirely from non-being. (*c. Sec.* 8)

These passages enunciate the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. They also imply that God cannot create anything equal to himself. Because every created thing has its origin in non being, it is mutable. But God is essentially immutable, and any immutable being is superior to any mutable being.

The second and third components of the *Timaeus* account of creation arise from these two questions. Why did the deity create anything? Why did the deity create this universe? Plato's answer to the first question is "An essentially flawless being cannot be envious" and to the second question, "A supremely good being cannot create anything less than the best." The two responses do not present equivalent doctrines. The first does not entail the second. The demiurge is free from the charge of envy so long as he creates something and is not subsequently envious of what he creates. If that standard of performance is all that is required, then a cynical demiurge might fill the bill by creating a crew of miserable creatures envied by no one. Plato's second response sets a much higher standard. Only the best will do for a supremely good being. Even so, the second response does not entail what the first entails, for the second response does not entail that the demiurge will create anything. The first response supplies that ingredient. The two responses together entail that the demiurge created this world and that this world is the best world the demiurge could have created.

Augustine endorses neither of these views. We can examine his doctrines by seeing what he has to say about God's will in creating and about the goodness of the created world. Concerning God's will, this text is important:

> 3. Thus if they were to say "What determined God to make heaven and earth?" one should respond to them that those who desire to become acquainted with God's will should first learn about the power of the human will. For they seek to know the causes of God's will when God's will itself is the cause of all the things there are. For if God's will has a cause, it is something that takes precedence over (*antecedat*) God's will, which is sinful to believe. Therefore to one who says "Why did God make heaven and earth?" one should respond "Because he willed." For God's will is the cause of heaven and earth, and thus God's will is greater than heaven and earth. But one who says "Why did God will to make heaven and earth?" seeks something that is greater than God's will; but nothing greater can be found. (*Gn. adv. Man*. 1.2.4)

This passage relies on a causal principle – every cause is superior to its effects – that, together with the thesis that nothing is superior to God's will, precludes God's will from having any cause. For Augustine the explanatory buck stops here. To put it another way, Augustine finds nothing in God's nature that entails that God must create.

It is not evident that Augustine thinks that if God decides to create, then God must create the best world that he can. Creation is indeed very good (*Gn. litt. imp*. 13.3, echoing Gen 1:31), created out of the "fullness of [God's] goodness" (*conf.* 13.2.2, 13.4.5). Augustine adds that God will not create a thing unless he knows that it is good (*civ. Dei* 11.21). At the same time, however, he offers the following observations. No *created* being had a claim against God to be created (*conf.* 13.2.2–3). If Augustine endorses the more general thesis that *no* being, actual or possible, had such a claim, then it follows that God would have wronged no actual being in omitting to create it and that God has wronged no potential but non-actual being in omitting to create it. God did not create out of any need, nor to perfect any deficiency in himself (*conf.* 13.4.5). God thus knowingly creates a good world, but Augustine's remarks do not entail the *Timaeus* thesis that this world is as "good a world as God could create." Perhaps naively, perhaps slyly, Augustine characterizes Plato's doctrine simply as the doctrine that the most accurate explanation for the world's creation is that good works are made by a good God (*civ. Dei* 11.21). Aquinas would later distinguish between a world's being composed of the best possible parts and a world's having the best possible order among its parts, even if the parts themselves are not the best. Aquinas argued that the created world must be as good as possible in terms of the order imposed on it by God, but that it need not be populated by the best possible components. I have not found Aquinas' distinction in Augustine's writings. If Augustine does regard the created world as best in either of Aquinas' senses, that regard is not a prominent part of his philosophy.

But Augustine does insist that every creature is good insofar as it exists (*nat. b.* 1). How, then, is there evil?

Augustine deploys his answer in two stages. First, although every creature is good, some creatures are better than others. That every creature is good Augustine regards as a consequence of God's creative activity. Insofar as corporeal things exist at all, God has bestowed upon them some degree of measure, number (or form), and order (*lib. arb.* 2.20.54; *nat. b.* 3). Organisms and artifacts possess these features to a high degree, but even the comparatively simpler materials out of which they are composed have some degree of measure, number, and order: if that were not so, these raw materials would be literally non-existent (*lib. arb.* 2.20.54). So for Augustine the predicate "good" is not like the predicate "average." Even if all the children of Lake Wobegon are above average, it is mathematically impossible for everyone to be above average. Yet everything can be and is good in virtue of having measure, number, and order.

Some good things are better than others (*civ. Dei* 11.22). Augustine sometimes seems prepared to regiment all cases of x's being better than y into cases of x's having more measure, number, and order than y (*nat. b.* 3). But he leaves the project's details mostly blank. Thus, for example, he is eager to put forward the thesis that some things, even when corrupted, are still better than other things that remain uncorrupted. According to human estimation, at least, corrupted gold is better than uncorrupted silver, and corrupted silver is still better than uncorrupted lead (*nat. b.* 5). It may be that Augustine believes that human estimation is capricious in this matter. But there is nothing capricious, in his estimation, about the claims that a rational spirit corrupted by an evil will is still better than an uncorrupted irrational spirit, and that any spirit, no matter how corrupted, is better than any uncorrupted body (*nat. b.* 5). In support of the latter claim Augustine says that as a runaway horse is better than a stationary stone and a drunken sot is better than the excellent wine he imbibed, so the lowest, most depraved soul is better than light, the noblest of corporeal things (*lib. arb.* 3.5.12–16).

This is the imagery of a rhetorical master. More prosaic minds seek instruction about how to justify the claim behind the images. The trio of measure, number, and order suggests that betterness might track increased structural integrity or complexity. But since many of us find our paradigm examples of structural integrity and complexity in material objects, we will need guidance on how to apply the trio to sustain Augustine's comparative judgments between spiritual and material beings. The situation is especially puzzling because Augustine regards God, the supreme spiritual being, as supremely simple, having no metaphysical complexity whatsoever.

No creature, then, is evil, in spite of the fact that some creatures are worse than others (*nat. b.* 14). The word "evil," when predicated of creatures, refers to a privation, an absence of goodness where goodness might have been (*conf.* 3.7.12). If we are audacious enough to enquire why God allows such privations to occur, we are apt to be reminded of the following points. First, creatures have a natural tendency toward mutability and corruption, an unavoidable liability of their having been created *ex nihilo*. Secondly, we are subject to perspectival prejudices, failing to see how local privations, especially the ones that affect us, contribute to the good of the whole. The distinctive twist that Augustine puts on this now familiar point is that for him the assessment of the good of the whole is more diachronic than synchronic. One who laments the passing away of particular ephemeral things should realize that to wish that they might last forever is to wish that not they but some other kind of being existed. Moreover, their passing away ushers in new, good creatures. Finally, there is order and beauty to be found in this very dynamic passage, analogous to the way in which speech is made possible by the coming to be and passing away of phonemes, or music by the sequential production of notes (*lib. arb.* 3.9.24–25, 3.15.42–43). Thirdly, "God owes nothing to anyone" (*lib. arb.* 3.16.45). On the contrary, anything that exists owes its entire existence to God's grace.

But "evil" is sometimes predicated of the choices and actions of creatures possessing reason. The second stage of Augustine's treatment of the problem of evil begins here, presupposing, however, the results of the first stage.

4. As I have said, therefore, sin is not a desire for naturally evil things, but an abandonment of better things. And this itself is evil, not that nature which the sinner uses evilly. For evil is to use a good evilly. (*nat. b.* 36)
5. But perhaps you are going to ask: since the will is moved when it turns away from an immutable good to a mutable good, from whence does this movement arise? It [the movement] is actually evil, even though a free will is to be

> counted among the good things, since without it no one can live rightly. For if that movement, that is, the will's turning away from the Lord God, is without doubt a sin, how can we say that God is the author of the sin? Thus that movement will not be from God. From whence then will it come? If I respond thus to your querying – that I do not know – perhaps you will be disappointed; but nevertheless I would respond truly. For that which is nothing cannot be known. (*lib. arb.* 2.20.54)

Sin is not a desire for naturally evil things, according to passage 4. Augustine's claim must be interpreted *de re* – there are no naturally evil things that could serve as objects of sinful desires – rather than *de dicto*. For *de dicto*, there might well be benighted souls who desire what they take to be naturally evil things, and such a desire would be sinful for Augustine. Passage 4 leaves unexplained what might constitute a case of abandonment of better things. Even if gold is intrinsically better than silver, my desiring a silver chalice over a gold one could hardly count as sinful. Augustine sometimes stipulates that the thing desired must be forbidden to the desirer by justice (*Gn. litt. imp.* 1.3). Since justice is derived from God's eternal law (*lib. arb.* 1.6.50), an object of a sinful desire is something in fact forbidden to the desirer by God's edicts. On some occasions Augustine takes pains to say that the sinfulness of the desire resides not in the desire itself but in one's consent to it (*cont.* 2.3–5), where consent involves either forming an intention to act in accordance with the desire or, at a minimum, failing to suppress the desire.

As passage 5 indicates, Augustine is fond of describing sin as the will's turning away from God, a culpable rejection of the infinite bounty God offers in favor of an infinitely inferior fare. Passage 5 also conveys the message that what makes the rejection culpable is that it is freely chosen by the agent's will. Described as the free rejection of an infinite good, however, the sin is not just culpable. It is staggeringly irrational: from a cost–benefit viewpoint, the worst deal imaginable. Attracted by the Platonic thesis that all error is due to ignorance, one might then probe for some cognitive defect in the anatomy of every sin. On many occasions we might find a cognitive defect, but it is no part of Augustine's brief that we always will.

Retrieve the last sentiment expressed in passage 5, namely, that the cause of the will's movement away from God is unknowable non-being. Compare it with the remark in passage 3 that "those who desire to become acquainted with God's will should first learn about the power of the human will." We may extract the following parallels. Just as God's will in creating has no cause, so a human's will in sinning has no cause. This feature is one aspect of the power of the human will, but perhaps not the only one. If God can knowingly choose to create a world that is not the best world he might have created, in either of Aquinas' senses mentioned above, then one can argue analogously that humans can have a clear perception that one good is superior to another, yet freely choose the inferior good. In some cases, perhaps, such as choosing silver over gold, the choice may lie below the threshold of sinfulness. In other cases, however, involving the choice of what justice forbids, the threshold is knowingly and culpably passed. Another aspect of the power of the human will is to reject the verdict of reason.

One might wonder whether the latter "power" is more liability than asset. Augustine offers the following answer. Material objects, as a class, are good but can be put to evil use and are not necessary for living rightly. In contrast, some spiritual goods, namely the virtues of justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance, are necessary for living rightly and cannot be used wrongly. There is another class of goods, intermediate between material goods and the virtues, which are spiritual, necessary for living rightly, but capable of being used wrongly. In this class are the faculties of will, reason, and memory (*lib. arb.* 2.18.49–19.52). A genuinely free will necessarily carries with it the liability to sin. But without having freedom of choice, with its built-in liability, humans would lack the capacity to choose to live rightly.

There are two cases of sinful choice that dramatize for Augustine the sheer willfulness of sin: the devil's defection from the ranks of the angels; and Adam and Eve's choosing to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The devil's case serves as a template to which the psychology of many human sins conforms. In answer to the question why the devil rejected the blessed life open to all angels, Augustine cites the motive of pride (*superbia*), which he defines as "the love of one's own excellence" (*Gn. litt.* 11.14.18) and a "desire for perverse elevation" (*civ. Dei* 14.13).

Pride is also the initial evil impulse behind the Fall of Adam and Eve (*Gn. litt.* 11.5.7; *civ. Dei* 14.13). The devil's tempting of Adam and Eve did not coerce their Fall, for if the temptation had been coercive, then their punishment would be unjust. Adam and Eve voluntarily succumbed to the temptation because of their prideful fascination with the thought that they would become like God. Augustine takes this similarity between the two cases to warrant the claim that sin entered the created world through pride. At the same time he is careful to insist that pride is not a component in all sins; as he points out, some sins are committed in ignorance or desperation (*nat. et gr.* 29.33).

Adam and Eve's Fall ushered into the world original sin, which is not an event but rather a condition (*pecc. mer.* 1.9.9–12.15). It is the condition imposed by God as punishment on Adam and Eve for disobedience. According to Augustine the condition includes dispossession from a naturally perfect environment, the loss of natural immortality, and the acquisition of susceptibility to physical pain, fatigue, disease, aging, and rebellious bodily disorders, especially sexual lust (*Gn. litt.* 11.32.42; *civ. Dei* 14.16–19). The condition is not only pathological, it is inherited, infecting every descendant of Adam and Eve. The condition is innate, not acquired; as Augustine puts it, it is transmitted by propagation, not imitation (*pecc. mer.* 1.9.9–12.15). Augustine's view, then, is that our first ancestors squandered their patrimony and our inheritance and – as if that were not bad enough – thereby contracted a suite of infirmities that is passed on to all their progeny.

The infirmities are physical: Augustine appears not to think that the penalties of original sin include any intrinsic diminution of the soul's active abilities, such as the capacities to reason and to will. Although he nowhere considers the point, Augustine has reason to reject that possibility. One can argue that an alteration of the soul's native abilities would be tantamount to the creation of a new species. It is awful enough to be told that we are at present disadvantaged because of the misdeeds of our ancestors. It would be monstrous to be told that our kind was created as a punishment for misdeeds perpetrated by superior beings of a different species. Even so, the physical infirmities have made it harder for humans to exercise their souls' abilities correctly. According to Augustine, all sinful souls suffer from two penalties, ignorance and difficulty (*lib. arb*. 3.18.52). Ignorance, not inborn stupidity: humans now lack the kind of noetic intimacy with God enjoyed by Adam and Eve, an intimacy, however, insufficient to guarantee the maintenance of righteousness, in either Adam and Eve's or the devil's case. Difficulty, not impossibility: it is no part of Augustine's message that humans have been shattered by the Fall. A full reconnaissance of this terrain would have to include an excursion into Augustine's anti-Pelagianism. But, as Augustine makes clear in the *Retractationes* (*retr*. 1.9.6), he takes his anti-Pelagianism to be fully consistent with this analogy. Suppose that our blessedness consisted in eloquence, so that every grammatical gaffe were a sin. Even then no one would fault an infant for initial ignorance, for the infant has not yet either culpably neglected eloquence or culpably allowed it to be lost once acquired. Nor would we fault an adult who continues to find eloquence difficult. We would reserve censure for those who do not even make the effort and for those who, having achieved some proficiency, backslide into inarticulateness (*lib. arb*. 3.22.64).

Endnote

[1] Plato, *Timaeus* 29e–30b.

6 Jesus Christ, the knowledge and wisdom of God

Allan Fitzgerald, O.S.A.

There is nothing unusual about saying that Jesus Christ stands at the center of Christian philosophy and Christian creeds. The patristic texts that have come down to us confirm that same reality. Those writers called themselves philosophers, lovers of wisdom; for them, theology was that part of philosophy that dealt with the divinity. Patristic writers were deeply implicated in a process of using reason to explain how the Scriptures could make sense in a world where both philosopher and peasant searched for answers about Jesus Christ. But none of them would have dreamed of calling what they did "Christology."[1] Neither were their interests fully captured by those special moments of episcopal consensus that led to conciliar statements.

Such comments are especially important when it comes to the study of the thought of Augustine on Jesus Christ. In his time "there were few Arians in Africa,"[2] and the great Christological debates that exercised so many of his contemporaries did not provide the main focus of his life and work. Brian Daley affirms: "Augustine's Christology has been accorded relatively little attention by modern scholars." Was that true because of Augustine's apparent lack of attention to "the categories by which developing patristic doctrine about the person of Christ is usually charted"? Perhaps. But his thought on Jesus Christ was an area where "deep reflection and real development of thought can be noted throughout Augustine's career."[3] Is it possible, then, to identify the special character of Augustine's understanding of Jesus Christ?

Over the last fifteen years, the number of important studies on Augustine's thought on this topic – building upon the new foundations developed since mid-century[4] – has been significant.[5] While Augustine never dedicated a work specifically to Jesus Christ, that has to be because he regarded Christ "as the condition, the author and the method of all his thinking . . . the source and method for his philosophical and theological thinking."[6] That compact statement can also be affirmed in relational terms: "he never spoke of Christ apart from also speaking of what it means to be identified with him."[7] Therefore, the fact that Christ was not the object of a specific treatise does not signal a lack of rational engagement or a failure to address the widespread concerns of his time. Augustine's Christ was defined in the crucible of his searching examination of his culture and of his faith. He would say: "Christ is our knowledge, and the same Christ is our wisdom" (*Trin.* 13.19.24 [my translation])." Just how knowledge and wisdom were the focus of his thought on Jesus Christ is the subject of this chapter; it begins to unpack the way that

Augustine used the best of what he found in the philosophies of his day and in the Christian faith.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first examines the historical context for his thought, providing background that is personal (his belief), thematic (the sense of confession), and methodological (adapting to the moment). The second takes up a consistent dimension of his thought on Christ who is seen as the unifying principle, the spiritual method, and the basis for his interaction with his contemporaries, whether Christian or not, whether philosopher or peasant.[8] All of this seeks to show that his thought on Jesus Christ has a consistent core that comes into play again and again as he faces new and challenging questions.[9]

Augustine in his time

Growing up

The story that Augustine told in the *Confessions* does not begin with his baptism but with his infancy because he portrayed his relationship with God as beginning at birth. Hence, we know more about Augustine than about most historical figures because of that and the many other writings that have been preserved. But it is also significant that we know about his relation to Christ from his earliest years. His attachment to Catholic tradition and piety was easily supplanted because the Manichees promised a *reasoned* faith in Jesus Christ. He saw himself as a believer in Christ (cf. *conf.* 1.11.17), but mere belief could not satisfy.[10] Even after he left the Manichees, his desire for a rational Christ continued to mature.

When he told the story of how his thirst for wisdom was kindled by reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, he also identified in some way with the name of Christ: "No writing from which that name was missing . . . could ever captivate me completely" (*conf.* 3.4.8; Boulding 1997, 80). That name was a principle of discernment, at least affectively speaking. By the time he wrote the *Confessions*, his choice for Christ had been identified as a pattern: either he recognized a need for Christ (cf. *conf.* 3.4.8, 5.14.25, and 7.18.24) or he turned to the Scriptures (*conf.* 3.5.9 and 7.21.27). His persistent claim that belief in Christ was clear and clearly recognized:

> I was still trying to trace the cause of evil, and found no way out of the difficulty. Yet you allowed no flood of thoughts to sweep me away from the faith whereby I believed that you exist, that your essence is unchangeable, that you care for us humans and judge our deeds, and that in your Son, Christ our Lord, and in the holy scriptures which the authority of your Catholic Church guarantees, you have laid down the way for human beings to reach that eternal life which awaits us after death. These beliefs were unaffected, and persisted strong and unshaken in me as I

feverishly searched for the origin of evil.

(*conf*. 7.7.11; Boulding 1997, 167–68)

Augustine saw his conversion, therefore, as all about Christ. While it can be said that his inner yearning and his outward expression came together in Christ only in baptism, it is possible to see how that climax was prepared. Even more significant, however, is the sense that the foundations for his thought on Christ were already part of his awareness.

Theology as confession

What is known about the young Augustine and about his faith in Christ is found, for the most part, in his *Confessions* – the story about God's work in him and beyond him. Augustine, like any good rhetorician, wants to 'move' his readers and listeners to 'keep watch' for similar divine action in their lives (*conf*. 10.3.4). As we just saw, Augustine too had been moved by reading the *Hortensius* of Cicero: "I was aroused and kindled and set on fire to love and seek and capture and hold fast and strongly cling not to this or that school, but to wisdom itself, whatever it might be" (*conf*. 3.4.8; Boulding 1997, 80). He was also moved to contemplate the Word when he read the books of the Platonists (cf. *conf*. 7.9.13), and the prologue of the Gospel of John, a text which had become especially significant to Augustine at that time.[11]

Thus did the Scriptures give him a knowledge of Christ as food for the mature; it was described as a word in the heart (cf. *conf*. 7.10.16). His confession that his understanding of Christ engaged both mind and heart was clearly personal. Augustine wants to praise the action in him rather than look for the words to 'explain' him. Because it is a confession, however, he also hopes that others will see what Christ has done in him and be moved by it. At the beginning of *Confessions* 10, he thus proposes his experience of conversion as a model for others. His confession is meant for the wider community. The rhetorician, in other words, does not just seek to 'move' or to be 'moved,' but to engage others in shared reflection on what it means to be saved by Christ.

When he displays the fundamental paradox of the Word made flesh before his listeners and readers, Augustine is not presuming that they understand, nor is he explaining how the words of Scripture can be subject to reason. Rather, he engages his listeners "in concrete, rhetorically challenging phrases that let the believer savor the inherent paradox of preaching an incarnate God."[12] He asks them to savor the mystery: "He is man who is God because God has become man" (*ipse est tamen homo qui deus, quia deus factus est homo*: *Jo. ev. tr*. 21.7; cf. *en. Ps*. 5.56.5). Christ is the man God (*homo Deus*; cf. *c. Faust*. 13.8), the God man (*Deus homo*: *cat. rud*. 4.8), the God who is born (*Deus nascens*: *f. invis*. 3. 5).[13]

Augustine's confession, therefore, is a fundamental building block for his approach to philosophical and theological thinking because it maintains a connection to his very human experience of conversion. Even though the mystery of Christ is unfathomable, its proclamation (*confessio*) serves to engage others in rational reflection on their experience. His frequent, seemingly constant, invitation to see confession not as breast-beating acknowledgement of sin but as praise suggests so much more than mere redefinition of a word.

Occasion-oriented writing

Most of Augustine's works were responses to someone or something. Whether writing or speaking, he tried to build up the faith of the Christian community in the face of some perceived threat.[14] But, each time an occasion arises, he improvises,[15] which means that he depends on his rhetorical skill to find the right words so that he can, as he says at the beginning of his commentary on the Gospel of John, feed his listeners with that which has nourished him (cf. *Jo. ev. tr.* 2.1: *et pro nostra capacitate pascamur, et ministremus uobis unde et nos pascimur*). The improvisational, interactive quality of his preaching means that his words depend in some way on his listeners since he pays close attention to what his listeners can bear and to what will move them – a principle of his own theory of teaching:

> During a sermon everyone quiets down and turns their faces in rapt attention in order to listen to the one speaking. And so it is neither customary nor appropriate for someone to interrupt and ask a question about what he does not understand. The speaker should, therefore, be especially attentive to come to the aid of the silent. Now an enthusiastic crowd, eager to learn, usually shows by its behavior whether it has understood things, and until it does, the speaker needs to keep going over and over whatever he is discussing in a whole variety of different ways. Now those who get up and deliver what they have previously prepared and memorized word-for-word cannot do this. However, once a speaker makes himself understood, he should either bring his sermon to an end or move on to other matters.
>
> (*doc. Chr.* 4.10.25)[16]

No system, no neat divisions into theological tracts, no merely speculative context. Improvisation allows Augustine to do so much more than can be done in a classroom because "rich and moving discussions of Christ as the central Mystery of Christian faith appear unpredictably in passages dealing with a wide variety of issues, at practically all stages of Augustine's life."[17] He is, therefore, always aware of his readers and listeners, adapting his words to that which he thinks they can hear. That does not mean that he was always seeking to be 'politically correct,' but it does mean that he feels no need to say all that he does or can understand. The need for a systematic theology would be addressed several centuries later.[18]

Given the improvisational quality of Augustine's work, is it possible to speak of his thought on Jesus Christ as unified? That is one question that needs to be addressed in the rest of this chapter. Yet the occasional dimension of his speaking and writing matters because it should make us cautious about the context for this or that word or phrase. His choice of words and phrases fit the immediate context; they introduce a variety into the text that will tend to defy philological patterns and theological constructs based on word usage alone. Hence, historical context, local significance, and rhetorical artistry must all be accounted for in the study of Augustine. In what follows, I will discuss Augustine's thought on Jesus Christ in a more focused way, that is, by recognizing an emerging consensus on his teaching on Jesus Christ and by recognizing the importance he gives to the incomprehensibility of God[19] in all of his writings.

Augustine's Christology

A unifying principle

Goulven Madec once boldly stated: "I argue that Augustine, from the time of his conversion, had, in the person of Christ, a principle of coherence which provided the fundamental unity of his thought."[20] Augustine had found that unity in the words of Paul who proclaimed Jesus Christ as the one, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Col 2:3).

A recent article by Robert Dodaro confirms Madec's vision, showing as well the need for a fuller development of his basic insight.[21] In 1975 Madec had written in reaction to some scholars (e.g. Robert O'Connell and Olivier du Roy) who emphasized the Neoplatonic character of Augustine's faith at the time of his conversion. Madec was concerned about the historical accuracy of those claims, rather than the theological ramifications. Hence, it is not surprising that his article lacked what Dodaro called "a detailed, metaphysical explanation of the relationship between *sapientia* and *scientia* as rooted in Christ."[22] Even though Madec never explicitly addressed the concern that Dodaro raised, he did, in other places, speak about Christ in the salvation-historical terms that, Dodaro shows, complete his thought.[23]

Citing a sixty-page article that Madec wrote on the *On Agreement among the Evangelists*,[24] Dodaro demonstrates that Madec's own scholarship can be used to complement his original stance. Even though this article was published in 1992, it was based on a paper that was written in 1963 "pour le diplôme d'études supérieures." Madec, then, interpreted Book 1 of Augustine's *On Agreement among the Evangelists* as a reply to a persistent, fourth-century pagan representation of Christ as a divinely inspired sage. That gave Christians a way to honor Christ in the way they might honor Pythagoras, Socrates, Apollonius of Tyana, or Apuleius. It was a way of denying the Christian story; in that way, the "devotees of the traditional gods could blunt the impact of Christianity on imperial religious policies."[25]

The cultural reality that Augustine faced – practically speaking – denied the divinity of Christ by putting something else in its place. Augustine knew that strategy well since he had had to grapple with the same problematic in the process of his own conversion. After all, it was in no way obvious how the immutable God could be immersed in a changing world without losing the very thing that made him God: his existence beyond change. It was, therefore, easier for Christians to understand the pagan Christ than to appreciate the Christian Christ.

Therefore, when Augustine later had to speak to the cultured pagans of his time, his own experience and learning process was the basis for his response to the image of Christ that they proposed. He had to deal with "the pagan objections to the Christian concept of an incarnate deity."[26] For Augustine, Christ was not just a wise man but Wisdom, and, by his incarnation, Christ is the incarnation of *sapientia*[27] who allows human beings to comprehend eternal truths. Augustine's own struggle with the pagan Christ led him to insist "on the mediatorial role of Christ in relation to divine *sapientia*."[28] He would make that same argument in Books 8–10 of the *City of God*, refuting Platonic conceptions of worship and of religious mediation.

Augustine's application of his thinking about Christ, therefore, was fashioned in response to the way that Christ was seen within the secular culture – countering especially the Neoplatonist definition of Christ as a great man or hero. Evidence of the importance of this argument for Augustine can be found in the *Confessions* (Book 7), in *On Agreement among the Evangelists* (Book 1), in *Sermon Dolbeau* 26, in *De Trinitate* (Books 4, 12, and 13) and in the *City of God* (Books 8–10).

But this was not, in the first place, a philosophical or theological issue. Augustine was confronting the theurgic rites of the Neoplatonists.[29] Intimately connected to Augustine's view of Christ as the knowledge and wisdom of God, therefore, is his criticism of pagan rituals which do nothing to save. It is the Christian community which is the body of Christ and the way to salvation. A religious and sacramental dimension, therefore, is central to Augustine's understanding of Christ, and that is a point that Dodaro also makes in his monograph *Christ and the Just Society*, where he discusses *scientia* and *sapientia* within the wider context of *sacramentum* and *exemplum*.[30]

Since Jesus Christ is the mediator of divine *sapientia*, "Believers experience the metaphysical relationship between *sapientia* and *scientia* through the *sacramenta*."[31] Augustine's recognition of the differences in religious practice thus led him to a heightened appreciation of Christ, incarnate as divine *scientia* and *sapientia*. As incarnate, Christ effectively mediates true illumination and purification of the human intellect and will. Augustine's Christology grew out of his own confrontation with pagan images of Christ; the pastoral and polemical challenges that he faced would benefit from the intensity of Augustine's experience of conversion.

Christ as spiritual method

Rowan Williams, using the thought of Jean-Marie Le Blond, describes Augustine's view of the Incarnation of Christ as the "revelation of a spiritual method"[32] because Jesus Christ is the way, not an object of thought. Thus does Williams see in Augustine "a notably coherent Christological scheme."[33] As *sapientia*, Christ is the path to follow; the Incarnate Word "gathers up the elements of broken humanity and constitutes thereby a new humanity," not by adding "an extra element alongside the human soul and body," but rather Christ's human soul–body is "concretely animated and individuated by a single divine agency."[34] That means that there is "no context in which Christ speaks simply as human or simply as God."[35] The tight unity in Augustine between the believer and Christ shows that the mediation of the Incarnate Word is invoked to engage Christians in forward-looking development.

Even though (or perhaps because) his chapter has chosen to discuss Augustine's Christology within rhetorical and exegetical categories, his observations stretch the understanding that is usually given to Augustine's use of *persona*.[36] Thus Christ speaks in our *persona*. In some of his works from the 390s,[37] he uses phrases such as "*personam sustinere*" or "*agere personam*" to say that "the entire earthly life of the incarnate Son is a speaking or acting in the person of divine Wisdom: *agere personam sapientiae dei*."[38] Hence, the "core theological conviction emerging more and more strongly in the 390s and early 400s is that the incarnate Word constitutes a *unitas personae* in taking human nature."[39] In other words, already in the 390s, Augustine's nuanced Christology speaks about the person of Christ in relation to the salvation of Christians. He may not be speaking about person in a way that can be linked to the major Christological debates in other places, because "Augustine's Christology is about spiritual method"[40] rather than being about the analysis of Jesus Christ.

In this way, Williams moves the discussion of Augustine's Christology away from a technical analysis of *persona* to a more general position whereby the incarnate Word as divine wisdom and as our spiritual path is a focus of his thought on Jesus Christ. The basic pattern of his Christology does not have to wait for his mature writings. Rather, Augustine's "pattern of christological exposition insists that there can be no accurate discussion of the incarnation that is not itself incarnationally modeled – humble in its awareness of the inescapable context of material history, alert to the question of how *justitia* is realized, open to the dangerous and potentially humiliating solidarity of fallible and sinful human agents, and refusing prideful isolation."[41] Christians are invited to learn a spiritual method that is political and prayerful.

Augustine's efforts, especially in his psalm commentaries, work to determine who is speaking, that is, whether it is Christ himself or Christ in his members. His need to resolve exegetical questions, however, becomes a process of presenting Christ in relation to his listeners, thereby including issues of sacrament and justice, of worship and practice. That position confirms and amplifies what was said in the previous section.

A subtle challenge to pagan intellectuals

How then is one to *read* Augustine? Looking beyond first impressions, a fresh and insightful study of *Letter* 137 provides a good example of how ready Augustine was to grapple with the questions of his day, not by trying to say all that he knew on a topic but by adapting his words and his reasoning to his readers.[42] In 411, Volusianus, the proconsul of Africa, wrote to Augustine about several questions that apparently arose in the midst of the regular philosophical discussions with fellow non-Christians who treated Christian teachings as superstition. In response to their questions about the incarnation of Christ, Augustine offered an "intellectual exploration deeply rooted in late antique philosophical practice."[43]

That means that, rather than pretend that he can explain how the Word is united to the body, he "recommends an exercising of the mind that incorporates standard aspects of the liberal arts tradition located within a Plotinian framework."[44] Thus he cites classical authors to justify his use of Scripture and his Christian self-presentation as he asks about the soul and then says, "We think we are told something incredible about the omnipotence of God when the Word of God . . . is said to have assumed a body!" (*ep.* 137, 6; Teske 2003, 216). In this way, Augustine has set the stage for using an analogy of Word and soul to turn his readers' attention to the real challenge that must be faced. Ayres summarizes concisely: "Whereas his addressees have considered the incarnation to be in the category of the miraculous and have considered God within material categories, Augustine suggests that attention to the mysteriousness of the created order's existence in the immaterial enables us to imagine the omnipresence of the Word as a plausible doctrine."[45] He thus leads them to pay attention to the created order where the body–soul unity is even more mysterious than the union of the Word with flesh. He will use the analogy of the soul–body relationship to reflect on the union of God and flesh. In this way, Augustine has employed the practices that investigated how the sensible was informed by the intelligible to speak of how divine power orders the sensible world.

Writing about the mystery of the Incarnation to people whose philosophical background had prepared them to dismiss its absurdity let Augustine speak to them about how the faith-community deals with the limits of its ability by continuing to seek from within (faith seeking understanding) rather than treating it as a theological problem to talk *about* or resolve.[46]

Thus does Augustine point to the mystery of the soul–body union to underline the plausibility of the union in Christ. "Just *as* the soul uses the body so that there might be a human person, so God uses a human being so that there might be the unity of Christ's person. Augustine is saying in effect that just as the soul's union with the body is real and yet incomprehensible, so too the union of natures in Christ is real (hence the new use of *persona* to name the metaphysical reality) and yet incomprehensible."[47] For, "only those who think that they are able to explain the quotidian event of the union of soul and body would think it possible to explain the unique event of the incarnation."[48]

As in the other studies cited in this chapter, attention is given to the fact that the doctrine of Christ as God-man is not reserved to the philosophically clever. The practices of thought and contemplation that philosophers use are part of Christian piety; they take Christ as the model for knowing God.[49] A direct relationship to God is not reserved to the learned; it is also accessible to the unlearned among Christ's followers – precisely because of Christian worship.

Therefore, Augustine chooses his words, examples, and emphases in relation to Volusianus and his fellow questioners. Rather than try to develop a theory about Christ for them or to show how much he knows, he has modeled what it means to think about Christ from within the Christian community, and to do so by using a thought process familiar to his readers. Seeking to convince or to move his readers, he has presented Christ in a way that changes the question. It is not a matter of investigating some wonder-filled idea about Christ that matters. It is more important to see how that very question turns to an appreciation of the world and its incomprehensibility. In responding to their questioning, Augustine challenged them to see with the eyes of the faithful for whom the Scripture exercises the minds of all. Thus is the church "a socially and intellectually diverse community of believers, subjecting to Christ the most brilliant minds."[50] The focus is not just knowing about Christ, it became a matter of piety and salvation.

This chapter, in other words, has affirmed in a different way the connection of Augustine's Christology to the faith and piety of the Christian community. In that way at least, Augustine's mature understanding of Christ mirrors the understanding he had as a new Christian where the wisdom he had sought found a clear response in the Christ he came to accept in baptism.

Conclusion

How, then, is one to 'read' Augustine? What does it mean to talk about Augustine's Christology? Scholars, both modern and not so modern, highlight a consistent understanding of Jesus Christ as the unifying principle (*le principe de cohérence*) of his thought. From a time not far removed from his baptism, Augustine sees Christ as the wisdom of God, and he applies the couplet knowledge–wisdom (*scientia–sapientia*) to Christ in a way that makes the practice of worship a means to wisdom. Christ is both wisdom and the way to wisdom.

Not only was this way of thinking about Christ a consistent part of his life as a baptized Christian, but he also used it to integrate both the titles he applied to Christ and his thinking about Christ's work in response to the challenges of his time. Christ was the foundation on which he built his pastoral and polemical responses. His improvisation is the adaptation of that which had nourished him to those that he wanted to nourish. Dependent on the scriptural text for nourishment, it can be said that "even while improvising, Augustine focuses intensely on minutiae, seeking to tease out the hidden melodies within the dense biblical chords."[51]

Augustine did not need, nor would he have understood, the way that modern theology develops its ideas in separate tracts (Christology, pneumatology, protology, epistemology, etc.). Rather, the unity and originality of his thought on Jesus Christ is both an invitation and an admonition: Christ provides him with the way to advance spiritually and to think theologically, to keep mind and heart together, and to explore the Word of God with a deep awareness of the mystery. That which is incomprehensible about Christ invites an insistent and ongoing exercise of the mind.

Endnotes

1 Christology is often used today as a kind of shorthand. Its application to pre-scholastic times needs appropriate nuance.

2 Van der Meer 1961, 119. Even though he lived in Milan at the time that Ambrose faced challenges to Catholic identity from Arian-leaning adversaries, Augustine showed minimal interest in Arian issues.

3 Daley 1999, 164. See too Keech 2012, 6, who calls him "a Father seemingly without a Christology."

4 Van Bavel 1954; Drobner 1986; Madec 1986–94, 845–908.

5 The articles that will be cited in this chapter include Drobner 2000, 27–29; Jones 2004; Williams 2008, 176–89; Ayres 2008, 190–211; Dodaro 2012, 49–56.

6 Drobner 2000, 28–29. Shortly thereafter (p. 29) he adds: "Here it should be sufficient to recall the function of Christ as the interior teacher (*magister interior*), the knowledge and wisdom of God (*scientia et sapientia dei*) in Augustine's illuminationist approach to knowledge. In this respect, one will not find a traditional christology . . . but only the whole Christ (*Christus totus*) who pervades the entirety of his thought, thereby drawing it into a unity that Augustinian scholarship has yet to understand fully as such.”

7 Jones 2004, 423.

8 See, for example, *Sermo* 150.3.4: “In general, all philosophers strove by study, research, discussion, and way of life to grasp the blessed life. This was the basis for their philosophizing; but I think that these philosophers have this in common with us. For, if I were to ask you why you believe in Christ, why you became Christians, every one of you answers me truthfully: for the blessed life. Therefore, the desire for the blessed life is common to philosophers and Christians” (my translation).

9 Discussion of the position defended by Carol Harrison (2006) was about Augustine’s theology of grace – not with Augustine’s Christology. A substantive review of Harrison by Anthony Dupont (2008, 78–79) points out that van Bavel (1954) showed “that the early works (386–391 and 394–397) contain a synthesis of Augustine’s mature Christology.” See www.ArsDisputandi.org.

10 See Madec 1986–94, 845–48 for a fuller discussion of the Christ of his youth, of the impact of his mother’s faith in Christ, and of the attraction of the Christ of the Manichees.

11 After many years, he will recall Simplician’s words about the prologue: “This passage should be inscribed in letters of gold and set up in the most prominent place in every church” (*civ. Dei* 10.29).

12 See Daley 1987, 101.

13 Daley 1999, 165.

14 See Jones 2004, 19: “the doctrine of Christ is not an academic exercise for Augustine. His Christology is almost always related to his pastoral care, and his pastoral care is continually grounded in Christ.”

15 See Harmless 2012, 145–73.

16 Translated in Harmless 2010, 134, n.12.

17 Daley 1999, 164; see *Expositio Epistulae ad Galatas* §24; *Confessions* 7.18.24–19, 25; *De Trinitate* 13.22.23; *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate* 1.5, 28.08; *De civitate Dei* 21.15. Some of the most significant Christological issues were with pagans and Donatists. His serious concern about the identity of Christ was also a concern for the identity of Christians – a matter to be addressed later in this chapter.

18 See Cipriani 2007 for a clear view of how philosophy and theology are intertwined in Augustine, without, however, losing the distinction between rational truth and revealed truth.

19 See van Geest 2011 for a long-overdue discussion of how comprehensive is Augustine's insistence of the limits of discourse about God.

20 Madec 1975, 84.

21 Dodaro 2012. See Dodaro 2004, 147–55 and 165–71 for his own treatment of this matter.

22 Dodaro 2012, 50.

23 Dodaro 2012, 52.

24 Madec 1992.

25 Dodaro 2012, 50–51.

26 Dodaro 2012, 51.

27 See, for example, *Epistula* 137.3.12.

28 Dodaro 2012, 52.

29 Madec 2003, 237.

30 See Dodaro 2004, 147–55 and 165–71.

31 Dodaro 2004, 51. The meaning and importance of this worship would be treated more fully by Augustine in the *City of God* (Books 8–10).

32 Williams 2008. See Le Blond 1950, 145.

33 Williams 2008, 176–77. This initial statement is applied to the writings of the second decade of the fifth century.

34 Williams 2008, 180; see *De Trinitate* 4.3.6 where “the single death and single resurrection of Christ . . . overcome the twofold death to which we are condemned” (Williams 2008, 185).

35 Williams 2008, 182.

36 Williams 2008, 184: “To engage with Augustine’s use of *persona*, then, is to encounter a concept providing a fluid and many-faceted connection between exegesis, soteriology, and Christology.”

37 Williams 2008, 182, where *De ordine* and *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* are cited.

38 Williams 2008, 183; see *De agone Christiano* 20.22.

39 Williams 2008, 183.

40 Williams 2008, 184.

41 Williams 2008, 188–89.

42 Ayres’ whole article (Ayres 2008) should be read since the few comments that I make in this chapter do not deal directly nor fully with its substantive contribution to Augustine’s Christology.

43 Ayres 2008, 191.

44 Ayres 2008, 196.

45 Ayres 2008, 197.

46 Ayres 2008, 197: “While this letter can be read as an accommodation to the styles of argument found in Volusianus’ circle, it is also a carefully shaped piece of polemic against them.”

47 Ayres 2008, 200.

48 Ayres 2008, 200.

49 Ayres 2008, 204–05.

50 Ayres 2008, 204.

51 Harmless 2012, 153.

Part III Human nature

7 The human soul: Augustine's case for soul–body dualism

Bruno Niederbacher, S.J.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes that as a young man he used to be a kind of materialist (*conf*. 5.10.19–20, 7.1.1).[1] Materialism is an anti-dualistic view according to which all entities are material, corporeal, or, as many today would say, physical. At the time of his conversion, however, Augustine became an ontological dualist claiming that some entities are non-corporeal. He believed that among these entities are God and the soul, and these were the entities he desired to get to know most (*sol*. 1.2.7). The soul is what makes some corporeal things alive. Thus, for Augustine, animals also have souls. The focus of his interest, however, was the human soul.[2] In this chapter I am first going to present Augustine's main theses about the human soul and name some problems arising with them. Secondly, I will pick out three Augustinian arguments for the immateriality of the soul and critically connect them with views from the contemporary debate in the philosophy of mind, where after a long period of materialist dominance renewed attention has begun to be paid to psycho-physical dualism.[3]

Augustine's view on the human soulin a nutshell

For Augustine, a human being is a rational substance consisting of soul and body.[4] Neither the soul alone nor the body is an individual human being or a human person. Only the soul–body composite is an individual human being, a person.[5] Nevertheless, Augustine thinks that the human soul, and especially its rational part, is superior to the body (*Trin*. 15.7.11; *en. Ps*. 145.4). For it is the human soul that rules the body,[6] and it is the human soul that is created according to the image of God.[7] Thus, it is the human soul that makes the human being close to God (*quant*. 33.70).[8]

Throughout his writings, Augustine ponders different hypotheses as to the origin of the soul and its entering the body: (1) the traducianist view, according to which God created only *one* human soul, namely Adam's soul, from which the souls of all who are born are derived; (2) the creationist view, according to which God creates a new soul for each body; (3) the view that the created souls exist prior to embodiment, and are either (3a) sent by God in order to animate and govern the bodies of individuals as they are born, or (3b) come to inhabit a body by their own choice.[9] Although Augustine can find no decisive grounds for opting for one of these hypotheses, he is clear about one anti-Manichaean thesis, namely that the human soul is not a part of God, not of the essence of God (*ep.* 166.2.3).

In *De animae quantitate*, Augustine distinguishes seven ascending levels of the human soul. By "levels" he means both powers or functions of the human soul and its states or kinds of acts (*quant.* 33.70–76).[10] On the first level are its vegetative powers (*animatio*): the power to give life to the earthly and mortal human body; the power to make it a unity; the power of nourishment; the power of the conservation of congruity, not only in the body's beauty but also in the process of growing and procreating. The second level concerns the sensual abilities (*sensus*): the power to perceive with the five senses; the power of appetition, avoidance, and movement; the power of sexuality and care for offspring; the ability to acquire habits and memory. From the third to the seventh levels, Augustine considers specifically human capabilities that depend on rationality. The third level concerns the power of what can be called discursive reasoning (*ars*) that manifests itself in many cultural inventions and achievements: art, know-how, language, counting, writing, order, and law.[11] The fourth level of the human soul is evaluative and ethical (*virtus*): it is in virtue of the soul that humans are capable to compare goods, to strive for moral progress and purification, to keep moral laws. In this state, humans are struggling, have fear of death, feel the temptations of the world, are anxious whether they achieve perfection. At the fifth level (*tranquillitas*), this fear is overcome. One realizes the greatness of the soul and is able to walk with great confidence in God toward the vision of the truth. On the sixth level (*ingressio*) one desires to have insight into what truly and in the highest sense *is*. And finally, on the seventh level (*contemplatio*), this desire is fulfilled: the contemplation and fruition of the highest truth and cause of all things.

Although Augustine distinguishes these different powers and states, he considers the human soul to be one. It is the *one* human soul that is able to realize all these kinds of acts. It is the *one* human soul (*animus*) that acts in virtue of these diverse powers.[12] The human soul is present as a whole, as a unity. By reflecting on the phenomenology of some of the acts of the human soul, especially on the acts of imagination, memory, and self-knowledge, Augustine tries to show that their subject, the human soul, is an immaterial and simple entity (*Trin.* 10.7–10), not composed of other material entities. It is a simple immaterial entity that cannot be reduced to still simpler elements (*quant.* 1.2). I will return to this point in the next section.

According to Augustine, the death of a human being is the separation of the soul from the body (*civ. Dei* 13.6). While the body perishes and dissolves into the elements, the soul is immortal (*sol.* 2.22.24; *imm. an.* 4.5.9.12.16; *Trin.* 10.7.9, 14.4.6).[13] Augustine tries to establish the immortality of the soul. One argument proceeds from the fact that the soul is able to grasp the truth. Since truth is in the soul as its subject, that is, since truth is soul-dependent, and truth remains forever, the soul must remain forever as well (*sol.* 2.13.24). This argument, however, fails because it does not distinguish between two senses of truth: “truth” in the sense of the cognition of a true proposition, and “truth” in the sense of a proposition’s being true. “Truth” in the first sense is mind-dependent. But what remains always is only “truth” in the second sense. Thus, it does not follow that the soul always remains. Another argument proceeds from the premise that the soul is the principle that makes some things alive. “The soul is a kind of life in virtue of which every living thing lives. But every lifeless thing that can be animated is understood to be dead, that is: deprived of life. Therefore the soul cannot die. For if the soul could lack life, the soul would not be the animating principle but something animated” (*imm. an.* 9.16).[14] This argument, again, is not valid. That the soul is essentially alive implies only that the soul is necessarily alive as long as it exists. It does not imply that the soul is necessarily immortal.[15]

According to Augustine, it is the soul that makes for the numerical identity of a human being through time and also after time. He believes that the disembodied soul experiences the beatitude of heaven or the torment of hell (*Gn. litt.* 12.34.65–35.68). Nevertheless, he believes also firmly in the resurrection of the flesh. One reason for this is the fact that the human mind has “a natural appetite to administer the body” (*Gn. litt.* 12.35.68). Augustine believes that in the life of the world to come a human being will have numerically the same body as she has now on earth (*ench.* 23.88).[16] He holds a kind of reassembly view. Although the resurrected body will have different qualities (*Gn. litt.* 12.35.68), it will be composed of the numerically identical elements out of which the earthly body was composed. Nothing of the material is going to be lost. This view is theologically inspired because Augustine models our resurrection according to the paradigm case for resurrection, which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ (*vera rel.* 16.32).[17] But there is a difference: Jesus’ body did not decay. Our bodies, however, will decay. They will be cremated or decompose in their graves. How can it be that my bones, my ribs, my flesh be brought back once they have been eaten by worms or have turned to dust? In order to illustrate the difficulty, Peter van Inwagen asks us to imagine that a manuscript written in Augustine’s own hand is burned.[18] How could it be possible for the same manuscript which has turned to ashes to exist again? Augustine deals with objections concerning the impossibility of regaining all the elements that once composed a human body. Omnipotent God, he says, will find these elements and call them back wherever they might be hidden (*civ. Dei* 22.20). In cases of cannibalism, the flesh of the eaten person will be restored to the one in which it first developed (*civ. Dei* 22.20). Missing parts and matter (as is the case with disabled human beings or children) will be supplemented by God who created out of nothing what he wanted (*ench.* 90). Thus, one could say: For Augustine, both metaphysical parts that constitute a human being, i.e. the soul and the body, have to be numerically identical so that numerically the same human being exists. The identity conditions of the soul are thereby thought to differ from the identity conditions of the body. The identity conditions of the body, as Augustine considers them, could be spelled out as follows: a body *x* and a body *y* are *one and the same* body if and only if the body *x* is composed of one and the same elements as body *y*. The reassembly of the same elements is therefore necessary and sufficient for the numerical identity of the resurrection body with the earthly body.[19]

From our scientific point of view, Augustine's conception appears too strong. What Augustine did not know is that our bodies are in constant flux, that the atoms of our bodies are continuously replaced. But this is no obstacle for them to be still the same bodies. On the other hand, from a metaphysical point of view, Augustine's conception seems too weak. For a body *x* to be the same body as a body *y*, it is not sufficient that body *y* is composed of the numerical identical atoms as body *x*. What seems required is some sort of internal causal continuity. And this is missing in the reassembly view. Anyway, since Augustine is a dualist, since he believes that the soul does not perish and that the soul remains numerically the same after death, and since he thinks that it is the soul that enlivens the body, he could drop the requirement for the body to be composed out of the numerically same elements. What would make a body my body would be its connection with my soul. This proposal would not be entirely against Augustine's tenet, for in one place of his writings he says: Even if the flesh of a human being were entirely lost, almighty God would reproduce it out of whatever he wanted (*civ. Dei* 22.20). However, if Augustine thought it logically possible for such a newly created body to be numerically identical with the earthly body that had disappeared, this would be a possibility we could not understand well.

The immateriality of the soul

For Augustine, the human soul is an immaterial entity. He defends this claim against various materialist positions of his time. Some materialists claimed that the soul or the mind is identical with the blood or the brain or the physical heart. Others said that the soul is composed of atoms, or that the soul consists of one of the four elements, or even a fifth element. Still others held the view that the soul is a kind of harmony of the body or the connection of the elements (*Trin*. 10.7.9). Such materialist reductive approaches were prominent among the ancient pre-Socratic philosophers but also among Christian theologians such as Tertullian.[20] Against these positions, Augustine thinks that the soul is neither identical to any of these or other corporeal entities nor to any relation between them. He develops several arguments for the immateriality of the soul. In what follows I will pick out, analyze, and assess three interesting arguments for the immateriality of the soul.

The argument from imagination

This argument starts with the claim that we are able to imagine things. Even materialist philosophers must concede this claim. Augustine writes:

> [1] They [the philosophers] had in themselves something they did not see, and they

> imagined to themselves what they had seen outside, even when they were not seeing them, but only thinking of them. [2] But that which is in the view of such thinking is no longer a body, but only the similitude of a body. [3] But that [faculty] by which this similitude of a body in the mind is seen, is neither a body nor the similitude of a body. And that [faculty] by which it is seen and judged whether it is beautiful or ugly, is without doubt better than the thing judged of. [4] This mind of the human being and of the rational soul is a nature that is certainly not a body, when not even that similitude of a body, which is seen and judged of in the mind of the thinker, is itself a body.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 8.5)

Premise 1 is uncontentious. We all make the experience of imagining things. Augustine reflects in many places of his writings on this experience. In *De Genesi ad litteram*, he gives examples of abilities and acts of imagination: the ability to form images of things perceived and to store them in imagination; the ability to imagine things we have once perceived but do not actually perceive whereby we form a certain spiritual appearance (*aspectus spiritalis*); the ability to imagine things we have never seen but the existence of which we know (for example, I can create an image of Carthage although I have never seen it); the ability to imagine things that do not exist; the ability to imagine and foresee actions we are planning; the ability to dream (*Gn. litt.* 12.23.49).[21]

Premise 2 is crucial. One of Augustine's reasons for thinking that imaginations are incorporeal is the fact that they display none of the properties that are considered to be essential for bodies. He argues in *De animae quantitate* that we are able to imagine two- or even one-dimensional things such as figures or lines. These are by no means bodies, for bodies are essentially three dimensional. Thus, according to Augustine, we are able to perform acts that have non-corporeal contents. This is a point where Augustine could meet the view of prominent dualists from today. They speak not of imaginings, but broader, of experiencing how things appear to us, how they phenomenally seem to us. We make experiences, they say, that by their intrinsic nature do not fit into the physical world. Such an experience, they say, is neither something that is physically going on outside the body nor something that is physically going on inside the body.[22] According to these dualists, such experiences are good evidence for the existence of events that are not physical.

In 3 Augustine states that the faculty that enables us to perform imaginations with immaterial content must itself be immaterial, and in 4 he identifies this faculty with the human soul, which is a rational soul. Augustine does not give an argument for 3 and 4. In *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine makes the strong claim that it is certain that there is "some kind of spiritual nature (*spiritalem naturam*) in us where the images of corporeal things are formed" (*Gn. litt.* 12.23.49). And in *De animae quantitate* he writes: "The soul is by no means a body; otherwise it could not discern incorporeal things" (*quant.* 14.23). The rationale behind this claim is probably the principle that cognition presupposes some sort of similarity between the object and the faculty of cognition. If the object of cognition is immaterial, the faculty by which it is grasped must be immaterial as well. This principle, however, is by no means self-evident. Even if there are experiences in us that are immaterial, even if there are spiritual or mental events occurring in us, that does not necessarily imply that the bearer of these events is itself spiritual or mental. Thus, even if we have evidence for the existence of mental events occurring in us, this would only be evidence for property dualism; it would not be evidence for substance dualism. Augustine is familiar with this objection. In *De Trinitate*, where he considers not only acts of imagination but also other acts that are claimed to be mental such as thinking, having insight, having memories, etc., he writes: "Those who believe that the mind is a body or a composition or a harmony of a body want to see all these [events] in a subject in such a way that the substance is the air or the fire or still another body which they believe to be the mind. And the insight (*intelligentia*) would be in this body like its quality, so that the former were the subject, the latter in the subject" (*Trin*. 10.10.15). However, Augustine wants to argue that the subject of the mental acts is an incorporeal substance. Let us look at some of his arguments for this position in more detail.

The cognitive access argument

The argument I am going to consider is from *De Trinitate* 10. Three preliminaries are apt. First, in this argument Augustine does not speak about the human soul but rather about the human mind. The human mind is the rational part of the soul. However, as indicated earlier, speaking of "parts of the soul" does not mean for Augustine that the human soul is divided. He considers the human soul to be one simple entity with different abilities or functions. Second, Augustine uses such formulations as "the mind thinks," "the mind cognizes," "the mind is certain." But I think one could replace "the mind" with "I."[23] Third, *De Trinitate* 10 is packed with arguments that are partly overlapping. I cannot deal with the entire text but will select the following short argument and comment on it:

> [1] All these people overlook the fact that the mind knows (*mentem nosse*) itself even when it seeks itself, as we have already shown. [2] Now, in no way one says rightly that anything is known if its essence (*substantia*) is unknown. [3] Wherefore, as long as the mind knows itself, it knows its own essence. [4] And if it is certain of itself, it is certain of its essence. [5] Now, it is certain of itself, as is demonstrated by what we have said above. [6] But it is by no means certain whether it is air, or fire, or a body, or anything of a body. [7] It is, therefore, none of these things.
>
> (*Trin*. 10.10.16)

Premise 1 states that the mind has some kind of self-knowledge. The overall question in *De Trinitate* 10 is how the human mind can desire to know itself if it does not know itself already. If one desires to know something, one must love it already. But in order to love it, one must have some cognition of it. Can there be a meaningful interpretation of the Delphic prescription "Know yourself!"? Augustine finds the answer to this question in the distinction between *se nosse* and *se cogitare*. He thinks that we have some kind of implicit self-knowledge or self-awareness (*se nosse*) which can be made explicit in acts of thinking (*se cogitare*). Augustine compares the difference between *se nosse* and *se cogitare* with the difference between habitual knowledge somebody has, for example the habitual knowledge of grammar, and its actual thinking about it or its use (*Trin.* 10.5.7). If somebody finds the truth about the nature of his mind "he finds, not what he did not know but what he did not think about" (*Trin.* 14.5.8).[24]

The mind's thinking and cognizing itself differs according to Augustine from the way the mind cognizes other things. His thesis is that we have a kind of cognitive access to ourselves that we have to no other things, not even to other persons. Augustine mentions several kinds of cognitive access which all have in common that the thing cognized is not immediately present to us: First, there are things we cognize through testimony. For example, we gain the knowledge that Cherubim and Seraphim are heavenly powers via testimony. Secondly, there are things we cognize through perception and inferential reasoning. The example Augustine gives is our knowledge of the intentions of other people. One way to gain such knowledge is to observe the behavior of others and to draw inferences. Thirdly, we cognize our own faces by looking into a mirror (*Trin.* 10.9.12).[25] Finally, we cognize bodily things by perceiving them. "The mind thinks all these things like fire or air or this or that body . . . through phantasia" (*Trin.* 10.10.16). These kinds of cognitive access are different from the cognitive access we have to ourselves. They are all cognized in a mediated way. The mind, however, cognizes itself in an immediate way. "If one says to the mind: Know yourself!, the mind knows itself in the very moment it understands the word 'yourself,' for no other reason than that it is present to itself" (*Trin.* 10.9.12). I have a kind of access to myself which no one else has to me and which I have to nobody else.

Premise 2 makes a conceptual point about the object of knowledge. According to Augustine, to know a thing is to know its "*substantia*". *Substantia* usually means substance. But I think that in our context *substantia* is better translated by "essence."[26] To know a thing is to know the essence or the nature of this thing.

If it is true that the mind has self-knowledge in the sense of *se nosse*, and if it is true that knowledge of a thing is knowledge about its nature, 3 follows: The mind has knowledge in the sense of *se nosse* about its nature. However, having seen the strong requirements for knowing something, one wonders what the argument for the truth of 1 is, namely, that we do have this kind of knowledge of the nature of the mind.

In 4 Augustine introduces the topic of certainty into the argument. He suggests that certainty is the criterion that enables us to discern which beliefs about the mind are true and which are false. Certainty is a property of a belief, or better, a property of a cognizer concerning a belief. But what are the conditions of certainty? As will become clear in a moment, Augustine might have endorsed the following definition of certainty: A cognizer *S* is certain of the belief that *p* if and only if the belief that *p* is indubitable for *S*. The belief that *p* is indubitable for *S* if and only if *S*'s act of doubting whether *p* is true presupposes that *p* is true.

In 4 Augustine states that if the mind is certain of itself, it is certain of its essence (*substantia*), and in 5 he claims that the mind has the required kind of certainty. The argument for this claim is a demonstration he has already given and which is known as "Augustine's cogito argument."[27] It runs as follows:

> On the other hand, who would doubt that he lives, remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows and judges? For even if he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he doubts; if he doubts, he understands that he doubts; if he doubts he wishes to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts he knows that he does not know; if he doubts, he judges that he ought not to consent rashly. Whoever, therefore, doubts about anything else, ought not to doubt about all these; for if they were not, he could not doubt about anything at all.
>
> (*Trin.* 10.10.14)

In *De civitate Dei* 11.26 Augustine formulates the same argument against academic skepticism in the first person: "I am most certain that I am, and that I know and delight in this." If I believe that I am, then I am certain that I am. And this implies that it is true that I am. Acts of doubting such propositions are self-referentially incoherent. *Si enim fallor, sum* (*civ. Dei* 11.26).

