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*PHILOSOPHY & SCRIPTURE IN BOOK VII  
OF AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS*

IT IS DIFFICULT TO IGNORE THE FACT that much of contemporary continental thought has been affected by what Dominique Janicaud has called “a theological turn.”<sup>1</sup> Though Janicaud diagnosed this turn with respect to phenomenology, we might also use it to designate a broader preoccupation with religion that runs the length of the philosophical spectrum from the devoutly religious to the adamantly atheistic, from Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Levinas to Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. Much can be and, indeed, has been said about this “turn.” But of particular interest here is the way in which it has managed to re-introduce scripture and philosophy to one another.<sup>2</sup> In light of this reconnection, both parties are left to assess the contemporary value of such an exchange and both parties—both philosophy and scripture—appear to have as much to lose as to gain.

As a result, it may at this time be particularly valuable to reflect on the ways in which philosophy and scripture have traditionally intersected. This is especially true with respect to the way in which the work of Alain Badiou represents an increasingly potent alternative to the more familiar hermeneutical methods employed by many continental thinkers. Badiou’s relentless efforts to re-install at the heart of philosophy strong, contemporarily thinkable notions of universality, truth, and subjectivity call to mind the less hermeneutic and more powerfully conceptual efforts of such traditional thinkers and readers of scripture as Saint Augustine. At the heart of what Badiou shares with these thinkers—in a way that significantly departs from much of continental thought—is a genuine appreciation for Plato. It is, then, particularly important in an attempt to assess the current value of interplay between scripture and philosophy to do so in a way that allows these particular stakes to take center stage.

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<sup>1</sup> See Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate* (New York: Fordham UP, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Particularly exemplary of this reconnection may be Jean-Luc Marion’s *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Alain Badiou’s *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003). Both authors engage philosophically with scripture via extended readings of Christian scripture, particularly Paul.

Thus, Augustine's work may, more than that of other possible historical figures, provide a powerful model on the basis of which we might attempt to re-think this issue in our own contemporary situation. Augustine not only offers us texts that explicitly reflect on the interaction of a powerfully conceptual brand of Platonic philosophy with Christian scripture, but he also offers himself as a performance of that relationship. Book VII of the *Confessions* is exemplary in this regard. Augustine's attempt in Book VII to think through the problem of evil and his concomitant mystical ascents offer a remarkable performance of philosophical and scriptural interpenetration.

For Augustine the interaction of philosophy and scripture simultaneously revalues both of the component parts. On the one hand, philosophy (as represented by the conceptual truths of Platonism) is at once a tremendous success and a remarkable failure. In a flash, philosophy enables Augustine's mystical ascent to Being, but—just as quickly—reveals itself as incapable of sustaining this contact with the divine. On the other hand, scripture (as embodied by the Gospel of John) suffers the same double fate. It is affirmed as an absolutely necessary mediation of purely conceptual truths even as it is revealed as simply mediating.

The logic of this revaluation of both philosophy and scripture in Book VII of the *Confessions* comes into focus when it is read in light of Paul Ricoeur's maxim, "the symbol gives rise to thought."<sup>3</sup> If we take our cue from Ricoeur's argument that only "the symbol gives; but what it gives occasion for is thought," then it becomes possible to trace with great precision Augustine's oscillating path from symbol to thought to symbol or, in language that is more appropriate to Augustine, from sensible image to conceptual principle to sensible image.<sup>4</sup> When such a path is pursued, the logic of much that might otherwise be obscure in Book VII—from the timing of Augustine's discussion of astrology to his claim that his soul may have been lost had he not read the Platonists *before* turning to scripture—becomes remarkably clear. And, though it cannot be pursued at greater length here, it is hoped that this clarity may also prove useful to the ongoing task of assessing the value of the various and varied logics of the contemporary manifestations of this re-connection of philosophy and scripture.

