

AGAINST THE ACADEMICS



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AGAINST
THE ACADEMICS
ST. AUGUSTINE'S
CASSICIACUM DIALOGUES,
VOLUME 1

Translation, Annotation, and Commentary by

Michael P. Foley

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*In grateful memory of
Fathers Ernest L. Fortin, A.A., and Matthew L. Lamb,
inspiring teachers who sparked, fanned, and guided
my love of these dialogues.*

Noverim me, noverim te.
May I know myself, may I know Thee.

—*Soliloquies 2.1.1*

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PREFACE

My goal in translating the four Cassiciacum dialogues of St. Augustine is to introduce the serious English-speaking student to an extraordinary tetralogy that is relatively underestimated and prone to misappropriation. Accordingly, this translation aspires to be as literal as is reasonable.

A literal translation, in which Latin words are given their closest approximation in English and in which the same English words are generally used for their Latin equivalent, suffers from several drawbacks. First, it is cumbersome. Trained in rhetoric, Augustine chose words not only for their meaning, but for their resonance; unfortunately, any mellifluence or connotations that go with that resonance are compromised in translation. Second, it is disconcerting. Certain styles or conventions popular in Augustine's time, such as the earthiness adorning even the most sublime of passages, are no longer in favor. Nowadays, for instance, grown men do not generally speak of fleeing to the nursing bosom of Lady Philosophy (see *Against the Academics* 1.1.4). Third, an absolutely consistent literal translation is impossible when translating a language with fewer than sixteen thousand words into one with more than thirty times that number. Latin's modest vocabulary encourages an

author working in that language to use one word several different ways whereas an English author is freer to use a different word each time. To translate, then, the same Latin word with the same English word in every instance can be misleading, and it clanks against the Anglophonic ear. But not to translate certain terms consistently, despite its oddity in English, would be to forgo perhaps vital clues the author has left in his text—for a language's apparent weaknesses can turn out to be hidden strengths in the hands of the right wordsmith.

In an attempt to overcome these difficulties, I adopted the following strategy. First, I allowed the goal of a literal translation to be trumped by the canons of good prosody when the literal meaning was virtually nonsensical and when a freer translation posed no threat to understanding the intellectual content of the work. When Augustine says in *Against the Academics*, “Don’t look . . . for something that is difficult to find anywhere among the peoples (*gentium*),” he is using a classical figure of speech, where *gentium* means “on earth” (1.2.6); hence, it is translated accordingly. Second, when I do depart significantly from the literal sense of the text, I acknowledge it in the Notes so that the reader may retain some access to the original wording. And third, I employ a Translation Key. When a significant Latin term can be translated several different ways, I note its variants; and when there is only one English word for two different Latin words, I designate one of the English words with an asterisk (*) and pair it with only one of the Latin words to distinguish it from the other (here I am inspired by Hippocrates Apostle’s translations of Aristotle). Augustine, for instance, uses both *animus* and *anima* for the soul, and so the former appears as “soul” and the latter as “soul*.” Both the annotation and the Translation Key, incidentally, are intended for readers making a close study of the text who may not be proficient in Latin.

If, however, these aids become a distraction from reading and enjoying the dialogues, readers should ignore them. Tools that are not helpful should be placed back into the box.

Yet despite the aforementioned drawbacks and the extra effort that must be made to overcome them, a literal translation remains advantageous for one simple reason: it alone liberates readers from what has been called the tyranny of the translator. Animated by the commendable goal of easy comprehension, translators are often tempted to paraphrase loosely in order to make the meaning of texts more digestible or palatable to a contemporary audience. Such translations, it is claimed, save readers from the disorientation that would ensue from an unmediated encounter with an alien worldview. Free translations of this sort constitute a kind of well-intentioned paternalism.

There is a thin line, however, between being paternalistic and being patronizing, and translators who do not faithfully reproduce a text into another language unwittingly take a condescending attitude, it seems to me, both to the authors they are translating and to the readers for whom they are translating: to authors, because their ideas are implicitly treated as inferior to those that are currently popular; and to readers, because it is assumed that they have neither the desire nor the capacity to wrestle with the work as originally crafted.

The antidote to this condescension, as a twentieth-century political philosopher once noted, is for the translator to “conceive of himself as a medium between a master whose depths he has not plumbed and an audience of potential students of that master who may be much better endowed than is the translator.” This model works well for translating the writings of St. Augustine. As Augustine himself reminds us in *On the Teacher*, in order to know the meanings of words, we must first know the realities to which they point; and as

he discusses in *On Christian Doctrine*, both the mode of ascertaining meaning and the mode of communicating it once it is ascertained are difficult to carry out. Some of the realities to which Augustine points are indeed difficult to grasp, especially in dialogues that, he stresses, deal with a subject only the rarest type of human being can comprehend (see *On Order* 1.1.1). It therefore behooves translators of Augustine to approach their task with special care and humility, even a sense of unworthiness.

Humility is an important quality for readers as well. Rather than approach these ancient texts as possibly interesting monuments to a quaint or benighted chapter in world history, I earnestly recommend that we read them as if our very lives depended on them, as if they were our only chance of escaping the shadowy cave into which historical happenstance or our own short-sightedness has placed us. I do so from the conviction that a great book offers the hope of freeing us of the prejudices that from our earliest days we have sucked up like mother's milk or into which our dissolute living has placed us (see Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.1.2). What we learn might not, in the final analysis, be any less fallible than our own opinions, but the only way we will know for certain is if we let authors speak for themselves, listening with one sincere assumption: that they have something worthwhile to say. Perhaps then and only then will we be able to graduate from milk to meat.

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TRANSLATION KEY

The following table shows the translations of several key terms in Augustine's early dialogues, first in English-Latin and then in Latin-English. Exceptions to the rules given here are mentioned in the annotation of each work. As mentioned in the Preface, when there is only one English word for two different Latin words, I designate one of the English words with an asterisk and pair it with only one of the Latin words to contradistinguish it from the other.

<i>English</i>	<i>Latin</i>
to approve	In Academic thought, when assent to something as true is impossible, the wise man may approve (<i>approbare</i>) of certain things as plausible or probable so that he may have a ground for action (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.5.12).
to assent	The wise man, according to Academic skepticism, should give his assent (<i>assentiri</i>) only to that which he absolutely knows to be true (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.5.11–12).

to know	Augustine uses several Latin verbs for “knowing” or “becoming acquainted with,” such as <i>noscere</i> , <i>cognoscere</i> , and <i>novisse</i> . These usually refer to a knowledge of passing, temporal things, but sometimes, because they are fairly generic terms, they can also be used to designate knowledge of the highest and eternal things.
to know*	<i>Scire</i> is the verb that is generally, though not always, used to designate the highest and most secure kind of knowing (see <i>On the Happy Life</i> 2.7, <i>Soliloquies</i> 2.1.1).
knowledge	<i>Cognitio</i> is most often a generic term for knowledge.
knowledge*	<i>Scientia</i> usually refers to the highest kind of knowledge, that is, the grasp of eternal realities such as the truths disclosed in the liberal arts. See <i>On the Immortality of the Soul</i> 1.1: “All that the soul knows (<i>scit</i>), it has within itself; nor does knowledge (<i>scientia</i>) contain anything other than that which pertains to some discipline, for discipline is the knowledge (<i>scientia</i>) of anything whatsoever” (see also <i>Against the Academics</i> 1.7.19).
measure	<i>Modus</i> , which is also translated as “limit,” is a key concept in the dialogues, especially in <i>On Order</i> . In <i>On the Happy Life</i> 4.34, Augustine describes God the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, as the <i>summus modus</i> or “Supreme Measure.”
mind	<i>Animus</i> is also translated as “soul” or even “heart,” depending on context (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.2.3 and entry for <i>animus</i> below).
mind*	<i>Mens</i> , along with reason (<i>ratio</i>), is defined by Augustine as the ruling part of the soul (<i>animus</i>) (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 1.2.5). In <i>Soliloquies</i> 1.6.13 it is characterized as the “senses” or “eyes” of the soul (<i>anima</i>), while reason (<i>ratio</i>) is the “looking” of the soul and understanding (<i>intellectus</i>) is the “seeing” of the soul.

opinion	In some respects the antithesis of knowledge or <i>scientia</i> , opinion is that from which the philosopher, especially the Academic skeptic, wishes to be free (see <i>opinio</i> below).
to perceive	<i>Percipere</i> is usually used in reference to basic sensory activities rather than higher acts of understanding. It can, however, designate comprehension of an intelligible reality, as when one “perceives” the truth or falsehood of a definition (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 3.9.21).
probable	<i>Probabile</i> , mostly translated as “probable,” is associated with the Academic doctrine of probability or plausibility (see <i>probabile</i> below).
to sense	<i>Sentire</i> is usually used in reference to either bodily sensation or the mental awareness and use of the bodily senses. It is usually translated as “to sense” or “to feel,” though context sometimes compels other variations, such as “to judge” at <i>Against the Academics</i> 1.3.8.
sense, sensation, etc.	<i>Sensus</i> is translated, depending on context, as “senses,” “sensation,” or “sense-perception.” <i>Sensus</i> can refer either to the five bodily senses of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell or the mental faculty that enables people to use their senses for seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 1.1.3, <i>Soliloquies</i> 2.2.3); in one case, Augustine uses <i>sensus</i> for the capacity to understand (<i>On the Happy Life</i> 4.25). Augustine regrets that he did not differentiate between physical and mental <i>sensus</i> by adding “bodily” to the former kind (see <i>Retractations</i> 1.1.2; <i>Soliloquies</i> 1.6.12, 2.2.3).
soul	<i>Animus</i> is also translated as “mind” or even “heart,” depending on context (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.2.3; see also entry for <i>animus</i> below). <i>Animus</i> is used only for human, that is, rational, souls.

soul*	<i>Anima</i> is that which gives life to the body or flesh (see <i>Confessions</i> 10.7.11). All plants and animals as well as humans have <i>anima</i> or this principle of life (see <i>Soliloquies</i> 1.2.7). One of Augustine's goals in the <i>Soliloquies</i> is to prove that the <i>anima</i> of a human being is immortal.
understanding	<i>Intellectus</i> is also sometimes translated as "intellect." In <i>Soliloquies</i> 1.6.13, <i>intellectus</i> is defined as the "seeing" (<i>visio</i>) of the soul (<i>anima</i>), while mind (<i>mens</i>) is the "senses" or "eyes" of the soul and reason (<i>ratio</i>) the "looking" of the soul. In <i>On the Immortality of the Soul</i> 6.10, <i>intellectus</i> is similarly defined as the "seeing" of the soul (<i>animus</i>). In <i>Against the Academics</i> 3.19.42, the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, is the Divine Understanding.
verisimilar	<i>Verisimile</i> is also translated as "similar to the true" or "like the true." It is a technical term employed by the Academic skeptics, reputed to be synonymous with "plausible" or "probable" (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.5.12).

Latin

English

<i>anima</i>	"Soul*" is that which gives life to the body or flesh (see <i>Confessions</i> 10.7.11). All plants and animals as well as humans have <i>anima</i> or this principle of life (see <i>Soliloquies</i> 1.2.7). One of Augustine's goals in the <i>Soliloquies</i> is to prove that the <i>anima</i> of a human being is immortal.
<i>animus</i>	"Mind," "soul," or even "heart" (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.2.3), depending on the context. In <i>On the Immortality of the Soul</i> , Augustine writes that in humans, reason is either <i>animus</i> or in <i>animus</i> (2.2) and that when we reason, it is <i>animus</i> that is doing it (1.1). The best or "ruling" part of <i>animus</i> in humans is <i>mind</i> (<i>mens</i>) or reason (<i>ratio</i>) (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 1.2.5). In the <i>Confessions</i> Augustine

writes that to *anima* belongs sensation as well as the interior sense that correlates sensory data and of which *animus* makes use (10.6.10–10.7.11).

<i>approbare,</i> <i>approbatio</i>	To “approve” or “give approval.” In Academic thought, when assent to something as true is impossible, the wise man may approve of certain things as plausible or probable so that he may have a ground for action (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.5.12).
<i>assentiri,</i> <i>assensio</i>	To “assent” or “give assent.” The wise man, according to Academic skepticism, should give his assent only to that which he absolutely knows to be true (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.5.11–12).
<i>cognitio</i>	Most often, a generic term for knowledge.
<i>comprehendo</i>	To “comprehend” or “grasp,” either by the senses or by the mind (depending on context). According to the Stoics, when a mind truly comprehends something, it has such a clear impression of it that it is completely different in every way from a false impression. This gives rise to an irresistible conviction in the knower’s mind that the impression is true (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.5.11).
<i>fallor</i>	“To be mistaken” or “to be deceived,” depending on context. In the <i>Soliloquies</i> , Reason defines <i>fallax</i> as something that is deliberately deceitful rather than merely untrue or fictitious (2.9.16), but this definition is not adhered to throughout the dialogues as a whole.
<i>intellectus</i>	“Understanding,” “the understanding,” or, sometimes, the “intellect.” In <i>Soliloquies</i> 1.6.13, <i>intellectus</i> is defined as the “seeing” (<i>visio</i>) of the soul* (<i>anima</i>), while mind (<i>mens</i>) is the “senses” or “eyes” of the soul and reason (<i>ratio</i>) is the “looking” of the soul. In <i>On the Immortality of the Soul</i>

6.10, *intellectus* is similarly defined as the “seeing” of the soul (*animus*). In *Against the Academics* 3.19.42, the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, is the Divine Understanding.

mens “Mind*,” along with reason (*ratio*), is defined by Augustine as the ruling part of the soul (*animus*) (*Against the Academics* 1.2.5). In *Soliloquies* 1.6.13 *mens* is characterized as the “senses” or “eyes” of the soul (*anima*), while reason (*ratio*) is the “looking” of the soul and understanding (*intellectus*) is the “seeing” of the soul.

modus “Measure” or “limit” is a key concept in the dialogues, especially in *On Order*. In *On the Happy Life* 4.34, Augustine describes God the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, as the *summus modus* or “Supreme Measure.”

noscere,
cognoscere,
novisse “To know,” either as a knowledge of passing, temporal things or as a more generic term for knowing that could include knowledge of the highest and eternal things.

opinari, opinatio,
opinio, opinor “To form an opinion” or “to opine,” “forming an opinion,” “opinion,” “opiner,” respectively. A technical term in Academic thought, an opinion should never be formed by the wise man, although he may hold various positions or make decisions on the basis of things that he approves as plausible or probable. In the Cassiciacum dialogues, the Latin phrase *ut opinor* (in my opinion) is fairly common and may not have a technical connotation.

percipere “To perceive,” usually used in reference to basic sensory activities rather than higher acts of understanding. It can, however, designate comprehension of an intelligible reality, as when one perceives the truth or falsehood of a definition (see *Against the Academics* 3.9.21).

- probabile* A critical term for the Academics in their defense against the Stoic charge of *apraxia*, namely, that their skepticism leads to inactivity. In Academic thought, *probabile* signifies something that is “plausible,” “persuasive,” or “approvable” rather than something that is certainly true to which one can give full assent. It is allegedly synonymous with “verisimilar.” *Probabile* is mostly translated as “probable,” but it should not be confused with the modern notion of probability as a form of statistical likelihood.
- scientia* “Knowledge*” usually refers to the highest kind of knowledge possible, that is, the grasp of eternal realities such as the truths disclosed in the liberal arts. See *On the Immortality of the Soul* 1.1: “All that the soul knows (*scit*), it has within itself; nor does knowledge (*scientia*) contain anything other than that which pertains to some discipline, for discipline is the knowledge (*scientia*) of anything whatsoever” (see also *Against the Academics* 1.7.19).
- scire* “To know*.” *Scire* is the verb that is generally, though not always, used to designate the highest or most secure kind of knowing (see *On the Happy Life* 2.7; *Soliloquies* 2.1.1).
- sensus* *Sensus* can refer to either the five bodily senses of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell or the mental faculty that enables people to use their senses for seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling (see *Against the Academics* 1.1.3; *Soliloquies* 2.2.3). In one case, Augustine uses *sensus* for the capacity to understand (*On the Happy Life* 4.25). He regrets that he did not differentiate between physical and mental *sensus* by adding “bodily” to the former kind (see *Retractations* 1.1.2; *Soliloquies* 1.6.12, 2.2.3).
- sententia* Most often, a “position” (a stance in thought or debate), but also a “notion,” “statement,” “viewpoint,” and “decision” (especially an official juridical decision).

<i>sentire</i>	Usually, “to sense” or “to feel,” though context sometimes compels other variations. It is used in reference to either bodily sensation or the mental awareness and use of the bodily senses.
<i>verisimile</i>	“Verisimilar,” “similar to the true,” or “like the true.” It is a technical term employed by the Academics, reputed to be synonymous with “plausible” or “probable” (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 2.5.12).
<i>visum, videri</i>	<i>Visum</i> is the past participle of <i>videre</i> (to see). It sometimes takes on the technical meaning of an “impression” in Stoic epistemology and is translated as such (see <i>Against the Academics</i> 3.9.18). The verb <i>videri</i> is translated as “seems” or “appears” and has to do with the realm of appearances or percepts that are not necessarily real or true.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE CASSICIACUM DIALOGUES

AUGUSTINE AT CASSICIACUM

In the autumn of A.D. 386, St. Augustine retired to the country villa of his wealthy friend Verecundus, located somewhere north of Milan in a place called Cassiciacum. He had brought with him several of his acquaintances and loved ones: his friend Alypius, his mother Monica, his illegitimate son Adeodatus, his brother Navigius, his cousins Lartidianus and Rusticus, and two spirited pupils named Licentius and Trygetius. There, Augustine not only recovered from the chest pains that had compelled his recent resignation as a teacher of rhetoric, but he began to reflect more deeply on the faith he had come to accept as true. The conversations held during this time of “fruitful leisure,” interrupted occasionally by farm work and violent poultry, were allegedly preserved with the help of stenographers who were hired largely for practical reasons: to spare Augustine’s health by reducing his need to speak and to provide a record for those who were not present. Later, Augustine edited the transcriptions with the help of his co-retreatant Alypius. Rather than preserving the discussions verbatim or arranging them chronologically, the two friends fashioned dialogues along pedagogical and thematic lines. The

result of these labors is the tetralogy of *Against the Academics*, *On the Happy Life*, *On Order*, and the *Soliloquies*.¹

What was Augustine hoping to achieve at Verecundus's villa? Certainly, he was preparing for his baptism and initiation into the Catholic Church, which would take place in Milan the following Holy Saturday on April 24–25, 387. Augustine had converted to Christianity in the late summer of 386, an event that he vividly recounts in book eight of the *Confessions*; but his actual reception into the Church would take time. One of the interesting aspects, then, about the Cassiciacum dialogues is that they were written by a mere catechumen, a candidate for baptism. Because of the early Church's so-called *disciplina arcani*, or "discipline of the secret," being a catechumen in the late fourth century meant not experiencing all of the Church's practices and teachings. Augustine the catechumen may have engaged in advanced theological speculation at Cassiciacum, but he probably did not know the wording to the Apostles' Creed, which was taught to catechumens only a few weeks before their baptism. And he may have known that the Eucharist was the bread of life, but he had probably never seen the Eucharist, since catechumens were dismissed from Mass after the homily.² On the other hand, Augustine profited much from listening to the sermons of St. Ambrose, from his socializing with the intellectual elite of Christian Milan (such as Manlius Theodorus, to whom he dedicates *On the Happy Life*), and from his own studies. Consequently, even though he was not yet a Christian layman, Augustine was well equipped for his first written venture into what is now sometimes called philosophical theology.

But more than prepare for his own baptism, Augustine wanted to lead others to the same breakthroughs that had brought him to where he was. This aspiration is evident in his solicitude for his students Licentius and Trygetius, as well as in his appeals to Romanianus and

Zenobius, the two friends to whom he dedicates *Against the Academics* and *On Order*, respectively. It is not difficult to infer that Augustine is also eager to assist his readers in the same way.

Those breakthroughs of Augustine's, as I have called them, are more aptly described as a "conversion," or turning around, and following the narrative order of the *Confessions*, they may be roughly identified as belonging to one of three kinds.³ In book seven of the *Confessions*, Augustine describes an "intellectual" conversion that was instigated by a reading of the Platonists; in book eight, he recounts a "moral" conversion that finally freed him from his addiction to the pleasures of the flesh; and in book nine, he touches upon a "religious" conversion that formally "bound" him to God in baptism and enabled him to experience, together with his mother Monica, the so-called Vision of Ostia.

The *Confessions* was written two decades after the Cassiciacum corpus, but the same three kinds of conversion are present in Augustine's early thought and can therefore serve as a useful reference point for interpreting the dialogues. The most conspicuous of the three at Cassiciacum is intellectual conversion, the cognitional revolution whereby one is able to differentiate between sensible and intelligible reality, that is, between that which can be grasped by any of the five bodily senses and that which is grasped by the mind or intellect alone. Contrary to our daily commonsensical assumptions that privilege the tangible, visible, audible, olfactible, and gustable, the intellectually converted mind recognizes that the reality of physical things is caused by something that is not physical but can be grasped only by our intelligence, far removed from the senses and even from physical images of any kind. This revolution in thinking, which ascends from sensible data to realities not intrinsically conditioned by space, time, or matter, is crucial because it alone enables one to understand, however dimly, the two things

that Augustine identifies in the *Soliloquies* as most worth knowing: God and the soul.

Moreover, intellectual conversion is made possible by a special “return to ourselves” whereby we recognize our own minds and our own desire to know as intelligible rather than sensible realities.⁴ Erik Kenyon identifies this return to oneself as the not-so-hidden agenda unifying all of Augustine’s dialogues: behind every “first-order debate” about a topic (skepticism, happiness, theodicy, etc.) is a “second order” that consists of an “inquiry into inquiry.” The *Cassiciacum* dialogues, Kenyon goes so far as to argue, “look foremost” not to a set of answers about first-order issues but “to the act of inquiry itself: The fact that we can inquire at all tells us various things about ourselves. By reflecting on our own act of inquiry, we are put in a position to improve how we go about inquiring” because reflection on our inquiry yields a discovery of “cognitive norms of thought” operative in “most if not all acts of rational inquiry.” Such a discovery clears the mind of errors such as materialism and serves as a guide for further investigation.⁵ The liberal arts, which come up frequently at *Cassiciacum*, are instrumental in these purging breakthroughs because their aim, according to Augustine, is to point to eternal, intelligible realities and to canons of reason that competently direct human inquiry.

Yet although intellectual conversion through a return to oneself is crucial to grasping reality as it truly is, such a conversion is an insufficient condition for acting responsibly and justly. “And what did it profit me when I read and understood all the books of the arts which they call liberal,” Augustine asks in the *Confessions*, “while I remained the vile slave of evil desires?” Besides a conversion of one’s intellect or understanding, a conversion of one’s behavior or mores needs to occur that enables one not only to know the good

but to do the good, to feel and act in a way that is consistent with what is right. It is Augustine's concern for moral conversion at Cassiciacum that explains his attentiveness to "the order for living," his advice to his pupils on how to live well, and his sharp criticism of them when they fail to do so. It also explains why Reason, Augustine's mysterious interlocutor in the *Soliloquies*, probes Augustine's heart with embarrassing questions designed to gauge whether he has suffered any moral relapses.⁶

Moral conversion begins the life of ethical excellence and makes one fit to have the best kind of friendships. That said, neither intellectual nor moral conversion satisfies the deepest yearnings of the human mind and heart. Something more is needed, both as a completion and grounding of these conversions and in order to bring the human person to ultimate happiness. Hence the need for religious conversion, which in biblical terms is the replacement of one's heart of stone with a heart of flesh (see Ezek 36:26) that enables one to love the Lord God with one's whole heart, whole soul, and whole strength (see Deut 6:4–5). Religious conversion is a surrender to divine love. It is "religious" in its modern meaning as ordered toward a formal and communal worship of God, but it is also "religious" in its ancient meaning as a binding (*religio*) of the soul to God. For Augustine, both senses are operative in the sacrament of baptism; and for Augustine, such a binding in the Christian religion does not involve a restriction but an expansion of one's freedom as well as a perfection or completion of the other two conversions, for in addition to knowing the good and doing the good, the individual is now capable of fully loving the good. "Without doubt," Monica concludes in the second dialogue, "this is the happy life, the life that is perfect. And we must presume that we who are hurrying to it can be brought to it by a firm faith, a lively hope, and an ardent charity."⁷

By being attentive to Augustine's overarching goal at Cassiciacum of intellectually, morally, and religiously converting his audience, readers can better appreciate the various twists and turns that the dialogues take. And these three kinds of conversions can even act as a gauge for the similarities and differences between the *Confessions* and the writings from Cassiciacum. Rather than trace Augustine's alleged move away from Neoplatonism to orthodox Christianity as many have tried, it may be more fruitful to ask whether or to what degree Augustine's thinking changed on the importance of each conversion or their ordering to each other.⁸ For instance, on the question of whether intellectual conversion is necessary in order for one to be relatively happy in this life, *On Order* would seem to answer in the affirmative, but the *Confessions* would seem to answer in the negative. And as to whether one needs to be morally converted before one can undergo an intellectual conversion, *Against the Academics* and *On Order* would seem to answer yes despite the fact that in the *Confessions* these conversions are narrated in the reverse order.⁹

THE DIALOGUE GENRE

The Platonic Template

Augustine chose the philosophical dialogue as the means of goading his readers to this triple conversion. To understand why, it is necessary to gain a better appreciation of this peculiar genre. The dialogue form as developed by Plato may be described as a way of effecting a sort of ceasefire in what Socrates calls "the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry."¹⁰ Poetry, when conceived broadly to include all forms of narrative, holds considerable sway over the hearts of men and women by dint of its power to stir their emotions and imagination. Poetry thus becomes a major source of

“values” for a people, functioning as the lens through which its followers filter, interpret, and evaluate their experiences. This reliance on the poets’ authority and their fiction has the subtle effect of deterring men and women from independent and rational inquiry, the result being that more attention is paid to the poet’s book than to the book of the world. Poetry therefore tends to be at odds with philosophy—that way of life which seeks a knowledge of the nature of things free of both opinion and authority. The concrete manifestation of this antagonism is a popular hatred of the philosopher (as we see in the trial of Socrates at Athens) and a philosophical censure of the poet (as we see in Socrates’s criticisms of Homer). Further, because it generally appeals to the lowest and basest passions, poetry would seem to have a dubious effect on the moral development of its readers or hearers.

The Platonic dialogue, on the other hand, remains faithful to Socrates’s way of life while successfully overcoming his reservations about poetry. The philosophical dialogue does not have the overpowering pathos of an epic or tragedy, a restraint that keeps readers’ minds less lulled and more alert. Moreover, the dialectical quality of a dialogue, in which a single question often begets several contradictory answers, places on readers a certain onus to figure out the dialogue’s true import, to sift through the various answers and scrutinize them closely. Rather than be hypnotized by charm and beauty, readers are prompted by the dialogue to be perceptive and rational.¹¹

This prompting may be said to consist of three dimensions. The first dimension of breadth or horizontality, of back-and-forth, requires readers to connect what they are reading now to what has gone before and to modify their impressions in light of what comes next. The second dimension of verticality, or up-and-down, requires readers to connect the narrative to the realities up to which

they are pointing as well as to be cognizant of tensions or hints that are percolating below the surface. Finally, the third dimension of depth, from there-to-here, requires readers to discover or verify things for themselves, not in a relativistic or subjectivist way, but in light of the narrative clues and “cognitive norms of thought” (to borrow Kenyon’s phrase) that are immanent in their own ability to know. Indeed, it is this third dimension—which in ocular vision gives depth perception—that can lead to self-knowledge.

The three-dimensionality of a philosophical dialogue is thus designed to bring readers to a state of knowing or discovery. But is it also designed to conceal? A philosophical dialogue can fall into anyone’s hands, including the hands of someone for whom certain truths, at least at this stage in his or her life, would only do harm.¹² Further, since all political society (even that of an enlightened democracy) rests on dogmatic assumptions that must remain more or less publicly unquestioned for the sake of civic stability, philosophers must exercise considerable caution lest their philosophizing undermine the opinions necessary for a vibrant polity.

Consequently, it has been speculated that authors like Plato wrote in such a way that the more dangerous, destabilizing aspects of philosophy were carefully kept from the general readership and revealed to only a minority of readers through various clues in the text. A single dialogue could therefore have two different “messages”: an “external” one for the philosophically challenged and an “internal” one for the philosophically inclined. In antiquity, these two different teachings came to be known as “exoteric” and “esoteric,” respectively. Conceived thus, the philosophical dialogue may be compared to a tamper-proof aspirin bottle: its real content can be obtained only by those who are mature enough to figure out the directions, while the rest are kept from something that would only damage their health.¹³

The Augustinian Dialogue

Whatever conclusions one may wish to draw about a “secret teaching” in the writings of ancient philosophers, it cannot be denied that the Cassiciacum dialogues are self-consciously situated within a broad tradition of philosophical *poesis* that includes the possibility of esotericism. Augustine was keenly aware of the three-dimensional, protreptic value of the dialogue genre. In *On Order* 1.11.31 he mocks those who pay no attention to what in a dialogue “is being explained and accomplished” (the vertical dimension) as well as those who ignore the whence and “whither of the discussants’ efforts” (the horizontal). Augustine also emphasizes readers’ independent discovery of the truth vis-à-vis the texts (depth perception). As he tells Romanianus in *Against the Academics*, everything accomplished in the dialogues will remain a mere opinion in the mind of a reader rather than genuine knowledge until the reader enters “entirely into philosophy” and verifies the truth personally (2.3.8).

Moreover, as his interpretation of Cicero and the Academic skeptics attests, Augustine also knew of the esoteric possibilities of philosophical literature. He even appears to have appropriated some aspects of esoteric writing. Like Plato and Cicero, Augustine draws a line between the very rare kind of human being who can understand reality as it truly is and the vast majority who do not, and he likewise recognizes the danger in teaching the truth to those who are not ready for it. But there is one event separating Augustine and the philosophers that might explain how he differs from them: the Incarnation. God’s humbling Himself and taking the form of a servant allows the carnal multitude for the first time to “return to their very selves and even gaze upon their homeland without the bickering of disputations.” The divine Word becoming human flesh does not eliminate the fallen world’s hatred of the light, and thus a careful reserve in expressing the truth is still

necessary. But it does place a certain responsibility on the believer to bear witness to the truth and to avoid incurring any suspicion that the good news being preached is concocted. For Augustine, having an “exoteric” message that is meant to deceive nonphilosophical readers, even if well intentioned, is incompatible with the demands of the Gospel.¹⁴

Augustine’s principled opposition to mendacity does not mean, however, that his dialogues are entirely veracious. In the *Soliloquies*, Augustine notes that not all falsehoods are lies: joke tellers, for instance, are not considered liars because their intention is not to deceive, and the same holds true for comic playwrights. Augustine himself admits that he can be ironic in these works. Overtly playful elements abound, such as the discussion in *On Order* about whether it is permissible to chant sacred music while answering the call of nature, but others are more veiled. A distant disciple of Augustine, St. Thomas More, was characterized as feigning seriousness so well when he was joking that his listeners had difficulty knowing when he spoke “in sport” and when “in good earnest.” One wonders whether the same could not be said about Augustine at Cassiciacum. Key to any philosophical dialogue is its comic quality, a trait no doubt partially due to the philosopher’s bemused indifference to the petty things, such as money or health or recognition, that most human beings regard with inordinate seriousness: a truly great soul, Cicero reminds his son, “holds as trivial the things that to the many seem to be outstanding and important.” But more fundamentally, the dialogue’s comic structure forces readers to get the joke, to discover on their own the knowledge being sought, and thus experience the delight of comprehension. Or put differently, with its beguiling three dimensions the dialogue is an ideal vehicle for exercising and provoking readers to the insights that induce or prepare for conversion. And this

spiritual exercise includes mental curveballs that put us through our paces and render us sharper by befuddling us and prompting us to consult our own intelligence and the world that is. The Cassiciacum dialogues may not contain “noble lies,” but they may contain noble untruths to test and challenge us.¹⁵

Reading a Cassiciacum Dialogue

At the very least, the dialogic character of the Cassiciacum corpus requires us to approach it as we would any other dramatic narrative. Never, for example, can we assume that the opinions of the interlocutors are those of Augustine the author, and neither can we even take for granted that the opinions of Augustine the character are those of Augustine the author. In deliberate imitation of daily life, what a character chooses to say is often contingent on who is present and who is not, on what personal motives are operative, and on what has just transpired. Consequently, abstracting from the dialogue’s dramatic dimensions misleadingly reduces a subtle interplay of dynamics to a colorless series of propositions, thereby stripping the dialogue of a content that often lies in the penumbra of the text. As with any other narrative, a dialogue’s characters, setting, plot, and time—not to mention the various incidentals mentioned throughout—are crucial.

Uncovering the many meanings of the dialogue therefore requires being fully and almost urgently attentive to the action of the work. As with a theatrical play, the Cassiciacum dialogues are to be experienced as if they were transpiring before our very eyes. Augustine follows the common ancient convention of putting narrative interjections such as “he says” in the present tense, but he amplifies this sense of presence with frequent exhortations to “pay attention” and “be here.” Even more, Augustine says that we should put ourselves *into* the text. We will learn many things,

Augustine tells Zenobius, if we engraft ourselves onto, and “co-fit” ourselves into, these works.¹⁶

It also helps to read the dialogues together. Augustine wrote the tetralogy in such a way that the teachings of one are clarified or even modified by those of another. We have already mentioned that the Cassiciacum dialogues function as a kind of spiritual exercise for readers, and exercise suffers when parts of a workout program are cut out randomly. Oddly, history has been fairly deaf to this obvious fact. Of the manuscript traditions bequeathed to us from the Middle Ages, not a single one includes all four dialogues together. *Against the Academics* and *On Order* were generally paired with each other while *On the Happy Life* was relegated elsewhere. Finally, the *Soliloquies* was either published alone or with later compositions of Augustine, but never with any of the other three dialogues. This dismemberment of the Cassiciacum corpus continued into the twentieth century with most editions of modern translations. From this pattern of publication we may tentatively conclude that for the bulk of their existence and despite their author’s explicit intentions, the dialogues have not been read as a coherent unit. Consequently, one of the goals behind this present four-volume edition is to reunite what the accidents of history have put asunder.

Lastly, it is profitable to read the dialogues in order. Like several of Plato’s and Cicero’s dialogues, the Cassiciacum tetralogy is meant to be read in a particular sequence for the full effect. Intellectual, moral, and religious conversion begins with a rejection of skepticism, which deadens the desire for truth by preaching its unattainability (*Against the Academics*); progresses with an intensified desire to become happy and know God, who is the Truth (*On the Happy Life*); turns on an understanding of God’s order through the soul’s coming to know itself (*On Order*); and is ratified

with a more explicit affirmation of the soul's knowledge of itself and its participation in God (*Soliloquies*).¹⁷

AUGUSTINE'S SOURCES

Another constructive way to approach the Cassiciacum dialogues is with respect to the history out of which they emerged. Because of Augustine's numerous achievements over the course of his life, it is tempting to read the dialogues as primitive or even flawed anticipations of later works such as the *Confessions*, *On the Trinity*, and the *City of God*. Granted that Augustine's theology did indeed develop over time, this temptation must nevertheless be resisted, for the works at Cassiciacum are in their own right the culmination of a long and eventful intellectual journey. From his youth, Augustine had been schooled in the liberal arts. At the age of eighteen, he discovered philosophy and turned (briefly) to a study of the Bible; a year later, he read Aristotle's *Categories* and joined the Manichaeans; a year after that, he began teaching literature, rhetoric, and dialectic, first in his hometown of Thagaste and then in the thriving metropolis of Carthage. When he was about twenty-seven, his philosophical leanings inspired him to write his first book (now lost) called *On the Beautiful and the Fitting*. Approximately five years later, he became an Academic skeptic and then a Platonist; at about the same time, he was introduced to a circle of Christian intellectuals loosely centered around St. Ambrose. By the fall of A.D. 386, then, Augustine had spent years wrestling with the trivium and quadrivium, the dogmatic claims of the Manichaean sect, the disputations of various philosophical schools, and finally, his mother's faith. For the Augustine who penned them, the Cassiciacum dialogues are in a sense mature writings, the fruit of more than a decade of determined germination.

Cicero

Augustine's journey to Christianity involved confronting a diverse assortment of intellectual forces, almost all of which appear in the dialogues in some form or another. The most obvious is Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.), who, though often dismissed today as an intellectual dilettante, was held by Augustine to be a serious philosopher. Augustine's own passion for wisdom began with reading Cicero's *Hortensius* at the age of eighteen, and at Cassiciacum he continues to treat the *Hortensius* as foundational to the formation of the youths in his care. Further, with their cover letters, choice of setting, and use of long concluding speeches, the Cassiciacum dialogues bear an unmistakable resemblance to a Ciceronian, as opposed to a Platonic, dialogue. (Another indication is that Augustine, like Cicero and unlike Plato, casts himself as a prominent character with lines in his own dialogues.) Augustine himself admits the Ciceronian connection when in the *Confessions* he recounts a disagreement with his friend Alypius. As a sort of assistant editor, Alypius had wanted to omit the name of Jesus Christ from the dialogues so that they would be redolent of the lofty “cedars of the gymnasia,” an allusion to the setting of several of Cicero's dialogues; but Augustine opted instead for what he called the “Church's wholesome herbs.” The name of Christ remained, although it did not entirely eradicate the fragrance of cedar.¹⁸

Moreover, each of the first three Cassiciacum dialogues may be seen as a specific response to a work or cluster of works by Cicero. Augustine's *Against the Academics* obviously wrestles with Cicero's *Academica*, while *On the Happy Life* engages Cicero's *On the Ends of Good and Evil Things* and the *Tusculan Disputations*, both of which address the *summum bonum* and the art of “living happily.” Similarly, *On Order* is a development of the themes in Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, *On Divination*, and *On Fate*,

which were intended to be read together. As with his use of the dialogue genre, Augustine's responses both build upon and move beyond their Ciceronian foundation. In *On Order*, for example, Augustine agrees with Cicero's critique of fate and superstition but replaces Cicero's insincere deference to Roman civil religion with a principled and unfeigned embrace of Christian teaching. And perhaps in a backhanded way it was Augustine's comfortable command of Ciceronian thought and composition that emboldened him to greater innovation with the *Soliloquies*, a dialogue that is unique in almost every way, from its neologic title to its sustained inner monologue and from its pioneering introspection to its thespian conceit. For as Augustine notes, it is after one masters something that one is eager to move on.¹⁹

The Platonists

But Augustine might never have been able to offer such a sustained engagement of Cicero or to overcome the philosophical skepticism of the school to which Cicero adhered were it not for the "Neoplatonists." This term is modern in origin, but it aptly signals a difference between the Platonists of the third and fourth centuries after Christ and Plato himself (427–347 B.C.). Whereas Plato, for instance, wrote only dialogues that enmeshed his metaphysical discussions in a political context, the Neoplatonists wrote abstract treatises or commentaries that were highly technical and often apolitical in nature. But whatever their differences with Plato, the one Platonic insight that the Neoplatonists affirmed and expanded is the one that made all the difference to Augustine: the insight into intelligible reality wrought by intellectual conversion. After that insight, nothing would ever be the same: "When behold! Some fulsome books, as Celsinus puts it, as soon as they breathed forth upon us good Arabian [fragrances] and as soon as they dribbled just a few drops of

their most precious ointment onto the tiny flicker, they enkindled an incredible, Romanianus, an incredible (and beyond what perhaps even you believe about me—what more can I say?—beyond what I as well believe about myself!), an *incredible* conflagration.” The incredible conflagration of which Augustine speaks is the intellectual conversion mentioned above, which yields a rare kind of knowledge of one’s own understanding or knowing as incorporeal or immaterial. This self-knowledge plays a role in all four dialogues, but it is especially prominent in *On Order* and the *Soliloquies*. And it also had a profound albeit implicit impact on Augustine’s understanding of the three divine persons in the doctrine of the Trinity.²⁰

It should be noted that scholars are not entirely certain which Neoplatonists influenced Augustine the most or, for that matter, how much of Plato Augustine ever read. Curiously, unlike his use of Cicero and the poets (see below), Augustine never directly quotes his Platonic sources. His writings betray a deep familiarity with several of the tractates of Plotinus (A.D. 204/205–270), but the influence of Porphyry (A.D. 232/234–305) and possibly others cannot be overlooked either. Regardless, Augustine’s debt to Plato or the Neoplatonists, no matter how great, does not imply that his own thought is reducible to them. Perhaps the best analogy for the relationship of St. Augustine to his classical sources is that of a skilled musician riffing off different melodic phrases in a way that is not beholden to their composers’ intentions.²¹

The Poets

Augustine’s sources were not limited to the philosophical. The assortment of Roman scholars and historians from which Augustine draws includes Aulus Gellius, Apuleius, Celsus, Pliny, Quintilian, Sallust, Seneca, Tacitus, Varro, and Vitruvius. Moreover, the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry reemerges at Cassiciacum,

with Augustine mustering Latin authors on both sides of the battle. A tragic love story by Ovid (43 B.C.–A.D. 17) occasions a dispute between Augustine and Licentius, and lines from the plays of Terence (195/185–159 B.C.) frequently reinforce the dialogues' comic character. The writings of Horace, Plautus, and even Lucretius are alluded to. Motifs from classical mythology are not uncommon either: Hector, Andromache, Hercules, Achilles, Medusa, Mount Helicon and the Muses, Scylla and Charybdis, Daedalus, and especially Proteus are all mentioned.

But the most important poet at Cassiciacum is Vergil (70–19 B.C.), whom the retreatants read daily and who appears to be viewed by Augustine as a poet with philosophical promise, either someone who in his own way had built a bridge between philosophy and poetry or whose verses could be used for that purpose—or perhaps, it was simply the case that the privileged status that Vergil's poems enjoyed in contemporary Roman life made them virtually irresistible. Whatever the reason, of all the poets at his disposal, Augustine appears most eager to “repurpose” Vergil by treating his work as an opportunity for ruminating on Christian truth.²²

Throughout the dialogues and regardless of the poet in question, Augustine evinces a keen awareness of the power of poetry on its readers' emotions and judgment and its claims on their allegiance. Yet he refrains from treating poetry as an enemy; instead, he employs a variety of techniques to channel or “convert” the power and beauty of the poets in a direction more open to philosophy and the Christian faith. The dialogues themselves—which, as we have already noted, are innovative not only philosophically and theologically but literarily as well—are the most impressive result of this endeavor. Augustine's own dialogic *poesis* is his ultimate and most eloquent answer at Cassiciacum to the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry.

Lastly, Augustine's brocading the dialogues with Greco-Roman poetic fancies serves the additional purpose of establishing this Christian author as well educated and familiar with the literary canon that was the staple of Roman high society. Although Augustine later came to regret many of his nods to classical literature, his generous use of ancient poetry and his well-crafted prosody were part of a common patristic strategy to use the literary arts of Christianity's detractors against them.²³

The Christians

The disagreement of Augustine and Alypius over the inclusion of Christ's name might give the impression that the Christian dimension of the dialogues can be excised with only a few cosmetic changes and is therefore superficial at best. Lending support to this conclusion are the cover letters to *Against the Academics* and *On Order*, which exhort their recipients to "philosophize" or "return to themselves" but make no mention of the Christian God.

Such a view, however, would be misleading. Although they are not explicitly catechetical or apologetic, and although they frequently appeal to reason without a direct connection to divine revelation, the Cassiciacum dialogues have a pervasively Christian content. Not only is the group portrayed as praying daily and holding discussions on God and Jesus Christ, but Augustine consistently aligns the dynamic of human knowing with the processions of the divine persons of the Trinity as understood by orthodox Christianity.²⁴ Augustine may call *On the Happy Life* more religious than the others (1.5), but all of the dialogues involve an interplay between, and an integration of, faith and reason.

It should also be noted that even though he was operating under the constraints of the discipline of the secret, Augustine already

had at Cassiciacum a significant exposure to Christian thought. He knew the four canonical Gospels (or at least parts of them), several Psalms (which he prayed daily), and several sections of the Epistles of St. Paul. As he recounts in the *Confessions*, he was deeply influenced by the sermons of St. Ambrose (337/340–397) as well as by Marius Victorinus, the story of whose conversion to Christianity profoundly affected Augustine. In fact, it was Victorinus's translations of several Neoplatonic books that prompted Augustine's intellectual conversion around 385 or 386, and there is evidence in the Cassiciacum tetralogy that Augustine was also familiar with Victorinus's Christian writings on the Trinity. Finally, Augustine and Monica socialized with Christian intellectuals such as Manlius Theodorus, to whom he dedicates *On the Happy Life*.²⁵

As far as Christian or patristic literature goes, the Cassiciacum dialogues are fairly novel, especially with respect to diction. Mary Bogan counts more than thirty neologisms in the four works, a higher concentration than is found in Augustine's later writings. Augustine, for instance, coined the word "soliloquy" to designate his fourth dialogue, which is itself an unprecedented melding of a philosophical dialogue and a stage play: he also appears to be the originator of the theological expression "beatific vision." Even in the realm of the mundane, Augustine left his mark while at Cassiciacum: from what we can tell, he is the first author to describe what is known today as a cuckoo clock. Coupled with a relative dearth of ecclesiastical terminology, with which he would become familiar only after his baptism and ordination to the priesthood, Augustine's semantic resourcefulness attests to an eagerness to communicate something of great importance and a slight uncertainty with how best to go about it. Even as a catechumen, Augustine could not wait to proclaim the Gospel from the Areopagus to the Seven Hills of Rome.²⁶

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INTRODUCTION

A well-educated and articulate Roman citizen from North Africa gathers with some friends in autumn around the time of the Vintage holidays at a vacation destination in Italy. Two members of the group decide to hold a philosophical disputation in which Christianity vies with the skepticism of the Academic philosophers, while a third person is appointed judge of the debate. The disputants argue about divine providence, the authority of the poets, the influence of celestial spirits on human understanding, the relation between self-knowledge and the knowledge of God, and the epistemological doctrine of probability. The debate is cast in the style of a Ciceronian dialogue, and indeed the work is characterized by a classical, humanist charm, even though it is an early example of Christian apologetics.

While this could quite easily be a description of *Against the Academics*, Augustine's inaugural work as a convert, it is not. Minucius Felix was a Christian lawyer who penned a dialogue called the *Octavius* two hundred years before stenographers purportedly began recording Augustine's conversations at Cassiciacum for what would become *Against the Academics*. Although we are

not certain whether Augustine ever read the *Octavius*, the parallels are remarkably strong. And the parallels, whether intentional or not, make one thing certain: philosophical skepticism, the contention that the wise man will refrain from assenting to anything as true, is a persistent nemesis of orthodox Christianity. Augustine succinctly summarizes the reason why: "If assent is taken away, so is faith; for without assent nothing can be believed."¹

THE FIRST STEP

The immediate goal of Augustine in *Against the Academics* is to lead his friend Romanianus, to whom he has dedicated the dialogue, to philosophy rather than Christianity per se. (Augustine will dedicate another book, *On True Religion*, to Romanianus's religious conversion four or five years later.) Because of its apparent reasonableness, unedited Academic skepticism is dangerous to both philosophical and religious assent. As Caecilius, the pagan proponent in the *Octavius*, asserts:

[Socrates's] confession of ignorance is the height of prudence. From this source flowed the safe doubting of Arcesilaus and much later of Carneades and of a great many of the Academics in questions of the highest importance. . . . Also, in my opinion, things that are uncertain ought to be left alone. Nor, with so many and so great men deliberating, should we rashly and boldly give a divergent opinion, lest either a superstitious old wives' tale be introduced or all religion destroyed.²

In a world where knowledge of the highest things is fraught with uncertainty, the argument goes, a healthy agnosticism is the only reasonable position to maintain. Both Christianity and any philosophy making a claim on truth are not only false but rash.

Is it not better simply to say that our access to the truth is never absolute and that we should therefore not commit to anything absolutely?

Augustine's response to this argument is to refute on rational grounds the Academics' central contention that there is no truth to which the wise man can give his complete assent. *Against the Academics* is not free of Christian assumptions or intentions (one of Augustine's goals is to persuade Romanianus that God cares for him), but his primary objective in the dialogue is to establish beyond a reasonable doubt the possibility of the human mind discovering the truth—any truth. Augustine's arguments are in the service of nonskeptical philosophy that, once established, acts as a propaedeutic for the Christian faith. As Augustine later writes:

And so, when I had abandoned either what I had attained from the ambitions of this world or what I was trying to attain, and when I had brought myself to the leisure of the Christian life, I (who had not yet been baptized) first wrote *Against the Academics* or *On the Academics*. The Academics' arguments cause many to despair of finding the truth, and they keep the wise man from assenting to anything and from approving something even when it is thoroughly manifest and certain, since everything appears obscure and uncertain to them. And because these arguments disturbed me as well, I wrote in order to banish them from my mind with the strongest reasons that I could. And with God's mercy and assistance, that is exactly what I did.³

The purpose of *Against the Academics*, in other words, is to remove the despair of finding the truth in order to pave the way for intelligent noetic assent, both philosophical and religious: to remove the barriers, as Augustine puts it in another work, "that block us at the gate."⁴ As such, the dialogue serves as a fitting and logical

launching point for a knowledge of God and the soul, the overall subject of the Cassiciacum tetralogy.

ACADEMIC SKEPTICISM

Against the Academics can seem to some readers to be a somewhat complicated dialogue because in dealing with Academic skepticism it must address a rather long and convoluted history. Although it is beyond the scope of this introduction to do justice to that history, several points should be noted.

The Academics were members of the Third or “New” Academy, founded by Carneades (ca. 213–129 B.C.). Their thought developed from that of the Second or “Middle” Academy founded by Arcesilaus (ca. 315–241 B.C.), who was the sixth head of Plato’s original or “Old” Academy. Much of the thought of the New Academy springs from a reaction to Stoic epistemology. Zeno (334–262 B.C.), the founder of the Stoics, had taught that everything we hold or believe comes from assenting to an impression (*phantasia*) in our mind. True knowledge consists of assenting to “cataleptic” impressions, impressions that are so self-warranting or convincing that assenting to them amounts to a grasp (*katalēpsis*) of their objects. The wise man, therefore, should restrict his assent only to cataleptic impressions that, unlike noncataleptic impressions, (1) come from reality and (2) are stamped or impressed on our minds from reality (3) in such a way that they in no way resemble what is not real. True knowledge, in other words, is essentially a matter of perception or “apprehension” of “an immediate grasp of facts.”⁵

The Academics took a contrarian approach to this new doctrine, arguing that if the Stoics were right, then nothing could be known, since nothing could conform to Zeno’s criteria for a cataleptic impression. From this critique mushroomed an entire

philosophy of skepticism, one that Carneades would use against other philosophical schools as well, such as the Epicurean. The Stoics, in the meantime, were quick to retort that skepticism was disastrous for morality, since if nothing could be known, one could never act on what one knew to be right or wrong. Carneades responded to the Stoic accusation by adding a doctrine of probability. Although the wise man should withhold all assent from his apprehensions as true, he could reasonably approve of certain apprehensions as more or less *probabile*—"approvable." This conditional approval would enable him to act on the basis of a moral code and function in daily life. Unlike the Pyrrhonist skeptics,⁶ the Academics were not content to aim for mental tranquility or inactivity (*ataraxia*) as the fruit of their restraint from all assent; they also devised an epistemological justification for engaging the world practically and politically.

CICERONIAN SKEPTICISM

It was in Marcus Tullius Cicero that the Academics found their most celebrated and best-known spokesman. Cicero was eager to introduce into Roman civilization genuine philosophy—that is, philosophy that is first and foremost an erotic longing for wisdom rather than a long and encrusted litany of doctrines—but he wished to do so in a way that was not detrimental to the Roman polis. He found a good fit with Academic skepticism: its doctrine of probability was politically responsible, and its gainsaying of all other philosophical sects liberated philosophy, the love of wisdom, from the wet blanket of rote dogmatism. Cicero was highly critical of that blind loyalty to one's own that more often than not replaces authentic philosophizing. He cites as the classic example of this unfortunate phenomenon the disciples of Pythagoras, who, when

unable to prove one of their master's teachings, would simply respond "*Iipse dixit*" — "He himself said so."⁷ Unfortunately, this tendency proliferated with the development of philosophy itself. Independent inquiry and objective scrutiny were substituted by the authority of schoolmasters, and the schools themselves became dominated more by subrational feelings of fealty than the pure and detached desire to know. "I know not how," Cicero writes, "but most men prefer to err and to defend with the utmost pugnacity the opinion that they have loved rather than to seek out without obstinacy what may be said most consistently."⁸ This stubborn clinging to an opinion given to us by a master (most likely at a time when we were unable to make a mature judgment on our own)⁹ prevailed in the Stoic and Epicurean camps, which, in Cicero's view, were philosophically jejune. And it even affected, as far as Cicero was concerned, the Platonists, who remained followers of the Old Academy.¹⁰

Skepticism thus has the advantage of freeing its practitioner from these feudal allegiances in order to seek out the truth.¹¹ In doing so one is actually closer to the spirit of Socrates, who never put forward anything positive of his own,¹² and of Plato, who in his writings never affirmed anything.¹³ The philosophy of the New Academy is therefore not only "the least arrogant and the most consistent and elegant,"¹⁴ but the most reasonable because it does not behoove the philosopher to reach any hasty conclusions.¹⁵ Further, far from being dangerous by encouraging inaction, the doctrine of probability is politically salutary, ameliorating humanity's proclivity to fanaticism by robbing individuals of the absolute certainty from which fanaticism springs, all the while keeping a modicum of assent so that they are still able to act.¹⁶ The Academic's refusal to affirm a particular dogma even wins him praise from Stoic and Epicurean alike.¹⁷ And as can be seen by the example of

Gaius Cotta—Cicero’s spokesman in *On the Nature of the Gods*, who as a high priest vigorously defends traditional Roman religion while as an Academic radically questions anything not demonstrated by reason—the skeptic can doubt the opinions of the city with all of the vigor that befits the philosopher without rashly undermining the laws and customs to which its citizens cling.¹⁸

AUGUSTINIAN SKEPTICISM OF SKEPTICISM

Four centuries later, however, Augustine—who shared Cicero’s desire to convert others to genuine philosophy—arrived at the opposite strategy. Despite whatever aporetic value the tenets and methods of the New Academy might have, skepticism’s denial of the possibility of ascertaining the truth is, in Augustine’s estimation, a strong disincentive from embarking on the philosophical quest and is therefore a threat rather than an aid to the philosophical life. Such was especially the case in Augustine’s day when, as we see with his impressionable young student Licentius, Academic philosophy had gone from being a retrieval of the Socratic method of questioning authority to an established authority in its own right.¹⁹ In order to prepare the way for genuine philosophy, then, Augustine endeavors to clear the field of obstructions with arguments against Academic skepticism, much like Cicero endeavored to prepare the way for genuine philosophy by clearing the field with arguments in favor of Academic skepticism. For Cicero, the false and arid dogmatism of Stoicism and Epicureanism were best met with a hermeneutics of suspicion that could undermine their truth claims and restore philosophy to an open-ended quest for the truth. For Augustine, the dogmatic skepticism that the New Academy had become was best met with a hermeneutics of suspicion that could undermine the skeptic’s paralyzing rejection of

truth claims and restore to philosophy a lively hope in attaining its quarry. Whereas Cicero promotes skepticism to make his contemporaries work harder at finding the truth, Augustine discredits skepticism in order to persuade his contemporaries to work in the first place. Ironically, Augustine attacks skepticism for the same reason that Cicero defends it: to foster the love of wisdom.

And if latter-day Academic skepticism is bad for truth-seeking, it is equally injurious to morality. One of the most darkly humorous passages in *Against the Academics* is Augustine's parody of a court case involving adultery, the aim of which is to show how the Academic doctrine of probability does not provide a sufficient grounding for moral or legal reasoning (3.16.35). Approving something as *probabile* may guard against fanaticism, but it cannot persuade a young man to reject adultery as a sin, it cannot prove to the cuckolded man that he or anyone else has been sleeping with his wife, and it cannot assure the convicted man that his sentencing was not simply a bad dream.

TWO TITLES

At first blush, Augustine does not seem to be completely consistent in his attitude toward Academic skepticism. Judging from his accounts in the *Retractations* and *Enchiridion*, the Academics' teachings are pernicious stumbling blocks that should be exorcized from the soul. In *Against the Academics*, Augustine seems to wish that the method of the Academics had been buried with the remains of Carneades and Cicero;²⁰ in *On the Happy Life* he guffaws when his mother Monica, after being apprised of their dithering, calls them "spazzes";²¹ and in *On Order* he rejoices when one of his students calls the Academics "captious," that is, legacy hunters who steal the inheritance of the weak and vulnerable.²² On the

other hand, Academic doubt was instrumental in freeing Augustine from the chains of Manichaean dogmatism;²³ and in a letter written from Cassiciacum to his friend Hermogenianus, Augustine praises the Academics and even professes a desire to imitate them.²⁴

This ambivalence is also manifest in the curious fact that Augustine's dialogue about skepticism has two titles. In the passage of the *Retractations* cited near the beginning of this introduction, Augustine refers to his first dialogues as *Against the Academics* or *On the Academics*. He seems to have had a preference for the latter title, since it is the one he uses for the rest of the *Retractations*.²⁵ Further, in his letter to Hermogenianus, Augustine rejects taking an adversarial posture against the Academics.²⁶ It was Possidius, Augustine's first biographer and a personal acquaintance, who listed the sole title as *Against the Academics*,²⁷ with subsequent manuscripts following his example. Although this edition does as well, it is nevertheless important to keep both titles in mind. If Augustine is "against" the Academics (and in some ways he is), he is also surprisingly sympathetic to their aims and methods and even more surprisingly in favor of their epistemology, a significant part of which he makes his own.

SELF-REFERENTIAL COHERENCE

Either way, both titles bespeak one interesting difference between Cicero's treatment of the subject and Augustine's. Cicero titled his work the *Academica* in reference to Academic "things," that is, their positions or teachings. Augustine's twin titles, on the other hand, both refer to the Academics themselves, to the people making or holding those arguments.²⁸ Augustine's examination thereby broadens the field to include not only the content of Academic thought, but, in a special way, the agents behind it. This

wider field of scrutiny allows him to ask whether there are any contradictions between the acts and the products of their thinking, between what they are saying about human knowing and what they are actually doing as human knowers. Consequently, Augustine is free to raise, in a way that Cicero did not, the question of self-knowledge and its role in the comprehension of all other reality. As Lucullus, an opponent of Academic skepticism in the *Academica*, points out, the Academics are guilty of what is called today self-referential incoherence: their statement that assent should never be given collides with their aim of persuading their listeners to assent to that statement. For if nothing is apprehensible, then the statement “nothing is apprehensible” cannot be apprehended, and therefore the Academics have no business opening their mouths.²⁹

To his credit, Cicero himself included this indictment of skepticism in one of his dialogues; still, it is Augustine who more loudly blows the whistle. Are the Academics proclaiming the truth that the truth cannot be found, and if so, how can they do so without serious contradiction? Can they, even with their theory of probability, avoid the pitfalls of self-referential incoherence? And if not, were they themselves perfectly aware of this fatal flaw but hid it from the public? What else were they hiding, and why?

It is to answer these questions, and much more, that Augustine writes on the Academics.

BOOK ONE

1.