It is not clear what it is that Augustine shows with the cogito argument. On one interpretation he is supposed to show that whenever I make a claim about myself I presuppose the existence of myself. According to this interpretation, Augustine draws a rather trivial conclusion in which he only makes explicit the existential presupposition of every first-person singular verb use.[28] Thus, one could just as well conclude: *I walk, therefore I am*; *I swim in a lake, therefore I am*; *I grew ten centimeters, therefore I am*. But this cannot be what Augustine had in mind. For, first, in the statements of the argument he always uses, besides the verb *vivere*,[29] words for mental acts such as *se meminisse*, *intelligere*, *velle*, *cogitare*, *scire*, *iudicare*. Secondly, as becomes clear in step 6 of the argument, Augustine contrasts the epistemic status of such beliefs as *I am*, *I know that I am*, *I know that I delight that I am*, *I desire that p*, *I think that p*, *I judge that p*, etc. with the epistemic status of such beliefs as *I am air*, *I am fire*, *I am a body*, *I am a brain*. Beliefs of the latter kind are not certain for the cognizer. If I believe that I am a brain, I do not know that I am a brain. I only have the opinion that I am a brain. I can doubt that I am a brain. And actually, many have doubted whether the mind is a brain or some other part of the body or some other element such as air, fire, etc. Acts of doubting whether I am a brain or any other physical entity are not self-referentially incoherent. Augustine draws by *modus tollens* the negative conclusion 7 that the mind is none of these bodily things. Thus, "Know yourself!" commands one to withdraw such bodily conceptions that the mind erroneously has added to itself.[30]

There are several contentious presuppositions in the argument, of which I mention two:

(i) Only that can be true of the mind which is certain for the mind.

What is the argument for this claim? Why should not propositions also be true of the mind that do not fulfill Augustine's strong requirements for certainty? Augustine would counter that claim (i) is a corollary of the other claim which we considered already, namely, that the mind is present to itself, that the mind has immediate cognitive contact to itself. The certainty of the beliefs about the mind results from this immediate access of the mind to itself. Another presupposition of the argument seems to be the following:

(ii) That I exist, think, doubt, etc. are essential properties of me.

However, if it were an essential property of mine that I exist, I would essentially exist (like God) which no human being would dare to claim. Moreover, it is not at all clear why knowledge *that* I am, *that* I think, *that* I judge, etc. should imply knowledge about *what* I am. Why should knowledge of the existence of *x* or of acts of *x* imply knowledge of the nature of *x*? Normally we can know that something, *x*, exists or acts in certain ways without knowing the essence of *x*. Why should it be different in the case of knowledge of the mind? Augustine would counter that the mind is a special case. The mind is a unity, a whole. "When [the soul] knows itself as searching itself, it knows itself as a whole (*tota se novit*), therefore it knows itself also entirely (*ergo et totam se novit*): not as another thing but as a whole does it know itself" (*Gn. litt.* 7.21.28)[31] This, however, is again a presupposition which is not uncontentious.

I see two ways in which Augustine's argument could be made plausible. The first way would be the weaker claim that the mental acts are good evidence that their subject is also mental. Behind this claim lies the presupposition that essences are cognized by their characteristic acts. If the characteristic acts of something, *x*, are mental, this is a good reason to believe that *x* is itself mental.

The second way draws on three Augustinian intuitions: (1) Whoever understands the expression "Know yourself!" is able to follow this command and actually know himself, that is: If I am a competent user of "I," if I have the concept of *I*, then I have thereby access to what I am. (2) Whenever I think that *p*, I judge that *p*, I doubt whether *p*, etc., I cannot err that it is I who think that *p*, judge that *p*, doubt that *p*. (3) By mere *a priori* reflection I am able to discern what it essentially involves to be me. These three claims can be made plausible with the aid of an argument developed by the substance dualist

Richard Swinburne.[32] He uses modern semantics in order to make his point. Some things (substances or substance-kinds), he says, following Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam, can be picked out by referring expressions that are rather uninformative as to the nature of what is picked out. The standard examples for such expressions are ‘Phosphorus’ and ‘Hesperus’ as used by the old Greeks or ‘water’ as used in the eighteenth century. People used these expressions and referred successfully to the corresponding things without knowing the nature of these things, without knowing that Phosphorus is a planet, that water is H_2O, and that Phosphorus is the same planet as Hesperus. Having just the concept *water* would not enable them to find out whether some fluid on some planet really is water. Words like these are called uninformative designators, in contrast to informative designators. If a referring expression is an informative designator, and if we know how to use it, then we know the nature of what is picked out. We can identify new instances of the object with them. Examples are expressions for properties such as ‘green’ or ‘square.’ Now, what sort of expression is ‘I’? Materialists or reductionists would probably say that ‘I’ is an uninformative designator. We use ‘I,’ we pick out something by it, but we do thereby not know the essence of what we pick out. *A priori* reflection alone does not tell us that what we pick out is or is not identical to some physical entity. We have to discover such truths *a posteriori*. Dualists, on the other hand, could claim that ‘I’ is an informative designator. When we know how to use ‘I’ we pick out something the essence of which is familiar to us. When we know how to use ‘I’ we cannot be mistaken about when to apply this expression. We are “immune to error through misidentification,” as Sidney Shoemaker says.[33] When I think, doubt, see something red, experience pain, etc., I cannot doubt that it is I who am thinking, doubting, seeing something red, being in pain. Just as *a priori* reflection tells us that nothing can be red and green all over, in the same way *a priori* reflection tells us that the subject of the aforementioned acts and experiences cannot be a physical entity. What I unmistakably pick out with the expression ‘I’ is a mental substance, the soul. This is a possible modern reading of Augustine’s intuitions. But of course, this interpretation can be challenged. The most obvious question is this: Is the expression ‘I’ really an informative designator? If with ‘I’ we pick out something the essence of which is familiar to us, why then is there so much controversy over this essence?

The indivisibility argument

The last argument for the immateriality of the mind I am presenting here comes from ontological considerations. In one of his letters to Jerome, Augustine writes:

> If a body is only that which consists or moves in space with some length, breadth and height in such a way that with a greater part of itself it occupies a greater part of space, and with a smaller part a smaller part of space, and is in a part less than the whole, then the soul is not the/a body. For it pervades the whole body which it animates not by spatial extension but by a kind of vital tension. For it is present at

> the same moment in its entirety in all parts of the body, and it is not smaller in smaller parts and greater in larger parts, but here more attentive and there less; and it is in all parts of the body together present as a whole and in every single part of it present as a whole. For otherwise the soul could not perceive (*sentit*) as a whole which it does not perceive in the whole body; for if on a small point of the living body something is touched . . . the contact does not escape the entire soul, and yet the contact is not felt over the whole body, but only at the one point where it takes place.
>
> (*ep*. 166.2.4)[34]

The argument could be put in the following way:

(1) The body is composed of parts.
(2) The soul is not composed of parts.
(3) The soul is not a body.

Premise 1 is uncontentious, especially when we are talking about the human body. No one will deny that the body is composed of parts. The crucial premise of the argument is premise 2. The soul is not composed of parts in the way the body is. Augustine talks sometimes of the parts of the soul; but there he has in mind different functions and states of the soul: know-how, inertia, acumen, memory, cupidity, fear, happiness, sadness.[35] What he denies in 2 is that the soul has spatial parts or is spatially extended as the body is. His reason for assuming premise 2 is that the soul is present as a whole both in the whole body and in every part of it. A pain in the finger is felt by the whole soul. Thus, the soul is not divisible as the body is. It is always the one soul as a whole that has the different experiences. When dealing with the self-knowledge of the mind, Augustine expresses a similar idea. The mind, he says, knows as a whole: “I do not say that it [the mind] knows the whole; but rather: What it [the mind] knows, it knows as a whole.”[36] To summarize and generalize Augustine’s view: Bodies essentially involve characteristics that the soul essentially does not involve. Thus, the soul cannot be a body or identical to the body or some part of it. This conclusion could be strengthened with a further metaphysical argument that can be derived from Augustine’s view about the resurrection of the flesh as presented above. We have seen that the identity conditions of the body differ from the identity conditions of the soul. And now one could argue: What has different identity conditions cannot be the same. Therefore the soul cannot be the body or a part of it.[37]

Conclusion

Augustine is a thinker who drew attention to the inner life: experiences, mental occurrences, acts that he deemed to be irreducible to corporeal events or properties. He discovered that he had access to these events in a way he has access to no other things; and that no other human beings have access to his inner life in the way he himself has it. And he was struck by the fact that in grasping these events one is immune to a certain type of error. I can err and be in doubt about many things, but I cannot err or doubt that it is *I* who am erring, doubting, or, more generally, thinking. From these and other considerations he drew the conclusion that there is an immaterial, simple substance: the human mind as bearer of the mental events and acts we are all familiar with. There are certainly controversial steps and presuppositions in Augustine's arguments. Nevertheless, as I have tried to show, his intuitions are still worth pondering and connectable to arguments for soul–body dualism of our time.

Endnotes

1 In *De animae quantitate* 3.4 Evodius mirrors the materialist attitude when he says: "for the soul seems to me to be quasi nothing if it does not have any of these [spatial dimensions]."

2 For Augustine's use of the words *anima*, *animus*, *mens*, etc. see O'Daly 1987, 7–8.

3 See for example Lowe 1996; Swinburne 1997; Meixner 2004; Antonietti, Corradini, and Lowe 2008. Of course, there are many types of psycho-physical dualism. The chief kinds are *property* dualism and *substance* dualism.

4 *De Trinitate* 15.7.11; *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1.4.6. "Hence the human being consists of soul and body; but not of any soul, for also the animal consists of soul and body: hence the human being, consisting of a rational soul and of mortal flesh, seeks beatific life" (*s*. 150.4.5).

5 "The soul having a body does not make two persons but one human being" (*Jo. ev. tr*. 19.15). Also, "Soul and body are two things, but one human being" (*Jo. ev. tr.* 47.12).

6 "For the human soul (*animus*) seems to me to be a kind of substance that participates in reason, fitted to ruling the body" (*quant*. 13.22).

[7] “The human being is made in the image of God not in the body, but in the mind itself” (*Jo. ev. tr*. 23.10).

[8] The soul is to God the “purest neighbor” (*civ. Dei* 11.26).

[9] See *De libero arbitrio* 3.56–59; *De Genesi ad litteram* 7.24.35, 10.1.1–3.4; *Epistula* 166.3.7. For the discussion in detail see O’Daly 1987, 15–20.

[10] Besides *gradus* (levels, grades) Augustine uses also the terms *actus* (act; see *quant*. 35.78–79), *potentia* (power; see *quant*. 35.79), and *vis* (power; see *conf*. 10.7.11).

[11] O’Daly 1987, 14 summarizes these capacities with the term “discursive reason.”

[12] “quae diversa per eos ago unus ego animus” (*conf*. 10.7.11).

[13] “The human soul is in its own way immortal” (*ep*. 166.2.3).

[14] See also *De Trinitate* 10.7.9.

[15] See also O’Daly 1987, 12.

[16] For a detailed account of the development of Augustine’s view of the numerical identity of the resurrection body with the earthly body see Sieben 2012, 141–82.

[17] See also *Sermo* 238.2.

[18] Van Inwagen 1998.

[19] In *De civitate Dei* 22.19, Augustine compares the reassembly of a human body with the action of a potter who, not having been successful the first time, uses the same lump of clay in order to model a pot again. What matters is that the same amount of the same material is used again, and not whether the parts of the clay take the same position as they did the first time.

[20] Augustine refers to Tertullian’s view at *De Genesi ad litteram* 10.25.41.

21 For a detailed analysis of the different kinds of acts of imagination see Hölscher 1986, 45–53.

22 Meixner 2008, 146.

23 As evidence for this claim I take the fact that Augustine himself elaborated parts of the argument of *De Trinitate* 10 in *De civitate Dei* 11.26 not in the third person but in the first person.

24 For the relevance of the distinction between *se nosse* and *se cogitare* see Brachtendorf 2000, 170–81.

25 See also *De Trinitate* 10.3.5: Augustine says here that one should not believe that the mind cognizes itself as if in a mirror.

26 See Augustine's remark in *De Trinitate* 5.9.10. Compare also Matthews 1999, 229. Furthermore Hölscher 1986, 183–84.

27 The argument is presented in several writings of Augustine. Most prominent are the formulations of the argument in *De Trinitate* 10.10.14 and 15.12.21 and *De civitate Dei* 11.26. Analyses of the argument and comparisons with Descartes' *Cogito* can be found in Matthews 1992 and Horn 1997.

28 For this interpretation see Hintikka 1962. See also the criticism made by Horn 1997, 117–18.

29 *Vivere* can be understood in this context in the sense of "exist." For a living thing to live is to exist. See also Matthews 1999, 228.

30 "When, therefore, it is commanded to know itself, it should not search for itself as if withdrawn from itself, but it should withdraw what it has added to itself" (*Trin.* 10.8.11).

31 Also: "for the cognized [thing] and the cognizer are the same . . . Hence, what cognizes itself, begets a knowledge of itself that is equal to itself. For it does not know itself less that it is, nor is its knowledge that of another essence, not only because it is itself that which knows, but also because it knows itself" (*Trin.* 9.12.18).

32 Swinburne 2006. See also Swinburne 2007.

33 Shoemaker 1968, 556.

34 Similar arguments can be found in *De Trinitate* 6.6.8 and 10.7.10.

35 See *De Trinitate* 6.6.8.

36 “Non dico: Totum scit; sed: Quod scit tota scit” (*Trin*. 10.4.6).

37 Such an argument is developed in Lowe 2008, 173–74.

8 Augustine on knowledge

Peter King

Augustine wrote extensively, though not systematically, on topics central to epistemology: skepticism, intellective and sensory cognition, knowledge, testimony, scientific proof and disproof, self-knowledge, belief, innate ideas, memory, and much else. From these discussions we can assemble a coherent picture of Augustine's epistemology, bearing in mind that this reflects our interests more than his. For instance, Augustine distinguished knowledge (*scientia*) from wisdom (*sapientia*), eventually settling on the view that 'knowledge' is a matter of the mind's practical engagement with the world whereas 'wisdom' has to do with its contemplation of eternal truth, a distinction he found more relevant to human understanding than we do: Augustine is not our contemporary, despite sharing some of our contemporary interests.

We start with Augustine's refutation of skepticism and what he understands it to involve. We then consider 'illumination,' his account of coming to know necessary truths, and knowledge of psychological states generally. We end with empirical knowledge and social epistemology.

Skepticism

Augustine had briefly been a skeptic,[1] and devoted his first post-conversion work to responding to it. In his *Contra Academicos*, Augustine identifies the core of skepticism to consist in two theses:[2]

> [S1] Nothing can be known.
> [S2] Assent should always be withheld.

Now [S1] was justified by appeal to Zeno's account of truthful perception. Zeno claimed that a perception is truthful when (*a*) it accurately reflects the way the world is, and (*b*) it could not be caused by anything other than its actual cause. The skeptics argued that (*a*) could not be satisfied because things are naturally obscure and so cannot be accurately represented, and that (*b*) could not be satisfied because things may resemble each other too closely to be reliably distinguished as causes. If (*a*) and (*b*) could be satisfied, why would there be errors and disagreements? They concluded that since no perceptions satisfy (*a*) and (*b*), nothing can be known. Then [S2] was derived from [S1] with the aid of two other premises:

[S3] The wise man should not risk error.
[S4] Giving assent to what is not known risks error.

Two refinements were made by Carneades. First, [S1] was restricted to philosophical matters; it did not apply to ordinary everyday concerns. Understanding [S1] in this way enabled the skeptic to avoid many counterintuitive consequences of his position. For example, he could now claim to know he was not an insect. Second, [S2] seems to have the consequence that if one assents to nothing, one also will never do anything (the 'Inactivity Argument'). Carneades, declares Augustine, replied that a skeptic can be guided by "what is plausible (*probabile*)" or "like the truth (*uerisimile*)." Thus he adopted the following thesis:

[S5] Someone who is wise will follow what is plausible or like the truth.

This refined version of skepticism emerges above all as anti-dogmatic: iconoclastic as regards competing theories, accepting no more than the evidence warrants, free of philosophical commitments. Augustine later summarizes the skeptical position:

> Thus with the [Academic Skeptics], every error is thought to be a sin, which they maintain can be avoided only if all assent is suspended. They say that anyone who assents to uncertain things is in error, and they argue in clever but shameless debates that there is nothing certain in human sights, because of its indistinguishable likeness to falsehood, even if what seems to be so were perhaps true.
>
> (*ench*. 7.20)

The key pieces of ancient skepticism are assent, avoidance of error, certainty, and the difficulty of distinguishing what is true from what merely seems to be true.

Augustine's main argument against the skeptical position attacks the relative plausibility of [S1]. He argues at length that it is at least as plausible that something can be known – that the truth can be found – as that it cannot. He describes his strategy to Alypius:

> Therefore, the question between us is whether the arguments [of the Academicians] make it plausible that nothing can be perceived and that one should not assent to anything . . . if I can demonstrate that it's much more plausible that the wise man be able to attain the truth and hence that assent need not always be withheld, then you'll have no reason, I think, for refusing to come over to my view.
>
> (*c. Acad*. 2.13.30)

At the end of the day, Augustine reiterates his conclusion: "It's enough for me that it's no longer plausible that the wise man knows nothing" (*c. Acad*. 3.5.12).[3] What he has argued, in fact, is that [S1] is no more plausible than its denial; Augustine is clear that this is his main argument against skepticism. Unfortunately, to reach his conclusion he rejects the distinction between

> *S* knows that *p*

and

> It seems to *S* that he knows that *p*

He does this to move the debate to the level of appearances, of what seems to be so rather than what is so, to put dogmatic claims to knowledge on the same footing with skeptical contentions against knowledge, making each a matter of what seems so. Yet there is surely more to knowledge than merely seeming to have it – people can be mistaken about what they claim to know – in which case Augustine's argument, no matter how clever, is unpersuasive.

Along the way to his conclusion, Augustine identifies three kinds of knowledge-claims that are not readily susceptible to skeptical doubt, and philosophers have found these three cases more promising against skepticism.

First, there are logical truths about the world (*c. Acad.* 3.10.23, 3.13.29). We know, for instance, that either it is raining or it is not raining. If the disjuncts are exclusive and exhaustive, we know the truth of such disjunctions even without knowing which of the disjuncts is true. If the skeptic objects that we have to know that the disjunctions are exclusive and exhaustive, Augustine can reply that this is determined by their logical form. If the skeptic charges that as truths about the world, they presuppose the existence of the world, which is not known, Augustine replies that he calls 'the world' whatever seems to appear to him, and so there is no substantive presupposition at stake.

Secondly, there are mathematical truths, e.g. 7+5=12 (*c. Acad.* 3.11.25). Since their truth is not connected with the body, they are not cast in doubt by objections to the reliability of sense-knowledge.

Thirdly, there are pure appearance-claims (*c. Acad.* 3.11.24–26). Rather than asserting that something *is* the case I can say that it *seems* to be the case, and such propositions are directly known to be true. While 'There is a book in front of me' may be false, the appearance-claim 'It seems to me that there is a book in front of me' is unaffected by what Augustine takes to be the stock-in-trade of the skeptic: the unreliability of sense-perception and perceptual illusion;[4] the possibility that one is asleep and dreaming; the possibility that one is insane. We cannot go wrong if we restrict ourselves to what seems to us to be so.

Augustine subordinates these three classes of knowledge-claims to his overall relative-plausibility argument because they do not provide any substantive knowledge. Logical truths have no subject matter and therefore are not about the world; pure appearance-claims are about what seems so to the person making the claim rather than about the world; mathematical truths are arguably about numbers and so a special kind of object 'in' the world, but less clearly substantive – they might be synthetic *a priori* but it takes philosophical work to establish this. Hence these cases are not clear counterexamples to [S1] but only starting points for disagreement. The heavy lifting is still done by his relative-plausibility argument.

Around the same time, Augustine found a fourth kind of knowledge-claim which, unlike the three canvassed above, seemed to provide substantive knowledge while being immune to skeptical doubt: the knowledge each person has that he or she is alive, sometimes called 'the Augustinian *cogito*.' Early versions appear in *De beata vita* 2.7, *Soliloquia* 2.1.1, *De libero arbitrio* 2.3.7.20–22, and *De vera religione* 39.73, mature statements in *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate* 7.20, *De civitate Dei* 11.26, and *De Trinitate* 15.12.21. Augustine holds that it definitively refutes the skeptical claim [S1], not merely shows that it is just as plausible to think [S1] false as true. For the next thousand years it was widely accepted that Augustine had given a decisive refutation of skepticism.[5] This is most apparent in *De Trinitate* 15.12.21 where, in the space of a single chapter devoted to human knowledge, he moves from knowledge of one's own existence to endorsing testimony as a source of knowledge – plausible only if skepticism has been discredited from the outset. While Augustine does allow a loose and imprecise sense in which we sometimes claim to 'know' things (*retr*. 1.14.3), "suitable to common usage," his declared aim here shows that he is concerned with the strict sense of knowledge. Augustine begins by "putting aside what comes into the mind from the bodily senses," so that he is concerned only with what the mind "perceives through itself." The paradigm instance of such knowledge is knowledge that we are alive, so that anyone can maintain "I know that I am alive": it is "the most inward knowledge" (*intima scientia*):[6] "Nobody is allowed not to know that he is alive, seeing that he cannot even fail to know something if he is not alive. For *failing to know*, as well as *knowing*, are features of the living" (*ench*. 7.20).

Augustine reasons that knowledge belongs to living subjects, which leads him to the further reflection that being ignorant is no less a cognitive state, and hence likewise a feature of living subjects. Thus any subject with cognitive states, even without one of those states being an episode of knowledge, necessarily is alive – and so the subject could be in the self-guaranteeing cognitive state of knowing that he is alive.

Having established the (necessarily self-guaranteeing) truth of "I know that I am alive," Augustine then shows that it can withstand any skeptical challenge: even if someone does not know whether he is awake or is asleep and dreaming, he is alive; he cannot "be in error in his knowledge through dreams, since both *sleeping* and *seeing things in dreams* are features of someone who is alive"; and even if he is insane he is alive (*Trin.* 15.12.21).[7] Augustine draws the conclusion explicitly: “Therefore, anyone who says that he knows he is alive can never be deceived nor put forward a falsehood.” Hence something not only can be but actually is known – that is to say, [S1] is false, and skepticism thereby refuted.

What follows if we grant Augustine his claims about “I know that I am alive”? Ever since Descartes, philosophers have held that we have to fight the skeptic for every bit of knowledge, and thus that everything apart from knowledge that one is alive remains open to skeptical doubt. Augustine concludes from the falsity of [S1] that [S2] could not be derived from [S1], and so different kinds of knowledge-claims have to be considered on their own merits to see whether assent should be granted or withheld, but the burden of proof is on the skeptic to offer reasons against a given class of knowledge-claims, since his contention that nothing can be known has been shown to be mistaken.

The Theory of Illumination

Augustine is prone to the oversimplification that there are only two sources of knowledge, namely the bodily senses and the mind, and further that skepticism has some success only against the former. The ‘Augustinian *cogito*’ shows that skepticism is false. Augustine holds that there are many “eternal and unchangeable” truths knowable through the mind alone. In keeping with the Platonist tradition, Augustine maintains that we have direct cognitive acquaintance with eternal and unchangeable Forms, which constitute the basis for true judgments.[8] Our cognitive contact with Forms is usually expressed with metaphors drawn from vision: we ‘see’ Forms and are thereby directly acquainted with them, without the need for intermediate entities, much as we see an object that is present before us. Furthermore, Forms are paradigms of the features they exemplify, and function as standards for ordinary non-eternal mundane objects (*div. qu.* 23). Specifically, God uses the Forms, which are Ideas in the Divine Mind (*div. qu.* 46.2), as archetypes in creation which become reflected in created things.[9] Some knowledge-claims have the character they do in virtue of the distinctive entities they involve. Mathematical truths, such as 7+5=12, are eternal and unchangeable because they involve eternal and unchangeable objects, which we cannot know through the changeable items in the world but only through the mind (*vera rel.* 30.55).

To explain how knowledge of such truths is possible, Augustine initially adopted the Platonic Theory of Recollection (ἀνάμνησις), which he praised as “the most admirable discovery.”[10] Our knowledge derives from (*a*) the direct cognitive contact our mind has with the Forms, which (*b*) took place prior to its embodiment in this life. The ‘preexistence’ requirement, (*b*), explains how we seem to know these truths without learning them (once grasped they seem to be something “we always knew”), for putative cases of learning these truths are really a process of ‘un-forgetting’ them. We therefore come into this life equipped with a full, if unremembered, knowledge of the truths contained in the liberal arts.

In later works Augustine rejects the Theory of Recollection (*Trin.* 12.15.24; *retr.* 1.4.4 and 1.8.2). His rejection is usually chalked up to doctrinal orthodoxy, but at all stages of his career Augustine is explicit that the preexistence of the soul is doctrinally and philosophically an open question.[11] His motivation for giving up the Theory of Recollection is not doctrinal but philosophical. He takes it to be superseded by his 'Theory of Illumination':

> The nature of the intellectual mind has been created in such a way that, joined from below (*subiuncta*) to intelligible things in a natural arrangement by the Creator's design, it sees them in a unique kind of incorporeal light – just as the physiological eye sees objects in its vicinity in this physical light, since it was created to be receptive of and adapted to the light.
>
> (*Trin.* 12.15.24)

The Theory of Illumination is an improvement on the Theory of Recollection:

> It is more plausible that even untrained people reply with the truths of certain disciplines when they are questioned well for the reason that the light of eternal reason, where they look upon these unchangeable truths, is present to them insofar as they are able to receive it – not because they were familiar with them at some point and have forgotten them, as it seemed to Plato and others like him.
>
> (*retr.* 1.4.4)

Yet the philosophical advantages of the Theory of Illumination are not immediately apparent. Augustine retains (*a*), and so takes our knowledge of unchangeable truths to be a matter of the direct cognitive contact our mind has with the Forms. He replaces the preexistence requirement (*b*) with (*b**), namely the claim that such epistemic contact takes place in this life, adding further that it does so (*c*) through the 'light' of reason, at least (*d*) to the extent one is capable of receiving it.[12]

The defender of the Theory of Recollection might object that (*c*)–(*d*) merely spell out what is implicit in the visual metaphor used to describe (*a*), and that adopting (*b**) in place of (*b*) saddles Augustine with the problem of why we have no conscious experience of 'contacting' the Forms in this life while encumbered with the body – to say nothing of how easy or hard it is to engage in such contact.

But Augustine holds that his Theory of Illumination recognizes and can solve a philosophical problem the Theory of Recollection hardly addresses, namely what it is to *understand* something. This is a problem that leaps into sharp relief when we try to describe what change takes place when we understand something we have not understood before, which can also be called 'learning.'[13] Roughly, Augustine takes our knowledge of eternal truths, or at least coming to know them, as an *occurrent inner episode of awareness* in which we grasp the reasons why they are true. Rehearse the steps of a mathematical proof in an effort to understand it. If you do not yet understand it you are merely parroting the proof, as Augustine says (*mus*. 1.4.6). While thinking it through, however, you may suddenly have a flash of insight and see how its various steps establish the conclusion. There is a real difference before and after understanding the proof. We commonly describe this difference with visual metaphors, e.g. 'the flash of insight' and 'seeing the truth'; Augustine calls it "illumination." His account explains not only how we have *a priori* knowledge through immaterial cognitive contact with eternal objects, but also what coming to understand something consists in, namely becoming aware of the reasons why it is and must be so. The Theory of Recollection accomplishes only the first of these tasks, whereas the Theory of Illumination does both.

The Theory of Illumination counts as a *theory* about understanding and knowledge because Augustine tries to cash out the extended metaphor of light and vision in systematic ways.[14] Something can be seen in virtue of the light provided by a light source: an eternal and unchangeable truth can be understood (and thereby known) in virtue of the 'light' provided by God.[15] Just as a light source produces the light that makes what is potentially visible (a physical object) able to be actually seen by someone, God produces the 'light' that makes what is potentially intelligible (an eternal unchangeable truth) able to be actually understood by someone. Physical light permits cognitive contact between the perceiver and the object perceived; "a unique kind of incorporeal light" (*Trin*. 15.12.24) permits cognitive contact between the mind and what it understands. In short, Augustine explains occurrent acts of knowing as the result, at least in part, of God's causal influence on the human mind.[16] This allows Augustine to explain how we come to know eternal truths in this life, at the time we grasp them, since God brings it about that it happens. Furthermore, it allows him to explain the phenomenological character of learning eternal truths, in that it seems to be both active (we make an effort to comprehend the truth) and passive (the truth "bursts in upon us" as something "discovered rather than made"). The active features are due to our cognitive efforts, the passive features due to God's causal activity on us, even if that is no more than to "consult the Teacher within" (*mag*. 12.40). It also allows Augustine to distinguish the kind of mental effort involved in recalling something from the kind of mental effort involved in thinking something through, which the Theory of Recollection cannot do.

There is another aspect of the Theory of Recollection that Augustine finds unsatisfactory, namely the obscurity in (*b*) about how recollection can put us in touch with the Forms. If recollection is an 'inner episode' taking place in the person who recollects, it is unclear how to think about the content of the recollection: is the person who recollects something directly in contact with the Forms in her memory? Surely not, since then Forms would be private to her. Hence she must have instead a representation of the Forms stored in her memory, by means of which she is then indirectly or mediately in touch with the Forms. But these representations are as changeable and impermanent as the other transitory contents of our minds, and so cannot support the unchangeable necessity of eternal truth. Neither answer seems satisfactory.

Augustine argues in *De libero arbitrio* 2 that just as we conclude that a sensible object exists because it is publicly accessible to our distinct individual senses, in that you and I can both see it, so too we should conclude that an 'intelligible' object exists because it is publicly accessible to our distinct individual minds, in that you and I can both conceive it: we both know the same truth when we know 7+5=12. These intelligible objects are 'higher' than our minds, since we conform our thinking to them rather than vice versa. Their truth is independent of our minds and not a matter of dispute or opinion. An individual human mind is capable of apprehending "intelligible things" (Forms) to which "we are joined from below" (*Trin*. 15.12.24), which are not really 'in' the human mind at all; if anything they are 'in' the Divine Mind. Yet Augustine is not satisfied with this answer. In *Confessions* 10, he notes that he finds in his "memory" (*memoria*), in addition to representations of sensible objects, "countless principles and laws of numbers and dimension" present "in person" rather than via representations (*conf*. 10.12.19): the very things themselves (*res ipsae*) are there (*conf*. 10.10.17). But what does it mean to say that intelligible objects are 'in' the mind, a private realm, rather than somewhere accessible to many minds? Augustine takes this up in *De Trinitate* 12.14.23–15.24,[17] where he maintains that the human mind has direct cognitive contact with Forms that are above us, but this contact leaves or may leave a representation of the Forms in memory, which can be used for "private" thought; if necessary, the mind can always "revisit the intelligibles" to cognitively refresh itself.

Augustine's Theory of Illumination explains what it is for us to come to know an *a priori* truth, namely to become aware of the reasons why it is and must be so. These truths cannot be understood properly without recognizing their truth (*div. qu*. 48). What makes such inner episodes of understanding into cases of knowledge has to do with the grasp of the reasons which justify it. The proper understanding of the content of eternal and unchangeable truths is bound up with the reasons why they must be so; we simultaneously see the Forms involved in such truths and their interconnections which underwrite them. Augustine often takes these eternal truths to be incorrigible, as when we hold "Wisdom should be pursued" – someone who denied this claim would be thought not to know what 'wisdom' meant. But not all eternal unchangeable truths are like that. Consider a simple truth of arithmetic, say 12+45=57. To understand this truth is to grasp the numbers 12, 45, and 57; to know what equality and addition are; and to connect these notions properly (*lib. arb*. 2.8.23). This is a constructive synthetic procedure whose mechanics are part of understanding it and which justify accepting it. In short, the procedure explains why it must be so and is part of understanding the claim itself. The truth need not be self-evident or obvious; the epistemic warrant for accepting eternal unchangeable truths is not the "flash of insight" (a psychological state) but what the flash provides, namely recognition of the reasons why something must be so.

Does the Theory of Illumination extend beyond eternal unchangeable truths and self-guaranteeing truths? This question was debated in the Middle Ages but no consensus was reached. When Augustine describes illumination he usually speaks only of these cases. When he talks about knowledge of things in the world through illumination, he has in mind cases where physical objects exemplify Forms – regularities in the world that obey mathematical laws, such as the rate at which bodies fall downwards. On the whole, Augustine adopts the view that the world is structured by Forms and that objects in the world exemplify Forms, and are thus intelligible insofar as they reflect eternal unchangeable truths. Augustine's epistemological claims do not force us to think that illumination applies to anything but truths that are somehow bound up with their justification conditions. This is not the case for matters of brute fact, e.g. "This table is brown," which therefore cannot be known through illumination – there is no 'why' to be grasped.

Innermost knowledge

Among the things "the mind (*animus*) perceives through itself" is what Augustine calls "innermost knowledge" (*intima scientia*): the immediate awareness we have of our cognitive condition, which is immune to error (*Trin*. 12.15.21). Knowledge that we are alive is an instance of innermost knowledge. To this Augustine adds the mind's self-knowledge and its direct acquaintance with its occurrent psychological states.

Augustine's avowed aim in the *Confessions* is self-knowledge, to confess to God what and who he is. Yet it is surprising how puzzling self-knowledge turns out to be; "what is closer to me than myself?" (*conf*. 10.7.26). While it seems to Augustine that he cannot grasp all that he is, this would entail that the mind is too narrow to encompass itself, with the paradoxical result that the mind would contain parts that are somehow outside of itself: a situation that renders him dumbfounded (*conf*. 10.8.15).

Dissatisfied with his inconclusive treatment in the *Confessions*, Augustine takes up self-knowledge in the *De Trinitate*, in a discussion that is more sophisticated, precise, and technical than his earlier reflections.[18] *De Trinitate* 9.2.2 restricts its scope to the mind (*mens*), the purely rational part of the soul independent of faculties such as perception, memory, or imagination; it is something which a human soul or self (an 'I') has, not something it is, and its proper activity is thinking.[19] For Socrates to think of something is for him to use his mind to think of the thing in question. The mind is the means by which Socrates is in cognitive contact with something. Thus every case of thinking involves a direct use of the mind in order for thinking to occur. Augustine calls this the "mind's presence to itself" and reasons that it is the ground for self-knowledge.[20]

The core of Augustine's reasoning is found in several arguments presented in *De Trinitate* 10.3.5–4.6. First, he argues that the mind's self-presence is not a matter of the mind taking itself as the object of its own thought, the way it might do so for any given object of thought. The mind may think of itself that way – there is nothing to prevent it from being a standard object of thought – yet it is rare for the mind to be present to itself as an object of thought, whereas the mind's self-presence is involved in any act of thinking, even when the object of that thinking is not the mind itself. Rather, the mind is present as the subject actualized in thinking, no matter what the object of that thinking is. The mind is the "point of view" (*conspectus*) which necessarily characterizes any thinking, without being something distinct from it, as Augustine later puts it (*Trin.* 14.6.8); the point of view is the very possibility of thinking (*Trin.* 15.15.25).[21] This immediate and ever-present consciousness of the mind's presence as subject – its subjectivity – is something of which we are by definition aware without thinking about, and thereby it counts as knowledge we have, which Augustine identifies as fundamentally non-discursive (*nosse*) as distinct from the typical discursive knowledge (*cogitare*) we may have regarding objects of thought (*Trin.* 10.9.12).

Having established that there is a unique kind of self-knowledge teased out of the mind's self-presence, Augustine argues that the whole mind is the subject of knowledge, not just some part of it (*Trin.* 10.4.6). He concludes that since the mind is present as a whole in any instance of thinking, it is therefore available, again as a whole, to be the object of its thinking as well as the subject. One corollary of this result is that the mind's self-reflexivity – its ability to be the whole subject and the whole object of thought – establishes that the mind is immaterial, since nothing material is capable of complete self-reflexivity.[22] Self-reflexive thought is hard to achieve, Augustine warns, in part because we are easily distracted by our love of material objects and in part because it is difficult to think without making use of material images, whether appropriate or not (*Trin.* 10.7.10 and 10.10.13–16). Yet there is a more fundamental question. What is the content of successful self-reflexive thought, that is, what is it for the mind as a whole to know itself as a whole? Augustine takes up this question in *De Trinitate* 14.6.8, where he argues that the mind's awareness of its subjectivity *qua* subjectivity is what constitutes the mind as self-actualized in thinking – very roughly, being nondiscursively aware that being (not merely 'having') a point of view is what constitutes the thinking subject, i.e. the mind as mind.[23]

The mind is the subject for thinking. If we broaden our view to encompass other mental activities, such as remembering or imagining, then Augustine holds that in these cases too we have a direct and immediate awareness of our psychological states – that is, we have nonrepresentational knowledge of what we find in ourselves. He offers a survey of *memoria* in *Confessions* 10: in addition to direct cognitive contact with Platonic Forms, the laws of numbers and shapes, and in general truth and falsehood, the mind also contains immediate awareness of feelings (*affectiones animi*), a category broad enough to include emotions, volitions, and pleasure/pain; skills and abilities; and, finally, representational states, which (*a*) we are directly aware of as mental states, and (*b*) function as means by which we have indirect cognitive contact with what such states represent: imaginings, sensings, rememberings. Whatever their success at (*b*), we are immediately (noninferentially) acquainted with them as mental states. The mind is also capable of forming representations of at least some of the things it knows nonrepresentationally. We can think about knowing how to ride a bicycle as well as simply being aware that we know how to ride a bicycle. Likewise, we can form second-order representations of representational states, as when we ask whether a memory is accurate or complete; we then are directly aware of representing a memory (itself a representational state).

Not everything in the realm of the mental is known directly. It is puzzling why the presence of pain in itself is painful whereas the representation of pain, say in a memory, is not (*conf*. 10.14.21). Again, the low-level mechanisms involved in memory proper are known only through inference: the taking of a ‘copy’ of a sense-impression; ‘storing’ that copy somewhere; ‘tagging’ it for later retrieval; and the process of ‘retrieval’ are all opaque to consciousness (*conf*. 10.8.12–13). Augustine’s later distinction between the mind strictly speaking, the rational soul, and the soul as a whole gives him room to distinguish cases of innermost knowledge from the sort of evidential or fallibilist knowledge we might have regarding, say, memories taken strictly, which are not different in kind from the sorts of things we know about the world in general.[24]

Empirical knowledge

Augustine declares that sensing is “for the soul not to overlook what takes place in the body” (*quant*. 23.41; see also 25.48). It is possible for external objects to causally affect the sense-organs without being sensed if the soul does ‘overlook’ them. Augustine therefore takes some form of mental attention (*attentio*) or directedness (*intentio*) to be necessary for sensation; consequently, he is at pains to stress the active element in sensation and perception. He holds the common ancient ‘extromission’ theory of vision, for example, in which “something luminous” in the eyes (*mus*. 6.5.10) is shot forth from the pupil to touch whatever is seen (*Trin*. 9.3.3), almost instantaneously reaching them (*ep*. 137.8); the eyes are the ‘window’ through which the mind may look out at the world (*en. Ps*. 41.7), directing its gaze hither and thither (*quant*. 23.43). More exactly, the soul moves air (*spiritus*) through the nerves, understood as narrow tubes, between the various sense-organs and the anterior cerebral ventricle (*Gn. litt*. 7.18.24) to trigger the active element in the sense-organ.[25] Sensing occurs because the soul sets up a ‘contrary motion’ to that engendered in the nerves by the physiological changes that external objects cause in the sense-organ – in the case of vision, when the extromitted ray touches the external object – so that “sensing is moving the body counter to the motion engendered in it” (*mus*. 6.5.15), as though the external object ‘pushed’ the body and the soul were pushing back.[26] What goes for vision applies *mutatis mutandis* to the other senses. The physiological changes that take place in the respective sense-organs are thus necessary conditions for sensation.

Physiology is only part of the story, however. The material changes that take place in the body serve as the physical substratum for the form to be transmitted from the external object to the soul. Each of the five external senses has its own proper object, so that sight is the only sense that perceives color, hearing sound, smell odor, taste flavor, touch texture; there are also common objects, such as shape, number, and unity, which can be perceived by more than one of the external senses (*lib. arb.* 2.3.8.25–26).[27] There is in addition an “internal sense” that receives and integrates the deliverances of the external senses, and provides information about what should be pursued or avoided. Unlike the external senses, the internal sense can “sense” and distinguish among them (*lib. arb.* 2.3.8.26–2.4.10.40).[28] Augustine describes perception as follows: “The following points are clear: physical objects are sensed by bodily sense; an [external] sense cannot be sensed by the selfsame sense; physical objects are sensed by the internal sense through bodily sense, as well as bodily sense itself; reason acquaints us with all the foregoing, as well as with reason itself, and knowledge includes them” (*lib. arb.* 2.4.10.41). We are not given details of how these stages take place, or why the process should result in knowledge.

Augustine remedies these deficiencies in his account of perception in *De Trinitate* 11.[29] Consider what happens when Socrates sees a sheep. The sheep is an object that is a substantial composite of matter and form (the “form-in-the-object”).[30] Socrates is a cognitive subject having a rational mind, internal sense, and external senses; he is alive, animated by his whole soul, and his sense-organs are thereby animate as well; they are part of a living being, and when undamaged are responsive to his will and to causal influences from without. A ‘living’ eye as part of a living body will respond in certain ways to external objects, unlike an eye in a corpse. Three things have to happen for Socrates to see the sheep. First, the mind fixes its attention on the sheep by directing the eyes (sense-organ) at the sheep and, as noted above, shooting out the luminous ray that is the physical aspect of vision. This binds together the object and the sensing of the object. Secondly, the sheep causally affects the sense-organ, or more precisely the form-in-the-sheep causes a change in Socrates’ eyes; this change is physically located in the eye, though it occurs only in virtue of the eye being properly animated. These physical effects in the sense-organ are the sorts of things typically caused in normal animated eyes in normal circumstances. Since the effect (re)organizes the physical matter of the eye, it must be a form informing the matter of the eye, and indeed the form correlative to the form-in-the-object; call it the form-in-the-sense. It is not literally the same form as the form-in-the-object, though it is systematically correlated with it, and thereby can be said to represent the external object. Thirdly, the cause is simultaneous with its effect. If the sheep wanders out of sight, the form-in-the-sense ceases to exist. The effect of the external object on the sense-organ is like that of a body in water, which displaces the water as long as it is present but when removed the water returns to its previous state. The form-in-the-sense can, however, leave physical traces behind. Visual afterimages are “remains of the form,” for instance. It may also leave behind a representation stored in memory (the form-in-memory). Augustine suggests that the creation and retention of the form-in-memory requires a distinct act of the will; we choose to remember something when we do. In a case of occurrent perception, the sense of sight does not distinguish the form-in-the-object from the form-in-the-sense; it deduces the existence of the latter from the (successful) seeing of the object, which thus takes place by means of the form-in-the-object. Although the form-in-the-sense is a representation of the object (in virtue of being a likeness of the form-in-the-object), Augustine is clear that Socrates sees the sheep rather than the form-in-the-sense. When the sheep is absent the mind can recollect the form-in-the-memory and bring it before the mind's eye (*acies mentis*), thereby thinking of the (absent) sheep through the form-as-regarded (the "inner phantasm"). Therefore, when Socrates recalls the sheep he encountered in the meadow earlier, Augustine holds that an adequate analysis has to postulate four forms and three acts of will: the form-in-the-object, the form-in-the-sense, the form-in-memory, and the form-as-regarded; the will joining the object to the sense, the will joining the sense to the memory, and the will joining the memory to the mind's eye – though Socrates' present seeing of the sheep needs only the first two forms and the the first act of will.

For perception to count as knowledge there must be an epistemic warrant underwriting it, which turns a complex causal story into an account of knowledge. Augustine is usually taken to be a reliabilist, trusting the process described above to work reliably well. However, Augustine offers the following remark about empirical knowledge in *De Trinitate* 15.12.24: "Far be it from us to doubt that the things we have learned through the bodily senses are true! Through them we learned about the heaven and the earth, and the things in them that are known to us, to the extent that He who fashioned both us and them wanted us to come to know them."

There is a general epistemic presumption in favor of the bodily senses on the grounds that they were designed by God so that we might come to know external things.[31] This is not to say they are always right, but it shifts the burden of the argument to establishing a reason for doubt in a given case, rather than thinking that perceptual illusion casts its shadow over each case regardless of circumstances. Rather, the senses were meant to provide us with knowledge and in the absence of defeating conditions can be taken to do so. God's benevolence guarantees that although we may occasionally go wrong in claiming to know things via sense-perception, we will not go far wrong.[32] Accordingly, Augustine adopts a modified fallibilism: "In all cases of perception, the testimony of the other senses and above all that of mind and reason is brought in, so that the truth appropriate to this sort of thing may be found, insofar as it can be" (*Gn. litt.* 12.25.52). We can correct our providentially reliable perceptions by the evidence of other perceptions and the exercise of reason. If we do so systematically we have empirical science.

Augustine recognizes that there are empirical sciences, such as zoology and history, made up of empirical reports rather than being based on "unchangeable wisdom" (*Trin.* 4.16.21), but most sciences have at least a mixed character, and Augustine's comments on astronomy are sensitive to the demands of empirical knowledge. He tells us that "philosophers" – in this case, astronomers – have investigated the heavens using intelligence and observation, and "have discovered a great deal": rules for calculating eclipses, for instance, which have "turned out exactly as they predicted" regarding the date and the type of eclipse (*conf*. 5.3.4). Reason and observation have led them to the truth (*conf*. 5.3.5), uncovering "the rational and mathematical order of the world, the order of the seasons, and the visible evidence of the stars" (*conf*. 5.3.6). The ability to make true predictions "amaze[s] those who are ignorant of these matters." Astronomy consists in well-confirmed hypotheses (*coniecturas certas*: *doc. Chr*. 2.29.46). Augustine seems to recognize experimental disconfirmation, too, which he applies to astrology. He reports a story about two children born at the same time and the same place whose fortunes in life nevertheless differed dramatically, although their horoscopes should have been identical (*conf*. 7.6.8). Augustine concludes that this "experiment" shows that astrology is not knowledge (*conf*. 7.3.9).[33] While Augustine thought empirical knowledge a distraction from genuine wisdom, he recognized its credentials as knowledge nonetheless.

Social epistemology

Augustine is one of the first philosophers to recognize testimony as a source of knowledge, at least in his later writings.[34] His many examples of testimonial reports concern (*i*) foreign places, (*ii*) histories of people and nations, (*iii*) current events, and (*iv*) a hearer's own biographical information.[35] Augustine makes the following remark about the epistemic status of testimony:

> Far be it from us, too, to deny that we know what we have learned from the testimony of others! Otherwise we do not know that there is an Ocean; we do not know that the places and cities that widespread report describes to us exist; we do not know that the men and the works of theirs we learned about by reading histories have existed; we do not know the news brought to us daily from all over and confirmed by evidence that is consistent and convincing; and, finally, we do not know where or from which persons we sprang – for we believe all these things on the testimonies of others. But if it's supremely ridiculous to say this, then it should be granted that not only our senses but those of other people contributed greatly to our knowledge (*scientia*).
>
> (*Trin*. 15.12.21)

The reason given here for an epistemic warrant in favor of testimonial knowledge is not persuasive; it begs the question by assuming that we do have such knowledge. However, the pattern of his discussion bears out the strategy outlined above relative to empirical knowledge.[36] In his *De fide rerum invisibilium*, Augustine imagines the result of people apportioning belief only to what is perceived and claims that attitudes of "mutual charity" and "good will" would cease: a husband and wife would lack affection toward one another; parents would love children less; kindness would not be expressed between friends (*f. invis.* 2.4). In order to keep such problems at bay, Augustine recommends an ethic of belief whereby a person ought to have attitudes of charity and good will toward others (as opposed to a "faithless lack of reverence"). These attitudes enable a person to believe what in others cannot be perceived, such as affection, kindness, and honesty. Maintaining charity and good will toward others does not presuppose that a person must first test or evaluate others to determine whether such attitudes are appropriate. Indeed, a person ought to "believe in the hearts of friends though these hearts be not yet truly tried" (*f. invis.* 2.3). To call into question a friend's trustworthiness is to be no friend at all. But friendship is central to charity, and, along with a general commendation of "good will," Augustine recommends we have it toward all. Briefly: we should extend the privileges of friendship even to strangers, giving their testimony the same default epistemic status.

As for testimony-based belief, Augustine says that in situations when it seems to the hearer that the testifier is trustworthy, the hearer should believe the report, and otherwise not. Discussing a particular testifier's report: "If I hold him to be lying, I do not believe him, even though perhaps it is as he says. Therefore, we believe things that are not present to our senses as long as what the testimony says seems appropriate" (*ep.* 147.2.7). Augustine's proposal may be tidied up somewhat. First, Augustine requires a hearer to maintain a default position of charity and good will toward others. This requirement obligates the hearer to believe what a testifier reports, unless it seems to the hearer that the testifier is untrustworthy. Secondly, there are two ways in which a testifier's report may claim something so that it "seems appropriate" to a hearer. Take first a case where a testifier has been tested or evaluated in a variety of situations and has been determined to be generally trustworthy. In another case, the general trustworthiness of a testifier is undetermined, but a particular report is confirmed and supported by additional evidence (either testimonial or non-testimonial) – for, as he says in *De Trinitate* 15.12.21, certain reports are "confirmed by evidence that is consistent and convincing." These cases raise a distinction between a testifier's trustworthiness and the trustworthiness of a report. The general epistemic warrant governing testimony is that someone should accept a testifier's report unless it seems to her that either the testifier or the report is untrustworthy.[37] Like ordinary empirical knowledge, testimonial knowledge is defeasible, but its claims to knowledge are underwritten by a specific warrant.

In contemporary discussions of testimony, philosophers are divided on the issue of whether non-testimonial evidence is required, at least in principle, to yield testimonial-based knowledge. Some claim that a hearer's testimony-based knowledge (or, often, justification) depends upon the hearer possessing further independent evidence or reasons, that is, non-testimonial evidence. Accordingly, all testimony-based knowledge is reducible to non-testimony-based knowledge. Others have claimed that a hearer can have testimony-based knowledge without possessing evidence or reasons that are independent of any instance of testimony. Augustine falls within the latter camp. He gives examples of testimony-based beliefs that count as knowledge for which no sufficient non-testimonial evidence could be offered. For instance, a testimonial report concerning the identity of a hearer's parents is what we've called distant, that is, testimony that cannot be supported using non-testimonial evidence. Even the testifier is "unable to demonstrate the fact because the event is already in the past" (*f. invis*. 2.4). Yet Augustine thinks a hearer can know, for example, the identity of his parents through distant testimonial report. Consequently, Augustine denies that a hearer's testimony-based knowledge must be supported by non-testimonial evidence, even though it may be, not requiring any expansion of the epistemic warrant given above.

All translations are mine.

Endnotes

1 Augustine writes that the skeptical position is "nicely protected and fortified, as it usually seemed to me *when I was peddling it*" (*c. Acad*. 3.15.34 [my emphasis]). Hence Augustine defended skepticism publicly – which fits well with *Confessions* 5.10.19, filling out his "despair at finding the truth" after his Manichaean phase, as described in *Contra Academicos* 2.1.1, *Retractationes* 1.1.1, and *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate* 7.20.

2 Augustine derives his knowledge of skepticism mainly from Cicero's *Academica* (which he possessed in a more complete state than we do), and so identifies it with Academic Skepticism, knowing little to nothing about the tradition of Pyrrhonian Skepticism found in authors such as Sextus Empiricus.

3 Augustine is guilty of overstatement here; he is only entitled to conclude that it is at least as plausible that the wise man knows something as that he knows nothing. He emphasizes that this is his conclusion: *Contra Academicos* 3.14.30, 3.14.31, and the close of his monologue at 3.20.43.

4 Augustine notes that an oar partially submerged in water looks bent, which is exactly how a straight oar in water should look given the laws of optics; the same point holds in other cases (*c. Acad.* 3.11.26).

5 See Grellard 2004 and Perler 2006 regarding the history of medieval skepticism.

6 In *De civitate Dei* 11.26 Augustine discusses knowledge of our existence, so that "I know that I exist" is the relevant claim. No difference is signaled by his use of 'existence' (*sum*) rather than life (*uiuo*) in presenting the argument. The distinction he draws in *De libero arbitrio* 2.3.7.22, for example, among things that (merely) exist, things that are alive, and things that understand is such that human beings clearly fall into the latter class – and the point is to underline the fact that only certain living beings have cognitive states.

7 Augustine's procedure is different in *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate* 7.20 and *De civitate Dei* 11.26. In the former, he argues that the skeptic who does not assent to the claim that he knows that he is alive is nevertheless *ipso facto* entitled to assent to the claim that he is alive, and "therefore it is not only true but certain that we are alive." In the latter, he imagines a skeptic asking how Augustine knows he is not mistaken, prompting Augustine's reply "If I am mistaken, I exist" (*Si fallor, sum*). Commentators have identified this reply as a source for Descartes, although in Augustine's argument it is subordinate to his main point about the certainty of knowledge that one is alive.

8 Augustine refers to them as Forms, Ideas, species, principles, reasons, and rules/standards; they are all ways of referring to the same Platonic entities. Augustine's most compact presentation of his understanding of the Theory of Forms is in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 46.

9 The "forms in things" Augustine talks about in *De libero arbitrio* 2.16.44–46 may be what he elsewhere calls *rationes seminales*, aligning a Stoic doctrine with Plato's remarks about "the Forms in us" (*Phaedo* 102B–E); there are early reflections on whether there are Forms of individuals in *Epistulae* 14.4. Augustine also identifies the realm of Forms as a totality, the *intelligibilis mundus* (the κόσμος νοητός of Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.8.11.36), as the Word (λόγος) expressed in the second person of the Trinity, the principle through which God makes all things (*c. Faust.* 2.5; *Jo. ev. tr.* 1.9; *s.* 252.1; *retr.* 1.3.2).

10 Plato, *Phaedo* 72D–76A and *Meno* 81E–85B. Augustine's knowledge of the Theory of Recollection seems to be derived from Cicero, *Tusculan disputations* 1.24.57. He appears to endorse it in *Epistulae* 7.1.2, *Soliloquia* 2.20.34–35, *De animae quantitate*

20.34, and perhaps *De libero arbitrio* 1.12.24.81. There is controversy whether Augustine's language is literal or figurative; see Miner 2007 and Siebert 2013.

11 Among his early works see *De Genesi adversus Manicheos* 2.10 and *De libero arbitrio* 3.20.56–59; for the later works see *De Genesi ad litteram* 10, *Epistula* 166 and 190, *De civitate Dei* 12.23, and the declaration in *Retractationes* 1.1.3 that he did not know the answer when he wrote his *Contra Academicos* and still does not know it.

12 Augustine mentions (*d*) as early as *De magistro* 11.38 to explain differential success in coming to understand something; see also *De civitate Dei* 11.27.2.

13 Whether the phenomenology of learning needs to be taken into account in a theory of understanding is a matter of debate: see King 1998.

14 Ancient commentators on Plato drew connections between the soul's 'vision' of the Forms and the role played by the Form of the Good in *Republic* VI 508B–E in making other Forms intelligible; the later Platonic tradition sometimes speaks of seeing things in its light, as for example Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.7–8 and 6.7.23.1; see Nash 1971. But the language is typically left metaphorical, even when the metaphor is extended, unlike Augustine's attempt to explain it in terms of divine activity.

15 Augustine describes the source of the unique immaterial 'light' in many ways, but they all boil down to God (and specifically Christ as the begotten Word of the Father), who is Truth as well as the Supreme Good and Reason Itself (see *Gn. litt.* 12.31.59).

16 Does God directly cause each occurrent act of knowing ('special illumination'), or does God merely establish the natural order in such a way that occurrent acts of knowing take place in appropriate circumstances ('general illumination')? The issue was extensively debated in the Middle Ages, but without resolution.

17 See MacDonald 2012. The passages in the *Confessions* are less puzzling if we read *memoria* = "awareness," for then Augustine is claiming only that we are aware of eternal truths. Since he also says that he finds God in his *memoria* (10.25.36–26.37), this reading is plausible.

18 Augustine had clearly been (re)reading the Platonist tradition on self-knowledge: see Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3. Some of the Plotinian background is covered in Horn 2000 and Emilsson 2007.

[19] See Matthews 1992 and Brittain 2012a and 2012b for these points.

[20] He makes this point in *De Trinitate* 8.6.9 and reiterates it at 9.3.3; it lies behind his claim that nothing is more present to the mind than the mind itself (see *Trin*. 10.3.5 and 10.7.10), which he means as an improvement over his formulation in *Confessions* 10.7.26. The mind's self-presence is at work in our knowledge that we are alive: see *De Trinitate* 10.4.6 and 10.10.14, passages which lay the groundwork for 15.12.21.

[21] See Brachtendorf 2000, Horn 2012, and especially Brittain 2012a. Augustine revisits and expands these considerations in *De Trinitate* 14.8–10.

[22] The argument that material objects are not able to have complete self-reflexivity is standard in the later Platonist tradition: see e.g. Porphyry, *Sententiae* 41.

[23] The argument in *De Trinitate* 14.6.8 is analyzed in Brachtendorf 2000. An alternate analysis is presented in Brittain 2012a, who proposes that Augustinian self-thinking thought is a matter of the mind grasping itself as "this individual consciousness (an empty consciousness, as it were, whose content can vary with time)" (p. 329). Augustine further aligns self-thinking thought as a permanent actuality constituting the mind, with a proper trinitarian structure, of which we may become occurrently aware.

[24] See Bubacz 1981 on memory.

[25] See O'Daly 1987 ch. 3 for references and details.

[26] The soul can set up the countermotion since it is commingled, or mixed, or incompletely fused with the body, all Augustine's descriptions of the union of soul and body.

[27] The doctrine of proper and common objects of perception derives from Aristotle, *De anima* 2 418a9–19.

[28] See also *Confessiones* 7.17.23. Augustine is likely influenced by Plotinus: *Enarrationes in Psalmo* 4.8.8.10.

[29] Augustine describes the basics of perception in *De Trinitate* 11.2.2–5, the parallel case of memory in 11.2.6–5.8 (since the immediate result of a perception is the creation

of a memory-trace), and the role of the will in each in 11.6.10–9.16 (the will being the faculty that exercises attention).

30 Augustine speaks of *formae*, *imagines*, and *species* in discussing perception, all rendered here as 'form.'

31 Augustine's epistemic presumption is a consequence of his distinction between knowledge (*scientia*) and wisdom (*sapientia*), since the former is the divinely sanctioned use of our minds in regard to things of this world.

32 Augustine's attempt to justify sense-perception based on God's benevolent intention that it be a source of knowledge for us about external objects is analogous to Descartes' attempt in his *Meditations* to justify the deliverances of the senses based on God's non-deceptiveness and benevolent intention for them to inform us reliably about external objects. (How close the analogy is depends on the reading one has of *Med.* 6.) Their overall strategy seems to be the same. Descartes' assertion to Colvius in his letter of November 14, 1640 that Augustine's philosophical project and his are entirely unlike (*deux choses fort différentes*) is at best disingenuous (Adam-Tannery III, 247–48).

33 Augustine mentions the same case in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 45.2. The case of identical twins with different life histories was cited by Carneades against the astrologers.

34 The account here is based on King and Ballantyne 2009; a different view is given in Siebert 2014. Augustine argues in his early writings that it is impossible to gain knowledge from testimony – in fact, he argues that it is impossible for anyone to transfer information to anyone else: see King 1998.

35 For (*i*) see *Confessions* 6.5.7, *De Trinitate* 15.12.21, and *De fide rerum invisibilium* 2.4; for (*ii*) see *De utilitate credendi* 11.25, *De fide rerum invisibilium* 2.4, *Confessions* 6.5.7, *De Trinitate* 15.12.21, *Epistula* 147.1.5; for (*iii*) see *De Trinitate* 15.12.21; for (*iv*) see *De utilitate credendi* 12.26, *Confessions* 6.5.7, *De fide rerum invisibilium* 2.4, *De Trinitate* 15.12.21, and *Epistula* 147.1.5.

36 Augustine also endorses testimony as a form of knowledge in *Epistulae* 147.1.5 and *De civitate Dei* 11.3.

37 Augustine allows testimonial chains in *De Trinitate* 14.8.11, so this warrant should govern the trustworthiness of the whole testimonial chain (and presumably the accuracy of transmission of the report). One way a report might be suspect is if it is based on unreliable memory (*Trin*. 11.8.14).