## I. The Weight of Images: the Burden of the Non-Conceptual

Augustine opens Book VII of the *Confessions* with a description of his inability "to think any substance possible other than that which the eyes normally perceive" because his power of vision has been clouded by a "swarm of unpurified

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 348.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

notions" (i, 1).<sup>5</sup> In this condition, it seemed to him that "anything from which space was abstracted was non-existent, indeed absolutely nothing, not even a vacuum" (i, 1). This philosophical debility is, for Augustine, no small matter. Because of the ways in which these physical images obscure his vision, he finds himself unable to conceive properly of the nature of God. Indeed, his problem could be precisely described as an inability to be properly *conceptual*, period. All of his concepts are unpurified, all of his notions retain sensible elements. He is oppressed by the opacity of the image and burdened by the non-conceptual. Augustine concisely describes this condition with a single word: vanity. Vanity is the inability to see past the pressing demands of the senses to the simplicity and purity of concepts. Vanity is the inability to be properly philosophical.

Philosophy, as the properly conceptual, has, though, already begun to come to Augustine's aid. He is armed at this point in the narrative with at least one clear and indubitable principle: God must be incorruptible and unchangeable. This principle allows him to cut through the fog of images. For instance, it is the clarity of this principle that has allowed him at last to set aside Manichean dualism as something to be "vomited forth from my overloaded stomach" (ii, 3). The incorruptibility and immutability of God's singular substance renders any doctrine of a duality of opposed and combative substances patently false. But with this leap forward toward the true nature of God, Augustine's difficulties have not been overcome. Rather, they have simply been displaced.

In fact, Augustine's inability to be properly philosophical and conceptual is now metonymically packed into a single question: if dualism is unthinkable, then what is the cause of evil? The answer to this question will not be cheaply won. Initially Augustine tries to free himself from this "hell of error" through an attempt "to discover other principles" that might, with the same razor's edge as the initial principle, loose his bonds (iii, 5; iv, 6). But such principles are not immediately discernable. Even in these attempts at a purely conceptual discovery of the truth his search remains flawed:

I searched for the origin of evil, but I searched in a flawed way and did not see the flaw in my very search. I placed before my spirit a conspectus of the entire creation—all that we can perceive in it, earth, sea, air, stars, trees and mortal animals, and all that we cannot perceive, the firmament of heaven above, all the angels, and all the spiritual beings. But I imagined these being to be like bodies which are allocated to particular places. I conceived of your creation as a single vast mass differentiated by various types of bodies . . . I visualized you, Lord, surrounding it on all sides and permeating it, but infinite in all directions, as if there were a sea everywhere and stretching through immense distances, a single sea which had within it a large but finite sponge. (v, 7)

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<sup>5</sup> All citations from the *Confessions* are from: Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991).

Every attempt to think the nature of God and to thereby think through the problem of evil is foiled for Augustine by the way in which all of his thoughts remain chained to extended bodies. He attempts to search for principles, but what he searches through are images. Unwittingly, he both begins and ends his search for the conceptual with the sensible world: spirits themselves remain bodies and God is actually visualized. He knows that God must be infinite and that creation must be finite, but these terms—perhaps more so than any of the others—are not understood philosophically. Rather, both the finite and the infinite are taken to refer fundamentally to extension. To be finite is to occupy a limited space: like a sponge. To be infinite is to occupy an unlimited space: like an unending sea. Thus every attempt to discover additional conceptual principles remains fruitless. Augustine remains rudderless and he is left to look elsewhere in the hope of finding an appropriate supplement to thought.

## II. Supplementing the Purity of the Conceptual with the Richness of the Oracular

It is at this point in Book VII that Augustine turns to a consideration of astrology. This move is not accidental. Rather, it is our argument that this turn to astrology shows up as crucial in light of our question about the interplay of philosophy and scripture as it simultaneously serves two purposes: (1) astrology offers itself as an obvious, though ultimately rejected, answer to the problem of evil, but also (2) Augustine turns to astrology at precisely the moment when every attempt to think conceptually has failed. That is to say, Augustine's turn to the rich opacity of the oracular as a form of divine revelation foreshadows the way in which philosophy will ultimately have to turn to the Word of God as embodied in scripture in order to escape the monopolizing tyranny of sensible images.<sup>6</sup> Philosophy, lacking this mediating supplement, will again and again prove itself incapable of maintaining contact with the divine.