1. O Romanianus, if only Virtue could take a man who is well suited to her and snatch him away from an opposing Fortune, in the same way that she keeps Fortune from snatching anyone away from her!¹ For then she would have certainly already laid her hands on you, proclaiming you to be rightfully hers. And, once she had led you to the possession of goods that are utterly certain, she would not permit you to be a slave, not even a slave to good luck. But, on account of either our merits or the necessity of nature,² it has been so arranged that the port of Wisdom (where a soul would not be moved by either an adverse or a favorable wind of Fortune) never lets in a divine soul that is clinging to mortal things unless Fortune herself, be she favorable or “adverse,” leads it there.³ Consequently, nothing else remains for us to do but to pray on your behalf to the God who cares about these things, to pray in order to obtain from Him, if we can, His returning you to yourself⁴ (for thus will He easily return you to us as well) and to pray that He permits that mind^{*5} of yours, which has long been laboring to breathe, to come up at last into the air of true freedom. In fact, perhaps what is

commonly called Fortune is actually being ruled by a certain hidden order, and what we call chance in human affairs is nothing but something the reason and cause of which are concealed.⁶ And perhaps nothing, regardless of whether it is advantageous or not, happens in part that does not fit and harmonize with the whole.⁷ Philosophy, to which I am inviting you, promises that she will show to her true lovers this notion, which has been relayed by the oracles of the most fruitful teachings and which is far, far removed from the understanding of the uninitiated.⁸ Therefore, when many things happen to you that, to your mind, are undeserved, do not condemn yourself. For if divine providence extends all the way to us—and this should not be doubted, believe me—it behooves you to be treated in the way that you are.⁹ For instance, when you, with that great natural ability of yours that I have always admired, were from the beginning of your youth—with reason’s still weak and faltering steps—entering into a human life completely filled with every single error, a superabundance of riches followed you. And that life would have begun to suck that period of your life as well as your mind¹⁰ (which was eagerly pursuing what seemed beautiful and honorable) down into its enticing whirlpools had not the winds of Fortune, which are considered “adverse,” rescued you from there when you were almost drowning.

2. But if you put on bear shows and spectacles for our fellow townsmen that had never been seen there before and that were received with a theatrical applause that was always extremely favorable;¹¹ if you were borne high to heaven by the excited and united voices of foolish men making an uproar beyond measure; if no one would dare to be your enemy; if municipal plaques declared in bronze that you were not only a patron of our fellow townsmen, but also of neighboring peoples;¹² then statues of you would be erected, honors would come pouring in, and powers added to you

that would increase your civic standing; sumptuous tables would be arrayed for daily banquets; whatever anyone needed and whatever he had a craving for, he would ask for without hesitation and drink up without hesitation; [guests] would be showered with many things that they did not even ask for; your household, diligently and faithfully administered by your servants, would be presented fit and ready for such great expenses. And you yourself in the meantime would be living in a most exquisite mansion, in the splendor of the baths, in respectable dice games,¹³ in hunts, and in banquets; and in the mouths of clients, in the mouths of our townsmen, and lastly, in the mouths of the multitude, you would be talked about as most cultured, most gracious, most elegant, most fortunate—Would anyone then, Romanianus, would anyone, I beseech you, dare to mention the other life, which is the *only* happy life?¹⁴ Could anyone persuade you that not only were you not happy, but that the less miserable you seemed to yourself, the more especially miserable you were?¹⁵ But now, because of the many great adversities you have endured, how little you need to be admonished! For you do not need to be persuaded by the examples of others as to how fleeting and frail and full of calamities are all the things that mortals reckon to be good, when you are so experienced that we can persuade everyone else from your own example.¹⁶

3. Therefore, that something of yours by which you have always longed for beautiful and honorable things, by which you have preferred being generous to being rich, by which you never desired being more powerful than just, and by which you never once yielded to adversity and unscrupulous behavior—that very same divine something in you, I say, which has been rendered unconscious by some sort of sleep and torpor of this life, a hidden providence has [now] decreed that it be woken up by being shaken

hard in various ways. Wake up! Wake up, I beg you! You will be very glad, believe me, that the gifts of this world have been coaxing you with almost none of the prosperity that keeps the careless down. These things were also trying to capture me as I was daily singing their praises, [and they would have too] if a chest pain had not forced me to cast aside my windy profession¹⁷ and flee to the bosom of Philosophy.¹⁸ And now she herself nourishes and fosters me in the leisure we have vehemently wished for;¹⁹ she herself has completely freed me from that superstition into which I had thrown you headfirst along with myself.²⁰ For she herself teaches, and teaches truthfully, that whatever is perceived by mortal eyes, whatever any sense [of our mortal body] touches,²¹ ought in no way to be cherished and should be completely held in low regard. She herself promises to show clearly the most true and most hidden God, and she deigns to reveal Him right this very moment through translucent clouds, as it were.

4. Our very own Licentius is most eagerly living with me in Philosophy, and he has so completely turned away from youthful allurements and pleasures and toward her that I dare to propose him—and not rashly either—to his father as someone to be imitated. For it is Philosophy from whose breasts no age will ever complain that it is excluded. And although I know very well of your thirst for her, I nevertheless wanted to give you a taste by which I might incite you to hold on and drink from her all the more voraciously, a taste that (I pray I have not hoped in vain) you will find most sweet and seductive, so to speak.²² For I have sent you a disputation put down in writing that Trygetius and Licentius had with each other. Regarding the former, it is as if military service had conscripted the young man for a while in order to remove his distaste for the disciplines, and so it restored him to us extremely passionate and hungry for the great and noble arts.

And so, just a few days after we began living in the country,²³ while I was exhorting and inspiring them to study, I saw that they were ready and totally eager, beyond what I had been hoping for. I thus wanted to test what they could do according to their age, especially since Cicero's *Hortensius* seemed to have already won them over in large part to philosophy.²⁴ And with a stenographer in our employ²⁵ lest "the winds disperse our labor,"²⁶ I permitted nothing to be lost. In this book, of course, what you are about to read is their content and their positions; the words, however, belong to me and to Alypius as well.²⁷

2.

5. When, therefore, at my suggestion we all assembled in a place that seemed suitable for the purpose, I said, "Surely you don't doubt that we should know* what's true?"

"Not at all," Trygetius said, and the others indicated by the very look on their faces that they agreed with him.

"What if we could be happy even without comprehending truth?" I said. "Do you think that comprehension of the truth would then be necessary?"

Here Alypius said: "I reckon it would be safer for me to be a judge of this inquiry. Since I'm scheduled to take a trip into the city, I ought to be relieved of the burden of taking a side; at the same time, I can more easily delegate to someone else the role of a judge than that of someone's defense attorney. From now on, then, don't expect anything from me for either side."

When they all made this concession to him and I repeated the question, Trygetius said, "'We certainly want to be happy,'²⁸ and if we can reach this goal without the truth, then we don't need to seek the truth."

“What’s this?” I said. “Do you all think that we can be happy even without finding the truth?”

Then Licentius said, “We can, if we *seek* the truth.”

Here, when I urged the others with a nod to give their position, Navigius said:²⁹ “I am moved by what Licentius has said. For perhaps living in a quest for the truth is itself living happily.”

“Then define what the happy life is,” Trygetius said, “so that from it I may cobble together something suitable to say in reply.”

“What do you think living happily is,” I said, “other than living according to that which is best in man?”

“I won’t spill my words rashly,” he said, “for I reckon that you should define ‘that which is best.’”

“Who would doubt,” I said, “that man’s best is nothing else than that ruling part of the soul which the other parts in man should obey? Moreover, lest you demand yet another definition, this part can be called mind* or reason.³⁰ But if it doesn’t seem so to you, then figure out how you yourself would define either what the happy life is or what is the best in man.”

“I agree,” he said.

6. “What then?” I said. “To return to our objective, does it seem to you that someone who has not found the truth can live happily, as long as he is searching for it?”

“I repeat my position,”³¹ he said. “In no way does it seem so.”

“What are your opinions?” I said [to the group].

Then Licentius said, “It seems totally clear to me that he can; for our ancestors, whom we take to be wise and happy, lived well and happily for the sole reason that they *sought* the truth.”³²

“I’m grateful,” I said, “that you have made me a judge along with Alypius, whom, I must admit, I was already beginning to envy. Therefore, since it seems to one of you that the happy life can be

attained by a mere investigation of the truth while for the other it can be attained only by a discovery of the truth, and since a little while ago Navigius showed that he would like to go over to your side, Licentius, I shall observe with great interest what kind of an advocate of your positions you all can be. For this is a great matter and most worthy of careful discussion.”

“If it’s a great matter,” Licentius said, “it needs great men.”

“Don’t look, especially in this villa,” I said, “for something that’s hard to find anywhere on earth. Instead, explain why the things you have put forward haven’t been put forward rashly (as is my opinion) and for what reason they seem true to you. For when the very greatest of things are sought by little men, it often makes them great.”

3.

7. “Because,” [Licentius] said, “I see that you’re very much urging us to debate each other, which I’m confident you want for our own good, I now ask: Why can’t someone who seeks the truth be happy, even if he finds nothing?”

“Because,” Trygetius said, “we want the wise man to be perfect in all things.³³ But he who is still seeking is not perfect. Therefore, I don’t at all see how you can claim that this man is happy.”³⁴

“Is it possible,” [Licentius] said, “for the authority of our ancestors to dwell in your heart?”

“Not all of them,” Trygetius said.

“Then which ones?”

“Those that were wise, of course,” he said.

“Doesn’t Carneades seem wise to you?”³⁵ Licentius said.

“I am not Greek,” [Trygetius] said. “I don’t know who this Carneades of yours was.”

“What of our very own Cicero?”³⁶ Licentius said. “Now then, what do you think of him?”

Here, after [Trygetius] was silent for quite a while, he said, “He was wise.”

“Then his position on this matter carries some weight with you?” [Licentius] said.

“It does,” [Trygetius] said.

“Then accept what that position is,” [Licentius] said, “because I think it has escaped you. For our Cicero held that he who investigates the truth, even if he cannot come to a discovery of it, is happy.”

“Where did Cicero say this?” [Trygetius] asked.

And Licentius replied: “Who is not aware of the fact that he vehemently affirmed that nothing can be grasped by man and that nothing remains for the wise man except a most diligent search for the truth? Accordingly, if a wise man should give his assent to uncertain things (even if perhaps they may be true), he couldn’t be liberated from error, and error is a wise man’s most grievous failing.³⁷ Therefore, if we must believe that the wise man is necessarily happy and that wisdom’s entire prerogative consists only in a quest for the truth, why do we hesitate to hold that the very quest for the truth, even by itself, can enable one to attain the happy life?”

8. Then Trygetius said, “Now, are we permitted to take back what we conceded rashly?”

Here I said to him: “Those who are drawn into debating not by a desire for finding the truth but by a childish exhibition of their talent don’t usually grant this.³⁸ Accordingly, when you’re in my presence (especially since you still need to be nourished and educated), I not only grant it, but I’d even like you to have as one of your rules the following: that it is *necessary* to take back under discussion those things that you conceded rather carelessly.”³⁹

"I think," Licentius added, "that it is no small progress in philosophy when, in comparison with the discovery of what is right and true, a debater holds victory in low regard. And thus I gladly comply with your rules and your decision, and I permit Trygetius (for this decision rightfully belongs to me) to take back what he thinks he conceded rashly."

Then Alypius said: "You and I all realize that I haven't undertaken the function of my office yet. But my departure was arranged a while ago, and because it now forces me to break off, he who is sharing my judicial authority will not refuse double the power (for he's taking on my office as well) until my return. For I see that this contest of yours will be going on a bit longer!"

And after he left, Licentius said: "What did you concede rashly? Let's have it!"

"I rashly granted," Trygetius said, "that Cicero was wise."

"Are you saying that Cicero, who both began and perfected philosophy in the Latin language, was not wise?!"⁴⁰

"Even if I grant that he was wise," he said, "I still don't approve of all his teachings."

"Well, you should refute his many other teachings so that you don't seem impertinent in rejecting this one teaching that is being discussed."

"What if," Trygetius said, "I am prepared to claim that this is the only matter he didn't judge correctly? In my opinion, the only thing that matters to you is that I present weighty reasons for whatever I would like to have maintained."

"Proceed!" he said. "For what could I dare to say against someone who declares himself an adversary of Cicero?"

9. Here Trygetius said: "I'd like you, our judge, to pay attention to the way that you defined the happy life earlier. For you said that he who is happy lives according to that part of the soul for

which it is appropriate to govern the other parts.⁴¹ But as for you, Licentius, I'd also like you now to concede to me—for already, thanks to the liberty that philosophy promises to claim for us in particular, I have cast off that yoke of authority—that he who is still searching for the truth is not perfect.”

Then, after keeping silent for a long time, [Licentius] said, “I don’t concede it.”

“Why, I beseech?” Trygetius said. “Explain yourself. I’m listening, and I’m eager to hear in what way a man can be both perfect and still seeking the truth.”

Here he said: “I admit that someone who doesn’t reach his goal isn’t perfect. I suppose, however, that this truth is known by God alone—or perhaps by man’s soul*, after it has left this body, that is, this shadowy prison.⁴² But the end of man is to seek the truth completely.⁴³ For we are seeking a perfect man, but a man nonetheless.”

“Then man can’t be happy,” Trygetius said. “For how can he be, when he is incapable of attaining what he so strongly desires? A man can live happily, however, if he can indeed live according to that part of the soul for which it is right that it be master.⁴⁴ Therefore, he can discover the truth. Or, let him get a hold of himself and let him *not* desire the truth lest he necessarily be miserable, since he can’t attain it.”

“But this itself is man’s happiness, to seek the truth completely,” he said. “For this is reaching the end beyond which one cannot proceed. Therefore, whoever seeks the truth less urgently than he ought to doesn’t reach man’s end; but whoever devotes himself to finding the truth, as much as a man can and should, even if he doesn’t find it, is happy. For in this way is he doing all that he was born to do. But if he fails to find the truth, he fails because nature has not granted it.⁴⁵ Lastly, since it is necessary for man to be either happy or miserable, is it not an act of insanity to say that someone

who day and night searches incessantly for the truth (insofar as he can) is miserable? He will, therefore, be happy. Hence I believe that this definition favors *me* more. For if he is happy (and he certainly is) who lives according to that part of the soul for which it is appropriate to rule the other parts, and this part is called ‘reason,’ I ask you whether he who seeks the truth completely is not living according to reason. And if it is absurd [to say that the person who seeks truth completely *isn’t* living according to reason], why do we hesitate to say that man is happy solely by the very quest for the truth?”

4.

10. “It seems to me,” [Trygetius] said, “that someone who is in error is neither living according to reason, nor is he in any way happy. Moreover, every person who is always seeking but not finding is in error. Hence, you must prove one of these two positions: that someone who is in error can be happy, or that he who seeks something but never finds it isn’t in error.”

At this point [Licentius] said, “The happy man cannot be in error.” And after he was silent for a long time, he said, “He isn’t in error, however, when he seeks, because he’s seeking in order not to be in error.”

“He is certainly seeking in order not to be in error,” Trygetius said, “but he is in error when he doesn’t find. You, however, reckoned that his not wanting to be in error would be to your advantage, as if no one would err unwillingly or as if the only way someone would err was unwillingly.”

Then, after [Licentius] was dallying for a long time as to what he should say in reply, I said: “You should both define what error is, for then you could more easily see its borders into which you have now fully entered!”

"I myself," Licentius said, "am not fit to define something, although *defining* error is easier than *confining* it."⁴⁶

"I myself shall define it," [Trygetius] said. "It is extremely easy for me, not because of any talent on my part but for a very good reason. For certainly, to be in error is always to be seeking and never to be finding."

"If I myself could have easily refuted that definition of yours," Licentius said, "I wouldn't have been failing in my case for so long. But because this matter is either difficult in and of itself or it appears so to me, I ask you to postpone the inquiry until tomorrow unless I can come up with something to say in reply today as I carefully turn the matter over."

When I reckoned that this should be granted and the others did not object, we got up to go for a walk. And while we were talking among ourselves about many different things, [Licentius] was buried deep in thought. When he sensed that it was in vain, he decided to relax his mind and join our discussion. Afterwards, when evening came, they resumed the same disagreement, but I set a limit to it and persuaded them to allow it to remain postponed until another day.⁴⁷ Then it was off to the baths.⁴⁸

11. The next day,⁴⁹ however, when we had taken our seats,⁵⁰ I said, "Both of you, report on what you began yesterday."

Then Licentius said, "We had postponed the disputation, if I'm not mistaken, at my request, since the definition of error was extremely difficult for me."

"You're clearly not in error about that," I said. "And I gladly hope that this will be an omen to you regarding the remaining portion [of the disputation]."⁵¹

"Then listen to what I would have mentioned even yesterday had you not intervened," he said. "It seems to me that error is the approval of the false instead of the true."⁵² And in no way does

someone fall into this who thinks that the truth should always be sought, for he who approves nothing cannot approve the false. Therefore, he cannot be in error.

“Moreover, he can very easily be happy. For lest I go too far afield,⁵³ if it were permitted for us to live every day as we did yesterday, I see no reason why we would hesitate to call ourselves happy. For we lived with a great tranquility of mind*, making the soul free from every bodily blemish⁵⁴ and, far, far removed from the fires of lust, devoting ourselves (insofar as man is allowed) to reason⁵⁵ — that is, living according to that divine part of the soul which we agreed apropos of yesterday’s definition was the happy life.⁵⁶ In my opinion, however, we found nothing but merely sought the truth.

“Only by a quest for the truth, therefore, can the happy life be granted to man, even if he cannot find the truth. For look how easily your definition may be distinguished from the common notion [about error]. As a matter of fact, you said that error was always seeking and never finding. What if someone seeking nothing were asked, for example, whether it were daytime now and he rashly and immediately formed the opinion that it was night and said so: Doesn’t he seem to you to be in error? Your definition, then, hasn’t even included the greatest kind of error. And what if it also included those who weren’t in error: Could any definition be more defective? For if someone is looking for Alexandria and he is headed for it on the right road, in my opinion you can’t say that he’s in error. What if, impeded by a number of different things, he spent a long time on the same road and was overcome by death on it: Isn’t it so that he was always seeking and never finding and yet he was not in error?”

“He wasn’t always seeking,” Trygetius said.

12. “You’re right,” Licentius said, “and your admonition is sound. For then your definition has absolutely nothing to do with

the matter at hand. I did not in point of fact say that he who always seeks the truth is happy. Indeed, this can't be done: first of all, because a man doesn't exist forever; second, because a man can't seek the truth from even the time that he begins to exist, for he is impeded by age. Or, if you think that we should say 'always' if he doesn't allow any time to be lost from the moment he is now able to seek, you should again go back to Alexandria. For suppose that someone starts to head out on that road, as I said earlier, from the time he is allowed, by either business or age, to make the journey.⁵⁷ And although at no point does he take any detours, he nevertheless departs from this life before he arrives [at his destination]. You will surely be in great error if it seems to you that this man of ours is in error, even though he neither ceased seeking whenever he could, nor could he find what he was headed for.

"Therefore, if my description is true, and if according to it he who seeks completely isn't in error (even if he may not find the truth), and if he is happy by virtue of the fact that he lives according to reason, then your definition, to be sure, has been refuted. And if it hasn't, I should still not care for it if the case has been sufficiently established solely by what I have defined. Why, I ask, hasn't this inquiry of ours already been closed?"

5.

13. Here Trygetius said, "Do you grant that wisdom is the right way of life?"⁵⁸

"Without a doubt I do," [Licentius] said. "But I still want you to define wisdom for me so I can know* whether it seems the same to me as it does to you."

"Is it not enough for you," Trygetius said, "that wisdom has been defined by the very question that you've just been asked? And

you also conceded what I wanted. For unless I'm mistaken, wisdom is called the right way of life."

Then Licentius said, "It seems to me that nothing is so ridiculous as that definition of yours."

"Perhaps," [Trygetius] said. "Yet watch your step, I beseech, so that reason may precede your laughter; for nothing is more loathsome than laughter that amply deserves to be laughed at."

"What of it?" Licentius said. "Do you not acknowledge that death is the opposite of life?"

"I do," Trygetius said.

"Then it seems to me," [Licentius] said, "that a way of life is none other than that by which each one advances, lest death come upon him."

Trygetius agreed.

"Therefore, if some traveler, avoiding a byway because he heard it was besieged by robbers, were to continue going the right way and thus escape perishing, hasn't he followed both the way of life and the right way? And no one calls this wisdom. Then how is it that every right way of life is wisdom? I have conceded that it is, but not *only* it. A definition, however, shouldn't encompass anything that is alien [to it]. So, if you please, define once again what it seems to you that wisdom is."

14. Trygetius was silent for a long time. And then he said: "Now see here! For the second time, I'm [ready to] define it if you yourself are resolved never to confine it. Wisdom is the right way that leads to the truth."

"And this is likewise refuted," Licentius said. "For when, according to Vergil, Aeneas's mother says to him, 'Just go on, and direct your step along the way that leads you,'⁵⁹ he follows this way and comes to what had been spoken about, that is, to the truth. Please, affirm that whatever place he put his foot on while

he was walking can be called wisdom—though it would be utterly foolish of me to try to demolish that description of yours, for no description could help my case more, since you said that wisdom isn't the truth itself but the way that leads to it. Whoever, therefore, uses this way is certainly using wisdom; and he who is using wisdom is necessarily wise. Therefore, the man who completely seeks the truth will be wise, even if he has not yet reached it. For in my opinion, no way is understood better as a diligent search for the truth than the way that leads to the truth. Therefore, this man of ours, who is using this way alone, will already be wise. And no one who is wise is miserable; every man, however, is either miserable or happy. Therefore, not only the discovery of the truth, but the very quest for it will by itself make him happy."

15. Then, laughing, Trygetius said: "As long as I'm confidently agreeing with my adversary about something that isn't essential, I deserve for these things to happen to me. As if I were in fact some great definer or should consider anything whatsoever in a disputation to be more superfluous!⁶⁰ For what end in sight⁶¹ will there be if I should like you to define something again and again and if, pretending that I don't understand it, I should entreat you to define all the words of the same definition and their logical consequences as well, one by one? On the other hand, if a definition of wisdom is rightly required of me, why shouldn't I rightly compel something to be defined that is abundantly clear? In fact, of what word has nature wanted us to have a clearer notion in our minds than 'wisdom'? But when the notion itself somehow leaves the port of our mind*, as it were, and hoists the sails of words,⁶² so to speak, the shipwrecks of a thousand fallacies instantly lie in its way. Therefore, either let no definition of wisdom be required or let our judge deign to step down to its defense."

At that point, since the night was already impeding our pen⁶³ and I could see that an important matter for discussion was arising afresh, so to speak, I postponed it for another day. For the sun had already been setting when we began the disputation, and practically the entire day had been spent not only in putting some farm work in order,⁶⁴ but also in reviewing the first book of Vergil.⁶⁵

6.

16. Then, as soon as it was daylight⁶⁶—for on the previous day, things had been arranged in such a way that we would have ample time for leisure—we immediately took up the business that had yet to be completed. Then I said: “Yesterday, Trygetius, you demanded that I step down from my office as judge for the defense of wisdom, as if indeed wisdom would tolerate anyone as her adversary in your discussion or would fall into such trouble while someone was defending her that she would have to beg for more help.⁶⁷ For on one hand, nothing in the way of inquiry has come up between you two other than what wisdom is, which neither of you attacks since both of you want it. On the other hand, even if you [Trygetius] think that you failed to define wisdom, you should not for that reason abandon the defense of what remains of your position. And so, you will get nothing more from me but a definition of wisdom, which is neither mine nor new. It is from the ancients, and I’m surprised that neither of you remembers it, for you’re not now hearing for the first time that ‘Wisdom is the knowledge* of human and divine things.’”⁶⁸

17. At this point I figured that after this definition Licentius would be taking a long time in seeking what to say, but he proposed the following immediately: “Then why don’t we call that utterly scandalous fellow who, as we ourselves well know, usually

squanders himself on countless harlotries, a wise man? I am speaking about the infamous Albicerius, who for many years at Carthage has given some astonishing and reliable answers to those who consult him. I could recount countless incidents if I weren't speaking to those who have experienced them and if a few examples didn't suffice at present for my purpose.

"When we couldn't find a spoon at home and at your bidding," for Licentius was now speaking to me, "I not only asked Albicerius what we were looking for, but I also asked him in detail whose it was and where it was hiding, did he not respond very quickly and very accurately?⁶⁹ Likewise in my presence (I'm passing over the fact that his response to what he was being consulted about wasn't false in any way), when the boy who was carrying the money stole some of it as we were on our way to him, Albicerius ordered him to count all of it for him and forced him before our very eyes to return what he had pocketed—this before Albicerius had in any way either seen the money or heard from us how much we had brought for him.

18. "And what about the [story] we heard from you regarding Flaccianus, a most learned and illustrious man?⁷⁰ He would marvel at the time he had been talking about buying an estate and he referred the matter to that divine man⁷¹ to see whether he could tell what he [Flaccianus] had done. And Albicerius not only immediately divulged the kind of business it was, but also—and this is where Flaccianus really cried out with wonder—the very name of the estate, even though it was so absurd a name that Flaccianus himself barely remembered it. And even now I cannot speak without my mind growing amazed about when our friend and your pupil, wishing to rattle Albicerius, haughtily demanded that he tell him what he was silently turning over in his mind, and he replied that he was thinking about a verse of Vergil's. When [our

acquaintance], dumbfounded, could not deny it, he went on to ask what verse it was. Albicerius, who barely even looked at a grammar school as he passed one by, did not hesitate to recite, confidently and boisterously, the very verse. Surely, then, it isn't the case that these weren't human things about which he was being consulted, or that he was giving such reliable and true answers to those who were consulting him without a knowledge* of divine things? On the contrary, either option is absurd. For human things are nothing else but the things of men, like silver, money, a farm, and lastly, even thinking itself; and who doesn't rightly suppose that divine things are those through which divination itself is bestowed upon man? Therefore, Albicerius was wise if by that definition we grant that wisdom is the knowledge* of human and divine things."

7.

19. Here [Trygetius] said, "First of all, I don't call it knowledge* when the person who professes it is sometimes wrong. For knowledge* consists not only of things that are comprehended, but of things that are comprehended in such a way that no one with this knowledge* is in error; and when he is pressured by contrary things, no matter what they are, he should not waver.⁷² Hence it is most truly said by some philosophers that knowledge* cannot be found in anyone but the wise man,⁷³ who ought not only to hold on perfectly to what he maintains and follows, but also to possess it firmly.⁷⁴ We know*, however, that the man you mentioned has often said many false things, which not only did I discover from others reporting to me, but which I myself, being present, sometimes observed. Should I then call him a knower* when he has often uttered falsehoods, him whom I wouldn't call wise if he had hesitantly uttered true things? Suppose I have been saying this

about soothsayers and about augurs and about all those who consult the stars and about oneiromancers:⁷⁵ produce someone of that ilk, if any of you can, who never hesitated in his responses once he was consulted and who ultimately never gave false answers. For I don't reckon that I should be worried about seers who speak the mind* of someone else.⁷⁶

20. "Next, in order for me to concede that human things are the things of men, do you think that anything belongs to us which chance can either give us or take away? Or when we speak of a knowledge* of human things, are we speaking of that by which someone knows how many or what kind of estates we have, and what gold, silver, and finally, miscellaneous poems we may be thinking of? Knowledge* of human things is that by which one knows the light of prudence, the decorum of temperance, the strength of fortitude, and the holiness of justice.⁷⁷ For these are the things that we dare to say, without any fear of misfortune, are truly *ours*. If the famous Albicerius had known them, believe me, he would never have lived so wantonly and shamefully. And regarding his voicing the verse that was being turned over in the mind of the person consulting him, I don't think we should count this among the things that are ours either—not that I'd deny that the most honorable disciplines have something to do with a certain possession of our mind, but because even the most unlearned have been granted the ability to sing and recite a miscellaneous verse. And so when such things surge into our memory, it is no wonder if they can be perceived by some extremely vile beings of this air that are called demons⁷⁸ (which I grant can surpass us in keenness and acuteness of the senses but deny that they can surpass us in reason);⁷⁹ and it is no wonder that this happens in some way or another that is most hidden and very far removed from our senses. For if we wonder at the little bee that flies from wherever it is to the honey it has deposited

by some kind of acuity [of sense], an acuity by which it surpasses man, we should not for that reason rank it higher than or even equal to ourselves.

21. "And so I would rather that this Albicerius of ours had taught meter itself whenever he was asked by a person seeking to learn from him; or that, forced by some client, he had recited verses of his own on a topic proposed to him on the spot. And as you are wont to recall, the same Flaccianus often said this himself, whenever with great profundity of mind* he derided and despised this kind of divination and attributed it to some utterly sordid 'mini-soul'⁸⁰ (for that is what he called it) by which Albicerius used to give these answers, as if Albicerius were being admonished or inspired by a spirit. For that most learned man asked those who marveled at such answers whether Albicerius could teach grammar or music or geometry. But among those who knew him, who would not admit that he was utterly ignorant of all these disciplines? That is why in the end Flaccianus encouraged those who had learned such things to prefer without a moment's hesitation their own souls to this divination and to devote themselves to instructing and supporting one's own mind* with these disciplines, disciplines that succeed in leaping over and flying above the airy nature of invisible beings.

8.

22. "Now, since everyone grants that divine things are much better and more august than human things, by what means could Albicerius, who didn't even know what he himself was, have acquired them? Unless perhaps you think that the stars, which we contemplate daily, are something great in comparison with the most true and most hidden God, the God whom perhaps the intellect

touches on rare occasions but no sense *ever* does. The stars, however, are before our very eyes, and so they are not divine things, the kind of thing that wisdom alone professes to know. Moreover, the other things that these diviners of ours (whoever they are) abuse for the sake of either vain boasting or profit are certainly baser than the stars.

“Albicerius, then, was not a partaker of the knowledge* of human and divine things, and in vain have you tested our definition in this way. Finally, since we ought to consider as most base and to hold in utterly low regard whatever is outside the pale of human and divine things, I ask you: In what things would this wise man of yours seek the truth?”

“In divine things,” [Licentius] said. “For there is a power even in man that is indubitably divine.”⁸¹

“And so did Albicerius already know* the things into which your wise man will be forever inquiring?”

Then Licentius said: “Even he knew divine things, but not the things that should be sought by the wise man. For who will not overturn every usage of speech if he grants him divination but deprives him of divine things, from which divination takes its name? That is why your definition, if I’m not mistaken, includes something or another that doesn’t pertain to wisdom.”

23. Then Trygetius said: “The one who mentioned this definition of ours will defend it, if he so pleases. But for now, I want you yourself to answer me so we may finally come to the topic that is being treated.”

“I’m listening,” [Licentius] said.

“Do you grant,” [Trygetius] said, “that Albicerius knew* the truth?”

“I do,” [Licentius] said.

“Then he is better than your wise man.”

“By no means,” [Licentius] said. “For it is not just that silly seer—not even the wise man himself, while he is living in this body, attains the *kind* of truth that the wise man seeks. Yet it is still the case that forever seeking the latter [the kind of truth the wise man seeks] is far more excellent than sometimes finding the former [the kind of things Albicerius knew].”

“In my dire straits,” Trygetius said, “it is necessary for that definition to rescue me. If it seemed to you that the definition is defective on account of the fact that it included someone whom we cannot call wise, I ask whether you would approve if we were to say that wisdom is the knowledge* of human and divine things, but only of those things that pertain to the happy life.”

“That is wisdom,” [Licentius] said, “but wisdom is more than that. Hence, while the earlier definition took possession of something alien to it, this one has abandoned something proper to it;⁸² and thus the former can be convicted of avarice, the latter of foolishness. As a matter of fact, to explain now what I myself think by way of a definition, it seems to me that wisdom is not only a knowledge* of but also a diligent quest for the human and divine things that pertain to the happy life. And if you would like this definition to be subdivided: the first part, which comprises knowledge*, pertains to God, but the part that is content with the quest pertains to man. By the former, then, God is happy; by the latter, man.”

Then [Trygetius] said, “I wonder how you can claim that your wise man is spending his efforts in vain.”

“How is it in vain when his searching brings with it such great reward?” Licentius said. “For he is wise by virtue of the fact that he is seeking, and he is happy by virtue of the fact that he is wise. This is because he has unwrapped his mind*, insofar as he can, from all the gift-wrap of the body⁸³ and collects his very self into his very self;⁸⁴ and it’s because he doesn’t permit himself to be torn apart by

lusts but, always tranquil, is forever straining toward himself and God, the result being that here [on earth] he thoroughly enjoys reason (which we agreed earlier was to be happy),⁸⁵ and on the last day of his life he may be found ready to obtain what he has been desiring. And he who had thoroughly enjoyed human happiness before may [now] deservedly enjoy divine happiness.”

9.

24. Then, when Trygetius was taking a long time trying to find what to say in reply, I said: “I don’t reckon, Licentius, that [Trygetius] would be lacking in arguments either if we were to permit him to seek them at a leisurely pace, since at what point did he ever fail to give an answer? For in the first place, he himself inferred that because the question of the happy life arose and it is necessary that the wise man alone be happy (since indeed even by the judgment of fools folly is miserable), the wise man ought to be perfect, but that he who’s still seeking after what is true isn’t perfect and hence he certainly isn’t happy. At which point, when you yourself tossed in the weight of authority, out of modesty he grew somewhat alarmed by the name of Cicero. Yet immediately he lifted himself up and with a certain noble stubbornness leapt onto the peak of liberty and once again seized what had been violently knocked out of his hands. And he asked you whether it seemed to you that someone who was still seeking was perfect, so that, if you had admitted that [such a man] was not perfect, he was going to rush back to the main point and show by means of that definition, if he could, that the man who rules his life according to the law of the mind* is perfect and hence he cannot be happy unless he is perfect.

“You extricated yourself from this trap more carefully than I

had expected and said that the perfect man is the most diligent seeker of the truth; but then you fought with too much reliance on, and left yourself wide open because of, the very definition by which we had said that the happy life, when it's all said and done, is that which is lived in accordance with reason. And when you did this, Trygetius clearly put you back in your place. For he captured your garrison, from which you had been altogether driven back; and you would have lost the whole engagement⁸⁶ had not the truce brought you back to life.

“For where did the Academics, whose position you’re defending, locate their citadel if not in the definition of error?⁸⁷ If this definition had not returned to your mind* overnight (perhaps through a dream), you would’ve now had nothing to say in reply, although you yourself had mentioned this very thing before when you were explaining Cicero’s position.⁸⁸ Then we came to the definition of wisdom, although you tried to undermine it with such cunning that not even perhaps your helper, Albicerius himself, would be able to grasp your trick. With what great vigilance, with what great might, Trygetius resisted you! How he almost entangled and overwhelmed you if you hadn’t finally defended yourself with your new definition and said that human wisdom is a search for the truth and that the happy life comes to pass from this by reason of a tranquility of mind! He himself won’t respond to this position, especially if he’s going to request that the courtesy be returned to him of an adjournment for the day or for what’s left of it.

25. “But, lest we prolong this discussion of ours, let it now be drawn to a close if you please, for I reckon that continuing to linger on it would be gratuitous. For the matter has been treated sufficiently for the business we have undertaken; and it could be finished off completely after just a few more words were it not for the fact that I want to exercise you and test your nerve and your

dedication,⁸⁹ about which I care very much. For when I decided to encourage you very strongly to seek the truth, I began to seek from you how much importance you would place on it; but you have all placed so much importance on it that I couldn't ask for anything more. For since we yearn to be happy—regardless of whether it cannot be attained unless the truth is found or unless it is diligently sought—if we wish to be happy, we are required to prefer the truth over everything else. Therefore, let us now, as I have said, conclude this disputation, and let us send a record of it in writing to your father especially, Licentius, whose mind I'm now piloting wholly toward philosophy, even though I'm still seeking the fortune that would admit him into it.⁹⁰ Moreover, he could be more ardently set on fire for these studies when he learns, not only by hearing it, but by reading about it as well, that you yourself are living with me in this way. But if you like the Academics (as I sense you do), muster your strength to defend them more vigorously; for *I have decided to arraign the accused.*"⁹¹

When I finished saying this, it was announced that lunch was ready, and we arose.

BOOK TWO

1.

1. If finding wisdom anytime it was sought were as inevitable as a wise man's inability to be without the discipline and knowledge* of wisdom, then certainly all the Academics' sophistry or pertinacity or stubbornness or, as I sometimes suppose, that method of theirs which fits in well with the time period would have been buried simultaneously with that era and with the bodies of the famous Carneades and Cicero.¹ But either because of the many different disturbances of this life (as you yourself show to be the case, Romanianus); or because of a certain stupor in those with a lackluster aptitude [brought about] by laziness or stupidity; or because of the despair of discovery (for the star of wisdom does not dawn on our minds* as easily as this light of ours does on our eyes); or even because—and this error is common with people—of a false opinion that they have already discovered the truth: it so happens that men do not seek the truth diligently (if they seek it at all!) and are turned away from the will to seek it,² the result being that knowledge* is seldom attained and only by the few. And thus it turns out that the arms of the Academics, when one comes into hand-to-hand

combat with them, seem invincible and Vulcanian,³ so to speak, not only to the mediocre, but to perceptive and well-educated men as well. Consequently, we should resist not only those tides and tempests of fortune with the oars of any kind of virtue whatsoever, but we should especially implore divine assistance with all of our devotion and piety, so that an ever-constant application to good studious pursuits⁴ may hold its course (from which no mishap may drive it), lest the utterly safe and utterly delightful port of philosophy fail to receive it.⁵ This first case is yours, and hence I fear for you, hence I long for you to be liberated, hence—if only I were worthy to obtain what I ask for!—I do not cease to pray with daily petitions⁶ for favorable winds for you; moreover, I pray for the very power and wisdom of the most High God.⁷ For what else is He whom the mysteries have handed down to us as the Son of God?⁸

2. You will help me a great deal as I pray for you, however, if you do not despair of our being able to be heard and if you yourself strive with us not only by prayers, but also by will and by that natural loftiness of your mind*,⁹ on account of which I am seeking you out, in which I take singular delight, at which I always marvel. But alas, it is wrapped up in you as if it were a thunderbolt in those clouds of domestic affairs, and it is hidden from many and from almost everyone. It cannot hide from me, however, and from one or two other very close acquaintances of yours¹⁰ who have often not only listened attentively to your rumblings, but who have also seen some flashes that were more like lightning bolts. For who—to pass over in silence the other [examples] for the sake of time and to mention just one—who, I say, ever thundered so suddenly and so greatly and who ever emitted such a mighty [burst] from the light of his mind* that a lust thoroughly raging the day before died in a single day beneath one roar of reason and from one flash of temperance? Then will that virtue of yours not burst forth some

day and convert the sneers of many despairing [souls] into dread and shock and, having uttered upon the land certain signs of the future, as it were, with the burden of the entire body having in turn been cast aside, will it not return again to heaven?¹¹ Then has Augustine said these things about Romanianus in vain? He will not permit it, He to whom I have given myself entirely, whom I have now begun to recognize to some extent.¹²

2.

3. Therefore, approach philosophy with me. Here there is everything that is wont to stir you up in a wonderful way anytime you experience your frequent anxiety and doubt. For I am not concerned about any laziness in your habits or slowness in your mental aptitude.¹³ Who has appeared more alert during our discussions (whenever you were granted a bit of respite), who more perceptive? And shall I not repay you the favor? Or perhaps I do not owe you that much? When I was a poor youth pursuing my studies, you supported me with your home and with your money and, what is more, with your heart.¹⁴ When I was bereaved of my father,¹⁵ you consoled me with your friendship, animated me with your encouragement, helped me with your resources. With your favor, your close friendship, the sharing of your home, you made me almost as famous and as prominent in our own town as yourself.¹⁶ When I disclosed to you and to no other friends or family my plan and my hope to return to Carthage for the sake of a more illustrious profession, although you hesitated for a while out of an innate love of your homeland (because I was now teaching there),¹⁷ nevertheless, when you were unable to overcome the desire of a young man striving for what seemed to be better things, you turned from being a naysayer into a helper with a wonderful tempering of goodwill. It

was you who provided me with all the necessities for my journey. In the same matter it was you again who had fostered the cradle and nest, as it were, of my studies, and who now supported my first attempts in daring to fly. It was also you who, when I had sailed away during your absence and without your knowledge, were not angry in the least that I had not communicated with you as I usually did.¹⁸ And suspecting anything but stubborn defiance, you remained unshaken in our friendship; the fact that the children had been abandoned by their teacher was not given more consideration before your eyes than the inner [motives] and pure [intentions] of our mind*.¹⁹

4. Lastly, whatever in my leisure I am now rejoicing over: the fact that I have escaped from the chains of superfluous desires; the fact that having cast off the burdens of dead cares I am breathing free²⁰ and recovering my wits and returning to myself;²¹ the fact that I am most intensely seeking the truth; the fact that I am beginning to discover it; the fact that I am confident I will reach the Supreme Measure itself²²—*you* have brought to life, *you* have urged on, *you* have made possible.

Further, I have grasped even more by faith than comprehended by reason whose minister you have been.²³ For when I had related to you face-to-face the inner disturbances²⁴ of my soul and I emphatically and frequently declared that it seemed to me that no fortune was favorable unless it granted the leisure of philosophizing and that no life was happy unless it was lived in philosophy but that I was held back by such a great burden of my relatives (whose lives depended on my employment) and by many necessities [brought on] either by shame or by my relatives' impertinent misery, you were elated by such a great joy, you were inflamed with such a holy ardor for this life,²⁵ that you would say that if you could be released in some way from the chains of those vexing

lawsuits,²⁶ you would break all my chains by sharing even your patrimony with me.

5. And so, although you departed after you furnished us the kindling, we have never ceased to pine for philosophy and for that life which has pleased us so and on account of which we have agreed to think about absolutely nothing else. And we were indeed doing that consistently, though less intensely—yet we reckoned that we were doing enough. And because we were not near that blaze which at its height was to take hold of us, we thought that this slow flame by which we were being warmed was the greatest that could ever be. When behold! Some fulsome books,²⁷ as Celsinus puts it, as soon as they breathed forth upon us good Arabian [fragrances]²⁸ and as soon as they dribbled just a few drops²⁹ of their most precious ointment onto the tiny flicker, they enkindled an incredible, Romanianus, an incredible (and beyond what perhaps even you believe about me—what more can I say?—beyond what I as well believe about myself!), an *incredible* conflagration.

From that point on, what honor, what retinue of men, what desire for empty fame, and, in short, what bandage and bondage of this mortal life³⁰ was there to affect me? Straightaway I wholly and hastily returned to myself.³¹ Yet I admit that I looked back from that journey, as it were, to that religion which was grafted onto us as boys and woven into the very marrow of our being; in truth, however, it was itself pulling me to it, all the while without my knowing it. And so, faltering, hastening, hesitating, I took hold of the Apostle Paul. For surely, I say, these men could not have been capable of such great things³² and they could not have lived thus (as it is obvious that they did) if their writings and their reasoning were in opposition to so great a good as this. I thoroughly read through all of it with the utmost attention and piety.³³

6. Then indeed, with a light (howsoever faint) having now been shed on her, the countenance of Philosophy showed itself to me so much that I should not speak of it to you, you who have always been on fire with a hunger for her even though she has remained unknown to you. But if I could have shown her to that adversary of yours (and I know not whether you are more agitated by him or impeded by him), he would surely have cast off and abandoned Baiae³⁴ and the lovely parks and the sumptuous and glittering banquets and his own private [troupe of] actors and, in short, whatever keenly incites him to any luxuries whatsoever.³⁵ And, being the pleasant and pious³⁶ lover that he is, he would dash off to the beauty of that face, marveling and panting and burning for it. For one must admit that he has a certain decorum of mind, or rather, the planting of decorum, as it were, which, as it is trying to sprout into true beauty, brings forth warped and deformed leaves amidst the rough brush of vices and the thickets of fallacious opinions.³⁷ Nevertheless, it does not cease to bring forth leaves, and—to the few who look clearly and carefully into the dense shrubbery, insofar as it is permissible—to stand out. Hence the hospitality, hence the many seasonings of courtesy at his banquets, hence the very elegance itself, the splendor, the most refined appearance of everything, the urbane sophistication of a silhouetted charm pouring over all things from all sides.

3.

7. This is commonly called philocaly.³⁸ Do not look down on this name because it comes from the common people, for Philocaly and Philosophy are surnamed almost the same, as if they want it to appear that they were from the same family—and they are. For what is philosophy? The love of wisdom. What is philocaly? The

love of beauty. (Just ask the Greeks.) What, then, is wisdom? Is it not true beauty itself? Therefore, these two are full sisters, born from the same parent; but [Philocaly] was pulled down from her place in heaven by the birdlime of lust and was penned in a popular cage.³⁹ Nevertheless, she held on to the likeness of her name in order to impress upon the bird-catcher that he should not look down upon her. And so, Philosophy, flying about freely, often recognizes this wingless and shabby and needy [sibling]. But she seldom frees her, for only Philosophy knows whence this Philocaly of ours may trace her ancestry.

This entire fable—as I have suddenly become Aesop—will be more pleasantly rendered in a poem for you by Licentius, for he is an almost perfect poet.⁴⁰ Now that lover of false beauty [your adversary], if he could gaze upon true beauty with eyes that have been healed and stripped a little of their blindfold, then with what great pleasure would he enfold himself in the lap of Philosophy! How, once he recognized you as a true brother, would he then embrace you!

You are marveling at these statements and perhaps you are laughing. What if I were to explain these things as I have been wanting to? What if you could at least hear Philosophy's voice, even if you still could not see her countenance? You would marvel, to be sure, but you would not laugh, you would not despair. Believe me, we should despair over no one, least of all over men such as these; they are examples in every way. This kind of bird easily escapes and easily flies back, while many, still encaged, look on with great wonder.

8. But let us return to ourselves, Romanianus: let us, I say, philosophize.⁴¹ I shall return the favor; your son has begun to philosophize. I myself am restraining him, that after being cultivated by the requisite disciplines, he may rise up more vigorous and

strong.⁴² Do not fear that you are without these disciplines: if I know you well, I need only wish you to have open winds.⁴³ For what shall I say about your natural ability? Would that it were not so rare in men as it is fixed in you! There remain two vices and impediments to finding the truth, which I do not much fear on your behalf. Nevertheless, I fear that you hold yourself in low regard and that you despair that you will find the truth, or that at any rate you may believe that you have [already] found the truth. If you are still involved in the first of these two vices, perhaps this disputation of ours will pull you out of it. For very often you were enraged at the Academics—indeed, the less educated you were [about them], the more severely you became enraged; and because you were egged on by a love of the truth, you became enraged all the more willingly. And so with you acting as a patron, I shall argue with Alypius and I shall easily persuade you of what I want, although it will still only be *probable*: for you will not see the truth itself unless *you* enter entirely into philosophy. But as for that other vice—that perhaps you presume to have found something even though at the time you left us you were seeking and hesitating—nevertheless, if any superstition has rolled back into your mind, it will be certainly cast out either when I send you some disputation we hold on religion or when I discuss a good number of things with you in person.⁴⁴

9. I myself am doing nothing else right now but purging myself of vain and pernicious opinions, and so I do not doubt that I am better situated than you. It is only because of one thing that I envy your fortune: the fact that you alone are enjoying [the company of] my Lucilianus.⁴⁵ Or do you also envy me because I have said “my”? But what have I said other than that he is your Lucilianus and the Lucilianus of all of us (whoever we may be) who are one? Yet what should I ask of you in order to relieve my missing him? Or

am I myself gaining you?⁴⁶ You know* that you owe me that much! But I now say to you both: beware, lest you think that you know something—unless, in any event, you know what you have learned in the same way that you know that one, two, three, and four, collected together into a sum, is ten. But beware all the same, lest you think either that you will not know truth by means of philosophy or that truth cannot in any way be known in this manner. Believe me, both of you, or rather believe Him who says “seek and ye shall find,”⁴⁷ that we must not despair of obtaining knowledge and that it will be more obvious than those numbers.

Let us now come to the point. For by now I have begun to fear, too late, that this introduction is exceeding its measure, and this is no trivial concern. For without a doubt measure is divine, but it slips by unnoticed when it leads pleasantly.⁴⁸ I will be more careful once I am wise!

4.

10. After the original discussion that we brought together in the first book, we spent about seven days away from the disputation, although we reviewed the three books of Vergil following the first⁴⁹ and discussed them when it seemed to fit in with the time we had. Still, Licentius became so inflamed by this activity for the study of poetry that it seemed to me that I should also restrain him a bit, for he did not take it gladly when he was called away from this preoccupation to anything else. Yet at last, when I praised the splendor of philosophy, insofar as I could, in order to undertake anew the question about the Academics that we had postponed, he did not approach it unwillingly. And by chance the day shone with such clarity that it seemed to fit in with no greater purpose at all than clarifying our minds. And so we arose from our beds

earlier than usual, and because time was pressing on, we did very little with the farm hands.

Then Alypius said, "Before I hear you argue about the Academics, I want your discussion, which you say was completed during my absence, read to me. For otherwise, since the occasion of this debate springs from that one, I can't help but err or at least have difficulty [following] when I listen to you."

When this was done, we saw that it had taken up almost the entire morning, and so we decided to return home from the field that had hosted us as we were walking about. And Licentius said, "Please don't be annoyed at having to repeat the whole position of the Academics by briefly explaining it to me before lunch, lest something in it should escape me that would be of use to my side."

"I will do it," I said, "and all the more gladly, because you eat little when you think about this subject."

"Don't be so sure of that," he said. "For I have often noticed with many people, and especially with my father, that the more stuffed with cares he is, the more voracious he becomes. Further, you also haven't seen me thinking about those meters in such a way that my attention is free of the table.⁵⁰ In fact, I usually wonder about this in my own case. For what does it mean that we hunger more persistently for one thing when our mind is intent on something else? Or what is it that becomes so exceedingly domineering when we are occupied with our hands and teeth?"⁵¹

"Listen instead to what you asked about regarding the Academics," I said, "lest I have to endure without measure your going over those poetic measures of yours, not only during meals, but during questions as well. If, however, I hide something for my side, Alypius will uncover it."

"Your *bona fides* is needed,"⁵² Alypius said, "for if we must fear that you're hiding something, I think it will be difficult for me to

be able to nab the person from whom I learned these things (as everyone who knows me knows), especially since in producing the truth you will be looking out not so much for a victory as for your own design.”

5.

11. “I will act *bona fides*,” I said, “because you’re giving this order *de jure*.⁵³

“Now, the Academics held that man cannot attain a knowledge* of precisely those things that pertain to philosophy (for Carneades said that he didn’t care about anything else); and yet they held that man can be wise and that the whole office of the wise man is developed in the diligent search for the truth, as you articulated in your discourse, Licentius. Hence it follows that the wise man shouldn’t assent to anything, for if he assents to uncertain things, it is inevitable that he errs, which is abominable to a wise man.⁵⁴ And they not only said that all things were uncertain, but they also confirmed this with a plethora of reasons. But it seems that they seized the [idea] that truth cannot be grasped from a definition of Zeno the Stoic,⁵⁵ who said that that truth can be perceived which has been so impressed upon the mind from the place whence it comes that it cannot be from the place whence it does not come.⁵⁶ To put it more briefly and clearly, truth can be grasped by the features⁵⁷ that cannot be possessed by the false.⁵⁸ And they [the Academics] dwelt on this most vigorously in order to prove that there was no way such a thing could be found.⁵⁹ Hence disagreements between philosophers,⁶⁰ hence the illusions of the senses,⁶¹ hence dreams and fits of madness,⁶² and hence false syllogisms and sophisms⁶³—all thrived in the defense of their case. And since they accepted from the same Zeno that nothing is more disgraceful than

forming an opinion, they most cleverly concluded that if nothing can be perceived and if forming an opinion is utterly disgraceful, then the wise man should give approval to nothing.⁶⁴

12. “From that point on, a great hatred flared up against them, for it seemed that a consequence of their thought was that someone who gave approval to nothing could do nothing.⁶⁵ Hence, it seemed that the Academics were describing your wise man, whom they opined gave approval to nothing, as someone who was always asleep, a deserter of every duty.⁶⁶ At this point, they introduced a certain [notion of the] ‘probable,’ which they also named ‘truth-like,’⁶⁷ and asserted that in no way is the wise man remiss in his duties, since he has something to pursue while the truth—whether on account of some obscurity in nature or on account of the similarity of things—remains in hiding, either buried or blurred.⁶⁸ Although, they [also] said that the very curbing and suspending of assent, as it were, was a thoroughly great deed belonging to the wise man.⁶⁹

“It seems to me that, as you wanted, I’ve explained things briefly and haven’t gone back on your precept, Alypius—that is, I have acted *bona fides*, as they say. For if I said something that’s untrue or if perhaps I didn’t say something I should have, I did not do so intentionally; therefore, to my mind it is *bona fides*. For to a man it should be apparent that a deceived man should be taught, a deceitful man should be dealt with cautiously. The first of these cases calls for a good teacher, the second a wary pupil.”⁷⁰

13. Then Alypius said: “I’m grateful, since you satisfied Licentius and relieved me of a burden that had been imposed on me. For you shouldn’t have feared saying less in order to test me—for how else could it have been done?—any more than I should’ve feared exposing you on some point were it necessary. So don’t be annoyed at having to explain what is [still] missing, not so much in the inquiry

as in the inquirer himself, into the difference between the Old and New Academy.”

“That, I admit, I find utterly annoying,” I said. “So grant us a favor—if you would differentiate those names and explain the case for the New Academy in my presence while I rest a little bit. For I can’t deny that what you’re mentioning greatly pertains to the matter at hand.”

“I would have believed,” he said, “that also you wanted to call *me* away from lunch if I hadn’t reckoned that you were more frightened by Licentius a little while ago and if his petition hadn’t ordered us about in such a way that we should explain to him before lunch anything [in the case] that was complicated.”

And as he was trying to continue with the rest, our mother—for we were already home—began to hustle us to lunch in such a way that there was no time to talk.

6.

14. Then, after we had received enough food to satisfy our hunger and had returned to the meadow, Alypius said to us: “Let me obey your decision, nor would I dare refuse it. For if nothing escapes me, I shall be grateful not only for your teaching, but also for my memory. But if perhaps I go astray in something, you’ll set it aright, so that from now on I won’t be terribly frightened of an assignment of this kind. The splintering of the New Academy, I think, was triggered not so much in opposition to the Old version as it was in opposition to the Stoics.⁷¹ Nor, indeed, should it be thought of as a splintering, since it was right to refute and discuss the new inquiry introduced by Zeno. For it has been reasonably speculated that the position about not perceiving, although it wasn’t triggered by any conflicts, was nevertheless also in the minds* of the Old

Academics. This is also easy to prove on the authority of Socrates himself and Plato and the rest of the old philosophers, who believed they could be defended from error to the extent that they did not give assent rashly—although they did not introduce their own disputation on this point into their own schools, nor did they ever *straightforwardly* inquire into whether or not truth can be perceived.⁷² But Zeno had brought forward something undeveloped and new and was arguing that nothing could be perceived unless it was true in such a way that it could be distinguished from the false by its dissimilar marks, and that it doesn't belong to a wise man to come up with an opinion.⁷³ And when Arcesilaus⁷⁴ heard this, he said that nothing of this kind could be discovered by man, nor should the life of a wise man be entrusted to this shipwreck of an opinion. Hence he also concluded that assent should be given to nothing.⁷⁵

15. “But when the matter stood in such a way that the Old Academy seemed more augmented than attacked, there stepped forth a disciple of Philo, Antiochus, who (as it seemed to some) was more desirous of glory than truth.⁷⁶ [Antiochus] brought the position of both academies into enmity with each other, for he said that the New Academics were trying to introduce something unusual and far, far removed from the opinion of the Old. On this topic he appealed to a trust in the old naturalists⁷⁷ and the other great philosophers, and he even attacked the Academics themselves, who argued that they were following the ‘truth-like’ even though they acknowledged that they were ignorant of the truth itself. And he amassed many arguments, which I think should be passed over right now. Nevertheless, nothing did he defend more than that the wise man can perceive [truth].⁷⁸

“This, I reckon, was the controversy between the Old and New Academics.⁷⁹ And if it isn't, I would ask that you fully inform

Licentius, for both our sakes. But if it is just as I was able to express it, complete this disputation that you have taken up.”

7.

16. Then I said, “How long, Licentius, will you remain quiet in this discussion of ours, which is taking longer than I had thought it would? Have you heard who your Academics are?”

Smiling sheepishly and somewhat discombobulated by this reproach, he said, “I’m sorry that I so strongly affirmed against Trygetius that the happy life consists of a search for the truth. For this inquiry of ours so disturbs me that it is only with difficulty that I’m not miserable (at least, if you all bear any human kindness, I must seem worthy to you of being pitied).⁸⁰ But why do I, dimwit that I am, torture myself? Or why am I terrified, I who am supported by so noble a cause? I shall not yield at all except to the truth.”

“You like the New Academics?” I said.

“Very much so,” he said.

“Therefore, it seems to you that they speak the truth?”

Then, when he was already about to say “yes,” a smile from Alypius made him more careful and he hesitated somewhat. At which point he said, “Repeat that little question.”

“Does it seem to you that the Academics speak the truth?” I said.

And after he was again silent for a while, he said: “Whether it is true, I know not; yet it is probable. Nor, in fact, do I see anything more for me to strive after.”

“Do you know* that these men also call the probable the truth-like [*verisimilis*]?”⁸¹ I said.

“Yes, it would seem so,” he said.

“Then the position of the Academics is like the truth [*verisimilis*],” I said.

“Yes,” he said.

“Pay closer attention, please,” I said. “If someone who didn’t know your father were to claim that he had seen your brother and that your brother was like your father, won’t that person seem to you to be either insane or dimwitted?”

And here he was silent for a while. Then he said, “This doesn’t seem absurd to me.”

17. When I began to answer Licentius, he said, “Wait a minute, please.”

And after he smiled, he said, “Please tell me: Are you already certain of your victory?”

“Suppose that I am certain,” I said. “You still shouldn’t abandon your case for that reason, especially since this disputation of ours has been undertaken for the sake of exercising you and challenging you to fine-tune your mind.”⁸²

“What on earth!” he said. “Have I read the Academics? Or have I been educated in as many disciplines as those with which you, who are well-instructed, are coming at me?”

“The ones who first defended this position of yours hadn’t read the Academics,” I said. “But if you lack education and a copious amount of the disciplines, nevertheless, your mental aptitude shouldn’t be so weak that you succumb to my scant words and questions without making any assault on them. For I have already begun to fear this very thing, that Alypius may succeed you more quickly than I’d like. For I won’t be strolling about so carefree with him as my adversary.”

“Would, then, that I were already defeated,” he said, “so that I could hear you at some point discussing these things and, what is more, so that I could see it: a more felicitous spectacle could not be presented to me. Now because both of you have decided to drizzle your [thoughts] rather than have them gush forth—and

since they're being caught by the pen as they flow from your mouth and you aren't letting them to fall to the ground, as they say—it will be permissible to read even you.⁸³ But when somehow the very men who fence with words⁸⁴ are actually brought before our eyes, then a good disputation floods the soul—if not with greater benefit, then at least with greater pleasure.”

18. “We are grateful,” I said. “But those sudden joys of yours have rashly forced the escape of a statement in which you said that a more felicitous spectacle could not be presented to you. What if you could see your father inquiring into these things and discussing them with us? For surely, no one would guzzle down philosophy more passionately after so long a thirst than he. Since I myself will never reckon that I could be more fortunate, what, pray tell, is it appropriate for you to think and say?”

But here he wept a little, and when he could speak he looked up to heaven with an outstretched hand⁸⁵ and said: “And when, O God, shall I see this? But I should not despair over receiving anything from You.”