9 Augustine on free will

Eleonore Stump

Introduction

There is an enormous scholarly literature on Augustine's account of free will, and it is remarkable for the range of views it contains. Historians of philosophy read Augustine on free will so variously that it is sometimes difficult to believe they are reading the same texts.

One might suppose that this divergence of views is less a difference of historical opinion about Augustine's account of the will than a difference of philosophical opinion about the nature of free will.[1] But even scholars who are careful to make explicit what they mean by 'free will' still don't agree about the nature of Augustine's theory of free will.[2]

In my view, the confusing difference of interpretation in the literature arises at least in part because presenting Augustine's theory of free will adequately requires the application of some philosophical nuances that scholars have not generally brought to bear on his texts.

De libero arbitrio

To understand Augustine's conception of free will, it is helpful to begin with his treatise on free will, *De libero arbitrio*.

It is a common scholarly opinion that Augustine's views on the nature of free will, and particularly on the relation of free will and grace, developed over the course of his writings, especially in consequence of his controversy with the Pelagians. Augustine's early views on the will's freedom are laid out in his treatise *De libero arbitrio*, and some scholars go so far as to suppose that Augustine later repudiated his views in that treatise.[3]

It is certainly true that over the course of time Augustine developed his views on the relation of free will and grace, as he himself makes clear in some of his late writings. In *De dono perseverantiae*, for example, Augustine complains that he has as much right as anyone to grow and develop in his views and that he should not be held to defending now views he presented so much earlier in *De libero arbitrio* (*persev.* 12.30). But here the issue is not the nature of free will itself; the issue is the state and condition of infants. In *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, he confesses to an error about the will and grace in an earlier treatise (*praed. sanct.* 3.7), but what concerns him in this case is his exposition of a passage in Romans, and the error in question has to do with whether faith is a gift of God.

As far as his account of free will in *De libero arbitrio* is concerned, what Augustine himself says in the *Retractationes* is just that his views of grace were undeveloped, not that his views of free will were wrong. On the contrary, in the *Retractationes* he asserts vigorously that the Pelagians are mistaken to think he ever held a view of free will like theirs, that is, a view of free will that makes the freedom of the will independent of divine grace (*retr.* 1.9).

On his own account, then, Augustine does not repudiate his *basic* view of the freedom of the will in *De libero arbitrio* even during the Pelagian controversy. It is therefore worthwhile to look carefully at his theory of free will in that early treatise.

As Augustine reminds his readers in the *Retractationes* (*retr.* 1.9), he claims in *De libero arbitrio* that anything good in a human person, including any goodness in the will, is a gift from God (*lib. arb.* 2.19.50). On his view in the *De libero arbitrio*, then, human beings are unable to form a good volition unless God produces it in them or cooperates in producing it.[4] Nonetheless, when human beings will to sin, according to Augustine they are culpable.

It apparently follows that a person can be morally responsible for a sinful act of will even when it was not possible for her not to will to sin. It seems, then, that for Augustine in *De libero arbitrio* it is not requisite for moral responsibility that an agent have the ability to do otherwise.[5] That is, Augustine apparently rejects what some philosophers take to be a condition on libertarian free will, namely,

> (L2) an agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act, only if he could have done otherwise.[6]

I have put this conclusion in a hedged way, because some reasons will emerge for reconsidering it; but even with that reconsideration, this much remains true: for Augustine, a person who is unaided by grace cannot do otherwise than sin, and yet she is morally responsible for the sin she does.

On the other hand, in *De libero arbitrio* Augustine does apparently accept some version of another of the standard conditions for libertarianism, namely,

> (L1) an agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act,[7] only if the act is not causally determined by anything outside the agent.

For example, Augustine insists that human beings would not be culpable if their will were constrained by any necessity or by their nature (*lib. arb.* 3.1.1).[8] So Augustine rejects compatibilism. He rejects as unfree a causally determined will.

If (L1) entailed (L2), then it would be perplexing or worse to find Augustine accepting (L1) and rejecting (L2). But, as I explained elsewhere, (L1) does not in fact entail (L2).[9] It is possible for an agent to act indeterministically and yet not have alternative possibilities for action. That is because there are more ways of limiting the alternatives for action to only one besides having something act on the will with causal necessity.

Augustine's own explanations of why a post-Fall human will cannot will the good without grace is not developed in detail, but all his explanations are in terms of what the will itself wants, rather than in terms of anything like externally imposed necessity. So, for example, he says, "the mind becomes a slave of sinful desire only by its own will" (*lib. arb.* 3.1.2), and elsewhere he says, "What remains is [the conclusion] that . . . nothing else makes the mind the ally of evil desire except its own will and free choice" (*lib. arb.* 1.11.21). For a post-Fall human being, on Augustine's view, the alternatives for willing are limited not by causal necessity or even by counterfactual interveners,[10] but by what the agent himself fervently wants.[11]

Finally, Augustine's insistence that a will determined by nature or causal necessity is not a free will (in fact, is not a will at all, properly speaking) and certain other things he says about the nature of the will strongly suggest that he accepts still another condition some philosophers accept on libertarian free will,[12] namely,

> (L3) an agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act, only if her own intellect and will[13] are the sole ultimate source or first cause[14] of her act.[15]

So, for example, Augustine says, "There are two sources of sins, one from our own thought and one from the persuasion of someone else . . . and each is voluntary. For just as no one sins unwillingly by his own thought, so when he consents to someone persuading him to evil, he consents just by [his own] will" (*lib. arb.* 3.10.29).[16]

Elsewhere, when Augustine is trying to explain why post-Fall human beings do not will the good, his explanation is couched in terms of intellect and will as well. Post-Fall human beings are unable to do what is good, he says, either because they are ignorant of what the good is in a given case or because although they see the good and want to have a will that wills it, they find doing so too difficult (*lib. arb.* 3.18.30–32). Augustine's main explanation for the culpable evil post-Fall human beings will is both their ignorance and their difficulty in governing their own wills (that is, in making first-order volitions conform to good second-order desires). Here, too, then, intellect and will are picked out as the ultimate causes of acts for which agents are morally responsible.

In addition, when Augustine explains his view of the way in which the will functions, he ties it closely to the mind. A person who wills has to will something, he says, and unless this something were suggested by the bodily senses or arose in some way in the mind, the will would not will it (*lib. arb.* 3.25.75).[17]

It looks, then, as if Augustine's position in *De libero arbitrio* is one kind of libertarianism.[18] There is, however, a certain additional complexity to Augustine's position in this early treatise which is crucial to see, because it challenges this classification of his position.

In explaining the culpability of post-Fall human evil, Augustine takes a somewhat surprising stand. According to him, neither ignorance of the good nor weakness of will is itself culpable. What post-Fall human beings are culpable for is not the corruption of their post-Fall nature but something very different:

> There is everywhere present someone who in many ways, by means of creatures who serve him as lord, calls the man who is turned away [from him], teaches the man who believes, consoles the man who hopes, exhorts the man who loves, helps the man who strives, [and] hears the man who prays. And so it is not attributed to you as a fault that you lack knowledge unwillingly, but that you fail to seek the knowledge you do not have. And it is not attributed to you as a fault that you fail to bind up the parts [of yourself] which are wounded but that you disdain him who is willing to heal them. These are your own sins. For no man has taken away from him the knowledge that it is beneficial to seek what it is not beneficial to lack knowledge of or [the knowledge] that [his] weakness should be confessed with humility. And so a man, seeking and confessing, will be aided by [God], who neither toils nor errs when he gives aid.
>
> (*lib. arb.* 3.19.53)

And elsewhere in the same treatise he says, "The soul is charged with guilt, not because by nature it lacks knowledge or is incapable, but because it did not make an effort to know and because it did not work adequately at acquiring the capability of doing well" (*lib. arb.* 3.22.64).

> [The soul] does not know what it should do because it has not yet received [this knowledge]; but it will receive this too if it uses well what it has received. What it has received is [the ability] to seek carefully and devotedly if it is willing [to do so]. [The soul] has also not yet received [the ability] to carry out immediately what it knows that it should do . . . so from this very difficulty the soul is prompted to plead with him who helps it to perfection.
>
> (*lib. arb.* 3.22.65)

Here Augustine is apparently thinking of God as always willing to give grace to any person who wants God to give it to him, either in the form of knowledge about what is to be done, or in the form of grace which strengthens the will in the good. For Augustine, therefore, a person who sins in ignorance is nonetheless culpable – not for the ignorance in which he sins but because the ignorance that results in his sin is his own fault. He did not seek the knowledge he needed when he could have done so; if he had sought it, God would have given it to him. Similarly, a person who is unable to will the good on his own is nonetheless culpable for the evil he does, because he could have asked God to help his will; and if he had done so, God would have given him the help he needs to do the good.

So although for Augustine in *De libero arbitrio* it is true in one sense that a post-Fall human being is unable to will not to sin, in another sense it is false. A post-Fall human being is not able to bring his first-order volitions under the control of his good second-order desires, and in this sense he is unable to will not to sin. But his good second-order desire is enough to enable him to form the first-order volition to ask God to strengthen his will in good; and when he does, God gives him the strength of will he wants and needs. In this sense, even a post-Fall human being *is* able to will not to sin.

Since this is Augustine's position, it is not as clear as it first seemed that in *De libero arbitrio* Augustine rejects the condition in (L2). Furthermore, the things he says about a person's asking for grace to help his will suggests that Augustine accepts (L1) in this form:

(L1') an agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act, only if the act is not *ultimately* causally determined by anything outside the agent.

A further and much more important issue, which threatens the classification of Augustine's position as libertarian of any sort, depends on what Augustine has to say about good second-order desires, a matter which will be addressed below.

Augustine's theory of free will in his later works

Even in his later treatises, Augustine is insistent that post-Fall human beings have free will. Among other reasons for thinking so, he maintains that the exhortations of Scripture would be pointless unless human beings have free will (*gr. et lib. arb.* 2.2). So, for example, he says,

> One must not think that free choice has been removed because [the Apostle] said, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do, of [his] good will." Because if this were so, he would not have said above, "Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling." For when it is commanded that they work, their free will is invoked.
> (*gr. et lib. arb.* 9.21)

In his controversy with the Pelagians, he emphasizes the point he made even in *De libero arbitrio*, that post-Fall human beings are unable to will not to sin unless their will is aided by grace; but he argues that God gives grace to the intellect and will of a person who desires it. By his grace God gave the law, so that people might know what they should do, and that, knowing it, they might ask God for help in doing it.[19]

He also continues to maintain his earlier explanation of the post-Fall inability to will the good. It stems from ignorance and difficulty, but the remedy for ignorance and difficulty is readily available. In *De natura et gratia*, for example, he quotes *De libero arbitrio* and reemphasizes the point he made there: ignorance and difficulty are not themselves culpable; what is culpable is just the failure to seek God's help with them (*nat. et gr*. 47.81).

Many of the places scholars point to in support of their claim that Augustine is a compatibilist are in fact places where what is at issue is the governance of first-order volitions by good second-order desires. So, for example, Gerard O'Daly maintains that the "concept of a will that is morally determined represents Augustine's mature thought on the subject";[20] and he cites *De gratia Christi* 18.19–20.21 as a text in which Augustine maintains that the "causes of good and evil actions are twofold good and evil wills, determined in turn by grace or sin."[21] But in the immediately preceding text, when Augustine is explaining the difference between law and grace, he says that grace produces sweetness, rather than fear, and that is why we pray to God "in your sweetness teach me your righteousness . . . so that I am not forced to be under the law as a slave out of fear of punishment but that I might have delight with a free love in the law" (*gr. et pecc. or*. 13.14). Here the person praying has a second-order desire that God might strengthen his first-order will in goodness; the determination of the will by grace works together with the human second-order desire for that grace. That is why Augustine goes on to say that in such a case the will is *helped* by grace (*gr. et pecc. or*. 14.15).

Passages such as the one cited by O'Daly are thus not enough to show whether Augustine rejects even the condition in (L2), let alone whether he rejects the condition in (L1'). Augustine himself makes this point clearly in one of his rejoinders to the Pelagians. He cites a passage from Pelagius in which Pelagius accuses Augustine of inconsistency. Certain words of Augustine's in *De libero arbitrio* commit him to accepting that human free will has the ability to do otherwise, Pelagius says, whereas now (Pelagius claims) Augustine is trying to argue against the Pelagians that human free will is unable not to will to sin. In response, Augustine says:

> I acknowledge it, these are my words [in *De libero arbitrio*]; but [Pelagius] might also find it appropriate to acknowledge all that was said previously [in *De libero arbitrio*]. In fact, the subject [there] is the grace of God, which aids us as a medicine through the mediator, and not the impossibility of righteousness. Whatever, then, may be the cause [of the state of the will], [unrighteousness] can be

> resisted. Plainly it can. For this is why we ask for help, when we say, “Do not bring us into temptation,” and we would not plead for help if we believed that there was no way to resist it. It is possible to ward off sin, but by the aid of him who cannot be deceived.
>
> (*nat. et gr*. 67.80)[22]

Here Augustine agrees at least so far with Pelagius as to accept the claim that post-Fall human beings have the ability to will not to sin and so the ability to do otherwise – provided that we understand this ability in the right way, as stemming from God’s giving grace in response to a person’s asking for it.

Whether Augustine would go so far as to suppose that the ability to do otherwise is essential to free will is not made clear by this passage. There are certainly passages in various treatises which imply that he would not. So, for example, in *De natura et gratia* he says that if we accepted this condition on free will, which he takes to be absurd, we would have to suppose that God is good of necessity since it is not open to him to will to sin (*nat. et gr*. 46.54). And in *Opus imperfectum contra Julianum*, he says to his opponent, “if, as you say, only the possibility of willed good and willed evil is freedom, then God does not have freedom, since there is no possibility of sinning in him” (*c. Jul. imp*. 6.11).

Whether Augustine’s view of free will in *De libero arbitrio* constitutes libertarianism is open to question; but these passages indicate that at least in his later treatises he rejects the condition in (L2).[23] Furthermore, since he is willing to allow a free will to be determined by God at the first-order level in response to a second-order desire for God’s doing so, he clearly accepts the condition in (L1) only in the form it takes in (L1’), if he continues to accept it at all in his treatises on the Pelagian controversy. Finally, he thinks that a person’s intellect and will must be the source of what she does, as the remarks about the remedy for post-Fall evil make clear. So if Augustine in his later treatises does in fact accept (L1’), his view of free will in his later period constitutes a less common kind of libertarianism.

Grace and faith

There is a real question whether Augustine accepts (L1’) in his anti-Pelagian treatises; and if he doesn’t, then since (L3) entails (L1’), Augustine must reject (L3) also. In that case, his account of free will is not libertarianism of any sort. The question arises because of what Augustine says about the second-order volition which is a crucial component of justifying faith. He describes this second-order volition variously as an acceptance of grace, a desire for a righteous will, a desire that God make the will good, a will to believe, or even just as faith.[24] For the sake of brevity, I will refer to it as the will of faith, where ‘will’ is to be understood as a second-order act of will or a second-order volition.

The particular nature of this act of will is not nearly as important for my purposes here as its origin. Where does this second-order volition come from? Is it also a gift from God and caused only by divine grace? If it is, then, the argument that Augustine's account of free will is libertarian appears to collapse like a house of cards.[25] One can argue that a person has libertarian free will even when his first-order will is causally determined by something else such as grace, as long as we can tell a story that makes it entirely up to that person that grace determines his will. We can even attribute to such a person the ability to do otherwise when his first-order volition is causally determined – but only if control of the causal determination operating on his will is ultimately up to him. If the control over a human agent's will with regard to the desire for grace were vested in God and not in the human agent, then the agent's grace-caused volitions would not meet the conditions for being free and responsible on any kind of libertarianism.

For theological as well as philosophical reasons, it certainly seems as if Augustine ought to deny that the will of faith is caused only by divine grace. If God causes this act of will, too, then a person's second-order volition for a good will is in God's control, not in the control of the willer. Furthermore, if God then responds to the second-order volition he has caused in a person and strengthens her first-order will in the good, the responsibility for this good also lies with God and not with her. And if God thus determines her will at the second-order as well as the first-order level, it is hard to see why her will should be thought of as free in any sense.[26] It is also difficult to ward off the conclusion that in this case God is responsible when a human will doesn't will the good since even the volition for a good will is in his control. Finally, on this position, it is hard to see why a good God wouldn't cause the will of faith in everyone, so that everyone is saved. As Augustine himself says regarding the second-order will of faith, "this is the question: where does [the will of faith] come from? . . . If it comes to us as a gift of God's, then why doesn't it come to everyone, since God wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth?" (*spir. et litt.* 33.57).

So there seems to be every reason for Augustine to reject the claim that the will of faith is a gift of God and caused by grace. There can be no doubt, however, that Augustine did in fact accept it.[27] As he puts it in one place, "without grace men can do no good, in thought, will and love, or action" (*corrept.* 2.3).

Nonetheless, Augustine also wants to maintain that human beings have free will and are solely responsible for their sins and that God wills all human beings to be saved, even the sinful who are in fact not saved. His attitude is summed up well in *De spiritu et littera* where he argues at length that the will of faith is caused by grace. "Are we then doing away with free choice through grace?" he asks; and he answers with vehemence, "God forbid!" (*absit*) (*spir. et litt.* 30.52).

There are texts where Augustine is plainly trying to make human beings at least a partial source of the will of faith. So, for example, in a famous passage in his sermons, cited later by Aquinas,[28] Augustine says, “He who made you without you does not justify you without you. And so he made you when you were unknowing; he justifies you when you are willing” (*s*. 169.11.13).[29] As his views on grace develop, however, Augustine becomes increasingly insistent that the will of faith is a gift of God in the sense that God alone is the cause of it. So, for example, in *De gratia et libero arbitrio* he says, “When he begins, God operates [in us] that we might will, and he cooperates with those who are willing when he perfects [us] . . . And so he operates without us that we might will; but when we will, and will in such a way that we act, he cooperates with us” (*gr. et lib. arb*. 17.33).

Augustine wants this theological position to be – somehow – compatible with the theory of free will he presented in his *De libero arbitrio*. In the *Retractationes*, when he is willing enough to retract earlier views of his and when his view of grace and faith has matured, he stands by his theory of free will in the early treatise. Rather than retracting his earlier theory of free will when he emphasizes the view that the will of faith comes from God, he struggles instead to find some way of reconciling the two. The main question for any evaluation of Augustine’s account of free will is, then, whether he can have both these positions. Is there after all some way in which even the will of faith can be caused by grace and yet ultimate control of the state of a human being’s will can be vested in that human being, rather than in God?

One attempt Augustine makes in some treatises to show that this is possible is to suggest that God offers this grace to everyone, but that it is open to human beings whether to reject it or accept it. So, for example, he says presciently,

> [An objector] might reply that we have to be careful lest someone suppose that the sin which is committed by free choice is to be attributed to God, if in [the passage] where it is said, “What do you have which you did not receive?” the will by which we believe is taken to be a gift of God’s . . . But to consent to the calling of God or to dissent from it belongs to the will itself . . . And this not only does not invalidate the saying, “For what do you have which you have not received?”, it in fact confirms it. For the soul cannot receive and have these gifts . . . except by consenting. And so whatever it has and whatever it receives comes from God, but to receive and to have comes from the one receiving and having.
>
> (*spir. et litt*. 34.60)

But Augustine doesn’t develop this line, and in the end he appears to have dropped it, as he had to do. If there is nothing good in a human being which she has not received, and if the consent to receive God’s grace is itself a good act of will, then that very consent also has to be a gift of God. And so sometimes Augustine takes the will of faith to be just the assent to grace itself. He says, “And so this grace, which is secretly given to human hearts by God’s generosity, is rejected by no hard heart. On the contrary, it is given just in order first to take away the hardness of the heart" (*praed. sanct.* 8.13).

Augustine also seems to try and then give up on a line which makes God's grace a matter of God's making the Gospel available, presenting people with good preachers, or even introducing thoughts into their minds so that they might come to hold certain beliefs, which would in turn prompt them to certain desires and volitions.[30] In this case, although God does all the work of bringing a person to belief, the human willer responds by believing, and the belief stimulates certain acts of will. The problem here is that Augustine himself takes believing to be thinking with assent.[31] And so the same problem as before arises: the assent to a belief, which is itself an act of will, must also be a gift of God if it is good.

In other places, Augustine espouses the somewhat different idea that God arranges the circumstances of our lives in such a way that we freely will to believe.[32] Here the idea seems to be that God knows what we would freely will in any given circumstances,[33] that there are circumstances in which everyone (or at any rate many people who in the actual world die faithless) would freely accept faith, and that God is able to bring about those circumstances. So, for example, Augustine says, "For if he had willed to teach even those for whom the word of the Cross is foolishness so that they might come to Christ, without doubt even they would have come" (*praed. sanct.* 8.14).

The problem with this idea is that it makes it up to God entirely whether or not a person forms the will of faith. Although in such a case a human being forms this volition without being caused by God to form it, it remains true that ultimate control over that person's will is vested not in the human person herself but in God. Although God doesn't act on the will with causal determination, God ultimately controls what that human being wills because God knows what free volitions will be produced in any given circumstances and he controls the circumstances. So here it is arguable both that the will of faith is a gift of God and that human beings have libertarian free will, but this position nonethless constitutes a Pyrrhic victory for Augustine because it simply raises all the hard questions again in a different form. For example, if this view of God's relations to the will is right, then why doesn't God arrange the circumstances in such a way that everyone wills to believe? And why shouldn't we think God responsible for any human failure to will the good since God puts sinners in circumstances in which he knows they are not going to will the good?

In one treatise after another, Augustine grapples with the problem of making God the sole source of all goodness in the post-Fall human will without taking away from human beings control over their wills, so that God becomes responsible for the evil of the human will. In the end, Augustine makes it clear that he cannot solve this problem and that he knows it. For example, in one of his latest works, *De dono perseverantiae*, after he has argued hard that any good in a human will is God's gift, Augustine imagines an objector who wants to know why God saves those who have the will of faith and punishes the others if it is only God's grace that causes anyone to have the will of faith. This is a question Augustine will not answer; “and if you ask me why [not],” he says, “I confess that it is because I haven’t discovered what I should say” (*persev.* 8.18).

It does not follow either that the problem of grace and faith is insoluble or that Augustine thought it is. On the contrary, even in the face of his own inability to find a solution, Augustine refused to give up either his conviction that grace is the sole source for the will of faith or his insistence that human beings have real free will – and there is no indication that he felt he had to abandon anything in his earlier exposition of freedom of the will to maintain this position. In *De dono perseverantiae*, for example, Augustine discusses his *De libero arbitrio* and his reflections on it in his *Retractationes*, and he takes back nothing of his early view. Instead, he concludes that the Pelagians are wrong to think that if the will of faith comes from God alone, God would be unjust to punish those who don’t have it. As for the question *why* God wouldn’t be unjust and *why* God gives this grace to some and not to others, Augustine takes refuge in the claim that God’s judgments are inscrutable to us (*persev.* 11.26–27).[34] Clearly, this is less than an optimally satisfactory conclusion.

A friendly suggestion

Augustine’s difficulties would be solved if he could find a way to hold that human beings are able, on their own, to reject grace, without God’s being ultimately responsible for their doing so. Suppose that God offers to every person the grace that produces the will of faith but that it is open to a person to refuse that grace. Then the will of faith would be a gift of God, but it would be up to a human person whether he had such a will or not. Augustine is kept from such a solution by his conviction that he would then also have to say that human persons have it in their own power to accept grace. His attitude, and his problem, are brought out well in his consideration of Jacob and Esau. Jacob was saved because God’s grace produced the will of faith in him. But, then, what about Esau? Augustine says:

> Why was this mercy [of God’s] withheld from Esau, so that he was not called in such a way that faith was inspired in him when called and, believing, he became merciful so that he might do good works? Was it perhaps because Esau was unwilling? But then Jacob believed because he willed it and God didn’t give him faith, but Jacob prepared it for himself by willing and he had something [good] which he had not received.
>
> (*Simpl.* 1.2.10)[35]

In my view, the problem is insoluble for Augustine because he assumes, in the way illustrated by his treatment of the example of Jacob and Esau, that the will has only two positions available to it as regards volitions: assenting or rejecting. On this view, a person who does not assent to grace rejects it, and a person who does not reject grace assents to it. Therefore, if God is solely responsible for the good will of faith which assents to grace, then God is also solely responsible for those acts of will which reject grace; those are just the wills in which God has not produced assent to grace.

At least some thinkers in the later Middle Ages, however, supposed that there are more than two positions for the will as regards volitions. So, for example, Aquinas holds that the will can assent to something or reject it, but it can also simply do nothing at all. It can just be turned off.[36] Sometimes the will is determined to want some thing by the nature of the will's object, Aquinas says, but the exercise of the will – whether the will is turned off or not – is always in the power of the will itself.[37] Furthermore, in principle, the will can move directly from any one of these positions to another. That is, it can move from rejecting to quiescence, from quiescence to assenting, from assenting to rejecting, and so on.

If this view of the will is right, then there are at least three possibilities for the will as regards grace, and not just two: the will can assent to grace; it can refuse grace; or it can be quiescent. When it is quiescent, it doesn't refuse grace, but it doesn't accept it either. It is thus possible to hold that a human person has it in her power to refuse grace or to fail to refuse grace without also holding that she has it in her power to form the good act of will which is the assent to grace.

This view of the will allows us to tell a theological story that attributes any good human will to God's action on the will and yet permits human beings to be the ultimate source of their own volitions. I am not now claiming that this theology story is true, that it is a story Augustine believed, or even that it is a story he ought to have believed. My point in presenting the theology story is only to show that Augustine's position as regards grace and free will is not hopeless; there is at least one way in which he can have all the things he wants to hold as regards grace and the will.

So suppose the following theology story to be the case. (1) God is constantly offering grace to every human being in such a way that if a person doesn't refuse that grace, she receives it and it produces in her the will of faith. (2) Normal adult human beings[38] in a post-Fall condition who are not converted or in the process of being converted refuse grace continually, even if they are not aware of doing so. (3) Ceasing to refuse grace is accompanied by an understanding that grace will follow and that grace would not follow if the refusal of grace were continued. (4) It is solely up to a human person whether or not she refuses grace.[39] A person who ceases to refuse grace in these circumstances is thus in some respects analogous to a person suffering an allergic reaction who actively refuses an injection of an antidote to the allergen, perhaps out of a hysterical fear of needles. Such a person might not be able to bring himself to will that the doctor give him the injection. If the doctor is asking him whether he will accept the injection, he might not be able to bring himself to say "yes," for example. But he might nonetheless be able to stop actively refusing the injection, knowing that if he ceases to refuse it, the doctor will press it on him. In this case, whether or not he receives the injection is in his control, even if it is also true that he cannot bring himself to answer “yes” to the doctor’s request to give him the injection.

We can take claims (1)–(4) to be true without having the dilemma Augustine thought he had in the case of Esau and Jacob if we suppose that there are three, rather than two, positions available to the will as regards volitions. We can postulate that it was in Esau’s power to reject grace without thereby being committed to supposing that Jacob had it in his power to accept grace. It can be the case that God alone causes in Jacob the acceptance of grace but that he causes it in Jacob because Jacob, unlike Esau, ceases to refuse grace. If the will can move directly from rejecting to quiescence, without first moving to acceptance, then Jacob has two alternatives for his will as regards grace, even if it is also true that it is not possible for his will on its own to accept grace.

On the theology story I have told, then, God gives grace to anyone who ceases actively refusing it, but these are not people who already assent to grace. They don’t accept grace or reject it. Their wills were actively refusing grace, but then cease doing so, without moving all the way to accepting grace. Once their wills are quiescent, God acts on their wills in such a way as to move them to the acceptance of grace, which is the will of faith.

Consequently, on this theology story, the will of faith is a gift of God, but a human person’s will is still ultimately in the control of that person, because it is up to her either to refuse grace or to fail to refuse grace, and God’s giving of grace depends on what the will of a human person does.[40]

Conclusion

If there are three possibilities for the will as regards volition and if Augustine had been willing to accept this view of the will as well as the theology story I told above, or any theology story like it which makes God’s giving of grace responsive to a human person’s will, he could maintain his opposition to the Pelagians and still hold that human beings have free will in one or another variety of libertarian free will. The will’s simply failing to refuse grace is not yet a good state of will. Since the will of faith is a will for righteousness, a will which doesn’t refuse grace but hasn’t yet accepted it is a will which doesn’t so much as will to will the good; and it seems reasonable to deny that any will in this condition is in a good state.[41] On the other hand, if God gives grace only in response to a human willer’s failing to refuse grace, then whether God gives grace or not will be up to the human willer alone.

Consequently, it is possible for Augustine to have his anti-Pelagian thesis and still maintain (L1’) and (L3) even with regard to the second-order will of faith. It is also possible for him to hold (L2), provided the ability to do otherwise is understood in the latitudinarian way discussed above. Since a human willer can refuse grace or fail to refuse grace, a human willer has alternative possibilities available to her, even if God alone produces any good in her will. Furthermore, as I argued above, what Augustine says about the determination of a person's first-order will is compatible with the will's having libertarian freedom if the second-order will is within that person's control. On the theological story I have told here, then, a person can have libertarian freedom even if God determines her will at both the first- and the second-order level, provided only that it is up to her whether or not God acts on her will, so that her own intellect and will are the first and ultimate determiner of the final state of her will.

I think, then, that there is a stronger line of defense available to Augustine than he recognized. Whether he would have been happy to take it or not isn't clear. If he is really wedded to the claims he sometimes makes, that God knows what a human being would freely will in any circumstances and that it is within God's power to produce or not produce those circumstances, then God is the ultimate controller (whether or not he is the ultimate cause) of the human will, and his giving of grace isn't responsive to anything in the human will. In that case, I don't see how Augustine can suppose that his view of the will in the Pelagian controversy is already contained in his *De libero arbitrio*. On the contrary, unless Augustine is willing to accept that God's giving of grace is responsive to something in human beings, even if that something is not good or worthy of merit, I don't see how he can be saved from the imputation of theological determinism with all its infelicitous consequences.

The earlier version of this chapter, published in the original *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, was twice as long as this chapter, and devoted the extra space to a more detailed exposition of the philosophical issues than is possible in this shortened version. For comments on the original draft, I am grateful to William Alston, Joel Anderson, John Heil, Sigidur Krisstenson, Scott MacDonald, Colleen McCluskey, Al Mele, Thad Metz, Claudia Eisen Murphy, David Robb, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and audiences at Cornell University, Georgetown University, Davidson College, Wheaton College, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Endnotes

[1] For present purposes, I take compatibilism as the position that an act's being causally determined is compatible with its being an act for which an agent is morally responsible or an act which an agent did with free will, and I take causal determinism as the position that every event is causally determined by preceding events. How libertarianism is to be understood will emerge in the next section.

2 For some idea of the diversity of views, see, for example, Craig 1984, 49; Chadwick 1983; O'Daly 1989; and Incandela 1994. Chadwick and Craig argue that Augustine rejects compatibilist free will; Craig also maintains that for Augustine free will requires the ability to do otherwise. O'Daly explicitly rejects this view; Incandela goes so far as to suppose that the Christian tradition in general is committed to compatibilism.

3 See, for example, Babcock 1988.

4 Augustine makes this point explicitly and at length in *De libero arbitrio* 3.18.51.

5 In other treatises, it is clearer that Augustine rejects (L2), as I will explain below.

6 For the sake of adding more entries to the new edition of this book, all the entries have had to be limited in size. In consequence, I have had to omit portions of this chapter as it was in the earlier edition. To avoid unnecessary confusion, however, I have tried to keep the numbering of propositions the same. The result has been a slight inversion of the usual order in this version of the chapter.

7 'Act' here, as well as in (L2) and (L3), is meant to refer to mental as well as bodily acts.

8 Elsewhere in the treatise, he argues that a free will's turning from a greater good to a lesser good is not done out of any necessity but of its own accord and voluntarily (*lib. arb*. 2.19.53). In *De libero arbitrio* 3.3.8, in response to an imaginary objector who thinks he can be caused to will something, Augustine argues that a caused will is no will at all. In *De libero arbitrio* 3.17.48–49, Augustine maintains that a sinful will wouldn't be the root of all evil if there were something else which was the cause of the will; he also argues there that no cause operates on the will to determine its states and that Evodius is therefore asking a confused question when he asks what the cause of an evil will is.

9 See, for example, Stump 1996 and Stump 1999.

10 There is a large literature exploring the implications for free will and/or moral responsibility of the possibility of counterfactual interveners. For some discussion of the issues and the literature, see Stump 1996.

11 James Wetzel also points out that for Augustine there is sometimes only one alternative available for the will because of the state of the agent, rather than something external to him. See Wetzel 1992, 198–202.

12 A detailed explanation of the way in which Augustine thinks intellect and will function together in an evil choice can be found in MacDonald 1999.

13 Some philosophers are uncomfortable with the terms ‘intellect’ and ‘will’ because they suppose them to be part of some outmoded faculty psychology. But this unease is misplaced in my view. By talk of intellect and will here, I don’t mean to suggest that there is a cognitive or conative faculty which is correlated with a single neurobiological structure or even a single neurobiological system. Whatever exactly a human intellect or a human will is, it is undoubtedly correlated with many subsystems which have to work together to yield the faculty or capacity in question. Vision seems to be like this. It is entirely appropriate to speak of the faculty of vision, but many different neural subsystems have to work together properly in order for a person to have the capacity to see. It may also be the case that some of the subsystems which constitute a faculty have multiple uses and function to constitute more than one faculty. This seems to be the case in vision, too.

14 By saying that the first cause of a person’s act is her own intellect and will, I mean to leave open whether the cause is an act of intellect and will or just the faculties of intellect and will themselves, as seems to be the case in certain theories of agent causation.

15 In order to avoid having to employ the clumsy locution ‘ultimate source or first cause’ throughout, in what follows I will speak just of first or ultimate causes in describing the condition in (L3), but that locution should be understood as a shorthand for the disjunctive phrase spelled out here. Furthermore, there is a complication which I am leaving to one side here. Insofar as God is the creator of every created thing and insofar as any created cause is always dependent on the operation of divine causality, no created thing can ever be the sole cause of anything or the ultimate first cause of anything. What is at issue for Augustine on free will and grace, however, is whether God is also the cause of the will in some stronger sense than this. And so for the sake of simplicity in this chapter, I am simply bracketing the operations of God as first cause and creator. I am grateful to Claudia Murphy for calling to my attention the need to spell out this point.

16 According to this passage, when someone does a morally culpable act, the ultimate cause of the act is the agent’s own intellect and will, whether he has been persuaded by another or not. And even if he was persuaded by someone else, his own intellect and will remain the ultimate cause of his act. If one person A persuades another person B of something, A's persuasion doesn't operate on B's mind with causal efficacy. On the contrary, the attempts of A to persuade B to do something will have any force with B only if B accepts A's persuasions. Consequently, when A's persuasion is effective with B, it is still B's own states of intellect and will which are ultimately the cause of what B does.

17 Throughout this chapter, the translations are my own, although where there are already published translations, I have often consulted them.

18 For a discussion of the kinds of libertarianism, see my discussion of these issues in connection with Aquinas' thought in Stump 2003, chapter 9.

19 See, for example, *De natura et gratia* 12.13. There are even places where Augustine applies this point to pre-Fall human beings: "Even if [Pelagius] were speaking about a whole and healthy human nature . . . what he says would not be correct, [namely], that not sinning depends only on us, as sinning depends on us. For even then there would be the help of God . . . which is prepared for those who are willing [to receive it]" (*nat. et gr*. 48.56).

20 O'Daly 1989, 88. For another example of the same sort of position, see Djuth 1990.

21 O'Daly 1989, 89.

22 See also *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 16.32, where he makes a similar point.

23 In correspondence, Scott MacDonald has suggested to me that Augustine may hold an asymmetrical view of freedom. It requires alternative possibilities for doing evil but not alternative possibilities for doing good. That may be right, but another possibility, and one I am more inclined to accept, is that Augustine held modified libertarianism. Modified libertarianism seems to me to fit better with Augustine's views of the mind and human agency, as I understand them; I am not sure what in his basic views would motivate and explain an asymmetrical account of freedom.

24 For some discussion of the connection among these and other ways of describing the will of faith, see *De spiritu et littera* 32.56.

[25] One might postulate a higher-order volition for the second-order volition produced by God, but the same problems would then arise for this higher-order volition. Either it is caused by God, or human beings have something good which is not a gift of God.

[26] Even compatibilists, who maintain that an agent can be morally responsible for a causally determined act, generally hold that an agent isn't morally responsible for an act if he is caused to do that act by another person.

[27] For further discussion of this part of Augustine's thought, see the chapters in this volume by David Vincent Meconi.

[28] See, for example, *Summa theologiae* IaIIae q.111 a.2 obj.2 and ad 2.

[29] The Latin is hard to translate without introducing into the English more than there is in the Latin. The Latin is simply "Qui ergo fecit te sine te, non te justificat sine te. Ergo fecit nescientem, justificat volentem."

[30] See, for example, *De spiritu et littera* 34.60; cf. also *Ad Simplicianum* 1.2.7.

[31] See, for example, *De spiritu et littera* 30.54 and *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 2.5.

[32] See, for example, *Ad Simplicianum* 1.2.13.

[33] Although the debate over middle knowledge arose centuries after Augustine, the view about God's knowledge which he espouses in this connection has at least a family resemblance to the doctrine of divine middle knowledge. For an interesting recent argument against the claim that God has middle knowledge, see Van Inwagen 1997.

[34] See also *De dono perseverantiae* 8.16, where he takes the same line.

[35] Elsewhere, Augustine takes a different line. For example, in *De correptione et gratia* he says, "If a person who is already regenerate and justified relapses by his will into an evil life, he is certainly not able to say, 'I have not received [the gift of perseverance],' because in his free choice for evil he let go of the grace of God which he had received" (*correpț*. 6.9; cf. also 7.11).

Here Augustine is apparently willing to entertain the possibility that the will's perseverance in good is produced in the will by God alone but that the will's failure to persevere can be attributed to the willer. But he doesn't explain how these claims can be compatible, and he doesn't develop this line as a solution to the problem of grace and free will.

36 See, for example, *Summa theologiae* IaIIae q.9 a.1.

37 See, for example, *Summa theologiae* IaIIae q.10 a.2.

38 Children and adult human beings in non-normal conditions pose special problems which complicate the case, and so I am simply leaving those cases to one side here.

39 By saying that it is solely up to her, I do not mean to rule out all the influences for good which Augustine sometimes also describes as grace, such as the influence of good preaching or good friends; I mean only that it is up to the human willer alone whether such good influences are persuasive with her, so that rejecting the influence of graces of this sort is possible for her.

40 I am presenting this position as one which allows Augustine to have both the apparently incompatible claims he wants, but I am not proposing this position as problem free. For a more detailed discussion of the position, see Stump 1989.

41 It is true that a will which ceases to refuse grace is better than one that refuses grace, but comparatives don't presuppose positives; Smith can be taller than Jones without being tall.

Part IV Human excellence

10 Augustine's ethics

Timothy Chappell

> The adorned figure of the Emperor, throned among the thirty score of prelates, hearing and declaring with them the witness of all the churches to the apostolic tradition, signifies many things. There the acceptance of time was completely manifested; there a new basis – a metaphysical basis – was ordained for society. The Roman past was rejected; the effort of the Middle Ages was begun. Intellect was accepted; marriage was accepted; ordinary life was accepted. The early vision of St. Peter was found to have wider meanings than had been supposed: "what I have cleansed that call not thou common." The nature of the Church had not changed . . . It remained reconciliation and sin redeemed; "my Eros is crucified"; "Another is in me." It was declared now by all the magnificence of this world, by the all-but-idol of the episcopate. It had become a Creed, and it remained a Gospel.[1]

The historical context

What Constantine was in the practice of politics, St. Augustine was in the theory. With Charles Williams we may say that through Constantine at the Council of Nicaea (325), the Christian Church became (and I choose the words with care) a worldly order. It became that concrete reality in the public world of human life that, for at least the next thousand years, it was indisputably to be in every part of the Roman or post-Roman world that evaded annexation by Islamic conquistadors, and in many places still is today. For good and for ill – for a very great deal of both – Constantine's achievement was no less than to invent Christendom. Here as elsewhere in theology, the theory followed the practice: the first great theorist of the Christendom inaugurated by Constantine (272–337) is Augustine (354–430), and the central text of his theorising, *De civitate Dei*, "On the city of God," was completed almost exactly 100 years after Nicaea, in 427.

Two basic problems faced Constantine as a policy maker. The first was to maintain stability and continuity. This he did in the only way possible in the circumstances, by introducing fundamental change and discontinuity. Thus a private if widespread sect became an imperial and soon a universal church, the emperor himself became an *isapostolos*. Likewise, the keynote of the *City of God* is that the only way for the Romans to stay fundamentally the same is for them to change fundamentally.

One guiding question of the *City of God* is the deeply Constantinian, and Byzantine, question: What is it to be truly Roman? The Romans' own moral tradition, Augustine argues (see especially *civ. Dei* 4.8–34), is immanently charged with pointers away from the moral and metaphysical confusion, superficiality, and incoherence of their own traditional paganism, toward the clarity and profundity of an ethical monotheism which, once fully understood, turns out to be no less than Catholic Christianity. History, Augustine argues in the *City of God* (especially Books 1–5, 15–18), has a meaning and a direction: its meaning is God's plan, and its direction is toward God's eternal city. This central Augustinian idea, the idea of progress that he forged out of his reading of Roman and Old Testament history and from the progressivism of the New Testament, is a commonplace in our meliorist culture. It was a novelty to pessimistic and cyclically minded pagans, such as many of Augustine's first readers. We might almost say that in the *City of God* Augustine invented the idea of progress. Though Augustine himself – like Hegel, he is the most tradition-minded of progressivists – would undoubtedly (and rightly) have insisted that he was only refining what was already there.

Constantine's second problem was to find a common measure between the infinite and the finite, the temporal and the eternal. How was the Church, standing as it did as a sign of the end of the age, also to stand *within* the age – as, in the absence of an immediate apocalypse, it was becoming clear it must? How was the mystics' measureless longing *away from* the world to be modeled by practical policy *in* the world? Above all, what is the proportion between God's infinite initiative and any puny response to him that humans can possibly make? This problem too, in a variety of philosophical inflections, is Augustine's problem. To it Augustine the theorist, no less than Constantine the practical politician – no less than the rest of us since – found no stable satisfactory solution.

Augustine's personality

We might even say that Augustine himself is a symptom of this incommensurability: that just as there are two cities, so too there is a heavenly Augustine and an Augustine who is of the earth, earthly. The *Confessions* abounds in evidence that Augustine himself is a kind of mystic, even a kind of poet (perhaps *malgré lui*, given his frequent sharp words about the poets [e.g. *civ. Dei* 1.4]). Ultimately his gaze is turned away from the world not toward it; nothing matters more to him than the direct experience of God.

The mystic, however, is also a controversialist; the gentle rhapsodist of the soul's ascent is also a hectoring professor of oratory. (Augustine happily appeals to Plato as backing for his own criticisms of poetry; he is quieter about Plato's equally critical attitude to rhetoric.) Augustine's close contemporary and correspondent St. Jerome (347–420) famously dreamt that he protested to a chorus of angels, "I am a Christian!" to which the angels damningly replied, "No, you are a Ciceronian." The angels had a point. Jerome often copies Cicero's bad philosophical habits: verbal bullying, heavy-handed hyperbole, unconvincing bluster, mere abuse; indeed, these bad habits were still lowering the IQ of debate as late as St. Thomas More and Erasmus. The taint of Ciceronian mediocrity is evident in Augustine's writings too. The model that he tells us he made of Cicero (*conf.* 3.4) was an unfortunate one; Augustine had more philosophical acumen in his little finger than Cicero had in his entire body. The irony – to add a touch of Ciceronian *ad hominem* – is that Cicero was himself an obvious if rather unsuccessful instance of what Augustine plausibly diagnoses (*civ. Dei* 1.1) as the paradigmatic Roman fault, *libido dominandi*, the urge to dominate others. Well might we wish that the young Augustine had had ready access to (and aptitude for) Plato's books and almost none to Cicero's, instead of, as he tells us (*conf.* 1.14, 7.9), vice versa.

It matters, when we try to make philosophical sense of Augustine, that – Ciceronian or not – he is as far as he could possibly be from what seems to be much of modern philosophy's stylistic ideal: that the author should be a nonentity, invisible in his or her own text. Augustine is never less than a boisterous authorial presence, always as vividly *there* in his writings as another of his masters, St. Paul. Like St. Paul, Augustine knows both how to delight a reader, and how to madden him. What he does not know is how to bore him. In this too Augustine is quite unlike many moderns.

Perhaps Augustine's own multiply inflected dualism tended to legitimize this personality division between Augustine the serene contemplative and Augustine the bruiser of a bishop. As above, it was part of the heritage of Constantine that we have to live in the world, as well as learning to transcend it. We have to do what we can of the impossible task in which only the Messiah himself, the divine Word or *ratio*, could possibly succeed in full: the task of commensurating the infinite with the finite. Impossible; yet sometimes with Augustine – as with plenty of others – failure seems a little too easily accepted, one way or the other.

Successfully or not, we see three examples of Augustine at work on practical–ethical issues in the next three sections.

Just war and the ordo amorum

It is no accident that Augustine is generally accounted, among other things, one of the first proponents in Christian ethics of "just war theory." Wandering mendicant idealists, Jesus for instance, might insist that "those who live by the sword shall die by the sword" (Mt 26:52), or enjoin their followers to turn the other cheek (Mt 5:39). In the first- and second-century Church, these teachings were commonly taken to imply a universally binding injunction. But Augustine sees clearly that a church which has become an integral part of an imperial order simply cannot live like that, any more than Israel and Judah in the Old Testament lived like that (or indeed died like that). Offenses must come, and when they come – it is licit to defend ourselves from them.

Outside the Christian tradition, accounts of the conditions under which war can justly be begun or waged can already be found in or extrapolated from Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Thucydides' *Histories*, and in plenty of other places. Cicero's *De officiis* includes a particularly explicit discussion on which Augustine evidently drew;[2] Cicero also reminds us that a code of war, and a religious ritual for declaring war, was part of the customary morals of Rome: the *ius fetiale*.[3]

The presence of just-war thinking in the pagan world is unsurprising. Given the initial assumption, almost universal in that world, that just people will be found fighting wars, it is merely banal to remark that they may be expected to do so justly. What is surprising is that Christianity should find a home for the initial assumption. Augustine's own teacher St. Ambrose (340–97) was one of the first to take a just-war line, and the expediencies that moved him toward it are obvious enough to anyone who reads Ambrose's *De fide ad Gratianum Augustum*, written as its name tells us for the emperor Gratian (in 378, as he was on his way to war). Ambrose's book is mainly about the Trinity, with only the slightest patina of argument for the justness of some war-making – for instance Gratian's.

If these slight *obiter dicta* are enough to make Ambrose a "just war theorist," then Augustine certainly qualifies: he has many more *obiter dicta* than Ambrose, making more more-substantial points about the conditions for a permissible war. We should perhaps be more sparing with the word "theorist" than that, and insist that there was no true *theory* of just war until the canon lawyers collected and made a system out of these incidental remarks, over 700 years after Augustine's death. Perhaps we should even save talk of a *theory* of just war for another century after that, until the time (*c*. 1240) of St. Thomas' treatise on war – where Aquinas obligingly quotes a whole string of relevant remarks by Augustine, probably because he has some canon-lawyer epitomizer open at his elbow.[4]

Still, the scatteredness and unsystematicity of Augustine's remarks about just war does not lessen their interest. As a softening-up exercise against those who are adamant that Christians must be pacificists, Augustine notes (*ep*. 138) that when soldiers ask Jesus how they should live, what he tells them is not to engage in extortion, and to be happy with their wages (Lk 3:15) – which falls a long way short of telling them to give up soldiery. In *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 4.10 Augustine makes the fundamental point that is the basis for the second and third of Aquinas' three criteria of *ius ad bellum* (just cause and right intention): he says that a war cannot be just unless its aim is to put right (or punish) some wrong. He reiterates this in *Epistula* 189, adding the further (potentially sinister) thought that wars can be undertaken for the good of those attacked: "when being defeated takes away someone's freedom to act wickedly, it does him good." A just war, he notes in the same Letter, is necessarily aimed at the consequence of peace (cf. *civ. Dei* 19.12). In *Contra Faustum Manicheum* 22.75 he foreshadows the first of Aquinas' three criteria of *ius ad bellum*, by insisting that a just war must be declared by a legitimate authority. In *Contra Faustum Manicheum* 22.70 he takes the legitimate-authority point so far as to claim that "living by the sword" (Mt 26:52) means taking up arms *without* due authority – which may seem like stretching a point.

It is from Augustine's just-war teaching that we get the Latin tag familiar in contemporary medical ethics, *primum non nocere*, "above all do no harm."[5] It is a tag more usually recited than cited (properly), but here it is in its original context:

> Our divine teacher gives us these two master-teachings – the love of God, and the love of our neighbor. In those teachings, man finds three whom he may love: God, himself, his neighbor; and he who loves God will not go wrong in loving himself. Since he has been told to love his neighbor as himself, it follows that he will counsel his neighbor (his wife, for instance, and his children, and his servants, and whatever other people he is able to) to love God, and that conversely he will be willing for his neighbor to give him this counsel, should he need it. Through this disposition he will be in peace with every man, so far as in him lies. That is, he will be in the peace of humanity, which is an ordered agreement with the following content: first that he should harm no one, and then that he should also help whoever he can. And the first part of this is that he should look after his own. For whether by the order of nature or by the order of human society itself, he has more convenient and easy access to advising them than others.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 19.14 [my translation])

Even in the context of expounding a just-war doctrine, Augustine insists here on the absolutely anti-Hobbesian view that peace is the natural condition of human life; his thesis is that no just person will leave that condition, and enter a state of war with others, except when he is forced to by others (who will then *ipso facto* be acting unjustly).

The passage is notable for at least two other points too. First, it shows us where Augustine would stand in a familiar modern debate about partiality: in the last sentence he enounces a nearest-and-dearest-first view, though, interestingly, he is non-committal about whether the basis for the partiality that he endorses is social or natural. Secondly, the passage is an expression of Augustine's famous doctrine of the *ordo amorum*, his view that there is a hierarchy of value among the things that we might love, and that right living means having a corresponding hierarchy in our loving: "The peace of all things is the tranquillity of order, and order is a disposition to give their places to all things equal and unequal" (*civ. Dei* 19.13; cf. *doc. Chr.* 1.27).

It is against this background, incidentally, that Augustine offers what may be his best-known piece of moral advice: *dilige, et quod vis fac* – "Love, and do what you will" (*Jo. ev. tr.* 7.8). E. M. Forster's old Mr. Emerson[6] and Augustine can happily agree that good character leads effortlessly to good action. What Augustine and Mr. Emerson do not agree on is what it takes for a character to be good. I don't know about Mr. Emerson's, but Augustine's answer to this latter question we see above: it is that a character cannot be good without being truly aligned with the *ordo amorum*.

Most characteristically of all in Augustine's reflections on the notion of a just war – to come back to those – Augustine of course admits that war is at home in the Earthly City, not the Heavenly (*civ. Dei* 15.4). And he notes carefully the sheer brutal awfulness of war more than once in *City of God*. (There is a marvellously eloquent passage about this at *civ. Dei* 19.7. And the whole vast work opens as it were amid the smoking embers of a fallen Rome, with comparisons with other sackings of other ancient cities, and a curious tone of "It could have been worse" which perhaps arises because Augustine is thinking of the pagan element in his audience – and the Christian element in the Arian Goths who did the sacking.)

Augustine also, elsewhere, poses the question: What is the *real* evil in war? Not the *killing*, he tells us in *Contra Faustum*. Rather, it is the wicked passions that war unleashes.

> What is the evil in war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is merely cowardly aversion, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, the lust to dominate (*libido dominandi*), and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars.
>
> (*c. Faust*. 22.74)

Jesus stressed the heart as the source of all real goodness and wickedness (Mt 15:19, 6:21). Likewise, Augustine insists that what is morally crucial in war is what goes on in the psyche of the warrior. This too is an application of Augustine's distinction between the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly: it is only what pertains to the heavenly that *really* matters. It is also, of course, an application of Augustine's doctrine of the *ordo amorum*: since the things of the spirit are more important than the things of the body, we are bound to love them or care about them more.

The ordo amorum and sexuality

A crude summary of Augustine's last-quoted remarks might be: It's all right to kill in war, provided you don't enjoy it. Would it be fair to offer an equally crude summary of Augustine's views about sex: that it's all right to have (marital)[7] intercourse, provided you don't enjoy it?

In fact, Augustine's views are only summarizable this way if *libido* and/or *cupiditas* should be translated as "enjoyment." But there is no good argument in favor of this translation, and there is good argument against it. Certainly Augustine's endorsement of the thesis that sexual pleasure is good is less than ringing (*b. conjug*. 8). Yet he clearly did not hold that sexual pleasure as such is bad; only that *disordered* sexual pleasure is bad. *Libido* and *cupiditas* are his words for "disordered sexual pleasure." Indeed, these (especially *libido*) are his words for disordered pleasure in general, not necessarily sexual: "[*Libido*] is rightly defined as an appetite of the soul whereby *any* kind of good things in this world are preferred to eternal goods" (*mend.* 10).

The sense of "disordered" here is given, once more, by the notion of the *ordo amorum*. It is part of that *ordo*, Augustine holds, that the lower parts of the human being should be properly subordinated to the higher. The highest part of all is the reason. The disorderedness of fallen human sexuality is, then, the unbiddability of human sexuality by reason:

> This lust, of which we at present speak, is the more shameful on this account, because the soul is therein neither master of itself, so as not to lust at all, nor of the body, so as to keep the members under the control of the will; for if they were thus ruled, there should be no shame . . . But so long as the will retains under its authority the other members, without which the members excited by lust to resist the will cannot accomplish what they seek, chastity is preserved, and the delight of sin forgone.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 14.23)

The thesis of *City of God* 14.23 – a message which Augustine's often ascetically inclined society perhaps needed to hear more than our routinely sensual one does – is that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with sex. (Nor with the body. It is the spirit, not the body, where sin arises: *civ. Dei* 14.3.) This thesis Augustine takes to be equivalent to, or deducible from, the claim that Adam and Eve could blamelessly have had intercourse, had they lasted long enough in the Garden of Eden to get around to it. However, at least part of what apparently horrifies Augustine about sex is that, in the fallen state of humanity in which we find ourselves, the will cannot directly control the movement and activity of the sexual organs (he is probably thinking primarily of the male sexual organs). It is on this sort of ground that Augustine thinks that for fallen humans completely blameless sexual activity is impossible or close to impossible, because of what he calls *libido* or *cupiditas*. The *inoboedientia carnis* just described (*civ. Dei* 14.17) is the sign of this.

Augustine also says that the trouble with sexual pleasure is the way it overwhelms our rationality: "it puts the whole man in turmoil" (*civ. Dei* 14.16). Sexuality is troublesome, for Augustine, because of its *disintegrating* and *disordering* tendency, and because of the way, during strong experiences of sexual pleasure, our rationality tends to be occluded: "at that moment of time when sexual pleasure reaches its extreme, nearly all our acuity and alertness of mind is taken away" (*civ. Dei* 14.16).

To this a number of obvious objections suggest themselves. For one thing, why should it be thought a problem that sexual arousal causes movements of bodily parts that are not under the will's direct control? So does digestion – but Augustine shows no inclination to view peristalsis as a symptom of the Fall. For another, why should it be thought a problem that sexual arousal causes a kind of disturbance of the mind that brings about a suspension of normal rational control? So do sleep and religious ecstasy – but Augustine is unlikely to see those as threatening our rationality. Such cases are reminders of the essential embodiedness, hence vulnerability, of human reason. We might say that they are reminders of St. John's great statement of how the Incarnation creates a measure between the eternal and the mortal: "the word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). The natural thing for Augustine to say about digestion is that it is a sign of how we are both physical objects and also not *mere* physical objects; the natural thing for him to say about sleep and religious ecstasy is that these temporary suspensions of normal rational control and psychic integration can, all being well, lead to greater rational control and deeper psychic integration in the long run. Indeed, Augustine *does* say this sort of thing about these cases. So he could say such things about sex too. (Sometimes he nearly does, e.g. *b. conjug*. 9.)

The point here is *not* that human sexuality is just one appetite among others. We may agree with Augustine (and some other writers who follow him, such as G. K. Chesterton in a marvellous passage in chapter 1 of his life of St. Francis) that sex is special. It is not *just another* appetite; corruptions of it are specially powerful, and need special treatment. What we should deny is (first) that special treatment must necessarily mean specially astringent treatment; and (secondly) that Augustine has hit on what *makes* sex special. He says that sex tends to make our bodies disobey our wills, or to suspend or bypass our rationality, in a special way. True enough; but what *is* that way? No doubt we recognize what Augustine is talking about, so that his observation is not quite as vacuous as it seems. The puzzle remains as to how we might give a fuller philosophical account of that special way, in order to fit sexuality into its correct place in the *ordo amorum*.

Augustine's own account of sexuality comes dangerously close, not just to treating sex as special in a hard-to-define way, but to demonizing it. He speaks in *City of God* 14.19 of the "acts of lust" that "are performed by the sexual organs"; he also says there that "the genital organs have become as it were the private property of lust." Augustine's own principles surely disallow both remarks. It is not the person's genitals that perform "acts of lust"; it is the person. And no part of the human body belongs to someone *else*, as it were as an outpost of the kingdom of darkness. (If it were such an outpost, then presumably Origen's extreme would be a reasonable response, which Augustine would surely deny.) Rather, the person's body is the *person's*. Or, as Augustine, and many other philosophers at least down to John Locke would prefer to say, it is God's: it is flesh indwelt by the Word, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19–20). The right conclusion is the obvious one: that Augustine – in this well in tune with his contemporaries, both Christian and pagan – is unduly Manichaean in his attitude to human sexuality.

In the case of war, Augustine's attempt to commensurate heavenly ideals with earthly realities led him, like Ambrose, to a rather accommodating position – though not *completely* permissive. In the case of sex, he is rather less accommodating – though not completely negative. In the next section I turn to a third case study of Augustine's ethics in action: the case of lying.

Lying in the de mendacio

Some readers will want to know where Augustine fits into our standard classification of types of ethicist: is his an ethics of consequences, or of principles, or of virtue, or of divine command, or of natural law – or what?

All of these, and none of them. Every notion just listed matters for Augustine's ethics. That does not make him fit our categories; which are, after all, *our* categories. It is hardly surprising if they do not neatly fit Augustine – or anyone else from outside our own little corner of history. I suspect Augustine would be astonished that anyone should try to do ethics without *all* of these notions.

Certainly Augustine has something to offer to modern ethicists from all these categories. He is an important contributor to the tradition of the virtues, in particular because he is inclined to unify the virtues around love of God. (See e.g. *civ. Dei* 4.20 and *mor*. ch. 15 – the whole of the latter work will repay the study of modern virtue ethicists.) The importance of consequences for Augustine is evident, from one end of his philosophical career to the other, in his stress upon the notion of *felicitas* or *beatitudo* (see e.g. *b. vita*; *c. Acad*. 1.25; *lib. arb*. 1.10, 2.26–27, 3.59; *Trin*. 13.4; *civ. Dei* 4.18, 8.3, 19.11–12). And we have already seen that Augustine has plenty to say about the notion of natural law.