Augustine recounts that under the influence of some outspoken friends he had previously rejected the possibility of astrology offering any solution to the problem of evil. Astrology cannot account for the differences between the fates of a freeman and a slave both born at the same time. Further, it cannot account for the differences in the fates of twins. The calculations necessary in order to mark any difference between the fates decreed for them by the stars are impossible to make with the required precision. Some “contend that in the realm of nature this interval” between the birth of two twins “has considerable consequences. But it

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<sup>6</sup> This position takes issue with James J. O'Donnell's characterization of Augustine's discussion of astrology in the second volume of his commentary on the *Confessions* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), 405, as both “chronologically misplaced” and “poorly integrated with the surrounding context.” O'Donnell's description fails to take into account precisely the interplay of concept and image that we are here attempting to follow throughout Book VII.

cannot be recorded by human observation and noted in the tables that the astrologer will inspect to give a true forecast" (vi, 10). Astrology, then, is a "pseudo-science" that cannot offer itself to thought as genuinely conceptual (vi, 8).

Further, astrology fails to address the problem of evil because it posits that evil is something fated. It effectively negates free will as it forecasts the nature of each individual's destiny: "I was seeking the origin of evil and here was no solution" (vii, 11). Evil, as described by astrology, is something that is *suffered*. It is not the result of freely chosen human actions: evil is predestined. This solution will not do for a number of reasons. First, it makes God responsible for evil. And second, even at this point, Augustine was already "coming to recognize" free will as something unavoidably true: "when I willed or did not will something," Augustine says, "I was utterly certain that none other than myself was willing or not willing" (iii, 5). If this is the case, then evil is not fated but chosen.

But if astrology is plainly false, then how is it that it often makes accurate predictions? What accounts for its appeal and power? Augustine's answer is instructive, particularly in so far as astrology operates here as scripture's false double: astrology's secret power is due to (1) chance, and (2) the richness and opacity of its predictions. In these respects astrology reveals itself not only as "pseudo-science," but also as pseudo-revelation. Astrology works, Augustine says, because "human conjectures often have the power of chance" (vi, 8). It is the power of chance that closely mimics the operation of divine grace. This mimicry creates the illusion of revelation. But astrology also works, Augustine continues, because "the fortune-tellers say so much that some of their predictions are fulfilled, not because the forecasters know but because merely by not keeping silent they hit on the truth" (vi, 8). If enough is said, then some of it is bound to come true. And further, the more something is said *and the more obscurely it is said*, the more likely it is that the prophecy can be correlated with actual events. In this second respect astrology is again, for Augustine, mimicking the richness and complexity of scripture. Augustine discounts neither the value of rich symbolic complexity nor the graciousness of divine revelation. Astrology is not excluded from thought for either of these reasons. Rather, it is our contention that these qualities account, at least in part, for the very reason that Augustine at this point in the narrative turns to astrology. Failing to find the purely conceptual principles he needs, he turns to the possibility of a divine supplement. Astrology is not ruled out as necessary for the work of thought because it is oracular or revelatory, it is ruled out because it is only pseudo-oracular and pseudo-revelatory. Philosophy, however, despite the unsuitability of astrology, remains in need of a mediating supplement.

### III. The Power and Poverty of the Purely Conceptual

In the wake of astrology Augustine remains without manifest divine aid. In this condition, once again “those inferior things came on top of me and pressed me down, and there was never any relaxation or breathing space. As I gazed at them, they attacked me on all sides in massive heaps. As I thought about them, the very images of physical objects formed an obstacle to my return” (vii, 11). “My swelling conceit separated me from you, and the gross swelling on my face closed my eyes” (vii, 11). But, despite these difficulties, God’s gracious hand is operating behind the scenes and will become manifest not only in what follows for Augustine but also *in the order* of what follows. Before Augustine can recognize and appreciate the power of God’s mediating Word, he must first see clearly the end that it will put within reach. Before he can appreciate scripture, he must understand both the power *and* the poverty of philosophy.