At this point, since almost all of us were being driven to tears and away from the purpose of the disputation, I struggled with myself and, barely pulling myself together,⁸⁶ said: “Come now! Return instead to your strength, which I advised you long ago, as a future patron of the Academy, to gather up wherever you could.⁸⁷ And for that reason I don't think that right now ‘trembling should overtake your limbs even before the sound of the trumpet’,⁸⁸ nor do I think that you would hope to be a captive so suddenly out of a desire to see another in the battle.”

Here Trygetius, when he noticed to his satisfaction that our countenances were now serene, said: “Why shouldn't a man as saintly⁸⁹ as he not hope that God may grant his petition before he's asked for it? Believe me now, Licentius: for you, who are not

finding what to say in reply and are still hoping to be defeated, seem to me to be of little faith.”

We laughed. Then Licentius said, “Speak, you who are happy not in finding the truth, but certainly not in seeking it!”

19. When the youths’ lightheartedness cheered us up, I said, “Pay attention to the question and return to the path firmer and stronger, if you can.”

“Behold, I’m here as much as I can be,” Licentius said. “For what if the man who has seen my brother has discovered through a rumor that he is like my father: Would he be insane or dimwitted if he believes it?”

“Can he at least be called foolish?” I said.

“Not necessarily,” Licentius said, “unless he claims that he knows* it. For if he follows as probable something that rumor has repeatedly thrown around, he cannot be accused of any rash behavior.”

Then I said: “Let us consider that very point for only a little while, and let us place it before our eyes, so to speak. Look: Suppose that this man we’re describing (whoever he is) is present, and your brother comes in from somewhere. Then the man asks, ‘Whose son is this boy?’ It is answered, ‘The son of a certain Romanianus.’ But here he says, ‘How similar he is to his father! How accurately rumor has reported this to me!’ Here you or someone else says, ‘My good man, do you even know Romanianus?’ ‘No I don’t,’ he says, ‘but it seems to me that he is like him.’ Would anyone be able to hold their laughter?”

“By no means,” he said.

“Then you see what follows,” I said.

“I see it at once,” he said, “but I still want to hear the conclusion from you, for you ought to start feeding him whom you have captured.”

“Why shouldn’t I give the conclusion?” I said. “The very thing cries out that your Academics should be similarly laughed at, they who tell us to follow likeness-to-the-truth in this life when they don’t know what the truth itself is.”

8.

20. Then Trygetius said: “It seems to me that the Academics’ caution is far different from the dimwittedness of the man you described. For it is through [various] reasons that they arrive at what they say is like-the-truth, while this dimwit of yours followed a rumor, of which no more worthless authority can be found.”

“As if indeed,” I said, “he wouldn’t be even more dimwitted if he were to say, ‘In fact, I don’t know his father at all, nor have I made any discovery through a rumor as to how he is similar to his father, yet it still seems to me that he is.’”

“He certainly would be more dimwitted,” he said, “but what’s the point?”

“That of the same ilk are those who say, ‘In fact we don’t know the truth, but what we see is similar to what we don’t know,’” I said.

“They say that it’s probable,” Trygetius said.

“What’s the point in your saying that?” I said. “Can it be that you deny they call it ‘like-the-truth’?”

“I wanted to say it for this reason,” he said, “to keep out that comparison of yours.⁹⁰ For it seemed to me that rumor flagrantly barged into your inquiry whereas the Academics don’t even trust human eyes, to say nothing of the thousand (but nevertheless monstrous) eyes of rumor, as the poets portray it.⁹¹ For what kind of a defender of the Academy am I now? Can it be that during this inquiry of yours you have become envious of my carefree state?⁹² Come: you have Alypius, whose arrival will, I pray, give us

a holiday. We think you've been afraid of him for some time, and for good reason."

21. Then, after it grew silent, both of them turned their eyes to Alypius. And then he said: "I wish indeed that, as my strength permits, I could to some extent be of help to both your sides were it not for the fact that your omen causes me such fear."⁹³ But unless my hope deceives me, I may easily dispel this terror, for I'm at once consoled by the fact that the Academics' present assailant will have taken on the burden of the almost defeated Trygetius, and that now it's probable, as you admit, that he will be the victor. And I fear something else even more: that I may not be able to avoid both the negligence of having deserted my own position and the effrontery of having arrogated another. For I don't believe that you have forgotten the office of judge which was conferred upon me."⁹⁴

Here Trygetius said, "That is one thing but this is another, and that's why we beseech you to endure private practice for awhile."

"I shouldn't refuse," [Alypius] said, "lest, in my eagerness to avoid effrontery or negligence, I fall into the trap of pride (and there's no more monstrous vice than that) by holding on to the honor you granted me longer than you permit."

9.

22. "And so, I'd like you to explain to me, O good prosecutor of the Academics, your office: that is, in fighting them, whom are you defending? For I fear that while refuting the Academics, you would like to prove that you're an Academic."

"In my opinion," I said, "you well know that there are two kinds of prosecutors. For even if Cicero said with the utmost modesty that he was Verres's prosecutor in such a way that he was the

Sicilians' defender,⁹⁵ it isn't therefore necessary that he who prosecutes one person is defending another."

"Do you at least have something on which your position will stand firm?" he asked.

"It's easy for me to respond to this question, especially since it isn't unexpected. I have already worked on this whole matter with myself, and I have turned it over in my mind a great deal and for a long time.⁹⁶ Therefore, Alypius, listen to what I suppose you already know* very well: that I don't want this disputation undertaken for the sake of disputing. Let it be enough that we playfully sparred with these youths of ours, when Philosophy, as it were, was gladly joking along with us.⁹⁷ Therefore, let the childish fables be taken out of our hands. The matter being treated is about our life, about our mores, and about our soul. Our soul, more secure in its return to heaven,⁹⁸ supposes that: it will overcome the hostility of all deceits and triumph over lusts once it has grasped the truth, returning, as it were, to the region of its origin; and once it has taken Temperance to wife, so to speak, in this fashion, it will reign.⁹⁹ You see what I'm talking about. And now let us take away from our midst all these things:¹⁰⁰ 'for a vigorous man, arms should be made!'¹⁰¹ There's nothing that I have ever wished for less than for something to emerge that would occasion a new scuffle, so to speak, among those who have lived together so long and have talked with each other so much. But because memory is an untrustworthy guardian of thoughts, I wanted to record in writing what we have often treated among ourselves, and at the same time I wanted these youths of ours to learn to attend to these things and to try to approach them and advance in them.¹⁰²

23. "Don't you know, then, that I as yet have nothing which I perceive as certain, but that I'm prevented from seeking it by the arguments and disputations of the Academics? For somehow or

other they induced in my mind a certain probability (lest I retreat from their word just yet) that man can't discover the truth. As a result I became lazy and utterly slothful, nor did I dare seek for what the most astute and learned men weren't allowed to find. Therefore, unless I will have first convinced myself that the truth can be found as much as they have convinced themselves that it can't, I won't dare to seek, nor do I have anything to defend. And so, please withdraw that question of yours, and let us instead discuss among ourselves as perceptively as we can whether the truth can be discovered. And it seems to me that I already have many things on my side that I'm trying to set in motion against the reasoning of the Academics. And now for the time being, nothing separates them from me except that it seemed probable to them that the truth can't be found while it seems probable to me that it can. Either an ignorance of the truth is peculiar to me (if they've been pretending), or both of us certainly have it in common."

10.

24. Then Alypius said: "I will now continue free from care, for I see that you won't so much be a prosecutor as an aide. And so, lest we get sidetracked any more, let us please first see to it that during this inquiry (in which I appear to have succeeded those who yielded to you) we do not fall into a controversy over a word, which we have often admitted, thanks to both your own lobbying and the authority of Tully, is most disgraceful.¹⁰³ For unless I'm mistaken, when Licentius said that he liked the position of the Academics on probability, you asked in addition whether he knew* this was also called by the same people likeness-to-the-truth, to which he replied in the affirmative without hesitation.¹⁰⁴ And well do I know that the sentiments of the Academics are not unknown

to you since I know them from you! And since these sentiments, as I said, are fixed in your mind, I don't know why you're running around after words."

"Believe me," I said, "this is a great controversy not over words, but over the things themselves. For I don't think that they were men who didn't know how to put names on things; rather, it seems to me that they chose these terms both in order to hide their position from the more sluggish and to reveal it to the more alert.¹⁰⁵ I will explain how and why this seems so to me after I first go over the things that men *think* have been said by the Academics as enemies of human knowledge. And so I'm very glad that our discussion today has brought us up to this point, that we have a sufficient and open agreement about what it is we are inquiring into.

"It seems to me that the Academics were thoroughly serious and prudent men. Moreover, if there is anything that we will now dispute, it will be against those who have believed that the Academics were *opposed* to the discovery of the truth. And lest you think that I'm scared, I shall not unwillingly take up arms against even the Academics themselves *if* they defended the things that we read in their books not for the sake of hiding their position (lest they rashly reveal certain sacred [mysteries] of truth to minds* polluted and profane, so to speak) but out of sincerity. I would do this today if it weren't for the setting sun that is already compelling us to return home."

We did not dispute beyond this point on that day.

11.

25. Although the following day shone no less pleasant and peaceful, it was nevertheless with difficulty that we were released from our household affairs (for we had spent a great part of it especially in

writing letters).¹⁰⁶ And even though there were barely two hours left, we headed out to the meadow. For the sky's serenity was awfully inviting to us, and as a result we decided not to allow even the little time that remained to be lost.

And so, when we came to the usual tree and remained there, I said, "I would like you, young men, since we cannot approach an important matter today, to recall for me from memory how Alypius responded to the little question that disturbed you yesterday."

Here Licentius said, "It's so brief that there's no trouble remembering it; how trivial it is, however, you shall see. For, in my opinion, he prevented you from starting an inquiry into words, since there was an agreement about the matter itself."

And I said, "Have you both sufficiently taken note of this matter, what it is, and what significance it has?"

"It seems to me that I see what it is," Licentius said, "but please explain it briefly. For I have often heard from you that it is disgraceful for disputants to fixate on a question of words when there remains no dispute about the substance."¹⁰⁷ But the matter is too subtle for an explanation of it to be rightly demanded of me."

26. "Then listen, both of you, to what it is," I said. "That which the Academics call 'probable' or 'like-the-truth' is capable of summoning us to action, without our assenting to it."¹⁰⁸ Moreover, I say 'without our assenting' in order for us not to suppose that what we are doing is true or to think that we know* it but in order for us to do it nonetheless. For example, if someone were to ask us whether such a cheerful sun would rise today (last night having been so limpid and clear), I believe that we wouldn't say that we *knew** it would but that it *seemed* that it would.¹⁰⁹ 'As such, it seems to me,' says the Academic, 'are all the things that I have reckoned should be named either probable or like-the-truth. And if you want to call these things by a different name, I have no objection. For I'm

satisfied that you have now rightly accepted what I'm saying—about the things, that is, to which I'm assigning these names—since it isn't proper for the wise man to be a wordsmith but a detective of reality.¹¹⁰ Have you understood adequately how the playthings with which I have been riling you up have been knocked out of my hands?"

Here, when they both replied that they understood and when they asked by the expression on their faces for my response, I said, "What do you think—that Cicero, whose words these are, was deficient in the Latin language, so that he assigned names that were less than suitable to the things he was observing?"

12.

27. Then Trygetius said, "Since we're now acquainted with the matter, we don't intend to instigate any bogus lawsuits over words!¹¹¹ That's why you should instead consider what to say in response to him who has liberated us—we against whom you who are spurred on and once again trying to assault."¹¹²

"Hold on, please," Licentius said. "For something or another is glowing faintly before me, and in light of it, I see that such an argument shouldn't have been taken away from you so easily."

And after being silently fixed in thought for some time, he said, "I ask you, does anything seem more absurd than someone who doesn't know what the truth is to say that he's following what is like the truth? Nor does that comparison of yours disturb me,¹¹³ for if I were asked whether any rain were being accumulated for tomorrow from this temperate sky of ours,¹¹⁴ I, who don't deny that I know something true, would correctly reply that it is like the true. For I know* that this tree of ours cannot turn silver right now and it isn't with arrogance that I say that I truly know* many such

things, and I see that the things which I call like-the-true are similar to them.¹¹⁵ But you, O Carneades, or some other Greek pest (that I might spare our own): why indeed should I hesitate to go over to this side, to him whose prisoner of war I am obliged to be by right of victory?¹¹⁶ You then, since you say that you know* nothing true, how is it that you're following something which is like the true? 'But surely,' [Carneades says], 'I couldn't assign any other name to it.' Then why should we dispute with someone who can't even speak?!"¹¹⁷

28. "I shall not fear deserters," Alypius said, "and much less shall the famous Carneades. I don't know if it's a juvenile or a puerile levity that has stirred you up, but you have somehow figured that insults rather than a weapon ought to be hurled at him.¹¹⁸ But to reinforce his position, which was always founded according to the probable, this will easily suffice for him against you for a while—namely, the fact that we have been placed so far from the discovery of the truth that you can be in a huge argument with *yourself*. You were so driven from your post by one little question that you're utterly unaware of where you should stand your ground! But let's postpone these things as well as your knowledge* about this tree (which you admitted just now to be impressed upon you) for another time; for although you've chosen another side, you must nevertheless be carefully taught what I had said not long ago.¹¹⁹ In my opinion, we had still not gotten very far into that question about whether the truth can be discovered. But at the very threshold of my defense¹²⁰ (where I saw you exhausted and laid out flat) I reckoned that one question alone ought to be prescribed: whether we shouldn't be seeking what is 'like-the-truth' or the 'probable' or any other name by which it can be called, which the Academics say is sufficient for them. For if it seems to you that you're now an excellent discoverer of the truth, it means nothing

to me. Afterwards, if you're not ungrateful for my legal defense,¹²¹ perhaps you will teach me the same things."

13.

29. At this point, since Alypius's assault had left Licentius frightened and chagrined, I said, "You have preferred, Alypius, to speak about everything except how we should dispute with those who don't know how to speak."

"Because I and everybody else have known for a long time that you are an expert in speaking (and your current profession gives sufficient indication of this as well)," Alypius said, "I would like *you* to explain first of all the advantage of this inquiry of his.¹²² Either it is superfluous (and in my opinion it is), in which case it is much more superfluous to reply to it; or, if it seemed to you that it was an appropriate inquiry and I can't explain it, then let me prevail upon you by an earnest plea not to be reluctant in assuming the office of teacher."

"You remember that yesterday I promised that I would tend to those terms later on," I said. "And now the sun is admonishing me to put the playthings I offered to the boys back in their trunks, especially since at the moment I'm offering them for display rather than for sale. Now before darkness, which is used to being the patron of the Academics, overtakes our pen, I want us to be in complete agreement today about what issue we should unpack when we rise in the morning. And so, please tell me whether it seems to you that the Academics had a definite position about the truth which they did not wish to proffer rashly to minds ignorant and unpurified,¹²³ or whether, indeed, they thought in the same way as their disputations read."

30. Then [Alypius] said: "I will not rashly assert what they had in mind. As a matter of fact, you yourself know better than I into

what words they are accustomed to put their position, insofar as it can be gathered from their books. However, if you ask me about my own position, I think that the truth has not yet been discovered. I also add, which is what you were demanding of the Academics, that I don't think that it *can* be discovered either—not only by virtue of my own deep-seated opinion, which you have almost always noticed,¹²⁴ but also on the authority of the great and outstanding philosophers before whom either our weakness or their sagacity somehow or other compels us to bend the neck;¹²⁵ and it should be believed that nothing can now be discovered that surpasses their authority.”

“This is what I wanted,” I said. “For I was afraid that if things seemed to be the same to you as they did to me, our disputation would remain *manqué*, since then no one from the other side would flush the matter into our hands so that we could carefully turn it over and over as best we could. And so if that had happened, I was prepared to ask you to take the Academics’ side [and act] as if it seemed to you that they not only argued but also thought that the truth could not be grasped. Therefore, the question among us is whether, by virtue of their arguments, it is probable that nothing can be perceived and that assent should not be given to anything. If you prevail in this, I shall gladly yield; but if I can demonstrate that it is much more probable that a wise man can reach the truth and that assent should not always be withheld, you will have no reason, in my opinion, for refusing to come over to my position.”

When he and the others who were present agreed to this, the evening had already overshadowed us and we returned home.

BOOK THREE

1.

1. The day after the discussion that is contained in the second book,¹ we took our seats in the baths, for it was too gloomy out for us to want to go down to the meadow.² I then began in the following way: “I suppose that you’ve already paid sufficient attention to the subject which, it has been decided, we are going to inquire into and discuss. But before I come to my own role (which has to do with explaining the question), please listen willingly to just a few things about our hope, our life, our intention—things not inconsistent with the matter at hand. I believe that our activity is neither trivial nor superfluous but necessary and of the greatest importance, namely, seeking the truth with all one’s heart. Alypius and I agree on this. For while the other philosophers reckoned that their own wise man had found the truth, the Academics professed that it is to be found by their wise man with supreme effort and that he is doing so carefully. But because the truth is either hidden (being buried) or inconspicuous (being mixed in with other things),³ he follows (in order to live his life) that which presents itself as probable and like the truth. This was also settled in your original

discussion.⁴ For since the one asserted that man becomes happy once he has found the truth but the other only when seeking it diligently, we have no doubt that we should put nothing ahead of this activity.

“So, what kind of day, I beseech, does it seem to you that we spent yesterday? For you were both allowed to abide in your studies.⁵ You, Trygetius, took delight in the poems of Vergil, and Licentius was free to bring forth his verses.⁶ Licentius has been so overpowered by a love of these verses that it is especially on his account that I reckoned to myself that I should bring up that discussion of ours [from yesterday], so that Philosophy might seize and claim for herself a greater place in his soul than the discipline of poetry or any other discipline. For the time for this to happen is now.

2.

2. “But I ask you, didn’t you feel sorry for us yesterday? We went to bed in such a way that we would be able to wake up to the question which had been postponed and to nothing else at all. But so many household chores came up that needed to be done! And because we were wholly occupied with these things, we could barely catch our breath by ourselves for the last two hours of the day. Consequently, it has always been my position that a man who is already wise needs nothing, but fortune is most necessary in order for him to become wise⁷ — unless it seems otherwise to Alypius.”

“I still don’t fully know,” Alypius then replied, “how much jurisdiction you’re bestowing on fortune.⁸ For if you think that Fortune herself is necessary in order to disregard Fortune, then I give myself to you as a partner in this position. But if you are granting to Fortune nothing else but the things that cannot be available

for the necessities of the body unless Fortune herself wills it, I don't see it the same way. For either the man who isn't yet wise but desirous of wisdom is at liberty to acquire those things that we admit are necessary for life even when fortune is adverse and unwilling, or we must concede that fortune dominates over the life of every wise man, since even the wise man himself cannot *not* be in need of these things that are necessary for the body."⁹

3. "So you're saying that fortune is necessary for someone who is eager for wisdom," I said, "but you deny that it's necessary for a wise man."

"It's not to our disadvantage," [Alypius] said, "to revisit these things. And so, now I too seek to learn from you whether you think that Fortune is of some assistance in disregarding her very own self. And if you think so, then I say that a man desiring wisdom greatly needs fortune."

"I do think so," I said, "if in fact it is by virtue of fortune that he will be the kind of man who can disregard fortune. Nor is this absurd: as little ones we need breasts for sustenance, and it is as a result of these breasts that we can later live and wax strong without them."

"If there's no discord between the concepts we have in mind," he said, "then it's clear to me that our positions are in harmony—unless perhaps it appears that we must explain to someone that it isn't the breasts themselves or fortune but something else that makes us disregard fortune or breasts."

"It's not difficult to use another simile," I said. "For no one crosses the Aegean Sea without a ship or without some sort of vehicle or indeed—lest I fear even Daedalus himself¹⁰—without some device suited for the purpose, or without some more hidden power. And even though the person intends to do nothing but arrive at his destination, when he reaches it he is prepared to cast

off and disregard everything that transported him there. So too, it seems to me that whoever wants to reach the port of wisdom and utterly firm and peaceful ground, so to speak, needs fortune [to attain] what he desired. For to pass over other examples, he can't reach the port if he is blind and deaf, which is within fortune's power to make happen. And when he has obtained this, although it may be reckoned that he stands in need of those things which pertain to bodily health, it is nevertheless agreed that he doesn't need these things in order to be wise but in order to live among men."

"No, even more," [Alypius] said. "For if he is blind and deaf, he will in my judgment have a right to disregard the struggle both for wisdom and for life itself, on account of which wisdom is sought."

4. "Nevertheless," I said, "since our very life, while we are living here, is in Fortune's power and since someone can't become wise unless he is alive, shouldn't we acknowledge that we need her favor to be conveyed to wisdom?"

"But since wisdom is necessary only for the living," he said, "and since no life is free from the need for wisdom, I have no great fear at all of fortune when it comes to increasing life. In fact, I want wisdom because I'm alive; it's not because I desire wisdom that I want to live. Hence, if Fortune takes my life away from me, she will be taking away the cause of my seeking wisdom. And therefore, in order to become wise, there is no reason why I should either wish for Fortune's favor or fear any of her impediments—unless, perhaps, you mention other reasons."

"So you don't think," I then said, "that the man desirous of wisdom can be impeded by Fortune to keep him from attaining wisdom, provided that she does not take his life?"

"I don't believe so," he said.

3.

5. “I would like you,” I said, “to open up a bit for me what seems to you to separate the wise man from the philosopher.”

“I don’t think that the wise man and the man desiring wisdom differ in anything,” [Alypius] said, “except that in the wise man there is a certain possession¹¹ of those things for which the desirous man has only a passionate longing.”

“And what in the world are those things?” I said. “For it seems to me that nothing else makes them different except that one knows* wisdom while the other longs to know* it.”

“If you define ‘knowledge*’ within a moderate limit,” he said, “you have articulated the matter itself rather clearly.”

“However I define it,” I said, “everyone agrees that there cannot be a knowledge* of false things.”¹²

“In this matter,” he said, “it seemed to me that I should throw out an objection¹³ lest as a result of my thoughtless agreement your speech should easily trot all over the fields of the principal question.”¹⁴

“Clearly,” I said, “you have left me no place where I can go trotting! But now unless I’m mistaken, we have arrived at the goal itself, which is what I have been trying to do for some time now. For if, as you so nicely and truly put it, there is no difference between the man desirous of wisdom and the wise man except that the former *loves* but the latter *has* the discipline of wisdom (hence you also didn’t hesitate to use the very term, ‘a certain possession’),¹⁵ then no one who has learned nothing can have a discipline in his mind. But he who knows nothing has learned nothing; and no one can know what is false. Therefore, the wise man knows truth; he has, as you yourself already acknowledged, the discipline—that is, the possession—of wisdom in his mind.”

"I don't know what kind of impudence I would have to have," he said, "if I wished to deny that I had acknowledged that in the wise man is a 'possession'¹⁶ of inquiring into divine and human things. But I don't see how it appears to you that there is no such thing as a possession of probable discoveries."

"Do you grant me," I said, "that nobody knows* false things?"

"Quite easily," he said.

"Now say, if you can," I said, "that the wise man doesn't know wisdom."

"What for?" he said. "Do you confine everything within this limit, so that it cannot [even] *seem* to him that he has comprehended wisdom?"

"Give me your right hand!" I said. "For if you recall, this is what I said yesterday that I would prove.¹⁷ And now I rejoice—not that I have accomplished this but that you have voluntarily offered it to me. For I said that the difference between myself and the Academics was this—that it seemed probable to them that the truth could not be comprehended, but it seems to me (who has not yet discovered the truth) that the truth can nevertheless be discovered by the wise man.¹⁸ And just now, when you were pressed by my question whether the wise man doesn't know wisdom, you said, 'It seems to him that he knows* it.'"

"Well, what of it?" he said.

"That if it seems to him that he knows* wisdom," I said, "it doesn't seem to him that the wise man can know* nothing. Or if wisdom is nothing, I wish you'd say so."

6. "I would truly believe," he said, "that we have come to the finish line and the goal, except that suddenly, as your right hand clasped mine, I see that we are completely disconnected from each other and have drifted far apart. Obviously, it seemed that yesterday we raised no other question except whether the wise

man can attain a comprehension of truth, you maintaining that he could and I that he couldn't.¹⁹ But in my opinion I have just now granted you nothing else than that it *can seem* to the wise man that he has acquired a wisdom about probable things.²⁰ Yet for all that, I believe that none of us has any doubt that I situated this wisdom in an *investigation* of divine and human things."

"Just because you're making things complicated doesn't mean that you'll be extricated," I said.²¹ "Indeed, it seems to me that you're now disputing in order to get some exercise. And because you know very well that these youths of ours can still barely understand with subtlety and finesse the things that we are putting forward, it's as if you're exploiting the judges' ignorance so that you can say as much as you like, with no one to protest! For a little while ago, when I asked whether the wise man knows* wisdom, you said that it seemed to him that he did.²² Now, if it seems to a person that the wise man knows* wisdom, it certainly doesn't seem to the same person that the wise man knows* nothing! For this cannot be maintained unless someone would dare say that wisdom is nothing. From which it follows that the matter appears the same to you as it does to me: for it seems to me that the wise man does not know* nothing and it seems so to you as well, in my opinion, since you agree that it seems to the wise man that the wise man knows* wisdom."

Then he said, "I suppose that I don't wish to exercise my mental aptitude any more than you do, and I'm surprised at this, for you don't need any exercise in this matter! For unless perhaps I'm blind, it seems to me that there is a difference between 'it seems to him that he knows*' and 'he knows*' as well as a difference between wisdom, which is based on investigation, and truth. The things we say, I find no way to square them with one another."

Then, since we were now being called to lunch, I said, "I'm not displeased that you're opposing me with such vehemence. For

either both of us don't know what we're talking about and should make an effort not to be quite so disgraceful; or one of us doesn't know, which is likewise no less disgraceful to leave out and ignore. But we'll rendezvous with each other this afternoon. For although it seemed to me that we had already reached the finish line, you still mixed blows with me!"

Here, after they had all laughed, we left.²³

4.

7. And when we returned we found Licentius, whom Helicon never assisted in his thirst,²⁴ eager to think through his verses. For close to the middle of lunch (even though the beginning of our lunch was the same as its end),²⁵ he had quietly gotten up and had nothing to drink.²⁶

"I certainly hope for your sake," I said to him, "that at some point you master this poetry of yours which you've been lusting after—not that I'm terribly delighted by such perfection, but I see that you're burning for it so much that you won't be able to escape this love unless you become sick of it, which usually happens when perfection is reached easily. From now on, since you're so musical, I would prefer that you ram your own verses into our ears rather than singing words you don't understand in those Greek tragedies, like the little birds that we see cooped up in cages.²⁷ Yet I advise you to go get a drink if you want one and to return to our school—that is, if the *Hortensius* and philosophy are still worthwhile to you. You have already tasted²⁸ their exceptionally sweet first-fruits during your discussion that set you on fire for the knowledge* of great and truly fruitful things more passionately than did that poetry of yours.²⁹ But while I wish to call you both back to the race track of those disciplines that cultivate the mind, I fear that it

might become a labyrinth for you,³⁰ and I almost regret that I have kept you from it by force.”

He blushed and left to get something to drink, both because he was very thirsty and because he was being given an opportunity to avoid the perhaps additional and harsher things that I might say.

8. When he returned and with everyone attentive, I began thus: “Is it true, Alypius, that there is no agreement between us on this matter which, as it seems to me, is completely obvious by now?”

“It’s not surprising,” he said, “if what you claim to be in plain sight for you is obscure to me, since many obvious things can be more obvious to some: and likewise, some obscure things can be more obscure to others. For if this is truly obvious to you, believe me, there is someone else for whom what is obvious to you is even more obvious; and likewise, what is obscure for me is more obscure for another. But in order for you not to consider me pugnacious any longer, I would implore you to explain this obvious thing in a more obvious way.”

“Please pay careful attention,” I said, “as if the trouble of making a response had been removed from you for a little while. For if I know myself well and you well, paying a little attention will clarify what I’m saying and one of us will be able to persuade the other quickly. Now then, did you say (or perhaps I had turned a deaf ear for a moment) that it seems to the wise man that he knows* wisdom?”

He nodded.

“Let’s put this wise man of ours aside for the moment,” I said. “Are you yourself wise, or not?”

“Not in the least,” he said.

“I still want you to tell me,” I said, “what you yourself perceive about the Academic wise man: Does it seem to you that he knows* wisdom?”

“Do you think,” he said, “that ‘it seems that he knows*’ and ‘he knows*’ are the same thing, or are they different? For I fear that this confusion could provide cover for either of us.”

9. “This,” I said, “is what is usually called the famous Tuscan quarrel—when it seems that the answer to a proposed question is provided not by its solution but by posing another question.³¹ Even our own poet—to give myself over a bit to Licentius’s ears—in his bucolic poem appropriately judged this to be rustic and plainly provincial. When one man asks the other where the span of the sky extends not more than three ells wide, the other replies, ‘in the lands where there grow flowers inscribed with the names of kings.’³² I beseech you, Alypius, don’t think that this is permissible for us in this villa; at least, surely even these modest baths of ours should evoke some memory of the decorum of the gymnasia.³³ Please answer the question I am asking: Does it seem to you that the Academics’ wise man knows* wisdom?”

“Lest we go on and on repaying words with words,” he said, “it seems that it seems to him that he knows*.”

“Then it seems to you that he doesn’t know?” I said. “For I’m not asking *what* seems to you seems to be to the wise man but *whether* it seems to you that the wise man knows* wisdom. At this point, in my opinion, you can either say yes or no.”

“O would that it were either as easy for me as it is for you or as difficult for you as it is for me,” he said. “You wouldn’t then be such a bother, nor would you hope for anything in these matters. For when you were interrogating me about what it seemed to me regarding the Academic wise man, I answered that it seemed to me that it seemed to him that he knew* wisdom, so that I would neither affirm rashly that I knew*, nor would I say any less rashly that he knew*.”

“I beg you to do me a great favor,” I said. “First, deign to answer what I’m asking and not what *you* are asking. Second, put

aside for the time being my expectations, which I know* to be no less of a concern to you than your own: surely, if I have deceived myself in this inquiry of ours, I shall quickly cross over to your side and we'll end this controversy. Finally, get rid of the worry, whatever it is, that I see has so affected you, and pay closer attention so you may readily understand what I'd like you to answer me.

"For you have said that you wouldn't answer yes or no (which you certainly must do in order to respond to my question) lest you rashly say that you know* what you don't know—as if indeed I was asking what you know* and not what *seems* to you. And so now, I ask again more blatantly, if it can still be said more blatantly: Does it or does it not seem to you that the wise man knows* wisdom?"

"If a wise man, of the kind that reason discloses, is able to be found," he said, "it can seem to me that he knows* wisdom."

"Therefore," I said, "reason discloses to you that a wise man is such that he's not ignorant of wisdom, and rightly so, for it ought not have seemed to you otherwise."

10. "And now, therefore, I would like to know whether a wise man can be found," I said. "For if he can, he can also know* wisdom and this whole inquiry of ours is resolved. But if you say that he can't, then we won't ask whether the wise man knows* something but whether anyone can be a wise man. And should this be established, we ought then to distance ourselves from the Academics and, along with you, carefully and cautiously mull over this inquiry of ours insofar as we can. For they held—or rather, it *seemed* to them—that a man can be wise and yet knowledge* cannot befall a man, which is why they affirmed that the wise man knew* nothing. It seems to you, however, that he does know* wisdom, which is certainly not knowing* nothing! At the same time, we determined—as well as all the ancients and even the Academics themselves—that no one can know* false things.³⁴ Consequently, what now remains

is this: either you argue that wisdom is nothing, or you admit that the wise man as described by the Academics is the kind of person whom reason does not hold in any regard, and, having set these things aside, you consent to our asking whether such wisdom, the kind that *reason* makes known, can occur in a man. For we should not, or cannot, rightly call wisdom anything else.”

5.

11. [Alypius] said: “Even if I concede (which I see that you’re striving for mightily) that the wise man knows* wisdom and that we have latched onto something which the wise man can perceive—still, in no way does it occur to me that the Academics’ entire plea has been undermined.³⁵ For I espy a defensive position onto which they have held, and it’s not inconsiderable either; nor has their suspension of assent been cut off, seeing that they cannot fail in their case by virtue of the very thing that you reckon has them conquered. For they will say that ‘nothing is ever grasped’ and that ‘assent should be given to nothing’ to such an extent that even this point about perceiving nothing—which for most of their history (until you came along!) they had convinced themselves was probable—has now been wrenched away from them by this argument of yours. Consequently, regardless of whether the force of this proof of yours stands undefeated because my wits are slow or because its strength is the real thing, it can’t dislodge them, since they can still confidently affirm even now that consent should not be given to anything. Further, they will say that perhaps someday they or someone else may discover something against [your argument] as well, something that can be articulated astutely and with probability. And they will say that an image and a certain reflection of them, as it were, ought to be noticed in the illustrious Proteus. It is said that it was customary to capture

him in the way that he was captured the least, and that his pursuers never took hold of him unless it was by virtue of a deity [acting as] a guide of some kind.³⁶ But should [a deity] be here and should he deign to reveal to us that truth which is of such great concern, I shall likewise confess—even if they themselves are unwilling to (which I don't think at all they would be)—that they have been defeated.”

12. “Very well!” I said. “I wished for not the slightest bit more. For please just take a look at how many and how great are the good things that have come upon me! First, the Academics are now said to be conquered in such a way that there is nothing left for them to defend except the impossible. For who could in any way understand or believe that a conquered man should boast about being a victor by virtue of the very thing that conquered him? Second, if even now there remains any conflict with them, it's not from the fact that they say that nothing can be known* but from the fact that they contend that assent should not be given to anything.

“And so, we are now of one accord, as it seems to me so too does it seem to them: that the wise man knows* wisdom. But still they advise refraining from assent, for they say that it only seems so to them but that in no way do they know*. As if I myself professed to know*! On that point, I also say that it seems so to me, for I'm a fool, as they themselves are as well if they don't know wisdom. I reckon, however, that we ought to approve something, and that what we ought to approve is truth! I ask them about this: whether they deny, that is, whether they hold that they should *not* give assent to, the truth. They will never say that, but they will assert that the truth hasn't been found. Therefore, to a considerable extent they hold me as an ally on this point as well (that consent ought be given to the truth), since it doesn't disagree with either of our opinions and to this extent it necessarily agrees with them. ‘But who will reveal the truth?’ they ask. At this point, I won't care to vie

with them. It is enough for me that it's no longer probable that a wise man knows nothing. For otherwise they'd be forced to say something utterly absurd—namely, that either wisdom is nothing or that the wise man doesn't know* wisdom.

6.

13. “But *you*, Alypius, have told us who is capable of disclosing the truth—and I should strive mightily not to dissent from you! For in fact you said, as briefly as you did piously, that only some deity could show man what's true. And so, nothing in this discussion of ours have I more gladly heard, nothing more momentous, nothing more probable, and—if that deity is here, as I'm sure he is—nothing more true. For with what great depth of mind*, with how great an aim for the best kind of philosophy, did you mention that illustrious Proteus as well!³⁷ So that you, O youths, may see that poets shouldn't be completely disregarded by philosophy, that illustrious Proteus is brought in as an image of truth.³⁸ In poems, I say, Proteus performs and plays the role of truth, whom no one can obtain if he is deceived by false images and either loosens or lets go of the knots of comprehension.³⁹ For these are those images that—in the typical manner of corporeal realities—try to dupe and deceive us through the very senses we use for the necessities of this life, even when the truth is being grabbed and held, as it were, in our hands.⁴⁰ This, then, is the third good that comes to me, the value of which, I find, I cannot measure.⁴¹ For my closest friend agrees with me not only with respect to probability in human living, but also with respect to religion itself. And this agreement is the most unmistakable sign of a true friend, since friendship has been most rightly and piously defined as ‘an agreement, in kindness and charity, on human and divine things.’⁴²

7.

14. “Nevertheless, lest the Academics’ arguments seem to be clouding the issue⁴³ or lest it seem to some people that we are proudly resisting the authority of very learned men (and among them, Tully especially cannot *not* move us),⁴⁴ with your permission I shall first discuss a few things against those who think that their disputations are opposed to the truth. Then, I shall show, as it seems to me, the reason why the Academics concealed their position. And so, Alypius, although I see that you’re entirely on my side, still, defend their cause for a little while and answer me.”

“Since you’ve had an auspicious start today, as they say,⁴⁵ I won’t stand in the way of your complete and total victory,” he said. “And I shall attempt to defend their side all the more confidently now since you’re assigning it to me. Still, if it is alright with you, you might prefer to turn what you mean to accomplish through cross-examination into an uninterrupted speech. Otherwise, truly, I who am your prisoner now will be tortured by you as an uncooperative enemy with the needling darts [of cross-examination]. And that would be far removed from your human kindness!”⁴⁶

15. And, since I noticed that they were looking forward to this, I embarked on another introduction, so to speak.

“I shall comply with your wish,”⁴⁷ I said, “even though I had assumed that after toiling in the school of rhetoric I would have a certain amount of rest in light armor and that I could do this by asking questions rather than by speaking.”⁴⁸ Still, since there are so few of us that it’s not necessary for me to shout in a way that would be contrary to my health⁴⁹ and since it was for the sake of my health that I wanted that pen of ours to be the charioteer and moderator, so to speak,⁵⁰ of my discussion so that I wouldn’t be carried away in my mind more quickly than is good for the care of my

body: listen in an uninterrupted speech, as you wish, to what I'm thinking.

"But first, let's look at what it is that the Academics' devotees are wont to boast about so excessively. For in the books of Cicero, which he wrote in defense of their cause, is a certain passage that, it seems to me, is seasoned with a wonderful wit and that, it seems to others, is fortified with power as well.⁵¹ For it's terribly difficult not to be moved by what is said here: 'All the members of the other schools who think themselves wise give second place to the Academic wise man, since each one necessarily claims first place for himself. From this it can be concluded in all probability that he who is second according to the judgment of all the others is right in ranking himself first according to his own judgment.'⁵²

16. "Suppose, for example, that a Stoic wise man were here, for it was especially against them that the Academics' wits were enkindled. If, therefore, Zeno or Chrysippus⁵³ were to be asked who is wise, he would answer that it was the man whom he himself would describe. On the other hand, Epicurus or some other member of the opposition will deny this and argue instead that his own man, a most expert bird-catcher of pleasures, is wise. And from here it's on to the quarrel!⁵⁴ Zeno cries out and the whole Porch starts ranting about man being born for nothing else but the honorable;⁵⁵ it is the honorable that leads souls to itself by its own splendor without offering any fringe benefit whatsoever and without any pandering bribe, so to speak. As for that pleasure of Epicurus, it is common only among barnyard animals⁵⁶—and it is abominable to push a man, and a wise man at that, into their company. In opposition to this, [Epicurus] has summoned to his aid, as if he were Bacchus, a mob of drunks from his little Gardens.⁵⁷ Though drunk, they search in their Bacchanalian frenzy for someone to tear to pieces with their unkempt nails and savage mouths. And with the

people as his witness, [Epicurus] builds up the name of pleasure as [a form of] sweetness and repose, and he fiercely insists that it appears that no one can be happy except through pleasure.

“Now if an Academic were to run into this donnybrook of theirs, he will listen to both of them as they try to drag him over to their side; but if he yields either to the one or to the other, those whom he has abandoned will cry out that he is mad, ignorant, and rash. And so, after he has carefully lent an ear to this side and to that and is asked his opinion, he’ll say that he’s in doubt. Now ask the Stoic who is better: the Epicurean, who is screaming that he’s crazy, or the Academic, who says that he should deliberate further about so great a matter? No one doubts that the Academic is going to be preferred. Likewise, turn to the other one and ask him whom he could love more: Zeno, who calls him a beast, or Arcesilaus, from whom he hears, ‘Perhaps you speak the truth, but I shall look into it more carefully.’ Isn’t it clear that to Epicurus the whole Porch is mad, but in comparison to them the Academics seem modest and careful?

“Thus Cicero most sumptuously provides his readers an utterly delightful spectacle, so to speak, of almost all the schools equally. It’s as if he were showing that there isn’t one of these men, once they had given first place to themselves (which is inevitable), who would not announce that second place should be given to the man they see not opposing them but merely doubting. And I shall say nothing against this, nor shall I take away any of their glory.

8.

17. “Of course, it may seem to some people that Cicero wasn’t joking here but wanted to chase down and round up certain inane and vain things, for he loathed the frivolity of those puny

Greeklings.⁵⁸ Now if I should wish to oppose this vanity, what is stopping me from easily showing by how much less an evil it is to be untaught than to be unteachable? Hence, when it so happens that this puny braggart of an Academic offers himself as a disciple to each of the schools and when none of them is able to persuade him of what they think they know*, they will laugh at him in great accord. For each one will now conclude that while other members of the opposition have learned nothing, this man can't learn anything. From which it next follows that he'll be thrown out of all of the schools—not with the rods of those cloaked men, which would be more shameful than injurious, but with cudgels and clubs.⁵⁹ For it would be no trouble in requesting the Herculean aids of the Cynics,⁶⁰ as it were, against a common nuisance.

“If, however, I take a fancy to vying with them for the utterly worthless honor of first place (a favor that should be granted to me all the more readily since indeed I am now philosophizing but am not yet wise!), what do they have that they can use as a rebuttal? For behold, let's suppose that I and an Academic jump into these rows that the philosophers are having. Let them all come forward and, according to the time allotted, briefly expound their positions. Let Carneades be asked what he thinks; he will say that he's in doubt. And so, each one will prefer him to the others, and thus, he'll be preferred by all over all—no doubt a great and most lofty honor! Who wouldn't wish to imitate this man of ours? And so I myself, when I'm asked, will give an identical response, and I shall receive equal praise. And therefore the wise man exults in the glory in which the fool is his equal. What if the fool easily surpasses him? Does he have no shame? Now, I shall detain this Academic of ours as he leaves the court (naturally, folly is all the more eager for a victory of this kind); as I restrain him, I shall put forth before the judges what they don't know and I shall say: ‘O best of men,’⁶¹

I have something in common with this man, the fact that he's in doubt as to who among you follows the truth. But we also have our own positions, which I ask you to judge. Now indeed for me it is uncertain where the truth is (although I have heard your doctrines), but it's for this reason that I don't know who among you is wise. This man, however, also denies that the wise man knows *anything*, not even wisdom itself, from which he is called wise.' Who doesn't see which of us gets the palm of victory? For if this adversary of mine says this, I will prevail in glory; but if he blushing confesses that the wise man knows* wisdom, I will prevail in the position.

9.

18. "But let us now withdraw from this litigious tribunal to another place where there's no crowd to trouble us; and would that it were to the very school of Plato, which received its name, it is said, because it was removed from the people.⁶² Here, let us now discuss among ourselves, insofar as we can, not glory (which is frivolous and puerile), but life itself and some hope for a happy soul. The Academics deny that anything can be known*. How did you determine this, most studious and learned men? 'Zeno's definition admonished us to,' they say. Why, pray tell? For if it's true, then even he who knows it knows something true; but if it's false, then it shouldn't have upset men of great resolve. But let's see what Zeno says: it is, of course, that 'the impression that can be grasped and perceived is such that it has no features in common with what is false.'⁶³ Is *this*, O Platonist, what moved you to drag the studious away with all your might from the hope of learning so that, abetted as well by a deplorable mental torpor, they would abandon the whole activity of philosophizing?

19. “But how could it not disturb [Zeno] if nothing like this can be found and if nothing can be perceived unless it is like this? If such is the case, it should’ve been said that wisdom cannot befall a man⁶⁴ rather than that the wise man doesn’t know why he is living, that he doesn’t know how he is living,⁶⁵ that he doesn’t know whether he is living, and finally (and nothing more queer, delirious, and insane can be said than this), that at the same time the wise man exists and doesn’t know wisdom. For what is harder to accept: that a man can’t be wise or that the wise man can’t know wisdom? If the case is put forward in such a way that there isn’t enough for a determination to be made, there should be no further discussion.⁶⁶ But perhaps if this were said, people would be completely turned off from philosophizing. Are they now indeed to be led on by wisdom’s most sweet and holy name, so that having learned nothing after a wasted life, they later hound you with the greatest ear-splitting curses? For having forsaken at least the pleasures of the body, they followed you to the torments of the mind.

20. “But let’s see who deters them from philosophy more. Is it he who says: ‘Listen, friend. Philosophy doesn’t go by the name of wisdom itself but the *zeal* for wisdom. If you devote yourself to it, not even then, as long as you’re here in this life, will you be wise, for wisdom is with God and it cannot reach man.’⁶⁷ But when you have sufficiently exercised and purged yourself by a zeal of this kind, your mind will easily enjoy it after this life, that is, when you will have ceased to be a man’?⁶⁸ Or is it he who says: ‘Come, O mortals, to philosophy! Great is the reward here, for what is dearer to a man than wisdom? Come then, that you may be wise and not know wisdom!’? ‘I won’t say it that way,’ [the Academic] replies. That is a deceptive statement, for nothing else is to be found among you people. It thus follows that if you do say this, they’ll run

away from you as if you were insane; and if you bring them to this view some other way, you will make them insane.

“But let’s suppose that men are equally unwilling to philosophize as a result of either position. If, my good man, Zeno’s definition forced us to say something that brought ruin upon philosophy, which should be said to a man: something that would make him grieve over himself, or something that would make him laugh at you?

21. “Nevertheless let’s discuss, insofar as we fools can, what Zeno has defined. He says that an impression can be grasped which appears in such a way that it cannot appear false.⁶⁹ It is obvious that nothing else enters into [the realm of] perception. ‘I see this,’ says Arcesilaus, ‘and by virtue of the fact that I see this, I teach that nothing is perceived, for nothing like that can be found.’ Perhaps it can’t be by you and by other fools, but why not by the wise man? And yet I suppose that no answer can be given to the fool himself if he should tell you to refute this very definition of Zeno’s with that remarkable acumen of yours and to show as well that it is capable of being false. And if you couldn’t do it, then you have this very thing [the definition] that you may perceive; if, however, you do refute it, then you don’t have anything that prevents you from perceiving. I myself don’t see that it can be refuted and I judge it to be absolutely true.⁷⁰ And so when I know* it, even though I’m a fool, I am knowing* something. But suppose that the definition succumbs to your cunning. I shall use a very sound dilemma.⁷¹ The definition is either true or false. If it’s true, I am right to hold on to it; if it’s false, something can be perceived, even though it has features in common with what is false.⁷² ‘How can this be?’ [Arcesilaus] asks. In that case, Zeno has defined with the utmost veracity, nor has anyone who has agreed with him, even on this one point, been in error. Or shall we reckon the definition to be of little merit and soundness, even though it indicated (against

those who were fixing to say many things against perception) what kind of thing could be perceived and then showed itself to be that very kind of thing? And so in the case of things that can be grasped, it is both a definition and an example.

“‘I don’t know,’ [Arcesilaus] says, ‘whether the definition itself is even true. But because it’s probable, I am for that reason following it, and I’m showing that there’s no such thing as that which the definition has articulated that is capable of being grasped.’ Perhaps you’re showing this *except* for the definition itself, and I think you see what would follow as a result. But even if we’re uncertain about it, knowledge* does not abandon us thus. For we know* that the definition is either true or false; therefore, we do not know* nothing. Even though I will be eternally grateful for [even this knowledge], I myself thoroughly judge the definition to be absolutely true. For either false things can be perceived as well (which the Academics greatly feared and which truly *is* absurd), or the things that are most similar to the false can’t be perceived, and hence the definition is true. But let’s look at the rest [of their positions].

10.

22. “Unless I’m mistaken, although this may suffice for a victory, it might not be enough for the fullness of victory. We resolved to come up against, as best we could, two things that the Academics say: that nothing can be perceived and that assent should not be given to anything.⁷³ We shall come to the topic of giving assent momentarily; right now we’ll say a few more things about perception.

“Are you saying that absolutely nothing can be grasped? At this point Carneades has awoken—for none of them slept more lightly than he—and has examined the obviousness of things.⁷⁴ And so, speaking to himself (as often happens), I believe he says:

So you're going to say, O Carneades, that you don't know whether you're a man or an ant? Or will Chrysippus be victorious over you?⁷⁵ Let's say that we don't know the things that are being investigated by the philosophers and that the other things don't pertain to us. Consequently, if I should stumble in everyday, ordinary light, I can appeal to that [realm which is] dark to the inexperienced and where only some divine eyes may see.⁷⁶ And even if these eyes see me tottering and falling, they'll be unable to reveal it to the blind, especially to the arrogant and to those who are ashamed of being taught something.

You are proceeding splendidly indeed, O Greek diligence, well-girded and ready for action, but you don't notice that the definition was invented by a philosopher and remains fastened to and grounded in the vestibule of philosophy. And if you attempt to cut it down, your two-edged axe will ricochet onto your shins, for once the definition is weakened, not only can something be perceived but—assuming that you dare not overthrow the definition⁷⁷—so too can that which is most similar to the false. For [Zeno's definition] is your lair, from where you violently sally forth and pounce on the unwary seeking safe passage. And some Hercules, teaching that there is something in philosophy that is similar to the false, so to speak, which you cannot render uncertain, will strangle you in your cave as if you were semihuman and crush you with its boulders.⁷⁸

“Of course, I've been hurrying on to other things. Whoever presses me to do so, Carneades, is afflicting *you* with a great insult, since he reckons that you're as good as dead and can be overcome by me anywhere or from any angle. But if he doesn't reckon so, he is without mercy, forcing me to abandon my fortifications both far and wide and to fight you out on the open battlefield. When I

started to come down to the battlefield, I was terrified by your mere name and retreated, and from a higher place I hurled something or other down at you. Whether it reached you or what it did, let those under whose scrutiny we are battling see for themselves.⁷⁹

“But why is a dimwit such as I afraid? If I remember correctly, you’re dead, and Alypius is no longer fighting *de jure* in defense of your tomb.⁸⁰ God will readily help me against your ghost.

23. “You say that nothing in philosophy can be perceived, and in order to spread your saying far and wide, you seize onto the alterations and dissensions of philosophers, thinking that they furnish you with arms against them.⁸¹ For how shall we adjudicate the quarrel between Democritus and the earlier natural philosophers on the topic of one world and innumerable worlds when there could be no agreement between himself and his own heir Epicurus?⁸² For the latter, that pleasure-monger, when he allowed atoms (as if they were his own petite chambermaids, that is, ‘minute bodies,’ which he liked to embrace in the dark)⁸³ to stray from their course and deviate spontaneously onto the paths of others, he also squandered his whole inheritance through quarrels.⁸⁴

“To be sure, this is none of my concern. For if it pertains to wisdom to know* something about these things, it cannot escape the notice of a wise man. But if it’s something else, the wise man knows* *that* wisdom and holds those other things in low regard.

“Yet even though I am still a long way away from being even in the vicinity of a wise man, I know* something about this matter of natural philosophy. For I hold as certain that the world is either one or it isn’t, and if it isn’t, the number of worlds is either finite or infinite. (Let Carneades teach that this position is similar to a false one!) Likewise, I know* that this world of ours is arranged the way it is either by the nature of bodies or by some providence, and that either it was and always will be, or that it began to exist and will

never cease to exist, or that it doesn't have an origin in time but it will have an end, or that it began to abide but won't abide forever.⁸⁵ And in this way I know countless things pertaining to natural philosophy, for these disjunctions are true and no one can confuse them with some similarity to the false.

“‘But choose an answer [to one of these disjunctions],’ says the Academic. I don’t want to, for this is tantamount to saying, ‘Relinquish what you know* and say what you don’t.’ ‘But your position is hanging in suspense.’ At least it’s better to hang than to fall. And of course, my position is clear; and of course, it can now be called either false or true. I say that I myself know* it. You! You who don’t deny that these things pertain to philosophy and assert that none of them can be known*, show me that I don’t know them. Tell me either that these disjunctions are false or that they have something in common with the false on account of which they cannot in any way be distinguished [from the false].

11.

24. “‘How do you know*,’ he says, ‘that this world of ours exists if the senses are deceived?’⁸⁶ Your reasons could never refute the power of the senses in such a way that they could convince us that *nothing* appears to us. Nor have you in any way ever dared to try such a thing, but you have vehemently fastened onto persuading us that a thing can be different from what it seems. And so I myself call this whole thing (whatever kind of thing it is) that contains and nourishes us—this thing, I say, that appears before my eyes and that I sense has earth and sky (or quasi-earth and quasi-sky)⁸⁷—this I call the ‘world.’ If you say that nothing ever seems so to me, I shall never err, for it is he who rashly *approves* of what seems to him to be so who errs. You say that a falsehood can appear to

perceivers, but you don't say that *nothing* appears. Indeed, every reason for our disputation (which is where you like to reign supreme) will be completely taken away not only if do we know* nothing, but if nothing ever appears to us. But if you deny that this thing which seems to me is the world, you're stirring up controversy over a name, since I said that I *call* it the world.

25. "‘Is this thing that you see the world,’ you will say, ‘even if you’re asleep?’⁸⁸ I’ve already said that whatever seems to me as such is what I call the world. But if you decide to call the world only what appears to those who are awake—or even better, to those who are sane—argue, if you can, that those who go to sleep or go mad do not go mad or go to sleep in the world! And for this reason I say this: that this whole mass of bodies and the framework in which we are asleep or mad or awake or sane is either one or it’s not one. Explain how this position can be false. For if I am sleeping [right now], it can so happen that I have been saying nothing; or even if words have been escaping from my mouth while asleep (as is sometimes the case), it can so happen that I have not been speaking here, sitting this way, to these listeners: but it cannot be that this statement is false. Nor do I say that I have perceived this because I am awake, for you can say that this could have appeared to me even when I was asleep and consequently it can be very similar to the false. But if there are one and six worlds, it is obvious to me that there are seven worlds (no matter what condition I’m in), and it’s not bumptious of me to affirm that I know* this. Teach me how either this logical sequence or the earlier disjunctions can be false by virtue of sleep or madness or the untrustworthiness of the senses and I shall concede defeat—if I remember them when I wake up! For I believe that it’s already clear enough that the falsehoods which appear through sleep or dementia are surely those that pertain to the senses of the body. For it is necessarily true that

three times three is nine and that it is the square of intelligible numbers, even while mankind snores!

“That said, I see that many things can be said on behalf of the senses which we don’t find the Academics considering reprehensible. In fact, I don’t believe that the senses are to be blamed either because mad men suffer false images or because we see falsehoods in dreams. For if the senses have reported true things to those who are awake and to those who are sane, what the mind of a man who is asleep or mad may concoct for itself is no reflection on them.

26. “It remains for us to inquire into whether the senses, when they report, report what is true.⁸⁹ Well then, suppose some Epicurean were to say: ‘When it comes to the senses, I have nothing to complain about, for it’s unjust to demand more from them than what they can do. In fact, whatever the eyes can see, they see to be true.’ Then is what they see regarding an oar in the water true?⁹⁰ Absolutely! As a matter of fact, because of the additional cause by virtue of which it appears this way, I’d rather accuse my eyes of false reporting if the oar appeared *straight* under water, for then they wouldn’t be seeing what should be seen, given such existent causes.⁹¹ What need is there for a plethora of examples? The same can be said of the motion of towers, the feathers of birds, and countless other things.⁹² ‘Yet I’m deceived if I assent,’ someone says. Then assent to no more than the fact that you’re convinced that it appears to you this way and there’s no deception.⁹³

“For I don’t see how the Academic can refute the person who says, ‘I know* that this seems white to me; I know* that this is delightful for me to hear; I know* that this smells pleasant to me; I know* that this tastes sweet to me; I know* that to me this is cold.’⁹⁴ ‘Tell me instead,’ [the Academic says,] ‘whether oleaster leaves, which the goat so stubbornly seeks, are bitter in and of themselves.’⁹⁵ O, you naughty man! Isn’t the goat itself being more modest? I

don't know what sort of thing oleaster leaves are to a farm animal, but to me they are still bitter. What more do you seek? 'But perhaps there is even someone from the human race for whom they are not bitter.' Do you persist in order to be annoying? What on earth! Did I say that they are bitter for all men? I said that they are for *me*, and I do *not* affirm this always. For what if at some other time and for some other reason I sense something in my mouth that is now sweet, now bitter? I'm saying that a man, when he tastes something, can swear in good faith that he knows that it is sweet to his palate or not, and that he cannot be 'deductively' divested of this knowledge* by any Greek sophistry.⁹⁶ For who is so impudent that he would say to me when I'm licking something with delight, 'Perhaps you're not tasting anything but are dreaming.' What on earth—do I oppose him? But it still may delight me, even in dreams. This is why no similarity to false things confounds what I said that I know*; and the Epicurean or the Cyrenaics may add many more things on behalf of the senses, against which I have heard the Academics say nothing.⁹⁷

"But what does this have to do with me? If they want to and if they can, let them discredit these things, even with my support; for whatever the [Academics] argue against the senses doesn't prevail over all philosophers. In fact, there are [some philosophers] who acknowledge that all these things which the mind receives by bodily sensation are capable of generating opinion, but they deny that this is *knowledge**. They do hold, however, that knowledge* is contained in the intelligence and resides in the mind*, far from the senses.⁹⁸ And perhaps the wise man we are seeking is in their number. But more about this some other time.⁹⁹ For now let us proceed to the remaining items: if I'm not mistaken, because of what has already been said, we shall be able to explain them in a few words.

12.

27. “For how does bodily sensation either help or hinder a person inquiring into morals? Indeed, except for those who have located man’s supreme good in pleasure, nothing—not the dove’s neck or the uncertain cry or the burden that is heavy for a man and light for camels¹⁰⁰ or a million other things¹⁰¹—prevents men from saying that they know* they are delighted by what delights them or offended by what offends them; and I don’t see how this can be refuted.¹⁰² Will such things disturb the person who considers the high point of the good to be in the mind*?¹⁰³ ‘Which of these do you choose?’ [the Academic asks.] If you’re asking what *seems* so to me, I suppose that man’s supreme good is in the mind*;¹⁰⁴ but right now we are asking about knowledge*. Therefore, question the wise man, who cannot be ignorant of wisdom. In the meantime it is permitted to me, even though I’m a dullard and a fool, to know* that either there is no high point of the human good in which the happy life resides, or it is in the soul, or in the body, or both. Convince me if you can that I don’t know this, because those notorious reasons of yours certainly don’t. But if you can’t convince me—for you won’t find a falsehood it is similar to—shall I hesitate to conclude rightly that it seems to me that the wise man knows* whatever is true in philosophy, as I myself have since come to know so many truths?

28. “‘But perhaps [the wise man] fears that when he’s asleep he may not choose the supreme good,’¹⁰⁵ [the Academic says]. There’s no danger at all!¹⁰⁶ If he is displeased with his choice, he will reject it when he awakes or hold onto it if he is pleased.¹⁰⁷ For who will rightly blame him because he saw something false in his dreams? Or perhaps you’ll fear that he may lose his wisdom in his sleep if he approves of false things instead of true? Now, not even a

man who's asleep dares to dream this, to call a man wise when he's awake but to deny it if he should sleep! And the same things can also be said about madness; our discourse, however, hastens on to other matters. Yet I'm not leaving these things behind without a most solid argument.¹⁰⁸ For either wisdom is lost through madness and the person who you claim is ignorant of the truth will no longer be wise, *or* his knowledge* remains in his understanding even if the other part of his mind is imagining what it has received from the senses, as it does in dreams.

13.