Still, Augustine does sometimes sound very much like a straightforward exemplar of what we today call deontological ethics. His scintillating short work *De mendacio* is a case in point. It contains a remarkably clear and rigorous analysis of what lying is (chs. 3–4), in which Augustine shows his awareness of such subtleties as the possibility of a lie (or "lie") that speaks the truth (when one intends to say what is false, but is mistaken about what *is* false), or of a knowing statement of a falsehood with no intention to deceive, but rather to deter (as in "I'll kill you if you do that again"). Augustine is well aware that language is not necessarily used to assert; his very first point about lies is that jokes, for example, are not lies (ch. 1). There is a classification of eight different types of lie (summarized in ch. 25), with some penetrating psychological observations: Augustine notes, for instance, the familiar human willingness to tell lies merely to make the party swing (ch. 18). His clear and forceful arguments against the permissibility of lies of any of these types are summarized in chapter 42. There are striking anticipations of what are now familiar hard cases for a rigorist line about lying, such as the murderer-at-the-door case that Kant also famously discusses (chs. 23–24).

Some of Augustine's hypothetical cases are as intricate as anything in the modern literature. Consider, for example, this case (*mend*. 4): X cares for Y's well-being. But X anticipates that Y will disbelieve whatever X says. Y is going to Rome; he can take either

Road A or Road B. (Both roads lead to Rome.) X knows that there are robbers on Road A. X therefore insincerely warns Y of robbers on Road B, foreseeing and intending that Y will therefore take Road B, which is in fact the safe one. Does X *lie*? If a lie is defined as an utterance intended to deceive, then clearly not – any more than I misdirect you if you ask me to point you the correct way, but I realize (as you do not) that we see each other via a mirror, so that if I want you to go left I must point to my right. What about if a lie is defined as a false utterance? In that case, there is a serious question whether what X tells Y *is* false. If I speak to you in some upside-down code of our own which involves consistently reversing truth-values, then my utterance "not-p" is not a lie relative to the known truth "p"; it is just the correct translation of "p" into our idiolect. The two-roads case seems significantly like this code case, even if X and Y have not *agreed* on the convention that X uses to bring about a true belief in Y.

De mendacio also has some striking anticipations of some well-known modern anti-consequentialist arguments. Consider this from chapter 9:

> As for those who are outraged and furious if someone refuses to tell a lie to save his own skin, with the result that someone else gets to grow old in this life instead of him – well, what if we could save someone from death by committing adultery, or by theft? Would that be a good reason to steal or to fornicate? Or suppose someone should come to us with a rope and demand sexual gratification from us, insisting that he will hang himself unless we give him what he asks. Those who put this argument are incapable of pushing it so far as to claim that – for the sake of saving a life, as they say – we should agree to *this*.

The point here is not merely that saying that lies may be told for the sake of good consequences opens the door to saying that *anything* may be done, no matter how bad, for the sake of good enough consequences (though Augustine makes that point too, e.g. in ch. 14). The point is that those who are prepared to consider doing anything to avert something else[8] can be pushed into doing some pretty bad things pretty easily. The implementation in agents' psychology of the kind of disposition that Augustine is criticizing leaves virtue so to speak chasing vice's tail: virtue ends up trying to mitigate vice's badness by acting badly, whenever virtue's acting badly seems necessary to stop vice itself from acting even a little worse. When modern philosophers meet something very similar to this in Bernard Williams, they call it the "Gresham's law" argument.[9]

Or again, consider Augustine's anticipation of the argument usually attributed to David Hodgson that utilitarianism has a self-defeating attitude to truth-telling because it has no commitment to speaking the truth as such, only to saying whatever it is beneficial to say.[10] In Augustine's words: "How can we believe the person whose opinion is that we should sometimes lie? What if he is lying even then when he gives this opinion?" (*mend.* 11). The logic of lying, Augustine suggests, leads us into an impasse from which nothing less than a fully restrictive attitude to lying can rescue us. If good people will lie, and say that we should lie, then either we should not believe good people, or we should believe (always) those who we think are lying sometimes. But the first alternative, Augustine says, is "pernicious," the second one "stupid." The only way out is to deny the antecedent: good people will neither lie nor say that we should lie.

So far, so deontological. But Augustine – unlike many modern philosophers – is not such a mug as to think that there has to be just one answer to the question "What is *the reason* why lying is wrong?" He thinks all the points just made count against lying, and others too, such as the fact that lying divides the mind against itself, undermines its integration (*mend*. 3: "the liar, as the saying is, has a mind divided in two"; cf. the mental disintegration that worries Augustine in the case of sexual pleasure).

Alongside this mix-and-match approach to what we think of as rival moral theories, there is one thing that is recognizably the bedrock of Augustine's case against lying. It is a divine-command point. Everywhere *De mendacio* appeals to positive scriptural authority for a ban on lying; chapters 6–8 are devoted to the corresponding negative proof, that Scripture gives no support to the notion that lying is permissible. His three favorite proof-texts are the Ninth Commandment, against "false witness" (Ex 20:16); Wisdom of Solomon 1:11, "The mouth that lies slays the soul"; and Psalm 5:7, "You will destroy all who speak a lie."

We might wonder about Augustine's rigorist use of these biblical proof-texts, especially when we compare his markedly laxer use of the apparently equally decisive texts against killing (such as the Sixth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill" [Ex 20:13]). A cynic might wonder what ideology stands behind this differential treatment of what on the face of it seems the same weight of evidence. Whose interest, the cynic may ask, is really served by an ethics which commits the citizen to be prepared to kill sometimes, but never to lie? It is tempting to suggest that these commitments are likely to serve the ruler's purposes of *surveiller et punir* more readily than the subject's project of getting on with her individual life.

Less cynical readers will conclude that Augustine genuinely thinks that it is more important to respect the truth by not lying than to respect the body by not killing; also that he has a reason for thinking this that goes to the heart of his philosophy. Augustine thinks that the body is just the body – a collection of physical matter, good and important in its way, but not *supremely* good or important. But he does not think, as modern philosophers tend to, that the truth is just the truth – a collection of matters of fact, some of them interesting, some of them less so, of no particular intrinsic value. For Augustine "truth," *veritas*, is a name for God himself.

So for Augustine knowing the truth, even about trifling matters, is always something sacred and holy, an intimation to us of God's presence; denying that knowledge seems to him a kind of betrayal of this intimation. The bedrock of his argument is, to repeat, the clear divine command against lying that he takes to be present in Scripture; understanding his philosophical conception of truth may help us make sense of the way he reads

Scripture on this topic.

But – a modern philosopher may ask here – why should anyone feel inclined to take a divine-command approach to ethics seriously anyway? I work my way toward an answer to that question in the following section.

Augustine's essentially second-personal ethics

Two great books in the Western tradition are called, in English, "The Confessions": Augustine's *Confessions* (400) is one, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Les Confessions* (1717–28) is the other. In all sorts of ways, the pair make an instructive comparison. One comparison is to do with their address; another concerns their purpose.

The address of Rousseau's *Confessions* is clear from its famous opening. "I have begun on a work which is without precedent," Rousseau says (a surprise, given his title): "I propose to set before my fellow-mortals a man in all the truth of nature; and this man shall be myself." His address, then, is other people in general; to put it another way, it is nobody in particular.

And Rousseau's purpose? Bluntly, it is self-justification:

> I will present myself, whenever the last trumpet shall sound, before the Sovereign Judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim, "Thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I . . . Power Eternal! assemble round Thy throne an innumerable throng of my fellow-mortals, let them listen to my confessions, let them blush at my depravity, let them tremble at my sufferings; let each in his turn expose with equal sincerity the failings, the wanderings of his heart, and if he dare, aver, I was better than that man."

Here, by the sharpest of contrasts, is Augustine:

> Hear my prayer, O Lord, let not my soul faint under thy correction; nor let me faint in confessing unto thee thine own mercies, by which thou hast drawn me out of all mine own most wicked courses: that thyself mightest from hence forward grow sweet unto me, beyond all those allurements which heretofore I followed.
>
> (*conf.* 1.15)

Unless we count the imaginary literary conceit quoted above, throughout his *Confessions* Rousseau never addresses God. Throughout his *Confessions*, *A*ugustine never addresses anyone else – unless we count a few literary tropes apostrophizing himself or other people or things. The whole book, as *Confessions* 1.5 says, is a prayer. It is a confession indeed, both of Augustine's weaknesses and of what he sees as God's mercies.

Augustine and Rousseau are both concerned with truth; but in entirely different ways. The sound of Rousseau's truth is *je, je, je* – I, I, I; the sound of Augustine's truth is *tu, tu, tu* – thou, thou, thou. And, Augustine would say, *tu* not *ego* is what it has to be. For him the first step on the way of moral progress is to turn away from what is private to what is common; and what is most common of all is truth and God.[11] Of course Rousseau thinks something like that in his political philosophy; it is odd and ironic that the author of *Du contrat social* should also be the author of *Les Confessions*.

Rousseau believes that arriving at the truth about himself is a matter simply of being truthful and free. The only obstacles that could prevent his own sincerity and authenticity from getting at the truth are either incidental (defects of memory) or external (the pressure that society imposes on him to add "superfluous ornament"). Left to himself, left to run his own course, freed from misfortunes and the corrupting pressures imposed by other people, Rousseau thinks he all on his own will *naturally* arrive at the truth – and that this truth will be a truth that very likely does him great and vindicating credit.

Augustine's beliefs about how to write true autobiography could not be more different. "Man is a profound deep" (*conf.* 8.1); "And do we imagine that the heart of man is not an abyss?" (*en. Ps.* 41.13); "Here behold is my heart, O God, here behold is my heart, which you have had mercy on in the depth of the abyss" (*conf.* 2.4). Self-knowledge, according to Augustine, is not to be achieved by simply attempting to be "sincere" and "authentic" and "natural"; only disaster can come from such unaided attempts. Rather, real self-knowledge is only achieved when the self comes to be illuminated by second-personal relation with the God who made that self. For God, Augustine finds, has been "closer to him than the closest part of himself, and further above him than the highest he can know" (*conf.* 3.6).

A modern secular reader will find it only too natural to assume that the *Confessions*' ostensible second-personal address – to God – must be a mere literary conceit; that Augustine's *real* audience must be, like Rousseau's, his contemporaries, and that his real intent too must be something rather more like Rousseau's: self-justification. It is hard to imagine a more fundamental misunderstanding. We cannot hope to understand the *Confessions* – we cannot hope to understand Augustine – unless we register that to him God was a person with whom he was in relation: not just a 'he,' but a 'thou' as well.

Moreover, this relation with God in which Augustine takes himself to stand is, in both directions, a relationship of love and desire. *Te volo*, Augustine says in the closing lines of Book 2, "I *desire* you": on a Rousseauian conception of God, the sentiment is unimaginable. Whatever other forms of address Augustine's writing may lead him to, that second-personal relation in which he takes himself to stand relative to God is the heart of his theological and philosophical thought, and in particular of his ethics. Unless we understand this, we are almost certain to misunderstand the structure and the dynamics of his thought overall.

For one thing, it explains why Augustine's rule, in *De libero arbitrio* 1.4, *In Johannis evangelium tractatus* 29 (Jn 7:14–18), §6 and elsewhere, is the rule he bequeathed to Anselm: "believe that you may understand" (*crede ut intelligas*). The point of this often-quoted dictum is not, as is often said, to get us to make an irrational "leap of faith" from one third-personal belief-system into another third-personal belief-system. Rather, it is about second-personal trust: trust in a person, confronted not as a *he* but as a *you*, who is already to some extent known; trust given so that, on the basis of that trust, we may come to the kind of understanding that is impossible *without* trust. Nor should it be thought – though apparently it often is – that trust of the specifically religious kind is unique or peculiar in this respect. In Book 1 of the *Confessions* Augustine goes out of his way to illustrate from his own case how *all* human relationships, and *all* trust, are dependent in the same way on a context which is essentially structured by second-personal relations, and is, as they say, "always already" there whenever any individual begins to understand.

The second-personality of Augustine's ethics also brings us back to my earlier question: why Augustine's is a divine-command ethics before anything else, and why such an ethics is credible. For him a divine-command ethics is not what it is often thought to be today – a matter of unquestioning obedience to a set of impersonal and non-negotiable rules handed down without explanation by some cloudy distant inscrutable authority. Rather, it is about seeking to please the person who knows and loves you best, and who matters most to you. We might almost say that it is more like a love-affair or a (happy) marriage than a legal–moral code. If any line of thought in Augustine genuinely promises to fulfill the task that I began by calling impossible, the task of commensurating the infinite with the finite – perhaps this is the one.[12]

Endnotes

1 Williams 1939, 37.

2 Cicero, *De officiis* 1.34–41; cf. 3.107–11.

3 Cicero, *De officiis* 1.36.

4 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae.40. Another convenient list is Jonathan Barnes': "the main Augustinian texts [on the just war], in chronological order, are *Contra Faustum* 22.74–8; *Epistula* 138; *De civitate Dei* 15.4, 19.7, 19.12–15; *Epistula* 189; *Sermo* 302; *qu.*4.44, 6.10; *Epistula* 289" (Barnes 1982, 771). All except the *City of God* texts are cited in *Summa Theologiae* 2a.2ae.40.

5 As it is generally rendered; perhaps a little misleadingly, since Augustine is laying down a necessary condition for right action, not a goal at which it should aim.

6 Old Mr. Emerson quotes Augustine's dictum in James Ivory's 1985 film of E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*; he does not in the book itself.

7 Augustine's views on such other manifestations of human sexuality as homosexuality (*conf.* 3.8), promiscuity (*civ. Dei* 14.18), and transvestism (*sol.* 2.30) are decidedly, as they say, traditional. His aim is to reaffirm and combine what is best in both the Judeo-Christian and the pagan–Roman moral traditions, and those two traditions, in his view, are solidly non-permissive about such manifestations. This inclination on his part to pass back to other authorities the onus of actual *argument* for his views about sexual ethics makes him less useful than he might be as a source for anti-permissive arguments. (He uses the slogan *contra naturam* often enough in discussion of these matters. But as usual, it is not clear that any anti-permissive argument can be mined out of that slogan, or out of the notion of "nature" that underlies it, for which there is no analogue argument on the permissive side.)

8 Notice too the asymmetry between concern about what *I do* and concern about *what happens*. This asymmetry is the ground of the action/omission distinction. It is clear from Augustine's words in the last quotation that he recognizes this asymmetry.

9 See Williams 1973, 131–32.

10 See Hodgson 1967.

11 For God and truth as *commune* see in particular *De libero arbitrio* Book 1.

12 Thanks for comments and criticisms to Christopher Coope, Andrew Pinsent, Karla Pollmann, and Eleonore Stump.

11 Augustine's doctrine of deification

David Vincent Meconi, S.J.

Augustine's world was filled with gods. Men and women of competing creeds sought not only to communicate with divinity, but to attain it. The very decade in which Augustine himself was ordained priest (391) and consecrated bishop (395) in the Church of Christ, for example, the emperor Theodosius sought to appropriate non-Christian worship by relocating an Egyptian obelisk into the main hippodrome at Constantinople (390), the famed Temple of Eleusis was dismantled after centuries of promising godliness to its initiates (395), and in the following year, Eunapius published his hagiographical guide to pagan antiquity, *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*. The age of Augustine was full of religions racing to secure divinity, straining to live as gods.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how central deification is in the thought of Augustine. Like most of his contemporaries, Christian as well as non-Christian, Augustine was very much a thinker of late antiquity who saw the essence and end of philosophical inquiry as the human person's assimilation of divinity. In fact, Augustine far outpaces any other Latin patristic writer in his use of the technical term *deificare* and its cognates.[1] Yet, in a corpus tallying almost five-and-a-half million words, his eighteen usages appear economical at best. It would be a methodological error, however, to restrict Augustine's doctrine of deification only to those places where some form of 'deification' explicitly appears. For, in Augustine's mind, related and synonymous terms abound to describe deified creaturehood, just as readily expressible through more scriptural or creedal terms – such as becoming divinely adopted children, being made participants in God's life, and incorporation as members of Christ's own body, what he called the *totus Christus*. Admittedly, the Bishop of Hippo is not a standard figure in the history of human divinization. Most previous scholars have argued that Augustine's way of thinking made him incapable of maintaining that the human person could be divinely transformed and refashioned into an intimate participant in God's very own life.

Twentieth-century assessments

Contrasting Augustine's (and thus the Latin West's) alleged inability to conceive of how humanity can gloriously share in the divine life against a tidy reading of the Greek Fathers, who supposedly and unanimously emphasized the beauty of Christian deification, appears to have begun with Josef Mausbach back in 1925. While summarizing the heart of patristic thought, Mausbach concluded that, whereas the

Eastern Fathers emphasized humanity's "marvelous elevation, enlightenment, and deification," Augustine unfortunately saw grace only as "a healing, a freeing, and a reconciliation of a decrepit, enslaved, person far away from God . . . Augustine sees the human person in his sinfulness, how he is filled with the tragedy of the internal fight and from this starting point he builds his ethics and spirituality."[2] Mausbach's condemnatory juxtaposition between Augustine and the Greek Fathers lasted well into the twentieth century.

Take, for example, Myrrha Lot-Borodine's comprehensive study on patristic deification. Unlike the Greeks, she argues, Augustine failed to account for *compénétration* between God and humanity. Lot-Borodine accordingly concludes that because of Augustine's inability to conceive of the possibility of Christian divinization, the entire Western theological tradition has had to explain salvation in any terms other than deification (*mais non à la déification*).[3] Quite recently, Linda Woodhead's *An Introduction to Christianity* introduces divinization as "a theme that had long been central in Christian life, particularly in asceticism and monasticism . . . the purpose of prayer, of the liturgy, of the incarnation itself: God became human so that man could become divine." Correct, but then Woodhead goes on to contend that such an all-encompassing theme was never really accepted in "the Latin tradition, under the influence of Augustine, [which] tended to set an unbridgeable gulf between man and God by way of their doctrine of the fall and original sinfulness."[4] Repeatedly, Augustine is looked at suspiciously for supposedly failing to highlight divinization as the goal and purpose of Christianity. Such radical dichotomies may make the categorizing of historical figures and themes easier, but they are rarely faultless.

Students of Augustine are only now realizing how pervasive and indispensable the theme of deified humanity is to the way the Bishop of Hippo understands and explains life in Christ. Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, an alternative reading of Augustine began. The first really influential publication appeared in 1954 by a Spanish Augustinian, Victorino Capánaga.[5] Perhaps the most important alternative reading has come from Gerald Bonner's study of the (then available) fifteen instances of *deificare* running throughout Augustine's theological macrostructure.[6] After Bonner, however, the eponymously named "Dolbeau sermons" revealed three new instances of *deificare*, thereby reinvigorating this study.[7] More encyclopedia entries indicate a new awareness that Augustine is not as opposed to the possibility of human deification as the tradition has made him out to be;[8] I produced the first full-length monograph and other studies continue, contending that deification is a central tenet in the Bishop of Hippo's thought.[9]

The metaphor of deification in the patristic tradition

Enjoying a long pedigree, the term deification (θεοποιεῖν) was first employed in a

Christian sense by Clement of Alexandria,[10] but received its most legendary and lapidary expression at the end of Athanasius' work on the Incarnation: "He was made human, so that we might be made God."[11] While such an exchange is formulated in one way or another in most of the Church Fathers, its full meaning would not be defined until the sixth century when Pseudo-Dionysius declared that Christian deification (*theosis*) is "the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible."[12] Behind the Fathers' understanding of deification thus stood two central philosophical components: (1) humanity's ability to attain the likeness of God; and (2) humanity's subsequent participation in God in achieving this divine similarity. These obviously Platonic terms, *homoiosis* and *methexis*, ensure two correlative truths essential to Christian deification: (1) human nature is fulfilled and not obliterated when appropriating the divine life; and (2) the "divinity" any human receives remains properly God's and therefore remains always adjectival and a manner of participation, never possession.

Accordingly, deification proves to be a standard soteriological metaphor in the early Church. Stephen Ullmann's straightforward articulation of the "basic structure of metaphor" is helpful: "There are always two terms present: the thing we are talking about and the thing to which we are comparing it."[13] To speak of Christian deification is thus to keep two correlatives always in relationship: (1) the God who is alone divine, yet who chooses to deify; and (2) those created persons he calls to receive and consequently participate in his divinity. These two agents, then, are neither ever separate (as if the elect came to possess divinity autonomously), nor is the creature ever transmutated or absorbed into divinity. As a metaphor for human salvation, deification aptly teaches that the Christian life is humanity's transformative and assimilative union with God, perfecting the human qua human through participation in the one in whose image and likeness humanity was originally fashioned.

Augustine's initial attempt at deification language

The doctrine of deification most likely first came to Augustine through the *libri platonicorum* which he first mulled over while in Milan (384–87). In a letter dated 389, Augustine's initial use of the Latin *deificare* appears, exhorting his ailing friend Nebridius not to expend his energies traveling. Nebridius is instructed to seek solace not actively in this world but instead to seek to be deified in leisure (*deificari in otio*), a line shown to have been lifted from the thirty-second proposition of Porphyry's *Sententiae*.[14] Given this clear connection between Augustine's newly embraced Christianity and his recent immersion in Neoplatonism, this has been the most studied instance of his reliance on explicit deification language, with scholars divided into two contending camps.

One group maintains that *Epistula* 10 demonstrates that Augustine continued to prefer the content and contours of Neoplatonism even after his Christian conversion. They argue that the "deification in leisure" prescribed here is nothing other than the privileged rest of any ancient sage, signaling that there is absolutely no mention of Christ, sanctifying grace, or the role of the sacraments in effecting divinization.[15] One of Augustine's most sympathetic biographers points to this line and embarrassingly notes that the young convert must not have realized "how selfish and presumptuous were these words."[16] Another group of scholars stresses that the passive infinitive indicates that Augustine's understanding of deification here is not that of the old pagans, achieved by one's own intellectual powers, but a graced state received by those humble enough to enter into the *otium* of silent prayer and ecclesial worship.[17] The omission of any overt Christian language of grace, a savior, or the sacraments, they maintain, tells us more about Augustine's youthful and zealous apologetic in winning over aspects of Nebridius' lingering paganism than about what Augustine himself actually believed at this period.

While *Epistula* 10 clearly echoes the Platonic insistence that the goal of the intellectual life is assimilation to God (e.g. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176B: ὁμοίωσις θεῷ), it falls short on any real appreciation of what such a life would mean and how it would be obtained. Augustine's more sustained soteriological reflections would not come until well after the year 400. By then he had been ordained priest, consecrated bishop, had taken up an intensive study of St. Paul, and had been actively engaged in the affairs of both Church and state for just over a decade. Examining his extant works of the fifth century reveals that deification language is always amplified by other rich images of salvation in Christ. This is a union found first in Augustine's anthropology where the dynamics of deification are initially adumbrated, and it is there we now turn.

Made to image the triune God

Augustine was unique among the Church Fathers in arguing that the human person was the only creature brought into the world incompletely. Whereas the other days of creation receive an "and it was good," Augustine's very careful reading of Scripture alerted him to the fact that God does not stamp the sixth day with its own exclusive declaration, "*esset bonum*," but instead on the sixth day God overlooks *all* things together and declares that all things together (*cuncta*) are very good (cf. Gen 1:31). As such, the day on which humans are created is still incomplete, pointing to something beyond itself. Adam is thus presented as "foreshadowing another something still to come" (*Gn. litt.* 3.24; CSEL 28.92). This is how Augustine accounts for the divine dynamism inherent in the human soul; although created naturally good, the *imago Dei* still longs to be like God, and in Adam's very humanity, how that will be accomplished is foreshadowed.

This desire of a copy to be like its paradigmatic archetype was something Augustine had worked out very early on. In his *Soliloquia* (386–87) he famously admits to wanting to know nothing more than "God and the soul," and the two meet in his subsequent discussion on the *imago Dei* where Augustine cleverly depicts himself [A] talking to reason personified [R]:

R: Does it not seem to you that your image in a mirror wants, in a way, to be you and is false because it is not?
A: That certainly seems so.
R: Do not all pictures and replicas of that kind and all artists' works of that type strive to be that in whose likeness they are made?
A: I am completely convinced that they do

(sol. 2.9.17; *Paffenroth* 2000, *72–73; cf.* c. Acad. 3.17.39).

This move is essential to understand. Deifying union with God for Augustine is not the abolishing of human nature but its only true fulfillment. The heart is *inquietum* outside the divine life for which it has been created. Sin depersonalizes and destroys. Growing in likeness with God restores the otherwise fragmented self. "I shudder inasmuch as I am unlike him, yet I am afire with longing because I am like him" (*conf.* 11.9.11: *Et inhorresco et inardesco: inhorresco, in quantum dissimilis ei sum, inardesco, in quantum similis ei sum* [my translation]; CCL 27.200). The doctrine of the *imago Dei* allows Augustine to explain deification as the consummation of all human impulse and agency, the copy's full share in its model, the final rest for which every human person is created.

So, while the natural desire for the divine life is present in every human soul, humanity's original aversion to God has rendered each of us incapable of attaining God's life on our own powers. Even Augustine's philosophy of moral evil bears the stamp of deification: knowing the single good still lacking in paradise, the enemy of humanity promises the one, solitary thing he can use to tempt our otherwise perfect protoparents: "you will be like gods" (Gen 3:5). That is, at the level of creation, Satan knew that Adam and Eve had all they could desire, but the one thing still lacking was a total and divinely appropriating union with God, the only thing with which Satan could tempt them. The enemy promised Adam and Eve divinity in themselves, whereas they were made to become "created gods" by participating in only true God (*civ. Dei* 14.13: *Dii enim creati non sua veritate, sed Dei veri participatione sunt dii*; CCL 47.435; cf. *Trin.* 10.5.7). Augustine thus inquires:

> What else, after all, is man seeking in all this but to be the one and only, if that were possible, to whom all things are subject, in perverse imitation, that is to say, of almighty God? And to think that he would only have submissively to imitate God by living according to his commandments, and he would have all other things made subject to him . . . So then, pride too has a kind of appetite for unity and omnipotence
>
> (*vera rel.* 45.84; Hill 2005, 87; CCL 32.243; cf. *en. Ps.* 103, *exp.* 2.11; *civ. Dei* 14.13; *en. Ps.* 70, *exp.* 2.6).

Becoming like God is God’s promise to humanity, but it is solely God’s to grant. Innately constituted for a deifying union, the human person sins by seeking such union and omnipotence apart from God (what Augustine here calls a *perversa imitatio*). This breach between humanity and God had thus to be repaired by God-made-man, and for this reason, the Son of God becomes human: *Deos facturus qui homines erant, homo factus est qui Deus erat* – to make into gods those who were human, he who was God became human (*s*. 192.1; PL 38.1012).

Augustinian images of deification

Apart from this initial use of *deificari* at *Epistula* 10, there are six uses relegated to the “deifying” effect of a sacred text, and then eleven more important uses exhorting his Christian flock to become gods, divinely adopted children of their heavenly Father.[18] Each of these more overtly soteriological instances appears always in the context of the Son’s incarnation, as humanity’s divinization is clearly the result of the lowliness of Christ. The Son’s emptying (*kenosis*) is thus humanity’s fulfillment (*theosis*), effected by the Holy Spirit’s indwelling and the sacraments of Christ’s Church.

In order to understand how Augustine understands the deified life, let us now turn to the three main images he utilizes to illumine such a great promise: (1) language of recapitulation wherein the giver of natural life is also the conferrer of divine life; (2) the “great exchange” in which God becomes human so humans can become gods; and (3) the more explicitly scriptural language of divine adoption.

Recapitulation. If Gerald Bonner is correct and Augustine did receive his understanding of Christian deification through Irenaeus of Lyon (d. *c*. 202), we should not be surprised to see how a theology of recapitulation is found in Augustine’s writings as well.[19] Irenaeus and other Church Fathers found warrant for recapitulation in places such as St. Paul’s insistence of all things being restored in Christ (cf. Eph 1:10), as well as his presentation of Christ as the New Adam (cf. Rom 5; 1 Cor 15) who descended and has thus re-gathered the fallen human condition into himself. Or, as Irenaeus put it, the incarnate Son “recapitulated (*recapitulavit*) himself in the long line of humanity and gave us salvation so as to regain in Jesus Christ what we had forfeited in Adam.”[20] In any recapitulative model, there are four distinct moments, beginning with (1) opposed contraries – the former impoverished, the latter ameliorating; (2) the latter contrary’s movement ‘back’ to the state of the former; (3) the latter’s subsequent identification with the deficiency of the former; and (4) the consummate perfection of the former in union now with the latter.

This pattern is replete throughout Augustine’s works, especially in his sermons. Oftentimes his preaching employs the couplet of creator and re-creator to describe this recapitulative process. The one who made you is also the one who becomes like you in order to make you like himself: "Be still (*vacate*) . . . And see that I am God. See that you are not God, but I am. I created you, and I recreate you; I formed you, and I form you anew; I made you, and I remake you. If you had no power to make yourself, how do you propose to re-make yourself?" (*en. Ps*. 45.14; Boulding 2004, 322; cf. *Jo. ev. tr*. 38.8; *s*. 125.4; *en. Ps*. 37.27). Again stressing the weakness of the created order, Augustine highlights that only the perfect humanity of Christ can elevate sinners to God: "There you have something for your infirmity, something for your becoming perfect. Let Christ set you on your feet by that in him which is man, let him lead you forward by that in him which is God-man, let him lead you right through to that which is God" (*Jo. ev. tr*. 23.6; Ramsey 2008a, 410; cf. *Jo. ev. tr*. 108.5, *s*. 117.17; *en. Ps*. 103, *exp*. 4.1).

In 1990 François Dolbeau, a French medievalist, was rummaging around the stacks of the Stadtsbibliothek in Mainz and, in a dusty volume of sermons collated sometime in the mid-fifteenth century, fell upon twenty-six of Augustine's lost sermons. One of these *extravagantes*, now labeled *s*. 23B (Dolbeau 6; Mainz 13), was delivered in the winter of 404, probably in Carthage, as Bishop Augustine sought to teach the people how to understand the plural *dii* when they come across it in Scripture. At Psalm 81, for example, we hear that "God has stood up in the synagogue of the gods," and Augustine uses this occasion to teach those present that the Christian understanding of "gods" is wholly different than their pagan neighbors who prayed to gods (and goddesses) in the hope of becoming gods themselves. Augustine begins:

> To what hope the Lord has called us, what we now carry about with us, what we endure, what we look forward to, is well known . . . We carry mortality about with us, we endure infirmity, we look forward to divinity. For God wishes not only to vivify, but also to deify us. When would human infirmity ever have dared to hope for this, unless divine truth had promised it?
>
> (*s*. 23B.1, lines 1–6; Hill 1997, 37)

The Bishop of Hippo enjoins his congregation to see that their weakness only calls out for God's greatness to take on weakness for the sake of their salvation. God is both *vivificator* and *deificator*, the one who implanted a hope within all persons for divinity (*exspectamus divinitatem*). This hope is ratified by God's own power. Yet, to render such divine power efficacious, God humbly enters the weakness of human mortality and thus re-gathers all to himself.

The great exchange and becoming "gods." Continuing in *Sermo* 23B, we watch Augustine seize the opportunity to move from recapitulation language – God as both vivifier and deifier – to how the Son's descent achieves the simultaneous transformation of God's humanity and humanity's godliness, thereby again illuminating what Augustine means by deification:

> Still, it was not enough for our God to promise us divinity in himself, unless he also

> took on our infirmity, as though to say, "Do you want to know how much I love you, how certain you ought to be that I am going to give you my divine reality? I took to myself your mortal reality." We mustn't find it incredible, brothers and sisters, that human beings become gods, that is, that those who were human beings become gods . . . The Son of God became a son of man, in order to make sons of men into sons of God.
>
> (*s*. 23B.1, lines 10–14; Hill 1997, 459)

The initiative is all the Son's: he first takes on what belongs to humanity so he can bestow upon them his own divine reality (*divinam meum*). This is love: that God takes on human infirmity so as to bestow his own life. In so doing, he transforms humans into "gods," a term appearing most often in the context of Augustine's language of the Son's exchanging his humanity for our divinity.

For example, if we return to the next section of *Sermo* 23B, we see that this is precisely where Augustine subsequently takes his flock, contrasting the God who is so by nature and the gods who are made so by grace:

> Our God, the true God, the one God, has stood up in the synagogue of gods, many of them of course, and gods not by nature but by adoption, by grace. There is a great difference between God who exists, God who is always God, true God, not only God but also deifying God; that is, if I may so put it, god-making God, God not made making gods, and gods who are made, but not by a craftsman
>
> (*s*. 23B.2; Hill 1997, 459).

Notice how in very brief space, Augustine is able to distinguish between (1) the one true God who deifies (*deificatorem deum*) and (2) those gods who have been legitimately made so by grace (*non natura deorum, sed adoptione, sed gratia*).

Oftentimes, this *qualia commercia* (*s*. 80.5; PL 38.496) wherein Christ "sells" his divinity so as to acquire his Church, takes on a remunerative tone: a "wonderful exchange" (*mira commutatio*), or a "divine business deal" (*divina commercia*) which is "effected in this world by the heavenly dealer . . . Without him, we are nothing, but in him *we too are Christ*" (*en. Ps*. 30, *exp*. 2.3; Boulding 2004, 323 [my emphasis]). Augustine frequently forges this identification between Christian and Christ so strongly that he is able to exclaim: "Let us thus rejoice and give thanks, for we have been made not Christians, but we have been made Christ" (*Jo. ev. tr*. 21.8: *Ergo gratulemur et agamus gratias, non solum nos christianos factos esse, sed Christum*; CCL 36.216). Or using his favored scriptural passage, the Holy Spirit's pouring charity into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5), he maintains that through such charity (*per dilectionem*), the elect are incorporated (*in compage*) into the body of Christ; and there will be one Christ loving himself (*erit unus Christus amans se ipsum*: *ep. Jo*. 10.3; PL 35.2056). This is the glorious "transaction" which effects the transformative union of the Christian into Christ, the deification of the saints, and the formation of Christ's body.

Christians become Christ when he descends into their lives, a great transaction (*grande commercium*) costing the Son of God his life on the Cross (*s*. 329.1; PL 38.1454; cf. *en. Ps*. 147.16). This is achieved by the Son's taking to himself what has to be redeemed by being offered to the Father, humanity's mortality. The Son dies not by anything of his own eternal nature but by assuming ours (*assumpsit pro te, quod offeret pro te*), thus taking from us what he would offer to the Father: "You didn't have anything to live by, and he didn't have anything to die with. What a marvelous exchange (*o magna mutatio*). Live by what is his, because he died with what is yours" (*s*. 265D; Hill 1997, 259). At Psalm 117:15–16 we hear how the psalmist praises God for defeating Israel's enemies, but Augustine recasts this warfare no longer simply in terms of earthly, military might, but in terms of the greatest battle possible – to recreate a human into a god. "Great might is needed to raise up the lowly, to deify a mere mortal, to make the weak perfect, to grant glory through abasement and victory through suffering . . . No human being has ever raised up himself, no human has made himself perfect, no human has conferred glory on himself, no man or woman has proved victorious, no human being has saved himself" (*en. Ps*. 117.11; Boulding 2004, 337).

The Son's descent and humanity's consequent ascent form a stereoscopy eliciting Augustine's language of our "becoming gods." While such passages make clear that the Son's weakness results in our glory, what does Augustine mean by becoming a god? Clearly it is no mere figure of speech, appearing to be more than an honorific title, as Moses was "a god" to Pharaoh (cf. Ex 7:1). This language of "becoming gods" is Augustine's way of inviting his flock to transcend their fallen habits, their "human" proclivities toward dominance, revenge, sensuality, and to become God-like by allowing God to inform their intellect and actions. Here Augustine may be influenced by the Platonic principle that "like knows like," drawing perhaps from Plotinus, for whom assimilation and cognition were necessary correlatives. One must "become" the object of one's knowledge, as only that which was similar and like (συγγενὲς καὶ ὅμοιον) could ever come into contact with each other. For example, one must become "sun-like" in order to see the sun or "in some way god-like" (θεοιδὴς πᾶς) in order to gaze upon God.[21] Is this not how Augustine opens *De Trinitiate*? He begins by cautioning his readers that their natural ability to see will never behold the mystery of the Trinity; instead, they must seek to see with a power describable only as something "more than human" (*ultra homines*: *Trin*. 1.2.11; CCL 50.40).

Divine adoption. This new life is also described in terms of becoming the heavenly Father's children. Augustine relies on the Pauline image of adoption to emphasize the indispensable role of grace. According to Augustine, there are various ways of "being" divine: one is thus born, another is so given, but others are made into gods through the glorious act of adoption. In cleverly rhetorical fashion, then, the Son is the divine person who is born (*natus*), the Holy Spirit is the divine person who is given (*datus*), while the human person is the "god" who is made (*factus*). That is, the Holy Spirit comes forth not as one begotten (*non quomodo natus*) but as one given (*sed quomodo datus*), while a saint is made god through the grace of adoption (*factus ut per gratiam in adoptionem*: *Trin*. 5.14.15; CCL 50.222).

Needing of course to defend himself (and the Christian tradition) from any accusation of polytheism when employing such nomenclature, Augustine relies on this deified state of the elect to explain the scriptural use of the plural *dii* (as we saw above in *s*. 23B). At *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 49, for example, he explains why a song of Christian praise can open with "the God of gods" (Ps 49:1). There is one God by nature but in adopting sons and daughters, God has made "gods" by grace. In fact, here the acts of justification, deification, and adoption all appear as the same gift of new life because "he who justifies is the same as he who deifies, because by justifying us he made us sons and daughters of God." Therefore, Augustine continues, "if we have been made children of God, we have been made into gods; but we are such by the grace of him who adopts us, not because we are of the same nature as the one who begets." The dual paternity of the Father is again stressed: one divine Son by nature, while the rest have been made into children by grace, "not born of God's very being in such a way that they are what he is; it is through a gracious gift that they come to him and become with Christ his coheirs" (*en*. *Ps*. 49.2; Boulding 2004, 381). This passage is replete with all the related images Augustine uses to illumine his understanding of the deified life: becoming gods, becoming sons and daughters of the Father, graced co-heirs alongside the one Christ.

Similar to his need to distinguish between the types of G/gods, Augustine also knows it is essential to distinguish between the two ways to be a child of God: Son by nature and countless other sons and daughters through grace. At John 20:17, he easily finds warrant to account for this dual paternity. Christ tells Mary Magdalene that he has not yet ascended *ad Patrem meum et Patrem vestrum* and it becomes obvious why "He does not say 'our Father.' Therefore, in one way, 'my,' in a different way, 'your.' By nature, 'my,' by grace, 'your'" (*Jo*. *ev*. *tr*. 121.3; Rettig 1993, 5.59). Augustine thus grounds human deification in the natural generation of the Son without ever wrongly subsuming the creature into the creator. His doctrine of divine adoption at once not only retains human nature, it perfects it by providing men and women with a new, unfallen life. As divinely adopted children, we now are enabled to perform supernatural acts like true charity and to enjoy supernatural states like immortality and incorruptibility.[22]

To provide a very concrete instance of how this new life is manifested, Augustine uses Ephesians 4:25 to address a fallen human's ability to tell the truth. At *Sermo* 166 (dated after 409), we hear that by making us like himself, God not only conforms our mortal nature to his own life but endows us now with supernatural agency. Making human persons gods through adoption, humans become *so* human, they begin to act like God through the graced fulfillment of their humanity:

> Don't take umbrage, I mean, you are not being told not to be a man . . . God, you see, wants to make you a god; not by nature, of course, like the one whom he

> begot; but by his gift and adoption. For just as he through being humbled came to share your mortality; so through lifting you up he brings you to share his immortality . . . So, *putting aside lying, speak the truth* [Eph 4:25], in order that this mortal flesh too, which you still have from Adam, may itself earn renewal and transformation at the time of its resurrection, having been preceded by newness of spirit; and thus the whole man being deified (*totus homo deificatus*) and made divine may cleave forever to the everlasting and unchangeable truth.
>
> (*s*. 166.4; Hill 1997, 209–10; PL 38.909)

As "gods," deified humans now transcend the mendacity of Adam. This "wholly deified human" is made through his or her participation in God, through "cleaving" to God, sharing his life so as to be renewed not only in spirit but transformed from mortal into immortal flesh.[23]

This is a transformation of a human being conformed to the likeness of the Son, now an adopted son or daughter of the same Father, effected by the unity granted the saints by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is thus the one who unites not only the Christ-like to the Father but all Christians together. This is the Church, that concordant ecclesia of praise where creatures can finally achieve the *quietum* for which their hearts were made. The Spirit animates Christ's Church into one body and here the divinely adopted children are bound to Christ and to one another.

The gift who is the Holy Spirit

It is an Augustinian commonplace that the Holy Spirit is the Gift of the Father and the Son, the Love between the Lover and the Beloved, the Glue who unites persons eternally.[24] We have just seen that all instances of *deificare* appear within a discussion on the effects of the Son's Incarnation, but the Spirit too plays an indispensable role in humanity's divine transformation. As the principle of communion, the Spirit unites human persons to the Son as well as to one another within the Son's own body, thus effecting two essential components of Augustine's doctrine of deification: divine union and divine indwelling.

First and foremost, the Spirit is the principle of union. As the eternal communion between the Father and the Son, the taxonomy Augustine utilizes to describe the Spirit's work in the economy is always telling: the Spirit is always the divine person who joins together (*coniungere*), who inheres between (*inhaerere*), who binds (*vinculare*) the Father and the Son, and so on. As the person of the Trinity whose particular function is to join persons, the Holy Spirit unites not only divine persons, Father and Son, but also human persons to God as well as to one another. The Spirit is thus the love between persons who comes to those desirous of him, because the Spirit lives to join us to God "so that we may abide forever in that supreme and unchangeable good" (*doc. Chr.*

1.34.38; Hill 1996, 123). In uniting us to God, the Spirit inevitably unites us to other members of Christ's body because Christian union is always "both with reference to God and to each other . . . because it is by his gift that we are one with each other; with him we are one spirit (1 Cor 6.17)" (*Trin.* 6.5.7; Hill 1991b, 209: CCL 50.235). The Holy Spirit thus renders the Christian one with God as well as one with God's people.

The second role the Spirit plays in deification is to inhabit the Christian soul. The Spirit perfects the deified gathered into the Son's body. By the love who is the Spirit indwelling in the faithful, they realize true perfection by loving rightly. With a gloss on 1 John 4:12–16, Augustine entreats his hearers: "Begin to love, to be made perfect (*incipe diligere, perficieris*). Have you begun to love? God has begun to dwell in you. Love him who has begun to dwell in you, so that by dwelling in you more perfectly he may make you perfect . . . Ask your heart. If it is filled with charity, you have God's Spirit" (*ep. Jo.* 8.12; Ramsey 2008a, 127–28; PL 35.2043).

The result of the Spirit's activity in the soul is perfecting charity, a love that further conforms the Christian to Christ. To illustrate this transformation in the Spirit, Augustine will oftentimes enlist Paul's imagery to the Church at Corinth that the Spirit renders believers into God's own temples. As the Spirit unites the created soul to God, the Spirit himself begins to dwell in the elect, rendering each a temple of God (cf. 1 Cor 3:16). Combining insights from St. Paul, one of the baptismal creeds he knew, and his language of becoming "gods," Augustine is once again able to make important distinctions when discussing what happens when the Spirit dwells in a rational soul. Christians profess faith in the Spirit and then the Church because it is in this order that we come to know God. For we are his new temples, known by the fact that even if we have thereby been made "gods" we are not the kinds of gods or temples to whom one prays:

> So neither the whole Church nor any part of it desires to be worshipped instead of God, nor does anybody want to be a god to those who belong to the temple of God which is built of those made into gods by the uncreated God. So the Holy Spirit, if he were a creature and not the creator, would certainly be a rational creature – for rational creatures are the highest of creatures – and so would not be placed before the Church in the rule of faith, since he also would be a member of the Church in that part of it which is in heaven, and would have no temple himself but be himself a temple.
>
> (*ench.* 15.56; Hill 2005, 307; CCL 46.79–80)

We again see that Augustine, when utilizing such provocative language, is careful to make distinctions that keep his doctrine of deification insulated from any hints of polytheism. While created temples can also be considered gods, these temples are not to be worshiped; one worships from a temple, not to it. The Holy Spirit has temples but is himself not one, for he is God, evidenced by the right order of the creed, the *regula fidei*, where the Spirit comes before the Church because the Spirit is the one who renders this gathering of rational (and sanctified) souls into divine temples. In other words, from the Spirit of Christ comes the body of Christ: *de Spiritu Christi non vivit, nisi corpus Christi* (*Jo. ev. tr*. 26.13; CCL 36.266). From the Holy Spirit arises the Church, the "whole Christ" where the saints become one with God and with one another forever. Let us now conclude these reflections by examining where Augustinian deification and ecclesiology meet.

The totus Christus

Augustine knew from the Donatist exegete Tyconius (d. *c*. 400) that at times Christ speaks in the Scriptures as our head and sometimes on behalf of his body, the Church.[25] What Tyconius could not conceive of was how Christ could speak as both head and members, the whole Christ who is the fullness of his church (cf. *s*. 341.1). This "whole Christ" is precisely the manner by which Christians become Christ, how the Incarnation not only unites all human persons into Christ but allows them to find their truest identity in him as well. The *totus Christus* is therefore the way the Son "unites us into one body with himself and makes us his members, so that in him we too are Christ (*in illo et nos Christus essemus*) . . . From this it is obvious that we are the body of Christ, being all anointed. In him all of us belong to Christ, but we are Christ too because in some sense the whole Christ is Head and body" (*et omnes in illo et Christi et Christus sumus quia quomodo totus Christus caput et corpus est*: *en. Ps*. 26, *exp*. 2.2 [my translation]; CCL 38.155). Most of Augustine's allusions to the *totus Christus* appear throughout his *Enarrationes in Psalmos* because there Christ speaks as one with his chosen people, the children of Abraham: "Remember that Christ is Abraham's descendant, and, if we too are, that would mean that we are Christ. But we are Christ (*ergo et nos Christus*) . . . [yet] we are not the Word, we were not with God in the beginning, not through us were all things made. But when we consider the flesh, there we find Christ, and in Christ we find both him and ourselves" (*et ibi Christus et ille et nos*: *en. Ps*. 142.3; Boulding 2004, 346–47; CCL 40.2062).

Tarcisius van Bavel sees in this Augustinian doctrine of the *totus Christus* the "second poverty" (*seconde pauvreté*) of Christ.[26] The Lord continues a new kind of emptying by continuing to identify himself with his mystical body on earth – especially with the beleaguered, the hungry, and the persecuted:

> Now, however, I wonder if we shouldn't have a look at ourselves, if we shouldn't think about his body, because he is also us (*quia et nos ipse est*). After all, if we weren't him, this wouldn't be true: *When you did it for one of the least of mine, you did it for me* [Mt 25:40]. If we weren't him, this wouldn't be true: *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* [Acts 9:4]. So we too are him, because we are his organs, because we are his body, because he is our head, because the whole Christ is both head and body.

(*s*. 133.8; Hill 1992, 338)

Incorporated into Christ's body, Christians are to recognize themselves in him. As "head," Christ makes his body his very own, thereby forging a union of mutual identification so real that therein, he becomes us and we become him.

Very often this same identification between head and body is given ecclesial expression when Augustine preaches on the Eucharist. Within the *totus Christus*, this body is continually celebrated, as each member of the Church is called to receive what he or she is to become:

> So if it's you that are the body of Christ and its members, it's the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply *Amen*, and by so replying you express your assent. What you hear, you see, is *The Body of Christ*, and you answer, *Amen*. So be a member of the body of Christ, in order to make that *Amen* true.
>
> (*s*. 272; Hill 1993, 300; PL 28.1242)

The Church's liturgical "Amen" corroborates each member's incorporation both *into* and *as* the body of Christ: all are to receive what they are and drink where their names are enrolled (cf. *en*. *Ps*. 32, *exp*. 2.4). For this is the effect of worship which proves eternal on the souls of those still in time. Here is where the "sacrament of piety" is realized as both the pledge of unity and of binding charity. *O sacramentum pietatis! O signum unitatis! O vinculum caritatis!* (*Jo. ev. tr*. 26.13; CCL 36.266).

Conclusion

Deification is a central theme in Augustine's thought, illuminating how he understood and presented the Christian life. Careful to make a strict distinction between the God who deifies and those who are made gods-by-grace, Augustinian deification means the perfection of the human person as he or she comes to live in total and perfect union with God. The transformation from fallen creature to deified saint does not abolish but perfectly fulfills human agency as the children of Adam are now made co-heirs with Christ.

Moreover, Augustine's doctrine of deification is not limited to his sporadic uses of *deificare*, but emerges in his many rich descriptions of the Christian's new life in Christ. To explain this, he preferred the language of assimilation and identification over the more traditional language of participation.[27] Why so? He consciously stayed away from the *locus classicus* of most patristic deification – 2 Peter 1:4 and becoming participants in the divine nature – because he saw the Pelagians co-opting this passage in their promotion of human perfection.[28] In order to advance and expound such a possibly misleading term as *deificare*, he just as easily appealed to images of "becoming gods" through the descent of Christ, becoming divinely adopted children of the Father, as well as temples of the Holy Spirit.

This reading reshapes how we approach Augustine's overall thought, receiving a fuller understanding of his purpose in preaching and writing; we are even able to place the more pessimistic phrases from his later, anti-Pelagian years in a more accurate context. There are also great ecumenical possibilities in this reinterpretation of Augustine. For he was never a penologist fixated on the avoidance and the consequence of sin, but a lover of truth and a pastor of souls who strove to exhort himself and others to a deified life in Christ.

Endnotes

1 Searching Corpus Christianorum (CCL) reveals sixteen various instances of *deificare* before Augustine's eighteen uses. All references to Augustine follow the standardized abbreviations as found in Fitzgerald 1999, xxxv–xlii and are included simply in the body of the chapter. English citations from the *De civitate Dei* come from Bettenson 1984.

2 Mausbach 1925, 37–38.

3 Lot-Borodine 1970, 39–40.

4 Woodhead 2004, 80; the same concerns were also raised by Sherrard 1959, 143–44.

5 Capánaga 1954. While Capánaga is the watershed study, there does exist an earlier dissertation in Afrikaans, Stoop 1952.

6 Bonner 1986.

7 Cf. *Sermo* 23B, as in Hill 1997; all translations of Augustine, unless otherwise noted, come from this series. For more on *Sermones* 23B, see also Casiday 2001.

8 Gustave Bardy, "Divinisation: Chez les Pères Latins," in Bardy 1957, vol. III, section 3; Augustine is found at 1395–97. See also Bonner's encyclopedia entries: "Deificare," in

Mayer 1996a, vol. II, 265–67; and “Deification, Divinization,” in Fitzgerald 1999, 265–66.

9 Meconi 2013; Keating 2004, 227–51; Russell 2004, 329–32. Other studies include Puchniak 2006; Chadwick 2002; Urbano López de Meneses 2001, 112–24; Williams 1999, 29; Botterill 1994, 206–07; Reta 1993; Wilson-Kastner 1976; Juberias 1972, 115–18.

10 Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 1.8 and *Paedogogus* 1.6.26.

11 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* §54; PG 25.192B.

12 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.3; PG 3.376A.

13 Ullmann 1962, 213.

14 Folliet 1962, 225–36. See also Teske 1992 and Beatrice 1989.

15 Cf. G. Bardy, “Divinization,” in Bardy 1957, 1391: “Le sens du mot *deificari* paraît encore très général, ou peut même dire philosophique; car il n’est pas mis en rapport avec les mystères chrétiens.”

16 Van der Meer 1961, 209.

17 Teske 1992, 290; see also Lawless 1987, 51.

18 Cf. Meconi 2013, 82–88.

19 Cf. Bonner 2007, 63.

20 Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.18.

21 Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.9.

22 For example, we cannot love as mere humans, “but they love one another because they are gods and all of them sons and daughters of the Most High, so that they may be brothers and sisters to his only Son, loving each other with the love with which he himself loved them" (*Jo. ev. tr*. 65.1; cf. *s*. 121.5, *Jo. ev. tr*. 111.6 and *conf*. 13.31.46–47 entails amazing discussions of how God begins to operate within and through the sanctified soul).

23 With regard to the term for cleaving (*adhaerere*), Robert Wilken (2003, 72) writes that "no other biblical word seemed to Augustine to embody the entire mystery of faith so fully."

24 Meconi, 2013, 147–50.

25 Meconi, 2013, 195–96.

26 Van Bavel 1954, 113.

27 "Participation" in Augustine is a highly technical and important term. It is an essential concept in understanding his doctrine of deification because it is precisely how he explains a creature's graced ability to enjoy a limited share in a divine attribute. It appears that he avoids quoting 2 Peter 1:4 and its use of participation because the Pelagians had usurped that passage for their own ends, but that is not to imply he avoids participation language altogether. For more on Augustine's theory of participation, see Meconi 2013, 51–52 as well as Meconi 1996.

28 Cf. Russell 2004, 332; Meconi 2013, 128–32.

Part V Political and ecclesial life

12 Augustine’s political philosophy

Paul Weithman

The topic of Augustine’s political philosophy must be approached with care. Augustine never devoted a book or a treatise to the questions of what we now call “political philosophy.” Unlike Aristotle, he did not serially address those questions and draw out the institutional implications of his answers. Unlike Hobbes, he did not elaborate a philosophical theory of politics, if by that is meant a synoptic treatment of those questions which relies on theoretical devices contrived for the purpose. Discussions of politics can be found in many of Augustine’s writings. Those discussions draw heavily upon ethics, social theory, the philosophy of history, and, especially, psychology and theology, and they advance conclusions which neither we nor Augustine would regard as philosophical. It is therefore questionable whether Augustine believed political philosophy was a subject which should be distinguished from the subject matters of other areas of philosophy or political inquiry. A distinctive set of political views can be recovered from Augustine’s texts. That set constitutes, not a consistent political philosophy, but a loose-jointed and theological body of political thought which Augustine never assembled.

Though Augustine did not draw his political views together into a coherent whole, generations of readers have seen unity and power in his political thought. In the centuries since Augustine’s death, his work has proven a rewarding source for philosophers and theologians concerned with the nature and purposes of government, with Church–state relations, with the political implications of religious and moral pluralism, and with the conditions of just war. Its importance for medieval political theory can hardly be overstated. In the twentieth century, creative social thinkers as different as Reinhold Niebuhr, Alasdair MacIntyre, and John Milbank returned to it with profit.[1] Unfortunately it is impossible to trace here the gestation of that body of thought through Augustine’s many writings, to describe in detail the classical and Christian political views that nourished it, or to discuss its subsequent influence. My aim is simply to sketch its profile as it appeared at maturity.

Love, the two cities, and the saeculum

The richest source of political material in Augustine’s corpus is *De civitate Dei*, which Augustine undertook to answer those who blamed the Christianization of the Roman Empire for the sack of Rome. There he argues that despite the diversity of human cultures, nations, and languages, the most fundamental cleavage in humanity is that between the two groups he calls the City of God and the Earthly City.[2] Augustine's use of the term 'city' to describe these groups suggests, correctly, that he thinks their internal dynamics can be illuminated using concepts appropriate for explaining the behavior of political entities such as Rome. It also suggests, misleadingly, that the cities can be identified with actual political societies with which his readers were familiar. To see why this second suggestion is mistaken and to see how the motif of the two cities structures Augustine's political thought, we must begin with his psychology and the central place of theology within it.

Augustine thinks human beings are moved by what he calls their "loves." He uses this term to embrace a variety of attitudes toward things we possess, as well as a range of appetites and aversions toward things we do not (*civ. Dei* 14.7). These loves may be transient motives which explain isolated acts, traits of character that motivate habitual action, or fundamental orientations of a person that unify her character. Augustine thinks two ways of loving are especially important: "enjoyment" and "use." To enjoy something is to love it for its own sake; Augustine contrasts this with regarding one thing as useful for securing another (*doc. Chr.* 1.31). Something worthy of being loved entirely for its own sake is capable of conferring true happiness (*civ. Dei* 8.8). Its secure possession quiets desire. Only God is worthy of being loved in this way and, as Augustine says to God near the beginning of his *Confessions*, "our hearts find no peace until they rest in you" (*conf.* 1.1). By contrast, no created good can completely quiet the appetites and convey the happiness and peace brought by the enjoyment of God; hence no creature is worthy of being loved entirely for its own sake.

Perfect justice, Augustine thinks, consists in an enduring disposition to love objects, including God, according to their worth (*vera rel.* 48.93). Sin is a turn away from God that disorders our loves. Augustine associates this disorder with pride (*civ. Dei* 14.13) because he thinks it consists in giving undue importance to ourselves and to the satisfaction of our desires. From this prideful exaltation of self, more disorder follows. Our love for things becomes disproportionate to what their nature merits (*civ. Dei* 15.22), so that we enjoy objects which ought to be used and use goods which ought to be enjoyed. We seek happiness in things that cannot confer it, including carnal pleasures, transient glory, enduring reputation, and power over others. Despite our psychological disorder, Augustine thinks we retain some desire to do what we ought. We are therefore at odds with ourselves. Thus Augustine thinks that the best of lives are beset by both inner conflict (*civ. Dei* 14.7) and conflicts with others, conflicts evident in even the most intimate relationships (*civ. Dei* 19.5 and 8).

In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine relies on this account of love to explain the origin and progress of the two cities. The loves he appeals to are not transient motives. They are members' fundamental orientations. The Earthly City, he says, was created "by love of self extending even to contempt of God" (*civ. Dei* 14.28), and consists of those who exalt themselves and love dominion. Fractious though it is (*civ. Dei* 15.4), this city has a certain unity since its members look for glory and subjugate nations (*civ. Dei* 15.28).

Augustine traces the founding of the Earthly City to Cain, the son of Adam and Eve whom the Scriptures say killed his brother Abel and founded a city (*civ. Dei* 15.2). The City of God consists of all those who are rightly oriented toward Him. Its members are unified by their common love of God, "a love that rejoices in a common and immutable good: a love, that is, that makes 'one heart' out of many" (*civ. Dei* 15.3). Since this city includes the saints and the angels,[3] only some of its citizens are in the world and they are spread throughout it. Augustine speaks of them as being "on pilgrimage" in this life and spells out the implications of this evocative image using technical language introduced in his discussion of love. Members of the City of God use the world while they are in it; they do not enjoy it (*civ. Dei* 15.7).

Augustine sometimes speaks as though the City of God is the Church (*civ. Dei* 13.16). His considered view, however, is that "many reprobate are mingled in the Church with the good. Both are . . . collected in the net of the Gospel; and in this world, as in a sea, both swim without separation, enclosed in the net until brought ashore" (*civ. Dei* 18.49; see also 18.54).

Thus in the visible Church, members of the two cities exist side by side (*civ. Dei* 1.35). Every political society also includes citizens of each. Therefore no visible institution or society can be identified with either the City of God or the Earthly City. The distinction between the two is eschatological rather than political. It is between those who are and are not destined for eternal life with God, rather than between those who are and are not members of a given society. Members of the two cities are intermingled in the *saeculum*, that realm of temporal existence in which politics takes place.[4]

In *De civitate Dei* Augustine seizes on the love of power that characterizes the Earthly City and poses a question which seems an obvious counterpoint to his remark in the *Confessions* that our hearts rest only in God. "Once established in the minds of the powerful," he asks, "how can that lust for mastery rest until, by the usual succession of offices, it has reached the highest power?" (*civ. Dei* 1.31). His answer is that the arrogant do not rest until they have achieved dominion. He thinks their restless love for power explains the rise of great empires and Rome's hegemony over his own world. This identification of one of the driving forces of political history with the love that defines the Earthly City suggests that history unfolds as a contest between it and the City of God. In fact, Augustine recognizes that every human being has a divided will. Even those destined to spend eternity with God bear some responsibility for the conflicts of temporal life. Even they therefore need the restraint that, as we shall see, Augustine thinks government exists to provide.

Slavery, government, and property

Augustine was relatively uninterested in a question about government that deeply concerned both Plato and Aristotle: that of which form of government is best. In an early passage Augustine remarked perfunctorily that if a people is committed to the common good they should be allowed to choose their own rulers; he does not consider the matter further (*lib. arb.* 1.6). Again unlike Plato and Aristotle, Augustine is uninterested in the historical and social processes by which one regime is typically transformed into another. He is more interested in how God's providence works through political history than he is in how that history depends upon the forces characteristically set in motion by one or another institutional form. To see this, it helps to see exactly what questions his discussion of government is intended to answer.