“First,” Augustine recounts, “you wanted to show me how you ‘resist the proud and give grace to the humble’” (ix, 13). It is entirely appropriate, then, that “through a man puffed up with monstrous pride, you brought under my eyes some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin” (ix, 13). It is in Platonism that Augustine finally finds the conceptual principles he needs in order to cut through the tangle of bodies that constrain him. Here he finds the key. The Platonic books admonish him to return into himself and enter his “innermost citadel” (x, 16). As Colin Starnes describes this critical moment, the key is that Augustine now turns “the attention of his mind away from sensible bodies” and toward “intelligence *itself*, which had the idea of an infinite, universal and incorruptible good as the proper object of a certain knowledge.”<sup>7</sup> When he turns toward the purity of thought *itself*, Augustine is finally able to see with his soul’s eye

the immutable light higher than my mind—not the light of every day, obvious to anyone, nor a larger version of the same kind . . . . It was not that light, but a different thing, utterly different from all our kinds of light. It transcended my mind, not in the way that oil floats on water, nor as heaven is above earth. It is superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it. The person who knows the truth knows it, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it. Eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity: you are my God. To you I sigh ‘day and night.’ When I first came to know you, you raised me up to make me see that what I saw is Being, and that I who saw am not yet Being. (x, 16)

Turned inward, away from the images and bodies that oppress him, Augustine is able to think conceptually. Turned inward, Augustine becomes philosophical. He sees a light that is neither physical nor mega-physical. It is not superior to him because it is infinitely larger or spatially pervasive. It is superior because it is the

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<sup>7</sup> *Augustine’s Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP), 183-184. My italics.

Creator and he is the created. While the light is necessary, he is contingent. While it is sufficient, he is dependent. Succinctly stated, the light he sees is eternal Being.

Augustine has discovered the additional principle that will make it possible for him to think through the problem of evil. He has discovered *immaterial* substance: Being that is *not* a body. In particular, his discovery transforms his notions of the infinite and the finite. To be infinite means to be uncreated; it does not mean to be infinitely extended. To be finite means to be created; it does not mean to be a limited body. Once Augustine has realized this, then a panoramic vision of the entire chain of being opens up before him. He sees that goodness and being are convertible and that as a result everything that exists, no matter how contingently, is good: "As long as they exist, they are good" (xii, 18). The solution to the problem of evil is now clear: evil "is not a substance, for if it were a substance, it would be good" (xii, 18). Instead, evil is "a perversity of the will twisted away from the highest substance, you O God, towards inferior things, rejecting its own inner life and swelling with external matter" (xvi, 22). Finally Augustine has been granted the strong conceptual vision necessary in order to think clearly and connect with the divine. And as he does, the remarkable and indispensable power of the philosophical is displayed. If the eternal is what must be thought, then the strongly conceptual is the *way* it must be thought.

Augustine's stunning conceptual success is rivaled only by its monumental failure: "I was astonished to find that already I loved you . . . But I was not stable in the enjoyment of my God. I was caught up to you by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight. With a groan I crashed into inferior things. This weight was my sexual habit" (xvii, 23). Despite Augustine's meteoric ascent to eternal Being, he remains mortal. Despite the power of his mind, he remains weighed down by a body whose weight is here compactly represented by the singular problem of his sexual incontinence: "In the flash of a trembling glance it attained to that which is . . . But I did not possess the strength to keep my vision fixed. My weakness reasserted itself, and I returned to my customary condition" (xvii, 23). Augustine's mortality makes impossible for him any sustained capacity for pure conceptuality. For Augustine, philosophy, as the purely conceptual, requires a mediating supplement. It requires, precisely, "the Word made flesh."

#### **IV. Scripture as Incarnation: Food for Mortal Thought**

Augustine is clear about the need for a mediating supplement to philosophy. Mortals are not capable of sustaining philosophy otherwise. The univocal drive of the conceptual must be supplemented with the rich opacity of the symbolic image. Principle must be supplemented with narrative. Eternity must be mediated in time. Though astrology as pseudo-revelation proved itself

inappropriate for the task, scripture does not. Scripture bears in it the symbolic, narratival, and temporal elements needed for mediation. All of these ways in which scripture mediates thought are concisely represented in what for Augustine becomes a crucial expression: the Word made flesh.