29. "Dialectic remains, which the wise man certainly knows well,¹⁰⁹ and no one can know* something that is false."¹¹⁰ However, if he doesn't know it, the knowledge of it is irrelevant to wisdom (since [the wise man] could be wise without it), and it's superfluous for us to inquire into whether [dialectic] is true or whether it can be perceived. At this point someone might perhaps say to me: 'You fool, you usually tell us what you know! Can it be that you were capable of knowing* *nothing* about dialectic?' Indeed I [know*] more about this than any other part of philosophy. For first of all, it has taught me that all those propositions of which I made use earlier are true. Second, it is through dialectic that I know many other truths. But how many there are . . . well, count them if you can. If there are four elements in the world, there are not five; if there is but one sun, there are not two; one soul* cannot both die and be immortal; a man can't be both happy and miserable at the same time;¹¹¹ the sun doesn't shine in the same place where it is night; either we're awake now or we're asleep; what it seems to me that I'm seeing is either a body or it's not. These and many other things (which would take a very long

time to recount) I have learned are true through dialectic, and they are true in and of themselves no matter how things stand with our senses. Dialectic has taught me that if the antecedent of any of the things that I have just proposed by way of deduction is assumed [to be true], what is connected to it necessarily follows.¹¹² Indeed, the things that I articulated by way of opposition or disjunction have this nature: that when other things are taken away, be it one or many, something remains that is confirmed by their removal.¹¹³

“Dialectic has also taught me that one should not argue over words when there is agreement about the matter on account of which the words are uttered.¹¹⁴ And it has taught me that whoever does argue like this, if he’s doing it out of ignorance, he should be taught; if he’s doing it out of malice, he should be abandoned; if he’s doing it because he can’t be taught, he should be admonished to do something else instead of wasting his time and effort on unnecessary things; and if he doesn’t comply, he should be ignored. But regarding sophistical and fallacious petty syllogisms,¹¹⁵ there is a brief precept: If they are brought about by faulty concessions, one should return to the things that were conceded,¹¹⁶ and if a true and a false [statement] are at odds with each other in the same conclusion, one should then accept what is understood and leave behind what cannot be explained. But if the mode in some things is fully hidden from a man, the knowledge* of it should not be sought.¹¹⁷ Indeed, it is from dialectic that I hold these things and many others which are not necessary for me to mention (for I shouldn’t appear ungrateful). The wise man, however, either disregards these things or—if perfect dialectic is itself the knowledge* of truth¹¹⁸—knows [dialectic] in such a way that he starves to death that utterly mendacious sophistry of theirs, ‘If it’s true it’s false, if it’s false it’s true’—by disdaining it and taking no pity

on it.¹¹⁹ I reckon that these considerations are sufficient for the matter of perception, since the whole case will again be mulled over when I begin to talk about assenting.

14.

30. “Now then, let’s come to the part about which Alypius still seems to be in doubt,¹²⁰ and first let us examine what sort of thing it is that moves you to be so very perceptive and cautious. For if this discovery of yours which compels us to acknowledge that it’s much more probable that the wise man knows* wisdom undermines the Academics’ position, reinforced as it was by so many and such mighty reasons (this is what you said!) according to which they determined that the wise man knows* nothing—well then, assent ought to be withheld all the more.¹²¹ Indeed, this very point shows that no matter how superabundant and subtle the arguments, nothing can be proposed that cannot be contested any less keenly (or perhaps even more keenly) by the opposing side, as long as some ingenuity is available. From which it follows that although the Academic is conquered, he conquers.

“O would that he were conquered! Never, not by any Pelasgic artifice whatsoever,¹²² will [the Academic] bring it about that he departs from me conquered and conqueror at the same time. Certainly, should nothing else be found that could be said against these things, I will voluntarily profess that I have been conquered: for we are discussing these matters not for the sake of gaining glory, but in order to discover the truth. It is enough for me to climb over, in whatever way I can, that mountain of theirs that blocks the way of those entering into philosophy and that, casting shadows from I know not what hiding places, menacingly portends that all philosophy is like this; nor does this mountain allow one to hope that any

light is ever going to be discovered in [philosophy].¹²³ But I have nothing more to desire if it's now probable that the wise man knows* something, since it seemed likely [*verisimilis*] that he should withhold assent for no other reason than that it was likely [*verisimilis*] that nothing could be grasped. With this out of the way (for the wise man, as has already been conceded, perceives at least wisdom itself),¹²⁴ no reason will remain now as to why the wise man should not assent to at least wisdom itself. For without a doubt it is more monstrous that a wise man not give approval to wisdom than that a wise man not know wisdom.

31. "Now if we can, let us please picture for a moment, as if it were before our very eyes, a particular kind of spectacle—a donnybrook between a wise man and wisdom. What else does wisdom say other than that it is wisdom? But in opposition to this the wise man says, 'I don't believe you.' Who is it that says to wisdom, 'I don't believe that wisdom exists'? Who else, if not he with whom wisdom has been able to speak and in whom wisdom has deigned to dwell, namely, the wise man?!¹²⁵ Now go ahead and seek me out, I who would fight with the Academics: now you have a new scuffle—the wise man and wisdom are fighting each other! The wise man doesn't want to give his consent to wisdom! I myself, along with you all, am awaiting the outcome carefree, for who would not believe that wisdom is invincible? Nevertheless, let's fortify ourselves with a certain dilemma: Either the Academic conquers wisdom in this scuffle and is conquered by me (because he won't be wise), or he will be overcome by wisdom and we shall teach that the wise man gives his consent to wisdom. Therefore, either the wise man isn't an Academic or the wise man will assent to something—unless perhaps, he who was ashamed to say that the wise man doesn't know wisdom will not be ashamed to say that the wise man doesn't give his consent to wisdom.¹²⁶

“But if it is now likely [*verisimilis*] that at least the perception of wisdom itself befalls a wise man,¹²⁷ and if there is no reason why he shouldn’t assent to what can be perceived, I see that what I wanted is likely [*verisimilis*]: that a wise man is obviously going to assent to wisdom. If you ask where he finds wisdom itself, I shall answer, ‘In his very self.’ If you say that he doesn’t know what he has, you return to the absurdity that the wise man doesn’t know wisdom. If you deny that the wise man himself can be found, we will go over this in another discussion—not with the Academics any more, but with whoever you are who thinks this. For when the Academics argue about these things, they are definitely arguing about the wise man. Cicero proclaims that he himself is a great opiner, but he is inquiring into the *wise man*.¹²⁸ But if, O youths, you’re still unaware of this, at least you’ve read in the *Hortensius*: ‘And so, if nothing is certain and if it doesn’t belong to the wise man to form an opinion, the wise man will be forever approving of nothing.’¹²⁹ From this it’s evident that in their own disputations (against which we are striving), the Academics are seeking to learn about the wise man.

32. “Therefore, I myself think that the wise man possesses wisdom for a certainty—that is, the wise man has perceived wisdom, and consequently, when he assents to wisdom, he does not form an opinion;¹³⁰ for he is assenting to that without which, had he not perceived it, he wouldn’t be wise. Nor do these men [the Academics] claim that no one should give assent—they claim that no one should give assent to the things that can’t be perceived.¹³¹ Wisdom, however, is not nothing, and so, when he both knows* wisdom and assents to wisdom, the wise man neither knows* nothing nor does he assent to nothing. What more do you want? Can it be that we are seeking something about error, which they say is completely avoided if assent doesn’t turn the mind toward anything?¹³² ‘For,’

they say, ‘someone errs who approves not only what is false, but also what is doubtful, even if what is doubtful is true.’¹³³ There is nothing I find, however, that isn’t doubtful; but the wise man, as we have been saying, finds wisdom itself.

15.

33. “But perhaps you now want me to abandon all this. The most secure things should not be left behind readily, seeing that we are dealing with men who are extremely wily. Still, I shall comply with your wish. But what shall I say at this point? What, O what in the world, shall I say? That undoubtedly old chestnut should be mentioned, to which the Academics also have something to say in reply. For what else can I do? You all are forcing me out of my camp! Can it be that I shall implore the aid of the learned?¹³⁴ If I’m unable to conquer with them, perhaps it’ll be less embarrassing to be conquered. And so, I shall hurl a spear with whatever strength I can muster—a spear that is indeed grimy and rusty by now but, unless I’m mistaken, is most effective: ‘He who approves nothing does nothing.’¹³⁵

“‘O you country bumpkin!’ [says the Academic.] ‘And where is the “probable”? Where is the “truth-like”?’ You all wanted this! Are you listening to how the Grecian shields resound? What was in fact our mightiest weapon has been intercepted, and yet with what force we hurled it! My [learned allies] furnish me with nothing more powerful, and we have not inflicted, as far as I can see, a single wound. I shall turn to what the villa and field supply; the grander things are weighing me down rather than equipping me.

34. “For when at leisure on this farm of ours I had been thinking for a long time about how the probable or the truth-like could thither defend our actions from error, it seemed to me at first the

same as it usually seemed when I was selling it¹³⁶—that it was nicely protected and guarded. Then, when I looked over the whole thing more carefully, it seemed to me that I saw an opening from which error could rush in upon the secure occupants. For I reckon that not only does someone err when he follows a false path, but also he errs when he doesn't follow the true one.

“For instance, let's suppose that there are two travelers heading to the same place: one of them has resolved to believe no one; the other is exceedingly credulous.¹³⁷ They come to a fork in the road. Here the credulous one says to a shepherd or to some such yokel who is nearby: ‘Greetings, my good man! Tell me, please, the best way to go to such-and-such a place.’ The man responds, ‘If you go this way, you won't be in error.’ And so the credulous man says to his comrade, ‘He speaks the truth; let's take this road.’ The extremely cautious man laughs and with great wit mocks him for assenting so quickly; in the meantime, while the other [credulous] man leaves, he [the cautious man] remains fixed in the fork of the road. And now his dallying is beginning to look disgraceful when, behold, from the other branch in the road an elegant and urbane man on horseback comes into view and starts approaching. Our man rejoices, and greeting the urbane rider as he arrives, mentions his own destination and asks for the way. (He even tells him the reason for his delay—preferring him to the shepherd—in order to curry greater favor.) But by chance the rider is a cheat, one of those people whom the common man nowadays calls a trickster.¹³⁸ This worst of men even sticks to his routine for free. ‘Take this road,’ he says, ‘for I'm coming from there now.’ He deceives and departs.

“But at what point would our man be deceived? For he says: ‘I don't approve of these directions as though they are true but because they are similar to the true; nor is it either honorable or advantageous to be leisurely here. I shall take this road.’ In the

meantime, the other fellow, the one who considered the shepherd's words to be true and erred by assenting so quickly, has already been refreshing himself in the place to which they were headed. Our man, on the other hand, doesn't err since he's following the probable, and yet he goes around in the woods somewhere, unable now to find anyone who knows the place to which he had intended to go.

"To tell you the truth, when I thought about these things, I could not contain my laughter. According to the words of the Academics, it somehow happens that he who holds to the true path even by chance may be in error, while he who was led by probability through pathless mountains and who doesn't find the area he is seeking doesn't appear to be in error. Now, to rightly decry rash consent, [let me state that] it is easier to hold that both men err rather than that our man doesn't err. From this point on I was now more vigilant around these words of theirs, and I began to consider human actions and practices. It was then indeed that so many and such first-rate considerations against them came to mind* that I could no longer laugh but became partly vexed, partly pained, that very learned and astute men had sunk to such wicked and shameful things in their positions.¹³⁹

16.

35. "For to be sure, perhaps not everyone who errs sins: still, it must be granted that everyone who sins is either in error or something worse. Then what if some young man hears these men saying the following: 'It is disgraceful to err, and consequently we shouldn't give our consent to anything. Yet nevertheless, when someone does what seems to him to be probable, he is neither remiss nor in error.'¹⁴⁰ Let him only remember that he shouldn't approve of as true

whatever comes to him from either the mind or the senses.' What if upon hearing this the young man then goes on to lie in wait for the chastity of another man's wife? It is you, you, whose advice I am seeking, Marcus Tully: we are considering the morals and lives of the young, the education and fostering of which all of your writings have kept a careful watch over.¹⁴¹ What else are you going to say other than that it's not probable to you that the young man should do this? But it's probable to him! As a matter of fact, if we live off of someone else's sense of the probable, then *you* shouldn't have administered the Republic,¹⁴² since it seemed to *Epicurus* that one shouldn't do this.

"And so the youth will commit adultery with another man's wife. And if he is caught red-handed, where will he find you so that you can defend him? And even if he should find you, what are you going to say? Of course you will deny the charge. What if the matter is so obvious that your plea of not guilty is in vain? You will, of course, convince everyone as if you were in the gymnasium at Cumae (and even Naples) that he did not commit a sin; no indeed, he wasn't even in error!¹⁴³ For he did not convince himself that 'adultery ought to be committed' as something true. It occurred to him as something probable: he followed up on it and did it—or perhaps he didn't do it but it only *seemed* to him that he did. The husband, on the other hand, foolish man that he is, upsets everything with his calls for lawsuits on behalf of his wife's chastity: perhaps he is asleep beside her right now and doesn't know it! If those judges understand all this, they will either disregard the Academics and punish this as a crime that is very real, or they will submit to the Academics and condemn the man as likely [*verisimiliter*] and probably guilty, the result being that this attorney of his now has utterly no idea what to do. For he will have no one to be angry at, since they'll all say that they committed no error when,

withholding assent, they did what seemed probable. Consequently, he will put aside the role of attorney and take on that of a philosopher-comforter: and he will so easily convince the young man (who has already made so much progress in the Academy!) that the young man will think of himself as someone who has been condemned in a dream.

“But you all think that I’m joking. I hereby decree that I swear by all that is holy¹⁴⁴ that I have utterly no idea how this man of ours sinned if whoever does what seems probable doesn’t sin—unless, perhaps, the [Academics] say that committing an error is one thing but committing a sin is something else entirely, and that they came up with these precepts to keep us from committing an error, but committing a sin they regarded as something of no great importance.

36. “I pass over in silence homicides, parricides, sacrileges, and all those sins and crimes¹⁴⁵ that can in any way be done or thought, things that are defended—and, what is more serious, defended before even the wisest judges—with these few words: ‘I did not consent to anything and therefore I committed no error; moreover, how could I not do what seemed probable?’ But let those who don’t think that these misdeeds can probably be persuasive read the oration of Catiline, in which he is persuasive about parricide of the fatherland, the crime in which all other crimes are contained.¹⁴⁶ Who isn’t laughing at this by now? They say that they’re following nothing in their actions except what is probable, and they are ardently seeking the truth,¹⁴⁷ although it is probable to them that it can’t be found. O wondrous monstrosity! But let us pass over this: it has little to do with us, little to do with any crisis in our lives, little to do with any danger to our possessions. But the former point is a capital offense, the former point is terrifying, the former point is to be dreaded by every good man: that if this reasoning of theirs is probable, each man may engage in every atrocity

every time it seems probable to him that it ought to be done, as long as he assents to nothing as if it were true; and he may do this not only without the blame incurred by wrongdoing, but even without the blame incurred by error.

“What then? Did the Academics not see this? They did indeed see it, and with the utmost cleverness and prudence. By no means would I arrogate to myself so much as the claim that I am in any way succeeding Marcus Tully in his diligence, alertness, talent, or learning. Nevertheless, when he asserts that a man can’t know* anything, he would have nothing to offer in rebuttal if only it were said to him, ‘I know* that it seems so to me.’

17.

37. “Why, then, did such great men decide to engage in such endless and obstinate controversies, all in order to make it seem that a knowledge* of the truth could not befall anyone? Listen a little more carefully now, not to what I know*, but to what I suspect. In fact, I saved this part for the end to explain (if I can) what seems to me is the nature of the Academics’ whole intention.¹⁴⁸

“Plato, the wisest and most educated man of his time,¹⁴⁹ spoke in such a way that whatever he said became important, and no matter how he said them, the things he uttered lost none of their importance. After the death of Socrates his master (whom he loved above all), he is said to have also learned many things from the Pythagoreans.¹⁵⁰ Pythagoras,¹⁵¹ who had not been satisfied with Greek philosophy (which at the time was virtually nonexistent or at least very obscure), came to believe that the soul was immortal after being roused by the disputations of a certain Pherecydes of Syros;¹⁵² and, journeying far and wide, he also went on to listen to many wise men.¹⁵³ And thus Plato added to the charm and subtlety

of Socrates, which Socrates wielded in moral matters, an expertise in natural and divine things, which Plato had carefully received from those whom I have mentioned.¹⁵⁴ And by joining them under dialectic, the foundress and judge, as it were, of those parts (dialectic is either wisdom itself or that without which wisdom can in no way be),¹⁵⁵ Plato is said to have compiled the complete discipline of philosophy. Now is not the time to discuss this. For what I want, it suffices that Plato sensed that there are two worlds: one intelligible (in which the truth itself dwells) and the other sensible (which we obviously sense through sight and touch).¹⁵⁶ And Plato sensed that the former is true while the latter is 'truth-like' and made in its image. Thus, truth about the former is polished and brightened, as it were, in the soul* that knows itself, while only opinion and not knowledge* about the latter can be produced in the souls* of the foolish. However, whatever has been done in this world by means of the virtues that Plato called political¹⁵⁷ (which are similar to the other true virtues that are known only to the few who are wise) can be labeled nothing else but 'truth-like.'

38. "It seems to me that these teachings and others of this kind were preserved by Plato's successors as much as they could and guarded as mysteries.¹⁵⁸ For either these teachings are not easily perceived except by those who, having cleansed themselves from all vices, have in some way appropriated a different way of living that is more than human; or, whoever knows* these things and wants to teach them to just anyone is sinning grievously.¹⁵⁹ And so I suspect that Zeno, who was the head of the Stoics, was held suspect for having already heard and believed certain things by the time he came to the school bequeathed by Plato and being then maintained by Polemon.¹⁶⁰ Nor did Zeno seem to them to be the kind of man to whom they should readily reveal and entrust those virtually sacrosanct Platonic precepts before he had first *unlearned*

the things that he had accepted from others and had brought into this school.¹⁶¹

“Polemon then dies; he is succeeded by Arcesilaus—a classmate of Zeno, in fact, but one who was under the instruction of Polemon.¹⁶² Consequently, when Zeno began to delight in a certain position of his own about the world and especially about the soul* (for which true philosophy is ever vigilant), a position which states that the soul is mortal,¹⁶³ that there is nothing beyond this sensible world, and that in this world nothing is done except by matter¹⁶⁴ (in fact, he even thought that God Himself is [made of] fire):¹⁶⁵ since this wicked stuff was slowly spreading high and wide, Arcesilaus—very prudently and advantageously, it seems to me—thoroughly hid the position of the Academy and buried it as if it were gold to be found someday by future generations.¹⁶⁶ Hence, since the multitude is rather prone to rushing into false opinions and since, by virtue of corporeal habit, it is extremely easy yet harmful to believe that all reality is corporeal,¹⁶⁷ this most astute and most humane man resolved to *unteach* those poorly taught people whom he was putting up with rather than to teach those whom he did not think were teachable. From these [considerations] were born all those things that are attributed to the New Academy, because the Old Academics had had no need of them.¹⁶⁸

39. “But if Zeno had snapped out of it at some point and noticed that nothing can be grasped unless it is the sort of thing that he himself was defining, and that such a thing can’t be found in bodies (to which he relegated all reality), then this kind of disputation, which very much flared up inevitably, would have been completely extinguished long ago. But Zeno, deceived by an appearance of consistency—as it seemed to the Academics and as it seems to me as well¹⁶⁹—was stubborn, and this pernicious faith of his in bodies lived on in whatever way it could down to the time of

Chrysippus, who (for he was especially capable of doing this) gave it enormous power in spreading itself more widely.¹⁷⁰ And yet on the other side Carneades, who was more astute and vigilant than all the others mentioned above,¹⁷¹ opposed this Stoic opinion in such a way that I marvel that it actually survived at all afterwards. In fact, lest it appear that he wanted to speak out against everything for the sake of ostentation, Carneades first cast aside the effrontery of making virtually false accusations, as he saw that Arcesilaus had to no small extent been defamed by this [tactic]. But he was particularly determined to smash and overthrow the Stoics themselves and Chrysippus too.

18.

40. “Then, since he was overwhelmed from every direction [with the objection that] if assent is given to nothing, the wise man will do nothing,¹⁷² Carneades—O wondrous man and yet not wondrous! for he flowed forth from the very fountains of Plato—wisely took note of the kinds of actions [his objectors] approved of. And seeing that these were similar to some truths or other, that which he would pursue in this world in order to act he named the ‘truth-like.’ For he both skillfully knew and prudently concealed to what these things were similar, and he also called them ‘probable.’ (For whoever beholds an exemplum adroitly approves of its image.) Indeed, how does the wise man give approval or how does he follow what is similar to the true when he doesn’t know what the truth itself is?¹⁷³ Therefore, they *did* know, and they approved of the falsehoods in which they noticed a commendable imitation of true things.¹⁷⁴ But because it was neither proper nor easy to show this to the uninitiated,¹⁷⁵ so to speak, they left to posterity—and to whomever they could in their own age—a certain sign of their

position. They rightly prohibited those dialecticians, however, from raising questions about nomenclature by insulting and mocking them. On account of this, it is said that Carneades was also the head of the Third Academy and its author.

41. "This conflict then continued down to our very own Tully. By now it was obviously injured yet poised to inflate Latin literature with its last breath. (For it seems to me that nothing is more inflated than saying so many things so copiously and elaborately while not believing them!) Nevertheless, it was by these winds, it seems to me, that that Platonic straw man Antiochus¹⁷⁶ was sufficiently scattered and dispersed; for the Epicureans' herds built their sunny stables in the souls of hedonistic multitudes.¹⁷⁷ As a matter of fact, Antiochus was a disciple of Philo,¹⁷⁸ and Philo, as far as I can tell, was a most circumspect man who had begun to open, so to speak, the gates to his retreating enemies and to call the Academy and its laws back to the authority of Plato. (That said, Metrodorus had also tried to do this before. It is said that he was the first to have admitted that the Academics did not believe the doctrine that nothing can be grasped but took up arms of this kind against the Stoics out of necessity.)¹⁷⁹ And so Antiochus, as I was starting to say, once he had listened to Philo the Academic and Mnesarchus the Stoic, crept into the Old Academy, which was void of defenders and vulnerable to every enemy, so to speak. In the guise of a helper and fellow townsman, he brought with him from the ashes of the Stoics some evil or other that defiled Plato's inner sanctums.¹⁸⁰ But Philo, having wrested Antiochus's arms away from him for a second time as well, resisted him till the day he died; and our man Tully, who for as long as he lived couldn't stand to have anything he loved undermined or contaminated, crushed whatever remained of him. Indeed, not long after those days, when all the stubbornness and pertinacity was dead, when

the clouds of error had been dispersed, the illustrious countenance of Plato, which is the purist and most lucid in all philosophy, shone forth [once again]. And it did so especially in Plotinus, the Platonic philosopher who has been judged to be so similar to him that they seemed to have lived at the same time. There is, however, so much time between them that one should think that in Plotinus Plato lives again.¹⁸¹

19.

42. “And so, we hardly ever see any philosophers now except Cynics or Peripatetics¹⁸² or Platonists. Indeed, we see Cynics because a certain liberty and license of life delights them. But regarding the education and the teaching and the mores that look after the soul*, there is nevertheless, in my opinion, a single discipline of philosophy that is utterly true which—because there has been no dearth of extremely astute and alert men who have taught in their disputations that Aristotle and Plato harmonize with each other in such a way that to the ignorant and inattentive they seem to be in conflict¹⁸³—has in fact been refined over many centuries and by many arguments. For this philosophy is not the philosophy of this world that our Sacred [Scriptures] most rightly detest but of the other, intelligible world¹⁸⁴ to which that most subtle Reason would never call back souls* blinded by the multiform darkness of error and smeared by the deepest filth from the body had not the Supreme God, out of a certain clemency for the multitude,¹⁸⁵ humbled and lowered the authority of Divine Understanding all the way into the human body itself,¹⁸⁶ so that having been roused up by not only His precepts but His deeds,¹⁸⁷ souls* could return to their very selves and even gaze upon their homeland without the bickering of disputations.¹⁸⁸

20.

43. “Meanwhile, I have convinced myself, insofar as I have been able to, that all this about the Academics is probably true. But it means nothing to me if it should be false: it’s enough for me that I no longer think that the truth is incapable of being discovered by man. But whoever reckons that the Academics did believe this should listen to Cicero himself. For he says that it was the practice among them of concealing their position, and that they weren’t accustomed to revealing it to anyone except to someone who had lived with them into old age.¹⁸⁹ What this position of theirs was, however, God only knows—though I think it was that of Plato.

“But for you to get my whole point in brief, [let me say this]: in whatever manner human wisdom may be constituted, I see that I haven’t yet perceived it. But since I’m thirty-two years old,¹⁹⁰ I don’t think I should despair of obtaining it someday; at least having put in low regard all the other things that mortals consider good, I have resolved to devote myself to a search for wisdom. And whereas the reasons of the Academics once seriously deterred me from this undertaking, I think that I have been sufficiently protected from them by this disputation of ours.

“Moreover, no one doubts that we are urged on to learn by the twin weight of authority and reason.¹⁹¹ Therefore, I am determined not to depart ever, in any way, from the authority of Christ, for I find no authority more powerful. But what should be pursued by a most subtle reason—for I am now of such a mind that I impatiently long to apprehend what is true not only through believing, but also through understanding—I am confident in the meantime that I shall find among the Platonists, and that it won’t be incompatible with our sacred [teachings].”

44. Here, after they saw that I had finished my discourse, the youths were very intently waiting to see whether Alypius would promise to offer a rebuttal (at least on some other day), even though it was now nighttime and some of my discourse had been written down after a lamp had even been brought out.¹⁹² Then Alypius said: "I'm ready to declare that nothing has ever happened to me more to my liking than that I depart from today's disputation bested: nor do I reckon that this joy should be mine alone. I will therefore share it with you, my rivals or our judges, since perhaps even the Academics themselves hoped that they would be conquered in this way by their own posterity. For what could be seen or shown to us more pleasant than the charm of this discourse, what more deliberate than the seriousness of its positions, what more unhesitating than its kindness, what more expert than its doctrine? There is absolutely no way I can worthily express my admiration for the fact that pointed matters have been treated so smoothly, desperate matters so bravely, refuted matters so moderately, obscure matters so lucidly. Now then, fellows, take that expectant longing of yours with which you were goading me to respond and exchange it for a more reliable hope of learning with me. We have a leader who, with God now showing him the way, may lead us into the very arcana of truth."¹⁹³

45. Here, since it did not appear that Alypius would offer a rebuttal, they showed by their expressions and with a certain childish enthusiasm that they had been cheated, so to speak. Then I said laughingly: "Do you envy the praise that I've received? Because I'm now secure in Alypius's loyalty, I'm not afraid of him at all. But so that you may thank me as well, I shall arm you against him, this man who has dashed your great expectations. Read the Academics, and when you find that Cicero is the victor there over these trifles of mine¹⁹⁴ (for what could be easier?), compel Alypius to defend

our discussion here against those invincible arguments. This, Alypius, is the steep price with which I repay you for your false praise of me.”

Here, when they had laughed, we put an end—whether it was a completely solid end, I know not—to so important a disagreement, albeit more mildly and quickly than I had expected.

Finis.

COMMENTARY

BOOK ONE

Cover Letter (1.1.1–4)

Curiously, the introductory cover letter to a dialogue on the Academics fails to mention them or the epistemological claims for which they are famous. Rather, Augustine devotes his opening remarks to the ulterior motive behind Academic skepticism: the desire to be happy. Augustine's relative and benefactor Romanianus has been the recent victim of misfortune, and to help him on the path to happiness, Augustine provides a solution that he casts in terms of three "ladies": Fortune, Virtue, and Philosophy.

Lady Fortune is commonly thought of in terms of the body (health, beauty, etc.) or the things that matter as a result of having a body (property, money, status, rank, etc.). When these bodily goods come easily and we grow in wealth, power, and standing, we feel that fortune is smiling on us; when we have difficulty in acquiring or holding on to these things, we curse our bad luck. There is a strong emotional attachment to this view, but the problem with it, according to Augustine, is that it wrongly assumes that an abundance of bodily goods leads to happiness. If this were true, the rich and famous would always be happy, which clearly they are

not. And even when they show no signs of self-destructive or careless behavior—as in the case of the munificent Roman citizen whom Augustine describes in 1.1.2—their contentedness can blind them to a profound spiritual malnutrition that leads to unhappiness. Sometimes, therefore, good fortune is not always fortunate, while misfortune may be the best fortune to have. Augustine himself found his way to a better life by the misfortune of a pulmonary disease that prompted his resignation from an unfulfilling career as a teacher of rhetoric, and apparently Romanianus suffered some kind of misfortune earlier in his life that kept him from frivolous and vain pursuits (1.1.1). Augustine's hope is that Romanianus's current troubles will have the same effect on him now.

But if wealth or financial security, prestige or recognition, health or fitness, beauty or bodily pleasure are not sources of genuine happiness, then what is? As Monica makes clear later, happiness involves not so much things as the *virtuous use* of things, and so the second lady, Virtue, is essential for human flourishing. Augustine is again drawing upon a well-established tradition of reflection on the good life. When Themistocles was asked whether he would rather have his daughter marry an honest poor man or a rich man of untested character, he replied, "I definitely prefer a man without money to money without a man."¹ As the perfection of our desires and emotions, virtue is more important than the possessions serving our human needs and wants.

Most people would agree with this statement, and yet most remain firmly attached to their temporal goods and care more for their possessions or their health than the condition of their soul or character. It is common, for instance, to be more terrified of becoming physically deformed than morally blemished or to be more unwilling to become a victim of injustice than a perpetrator of it. As Cicero observed, it takes a truly great spirit to look with

indifference or even disdain on such amenities as pleasure, riches, and life itself.²

The majority of human beings lack this greatness of soul, in large part because greatness takes a great deal of practice. According to Africanus, the wealthy and comfortable in particular are like shell-shocked warhorses that need to be taken off the battlefield and put into the “training ring of reason and learning” so that they may comprehend “the frailty of human affairs and the fickleness of fortune.”³ Fortune is taking Romanianus out of the battle; Augustine, we may surmise, is trying to provide him with a training ring through this dialogue.

But since training requires a trainer, a third lady is necessary. Philosophy is crucial in giving her children instruction about the good life and thereby orienting them to the life of virtue; at the very least, Philosophy can expose the erroneous beliefs and opinions that distort the mind and make systematic the aberrations of one’s conduct. In Augustine’s case, his past debauchery found a ready justification in Manichaean doctrine, which taught that humankind was not ultimately responsible for its behavior but was a mere pawn in a cosmic, dualistic tug-of-war between a good and evil deity. It was Philosophy, Augustine claims here, that freed him from that superstition and enabled him to live a more virtuous life, and it is Philosophy that has similarly helped turn Licentius away from sensual pursuits (1.1.3).

At this point we may wonder whether Augustine is using the term “philosophy” as a synonym for Christianity, since philosophy is being portrayed as both intellectually and morally liberating. Further arousing our suspicion is Augustine’s statement that a chest pain forced him to resign from his teaching position and “flee to the bosom of Philosophy” (1.1.3); yet as we learn from the *Confessions*, he converted to Christianity and not philosophy at the time of his

resignation (see *Confessions* 9.5.13). On the other hand, Augustine writes that Cicero's *Hortensius* has "won over" Licentius and Trygetius to philosophy (1.1.4); and although the *Hortensius* had many virtues, it can hardly be considered a fifth Gospel.

It is difficult to determine from this cover letter alone the precise relationship between philosophy and Christianity in Augustine's thought at Cassiciacum, but we can draw several tentative conclusions. First, Augustine does not see any fundamental contradiction between philosophy and Christianity, between the search for wisdom through unaided reason and the search for wisdom through reason aided by and subordinated to religious faith. Second, Augustine seems to associate philosophy with not only the love of wisdom, but the leisure that enables one to love wisdom wholeheartedly (which could explain why he calls his Cassiciacum retreat a flight to the bosom of Philosophy). Third, Augustine does not use the terms philosophy and Christianity interchangeably, but he does view the former as instrumental in coming to the latter. Philosophy, as we can see with the impact of Cicero's *Hortensius* on Augustine's formation,⁴ is not Christianity, but it can have significant propaedeutic value from a Christian perspective. Classical philosophy and Christianity intersect in crucial areas, such as in their teaching that sensible reality should be held as inferior to intelligible reality—yet in a way that does not condemn or vilify the sensible per se (1.1.3). Fourth, it is Augustine's hope that God will orchestrate fortune and misfortune in a way that prompts Romanianus to "return to himself" (1.1.1) through philosophy so that, with his mind and heart duly reconditioned, he will be more amenable to a religious conversion. Philosophy is, or can be, a tool of divine providence. Augustine's immediate goal in writing *Against the Academics* is not to convert Romanianus directly to the Christian faith, but to use philosophy to remove the poor thinking and bad beliefs keeping Romanianus from religious assent.⁵

It is this fourth conclusion that returns us to the interplay between philosophy and “good” misfortune, which was a well-established theme in ancient philosophical literature. According to legend, Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, turned to philosophy after his ship sank off the coast of Athens and he chanced upon a copy of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*. Years later he would say, “I now find that I made a prosperous voyage when I was shipwrecked.”⁶ (The nautical imagery in Augustine’s letter to Romanianus, which resurfaces in the introductory paragraphs of *On the Happy Life*, may be an echo of this story.) Cicero composed his greatest philosophical works after heavy blows of misfortune, such as the death of his daughter Tullia and his dismissal from public service.⁷ Augustine shares Cicero’s desire, which Cicero makes evident in the fifth book of the *Tusculan Disputations*, of not allowing fortune to be seen as an essential component of human happiness, since most people would then spend all of their time wooing Lady Fortune instead of Lady Virtue.⁸ However, as Augustine points out in the first paragraph of this cover letter, even if the life of virtue is ostensibly self-sufficient and immune from the vicissitudes of fortune, it must always begin with a stroke of luck. Cicero’s growth in virtue, for example, may never have begun had he not chanced upon the study of philosophy when he was young; and Plato may never have grown wise, or at least become a lover of wisdom, had he not met Socrates. This “dependence” on fortune, however, is not capricious and does not reduce the importance of virtue when fortune is construed as an extension of the omnipotent and omnibenevolent providence of God, who is using chance events in our lives to bring us closer to Him and hence to the virtuous life.⁹ Augustine’s Christian belief in an all-good God has enabled him to resolve at least to some degree a difficult dilemma in philosophy. This too indicates something about the relationship between Jerusalem and Athens.

Day One: Setting the Stage (1.2.5–6)

Augustine does not disclose the precise location of the group's discussion: appropriately, the uncertainty of the location foreshadows the topic of uncertainty that will arise later. He instead begins by narrating his inaugural question to the group: "Surely you don't doubt that we should know what's true?" The question is significant for at least three reasons.

First, Augustine does not initiate a discussion on Academic skepticism with an epistemological question such as "Can the truth be known?" Rather, his question concerns something more fundamental for the knowing subject. Before we answer whether the truth can be known, Augustine appears to be saying, let us see whether we want to or should know the truth. Augustine is inquiring into intellectual desire or orientation rather than intellectual faculties or capacity, and in the process he is directing the group's attention to it.

Second, the question indirectly ferrets out whether the youths approach existence as something that is comic or tragic. As becomes clearer in book one of *On Order* and in the *Soliloquies*, Augustine is working within a tradition that philosophizes in part vis-à-vis the themes of comedy and tragedy. Plato ends the *Symposium* with a quarrel between Socrates, the comedian Aristophanes, and the tragedian Agathon on the nature of comic and tragic drama (223d). Socrates in the *Republic* is particularly critical of tragic poetry, which "maims the thought of those who hear" it (10.595b). In tragedy the truth is either hidden away or reveals an incoherent universe that is contradictory and absurd.¹⁰ Tragedy professes to offer a profound reflection on the nature of reality, but it subtly discourages any independent philosophical quest for the intelligibility of the whole by denying that the whole is intelligible. Tragedy, it may be argued, also discourages genuine self-knowledge: as Jocasta tells

Oedipus in what could be the central point of all the tragic arts, “May you never come to know who you are.”

On the other hand, comedy—which classically speaking refers to stories with a happy ending rather than stories that are amusing—has a sunnier outlook on the enigma of existence. It presupposes that things (such as a punch line) can be understood by the human mind. It is sustained by the fact that understanding brings with it delight, the joy of discovery or comprehension. And it has a far more permeable “fourth wall” than tragedy, relying on the audience to get the joke in order to consummate its action. This reliance, in turn, puts an onus on the reader or spectator that is absent in tragedy: one loses oneself in a tragedy, sucked into a macabre but enthralling train wreck, but one does not lose oneself in comedy. In short, comedy—or rather, comedy in the right hands—facilitates an appreciation of reason and a “return to oneself.” Because Licentius and Trygetius give the comic rather than tragic answer in response to Augustine’s question, the conversation can proceed in a direction that is open to philosophical inquiry. Had they answered differently, the conversation would have taken a significantly different direction.

Third, Augustine does not ask, “Should we know what’s true?” but “Do you doubt that we should know what’s true?” (Here, the Latin *oportet*, which I have translated as “should,” does not so much imply a moral necessity as a practical one, as in “Is it necessary or useful for us to know truth?”) The fact that both young men answer resoundingly in the negative shows that, regardless of what either of them eventually claims, neither is a true skeptic. For in not doubting, they are certain, and in being certain, they are not skeptics. The Roman adage *facta non verba* (actions speak louder than words) has bearing here. One cannot always divorce the arguments of one’s speech from the arguments of one’s deeds. A discourse

eloquently denying the possibility of eloquence, for instance, is sufficient evidence of its falsity.

Without revealing his motive, Augustine then gauges the group's attitude toward skeptical thought by asking them a second question: whether we can be happy by merely pursuing the truth. The skeptic's answer to this question is "yes," which is why skeptics continue to pursue the truth even though they are skeptical of ever attaining it.

When Alypius hears the question, he quickly excuses himself from partisan participation, even before anyone has the opportunity to ask him to take sides. His stated reason is that he is scheduled to depart for Milan soon, and it is easier to replace a judge than an attorney. But is there another reason behind his eagerness for neutrality?

Trygetius is the first to answer Augustine's question. He had been the leader in claiming certainty about the importance of knowing the truth. Now, he professes certainty again, this time over humanity's universal desire for happiness. Trygetius reasons that if we can become happy without the truth, then no one will bother to seek it. This outcome, we soon learn, is unacceptable to Trygetius, and so he feels compelled to deny that people can be happy without the truth. His reasoning may be a bit odd (it is more attentive to the anticipated effects of neglecting the truth than the actual causes of human happiness), but it confirms the link between the love of wisdom and the quest for the happy life.

Licentius's position, that we can be happy from a mere search for the truth, departs from that view. When Augustine asks the opinion of others, it is his brother Navigius who speaks up, the first to side with Licentius. As his later contributions to the conversation make clear, Navigius has studied some of the writings of Cicero, including the *Academica*. Trygetius, perhaps a little defensively, asks

Navigius to provide a definition of the happy life, but Augustine intervenes with a definition of his own. It is uncharacteristic for Augustine to do this (he usually prefers his students to define), and it is uncertain whether he is motivated by an annoyance at Trygetius's question or a desire to help his brother, who may not have the same intellectual talents. Perhaps Augustine simply wishes to keep the discussion from being derailed by a dispute over terms.

After defining happiness as living "according to that which is best in man," he goes on to define "man's best" as "that ruling part of the soul which the other parts in man should obey" (1.2.5). Augustine's definition, which is more conspicuously convoluted in the Latin, is meant to be heuristic; rather than give the direct content or essence of the thing being defined, it offers the broad outlines or properties by which the thing can first be discovered and only then defined.¹¹ Augustine could define reason directly if he wanted to—as a matter of fact, he does in *On Order* 2.11.30—but here he wants his students to arrive at the answer on their own. He takes the same approach earlier in the cover letter when he refers to a "divine something" in Romanianus (1.1.3), a certain *je ne sais quoi* that is utterly present but difficult to identify.¹² What is it, Augustine is asking his students, that, if it were in charge of our souls, would be in charge in such a way that all the other parts would be glad that it was in charge? What is the best or natural ruler of the soul that would make it happy?

Among other things, Augustine is hinting here at Plato's teaching on the three parts of the soul. In the *Republic* and elsewhere, Socrates speaks of three basic kinds of desires a human being can have as three different "parts"—an appetitive part, which craves physical pleasure or the possession of a physical good (such as money); a spirited or "thumotic" part, which jockeys for recognition or glory (and which is the seat of anger, pride, and revenge);

and a rational part, which yearns for knowledge and truth. None of these parts is bad in and of itself. There is nothing intrinsically immoral about hunger, thirst, sexual desire, or anger. What is crucial is whether these desires or emotions are well ordered or disordered. Well-ordered desires and emotions are virtuous; disordered desires and emotions are vicious.

But if the key to happy, healthy desires is their rightful ordering, then who or what does the ordering? For Plato's Socrates, the answer is the third part of the soul, the faculty of reason. When reason orders and rules the soul's appetites and emotions, all three parts of the soul work in harmony with each other and are at peace. This rule, it should be stressed, is not that of a tyrant imposing its will but that of a symphony conductor doing what he or she is supposed to do in providing the guidance that an orchestra is supposed to have. Reason's rule brings out the best of the soul just as a conductor's supervision brings out the best in classical musicians. It is fitting that the other parts of the soul should "be submissive to" reason in the same way that it is fitting that the performers in an orchestra heed a good conductor.

Of course, orchestrating our own soul is easier said than done. Our appetites and emotions, especially after the Fall of Adam, tend to be unruly. What the Greeks called *thumos*, or the spirited part of the soul, can be especially problematic. Our *thumos* is such that we grow easily offended when we are proved wrong in a public debate, for *thumos* is interested not in the truth, but in what Augustine calls elsewhere the *libido principandi*, the lust for first place, for being top dog.¹³ If Augustine is to keep this discussion between the youths fruitful, he must make sure that their *thumos* remains strictly subordinate to their reason, that their desire to look at the truth overpowers their desire to look good. We the readers,

in turn, must keep our eyes on this tripartite division of the soul, as it figures consistently if implicitly in the dialogues.

To supervise the young men's progress, Augustine assumes the role, along with Alypius, of a co-judge. Or maybe we should say that he arrogates the role, for contrary to what he says (1.2.6), nobody has appointed him judge. Yet the group goes along, perhaps because they recognize, as Licentius puts it, that Augustine is encouraging a debate "for our own good" (1.3.7).

Day One: Round One Between Licentius and Trygetius (1.3.7–1.4.10)

The first exchange between Licentius and Trygetius is rife with irony. Licentius, in taking the side of the skeptics, appeals to Carneades and Cicero as authorities, not seeming to realize that skepticism is based on a rejection of authority. He also treats Cicero as a "wise man," which Cicero himself would have denied. Trygetius, on the other hand, in throwing off the "yoke of authority" by rejecting Cicero, is actually closer to the spirit of Cicero's philosophy than Licentius. He also understands that the Academic position that Licentius is taking is largely contrapuntal; the only thing that matters as far as Licentius is concerned is that he has something of substance against which to react (1.3.8)—or rather that *they*, Licentius and the Academics, have something of substance against which to react (Trygetius, presumably envisioning the specter of the Academics over Licentius's shoulder, does not use the second-person singular but the plural when addressing him here). Trygetius takes a hard Platonic line in general, holding that if the wise man is not perfect, he cannot be wise; but Trygetius unintentionally undermines his claim when he is willing to entertain the possibility that Cicero can be wise and have objectionable

teachings (1.3.8). Trygetius ultimately “wins” the first round with his definition of error, but as we shall see later, it is a Pyrrhic victory that sets him up for defeat the next day.

The exchange also shows a simmering tension between *thumos* and reason. Augustine makes it clear that he wants this disputation to be about truth-finding and not a childish exhibition of talent—that is, it should be animated by reason’s dispassionate desire to know rather than *thumos*’s desire for self-exaltation. To this end, Augustine rewrites the conventional rules of debate, allowing retractions to be made in the service of truth (1.3.8). Licentius’s response is noteworthy. He explicitly praises Augustine’s intentions and decision but adds that he also gives Trygetius permission to retract something, “for this decision rightfully belongs to me.” Does it? Or does that right belong to the judge? Licentius may be showing a bit of egotistically driven *thumos* in his rejection of a thumotically motivated debate. Perhaps this is the reason why Alypius chooses to depart at this moment: having caught a whiff of Licentius’s self-promotion, he suspects that the debate is going to be prolonged by the ego of at least one of the participants. Indeed, he refers to the debate as a “contest” or struggle (*certamen*), a label suggestive of thumotic competition.

One thing we can say: Licentius is using rhetorical stratagems rather than pure logic to bolster his case. His praise of “our very own Cicero” as the great Roman citizen smacks of flag-waving, and it is implicitly designed to accuse Trygetius, who unlike Licentius actually served his country as a soldier, of lacking patriotism. It is not a rational argument but an argument *ad verecundiam*, geared to make one’s opponent ashamed of disagreeing.

On the other hand, Trygetius’s initial paralysis in the face of this assault reveals an interesting literary device in *Against the Academics* first detected by Augustine J. Curley.¹⁴ These moments

of silence, which occur several times in the dialogue, presage the speaker's regretting the stance that he has taken. In this instance, Trygetius pauses before conceding that Cicero was wise. Within a minute, he is asking to retract the statement.

Trygetius and Licentius are novice thinkers, but their debate reveals sufficiently what is at stake: the status of the philosophical life. Licentius thinks that the life of loving but never finding wisdom is that beyond which one cannot go, at least on this side of the grave (1.3.9). Seekers are empty of the wisdom they seek, but their activity of seeking gives them a happiness proportionate to their nature as human beings. Their search completes them in a certain sense, and hence they can be perfect. Trygetius, on the other hand, cannot understand how one can speak of a person as perfect or complete as long as this emptiness exists. The philosophical life is certainly better than the nonphilosophical life, but it cannot therefore be the highest life *per se*. The highest kind of life is not the search for wisdom (philosophy) but the possession of wisdom. The youths' debate recalls the ambivalence that ends the *Nicomachean Ethics*, when Aristotle concludes that the highest virtue men and women possess is practical wisdom, but the highest wisdom they *strive for* is the "divine" and "godlike" wisdom of *theoria* or contemplation. Aristotle does not know whether it is possible to attain this latter wisdom (such a life, he says, would be more than human), but he still exhorts his readers to pursue it, since it would be fully living in accord with what is highest in them. Moreover, it alone would constitute true happiness, "for nothing connected with happiness must be incomplete" (10.1177b25).

The youths' exchange also reveals something about the status of desire. Licentius claims that humanity's end or goal is to seek the truth rather than attain it (1.3.9). But is this an adequate account of the nature of desire? A certain joy or pleasure may

accompany the pain of longing (as with a pining Romeo below the balcony), but the *greater* joy or pleasure typically comes from the attainment of what is sought, when the tension of desire is released or dissolved in an act or event that fully satisfies. The same can be said for intellectual or noetic desire. Archimedes was not pleased when he could not figure out how to determine whether the king's crown had been fraudulently made of lead instead of gold, but he was pleased when, relaxing in the baths, the theory of water displacement came to him so suddenly that he ran out of the baths naked into the public square, shouting "Eureka!"

Licentius is not completely wrong to note the pleasing moments that attend the quest for the truth, but he overstates his case when he implies that unfulfilled desire is satisfied with the status quo. However, Licentius's misstep is indirectly useful to the reader: by recognizing the inadequacy of Licentius's view of desire, the reader realizes by default that the desire to know the truth is inescapably teleological; it desires not a perpetuation of itself or a permanent vacuum, but fulfillment in an act of knowing. The desire to know, as it were, does not want to be an intellectual Sisyphus; it wants to be Archimedes in the baths. Whether the desire to know can ever be fully satisfied is a different question, one that will be answered later. The point here is that *if* the desire to know is to be fully satisfied, it must attain what it seeks.

Based on these observations, we may conclude that *Against the Academics* begins not with a consideration of the possibility of knowledge, but with an implicit inquiry into the human desire for knowledge and into the implications of that desire. Even this inquiry requires some effort, since oddly, most people are unaware of that "divine something" in their beings that is responsible for all their questions and curiosity and that accounts for all their advances in learning.

Trygetius sees none of this but instead gains the upper hand by dumb luck. He offers a syllogism with a major premise (that anyone in error is not happy) and a minor premise (that seeking but not finding is error). The conclusion, of course, is that the mere seeker of truth cannot be happy—a fatal blow to Licentius’s case. However, Trygetius has unwittingly confused the notions of error and ignorance in his minor premise. Augustine spots the flaw and warns the youths about it by wryly noting that they should define the meaning of error, since right now they are steeped in it (1.4.10). But Licentius does not catch Trygetius’s error about error. The most he can do is ask for an adjournment, thus granting a provisional victory to his opponent at the end of the first round.

Licentius tries to reengage later in the day, but Augustine puts a limit to their conversation. Moderation is conducive to healthy desire, even to the limitless desire to know.

Day Two: Round Two Between Licentius and Trygetius (1.4.11–1.5.15)

Sometime between his request to suspend the debate and their next meeting, Licentius caught the error about error and now produces the Academics’ definition of it: “the approval of the false instead of the true.” He claims to have figured this out just before Augustine had prohibited them from resuming their argument the previous evening, and this could well be true; however, there is a hint of self-promotion in Licentius’s pointing it out. Licentius also shows his customary feistiness by being the first to oblige Augustine’s request for a summary, which was addressed to both young men (1.4.11).

Licentius follows his newfound definition with an appeal to experience. Weren’t we all happy yesterday? he asks the group. We spent the day gaining no knowledge but nevertheless enjoyed that

“great tranquility of mind” which confers happiness because we were all searching for the truth.

Certainly, Licentius has a point, but does yesterday’s conversation measure up to the standards of complete happiness? Ironically, the least happy of the interlocutors was most likely Licentius. He loses to Trygetius after demonstrating a vested interest in winning and then, after being confounded by the notion of error, lies buried in thought, straining for an answer. Only after he despairs of finding that answer does he return to the group. When he finally does come up with something to say, he is eager to reengage but thwarted by Augustine’s insistence on moderation. It is difficult to conclude from those moments of perplexity and frustration, when the problem was gnawing on him or he was prevented from saying what he wanted, that Licentius was truly happy or experiencing “great tranquility of mind.” At the very least, it should be concluded that he had *greater* happiness once he had found what he was seeking. Licentius appears to lack a certain self-knowledge. Although his definition of error is sound, he conflates the mere absence of error with the satisfaction of intellectual desire.

But Licentius is not entirely ignorant of the features of humanity’s intellectual longing. His description of the group’s activities as an escape from bodily blemish and carnal lust, perhaps despite its Neoplatonic phrasing, resonates with a kind of pattern or experience to which most can relate: the liberation of the mind from practical concerns and daily necessities when it is concentrating on a problem. In antiquity, the signature example of this deliverance from the mundane is the story of Thales, who was so intent upon knowing the stars that he failed to notice a well and fell into it. But there are numerous other examples of this phenomenon. Cicero, after describing a soul free of lust and passion, mentions the case of Gaius Gallus, who was so focused on his studies that he

was often surprised by daybreak after working all night and surprised by nightfall after working all day. “How, then,” Cicero asks, “can the pleasures of feasts or plays or whores be compared to these pleasures [of the mind]?”¹⁵ Albert Einstein was so immersed in his work that for days he would forget to eat and then grow puzzled by the strange pains in his stomach. And so on. Each of these cases involves flesh-and-blood men with bodily desires and impulses that made demands on their attention; but when the drive to understand, when the “question,” took over, these concerns faded into the background as their minds, free from the drag of biological purposiveness, slipped the surly bonds of earth to wrestle with the ideas or problems that drew them.

This time, it is Trygetius who fails to catch the flaws in Licentius’s reasoning. Trygetius first aims at Licentius’s example of a traveler to Alexandria, objecting that he is not “always seeking.” But Licentius correctly replies that he only needs to show that a wise man is not in error when he is seeking and not making any mistakes. Second, Trygetius objects by defining wisdom as the right way of life. Licentius first accepts this, then quickly denounces it as “ridiculous” — ironically, for this definition is based on the writings of Licentius’s great authority, Cicero. Licentius does so on the grounds that this definition is not sufficiently precise, for there are other “right ways” conducive to life that do not involve wisdom. Third, after a moment of silence (note again the pause), Trygetius tries to narrow the definition by calling wisdom the right way of life that leads to the truth. Licentius rejects this revision on the grounds that a person can be on the path to truth through mere trust or obedience, but any reliance on opinion or authority is not, strictly speaking, wisdom. And even if the definition is true, Licentius adds, it only bolsters his own case, for if wisdom is the right *path* to truth, it is not the possession or *attainment* of truth. And if it is not the

attainment of truth, a person can be wise (and therefore happy) without reaching the truth.

An interesting undercurrent also runs through the concluding passages of this exchange. Licentius's example of a man walking on the correct path to his destination on trust alone is taken from book one of Vergil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas relies on Venus's instructions on how to reach Carthage. Similarly, when Trygetius admits defeat, he draws (perhaps inadvertently) from the nautical imagery of the opening of the *Aeneid*, which is that of a shipwreck. The source of these motifs becomes clear only at the very end of this section, when Augustine narrates that they had been reading book one of Vergil's great epic. Augustine's withholding of this information until the end adds an "Aha" moment of comprehension on the part of the reader, but it also adds another layer of irony. Licentius, vigorously defending the position that a man on a journey can be happy without reaching his destination, quotes from book one of the *Aeneid*, which portrays Aeneas, a man on a journey who has not reached his destination, as utterly miserable.

Trygetius is stunned by Licentius's assaults, but he takes it all in good stride. His laughing at his own failings shows a humility that redounds to his credit. Cleverly, he invokes the aid of Augustine the presiding judge with an appeal to come to the aid of wisdom's legal defense. Augustine, noticing a discrepancy between the dusk of the day and the dawn of a new topic, postpones their discussion until both the sensible and intelligible sunrises might be more properly aligned. Hence the stage is set for the next day and the next round.

Day Three: Round Three Between Licentius and Trygetius (1.6.16–1.8.23)

The group meets bright and early for their third consecutive day of discussion, having made arrangements for an ample span of

leisure—a crucial element of the philosophical life. Augustine notes that both Licentius and Trygetius are agreed on the desirability and goodness of wisdom even if they cannot agree on its proper definition. Augustine will provide one, but he refuses to intervene further. He then defines wisdom as the knowledge of human and divine things.

Augustine is surprised by Licentius's immediate reply. Presumably, Augustine was expecting a delay in response because of the soundness of the definition but also because, we may conjecture, he was expecting Licentius to be wrong (and the silent pause, we have already noted, goes before a fall). At least in this regard Augustine is not confounded. Again ironically, the Ciceronian partisan Licentius attacks the definition that comes almost verbatim from Cicero—this despite the fact that Augustine strongly hints at its source in “the ancients.” Licentius's response is a curious one. He cites the example of a clairvoyant well known to the group from their days in Carthage (all the participants in the dialogue are North African) named Albicerius. Licentius reminds his interlocutors that Albicerius was a whoremonger to disqualify him from consideration as a wise man, for the wise, who are perfect, cannot be immoral. Nevertheless, this psychic lecher could identify the location of missing spoons and stolen money, and he could read people's minds, discerning the obscure name of an estate or the verse from Vergil of which they were thinking. Albicerius therefore had a knowledge of human and divine things: human things like spoons and estates, divine things because what he learned, he learned through divination. But Albicerius was not wise; therefore, Cicero's definition is not sound.

Licentius has made two mistakes. First, he confuses knowledge with the means by which it is acquired. Albicerius, he thinks, had a knowledge of divine things simply because he practiced the

art of divination. Later on, Licentius repeats his view, saying that if you grant that Albicerius was a diviner and deny him a knowledge of divine things, you “overturn every usage of speech” (1.8.22). But his reliance on etymology is unreliable. By the same logic, astrology is as valid a science as astronomy simply because “astrology” literally means “the study of the stars.”

Second, just as Licentius shows an excessive servility to one word’s origin, so too does he display ignorance of another word’s meaning. The term for “knowledge” that Cicero uses in his definition of wisdom is *scientia*. In this translation, it is set apart from other kinds of knowledge by being rendered “knowledge*.” *Scientia*, the Latin equivalent of the Greek *epistēmē*, designates the very highest kind of knowledge attainable, both by its content (e.g., the knowledge of eternal and immutable realities such as numbers, logic, and other truths of the liberal arts) and by the manner in which it is possessed (that is, with full intentionality and as certain and manifest to the knower). Modern science, despite its etymological derivation, does not therefore qualify as *scientia*, since modern empirical science consists not of an unchanging grasp of unchanging realities, but of highly probable and empirically verifiable hypotheses that are subject to revision on the basis of further discoveries or breakthroughs. The classical notion of *scientia* has extremely high standards, higher even than those of modern science; familiarity with a spoon’s location does not come close to qualifying.

Trygetius does not seem to have caught Licentius’s mistake about divine things and divination, but he does target Licentius’s imprecise use of “knowledge.” Three threads of Trygetius’s argument are particularly noteworthy. First, where *scientia* is concerned, attention must be paid to both what is held and how it is held. For someone to have a knowledge* of the fact that two plus two equals

four, he or she must not simply repeat the statement from memory or rely on the testimony of their first-grade teachers but actually understand the equation along with the fact that it must be right and cannot be wrong. Because knowledge* is not a regurgitation of things mentally stored or borrowed, Trygetius petitions to have the evidence of Albicerius's recital of Vergil thrown out of court. For knowledge* to be knowledge,* the individual himself must grasp the ground of the thing, the underlying principles by which a thing is what it is. Albicerius's recitation of the Vergilian verse is no more an instance of knowledge than a parrot's canned jabbering. Moreover, with the attainment of true knowledge* comes a certain kind of error-free certainty or security. A person cannot truly know something if what he or she knows is mixed with error; nor does a person know something if he or she wavers "when pressured by contrary things" (1.7.19).

Second, knowledge* or *scientia* must be about the highest things, such as the cardinal virtues (1.7.20) or the study of grammar and music and geometry (1.7.21), not the lowly temporal goods that are in no way to be cherished. Or put differently, knowledge* is the grasp of purely intelligible realities, not concrete sensible data or events. Even though it may be true that the spoon is located in such-and-such a place and therefore the statement "the spoon was in this place at that time" would heretofore be eternally true, nevertheless, it is not the wise man's main concern: spatiotemporal particulars about ephemeral goods fall below the purview of *scientia*.

At this point Trygetius introduces a topic that strikes the modern ear as rather odd: demons and their influence on human cognition. Trygetius implicitly contends that if Albicerius is not performing some kind of mental trick or subterfuge but is indeed "divining" things through what we would call paranormal means, then the source of his information must be demonic. (He does not consider

the possibility that Albicerius's "sixth sense," if genuine, could come from God regardless of the man's moral failings, in the same way that an immoral person could be gifted by God with high intelligence or athletic ability.) In any event, Trygetius affirms a standard teaching in classical Christianity: that fallen angels, who "now that they are ruined themselves" do not cease to ruin others,¹⁶ are capable of manipulating a human being's lower faculties (sensation, imagination, etc.) but not the higher (the intellect or understanding). As Augustine remarks in *On Order*, this manipulation especially happens to those who, because they are curious about fortune or greedy for power or afraid of "inane wonders," dabble in the occult (2.9.27). In extreme cases, it can even grow into demonic possession, when an unclean spirit, having entered into a person, "disturbs the senses and inflicts a certain madness" (*On the Happy Life* 3.18).