Augustine did not have a clear concept of the state, understood as a society's governing apparatus. His remarks about the origin and purposes of government are therefore not answers to questions about the origin or purposes of the state. Crudely put, Augustine's question concerns, not political institutions, but the rationale for certain human relationships. He observes that some human beings have the authority to govern others. He asks how such authority relationships came about and what ends they serve. Augustine does not doubt that human beings are naturally social; indeed, he remarks that there is no species so naturally social as humanity (*civ. Dei* 12.28). Nor does he doubt that human societies naturally need direction. In asking about the origins and ends of political authority, what he means to ask is whether societies naturally need to be directed by authority that is political, or whether what is natural to us is subjection to some other kind of authority instead.

Augustine's answer to that question, which is to be found late in *De civitate Dei*, hinges on what he means by 'natural.' He closes chapter 14, Book 19 of that work by speaking of the authority exercised by a benevolent father and husband. He opens chapter 15 by saying that "this is prescribed by the order of nature: it is thus that God created man." Augustine's equation of "the order of nature" with the condition in which "God created man" makes clear that for him, 'natural' and its cognates – when applied to human beings – refer to our condition prior to original sin.

Augustine seems to think that even had original sin not been committed, sinless human beings would have reproduced and multiplied to fill the earth (*civ. Dei* 13.24, 14.26). Because of our natural sociability, they would have lived in groups, and those groups would presumably have needed direction. The question of what kind of direction is natural to us can be addressed by asking what kind of direction that would have been. Later in the same chapter, Augustine notes that Scripture says that the patriarchs were shepherds rather than kings. By this, he says, God "indicate[d] what the order of nature requires" (*civ. Dei* 191.15). Since the "order of nature" refers to our condition before original sin, this passage suggests that Augustine thinks that there would be no king–subject relationship had original sin not been committed. Read in conjunction with the closing remark of chapter 14, it further suggests that Augustine thinks that if all had gone as God intended, and original sin had not been committed, human groups would have been guided by authority akin to that of a Roman *paterfamilias* or a biblical patriarch.

But Augustine thinks that the constitution of the patriarchs does not just show "what the order of nature requires." It also shows, by contrast, "what the desert of sinners demands. For we believe that it is with justice that a condition of servitude is imposed on the sinner" (*civ. Dei* 19.15). This contrast between patriarchs and slave-masters, together with the earlier one between the patriarchs and kings, suggests that Augustine thinks political authority is in important respects like the mastership of slaves. It thereby confirms that he thinks that it, like slavery, is a consequence of sin.

Augustine's implication that slavery is unnatural and his explicit claim that it results from sin do not add to views he inherited from the patristic tradition. He enjoins masters to treat their slaves kindly, and reiterates St. Paul's injunction that slaves should obey their masters. What is significant is that Augustine seems to assert a similarity between mastership and government. It is also puzzling. What is it about political authority that makes Augustine think it would not have existed if human beings were not sinful? What is it about sin that makes Augustine think political authority exists because of it?

Let us take the second question first. As we saw, Augustine observes that we are the most social of species by nature; he completes the thought by saying that we are also the most "quarrelsome by perversion" (*civ. Dei* 12.28 [following Bettenson]). While Augustine thinks we never lose our desire for peace, he also thinks that the psychological disorder which our sinfulness induces makes it difficult for us to live in peace with ourselves and others (*civ. Dei* 21.15). Our tendency to conflict is so strong that peace would elude us if groups were governed only by parental power. After the commission of original sin, the coercive power of political authority is required. But because the loves of sinful human beings are distorted and conflicts arise among us, the aims of political authority must be limited: "the earthly city . . . desires an earthly peace, and it limits the harmonious agreement of citizens concerning the giving and obeying of orders to the establishment of a kind of compromise between human wills about the things relevant to mortal life" (*civ. Dei* 19.17 [following Bettenson]).

Interestingly, Augustine's treatment of property conforms to the pattern laid down in his treatment of political authority. He follows other patristic writers in thinking that the division of property is not natural.[5] One reason it is unnatural is that it is often unjust: Augustine suggests in a letter that those who make bad use of their property possess it unjustly (*ep.* 153). We might expect Augustine to suggest that those who hold property ought to be deprived of it. A thinker more interested in institutional questions might sketch laws that would permit its expropriation and just redistribution. Instead, Augustine continues, surprisingly, by saying that a function of property law is to protect unjust possession so that "those using their [their property] badly become less injurious" (*ep.* 153) than they would otherwise be. Presumably what he means is that those who make bad use of property to which they are legally entitled do so because of their strong attachment to material goods. Their attachment is so powerful that they would steal or illegally retain the things they wanted if laws required them to give them up when they used them badly. Property laws allowing the unjust to retain possession thus keep them from "obstruct[ing the faithful] by their evil deeds." As is apparent from his discussion of love, Augustine thinks so strong an attachment to finite goods is an affective disorder resulting from human sinfulness. Therefore the fundamental reason private property is unnatural is that it is an accommodation to our undue love for material things. Like political authority, private property benefits everyone by allowing us to live together more peacefully than we otherwise could.

This takes us back to the first question: what is it about political authority that makes Augustine think it would not have existed if human beings were not sinful? The answer is that for Augustine, the salient feature of political authority just is that feature an authority would need to govern people prone to conflict: the authority to coerce them. This authority is common to those with political power and with authority over slaves. Augustine also insists that subjection to political authority, like subjection to a slave-master, is morally improving because both foster humility, particularly when the good are subjected to the bad (*en. Ps.* 124.8). Thus both political authority and the mastery of slaves rely on coercion and teach humility. It is because of these fundamental similarities that Augustine likens the former authority to the latter, moving back and forth between the two in chapter 15 of *De civitate Dei* and elsewhere (*en. Ps.* 124.8).

Augustine, Cicero, and Rome

The claim that political subjection is similar to slavery seems prey to a number of objections. First, no – or very few – societies maintain peace through forms of coercion that resemble the treatment of slaves. As should have been obvious to Augustine, peace in any society depends upon a large measure of voluntary compliance. Secondly, political society arguably exists to effect some degree of justice. That societies are perceived by their members to do so, at least to some extent, helps to explain why members of those societies freely comply with the demands of the social order. Thirdly, it is because political societies can effectively aim at justice that citizens are able to realize important elements of the human good by taking part in politics and helping to realize the common good. To the extent that their society is just, they exercise virtues such as justice, patriotism, and self-sacrifice which are good for them and help to sustain their society. The second and third of these points are stressed by Cicero who, by defending the second, placed himself in a tradition of political thought which had its origins in classical Athens. By setting out to refute these claims, Augustine takes a firm stand against that tradition.

Cicero raises these points in his dialogue *De re publica*, a work well known to Augustine. One of the participants in that dialogue is Scipio Africanus, who claims that a society is "not every assembly of the multitude, but an assembly united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right and a community of interest."[6] Scipio later asks rhetorically "what is a society except a partnership in justice?";[7] still later he praises those who serve the public good, implying that they are the most virtuous of citizens.[8] Augustine mentions the first two of these remarks early in *De civitate Dei* (*civ. Dei* 2.21) and returns to them in Book 19. He advances the traditional claim that justice prevails only where each is given his due. He says justice therefore demands worship of the true God. Since God was not worshiped in Rome, justice never prevailed there. Since it is granted all around that Rome was a society, it follows that Scipio's definition of a society must be wrong (*civ. Dei* 19.24).

Augustine began writing *De civitate Dei* to answer the charge that abandonment of the Roman deities for the God of Christianity was an injustice which led to Rome's sack by the barbarians. The assertion that Rome was unjust because the Christian God was not worshiped there would thus have struck many of Augustine's readers as high-handed provocation at best and question-begging at worst. Augustine therefore supports his reply to Cicero by several more sophisticated strands of thought which he deftly interweaves. One is a highly polemical version of Roman history. Augustine reminds his readers that Rome was established by a fratricide who could not bear to share the glory of the founding with his brother (*civ. Dei* 15.5). He recounts the Roman abduction of the Sabine women with a gleeful sarcasm aimed at the Roman historian Sallust, who boasted of the justice of the early Romans (*civ. Dei* 2.17). He observes that worship of the Roman gods was characterized by "horrible and detestable evils" (*civ. Dei* 2.6), particularly in the theaters where the gods' deeds were re-enacted (*civ. Dei* 1.32). He quotes Sallust on the efforts of the Roman rich to suppress the poor before the destruction of Carthage and on the moral decline of Rome afterwards (*civ. Dei* 2.18). And in reply to those who blame Christianity for the fall of Rome, Augustine writes:

> Rome was founded and extended by the labours of those men of old; their descendants made Rome more hideous while it stood than when it fell. For in that ruin there fell only stones and wood; whereas by these men's lives were overthrown, not her walls, but her moral defenses and adornments. More fatal than the flames which consumed the city's houses were the lusts that burned in their hearts.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 2.2.)[9]

Augustine turns to Roman history to support his claim that if Rome was a society, this was not because justice prevailed there but in spite of the fact that it did not. But Augustine also uses history to make another and more subtle point. That point is that because of Rome's injustice, the city never was worthy of the place its patriotic citizens gave it in their loves. Augustine believes, as we saw, that justice requires loving things as their nature merits. This claim, together with his historical narrative, strengthens his case that justice never prevailed in Rome, for it implies that even the noblest citizens of the republic were not truly just, his passing remark about "moral adornments" notwithstanding.

This conclusion allows Augustine to advance two further arguments. It enables him to rebut Cicero's contention that devoted citizenship draws on genuine human excellence by replying – in his most polemical moments – that even when Rome was at its apogee, its noblest citizens developed qualities which merely bore outward resemblances to the virtues. It also enables him to rebut the thesis that the stability and power of Rome in this period were to be explained by the civic virtues of its citizens. Augustine is at his most shocking and effective when he impugns the virtue of venerable figures in Roman history. The passages in which he does so have considerable rhetorical force (*civ. Dei* 1.19), especially when conjoined with his express view that Christians are the best subjects and office-holders a society could have (*ep.* 138). Augustine's case against the moral superiority of the great Romans of the past really depends, however, upon his account of what the virtues are and are not. Claims about the right order of love are, of course, at the heart of that account.

Some of Augustine's most extreme claims about the conditions of virtue, and his most extreme conclusions about the noble Romans' lack of it, can be found in *De civitate Dei*. There Augustine writes of the ancient Romans:

> Glory they loved most ardently. They chose to live for it, and they did not hesitate to die for it . . . Because they deemed it ignoble for their fatherland to serve and glorious for it to rule and command, the first object of all their desire was freedom, and the second, mastery . . . It was, therefore, this avidity for praise and passion for glory that accomplished so many wondrous things; things which were doubtless praiseworthy and glorious in the estimation of men.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 5.12)

Since Augustine thinks justice requires loving things according to their nature, he goes on to say that "nor is it a true virtue unless it tends toward that end where the good of man is" (*civ. Dei* 5.12 [my translation]). Earthly glory, for oneself or one's city, is not "where the good of man is." Therefore the Romans' passion for glory was not a virtue despite the achievements it brought to the city they loved. Augustine does not deny that "those men of old" who "founded and extended" Rome exhibited a self-discipline which "their descendants" lacked, for he grants that they "overcame the desire for riches and many other vices" (*civ. Dei* 5.13). To determine whether such self-restraint is genuinely virtuous, however, Augustine argues that it is necessary to look at the loves – the underlying desires and aversions – which constitute its characteristic motive.

Augustine argues in *De civitate Dei* that acts of self-restraint are sinful if done from fear of punishment (*civ. Dei* 14.10; *mor.* 30); abstinence "is only good when it is practiced in accordance with faith in the Supreme Good, which is God" (*civ. Dei* 15.20). He claims that the self-restraint of the ancient Romans was rooted, not in faith in God, but in fear of destruction by Carthage (*civ. Dei* 1.30–31) and in desires for Rome's freedom, dominion, and the ersatz immortality that comes from lasting glory. "What else was there for them to love," he asks, "but glory, by which they sought to find even after death a kind of life in the mouths of those who praised them?" (*civ. Dei* 5.14). He concludes that neither these loves nor the self-restraint they motivated made the Romans virtuous. They only made them "less vile" (*civ. Dei* 5.13).

Elsewhere Augustine is more measured. In a letter written about the time he began *De civitate Dei*, he grants that those who founded and preserved Rome had "a certain characteristic rectitude" which he refers to as "civil virtue" (*ep.* 138). The notion of a civic virtue assumed great importance in civic republicanism, a tradition of political thought which originated with Cicero.[10] According to this tradition, virtues are traits that orient their possessor to their city's common good. Augustine never suggests, however, that what he calls "civil virtue" is genuinely virtuous. As if to stress that it was not, he hastens to add that the Romans had this "characteristic rectitude" "without true religion" and that it pales in comparison with the virtues which make men citizens of the City of God.

Thus Augustine's remark about civic virtue should not blind us to the radical character of his political thought. His arguments that political authority is exercised because of human sinfulness, that it can be likened to slavery, that it exists to restrain and humble those subject to it, and that citizens do not develop the virtues by dedicating themselves to political life, together constitute a sustained assault on the tradition of political thinking which locates "the good for man" in the common good of earthly rather than a heavenly city. That assault culminates in Augustine's definition of a commonwealth, which he offers in Book 19 of *De civitate Dei*. "A people," Augustine says there, "is an assembled multitude of rational creatures bound together by common agreement on the objects of their love" (*civ. Dei* 19.24). Political societies enjoy the support of their members as long as their members love the same things. What is most important about this definition is its implication for social stability. Societies need not, as Scipio implied, be sustained by a common love of justice. They may be stabilized simply by their citizens' love for the limited peace their governments establish.

Augustine is sometimes labeled a "positivist" about politics or, more commonly, a "political realist."[11] His definition of a people lends some credence to the charge of positivism. Positivists in philosophy of law hold that a precept counts as a law in virtue of its having been enacted or posited in the right way. It is no less a law because it is not properly related to natural or moral law. Similarly, Augustine thinks that a group counts as a people in virtue of its having a common object of love. It is no less so because the object that unites it is not just; indeed, Augustine intimates that robber bands are societies (*civ. Dei* 4.4). There are also ample grounds for calling Augustine a political realist. He recognizes that those in authority must sometimes do things they regret, such as torturing the innocent (*civ. Dei* 19.6). He details the truths of Roman history and demolishes the myths latter-day Romans tell themselves about their city's past. He is clear-eyed about the loves of power and glory that actually move human beings and that, as we have seen, explain why political authority exists in the first place. He describes the earthly peace that power exists to secure as a mere compromise. Finally, Augustine sometimes gives in to a world-weariness which suggests the futility of pursuing ethical values in politics, as when he asks early in *De civitate Dei*: “As far as this mortal life is concerned which is spent and finished in a few days, what difference does it make under [whose] rule a man lives, who is so soon to die?” (*civ. Dei* 5.17).

Augustine’s positivism and realism do not imply, however, that he thinks that any society is as good as any other. He suggests that the world would be better off if it were partitioned into small kingdoms rather than far-flung empires (*civ. Dei* 4.15). Immediately after offering his definition of a people as a multitude in agreement on the objects of their love, Augustine continues, “and, obviously, the better the objects of this agreement, the better the people; the worse the objects of this love, the worse the people” (*civ. Dei* 19.24). Nor does he think that whatever those in political authority do to insure peace is acceptable. At one point in his early work, he says that human law must conform to divine law (*vera rel*. 31.58).[12] Moreover, as we shall see, Augustine holds out an ideal or “mirror” for Christians in positions of political authority (*civ. Dei* 5.24; *ep*. 155), thereby making clear that he thinks there are better and worse ways to rule. Augustine does not, therefore, believe that the various aspects of political life are beyond ethical assessment. The claims that Augustine has a “negative” view of politics or that he thinks politics is “morally neutral” are therefore overstated.[13] They emphasize Augustine’s departure from a tradition of thought according to which politics is an integral part of genuine human flourishing. In doing so, they obscure the comparative evaluations he was willing to make. They also obscure the fact that even those whose loves are properly ordered can rightly attach considerable instrumental value to the end political authority exists to secure (cf. *doc. Chr*. 2.25).

The instrumental value of those ends opens the possibility of positively assessing Rome’s political and military accomplishments. There certainly are places where Augustine speaks positively of them (*ep*. 138). That he does so takes us back to the question of why Rome accomplished what it did. As we have seen, this is just the question to which Roman historians hoped to provide a persuasive answer by citing the virtues of the ancient Romans[14] or the wisdom of the Roman constitution.[15] As we have also seen, Augustine concedes that the self-restraint, military discipline, and patriotism of the Romans strengthened Rome and extended its sway (*civ. Dei* 5.12). But by denying that these qualities are full-blown virtues, and later by denying that we can “by clear inspection . . . give judgment as to the merits of kingdoms” (*civ. Dei* 5.21), Augustine robs the explanation of its intended force. Furthermore, to seize on this explanation of Roman success would be to miss what is most important in Augustine’s discussion of the rise and fall of empires. We have seen that his analysis of politics begins from the fact that some human beings guide the lives of others by the threat and employment of force. Their authority to do so is divinely ordained, Augustine says, to humble those subject to it and to control their desires for earthly happiness. Augustine thinks that even the good need this discipline. Sometimes it is imposed by subjecting them to the bad; to this end, God makes use even of men such as Nero (*civ. Dei* 5.19).

What is true of the subjection of some people to others is equally true, Augustine thinks, of the subjection of populations to empires. Thus he says:

> God, therefore, the author and giver of happiness, because He is the only true God, Himself gives earthly kingdoms to both good men and bad. He does not do this rashly, or as it were at random, for He is God, not Fortune. Rather He acts in accordance with an order of things and times which is hidden from us, but entirely known to Him.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 4.33)

History does not provide evidence that Rome or any other empire is favored by Fortune or destiny, nor can Roman ascendancy be understood simply by appealing to the moral qualities of the Romans. It was God who gave power to Assyria and to Persia (*civ. Dei* 5.21). It was God who made use of Roman patriotism and discipline "to suppress the evils of many nations" (*civ. Dei* 5.13 [following Bettenson]). Political history is therefore governed by God's providence. To the extent that historical explanations are possible, they must refer to it. But for Augustine, such explanations must always be tentative. He can conjecture about God's reasons for giving power to Rome (*civ. Dei* 18.22). But his considered view, as he says in the quoted passage, is that the reasons history unfolds as it does are "hidden from us."

Justified violence

Even if no political society can be the City of God, shouldn't the Christian ruler use the coercive powers of his office to move his realm closer to that ideal? Despite the difficulty of discerning God's action in history, isn't it likely that God raised up Christian rulers for precisely this purpose?

In his most famous piece of writing on the duties of Christian rulers, the "mirror for princes" in *De civitate Dei*, Book 5, Augustine does say that they are to "make their power the handmaid of His majesty by using it to spread His worship to the greatest possible extent" (*civ. Dei* 5.24). This might be taken to suggest that Augustine thought the Christian ruler should "spread His worship" by force if necessary. But whatever this passage suggests when taken in isolation, Augustine's considered views were more complex. As a result of his involvement in the Donatist controversy in northern Africa during the closing decade of the fourth century, Augustine did abandon his opposition to religious coercion.[16] But he seems to have thought it justified in a narrow class of cases. While he came to believe that official sanctions could bring members of a heretical sect of Christianity to sincere and orthodox conviction, he never endorsed the coercion of pagans or Jews. He therefore recognized limits to the ways God's worship could be "spread." And while Augustine no doubt thought Christian emperors of Rome should attempt to "spread His worship," he seems to have been unsure that such attempts would actually yield a gain: he drily reminds those who said imperial power could be used to spread Christianity that pagan Rome advanced the cause of Christ by creating the martyrs.[17]

Augustine is sometimes said to have "interiorized" ethics by moving the focus of moral evaluation from the agent's action and its consequences to the psychological dispositions from which the actions proceed.[18] His mirror for Christian office-holders lends this claim some credence. Despite Augustine's injunction to put imperial power at God's service, *De civitate Dei* is really an extended paean to the Christian emperor who loves and fears God and who acts from clemency, humility, piety, and generosity (*civ. Dei* 5.24). This, conjoined with his reserve about what could be expected from the conversion of the Roman emperors, suggests that public officials, at least, will be judged by their motives rather than by their effectiveness. Of course, a fully interiorized ethic would hold, not only that we will not be judged negatively on grounds of ineffectiveness, but also that we will not be judged negatively even if we perform acts that seem to be bad. Only thus can we give full force to Augustine's famous remark "love and do what you will" (*Jo. ev. tr*. 7.8). To find such an interiorized ethic in Augustine, it is necessary to turn from his treatment of the duties of Christian rulers to his discussion of war.

It is ironic that an author who wrote so eloquently about the good of peace should have played a pivotal role in the emergence of Christian just-war theory. Augustine was able to play that role by offering alternative interpretations of scriptural passages that seemed to support pacifism. For example, many in the early Church had taken the Gospel's injunction to "turn the other cheek" to require quietism even in the face of aggression. Augustine counters that Christ challenged the Temple officer who hit him rather than turning his other cheek toward him (Jn 18:23). Moreover, he maintains that what Christ requires "is not a disposition of the body but of the heart, for there is the sacred resting place of virtu." (*c. Faust*. 22.76). This opens the possibility that at least some forms of violence may be justifiable if they proceed from a heart that loves rightly. But which forms, if any, does Augustine actually think can be justified?

In an early work, Augustine allows that laws which permit the use of force to defend oneself, and perhaps another, against unjust attack can be just laws. He does so on the grounds that laws may permit lesser evils to prevent greater ones (*lib. arb*. 1.5). By appealing to this ground, he implies that uses of defensive force may be evil because acts of violence can conflict with moral requirements even if laws permitting such acts do not. This distinction between the licitness of acts and the justice of laws that permit them is one on which Augustine seems consistently to rely. Thus in one of his letters he seems to deny that private persons may use force to defend others (*ep*. 47),[19] despite having said elsewhere that the law which permits them to do so is unexceptionable. He reaches a different set of conclusions, however, when he turns to the use of defensive force by soldiers. There he argues both that laws declaring war can be morally acceptable and that when they are, Christians are not just permitted to obey them, but are obligated to do so. He establishes the first claim by arguing that wars may be declared if another nation refuses to return property it has unjustly appropriated or if it refuses to rectify injustices.[20] He establishes the second by arguing, with one qualification, that soldiers are obligated to fight a war that has been declared by lawful authority (*c. Faust*. 22.74); the qualification is that soldiers engaged in warfare should not be motivated by cruelty, bloodlust, or desire for vengeance. Augustine thinks that we can never be certain of our own motives. But so long as they try not to act from these motives, Christians may fight in wars despite Christ's seeming command to the contrary. Augustine's qualification therefore gives some support to the claim that his ethic of violence, at least, is "interiorized."

The continuing significance of Augustine's political thought

The division of the world into two cities did not originate with Augustine. Rather, the image of the two cities is one he found in other writers and adapted to his own purposes (*doc. Chr*. 3.34). Why does he do so? Why, in particular, does he assert that those who love God constitute a single city composed of the angelic, the living, and the dead? Augustine believes in a communion of saints, the heavenly participants in which help those of its members who are still in their earthly lives.[21] The belief in a communion of saints raises a number of questions about the nature and unity of such a communion. Augustine may have thought that he could gain some insight into those questions by reconceptualizing that communion as a well-ordered political community unified by love for its ruler. If so, then this would be a case of using political theory to answer theological questions. But did Augustine proceed in reverse? Did his theological claims about a heavenly city add anything to his political thought?

We have seen that Augustine does not place politics beyond ethical assessment. Still less does he place it beyond theological critique. He levels that critique by developing an alternative vision of society, the City of God. That city serves as a social ideal, the rightly ordered love, peace, and justice of which no earthly society can realize. It is an ideal with which even the greatest earthly city suffers by comparisons that Augustine does not hesitate to draw out in some detail. Thus he contrasts the riches of Rome with the treasury of the City of God (*civ. Dei* 5.16). He juxtaposes the specious immortality sought by Roman heroes with the eternal life gained by the Christian martyrs (*civ. Dei* 5.14). He contrasts Rome to the City of God by comparing it to the Earthly City, reminding his readers that both were founded by fratricides (*civ. Dei* 15.5). Augustine therefore uses the City of God as a standard against which actual political societies, especially the great empires (*civ. Dei* 18.2), can be measured and found wanting. He thereby exposes the vanity of their moral pretensions and heightens his readers' desire to be members of that city where the "Supreme Good is to be found" (*civ. Dei* 19.11). That he set out to do the latter in *De civitate Dei* is clear from a passage early in that book, where Augustine writes: "Of the rise and progress and appointed end [of the two cities], then, I shall now speak . . . I shall do so as far as I judge it expedient to the glory of the City of God, which shall shine forth all the more brightly when compared with the other city" (*civ. Dei* 1.35).

I implied at the outset that Augustine's political thought does not fit comfortably into contemporary categories of political inquiry. Like Augustine's work, the disciplines which now study politics – political theory, political philosophy, and political science – have critical implications. Political theory and political philosophy articulate norms by which actual societies are to be judged. The same is true of some political science. Where their practitioners part company with Augustine is in their view that political activity can be made or shown to be a rational undertaking. They attempt to understand political behavior in terms of rational choice theory, to rationalize decisions among policy options according to their expected risks, costs, and benefits, to locate rational preferences and procedures for their rational aggregation, to defend deliberative procedures for the rational exchange of opinion so that citizens will respect one another and become attached to their common good, to frame institutions which encourage progress by liberating human reason or to find principles of justice the rational authority of which will stabilize and legitimize institutions conforming to them. By contrast, what seems to interest Augustine about politics is what it shows about the divine and psychological forces that govern human life but which human reason cannot fully penetrate or control.

We have seen that in Augustine's hands an analysis of political life invariably reveals the work of those forces he calls "loves." He appeals to the loves of self, glory, immortality, and peace to explain why human beings need regimes of private property and coercive authority, why they build and maintain empires, and how societies remain stable. Augustine allows for the possibility, as with the Romans, that political life will discipline the less desirable human loves. But he would deny that politics can eradicate or redirect those fundamental loves or that those loves can be enduringly subjected to our reason by felicitous institutional design. Instead, he offers an explanation of political stability that interestingly rivals explanations appealing to rationalist accounts of mutual respect, justice, and institutional legitimacy. Some have therefore thought that his work promises a corrective to political theories which exaggerate the role that reason can or should play in ordering political life.

That promise can be made good only if Augustine can persuasively undercut alternative theories of the way human beings do or could behave in politics. In a sustained attempt to do so, Augustine recalls episodes that apologist historians either paper over or neglect. He tirelessly probes what purports to be virtuous behavior, exposing the operation of misdirected loves and showing how frequently they masquerade as nobler motives with the connivance of self-deception and ideology. Peter

Brown once wrote that for Augustine "political activity is merely symptomatic: it is merely one way in which men express orientations that lie far deeper in themselves."[22] Augustine's account of those deep human orientations provides a set of concepts which religious thinkers have used to make sense of political life. The development of these concepts is his most enduring and valuable contribution to political thought.

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Endnotes

1 See Niebuhr 1953; MacIntyre 1988; Milbank 1990.

2 On human diversity, see *De civitate Dei* 14.1. Unless otherwise noted, quotations of *De civitate Dei* are from R. W. Dyson's translation (Dyson 1998). Of the available English editions, this is generally to be preferred for its literalness and economy of translation, and for the briskness of its prose. On occasion, I have followed the translation of Henry Bettenson (Bettenson 1972) or have retranslated passages myself. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from other of Augustine's works are my own.

3 For the angels, see *De civitate Dei* 10.7.

4 For a fine discussion of this notion in Augustine's thought see Markus 1970.

5 See generally Deane 1963, 104–05.

6 Cicero, *De re publica* 1.25; cf. *civ. Dei* 2.21.

7 Cicero, *De re publica* 1.39.

8 See Cicero, *De re publica* 6.26.29.

9 In the first sentence, I have followed Bettenson’s translation, which gives a more accurate rendering of Augustine’s word *foediorem*.

10 On republicanism, see Pettit 1997.

11 See Deane 1963, 221–43 and Niebuhr 1953, ch. 9.

12 For the claim that this commitment is not found in later works, see Markus 1970, 89.

13 See the literature cited by Burnell 1992.

14 See the remarks about Cato and Sallust at *De civitate Dei* 5.12.

15 See, for example, Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, Book VI.

16 The best study of this matter is Brown 1964.

17 For a nuanced discussion see Markus 1970, ch. 3.

18 For a sophisticated treatment see Taylor 1989, ch. 7.

19 Cited at Deane 1963, 311 n. 22.

20 Here I follow Deane 1963, 160.

21 See the remarks about the ministry of the angels at *De civitate Dei* 10.7.

22 Brown 1965, 9.

13 Heaven and the *ecclesia perfecta* in Augustine

David Vincent Meconi, S.J.

Augustine is matchless in presenting the story of one's life in terms of God's providence. And while all stories must have an ending, the concluding chapter of the Christian narrative, as told by Augustine, is less of a final termination than an unceasing consummation. For heaven is the only *vera vita* (*ep*. 130.2.3), where God grants divinity to humans, immortality to mortals, and glory to the outcast (cf. *en*. *Ps*. 109.1).[1] Heaven is where human *spes* becomes divine *res*, in that God's very self is the reward of pilgrim faith and fidelity (cf. *s*. 19.5, 169.10, 360B.16), where God alone is finally realized as the goal of all human desiring (cf. *civ*. *Dei* 10.3). The saints arrive there "not by swift feet, but by charity" (*en*. *Ps*. 149.5; Boulding 2004, 496). Its citizenry is constituted solely by the love of God (cf. *civ*. *Dei* 19.28), where people of all sorts are gathered into the *ecclesia perfecta* (*en*. *Ps*. 5.8, 28.1; *s*. 95.2; *ep*. 185.9.40).

While he nowhere employs the phrase *uisio beatifica*, he nonetheless brings together the transformative intellection of the Neoplatonists[2] with the promises of the Gospel, so as to provide an image of heaven where the elect not only see and love God (cf. Mt 5:8) but become ever more like him.[3] Without ever being the focus of any one single treatise, Augustine's reflections on heaven run throughout practically every aspect of his work. How so? It is the only proper end of all human activity and endeavor and, therefore, lasting beatitude is precisely the goal to which all his thinking tends. As such, heaven is key in understanding Augustine because he sees it as the goal and model of all truth and wisdom (epistemology), of all truly virtuous actions (ethics), and of all properly ordered societies (political philosophy and ecclesiology).

This chapter elucidates four aspects of Augustine on the heavenly life. First, we shall examine the effects those in heaven enjoy. What in fact 'happens' to the elect when this perfective state is realized? What do those in the *ecclesia perfecta* look like? Our second concern examines a difficulty very important to Augustine: What does it mean to see God and thereby become like him? How can God be said to be seen and what implications does this have for 'seeing' in new heaven and new earth? That is, what exactly do the saints see? Thirdly, we must examine Augustine on heavenly predestination. This section does not claim to account for all the dynamics involved in Augustine's theology of predestination, not to mention its oftentimes horrific legacy, but instead examines how those in heaven arrived there. The fourth and final section contends that the heavenly life is not simply a distant and future reality, but in fact is available even while on earth. Although heaven is the human person's only real *patria*, it is a reality that can be enjoyed even while *in via*.

Heaven as the ecclesia perfecta

Heaven for Augustine is clearly not a simple return to the first perfection experienced in Eden. It is a life infinitely better than the grace conferred on the first couple in Eden. The Second Adam has transformed humanity forever. Whereas in the first Adam humans were able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) and able not to die (*posse non mori*), the heavenly life is marked by the inability to sin (*non posse peccare*) and thus the inability to die (*non posse mori*):

> The human will's first liberty was able not to sin, but the final will is something much greater, as it is not able to sin. The first immortality was able not to die, but the last will be something much greater, as it is not able to die. The first was the power of perseverance, an ability not to relinquish the good; but the last will is the felicity of perseverance, an inability to forgo the good.
>
> (*corrept*. 12.33 [my translation]; PL 44.936)[4]

This well-known Augustinian conversion from *posse non peccare*/*posse non mori* to *non posse peccare*/*non posse mori* symbolizes well how he conceives of heavenly amelioration. Heaven is clearly not a mere reinstatement to what was lost in Adamic disobedience but a definite transformation into something better, a *renovatio in melius*, as the promises of the first paradise are surpassed definitively by heaven's "renewal and retrieval of immortality" (*Gn. litt*. 6.20.31; Hill 2002, 319). Augustine describes this new life as one "changed for the better" (*in melius commutati*), achieved through our participation in God's immortality and righteousness (*civ. Dei* 21.15; CCL 47.781).[5] Such superabundance allows the human wayfarer to come home and 'rest' in that love for which he or she was originally created. Only here does time give way to eternity and only in such eternity can the human soul finally be fulfilled (cf. *perf. just*.8.17).

In Augustine's conception of fulfillment, perfection can never be understood as an autonomous state which the creature now enjoys *in se*. Rather, this new life is always a matter of relationship, of participating more fully in God as well as in community with the other elect. For example, the heavenly attribute of eternity is explained not as one's possession but as one's participation: "God's years will exist in us . . . In the same way that God himself will be in us . . . God's years are not something different from God himself. God's years are God's eternity, and eternity is the very substance of God, in which there is no possibility of change" (*en. Ps*. 101, *exp*. 2.10; Boulding 2004, 70–71). In this final stability, creatures come to realize God as "the goal of our longings," and how "we shall see him forever; we shall love him without satiety; we shall praise him without wearying. This will be the duty, the delight, the activity of all, shared by all who share the life of eternity" (*civ. Dei* 22.30; Bettenson 1984, 1088). This eternal state is the beatific presence (*beatifica praesentia*) as the vivification of the elect and the culmination of all *caritas* (cf. *ep*. 164.8).

Because faith and hope melt away into something greater, charity becomes the distinguishing mark of heaven, a point made as early as Augustine's composing the first book of *De doctrina Christiana*, where we learn why faith and hope expire: "faith gives way to sight, which we shall see, and hope gives way to bliss itself, which we are going to arrive at, while charity will actually grow when these other two fade out . . . because when anyone attains to the things of eternity, while the first two fade away, charity will abide, more vigorous and certain than ever" (*doc. Chr*. 1.38.42–39.43; Hill 1996, 125). If charity is what binds a truly just society together, heaven is all the more so a place bound by love. Augustine is therefore careful to ensure that the heavenly images of immortality, impeccability, and incorruptibility can never be understood as autonomous states of the elect, but are rather the consequence of loving God and thus sharing in his life.

That is why human perfection is by nature communally constructed. Here the Bishop of Hippo eagerly draws from the ancient philosophical view that the life of the wise person is social. Consequently, the life of the Christian saint is all the more constituted by even more noble relationships, friendships, and a humble availability to others (cf. *civ. Dei* 19.5). This is why the heavenly life is essentially ecclesial: for not only is it where the human elect dwell together, but also where they are joined to the *societas angelorum*, a constitutive part of humanity's immortal joy (*en. Ps*. 33, *exp*. 2.19), as both were created to worship God forever together (cf. *ep*. 147.9). Not having the Thomistic distinction between essence and existence, Augustine (following other Church Fathers) relies on the concept of a "spiritual body" by which to individuate the angels (cf. *ep*. 98.5 and 102.20; *Gn. litt*. 6.19–24; *en. Ps*. 145.3), but what is of greater concern to him is the question of the resurrected human body. Whereas the unfallen angels continue unceasingly in their worship of God, the human elect will enjoy God even more fully when they are brought back to their natural state of being both body and soul (cf. *Gn. litt*. 12.35.68; *civ. Dei* 13.20).

On that final day the soul and the body will be reunified, thus transforming the human body from an *animale corpus* into a *corpus spiritale*, terms not easily translated. In order to make sense of 1 Corinthians 15:44 – "it is sown embodying the soul, but rises embodying the spirit" – Augustine sees this movement from a mortal "animal body" to a resurrected "spiritual body," as the elect's renewal into a new "enspirited body, into which Adam had not yet been changed, but into which he was to have been changed if he had not earned the death of his 'ensouled' body by sinning" (*Gn. litt*. 6.24.35; Hill 2002, 321). Careful not to interpret this "spiritual body" as something that is devoid or transcendent of flesh (cf. *ench*. 23.87–91; *civ. Dei* 22.19), Augustine says that the heavenly body will be conformed to Christ's own resurrected body (cf. *civ. Dei* 10.29), and will therefore possess "a wondrous ease of movement, a wondrous lightness" (*s*. 242.11; cf. *s*. 277.12). Such conformity also consists in the wounds of our mortal selves becoming eternal signs of God's providence, how former bodily *tormenta* become glorified heavenly *ornamenta* (*s*. 280.5, *s*. 328.6). The human body in heaven is no longer in need of being taken care of and obviously no longer in danger of dissolution or death (cf. *ep*. 118.14; *s*. 154.17). The resurrected body will be diaphanous as the glory of God shines through it, thus enabling the saints to know one another perfectly and even to know each other's (only honorable) thoughts (cf. *s*. 243.5).

Yet of all the bodily actions Augustine discusses when contemplating the heavenly chorus, one stands out in his pastoral concerns: the "seeing" of God. As he closes the massive *City of God*, for example, Augustine admits that bodies in heaven will be immortal and spiritual (*immortalis et spiritalis*: *civ. Dei* 22.29), but strains to understand the nature of such bodily activity (*actio*). He therefore asks no easy question (*non parua quaestio*), namely, how the blessed shall see God. Augustine refuses to settle for the more facile position by simply "spiritualizing" the saints' bodily activities in heaven, striving to understand the nature and implications of an enfleshed but spiritualized body with all the organs and activities proper to a truly human body.

Seeing God in the new heaven and the new earth

Explaining human felicity in terms of 'seeing' God finds its roots in Plato,[6] and was developed by Philo, Plotinus, and later Neoplatonists.[7] Augustine most likely encountered it first in his youthful readings of Cicero[8]. Later, Augustine would have learned that the Christian Scriptures likewise promise that the saints will become like God by seeing God (cf. 1 Jn 3:2). Seeing is particularly important in Augustine's eschatology because the eye stands as a synecdoche for the entire body. For instance, the eye is the only organ Augustine links explicitly with the saints' divinization: they will see the beauty of God through deified eyes (*oculis deificatis formam dei*: *s*. 126.14). It should come as no surprise, then, that one of the longer-standing pastoral questions Augustine entertains is precisely what "seeing God" in heaven actually means.

In the year 408 he attempted to answer a question from a Catholic widow, Italica, a noble *domina* who had just lost her husband and wrote to the famous bishop asking how she should now think of her departed beloved before God. Augustine the pastor begins by assuring Italica that she and her husband will be even more dear to one another in heaven than they were on earth: "We are confident that we have not lost those of ours who have departed, but have sent them on ahead, where they will be dearer (*cariores*) to us to the extent that they will be better known and where they will be lovable without any fear of losing them" (*ep*. 92.1; Teske 2001, 371). As perfected as each may be, however, no human can see God simply because the invisible "God is not like that" (*non ita est Deus*: *ep*. 92.3). Affirming the Johannine "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2) does not mean that such sight is a simple continuation of how we see things while on earth. This is why Augustine teaches Italica that such a carnal way of reducing things to bodily organs has no room in heaven and we must all therefore understand scriptural warrants of seeing God as seeing him “in spirit and in truth,” dismissing a literally corporeal vision of God as a demented (*dementiam*) opinion (*ep*. 92.6).

Augustine also enjoyed a special friendship with a Catholic couple, Armentarius and Paulina. At the end of the year 410 he writes to answer their questions about living continently as brother and sister (cf. *ep*. 127). Three years after this initial epistolary exchange, Augustine writes to Paulina alone to answer her persistent questioning about the manner of the saints’ seeing God in heaven. This letter, *Epistula* 147, which Augustine later names *De Videndo Deo* (cf. *retr*. 2.41), examines all scriptural referents to “seeing God” and how other theologians such as Ambrose and Jerome have dealt with these passages. Cited throughout the Middle Ages, this letter to Paulina reveals a caring pastor toward the end of his life who wants to provide the best answer he can for a widowed friend and perhaps even for himself. In the end, three possibilities are here offered:

1. God is a visible deity perceived in the earthly way of seeing by the organ of the eye;
2. God is immaterial and thus invisible but the eyes of the saints are so made that they can now actually see God just as they would gaze upon a material object on earth;
3. the eyes of the resurrected are “spiritualized” so as to see God not in any physical or earthly manner but in a new heavenly, spiritual manner.

Of these three possibilities, Augustine warns we must censure the first as to be avoided in any possible way, the second proves more tolerable (*tolerabilius*), while the third option is where we should settle for now. That is, in heaven, the eyes of the elect are spiritualized (citing 1 Cor 15:53), thereby brought from “natural to spiritual” organs of sight. Whatever “seeing God” means, it cannot connote a God who is seen with natural human eyes or a God who is seen as a physical object. Instead, “when he will be seen, a spirit will see him, not a body” (*ep*. 147.21.49; Teske 2001, 345). Consistent with his claim of “deified eyes” above, notice that the eye is the only human organ explicitly linked with a new manner of operating, it is “spiritualized” in heaven.

As thorough and as influential as *Epistula* 147 proves to be, it does not commit Augustine to any one position, but rather allows him to conclude that God will *not* be seen, and that when he is seen it will be spiritually. At the end of this same year (413), Augustine preached *sermo* 277 where he reaches the same conclusion (or lack thereof). God will not be seen bodily but,

> if that flesh undergoes such a change that by it can be seen what cannot be seen in a place; fine, let it be so. But we have to inquire where that is taught. And if it isn’t

> yet taught, it shouldn't yet be denied; but certainly it must at least be doubted. In such a way, however, that there is no doubting that the flesh will rise again, no doubting that an embodiment of spirit coming to be from the embodiment of a soul, no doubting this perishable and mortal thing putting on immortality and imperishability; so that *we may continue in that which we have reached* (Phil 3:16). Certainly, if in any respect we go astray by inquiring too much, at least let us go astray over creatures, not over the creator. Let us all do our best to turn body into spirit, provided, though we don't turn God into a body.
>
> (*s*. 277.18; Hill 1994, 45)

Here we see a careful theologian at work: given what has been taught, we can reject particular positions; given our desire to know, we can ask questions and continue to inquire into God's mystery; but we can never offend the divine nature by materializing it.

Augustine's final position seems to account for all his earlier musings, concluding that the resurrected eyes of the saints will truly be transformed to behold immaterial realities and in that way it is true that they will 'see' God; it is not accurate, however, that the divine nature will be perceived directly as one more object of physical sight. Heavenly bodies will 'see' God the way they 'see' life in one another: "God then will be seen by those eyes in virtue of their possession (in this transformed condition) of something of an intellectual quality, a power to discern things of an immaterial nature" (*quo et incorporea natura cernatur*: *civ. Dei* 22.29; Bettenson 1984, 1087). The saints now perfectly united to God will thus join the blessed angels in seeing God in all heavenly realities.

Peter Burnell (*beatae memoriae*) put Augustine's position this way: "the blessed will see God by seeing the inward reality of each other's souls – that is, the love that other souls have for God . . . As they will see God perfectly, but indirectly, by seeing the qualities of each other's souls, so they will observe the spiritual reality by physical means, for with their eyes they will see the qualities of souls expressed physically."[9] Eternal purpose and dignity are hence given to the resurrected body as an intended and original part of God's redemptive glory: in heaven all parts of the original human constitution will magnify God by making God known to all in and through their personal and unique identity. In this way, the blessed will see God in the clearest and most distinct way the invisible God can be seen:

> In each one of us, perceived in one another, perceived by each in himself; he will be seen in the new heaven and new earth, in the whole of creation as it then will be; he will be seen in every body by means of bodies (*videatur et per corpora in omni corpore*), wherever the eyes of the spiritual body are directed with their penetrating gaze.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 22.30; Bettenson 1984, 1090)

Augustine's answer to the use of human eyes is related to another important question when attempting to form his understanding of the celestial life. What will heaven look like? What exactly will constitute the scriptural claim of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1)? This was the question Monica and Augustine were pondering as she was carried off to that very reality: "we inquired between ourselves in the light of present truth, the Truth which is yourself, what the eternal life of the saints would be like" (*conf.* 9.10.23; Boulding 1997, 227). Will the created order as we experience it now be abolished or discarded in heaven, or will it be perfected and transformed eternally? In other words, apart from God and the elect, what else can one expect to encounter in heaven: will there be other bodies apart from the saints' bodies, will there be plants and trees, a surf's breeze, a sky's constellations?[10]

This is a question Augustine does not anywhere directly answer, but we are able to venture an answer by framing his response between the two extremes he explicitly avoided. Whatever heaven looks like for Augustine, we know that it is neither a simple continuation of the created order, nor is it something wholly other and thus unrecognizable from the present creation. The first mistaken opinion he knows from the Italian heresiologist and bishop Philaster of Brescia (d. *c.* 397): the unnamed belief that the created order continues without any change or amelioration (cf. *haer.* §67, Teske 1995, 50). This is obviously an offense to Scripture's promise of a new heaven and earth.[11]

The other extreme is the belief that the new heaven and new earth are so ontologically different than this creation that there is absolutely no continuity between what God has created and what God will also redeem. It is a good Augustinian principle that God chooses to amend rather than end that which is less than perfect. Augustine therefore reacts most strongly against (what he relates to be) the Origenist view that the world was created for no other purpose than to purify the souls which had fallen prior to its genesis. In this view, God created the material realm to provide the opportunities for sinful souls to overcome their aversion to the divine life. In his work to Orosius, *In Refutation of the Priscillianists and Origenists*, Augustine therefore uses the biblical promise of a "new heaven and a new earth" to argue that far from being dispensable once the elect are cleansed from impure desires, the new heaven and earth will be more beautiful, more doxologically deiform, more unified in its revealing God's own self. Against these cosmic cessationists, Augustine argues that the "last day" will be "not an end that destroys, but one that perfects" (*c. Prisc.* 7.8; Teske 1995, 108).

Between these two extremes, that heaven will be either a mere continuation or a total cessation of this present reality, Augustine's understanding of the "new heaven and new earth" seeks a mean. Examining his homilies on the resurrection of the body, we find the most helpful hints of his imagining of the world to come. To begin, there is nothing more intellectually offensive than Porphyry's maxim to flee all that is bodily; to imagine an eternity without corporeal reality is to shun heaven and earth (cf. *s.* 241.7). The human body shall exhibit all its members not for the sake of use but, rather, in order to display a beauty revealing the harmony of otherwise disparate parts (cf. *s.* 243.3–4). Accordingly, Augustine very positively frames the discussion that the things (*quae*) humans have come to enjoy on earth will also be present to them in heaven, while the things we have come to find displeasing will rightly be absent (*sed quae tibi placent erunt, quae tibi displicent non erunt*; *s*. 242A.3). Or consider the concluding chapters of *De civitate Dei* where he admits that of course the resurrected body will be fully present in heaven (cf. *civ. Dei* 20.16), but then goes on to reaffirm the eschatological principles he had established in earlier books:

> For such reasons it is possible, it is indeed most probable, that we shall then see the physical bodies of the new heaven and the new earth in such a fashion as to observe God in utter clarity and distinctness, seeing him present everywhere and governing the whole material scheme of things (*universa etiam corporalia gubernantem*) by means of the bodies (*corpora*) we shall then inhabit and the bodies we shall see wherever we turn our eyes.
>
> (*civ. Dei* 22.29; Bettenson 1984, 1086)

In this view, a significant distinction between human bodies (*corpora*) and other bodily things (*corporalia*) is made. From this it appears as if non-human creatures do in fact participate in God's heavenly glory, allowing him to continue his divine control (*gubernantem*) of all that he ever willed to bring into existence. While remaining admittedly vague on precise eschatological particulars, the heaven Augustine presents does seem to be a world full of God's glory, goodness, and governance through the things he has made and not simply the human body stripped of all else. In the following chapter of *De civitate Dei*, this again seems to be suggested. Augustine envisions the heavenly life's involving not only the resurrected body's excellence both "internally and externally" (*intrinsecus et extrinsecus*), but that the great Artist (*tantus artifex*) will also combine the body's perfection "with other great and marvellous things that will then be revealed" (*civ. Dei* 22.30; Bettenson 1984, 1087: *et cum ceteris rebus, quae ibi magnae atque mirabiles videbuntur*, CCL 47.862).

Augustine hinted at this distinction relatively early on. In *De vera religione* (late 390) we read how the saints "will begin to possess the world together with their bodies now restored to their pristine firmness, instead of being possessed by the world" (*non cum mundo possideri, sed mundum possidere coeperit*: *vera rel*. 23.44; cf. Hill 2005, 57). Here heaven is depicted as *both* the redeemed body (*corpus*) and a world (*mundum*) which the saints possess, suggesting that there are other terrestrial realities constituting heaven apart from resurrected bodies only. In this view, heaven is not the cessation and disappearance of non-human creation but the redeemed soul's perfect mastery over those goods as it enjoys consummate union with God. In this way the final peace of godly souls is realized: on earth they waged war against these inferior impulses and goods, so in heaven "by the fire of divine love we are set on fire with longing to attain that orderly peace where the lower elements may be subdued to the higher in a stability that can never be shaken" (*civ. Dei* 21.15; Bettenson 1984, 993). This is how God longs to thus save *all things* he has created (*et saluat omnia qui creavit omnia*: *civ. Dei* 20.21).

Commenting on Psalm 35:7 – that God will save both men and beasts (*homines et iumenta saluabis Domine*) – Augustine acknowledges that the *salus* of non-human animals here must consist of a certain safety and health which belongs in time (*salus iumentorum temporalis est*), but he then likens such salvation exactly to what the Lord grants the wicked as well (*Tuetur enim illos, et non illos deserit secundum modum suum, tamquam pecora sua: et non illos deserit*). From this it would appear that even though beasts and lower creatures resemble the wicked in that they are not mindful of God nor do they explicitly long for heaven (*non desiderant regnum coelorum*), God nonetheless raises them and places them in an eternal place proper to them (*en. Ps.* 35.12; CCL 38.331). Augustine treats other created goods somewhat in the same manner. For example, when discussing the resurrected Lord's eating (e.g. Lk 24:41–43), Augustine warns us that such enjoyment of food is possible for the resurrected as "a matter of power, not of need" (*potestas non egestas*: *s.* 242.2), leaving open the possibility of a literal heavenly banquet.[12] Similarly, he describes the heavenly life as one of music and praiseful hymnody (cf. *en. Ps.* 41.9), suggesting (at least) the presence of air and perhaps even musical instruments.

Accordingly, there seems to be more than simply redeemed persons and God in heaven. How so? Unlike the quasi-Origenist position examined above, Augustine sees even the most material of creation as good and divinely willed, surely a lesson learned when studying his way out of Manichaeism. When describing the life of the *pii* in heaven, he thus emphasizes a totality and a thoroughness to the redeemed order in which all "parts" of creation come together in perfect order: "And that is why it was quite right for the godly to be told that theirs is the land, of which not a single particle will belong to the ungodly (*quod ipsa sit terra eorum quae ulla ex parte non erit impiorum*), because it too was likewise given" (*doc. Chr.* 3.34.49; Hill 1996, 193). Furthermore, he not only suggests that there are things in heaven other than God, angels, and redeemed human persons, he also provides a scheme for how these non-human realities shall be in relation to created persons.

Whether or not there will be natural beauty, created things, non-human animals, and so on, are never the direct focus of his concern but such good creatures are clearly important because they play a role in Augustine's heavenly mystagogy. That is, in Augustine's hands, scriptural metaphors used to describe the saints' life in heaven become personalized, in that the sanctified soul fulfills and thereby 'becomes' the religious symbols used economically on earth. As a bishop, he understood well the ritualization and reliance upon Christian signs; as a pastor, he realized that all liturgical and biblical symbols and movements must be taken up, animated, and thus made personally effective in the lives of the faithful. In his doctrine of heaven this assimilation becomes eternally real: in heaven the cultic and the personal coalesce as tangible symbols once used by the Church on earth give way to their fulfillment in the souls of the saints. In heaven the faithful thus become the true Jerusalem (cf. *en. Ps.* 147.7), the living altars of God (cf. *civ. Dei* 10.3), his everlasting temples (cf. *Jo. ev. tr.* 15.25), and valleys of praise (cf. *en. Ps.* 103, *exp.* 2.11). They are God's gold (cf. *s.* 62.12), his chrism (cf. *s.* 19.6), his eternal city (cf. *civ. Dei* 19.23), and true Sabbath rest (cf. *civ. Dei* 22.30). What the Church professed on earth, it becomes in heaven: "be what you proclaim, and you will be his praise" (*s.* 34.6; Hill 1990, 168).[13] In this way Augustine always stresses heaven as the fulfillment of human living, where true flourishing is realized as the saints appropriate God's symbols and accoutrements and, in so doing, thus become Gods. For, as important as the Christian Sabbath, scriptural referents, cultic symbols, and liturgical rituals were on earth, these would remain inert and ineffective if not assimilated into the lives of the saints in heaven.

Predestined for glory

In the Gospel of John, Augustine would have read Jesus tell his followers that in heaven there were many rooms (*mansiones*) prepared for them by God the Father (cf. Jn 14:2). Commenting on these heavenly dwelling-places, Augustine notices that the Johannine passage reveals an interplay between God's knowledge from all eternity and God's subsequent providing of saving grace in time. Predestination and the bestowal of grace are necessarily related in Augustine's thought: "Predestination is the preparation for grace, while grace is the actual bestowal" (*praed. sanct.* 10.19; cf. Teske 1999, 165).

So when examining John 14:1–4, Augustine sees that God is depicted as *already* having prepared places for those who will spend eternity in his presence *as well as* one going to prepare places still: "He chose by predestining before the foundation of the world; he chose by calling before the consummation of the world." In other words, God predestines the *mansiones* of his elect before all time; and by Christ's calling, God is now giving each in time the grace to realize his or her heavenly home. "Therefore they already are, with respect to predestination; if they were not, he would have said, 'I shall go and shall prepare,' that is, I shall predestine. But because they are not yet, with respect to working, he says: 'I shall go and prepare a place for you'" (*Jo. ev. tr.* 68.1; Rettig 1993, 55–111, at 63, slightly adjusted). This conjoining of *praeparavit et praeparat* is Augustine's shorthanded way of always trying to establish the priority of divine grace in conforming one to heavenly realities without ever reducing creatures to mere automata within the divine economy.

Augustine strives to ensure that God's foreknowledge of the heavenly citizenry never robs human persons of their freedom. Particularly sensitive to the *fatum* which attracted him as a Manichee, and which still lingered in other philosophical schools (cf. *civ. Dei* 5.11), Augustine argued that grace does not eradicate human freedom but, in fact, establishes it.[14] While everything that is predestined is necessarily foreknown, not everything that is foreknown is necessarily predestined: God does not, for example, predestine anyone to sin or to destruction. In their own self-centered concupiscence, though, those who love themselves to the point of their contempt of God and his ways (*ad contemptum Dei*: *civ. Dei* 14.28) are the sole agents of their own peril. Those who freely turn away from God do so by their own autonomy and refuse to become who they were created to be. One's true identity is revealed only in accepting the grace to be in union with God.[15] Those made in God's image and likeness are free only when allowing that similitude to be fulfilled by living in accord with God's will (cf. *ep.* 157.7–8; *Jo. ev. tr.* 41.8). Therefore, in Augustine's own estimation, predestination does not destroy human freedom, it actualizes and fulfills it. He does acknowledge, however, that there is one thing predestination ruins: "that most destructive error which says that the grace of God is given according to our merits" (*persev.* 17.42; Teske 1999, 220). The saints are thus 'predestined' to receive grace and thereby realize their freedom.

How Augustine came to stress this primacy of grace is a well-rehearsed narrative. At the beginning of his episcopacy, he received a missive from the elderly Simplician, a spiritual father to both himself and Ambrose while in Milan (succeeding the latter there as bishop in 397). Simplician wrote to Augustine asking how to understand the thornier passages of Paul (i.e. Rom 7:7–25 and 9:10–29) that seem to depict God acting arbitrarily when it came to choosing some for heaven. Now that Simplician was the overseer of the Milanese Church, how was he to explain such passages as God's declaring, "Jacob I have loved but Esau have I hated"? Why would God predestine one person for heaven and not another? Much later on in his *Retractiones*, Augustine admitted that these queries forced him to reevaluate how he understood the interplay between divine grace and human freedom, famously admitting: "I in fact strove on behalf of the free choice of the human will, but God's grace conquered" (*sed vicit Dei gratia*: *retr.* 2.1.28; Ramsey 2010, 110).

That is, before he was asked by Simplician, Augustine admits to imagining God's election being attributable somehow to foreseeable human faith (cf. *ex. prop. Rm.* §60–61).[16] God may have loved Jacob, for example, because God could see all the good which the faithful patriarch would do on behalf of God's chosen people. Pressed by Simplician to make sense of Romans, however, Augustine came to acknowledge that understanding divine foreknowledge in terms of a creature's assent is tantamount to foreknowledge of works, reducing grace to a contractual reward. He would hereafter stress that human faith must follow divine favor:

> Before every merit, then, there is grace, since Christ died for the wicked [cf. Rom 5:6]. Hence it was not because of any merits of his own, but because of him who called, that the younger received [the grace] to be served by the older. This also explains the phrase, *I loved Jacob*, which was because of God who called and not because of Jacob's works.
>
> (*Simpl.* 1.2.7; Ramsey 2008b, 191)

In this way Augustine grew quite adamant that God's grace is in no way dependent upon some foreseen assent or subsequent virtue on our part, as this would still be the human meriting of divine favor, still an understanding of grace that is not in actuality *gratis*.

He accordingly came to emphasize that God's grace necessarily precedes any good the human person assents to or achieves: "If any merit got in ahead of grace, then grace isn't given gratis, but is paid back as being due. And if it isn't given free, gratis and for nothing, why should it be called grace?" (*s*. 26.14 [dated 417]; Hill 1990, 101).[17] In coming to highlight the utterly gratuitous nature of grace, Augustine developed two related themes: the absolute inability of a fallen creature to save him- or herself; and the radical prioritization of divine favor. Precisely because all are sick with sin, the liberation men and women seek can never come from themselves. Since the children of Adam freely forfeited their right to divine favor, this entire *massa damnata* stands in need of receiving redemption (cf. *civ. Dei* 12.3; *Simpl*. 1.2.15; *persev*. 8.17).[18]

In positing things in this way, the question of why God would choose to save anyone inevitably arises. Moreover, the grimmer inference of why God would choose not to save everyone also arises. Of course Augustine will admit that God is powerful enough to convert anyone he wishes, but when pressed explicitly, then, why some enjoy heaven and some will not, he can simply and safely admit that this is God's own mystery, something *penes ipsum est*, utterly unto himself (*Gn. litt*. 11.10.13; *praed. sanct*. 10.19). He struggles to find a solution, but the best he can know are these two operative dictates: (1) that God's will never displaces human freedom, and (2) that God's will is always and everywhere just.

> But as to why he sets free this person rather than that one, *his judgments are inscrutable, and his ways unsearchable* [Rom 11:33]. After all, it is better in this case too that we hear or say, *Who are you, a man, to answer back to God?* [Rom 9:20], rather than dare to say, as if we had knowledge of it, what he willed to be hidden who could not, nonetheless, will anything unjust.
>
> (*praed. sanct*. 8.16; Teske 1999, 163)

The structure of salvation is thus set: while God created all to be in union with him, in Adam all freely rejected that invitation. The children of Adam have hence turned to their own selves, and such concupiscence has rendered all men and women unable to know beatitude without a savior. But why God has given some the grace to receive his salvation and others not, Augustine never ventures to decide definitively.