Right from the beginning, even as he introduces us to Platonism, Augustine refuses to present the Platonists to us cleanly, purely, in their own words. He does not cite them. He will tell us what principles they convey, but only through the mediation of scripture. In the books of the Platonists, Augustine says, "I read, not of course in these words, but with entirely the same sense and supported by numerous and varied reasons, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God'" (ix, 13; cf. John 1:1). In Platonism, Augustine says, he found the conceptual truth. However, this conceptual truth was not only itself unmediated but failed, in every instance, to take note of God's gracious act of mediation. Though philosophy tells us that the Word is God, the light which makes and illuminates all things, only scripture marks the fact that the Word came to his own, giving them power to become the sons of God. Though philosophy makes plain that the Word is not of the flesh, only scripture reveals that the Word was *made* flesh. Though philosophy is clear that the Word abides eternally with God, only scripture bears record that the Word died for the impious. What is particularly important to notice is that in each of these instances scripture operates in two ways at once: (1) it bears witness to the incarnation of the Word, and (2) it embodies this same incarnation of the Word in the flesh. The Word was made flesh in Jesus, but an incarnation of the Word continues to be available to us in scripture. Scripture embodies in symbols and narratives the truth of the eternal Word. Most importantly, because it embodies these truths in symbolic images and narratives it is capable of continuing to mediate them to us. Scripture mediates the Mediator.

Though philosophy makes possible Augustine's escape from the vanity of images, it leaves him subject to the vicissitudes of pride. Philosophy is guilty of thinking itself capable of purely conceptual thought without God's mediating help. Philosophy must learn to be humble. It must learn to meekly bear the mediating yoke of the symbolic, of the Word made flesh. It may on its own touch the divine, but it will never of its own accord be capable of sustaining that contact. Philosophers may know God, but they do "not glorify him as God or give thanks, but are lost in their own thoughts and their foolish heart is obscured; professing themselves wise, they have become fools" (ix, 14; cf. Romans 1.21-23). This last citation precisely summarizes the dangers of any unmediated philosophy. The danger of purely conceptual thought is this: getting lost in our own thoughts. When thought gets lost in itself, it loses contact with that which it wishes to think. The result is that, for mortals, philosophy must always be mediated by the symbolic. The Word must be made flesh and thought must be nourished and strengthened by it. Subject to temporal distention, thought cannot simply think the eternal but must submit to think the eternal as it gives itself in

time; that is, as it gives itself in the temporally unifying operation of narrative. It must accept not only the Word, but the Word incarnate.

## V. Image and Concept: A Fragile Mortal Equilibrium

For Augustine the conceptual ultimately has priority. God *is* a pure immaterial substance that is univocal, eternal and immutable. Though the mediation is, for us, absolutely necessary, the mediation remains a mediation of eternal Being, a mediation wrought for the sake of allowing us access to the immutable Truth. Yet it is also the case that Augustine does not wish us to view the Word's flesh as disposable. A more difficult act of balancing philosophy and scripture is required.<sup>8</sup> Through conceptual clarity about the nature of God Augustine avoided the trap of Manichean dualism, but now he must be careful to avoid the trap of seeing *only* the conceptual as genuinely real. Such a point of view would lead to a devaluing of the incarnation, the created universe and, by extension, scripture.

Augustine, for instance, is careful to argue that the Word *did* become fully human. The Word's flesh was not a mere pretense: "I know that his flesh was not united to your Word without a soul and a human mind. Everyone knows this if he knows the immutability of your Word" (xix, 25). The union of Word and flesh was a genuine union: "I acknowledge the *whole* man to be Christ, not only the body of a man or a soul and body without a mind, but a fully human person" (xix, 25, italics mine). Christ was not simply the contingent representation of truth, the Word was not merely ephemerally associated for a moment with the flesh. Rather, Christ is "the personal embodiment of truth" and the Word *was made* flesh (xix, 25). All of this is to say that, despite the ultimate priority of the conceptual for Augustine, this priority in no way sanctions a dismissal of the mediating body of scripture. The unity of Word and flesh, of philosophy and scripture is not illusory, but real. In other words, as long as we are mortal, scripture will be necessary for thought.