Third, it is significant that Trygetius links the liberal arts to self-knowledge. After mentioning grammar and music and geometry (three of the seven liberal arts), he describes these disciplines as "leaping over and flying above" the realm of the sensible, which is vulnerable to demonic interference. The liberal arts are divine things, Trygetius is saying, and it is impossible for Albicerius to know them because he "didn't even know what he himself was" (1.8.22). The reasoning is curious but suggestive: you cannot know the highest truths unless you first know yourself, not so much who you are (this individual with these sets of strengths and weaknesses) but what you are (a creature with a faculty of knowing capable of ascending to the divine).

But Trygetius missteps and is ultimately foiled. After making his case, he inadvertently treats wisdom and truth as synonymous, when in fact wisdom concerns not all truths but only the highest: as we have seen, the wise man does not know the truth about where the world's spoons are located.¹⁷ Trygetius tries to recoup his losses

by tinkering with the definition of wisdom, but Licentius is able to take advantage of his confusion and argue that the definition should also include a stipulation of wisdom as “a diligent quest for human and divine things” (1.8.23). In a certain sense, that clause is already implied in the meaning of knowledge (of which Licentius is ignorant), for *scientia* is the successful fruit of an intentional quest or mental diligence on the part of the knower. But it is too late: Trygetius is dazed by the sudden turn of events and unable to think clearly. He does not comment on Licentius’s detailed classification of the new definition and of its subdivisions, which, though impressive in its symmetry, is dubious at best; and he fails to challenge Licentius’s repeated portrayal of the moral and self-possessed wise man as someone who is both ever straining and always tranquil. A fateful silence ensues.

For the second time, Augustine comes to the aid of Trygetius, summarizing the youths’ three days of discussions in a way that is sensitive to the bruised feelings of the loser. The synopsis has several points worth further consideration. First, when Augustine explicitly declares Licentius a defendant of Academic opinion (1.9.24), it is the first time in the dialogue that the Academics, or their school, are mentioned by name. How curious that a dialogue dedicated to examining the Academics does not mention them until now. Second, Augustine claims that Licentius received the Academic definition of error overnight, possibly through a dream. The reference to a dream may be a playful jab at Licentius’s interest in divination, but it also calls into question the honesty of the youth, who claimed that he received his insight before sunset (see the end of 1.4.10 and beginning of 1.4.11). Third, Augustine gently points out that Licentius’s rejection of the Ciceronian definition of wisdom, though ingenious, was erroneous: he won by a “trick,” not by sound argument. Wisdom, it therefore would seem, is what Cicero says it

is: a possession of the highest forms of knowledge about humanity and God.

But despite the fact that the disputant with the “wrong position” won, Augustine is quite pleased with the debates. Scoring the right wins or even drawing the right conclusions about the topic was never one of his objectives. Rather, his aim was to exercise and to test, and to confirm that both youths placed a high value on the truth (the latter being important because happiness can be attained only by preferring the truth to everything else). Now that both of them have passed the test and are now growing accustomed to their workout program, it is time for Augustine the judge to interrogate the Academics themselves before the tribunal of truth.

BOOK TWO

Cover Letter (2.1.1–2.3.9)

Book two begins with a second cover letter or address to Romanianus, ostensibly because Augustine has already sent him a copy of book one (1.9.25). A week has passed since the end of the last book, so it is feasible that a polished version of the youths’ debate was sent out according to plan. But whether or not it was, the two different cover letters serve an additional function of dividing *Against the Academics* into two main sections (book one, and books two and three), with each section covering three consecutive days.

The second cover letter resumes the main motifs of the first. Fortune, philosophy, and virtue are mentioned again, along with maritime images of ships, wind, and ports. The only significant difference is that whereas philosophy in the first cover letter is portrayed largely in terms of rest and refuge, here it is portrayed in terms of action and animation. Philosophy is what stirs us up when

we fumble in anxiety and doubt (2.2.3); it is a warm flame that can easily turn into a terrific wildfire (2.2.5).

The cover letter to book two also answers some of the unresolved questions from the debate in book one. When Augustine speaks of the inseparability of the wise man from his wisdom in the opening sentence, he is essentially declaring that Licentius is wrong: if the wise man does not possess the knowledge or *scientia* that is wisdom, he is not wise, even if he is doggedly searching for wisdom. But Augustine also expands the notion of wisdom beyond the restraints of the youths' disputation. At the end of 2.1.1 he writes that he prays constantly for Romanianus to the Son of God, who is the "very power and wisdom of the most High God" (this prayer also reminds us that Augustine's ultimate goal is to convert Romanianus to the Christian religion, even though the primary tool he uses in *Against the Academics* is philosophy). Ultimately, the question for Augustine is not "what is wisdom?" but "who is wisdom?" Although this question was also raised by philosophers such as Plotinus, the source for Augustine's answer is theological: the "mysteries" that hand down to us the teaching that wisdom is the Second Person of the Trinity. In orthodox Christianity, mysteries are veiled truths rather than veiled obscurities as in the pagan mystery cults of late antiquity. That is, if the Christian mysteries are difficult to understand, it is due to the feebleness of the human intellect or the sinfulness of humanity rather than a deficiency in the supernatural realities themselves; they are inexhaustibly and overwhelmingly intelligible rather than intrinsically unintelligible. The mysteries are probably on Augustine's mind because he will be entering into them when he is baptized the following Easter.

The cover letter of book two also breaks new ground in its open criticism of the Academics. Augustine accuses them of sophistry and pertinacity and stubbornness, and he also adds a fourth

option: that they practiced a “method” (*ratio*) suited to the age in which they lived. Augustine primarily has Carneades in mind, but he includes Cicero as well, so the time period in question was at least the span of a hundred years; or perhaps Augustine is thinking of the entire age before Christ—a time of darkness groaning for redemption. Either way, he is suggesting that the Academics may have suited their *modus operandi* or their statements to the age, which could mean that they did not do or say what they would have liked. It is the first subtle indication in *Against the Academics* of what will become an explicitly formulated hypothesis by the end of book two and the dominant preoccupation of book three.

The key question of the second cover letter is why only a small minority of human beings ever acquire genuine knowledge. As we saw in book one, for knowledge to be knowledge* (*scientia*), it must be thoroughly known and understood by an inquiring mind, not simply memorized or believed in good faith. And for knowledge to be knowledge*, it must be of the highest things, things not determined by the world of space, time, or matter. This means that the vast majority of things that we think we know, we do not know. We do not truly *know* history, for it is an endless stream of things that happened (or allegedly happened) within space and time, nor do we really *know* computer science, mechanical engineering, chemistry, etc., if we are simply taking on the authority of our teachers a series of methods, theorems, and tables and applying them accordingly. Yet every human being has a mind capable of attaining knowledge*. Why, then, is knowledge* the rare possession of a few? Is there a clearly demarcated natural elite of illuminati, or is the explanation more complicated?

Augustine lists four causes for widespread ignorance: (mis)fortune, laziness or stupidity, despair, and presumption. He uses these causes as criteria to evaluate Romanianus’s condition, but they are

also being made available to readers for their own self-examination. It is according to these four causes that Augustine structures the cover letter.

Fortune (2.1.1–2)

Augustine asserts that Romanianus is being kept from knowledge* by the first cause, the disturbances or agitations (*jactationes*) of life (2.1.1). Augustine's diagnosis corresponds with Romanianus's own assessment of his condition (2.2.4). Romanianus's mind possesses a natural *altitudo* or "loftiness," but it is engulfed in the thick clouds of domestic affairs. Similarly, Augustine describes Romanianus's mind as a thunderbolt, or *fulmen*, a word that can mean either thunder or lightning; the greatness of Romanianus's mind is manifested both as the low rumblings of thunder and as flashes of lightning. Limiting himself to one example, Augustine mentions an incident when a young Romanianus suddenly quelled a strong impulse of lust with "one roar of reason" and "one flash of temperance." Augustine's hope is that lightning will strike again and that the shock of Romanianus's sudden conversion, should it happen, will have the same effect on the despondent as a deafening peal of thunder on bystanders, silencing their cynical laughter and replacing it with silent trepidation. The masses, in Augustine's estimation, lead lives of noisy rather than quiet desperation; they jeer at anyone filled with the hope of acquiring what they themselves have given up seeking. But a dramatic proof of wisdom's attainability might just change their minds and deliver them from despair. The entire metaphor has Vergilian echoes: the characterization of the thunder of Romanianus's virtue as "certain signs of the future," for instance, hearkens to the *Aeneid*, where thunder is no mere "empty murmur" that terrifies in vain but an omen of God's providential will.¹⁸

Augustine also speaks of Romanianus's hypothetical conversion as involving an abandonment of the "burden" of the body and a return to heaven or to God. This abandonment is not so much a description of death and the experience of the beatific vision in heaven as it is a state of mind experienced by the wise and the holy while they are still alive; for it is not the body that is being cast aside but its burdensomeness. The body is not evil, but while we inhabit it we are subject to evils, and this vulnerability continues as long as we live: "For the corruptible body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind that museth upon many things" (Wis 9:15). These "many things" include the "domestic affairs" currently pressing down on Romanianus by virtue of his habitation of a corruptible body: if he were a disembodied soul floating in the ether, he would not have to worry about lawsuits. But he does not have to wait for the decisive separation of his soul from his body in death in order to be inwardly free, for the soul is released from bodily burdens when reason is liberated from an excessive and anxious concern about or coveting of temporal goods.¹⁹ As Licentius puts it in book one, the goal is to make the soul free "from every bodily blemish and far, far removed from the fires of lust" (1.4.11).

There is another consequence to bodily habitation that bears upon Romanianus's dilemma, but it is not alluded to until Augustine examines the next two causes of ignorance.

Laziness or Stupidity (2.2.3–2.3.7)

Augustine rules out any shortcomings in Romanianus's mental aptitude or moral character as a possible cause behind his current distance from philosophy. To demonstrate his point, he alludes to several aspects of Romanianus's life as well as to his own.

As proof that Romanianus is no nitwit, Augustine recalls his kinsman's intellectual acumen and perceptiveness (2.2.3). But Augustine

is especially ebullient about his moral fiber, which he has had the occasion to observe over the course of many years. Whether Augustine was impoverished, bereaved, ambitious, or immature, Romanianus always responded with kindness and generosity, even when it was not in the interests of his own children to do so (2.2.3). Indeed, Augustine credits Romanianus with making possible virtually everything that is now good in his life. Romanianus has acted like nothing less than a minister of God.

This ministry even includes the life of philosophy, into which Augustine now wishes to initiate Romanianus, no doubt in an effort to pay back some of his debt to him. Romanianus provided the “kindling” (the material conditions?) that Augustine used to make a philosophical “flame.” Things proceeded along a modest pace until he came upon some unnamed books of the Neoplatonists. The few passages that he read were like gasoline on a fire: still stunned at the incredible effect they had on him, Augustine writes that just a few drops started a conflagration (2.2.5).

Augustine is describing his own intellectual conversion, which has already been surveyed in the General Introduction to this volume.²⁰ That conversion primarily consists of a special kind of self-knowledge—one that Augustine explores in greater detail in *On Order* and the *Soliloquies*. For now, we may glean a few more features about intellectual conversion from Augustine’s fiery account. First, intellectual conversion is dramatic and thrilling, a momentous discovery of unparalleled delight. Second, it is decisively clarifying and enlightening, removing numerous ambiguities about oneself and the objective world and destroying any illusions one might have about the attractiveness of a life lived for the sake of pleasure or glory. Third, it is adventitious in the sense that, like any other intellectual breakthrough, it can be prepared for but not forced. In other words, this conversion of the intellect, this return

to oneself (2.2.5), comes as a rapturous “Eureka” moment, like the theory of water displacement came surprisingly to Archimedes in the baths.

Augustine also recounts in the same breath his rediscovery of the Christian faith. He introduces the topic almost hesitatingly, possibly because of his shared history with Romanianus. Both men were raised Christian, but Augustine had led Romanianus into Manichaeism, which ridiculed Christianity as lowbrow and absurd. Now Augustine is asking him to reconsider the faith of their childhood after years of snickering at it. He proceeds cautiously, for an ex-Catholic is less likely to be reasonable or dispassionate about the subject of Catholicism. And even though his immediate goal is to bring Romanianus to philosophy, he tells him that he read the writings of St. Paul and found them in agreement (or at least, not in disagreement) with the “great good” that he had found thanks to the Neoplatonists. Sound reason and the true faith are compatible with each other.

Augustine offers an unusual proof for this compatibility that we can reformulate as a syllogism:

Major premise: If the theology (“writings and reasoning”) of “these men” (St. Paul and the apostles?) contradicted the genuine philosophy found in the books of the Neoplatonists, they could not have lived holy lives.

Minor premise: They did lead holy lives.

Conclusion: The theology of the apostles does not contradict genuine philosophy.

The major premise of this syllogism is perhaps the most controversial, but Augustine’s point is that if the apostolic faith were absurd or irrational, it could not have produced men and women of such extraordinary virtue and integrity, men and women whose lives

elicited respect and awe from even their pagan persecutors. Although it *may* be possible to be relatively good and decent on a religious diet that is relatively incoherent or nonsensical (like the Romans and their Olympian gods), it is surely impossible to be extraordinarily good and wise without an extraordinarily good and wise diet. Since the apostles and the saints to come after them were extraordinarily good and wise, the religious diet on which they lived and for which they died must have been as well.²¹

Augustine, however, does not apply this same standard to the philosophers themselves—for example, Plato, Cicero, or Plotinus—perhaps because they do not measure up to it. Cicero’s explanation of virtue, for instance, was better than his practice of it, as his ex-wives might attest; and even Socrates was arguably a deadbeat husband and father. Although a discrepancy between life and thought does not make the philosophy of philosophers false, it does call into question their ability to appropriate the good, true, and beautiful that they identify.²² Augustine elaborates upon this point in the other work that he dedicates to Romanianus, declaring in *On True Religion* that if Plato were alive today, he would convert, for he would see the many as well as the few spurning the temporal and pursuing “spiritual and intelligible goods” and the “hope of eternal life.”²³ In this sense at least, then, Christianity is not only compatible with genuine philosophy, but superior to it.

The Love of Beauty

In the same section on Romanianus’s intelligence and probity, Augustine brings up the unnamed nemesis that is presumably behind the lawsuits plaguing his kinsman (2.2.4). Augustine does not know whether the antagonism between the two men is inwardly gnawing at Romanianus or merely distracting him from philosophy; either way, Augustine mentions the nemesis for at least three reasons.

First, Augustine wishes to show that philosophy, as the love of a perfectly shareable good, is the cure for both their troubles. All rivalries and animosities are the result of competition over goods that are ultimately unshareable: money, property, honor, a lover, etc. Such goods can be shared, but they can only be shared to a certain extent before there is nothing left—as Augustine puts it in *On the Happy Life*, they are the goods that “are susceptible to becoming scarce.”²⁴ Keenly aware of this fact, people tend to fight over unshareable things and develop rivalries so intense that the rivalry itself takes over and becomes more important than the initial object of competition.

Philosophy, by contrast, is the love of perfectly shareable goods. Truth and virtue, for instance, can be shared perfectly, since a teacher’s imparting a truth to students does not take anything away from the teacher, and a father’s helping his son gain courage adds to the son without subtracting from the father. So too with wisdom. As Augustine colorfully puts it in another work, Wisdom is a lover whose promiscuous sharing does not sully or lessen her, “for nothing at any time ever belongs to one man or to any group of men as their own, but the whole is common to all at the same time.”²⁵

The difference between the shareable and the unshareable is reinforced later in the cover letter when Augustine speaks of their mutual friend Lucilianus (2.3.9). Is Lucilianus Augustine’s, so to speak, or Romanianus’s? He is both, for in contrast to rivalries over unshareable goods or friendships based on unshareable things, a friendship of the good is grounded in a love of the shareable and is itself shareable. Since true friendship does not breed jealousy, Lucilianus “belongs” to anyone who is united in a common quest for the good.

Similarly, Augustine confidently predicts that if Romanianus’s nemesis were ever inflamed by the love of wisdom, he would aban-

don his vast hoard of unshareable goods, drop his case against Romanianus, and embrace him as a brother (2.3.7). Contentious turf wars would give way to a shareable solidarity. One also wonders whether this is not a veiled warning against Romanianus's failure to turn to philosophy. Do not rivals imitate each other's desires and tactics until they are virtually indistinguishable from each other? If Romanianus does not leap into "the lap of Philosophy," how is he any better than or different from his enemy?

The second reason for discussing Romanianus's nemesis is that it establishes a connection between the love of beauty and the love of wisdom, where the love of false beauty (present in unshareable things) can serve as a ladder to the love of true beauty (the shareable). Playing the part of Aesop, Augustine creates a fable involving two birds: "Philocaly," a transliteration of the Greek for the love of beauty, *philokalia*; and "Philosophy," the love of the true beauty that is wisdom. The two sisters were separated from birth by lust, and now Philocaly is "wingless," "shabby," "needy" and locked in a "popular cage." Philosophy knows who Philocaly is, but Philocaly does not know herself, for she lacks a knowledge of her ancestry. Sounding a bit like a bossy older sister, Philosophy visits Philocaly but seldom frees her, presumably because of Philocaly's lack of self-knowledge.

Augustine's allegory is a collage of metaphors borrowed from Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Theaetetus*. In the former, Socrates speaks of winged souls who, when seeing beauty on earth, remember true beauty, feel their wings grow, and long "to stretch them for an upward flight."²⁶ In the latter, Socrates compares the human mind to a birdcage.²⁷ Centuries later, Plotinus would speak of the highest part of the soul as "winged for intellection (*noēsis*)."²⁸

Looking back on this passage years later, Augustine excoriates his fabulous genealogy as "totally silly and stupid."²⁹ His animus

may be part of a broader rejection of mythological motifs in his later life, although he is not explicit on this point. What he does state is that the fable is flawed in calling Philocaly and Philosophy sisters. If Philocaly is nothing more than the love of pretty trifles, it is not related to Philosophy at all; and if Philocaly, on the other hand, is the love of true beauty, it is identical to the love of wisdom rather than merely related to it. Either way, the two are not sisters.

Throughout his life, Augustine would hold that wisdom is not simply beautiful but Beauty itself, with his praises of the true beauty of wisdom or God being among the most beautiful passages in his corpus.³⁰ Where the older Augustine who wrote the *Retractations* and the younger Augustine who wrote *Against the Academics* differ is on the pedagogical potential of this love of beauty as defined within the cover letter. Philocaly here does not denote an appreciation of lower beauty per se but the love of “false beauty” (2.3.7), the difference being—judging from Augustine’s examples of nice estates, pretty gardens, acting troupes, and glittering banquets—that the love of false beauty is bound to social comportment and the desire to be seen a certain way by one’s peers. Whereas lower sensual beauties can be altruistically used in the service of a higher good, “the love of false beauty” seems to be a vain love of lower beauty that substitutes the low for the high. To put a modern face on it, it is the difference between *Babette’s Feast* and *Martha Stewart Living*.

The older Augustine of the *Retractations* is more jaundiced about the value of the Stewartesque love of beauty than is his younger self, the younger seeing lower social graces as vestiges of higher beauties that can be potentially developed into something greater. The older Augustine lays stress on the discontinuity between the two loves: practically speaking, the followers of Martha Stewart do not become the disciples of Babette or Socrates but

remain fixed where they are, fretting over the minutiae of dinner settings and holiday decorations. To use a metaphor from the cover letter, whereas the older Augustine emphasizes that a love of these trifles “brings forth warped and deformed leaves,” the younger Augustine emphasizes that it nonetheless “does not cease to bring forth leaves” (2.2.6).

Both have a good case to make, yet perhaps the older Augustine is more right in one decisive respect. The fable implies that in order for Philocaly to be liberated from the cage, she must know her origin, that is, gain self-knowledge. But philosophy for Augustine does not simply confer self-knowledge; philosophy *is* self-knowledge (see the first line of 2.3.8). For Philocaly to know herself, therefore, she would have to become her sister Philosophy, which would make the fable incoherent. And we might add that if she became Philosophy, she could no longer function in the cage as Philosophy’s pedagogue, as the lowly footservant who brings others to the teacher.

Further, the older Augustine appears to be more sensitive to what we may call the ache of beauty, the fact that true beauty, as Plato suggests in his *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, “wounds” the soul with an arrow of longing and creates an “ache” for its divine archer.³¹ It is precisely this element of the ache and paradox of beauty’s healing wound that is missing from superficial aestheticism. The older Augustine’s rejection of the younger’s fable, then, is not so much a rejection of the latter’s embrace of Platonism as it is an indictment of his failure to develop a particular aspect of Platonism in a more mature fashion.

Nevertheless, there is at least one reason for the reader to pay careful attention to this fable, and that is the clue that it yields into Augustine’s mode of writing. Augustine applies the term “Philocaly” to the wingless bird in the story, and after stating twice that this is a common word, he asks Romanianus not to despise it on that

account. Yet the only recorded instances of *philocalia* ever being used in Latin, aside from a passing reference in Pliny to a river by that name,³² are in this passage and the corresponding section of Augustine's *Retractations*—hardly a persuasive testimony to its prevalence. Even the word's popularity in Greek is dubious. (Plato speaks of a *philokalos*, or lover of beauty, in *Phaedrus* 248d but not of *philokalia*.) Augustine, in other words, is being ironic, joking with Romanianus as if he were asking him not to despise the term “sesquipedalian” because it is such popular street slang. It is a joke among the *cognoscenti*, one that is intended as a compliment to Romanianus's erudition and his ability to get the punch line, even though Romanianus is not well versed in the liberal arts (2.3.8). But it also indicates how impishly straight-faced Augustine can be with his irony. Clearly, we must approach the wry Augustine who penned these pages with a grain of salt.

The third reason for Augustine's remarks about Romanianus's nemesis is to help Romanianus overcome any sense of despair he might be harboring about what his nemesis will do to him. Take heart, Augustine is saying, for even men like him are not immune to the beauty of wisdom and can be converted suddenly and unexpectedly (2.3.7). Augustine may also have Romanianus himself in mind, subtly suggesting to his friend that if this nemesis, this shallow poseur, can do it, so can he. The topic of despair, in turn, brings us to the final two causes of ignorance.

Despair and Presumption (2.3.8–9)

Although Augustine singles out misfortune as the cause of Romanianus's failure to reach the port of philosophy, he is also troubled by the possibility that Romanianus is impeded by despair. The theme of despair recurs throughout the cover letter. In the opening paragraph, Augustine explains that people despair over

finding the truth because intelligible reality is far more difficult to recognize than sensible reality: or as he puts it, the “star of wisdom” does not dawn on our minds as easily as visible light (2.1.1). A prominent cause of despair, in other words, is the absence of intellectual conversion. In the next paragraph, he mentions religious despair—the despair of our prayers ever being heard by God (2.1.2)—and several paragraphs later Augustine cautions against despairing over the possibility that Romanianus and his nemesis will ever turn to philosophy (2.3.7). All of these forms of despair are formidable obstacles to the discovery of truth, and although Augustine tries to show no great concern, he is clearly worried that his friend may be subject to one or more of them. Indeed, the purpose of *Against the Academics* is to remove any despair over truth’s attainability.

Presumption is the diametric opposite of despair, yet it has an identical effect on the soul; for if the soul presumes that it already knows the truth, it will not embark on a quest for the truth any more than a soul sunk in despair. Augustine mentions “superstition” in this context, which suggests the possibility that Romanianus’s attachment to the religious certitudes of Manichaeism may be a cause of presumption in him. Augustine’s main piece of advice against this vice is to recall the true character of knowledge*, which must be grasped and understood by the knower rather than believed or assumed. Even his arguments against the Academics will remain merely “probable” opinion (note the concession to Academic doctrine) if Romanianus does not see the truth for himself (2.3.8). Augustine offers one simple litmus test. “Beware,” he solemnly warns Romanianus and Lucilianus, “lest you think that you know something” when you do not know it in the same way that you know simple arithmetic. Because this standard for authentic knowledge* sounds outrageously high (and it is), Augustine again admonishes

his friends not to despair, asking them to believe in God, who has promised that knowledge* is attainable and that it “will be more obvious than [even] those numbers” (2.3.9). The supernatural gift of faith—or rather, hope—strengthens the soul to seek and find the truth; it is the ultimate cure for despair. Believe, Augustine is telling Romanianus, in order to have the confidence to understand and know.

Day Four: Two Developments (2.4.10)

One week has passed since the end of book one, and there have been two major developments: Alypius has returned from his trip, and Licentius has become infatuated with poetry, especially tragic love poetry. The group has been reading books two through four of the *Aeneid*, which recount the fateful tale of Dido and Aeneas, and Licentius has also grown quite fond of Ovid’s story of Pyramus and Thysbe, the ancient prototype of Romeo and Juliet.³³ With his love of the poets, Licentius is in some respects recapitulating the wanderings of the young Augustine as retold in books one and three of the *Confessions*; moreover, his new fancy introduces into the Cassiciacum villa the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry.³⁴

Augustine calls Licentius “an almost perfect poet” (2.3.7), which is most likely an exaggeration proffered for the sake of his father Romanianus.³⁵ He mentions the need to restrain the young man’s newfound enthusiasm for poetry lest it grow stronger than his love of wisdom (2.4.10); on the other hand, he also wants to ensure that Licentius be properly educated in the liberal disciplines, which include poetics or the study of poetry, so that he will be more proficient in his philosophizing (2.3.8). And even his love of wisdom must be duly moderated, so that in being pruned, he will “rise up more vigorous and strong” (2.3.8). Ever cognizant of

the importance of measure (2.3.9), Augustine wants moderation in all things, not for the sake of suppressing, but for the sake of bolstering. His strategy recalls the motto of the Benedictine mother-house at Monte Cassino: *succisa virescit*—cut back, it grows.

One way in which Augustine attempted to moderate Licentius' progress in poetry was by giving him an unusual assignment the week before. In book one of *On Order*, Augustine instructed Licentius to turn the tragedy of Pyramus and Thysbe into a comedy and then sing the praises of the marriage of the soul to understanding through philosophy.³⁶ There is no indication that Licentius ever completed the assignment, but it could be the same work-in-progress that Augustine tells Romanianus will include a versification of the Philocaly fable (2.3.7). In any event, there is a mild note of concern in Augustine's report, a note that was not registered when Licentius began to espouse Academic skepticism.

Who Were the Academics? (2.4.10–2.6.15)

Faithful to his role as judge, Alypius asks for the stenographers' transcription of the conversation in his absence; afterwards, Licentius asks for an overview of the Academics' teaching. The request is not unreasonable. The conversation has now shifted to the positions of the Academics themselves and not simply whether truth can be known or whether the search for it is sufficient for human happiness, and Licentius has already unwittingly demonstrated a partial ignorance of Cicero's writings. Augustine promises to oblige the request because, he jokes, it will make Licentius eat less. Licentius denies the charge and begins again to wonder about the intellectual activity or pattern of experience that extricates itself from the demands of the belly (see 2.4.10). And he continues to wonder about reason in the heuristic terms of book one (see 1.2.5). "What is it," he asks, "that becomes so exceedingly domineering when we are

occupied with our hands and teeth?” These are good questions, similar to the ones the group raises in *On Order* 1.8.26; but they are being asked at the wrong time. In order to cut this digression short, Augustine shames Licentius into silence with a jab about the discrepancy between the well-defined limits of his poetry and the limitlessness of his prattling. It is a joke born of impatience, but it has a serious point. With respect to wisdom and the happy life, there should be no inconsistency between the orderliness of one’s words or products (e.g., one’s art) and the orderliness of one’s life. Self-referential coherence and consistency matter.

Augustine obliges Licentius’s request, but before he does, he mentions the possibility that he might be dishonest by withholding some important information. Augustine was supposed to arraign the Academics as a judge at the end of book one, but with Alypius’s return, he has gone from being a magistrate to a prosecuting attorney, a role that still enables him to cross-examine the Academics. And as a prosecuting attorney, he can hardly be expected to provide evidence that would help the defense.

In response to this possibility, Alypius demands Augustine to act in good faith. The term *bona fides*, then as now, has a technical legal meaning, referring to a mental or moral state of honesty and sincerity. Some Romans, like Quintus Scaevola, thought that *bona fides* should be extended to virtually all social interactions: trade, contracts, and so on. Its opposite was *astutia*: trickery, double-crossing, or swindling. Alypius wants the principle of *bona fides* extended to their mock trial, and he appears to be particularly worried because Augustine’s *astutia*, should there be any, would be relatively unpredictable. Normally, dishonest prosecutors can be counted on to bend the truth in order to win their cases. But Augustine, according to Alypius, is not interested in a victory but has an ulterior purpose or “design” (*animus*), one that is unknown to Alypius (2.4.10).

To put it more colloquially, Alypius suspects that Augustine has something up his sleeve but cannot figure out what it is.

Augustine says that he will comply because Alypius is giving the order *de jure*, which is a binding decision from a legitimate judge. Then again, Alypius is not a legitimate judge but someone who is playacting. Could Augustine's *bona fides* be equally false? For instance, Augustine states that "the Academics held that man cannot attain a knowledge*" of philosophical things (2.5.11). It is true that this was the commonly accepted assessment of the Academics, but as we will learn later, it is not what Augustine believes about them. His summary is true only insofar as it gives the conventional opinion about the Academics but not his own "mind" (*animus*) regarding the real opinion of the Academics. Moreover, Augustine concludes that his summary is *bona fides* to *his* mind or to *his* liking (which is the meaning of the phrase *ex sententia*); he does *not* state that his testimony is *bona fides* absolutely (2.5.12).³⁷ Finally, Augustine goes out of his way to heighten our suspicions by ending his summary with the ominous words: "For to a man it should be apparent that a deceived man should be taught, a deceitful man should be dealt with cautiously. The first of these cases calls for a good teacher, the second a wary pupil" (2.5.12). In this statement, the deceived man needs a teacher while the deceitful man *is* a teacher—someone who has or needs wary pupils. As the teacher figure in the dialogue, Augustine would appear to be saying that he is being playfully deceitful: "playfully," because the last thing a truly deceitful man does is broadcast his deceitfulness. In any event, it is little wonder that although Alypius is gracious in thanking Augustine, he remains wary from this point on.

Alypius is about to play his part in explaining the difference between the Old and New Academies, but they are interrupted by Augustine's mother Monica, who makes her first and only

appearance in *Against the Academics*. Monica is a woman of action with a strong bent for the practical and little patience for arcane theory. A few days earlier, when Augustine explained to her the epistemological doubts of the Academics, she dismissed them as “spazzes” and got up to leave.³⁸ For Monica, there is no suspension of assent or hand-wringing about the probable and the verisimilar: when it is time for lunch, it is time for lunch. Her brusque and silent muscling of the group to attend to the needs of the body puts an end to their verbose exchanges. It is an eloquent testimony to the fact that actions speak louder than words as well as to the fact that an intellectual pattern of experience in this life cannot go on indefinitely. Neither of these points, as later becomes clear, is irrelevant to a consideration of the Academics.

After lunch, Alypius fulfills his promise and explains the difference between the New and Old Academies.³⁹ Three points about his summary bear notice. First, Alypius stresses that the New Academy was right to “refute and discuss” the epistemological novelties of Zeno and the Stoics. In this respect, the New Academy is not new but a reassertion of the Old Academy of Plato against the upstart Zeno. But if it is simply a reassertion or reformulation of Platonism, perhaps it is not as skeptical as is generally thought. Second, when discussing Philo of Larissa, Alypius relays Philo’s attack on the Academics for following the verisimilar “even though they acknowledged that they were ignorant of the truth itself” (2.6.15). Alypius does so casually and without comment, apparently not seeing much in the very argument that Augustine is about to take hold of and use as his main weapon against the Academics. Third, Alypius’s last words to the group are, “complete this disputation that you have taken up.” Why, we wonder, is he so eager to see an end to this conversation?

Augustine Versus Licentius: The Little Question (2.7.16–2.8.20)

Augustine, who has essentially replaced the vanquished Tryge-tius as the anti-Academic spokesman, now steps into the ring with Licentius, who reaffirms his approval of Academic teaching. When Augustine asks whether it seems to him that the Academics speak the truth, Licentius is about to answer “yes” when a smile from Alypius makes him think twice. If Licentius believes that Academic doctrine is true, then by his own concession he is assenting to a truth. But the Academic doctrine is that the human mind cannot assent to the truth, and Licentius would therefore be contradicting himself. The issue of self-referential coherence, mentioned briefly above and in the Introduction to this dialogue, is becoming more salient.

Licentius asks Augustine to repeat his “little question.” The word that he uses here is *rogatiuncula*, a neologism coined by Cicero in *On the Ends* to refer to a quick question that just as quickly exposes the bankruptcy of an opponent’s thought.⁴⁰ In response to Augustine’s *rogatiuncula*, Licentius shrewdly answers that the Academic doctrine of probability seems probable to him. Augustine asks whether he is aware that the Academics use the terms “probable” and “verisimilar” interchangeably, to which Licentius replies that he is. Augustine then inquires into the cogency of this usage. How can something be called verisimilar (literally, “similar to the true”) when no one knows what “the true” is? Augustine uses a simile to illustrate his point: if a man says that your brother is similar to your father but does not know your father, he would be rightly dismissed as crazy or idiotic.

In the face of this objection Licentius wavers in silence, a sure sign that he is about to be defeated. Augustine encourages him to press on and not be deterred by his unfamiliarity with Academic

literature, for philosophy is not bibliophilia: the writings of the philosophers can be helpful, but even they are mere means to an end. Augustine characterizes Licentius's education (or lack thereof) in terms that are redolent of Romanianus: a keen mental aptitude but not a "copious amount" of the liberal arts (2.7.17; cf. 2.3.8). Augustine may be identifying Licentius with his father in order to encourage the latter to persevere as well: but the fact that he is able to make this comparison, however implicitly, is due to the fact that he, unlike the crazy idiot in his example, knows both father and son.

Augustine also gives Licentius a way out: Alypius can replace you, he tells him, once you reach the maximum of your ability. It is the first time that the possibility of Alypius's functioning as a proxy is mentioned, although it has probably been weighing on Alypius's mind from the beginning. It was Alypius who asked to be a judge of the disputation in order to avoid being a participant (1.2.5), and it was Alypius who only moments ago wished for a speedy conclusion to the discussion, perhaps in the hopes of having it end before he was dragged into it. In any event, it is a possibility that Licentius very much likes (2.7.17). He has been frustrated that both men clearly have been holding something back (speaking in drips rather than geysers, to use his metaphor), and he would love nothing better than to see two experienced debaters go at it. Licentius is complimentary and polite when expressing these thoughts, but there is a hint throughout of what Augustine would later in his life call the *libido spectandi* (the lust for looking)⁴¹ or *curiositas*—not curiosity or intellectual inquiry per se, but a disorder of the rational part of the soul whereby the mind seeks titillation rather than learning, vain information rather than edifying knowledge, gossip about others rather than the truth about oneself.⁴²

Augustine's response to this flash of *curiositas* is to invite Licentius to replace the prospect of a titillating spectacle with one that would bring true and wholesome joy: the deliverance of his father from trouble and into the lap of philosophy. Instead of entertaining a pointless hope in satisfying *curiositas*, Licentius is asked to be filled with the pious hope of seeing a loved one truly happy. It is a much better hope with which to be filled, but Augustine's substitution is almost too effective. Licentius begins to weep, and his emotions temporarily derail the disputation. The conflict between comedy and tragedy reemerges (see 1.2.5), with the group's disputation representing the comic outlook of philosophy and Licentius's tears the sorrow of tragedy. That said, the young man's tears are only partially tragic, for his weeping springs from a happy image of his father and occasions a salubrious self-admonition against despair (the deadly vice discussed in the second cover letter). Still, even nontragic sorrow is incompatible with the spirit of philosophy, and the group cannot continue until their tears are turned into laughter. Once they are, the philosophical dialogue may continue.

There is, however, one philosophically useful dimension to Licentius's reaction. When Augustine asks him whether there is anything more appropriate for him to imagine than his father happy, Licentius looks up to heaven with an outstretched hand, the Roman gesture for an "aye" in voting. Licentius, who has been saying that the wise man should never assent, has just given his assent.

Licentius vows to be "here as much as" he can and quickly reengages the topic, trying to find a way of showing how someone who is ignorant of *B* can still go on to say intelligently that *A* is like *B*. Augustine again personalizes the example, speaking of the resemblance between Licentius and his father. (The example has

the added advantage of exhorting Romanianus to philosophize. For if his son Licentius has philosophical potential, and if sons resemble fathers, then perhaps Romanianus may become convinced that he too has philosophical potential.) Licentius is quickly defeated in this single combat, and one wonders whether his earlier desire to see the two adults debate each other played a role in his easy surrender. Now that he is a prisoner of war, he immediately invokes the Geneva Convention, so to speak, and demands to be fed the answer (2.7.19). Even Trygetius comes to his aid and, somewhat to his own surprise, tries to defend the Academics against Augustine's simile. But Trygetius's objection is beside the point since it is unable to divorce the probable from the verisimilar in Academic thought. Ironically, the anti-Academic Trygetius calls in Alypius to defend the Academics against Augustine's attacks. Alypius, after offering initial resistance, graciously obliges.

Augustine Versus Alypius: Establishing the Terms (2.9.22–2.10.24)

The defeats of Licentius and Trygetius have set the stage (and whetted the reader's appetite) for a showdown between the two heavyweights in the dialogue. As Alypius notes, just as he is to replace Licentius, Augustine is to replace Trygetius (2.8.21, 2.10.24). But this substitution also implies a reversal of roles, with the young men now acting as the judges. Such an arrangement is not without its problems. As Augustine will point out in the next book, Licentius and Trygetius, novice students of Academic skepticism and of philosophy in general, are not really fit to take the bench (3.3.6). Perhaps it is left to the reader to be the real judge but with the same responsibility of becoming qualified to do so.

Further, although Augustine and Alypius may be acting as surrogates for the youths, the two men do not necessarily hold the same positions as the two youths, who often contradicted themselves

unwittingly (e.g., Licentius's erratic use of Cicero) because they were both inexperienced beginners. When a true master, however, makes a schoolboy blunder, one can only wonder whether it is not intentional. Alypius immediately suspects that whatever Augustine is going to say, it is going to spring deliberately from a hidden agenda and that in fact Augustine, in refuting the Academics, secretly wishes to establish *himself* as an Academic. It is impossible to determine here precisely what Alypius means by this statement: Is he referring to the Academics' contrarian methods or to the content of their thought or both? Clearly, he is not satisfied with Augustine's earlier pledge of acting *bona fides*, and he wants to know whom or what Augustine is secretly defending.

Augustine replies by referring to a well-known case from Cicero's legal career. At the request of the people of Sicily, Cicero prosecuted Caius Verres, who was accused of plundering the temples and houses of the island while he was praetor of that province. Cicero, wishing to be excused for taking on the role of a prosecutor when he was better known as a defense attorney, several times remarks that in accusing the corrupt Verres he is defending the exploited Sicilians.⁴³ Augustine's point is that not all prosecuting attorneys are like Cicero during the Verres case, defending one party by attacking another: there is a second kind of prosecutor who prosecutes without simultaneously defending. But *can* a prosecutor prosecute without defending? Insofar as every prosecution indirectly defends some interest—be it that of the “state,” the “people,” or a private party—there are not “two kinds of prosecutors” but only one. Augustine is therefore deflecting the question rather than answering it.

Further, there is something mildly suspicious about Augustine's statement that Cicero, who in his oration portrays himself as Sicily's last true hope for justice in the Roman courts,⁴⁴ was acting

“with the utmost modesty.” Cicero, if we may say so with all due respect, was never accused of doing anything with the utmost modesty. In sum, Augustine replies to Alypius’s inquiry into the transparency of his intentions with an obfuscating sophistry that Alypius, a trained lawyer and respected magistrate, would be sure not to miss. Alypius is right to be wary of Augustine.

Alypius instantly recognizes that Augustine has teasingly proffered a red herring, and so he pushes him again to disclose his ultimate convictions. “Do you at least have something on which your position will stand firm?” he asks. It is essentially the same question as before but stripped of all whimsical ornament—a sign of its earnestness and of the fact that he wants a sincere reply to his sincere inquiry. Augustine understands this and steps out of his ironic persona for a moment. He admits that all of the discussions so far have been a game filled with many a curve ball, but a game played for the sake of something quite serious. Young pups and cubs playfully fight with each other for the joy of it, but whether they know it or not, their scuffles prepare them for real conflicts as adults. Similarly, Augustine and Alypius have been exercising the minds of the young men by sparring with them (the last thing he wanted to do was start a genuine conflict within the group) but with a serious purpose in mind: to initiate them into the life of philosophy. Although philosophy is playful by nature and is portrayed “joking along” with the group, its ultimate aim is no laughing matter: the triumph of the soul over deceits and lusts, the attainment of temperance (and presumably other virtues), the grasping of truth, and the soul’s return to itself and to God.

With these solemn goals in mind, Augustine says that it is time to put aside the playthings and take up real weapons. He quotes Vulcan’s words in the *Aeneid* before forging Aeneas’s invincible armor: “for a vigorous man, arms should be made” (2.9.22). The

allusion hearkens back to the second cover letter and the suspicion that the Academics' arguments are Vulcanian (2.1.1). Who is the triumphant Aeneas in this scenario and who the doomed Turnus: Augustine or the Academics? Which side really bears the arms of Vulcan?

But ending the childish sparring does not mean putting an end to Socratic irony. No sooner has Augustine described his sincere aims in 2.9.22 than he resumes his devil's-advocate persona in 2.9.23. It is as if he is giving Alypius a blueprint of the character that he will play in the finale to their mock showdown. That it is not a completely accurate reflection of his true convictions can be seen from the contradictions between his statements here and elsewhere. Augustine claims here to be ignorant of the truth and to be impeded by the arguments of the Academics; yet in book three we will see him claiming to know many things and clearly not impeded by the Academics. There is even a contradiction within 2.9.23: at the beginning of the paragraph he states that the Academics induced in his mind the probability that the truth cannot be discovered; yet by the end of the paragraph Augustine expresses his belief in the probability that the truth *can* be discovered. On the other hand, perhaps the persona in paragraph twenty-three is a pastiche of Augustine's struggles with the Academics from the past to the present, from their initial impact on him to his present estimation.

One part of Augustine's persona in 2.9.23 bears special consideration. At the end of the paragraph, Augustine mentions the possibility that the Academics were "pretending," that is, that they only feigned an ignorance of the truth. Could this pretense be tied to the "method" that Augustine sometimes imagines the Academics practiced? (see 2.1.1).

Alypius, reassured by Augustine's remarks, now refers to him as a paralegal on his side aiding in the discovery of relevant facts

rather than a prosecutor trying to thwart or sabotage him. As such, he asks his aide a question: Why did you make such a fuss about the terms “verisimilitude” and “probability”? We know what the Academics mean when they use these words, so why quibble over them, especially since it is unbecoming for people interested in truth and not the scoring of polemical hits to become obsessed with semantics?

Augustine answers him honestly. He believes that the issue is not one of semantics, for the Academics were “serious and prudent men” who knew what they were doing: they were experts in putting “names on things” (2.10.24). They chose their labels carefully, Augustine opines, “in order to hide their position from the more sluggish and to reveal it to the more alert”—in other words, they deftly practiced a “method” that involved “pretending.” The Academics, then, were *not* opposed to the discovery of the truth, as is commonly held; rather, their skepticism was designed to throw the “sluggish” off the scent and to reserve their real teachings only to the “alert” few. And Augustine is *not* against the Academics; rather, he says, he is against the people who are against the Academics. If, on the other hand, Augustine is wrong and the Academics were sincere in their skepticism, he will not hesitate to take up arms against them. Put differently, Augustine will attack the Academics if they are genuine skeptics, and he will defend them if they turn out to be playful or pretend skeptics. Augustine, therefore, *is* in a certain way both a prosecutor and a defender of the Academics. Alypius was once again right to be suspicious.

Day Five: Round One Between Augustine and Alypius (2.11.25–2.13.30)

The evening before, Augustine had introduced an astonishing hypothesis into the proceedings by mentioning the possibility that

the Academics were not real skeptics. No doubt the group would have liked to question him more about his ostensibly outrageous claim, but the setting sun prevented further discussion (2.10.24). On this day, the group is impeded by domestic chores and writing letters. Intentionally or not, the reference to letter-writing invites the reader to consult Augustine's early epistles, where one discovers his first letter, to a friend named Hermogenianus. In that letter, Augustine recounts the same theory about the dissimulating method of the Academics.⁴⁵ Clearly, the theory was much on his mind.

Augustine states that today's discussion takes place in the meadow next to "the usual tree," although it is the first mention of a tree in the dialogue. Augustine may be mentioning it now because the group's familiarity with the tree explains why Licentius will in a few moments refer to it as "this tree of ours" (2.12.27). Holding a discussion near a tree is also reminiscent of Plato's *Phaedrus*, where Socrates and Phaedrus converse about rhetoric, writing, and philosophy under a plane tree.

Because of the lack of time, Augustine asks the youths to summarize the point of contention between himself and Alypius that arose from the "little question" (*rogatiuncula*) that had rattled Licentius and even Trygetius. Ever rambunctious, Licentius is again the first to reply, and he replies first again when Augustine asks whether they understand the significance of this disagreement. When Licentius asks for a clarification, Augustine explains the Academic doctrine of probability whereby one can make a decision to act without giving assent to something as true.⁴⁶ Augustine even says that the Academics would be happy to abandon the terms "probable" and "verisimilar" as long as there is agreement on the reality that those terms signify, a willingness that would seem to undermine the import of Augustine's playful "little question." But Augustine adds a counter objection: Do you really think that Cicero, the master

wordsmith of the Latin language, chose these philosophical terms in a slipshod manner?

Trygetius, with uncharacteristic assertiveness, tells Augustine to get on with it. We all agree what the Academics mean by these terms, he maintains, so stop quibbling over them and give your response to Alypius, who has freed us (Trygetius and Licentius) from having to answer your questions. Trygetius too, it would appear, has the itch of *curiositas* and would prefer to see a duel from the sidelines rather than undergo intellectual conversion himself. Yet he does have one valid point: when there is agreement on the meaning of a term, there is no need to argue over the verbiage. Such a maneuver would be akin to defining every word in a definition and then every word in those definitions ad infinitum. Since there can be no infinite regression of terms, at some point in the parsing of words an insight into reality itself must intervene that rightly says, "Enough: I understand."

Surprisingly, Licentius does not share Trygetius's eagerness for the spectacle: he is actually considering Augustine's counterobjection. After a while, the argument against the verisimilar starts to make sense to him. It is curious that it should do so now and not the day before. Perhaps Licentius is reaping the benefits of having allowed the argument to ferment in the back of his mind, making him more amenable to an insight, just as Archimedes allowed the problem of the king's crown to soak a bit as he took a bath. How indeed, Licentius now sees, *can* one call something similar to the true if one does not know the true?

Licentius has had a genuine breakthrough, but, as his earlier moment of silence would suggest, it is riddled with problems. He has not been a perfect Academic, for while he asserted that the wise man can be happy in the mere search for wisdom, he now claims that he himself knows and has assented to many things that

are true. Although the two positions are not necessarily contradictory, the latter is the position that the Academics are famous for rejecting. Moreover, his example of something that he knows, that “this tree of ours cannot turn silver right now,” is dubious, for like the other two examples in this section, a cheerful sun rising (2.11.26) and the prospect of rain tomorrow (2.12.27), it is a claim about an empirical phenomenon that falls short of authentic knowledge*. Since *scientia* is of eternal and immutable realities not intrinsically shaped by space, time, or matter, and since when it comes to empirical phenomena, virtually nothing can be ruled out a priori, it would have been far wiser for Licentius to say that it is highly improbable, based on our conditional grasp of the laws of nature, that a tree can suddenly turn silver rather than to say that we know* that it cannot turn silver.

Further, Licentius continues to show a parochial Roman prejudice, an attribute unbecoming of a philosopher whose truth-seeking way of life transcends ethnic and national biases. Although he has now abandoned Cicero’s philosophical school, he “spares” Cicero from direct criticism and focuses instead on the non-Roman Carneades, sophomorically calling him a “Greek pest.” (And yet earlier, Licentius was willing to use Carneades as an authority with which to bludgeon Trygetius.)⁴⁷ Lastly, in order to highlight the internal contradictions involved with the use of the word “verisimilitude” by a skeptic, Licentius asks why we should even bother to dispute with someone who cannot speak (coherently). Licentius rightly draws attention to the importance of coherence, but if the group applied this standard to Licentius, they would not be speaking with *him*.

Alypius, retrieving Licentius’s earlier military language, denounces him as a deserter. His criticism consists of four points. First, a proof that Carneades is right about the uncertainty of attaining

knowledge* is Licentius's own flip-flopping, whose loyalty to the Academics is derailed by "one little question" (2.12.28). The word that Alypius uses here for "little question" is *interrogatiuncula*. Another Ciceronian neologism, it is similar to *rogatiuncula*—which Licentius and Augustine have each uttered before—but with an additional connotation. In Cicero's *On the Ends*, *interrogatiunculae* are narrow little questions "that prick us like pins" and compel our assent without really changing our minds. "For," Cicero explains, "these matters, which perhaps are true and which certainly are serious, are not being handled as they should be, but in quite a petty manner."⁴⁸ From such poignant diction we may gather what Alypius thinks not only of Licentius's waffling, but of Augustine's narrow focus on the word "verisimilitude."

Second, Alypius hints that Licentius's understanding of knowledge* is defective by characterizing it in terms of "impressions" and thereby associating it with Stoicism.⁴⁹ Although Alypius's larger indictment is not without merit (for Licentius here appears to subscribe to an epistemology that is as naïve as that of the Stoics), tarring Licentius with the Stoics may be unfair, since Licentius did not actually "admit" that his knowledge of the tree had been "impressed" upon him.

Third, Alypius continues, we should have kept to the original strategy, which was to limit the question as to whether we should or should not seek the "verisimilar" or the "probable." Alypius personally would like to have seen progress on the question of whether the truth can be discovered, but ever since he was drawn into the debate as Licentius's counsel, his backup plan was to focus on whether we should not seek what is probable. It was a winning strategy, for who would argue against the importance of arriving at the most probable conclusions to problems or questions? Further, it avoids the vexatious dimensions to the Academic teaching on

probability, such as its denial that anything can be known or its use of the word “verisimilar” as synonymous with the probable.

And fourth, if Licentius is such a great detective of truth, Alypius concludes, he does not need my help. Indeed, Licentius should become my teacher.

These are fairly harsh and sardonic words, and it is little wonder that Licentius is intimidated by them and remains silent. Augustine intervenes on the youth’s behalf, essentially telling Alypius that he’s being too hard on the lad. He accuses Alypius of not addressing perhaps Licentius’s strongest point: “how we should dispute with those who don’t know how to speak” (2.13.29). Alypius replies by saying that since everyone knows what a fine speaker you are, Augustine, you tell me. As far as I am concerned, Alypius quips, Licentius’s question is irrelevant; and if it is not, *you* become the teacher and explain it.

Alypius’s retorts express bitterness and frustration, and there may be several reasons why. Alypius is annoyed that he has been dragged from his perch of impartiality to defend a client who wants to defect to the other side, leaving him alone in a fight he assiduously tried to avoid from the beginning. He wanted to see the disputation ended before he could be pulled into it (2.6.15); he saw his role as a “burden imposed” on him (2.5.13); and he was afraid of taking on new assignments (2.6.14). At the time it appeared that these remarks were being proffered playfully, but perhaps there was more truth to them after all; at the very least, it may be stated that Alypius is consistently reluctant at Cassiciacum to intervene in discussions on behalf of the youths.⁵⁰ Alypius may also be annoyed by Licentius’s impetuosity in general, since this is not the first time that he has deserted the Academics. A week earlier, in *On Order*, he had also turned against the skeptics, calling them “cunning and captious.”⁵¹ Further, Alypius is annoyed that he was not able to put

into practice his excellent legal strategy of steering the question away from a scrutiny of words toward the question about whether one should not seek the probable. But most of all, Alypius seems particularly annoyed that he must confront Augustine on the issue of the Academics. On more than one occasion he has mentioned that everything he knows about the Academics he has learned from Augustine (2.4.10, 2.10.24)—an indebtedness that clearly puts him at a disadvantage, since the teacher rarely discloses everything he knows on a subject to the pupil, even when he is trying to.

Moreover, there are at least three substantial disagreements between Alypius and Augustine. First, as we have already seen, the two differ on the significance to be attached to Cicero's use of the word "verisimilitude." Second, as we learn in this section, Alypius thinks that the writings of the Academics accurately reflect their thought, whereas Augustine thinks that they do not and that the Academics hid their real opinions from the "ignorant" and "unpurified" (2.13.29). We have already seen Augustine hint at a "method" that may involve "pretending" (2.9.23, 2.10.24). For the sake of convenience, it is appropriate that we attach a name to the method Augustine is describing. Traditionally, the art of writing or speaking in such a way that one and the same discourse deliberately discloses two different and contradictory sets of opinions—one accessible to the majority of readers and one accessible to only a few—is known as esotericism. Today that term is often associated with the occult or with secretive religions such as Gnosticism, but its original meaning was philosophical. According to an old tradition, the term began with Pythagoras, who was said to have saved some of his teachings for only a small minority of his followers.⁵² The few disciples worthy of his true thought were told his "inner" teachings, or *esōterika*, while those who were for whatever reason deemed unworthy or unprepared were given his "outer" teachings,

or *exōterika*.⁵³ The Greek writer Lucian (fl. A.D. 180) satirically describes an Aristotelian philosopher in a similar manner: “When viewed from without he appears to be one man, and when viewed from within another; so if you buy him, make sure to call one exoteric [*exōterikon*] and the other esoteric [*exōterikon*].”⁵⁴ Esoteric writing, then, can refer to one set of texts that is meant only for the few and that consists exclusively of a master’s inner teachings; the master’s exoteric writings, on the other hand, would consist of a different set of texts that are designed for a popular audience and that do not contain his real thoughts. More often, however, the term “esoteric” refers to a *single* text that contains at one and the same time two different levels of meaning: an exoteric level that is fairly obvious to the most casual of readers, and an esoteric level hidden from plain view. The exoteric level is the “pretend” level that generally consists of fables and falsehoods and is easily accessible, while the esoteric level, somehow present between the lines and accessible only to the most alert readers, is where the author’s true convictions lie.⁵⁵

Alypius is openly skeptical of the latter kind of esotericism: not only does he believe that the truth about the Academics’ real intentions has not been discovered, but he also believes that the truth about them can *never* be discovered. This skepticism may explain his annoyance at Augustine: why keep harping on the possibility of esotericism when there is no determinative means of verification? How on earth can you second-guess the real intentions of an author? Not even “the great and outstanding philosophers” were able to do so, and who are we to think we can do better? (2.13.30). For Augustine to convert Alypius to his point of view, therefore, he will have to make his theory exceedingly plausible.

The third difference between Alypius and Augustine will likewise be difficult to surmount, for Alypius not only thinks that the

Academics believed what they wrote, but *he* believes it as well. Alypius's remarks about the truth having never been discovered and about the truth being incapable of discovery apply only secondarily to our knowledge of the Academics' intentions: they are uttered primarily to express Alypius's own concurrence with Academic opinion. Alypius, in other words, is skeptical of esotericism because he is a genuine skeptic across the board, a true believer of the Academics. His "deep-seated opinion" (2.13.30), as he calls it, is not without its difficulties. Alypius shows a decidedly nonskeptical deference to authority when he speaks of the propriety of not thinking that we can surpass the great philosophers, before whom we should bend the neck (not unlike Licentius in book one).⁵⁶ And there is an additional complication. Did Alypius not convert to Christianity moments after his friend Augustine in the garden in Milan?⁵⁷ Will he not be baptized along with him in several months?⁵⁸ How then can a catechumen, who is entering a Church that believes that the Second Person of the Trinity *is* the Truth (John 14:6), say that the truth has never been discovered and can never be discovered? Perhaps the answer will be revealed in the next book. In any event, Augustine must not only show the plausibility of his theory of esotericism, but he must do so by demonstrating the probability that the truth can be discovered.

To meet this challenge, Augustine, who has already promised that he will address the issue of verisimilitude and probability later (2.10.24, 2.13.29), suggests that they frame the debate along the following question: whether, *by virtue of the Academics' arguments*, it is probable that nothing can be perceived and that assent should not be given to anything. It is noteworthy that by using the Academic concept of probability to assess the Academic teaching on perception and assent, Augustine is indirectly paying tribute to and perhaps even affirming the former. Whatever conclusions

may be drawn about the Academics' theories on perceiving and assenting, they do not appear to affect Academic probabilism as a useful means of evaluation. Using probability as the gauge will also happily circumvent the fact that it is virtually impossible to attain certainty about an author's true motives and purpose. (Alypius is right to have pointed out in his own way that we can never know—according to the standards of *scientia*—the mind of the Academics, but that does not mean we should not aspire to an opinion that is reasonable based on the available data.)

Further, the qualifying phrase (put here in *italics*) is significant, for if it is determined that the Academics' arguments are probably correct, then it is highly unlikely that the Academics are being esoteric. If, however, their arguments are probably false, then their use of an esoteric method of writing is at least a plausible possibility. It is also fitting that the group approach these issues "by virtue of their arguments," for it is this very approach that the early Academics followed in their critique of the Stoics. As Alypius has already noted, Arcesilaus, the founder of the Middle Academy, did not assert that nothing could be known; rather, he claimed that nothing could be known *if* Zeno's definition of knowledge is true (2.16.14).

Happily, Alypius and the others agree to the terms, and the stage is set for the final debate.

BOOK THREE

Day Six: Part I: Round Two Between Augustine and Alypius (3.1.1–3.6.13)

Preliminary Considerations (3.1.1–3.4.7)

The group reassembles the next day in the villa's private bath-house instead of the usual meadow because it was "too gloomy out." The sunny weather that yesterday Licentius had called verisimilar or

likely to come did not (2.12.27). There is also an interesting emotional contrast between the weather of the two days. Yesterday, the sun was described as *laetus*, or “cheerful” (2.11.26); today, the sky is described as too “gloomy,” or sad (*tristior*), for being outdoors. Yet yesterday, the conversation ended rather gloomily, with Alypius’s sarcasm raining on everyone’s parade; today, the conversation is rather cheerful, with the group laughing at least once and enjoying a concluding monologue with facetious satirical elements. The gloom of the day may also be a reflection of the darkness that Augustine claims is the patron of the Academics (2.13.29).⁵⁹ For the past two days it has been darkness that has halted the group’s quest for the light (see 2.10.24 and 2.13.30), and so the reader is left wondering whether the discussion on this sixth and final day will be able to pierce through the gloom once and for all.

Augustine wishes to explain the question that he and Alypius will discuss, but before doing so he brings up several preliminary matters. First, he emphasizes that just as Licentius and Trygetius agreed during their debate that the search for the truth was of the utmost importance, so too do he and Alypius agree on this crucial point—and so do all genuine philosophers, the Academics included. The only area where the Academics differ from all other philosophers is that their “wise man” is one who seeks after the truth but never finds it, whereas the other philosophical schools claim that their wise man has found the truth (1.1.1).

Second, Augustine turns from theory to practice by asking the youths what kind of day they had yesterday: Did they each spend it doing what they said was of the utmost importance, namely, seeking the truth? In the second cover letter (2.1.1), Augustine writes of the importance of constantly applying oneself to “good studious pursuits” (*bona studia*); here, as he asks about the young men’s studies (*studia*), he is obliquely wondering whether their enthusiasms or

pursuits are good. Trygetius spent his day reading Vergil, which may qualify as a good pursuit of truth-seeking depending on his motives, namely, whether he was reading merely to be entertained or in order to discover deeper truths about “human and divine things.” Licentius, on the other hand, spent the day “bring[ing] forth his verses,” which can mean composing his own verses or bringing out Vergilian verses for further study. Either way, Augustine mildly censures Licentius for his time management not because there is something wrong with the composition or study of poetry *per se*, but because it is hypocritical for Licentius to argue that the truth should be sought above all else and then use poetry as a distraction from rather than as an aid to the search for the truth.