At times he may venture a philosophical explanation. For example, perhaps God's way of relating to humanity is, in the end, incomprehensible because God is more than our own limited sense of justice can understand (*ultra iustitiam*: *s*. 341.9). At other times, he berates human arrogance in demanding an answer from God (cf. *Simpl*. 1.2.15; *persev*. 8.17). But, as his engagement with Pelagianism unfolds, we encounter a thinker who, at the end of the day, is forced to admit that he is simply not able to put all the pieces of predestination, freedom, and heaven together neatly. One line at the end of his days (427) is very telling. In a letter to Abbot Valentine of Hadrumetum (one of the major interlocutors in this important discussion), Augustine uses two central New Testament images: one of God's saving the world (cf. Jn 3:17), and the other of God's judging the world (cf. Rom 3:6). If there were no divine grace, Augustine writes, how could the world ever be saved? Yet, if there were no human free choice, how could the world ever be judged (cf. *ep*. 214.2)? Both are simultaneously true, and the best advice Augustine can give Valentine at this point is to "pray that you may also wisely understand what you piously believe" (*ep*. 214.7; Teske 2001, 39).

This so-called Second Pelagian Controversy (418–30) forced Augustine to return to the conjunction of grace and free will with a vengeance. These years witnessed his most forceful vindications of God's grace: *Epistulae* 194 (to Sixtus of Rome in 418) and 217 (to Vitalis of Carthage in 427), *De gratia et libero arbitrio* and *De correptione et gratia* in 426, as well as *De dono perseverantiae* and *De praedestinatione sanctorum* in 429. Against what he perceived to be the central Pelagian tenet, the belief that salvation depends more on one's own faith than on God's grace, Augustine responded quickly and copiously.

To certain monastic communities in Africa and Gaul, the Bishop of Hippo set out to show that his understanding of predestination does not negate the good which asceticism and fidelity bring about. While God's foreknowledge never obliterates human striving, each step of that striving is accomplished by God's grace.

> Are we then doing away with free choice through grace? Heaven forbid! Rather, we make free choice stronger. After all, as the law is not done away with through faith, so free choice is not done away with, but strengthened by grace . . . In the same way, free choice is not done away with by grace, but strengthened, because grace heals the will by which we freely love righteousness.
>
> (*spir. et litt*. 30.52; Teske 1999, 185)

While Augustine may not be able to explain precisely *how* human free will and God's grace act together, *that* both interact without injury to the other must be maintained. In his view, grace emboldens and makes the created will truly free. So, to those who have sought God in their monastic vows (and, I would add by extension for Augustine, all those who desire God rightly), the answer comes that human actions are free and do in fact have significance, precisely because God has first emancipated the will to be free and to perform good actions.

Augustine finds in the person of Jesus Christ the supreme example of this intersection between foreordained grace and human freedom. The hypostatic union reveals a humanity that is instantly sinless and perfect. Why would the Father not only preserve but elevate this singular instance of glorified humanity? Obviously there can be no preceding merit on the part of Jesus' humanity at the moment of Mary's *fiat*; grace is Jesus' not in recompense for some future deed, but it is given for his own sake as well as for the sake of the human race – he predestined as our head, we as his members (cf. *praed*. *sanct*. 15.31). Precisely because of this intimacy between Christ and Christian, then, Augustine warns against dwelling on predestination, as it detracts from the core truth of God's love and grace. Moreover, not all have the intellectual ability to understand (cf. *persev*. 22.58), and some will inevitably be consumed by such an ultimate concern (cf. *praed*. *sanct*. 8.16). What should be made clear to all is that in Christ, God died for the sinner and each of the baptized should now believe that he or she has been predestined to heaven. At times Augustine even puts this charge firmly in the will of his flock: they can be saved if they only will it (*quod omnes homines possunt si uelint*: *Gn*. *adv*. *Man*. 3.6).[19] Similarly, when holding up heaven and hell before his congregation, Augustine the pastor exhorts them to make the right choice, for it is "now in your power . . . to choose which of these two you wish to be. Make your choice now while you still have time, because what God in his mercy conceals, in his mercy he is postponing" (*en*. *Ps*. 36, *exp*. 1.1; Boulding 2004, 92; cf. *en*. *Ps*. 120.11). In time is precisely where heaven begins; we therefore conclude this chapter by seeing how the effects of the beatific life are available to those still wayfaring on earth.

From spes to res: Heaven even on earth

The final section on Augustine's understanding of heaven examines how the celestial life is available in part to God's chosen ones while still on earth. The reality of heaven (*res*) is available even now to those who have hope (*spes*). This is not something new in Augustine. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, relied on these passages of "seeing God" to assert that this vision is possible for the holy ones even while on earth and that this deifying vision of the infinite God will never be completely exhausted, even in heaven.[20] Augustine is clearly indebted here, but with qualifications. Such a vision could never be obtained fully on earth, even though a few (*aput perpaucos*) might enjoy it partially and fleetingly (*cons*. *Ev*. 1.5; CSEL 43.8).

This current dwelling between our present fallen state and the heavenly life, when our "full adoption as children into redemption" (*adoptio plena filiorum in redemptionem*) will be made complete, is how Augustine begins a key section of his *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* (dated 411), where we learn that:

> We now have the first fruits of the Spirit, and in that respect we have now really become the children of God . . . Hence, we have now begun to be like him, because we have the first fruits of the Spirit, and we are still unlike him because of the remnants of our old condition. Hence, we are children of God because of our rebirth by the Spirit to the extent that we are like him, and we are children of the flesh and of the world to the extent that we are unlike him.

(*pecc. mer*. 2.8.10; Teske 1999, 87–88)

According to Augustine, grace is at work in the created order slowly conforming God's children into his own self. The life realized fully in heaven is realized here, albeit imperfectly and partially: "The perfection of this work of grace is even now being realized in those who are making progress, and it will attain total fulfillment, when death's strength has been destroyed and when the love that is nourished by faith and hope has been made perfect by vision and possession" (*perf. just*. 7.16; Teske 1999, 295). While the deified life of union is a state the Church on earth can begin to enjoy and experience here and now, its fruits will fully blossom only after death is finally defeated forever.

It is important to clarify this interplay between the *spes* and the *res* of Christian salvation embedded throughout Augustine's thought. The Christian is not only enabled but is expected to manifest divine attributes before others on earth, but he does so always (1) through the gift of hope by participating in God, the source of these good deeds, and (2) aware that he or she will in heaven participate even "more fully and more completely" (*plenius perfectiusque*: *ep*. 140.33.77; PL 33.573). Thus while Christians are made partakers of goodness on earth, the degree of participation they enjoy is only a foretaste of the fullness still to be experienced.

In another discussion of the *summum bonum*, Augustine again uses both the 'now' and 'not yet' of salvation by turning to St. Paul's teaching that the world is both saved in Christ and waiting its final redemption (cf. Rom 8:24–25). Augustine concludes that "we are saved in hope," for "it is in hope that we have been made happy; and as we do not yet possess a present salvation" we nonetheless await it in the future. The paradoxical interchange between the beatitude enjoyed *in via* and its fullness *in patria* is again evident: in hope, Christians have already been made blessed (*spe beati facti sumus*). This happiness is therefore both experienced (*facti sumus*) and also a state that awaits those who prove open to the grace of perseverance (*spe beati . . . per patientiam*: *civ. Dei* 19.4; Bettenson 1984, 857; CCL 47.668). This movement from *spes* to *res* is very often at the center of Augustine's homilies on the ascension of Christ. As the head of a body, he brings the minds and wills of his faithful with him as he leaves this earth: "He, while he is there, is also with us; and we, while we are here, are also with him. That's true of him in both his divinity and his power and his love; while as for us, even if we cannot make it true with divinity, we can make it true with love" (*s*. 263A.1; Hill 1990, 222). United to Christ as the body to its head, Christians are no longer merely terrestrial beings for Augustine, but have been transformed into citizens of heaven.

Conclusion

Augustine employs numerous images to describe the paradisiacal life, and abundant theological tenets are tied to his doctrine of heaven. Above all, however, heaven consists in the moral perfection and deification of God's elect. Augustine belongs to a community where heaven shapes their ethics, political theory, ecclesiology, and a particular worldview. Placing heaven and all it entails as the final consummation of human living provides Augustine with an ultimate scale of values, an 'end' by which to judge all other actions and thoughts. It provided the antithetical corollary as well. And while posterity did not accept everything Augustine had to put forward regarding the mechanics of heaven and hell, the Christian West is forever indebted to him. Dark sequellae have followed from some of his speculations, consequences Augustine himself did not wish to dwell on.[21]

Heaven is the sole consolation of the earthly pilgrimage (cf. *ep*. 92A). Only in heaven will the restless heart be satisfied (*satiabitur*: *ep*. 147.26; CSEL 44.300). It entails being transformed into a godlikeness which was first prepared by our original deiformity. As such, it is the completion of our human nature, a life which even now is realizable through proper belief and action. Heaven is thus a place of new vision, of true praise, and eternal flourishing: "There we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be, in the end, without end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?" (*civ. Dei* 22.30; Bettenson 1984, 1091).

Endnotes

1 All references to Augustine follow the standardized abbreviations as found in Fitzgerald 1999, xxxv–xlii and are included simply in the body of the chapter. English citations from the *De civitate Dei* (*civ. Dei*) come from the Bettenson translation (Bettenson 1984).

2 Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.2.6, 1.6.5–9.

3 Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176B; 1 John 3:2.

4 Cf. also *De Genesi ad litteram* 6.24.35–28.39; *De civitate Dei* 22.30; *Contra Faustum Manicheum* 24.2.

5 Cf. also *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 68, *exp*. 1.2; *De baptismo* 7.44.87; *De correptione et gratia* 7.12.

6 Cf. Plato, *Republic* 7, 533D.

7 In his homily on the Sixth Beatitude, “Blessed are the Pure in Heart, for They Shall See God,” Gregory of Nyssa uses Philo’s distinction between God’s *ousia* and God’s *energeiai* in order to argue that God remains ineffable in his essence but that the saints in heaven are granted knowledge of his activities: Graef 1954, 147.

8 Cf. Cicero, *De oratore* 2.160; *Tusculan disputations* 1.73.

9 Burnell 2005, 167.

10 The North African tradition tended to depict this “new heaven and new earth” in very concrete created terms: e.g., with eating (§1.3) and with heaven as “an immense place, a garden of pleasure with rose bushes and every other kind of flowers and all the trees as grand as any cypress” (*Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity* §4.1, my translation; PL 3.44).

11 When dealing with eschatological realities, Augustine saw how this had been a common error: namely, a literalism too simplistic to see how “metaphorical and literal expressions are intermingled” in Scripture and so, “the indolence of the flesh and the slowness of an uninstructed and untrained mind is content with the superficial, literal meaning, and thinks that no inner meaning is to be sought” (*civ. Dei* 20.21; Bettenson 1984, 940).

12 Based on his distinction between *uti* and *frui*, we can understand how Augustine would argue that since we are to use food only to reach God, once we have God we will no longer need to ‘use’ things: “Here you seek food; [there] God will be your food. Here you seek embraces of the flesh” (*s.* 255.7). Yet at other times we read that is not eating per se that is indecorous in heaven but *the need* to eat: “This is because they will be endowed with the gift of assured and inviolable immortality, and so they will eat only if they wish to eat; eating will be for them a possibility, not a necessity . . . For it is not the ability, it is the need to eat and drink that will be taken away from bodies like this” (*civ. Dei* 13.22; Bettenson 1984, 535–36).

13 For more on this, see Meconi 2008.

14 For an excellent discussion on the rather complicated relationship between Augustinian predestination, foreknowledge, and human freedom, see Rist 1994, 266–83.

15 This is the entire point of the *Confessions*: Augustine finally has a story to tell because his life now has a unified purpose and integrity. There is no coherent narrative without a unified life in God. This is how Peter Brown understood Augustine's appeal to a strict theory of predestination, giving his flock a secure identity: "for it provided men with what [Augustine] knew they could never create for themselves: a permanent core of identity, mysteriously free from those vertiginous chasms whose presence in the soul he had always felt so acutely" (Brown 2000, 408).

16 Brown 2000, 139–50, is certainly the most influential scholar arguing that the *Ad Simplicianum* of 397 marks a decided shift in the primacy of grace over human willing, but other scholars such as Goulven Madec (Madec 1996), as well as Harrison 2006, have tried to show a more uninterrupted, developing trajectory. For the history of this scholarship, see the excellent anthology Harmless 2010, 374–83.

17 This same etymology is stressed also at *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate* 25.98–99, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 3.7, and *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 144.10.

18 For more on this see Rist 1994, 272–74.

19 Cf. *Retractationes* 1.10 (9).2 where Augustine later added Proverbs 8:35 to this line: "For it is entirely true that all people are capable of this [salvation] if they will to be, *but the will is made ready by the Lord*."

20 For more on Augustine's sense of heavenly *epektasis* see Ladner 1959, 187–92.

21 In 529 at the Council of Orange, the debate between Augustine and Pelagius was examined and while the Council Fathers accepted many aspects of Augustine's predestinationism, they did not embrace all of his thought. For this mixed legacy, see Pelikan 1971, 326–31.

Part VI Language and faith

14 Faith and reason

John Peter Kenney

For Augustine, the goal of human life was ‘to see the face of God,’ in this world to whatever extent possible and assuredly in the next. The soul’s search for immediate knowledge of God dominated his thought and he reconstructed his life to that end. To approach his reflections on faith and reason we will thus need to be alert to this central vector in his writings and, moreover, to recognize several of the resulting features that separate it from contemporary thought. First, there is the core feature that he shares with many classical and patristic authors: that the pursuit of divine wisdom is a way of life.[1] Knowledge of God for Augustine can only emerge if the soul has been trained to actualize its latent connection to God. Through a special way of life the soul can recover the image of God within it and, in the interior depth of the self, discern the divine presence. A life dedicated to moral discipline and ethical virtue is necessary even to begin that process of interior vision. Secondly, recovery within the soul is, for Augustine, beyond our human capacity without divine assistance. For the soul is not now in the original condition of its creation, but deformed by an obscure separation from its initial condition when it could perceive God directly. Now it is fractured in its moral capacity and, as a result, impoverished in its epistemic ability to discover God. In this respect, as we shall see, Augustine pressed beyond the classical tradition in epistemology. Finally, faith is the instrument that opens the soul to that necessary divine aid. If the soul begins to open itself to the possibility of God, then its cure can begin, as the power of divine grace works at supplying to the soul the moral efficacy lost by the Fall. But faith is not just propositional acceptance, although that it important to Augustine. It is especially the adoption of revealed truths found in the Bible and interpreted through the Catholic Church. Through divinely sanctioned authority, God speaks to the deepest aspects of the individual soul and restores its prelapsarian condition. Faith in Christ cures the soul and leads to direct knowledge of God by the soul; for Augustine, there is no other way.

In consequence, to understand Augustine on faith and reason requires reorientation of our natural terms of reflection. Faith is not an open-ended doxastic commitment for Augustine; it must be faith in Christ, the divine power whose specific mission was redress of the human condition. And thus faith is about the moral and epistemic refurbishment of the soul by that divine power, leading to the renewal of its spiritual ability to discern the presence of God. Faith for Augustine is as much interior and personal as it is exterior and public. It is not analogous to empirical judgments about states of affairs, nor is it like the adoption of a worldview or noetic field that renders beliefs reasonable. It is about the profoundly difficult conversion of the soul leading to contemplation of God, a task impossible without divine intervention.

The theoretical was the personal for Augustine. To get at his thought we will need to turn to the course of its development and to specific texts. Augustine was no systematician; he worked on problems as they arose in the course of his life, with exigent theological controversies forcing certain questions into relief. So we will start with his adoption of Manichaeism, what he once regarded as a religious philosophy based on sound theoretical foundations. Then the focus will shift to his increasing skepticism, to his study of Platonism, and finally to his mature views as an orthodox Christian.

The religion of reason

Manichaeism was a Christian sect proscribed in the Roman Empire that presented itself as a scientific and rational alternative to orthodox Christianity.[2] The Manichaean account of truth dazzled Augustine in late adolescence, and he remained an adherent for over a decade. It became for him thereafter a paradigm of the confusions to which rational reflection is prone in matters of religion.[3] For Manichaeism was a theology based on scientific naturalism. It offered its followers a unified theory that addressed issues in metaphysics, cosmology, and ethics. An attenuated form of materialism, it propounded a conflict dualism in which two opposed forms of energy were responsible for the physical cosmos. The Good/Light/Spirit was a passive force that resisted the active power of Evil/Darkness/Matter. Manichees were the remnant among humanity whose inner nature harbored a ruined fragment of the divine light, making them invulnerable to the outward actions of the material body in which their true selves were encased. To the young Augustine this account was persuasive both because of the convincing appearance of theory with which it was taught but also because it appealed to his baser instincts.[4] As a Manichaean ‘auditor’ or initiate, Augustine was not yet required to assume the ascetical rigor of a ‘saint,’ thus leaving him free to continue cohabitation with his concubine. And it appealed to his vanity, making him one of the human vanguard who sheltered divinity within the recesses of his inner self.

Yet Augustine eventually came to regard Manichaeism as emblematic of the abuse of reason and of the failures to which it is prone. “Truth, truth” was their slogan (*conf.* 3.6.10); he tells us that Manichees relied on reason alone, free from any external authority, rejecting the Old Testament and amending the New (*util. credo* 1.2). Initially their materialism seemed to him internally coherent, the powerful and persuasive application of human reason to cosmology and theology. But it is here that the seeds of Augustine’s disquiet with reason lay.[5] Manichees relied on what he came to regard as a narrow sort of inductive reason that supported their materialism both in cosmology and theology. As he became more widely read in the liberal arts, he discovered that Manichaean cosmology was inconsistent with what he found in classical authors of natural science (*conf.* 5.3.3). Questions of decidability began to loom large as he pondered the central theoretical claims of Manichaeism, particularly its mix of astronomy and theology. His own astronomical observations were incongruent with Manichaean theories (*conf.* 5.3.6). Moreover, Augustine's attempt to secure detailed answers to his questions failed when Faustus, the sect's leading thinker, proved to be a rhetorician educated neither in the natural sciences nor philosophy (*conf.* 5.6.11–7.12). Finally, the dualist materialism of Manichaeism precluded any resolution to the problem of evil, since it countenanced the ravenous power of matter as a primordial element in opposition to goodness. This was, he would later maintain, the principal cause of its inadequacy: the failure of dualistic materialism to offer a sufficient explanation for evil beyond mere recognition of its brute existence (*conf.* 5.10.19).

Disillusionment with Manichaeism led Augustine to several important conclusions (*conf.* 5.14.25). First, empirical reason alone now seemed to him inadequate to address issues of theology conclusively. The religion of reason had failed to render an adequate account of its religious materialism, one that could refute alternative theories. But, more importantly, its apparent intellectualism had appealed to his vanity. It flattered his self-regard as a member of an ontological elite who alone contained within themselves the sparks of divine light, goodness, and reason. It also allowed him to nurture his exaggerated self-regard while continuing to live with a concubine. The religion of Faustus thus fueled an inflated and false vision of his own nature, and in doing so conjoined epistemic with ethical failure. That connection of belief with the moral condition of the self is one that would henceforth dominate Augustine's thinking, making him acutely alert to the personal foundations of theological claims.

"Books of the Platonists"

The failure of Manichaeism – the self-styled rational form of Christianity – plunged Augustine into theological skepticism and libertinism (*conf.* 5.14.24). He reports that he would have been lost in a whirlpool of carnal delights had he not hung onto the one belief that he could never shake: post-mortem judgment. Only this precluded him from Epicureanism. His earliest writings, produced before his baptism as an orthodox Christian, exhibit this lingering state of mind. There he emphasizes that his real interest had always been in "God and the soul" (*sol.* 1.2.7; *ord.* 2.18.47). But he had lost any conviction that knowledge of these matters was possible, retaining only an inchoate eschatological fear of judgment. All that would change as he encountered "some books of the Platonists" and a startlingly new notion of reason (*conf.* 7.9.13).[6] We cannot be certain exactly what he read, but treatises drawn from the Roman school were included, especially Plotinus and Porphyry.[7] Those works introduced him to the conception of interior contemplation that was a central feature of the Roman school's epistemology. Having concentrated on an empirical analysis of the cosmos, his vector now shifted to interior, *a priori* reflection. Contemplation – *theōria* or *contemplatio* – was a practice by which the inner self could be turned away from the plane of sense perception and the distractions of earthly existence. Through interior contemplation the highest element of the soul could come into immediate association with truth itself.[8] The elements of contemplation included: First, the initial training of the mind in mathematics, dialectic, and other mental disciplines that honed the soul's capacity for rational reflection in time. That was understood to lead to *noēsis* or *intellectus*, the rational intuition by which the mind could grasp by sudden insight the first principles of reality. Thus the intelligible foundations of sensible reality were to be discovered not by empirical observation but by interior ratiocination. Secondly, besides recognizing the substance of the intelligibles – the perfect natures that they defined and exemplified – the soul was able to discern the level of reality as a whole that the intelligibles shared. The intelligible world constituted a transcendent level of eternal being, the proper level of divinity. Only through the interior exercise of reason could divinity be discovered. Thirdly, through the exercise of contemplation the soul also came to recognize the inner depths of the self, alerting it to the daunting fact that the self of empirical consciousness was only a surface thing, awash with the transient impressions imposed upon it by sense experience. Stability could be uncovered as the soul settled into its innermost nature and recovered its native connection to the divine and the eternal. Finally, that process of interiority required both mental discipline and, crucially, the ethical curing of the soul. Only when the soul came to exercise the virtues and put off its false attention to the sensible and transient could it reclaim its inherent dignity. That inner worth rested in the intelligible self that *intellectus* – the highest sort of reason – both disclosed and permitted.

"What else is the face of God than the truth itself for which we sighed and to which, as the object of our love, we are restoring ourselves as pure and beautiful?" (*ord.* 1.8.23). So Augustine writes in *De ordine*, one of his earliest works written in the wake of his encounter with the *libri Platonicorum* but before his baptism as a Catholic. He embraced the Platonic two-world theory: "There is, however, another world entirely remote from the eyes that the intellects of a few sober men discern" (*ord.* 1.11.32). His soul, whose concentration on the visible world had been misplaced and whose moral vagrancies had been tolerated, now discerned what it never grasped before, the transcendence of the divine:

> When the soul has composed and ordered itself, and has restored its harmony and beauty, then it will be prepared to see God, both the fountain from which all truth flows and the father of truth. Great God, what will those eyes be like? How pure, how lovely, how powerful, how constant, how serene, how blessed! And what do they see? What? I ask. What should we think? What should we estimate? What should we say? Ordinary words come to mind but they have all been made common by worthless things. I will say no more except that a vision of beauty is promised us. Other things are beautiful by imitation of that beauty but base in comparison with it. (*ord.* 2.19.51)

The soul's grasp of God is intellectual and not empirical, mental and not physical. When it has set itself into ethical order, the soul can restore its ability to participate in the intelligibles that constitute the ontological foundations of sensible reality. That intellectual vision of God as the beautiful itself exceeds the intellect's finite categories. While ennobled by the reach of the purified intellect, the soul is also reminded of the limitations of its finitude. The tight connection of contemplation and the soul's ethical condition is underscored in another catechumenal treatise, *Soliloquia*:[9]

> Reason is the soul's gaze. But since it does not follow that everyone who gazes sees, a right and perfect gaze, from which vision follows, is called virtue. For virtue is right or perfect reason. But even if the eyes are healthy, the gaze itself cannot turn towards the light unless three things are present: faith, by which it believes that what it gazes upon will, when seen, make it happy; hope, by which it expects that it will see, if it has looked well; love, by which it desires to see and enjoy. And then the vision of God follows from this gaze, which is its end, not because it no longer exists but because it has nothing more to strive after. And this is truly perfect virtue: reason reaching its goal, which results in a blessed life. This vision, however, is that understanding which is in the soul, and it is brought forth by the one who understands and the one who is understood, just as what is called seeing in the eye consists both in the senses and what is sensed, and if either is removed, nothing can be seen.
>
> (*sol*. 1. 6.13)

The initial axis of this depiction of contemplation is ethical. Contemplation is a type of knowledge that requires the moral purification of the soul as a necessary condition. Achievement of virtue allows right reason to develop into direct cognitive grasp of God understood as intelligible being transcendent of the cosmos – in sharp contrast to Manichaeism. The intellectual vision of God is *intellectus in anima* – understanding within the soul. That is the new conception of knowledge that seized Augustine, launching his conversion to a transcendentalist version of Christianity to which he had been introduced by Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and his circle of Catholic intellectuals.[10]

Intellectual vision in the confessions

The definitive presentation of Augustine's understanding of intellectual vision can be found in Book 7 of the *Confessions*, which recounts his pre-baptismal encounter with Platonism. There he explains his adoption of transcendentalism and the conception of intellect that supports it. But he also defines the limitation of this newly discovered form of transcendental knowledge. He offers two accounts; the initial portion of the first version reads as follows:

> Thus admonished to return to myself, I entered into my innermost depths with you as my guide, and I was able to do so because you had become my helper. I entered and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, saw above that eye of the soul an immutable light higher than my mind – not the everyday light visible to all bodies, nor a greater light of the same type that might shine more clearly and fill everything with its magnitude. It was not that light but another, entirely different from all others. Nor was it above my mind in the way that oil is on top of water or the sky is above the earth. Rather it was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it. Whoever knows the truth knows it, and whoever knows it knows eternity.
>
> (*conf.* 7.10.16)

The soul has awakened to its interior depth and, turning away from the material light of the physical world, discerns through the eye of the soul (*oculus animae*) the light of reason. In doing so the soul recognizes its ontological dependence on that light. It has come to know truth itself, transcendent and eternal, the source of all reality. That is the promise of the contemplative turn into the inner recesses of the soul, the uncovering of truth itself:

> And I said: But truth can't just be nothing even if it is not diffused through finite or infinite space? And you cried from far off: "Truly, I am who I am." And I heard as one hears in the heart, and from that moment there was no longer any doubt. It would have been easier to doubt that I was alive than that there is no truth perceived by the intellect through the things that are made.
>
> (*conf.* 7.10.16)

What contemplation has afforded the soul is indubitable, *a priori* knowledge, the certainty of a transcendent level of reality that is the root of the soul and the seat of truth. It is recoverable by interior reflection alone.

This interior knowledge is described again, though disquieting notes are iterated as the limitations of contemplation become evident to Augustine. For contemplation is double-sided, it offers the certainty of truth as well as the disclosure of contingency. The soul recognizes its dependency and its distance from eternal being. But beyond this ontological framing, it must also come to terms with the episodic character of contemplative knowledge, for the soul's moral condition determines the extent and degree of its epistemic advance toward being. This is clearly and painfully evident as the passage begins, depicting his efforts at interior contemplation prior to his baptism:

> And I marveled that at last I loved you, not a phantom in place of you. Yet I was not stable enough to enjoy my God, but was swept up to you by your beauty and then torn away from you by my weight. I collapsed with a groan into inferior things.

> That weight was my sexual habit. Yet the memory of you remained with me and I had no sort of doubt that to whom I should cling, though I was not yet able to do that.
>
> (*conf.* 7.17.23)

Augustine's vagrant sexuality has fettered him, allowing only a momentary, interior grasp of the divine. Having neither adopted a Christian life nor been ritually washed from his sins, Augustine's soul finds itself with a mixture of certainty, memory, and regret. This ambivalent condition sets down a critical marker in Augustine's portrait of contemplative knowledge to which we shall return.

Yet there remains in Augustine's catechumenal description of contemplation much that certifies its success, albeit short-lived. He articulates five levels of interior cognition that the soul moves through: the body; the soul that perceives the body; the inward force of the soul itself; the power of discursive reasoning; and, lastly, intellect itself. Here is the text of this ascension narrative from *Confessions* Book 7:

> Then I was inquiring why I approved the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or terrestrial, and on what basis I made unqualified judgments about mutable things, saying: this ought to be thus and that ought not to be thus. While asking on what basis I made the judgments I was making, I discovered the unchanging and actual eternity of truth above my changeable mind. And so by stages I went from bodies to the soul which senses through the body, and from there to its inner force, to which bodily senses report external things; that is as far as beasts can go. And from there I went on to the power of reasoning to which is referred for judgment that which arises from the bodily senses. This power itself, ascertaining within me its mutability, raised itself up to its own understanding. It led its thinking away from that which is habitual, withdrawing itself from contradictory swarms of fantasies so that it might discover the light strewn upon it, and then, without any doubt, it could declare that the immutable is preferable to the mutable. On this basis it could know the immutable, for unless it could know the immutable in this way, there would be no way to prefer the immutable to the mutable with certainty. And so in the flash of a trembling glance it reached that which is. Then I clearly saw your invisible things understood through the things that are made. But I did not have the strength to keep my gaze fixed. My weakness rebounded and I returned to my customary state. I bore with me only a cherished memory and a desire, as it were, for something I had smelled but could not yet eat.
>
> (*conf.* 7.17.23)

The cognitive success of interior intellection is complete, having led to an intense, momentary cognition of eternal being itself. But Augustine regards it as fleeting in its immediacy; a knowledge that is later recalled but cannot be sustained. It is an unmediated form of intellection in which the knower achieves a non-symbolic, non-discursive knowledge of God. The restriction on that cognition is the ethical condition of the soul that forces the suspension of its intellectual association with the divine. This episodic aspect thus defined for Augustine the inherent limitation of contemplative intellection, its restricted capacity set by the moral status of human souls.

The many shades of concupiscence – *concupiscentia carnis* – that afflict the soul are the enduring impediment to contemplation in this life. But they can be mitigated by the only solution available to humanity: humble faith in God's healing power. This became, for Augustine, the sharp line of differentiation between the pagan Platonists and Christians. While he had discovered the efficacy of contemplation through his encounter with the treatises of the Platonists, he regards his efforts to adopt interior intellection as only a partial success. Platonic contemplation cannot be sustained precisely because Platonism did not offer a solution to the fallen nature of the soul. Instead, Platonists style themselves, in Augustine's view, as wise in their own estimation, an act of spiritual presumption based on mistaken pride (*superbia*) in their cognitive accomplishments (*conf.* 7. 20.26).[11] In doing so, Platonists are recapitulating the sin of the Fall. In contrast, Christians recognize the moral limits of contemplation, and confess their need for divine assistance in order to overcome the fallen nature of the soul. Indeed, the depictions of contemplation from Book 7 of the *Confessions* acknowledge the divine agency as a guide and sustainer of the soul. For divine intervention there can be no substitute. Only confession, rooted in humility before the saving presence of God, can restore to the soul the ability to know God – fractionally while still in this world, more fully in the next. Augustine found in Isaiah 7:9 confirmation of the prevenience of faith to contemplation:[12] "Unless we walk by faith, we will not be able to reach that sight that does not pass away but remains, uniting us to the truth through a purified intellect. Therefore one said: unless you will have believed, you will not endure, but another said: unless you will have believed, you will not understand" (*doc. Chr.* 2.12.17). Purification is a necessary condition for contemplative understanding and that is only available from a power capable of removing the effects of the Fall from the soul. Faith is, therefore, not an alternative to interior intellection; it is the source of its successful exercise.

How can that power of purification be reliably found? Only by turning to the authority of Christ and his Church. Augustine insisted that he would never deviate from the authority of Christ because it alone has the power to change him. This claim was for him a deeply personal one, based on his new resolve when he took up and read Romans, and accepted its admonitions as directed to him (*conf.* 8.11.28–29). But he offered as well a variety of more generalizable rules to test rival authorities, particularly in his early works as a Christian when this issue was especially exigent. While reason is distinct from authority, it is nonetheless involved in reflecting upon which authority can be trusted, and that shifts given the context of what sort of belief is involved (*vera rel.* 24.45; cf. *util. credo* 12.26). Thus we find, for example, analyses of different objects of beliefs distinguished: those believed but not fully understood, such as historical events; those understood at the same time they are believed, such as mathematics; finally, those first believed and then understood. The last is the case with divine things, since only the pure at heart can see God (*div. qu*. 48). Augustine recognizes that Catholicism has been criticized as a religion based on belief, but he insists that true understanding of theological matters can only be achieved by following a path set out by authority (*util. credo* 9.21). Authority, he insists, opens the door to deeper knowledge, for it alone can cure the soul of its disorders, making it first docile and then strong (*ord*. 2.9.26; cf. *util. credo* 14.31 and 16.34). The soul can thereby grasp what reason (*ratio*) is, which it follows through the precepts of authority; and then what intellect (*intellectus*) is, which contains within itself all things; and finally, the source beyond all things, which it can discern. It is only by accepting a remedial path of faith and by following the ethical precepts of authority that the soul can progress toward interior understanding. But then the soul can overcome its appetitive focus on mortal things by believing in the grace of God, and it can return from mutability to the immutable One (*vera rel*. 12.24).

The faith of Monica

There is one additional aspect of Augustine's understanding of faith and reason that requires close attention: the question of the access to interior contemplation. Here we come up against a sometimes neglected but critical aspect of his thinking: Augustine came to regard contemplative knowledge not as the preserve of philosophers alone, but as open to Christians of no special intellectual attainment. While in his early treatises there is some emphasis on education in the liberal arts as a foundation for higher intellection, this theme does not persist.[13] That program foundered because of the powerful presence of his mother, Monica, an uneducated North African woman whose spiritual authority was the fixed lodestone in the chapters of his own religious life. Monica came to be regarded by her son as a figure of unlearned wisdom, a woman whose obvious shortcomings, lovingly but frankly portrayed in Book 9 of the *Confessions*, were overshadowed by the divine grace that was evident throughout the steady course of her own life. She was a challenge to his own pretentions as a wise man, a paradigm of that deeper spiritual knowledge attained by simple Christians but so often elusive to him. At Cassiciacum before his baptism, he suggests a stark two-tiered model to accommodate Christians such as Monica: those who attain sanctity through authority alone will only achieve direct knowledge of God in the next life, in contrast to those few philosophers who can achieve this final epistemic state during their earthly lifetimes.[14] But this model was undercut in the Cassiciacum treatises by the conclusive interventions of Monica into the disputations of the male philosophers. Moreover, those works were written before the event described by Augustine in Book 9 of the *Confessions* – the 'vision at Ostia' – in which he and Monica both achieve contemplative knowledge of God. That passage, the preeminent description of immediate knowledge of God in Augustine's works, requires scrutiny (*conf*. 9.10.23–25). Augustine begins by setting the scene. Monica and Augustine are leaning out of a window into an interior garden in the port of Ostia as they await passage back to North Africa. Monica's death is imminent but unsuspected, and their conversation turns to the heavenly life of the saints. Augustine, newly baptized, plans to take up an ascetical life upon his return. Their joint apperception of divine Wisdom is described twice. Here is the first version:

> And the conversation led us to the conclusion that any pleasure of the bodily senses, in any physical light, was seen as incomparable with the delight of that other life and not worthy of consideration. Raising ourselves up by ardent affection to the self-same, we traversed by stages all corporal things and the earth itself, where the sun and moon and stars shine upon the earth. And we ascended further by interior reflection and dialogue and wonder at your works, and we entered into our minds, and then went beyond them so that we might touch that region of unending abundance where you eternally feed Israel with the food of truth. And there life is the wisdom by which all things are made, both things that are and those that will be. But this wisdom is not made, but is as it was and always will be. It is not possible for it to have been in the past or to be in the future, for it just is, since it is eternal. And while we talked and longed for it, we touched it slightly with the full force of the heart. And we sighed and left behind the first fruits of the spirit bound there, as we returned to the sound of our speech where a word has both a beginning and an ending. But what is like your word, our lord, who abides in himself without growing old and renews all things?
>
> (*conf.* 9.10.24)

This is a description of joint cognition of divine wisdom, in which both souls ascend from external conversation into interior reflection and thence through levels of reality. They pass out of time and into the presence of eternal wisdom, from which they then descend back into temporal conversation. The basic pattern is similar to that found above at *Confessions* 7.17.23. Augustine then reflects anew upon the ascension that he and Monica enjoyed:

> Therefore we said: If to anyone the tumult of the flesh became silent, if the images of earth and water and air became silent, if the heavens became silent, and the very soul became silent to itself and surpassed itself by not thinking of itself, if all dreams and visions in the imagination became silent, and all speech and every sign and whatever is transitory became silent – for if anyone could hear them, they would all say: "We did not make ourselves, but he made us who abides in eternity" – if, having said this and directed our ears to him who made them, they were to be silent, then he alone would speak not through them but through himself. We would hear his word not through the tongue of the flesh, nor through the voice of an angel, nor through the sound of thunder, nor through the obscurity of a likeness. Instead we would hear him, whom we love in these things, alone and without them. It was thus

> when we extended ourselves and in a flash of thought touched the eternal wisdom that abides beyond all things. If this could continue, and all other visions of a much lesser sort could be withdrawn, then this alone would ravish and absorb and enfold the beholder in inward joy. Eternal life is of the quality of that moment of understanding for which we sighed. Is this not the meaning of "enter into the joy of your lord"? And when will that be? When we all rise again but are not all changed.
> (*conf.* 9.10.25)

Monica achieves this instant of understanding because she has been transformed by divine grace and her inner life cleansed. Book 9 presents that narrative, offering us insights into her struggles with many of the exigencies of life as a woman in late antiquity. At the same time her many virtues are evident, especially humility, prudence, endurance, and especially courage in the face of potential martyrdom (*conf.* 9.7.15).[15] But hers was the path of faith rooted in authority leading here at Ostia to its dramatic confirmation. Monica has thus completed a Christian variant on the philosophical ascension scheme iterated by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, and, in doing so, confirmed that immediate understanding of wisdom is achievable both by philosophic and demotic souls through the power of God. If philosophy was for Platonists a way of life leading to contemplation of the One, then Monica has accomplished that end by other means. Her way of life – unlearned but wise through divine grace – became for Augustine the prime example of the Christian path of faith and authority leading to understanding. As such, it catalyzed for him a recognition that understanding can best be pursued after a fashion entirely distinct from philosophy.

Augustine's new path to contemplative knowledge was to be pursued not through a traditional philosophical life but rather through the study of divine revelation. It bears further consideration why this was so. For Augustine the soul's ignorance of the divine was not just a matter of embodiment, of cognitive incapacity resulting from the occlusion of its rational perception by the body. Augustine advanced beyond the more limited notion of the soul's declension in Plotinian Platonism, especially the soul's audacity in choosing to become grossly individuated in the physical body. Instead, he came to regard the very process of rational knowing as limited by the Fall.[16] And that Fall could not be subsumed in the eternal pattern of procession and return that made up the metaphysical seasons of reality in Plotinus. No, the Fall was for Augustine singular and temporal and wholly disastrous. And it was irremediable on its own terms. Thus knowledge of God was not within the soul's grasp, for the resources of its own ethical renewal were never within its own control. What Monica's soul achieved at Ostia was not just a cognitive advance but also the reversal of the fallen human condition. She has come to know divine wisdom immediately and non-symbolically, but also momentarily. That she has done because her soul has been given the power to do so through a life of preparation in grace. Not grace conceived as an instance of efficient causality, of some power infused into the soul by the agency of compulsion, but rather by the soul's slow sifting of the ethical contours of life in reference to God. Monica had done all that in her long life of prayer, so that her soul was reformed to the degree that this moment of understanding was now possible.

The ecclesial foundations of contemplation

What Augustine sought was a means to pursue this path habitually. He found it in a new model of contemplation designed to reform the soul – now understood to be dependent upon divine aid for its accomplishment. The restoration of reason could only be brought about through faith grounded in authority. Moreover, it could only be sustained by submitting the soul to the continuing presence of God's grace through sacred Scripture. Contemplation must be a matter of sustained study of revelation in order to search out its hidden meanings for the individual soul. For the soul's interior intellection of God is, at best, momentary, leaving a memory to be recalled and refreshed by attention to Scripture. Contemplation's inner ambivalence – knowledge of transcendent wisdom conjoined with the soul's recognition of its exile – must be habitually confronted and, in light of that tension, the soul must turn to divine revelation. Interior contemplation brought this knowledge of its status to the soul, but there are dangers in its discernment. For sin is conditioned by knowledge; it is an act of volition against what the soul knows to be true, and so the soul may be prone to exacerbate its fallen state when it grasps how far removed it is from the divine and the eternal. Thus it needs to maintain its focus on the divine wisdom through the power of grace. This it can do by the quotidian task of meditation upon Scripture. Books 12 and 13 of the *Confessions* explore this theme; there philosophical dialectic is replaced by scriptural reflection directed toward the inner life of the soul. By saturating the soul in the divine word, grace eradicates some effects of the Fall and advances the soul's interior recognition of the presence of divine wisdom. Indeed, Augustine conceives of this as participation in the inner intellection of God, joining the soul with the Holy Spirit (*conf.* 13.31.46). But perhaps the most salient feature of this transition, from philosophical to theological contemplation, is the larger context in which knowledge of God is now situated. For Augustine, inner intellection is, paradoxically, denominated in social as well as individual terms. To contemplate God through Scripture is to join with the Church, "the living soul of the faithful," in its collective knowledge of God (*conf.* 13.21.31). As such, the search for wisdom is reconceived by Augustine, and is now denominated in social terms. When faith seeks understanding, it does so by turning away from a solely individual quest for knowledge to one that is also socially grounded – in Scripture and the Church. The Church is not just the institutional arbiter of Scripture; it constitutes the collective life of souls who jointly know God (*conf.* 13.34.49).[17]

We might conclude by observing how distant Augustine's views are from contemporary discourse on faith and knowledge. The central fissure is found in Augustine's understanding of religious knowledge as the exercise of interior contemplation by the soul. For this reason, the soul's moral status defines its epistemic horizon. Because the soul is inherently in the frame – as it were – of any effort to discover the divine and the transcendent, its ethical character determines not just what it might be disposed to regard as cognitively certain but what it is actually capable of knowing. Moral lucidity is a necessary condition for knowing God. In this interpretation of religious knowledge Augustine built, of course, upon long-standing attitudes toward metaphysical knowledge held by some ancient philosophical schools, especially Platonism. Hence philosophy had to be a 'way of life' by which the soul could be trained for the arduous task of forsaking earthly distractions and concentrating on its inner ability to know the transcendent. But as we have seen, Augustine came to regard this spiritual strategy as largely a failure, for it overestimated the nature and power of the human soul. And the soul's moral status could too easily be externalized and attributed to the confusions of its embodiment in space and time. Augustine concluded from his own experience that the soul lacked an inherent capacity to cure its condition. This was so because the source of the Fall was deeply impacted within human nature and not external. The Fall of the soul was decisive and complete. And so the soul could not reliably come to know the divine and the transcendent without divine aid. Any 'way of life' that the soul might pursue to achieve knowledge of God must be conferred upon it by divine dispensation. Grace could open the soul to the transcendent, episodically in unmediated contemplation and habitually through meditation on divine revelation in Scripture. This Christian 'way of life' was calibrated to the exigencies of fallen human existence, requiring faith in authority to direct its moral renewal. Contemplation thus nests in a novel social setting, the Church, necessary for its exercise, replacing the classical philosophical school. In this respect, as in so many others, Augustine's understanding of faith and reason was a challenge to classical modes of thought. Coming to terms with his account of the ancient Christian practice of interior contemplation might also invite reflection on contemporary conceptual conventions regarding faith and reason.

Endnotes

1 Hadot 1995, part I, part II, chs. 5 and 8, part III, ch. 10; Hadot 2002, part II; Cooper 2012, chs. 1 and 6.

2 Brown 2000, ch. 5.

3 Augustine's autobiographical account of his days as a Manichee stretches across Books 3 to 7 in his *Confessions*.

4 Book 3 of the *Confessions* concentrates on his adoption of Manichaeism.

5 His disillusionment with Manichaeism becomes acute in *Confessions* 5.

6 Cf. *De beata vita* 1.4; *Contra Academicos* 3.17.37–.20.43; *Soliloquia* 1.4.9; *De vera religione* 4.7; *Epistula* 118.5.33.

7 Cf. Kenney, 2005, part II, ch. 4; Brown 2000, ch. 9.

8 This contemplative 'ascent through the liberal arts' can be seen in a pre-baptismal work, *De ordine* 2.11.31–16.44. Cf. Harrison 2006, 41–48.

9 "Reason," as a personified interlocutor with Augustine, makes this claim.

10 Cf., on Ambrose, *Confessions* 5.13.23–24 and 6.3.3–4.

11 This is the core of Augustine's indictment of Platonism.

12 Augustine is commenting here on two different readings of the passage from the Vetus Latina and the Vulgate. The passage is a popular one for him, turning up at *De Trinitate* 7.6.12, 15.2.2; *Epistula* 120.1.3; *De magistro* 11.37; *De libero arbitrio* 1.2.4, 2.2.6, etc.

13 *Soliloquia* 2.20.35; also, for the 'ascent through the liberal arts' *De ordine* 2.11.30–16.44. Cf. *Retractationes* 1.3.2 and 1.4.4 for his retrospective judgment.

14 At *Confessions* 7.20.26 Augustine tells us that he began to regard himself pridefully as a wise man after reading Platonism. This is clear enough at *De ordine* 2.9.26 where the simple Christians are subordinated to Christian philosophers, who comprise a blessed elite.

15 The fact that she was a 'martyr,' or witness in the face of death, is often neglected, perhaps because her Arian persecutors were themselves Christians.

16 The key treatise is *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*. Cf. Harrison 2006, part I, chs. 1, 2 and part II, ch. 8.

17 Cf. Kenney 2005, part III, ch. 7.

15 Augustine on language

Peter King

Augustine is cast as hero and as villain in two contemporary narratives about the philosophy of language. He is hailed as the founding father of modern semiotics, the first to recognize that language is a system of signs. But he is also ridiculed (most famously by Wittgenstein) for adopting the simplistic view that words are essentially names of the objects for which they stand. Each narrative contains a measure of truth, but does so at the expense of the more basic story, which is that Augustine does not put forward a systematic 'theory of meaning' (either semiotics or semantics) in the modern sense, i.e. an account of the meanings of the atomic constituents of language that recursively explains the meanings of compound expressions.[1] Instead, Augustine's approach to language is shaped by his training as a professional rhetorician. Skilled at how to do things with words, Augustine takes language to be primarily a (conventional) vehicle of communication, and he therefore concentrates on understanding the various ways in which we *use* language to convey meaning – partly a matter of the speaker's thoughts and intentions (*cognitiones et uoluntates*), partly a matter of linguistic conventions and practices. The upshot is that semantics takes a back seat to pragmatics: the 'meaning' of an expression, for Augustine, is paradigmatically a matter of its use as a vehicle for communication between speaker and hearer. As speakers, we try to encode our thoughts effectively in linguistic form for a given audience. As hearers (interpreters), we try to determine what content the speaker means to convey in his choice of expression, drawing on our knowledge of linguistic norms and conventions, taking into account the context and what the speaker has said elsewhere, all of which makes for a top-down 'holistic' account of meaning. That said, Augustine's analyses and explications of usage tend to be piecemeal rather than systematic, with only an occasional nod to wider implications. The reason for this is that the greater part of Augustine's works is devoted to (scriptural) exegesis, where spelling out the significance of some text, which involves among other things identifying and balancing the several ways in which it can reasonably be interpreted, is paramount. This task, devoted to uncovering the truths put forward in the Bible, was clearly of more moment to Augustine than pausing to clarify his methodology – especially since it was the classical methodology for dealing with authoritative texts, from Vergil to Homer, and sufficiently familiar to his audience not to need much comment. Augustine's most systematic reflections on language are found in the incomplete *De dialectica* (387), the *De magistro* (389), and the *De doctrina Christiana* (396/427) which is devoted to rules for scriptural exegesis.[2] Language-learning and interpretation are also discussed in the *Confessions* (397/401), and the ‘inner word’ in the *De Trinitate* (400/416–21). Augustine draws freely on earlier work in the philosophy of language, most notably the Stoic account of signs, but his ‘rhetorical’ approach to language has much in common with contemporary views about meaning-holism and the indeterminacy of translation.

Common to the analytic and semiotic narratives about Augustine’s philosophy of language is the claim that words are signs. We will then consider the distinction between natural and given signs; how words as linguistic signs have meaning in sentences; and that an expression can be interpreted in multiple ways, which is a fundamental and ineradicable feature of language. We will conclude by discussing whether Augustine held that there is a mental language.

Signs

Augustine offers two general descriptions of ‘sign’: “what shows itself to sense and something beyond itself to the mind” (*dial.* 5.7) and “a thing that of itself makes something else enter into thought beyond the appearance it presents to the senses” (*doc. Chr.* 2.1.1).[3] In each case he identifies the key feature of signs that they are “things employed to signify (*significare*) something” (*doc. Chr.* 1.2.2). Augustine’s point is that a sign is a thing like any other, and therefore “shows itself to sense” or “presents” an “appearance to sense” as does any ordinary object, but in addition it is bound up with something other than itself, something that is not the thing the sign is and which we therefore conceive rather than perceive. His insight requires careful handling. Although Augustine speaks of the sign as a ‘thing’ (indeed, as a sensible thing), he recognizes that actions and events can be signs: nodding the head is a sign of assent, persistent coughing is a sign of the flu, Judas’ kiss is a sign of betrayal. Nor is it clear that signs have to be sensible even broadly speaking. Recurring thoughts of suicide, which are entirely in the mind, may be a sign of depression. And what goes for the sign is also true of what it signifies. A single lantern hung in the Old North Church was a sign that British troops were attacking by land, for example, which is not a ‘thing’; a word may be the sign of a state of mind, e.g. ‘if’ perhaps signifies doubt (*mag.* 2.3). Furthermore, Augustine’s remarks that a sign is bound up with something “else” or something “beyond itself” should not be taken literally; the name ‘name’ is a sign of itself, since it names (all) names, including ‘name’ since it too is a name (*dial.* 10; *mag.* 4.8–9). Yet despite these qualifications, Augustine’s account of signs contains two insights crucial to understanding his semantics.

The first insight is that signs have *intentionality*: they are always directed at something, for a sign is always a sign *of* something. This need not depend on any intrinsic feature of the sign. There is nothing about the inscription ‘c-a-t’ which makes it suitable to signify cats. This is most apparent in the limit case where I arbitrarily declare one thing to be the sign of another, e.g. “Let $f(x) = 3x+17$” or “I dub this couch ‘Fred’.” Yet the fact that there need not be any intrinsic feature of the sign that makes it a sign of what it signifies doesn't mean that there cannot be a feature linking sign to significate. Augustine points out that an icon or a statue might resemble the objects of which they are the signs, for instance. Likewise, smoke is a sign of fire and the deer's footprint a sign of the deer (*doc. Chr.* 2.1.2). In these cases a real relation underwrites the intentionality of the sign, the relations of resemblance and causality respectively. Yet whether there is such a relation or not, Augustine's point is that it always makes sense to ask what a sign is a sign of, that is, what the sign signifies, since "a sign cannot be a sign if it does not signify anything" (*mag.* 2.3).

The second insight is that signs have *intensionality*: they signify something but not some thing, no matter how broadly understood, even if they intentionally 'target' things. Now it is easy to misread Augustine as holding that signs are to be explained extensionally, that is, in terms of the things of which they are the signs. Adeodatus for one falls into this extensional misreading in the *De magistro*, and Augustine tries to get him to recognize his error by asking what the word 'nothing' is a sign of – after all, 'nothing' picks out no thing. When this pedagogical move fails, Adeodatus is left in perplexity and Augustine proposes that they move on, hoping that they will "understand this kind of difficulty more clearly in due order" as he puts it (*mag.* 2.3). The inscription 'Fido' is a sign; it is more particularly a name; if we ask of what 'Fido' is a sign or name, the natural answer is that it signifies or names Fido, that is, this very dog. Indeed, Augustine often speaks as though the signification of a sign is given by exhibiting a thing. Yet fortunately this is not his considered view, since it would lead quickly to the discredited semantic principle Ryle famously ridiculed as the 'Fido'–Fido theory of meaning.[4] Instead, Augustine holds that the inscription 'Fido' as a sign "shows" Fido "to the mind" and "makes" Fido "enter into thought," as he says when describing what it is to be a sign. Fido the dog is the intentional target of the sign 'Fido,' but only *qua* shown to the mind or entering into thought, which is not such as to be captured on any extensionalist reading. This is a cousin of the modern view that sense determines reference: 'Fido' signifies Fido in virtue of Fido's presence to the mind in thought, where such presence determines what the thought is about (namely Fido as its intentional target) and thereby provides a referent for the linguistic expression. Adeodatus did not heed Augustine's stricture that signs signify as they do because of something in the mind, namely the intentional presence of the object which is the target, and so he confused the actual external object with the intensional object of signifying. But signs are intensional, and Augustine is aware that they introduce opaque contexts.[5]

The force of Augustine's insights should be apparent, as well as some of the questions to which they give rise. How do real relations underwrite the intentionality of signification, in those cases in which they do? How is an object present to the mind? And whose mind is in question here? The person who gives the sign or the one who receives it? Is signification a property of the sign, the use of the sign, the interpretation of the sign?

Natural and given signs

Augustine addresses these questions with his distinction between *natural* and *given* signs:

> Some signs are natural and others are given. Natural signs are those that of themselves make something beyond themselves to be thought about (*cognosci*), without wanting or any desire to signify, as for example smoke signifying fire. It does this without wanting to signify; instead, by observation and by attention to familiar matters, it is known that fire is close at hand even if only the smoke is apparent. The track of a passing animal belongs to this class [of signs], and the face of someone who is angry or sad signifies the emotion in his mind, even without the wish of the angry or sad person, or as any other mental impulse is revealed by our facial expression without our acting to reveal them . . . Given signs are those that living creatures give to themselves and to each other for showing one another, so far as they are able, their mental impulses or whatever they have sensed or understood. The only reason for our signifying, i.e. giving signs, is to bring forth and to transfer into another person's mind what is happening in the mind of the one who is giving the sign.
>
> (*doc. Chr.* 2.1.2–2.3)

Roughly speaking, signs are natural when they do not involve an intention that they be signs, whereas they are given if they do, because of their use in communication.

Natural signs are nonconventional; fire causes smoke, the passing deer leaves a hoofprint, facial expressions display a person's state of mind. These are real relations which obtain independently of anyone's desire for them to do so; the smoke, the hoofprint, and the facial expression can but need not be intended to make fire, a deer, or sadness present in anyone's mind. They count nevertheless as signs on Augustine's descriptions because they are capable of making these objects present to the mind in thought, whether this happens intentionally or not.[6] They make their objects present by grounding reliable inferences, or more generally counting as evidence indicating the existence and presence of the objects of which they are the signs: "by observation and attention to familiar matters" we can reasonably infer the existence of fire from the presence of smoke, which counts as evidence for the conclusion that there is fire, and similar inferential connections link the tracks to the deer and the expression to the state of mind.[7] Here Augustine makes contact with his ancient sources, for the original use of 'sign' was fundamentally inferential.[8] Two points. First, the strength of the connection between a natural sign and what it signifies generally prevents mere associative relations from being signs, such as when the shape of a cloud makes me think of a horse. Secondly, Augustine's claim is that natural signs are the warrant for drawing the conclusions as noted; this oblique allusion is the only way in which mind is involved in the signhood of natural signs, and it is clearly on the side of the 'recipient' or interpreter of the natural sign – the mental states of the producer of a natural sign are set aside, and none of the signs is the sort of thing that has mental states, so we are left with the (potential) epistemic subject who would be warranted, ordinarily, in drawing the conclusions as described.

Given signs, by contrast, are produced in order to call something to mind.[9] Linguistic signs (words) are Augustine's favored example of given signs, though there are nonlinguistic given signs aplenty: icons, maps, flags, traffic signals, paintings, sirens, and so on. Augustine holds that the main purpose of language is communication; the *De magistro* opens with Augustine's posing the question "When we speak, what does it seem to you we want to accomplish?" and Adeodatus replies, "Either to teach or to learn" (*mag*. 1.1), each of which is identified as a way of calling something to mind, and other uses of language are shown to be derivative from communication (*mag*. 1.2). All this is in line with his declaration in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.2.3 that the *only* reason for giving signs is communication. In describing given signs, Augustine asserts that they are meant "to transfer into another person's mind what is happening in the mind of the one giving the sign," which is a matter of "showing" those to whom the sign is given "their mental impulses or whatever they have sensed or understood" (*doc. Chr*. 2.2.3). Under 'mental impulses' Augustine includes affective states generally, volitions as well as emotions; infants try to give signs of their will (*conf*. 1.6.8), and we read the Scriptures to find out the thoughts and desires (*cogitationes et uoluntates*) of those who wrote them, thereby discovering God's will (*doc. Chr*. 2.5.6). In commenting on John 8:19, Augustine describes the process of communication:

> When there is an idea in your heart it differs from [any] sound, but the idea that is in you seeks out the sound as though it were a vehicle to come across to me. Therefore it clothes itself in the sound, somehow gets itself into this vehicle, travels through the air, comes to me . . . You have said what you were thinking and uttered those syllables so that what was hidden inside you would come to me; the sound of the syllables conveys your thought to my ear; through my ear has your thought descended into my heart.
>
> (*Jo. ev. tr*. 37.4)

In *De doctrina Christiana* 1.13.12 Augustine adds to this sketch the point that the thought 'encoded' in the sound remains in the mind of the speaker, unchanged by the encoding process. In short, the sign-giver expresses something by using signs; the signs are the vehicle of what is expressed; the audience for the signs grasps what the signs express, and thereby what the person who gave the signs meant by their use.

Augustine's account of given signs is therefore a description of the workings of the paradigm case of communication via signs, one especially well suited to explaining linguistic signs. Note that there is no overt reference to minds here, only to what can be expressed by the use of signs. In *De dialectica* 5 Augustine calls what is expressed by linguistic signs the *dicibile*, the 'sayable': "whatever the mind rather than the ears perceives on the basis of the word and holds within the mind . . . what is understood in the word and is contained in the mind," clearly a Latinization and an appropriation of the Stoic *lekton*.[10] A 'sayable' is some intelligible content, which in the paradigm case is the same for speaker, hearer, and utterance; it is identified as both what the speaker has in mind and with what is expressed when he speaks – and thus someone who knows the language knows what is expressed by the utterance, and so what the speaker has in mind, that is, what he wanted to say.[11] Augustine is well aware that the situation he is describing is a paradigm. In situations falling short of the ideal we have to introduce further distinctions. For one, a speaker might use words to convey something other than what he thinks: Augustine instances liars, deceivers, actors, and so on (*mag*. 13.41–42).[12] Furthermore, even when there is no intent to deceive, a speaker can fail to express what he has in mind. In rote recitation, for example, one's mind often wanders while speaking, so that what the speaker says does not correspond to what he is thinking about, though it may convey something he wants to convey; slips of the tongue likewise may result in an utterance that does not express what the speaker wants and is trying to express (*mag*. 13.42). On the side of the recipient, there can be different interpretations of the speaker's utterance, e.g. when a word is taken in different ways by different people (*mag*. 13.43); a simple mishearing can lead to a different understanding of what was said (*mag*. 13.44). Far and away the most common source of difficulty is the expressive medium: signs, even linguistic signs, are not always a clear vehicle for expression: Augustine discusses ambiguity, obscurity, and equivocation in *De dialectica* 9–10, and in *De doctrina Christiana* 3.

Thus Augustine can distinguish (*a*) what the sign-giver wants to express by his use of signs, roughly our 'speaker-meaning'; (*b*) what the given signs express, to the extent that this notion is well defined; (*c*) what a recipient of the signs may take them to express, roughly our 'hearer-meaning.'[13] In addition, Augustine distinguishes (*d*) what the sign-giver wants a recipient to understand by his use of signs, usually though not always what he tries to use the signs to express; (*e*) what a recipient understands the speaker to want to express by his use of signs, usually though not always what he takes the signs to express. Scriptural exegesis, for example, requires us to keep (*a*)–(*e*) carefully distinct: someone might interpret something in the Bible to express a truth even when the writer was not aware of it, and therefore could not have meant to express it (*conf*. 12.18.27); indeed, we often cannot tell an author's intention with any certainty (*conf*. 12.24.33). Further distinctions are available to Augustine by taking the pragmatic background to communication into account. In all cases, but particularly for language, the "living creatures" who give signs to one another have to master the relevant practices and conventions.

Augustine is clear in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.1.2 that he is not providing a systematic theory but rather a set of resources upon which to draw in his analysis of language above all.