That mortal thought cannot simply abandon scripture for philosophy can also be seen in Augustine's final explicit assessment in Book VII of the relationship

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<sup>8</sup> It is in this respect that Robert J. O'Connell fails to give Augustine an adequately charitable reading in his *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969), 88. O'Connell notes that his "analysis supposes, as both Plotinus and Augustine do, that 'imagination' and genuine 'thought' may be distinguished in the manner they insist those must, that 'imagination' can, therefore, be utterly 'untracked,' completely transcended when thinking on such matters as divine omnipresence. The supposition was, for purpose of this analysis, merely a methodological one. I doubt quite seriously that such a disincarnate performance is accessible to human intelligence." O'Connell seems to miss, however, the fact that Augustine is in full agreement: such a performance is indeed impossible for all mortals—hence the irrefutable need for scripture. Augustine preserves the distinction in light of an immortality to come.

between philosophy and scripture. Here we find a curious passage in which Augustine explains why it was important for him to have *first* read the Platonists, and then scripture:

I believe that you wanted me to encounter them [the Platonists] before I came to study your scriptures. Your intention was that the manner in which I was affected by them should be imprinted in my memory, so that when later I had been made docile by your books and my wounds were healed by your gentle fingers, I would learn to discern and distinguish between presumption and confession, between those who see what the goal is but not how to get there and those who see the way which leads to the home of bliss, not merely as an end to be perceived but as a realm to live in. For if I had first formed in mind your holy books, and if you had made me know your sweetness by familiarity with them, and then I had thereafter met those volumes, perhaps they would have snatched me away from the solid foundation of piety. Or if I had remained firm in the conviction which I had imbibed to my soul's health, I might have supposed that the same ideas could be gained from those books by someone who had read only them. (xx, 26)

There are a number of things that we should note about this passage. The first is that the difference between philosophy and scripture is here again described as the difference between presumption and confession or pride and humility. Thought can only approach God if its need for mediation is humbly confessed. Second, we should note here that philosophy and scripture are further distinguished in the following way: philosophy may be capable of momentarily recognizing the nature of God, but only the mediation of scripture makes possible an eventually permanent eternal reunion.<sup>9</sup>

But, most importantly, this passage is striking because of the way in which it re-describes the danger posed by philosophy. Why is it that Augustine's soul may have been snatched away from God if he had read scripture first and then come to the Platonists? What is the cause of the danger? The description seems to give a strong priority to philosophy: one ought to read philosophy first, then scripture; otherwise one's soul might be in danger. Is this prioritization a genuine possibility for Augustine?

In light of the work that we have done thus far it is now possible to offer a reading of this passage that does not simply re-privilege philosophy over scripture, but that instead maintains the fragile equilibrium of concept and image that we have labored to indicate as being at work throughout Book VII. The danger here indicated by Augustine is related to the way in which concept and

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<sup>9</sup> The danger here posed by philosophy may be fruitfully compared with Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological description of the idol. For Marion, the conceptual idol is the "low-water mark" of our contact with the divine. The difficulty with the idol is pride: the idol fails because its constitution involves only our own unaided capacity to grasp the divine. The idol is a frozen and reified glimpse of God. See especially Marion's discussion of the idol in the first chapter of *God without Being*, Trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991).

symbol interact. If the Platonists are viewed in their conceptual univocity prior to having read any scripture, then they show up in terms of a kind of transparency that limits them to simply saying what they say. But if the Platonists are read in conjunction with the rich plurivocity of scripture, then a third-dimension is introduced into their texts and they manifest a kind of Christian depth that, on their own, they fail to demonstrate. What is flatly explicit becomes full bodied when viewed in conjunction with the symbolically implicit. Thus, if you read the Platonists first, you see only their two-dimensional transparency and the inadequacies are apparent. But if you have already read scripture then these inadequacies may never show up *as such* and you may take the Platonists as being sufficient all on their own. This latter possibility is what has Augustine worried because it would lead directly to philosophical pride and would thus be disastrous for his confessional journey.

## VI. Conclusion

Throughout the course of Book VII of Augustine's *Confessions* we have traced an oscillating path from image to principle and from principle to image. We have moved from the vanity of the image alone to the pride of the concept alone to the humility of their fragile union in the Word made flesh. We have traced this path from the principle-based rejection of Manichean dualism to the rejection of astrology's pseudo-revelatory supplement to the inadequacies of the Platonists to the genuinely oracular supplement of the Gospel of John. Image, when predominate, is vanity. Concept, when unmediated, is prideful. But the union of image and concept in the humility of the Word made flesh gives life to mortal thought. Each of these turns in Book VII has indicated the way in which Augustine offers us a performance of the relationship between philosophy and scripture. Each of them indicates the way in which, for Augustine, the rich opacity of the image is necessary in order for conceptual thought to be strengthened and maintained. For Augustine, philosophy and scripture belong together.

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