Licentius, however, ignores the gentle mentorship: later in the day, he leaves the lunch table early in order to indulge his obsession with poetry (3.4.7). Augustine, escalating his level of criticism, compares him to a caged parrot in terms that are reminiscent of his fable about Philocaly, a comparison that tells us something about Licentius’s present condition: namely, that his current fixation with poetry renders him a “lover of false beauty” insofar as it is keeping him from flying the coop to Philosophy. But to underscore again that poetry or its study is not intrinsically bad, Augustine offers Licentius some interesting advice: rather than abandon poetry tout court, Licentius should perfect it; for once something is perfected, we tend to grow bored of it (3.4.7). Aside from being psychologically perceptive, this observation reflects Augustine’s desire to lead his pupils in an ascent not around but through the liberal arts to higher forms of wisdom, even though some of those arts are potentially dangerous in their power to distract.

Regarding the same incident at lunch, Augustine also describes his pupil as being unsatisfied by Mount Helicon, a metonymy for the Muses and the fine arts. Two days earlier, Licentius

had boasted that his concentration on meters would not impede his physical appetite (see 2.4.10). Now we see his boast proved false by his own actions. Locked in an intense intellectual pattern of experience, he has neglected to satisfy the demands of the body by leaving lunch early and forgetting to drink something (3.4.7). The Muses do not satisfy Licentius's thirst on two levels. They do not satisfy his physical thirst—and here there is an echo of the legend recorded in Plato's *Phaedrus* of the men who, enraptured by the Muses' invention of singing, sang without food or drink until they died (259b–c)—nor do the Muses satisfy Licentius's thirst for poetry. Perhaps his enthusiasm is insatiable, or perhaps his talents as a composer or an explicator of the text are not equal to his enthusiasm. (As Socrates points out, a poet without the divine madness of the Muses is mediocre [*Phaedrus* 245a].) Augustine had been worried that an excessive amount of philosophical cultivation would damage the two young men; now he is concerned that a deficiency in philosophical cultivation is damaging them. The right balance of moderation or measure is difficult to achieve.

Third, Augustine explores the relationship between fortune and wisdom, again by turning to the concrete (3.2.2). Did not fortune impede our progress yesterday, even though we made careful plans the night before to devote ourselves to the truth? Does this not show that we need fortune in order to become wise? Augustine tells the group what he has already told Romanianus in the opening sentence of the first cover letter: the wise man does not need fortune, but the person seeking wisdom most certainly does in order to become wise.

Fortune and the Search for Wisdom (3.2.2–3.3.5)

Ever the lawyer, Alypius is concerned that Augustine is giving fortune too much “jurisdiction” (*ius*) over our lives. If Augustine

simply means (A) that fortune is necessary in order ultimately to disregard fortune, then Alypius is in agreement. But if Augustine is saying that (B) all bodily necessities depend completely on fortune, Alypius is worried. Alypius sees two possibilities: either the seeker of wisdom can make use of bodily necessities even when impeded by misfortune, or fortune rules the life of even the wise man. If the first is true (and Alypius believes it is),⁶⁰ then option B is false. Moreover, if option B is true, then so too is the consequence that fortune rules over the wise man. In good Ciceronian fashion, Alypius vehemently wishes to avoid this conclusion.⁶¹ In the process of Alypius's articulating his thoughts, we learn of another difference between him and Augustine: Alypius's interest in wisdom is not as strong as Augustine's. While Alypius wants to seek wisdom in order to live, Augustine wants to live in order to seek wisdom.⁶² Perhaps Alypius's search for the truth, like that of his fellow Academic Licentius, is not as paramount as he claims.

One curious subtopic to emerge in this discussion is the plight of a man who is blind and deaf. Augustine uses such a person as an example of fortune's preventing someone from ever becoming wise (3.2.3). Alypius goes further, stating that a blind and deaf person has a right to hold both wisdom and life itself in low regard. Perhaps we should forgive Augustine for not having heard of Helen Keller, especially since his primary goal is not to demean the physically challenged but affirm the value of the senses. Rather than deprecating bodily senses, Augustine considers them vital to attaining wisdom, since without two of them wisdom is virtually impossible to attain. Moreover, this passage sets the stage for an interesting development of the themes of blindness and deafness beyond the boundaries of a physical handicap. Shortly afterwards, Alypius says, "For unless perhaps I'm blind, it seems to me that there is a difference between 'it seems to him that he knows*' and

‘he knows*’” (3.3.6); and moments later, Augustine says, “perhaps I had turned a deaf ear for a moment,” or more literally, “perhaps I had gone deaf for a moment” (3.4.8). These asides suggest that one need not be physically blind and deaf in order to be blind and deaf; mental or intellectual deficiencies can be just as debilitating as the physical equivalent. Today, we speak of people having a “blind spot” when they are avoiding or sabotaging their own understanding. Such blind spots include suppressing the insights that would lead to a breakthrough or a recognition of something, rationalizing something away, reacting with strong revulsion to a truth or a fact, and trying to encourage insights that justify, perpetuate, or expand one’s biases or flight from the light. Similarly, “turning a deaf ear” suggests a lack of attentiveness, purpose, or intentionality. It is this element of attentiveness or conation that accounts for the difference between hearing and listening, for although sensation obviously has a bodily component, it needs to be directed by a certain presence of mind in order to bear fruit. These intellectual handicaps, which are all too prevalent in human beings, erect before the port of wisdom blockades just as significant as those imposed by physical impairments.

Seeking Versus Possessing Wisdom (3.3.5–3.6.13)

Augustine reassures Alypius that he only meant option A, that just as babies depend on milk in order to move beyond it to solid food and just as travelers depend on a vehicle of some kind in order to forget about that vehicle the moment they have reached their destination, so too must seekers of wisdom initially depend on the favorable winds of fortune to pilot them to wisdom, whence they can disregard fortune. Augustine has already said as much in his two cover letters to Romanianus; what he does here is use this point, on which both he and Alypius agree, as a fulcrum for resolving a

more pressing dilemma. If the distinction between the person seeking wisdom (who is in need of fortune) and the person who is wise (who does not need fortune) is real, then there is a real difference between searching for wisdom and having it. Augustine does not think of “possessing” wisdom in an unshareable sense: my “having” the knowledge, for instance, that a whole is greater than its parts is a real possession, but it does not mean that there is less of that knowledge for you to “have.” Either we truly have something when we truly know something, or someone can know false or nonexistent things. But the latter option is absurd since it is an act of *not* knowing, of being ignorant or deceived. Therefore, when we truly know something, our minds are in possession of something real, whatever that something may be.

Like a vigorous fish on the end of a line, Alypius puts up a terrific fight against this reasoning, for he sees its implications. If the wise man must know something, then the Academics’ wise man is not wise, since he has been defined as a mere seeker rather than a possessor of wisdom (3.1.1). Alypius tries to maintain that what the Academic wise man possesses is not knowledge* but an investigation or inquiry of probable discoveries (see 3.3.5); and he even tries to divorce wisdom from truth (see 3.3.6). There is certainly something commendable about a rigorous investigation of probable discoveries, as the success of modern empirical science illustrates. Nevertheless, such discoveries fall short of knowledge-as-*scientia* or of wisdom, since true knowledge* and wisdom are not subject to further revision on the basis of possible future discoveries or developments: their content is fully complete, eternal and immutable.

Augustine, therefore, refuses to let Alypius off the hook. Eventually he has to tell him three things: (1) answer the question that I am asking you, not the question you would prefer to answer; (2) do not factor in my ultimate purpose, which is extraneous to the

question per se; and (3) do not factor in your own worry (whatever it may be), but pay attention to the question. These instructions echo and reinforce Augustine's earlier request, to concentrate "as if the trouble of making a response had been removed from you for a little while" (3.4.8)—a request that implicitly recognizes a difference between a mode of dispassionate inquiry into the truth and a mode of public disputation, with its apprehensions about defeat or looking foolish in the eyes of others.

Proteus and the Normative Nodes of Comprehension

Although these three admonitions essentially amount to the same thing, they highlight the difficulty in being truly rational. Even experienced thinkers are constantly tempted to introduce irrelevant items (such as their own fears and aspirations) or to exclude relevant items (usually on the basis of their fears and aspirations). But over and against this powerful nexus of druthers and irrational impulses stands the normativity of reason itself, on which even the skeptics or enemies of reason must rely; for in order to make their case against reason, they must somehow try to be reasonable. When, for instance, reason's critics reduce everything to the "will to power," they must appeal, however obliquely, to their interlocutor's desire to understand; when they champion "the absurd," they must articulate their thoughts coherently; and when they speak of all being as "nothing," they must rely on that "divine something" present in their interlocutors that can comprehend and assent to their theory of nihilism. A rational discussion, despite the enormous difficulties involved in having one, discloses a human reliance on unchanging and determinative canons of reason that, when violated, make the thinker look as comical as does Alypius in these passages, with all his brilliant but futile intellectual gymnastics. This reliance, in turn, means that there *are*

unchanging and determinative canons of reason that are immanent in human knowing.

Augustine almost gives us a name for these canons. When speaking of a deeper meaning behind the myth of Proteus, he says: "In poems . . . Proteus performs and plays the role of truth whom no one can obtain if he is deceived by false images and either loosens or lets go of the knots of comprehension" (3.6.13). If the human mind is to know anything, it must keep the "knots of comprehension" taut and not allow them to be compromised or abandoned by various sensations or images from the bodily senses. The word that Augustine uses here for a knot (*nodus*) can also signify a node, a point at which the orbits of two celestial bodies intersect.⁶³ In *On Order*, Licentius uses *nodus* thus when he speaks of "how by fixed successions [all things] are . . . nudged into their own grooves (*nodi*)" (1.5.14). A node in this additional sense marks a regularly recurring pattern, one as invariant as the perfect motions of the heavens in ancient astronomy. What then, could the "nodes of comprehension" be? Taken as a whole, they may be the unchanging cognitional structure of the human mind—the dynamic, complex, and recurring patterns of sensing, understanding, and judging that make up the human intellect and enable it to engage in each and every act of knowing. Both the use and abuse of reason attest to the reality of this invariant structure, for even the misuse of reason indirectly testifies to a transgression against a real norm.

Augustine, however, does not think of this invariant structure of noetic nodes as a self-enclosed or self-sufficient whole. Alypius had alluded to the myth of Proteus in order to say something along the lines that it would take a miracle ever to know something truly (3.5.11). Augustine leaps on this allusion in order to reply that this "miracle" takes place every day, that every act of knowing is made

possible by God. Augustine is not saying that God “zaps” the mind with an insight in a crude manner; nor is he limiting God’s activity to religious or supernaturally derived insights or suggesting that the only cure to skepticism is faith in religious authority. (When he speaks of an agreement on religion between himself and Alypius [3.6.13], he is indicating their agreement on the divine and ultimate source of human cognition, but that is not the whole of their accord.) Rather, Augustine is hinting at the fact that humans are *Homo sapiens*, knowing creatures, precisely because their minds are somehow contingent upon and participating in the Divine Understanding (see 3.19.42).⁶⁴ In the sacred Scriptures in which Augustine the catechumen is growing ever more proficient, this participation is expressed in various ways. In the creation account, God declares that He has made man in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26); the psalmist praises God by chanting “in Thy light we shall see light” (Ps 35:10 [36:9]); and St. John speaks of the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, as “enlightening every man that cometh into this world” (John 1:9). The philosophers, too, use various idioms to describe this phenomenon: Plato’s metaphor of the sun,⁶⁵ Aristotle’s account of human intelligence as either “itself divine or the most divine part of us,”⁶⁶ Cicero’s statement that there is nothing more divine than reason,⁶⁷ and Plotinus’s understanding of the human soul as included in and even identical to the divine World-Soul.⁶⁸ However it is expressed and despite significant differences in all these accounts, the basic idea is that every human insight into reality (which is the successful outcome of the nodes of comprehension working properly) is somehow related to or dependent upon the pure luminosity of ultimate and transcendent Being. As a more recent author puts it, “every Archimedean cry of Eureka” is a glimpse of the “eternal rapture” that is God.⁶⁹

With its discrepancy between Proteus's many appearances and the reality of the situation, the myth of Proteus aptly represents the stark difference between the sensible and the intelligible so crucial to these dialogues;⁷⁰ and with its reliance on a deity for a successful resolution, the myth also epitomizes the interplay between the human intellect and the divine in every act of knowing, however modestly or robustly knowledge is defined.⁷¹ Further, the myth of Proteus, a god hidden in the veils of the sensible and revealed only by divine inspiration, also has significant Christological implications.⁷² Lastly, Augustine is happy to discuss the story because it allows him to introduce his pupils to another installment on the proper relationship between poetry and philosophy. Poetry should be approached warily by the philosopher, but it should be approached nonetheless, for it often contains an "image of the truth" (3.6.13).

There is one slight subterfuge in Augustine's victory over Alypius, one that hearkens back to the previous day. The night before, Augustine modified the discussion topic on whether the truth can be probably known with the qualification whether the *wise man* probably knows the truth.⁷³ Still, Augustine is not guilty of sophistry or a logical fallacy. Alypius agreed to the change the previous day (albeit, perhaps, inattentively), and Augustine has not so much avoided the question of whether the truth can be known as he has merely acted according to the arguments of the Academics, which is what he said he would do. Augustine takes seriously the Academics' claim that the wise man seeks but does not possess wisdom and that "man can be wise and yet knowledge* cannot befall a man" (3.4.10). But if wisdom consists of the possession of wisdom (and by definition it must), the Academics' wise man cannot be wise. Augustine sees two possibilities: (1) a wise man can be found and wisdom can therefore be known, in which case the Academics

are wrong; or (2) no one can be a wise man, in which case the Academics are wrong. Either way, we should “distance ourselves” from the Academics (3.4.10). That said, the question as to whether the truth can be known has not yet been answered.

Day Six: Part II: Augustine’s Concluding Speech
(3.7.14–3.20.43)

A Change in Modus Operandi (3.7.14)

Augustine claims that he has received three “good things” from this exchange: (1) the fact that the Academics have been defeated in such a way that they are left with the task of defending the impossible (that wisdom is nothing or that a wise man can lack wisdom [3.5.12]); (2) the fact that the remaining conflict with the Academics is not on whether anything can be known but on whether assent should be given, a conflict that is easily resolved in favor of Augustine, since indubitably assent should be given to the truth (3.5.12); and (3) an agreement with Alypius on religion and on probability in human living (3.6.13). For it is not only probable that a wise man knows wisdom: it is necessary that he know it.

Satisfied with these goods, Augustine now offers to survey the common or conventional case against the Academics and to explore the reasons why, in Augustine’s opinion, the Academics wrote esoterically (3.7.14). Augustine would like to proceed dialectically as before, but Alypius has another idea. Following the example of Licentius (see 2.7.19), he portrays himself as a captured prisoner of war seeking mercy from further torture (an interesting commentary on Augustine’s questions!) and suggests that Augustine continue unabated. The “trial” of the Academics thus moves from its cross-examination stage to the closing argument.

Because Augustine’s closing argument is rather extensive, I divide the rest of the commentary into the following:

- A. The Conventional View of the Academics
 - 1. Matters Concerning Glory: The Academic Boast
 - 2. Matters Concerning Life Itself
 - a. Zeno's Definition
 - b. "Nothing can be perceived"
 - Morality and Dialectic
 - c. "Assent should be given to nothing"
 - Additional Observations
- B. Augustine's View of the Academics: Esotericism
 - The History of Philosophy
 - Is Augustine Right?
 - Philosophy and the Triune God
 - Augustine's Own Opinion and Confession of Faith

The Conventional View of the Academics (3.7.15–3.16.36)

MATTERS CONCERNING GLORY:

THE ACADEMIC BOAST (3.7.15–3.8.17)

Augustine begins by examining a claim that Cicero makes in the *Academica*: that the Academic wise man is first because he is judged to be second by all other philosophical schools, for all other schools, while according themselves first place, will happily put the doubting Academic in second rather than other competing schools that roundly denounce their beloved teachings. Augustine treats this claim sympathetically but soon moves to show its weakness when yoked to another apparent Academic teaching: that the wise man can know nothing, not even wisdom itself. The outsider's perception of the Academic wise man moves from thoughtful fact-collector to unteachable flunky.

Playing on Cicero's own occasionally whimsical handling of the Stoics and Epicureans in his dialogues, Augustine casts his critique of the Academics in the mold of a grand parody. The group at Cassiciacum knew that he was going to be impish, as he had

already given them a sneak preview of the less-than-straightforward persona he would be assuming (2.9.22). Now, that persona is on full display: immediately after saying, for instance, that he wishes to take away none of the Academics' glory (3.7.16), Augustine proceeds to take away all of their glory by showing the inanity of their boast. The group probably did not anticipate the extent to which, once unleashed from the question-and-answer format, Augustine would launch into such a sustained satire, one that makes these passages unparalleled in the *Cassiciacum* dialogues and, for that matter, in all of Augustine's writings. He paints a number of comic scenes that border on the slapstick, drawing liberally from recognizable props and characters straight out of central casting: the palliums, or cloaks, of the philosophers; the cudgels of the Cynics; the debauched garden of the Epicureans; the boorish perch that is the Stoic porch, and so on. Augustine's caricatures, however, are instructive, as are all good caricatures, since caricatures succeed when they distort in such a way that a truth is recognized in the process. The depiction of Epicurus and his drunken minions, for instance, highlights the association of reckless violence with the pursuit of bodily pleasure as the supreme good, an association exploited in Dionysus's (or Bacchus's) Greek tragedy even though it is arguably an unfair representation of all Epicurean philosophers.

Augustine's caricatures also show that he is willing to practice what he preaches. Earlier, he had assigned Licentius with the task of turning the tragic love story of Pyramus and Thysbe into a satire;⁷⁴ here, he turns Academic skepticism, which according to Augustine has unintended tragic consequences, into a satirical comedy of errors.

MATTERS CONCERNING LIFE ITSELF (3.9.18–3.16.36)

Augustine now moves from matters concerning glory and reputation (which, because they are "frivolous and puerile," he does

not believe Cicero took seriously anyway [3.8.17]) to something of far greater importance: life itself and whatever hope we may have for a happy soul (3.9.18). This requires a more “esoteric” setting, a setting that is removed from the raucous forum of the peanut gallery on which glory depends and one that is closer in spirit to the secluded grove of Plato’s Academy. But apparently, it does not require a less satirical treatment. Our hope for happiness continues to be enlivened by Augustine’s comic approach to the Academics.

Augustine examines three Academic teachings: (a) the rejection of Zeno’s definition of a cataleptic impression, (b) the denial that anything can be perceived or comprehended, and (c) the position that assent should not be given to anything. (These issues are relevant not only to epistemologists, but to all who wish to live a good life: for as Augustine makes clear, erroneous beliefs about knowledge can radically affect one’s chances at becoming wise, virtuous, and happy.) And to refute those teachings Augustine implicitly relies, at various times and in various ways, on three distinctions: (1) the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, namely, between that which is accessible to the five bodily senses and that which is accessible to the intellect alone; (2) the distinction between the *primum quoad nos* and *primum quoad se*, between that which exists “in relation to us” and is “first” in the order of discovery and that which exists “in relation to itself” and is “first” in the order of being; and (3) the distinction between self-referential incoherence and self-referential coherence, where knowers cannot claim to know that there is no such thing as knowing or that knowledge is impossible for knowers to attain without performatively contradicting themselves and thereby disqualifying themselves and their statements from serious consideration. We will say more about these distinctions as we review Augustine’s critiques of the three Academic teachings.

(a) *Zeno's definition* (3.9.18–21): Zeno, Augustine reminds us, teaches that that which “has no features in common with what is false” can alone be “grasped and perceived”—that is, a cataleptic impression or true knowledge has nothing in common with what is false or with what does not exist. Augustine thinks that it is silly for Platonists (and the Academics claimed to be true members of the Platonic Academy) to be so affected by this definition that they would discourage the studious from ever philosophizing. But even if Academics are right to be worried about the implications of this definition, they should have simply said that humans cannot become wise rather than that a wise man cannot have wisdom.

Augustine shows a surprising sympathy to the general skeptic, the person who believes that man cannot be wise; indeed, the position of the general skeptic, that man cannot become wise until he has met his eternal reward (3.9.20), is remarkably close to Augustine's own (see *On the Happy Life* 4.35). It is the *Academic* skeptic for whom Augustine shows or feigns little patience, especially the Academic position that a wise man, who by definition possesses some kind of wisdom, does not possess wisdom. Saying something that brings “ruin upon philosophy” is one thing (3.9.20); saying something fundamentally “queer, delirious, and insane” is another (3.9.19).

And Augustine is surprisingly sympathetic to the definition of Zeno, who as the founder of the materialist school of the Stoics is more often than not the object of Augustine's censure. His defense of Zeno's definition, however, comes with an additional surprise of its own. Unlike Zeno, Augustine does not assume that perception is an act synonymous with sensation or even an act somehow involving sensation; rather, perception and comprehension can just as easily be understood as pure acts of the intellect. And if they are, Zeno's definition is “absolutely true” (3.9.21), at least regarding

nonsensible, intelligible things such as definitions themselves. For definitions, even when they are definitions of sensible realities, are intelligible concepts that can be true in such a way that they bear no resemblance to the false. And even if the truth of a particular definition can never be determined, the human mind can at least know that the definition is ultimately either true or false. True knowledge*, in the strict sense of *scientia*, can pertain only to the realm of the intelligible. There are then, contra the Academics, several things that can be known, even according to Zeno's definition of knowledge. Augustine gives several examples of what he calls "disjunctions," either/or propositions pertaining to the intelligible realm: that is, analytic, a priori truths such as the excluded middle, the principle of noncontradiction, and mathematics. And by not limiting perception and comprehension to the sensible realm, he is able to circumvent all of the conundrums about twins, eggs, etc., that turn the debate between Academics and Stoics into a seemingly endless quagmire.

(b) "*Nothing can be perceived*" (3.10.22–3.13.29): Augustine believes that perceiving the truth of the disjunctions he has listed is sufficient for refuting skepticism, but to ensure complete victory he presses on. He turns to Carneades, founder of the Third or New Academy, whom he suspects of cowardly focusing on philosophical matters that are inaccessible to the average person, making it difficult for the wise man to criticize publicly any mistakes he may have made, since they will no doubt go undetected by the unlettered masses and since it will be almost impossible to communicate the nature of his mistakes (which involve complicated and arcane material) to a broader audience. Augustine goes so far as to suggest that Carneades is dependent on Zeno's definition, as it provides him a cover for attacking others, like the half-wild monster Cacus (3.10.22).

Augustine also exploits the issue of self-referential coherence. In the previous section, he had drawn attention to the consequences of the Academic rejection of Zeno's definition, noting that if the Academic skeptic can perceive that the definition is false, he is perceiving something (i.e., the definition), and therefore something can be perceived; or, if he perceives that the definition is true, something can be perceived (i.e., the truth of the definition). Either way, there is an incriminating contradiction between what the Academic is saying and what he is doing. In dealing with Carneades, Augustine becomes even more explicit. Using the vivid image of a double-edged axe that ricochets off the enemy onto one's own shins, Augustine charges Carneades with undercutting his own credibility with his attack on Zeno's definition (3.10.22). If the definition remains strong after Carneades's attack, Carneades is a failure; and if the definition is weakened by Carneades's attack, so is his ability to claim that he has perceived the definition to be false. Either way, Carneades loses.

Augustine has pictured an unnamed "Hercules" as Carneades's opponent, but now he himself feels compelled to leave the protection of his fort and engage Carneades on the field of battle (3.10.22). The tone remains comic and satirical, as Augustine calms his fears by reminding himself that Carneades is dead and that ghosts are not very strong. Carneades's shade tries to arm itself with the indeterminacy and diversity of learned opinion about the world, especially among the pre-Socratic natural philosophers, as proof that nothing can ever be truly known. If not even rank materialists like Democritus and Epicurus (who is amusingly portrayed as a *derrière*-pinching lecher chasing atoms around like they were French maids) can agree, what hope is there of ever reaching a higher agreement about such obscure matters? But widespread disagreement about a topic only establishes the difficulty rather than the impossibility of resolv-

ing it, and so Augustine returns with another volley of disjunctions: I *know* that the number of worlds is either finite or infinite, that the world is either temporal or eternal, etc. (3.10.23). Augustine dares Carneades to prove them false or demonstrate how they have something in common with the false, which would disqualify the disjunctions on the basis of Zeno's definition. And he also defends the validity of these disjunctions from the charge that they are "hanging in suspense," that is, that they are mere heuristics or an *a priori* framework for answering a question that has no content *per se* (3.10.23). Augustine's answer is that a heuristic may be "in suspense," but it is still something that can be known and either assented to as true or rejected as false. If it is true, it is real; if it is false and we know that it is false, we know the reality of the situation, namely, that it is false. Either way, the claims of Academic skepticism are refuted.

Augustine next imagines Carneades turning to the topic of the five bodily senses, a classic Academic line of attack (3.11.24) since the unreliability of the senses, as we see in the cases of dreams and hallucinations (3.11.25) and optical illusions (3.11.26), can certainly undermine our confidence in ever gaining knowledge of the world around us. In addition to another round of logical disjunctions (see 3.11.25), Augustine stresses that even distorted views of reality prove that there is a reality, for if there were no reality, there would be nothing to distort (3.11.24). Augustine *knows* that there is a world capable of appearing deceptively precisely because of all of these deceptive appearances, and therefore he knows something about this world: that it exists. Nor do failures to grasp reality on the part of sleeping or insane people in any way cast doubt on reality itself: "it is necessarily true that three times three is nine . . . even while mankind snores" (3.11.25).

Throughout his treatment, Augustine remains positive in his assessment of the bodily senses. They are not to be blamed for the

illusions that the sleeping or the insane have, since these phenomena can be traced to conditions of the *mind*, such as a lack of consciousness or a lack of mental health (3.11.25). The senses are likewise exonerated from the charge of deception, for deception enters in only on the level of assent or judgment, which is a mental act and not a sensible one: “Assent to no more than the fact that you’re convinced that it appears to you this way,” Augustine advises, “and there’s no deception” (3.11.26). Philosophical confusion often arises when the senses are thought of as channels or arbiters of truth, but they are not: they are channels of sensible data, from which the mind and the mind alone goes on, with the help of a number of other considerations and criteria, to judge truth or falsity. It can be a somewhat misleading question, then, to ask whether the senses report what is true or real (*verum* in Latin), for there are different levels of reality. In a normal and healthy state, the bodily senses accurately report appearances—or to put it differently, they accurately report how the real first appears to us (the *primum quoad nos*). Although Augustine will locate genuine knowledge with the *primum quoad se* (the thing in relation to itself), he does not dismiss the *quoad nos* as mere illusion. Regarding the classic example of the oar in water, Augustine praises his eyes for reporting the oar as bent. “I’d rather accuse my eyes of false reporting,” Augustine remarks, “if the oar appeared *straight* under water,” for the eyes would then be failing to report the effects of the laws of nature concerning refraction. The effects of refraction are real, even though those effects can be misjudged by the mind and even though the effects are “less real” than the principles of refraction, which exist *quoad se* or in relation to themselves. Augustine’s ultimate trump card in his match against Carneades is that even if he can never arrive at a knowledge* of objects in and of themselves or in relation to themselves (*quoad se*), he can still truly know *that*

some things are appearing to him in relation to himself (*quoad nos*). Matter *qua* matter may fall below the purview of genuine *scientia*, but one can still know how matter seems.

Even though he does not use this exact wording (which comes from the later Middle Ages), Augustine's understanding of the difference between the *quoad nos* and the *quoad se* explains his almost gleeful readiness to dismiss the "oleaster objection" advanced by the hypothetical Carneades (3.11.26). Some things can be "real" or exist only *quoad nos*, namely, the realities that pertain intrinsically to sensible phenomena. Bitterness and sweetness do exist, but they exist only in relation to the taste buds of a living, conscious organism; they do not exist *per se*, in relation to themselves alone. Hence, one cannot make universal pronouncements about these attributes *quoad se*, for what is bitter to one creature may not be bitter to another; and indeed one and the same creature can experience the same object as bitter at one moment, sweet at another, depending on changing conditions. The same can be said about fragrance and stench, roughness and smoothness, and largeness and smallness. Yet even if these *quoad nos* realities may qualify as a lesser form of reality, they are important nonetheless, for it is by being cognizant of them that one often detects the intelligible laws and principles governing them. Modern science, for instance, depends on the initial *quoad nos* descriptions of empirical phenomena, made from the viewpoint of the observer or the observer's instruments of measurement. These collected data serve as launch pads for the abstract hypotheses that are ultimately free of the scientist's individual perspective or the particular measurement system used. The senses ably do what they were designed to do, but they were not designed to confer knowledge* in and of themselves.

It is in light of these considerations that one must evaluate one of Augustine's responses to Carneades, namely, that according to

“some philosophers,” *scientia* is not from or through the senses (3.11.26). Augustine, of course, has in mind the Platonists, but the Platonists are not dualists in the sense that they ignore or condemn the senses as illusory or evil and focus only on the realm of the intellect. Rather, they (at least as far as Augustine is concerned) recognize that sensible phenomena provide stimuli after which the intellect comes into its own. Ultimately, then, the reliability or unreliability of the senses is irrelevant to the question of the possibility of wisdom, since wisdom is not the product of bodily senses even if (as we saw earlier in the brief discussion of blindness and deafness) the mind makes great use of bodily sensation to arrive at wisdom (3.11.26).

Morality and dialectic (3.12.27–3.13.29): To give concrete examples of what he means, Augustine surveys the fields of morality and dialectic. People do and do not learn the laws of morality from what they experience. That is, although empirical experience provides evidence from which intelligent human beings go on to discover or reach immutable laws of good conduct, their arrival at those laws involves a quantum leap above and beyond the merely empirical. Specifically, no amount of data-gathering, no immersion in voluminous encyclopedias of information, can ever by itself carry the mind to its *summum bonum*, to the proper identification of humanity’s supreme good (3.12.27). The insight into the supreme good is an insight that transcends or rises above all of the catalogues of human behavior or human history, even if at some point it may have been triggered by them. The vicissitudes of how a thing appears to us have no ultimate bearing on what is choice worthy in itself, for humanity’s supreme good pertains to the mind, not the bodily senses (3.12.27–28).

Similarly, with the science or discipline of dialectic, no amount of empirical demonstration can compel the mind to recognize that

a whole is greater than its parts or that if there is only one sun, there are not two. Somehow the mind, participating in the realm of the intelligible, grasps these principles and recognizes them as eternally true, even if they are indemonstrable (3.13.29). As Augustine will later put it in the *Confessions*, dialectic is a science that does not enter directly through any of the “doors” of the senses: it comes from, or rather is, the rules or canons of reasoning immanent within human cognition itself (see *Confessions* 10.10.17). Augustine lays great stress on the power and veracity of dialectic. Not only is it that part of philosophy which he knows best of all and not only is it responsible for all of the disjunctions that he has been using to refute the Academics’ teachings, there is a way in which dialectic, when fully developed, or “perfect,” may be synonymous with “the knowledge* of truth” itself (3.13.29). The “foundress and judge” of the other parts of philosophy, dialectic is either “wisdom itself or that without which wisdom can in no way be” (3.17.37). In *On Order* 2.13.38, Augustine calls dialectic “the discipline of disciplines” and says that it “teaches teaching, it teaches learning; in it, reason itself shows itself and reveals what it is, what it wants, what it can do. [Dialectic] knows* how to know*; it alone not only wants to produce knowers*, but it also can.”

(c) “Assent should be given to nothing” (3.14.30–3.16.36): Augustine now turns to the subject of assent. It was Alypius who had earlier said that even if the Academics were wrong in thinking that nothing could be perceived, their mistake only proves their second point all the more, that assent should never be given to anything. For if the Academics had given their assent to the claim that “nothing can be perceived,” and if that claim is indeed wrong, then the Academics would have erred. But because they approved of the “perception-is-impossible” proposition only as probable or verisimilar, they kept both their minds and reputations untarnished. Thus,

even when they are “conquered” in the area of perception, their defeat only shows their triumphant wisdom in the arena of assent. Alypius compares the Academic skeptic to the man holding Proteus who, even though he accurately perceives every terrifying image before him, wisely refrains from assenting to any of them (3.5.11).

Alypius did not go so far as to say that the Academic conquered by being conquered, let alone that the Academic boasts about “being a victor by virtue of the very thing that conquered him” (3.5.12); this wording is Augustine’s own rhetorically charged reformulation. But Augustine is careful not to paint himself into a corner: he does not say that he knows for certain that the wise man knows something, only that it seems to be or is probably so (3.5.12, 3.14.30). But such is all he needs to reopen the case, since the Academic teaching that assent should probably not be given to anything rests to some extent on the position that perception is highly improbable. Now that it is probable, perhaps so is the possibility of assent.

To show that it is, Augustine resumes a line of argument he had used earlier in 3.5.12: that at the very least, the wise man should give assent to wisdom or truth (3.14.30, 31). Continuing his whimsical tone, Augustine portrays the silly spectacle of a wise man daring to argue with wisdom itself (which is not so farfetched a possibility, given that for the Christian, wisdom is a divine person [1 Cor 1:24]). A wise man rejecting wisdom is a contradiction in terms, and so Augustine concludes: “But if it is now likely [*verisimilis*] that at least the perception of wisdom itself befalls a wise man, and if there is no reason why he shouldn’t assent to what can be perceived, I see that what I wanted is likely [*verisimilis*]: that a wise man is obviously going to assent to wisdom” (3.14.31). Whether there can ever be a wise man is a different issue: it must be recalled that the entire debate in book three is being conducted on the basis of the Academics’ own statements, not on skepticism in general

(see 2.13.30). The Academics certainly write as if the wise man were a distinct possibility, and their own position sets them up for the conclusion that Augustine here makes. For the Academic doctrine is not against assent tout court, but against assent to that which cannot be perceived or comprehended. Wisdom, however, can be perceived or comprehended by the wise man; therefore, the wise man should give assent to wisdom (3.14.32).

After having established the possibility of assent (by the wise man), Augustine then considers the Academic doctrine of probability. Still being forced to fight on the open battlefield, his first instinct is to use the old Stoic chestnut, "He who approves nothing does nothing." Augustine anticipates that this accusation will have little effect: it is like a rusty spear bouncing fecklessly off the Academics' "Vulcanian" Greek shields (2.1.1) because their entire teaching on probability was designed precisely as a rebuttal to this charge. To defeat his opponent, Augustine will have to find more humble arms taken from "the villa and the field"; the usual grand philosophical weapons are hampering rather than helping, like Saul's armor on the shepherd boy David. Augustine's single-handed combat thus moves from the epic, heroic showdown as found in the *Aeneid* to the biblical story of David and Goliath.

The stone that Augustine uses in his sling is simple but effective. As can be seen with his story of the two travelers at the fork in the road (which both reclaims and corrects Licentius's use of a similar metaphor at 1.4.11–12), error is not simply assenting to a false path but, in some cases at least, failing to follow a true one (3.15.34). Continuing his satirical tone, Augustine infuses his example with stock characters from comedy such as a country bumpkin and a city slicker in order to show the ridiculous consequences of Academic thought on everyday life. And there is perhaps a deeper symbolism to his story as well. Augustine describes the first

man to give directions as a shepherd (*pastor*) or a yokel (*rusticus*), while the second is an elegant (*lautus*) and urbane (*urbanus*) trickster (*samardocus*). The rustic shepherd could be a Vergilian figure, the kind of simple and honest bucolic guide one would expect to find in the *Georgics* or *Eclogues*. But the identity of the rustic as a shepherd may also be a possible allusion to Christ or the episcopal shepherds of the Church, who were dismissed by their detractors as “theologizing fishermen” and unlettered rubes. The guidance of these simple pastors leads the believing traveler to his destination, where he, like the traveler in Augustine’s story, is now “refreshing himself” (*reficere*). (Augustine’s use of *reficere* is significant, evoking Ambrose’s description of the Eucharist as the *panis refectiois*.)⁷⁵ The trickster, on the other hand, is described as *urbanus*, the same word that Cicero uses when he defines irony as “urbane dissimulation.”⁷⁶ If the rustic is the Christian, the trickster is the ironic Academic philosopher, leading his seemingly sophisticated and cautious disciple astray.

Even without this additional layer of meaning, the story of the two travelers demonstrates that the Academics’ rules regarding probability are unable to prevent all forms of error. Once Augustine has discovered this chink in their armor, numerous other examples calling into question their teaching leap to his mind. Interestingly, he says that this breakthrough did not occur to him until very recently, namely, shortly after his arrival at the villa in Cassiciacum. When he was teaching rhetoric—presumably up until his last day on the job—he had thought of the New Academy’s doctrine of probability as virtually invincible (see the beginning and ending sentences of 3.15.34).

Augustine is also concerned about the effects of Academic probability on ethics. Intellectual error is not synonymous with sin or wrongdoing; on the other hand, everyone who sins or does

wrong is in some way “in error or something worse” (3.16.35). Here Augustine’s comic imagery reaches its apogee as it shifts from a mock battle to a slapstick courtroom scene worthy of Groucho Marx involving a young man who has committed adultery with another man’s wife (3.16.35). Because of Academic doubt, no one is certain whether the husband has been cuckolded: not the husband, not the judge, and not even the perpetrator. The husband cannot even know for certain whether *he* is sleeping with his wife, and the most that the judge can do is to declare the man “likely and probably guilty.” But no matter: all the young man’s Academic lawyer has to do is persuade his client that the entire conviction was just a dream. Augustine’s critique reaches a crescendo with a direct and impassioned address to Cicero, who up until now has been left out of the debate while Augustine attacks his Greek predecessors Arcesilaus and Carneades. Do you really think, Augustine asks him, that the doctrine of probability is sufficient to condemn or prevent wrongdoing? Cicero no doubt embraced the idea of probability in part because of its salutary moral repercussions, insofar as it counteracted the dangers of fanaticism and dogmatism that spring from unreflective certainty; yet as Augustine points out, Academic probability is susceptible to the dangers of relativism, for there is no objective basis on which actions can be rightly condemned or praised. When you practically deny the possibility of assenting to a moral dictum *quoad se*, all that is left is the *quoad nos*, how the thing looks to us. And at some point, how it looks to me is going to differ from how it looks to you. Moreover, there is no impartial, objective way according to which these differences can be resolved, for there is no known truth or exemplum in light of which they can be evaluated. We are thus left with the phenomenon of agents engaging in every wrongdoing every time it seems probable to them, and this is a recipe for all sins and all crimes,

including the great treasonous offenses that Cicero heroically fought his entire life (3.16.36).⁷⁷

Additional Observations: Two final points must be made about Augustine's discussion of assent and probability. First, his critique presupposes a fundamental difference between perception or comprehension on one hand and assent or judgment on the other. Intellectual perception, which answers the question "What is it?," grasps the "whatness" or essence of a thing, whereas assent, which answers the question "Is it true?," grasps the reality or existence of a thing. I may clearly perceive or comprehend the concept of a unicorn, but I am wise not to assent to the concept as true or real. Unlike the Stoics, who at least in Cicero's portrayal equated knowing with an act of ocular vision or some sensate, "impressionable" experience, Augustine appears to be relying on a threefold cognitional pattern by which the mind ascends or comes to knowledge or truth: sensing (through the body), perceiving (or understanding), and assenting (or judging). Given his often irreverent critique of the Academics, the extent to which Augustine actually agrees with his opponents is astonishing. When Augustine "intellectualizes" Zeno's definition of perception, removing it from the realm of the sensible and locating it firmly in the intelligible, he is essentially conceding that the vast majority (let us say 99 percent for the sake of argument) of what average people think of in the course of their daily lives is not genuine knowledge* or *scientia*, for it cannot be truly perceived or comprehended. Similarly, when Augustine says that the one thing to which a wise man should give his assent is wisdom, he is essentially conceding that he should *not* give his assent to the other 99 percent.⁷⁸ What, then, becomes of the overwhelming remainder of things to which one should not give assent? They should be approved of as probable, as the Academics hold.

Augustine, therefore—and this brings us to our second point—is not rejecting all models of probability but only the exact model that has been articulated by the Academics. He leaves open the possibility that many if not most forms of assent or judgment that the human mind typically makes are according to some kind of probability or verisimilitude. To be sure, probable judgment does not yield genuine *scientia*; still, it is not nothing either. The conclusions that comprise the bulk of modern empirical science, for instance, are no more than probable, and they will remain no more than probable until the entire field in question is thoroughly determined (which is likely never to happen); yet these provisional conclusions are constantly being refined and are constantly converging upon a limit that is of enormous benefit to our understanding of the universe. Or to take Augustine's example: the *Academic* doctrine of probability is deleterious to a legal system because it denies a knowledge* of absolute right and wrong, but that does not mean that *every* court judgment based on probability—such as the principle of proving the guilt of the accused beyond a reasonable doubt—is unjust or unsound. In areas where true comprehension or knowledge is impossible to attain (i.e., those areas that rely on the data of the senses—a vast area indeed),⁷⁹ it is reasonable to make probable judgments or give probable assent in light of what is known in such a way that there is a convergence or movement toward the truth, even if it is only asymptotically at best.

Augustine's View of the Academics: Esotericism (3.17.37–3.20.43)

Following the order he proposed earlier (3.7.14), Augustine turns now to his own view of the Academics, which he has been hinting at or stating outright for some time now. As early as the opening of book two, Augustine speaks of an Academic method

(*ratio*) of communicating that was suited to the age in which they lived, a method that may have been at odds with what they truly thought (2.1.1).⁸⁰ By the end of the same book, Augustine asserts his opinion: the writings of the Academics do not contain what they really thought, for the Academics hid their real opinions from the “ignorant” and “unpurified” (2.13.29). Augustine’s curious assessment forms the warp and woof of his disagreement with Alypius that shapes their debate in book three. Far from “coming out of the blue,” as some scholars have thought, Augustine’s theory about Academic esotericism arrives as the climax to a long process in which Augustine has been duly preparing the reader for what he has to say.

That preparation involves mulling over the following considerations. Upon close examination, the arguments or teachings of the Academics, *as they are articulated in their writings*, are ultimately not coherent. The conventional view of the Academics, that they believed what they taught, is therefore problematic. A fool speaking foolishly is easy to explain, for that is what fools do. But at least several of the Academics, such as Cicero himself, were hardly fools. They were men of diligence, alertness, and aptitude (3.16.36). For what reason, then, would a first-rate philosophical mind utter things that are inconsistent and even absurd?

It is at this point Augustine must shift from what he knows to what he suspects (3.17.37), for Alypius was right: no one can truly know the mind or intention of another (2.13.30). Augustine contends that the Academics were no dolts and that they saw, “with the utmost cleverness and prudence,” all the problems in their writings that he has outlined (3.16.36). To answer the vexing question as to why they then went on to write what they did, Augustine offers an interpretation, based largely on Cicero’s works, of the history of philosophy up to his time.

THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY (3.17.37–3.19.42)

According to Augustine (following Cicero), philosophy really came into its own only with Plato, who brought together the genius of Socrates regarding morality and the genius of Pythagoras regarding natural and divine things. Plato taught that there were two “worlds,” an intelligible world and a sensible world. The former is true; the latter is like the true or verisimilar; and only the soul that has self-knowledge can know the former. Augustine, who agrees with Plato on these issues, therefore implicitly reveals his own answers to several outstanding questions about the nature of verisimilitude and about his own thought on how many “worlds” there are (see 3.11.24–25). But Augustine’s summary is significant for other reasons. The truth dwells in the intelligible world, Augustine says, and from the intelligible world the truth can be “polished and brightened” in the soul possessing self-knowledge (self-ignorant or foolish souls, on the other hand, rely on the verisimilar and produce not truth but opinion). The importance of self-knowledge to the possession of truth—the self-knowledge described in the General Introduction to this volume⁸¹ and by Augustine in his cover letter to *On Order*—cannot be overstated. What is also noteworthy is Augustine’s rejection of a crude or quasi-materialistic realism. The truth is in the intelligible world, but the intelligible world, which is real, is beyond space and time. The truth is therefore not “out there,” which is a spatial category. On the contrary, the truth must be polished or brought forth in the soul, even though it cannot exist “in” the soul spatially. Moreover, the soul does not invent or concoct the truth out of itself.

Plato’s successors in the Academy preserved his teaching like the secrets of an ancient mystery cult, either because it was enormously difficult to communicate (for only the morally pure who

have appropriated a “way of living that is more than human” are capable of understanding them) or because doing so would have been a grave sin—perhaps, we may conjecture, along the lines of Matt 7:6 (3.17.38).⁸² But Zeno, a student of the Academy, did not understand these mysteries and foolishly taught that all reality was material. Consequently, his classmate Arcesilaus hid the true Platonic doctrine in such a way that it could be rediscovered by only a small minority of perceptive readers. Carneades continued the esoteric tradition of what was now being called the New Academy by inventing the doctrine of the probable or the verisimilar. Carneades himself knew what was true, which is why he could talk about what was like the true, the verisimilar (3.17.39–3.18.40). In a letter to Hermogenianus, who wrote to him approvingly after receiving his copy of *Against the Academics*, Augustine uses the metaphor of a pure Platonic spring wisely channeled into dark and thorny thickets because it was being threatened by the muddy hooves of the Stoic herd. “For what is more appropriately called ‘bovine,’” Augustine asks of the materialist Stoics, “than thinking that the soul is a body?”⁸³

Although Augustine praises the Academics for their initial prudence, he is not entirely complimentary about the long arc of their work, describing the literary tradition that they developed over time as “inflated,” or bloated (3.18.41). Still, even then it continued to serve its purpose, dispatching the former Academic Antiochus, who misunderstood the nature of Platonism and Stoicism and was subsequently opposed by Philo and Cicero (3.18.41). After Cicero crushed what was left of Antiochus, the stage was set for the open and full resurgence of Platonism, which occurred not long after in the person of Plotinus, a sort of reincarnated Plato. At this point, esoterically hiding the Platonic spring was no longer needed. Augustine concludes his survey by describing the contemporary

scene as one peopled by Cynics, Peripatetics, and Platonists (3.19.42). True philosophy, Augustine goes on to say, is a combination of Plato and Aristotle, who only appear to be in conflict with each other “to the ignorant and inattentive.” (Augustine is no doubt basing his opinion on the presumably wiser and more attentive readings of Cicero and Plotinus, who both approached Plato and Aristotle as ultimately compatible thinkers or who at least drew liberally from both of them.) Moreover, unlike the materialist “philosophy of this world”—a category into which, despite all their other differences, both Stoicism and Epicureanism fall—this true philosophy is approved of by the Christian tradition. For both true philosophy and Christianity recognize and understand the crucial distinction between the sensible and the intelligible (3.19.42).

IS AUGUSTINE RIGHT?

Augustine’s theory is fascinating, but is it true? Having perceived and comprehended it, readers can only wonder whether they should now assent to it. It is beyond the pale of this commentary to answer that question. As Augustine tells Licentius and Trygetius, the only way to confirm the hypothesis is to read the works of the Academics directly (3.20.45), a task that is not only monumental but further complicated today by the fact that Cicero’s *Academica* now exists in a mutilated and incomplete state, and several of the passages with which Augustine builds his case against the Academics are from these lost sections.⁸⁴ Given this unfortunate situation, we may never arrive at a satisfying verisimilitude of the matter.

We can, however, offer several circumstantial observations. First, Augustine’s hypothesis does not originate from a lack of options. He does not turn to the possibility of esotericism as a last-ditch effort to refute the skepticism of the Academics. On the contrary, Augustine has—at least to his own satisfaction—already

refuted them logically and rationally vis-à-vis a dialectical barrage of disjunctions, instances of self-referential coherence, etc. His esoteric theory is presented not as a desperate Hail Mary pass or deus ex machina device, but as a backhanded crowning tribute to the subtle genius of the Academic philosophers. It was because of earnestly wrestling with their texts that Augustine came to reject their authority, which may have been their intention all along (see 3.20.44), for no one truly philosophizes until he or she quits the cradle of authority.

Second, right or wrong, Augustine never deviates from the opinion that he offers here. He recounts the same theory in a contemporary letter to his friend Hermogenianus,⁸⁵ and he reiterates it decades later as the bishop of Hippo.⁸⁶ He also alludes twice to the Academics' alleged esotericism in the *Confessions*.⁸⁷ Augustine does not discuss his suspicion of the Academics in the *City of God*, but he cites numerous examples of philosophers dissembling and dissimulating, including Cicero.⁸⁸ Finally, Augustine has the opportunity to retract or modify his thesis about the Academics when composing the *Retractations* near the end of his life, but he does not do so.

Third, Augustine is not alone in suspecting the presence of esotericism in classical philosophy in general or in the Academics in particular. In the *Saturnalia*, composed by Augustine's fellow African Macrobius (fl. A.D. 395–423), the character Eustathius contends that when Lady Philosophy is in a group consisting of a majority of people who know her well, she speaks freely. But if the majority “are strangers to her,” he says, she “will sanction dissimulation about her” by the few who truly know her, and she “will permit joining in with chatter that is more agreeable to the majority, lest a handful of nobles be disturbed by the more tumultuous rabble” (7.1.10). And this, Eustathius continues, is

one of the virtues of Philosophy: that whereas an orator is judged by nothing else than his speaking, a philosopher philosophizes by keeping silent at the right time as much as he does by speaking. Therefore, the few learned men who are present will keep quiet about their knowledge of the truth that is safely within them and will move about within the consensus of an unlettered society in such a way that every suspicion of disagreement will disappear. (7.1.11)

And even when Philosophy sees that she is among her own, “she will not talk about her deepest, darkest secrets in between rounds of drinks but will raise questions that are practical and easy rather than knotty and disturbing” (7.1.15). Philosophy, it would appear, is a most discreet lady.

Such thoughts are present in earlier philosophical literature as well. In his *Seventh Letter* Plato writes, “Therefore, every man of worth, when dealing with matters of worth, will be far from exposing them to ill feeling and misunderstanding among men by committing them to writing.”⁸⁹ According to Plutarch, Aristotle held a similar view. When his pupil Alexander the Great expressed anger over the publication of the *Metaphysics* on the grounds that Aristotle had disclosed his secret teachings to all, Aristotle assured him that his doctrines remained “both published and unpublished,” for the *Metaphysics* is of use only as a memorandum to those who already know that arcane science.⁹⁰ Lucian, suspecting a similar dissimulation in Aristotle’s successors, describes the Peripatetics as looking like one thing from the outside (*exoterikon*) and another from the inside (*esoterikon*).⁹¹ As noted earlier, it is from this passage that the philosophical use of the terms “esoteric” and “exoteric” is derived.

Regarding the Academics in particular, Augustine was not the first to suspect that they wrote esoterically. In addition to several

suggestive remarks in Cicero's own works (one of which Augustine cites in 3.20.43), individual Academics, such as Metrodorus of Stratonice and Arcesilaus, were openly accused by critics such as Diocles of Cnidus and Sextus Empiricus of being "false" skeptics who were hiding Platonic convictions.⁹² Perhaps Descartes, that supreme snake handler of skepticism, had the Academics in mind when he wrote disapprovingly of those "who doubt merely for the sake of doubting and put on the *affectation* of being perpetually undecided."⁹³

Fourth, no objective assessment of Augustine's contention is possible until inquirers have rid themselves of a strong modern bias against the very possibility of esotericism. The Enlightenment belief that every human being has an inalienable right to all truth often leads to an inability to sympathize with the concern that not everyone can handle the truth, a concern that historically provides a justification for writing esoterically. Despite the rise of postmodernism, Enlightenment egalitarianism and epistemology remain present in the modern psyche, a fact that may account for the relative dearth of recent scholarship on the subject of philosophical esotericism (Melzer's *Between the Lines* being the notable exception)—this despite the lively discussion on the topic that took place in antiquity.

Still, none of these four points *eo ipso* proves that Augustine's thesis is correct, and indeed with a theory of so vast a sweep, there will inevitably be grounds for calling at least parts of it into question. In addition to wondering whether Augustine is right about the Academics in general and Cicero in particular, we may also wonder whether Augustine's claims about esotericism are correct, specifically his claims about its reasons for existing, its *modus operandi*, its history from Plato to Plotinus, and precisely what it was hiding from the sluggish reader.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE TRIUNE GOD (3.19.42–3.20.43)

As we have mentioned several times, Augustine locates at least some areas of compatibility between classical Socratic philosophy and Christian revelation in the fact that both recognize the difference between the sensible and the intelligible and the importance of that difference (3.19.42). This compatibility does not mean that philosophy and Christianity are interchangeable terms or versions of each other or even separate entities running on parallel tracks; nor does Augustine ever speak, either here or in any of his other writings, of a combined “Christian philosophy.” Rather, Augustine speaks approvingly of “the twin weight” of authority and reason (3.20.43), with the conclusions of reason, as gathered in the writings of the Platonists, firmly subordinated to the “authority of Christ,” as witnessed by the sacred writings and ecclesiastical tradition. Yet even this map of faith and reason, which by itself might suggest voluntarism or fideism, is not as simple as it seems at first blush, for Augustine does not equate all authority with divine revelation and all reason with philosophy. We must wait until *On Order* for Augustine’s account of the relationship between authority and reason.⁹⁴ In the meantime, it should be noted how Augustine compares the Holy Spirit to reason, obliquely referring to the Third Person of the Trinity as “that most subtle Reason,” who draws us to the intelligible world (3.19.42). Whatever their differences, faith and reason or God and His creation are not in two separate sealed containers, with one stacked neatly on top of the other.

Similarly, Augustine’s mention of the intelligible world to which both classical philosophy and Christianity point provides a bridge to a brief yet astonishingly rich discussion of the Trinity. In 3.19.42, Augustine tells the group that the Holy Spirit (that most subtle Reason) calls back souls from error and sin by virtue of the

fact that God the Father mercifully sent His Son to be conceived of the Virgin Mary and become incarnate. Therefore, the mission of the Holy Spirit, at least in the current era, springs from the mission of the Son, which was initiated by the Father's love for and mercy on humankind (see John 3:16). Regarding the Son's mission, Augustine concentrates on the Incarnation, which makes something—or someone—invisible now visible, thereby allowing this visible divine person to “arouse” souls by His visible signs (preaching and miracles) so that they will soar up to higher, invisible realities and to the ultimate reality that is God. Augustine's theology here finds a parallel in a later liturgical text: “Through the mystery of the Incarnate Word, a new light of Thy glory hath shone upon the eyes of our mind, so that while we are recognizing God visibly, we might be snatched up through Him into a love of the invisible.”⁹⁵ Moreover, being snatched and taken up is not only for the philosopher but for “the multitude” (3.19.42). Philosophy is excellent, but as Augustine points out in *On Order*, “it barely frees a tiny few” (2.5.16). If philosophically provoked intellectual conversion is the experience whereby a fortunate or gifted minority is able to climb out of Plato's allegorical cave, then the Incarnation is the event whereby God, circumventing the need for the “bickering of disputations” (i.e., philosophy),⁹⁶ enters the cave from without and rescues both the few and the many.

Such a rescue is necessary because after the Fall of Adam, sin so affects the soul that the sensible often functions as a dead-end diaspora rather than the first step to the divine—in Augustine's colorful language, the postlapsarian soul is blinded by error and smeared “by the deepest filth from the body” (3.19.42). Sensible or bodily reality is not bad or “filthy” per se, but the soul's lingering exclusively on the multiplicity of all that sensation experiences inflicts certain materialist “wounds of opinion” that lead it astray.⁹⁷

The human soul was not made to dwell only on the mortal and the perishable; it was also made for a grasp of the higher, permanent things. Or to put it more precisely, it was made for understanding, and it will be fully satisfied only by a pure and total act of understanding that answers all of its questions and longings, potential and actual. But what if that pure and total act of understanding is not simply an act of the soul at its very best, but a divine person? How amazing, then, and how very kind that this Divine Understanding should proceed from the Father and descend to our level in order to raise us up to His. As Augustine says in *On Order*, “How great it is that for our sake so great a God also deigned to assume and bear this body of our race. The more this appears to be vile, the more it’s filled with clemency, and the farther and more deeply removed it is from a certain pride of clever folks” (2.5.16). Thanks, then, to the Incarnation, in which God becomes flesh and blood, the sensible yet again becomes the first step to the divine rather than a stumbling block. Indeed, from the Christian conviction that the Word became flesh and dwelled among us, the entire debate between Augustine and Alypius on whether the truth can be known in our world can be seen as “a debate regarding the possibility of the Incarnation.”⁹⁸ Augustine is indeed removing obstacles blocking Romanianus’s assent to the Christian faith.

And if the Son of God is instrumental in our grasp of the truth, so too is the entire Trinity constantly active in us and among us, moving us to return to our “homeland.” For one thing—and to speak in Carneadean terms—our minds are a verisimilitude of the Blessed Trinity. Augustine’s comparison of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to the “Supreme God,” Understanding, and Reason is partially inspired by the Plotinian triad of Existence, Life, and Intellection, but it is also an exploration or development of the biblical doctrine that man is made in the image of God (Gen 1:27).

Since the human mind contains this image,⁹⁹ or rather is this image, and since God is revealed as the Trinity, it is not unreasonable to conclude that every human mind bears a Trinitarian stamp. Augustine is not dogmatically wed to the analogy that he offers here: he will mention others in *On the Happy Life*¹⁰⁰ and *On Order*,¹⁰¹ and he will certainly offer a different formulation decades later in *On the Trinity*, all of which attests to his own restraint before a divine mystery. But Augustine remains consistent in adhering to one principle: that the *imago Dei* in which humanity is made must somehow be Trinitarian.

One advantage of this principle is that it stresses the profound relationship between the knowing human subject and God, specifically, that *every* act of human knowing (and not just religious or mystical insights) is somehow grounded or participating in the luminosity and activity of the divine;¹⁰² or as Augustine puts it, “only some deity could show man what’s true” (3.6.13). Rather than a pantheist notion of the mind as God or vice versa, and rather than a deist notion of the mind as a mechanism that can work on its own once its divine maker has set it in motion, Augustine’s psychological analogies presuppose that God is utterly near yet utterly transcendent and that this paradoxical divine presence enables the mind to be intelligent. Indeed, we may learn something about our intelligence from the missions of the divine persons of the Trinity. In the analogy offered in 3.19.42, it is our ratiocinating process, our reason (which Augustine understands as a motion on the go rather than a static faculty),¹⁰³ that leads us to understanding, and it is our reasoning and our understanding that lead us to that which is. This progression is analogous to the Holy Spirit, who leads us to the Son (one cannot know that Jesus is the Messiah without the inspiration of the Paraclete) and the Son to the Father.

AUGUSTINE'S OWN OPINION AND CONFESSION OF FAITH (3.20.43)

Augustine concludes his discourse by reaffirming his opinion that the Academics were esoteric writers, but it is no skin off his nose if they were not. Either way, they are no longer an impediment to his search for wisdom (which he does not yet possess); for if his own reasoning is not powerful enough to keep them at bay, the authority of Christ, in which he has great faith, is. Divine authority is an ally rather than a competitor of or alternative to reason, for it frees reason from the crippling paralysis of despair that is caused by skepticism. Good authority and right reason are twin weights that keep the soul properly anchored. And reason is not divorced from the providence or presence of God. Augustine again uses in this paragraph the curious phrase "that most subtle reason," which he had previously used to designate the Holy Spirit, but this time in reference to the Platonists. Even the truths that the philosophers discovered can be credited, in some way, to the inspiration of the Paraclete.