A sign, or more precisely the use of a sign, may be either *proper* or *transferred* (*dial*. 10; *doc. Chr*. 2.10.15). The proper use of a linguistic sign is usually called its literal use, whereas its transferred use includes figurative or metaphorical speech. More exactly, a given sign is proper when it is used to signify what it is meant to be a sign of: a statue may be a sign of Hercules because it closely resembles his appearance, the name 'Socrates' may be a sign of Socrates by a baptismal act in accordance with linguistic customs. Other significative uses of signs are transferred when a sign is used to signify something it is not meant to be a sign of. When an abject sinner declares that he is a worm, the word 'worm' does not have its proper use, since he does not mean that he literally is a worm; instead, it is meant to be a sign that he is like a worm in being insignificant and contemptible – such characteristics are 'transferred' by his use of that sign. Transference can occur in nonlinguistic contexts too. Placing a crown on a person's head is a sign that she is the queen; if I put a crown on a pile of cash it is transferred to be a sign that money rules over all. But the most interesting and nuanced transferred uses of signs are found in language.

Meaning and language

Speaking, Augustine tells us, is giving a sign by means of an articulated sound (*dial*. 5), specifically an external sign of the will (*mag*. 1.2); a word is "what is uttered by an articulated sound accompanied by some significate" (*mag*. 4.8; see also 4.10, 5.12 and 10.34). Words are therefore a subclass of signs. It is tempting to draw the conclusion that the meaning (in the modern sense) of a word is what it signifies, or, to put the point another way, that signification, in the case of a linguistic sign, is meaning. This is not quite correct. Augustine tells us repeatedly that written letters are signs of spoken words.[14] Yet the meaning of an inscription is not its corresponding utterance, it is instead what that utterance signifies. Again, a given utterance is not only a sign of what it signifies but also functions as a sign of itself (*dial*. 10; *mag*. 8.22), Augustine calling the former the *dictio* and the latter the *uerbum* in *De dialectica* 5.[15] But a word does not mean itself, even if it always is a sign of itself. Furthermore, Augustine declares in *De dialectica* 9 that any word spoken in isolation is ambiguous, that is, brings many things to mind without deciding among them. If so, then there is no clear answer as to what 'the' meaning of the word is. The common noun 'animal' is a sign of the cat Felix and of the dog Rover, but it does not mean either (or both). Hence the meaning of a linguistic sign cannot simply be identified with what it signifies, even if this identification is often intuitively correct.

Augustine introduces a notion of 'meaning' that is independent of signification. His reasoning is that while every word is a sign, it does not follow that a string of words is itself a sign of anything; combinations of signs, if put together in the right way, can express a meaning (*comprehendunt sententiam*), i.e. propositional content; incomplete strings, or sentence-fragments, don't quite "complete a meaning" (*non impleant* *sententiam*) and leave the expression hanging (*dial.* 2).[16] When analyzing scriptural texts, Augustine is careful to ask about the 'meaning' (*sententia*) they express (see *doc. Chr.* 1.36.40, 2.12.18, and 3.27.38).[17] He is not consistent in his usage, occasionally referring to the *significatio* of sentences, but in such cases he seems to have in mind our modern notion of 'significance,' which is far more general than 'meaning.' In contexts that require precision, Augustine is careful to speak of the *sententia* expressed by a sentence.

While the grammarian deals with the auditory features of utterances, such as their syllabification, accentuation, consonance, and syntax (*dial.* 5), the dialectician instead deals with their truth (*dial.* 7): we can grasp the meaning of an expression even if the syntax isn't correct, as in cases of barbarisms and solecisms, which is what matters for semantics. Words themselves are individuated semantically. A word is *simple* if it signifies something that is itself one, such as 'animal,' and *compound* otherwise, such as 'lamplighter' (*dial.* 1). A word such as *ambulo* ('I-am-walking') is syntactically single but semantically compound, since it brings to mind both walking and the one who is walking, though third-person forms of the finite verb do not include any subject (*dial.* 1). Augustine is familiar with the traditional division of the eight parts of speech – name, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, conjunction, preposition, interjection – but does not take it to be fundamental. In *De magistro* 5.12–16 he argues that all words are names regardless of part of speech. He argues that we can treat any word as the referent of a pronoun, and, since according to the grammarian a pronoun takes the place of a noun, any word is a name. On an uncharitable reading Augustine is guilty of confusing use and mention here, since his examples turn on sentences such as "'And' is a conjunction"; on a more charitable reading he is calling attention to the fact that if a part of speech is meaningful then it must make some kind of semantic contribution to the whole, and we can always introduce a name for whatever contribution it is that it makes.[18] As noted above, each word is a sign of itself, or more exactly of its linguistic role, and so names it, a fact made plain in the case of interlinguistic identity, e.g. of *et* (Latin) and *kai* (Greek). Nor are the parts of speech exclusive; one of the ways to say "Yes" in Latin is *Est*, which is therefore a name of one's agreement as well as a verb.

Names and verbs are privileged parts of speech, because a sentence can be compounded out of them alone (*dial.* 2; *mag.* 5.16). Unlike names, a verb "signifies things inflected by tenses" (*mag.* 4.9), a remark noteworthy because it marks a break with Aristotle, who held that verbs and other parts of speech have 'consignification' (i.e. signification in combination with other words), verbs being in essentials just names that consignify times.[19] Simple sentences, that is, strings of words semantically identified as expressing a complete meaning (*impleant sententiam*), come in two main kinds: (*a*) those susceptible to truth and falsity, namely assertions; and (*b*) those that are not, even though they express a complete meaning, such as commands, wishes, curses, and other non-declarative sentences (*dial.* 2).[20] Sentences are 'compound' when "they are judged to be connected to other sentences" (*dial.* 3), as they are components in conditionals,[21] conjunctions, and disjunctions, the Stoic types of molecular formulae. Aside from these brief remarks, Augustine says nothing more about sentences in general, reserving his efforts for the detailed exegesis of particular sentences.

Augustine rejects three common answers to the question how utterances become linguistic signs, that is, how an utterance becomes the sign of something. First, he unequivocally rejects the Stoic account of the origin of words as somehow being natural signs of what they signify (*dial*. 6).[22] Words do not of themselves mirror the world or the essences found in the world. While it is true that everyone strives to capitalize on resemblance when giving or devising signs, so that the sign resembles what it is the sign of, this does not in general succeed because things resemble one another in too many ways (*doc. Chr*. 2.16.23). Secondly, he rejects the Aristotelian method in which the sign's meaning is spelled out by a proper definition. This is, he argues in *De magistro* 2.3–7.21, just a matter of explaining signs by signs, and, unless what the sign signifies is itself a sign (such as 'verb'), this gets us no closer to what the sign signifies. Thirdly, matters are no better if we appeal to 'language-exit transitions' such as ostensive definition, because of a version of the hermeneutic circle (*mag*. 10.29): ostension is useless because pointing a finger is itself a *sign* of the pointing-out rather than of the things that are pointed out, much as saying "Look!" would be (*mag*. 10.34). Augustine draws the radical conclusion that from words we learn only the sound of words, and that they can do no more than prompt us to seek further (*mag*. 11.36).[23] Augustine, of course, is interested in how words can serve as a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, which is not quite the same as knowing what a word signifies, but the fact remains that it is unclear how we could learn the meaning of some word with which we are unfamiliar (*mag*. 10.29 and 10.33).

Augustine follows instead the Epicurean view that takes the origin of language to be utilitarian, a matter of useful discoveries that facilitate cooperation – a view perhaps adopted by some Stoics, but which Augustine might also have known from Lucretius.[24] Language exists not by nature but rather by agreement and convention (*societatis consensio* and *institutio*): "people did not agree [about signs] because they had the power to signify, but they have the power to signify because people agree about them" (*doc. Chr*. 2.24.37). Speaking correctly is a matter of maintaining linguistic conventions (*doc. Chr*. 2.13.19). In some sense there is no difficulty about how words 'hook on' to the world, because as language speakers we have never been divided from the world; socialized from birth into a system of linguistic practices, our philosophical reflections start from this common background (described in *conf*. 1.6.8 and 1.8.13 as well as *doc. Chr*. praef. 9, 2.14.21, and especially 4.3.5).[25] Whether we say something true when we use language is another question, to be sure, but that is a question more appropriate to epistemology than to philosophy of language, even when Augustine regularly combines the two.[26] A consequence of his adoption of this view is that the limits of signification depend on whatever linguistic conventions are in force. A word cannot signify whatever one chooses it to signify, at least not if one wants to communicate to others, which Augustine takes to be the primary purpose of language.

Interpretation and indeterminacy

In *De magistro* 2.3, Augustine asks Adeodatus what Vergil's *Aeneid* 2.659 means by asking about its first several words in order. Adeodatus falls into the trap and accepts a naive principle of semantic compositionality, taking the meaning of the whole line to be a function of the meaning (signification) of its individual parts. While it is true that each word *qua* linguistic sign has some signification, Augustine is clear that this naive principle of compositionality does not hold. After noting in *De dialectica* 9 that any word spoken in isolation is ambiguous, by bringing many things to mind without deciding among them, he argues that what a given word signifies is explained through further words in discussion – in short, that its signification is determined by its *context*, a point he explores in detail in *De dialectica* 10. In *De magistro* 8.24 Augustine proposes as a "law of reason" that we should follow contextual indications to disambiguate use and mention, and to the question about how we can learn the signification of the unknown word 'sarabara' he describes how it is learned in context. The necessity of appealing to context is one of the central themes of *De doctrina Christiana*. It may happen that the meaning (*sententia*) of a word or an idiom is ambiguous, but made quite clear (*clarescit*) by what follows (*doc. Chr.* 2.12.18). Indeed, one of the constraints on an interpretation of some text is whether it coheres with other passages; if not, the proposed meaning should be abandoned (*doc. Chr.* 1.37.89). The natural procedure is to explain obscure passages by plain ones and to use evidence from indisputable passages on ambiguous ones (*doc. Chr.* 2.9.14). In a case of what Augustine calls "literal" ambiguity, when we try to discover what signification a word has in a scriptural passage, if the Rule of Faith (namely that Scripture only expresses truth in an edifying way) does not prefer one signification over another, we should look to the surrounding context, and, if that does not determine one rather than the other, both are permissible (*doc. Chr.* 3.2.2).

Augustine's insistence that the signification of a word, or the interpretation of a passage, depends on its context is directly opposed to semantic compositionality. Rather than the sense of an expression being a function of the senses of its constituent parts, the sense of any part may be affected, altered, or completely changed by the context in which it appears; as he says in *De doctrina Christiana* 3.3.7, they must fit together (*cohaerere*). In short, Augustine adopts a version of semantic holism. An individual word (sign) may be capable of bringing many things to mind; its use in a sentential context, or in a broader textual net, will govern its interpretation in that use. Consequently, meaning is wide open to all the ways in which people can do things with words – a conclusion that suits Augustine the professional rhetorician well.

If meaning is holistic, the meaning of a given text is indeterminate. The context that is brought to bear upon its interpretation may differ; the constraints of interpretation may differ depending on the text or the purposes behind its interpretation; different interpreters may see different things in the same text. Augustine recognizes all these several possibilities. Most of his discussion of the principles of interpretation pertains to scriptural exegesis, where special constraints apply, but these can be relaxed to apply to ordinary cases of interpretation. Now Augustine insists that a given text can have many true different interpretations (see *conf.* 12.18.27, 12.27.37, 13.24.36; *doc. Chr.* 3.2.2 and 3.27.38). He even claims that there are as many distinct true interpretations as there are interpreters (*conf.* 12.31.42). Multiple interpretations can be of different rhetorical kinds: allegory, parable, riddle, literal, irony, history, metaphor, antiphrasis, prophetic, spiritual . . . there is no definitive or privileged list of the rhetorical tropes Augustine countenances. Nor does he say that there is only a single true interpretation for each kind, although he does say that there is a true interpretation of each of several kinds for the opening line of Genesis (*conf.* 13.24.36). On the contrary, there are passages which should not be read literally (for instance); Augustine offers a rule of thumb for biblical passages that anything in Scripture that is not derived from good morals (the love of God and neighbor) or the true faith (the understanding of such morals) is necessarily figurative (*doc. Chr.* 3.10.14). There are other passages, such as those describing deeds of the patriarchs, that should be interpreted literally and in a transferred sense (*doc. Chr.* 3.22.32). The bounteousness of interpretations is a feature deliberately designed by God for the Scriptures (*doc. Chr.* 3.27.38), just as He deliberately put in obscurities on which we should exercise our intellects and interpretive skills (*doc. Chr.* 2.6.7), and also included figures of speech to make Scripture both more pleasant and more rewarding to read:

> Why this [series of metaphors] should give me greater pleasure than if no such imagery were presented in scripture, since the subject is the same and the lesson is the same, it is hard to say. But this is another question. No one disputes that it is far more pleasant to learn lessons presented through such imagery, and far more rewarding to discover meanings that are won only with difficulty.
>
> (*doc. Chr.* 2.6.8)

What applies to scriptural exegesis likewise applies to ordinary cases of interpretation, though we should be less inclined to call them ‘true’ as much as ‘well founded’ or the like. However, when the sense of a passage is equivocal and the best efforts to clarify its obscurity have still not succeeded, then, and only then, suggests Augustine, we should try to determine its meaning through reasoning – a dangerous last resort, since reason often goes astray (*doc. Chr.* 3.28.39).

Normally the interpreter is trying to discern the intention (*uoluntas*) of the author of the text; this is particularly important in the case of scriptural exegesis, where it is assumed that the Holy Spirit was working through the writer (*doc. Chr.* 3.27.38); this is how we can come to know, however dimly, the will of God (*doc. Chr.* 2.7.9). But ordinarily it is not always possible to tell what an author intended, or at least not with certainty, especially in non-scriptural cases where the writer may not have been correct (*conf.* 12.24.32–33; see also 12.25.35). Fidelity to authorial intent is in general only one of the constraints on interpretation; Augustine is willing to endorse an interpretation that he takes to express a truth even if it isn't, or could not have been, what the author had in mind (*conf.* 12.18.27). For scriptural passages this may count as the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; for other passages it may be charity, or a general constraint to try to interpret the majority of what someone says as true while nevertheless endorsing some readings not easily ascribed to the author. As in aesthetics, there is no reason to think that the author is the sole, or even the most important, interpreter of his work; the intentional fallacy holds for interpretation generally. Truth is public, not private, and so can override any psychological hypotheses about authorial intention (*conf.* 12.25.34).

Conclusion

Augustine emerges as surprisingly modern in several respects once we appreciate the depth of his commitment to a 'rhetorical' understanding of language. Some commentators, however, think that he had another theory of language, one more fundamental than the rhetorical conception presented here, namely a form of mental language – an account of thought as fundamentally linguistic, prior to and grounding the possibility of the sorts of natural languages discussed above.[27] There are two reasons for thinking that Augustine did have a theory of mental language. First, his description of the infant learning language seems to appeal to conceptual states prior to the acquisition of language, in particular his communicative desires and desire to dominate the adults around him. Secondly, in his *De Trinitate* Augustine puts forward an elaborate theory of the Inner Word, which he identifies as being of no language but underlying all conventional language. Each deserves comment.

While it is undeniable that Augustine attributes at least some conceptual skills to the infant, it is not clear that these conceptual skills are a form of language. In *Confessions* 1.6.8 Augustine speaks of the infant giving signs of his will, for example, but this need be nothing more than a way of describing the infant's hunger from the infant's point of view (so to speak). If we are not already convinced that conceptual skills presuppose language, there is nothing in Augustine's discussion of language learning that suggests the infant already has a mental language, to which various conventional utterances are then correlated.

Matters are more complex for the theory of the Inner Word. It is true that Augustine is developing a theory for theological reasons, namely to explain John 1:1, but he would no doubt reply that the theory has wider scope. The detailed description of how an Inner Word is formulated has a great deal to do with the mechanics of cognition, but not in any especially language-like fashion; there is no discussion of different categories of thought corresponding to different types of words, for instance. The Inner Word may "underlie" language but that need mean no more than that it is the expressible content, the *dicibile*, before it is expressed, and surely Augustine's view that we can think before we speak does not entail that there be a mental language in any philosophically interesting sense. Nor does it presuppose that the set of conceptual capacities involved in the Inner Word in our case exists prior to the acquisition of our first natural language, so it need not be prior. I conclude that nothing in Augustine's doctrine of the Inner Word requires us to accept that he held there to be a mental language in the sense described.

Later generations of medieval thinkers often read Augustine as holding such a theory, of course. But they need not have been correct to do so, any more than they were correct to think that he proposed a compositional semiotics, which was the way he was commonly read (e.g. by Anselm), or correct to ignore the relevance of his strictures on interpretation to his philosophy of language. If we put aside medieval and modern misreadings, we can recognize Augustine as the original and powerful philosopher of language he undoubtedly was.

Endnotes

1 This conception of a theory of meaning follows Davidson (broadly speaking). It has two components: (*a*) a principle of compositionality, which explains how the meaning of a given expression is a function of the meanings of its constituent parts; and (*b*) recursiveness, which explains how to construct complex expressions and their meanings from simple atomic expressions and their meanings. Davidson's further constraints, having to do with Tarski's "Convention T" and charitable interpretation, are not relevant here.

2 The first two demand cautious handling. On the one hand, Augustine seems to have abandoned the *De dialectica* without completing it, and so thoroughly put it behind him that he did not even own a copy when he wrote his *Retractationes*. On the other hand, the *De magistro* is an uncompromising dialectical work in which positions are advanced, reversed, modified, and rejected in the course of the dialogue, while Adeodatus, Augustine's interlocutor, is allowed to make elementary mistakes and put forward straw-man arguments.

3 Perhaps derived from Cicero, *De inventione* 1.30.48: "A sign is that which falls under some sense and which signifies something seen to follow upon it." Other possible sources are Quintilian and Origen.

4 There is no shortage of commentators ready to repeat Adeodatus' mistake and accuse

Augustine of holding the 'Fido'–Fido theory: see for instance Kirwan 1989, 49 and King 1995, xviii n. 24.

5 Augustine notes that transitivity fails: 'word' is *inter alia* a sign of the name 'name,' which is a sign of the name 'river,' which is a sign of a river, but 'word' is not a sign of a river (*mag*. 4.9). Substitutivity likewise fails as expected.

6 Augustine talks about "want" and "desire" on the part of the signs themselves, which is surely wrong; he must have in mind that whatever *produces* the sign need not do so intentionally, as fire does not intend to signal its presence by causing smoke. See Kirwan 1989, 42–43.

7 This last case may not be inferential as much as constitutive: seeing someone smile may be to observe their being in a happy frame of mind, the way seeing reddish blotches may be to observe their having the measles; the inference, if any, is to the underlying cause of which smiling and reddish blotches are symptomatic.

8 See Allen 2001 for discussion of signs in this sense.

9 Given signs are often though not always conventional. I might strike someone to signal my anger to everyone, but striking someone, even as a display of temper, does not reveal my anger as a matter of convention.

10 See Frede 1994 for a clear account of the Stoic notion of a *lekton*, which shows what Augustine found attractive in the theory. There is a vast literature on Stoic philosophy of language: see Algra et al. 1999 for a survey. Augustine's account of signs has many of the vices and the virtues of its progenitor. His use of Stoic semantic theory has been explored extensively, but the older studies of Markus 1957 and Jackson 1969 are now superseded by Ruef 1981 and Borsche 1994.

11 See Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* 8.12.

12 In *De mendacio* 3.3 and *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate* 7.22 Augustine argues that lying is intending to deceive someone by asserting the opposite of what he believes, whether what he believes is true; it certainly is not to indicate what he thinks.

13 Kirwan 1989, 39–46 effectively presses Augustine on these distinctions.

14 See *De dialectica* 5 (where Augustine says that inscriptions are not words), *De magistro* 4.8, and *De doctrina Christiana* 2.4.5 (where Augustine says that letters as "signs of words" were devised because vibrations in the air pass away quickly). Aristotle says that letters are signs of utterances in *De interpretatione* 1 16a3–4, a text Augustine may have known (there is no scholarly consensus on the question).

15 The use/mention distinction as usually drawn nowadays treats the mention of a word as the creation of a new word that is the name of the word mentioned; Augustine holds that it is one and the same word that can be a sign of a thing and a sign of itself. Adeodatus proposes that we should always understand words to be used rather than mentioned in *De magistro* 8.23, a proposal Augustine rejects in favor of the "law of reason" that we should follow contextual indications to disambiguate use and mention (*mag*. 8.24).

16 Augustine is here following the Stoic account of 'deficient' and 'indeficient' *lekta*: see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Philosophers* 7.53.

17 Sometimes Augustine will speak of the *sensus* of a text, e.g. *De doctrina Christiana* 2.6.7 and 2.12.17, but this seems no more than another way of talking about its *sententia*. Augustine needs some such notion to distinguish between a mere string of signs and a coherent sentence, something Plutarch claimed the Stoics could not do.

18 See Burnyeat 1987, 68 for this charitable reading.

19 Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 3 16b6.

20 Here again Augustine is following his Stoic sources: see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Philosophers* 7.66ff.

21 Augustine is careful to distinguish conditional sentences, which are made up of two sentences connected by a conditional particle, from inferences, in which the concession of one (possibly compound) sentence is the ground for accepting another sentence: *De dialectica* 3 and *De doctrina Christiana* 2.33.51.

22 See Allen 2005 for a discussion of the Stoic theory, and Long 2005 for its relation to

Plato’s theory of names in the *Cratylus* and Augustine’s criticisms in the *De dialectica*.

23 See Watson 1982, Burnyeat 1987, Kirwan 1989, 53, and Louth 1989.

24 See Verlinsky 2005. There are traces of this view in Ammonius, *in Cat*. 2.8–14, who is later than Augustine but a witness to the late Platonic tradition; see also Porphyry, *in Cat*. 57–58.

25 In *Epistula* 187.7.25 Augustine points out that what Wittgenstein ridiculed as Slab Language in *Confessiones* 1.8.13 is at best a primitive proto-language, not a model of full-fledged speech – Wittgenstein’s point *avant la lettre*. Whether this is possible only if we somehow already possess a ‘mental language’ prior to acquiring any ordinary natural language is discussed in the conclusion.

26 See Bearsley 1983; Burnyeat 1987; and Cesalli and Germann 2008.

27 See Sirridge 1996 and 2000; a dissenting view in given by Panaccio 1999.

16 Hermeneutics and reading Scripture

Thomas Williams

An overview of Augustine's exegetical writings

Augustine began writing commentary on Scripture not long after his conversion.[1] His first such work, meant as a counterblast to Manichaean attacks on the creation account, was *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (388–90).[2] In many ways it sets the tone for much of his later work: Augustine admits an allegorical sense but warns against overenthusiasm for allegory and denigration of the literal sense; we see also from the outset Augustine's interest in Scripture as a controversialist and polemicist. After his ordination to the priesthood in 391, he seems to have gone through something of a writer's block,[3] starting but leaving incomplete a treatise on exegetical theory (*De doctrina Christiana*,[4] begun 396 but not completed until 427), another commentary on Genesis (*De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, 393–94),[5] and an exposition of Romans (*Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*, 394–95).[6] He did manage to finish a verse-by-verse commentary on Galatians, giving the literal sense (*Epistulae ad Galatas expositio*, 394–95)[7] and a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount (*De sermone Domini in monte*, 393–96).[8] His *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula ad Romanos* (394)[9] derives from conversations with the monks at Hippo, who recorded his answers to their questions about Romans; Augustine tells us later (*retr*. 1.23) that he had not yet thought carefully enough about Paul's account of divine election and grace in that epistle.

Augustine found his voice when he came to write the *Confessions* (397), of which Books 11–13 are an extended commentary on Genesis 1. It is often described as an allegorical commentary, but wrongly so: most of it is quite literal by Augustine's standards, which are unlike ours. Only in Book 13, chapter 12, does the real allegory begin: Augustine sees in the story of the divine making of the formless world another story about the divine remaking of the sinful soul. After the *Confessions* came two works not intended as sustained commentary: *Quaestiones Evangeliorum* (399–400)[10] is a loose collection of replies to a correspondent's questions about Matthew and Luke; and the *Adnotationes in Job* (399)[11] were compiled and published, not very skillfully, by others. *De consensu Evangelistarum* (399–400),[12] by contrast, was a product of more careful composition; in it Augustine discusses the authority and nature of the Gospels and attempts to reconcile apparent contradictions between them.

The greatest of Augustine's exegetical writings, mostly long works composed over the course of many years, came between 400 and 420. *De Genesi ad litteram* (401–15)[13] is a wide-ranging and open-ended work intended to show the consistency of Scripture with the science of the day; polemic against the Manichees no longer figures in the title, but it is by no means forgotten. Perhaps his greatest work on Scripture is the *Tractatus in evangelium Iohannis* (406–21;[14] the dates are much disputed), a collection of sermons treating the whole text of the Gospel. It is a masterful blend of literal and allegorical exegesis, philosophical speculation, moral exhortation, and theological polemic. The commentary on 1 John (*Tractatus in Iohannis epistulam ad Parthos*, 406–07)[15] is another collection of exegetical sermons, as is the highly allegorical *Enarrationes in Psalmos*,[16] which Augustine began in 392 and put in final order around 417.[17] (A number of the sermons in the *Enarrationes*, however, were composed specially for the work and were never preached.) Augustine's other sermons are also generally exegetical. An *Expositio epistulae Jacobi ad duodecem tribus*, probably written around 412, is no longer extant.

In 419 Augustine wrote two commentaries on the first seven books of the Bible. *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* deals with obscurities in the Latin text that arise from peculiarities of Hebrew or Greek idiom; *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* offers more developed exposition of difficult passages.[18] Near the end of his life Augustine made a collection of moral injunctions in the *Speculum Scripturae* (*Mirror of Scripture*, 427).[19]

De octo quaestionibus ex Veteri Testamento is of uncertain date, and its authenticity is controversial.

Exegetical practice

Augustine's exegetical practice defies easy generalization. A reader who wishes to get a feel for his style as a biblical commentator can do no better than to follow him through a few representative passages. Here I provide an introduction to that task by exhibiting Augustine's approach to Genesis 1:1–2a in *Confessions* 11.3–12.13. The first thing one notices is that Augustine has squeezed some 8,500 words of commentary from a text that runs (in his version) a mere seventeen words. He is not always so prolix, of course, but Augustine finds a great deal in his chosen texts – partly because, being thoroughly convinced of their divine authority, he *expects* to find a great deal in them. He is no cautious scholar, afraid to commit himself beyond the evidence, trained to a gritty skepticism that scours the gloss off the greatest of texts; he brings to his exegesis the full measure of Christian belief. His goal, moreover, is not merely to inform us but to help us see things differently. So he does not (for example) merely offer a quick definition of some difficult term in Scripture and then move on; he asks his readers to look within until, by teasing out the implications of some quite ordinary experience or idea, he brings us to see for ourselves what the term means. And he often breaks off for praise to God and exhortation to his readers – these not being digressions, in his mind, but an integral part of the exegete's task. These procedures, however, do not make for short commentaries.

"In the beginning God made heaven and earth." In Augustine's view, the change and variation of created things is itself evidence that they have their existence from some source other than themselves. Moreover, the beauty, the goodness, indeed the very existence of heaven and earth points to the perfect beauty, goodness, and being of their Creator, whom they mimic in their fragmentary and defective way. So heaven and earth were made, and it was God who made them: but how? He cannot have used any preexisting material in order to make them, because all such material is itself part of heaven and earth. Thus, purely rational argument shows that God created *ex nihilo*, and Augustine often relies on such philosophical argument in his commentaries. But rational argument has left us with an unanswered question: *How* did God create heaven and earth? To find the answer, Augustine relies on another favorite exegetical technique: he uses one part of Scripture to illuminate another. For Scripture itself tells us how God made heaven and earth: "He spoke and they were made" (Psalm 33:9) and "By the word of the Lord were the heavens established" (Psalm 33:6). What sort of word was this? It could not have been a word produced by a physical voice and having temporal duration, for there were as yet no physical voices and no time. It must have been an eternal word – in fact, the Word of which John the Evangelist wrote. "And so you call us to understand the Word, God with you, O God, the Word that is uttered eternally and by which all things are uttered eternally" (*conf.* 11.7.9). This Word, as Truth itself, is rightly called the Beginning, since "if he did not abide when we went astray, there would be nowhere for us to return to. Now when we return from going astray, we certainly return through knowing; and in order that we might know, he teaches us, since he is the Beginning and also speaks to us" (*conf.* 11.8.10).[20]

So "in the beginning" means "in the coeternal Word." Since the Word is eternal, the divine act of creation is eternal, and there is no room for questions such as "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" Augustine accordingly embarks on a long explanation of the nature of eternity and time,[21] all aimed at showing the folly of such questions and providing us with some insight, inevitably dim and partial, into a mode of existence utterly different from our own life in this realm of beginnings and ends.

Having explained "In the beginning," Augustine moves on to "God created heaven and earth." Here he relies on a passage from the Psalms (115:15–16) where Scripture itself comments on Scripture: "May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The heaven of heaven is the Lord's, but the earth he gave to the children of men." Here, "heaven" is identified with the heaven of heaven, and earth means the whole visible creation – including what we conventionally call the heavens (the skies). Augustine understands the "heaven of heaven" to be some sort of intellectual creature that ceaselessly contemplates God and is everlastingly happy in that contemplation. Although it is capable of change, it does not in fact change – so that it is not bound by time.[22]

Then we are told something about the earth (that is, the whole material creation): "The earth was invisible and unformed." That is, the first step of material creation is formless matter: "Was it not you, O Lord, who taught me that before you gave form and variety to this formless matter, it was not anything: not color, not shape, not body, not spirit? And yet it was not altogether nothing; it was a sort of formlessness, devoid of all beauty" (*conf.* 12.3.3). It is not that God actually created formless matter first and then proceeded to form it; this is not a case of temporal succession but of logical priority. Rational analysis shows that underlying all change from one form to another there must be some "stuff" that itself has no form but is capable of taking on form; this is the formless matter of which Augustine speaks.

This formless almost-nothing is timeless, because time is present only where there is change in form. The temporality of creatures means mutability, which is in a sense a limitation; but it is also the sphere in which God can work by forming them. The heaven of heaven is also not temporal, because although changeable, it is never in fact changed. Hence, there is no mention of "day" when "God created the heaven [i.e. of heaven] and the earth [i.e. unformed matter]," because neither of these creations is temporal. We get days only when God starts to form matter in various ways.

Exegetical theory: epistemological dimensions

Again, this is what Augustine considers literal exegesis – for he is reading the creation story as a creation story, not as (for example) the story of the Church or of individual salvation, and so he is not reading it allegorically. But even in literal commentary the exegete is free to draw material from altogether different parts of Scripture and from the best of philosophy. The approach is not scholarly in the modern sense – no self-respecting biblical scholar in our day would offer a reading of Genesis that depended heavily on St. John the Evangelist and Plato – and the results are often anything but commonsensical. Augustine is aware that the reading he has just given will strike some people as strange: "Others, admirers of the book of Genesis and not fault-finders [he is thinking of the Manichees in the latter group], say, 'The Spirit of God, who wrote these words through his servant Moses, did not intend for them to be understood in this way; he did not mean what you say, but something else – what we say'" (*conf.* 12.14.17).

In his response Augustine lays out the theory that legitimates his exegetical practice. He begins by stating some things he is quite sure of, things that "truth says to me with a strong voice in my inward ear" (*conf.* 12.15.18). Now he had used this expression three times in 12.11, where he was laying out his exegesis in the first place, except there it was "You, Lord, have said to me with a strong voice in my inward ear." Note two crucial differences in the expression as it appears here. First, it has changed from second person to third; the subject now is 'Truth,' which to Augustine means specifically God the Son.

Secondly, it is no longer perfect tense ("you have said") but present ("Truth is saying"). These changes hint at some significant elements of the theory that will emerge. What we learn from Scripture is learned from Truth himself. And Truth is not past but present, always accessible. It is in intellectual 'memory,' where we see not the images of past realities that are now gone (as is the case with sense memory) but the present – in effect timeless – realities themselves.

There is a careful parallelism in Augustine's invocation of what is said to him "with a strong voice in [his] inward ear." In 12.11 he uses that expression to introduce a discussion of (a) God's eternity, then of (b) the relationship between God and creatures, then of (c) the heaven of heaven; he then adds, independently of that expression, a discussion of (d) the timelessness of unformed matter. The sequence recurs in 12.15. These are the three things he is sure of, because Truth himself tells him: (a) God is eternal and immutable, so there is no succession in him, and therefore no change in his will regarding creatures; (b) everything that exists comes from God, who supremely is; and (c) there is a sublime creature, not coeternal with God, but also not temporal. Finally, he says, (d) there was also formless matter, which was created by God and also was not temporal. At each of these points he imagines asking his objectors, "Is this true?" and they invariably reply, "We do not deny it."

But if the objectors concede all these points – which together constitute almost the whole of Augustine's exegesis – what is their objection? Simply that when Moses wrote of "heaven," he was not thinking of the "heaven of heaven," and when he wrote of "earth," he was not thinking of the whole material creation. So Augustine goes on to consider several rival interpretations of these expressions. What is important for our purposes is not specifically what the different accounts say, but the fact that Augustine maintains that all the accounts are true. He insists that what he says is true, and the objectors should not deny it. But what they say is also true, and he will not deny that either.

This extraordinary generosity toward other interpretations makes perfect sense in light of Augustine's epistemology and philosophy of language. Written words are signs of spoken words, and spoken words in turn are signs of the speaker's thoughts. If all goes well, the written words will exactly capture the spoken words, and the spoken words will perfectly convey the speaker's thoughts; one who reads those words will in turn understand exactly what they mean, and thus the contents of the reader's mind will exactly match the contents of the author's mind. But Augustine is always keen to draw our attention to the many ways in which things might not go so well. A speaker may be lying or self-deceived about what he thinks. The author's thoughts might surpass his skill – perhaps any human skill – to signify them by words. The reader might be too dull or too distracted to make use of the words properly so that they carry his mind to just those realities which they were meant to signify, or the words themselves might be ambiguous. Augustine is, moreover, at least intermittently mindful that he is reading the Scriptures in Latin translation,[23] and translation complicates the story even further.

The words of Genesis are ambiguous, at least in the sense that as they stand they do not rule out a variety of rival interpretations, all of them plausible. Now what Moses wrote signifies what Moses would have said, so we could reduce the ambiguity if we could get Moses to speak to us – which, of course, we cannot do:

> I want to hear and to understand how in the beginning you made heaven and earth. Moses wrote this. He wrote it and went away; he passed over from here, from you to you, and he is not now in front of me. For if he were, I would get hold of him and ask him and plead with him for your sake to explain these things to me, and I would open the ears of my body to the sounds emanating from his mouth. And if he spoke in Hebrew, he would knock on my senses in vain, and none of what he said would strike my mind; but if he spoke in Latin, I would know what he was saying.
>
> (*conf.* 11.3.5)

Ordinarily even this would hardly be satisfactory, for we cannot generally know that a speaker even believes what he is saying: "Who knows the thoughts of a man but the spirit of the man within him?" Moreover, it is normally of no great moment to find out what someone is thinking: "Surely teachers do not profess to offer their own thoughts for their students to learn and memorize, rather than the actual subject matter that they take themselves to be propounding when they speak. For who would be so foolishly curious as to send his child to school in order to find out what the teacher thinks?" (*mag.* 14).

With Moses matters are somewhat different, since we can assume that Moses knew his own mind and intended to communicate his thoughts faithfully, and since we have a prior commitment to believing that whatever Moses thought and said under divine inspiration was true. Even so, would an interview with Moses be all we needed to overcome the deficiencies of signs? It would not. If he spoke in Latin, Augustine says,

> I would know what he was saying. But from what source would I know whether what he was saying was true? And if I were to know that, I wouldn't know it from him, would I? No indeed: the inward Truth, within me in the dwelling-place of my thought, would say to me – not in Hebrew or Greek or Latin or any barbarous language, without any organ of mouth or tongue, without the rattling of syllables – "What he says is true." And I with certainty and confidence would immediately say to him, "What you say is true."
>
> (*conf.* 11.3.5)

The argument thus far offers two reasons why biblical exegesis is not, after all, concerned with figuring out the author's intention. The first is that our ability to get at the author's intention is limited. Moses is not around for us to ask him questions, and any difficult text might bear more than one plausible and defensible interpretation. The second, and deeper, reason is that what guarantees the veracity of the author, and thus the text, is the divine truth; and that same divine truth is available to us even apart from our interpretation of the text.

Suppose, then, that Augustine says Genesis 1:1 means *x*, and I say it means *y*; suppose further that upon consulting Christ as Inner Teacher we find that both *x* and *y* are true. The only question is, which did Moses *mean*, *x* or *y*? Augustine asks, why not both?

> So when one person says "He meant what I say," and another says "No, he meant what I say," I think it would be more pious to say "Why not both, if both are true?" And if someone should see in his words a third truth, or a fourth, or indeed any other truth, why not believe that Moses saw all these truths?
>
> (*conf.* 12.31.42)

Somewhat surprisingly, it is not pride but just good Augustinian theology (and epistemology) to suspect that we might find truths in Moses' writings that had never crossed his mind:

> Finally, Lord, you who are God and not flesh and blood, even if one who was merely a man did not see all there was to be seen, did not your good Spirit, who will lead me into the land of uprightness, know everything that you would reveal through these words to later readers, even if the one who uttered them was perhaps thinking of only one of the many true meanings? If so, let us suppose he was thinking of whichever meaning is most exalted. O Lord, show us that meaning; or if you please, show us some other true meaning. In this way, whether you show us just what you showed your servant, or something else that emerges from the same words, we will in any event be fed by you, not mocked by error.
>
> (*conf.* 12.32.43)[24]

By now it would seem that Scripture is entirely unnecessary: if we have independent access to the truth, what need do we have of a written revelation? Augustine's answer is twofold. First, the written words of Scripture are signs, and they help direct our mind's eye to the realities they signify. Suppose I want to draw your attention to something, so I point to it and say "Look over there." You see it, and thereby come to know it. I begin to congratulate myself on my success as a teacher, but you retort, "My vision was working perfectly well, thank you. I am the one who looked, and I am the one who saw for myself. So what I know, I know from myself, not from you." "True enough," I reply, "but would you ever have looked if I had not pointed?" Scripture is such a pointer. We do not learn intelligible things from Moses or Paul or the Evangelists; we learn them by seeing them for ourselves in the eternal Truth. But the words of Scripture are signs that direct our attention to what we could, but rarely ever would, see without them.

Second, notice that I have been speaking thus far only of intelligible realities, since those are the timeless and unchanging realities of which Truth speaks to us in our inward ear. There are also truths that belong to the realm of time and change, and our only independent access to those truths is through our senses. I do not consult Christ the Inner Teacher in order to find out whether my office door is open; I just look. The senses can tell me only about the present; sense memory also tells me about the past – only my own past, though, and not even all of that. This means that most of the past is not merely unknown but unknowable: I cannot know it through the Inner Truth, because it is not a timeless intelligible reality, and I cannot know it through sense or sense memory, because it is not now and never was present to my senses. In that unknowable past are truths that, Augustine believes, I desperately need to be aware of; the most important, of course, is that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The words of Scripture make us aware of such truths in the unknowable past; if we did not believe them on the authority of Scripture, we could not have any beliefs about them at all. Thus, Scripture is indispensable not only because it directs our reason to see what we might otherwise miss, but because it informs us of things that neither reason nor sense can now reveal to us.

Exegetical theory: moral dimensions

The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is bankrupt, as far as Augustine is concerned. Such a pursuit springs from curiosity, which for him is no admirable trait but a vice; he identifies it with that "lust of the eyes" of which John wrote, "For all that is in the world – the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 Jn 2:16). So it is not surprising that when Augustine discusses the legitimacy of rival interpretations of Scripture, he reveals a deep concern with the morality of exegetical disputes. Undue attachment to one's own exegesis manifests a sort of pride, the love of one's own opinion simply because it is one's own opinion. In *Confessions* 10 Augustine describes this as a form of the "pride of life," the third of the unholy trinity of sins from 1 John 2:16. It is more grievous still when the exegete is driven by the desire for a reputation as a brilliant scholar; "this is a miserable life and revolting ostentation" (*conf.* 10.36.59). Moreover, since truth is common property, one's own opinion is not really one's own at all if it is true; it is the common property of all right-thinking people, and no one has any individual stake in it: "No one should regard anything as his own, except perhaps a lie, since all truth is from him who says, 'I am the truth'" (*doc. Chr.* Prologue, 8). Also, only temerity and insolence could justify such confidence in something we cannot actually know. We can know what Truth itself says, but we cannot know with any degree of certainty what Moses or Paul was thinking when he wrote the biblical text we are expounding. Most important of all, charity demands that we abstain from all such "pernicious disputes."

For charity is the ultimate aim of all worthy exegesis. "Whoever thinks he has understood the divine Scriptures or any part of them in such a way that his understanding does not build up the twin love of God and neighbor has not yet understood them at all" (*doc. Chr.* 1.36.40). Charity is, moreover, the unifying and animating theme of Augustine's treatise on biblical interpretation, *De doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Teaching*). Its message is this: Be always mindful of the end, and be on your guard against the pernicious tendency of means to encroach upon ends. The end of all things, Augustine insists, is God. He alone is to be loved for his own sake – "enjoyed," in Augustine's terminology. Whatever else is to be loved should be "used," that is, loved for the sake of God. Even human beings, including ourselves, should be "used" in this sense, which does not mean 'exploited.' But Augustine cannot quite bring himself to talk consistently of "using" ourselves and our fellow human beings, and he defines charity as "the motion of the soul toward enjoying God for his own sake and oneself and one's neighbor for God's sake" (*doc. Chr.* 3.10.16). Its opposite, cupidity, is "the motion of the soul toward enjoying oneself, one's neighbor, or any bodily thing for the sake of something other than God" (*doc. Chr.* 3.10.16). Scripture, Augustine says, "commands nothing but charity and condemns nothing but cupidity" (*doc. Chr.* 3.10.15).

Interest in biblical interpretation for its own sake is one such form of cupidity; exegesis is to be used for the sake of charity, not enjoyed for its own sake. In Augustine's metaphor, it is not the distant land where we will be happy, but merely a vehicle by which we may be conveyed there:

> The fulfillment and end of the Law and of all divine Scripture is the love of a being that is to be enjoyed [i.e. God], and of a being that can share that enjoyment with us [i.e. our neighbor] . . . That we might know this and be able to achieve it, the whole temporal dispensation was made by divine providence for our salvation. We should use it not with an abiding but with a transitory love and delight like that in a road or conveyances or any other means . . . We should love those things by which we are carried for the sake of that towards which we are carried.
>
> (*doc. Chr.* 1.35.39; see also 1.4.4)

So overriding is this end that even misreadings of Scripture are scarcely objectionable if they build up charity. Someone guilty of such a misreading is to be corrected only on pragmatic grounds, not in the interest of scholarly correctness (an ideal to which Augustine shows not the slightest allegiance):

> He is deceived in the same way as someone who leaves a road by mistake but nonetheless goes on through a field to the same place to which the road leads. Still, he should be corrected and shown how much more useful it is not to leave the road, lest his habit of wandering off should force him to take the long way around, or the wrong way altogether.
>
> (*doc. Chr.* 1.36.41)

Exegetical theory: practical dimensions

As we have seen, Book 1 of *De doctrina Christiana* concerns things; it explains which things are to be enjoyed and which are to be used. Books 2 and 3 discuss signs, and in particular the conventional signs or words found in the biblical writings. (Note again Augustine's concerns that means not encroach upon ends. Signs exist for the sake of things, and not the other way around, so he must first explain the nature of things before he can sensibly discuss the signs that point us toward those things.) Augustine's aim is to provide practical precepts for interpreters of the Bible to aid them in understanding both unknown signs (Book 2) and ambiguous signs (Book 3).[25]

The most important tool for understanding unknown literal signs is a thorough knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, so that the interpreter can resolve any doubts that arise from conflicting translations.[26] To understand unknown figurative signs the interpreter needs a wide grounding in the nature of the plants, animals, and other things that Scripture uses in its figures; otherwise we will not know (for example) why the dove brought an olive branch back to the ark or why the Psalmist says, "You shall sprinkle me with hyssop." Interpreters must also understand the figurative significance of numbers and should know something of secular history. They should be acquainted with music, the arts, various trades and professions, and sports – not as practitioners, but in order to understand the Scriptures when they use figurative expressions drawn from these areas. Astronomy is only tangentially useful and is too closely allied with the pernicious superstitions of the astrologers to be quite safe. "The science of disputation is of great value for understanding and solving all sorts of questions that arise in the sacred writings," although interpreters must be on their guard against the love of controversy and "childish showing-off in deceiving an adversary" (*doc. Chr*. 2.31.48). Moreover, a clever person will recognize fallacious arguments even without studying the rules of inference, and a stupid person will find it too hard to learn the rules. If you can recognize a bad argument when you see it, you do not need to know the technical name for the fallacy it exhibits; and such specialized knowledge is always a temptation to pride in oneself and disdain for others.

In acquiring the knowledge that will permit an intelligent reading of the Scriptures, the Christian exegete is free to draw upon pagan wisdom, even pagan philosophy – especially the Platonists. When the Israelites fled from Egypt, they left behind the idols but took with them the gold and silver, treasures of Egypt that the Israelites could put to better use. So also the Christian must repudiate the "fraudulent and superstitious imaginings" of the pagans but appropriate whatever truths they might have found, the gold and silver that the pagans "extracted from the mines of divine providence" (*doc. Chr*. 2.40.60). After all, "every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is his Lord's" (*doc. Chr*. 2.18.28). Still, just as the treasures of Israel under Solomon surpassed the Egyptian gold, so also the truths to be found only in Scripture are far more precious than any that can be appropriated from the pagans.

Having discussed the interpretation of unknown signs in Book 2, Augustine proceeds to consider ambiguous signs in Book 3. Ambiguities of punctuation and construction are to be corrected according to the "rule of faith" as it is found in unambiguous passages of Scripture and the teaching of the Church, and by attention to the context, since any good interpretation must preserve internal consistency.[27] More difficult are the ambiguities of figurative words. We need some principle for determining whether a locution or a story is literal or figurative, and here Augustine recurs to the theme of charity. "For figurative expressions a rule like this will be observed: what is read should be given careful consideration until an interpretation is produced that contributes to the reign of charity. If such a reading is already evident in the text taken literally, the expression should not be considered figurative" (*doc. Chr*. 3.15.23). For example, when Scripture says "If your enemy is hungry, give him to eat; if he is thirsty, give him to drink," we should take the admonition literally. But when it goes on to say, "For in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head" (Prov 25:21–22; Rom 12:20), we must take this figuratively. A literal heaping of coals of fire would, after all, harm our enemy. We cannot even take the expression figuratively – but uncharitably – as meaning that our act of kindness will shame and confound our enemy; rather, "charity should call you to beneficence, so that you understand the coals of fire to be burning sighs of penitence that heal the pride of one who grieves that he was an enemy of a man who relieved his suffering" (*doc. Chr*. 3.16.24).

By the same principle, even stories of the evil deeds of great men and women of the faith can be taken literally, since they stand as a warning against pride in our own goodness. (The stories can be taken figuratively as well, but such readings do not take the place of a literal reading.) On the other hand, "no one would seriously believe that the Lord's feet were anointed with precious ointment by a woman, as is the custom among extravagant and worthless men whose entertainments we abhor" (*doc. Chr*. 3.12.18). The only reading conducive to charity is a figurative one: "the good odor is the good fame that anyone leading a good life will have through his deeds, when he follows in the footsteps of Christ, as if anointing his feet with a most precious odor" (*doc. Chr*. 3.12.18).

Exegetical theory: spirit and letter

Yet although Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana* emphatically rejects a literal interpretation of the stories of the anointing of Jesus' feet, in *De consensu Evangelistarum* 2.79 he treats the stories as historical. Indeed, Augustine is largely responsible for the tradition that identifies the sinful woman of Luke 7:36–50 with the woman in Bethany described in Matthew 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9 and named in John 12:1–8 as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.[28] So by 405 Augustine had come to believe something that in 396/97 he had said "no one would seriously believe." This development illustrates Augustine's increasingly nuanced approach to the relationship between the spirit and the letter.

In the *Confessions* Augustine gives great prominence to the use that Ambrose made of 2 Corinthians 3:6, “The letter kills, but the spirit gives life”:

> I also rejoiced that the old writings, the law and the prophets, were no longer put before me to read with the same eyes that had once seen them as absurd, when I criticized your holy ones for holding views that in fact they did not hold. And I was delighted to hear Ambrose in his popular sermons frequently urge us most emphatically to adopt as our rule, “The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.” He would draw aside the veil of mystery, opening up the spiritual meaning of texts that, taken literally, seemed to teach perversity.
>
> (*conf.* 6.4.6)

Because Augustine credits Ambrose’s spiritualizing interpretations with such a crucial role in rescuing him from the Manichees and making Catholic Christianity seem intellectually tenable, it is easy to fall into the mistake of thinking that Augustine himself went on to adopt the rule that Ambrose so emphatically urged upon his congregation. He did so only in a highly qualified way, and with decreasing enthusiasm as his engagement with Scripture matured.

As early as 388–90, in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.2.3, Augustine says that if someone can manage to interpret a text literally “and can avoid blasphemies and preach everything that accords with the Catholic faith, not only should we not look askance at him, but indeed we should regard him as an exceptional and highly praiseworthy exegete.” But if one cannot hit upon a successful literal interpretation, a figurative interpretation is permissible, “without prejudice to any better and more careful interpretation that the Lord might see fit to bring to light through us or through others.” The point is not quite that spiritual interpretations as such are objectionable – for Augustine notes that we have apostolic authority for figurative readings of the Old Testament – but that spiritual interpretations as a way of avoiding the difficulties of literal interpretations are interim measures at best. His spiritualizing interpretation of the anointing stories seems to illustrate this point. In early works such as *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (392) and (as we have seen) *De doctrina Christiana* (396/97), we find only a spiritual interpretation. By the time of *De consensu evangelistarum* (405) Augustine has found a way to understand the events literally so that they no longer represent debauchery but instead speak of humility, repentance, and forgiveness. The letter no longer kills. Yet the spirit continues to give life, and spiritual interpretations persist alongside the literal reading in late works such as *In Johannis evangelium tractatus* 50 (*c*. 410–20).

So Augustine, never as enthusiastic a follower of Ambrose’s rule as one would expect from reading the *Confessions*, has by this point strayed very far indeed from the use of 2 Corinthians 3:6 that Ambrose had urged upon him. Yet a more decisive break is still to come. In *De spiritu et littera* (412) Augustine argues that the verse is not primarily about spiritual interpretations of Scripture at all:

> I mean to prove, if I can, that the Apostle's words, "the letter kills, but the spirit gives life," are not about figurative expressions (though one can extract a reasonable meaning from them along those lines) but clearly about the law, which forbids what is evil . . . The letter of the law, which teaches us not to sin, kills if the life-giving Spirit is not present, because it causes sin to be known rather than avoided, and thus increased rather than diminished, because transgression of the law is added to the evil of concupiscence.
>
> (*spir. et litt.* 5.7–8)

Augustine's contemptuous rejection of the historical sense of the anointing stories thus turns out to be a casualty not merely of his improved facility in literal exegesis but also of his increasingly critical approach to Ambrose's rule.

Endnotes

1 The Patrologia Latina (PL) edition of Augustine's works, originally published by Jacque-Paul Migne between 1844 and 1849, is available online at www.augustinus.it/latino/index.htm. In the notes on individual works I provide references to more recent Latin editions as well as English translations (where available).

2 CSEL 91; Hill 2004.

3 O'Donnell 1992, vol. I, xlii–xliv, discusses how "one literary project after another fell to pieces in [Augustine's] hands" in the period between his ordination and the writing of the *Confessions*. See also O'Donnell 2006, 139–42.

4 Green 1995.

5 CSEL 28; Hill 2004.

6 Divjak 1971.

7 Plumer 2003.

8 CCL 35; Kavanagh 2001.

9 Divjak 1971.

10 CCL 44B.

11 CSEL 28/2.

12 CSEL 43; trans. S. D. F. Salmond in Schaff 1886.

13 CSEL 28; Hill 2004.

14 CCL 36; trans. in Hill 2009; *Homilies on the Gospel of John (41–124)*, Works of Saint Augustine III/13 (forthcoming).

15 Ramsey 2008a.

16 CCL 38–40; Boulding 2004.

17 Rowan Williams (2004) offers a compelling account of Augustine's engagement with the Psalms, connecting the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* with central themes of the *Confessions*.

18 CCL 33.

19 CSEL 12.

20 John 8:25 in Augustine's version reads, "So they said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'The beginning, because I also am speaking to you.'" Notice again a familiar pattern: by purely philosophical argumentation Augustine shows us what the creative word could not have been, and then through Scripture he shows us what it was.

21 For Augustine's view of eternity and time, see chapter 4 of this volume.

22 The classic discussion of this mysterious creature (or possibly creatures) is Pépin

1953.

23 See, for example, *De doctrina Christiana* 2.11.16–15.22.

24 Augustine makes a similar argument at *De doctrina Christiana* 3.27.38.

25 Book 4 discusses rhetorical strategies for teaching and preaching and therefore falls outside our concern in this chapter.

26 Augustine's precept is better than his practice: his Greek was mediocre, and he had no Hebrew at all. Consequently, he knew Scripture chiefly in Latin translation. For an overview of what we know about Augustine's version of the Bible, see O'Donnell 1992, vol. I, lxix–lxxi.

27 Augustine emphasizes this requirement in a number of places. See, for example, *Confessiones* 12.29 and *De doctrina Christiana* 1.36.41, 3.2.2, and 3.3.6.

28 The further identification of Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene, though a natural outgrowth of this tradition, is not found in Augustine. Note that although Augustine reads the four accounts as involving the same woman, he does not think they all relate the same event; he argues for two episodes of anointing, one recorded by Luke and another recorded by the other three evangelists.

Part VII Augustine's legacy

17 Augustine's legacy: success or failure?

Karla Pollmann

Preliminary remarks

> It is in the essence of a great book that it changes each time it is reread . . . Our own great classical texts, and many of those judged lesser too, are forever changing. If we choose to come to them again, they are different from what they were, just as we are different. Our Latin and Greek helped to make us what we became. And later, in various ways, we repay the compliment. They made *us*. We make *them*. That is our tradition.

These words, quoted from the Classical Association Presidential Address 2012 by Sir Peter Stothard,[1] who had predominantly works by Greek and Latin authors from Homer to Statius in mind, are true of the phenomenon of textual reception in general. And *mutatis mutandis* they are also a valid characterization of important aspects of the reception of Augustine through the ages. While Augustine in many ways can be called a typical figure of late antiquity, in some aspects he is unusual among his peers. His social background was not the educated elite, but due to the ambitions of his parents and his own great intellectual abilities he envisioned embarking on a successful secular career. His Greek was not his strong point, which anticipates the separation of the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire which would begin soon after his lifetime. He lived in a time of historical turmoil, when the disintegration of the Roman Empire, whose borders were increasingly threatened by barbarian invasions, was incipient. At the same time, the rise of Christianity questioned pagan religion and the general way of thinking. All this created an atmosphere of uncertainty, but also an atmosphere in which traditional values came under increased scrutiny, either in order to be defended or to be transformed or to be abandoned. Augustine's own life in a way mirrors certain developments and characteristics of this "in-between-time." Augustine in his *Confessions* tells vividly how he was tortured by this pluralism of ideas, seeking his own way and trying to make the right choice in the supermarket of various belief systems and lifestyles on offer. Thus he can be called a truly liminal figure and an original innovator as well as a transmitter and transformer of ancient thought. Augustine had to fulfil many roles – as bishop, judge, theologian, friend, teacher, advisor – and he speaks in all these roles at various times. And, as Augustine's writing career spans forty-four years, he occasionally also changes his mind or chooses varying angles to shed light on an issue. For instance, initially he thought that philosophy could lead to perfect truth (*ord*. 1.8.24), but he later believed this could only be guaranteed by the Christian God (*doc. Chr.* 2.48–53). Or, first he believed that the Roman Empire becoming Christian was the culmination of human history, but later he cautioned that the Roman Empire was just an empire like many others and doomed to perish one day (*civ. Dei* 18.22 etc.). All this makes it understandable that Augustine's work received a very diverse and heterogeneous, even polarized, reception during the centuries.

Moreover, Augustine's writings were influential in many fields. He not only more or less established what were to become the principal outlines and foundations of Western theology, but he has also influenced secular disciplines as wide ranging as political theory, semiotics, philosophy of history, psychology, epistemology, social ethics, music, arts, education and pedagogy/didactics, and anthropology.[2] Indeed, many opposing parties could claim him as an authority in support of their position – Protestants and Catholics, Pacifists and War-theorists, Feminists and Patriarchs. Finally, there are those who abuse his authority and claim he has said things he actually did not say. Somehow aware of this, Augustine showed relatively early (in comparison to other ancient authors) a pronounced awareness of the fact that he had to control his reception by others.[3] First, he attempted to channel the reception of his *life* with his quasi-autobiographical *Confessions* (written around 400). This seemingly straightforward narrative of Augustine's life not only masks an implicitly apologetic perspective, but also contains a complex theological program. Thus, his statements should not always be taken as autobiographical facts at face value.[4] Secondly, Augustine attempted to control the reception of his *works* by writing, toward the end of his life (428/9), his *Revisions* (*Retractationes*), where he revised most of his works with the exception of his letters and sermons. The intention of this rather unique work is "to reprehend or to defend" his previous writings (*ep*. 224.2).

It is also worth mentioning that Augustine himself was among the first to use the authority of early Christian thinkers to bolster his arguments if everything else failed. It was during his time that an awareness of a library of Christian 'classical' authors began to emerge, and Augustine very soon became one of them. The appreciation of his person could be exceedingly diverse even in his lifetime. On the one hand, Jerome dubs him "the second founder of the Christian faith" (*ep*. 141.2). On the other hand, as bishop of a minor bishopric he had to endure being ignored by Atticus, the Bishop of Constantinople,[5] not to mention the outright hate-relationship he had with the aristocratic and highly intelligent Julian of Aeclanum. Getting a grip on his reception is not made easier by a comment in Possidius' biography of Augustine, written shortly after his death. In *Vita Augustini* 31.9 Possidius highlights that those could profit more from Augustine who were able to listen to and see him as preacher present in the Church and who moreover had intimate knowledge of his conduct among people (*sed ego arbitror plus ex eo proficere potuisse, qui eum et loquentem in ecclesia praesentem audire et videre* *potuerunt, et eius praesertim inter homines conversationem non ignoraverunt*). Augustine himself does not put much trust into earthly authority, and Conrad Leyser comes to the conclusion that "the Bishop of Hippo was, in the eyes of his most articulate and most prominent early Latin readers, insufficiently authoritarian: much of their writing is driven by an attempt, subtle and persuasive, to render his legacy otherwise."[6]

In order to map the vast field of the reception of Augustine's thought and work, a large international and interdisciplinary project on the reception of Augustine through the ages has just been completed under my direction.[7] Focusing on Augustine's works, individual thinkers, and themes, it aims to present solidly documented, albeit not comprehensive, information on Augustine's reception, including areas beyond the narrower confinements of theology, in the *Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (*OGHRA*). In the following some important general aspects of Augustine's reception will be fleshed out, which are only implicitly contained in the *OGHRA*. But before we embark on this, first a few brief remarks will be made about the notion of reception studies as relevant to our context.[8] For our purposes it is sufficient to define reception theory as an approach to texts that concerns itself first and foremost with *historical* actualization(s) of a text by one or more reader(s), be this by way of precise quotation, more or less precise paraphrase, or the mere apostrophe of the author as authority, and whether it is for rather mundane doxographic purposes, for political or other very specific concrete aims, or in wider interpretative contexts. Accordingly, reception studies do not primarily engage in textual interpretation. Instead, by developing and using reception theory, they seek to understand textual interpretations as they have been produced historically at different times by various readers and analyze the process of producing interpretations rather than providing them.[9] Although this has consequences for how we look at and interpret texts ourselves, it implies above all the acknowledgment of the fact that a text should not be confined to the meanings that have historically been attributed to it. Criticism of reception studies has helped to refine and further develop them, for instance, by making scholars more critically aware of the relativity and subjectivity ('ideology') of their own approaches, and by opening reception studies to new areas, including women's and multicultural literature, popular culture, the ordinary reader, and the history of the book. Thus it follows that literary production and its reception are part of the history of a people in general, and, more specifically, part of the history of ideas. Moreover, as reception studies now increasingly also take into account media beyond the written word, they have become part of cultural studies in general.[10]

Key factors of Augustine's reception

The 'cultivation' of his person

Two different emphases generally can be identified when it comes to the analysis of an author's legacy: the analysis can be focused on either the person or, more specifically, on the works of the author. In the first case, the author's name is appealed to as an iconic authority, and the specific content and close readings of his or her works or the analysis of their arguments are of lesser importance. Such a focus of reception is encouraged by and in return reinforces the elevation of an author in various forms. In the case of Augustine, the cult of his person as a saint in North Africa can be traced back to as early as the sixth century.[11] Such an emblematic reading can of course also be found in a hostile reception. In the second mode of reception, the textual evidence of Augustine is at the center of the receiver's interest, either to preserve it, to interpret, or to analyze it more or less critically, or in order to transform it into something that can add luster to one's own thought. Such an intense focus on the exploitation of Augustine's writing as a normative benchmark makes it tempting to ascribe works or statements *wrongly* to him. In the former case some of these so-called Pseudo-Augustiniana have at times shaped the image of Augustine more strongly than his authentic works.[12] Aphorisms and quotations falsely attributed to Augustine can be found through the ages, and continue to feature in websites.