Conclusion (3.20.44–45)

Augustine has completed his tour de force, which has taken so long that it is now nighttime. *Against the Academics* has been written in the style of a Ciceronian dialogue where, as with the *Academica*, it is not unusual for the ending to occur at night.¹⁰⁴ What is unusual is the use or mention of a lamp, a device that does not appear in any conclusion to Cicero's dialogues. Day three began with a bright and clear sky, a harbinger of heightened clarity, and it ends with a lamp dispelling the darkness. Augustine, who associates the Academics with darkness,¹⁰⁵ has shed light on their "shady" practices. The lamp he offers the group, as well as his readers, is a way of reading the Academics that exercises the mind and saves it from despair.

The two youths look expectantly to Alypius for signs of an intention to retaliate. Their keen anticipation suggests a motive of *curiositas*, that disordered desire for a spectacle or row (see 2.7.17). The young men's disappointment in Alypius's magnanimous praise for Augustine confirms their less than magnanimous wishes. Alypius invites them to move from their unshareable rivalry and judgment to the shareable joy of understanding that he himself is now experiencing;¹⁰⁶ he invites them to transform their *curiositas* into the "more reliable hope of learning" (3.20.44). Yet they refuse his invitation by their sullen silence and gloomy faces. They feel "cheated," as if they paid good money for a prizefight and got a love fest instead. Although Augustine is able to lift them out of their doldrums by playfully fining Alypius for his "false praise," the fact that he must resort to this diversionary tactic shows that the youths' spirits are not perfectly healthy. *Curiositas*, and all such disorders of the souls, are real problems that must be eliminated in order to ascend to wisdom, yet they are not easy to extirpate.

Alypius's gracious response surprises not only Licentius and Trygetius but Augustine as well. Given Alypius's sarcastic resistance the night before, Augustine was most likely fearing a more thumotically driven and potentially interminable disputation. Yet Alypius seems genuinely pleased with the results of Augustine's monologue. What accounts for the change of mind? The text gives us little concrete evidence, but we are free to speculate on the basis of the available data. We know that Augustine and Alypius have been good friends for years and that they have more or less reached several intellectual and spiritual milestones together; their decisions to convert to Christianity, for instance, were within moments of each other.¹⁰⁷ We also know that Augustine has been studying the Academics for years and that Alypius has been learning about them from him (see 2.4.10). Finally, we know that at least part of Augustine's

thesis about Academic esotericism is recent—so recent, in fact, that Augustine has probably not had the opportunity to share it with Alypius: they have been at Cassiciacum for only about two weeks, and Alypius has been away in Milan for roughly ten of those days.¹⁰⁸ It is therefore likely that Alypius was frustrated with Augustine in book two because it seemed to him that Augustine was being disingenuous when he claimed that the Academics were being disingenuous. This frustration would also provide a motive for inviting Augustine to make a long speech; it was probably Alypius's hope that during such a speech Augustine would stop being coy and finally speak frankly. The speech concluded, Alypius now realizes that Augustine was not truly misrepresenting his position but honestly unfolding a new theory that he had been developing. No doubt, this theory has also answered several nagging questions about inconsistencies in the Academic corpus that Augustine and Alypius had discussed before. Alypius, then, has experienced a double delight: his friend has been acting *bona fides* after all (albeit in Augustine's own ironic way), and his friend has solved a riddle that has in all likelihood been vexing both of them. Alypius's high praise, even if it may be exaggerated by lawyerly bombast, is most likely sincere.

Still, Augustine is somewhat surprised that the debate has ended so mildly and quickly. His theory of esotericism perhaps along with some of his other arguments are still new to him and to the group, and maybe they should be tested more. The uncertain note on which the dialogue ends puts an onus on the reader. Not only are we admonished to study the writings of the Academics with an eye to their soundness and sincerity, but Augustine's dialogue also invites us to verify the reality of our own noetic activities as the foundation from which to evaluate the merit of skepticism as a whole. Short of a profound and difficult philosophical turn to oneself, all else remains mere probable opinion.

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TIME LINE



THE PROBABLE CHRONOLOGY OF THE CASSICIACUM RETREAT

For the most part the following chronology is based on the conclusions drawn in Denis J. Kavanaugh's *Answer to Skeptics* and Desiderius Ohlmann's *De Sancti Augustini Dialogis*.

NOVEMBER 386

7th

8th

9th

The party is said to have arrived a "few days" before the beginning of book one of *Against the Academics* (1.1.4), most likely on one of these dates.

Trygetius and Licentius have read Cicero's *Hortensius* either shortly before or after their arrival and are eager for philosophy (*Against the Academics* 1.1.4).

NOVEMBER 386

10th

11th

12th

[Book one of *Against the Academics*]

[Mostly Augustine, Trygetius, and Licentius take part.]

A stenographer is first used (1.1.4) to record a discussion between Licentius and

The group does chores around the villa and studies book one of the *Aeneid* (1.5.15). A

A recorded discussion is held between Licentius and Trygetius on happiness

continued...

Trygetius on happiness and the quest for truth that takes place at an undisclosed location “that seemed suitable for the purpose” (1.2.5). During the discussion, Alypius departs for Milan (1.2.5, 1.4.11, 1.6.16). The group takes a leisurely stroll during which many topics are discussed (but not recorded) (1.4.10). Licentius and Trygetius try to resume their dispute at dusk, but Augustine persuades them to postpone it until tomorrow (1.4.10). They all take a trip to the baths (1.4.10).	recorded discussion is held (1.4.11) between Licentius and Trygetius on happiness and the quest for truth that takes place near sunset at an undisclosed location (1.5.15).	that takes place at dawn at an undisclosed location (1.6.16). Lunch (1.9.25).
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NOVEMBER 386

13th

14th

15th

[*On the Happy Life*]

[Augustine, Navigius, Monica, Adeodatus, Lastidianus and Rusticus,
Licentius, and Trygetius all take part.]

[Augustine's birthday]	Lunch (3.17).	Because the afternoon
A light lunch (1.6).	Later in the day, a	is sunny, the final
Afterwards, a recorded	recorded discussion is	discussion on

discussion is held in the bathhouse (on account of the morning mist) concerning happiness as “having” God (4.23).

held in the bathhouse (for the same reason as before [4.23]) on who “has” God (3.17).

happiness is held and recorded in the “little meadow . . . nearby” (4.23). After supper, Licentius chants a verse from the Psalms while answering the call of nature; Monica overhears and disapproves (*On Order* 1.8.22). [This is assuming that book one of *On Order* begins on the 16th; if *On Order* begins on the 17th, the outhouse incident happens on the 16th].

NOVEMBER 386

16th

17th

18th

[Book one of *On Order*, either on the 16th and 17th or on the 17th and 18th]

[Augustine, Licentius, and Trygetius take part, with a brief appearance by Monica at the end.]

A discussion takes place in the middle of the night in the bedroom that Augustine, Licentius, and Trygetius share (1.3.6) and lasts until the early dawn (1.7.20).

Early in the morning, the group gathers “in the usual place” (probably the baths) and continues their discussion on order (1.9.27). Near the end Monica joins the

continued...

Shortly after, Licentius and Trygetius rise while Augustine remains in prayer. After Monica and Licentius return from the outhouse, Augustine hears him chanting the same verse that had gotten him in trouble with Monica the night before (1.8.22). Augustine and Licentius have a brief conversation (1.8.22ff). Augustine rises from bed, and the group “renders its daily vows to God” (a possible allusion to a primitive version of Lauds) (1.8.25).

After prayer and on the way to the baths, the group witnesses a cock fight (*ibid.*).

Once at the baths, they write down all that transpired that day (1.8.26).

Before supper, they read half a book of Vergil and do nothing else for the day (*ibid.*).

group (1.11.31). The discussion is the only business that Augustine does on this day (1.11.33).

NOVEMBER 386

20th

21st

22nd

[Or possibly the 19th, 20th, and 21st]

[Books two and three of *Against the Academics*, which take place on three consecutive days (2.4.10, 2.11.25, 3.1.1) about seven days after the end of book one (2.4.10)]

[Augustine, Licentius, Trygetius, Navigius, and Alypius take part.]

<p>A beautiful clear day; Alypius has returned from Milan at some point (2.4.10). The group arises early and does a small amount of farm work (2.4.10). In the field, the group walks about as the first discussion is read to Alypius, an activity that takes up most of the late morning (2.4.10). While on the way back to the villa, a recorded discussion is held (2.4.10). Lunch at the villa (2.5.13). After lunch, a recorded discussion is held in the field (2.6.14). At sunset the discussion ends, and all return to the house (2.10.24).</p>	<p>An equally pleasant and calm day (2.11.25). Augustine spends the day writing letters (2.11.25), Trygetius reveling in Vergil's poems, and Licentius in writing or studying verse (3.1.1). Two hours before night, a recorded discussion is held in the meadow near the "usual tree" (2.11.25). At darkness all return to the house (2.13.30).</p>	<p>The weather is too gloomy for the meadow, so the bathhouse is chosen for a recorded discussion (3.1.1). (Earlier, Licentius had been singing verses from "Greek tragedies" that he did not understand [3.4.7].) Lunch at the villa (3.3.6). Licentius leaves early, returns to the bathhouse, and works more on his verses (3.4.7). Discussion at the bathhouse is resumed (3.4.7). At dusk a lamp is fetched so the recording can continue (3.20.44). At night the discussion comes to a close (3.20.44-45).</p>
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continued...

NOVEMBER 386

22nd

23rd

24th

[Book two of *On Order*, beginning either the day after the last discussion of *Against the Academics* or shortly thereafter, most likely the 23rd, but possibly the 22nd or 24th]

A warm day invites Augustine, Licentius, Trygetius, Monica, and Alypius out on the lawn, where Licentius defends his definition of order in a recorded discussion (2.1.1).

At one point of the discussion Licentius leaves and then returns (2.3.10, 2.5.17). After being summoned by a boy from the house, the group has lunch (2.6.18). After lunch, a cloudy sky compels the group to reconvene in the bathhouse for a recorded discussion on various topics related to order (2.6.19).

The discussion culminates in Augustine's explication of the liberal arts and closes at night, after a lamp has been fetched (2.20.54).

NOVEMBER 386–JANUARY 387

Day One

Day Two

Day Three

[Book one of the *Soliloquies*, which takes place either sometime during the other dialogues, when Augustine is alone by himself, or shortly thereafter (see *Retractations* 1.4.1). No mention of the date of book two of the *Soliloquies* is made, but given Augustine's impatience to continue his conversation with Reason, it presumably takes place not long after (see 2.1.1). The *terminus a quo* of the *Soliloquies* is Augustine's birthday on November 13, 386 (see 1.10.17); the *terminus ad quem* is January 6, 387, when Augustine presumably would have returned to Milan to enroll his name as a candidate for baptism. Augustine would be received into the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil on April 24–25, 387.]

Soliloquies 1.1.1–1.13.23:

At an undisclosed location. Augustine and Reason hold a

Soliloquies 1.14.24–

1.15.30: The next day (see 1.14.25).

Augustine and Reason

Soliloquies 2.1.1–

2.20.36: Presumably on another day (given the conversation of 1.15.30),

discussion, most likely during the day (*Soliloquies* 1.13.23, 1.14.25), which is similar to the meditations Augustine was accustomed to holding at night (compare *Soliloquies* 1.1.1 and *On Order* 1.3.6). The discussion is concluded in order to spare Augustine's health (*Soliloquies* 1.13.23). At night, as Augustine mentally reviews these things, his mind drifts to the enticements of a woman's charms (1.14.25).

hold a discussion near a tree, possibly the one in the meadow where the group was accustomed to meeting (see *Soliloquies* 1.15.28; *Against the Academics* 2.11.25).

although this is not explicitly stated. At an undisclosed location, Augustine and Reason hold a discussion.

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GLOSSARY OF SELECT NAMES

Adeodatus. The only child of Augustine and his unnamed mistress of fifteen years (*Confessions* 6.15.25). Adeodatus, whose name means “given by God,” was born in Carthage in A.D. 372. He went with his parents to Italy and remained there with his father and grandmother after his mother was forced to return to Africa. At Cassiciacum Adeodatus was fourteen or fifteen years old; along with Augustine and Alypius, he was there as a catechumen to prepare for baptism. Augustine comments that his son was “more intelligent than many a grave and learned man” (*Confessions* 9.6.14) and that he was “least of us all in age” but had an “intellectual aptitude, if my love does not deceive me, [that] promises something great” (*On the Happy Life* 1.6). *On the Happy Life* is the only Cassiciacum dialogue in which Adeodatus participates; his participation betrays a high regard for moral purity (see *On the Happy Life* 2.12, 3.18). Adeodatus was baptized along with his father by St. Ambrose in Milan on April 24–25, 387; he was also present at Monica’s death, accompanied his father back to North Africa, and joined his father’s lay community in Thagaste. The later dialogue *On the Teacher* consists of a conversation between Augustine and Adeodatus that is said to have taken place at this time. Adeodatus died of an undisclosed illness around 389, when he was seventeen or eighteen years old (*Confessions* 9.6.14).

Alypius, St. A native of Thagaste, born after A.D. 354 into a family nobler than Augustine’s. He became one of Augustine’s students and followed him into the Manichaean sect (*Confessions* 6.7.11–12). According to Augustine, Alypius went on to become a courageous and conscientious lawyer (*Confessions* 6.10.16). He converted to Christianity moments after Augustine,

taking and reading the same epistle from St. Paul that prompted Augustine's conversion (*Confessions* 8.12.30). He has a cardinal role to play in *Against the Academics* and *On Order* and is even significant in absentia in *On the Happy Life*. Described as somewhat short and stout (*On the Happy Life* 2.16), Alypius is the closest to an intellectual peer that Augustine has at Cassiciacum. Later he serves as a sort of assistant editor of the Cassiciacum dialogues (see *Against the Academics* 1.1.4, *Confessions* 9.4.7). A close friend of Augustine, who calls him his "heart's brother" (*Confessions* 9.4.7), Alypius eventually became the bishop of Thagaste and died sometime around 427 or 428. Although he is not commonly known as such, Alypius is considered a saint in the Catholic Church. For his feast day on August 15, the *Roman Martyrology* states: "At Tagaste in Africa, St Alipius, Bishop, who was of old a disciple of blessed Augustine, and afterwards his fellow-convert, his colleague in the pastoral office, a gallant fellow-warrior in his contests against the heretics, and lastly his consort in heavenly glory."

Ambrose of Milan, St. The bishop of Milan, Ambrose is called "our priest" by Augustine in *On the Happy Life* (1.4 and 4.35; see also Ambrose, *On Jacob and the Happy Life* 10.43). Elsewhere Augustine calls him "famed among the best men of the whole world" (*Confessions* 5.13.23). As the consular governor of Liguria and Aemilia, Ambrose addressed the Catholic faithful of Milan in order to resolve a dispute as to who should succeed their recently deceased bishop. While he was delivering an eloquent speech on the importance of peace and moderation, the congregation demanded that he be made their bishop (even though he was only a catechumen), and so Ambrose was baptized and ordained in a period of eight days. He went on to become a strong defendant of orthodox Christianity from the Arian heresy and the encroachment of civic power on the affairs of the Church (see *Confessions* 9.7.15–16). From him Augustine learned at least two important lessons: the figurative reading of Scripture (*Confessions* 5.14.24) and the Christian teaching on the immateriality of God's essence (*Confessions* 6.3.4). Monica also held Ambrose in high regard (see *Confessions* 6.1.1–6.2.2); his effect on her piety is evident in *On the Happy Life* 4.35.

Lartidianus. Also known in some manuscripts as Lastidianus. Along with Rusticus, Lartidianus is described as a cousin of Augustine who never had to endure "even a single grammar school teacher" but whose common sense Augustine considered indispensable to the undertaking of *On the Happy Life* (1.6). Lartidianus and Rusticus appear only in *On the Happy Life*, the least philosophically demanding of the Cassiciacum dialogues,

and although they participate in the discussion, neither has a recorded line (see *On the Happy Life* 2.12). Nothing else is known of them.

Licentius. The son of Romanianus and thus a relative of Augustine and a native of Augustine's hometown of Thagaste in North Africa. At Cassiciacum he is described as an *adulescens*, a young man somewhere between the ages of fifteen and thirty. Licentius is one of Augustine's two pupils and a principal participant in the dialogues. He is bold and impetuous, with a newfound passion for poetry (*Against the Academics* 2.3.7; *On Order* 1.2.5) and an equally recent but sporadic passion for philosophy (*Against the Academics* 1.1.4, *On Order* 1.3.8–1.4.10). Around A.D. 395, fewer than ten years after their retreat together, Licentius sent Augustine a poem he had composed praising their time at Cassiciacum and asking for further guidance. In his response, Augustine chides his former pupil for still missing the point about the right relationship between the love of wisdom and the love of poetry (see *Epistle* 26).

Monica, St. Augustine's remarkable mother. Possibly a native North African, she married a Roman named Patricius and bore him three children: Augustine, Navigius, and a daughter whose name we do not know. Although her husband was not a Christian at the time, Monica made sure that Augustine was initiated into the catechumenate the moment he was born (*Confessions* 1.11.17). Monica bore Patricius's marital infidelities and bad temper with patience and eventually brought him into the Catholic Church before he died around A.D. 370–371. Although she was initially preoccupied with Augustine's worldly prospects (*Confessions* 2.3.8), she grew more concerned about his spiritual welfare as he fell into debauchery and the Manichaean heresy. Monica prayed for her son constantly, followed him to Italy despite his efforts to evade her, and pestered at least one bishop for help in bringing back her wayward son (see *Confessions* 3.12.21). In the *Confessions*, Augustine credits his embrace of the Christian faith to her intercession (5.7.13, 5.8.15, 5.9.17); in the Cassiciacum dialogues, he writes that he owes everything to her (*On the Happy Life* 1.6) and praises her for her philosophical zeal (*On the Happy Life* 2.10; *On Order* 1.11.32, 2.1.1), for having “a mind utterly attentive to God” (*On the Happy Life* 4.27), and for having a soul “afire for things divine” (*On Order* 2.1.1). Monica figures prominently in *On the Happy Life* and to a lesser extent in *On Order*; but having little patience for exhaustive epistemological debate (see *On the Happy Life* 2.16), she has only a brief and rather comic cameo, so to speak, in *Against the Academics* 2.5.13. Monica lived to see her son and grandson baptized on April 24–25, 387; shortly

after, she succumbed to a deadly fever as she and her family waited in the Roman port town of Ostia for passage back to Africa. She was fifty-six years old.

Navigius. Augustine had at least two siblings, one of them a sister. Little is known of his brother Navigius other than that he was present at Cassiciacum with Augustine (see *Against the Academics* 1.2.5, *On Order* 1.3.7) and later at Ostia when their mother died, where he displayed a somewhat worldly concern for his mother's burial arrangements (*Confessions* 9.11.27). Most likely he accompanied Monica when she followed Augustine to Italy around A.D. 385. Nothing is known of Navigius's education, but he appears to have been more well read than his cousins Lartidianus and Rusticus, showing a familiarity with some of Cicero's writings and an intellectual wariness around Augustine (*On the Happy Life* 2.14).

Romanianus. A relative of Augustine (*Epistle* 26) and his most generous patron. At Carthage he funded Augustine's studies and provided him with a home (see *Against the Academics* 2.2.3); at Milan he enthusiastically supported a plan by Augustine, himself, and their friends to live together in community, and he was willing to use his own resources to make it happen (*Against the Academics* 2.2.3; *Confessions* 6.14.24). Many misfortunes had recently befallen Romanianus, which is why Augustine urges him to take these as a sign to study philosophy (see *Against the Academics* 1.1.2; *Confessions* 6.14.24). Augustine tries to repay his debt to his old friend as well as to atone for leading him into Manichaeism (see *Against the Academics* 1.1.3) by dedicating two works to him: *Against the Academics*, a call to the study of philosophy, and the treatise *On True Religion*, an invitation to convert to the Christian faith. Some conjecture that Romanianus accepted at least one of these invitations, possibly converting to Christianity in A.D. 396. As we learn in *Against the Academics* 1.1.4, he is also the father of Licentius, one of the main participants of the Cassiciacum dialogues.

Rusticus. Along with Lartidianus, Rusticus is described as a cousin of Augustine who never had to endure "even a single grammar school teacher" but whose common sense Augustine considered indispensable to the undertaking of *On the Happy Life* (1.6). Lartidianus and Rusticus appear only in *On the Happy Life*, the least philosophically demanding of the Cassiciacum dialogues, and although they participate in the discussion, neither has a recorded line (see *On the Happy Life* 2.12). Aside from his being particularly shy (*On the Happy Life* 2.12), nothing else is known of Rusticus.

Theodorus. Manlius Theodorus (his first name is mentioned in the *Retractations* but not in the Cassiciacum dialogues) was made consul of the Roman Empire in A.D. 399; before that he held several other important administrative offices under several emperors. He was the subject of a panegyric written in verse by the poet Claudian. Augustine asserts in *On Order* 1.11.31 that his mother Monica knew him and that his philosophical works are so erudite that “both now and in the coming generations, no class of men may rightly complain about the writings of our times” (see also *Soliloquies* 2.14.26). In the *Retractations* Augustine reiterates that Theodorus was a “learned and Christian man,” though he now regrets having attributed more to him than he should have (1.2). Little is known about the personal acquaintance between Augustine and Theodorus in Milan, as well as how well Monica knew him. Although Theodorus wrote on a variety of subjects, his only extant work is the treatise *On Meters* (*De metris*). Augustine dedicated *On the Happy Life* to him as a way of petitioning him to evaluate his spiritual progress (*On the Happy Life* 1.1, 1.4). It is doubtful that Theodorus ever complied with the request.

Trygetius. One of two pupils of Augustine at Cassiciacum, a fellow townsman of Thagaste, and a principal participant of these dialogues (see *On the Happy Life* 1.6). Trygetius is referred to as an *adulescens*, a youth between the ages of fifteen and thirty. Augustine writes of him in *Against the Academics* 1.1.4: “It is as if military service had conscripted the young man for a while in order to remove his distaste for the disciplines, and so it restored him to us extremely passionate and hungry for the great and noble arts.” Given that the average age of a recruit in the Roman army was eighteen or older, he may have been a couple of years older than Licentius. In *On Order* 1.2.5, Augustine again mentions Trygetius’s military service and describes him as someone “who has fallen in love with history like an old soldier.”

Verecundus. A generous and relatively wealthy friend who lent his villa at Cassiciacum to Augustine and his friends (*Confessions* 9.3.5). A grammarian by profession living and working in Milan, Verecundus may have been part of the circle of friends that desired to live together in a life of philosophical leisure (*Confessions* 6.14.24). When he heard of Augustine’s and Alypius’s conversions to Christianity, Verecundus not only wanted to convert as well but to join them in leading celibate lives. Verecundus, however, was married (to a Christian woman), and so he reluctantly deferred conversion as Augustine and Alypius encouraged him to remain faithful to his married state. Although he worried that his friendship with

the group would suffer, he gladly lent out his villa for their baptismal preparations (*On Order* 1.2.5). Verecundus eventually did convert and died shortly thereafter (*Confessions* 9.3.5).

Zenobius. A mutual friend of Augustine, Romanianus, and Verecundus. Zenobius was the victim of some kind of political or financial misfortune and had been forced to leave Milan (*On Order* 1.7.20), probably northward to the Alps (*Soliloquies* 2.14.26). Augustine portrays Zenobius as a man of outstanding moral character (*On Order* 1.2.4) and a lover and composer of poetry (*On Order* 1.7.20): he wrote a “good poem” about the difficulties of reconciling God’s goodness with the existence of evil (*On Order* 1.7.20), as well as a poem that helps conquer the fear of death (*Soliloquies* 2.14.26). Augustine hints, however, that Zenobius is in need of more intellectual formation and philosophical training (*On Order* 2.5.15). Augustine also wrote a brief letter to Zenobius while he was at Cassiciacum (*Epistle* 2).

NOTES

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE CASSICIACUM DIALOGUES

1. “Fruitful leisure”: *On Order* 1.2.4; farm work: see *Against the Academics* 1.5.15; violent poultry: see *On Order* 1.8.25; Augustine states that stenographers, possibly hired by Romanianus, were used to record the conversations of the group: see *Against the Academics* 1.1.4, 1.5.15, 1.9.25, 2.7.17, 2.9.22, 3.7.15; *On Order* 1.5.14, 1.7.20, 1.9.27, 1.10.29–1.11.31, 2.20.54; on Augustine’s health, see *Against the Academics* 3.7.15; *On Order* 1.2.5; on recording these conversations for those not present, see *Against the Academics* 1.1.4, 1.5.15, 1.9.25, 2.7.17, 2.9.22, 3.7.15; *On Order* 1.2.5, 1.5.14, 1.7.20, 1.9.27, 1.10.29–1.11.31, 2.20.54; on Alypius as collaborating editor, see *Against the Academics* 1.1.4; *Confessions* 9.2.4. Unlike the other three dialogues, the *Soliloquies* is not derived from transcribed conversations but is nonetheless—as I argue in the introduction to the *Soliloquies*—an integral part of the Cassiciacum corpus.
2. See *Soliloquies* 1.1.3.
3. The language of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion is borrowed from Loneragan, *Method*, 238–43. It should be noted that these conversions often overlap, that they do not follow the same chronological order in every case, and that an individual may not necessarily undergo all three.
4. Knowing God and the soul: see *Soliloquies* 1.2.7, 1.15.27, 2.18.32; “return to ourselves”: see *Against the Academics* 1.1.1, 2.2.5, 2.3.8.
5. “Inquiry into inquiry”: Kenyon, *Augustine*, 30; “look foremost”: *ibid.*, 12; “cognitive norms of thought”: *ibid.*, 34; “most if not all acts of rational inquiry”: *ibid.*, 40.

6. “And what did it profit”: *Confessions* 4.16.30, trans. Frank J. Sheed; “the order for living”: *On Order* 2.8.25; sharp criticism: see *On Order* 1.10.29–30; Reason’s embarrassing questions: see *Soliloquies* 1.14.25–26.
7. On baptism, see *Confessions* 9.3.6, where Augustine refers to his baptism as his *conversio*; on religion as binding, see *On True Religion* 55.111, 113 (in *Retractations* 1.13.9, Augustine notes that although there is some uncertainty regarding the etymology of *religio*, he prefers the interpretation that traces it to *religo*, “to bind”); on Christianity and freedom, see *On True Religion* 17.33; on Monica on faith, hope, and charity, see *On the Happy Life* 4.35.
8. For instance, Robert J. O’Connell, S.J., spent the bulk of his career arguing for a disjunction between an early Augustine imbued with a Neoplatonic, anticorporeal “angelism” and a later Augustine more properly informed by an incarnational Christianity: see O’Connell, *St. Augustine’s Early Theory*, *St. Augustine’s Platonism*, and *Art*. For a critique of O’Connell’s thesis, see Fortin, “Reflections,” 99, Review, *Birth of Philosophic Christianity*, 317–19; and Harrison, *Rethinking*.
9. On the necessity of intellectual conversion, see *On Order* 1.8.24 and *Confessions* 4.16.30; on the order of conversions, see *Against the Academics* 3.17.38 and *On Order* 2.8.25–2.9.26.
10. Plato, *Republic* 10.607b.
11. The distinctive traits of the philosophical dialogue are aptly summarized by Cicero, who introduced the genre to Rome: it hides the author’s opinion, frees the reader from error, and helps the reader reach the most probable or plausible truth (*Tusculan Disputations* 5.4.11).
12. See Plato, *Phaedrus* 275d–277c. Compare Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.9.23 and St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius*, q. 2, a. 4.
13. On the esoteric and exoteric, see Crosson, “Esoteric Versus Latent Teaching.” The prevalence or even existence of an esoteric literature was debated in ancient Greece and Rome and again during the Renaissance and early modern period (the *Commentary on Against the Academics* cites several ancient passages on this topic). In the twentieth century the debate was controversially revived by Leo Strauss; the most thorough treatment on the topic to date is Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines*. On Augustine, Strauss, and esotericism, see Kries, “Augustine as Defender.”
14. On Augustine’s conjectures about Academic esotericism, see *Against the Academics* 2.10.24, 3.7.15–3.20.43; on the few versus the many, see *Against the Academics* 1.1.1, 2.1.1, 2.2.6, 3.17.37; *On the Happy Life* 1.1; *On Order* 1.1.1, 1.11.32, 2.5.16, 2.9.26, 2.11.30; *Soliloquies* 1.1.2, 1.1.4, 1.13.22; on the danger of

- teaching the truth, see *Against the Academics* 3.17.37; “return to their very selves”: *Against the Academics* 3.19.42.
15. On joke-telling, see *Soliloquies* 2.9.16; on Augustine’s irony, see *Retractations* 1.3.2; “in sport”: *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 69/1–2; “holds as trivial”: Cicero, *On Duties* 1.20.67; on the comic structure of philosophical dialogue, see Downey, *Serious Comedy*; on “untruths,” see *On Order* 2.14.40.
 16. On engrafting, see *On Order* 1.2.4. For the sake of readability, the current translations do not follow the convention of using “he says” in the present tense.
 17. See *Against the Academics* 2.1.1; *On the Happy Life* 4.34; *On Order* 1.1.3; *Soliloquies* 1.1.1ff.
 18. For Augustine’s opinion of Cicero, see *Against the Academics* 1.3.8 and 3.16.36; on Augustine’s first encounter with *Hortensius*, see *Confessions* 3.4; on the *Hortensius* at Cassiciacum, see *Against the Academics* 1.1.4; “cedars of the gymnasia” and “Church’s wholesome herbs”: *Confessions* 9.4.7. It should be noted that Augustine also modifies the Ciceronian dialogue even as he adopts it. One of his most significant changes is rearranging the chronology of a Ciceronian dialogue from (1) aporetic confusion, (2) plausible explanation, and (3) reflection on the act of debating to (1) aporetic confusion, (2) reflection on the act of debating, and (3) plausible explanation. This reordering lends to Augustine’s dialogues a more dramatic element similar to that of a mystery novel. See Kenyon, *Augustine*, 13, 77–79.
 19. “Living happily”: Cicero, *On Divination* 2.1.2; for more on this thesis, see Foley, “Cicero, Augustine”; on boredom after mastery, see *Against the Academics* 3.4.7.
 20. On intellectual conversion, see *Confessions* 7.9.13; “When behold”: *Against the Academics* 2.2.5.
 21. For a summary of the debate on Augustine’s familiarity with Plato, see O’Donnell, *Augustine Confessions*, vol. 2, 421–24.
 22. See Pucci, *Virgilian Retreat*. Pucci prefers the terms “recuperating” (xiii).
 23. On Augustine’s literary regrets: Augustine writes in the *Retractations* that he wishes he had not mentioned the Muses and other pagan figures, even though the allusions were not meant to be taken literally (1.3.2), and he laments being “puffed up” with the “conventions of worldly literature” (Prologue, 3). It should be borne in mind, however, that Augustine tells his reader that in the *Retractations* he is approaching his earlier writings with a judgment more exacting and severe than even God’s in order to avoid His final judgment (Prologue, 1). Such a hermeneutic has several advantages, but not included among them is giving the benefit of the doubt to possibly

- innocuous passages. On fighting fire with fire: In response to accusations like Julian the Apostate's that Christianity was no more than a religion of "theologizing fishermen," Church Fathers such as Minucius Felix endeavored to refute the pagans with their own literary weapons (see *Octavius* 39; see also Jerome, *Epistle* 70.2; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 43.11).
24. See *On the Happy Life* 4.31–36. These alignments will be discussed in greater detail in the Commentaries.
25. On Ambrose's influence, see *Confessions* 5.13.23, 6.1.1–6.4.6; on Marius Victorinus's influence, see *Confessions* 8.2.3–5.
26. On neologisms, see Bogan, *Vocabulary*, 43; "beatific vision": *Soliloquies* 1.7.14; on cuckoo clocks, see *Soliloquies* 2.6.12.

AGAINST THE ACADEMICS

Introduction

1. *Enchiridion* 7.20.
2. *Octavius* 13.
3. *Retractations* 1.1.1; see also *Enchiridion* 7.20.
4. *Enchiridion* 7.20.
5. For a summary of the debate between the Stoics and the Academics, see Brittain, *On Academic Scepticism*, xix–xxiii.
6. The disciples of Pyrrho of Elis (ca. 360–ca. 270 B.C.), believed by many to be the father of ancient skepticism.
7. *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.5.10.
8. *Academica* 2.3.9.
9. See *Academica* 2.3.8.
10. There are actually two different referents to the phrase "Old Academy": those who followed Plato's Academy before Arcesilaus, and the school of Antiochus (ca. 130–68 B.C.), which came into being *after* the New Academy (while claiming to be a resuscitation of the older Platonism, Antiochus's Academy was in fact a pale Stoicized imitation). But no matter: Cicero was unimpressed with representatives from both schools, especially Antiochus, who had been one of his teachers.
11. See *Academica* 2.3.8 and 2.8.60.
12. See *Academica* 1.4.16; see also *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.5.11, where Cicero writes that Socrates and the founders of the New Academy never judged anything openly.
13. See *Academica* 1.12.46.
14. *On Divination* 2.1.1.

15. See *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.1.1.
16. See *Academica* 2.3.8.
17. See *Academica* frg. 20 (Müller).
18. See *On the Nature of the Gods* 3.2.5, 6.
19. See *Against the Academics* 1.3.7ff. Augustine's *Epistle* 1 to Hermogenianus gives a lucid explanation of his opinions on the matter.
20. See *Against the Academics* 2.1.1.
21. See *On the Happy Life* 2.16.
22. See *On Order* 1.4.10.
23. *Confessions* 5.10.19, 5.14.25.
24. See *Epistle* 1.1.
25. *Retractations* 1.2, 1.3.1.
26. *Epistle* 1.1, 1.3.
27. Possidius, *Index of the Works of Saint Augustine* 1.1.
28. *Academica* is in the nominative plural neutral and hence refers to things rather than to persons. While Augustine's title *De Academicis* could also be in the neutral gender, it is more likely that it agrees with Augustine's other title, *Contra Academicos*, and is in the masculine plural.
29. See *Academica* 2.9.28 and 2.11.35.

Book One

1. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.45.139, where he speaks of virtue "calling back or rather recapturing by the hand."
2. Augustine later regrets this phrasing:

In a certain place I said, "But on account of either our merits or the necessity of nature . . ." etc. Either nothing should have been said about these two things (since even without them the meaning can remain intact), or, it should have been sufficient to say "on account of our merits," since it is the case that our wretchedness is derived from Adam. But I should not have added, "on account of the necessity of nature," since the dire necessity of our nature deservedly arose from our previous iniquity. (*Retractations* 1.1.2)

In other words, even aside from the personal sins we commit that justly bring about our misfortune, we justly deserve ill fortune through the inherited sin of Adam, which has disfigured our common human nature. The phrase "on account of our merits," then, includes what is meant by "the

necessity of nature.” But why object to a redundancy? Perhaps Augustine is also concerned that the additional phrase could be taken to mean that man is not by nature meant to reach the port of wisdom, a position he would reject.

3. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.2.5; *On Duties* 2.6.19. For more on the surprising value of (at least some) misfortune, see Augustine, *On the Happy Life* 1.1–2, 1.4.
4. For other instances of the important concept of returning to oneself, see 2.2.4, 2.2.5, 2.3.8, 3.19.42 below; *On Order* 1.2.3, 2.11.30, 2.11.31 (specifically, to one’s reason); *Soliloquies* 2.6.9, 2.19.33; *Confessions* 7.10.16; Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.9.
5. For asterisked words, see the Translation Key.
6. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.7.29. Augustine later regrets speaking of fortune so many times in this work (see, for example, 1.1.9, 1.9.25, 2.1.1, 2.3.9, 3.2.2–4 below). In the *Retractations* 1.1.2, he writes:

I do not like how many times I mentioned Fortune (*fortuna*), although I did not intend for some goddess to be understood by this name but rather a fortuitous occurrence of things (either in our body or in goods or evils outside of us). And hence no religion prohibits the following words from being said: “perhaps” (*forte*), “maybe” (*fortisan*), “perchance” (*fortasse*), “by chance” (*fortuito*). Still, all of these should be traced back to divine providence. Also, I was not silent about this in that work but said: “In fact, perhaps what is commonly called fortune is being ruled by a certain hidden order, and what we call chance in human affairs is nothing but something whose reason and cause are concealed” (1.1.1). I definitely said this, yet I regret using the word fortune there in the way that I did, since I see that people hold on to a very bad habit: where it ought to be said, “God has willed this,” they say, “Fortune has willed this.”

Many temples in Rome were dedicated to Fortuna, the Roman goddess of chance. She was portrayed with a cornucopia (a symbol of the prosperity she bestows) and a ship’s rudder (symbol of her control over one’s fate). Though *fortuna* was the Latin word for chance, Augustine fears that its pagan derivation could linger, especially when used so frequently.

7. See Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.2.3, 13; Augustine, *On Order* 1.1.1.
8. The *profani*, or profane, are literally those outside the temple. Drawing from classical philosophy, Augustine distinguishes the few who are philosophical from the many who are not (see 2.1.1, 2.2.6, 3.17.37 below; *On the*

- Happy Life* 1.1; *On Order* 1.1.1, 1.11.32, 2.5.16, 2.9.26, 2.11.30; *Soliloquies* 1.1.2, 1.1.4, 1.13.22).
9. Augustine endeavors to justify his claims about providence in his third dialogue, *On Order*. See Augustine, *City of God* 10.14; Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.2.13; Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.21.56.
 10. See Vergil, *Georgics* 1.124.
 11. Cicero uses a similar description of expenditure to show the difference between the vice of prodigality (on display here) and the virtue of true generosity, but there were even philosophers such as Theophrastus, Aristotle's hand-picked successor at the Lyceum, who confused or conflated the two and who were subsequently chastised by Cicero for being "absurd" (see *On Duties* 2.16.55–57, 2.18.63).
 12. One such inscription from Thagaste, [COR]NELIVUS ROMANIANVUS, survives (Wilmanns, *Inscriptiones Africae Latinae*, suppl. no. 17226).
 13. Literally, in dice not spurned by decency. Augustine is probably contrasting uncontroversial games that involve dice with dice games heavily associated with gambling. A modern example would be the difference between Monopoly and craps.
 14. See Cicero, *On the Laws* 1.23.60–61, where Cicero claims that no greater degree of happiness can be described or imagined than when the mind has abandoned its subservience to the body and to pleasure and is able to distinguish the mortal and perishable from the divine and eternal. Cicero concludes: "How [the mind] will look down upon, how it will despise, how it will count as naught the things that the public calls the most important."
 15. See Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.7 and 3.2.13.
 16. We do not know what that story is, as the details of Romanianus's misfortunes have not survived. For the theme of happiness and adversity, see *On the Happy Life* 1.4; *Confessions* 9.2.4, 9.5.13.
 17. Augustine describes the ailment that forced his retirement from the "windy profession" of teaching rhetoric as a *pectoris dolor*, a chest pain (here, in *On the Happy Life* 1.4 and in *Confessions* 9.2.4) and as a *stomachi dolor*, a pain in the gullet or esophagus (*On Order* 1.2.5, 1.11.31). His most detailed account is in the *Confessions*:

My lungs began to give way under the great hardship [of teaching], and I inhaled with difficulty. And the pains in my chest were witnessing to the fact that my lungs were not well and were keeping me from speaking in a loud voice for a prolonged amount of time. At first this greatly disturbed me, since it was forcing me to cast off,

almost now by necessity, the burden of this teaching position—or at least, if I could convalesce and be cared for, to put it off intermittently. (9.2.4; see 9.5.13)

This respiratory problem continued to vex Augustine at Cassiciacum (see 3.7.15 below; *On Order* 1.2.5, 1.11.33; *Soliloquies* 1.1.1).

18. Augustine was a professor of rhetoric in Milan from A.D. 384 until his resignation sometime after October 15, 386, the close of the Vintage holidays (see *Confessions* 5.13.23, 9.5.13). For more on Augustine's understanding of philosophy, see *Against the Academics* 2.1.1, 3.2.3; *On the Happy Life* 1.1–2; and *On Order* 1.3.9, 1.8.21, 1.11.31.
19. See *Confessions* 6.14.24.
20. "That superstition" refers to Manichaeism. See *Confessions* 4.1.1, 7.2.3, 7.12ff.
21. See *Soliloquies* 1.1.3. Augustine later wishes he had added "of the mortal body" (as I have done here in brackets), for "there is a sense of the mind* as well" (*Retractations* 1.1.2; see *Soliloquies* 1.6.12, where the mind* [*mens*] is defined as the soul's sensation or faculty of sense, and *Soliloquies* 2.2.3, where Augustine opines that sensation belongs to the soul rather than to the body). At the time, he explains: "I was speaking in the manner of those who do not talk of sense (*sensus*) except in reference to the body and of sensible things (*sensibilia*) except in reference to the corporeal. And so, in every place that I spoke like this, there is an ambiguity that was insufficiently avoided—except among those for whom this terminology is customary" (ibid.). It is difficult to determine with precision whom Augustine means. Some characters in Plato's dialogues treat perception or sensation largely in terms of the body (see Timaeus in *Timaeus* 28a–c, 52b–c), yet Plotinus affirms the soul as the principle of sensation (*Enneads* 4.7.3). The contrast between mind* (*mens*) and *sensus* is also common in Cicero (see *On Oratorical Classification* 20; *Tusculan Disputations* 1.16.38; *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.19.49; and *On the Ends* 5.20.59).
22. Augustine adds this qualifier because he has coined a new word, *inductorius*, from a verb that can mean to lead or persuade, to induce or introduce, to seduce or cover up (*inducere*). Later generations of Latin writers will use *inductorius* as synonymous with "misleading," and there is reason to believe that Augustine is using it primarily in this way as well.
23. The first day of *Against the Academics* is most likely November 10, 386. Augustine and his companions are staying at their friend Verecundus's country villa located in Cassiciacum, somewhere north of Milan (probably

- near present-day Cassago, Italy). Interestingly, Augustine does not mention Cassiciacum by name in any of these dialogues; it is only in *Confessions* 9.3.5 (written in A.D. 397) that its proper name is given.
24. The *Hortensius*, which exists now only in fragments, was loosely based on Aristotle's *Protreptikos*, also lost. In the dialogue, Cicero attempts to persuade Quintus Hortensius Hortalus, an accomplished orator and lawyer known for his defense of corrupt provincial governors, of the superiority of philosophy to sophistical rhetoric in facilitating genuine human happiness. As Augustine testifies in the *Confessions*, the *Hortensius* was an exhortation not to this or that school of thought but to philosophy itself, that is, to the love of wisdom tout court (3.4.7–8). Reading the dialogue at the age of eighteen had a life-changing effect on Augustine (*ibid.*; see *On the Happy Life* 1.4; *Soliloquies* 1.10.17), and it appears to have had a similar effect on Licentius and Trygetius.
 25. A stenographer or team of stenographers may have been hired by the well-to-do Romanianus as a way of obtaining a progress report on his son. If so, the better rendering of *adhibito notario* would be “with the stenographer you hired.” In any event, a stenographer is mentioned again in 1.5.15, 1.9.25, 2.7.17, 2.9.22, and 3.7.15 below and in *On Order* 1.2.5, 1.5.14, 1.7.20, 1.9.27, 1.10.29–1.11.31, and 2.20.54. The stenographers used wax tablets on which they imprinted words with sharp *styli*; their transcriptions would later be edited and transferred to parchment by Augustine and Alypius (see below).
 26. Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.312.
 27. By mentioning Alypius here Augustine has finished listing the four principal participants of the dialogue. He is also alluding to the fact that Alypius acted as a sort of editorial assistant in turning the stenographer's transcripts into a polished dialogue. Augustine describes one of their disagreements over what content to include in *Confessions* 9.4.7.
 28. See Cicero, *Hortensius* frg. 36 (Müller); Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.10.28; Seneca, *On the Happy Life* (*De vita beata*) 1.1. As Augustine puts it in the *City of God* 10.1: “It is the decided opinion of all who are to some extent capable of using their reason that all men want to be happy” (see *On the Trinity* 13.4.7).
 29. Little is known of Augustine's brother Navigius other than that he was present at Cassiciacum with Augustine (see *Against the Academics* 1.2.5; *On Order* 1.3.7) and later at Ostia when their mother died (*Confessions* 9.11.27). He probably accompanied Monica when she followed Augustine to Italy around A.D. 385 and is probably not mentioned in the cover letter to

Romanianus in *Against the Academics* because of his small part in the conversation.

30. See Cicero, *On the Ends* 5.13.36, 5.14.38; *On the Commonwealth* 1.60; Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.7.1. Looking over this passage decades later, Augustine writes:

I said, “What do you think living happily is other than living according to that which is best in man?” And shortly afterwards, I explained why I said “to be best in man” [when I wrote]: “Who would doubt that the best of man is nothing else than . . . mind* or reason.” This is certainly true, for insofar as it pertains to man’s nature, there is nothing better in him than his mind* and reason. But he who wants to live happily should not live according to it, for then he is living according to man when he should be living according to God in order to attain happiness. For the sake of reaching happiness, our mind* should not be content with itself but should be subordinated to God. (*Retractations* 1.1.2)

At this stage, Augustine does not feel the need to differentiate mind and reason, but he does in the *Soliloquies* (1.6.13).

31. See 1.2.5 above.
32. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.41.127. Cicero, however, speaks of the life of inquiry as pleasant and delightful, not happy.
33. See *On the Happy Life* 4.25. The perfection of the wise man was not an uncommon philosophical assumption (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.20.66ff).
34. See Cicero, *On the Ends* 1.18.61: “No fool is happy and no wise man unhappy.”
35. Carneades (ca. 213–129 B.C.) was born in Cyrene (a Greek city in North Africa) and spent most of his life in Athens. He was the founder of the Third or New Academy, that is, of the Academics whose positions are the subject matter of this dialogue. Carneades argued that one could never assent to anything as true, although one could assent to certain things as “probable.”
36. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.) was the great Roman statesman whose philosophical writings Augustine, and apparently Licentius, held in high regard. Cicero professed to be an adherent of the New Academy (*Academica* 2.3.7–8).
37. See Cicero, *Hortensius* frg. 101 (Müller). The Academic position espoused by Cicero was that nothing was worse than assenting to something before understanding it (see *Academica* 1.12.45, 2.20.66, 2.21.67). In *On Duties*

- Cicero writes that “being mistaken, being in error, being wrong, and being deceived are as unbecoming as being deranged and being out of one’s mind” (1.27.94).
38. The puerile love of self-display can apply even to self-described philosophers (see Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 2.4.11). Augustine is consistent in wanting his pupils to wrestle with each other for the sake of discovering the truth, not scoring forensic hits (see *On Order* 1.10.29).
 39. See Cicero, *Hortensius* frg. 60 (Müller).
 40. In addition to doing more than anyone else to introduce philosophy to the Roman world, Cicero modified the Latin language by changing the meaning of several terms, inventing new ones, and transliterating Greek terminology. His purpose in doing so was to render Latin a more suitable vehicle for advanced philosophical thought. For Cicero’s command of Latin, see Augustine, *On the Teacher* (*De magistro*) 5.16.
 41. See 1.2.5 above.
 42. For this description of the body, see Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.734; Plato, *Gorgias* 493a; *Cratylus* 400c; *Phaedo* 82e, 114b, c; *Phaedrus* 250c; Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.7, 4.8.1, 3–4; Cicero, *On the Commonwealth* 6.14; Ambrose, *On the Good of Death* 2.5, 11.48.
 43. *Perfekte*, perfectly. Since perfection in Latin implies completion, I translate *perfekte* throughout as “completely.”
 44. See Cicero, *On the Commonwealth* 1.60. Trygetius uses the word *fas* for “right,” which has a more religious connotation.
 45. “Is that our fault? Blame nature because she has hidden the truth” (Cicero, *Academica* 2.10.32).
 46. *Finire*, translated here as “confine,” also means to mark out the boundaries of something. This translation of Licentius’s clever pun is inspired by that of Denis J. Kavanaugh.
 47. See *On Order* 1.8.26: “At all times our chief consideration was nothing else but the measure of things.” For more on measure or limit (*modus*), see note 61 below.
 48. It was not uncommon for the estates of Roman villas to have private bath-houses, some with multiple rooms, set apart from the main residence. Vitruvius says that the best hours for bathing are between noon and sunset (*The Ten Books on Architecture* 5.10.1).
 49. November 11, 386 (see Time Line).
 50. *Consedere* can mean to sit together or, more officially, to hold a session.
 51. Augustine later writes about his use of “omen” (*omen*): “Although I did not say this in earnest but as a joke, still, I wish I had not used this word.

Naturally, I do not recall having read ‘omen’ either in our sacred scriptures or in the writings of any ecclesiastical disputant—although ‘abomination,’ which is found in the divine books constantly, is said to come from it” (*Retractations* 1.1.2).

52. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.20.66.
53. A Ciceronian phrase for wishing not to have examples that are too far-fetched (see Cicero, *For Sextus Roscius of Ameria* 16.47; see also *For Aulus Caecina* 95.12).
54. See Anchises’s description of Elysium, where souls are purged until the length of days “removes their ingrained blemish / and leaves remaining the pure and ethereal sense and the fire of pure spirit” (Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.746). In the *Soliloquies*, Reason describes a mind free from bodily blemish as “a mind* that is now removed from and has been purged of the various lusts for mortal things” (1.6.12).
55. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.4.4.
56. See 1.2.5 above.
57. See Cicero, *Academica* frg. 16, which describes error in terms of road travel. *Error* literally means wandering lost, as on a crooked path.
58. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.1.1.
59. Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.401—on the road to Carthage.
60. That is, I should not consider anything in a disputation to be less important than something else.
61. *Modus* (usually translated as “measure” or “limit,” depending on context) is an important concept in the Cassiciacum dialogues (see 2.2.4 and 2.3.9 below; *On the Happy Life* 2.7, 4.32, 4.34–35; *On Order* 1.8.26, 2.5.14, 2.19.50).
62. A statement redolent of Cicero’s “unfold the sails of eloquence” (*Tusculan Disputations* 4.5.10).
63. That is, the stenographer’s *stylus* (see 1.1.4 above).
64. That is, they were planning the management of the villa so that they would have time for leisure (see 1.5.16 below) or they were performing some of these chores themselves (see 2.4.10 below). *Res rustica*, the phrase translated here as “farm work,” is a common expression for agriculture or husbandry (see the title of Columella’s work on agriculture, *De re rustica*).
65. This might explain why Licentius had a verse from the first book of the *Aeneid* come so readily to his mind (1.4.14 above).
66. November 12, 386 (see Time Line).
67. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.11.36.

68. See Cicero, *On Duties* 1.43.153, with the order of human and divine reversed. In the next book of *On Duties* Cicero offers a more elaborate definition of wisdom, which he claims comes from the ancient philosophers: “the knowledge of divine and human things and of the causes by which these things are sustained” (2.2.5; see *Tusculan Disputations* 4.26.57; Seneca, *Epistle* 14.1.5).
69. Prior to his conversion, Augustine eschewed soothsayers who practiced animal sacrifice (*Confessions* 4.2.3), but he remained enthralled by other forms of divination, such as astrology and possibly bibliomancy (*Confessions* 4.3.4–5). It is therefore not unlikely that he would have sent Licentius and a servant to consult Albicerius when he was still living in Carthage from A.D. 370 to 375 or from 376 to 383.
70. Flaccianus was the proconsul in North Africa. In the *City of God* 18.23 Augustine describes him as “a most famous man . . . a man of the easiest eloquence and much learning.” He and Augustine once discussed a Greek manuscript of alleged prophecies by the Erythraean sibyl that contained an acrostic which spelled, “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior” (*ibid.*).
71. In light of the penultimate statement in this paragraph, Licentius is most likely alluding to Albicerius’s powers of divination by calling him divine. There may also be, however, a touch of Socratic irony, as when Socrates refers to soothsayers, prophets, and poets as divine even though they have no idea what they are talking about (*Meno* 99d).
72. For Zeno, the founder of Stoicism and the first to apply the notion of comprehension (*katalēpsis*, “grasping”) to the mind, mental comprehension is one step shy of full knowledge, although it is higher on the cognitional scale than a visual appearance or percept (*visum*) and assent (*adsensus*) (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.47.145). In the *Soliloquies*, Augustine states that knowledge involves (though is not identical to) comprehension through the understanding or intellect (1.4.9).
73. The position of the Stoics (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.47.144–45; see also *Soliloquies* 1.4.9).
74. See Cicero *Academica* 2.9.27.
75. Soothsayers (*haruspices*) foretold the future by inspecting the entrails of sacrificed animals; augurs discerned whether the gods approved of an action by interpreting the behavior of birds; those who consulted the stars were astrologers, convinced that the heavenly bodies shaped human destinies; and oneiromancers or oneirocritics divined dreams.
76. Seers (*vates*) were the oracles or mouthpieces of the god or spirit possessing them.

77. Following Cicero, Trygetius is limiting “the human things” to the subject matter of moral philosophy (illustrated here by the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice), rather than to any datum that can be stored in the human mind. He is also following Cicero in holding that anything subject to fortune cannot truly be called our own (see *Tusculan Disputations* 5.1.2, 5.10.30–31).
78. The devil and other evil spirits are said to inhabit “this air” and “the high places” (see Eph 2:2, 6:12). According to some pagan thinkers, the gods are to be associated with the ether, *daimons* with the air, and souls with the earth (Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo*). In *On Order* 2.9.27, Augustine links divination to demonic influence (see also Acts 16:16–18). For the distinction between comprehension through understanding and bits of data retained by the memory, see *Soliloquies* 1.4.9.
79. For more on the power of demons over the senses and the imagination but not the mind, see *On Order* 2.9.27 and Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 26–28. For demonic possession, see *On the Happy Life* 3.18. For Porphyry’s thoughts on and questions about daemons, see his *Epistle to Anebo* and Augustine’s critique in *City of God* 10.9–11.
80. An *animula* is a diminutive and rather rare term for a little soul. See Augustine, *Epistle* 137.1.1; *City of God* 19.12.
81. See 1.1.1 and 1.1.3 above; Cicero, *On the Ends* 2.34.114.
82. See 1.5.13 above.
83. For the difference between soul and body, see 1.3.9 above; for another use of the metaphor of unwrapping (*involvere*), see 3.3.6 below.
84. See *On Order* 1.1.3.
85. See 1.2.5 above.
86. A *summa rerum* can also mean the chief particulars of a topic or discussion.
87. For philosophy as a citadel, see *On the Happy Life* 2.10 and *On Order* 1.11.32; for other uses of the metaphor of a citadel, see *Soliloquies* 1.10.17.
88. See 1.3.7 and 1.9.11 above.
89. *Studium* also suggests intellectual zeal.
90. The image of sailing a ship into a safe port hearkens back to the maritime metaphors of 1.1.1 above; it also anticipates 2.1.1 and 3.2.3 below and *On the Happy Life* 1.1–5.
91. Extant manuscripts have either *accusare decrevi* or *reos citare decrevi* (the latter of which is translated here). Both depict Augustine the judge summoning the Academics to the bench to answer the charges against them, with the latter implying that they are guilty.

Book Two

1. In Cicero's writings, "pertinacity" (*pertinacia*) is the vice of stupidly or maliciously persisting (see *Academica* 2.20.65; *On the Ends* 1.27.28, 2.9.107; *Tusculan Disputations* 2.2.5); for what Augustine means by the "method" (*ratio*) of the Academics, see the Commentary.
2. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.15.46.
3. The armor forged by Vulcan for Aeneas was indestructible (see Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.525, 12.739).
4. The expression *intentio bonorum studiorum* is inspired by Seneca's *Epistle* 75, where he speaks of three classes of people who have to various degrees triumphed over mental and moral "diseases." The second class consists of those who have escaped the worst diseases of the mind and its passions but who are in danger of backsliding. This class is reached "by a great good fortune of nature and by a great and constant application to study (*magnae et adsidua intentione studii*)" (*Epistle* 75.15).
5. See 1.1.1 and 1.9.25 above.
6. *Vota*, translated elsewhere as "vows" (see *On Order* 1.8.25). Daily prayer was part of the group's life at Cassiciacum.
7. See 1 Cor 1:24: "Christ [is] the power (*virtus*) of God and the wisdom of God." See also *On the Happy Life* 4.25. The divinity of "wisdom and true virtue (*virtus*)" are also mentioned in Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7.10.
8. The mysteries are those realities revealed by God through Scripture or liturgy or any other dimension of the Church's sacred tradition. See *On the Happy Life* 1.4; *On Order* 2.5.15, 2.6.16, 2.9.27, 2.17.46.
9. The expression here for a natural nobility, *altitudo mentis*, is probably inspired by Cicero's use of the phrase *altitudo animi* for magnanimity (see *Letters to Family Friends* 4.13.7).
10. Perhaps Alypius and Licentius.
11. For the expression "return to heaven," by which Augustine means a return to God, see book three note 188 below. For the return to God, see *On the Happy Life* 4.36; *On Order* 1.7.20, 1.8.23; *Soliloquies* 1.1.2, 1.1.3, 1.1.6, 1.10.17, 1.11.18, 2.6.9. Augustine also speaks of returning to the light (*On the Happy Life* 4.35; *Soliloquies* 1.6.13, 1.13.23, 2.19.33) and returning to our homeland (3.19.42 below; *On the Happy Life* 1.2).
12. Augustine refers here to Jesus Christ. See 3.20.43 below.
13. See 2.1.2 above.
14. Around A.D. 370, Augustine left his hometown of Thagaste in order to study in Carthage. In *Confessions* 2.3.5 he mentions how his father

- struggled to finance this stage of his education; here he mentions Romanianus's assistance.
15. Augustine's father died in the year A.D. 370 or 371, when Augustine was approximately sixteen years old (see *Confessions* 3.4.7).
 16. In A.D. 375, Augustine returned to Thagaste to teach rhetoric (see *Confessions* 4.2.2). However, he also returned as a Manichaean heretic and with a mistress and an illegitimate son. Romanianus allowed Augustine to stay at his home, presumably because his mother Monica, shocked at her son's behavior and beliefs, would not let him live under her roof.
 17. Augustine returned to the more illustrious city of Carthage in A.D. 376 to pursue a career in rhetoric. In the *Confessions*, he emphasizes the death of a dear friend in Thagaste as a motive for his moving away (4.7.12).
 18. In A.D. 383, Augustine departed from Carthage for Rome without even his mother's knowledge (see *Confessions* 5.8.14–15).
 19. That is, because of his generous and forgiving spirit, Romanianus did not let Augustine's "desertion" of his pupils overcome his trust in the purity of Augustine's motives.
 20. *Respiro*, to exhale, can also mean to enjoy a respite.
 21. See 1.1.1 above.
 22. That is, God the Father (see *On the Happy Life* 4.34–35; *On Order* 2.5.14, 2.19.50). Plotinus describes a Measure (*metron*) reigning above to which the measure in civic virtues bears a resemblance and which is "the Highest Good in the Supreme" (*Enneads* 1.2.2); he also describes the transcendent Good as "the Measure and Term of all" (*metron pantōn kai peras*) (*Enneads* 1.8.2). The Supreme Measure, then, is not merely the highest measurement but that by which all is measured and from which all measure is derived (see Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.4, which describes the One as "Measure unmeasured"). As such, it is similar to Aristotle's notion of *telos* as the final cause or good for which all else exists or is done (see *Metaphysics* 994b9, 996a26; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1097a22). Other passages from Plotinus may have also influenced Augustine in this regard (see *Enneads* 1.8.4–6, 5.1.2, 5.1.6–7, 5.2.1, 5.5.1, 5.5.2, 5.5.11, 6.5.11). For more on the notion of measure, see book one note 61 above.
 23. Most likely a reference to Romanianus as an (unwitting) minister of not simply God, but God the Holy Spirit, "by whom [we] are led to the truth" (*On the Happy Life* 4.35). By mentioning Truth and Supreme Measure in the previous sentence, Augustine has thus implicitly invoked the Trinity.
 24. More literally, the motions of the soul. The concept of nonlocal motion is explored in *On Order* 2.1.3ff, especially 2.6.10ff.