The transmission of his works

On the whole, Augustine's authentic works are unusually well transmitted. This is helped by two relatively unusual features: first, Augustine's already-mentioned *Retractationes* refer to most of his works, and even attempt to list them chronologically. Second, Possidius attached to his *Vita Augustini* a list (*indiculus*) of all the works by Augustine that were present in his library at the time of Augustine's death. Possidius offers a thematic, rather than chronological, order of these works. Through the ages, Augustine's extant work has been repeatedly subjected to rigorous philological effort in order to secure the best reliable text. Outstanding are here the later Middle Ages, in what has been called the "Augustinian Renaissance,"[13] Humanism (although here philological effort can be intertwined with confessional interests),[14] and the large editorial enterprises of the Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna) and the Corpus Christianorum Latinorum (Turnhout) that were begun in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively. Over many centuries, although with varying intensity, works such as the *City of God, De Trinitate, De doctrina Christiana*, the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, and the *Confessions* have been bestsellers, which is reflected in the large number of their manuscripts. A big project undertaken by the Austrian Academy of Sciences aims to catalogue all known manuscripts in the world that contain authentic works by Augustine. An intriguing side-effect of this ongoing, very thorough and systematic search has been the discovery of new works by Augustine, so far on three occasions: twenty-nine letters by J. Divjak in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris) in 1981; twenty-six sermons by F. Dolbeau in 1990; and, as recently as 2007, six new sermons by Augustine have been identified in a twelfth-century manuscript from Erfurt. So even regarding the body of Augustine's work further discoveries are still possible.

The role of institutions in the reception of Augustine

Institutions are of utmost importance for securing lasting reception and cannot be overestimated in their crucial function in this process. In general, institutions are the highest and most effective level in depersonalizing and perpetuating a specific human activity or interest. In the case of the perpetuization of Augustine's thought the following institutions are of particular relevance: the Church; educational institutions including monasteries, schools, and universities; groups such as the Augustinian Order which is especially dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of Augustine's work; scientific academies; and less-organized religious communities that have an intellectual and/or spiritual interest in Augustine's writings. Whenever there is a close affinity between religion and political activity, then Augustine's thought can also enter the political stage, especially, for instance, his *City of God* in the Middle Ages, but also in the twentieth century (for the latter see also below). A highly effective way of guaranteeing the survival and continuing consideration of an author's work is its canonization by a group considered authoritative, and the integration of this canon into an educational curriculum or intellectual program which is then put into teaching practice by an institution. Two things are noteworthy in this respect. First, there exists a dialectic relationship between such stable institution(s) that risk being ossified through the ages on the one hand, and on the other hand, 'rebellious' individuals who tend to challenge such institutions and their traditions. In the case of Augustine, it is his own work itself that allows for such anti-establishment challenges; one can play off one part of his thought against another. Secondly, at least within the framework of the *OGHRA* it has not been possible to establish clear traces of reception once the content of his work is forgotten altogether. Moreover, although his reception can take place outside the strictly religious or theological realm, so far I know only of such reception through people or institutions that have some kind of connection – however tenuous or tortured – with the Christian religious tradition. It seems that so far there are no clear strands of reception as an established mechanism outside this realm. Ideas and values that form a tradition of recognized authority, as revealed by the *OGHRA* enterprise, are related in various, potentially diverse ways to people that have some sort of institutional link to this tradition. This is a promising avenue of research that has not yet been fully exploited in the context of studying the reception of Augustine.

Augustine's reception in media beyond the book

If one ventures into areas other than the printed book while investigating Augustine's reception, it is nevertheless indispensable to take the written medium into account in which Augustine's thought is "fixed."[15] It is true that layers of reception, as it were, can obscure or disfigure aspects of Augustine's thought, as is particularly striking in the body of Pseudo-Augustinian writings that enjoyed great popularity in the later Middle Ages and in early modernity. It is also true that a famous author may not be read, even if – perhaps especially if – he is well known. Nevertheless, recourse to Augustine's writings is ultimately essential, both for the comprehensive evaluation of reception processes as well as for the successful generation of further processes in whatever medium. For instance, visualizations of Augustine range from shortly after his death until the twentieth century;[16] the twentieth century also boasts his reception in music,[17] as well as in modern psychotherapy.[18] As already mentioned, Augustine was *not* able to control his own reception as it was performed by later generations in written texts. The same is true of his reception in other media as well: Augustine was highly critical of the visual arts, music, and drama, but this did not prevent later painters, composers, and dramatists from making him or aspects of his thought the objects of their artistic endeavors.

All media are forms of knowledge in their own right. Accordingly, a given medium performs more than one function in the transmedial process; as in the example of the visual arts, it can not only illustrate but also comment upon juxtaposed or implied texts, undermining, enhancing, or complementing them to create deliberate tensions between the visual and the textual. This process, in turn, opens up the possibility of alternative readings, and of otherwise interrogating or criticizing the source. Thus, the effect of using different media to present Augustine and his thought goes beyond mere artistry or playful exploration. This is predominantly due to the fact that Augustine's person and his texts are generally not perceived as fiction, nor are his writings construed as invented narratives with an aesthetic function, even if an aesthetic can be perceived, exploited, and broadened.

Especially in music or art, but also in devotional or conceptual transformations, diverse media can intensify the meditative and/or emotional effect of the text. They even permit the intellectual discovery of new dimensions, so that one hears or sees (as it were) the text in a profoundly new way. These non-textual media also externally and internally support the appropriation and individualization of the text. In this way the text enters the possession of the listener or viewer who, as a consequence, can identify more readily with the message. On the other hand, and especially through art and music, one loses the complexities of textual arguments. It is rather the case that extracts of a text are amplified and an alternative dimension of meta-argumentative differentiation is added by the new medium. Thus, intermediality can mean the amplification but also the undermining of aesthetic illusion: the text reads, or comments on, the image and the image reads the text. Especially when these are not entirely congruent, the spectator has to meditate on the reasons for and significance of the discrepancy, opening up meta-fictional spaces for reflection. A notion also relevant in this context is intramediality, that is, thematic interaction or reception within one medium only. Intramediality can be produced by texts, and is then commonly called intertextuality, but it occurs also in other media. For instance, a picture or a visual motif taken out of a familiar context will still evoke the original setting to the knowledgeable spectator, thereby enhancing and deepening the message. The same is possible in music, where a (leit)motif evokes the original context and thus comments on its new one.

Trans- and intermediality widen the possibilities of the original textual medium when, for instance, they enable the engagement of illiterate audiences. Moreover, much of Augustine's thought is not easily grasped. This challenge is often met in relation to the stages of Augustine's conversion, his vision of truth, and his notions of the self, of longing for God, grace, and being. Articulation in another medium allows for the conjoining of new elements, and these, in turn, may widen, alter, modernize, individualize, politicize, or polarize his original intent. This does not only apply to the visual arts and music but also to devotional media such as sermons and meditative texts. The latter still deserve substantially more scholarly attention in this respect; this is also true for the vast and complex field of Pseudo-Augustinian writings. Moreover, it is premature at this stage to presume that we can establish a pattern indicating which of Augustine's texts or which of his preoccupations occur more frequently in any given medium or context. This, too, promises to be an exciting field of further investigation, especially as the creative thrust of the variant media engaging Augustine has always been inclined in the direction of breaking down traditionally conceived boundaries of the appropriate, the expected, or indeed even the possible.

All in all, the widening of media by which Augustine is received serves to universalize his person and his thought, for these can be adapted accordingly to a wider array of circumstances, including not only sacred and secular settings but also newfound sensory realms. If Augustine himself is transformed, so that his ideas and/or his language are used to express something completely other than his original intention (as far as this can be established at all), or if his name is used to authorize texts not originally written by him, then a 'myth' of Augustine is created. This, in turn, inflects perceptions of his authentic writings. Due to his ubiquity and to a myriad of adaptions, we, in turn, lose our own naiveté and presumed objectivity even as we attempt to engage with his meaning.

Intellectual receptions of his thought

The reception of Augustine's thought can take on various, often very diverse, forms, and this can be observed particularly clearly in the Middle Ages.[19] It can range from incorporating allusions and quotes from Augustine, partly acknowledged, partly not, in biblical commentaries such as those on the Pauline letters by the ninth-century Carolingian scholar Sedulius Scottus,[20] via integrating sentences from Augustine's writings under systematically arranged headings in Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* (written between 1145 and 1150), to more complex uses of Augustine's theological thought in order to enhance a mystical program of spirituality,[21] or in order either to rephrase Augustine's powerful ideas about illumination in newly conceptualized terminology or to camouflage new concepts of illumination in a seemingly traditional 'Augustinian' terminology.[22] In general, the intellectual independence and (sometimes implicit but nevertheless trenchant) critical attitude of medieval authors is underestimated. What is also not yet sufficiently recognized is the enormous intellectual potential for developing new forms of thinking by cataloguing an author's thought in what is often considered an unoriginal and slavish mode of intellectual subservience. In this field far more research is needed.

But diverse, also conflicting modes of reception can be observed in other epochs as well.[23] In the following, I only intend to highlight two instances of a mode of reception of Augustine's thought that seems relatively recent and particularly characteristic of the end of the twentieth century, namely the *secularization of Augustine's thought in political theory and in literature*.

Our first instance is represented by Jean Bethke Elshtain (1941–2013), professor of Divinity and political theorist at Chicago University. Especially in her book *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, she relies heavily on direct quotations and references from Augustine's works:[24] in addition to the summaries of his books and the broader discussions of Augustine's thought in general, Elshtain directly cites *The City of God* seventy-nine times, the *Confessions* thirty-four times, *The Trinity* twenty-four times, and various other Augustinian writings such as the *Letters* and *Selected Writings* twenty times.[25] In a book of only 118 pages, the copious use Elshtain makes of Augustine is also evident in her frequent use of blocked quotations. These extended references, often taking up nearly half a page, help to define Elshtain's purpose, since they generally indicate key points in her discussion. A number of the shorter quotations tend to bear less on the argument at hand and instead shed light on Augustine himself or on non-political aspects of his thought. Elshtain includes four blocked quotations from *The Trinity*, three from the *Confessions*, and three from Augustine's other writings, with nineteen drawn from *The City of God*. In regard to the specific sections of *The City of God*, Elshtain cites once from Books 2 (p. 46), 3 (p. 46), 4 (p.78), 8 (p. 81), 9 (p. 30), 13 (p. 31), 17 (p. 108), and 20 (p. 47), twice from Books 1 (pp. 19, 46) and 16 (pp. 43, 53), three times from Book 21 (pp. 62, 104, 118), four from Book 22 (pp. 3, 38, 62, 118), five from Books 10 (pp. 30, 46, 47, 117 [two citations on this page]), 12 (pp. 72, 82, 83, 102 [two citations on this page]), and 15 (pp. 63, 95, 102, 103 [two citations on this page]), and seven times from Book 14 (pp. 44, 46, 52, 62, 83, 95, 102). By far the greatest number of references is drawn from Books 11 (pp. 30, 31, 36, 53, 60, 61 [two citations on this page], 65, 66, 81, 82 [three citations on this page], 83 [two citations on this page]) and 19 (pp. 3, 27, 28 [two citations on this page], 29, 34, 37, 38, 39, 40, 52, 54, 95, 96 [four citations on this page], 97, 108, 109 [two citations on this page], 110, 112), which Elshtain quotes fifteen and twenty-three times respectively.

The citations from the *Confessions* are drawn more evenly from the work as a whole, with Book 6 being the only book not referenced at least once. Elshtain cites once from Books 4 (p. 4), 8 (p. 47), and 11 (p. 33), twice from Books 2 (pp. 77, 78), 3 (pp. 12, 13), and 13 (pp. 34, 43), three times from Books 7 (pp. 12, 62, 80), 9 (pp. 9 [two citations on this page], 65), and 12 (pp. 33 [two citations on this page], 34), five from Books 5 (pp. 32 [two citations on this page], 57, 79 [two citations on this page]) and 10 (pp. 6, 32, 63 [three citations on this page]), and six from Book 1 (pp. 12 [two citations on this page], 13, 31, 53, 79). Even when she elaborates on a specific point, such as the discussion in Book 12 regarding the meaning of speech, the function of language, and the clarity of interpretation, Elshtain still only directly quotes from this book three times. The *Confessions* lends itself to this comprehensive approach, since the arguments on the problem of evil, the nature of the self, the relationship between the self and others, and the importance of showing charity toward one's neighbours are spread throughout this work. In fact, they are key themes of the *Confessions* and Augustine constantly returns to them, repeating, expanding, and viewing them from a number of different angles. Overall, the quotations Elshtain references are carefully footnoted.

Unsurprisingly, Elshtain's theoretical work reflects relatively explicitly on the conditions, limits, and consequences of Augustinian reception. One could question her belief that Augustine's thought can be stripped of its divinity and thus made acceptable to postmodern readers. Is it not rather the case that when Augustine ceases to be theological, he also ceases to be Augustine? At the same time, however, it obviously would not be fair to say that any great intellectual whose work explores a vast variety of subjects (as is indeed the case with Augustine) has nothing to offer to those who do not agree with his religious creed. As Elshtain concludes in her epilogue, Augustine "gives us the great gift of an alternative way of thinking and being in the world, a way that is in many vital respects available to those who are not doctrinally Augustine's brothers and sisters."[26] Ultimately, Elshtain's theory on limits could also describe her own reception of Augustine. Although she borrows from his thought, she proves that she is not bound by it. One can argue that she deals creatively with Augustine while at the same time secularizing him, a method not atypical of his twentieth-century reception.

This is also demonstrable in our second instance, the reception of Augustine in Jostein Gaarder's *Vita Brevis: A Letter to St Augustine. A Love Story*, which appeared in the original Norwegian in 1996 and was translated into English (on which my remarks are based) in 1997.[27] J. Gaarder (b. 1952), a former teacher of philosophy, gained worldwide fame through his novel *Sophie's World: A Novel about the History of Philosophy* (Norwegian original 1991). Gaarder's novel about Augustine, inspired by Peter Brown's book *The Body and Society* (1988), tells how an old Latin manuscript comes to light in an Argentine flea market, appearing to be a letter to (St.) Augustine from the woman he renounced in favour of chastity. From the historical sources we do not know her name, but Gaarder calls her Floria: highly educated, passionate, and compassionate, she delivers a very personal commentary on the *Confessions*.

Even the novel's structure is unusual: after a brief prologue in italics,[28] in which the (fictitious) finding and purchasing of the manuscript by the author are described, there follows the translation of Floria's letter, presented on the odd pages, with comments and references especially taken from the *Confessions* placed on the even pages opposite to where they are quoted or indirectly referred to in the letter. According to my count, the

Confessions is referred to sixty-nine times and *De bono conjugali* once. Furthermore, the Bible is quoted several times (mostly from the New Testament), Cicero is referred to six times, Horace three times, and once mentioned are Juvenal, Seneca, Terence, Sophocles, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and other pagan authors. Like the prologue, the references and linguistic or historical annotations introduce a dimension of realism meant to enhance the feeling of authenticity of this 'document.'

We will now examine Gaarder's technique of quoting and using the *Confessions* (and other sources) by looking at a particularly crucial passage in the book. In chapter 6,[29] Floria recounts how Augustine met Bishop Ambrose, was troubled by the prospect of a Christian life in celibacy, and was finally persuaded to get engaged to a suitable young woman, which meant having to get rid of Floria. In this context, mostly passages from *Confessions* 6 are quoted literally (and in a correct translation). Throughout, Floria's comments on those passages make the focus of her criticism clear: she exposes Augustine's problematic assumption that living without a woman and his soul's salvation through Christianity are inextricably linked. Secondly, she attacks Augustine's sweeping generalization that celibacy is identical with the forgoing of sexual intercourse, instead of highlighting the personal and affectionate side of a heterosexual relationship which is then also at stake. Floria sets up her attack in two ways. First, by way of degeneralizing a literal quote by Augustine: after "For I thought I would be far too unhappy if I had to go without a woman's embrace" (taken literally from *conf.* 6.11.20), she adds, "It was *my* embrace you could not do without, Aurel, that was something we two talked of many times. Couldn't you write it? Ah, well, one must be cautious about naming names."[30] Not only does Floria emphasize here, as otherwise, that she is not merely an anonymous sexual but also an individual intellectual partner to Augustine, she also reaffirms her education by alluding with the proverb "One must be careful with naming names" to Cicero's speech to Roscius.

Secondly, the point that marriage does not only consist of sex but also of affection and companionship is made by quoting Augustine against himself, at *Confessions* 6.12.22 "Neither of us [i.e. neither Augustine nor his friend Alypius] was especially attracted to what makes marriage into something beautiful, the task of creating a good home and bringing up children. The chief concern was that I was accustomed to satisfying my insatiable sexual desire, which kept me captive and plagued me violently." She then unmasks this even more by pointing out their own family situation, with their child Adeodatus, and Augustine's not simply sexual commitment to Floria which he would have to give up if he married someone else: "What in reality plagued you was that a marriage . . . would entail your betrayal of me. For were we not twin souls?"[31] Again she emphasizes that their relationship was much more than simply physical and accuses Augustine of anonymizing and reducing their relationship to a purely carnal one for his specific line of argument. This is further backed up by Gaarder's note 87 in this context,[32] where he refers to the changed attitude of the old Augustine, who in a well-known passage from *De bono conjugali* 5 claims that dismissing one's concubine in order to marry another, more suitable, woman was to commit adultery.

But despite all this close reading there is in Gaarder's epistolary novel a strong undercurrent suffusing Augustine's story with what one could call a modern notion of romantic heterosexual love, which puts Platonic ideals back into an affectionate erotic relationship. This becomes clear when Floria uses a romantic *topos*: "you who once bent over me to smell my hair when we had walked over the River Arno together."[33] This line of thinking leads then to the very un-Augustinian conclusion or complaint, "I was betrayed by my own spouse [i.e. Augustine] for the sake of heavenly love! That is how it was, Aurel, that is exactly how it was!"[34] Augustine himself would not have put it that way. He would admit (as in *De bono conjugali* 5) that he betrayed Floria by committing himself to his new fiancée, but as becomes clear from his theological tenets it was more his mother (and his consenting in a state of weakness and uncertainty) who linked baptism (i.e. Christianity) to a suitable, i.e. career-friendly, marriage instead of celibacy.[35] So if at all, Floria was rather betrayed for the sake of love of earthly, material success. Significantly, in *De bono conjugali* Augustine does not say anything about whether it was acceptable to leave one's concubine (or indeed wife) in order to become a celibate monk or priest (rather than living together "as brother and sister").

Harking back several times to the title and leitmotif of the novel, *vita brevis*, Floria plays off the brevity of life against an ascetic ideal that looks too much towards the hereafter which may not even exist: "Life is short, it is all too short. But perhaps it is here and now that we live, and only here and now."[36] Floria interprets Augustine's advocacy of sexual asceticism as a deformed denial of his affection and love for her,[37] or, in modern psychological parlance, as a replacement activity. She accuses Augustine of putting an entirely subjective morality on an absolute, divine pedestal:

> As imperial rhetor you should at least have discussed the possibility of there being an eternal life for individual souls, but that the grounds of judgment are different from those you yourself almost take for granted. For instance, I believe it is not necessarily a greater sin to engage in physical love with the woman in one's life than it is to separate that same woman from her only son.[38]

Conclusion: Augustine's reception – success or failure?

I hope I have been able to make it a bit more transparent in this very modest sketch of Augustine's vast and pervasive influence through the ages that his legacy is *not* aptly characterized by claiming that it follows a linear movement toward an increasing or decreasing normativity and authority regarding his person, work, and thought. Indeed, the vicissitudes of his reception mirror the pattern of human nature in general with its inclination toward both stability and transformation, control and rebellion, imitation and emulation. This sketch highlights the diversity of his reception, the potential polarizations and even paradoxes (as for instance when secularizing his thought) that can be observed in it, and favors an understanding of reception that has more to do with the readers of Augustine and their intentions than with Augustine himself, although the complexities and the enormous size of his very oeuvre favour such diversity. In this line of thinking, the question expressed in the title of this contribution can only be answered in a very qualified manner, for success or failure are predominantly determined by groups of readers, and can change in their evaluation by different groups of such readers through the ages. This emphasis on the construction of reception through the reader is matched by the recognition that, despite considerable effort, Augustine *failed* to control the reception of his thought to the degree he might have wished. It deserves attention that the reception of Augustine has never stopped; several centuries have been called 'the century of Augustine,' and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are still keen on him. Not only the recently resigned pope and the previous Archbishop of Canterbury but also Dutch and British politicians love quoting Augustine, and poststructuralists and postmodernists such as Foucault and Derrida refer to him. This raises interesting questions about why human beings predominantly seem to feel the need to refer to an authority in order to bolster their position, thus conjuring up another authority in order to enlarge their own.

Mark Vessey pondered on certain characteristic features when it comes to the reception of Jerome, one of Augustine's contemporaries. Vessey coins the term "Jeromanesque" in order to highlight certain characteristics that reappear as a pattern in Jerome's reception through the ages: he is predominantly seen as the Christian scholar and intellectual par excellence who created a link between universal Roman history and Christian literary production.[39] Vessey sees this portrait of Jerome as a result of his intentional performative efforts, and adds as an aside: "Augustine's identity was equally performative, but who will talk of the *Augustinesque*?"[40] Taking up this gauntlet, it is tempting to speculate whether it is equally possible to find an analogous pattern in the reception of Augustine – or, in other words, is there such a thing as the "Augustinesque"? This question has to be answered with suitable caution, as we understand reception as an open-ended mechanism that will only be completed at the end of times. So everything is possible for the future. But looking at the past 1,600 years or so, it is perhaps fair to say that Augustine presents a more elusive reception matrix than Jerome. Thus, the Augustinesque does not exist in the same way as the Jeromanesque does. Indeed, Augustine's impact is such that he causes others to create various forms of the Augustinesque for him. But the unpredictable flexibility and diverse richness of Augustine's thought that can stimulate enormous spaces of inquisitiveness and imagination are presumably his most enduring legacy. Therefore, regarding Augustine's future reception, we can conclude with Sir Peter Stothard with whom we began this chapter: "We need old confidence and new questioning."[41]

Endnotes

1 Stothard 2012, 8.

2 Cf. Pollmann and Gill 2012; Pollmann et al. 2013.

3 Pollmann 2010.

4 Baker-Brian 2007, 151–67.

5 Leyser 2000, 3.

6 Leyser 2000, 5.

7 This project was generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust. For further information see www.st-and.ac.uk/classics/after-augustine, and Pollmann and Lambert 2004.

8 Cf. for this paragraph in more detail Pollmann 2008, 32f.

9 Hardwick 2003, 4–11, 107–13; cf. the multidisciplinary entry "Rezeption" in Wischmeyer et al. 2009.

10 This latter aspect is less central in the *OGHRA*, but the focus of Pollmann and Gill 2012.

11 Vössing 2012.

12 Staykova 2012.

13 Saak 2012.

14 See Backus 2013; Visser 2011.

15 This subsection closely follows the editors' Introduction in Pollmann and Gill 2012, 1–10.

16 Cf. Pollmann 2012 and V. Cvetkovič 2012.

17 Petersen 2012.

18 Pârvan 2012.

19 For a general overview see Otten 2013 and Saak 2012.

20 Sloan 2012, 91–108.

21 C. Cvetkovič 2012.

22 Schumacher 2011.

23 See e.g. Bergjan and Pollmann 2010.

24 She is not the only political theorist of the late twentieth century to do so; cf. Baumgartner 2013, who illustrates that Augustine can be summoned by war advocates and pacifists alike.

25 I owe these figures to Wilson 2005. Some of these statistics are drawn from times when Elshtain summarizes and footnotes a quotation from Augustine without using his direct wording. I also recognize that these statistical findings do not include the times when Elshtain refers to Augustine but does not reference him in the notes. For instance, see Elshtain 1995, 15, where she almost directly quotes from *Confessions* 13.24, but merely attributes it to Augustine in her text. Quotations from Augustine that summarize sections of his works but are not mentioned in the notes are also not included in these statistics, e.g. Elshtain 1995, 95.

26 Elshtain 1995, 114.

27 Gaarder 1997. My remarks about Gaarder's reception are taken from Pollmann 2008, 35–37.

28 Gaarder 1997, 3–8.

29 Gaarder 1997, 87–95.

30 Gaarder 1997, 91.

31 This thought or *topos* is at least as old as the craving of two souls for unity expressed in Aristophanes' speech in Plato, *Symposion* 189C–193D, and similarly expressed in Gaarder 1997, 81 and 137–39.

32 Gaarder 1997, 91.

33 Gaarder 1997, 89–90, similarly at 81. But Floria will not commit 'romantic' suicide in the end, thus shunning her model Dido (p. 95), the legendary queen of Carthage, who at the end of Vergil's *Aeneid* Book IV kills herself after the departure of her lover Aeneas. In this respect, Floria is more like Augustine's mother Monica who, when her son leaves Africa for Rome, laments like Dido but then decides to follow him (cf. esp. *conf.* 5.8.15).

34 Gaarder 1997, 93.

35 It is perhaps important in this context to emphasize that for the sake of simplicity I just paraphrase Augustine's line of story as he presents it in the *Confessions*, notwithstanding the fact that the *Confessions* is a highly elaborate artefact whose autobiographical credibility has to be handled with the utmost care.

36 Gaarder 1997, 105–07. Augustine uses the phrase *vita brevis* in *Confessions* 3.7.13: *homines autem, quorum vita super terram brevis est*. On p. 131 the *topos* reoccurs, and cf. also p. 159. It is perfectly clear where the pros and cons lie: if someone has a rotten life and does not see what one can do about it, the concept of a life after death is comforting and encouraging. If one has quite a good life or indeed sees that actions can or even ought to be taken to improve matters, then the vision of a life to come can be oppressive (or "life-denying").

37 Gaarder 1997, 115–17.

38 Gaarder 1997, 131–33.

39 Vessey 2009, 225–36.

40 Vessey 2009, 232.

41 Stothard 2012, 11.

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Index

Adam and Eve
  and creation 82, 212–214
  in Eden 252
  intimacy with God 107
  and original sin 106–107
  pride and fall of 106
  and sexual activity 197
  temptation of 214
  union with God 214
Adeodatus, son of Augustine 2, 5, 295, 303–304
Adnotationes 311–312
adoption
  divine 219–221
  Pauline image of 219
allegory 3, 311
Alypius 4
Ambrose, Saint 3–5, 63–64, 193, 256, 264, 325–326
analogies 70
angels
  fall of 57–58, 106
  and St. Jerome 191
animals, and resurrection 261
anti-Pelagianism 107, 167, 171–174, 181–182, 266–268
Antony of Egypt 4
appearance-claims 145
Aquinas, Thomas 175, 179–180, 193–194
Aristotle 8–9, 93, 192–193
Armentarius 256–257
arrogance, and dominion 234
ascension
  of Christ 220, 269–270
  of Monica 287–288
Attic Nights 91–92
Atticus, Bishop of Constantinople 333
Augustine
  and authority of early Christian writers 333
  baptism 5
  birth 2, 109–110
  as Bishop of Hippo 5–7, 208
  in Carthage 2, 216

  - in Cassiciacum 5, 286
  - changing ideas of 332
  - compatibilism of 172
  - conversion to Christianity 17–18, 63–64, 99, 109–110
  - as cult in Africa 335
  - death of 7
  - early years 2, 109–110
  - epistemology of 10
  - ethics of *see* ethics
  - Hippo Regius 5–7
  - historical time 331
  - inconsistency of 172–173
  - influence on other disciplines 332–333
  - legacy of 12–13
  - in Milan 2, 4
  - multiple roles of 331
  - mysticism of 191
  - ordination of 5–7, 208
  - personality of 191–192
  - pluralism of ideas 332
  - as political positivist 242–243
  - as political realist 242–243
  - reception of thoughts/works *see* reception
  - in Rome 2
  - sexuality of 282
  - social background 331
  - in Thagaste 2, 5
  - wives/concubines of 2–3
  - world-weariness of 242–243
- Augustinian cogito 145–147
- Augustinian images of deification 214–221
- Augustinian Order 336
- Augustinian Renaissance 335
- Augustinian terminology 340
- Aulus Gellius 91–92
- Austrian Academy of Sciences 335
- authority
  - patriarchal 235–236
  - and reason 285
  - relationships in 235
- Ayres, Lewis 8, 117

beatitude, *beatitudo* 11, 199
becoming gods 216–219, 225
belief, and understanding 205–206
blasphemy, and literal interpretation 325–326
bodies in heaven 255
body of Christ 224–225
body and souls, reunification of 254–255
Bonner, Gerald 210, 215
"books of the Platonists" 278–281
Brown, Peter 249
Burnell, Peter 258

Cain, and Earthly City 233–234
cannibalism, and resurrection 128
canonization of work 336
Capánaga, Victorino 210
Cavadini, John 8
century(ies) of Augustine 345
certainty 133–134
Chappell, Timothy 10–11
charity
  and exegesis 321–322
  and good will 160–161
  growth of 253–254
  and the Spirit 222–223
child of God, ways of being 220
Christ
  as Abraham's descendant 223–224
  advice to soldiers 193
  ascension of 220, 269–270
  Augustine's unified thoughts on 112–113
  baptism of 67
  body of 224–225
  Christians become 217–218
  death of 48
  descent of 218–219
  as divine sage 113–114
  faith in 276
  as God-man 118
  grace and human freedom 267–268
  as hero 114
  Incarnation of 51–52, 115–117, 214, 221

  as incarnation of *sapientia* 114–115
  as knowledge and wisdom of God 114, 118
  Neoplatonist definition of 114
  pagan representation of 113–114
  and *persona* 115–116
  and purification 284–285
  resurrection of 128–129, 254–255, 258, 260–261
  as seen by Augustine 9, 108–119
  as spiritual method 115–116
  titles used of 60
  whole Christ 223–224
  as wisdom of God 114, 118
  wisdom of 114
  wonderful exchange 217–218
Christ and the Just Society 114
Christian doctrine, Augustine on 8
Christian rulers, duties of 245
Christian soul, and the Spirit 222–223
Christianity
  Augustine's conversion to 17–18, 63–64, 99, 109–110
  and Constantine 189–191
  contrast with Manichaeism 20–22, 32–33
  doctrine of creation 32–33, 82
  interpretation of 62
  invisible realities 69
  and justified violence 245–247
  and liberal thinking 65–66
  Nicene *see* Nicene Christianity
  and the Spirit 61
  Trinitarian theology *see* Trinity; theology *see* theology
    see also Christ; God
Christians
  in Christ's body 224–225
  divine attributes of 269
  expectations of 269
  and Platonists 283–284
Christology of Augustine 113–118
  Christ as spiritual method 115–116
Cicero 64, 84, 110, 191–193, 239
City of God 37–43, 81, 87, 134, 189–191, 232–234, 239–241, 245–246, 255, 260–261
  as church 234
  compared with Rome 247–248

Clement of Alexandria 210
coercion, religious 245
cognition 131
commonwealth, definition of 242
communication, process of 297–298
communion
  Christians in Christ’s body 224–225
  principle of 221
  of saints 247
conceptual skills 306–307
concupiscentia carnis 283–284
Confessions 6, 12–13, 17–22, 25–26, 28, 30–31, 83, 110–111, 125, 203–206, 311–312, 332
Confessions (Book 1) 109–110, 204–206
Confessions (Book 2) 204–205
Confessions (Book 3) 21, 31, 109–110, 204–205
Confessions (Book 4) 20–22
Confessions (Book 5) 20–22, 109–110
Confessions (Book 6) 325
Confessions (Book 7) 18–20, 28, 30, 98, 109–111, 281–285, 287
Confessions (Book 8) 204–205
Confessions (Book 9) 5, 285–288
Confessions (Book 10) 110–111, 152, 155
Confessions (Book 11) 34, 81, 89–94, 311–315
Confessions (Book 12) 86, 289, 311–315
Confessions (Book 13) 289, 311–315
Les Confessions (Rousseau) 203–206
consilium of God 43–45
Constantine, Emperor 189–191
contemplation 278–281, 285–288
  ecclesial foundations of 288–290
  inner ambivalence of 289
  of revelation 289
Contra Academicos 5, 142
Contra Faustum Manicheum 194
corruption 102–103
cosmological monism 32
Council of Constantinople 62–63
Council of Nicaea 62–63, 189
created world, structure of 82–84
creation 8–9, 32–33, 40–43, 45, 81–94
  absolute beginning arguments 85–86

  - Christian doctrine of 32–33, 82
  - in *City of God* 41–43
  - and earth 314
  - and evil 98–107
  - Genesis 8–9, 81, 311–315
  - goodness of God 88
  - goodness of the world 101–102
  - and heaven 314
  - infinite forms in 87–88
  - Manichaeism on 43
  - nature and observation 86
  - and numbers 50–51
  - and original sin 98–107
  - out of nothing 8–9
  - Platonic (*Timaeus*) account 82, 99–101
  - possible/impossible in 86
  - and redemption 75–76, 259
  - and seminal reasons 82
  - simultaneous creation 82
  - time before 84–86, 313–314
  - time elapsed since 82
  - and the Trinity 45–47, 212–214
  - "why not sooner?" 85
  - and Word of God 53
- cycles, theories of 48, 54

- Daley, Brian 108
- *De animae quantitate* 130–131
- *De beata vita* 5
- *De civitate Dei see City of God*
- *De consensu Evangelistarum* 311–312
- *De doctrina Christiana* 27, 253, 262, 322–324
- *De dono perseverantiae* 167, 177–178
- *De fide ad Gratianum Augustum* 193
- *De fide rerum invisibilium* 159–160
- *De Genesi ad litteram* 130–131
- *De gratia Christi* 172
- *De immortalitate animae* 5
- *De libero arbitrio* 23, 25–29, 166–173, 175–176, 182, 205–206
- *De mendacio* 199–203
- *De moribus ecclesiae* 199
- *De natura deorum* 84

De natura et gratia 173
De ordine 5
De praedestinatione 167
De re publica 239
De spiritu et littera 175, 324–326
De Trinitate 74–75, 132–137, 152
De Videndo Deo 256–257
death
  and the soul 127
  and time 92
deification 11, 208–226
  Augustine's early thoughts on 211
  Augustinian images of 214–221
  doctrine of 208–226
  language of 211–212
  in leisure 211
  as metaphor 211
  patristic 209–211, 225
  twentieth-century assessments 209–210
deified eyes, of saints 255
deified humanity 210
deified life 215–221
deontological ethics 199–200
determinism 182
Devil, and sinful choice 106
dicibile 298
difficulty, culpability of 172
divine adoption 219–221
divine attributes *see* God
divine business deal 217–218
divine command 202, 206
divine immutability *see* God
divine nature *see* God
divine supremacy *see* God
divine Wisdom 275, 286–288
  and grace 289
divinity
  exchange with humanity 216–219
  granted to humans 251
doctrine of creation 32–33, 82
doctrine of deification 208–226
doctrine of heaven *see* heaven

Dodaro, Robert 113–114
Dolbeau, François 216
Dolbeau sermons 210, 216
Donatist controversy 245
dual paternity of God the Father 219–220

earth
  and creation 314
  seeing God in 252, 255–262
Earthly City 232–234
ecclesia perfecta, heaven as 252–255
ecclesial foundations of contemplation 288–290
elements of contemplation 278–279
Elshtain, Jean Bethke 340–342
empirical knowledge 155–159
empirical sciences 158–159
Enarrationes in Psalmos 312
encoded sounds 298
Epicurean ideas 43–44, 84, 303
Eraclius 6
Erasmus 191
error through misidentification 136–137
Esau
  God's grace and faith 178–181
  hated by God 264
eternal knowledge of God *see* God
eternal plan of God *see* God
eternity and simplicity 34
ethics 10–11, 189–206
  interiorizing 245–246
Eunapius 208
evil 9, 98–107
  moral evil 213
  in war 195–196
Evodius 27
exegesis, and charity 321–322
exegetical disputes 320–321
exegetical practice 313–315
exegetical theory 311
  epistemological dimensions 314
  moral dimensions 320–322
  practical dimensions 322–324

  spirit and letter 324–326
exegetical writings 311–312
  alternative interpretations 316–319
existence
  degrees of 83–84
  and the universe 23
experimental disconfirmation 159
external senses 156
extromission theory of vision 155
eye of the soul 281–285

face of God 275, 279–280
faith 12, 75, 253–254
  in Christ 276
  and divine favor 264–265
  and grace 174–178
  human refusal of 178–181
  and Incarnation 117
  of Monica 285–288
  and reason 275–290
  and the soul 275–276
  in the Spirit 223
  and understanding 289
  and variable positions of human will 179–181
fall of the soul 290
Faustus, Bishop 2–3, 277
felicitas 199
"Fido"–Fido theory of meaning 295
first emanation theory 83
first principle of things 38–39
Fitzgerald, Allan 9
form-in-the-object 156–157
form-in-the-sense 157
Forms 147
free will 166–182
  and *De libero arbitrio* 166–171
    see also De libero arbitrio
  and faith/grace 175–176
  in later works 171–173
    see also human will
friendship and charity 160–161
fulfillment, conception of 253

Gaarder, J. 342–345
Galatians 311
Geneseric 6–7
Genesis 8–9, 81, 311–319
glory
  granted to outcast 251
  predestination for 252, 263–268
God
  becoming a 218–219
  as acting by choice 86–89
  atemporal eternity of 92–93
  attributes of 29, 69–70, 75, 88
  as Being 30–31
  of Christianity 19, 25
  consilium of 43–45
  depth of 48
  dual paternity of 219–220
  eternal folly of 53–55, 58
  eternal graciousness 58
  eternal knowledge 8, 37–58
  eternal plan 43–45, 47–49
  eternal wisdom 46, 52
  exchange with humanity 216–219
  face of 275, 279–280
  as goal of our longings 253
  of gods 219–220
  goodness and creation 88
  goodness of 88, 177–178
  and grace 170–172, 174–178
  gratuitous goodness 50
  and history 56
  humans in likeness of 210
  image of 21, 74
  immutability 20, 28, 30, 33, 38, 43–44, 52, 83, 98–99, 114
  incorruptibility 20, 28, 30, 98–99
  and infinity 49–50, 58
  intellectual vision of 18–20, 280
  inviolability 30, 98–99
  judging the world 266–268
  knowledge of 288, 290
  as Love 74
  Love of 58, 71–72

  - Manichaeism on 20–22
  - the Mediator 41–42, 52
  - of Moses 19
  - nature of 17–35, 70
  - in New Testament 60–62
  - omnipotence 86–87, 128
  - omniscience 58
  - perfection in love 71–72
  - Platonist-inspired vision of 22–26
  - power and divine attributes 88
  - providential care by 4, 251
  - rationality of 86–87
  - recognizing 42
  - redemption 259
  - and resurrection 128
  - Rousseauian concept of 205
  - saving the world 266–268
  - seeing the face of 275
  - seeing of 255–262, 268
  - simplicity of 69–71
  - and the soul 278–281
  - sovereignty and creation 99
  - spirituality of 99
  - supremacy 26–29, 34
  - triune life of 60–76
  - as Truth 73
  - as ultimate controller 182
  - will of 86–89, 101–102
  - Word of God 46, 53, 111, 115–117, 313
    - *see also* Christianity; creation; Trinity
- gods
  - becoming gods 216–219, 225
  - mythological accounts of 55–57
  - and philosophy 55–57
- God’s providence, and life 251
- goodness
  - and creation 88
  - in creatures 102–103
  - of God 88, 177–178
  - gratuitous 50
  - of humans 167, 177–178
  - and will 172

  of the world 101–102
government and state 235–236
grace 170–172
  and divine Wisdom 289
  and faith 174–178
  gratuitous nature of 265–266
  and human freedom 264–268
  human refusal of 178–181
  indispensable role of 219
  of Monica 287–288
  and variable positions of human will 179–181
Gratian, Emperor 193
The Great Chain of Being 87–88
Great Exchange and becoming gods 216–219
Greek Fathers, and Augustine 209
Gregory of Nyssa 63, 268

happiness and misery 48, 51, 55
heart, as source of good and wickedness 195–196
heaven 11–12, 251–270
  and change 83
  and the creation 314
  on earth 252
  as *ecclesia perfecta* 252–255
  as goal of truth and wisdom 251
  and human divinity 251
  predestination to 267
  prepared places in 263
  and reality 259
  saints in 251
  seeing God in 252, 255–262
heavenly amelioration 252–253, 259
heavenly predestination 252, 263–268
Hilary of Poitiers 63–64
Hippo, Augustine, Bishop of *see* Augustine
history, and City of God 234
Holy Spirit *see* Spirit
Homilies on the First Epistle of John 312
Homilies on the Gospel of John 111–112, 263
homoiosis 210
hope 253–254
Hortensius 2, 17, 110

human beings
  and authority 235
  bodies in heaven 255
  in likeness of God 210
  motivation of love 232–233
  seeing God 255–262
human creation, *City of God* 47–49
human faith *see* faith
human freedom
  and grace 264–268
  and predestination 263–264
human incompleteness 212–214
human perfection 254
human reason 12
  liberation of 247–248
human relationships, and government 235
human reproduction, and original sin 236
human soul *see* soul
human well-being 10
human will
  determined by nature/necessity 169
  exercise of 179–180
  and faith 174–178, 181–182
  and grace 174, 181–182
  libertarian free will 174, 181–182
  nature/freedom of 6, 10, 88
  post-Fall 168–173, 180, 220–221
  power of 105
  refusal of grace/faith 178–181
  and sexuality 196–199
  variable positions of 179–181
    see also free will
humanity
  breach with God 212–214
  deified 210
  exchange with divinity 216–219
Husserl, E. 93–94

"I" expression 136–137
ignorance, culpability of 172
image of adoption 219
image of God *see* God

images of deification 214–221
imagination, and the soul 130–131
imago Dei 213
immateriality
  of the mind 132–138
  of the soul 129–138
immortal soul 48
immortality
  granted to mortals 251
  heavenly images of 253–254
  renewal and retrieval 252–253
immutability of God *see* God
immutable truth 30
impeccability, heavenly images of 253–254
In Iohannis evangelium tractatus 68, 71, 312
In Refutation of the Priscillianists and Origenists 259
Incarnation 51–52, 115–117, 214, 221
incorporeality, of intelligible objects 24–25
incorruptibility
  of God *see* God
  heavenly images of 253–254
Indiculum 6–7
infant learning 306–307
infinities, and meaning 49–51
inmost nature of God 30–35
Inner Truth 319–320
Inner Word 306–307
innermost knowledge 152–155
instantaneous change 91
intellectual vision
  in *Confessions* 281–285
  of God 18–20
intelligible objects 24–25
interior cognition levels 282–283
interior contemplation 278–281, 285–288
invisible realities 69
inward ear, strong voice in 315–316
Irenaeus 215
Italica 255–256

Jacob
  God's grace and faith 178–181

  loved by God 264
Jeromanesque term 346
Jerome, Saint 191, 256, 333, 346
Jesus *see* Christ
John the Evangelist 313
Julian of Aeclanum 333
just-war teaching 192–196
justified violence 245–247

Kenney, John Peter 12
killing 202
King, Peter 10, 12
knowledge 10, 142–161
  of being alive 145–147
  claims 144–147
  empirical 155–159
  of God 37, 288
  innermost 152–155
  pursuit of 320–321
  self-knowledge 133–138, 153–154
  testimonial 159–161
knowledge-wisdom 118
Knuuttila, Simo 8–9
Kripke, Saul 136

language 292–308
  Aristotelian account of words 302
  and biblical interpretation 293
  and communication 292
  Epicurean view of 303
  of faith 75
  grammar/semantics 301–302
  indeterminacy of 303–306
  and infant learning 306–307
  Inner Word 306–307
  interpretation of 12, 303–306
  linguistic conventions 303
  literal ambiguity 303–304
  and meaning 300–303
  mental 306–307
  nature of 12
  sayable 298

  - semantic compositionality 303–304
  - semantic holism 304–305
  - semiotics 292
  - significance and context 303–304
  - Stoic account of words 302
  - theory of meaning 292
  - and truth 301–302
  - utterances as linguistic signs 302–303
  - words as signs 293–300
    - *see also* signs
- language-exit transitions 302
- Leibniz, Gottfried 86
- Leyser, Conrad 333
- liberal arts 65–66
- libertarian free will 174, 181–182
- libertarianism 168–169, 173
- *libido* 196–197
- *libri platonicorum* 211
- life, and God's providence 251
- *Life of Augustine* 7
- life and the universe 23
- light, analogy of 26
- likeness, of God 212–214
- likenesses 70
- literal interpretation 322–326
- *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* 208
- logical truths about the world 144–145
- Lombard, Peter 340
- Lot-Borodine, Myrrha 209–210
- love
  - Augustine's advice on 195
  - and coercive authority 249
  - and enjoyment 232–233
  - as motivation 232–233
  - and perfection 222
  - and politics 249
  - of power 234
  - and property 249
  - in Scripture 71–72, 194
  - and two cities 233–234
  - and use 232–233
  - and worth 233

loved ones, after death 255–256
Lovejoy, A. O. 87–88
Lover and Beloved 221
lust *see* sexuality
lust of the eyes 320
lying 199–203
  divine command against 202
  eight types of 200
  and good consequences 201
  lies and truth 200
  and utilitarianism 201–202

MacDonald, Scott 7–8
MacIntyre, Alasdair 232
Madec, Goulven 113–114
Magdalene, Mary 220
Mani 2–3
Manichaeism
  Augustine's opposition to 5, 32, 277–278, 311, 325
  contrast with orthodox Christianity 20–22, 32–33
  on creation 43
  on evil 98–99
  on God 20–22
  incoherence of 30
  influence on Augustine 20–22, 28, 98–99, 109, 276–277
  Manichaean sect 2–3, 7–8
  theology of 276–278
Mann, William E. 9
manuscript catalogues 335
Marcellinus 86
Marius Victorinus 4, 63–64
material objects, and good/evil 105–106
mathematical truths 145
Mausbach, Josef 209
meaning
  and infinities 49–51
  and language 300–303
  and significance 301
measurement, of time 92–93
Meconi, David Vincent 11–12
Mediator, God as 41–42
Megalius, Archbishop 5–7

mental activities 154
Metaphysics 85, 90
metaphysics 7–8
methexis 210
Milbank, John 232
Mind of the Father 52–53
mirror
  for Christian office-holders 245–246
  for princes 245
misery and happiness 48, 51, 55
modality 89
Monica, mother of Augustine 2, 5, 258–259
  ascension of 287–288
  and divine Wisdom 286–288
  faith of 285–288
moral evil 213
moral lucidity, and knowing God 290
moral responsibility 167–168
moral theory *see* ethics
More, Saint Thomas 191
Moses 317–318
myth and philosophy 57

natures, categories/hierarchies comprising universe 23, 29
Navigius 2
Nebridius 211–212
Neoplatonic faith, of Augustine 113–114
Neoplatonism 3, 41, 251
new earth, seeing God in 252, 255–262
new heaven, seeing God in 252, 255–262
New Testament, on God 60–62
Nicene Christianity 62–64, 67, 76
Niebuhr, Reinhold 232
Niederbacher, Bruno 9–10
non-Christian philosophy 65
number, structure, and truth 23

occasion-oriented writing 111–113
O’Daly, Gerard 172
On Agreement among the Evangelists 113–114
ontological independence, and necessity 32
Opus imperfectum contra Julianum 173

ordo amorum
  and just war 192–196
  and sexuality 196–199
Origenist view 259, 261
original sin 9, 98–107, 236, 238, 242
Orosius 259
Ostia, vision at 286, 288
Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine (OGHRA) 333–334, 336–337

pagan intellectuals, and Augustine 116–118
pagan representation, of Christ 113–114
pagan wisdom 323
Parmenides 91–92
partiality 194
Patricius, father of Augustine 2
patristic deification 209–211, 225
Paul, Saint 39–41, 222–223, 264–265, 269–270
Paulina 256–257
Pauline image of adoption 219
peace
  and coercion/compliance 238–239
  as natural human condition 194–195, 236–237
  and political authority 243
Pelagius *see* anti-Pelagianism
perception 156–158
perfect justice 233
perfection
  degrees of 83–84
  and fulfillment 253
  human 254
  and love 222
Perpetua 2
peruersa imitatio 214
phenomenological time 93–94
Philaster of Brescia 259
philosophy
  and gods 55–57
  and theology 64–65
Phosphorus/Hesperus expressions 136
physical time 89–94
Physics 85, 89–94
pii in heaven 262

Plato/Platonist theory 8–9, 19–20, 22–26, 28–29, 38–40, 54, 64–65, 82, 84, 88, 91–92, 99–101, 111, 114, 192–193, 218, 278–281, 283–284, 287–288
Platonic Forms 154
Plotinus 19–20, 64, 83, 87–88, 218, 278–279, 288
political activity, as symptomatic 249
political authority
  and original sin 236, 238, 242
  and peace 243
  and property 237–238
  in Rome 243–244
  and slavery 236
political behaviour, and rational choice theory 247–248
political history, and God's providence 244
political philosophy, of Augustine 11, 231–249
political science 247–248
Pollmann, Karla 12–13
Porphyry 51–54, 56, 64, 211, 259, 278–279
Possidius 6–7, 333, 335
post-Fall human will 168–169
predestination 11–12
  and freedom 263–264
  for grace 263
  to heaven 267
pride
  and fall of Adam/Eve 106
  of life 320–321
  in self 233
primum non nocere 194
property
  division of 237–238
  and political authority 237–238
providential care, by God 4, 251
Pseudo-Augustinian writings 335, 337
Pseudo-Dionysius 210
psycho-physical dualism *see* soul–body dualism
psychological time 89–94
purification 284–285
Putnam, Hilary 136

Quaestiones Evangeliorum 312

rational choice theory, and political behaviour 247–248

reading Augustine 108–119
reason
  and authority 285
  and faith 275–290
  and the soul 280
reason personified 213
recapitulation, language of 215–216
reception of Augustine’s thoughts/works 332–334
  in art 337–339
  by J. Gaarder 342–345
  by Jean Bethke Elshtain 340–342
  cultivation of person 334–335
  intellectual receptions 339–345
  key factors in 334–345
  in literature 340–345
  in media beyond books 337–339
  in music 337–339
  in political theory 340–345
  Pseudo-Augustiniana 335
  role of institutions 336–337
  success of 345–346
  transmission of works 335–336
reception studies 334
recognizing God 42
redemption 259, 265–266
  hope for 269–270
relatio subsistens 70–71
religious coercion 245
resurrection 128–129, 254–255, 258, 260–261
  and God 128
Retractationes 6–7, 12–13, 107, 167, 175–176, 335
reunification, of body and soul 254–255
Roman deities, abandonment of 239–240
Romans 39–40, 264–265
Romans
  citizens’ lack of virtue 240–241
  civil virtue of 241
  injustice of 239–240
  passion for glory 241
  self-restraint 241
Rome
  compared with City of God 247–248

  and God’s providence 244
  positive accomplishments of 243
  sack of 232, 239–240
  traditions 189–191
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 203–206

Sabine women 239
sacrament of piety 225
saints
  arrival in heaven 251
  communion of 247
  and deified eyes 255
  and resurrection 260–261
  seeing God 255, 257–258
    see also individual saints
salvation 265–266
sapientia see wisdom
sayable 298
scepticism 142–147
scientia see knowledge
scientific naturalism, and Manichaeism 276–277
Scripture
  and charity 321–322
  and pagan wisdom 323
  as sign/pointer 319
  and Trinitarian theology 60–62, 71
  and truth 319–320
Second Pelagian Controversy 266–268
second poverty 224
second-personal ethics 203–206
Sedulius Scottus 339
seeing the face of God 275
seeing God in new heaven and new earth 252, 255–262, 268
self, existence of 134–137
self-advancement 54
self-justification 205
self-knowledge 133–138, 153–154, 204–205
self-reflexive thought 154
semantic compositionality 303–304
semantic holism 304–305
semiotics 292
sensation 155–156

sense-impressions 155
Sententiae 211
Sermon on the Mount 311
sexuality 196–199, 282
  of Augustine 282
    see also human reproduction
signs
  ambiguous 323–324
  descriptions of 293–294
  encoded sounds 298
  and extensionality 295
  false/misunderstood 298–299
  given 296–299
  and Hebrew/Greek 322
  and intentionality 294–296
  interpretation of unknown 322–324
  interpreters' knowledge requirements 322
  literal ambiguity 303–304
  natural 296–297
  process of communication 297–298
  proper 299–300
  and recipient 299
  sayable 298
  Scripture as 319
  significance and context 303–304
  speaker-meaning 299
  transferred 299–300
  utterances as linguistic 302–303
  and words 293–300
    see also language
similitudes 70
Simplician 264–265
simultaneous creation 82
sin
  and the Devil 106
  and difficulty 104–105
  and evil 104–105
  and free choice 176
  and ignorance 107, 170–171
  irrationality of 105
  and justice 104–105
  and knowledge 289

  original sin 9, 98–107, 236, 238, 242
  in post-Fall humans 171
  and predestination 263–264
  and rejection of God 105
sinful woman, Luke 324
slavery 236, 238
small kingdoms 243
social epistemology 159–161
society, as community of interest 239
Socrates 153, 156–157
Soliloquia 5, 213, 280
Solomon *see* Wisdom of Solomon
soul 82, 125–139
  argument from imagination 130–131
  Augustine on 9–10, 125–129
  cognitive access argument 132–137
  concupiscence of 283–284
  contemplation of 281–285
  and divine assistance 275
  as evaluative/ethical 126
  eye of 281–285
  and faith 275–276
  fall of 290
  and God 278–281
  and guilt 170
  immateriality of 129–138
  immortality of 127
  indivisibility argument 137–138
  interior cognition levels 282–283
  levels of 126–127
  misery and liberation 43–44
  origins of 126
  rational human capabilities 126
  and reason 280
  and resurrection 128–129
  sensual abilities 126
  as single unity/entity 127
  traducianist view 126
  and truth 127, 281–285
  vegetative powers 126
soul–body dualism 125–139
sounds, encoded 298

speaker-meaning 299
Spirit
  ambiguity on 66–68
  and charity 222–223
  Christian faith in 223
  corruption of 102–103
  discussion of 61
  as gift of Father and Son 221–223
  as inhabiting the Christian soul 222–223
  and Love 71–72
  as making the three one 72–73
  principle of union 221–222
  sin against 66
spiritual body
  concept 254
  and resurrection 254
spiritual goods, and good/evil 105–106
spiritual matter 83
spiritualizing interpretation 325–326
state and government 235–236
Stoicism 8–9
Stothard, Sir Peter 331
structure, of the created world 82–84
Stump, Eleonore 10
substantia 133
supremacy of God 34
Swinburne, Richard 136
Symposium 287

teaching, theory of 112
testimonial knowledge 159–161
theological determinism 182
theology 39–40
  as *Confessions* 110–111
  modern 119
  and philosophy 64–65
  and separate tracts 119
Theory of Illumination 147–152
Theory of Recollection 147–150
theory of teaching 112
theurgy 56
thinking, and redemption/reformation 75

Thomas, Saint 193
Thucydides 192–193
Timaeus 82, 84, 99–101
time 81–94
  see also creation
totus Christus 223–225
transference 299–300
Trinity 8, 51–52
  ambiguity on 66–68
  appearance of 75
  and beginnings 68
  and creation 45–47, 212–214
  creation and redemption 75–76
  equality 73
  and the Incarnation 51–52
  invisible realities 69
  logical distinctions 68–69
  and Scripture 60–62, 71
  Spirit as making the three one 72–73
  thinking and redemption/reformation 75
  Trinitarian theology 60–62
  triune life of God 60–76
  Truth 73
    see also De Trinitate
truth 73
  appearance-claims 145
  Augustine on 203–206
  as common property 320–321
  of deification 210–211
  eternal and unchangeable 147
  and fallen human 220–221
  and Forms 147
  Inner Truth 319–320
  knowledge of being alive 145–147
  and language 301–302
  logical truths about the world 144–145
  mathematical truths 145, 147
  Rousseau on 203–206
  as sacred 202–203
  and Scripture 319–320
  and the soul 127
  strong voice in inward ear 315–316, 319–320

  Theory of Illumination 147–152
Two Cities idea 232–234, 247–248
Tyconius 223–224

Ullmann, Stephen 211
understanding, and the universe 23

Valentine of Hadrumetum, Abbot 266–268
Valerius, Bishop 5–7
van Bavel, Tarcisius 224
Vandal army 6–7
Velleius 84
Vessey, Mark 346
violence, justified 245–247
virtues, and love of God 199
vision at Ostia 286, 288
vision of God 18–20
volition *see* human will
Volusianus 116

war, just 192–196
Weithmann, Paul 11
will *see* God; human will
Williams, Charles 189
Williams, Rowan 115–116
Williams, Thomas 12
wisdom 12, 29
  Augustine's discovery of 17–18
  divine *see* divine Wisdom
  of God *see* God
  perfection of 54
Wisdom of Solomon 37, 43
Woodhead, Linda 209–210
Word of God *see* God
words
  as signs 293–300
  Stoic account of 302
writings, of Augustine 311–312

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Index

Half title page 2
Other Volumes in this series of Cambridge Companions 4
Title page 5
Copyright page 7
Dedication 9
Contents 10
Notes on contributors 13
Preface 18
List of abbreviations 20
Introduction 26
Part I The nature of God 37
  1 The divine nature: being and goodness 39
  2 God’s eternal knowledge according to Augustine 56
  3 Augustine on the triune life of God 75
Part II God’s relation to the world 90
  4 Time and creation in Augustine 92
  5 Augustine on evil and original sin 107
  6 Jesus Christ, the knowledge and wisdom of God 115
Part III Human nature 129
  7 The human soul: Augustine’s case for soul–body dualism 131
  8 Augustine on knowledge 146
  9 Augustine on free will 167
Part IV Human excellence 186
  10 Augustine’s ethics 188
  11 Augustine’s doctrine of deification 203
Part V Political and ecclesial life 220
  12 Augustine’s political philosophy 222
  13 Heaven and the ecclesia perfecta in Augustine 238
Part VI Language and faith 256
  14 Faith and reason 258

15 Augustine on language 273
16 Hermeneutics and reading Scripture 289
Part VII Augustine's legacy 304
17 Augustine's legacy: success or failure? 306
Bibliography 322
Index 343