25. “This life”: the life of philosophical leisure.
26. In the *Confessions* Augustine mentions that Romanianus “had been brought to the court in Milan by the press of some very urgent business” (6.14.24).
27. See *On the Happy Life* 1.4. Described in the *Confessions* as the “books of the Platonists” (7.9.13), these “fulsome books” —filled with great wisdom— may be Plotinus’s *Enneads* or something by Porphyry, although their precise identity remains contested. Augustine lifts the phrase “fulsome books” from Cicero, who speaks of the fulsome books (*libri pleni*) of philosophers who criticize the fables of poets and painters (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.6.11).
28. The identity of Celsinus is uncertain; given the reference to Arabian fragrances and drops of oil that Augustine attributes to him, it could be the Roman medical authority Cornelius Celsus (ca. 25 B.C.—A.D. 50). Arabia was known for exotic luxuries, and *bonae res*, or good things (translated here as “fragrances”), could signify costly items. Plautus speaks of Chrysopolis as a “city in Arabia full of good things” (*The Persian* 4.3.46).
29. Significantly, the word here for “just a few” (*paucissimi*) is the same used for the “tiny number” of the books of Plotinus that led to Augustine’s profound intellectual conversion (*On the Happy Life* 1.4; see *Confessions* 7.9.13–7.16.22).
30. A *fomentum* is literally a poultice and a *retinaculum* a rope or chain.
31. See 1.1.1 above.
32. *Tanta potuissent* may also refer to their considerable influence on posterity.
33. See *On the Happy Life* 1.4; *Confessions* 8.12.28–29. The word Augustine uses here for “with the utmost piety” (*castissime*) also means “most chastely,” a fitting ambivalence given the effect that reading St. Paul would have on him (see *Confessions* 8.12.29). Some manuscripts, however, instead have *cautissime*, “most carefully.” As to what precisely Augustine means by reading “all of it” (*totum*), it is unclear whether an entire passage or section, an entire epistle by St. Paul, or the entirety of Paul’s epistles is being indicated. In the *Confessions* Augustine mentions that he was reading the Epistle to the Romans when he converted (see 8.12.29).
34. A seaside resort on the Bay of Naples proverbial for its warm baths and luxurious amenities.
35. Other than what Augustine says here, nothing is known of Romanianus’s unnamed adversary or the nature of his antagonism toward Romanianus.
36. *Sanctus*, translated elsewhere as “holy” (see 2.7.18 below).
37. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.35.112 for the expression “the thickets of the Stoics.” The rest of the metaphor may be inspired by Columella’s description of

weeds in a vineyard that burn up grapevine shoots or seeds in such a way that the grapevines “become rough (scabrous) and dried up” (*On Agriculture* 4.5).

38. A Latin transliteration of the Greek *philokalía*, which, as Augustine explains below, means “love of beauty.”
39. See *Soliloquies* 1.14.24. Birdlime is a sticky substance like flypaper that traps birds; for its use as a metaphor for “the embedded filth of lust,” see *On the Trinity* 8.2.3. Augustine most likely borrowed the image from Ambrose (see *On the Good of Death* 5.16). Augustine reserves his harshest criticism in *Against the Academics* for this passage:

In the second book is that completely foolish and silly quasi-fable about philocaly and philosophy, who “are full sisters and born from the same parent.” For either what is called philocaly is only in regards to mere trifles, and consequently it is not in any respect philosophy’s full sister: or, if the name should be respected on account of the fact that translated into Latin it means “love of beauty” (and [the beauty] is the true and ultimate beauty of wisdom), philocaly in regards to the highest incorporeal things is the very same thing as philosophy, and in no way are they two “sisters.” (*Retractations* 1.1.3)

40. See *On Order* 1.2.5. Though years later Licentius would send one of his poems to Augustine (see *Epistle* 26), there is no indication that he ever versified Augustine’s fable about philocaly.
41. See 1.1.1 above.
42. See *On Order* 1.8.24: “An education in the liberal disciplines (if, of course, moderate and concise), produces lovers more lively, more persevering, and better groomed for embracing the truth; and as a result they more ardently desire, more consistently pursue, and finally, more sweetly cling to that which is called . . . the happy life.”
43. That is, for him the disciplines are not necessary; a turn in fortune, symbolized here by “open winds” (*aurae liberae*), is all that is needed to bring him into the port of philosophy (see 1.1.1 above). The image of open winds is probably inspired by Livy’s statement about seizing the wind of freedom (*libertatis captare auram*) in his *History of Rome* (*Ab urbe condita* 3.37).
44. Augustine fulfills this promise when he writes the treatise *On True Religion* and dedicates it to Romanianus (see Augustine, *On True Religion* 7.12; *Epistle* 15.1).
45. We do not know who Lucilianus was, although Augustine and his friend Nebridius speak of a Lucinianus along with Romanianus in *Epistles* 5 and 10.1.

46. Some manuscripts have “Rather, you yourself ask instead of me” (*tu te ipse pro me roga*) rather than “Or am I myself gaining you?” (*aut te ipse promereor*).
47. Matt 7:7.
48. On the divinity of measure, see 2.2.4 above. *Modus* (usually translated as “measure” or “limit,” depending on context) is an important concept in the Cassiciacum dialogues (see 1.4.10 above; *On the Happy Life* 2.7, 4.32, 4.34–35; *On Order* 1.8.26, 2.5.14, 2.19.50).
49. Books two through four of the *Aeneid* recount the love affair of Dido and Aeneas. Augustine’s curious phrasing (“three books following the first”) sets these books, and the story they contain, apart as a unit.
50. See 3.4.7 below. For another example of mind and body at meals, see *On the Happy Life* 2.8.
51. The Maurist edition has instead, “Or why it is that the soul becomes domineering when we are occupied with our hands and teeth?”
52. Then as now, having “good faith” (*bona fides*) is an important concept in law concerning a person’s honesty and purity of intention (see 2.5.12 below). In Cicero’s writings it is described as applicable to virtually all areas of society and the polar opposite of chicanery and malice (see *On Duties* 3.17.70).
53. That is, as a binding judicial decision. Alypius as the judge is laying down the law, and the counselor Augustine promises to comply.
54. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.20.66: “To approve the false for the true is very disgraceful.” A similar sentiment is expressed in *Academica* 1.12.45.
55. Zeno of Citium (334–262 B.C.) was the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy.
56. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.6.18, 2.24.77; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.248, 7.426; *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 2.4.18, 2.7.7off; Diogenes Laertes, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.50; Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum fragmenta* no. 59.
57. Literally, signs (*signa*).
58. That is, Zeno taught that when a mind truly comprehends something, it has such a clear impression of it that it is completely different in every way from a false impression. This gives rise to an irresistible conviction in the knower’s mind that his impression is true, which is the only criterion of truth (see Cicero, *Academica* 1.11.41, 2.6.18, 2.10.30–31, 2.11.34, 2.13.40; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 8.257).
59. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.47.145.
60. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.5.14, 2.17.55, 2.36.116ff, 2.48.147.

61. Literally, the fallacies (*fallaciae*) of the senses. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.25.81–2.26.82.
62. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.15.47–48, 2.16.51ff, 2.27.88ff.
63. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.14.45, 2.15.46, 2.16.49, 2.28.92, 2.29.94, 2.30.96, 2.48.147. By a *sorites* (translated here as “sophism”) Cicero means the captious kind of argument that “would make a heap by adding a grain” (*Academica* 2.16.49).
64. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.12.45 and 2.18.59.
65. The Stoic *apraxia* argument is that Academic skepticism destroys the ground for all action (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.8.25, 2.12.39, 2.19.61–62, 2.33.108).
66. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.8.25.
67. *Verisimilis* or “verisimilar” (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.10.32, 2.31.99–100, 2.34.110). Unless noted otherwise, I translate this important concept as “truth-like,” “like the truth,” “like the true,” etc.
68. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.23.73 and 2.31.99.
69. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.34.108.
70. For a similar (but not identical) distinction, see Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 11.11.
71. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.4.13 and 1.12.43–46. The word *conceptum*, translated here as “version,” can also refer to a concept or idea.
72. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.4.16 and 1.12.44–46.
73. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.18.59.
74. Arcesilaus of Pitane (ca. 315–241 B.C.) was the sixth head of Plato’s Academy, a position he assumed in 264 B.C. He left no writings but is said to have founded the Second or Middle Academy, forerunner of the New Academy. He responded with skepticism to Zeno’s teachings on knowledge as an irresistible impression.
75. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.12.44–45 and 2.6.16.
76. See *Academica* 2.22.70, where Cicero mentions a similar accusation but disclaims it. Philo of Larissa (ca. 159–ca. 84 B.C.) was the head of the New Academy from 110 to 85 B.C. He was succeeded by his disciple Antiochus of Ascalon (ca. 130–68 B.C.).
77. A *physicus* is a natural philosopher especially, perhaps, a pre-Socratic thinker such as Democritus or Anaxagoras (see Varro, *On Agricultural Topics* 1.1 and 1.40, respectively). Cicero defines the *physicus* as an “examiner and hunter of nature” (*On the Nature of the Gods* 1.30.83; see *On the Commonwealth* 5.3.5).
78. Antiochus broke from the skepticism of his predecessors and tried to bring the New Academy more in line with the Old. However, he did so not by

- returning to original Platonism but by introducing Stoic elements into Platonic thought (see 3.18.41 below).
79. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.4.13–18 and 1.12.46.
80. Licentius is playing on the words “miserable” (*miser*) and “worthy of being pitied” (*miserandus*).
81. Cicero seems to use the terms almost interchangeably (see *Academica* 2.10.32).
82. Literally, to polish or file off (the rough edges of) your mind.
83. That is, because of the publication of this dialogue, Licentius and others will be allowed to read the words of Augustine and Alypius, which is at least some consolation for the way that Augustine and Alypius have been stinting with their words. For the stenographer’s pen, see 1.1.4 above.
84. Literally, among whom the conversation is being cut. The expression “to cut words” (*sermones caedere*) is a colloquialism for chatting, not unlike our idiom “shooting the breeze” (see Terence, *Self-Tormentor* 242). Licentius, however, seems to be drawing from the expression’s more dramatic connotations.
85. The gesture, evocative of prayer, also signifies agreement with or assent to Augustine’s remark, since an outstretched hand (*manus porrecta*) signified an “aye” in voting.
86. Literally, collecting myself (see 1.8.23 above; *On Order* 1.1.3).
87. See 1.9.25 above.
88. Vergil, *Aeneid* 11.424.
89. Literally, holy (*sanctus*). See 1.7.20, 2.2.4, and 2.2.6 above.
90. Literally, to keep out that similitude (*similitudo*) of yours. The term is important given its relevance to a discussion on the “verisimilar” or what is like-the-truth.
91. See Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.173–83.
92. See 2.7.17 above, where Augustine frets about losing his carefree position should Alypius join the debate.
93. For Augustine’s use of the word “omen,” see book one note 51 above.
94. See 1.2.5 above.
95. See Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.4, 4.11, 6.20. Caius Verres was a corrupt Roman official who, while praetor of Sicily, plundered the island’s temples and homes. Because Cicero had once served as quaestor of Sicily, the Sicilians asked him to prosecute Verres.
96. Some of Augustine’s struggles with Academic thought are relayed in *Confessions* 5.10.19 and 5.14.25.
97. For the role of playfulness in philosophical progress, see Augustine, *On the Teacher* 8.21.

98. Regarding his use of the expression “shall return to heaven” (see 2.1.2 above), Augustine later writes that he should have said “go” instead of “return” to distinguish him from “those who think that human souls, after falling or being thrown out of heaven on account of their sins, are cast down into these bodies of ours” (see Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8; Porphyry, according to Augustine in *City of God* 10.30, 22.27; and Origen, *On First Principles* 1.6.2–3). Augustine goes on to say that he did not hesitate to speak of returning to heaven because he was using “heaven” as a metonymy for God, who is its author and creator, and this usage has been sanctioned by such venerable churchmen as St. Cyprian of Carthage (in his *On the Lord’s Prayer* 16). He was not, Augustine continues, endorsing a particular account of the origin of the soul, for he did not know then nor does he know now “in what manner [the soul] happens to be in the body: whether it is from the man who was created first when man became ‘a living soul’ (Gen 2:7; 1 Cor 15:45), or whether individual souls are made in a similar way for individual men” (*Retractations* 1.1.3). Augustine’s *Epistle* 166.9.27 summarizes some of these problems.
99. See Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.3.
100. Either the deceits and lusts just mentioned or the “childish fables” mentioned earlier in the paragraph.
101. See Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.441.
102. For memory’s incapacity to retain everything, see *Soliloquies* 1.1.1. For the use of a stenographer in committing their conversations to writing, see 1.1.4 above.
103. Tully is another name for Cicero. For Cicero’s opinion on this subject, see *On the Orator* 1.11.47. For places where Augustine frowns on semantic disputes, see 3.12.29 below; *On Order* 2.2.4, 2.7.21; *City of God* 9.5.
104. See 2.7.16 above.
105. See 3.17.38 below; Cicero, *Academica* 2.18.60.
106. November 21, 386 (see Time Line). Augustine wrote at least four letters while at Cassiciacum: *Epistle* 1 to his friend Hermogenianus; *Epistle* 2 to Zenobius, to whom *On Order* is dedicated; and *Epistles* 3 and 4 to his friend Nebridius, who is frequently mentioned in the *Confessions* (see 4.3.6, 6.10.17, 6.16.26, 7.2.3, 7.6.8, 8.6.13, 9.3.6, 9.4.7; see also *Epistle* 98.9).
107. Or more literally, the things. See 1.10.24 above and 3.12.29 below; see also *On Order* 2.7.21. The distinction between signs/words and things is most famously explored by Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine*.
108. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.10.32 and 2.31.99.

109. The phrase “cheerful sun” (*laetus sol*) can also mean a beautiful or joyous sun (see Ovid, *Metamorphosis* 5.568).
110. See Cicero, *Academica* frg. 19 (Müller).
111. A *calumnia*, translated here as “bogus lawsuit,” refers to a false statement or misrepresentation, but in law it designates malicious or false litigation or litigation brought in bad faith. Trygetius is continuing the playful legal motif of their discussion.
112. That is, Alypius and the Academics, respectively.
113. See 2.7.16 and 2.7.19–2.8.20 above.
114. Licentius is drawing from contemporary theories about the formation of rain, according to which humidity is condensed in clouds to form rainwater.
115. In the *Soliloquies* the character Augustine tries to make a similar claim about knowing the phases of the moon, but Reason corrects him, pointing out that things pertaining to sense-perception cannot be truly grasped by the understanding (1.3.8).
116. Earlier, Licentius had characterized his defeat in debate to Augustine as being taken captive in battle (see 2.7.17–18 above). The *jus victoriae* or “right of the winner” is a term found in several Latin authors (see Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.4.116; Tacitus, *Histories* 4.74.1; Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch* 1.167).
117. A similar position was taken by some philosophers who held that there was no reason to argue with someone who approves nothing (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.6.17).
118. Alypius is comparing Licentius’s behavior to the braggart Numanus rather than Aeneas’s virtuous son Ascanius, who kills Numanus with a *telum* or arrow—translated here as “weapon”—through the head (see Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.590–637).
119. Possibly, about the issue of “verisimilitude” and “probability” being one of mere semantics (see 2.10.24).
120. See 2.9.23 above.
121. See 1.5.15 above.
122. See 2.12.27 above. Some manuscripts have “that inquiry of yours [Augustine’s].”
123. The soul must be purified before it can know the highest truths (see Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.7).
124. *Animadverto* can also mean to chastise or find censurable.
125. Literally, to show the neck, a sign of subservience or surrender.

Book Three

1. November 22, 386 (see Time Line).
2. It was not unusual for even private bathhouses to have warm water and rooms heated by hot air (see Cicero, *Letter to Quintus His Brother* 3.1). Thus, the baths would have been an attractive alternative to the outdoors on a cold and overcast day. See *On the Happy Life* 1.6, 4.23; *On Order* 1.8.25, 2.6.19.
3. See 2.5.12 above.
4. See 1.2.5 above, where both Licentius and Trygetius agree that the search for the truth is paramount (see also 1.9.25).
5. *Studia* also means “enthusiasms” or “pursuits.” See 2.1.1 above, where Augustine speaks of the importance of applying oneself to good pursuits (*bona studia*).
6. See 2.4.10 above. The verses may be those of Vergil rather than Licentius. The contrast would then be between Trygetius’s delight in Vergil’s poems and Licentius’s study of Vergil’s verses (see Pucci, *Augustine’s Virgilian Retreat*, 52–59).
7. See 1.1.1 above; see also Cicero, *On the Ends* 1.19.63; *Tusculan Disputations* 5.9.25.
8. See 1.1.1 above, where Augustine juxtaposes Virtue’s “right” to Romanianus with Fortune’s.
9. The position that Alypius disagrees with is this: “Fortune’s only power is to provide bodily necessities, and these necessities cannot be attained without her willing it.” Alypius wants to grant the wisdom-seeker the ability to acquire the bodily necessities of life regardless of Fortune’s help, and he does not want to see the wise man in any way beholden to Fortune’s control (see “Fortune and the Search for Wisdom [3.2.2–3.3.5]” in the Commentary).
10. The mythical Daedalus successfully crossed the Aegean Sea using wings he had fashioned out of wax and feathers—unlike his son Icarus, who flew too close to the sun and perished when his wings melted. There are echoes here of Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.8.
11. *Habitus* can mean a disposition or habit, but in *On Rhetorical Invention*, Cicero defines it in terms of possession (1.25.36). For more on “having” or “possessing” wisdom or God, see *On the Happy Life* 2.10–11, 3.19–21; *Soliloquies* 1.1.3.
12. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.24.77.
13. A *praescriptio* can also mean a demurrer, an objection that grants the facts as they are presented by the opposition but still maintains that they do not sustain the opposition’s main accusation.

14. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.35.112, where Cicero says: “And even now it seems to me that my treatment is too restricted. For when there is an [open] field in which speech can frolic, why do we drive it into such confined straits and into the thickets of the Stoics?” Alypius’s statement here is in contrast to Augustine’s earlier worry that he would not be able “to stroll about” carefree with Alypius as his adversary (see 2.7.17 above).
15. Augustine is drawing attention to the relation between having something (*habet*) and being in possession of something (*habitu*).
16. Or “habit” (see note 11 above).
17. See 2.13.30 above.
18. See 2.9.23 and 2.13.30 above.
19. See 2.9.23 and 2.13.30 above.
20. See 3.3.5 above.
21. A more literal rendering of this pun would be “you will not be unwrapped just because you are wrapping yourself up” (*non ideo, quia involvis, evolveris*). For another use of the metaphor of unwrapping, see 1.8.23 above.
22. See the preceding paragraph.
23. Augustine borrows the last line of Tacitus’s *A Dialogue on Orators* examining the decline of oratory in the empire (42). He uses the same line in *On Order* 2.6.18.
24. Helicon (now called Zagara) is a mountain in Boeotia that Greece once considered sacred to the Muses, the divine sources of artistic inspiration (see *On Order* 1.3.6). Augustine later regrets mentioning the pagan Muses, even though he made the allusion in jest (*Retractations* 1.3.2). Socrates likewise refers to the Muses playfully in Plato’s *Phaedrus* 237a et passim.
25. That is, only one course was served.
26. For a similar incident, see *On the Happy Life* 2.8. See also 2.4.10 above.
27. “Your own verses” may refer to Licentius’s own compositions or to the verses of Vergil that Licentius has made his own during their study of the *Aeneid* (see 1.5.15 above); similarly, “Greek tragedies” may be a reference to “those tragic Greek plots found in the *Aeneid*” that Licentius does not understand (Pucci, *Augustine’s Virgilian Retreat*, 68). If this is the case, the contrast is between hearing the Vergilian verses that Licentius understands (which Augustine would prefer) and hearing Licentius sing verses that he does not understand, a scenario that would make him resemble the pet parrots and ravens that the Romans taught to speak (see Ovid, *The Loves* 2.6; Pliny, *Natural History* 10.117, 121; Statius, *The Woods* 2.4.29). A *cavea* designates the seating section of an auditorium as well as a birdcage, and so the description may also be an allusion to the theater. Finally, the image hearkens back to 2.3.7 above.

28. The verb here for tasting, *libare*, can also mean to offer in libation.
29. During the week that transpired between the conversations recorded in books two and three of *Against the Academics*, Licentius's obsession with the study of poetry suddenly yielded to a passion for philosophy during a discussion held between him and Trygetius (see *On Order* 1.3.8–1.4.10). Augustine's statement also ties into his praise of Licentius as a model for his father in 1.1.4 above.
30. Reading *circus* from the β and μ manuscripts (translated here as “race track”) instead of *circulus*, a zone or orbit. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas's son Ascanius and his peers use a long track for elaborate equestrian maneuvers that are compared to the zigzagging Labyrinth in Crete, in which “error, undiscovered and irretraceable, would break all signs of finding a way out” (5.590–91; see 5.545–88). Pucci suggests that the contrast is between the “circle of the liberal arts” and a “vicious circle” (*Augustine's Virgilian Retreat*, 68).
31. The expression “Tuscan quarrel” (*tuscum iurgium*) is not found in any other extant Latin literature: more likely than not, Augustine is being ironic in calling it famous. In addition to Vergil's *Eclogue* 3, Augustine is drawing from two different classical sources: Quintilian's *Institutes* 8.6.53 and its definition of an *enigma*, and Cicero's *On the Orator* 3.19.69. The latter is especially important, for it is there that Lucius Crassus chides orators who remain in the “barbarous, rocky, dangerous” Tuscan Sea of forensic proceduralism instead of sailing into the wide open Mediterranean Sea of philosophy. Augustine seems to be leveling a similar accusation at Alypius, especially in light of his plea to return to the gymnasia of Cicero (see below).
32. Vergil, *Eclogues* 3.104–7. In the third Eclogue, two rustics, Damoetas and Menalcas, compete for the honor of being the best poet. In the course of their contest, Damoetas offers the riddle about the sky and Menalcas replies by challenging him with the riddle about the flowers. Servius contends that the answer to Damoetas's riddle is the bottom of a well, for from that perspective the sky appears no more than three ells wide (an ell being a unit of measurement roughly comparable, it is speculated, to the distance between one's elbow and fingertips). The answer to part of Menalcas's riddle is the hyacinth, which according to legend sprang up after the death of either Hyacinthus or Ajax (there were different versions of the story) and thus bore some of the letters of their names on its petals (see Servius, *Commentary on the Eclogues* 3.104–7). According to T. Keith Dix (“Vergil”), however, the answer to both riddles may be the same place.

33. See 3.16.35 below. A reference to Cicero as the model philosopher, who sets several of his philosophical dialogues in one of his two gymnasia on his private estate in Tusculum: one of the gymnasia was named the Lyceum after Aristotle and the other the Academy after Plato (see Cicero, *On Divination* 1.5.8 and *Tusculan Disputations* 2.3.9, respectively). A gymnasium was a separate building or annex commonly found in Roman villas. Although it was intended for bodily exercise, it was often adorned with beautiful works of art (see Cicero, *Epistle to Atticus* 1.4; *Against Verres* 2.14.36) and also became, at least for Cicero, the setting for wrestling matches of an intellectual nature. Bathhouses on Roman estates were also usually separate buildings, and they could also be lavish, incorporating some of the features of the gymnasium (see Juvenal, *Satires* 7.233). Augustine, however, refers to the baths on Verecundus's villa in Cassiciacum as *balneolae*, "modest baths." In so doing, he employs the word Seneca used to denote the austere, simple baths of the republican era as opposed to the more luxurious baths of imperial times (*Epistle* 86). Verecundus's bathhouse was also rather humble given the fact that it was not perfectly designed (see *On Order* 2.11.34). There is an unintentional irony in Augustine's chiding Alypius for not being sufficiently mindful of the gymnasia, for in the *Confessions* he criticizes Alypius for being *too* attentive to them (see *Confessions* 9.4.7).
34. See 3.3.5 above and 3.12.29 below; *Soliloquies* 2.11.20; Cicero, *Academica* 2.13.40, 2.32.103.
35. In legal terminology, an *intentio* (translated here as "plea") is the conclusion to an attorney's petition (see Gaius, *Institutes* 4.41).
36. Proteus was a sea god, the ever-truthful "old man of the sea" who would turn into terrifying shapes when captured in an effort to escape. If, however, the captor held on to him no matter what, Proteus would relent and answer his captor's question (see Homer, *Odyssey* 4.360–570; Vergil, *Georgics* 4.387–452). In the *Odyssey*, it is Proteus's daughter the goddess Eidothea ("image of the god") who has pity on the hapless Menelaus and tells him where and how to capture her father (Homer, *Odyssey* 4.360ff). Augustine also discusses Proteus in *On Order* 2.15.43. In both cases, he refers to the divine being who helps uncover Proteus as an *index*, a guide or witness. See 3.6.13 below.
37. See 3.5.11 above.
38. Augustine is resourcefully interpreting the *verum* in a verse from the *Georgics*, *verum ubi correptum manibus vinclisque tenebis* (4.405), to mean "true" rather than "but." Hence the verse would read "when you shall hold the truth held fast by [your] hands and chains" instead of "but when you

shall hold [Proteus] held fast by [your] hands and chains.” Or, he may simply be practicing his general conviction, which he mentions here, that images or passages from pagan literature can be put to good philosophical or Christian use, sometimes through a significant modification of the original meaning.

39. In addition to signifying a knot, a *nodus* can designate a node or point of intersection (see *On Order* 1.5.14; I explore this alternative meaning in the Commentary). Augustine is also playing on the double meaning of *comprehensio* as an intellectual comprehension and a physical seizing or grabbing onto.
40. For the difference between the mind’s grasp of sensible and intelligible reality, see *Soliloquies* 1.3.8; *On the Teacher* 12.29; *Confessions* 3.7.12, 7.1.2, 7.7.11, 10.8.12–10.12.19.
41. The other two goods are mentioned in 3.5.12 above.
42. Cicero, *On Friendship* 6.20.
43. More literally, spreading certain clouds around. The image may also hear-ken to Romanianus’s mind being in the clouds (see 2.1.2).
44. Cicero openly professed to be an Academic (see *Academica* 2.3.8 and 2.31.99).
45. Since *auspicato* literally refers to the pagan practice of taking up auspices or auguries, Alypius cautiously adds this qualifier.
46. For Cicero’s preference of an uninterrupted speech to questioning and being questioned, see *On the Ends* 1.8.29. A common element of a Ciceronian (as opposed to Platonic) dialogue is a long concluding discourse.
47. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.9.17.
48. Augustine resigned from his professorship of rhetoric approximately a month earlier citing poor health. His greater reason, however, was to enter the Church, which forbade its members to be professional rhetoricians (*Confessions* 9.1.1–9.2.4).
49. Ancient orators were trained to make their voices carry far since they spoke without the benefit of a microphone.
50. Augustine may have borrowed this image from St. Ambrose, who speaks of Elijah being carried to heaven in a fiery chariot “as a moderator of human minds” and “a good charioteer” (*On Naboth* 15.64). But he may also be alluding to Plato’s allegory of the chariot in which reason is a charioteer moderating two winged horses: the irascible and appetitive parts of the souls (see *Phaedrus* 246a–54e).
51. Augustine is giving a left-handed compliment: it *seems* that Cicero’s argu-ment is strong to some, but not to him. Augustine’s praise of the passage’s

wonderful wit or urbanity (*mira urbanitas*) is evocative of Cicero's description of irony as *urbana dissimulatio*," which occurs "when you are jesting straight-faced in the whole tenor of the speech, when what you are saying is different from what you are thinking" (*On the Orator* 2.67.269–70).

52. This passage is from one of the lost books of the second edition of the *Academica*, the so-called *Academica posteriora* (fig. 20 [Müller]; see also the Introduction to this volume). Some scholars think that most of chapter 16 is as well, whereas others suspect that it is an extrapolation by Augustine. The clause *ex quo posse probabiliter confici*, translated as "from this it can be concluded in all probability," has the sense of a plausible or persuasive inference.
53. Chrysippus (ca. 280–ca. 206 B.C.) was the third head of the Stoics, the successor of Cleanthes and Zeno. He is said to have written more than seven hundred treatises, of which only a few fragments remain (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.24.75). Because of his influence, Chrysippus is considered the cofounder of Stoicism. As an old saying has it, "If Chrysippus had not existed, there would have been no Stoa."
54. The expression *inde ad iurgium* is borrowed from Terence about a character who insists on something until a quarrel breaks out (see *The Eunuch* IV.i.626).
55. In Stoic thought, *honestas*, or the honorable, sums up the entire life of virtue or moral worth.
56. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.45.139.
57. Whereas the Stoics taught at the Porch (*stoa*) of Peisianax in Athens, Epicurus taught in his garden not far away. Although the typical Latin word to signify Epicurus's Garden school is *hortus* (see Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.33.93), Augustine uses *hortuli*, a diminutive word in the plural that pokes fun at Epicureanism (see Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.43.120). And Augustine's scenario of Epicurus calling for reinforcements may be inspired by Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.21.50.
58. Cicero refers to the Stoics and Epicureans as *Graeculi* or "puny Greeklings" (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.35.86). Augustine does not disagree with the put-down, but he extends it in the next sentence to the Academics by using a similar diminutive to describe them: *jacanticulus*, or "puny braggart."
59. Philosophers were known by a cloak they wore called the *pallium*; the ferules or rods used to discipline children in the schools are contrasted here with the more intimidating cudgels, commonly carried by the Cynics.
60. The Cynics, or "canine philosophers," were an ancient school of thought that blatantly rejected all social conventions and aspired to resemble dogs

- (see *City of God* 14.20). Augustine calls their cudgels “Herculean aids” because the cudgel was Hercules’s weapon of choice.
61. The address has a Socratic echo (see Plato, *Apology* 24e, 27b, 29d, 34d).
 62. Or, “hidden [*secreta*] from the people.” Plato’s school was named after the Academy, the grove outside the city of Athens where Plato taught his disciples (see Diogenes Laertes, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 3.7–8). Diogenes attributes the name to a man called Hecademus, which can be interpreted to mean “away from the people” (*hekas* + *demos*).
 63. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.11.34 and 2.24.77. See also 2.5.11 above and 3.9.21.50–51.
 64. See 3.4.10 above.
 65. *Quemadmodum vivat* can also mean “how he should live.”
 66. That is, the case should be closed or thrown out of court.
 67. Licentius has articulated a similar position on behalf of the Academics (see 1.3.9 above). On wisdom being with God, see 2.1.1 above.
 68. Even if the human soul is immortal, a human being as a whole does not exist without both body and soul (see *On the Happy Life* 2.7).
 69. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.11.34 and 2.35.112. The word translated here as “impression” is *visum*, Cicero’s translation of the Stoic term *phantasia* (see also 3.9.10 above). Zeno’s definition here pertains to “cataleptic” (comprehensible or perceptible) impressions, which allegedly confer true knowledge (see “Academic Skepticism” in the Introduction).
 70. For a related discussion on this topic, see *Soliloquies* 2.8.15.
 71. In *On Rhetorical Invention*, Cicero defines *complexio*, translated here as “dilemma,” as a situation in which one is blamed no matter which option one chooses (1.29.45). In this case, Arcesilaus is blameworthy if Zeno’s definition is true and blameworthy if it is false (or rather, if one can perceive that it is false).
 72. See 2.5.11 and 3.9.18 above.
 73. See 3.5.11 above; Cicero, *Academica* 2.18.59.
 74. In Stoic and Epicurean thought, *enargeia*—translated by Cicero into Latin as either *perspicuitas* (perspicuity) or *evidentia* (obviousness)—is a criterion of truth that has the power to indicate what a thing is (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.6.17–18 and 2.14.45–2.15.46). Carneades, on the other hand, taught that *enargeia* was subjective but not objective: he granted that *enargeia* could be a feature of an impression relative to the perceiving subject, but he denied that it could be a feature of an impression relative to the object being perceived. For Augustine’s use of the term *rerum evidentia*, see *Enchiridion* 2.8; *Against Cresconius* 2.5.7; *Against Faustus* 13.10; *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 12.3; and *Against Julian* 2.5.14, 4.15.78.

75. Chrysippus maintained that sense-perception was a valid source of knowledge (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.24.75).
76. For Augustine's use of "divine," see 1.1.1 and 1.1.3 above.
77. Augustine echoes the language of the Stoic spokesman Lucullus when speaking of Philo of Larissa, who, in overthrowing (*evertere*) Zeno's definition, found himself in precisely the position he was trying to avoid, namely, without a criterion separating the known from the unknown (*Academica* 2.6.18).
78. See Vergil's account of the battle between Hercules and the bestial Cacus (*Aeneid* 8.184–279).
79. Augustine is most likely referring to his interlocutors in the dialogue. Licentius initially upheld Carneades as a wise man (1.3.7) but turned on him after Augustine's argument about the true and the verisimilar (2.12.27); this argument could be the "something or other" that Augustine threw at Carneades. Alypius, who was pressed into service to fight on Carneades's behalf (2.8.21), came to his defense after Licentius abandoned him (2.12.28); Alypius accused Licentius of hurling insults at Carneades instead of a weapon (*ibid.*). Finally, Augustine and the ghost of Carneades are currently battling under the scrutiny (*examen*) of the "judges," Licentius and Trygetius (3.3.6). These same judges, who are eager to see Augustine and Alypius debate, are probably also pressuring him to hurry up (see 3.7.15 and 3.20.45).
80. For Augustine's legal imagery, see 2.5.11 above. Alypius stopped "fighting" at 3.7.14.
81. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.41.127–28.
82. Unlike Democritus, his predecessors Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Xenophanes believed in the coexistence of innumerable worlds (see Augustine, *City of God* 8.2 and 18.26).
83. *Corpuscula*, or minute bodies, is the Epicurean term for atoms (see Cicero, *Academica* 1.2.6). An *ancillula*, translated here as "petite chambermaid," is a diminutive term for a little serving maid.
84. Epicurus revised Democritus's theories on atoms: instead of falling straight down in a void (by virtue of which the world was created), Epicurus introduced the notion of a random "swerve" in their movements. Introducing the random in this way, however, abolishes the notion of causation and hence the possibility of philosophical investigation. Epicurus has thereby squandered his philosophical inheritance (see Cicero, *Academica* 1.2.6; *On the Ends* 1.6.17; *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.25.69; and *On Fate* 10.21ff.).
85. See Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.8.19; *Academica* 2.38.119.

86. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.24.59.
87. See *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.25.69–71.
88. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.15.47–48.
89. In the *Soliloquies*, Augustine compares the senses to a (reliable) ship that reaches (but cannot step onto) the dry land of intelligible realities (1.4.9).
90. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.7.19 and 2.25.79.
91. In Latin, *verum* can signify either what is real or what is true. Optical illusions may not be true, but they are real optical illusions, operating according to an intelligible nexus of cause and effect.
92. Towers on shore appear to be moving from a moving ship, and feathers around a dove or pigeon's neck appear to change color depending on the viewer's perspective (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.7.19 and 2.25.79). The examples of the "bent" oar in water and the "moving" tower are used in the *Soliloquies* as instances of *falsehood* (2.6.10).
93. Being deceived or not comes into play on the level of only assent, not perception per se (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.32.105). Strictly speaking, therefore, the bodily senses are incapable of deceiving (see *Soliloquies* 1.7.14).
94. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.24.76.
95. The skeptic Sextus Empiricus used examples of this kind to undermine confidence in assenting to the truth, such as honey tasting sometimes bitter and sometimes sweet, color seeming red in one instance and white in another, myrrh smelling pleasant to a healthy person and unpleasant to someone with a headache, and water feeling too hot to people with a fever but lukewarm to others (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 2.6.51–53).
96. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.5.14. For examples of similarly irrefutable knowledge, see *On the Happy Life* 2.7; *Soliloquies* 2.1.1.
97. Cyrenaicism was a hedonistic school of philosophy similar to Epicureanism in its emphasis on sensual pleasure as the highest good and on immediate sensation as the only true knowledge (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.7.19–22 and 2.42.131).
98. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.8.31–32 and 2.46.142; see also 3.17.37 below.
99. See 3.17.37 below.
100. For the dove's neck, see 3.11.26 above. The "uncertain cry" may refer to a sound that could come from either a bird or a cuckoo clock (see *Soliloquies* 2.6.12), from a woman or from a male falsetto (*ibid.*), or from a cat or a human infant (Peter King's example [King, *Augustine*]). According to Cicero, Chrysippus the Stoic mentioned phenomena such as these as examples of sense-deception but provided a weak refutation of them.

- Carneades, in turn, tried to use the same examples against the Stoics and Epicureans (see *Academica* 2.27.87–88).
101. Literally, six hundred other things, the preferred Roman colloquialism for a well-nigh infinite amount.
 102. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.25.79.
 103. See Cicero *Academica* 2.42.129; *On the Ends* 2.3ff, 3.9.30. By the “high point” (*finis*) of the good Augustine is referring to that beyond which nothing can be sought or desired. See Epistle 118.3.13: “For someone is happy when he enjoys that for the sake of which he wants everything else, since it is now being loved, not for the sake of something else, but for its own sake. And so, the high point (*finis*) is said to be there because at this point nothing is found toward which it can go forth or to which it is related. There one finds the desire’s rest, there the assurance of enjoyment, there the most tranquil joy of a perfect will.”
 104. In the *Retractations*, Augustine writes that it would have more accurate (*verius*) to say that man’s highest good is in God, “for in order to be happy, the mind enjoys Him as its supreme good” (1.1.4). See Cicero, *Academica* 2.42.129.
 105. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.16.51–2.17.52.
 106. Terence, *Lady of Andros* 350; *Phormio* 763.
 107. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.16.51.
 108. Augustine continues to use the terminology of Cicero’s *Academica*. In 2.8.26, Cicero equates *conclusio* (translated here as “argument”) with the Greek *apodeixis* and defines it as “a reasoning that leads from things perceived to something that was not being perceived.”
 109. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.28.91–2.30.98; *Topics* (*Topica*) 13.54–14.57.
 110. See 3.3.5 and 3.4.10 above; Cicero, *Academica* 2.13.40, 2.32.103.
 111. See *On the Happy Life* 2.11.
 112. In logic, *modus ponens* is where *p* implies *q*; *p* is true; therefore, *q* must be true.
 113. Disjunction elimination is the inference that if *p* implies *q* and *r* also implies *q*, then if either *p* or *r* is true, *q* must be true.
 114. See 2.10.24 above.
 115. The word here for “petty syllogism” is *rationicula*, translated elsewhere as “succinct bit of reasoning” (see *On the Happy Life* 2.15; *Soliloquies* 1.15.29, 2.11.20). Cicero uses it as a term of disparagement for a false or trifling argument (see *Tusculan Disputations* 2.12.29 and 4.19.43; *On the Nature of the Gods* 3.29.73).
 116. Augustine has been applying this rule all along (see 1.3.8 above).

117. For the significance of different modes, see Cicero, *Academica* 2.30.96.
118. See *On Order* 2.13.38.
119. The Liar Paradox. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.29.95: “If you say that you are lying and what you are saying is true, are you lying or speaking the truth?” (see also 2.30.96).
120. See 3.5.11 above.
121. For Alypius’s “discovery,” egged on by Augustine’s interrogation, see 3.4.9–10 above.
122. That is, Greek cunning, a phrase Vergil uses to describe the Greeks’ successful use of the Trojan Horse (*Aeneid* 2.106, 152).
123. Augustine’s metaphor of a mountain (*moles*) is elaborated in *On the Happy Life* as a volcanic mountain (*mons*) of pride draped in a “deceitful light” that blocks the harbor of true philosophy (1.3; see also *Aeneid* 1.159–63).
124. See 3.4.9 above.
125. Only a wise man could know that there is no wisdom; but if he is wise, he is wise by virtue of wisdom, the existence of which he denies. Such a position is absurd or self-referentially incoherent.
126. A reference to Alypius (see 3.3.5–3.4.9 above).
127. See 3.4.10 and 3.9.19 above.
128. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.20.66.
129. Cicero, *Hortensius* frg. 100 (Müller).
130. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.9.27.
131. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.21.67.
132. Literally, if assent turns the mind toward no thing (*nulla res*).
133. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.21.68.
134. Augustine has in mind the Stoics (see the following footnote).
135. See 2.5.12 above. The Stoic *apraxia* argument is that Academic skepticism destroys the ground for all action (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.8.25, 2.12.39, 2.19.61–62, 2.33.108). The Academic response was their doctrine of the probable or the truth-like (see 2.5.12 above).
136. That is, teaching rhetoric (see *Confessions* 4.2.2, 8.6.13, 9.5.13). For a while as a rhetorician, Augustine thought that the Academics were right (see *Confessions* 5.10.19 and 5.14.25).
137. See 1.4.11–12 above, where Licentius argues that someone heading for far-away Alexandria on the right road cannot be said to be in error. Augustine is reusing the metaphor but making a contrary assertion.
138. A *samardocus* or *samardacus* (literally a juggler) is a non-Latin word of uncertain origin. It may have been common in Africa; however, Ambrosiaster, whom scholars speculate was from Rome, uses it (*Question* 114.4) and so

- does St. John Chrysostom, though he immediately adds the Greek equivalent as if the term were not well known (*Homily* 17, on the Epistle to the Ephesians).
139. For more references to the soul's falling or sinking in the Cassiciacum dialogues, see *On Order* 2.17.45; *On the Happy Life* 4.33; and *Soliloquies* 1.14.25.
 140. *Cessat*, translated here as "remiss," can also mean "inactive." The imaginary Academic interlocutor here is responding to the Stoic *apraxia* charge of blameworthy inaction (see 2.5.12 and 3.15.33).
 141. See Cicero, *On Divination* 2.1.5. In *On Duties*, Cicero states that we cannot all be like Hercules, who, coming upon the diverging paths of Virtue and Pleasure, had the liberty to debate all day long which one to take (1.32.118). With his own metaphor of a fork in the road, Augustine has been turning Cicero's own example against him.
 142. Cicero was consul in 63 B.C., the highest elected political office of the Roman Republic.
 143. Both editions of Cicero's *Academica* take place in Cumae, a town not far from Naples, Italy. Book one of the first edition (the *Academica priora*) is at Catulus's villa (2.3.8, 2.35.80), and the second edition (the *Academica posteriora*) takes place in Cicero's villa (1.1.1). Although other Ciceronian dialogues take place in a gymnasium on one of Cicero's estates, neither edition of the *Academica* mentions a gymnasium. Augustine is instead playing on the double meaning of *gymnasium* as a familiar philosophical location and a school of thought.
 144. Augustine later states that he does not like the fact that he used this expression, which comes from Terence's *Eunuch* II.iii.331 (*Retractations* 1.1.4). Although Augustine does not tell us why, we can presume that it is because he eventually comes to view swearing as a "bad, bad, bad, and really bad habit" (*Sermon* 308.3.2; see *Against Fortunatus the Manichaeon* 2.22; *On Lying* 28). Elsewhere Augustine confesses that before his conversion he had this very bad habit (*Sermon* 180.9.10).
 145. *Flagitia ac facinora*. In later writings Augustine will speak of *flagitia* as disordered desires or misdeeds that corrupt one's own person and *facinora* as disordered desires or misdeeds that harm another (see *Confessions* 3.8.15; *On Christian Doctrine* 3.10.16).
 146. See Sallust, *Catiline* 20. Cicero calls parricide of the fatherland (such as Catiline's high treason) the most horrible and dreadful of all murders (*On Duties* 3.21.83).
 147. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.3.7.

148. *Consilium* can also mean a plan or strategy.
149. For Augustine's other remarks about Plato, see *Soliloquies* 1.4.9; *Epistles* 1.1, 7.1.2. In the *Retractations*, however, Augustine writes: "Not without good reason am I also displeased with the praise with which I extolled Plato or the Platonists or the Academic philosophers insofar as such praise is inappropriate for unreligious men, especially for those against whose great errors Christian doctrine must be defended" (*Retractations* 1.1.4).
150. See Cicero, *On the Commonwealth* 1.10.16.
151. Pythagoras of Samos (ca. 570–ca. 495 B.C.) was a mathematician and astronomer who founded a philosophical school in the Greek colony of Croton in southern Italy (aka Magna Graecia). The teachings of the Pythagoreans were a closely guarded secret, though much of their doctrine probably had to do with the numerical dimensions of reality. According to Cicero, Pythagoras was the first person to call himself a philosopher (*Tusculan Disputations* 5.3.8–9). See *On Order* 2.20.53, 54.
152. Pherecydes of Syros (one of the Cyclades islands off the coast of Greece) lived around 549 B.C. He is said to be Pythagoras' teacher and the author of a semimythological book on the origin of the universe. According to Cicero, Pherecydes is reputed to be the first thinker to claim that the soul is immortal (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.16.38).
153. Ancient legends of Pythagoras have him traveling to Egypt and throughout the Middle East and even to India.
154. According to Scipio in Cicero's *On the Commonwealth*, Plato added Pythagoras's obscurity on many disciplines to Socrates's charm and subtlety with words (1.10.16).
155. For more on dialectic, see *On Order* 2.13.38; *Soliloquies* 2.11.19, 21; Cicero, *On the Ends* 2.6.18.
156. See Plato, *Phaedo* 65a–68b; *Parmenides* 126a–135c; *Timaeus* 28a. See Augustine, *Epistle* 3.1; *On the Teacher* 12.39–40. For more on the sensible and intelligible worlds in the Cassiciacum dialogues, see 3.19.42 below and *On Order* 2.18.47.
157. See Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.2.1.
158. Augustine's use of *mysteria* for "secrets" is doubly suggestive. It is the word that Lucullus uses for Academic doctrine when he accuses Arcesilaus of being esoteric (see below), and it hearkens back to Plato's comparison of philosophical advancement to initiation into the mystery cults of ancient Greece (see *Phaedrus* 249c, 250c, 253c). In Cicero's *Academica* 2.18.60, Lucullus describes an imaginary scenario in which he says to Arcesilaus, "I would like to see what you have discovered," to which Arcesilaus

- replies, “We are not accustomed to revealing it.” Lucullus then asks, “What, after all, are these mysteries of yours, or why do you conceal your opinion as if it were something sordid?” “So that our listeners,” Arcesilaus answers, “may be led by reason rather than by authority.”
159. See *On Order* 1.1.1: “To grasp and retain the order proper to each and every thing, and then indeed to see or explain the order of the whole by which this world is held together and ruled—that, Zenobius, is extremely rare and difficult for men to do. Moreover, even if someone could *do* these things, he might not also be able to *show* it, for he would have to find a disciple who has been made worthy for such divine and hidden matters by a meritorious life or by a certain habit of education.”
 160. In *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* Diogenes Laertes states that Zeno studied under Polemon (7.25), the head of the Academy from 314/313 to 270/269 B.C. (see Cicero, *Academica* 1.9.35).
 161. Cicero calls Zeno an ignoble wordsmith (*ignobilis verborum opifex*) in the *Tusculan Disputations* 5.12.34.
 162. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.9.35; Diogenes Laertes, *Lives* 4.22, 4.24.
 163. See Epiphanius, *Against Heresies* 3.2.9.
 164. *Corpore*, literally, by a body. Zeno’s materialism is attested to by Diogenes Laertes (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.134ff) and Cicero (*Academica* 1.11.40; *Tusculan Disputations* 1.22.79).
 165. “Is [made of] fire”: see the first- or second-century B.C. Peripatetic philosopher Aetius (included in *Stoicorum Veterum fragmenta* no. 157); Diogenes Laertes, *Lives* 7.136–37; and Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.22.57–58.
 166. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.18.60.
 167. In *On Order* Augustine speaks of “certain wounds of opinion which the course of daily life inflicts” that make a withdrawal from the bodily senses difficult (1.1.3). See *Confessions* 4.15.24.
 168. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.12.43–46.
 169. A more literal translation for “appearance of consistency” is “image of constancy” (*imago constantiae*). Augustine may be referring either to the apparent (but not real) consistency of Zeno’s thought or to the apparent (but not real) consistency of corporeal images, which can be deceitful (see *On the Happy Life* 4.33). Zeno and his followers were deceived in exaggerating the importance and reliability of the sensible.
 170. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.24.75 and 2.27.87; see also Diogenes Laertes, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*: “Without Chrysippus, there would be no Stoa” (7.183).

171. See *Academica* 1.12.43–46, where Cicero describes Carneades as a man who was “not ignorant of any part of philosophy” and who was blessed “with an incredible faculty” (46).
172. See 3.15.33 above; see also Cicero *Academica* 2.12.39, 2.19.62, 2.33.108; *On the Ends* 4.25.46.
173. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.11.33.
174. Augustine later writes about this conclusion: “Regarding the Academics, I said that they knew the truth and called what was similar to the truth ‘truth-like,’ and I called this thing that was truth-like which they approved false” (*Retractations* 1.1.4). “This was said incorrectly,” Augustine continues, “and for two reasons. On one hand, [it suggests that] what is in some sense similar to something true is false, but the thing in question is also true within its own genus.” Tin, for example, is a “false silver” because it resembles silver without being so, but it is also a true metal in its own right (*Soliloquies* 2.15.29). The second reason Augustine is displeased with his original statements is that they suggest that the Academics “approved the false things which they called verisimilar, but in fact they approved nothing and affirmed that the wise man approves nothing” (*Retractations* 1.1.4). Augustine tells us that he said this about them because they also referred to the verisimilar as the “probable” (*ibid.*).
175. *Fas* (translated here as “proper”) is what is done in accordance with divine will or law; *profani* (translated here as “uninitiated”) literally refers to those outside the temple (see 1.1.1 above). The pagan religious imagery here echoes Augustine’s depiction of the Academics as keepers of divine mysteries (see 3.17.38 above).
176. Cicero’s friend and teacher Antiochus of Ascalon (130–68 B.C.) also studied under the Academic philosopher Philo of Larissa, although he later came to reject Philo’s teachings (see book two note 76 above). Cicero contends that Antiochus, who thought that the Stoics were authentic disciples of Plato, did not understand Plato correctly (see *Academica* 2.4.11–12, 2.22.69–71, 2.43.132, 2.45.137, 2.46.143; *Tusculan Disputations* 3.25.59; *Brutus* 91.315; *On the Ends* 5.3.7). Cicero’s low opinion of Antiochus’s philosophical acumen is shared by Augustine.
177. The Epicureans were likened to beasts because their notion of the supreme good (pleasure) was indistinguishable from an animal’s (see 3.7.16 above; see also Cicero, *Academica* 1.2.6, 2.45.139). Horace even refers to himself as “fat and sleek with good keeping, a hog of Epicurus’s herd” (*Epistle* 1.4.16).
178. The head of the New Academy who lived from ca. 159–84 B.C. (see Cicero, *Academica* 2.4.11).

179. For this claim about Metrodorus of Stratonice, see Cicero, *Academica* 2.6.16, *On the Orator* 51. Metrodorus was not alone in being suspicious of the intentions of the Academics. The Platonist philosopher Diocles of Cnidus asserted that Arcesilaus used his teaching on suspending judgment to avoid trouble in the same way that the cuttlefish (a relative of the octopus) squirts out a dark ink to evade predators (see Eusebius of Caesaria, *Preparation for the Gospel* 14.6). Similarly, Sextus Empiricus relays what he had heard about Arcesilaus:

He appeared at first glance to be a Pyrrhonian [skeptical] . . . but in truth he was a Dogmatist; and since he undertook to test his associates by the aporetic method, to see whether they were naturally fitted to receive the Platonic dogmas, he seemed to be aporetic, but in fact he did pass on the Platonic dogmas to those of his associates who were naturally fitted. And this was why Ariston said of him: “He is Plato in the front, Pyrrho in the back, and Diodorus in the middle,” for he made use of the dialectic of Diodorus, but he was an outright Platonist. (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.33.234)

180. Particularly, Antiochus tried to introduce Stoic materialism into Platonic thought. Antiochus’s materialism also explains why Augustine links his name to the “sunny stables” of the carnal-minded Epicureans several lines earlier.
181. For Augustine’s understanding of Plotinus’s relation to Plato, see Augustine, *Epistle* 6.1; *City of God* 8.12, 10.2, 9.10, 10.14.
182. Aristotelians were called Peripatetics because of their habit of walking (*peripatein*) as they philosophized (see Cicero, *Academica* 1.4.17; Augustine, *City of God* 8.12).
183. See Augustine, *City of God* 9.4. On the essential agreement between Plato and Aristotle or the Old Academy and the Peripatetics, see Cicero, *Academica* 1.4.17–18, 2.5.15; *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.7.16; *On the Ends* 4.2.5; *For Lucius Murena* 31.64 (where Cicero addresses both Plato and Aristotle as his friends). Plotinus and Porphyry also appear to have believed that Plato and Aristotle were essentially in agreement. Porphyry, for instance, is said to have written a seven-book work (now lost) titled, *That the Opinions of Plato and Aristotle Are the Same* (*Peri tou mian einai tēn Platonos kai Aristotelous hairesin*).
184. See Col 2:8: “Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy . . . according to the *elements of the world*, and not according to Christ” (emphasis added). See also *On Order* 1.11.32.

185. In classical Latin, *clementia* signifies a certain lenience about the failings of others (see Seneca, *On Clemency* 2.3.1: “Clemency is a moderation of the mind regarding the power of punishing, or the leniency of a superior toward an inferior when imposing penalties”). In the Cassiciacum dialogues, Augustine uses “clemency” and “clement” especially in relation to God’s kindness in bringing about the Incarnation (see *On Order* 2.5.16, 2.9.27, 2.10.29; *Soliloquies* 1.1.5, 1.1.6, 1.14.26, 1.15.30).
186. That is, the mystery of the Incarnation, when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14; see Augustine, *Epistle* 11.4). Augustine draws from Neoplatonic philosophy in referring to the Son of God as *intellectus*, Divine Intellect or Understanding (see *City of God* 10.23 and 10.29, where Augustine discusses the Porphyrian teaching that God is the Principle of all things and that God the Son is the *intellectus* of God the Father). Augustine also draws from Plotinus in identifying *intellectus* with Truth, which in Christianity is the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity (see *Enneads* 5.5.1, 5.5.3; John 14:6). But here Augustine, with the facticity of the Incarnation in hand, contradicts the Neoplatonic contention that God does not condescend to us (see Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.3: “Because it exists apart, [*intellectus*] is not a principle that inclines down to us but one to which we incline when we look up”). This passage echoes in some respects Marius Victorinus’s *Commentary on Ephesians* 1.4. Further, Augustine elsewhere associates reason with the Holy Spirit (see *On Order* 2.9.26). This is somewhat puzzling until one recalls that Porphyry’s triad of Existence, Life, and Intellection (*huparxis*, *zōē*, and *noēsis*) was applied, in that order, by Marius Victorinus (after due modification) to the Christian Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (see *Against Arius* 4.21; for an instance of this triad in Plotinus, see *Enneads* 1.6.7). Therefore, when Augustine speaks of “That Most Subtle Reason” calling us to the Supreme God thanks to the Incarnation of Divine Understanding, it is likely that he is alluding to God the Holy Spirit, God the Father, and God the Son, respectively.
187. For more on the precepts and deeds of the Trinity, see *On Order* 2.9.27.
188. Instead of “gaze upon” (*respicere*), some manuscripts have “revive” (*resipiscere*). Returning to oneself gives one the wherewithal to return to God, which is why Augustine here links the two returns (see *Soliloquies* 2.6.9). For the use of “homeland” (*patria*, also translated as “fatherland”) as a symbol for God, see *On the Happy Life* 1.2; *Soliloquies* 1.1.4. For the return to God, see *On the Happy Life* 4.36; *On Order* 1.7.20, 1.8.23;

- Soliloquies* 1.1.2, 1.1.3, 1.1.6, 1.10.17, 1.11.18, 2.6.9. For the return to oneself, see 1.1.1 above. Disputation for Augustine here seems to be a reference to the discipline of philosophy (see *On Order* 2.9.27).
189. See Cicero, *Academica* frg. 21 (Müller), 2.18.60, 2.45.139.
190. His birthday, the occasion of *On the Happy Life*, had been one week earlier.
191. See *On Order* 2.9.26.
192. For other nighttime endings to philosophical dialogues, see *On Order* 2.20.54; Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 3.40.94–95; *On the Ends* 4.28.80.
193. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.12.43.
194. Augustine later writes of this statement: “Also, in comparing the arguments of Cicero that are used in his book *Academica*, I said that the arguments with which I, using most certain reason, refuted those arguments were trifles. Although this was said in jest and, moreover, with irony, I nevertheless should not have said it” (*Retractations* 1.1.4).

Commentary

1. Cicero, *On Duties* 2.20.71.
2. Cicero, *On Duties* 3.5.24.
3. Cicero, *On Duties* 1.26.90.
4. See *Confessions* 3.4.7–8.
5. It is in *On True Religion* that Augustine explicitly attempts to persuade Romanianus to become Catholic. That said, *Against the Academics* is suffused with Christian elements no doubt meant to whet Romanianus’s religious appetite, such as Augustine’s prayer in 2.1.1 and his Trinitarian conclusion beginning at 3.19.42.
6. Diogenes, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.5.
7. See *Academica* 1.3.11.
8. See *Tusculan Disputations* 5.1.2.
9. This topic will be covered in greater detail in my commentary on *On Order*, vol. 3 of *St. Augustine’s Cassiciacum Dialogues* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming in 2020).
10. See Girard, *Violence*; Downey, *Desperately Wicked*, 64–70, 143.
11. A “heuristic” is something that is instrumental in finding (*euriskein*); often, it is a method or series of clues for discovering the solution to a problem.

12. This divine “known unknown” is, again, the mind. It was a common usage in classical philosophy to refer to the human mind as divine (see Cicero, *On Duties* 3.10.44: “Mind is the most important divine thing God has given to man”).
13. See *Confessions* 3.8.16.
14. See Curley, *Augustine’s Critique*. The use of silence to indicate that something is about to turn, or that something has gone wrong, is also used in a key passage in Plato’s *Phaedo*.
15. *On Old Age* 14.49–50.
16. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 26.
17. Trygetius also subscribes to the Stoic notion that only the wise man can possess *scientia*, a view that Augustine explicitly rejects elsewhere on the grounds that even a fool can possess the knowledge of several truths (see *Soliloquies* 1.4.9).
18. See *Aeneid* 4.209–14.
19. See Plato, *Phaedo* 82–83, where those who seek wisdom are free whereas those who do not have souls pinned to the body by the nails of physical pleasure and pain. See also *Phaedo* 65, 66.
20. See “The Threefold End” and “The Platonists” in the General Introduction.
21. A somewhat similar logic motivated St. Justin Martyr, who marveled even before his conversion at the moral beauty and consistency of the martyrs. See *Second Apology* 12.1; *First Apology* 14.
22. See *Confessions* 7.21.27, where Augustine contrasts philosophy and Christianity in the following manner: “It is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded mountaintop, yet not find the way to it and struggle hopelessly far from the way . . . [it is] quite another to hold to the way that leads there, a way guarded by the care of our heavenly General . . . Marvellously these truths graven themselves in my heart when I read that least of Your Apostles and looked upon Your works and trembled.”
23. *On True Religion* 4.6; see 3.3.
24. *On the Happy Life* 4.25.
25. *On Free Choice of the Will* 2.14.37.
26. *Phaedrus* 249d.
27. See *Theaetetus* 199a.
28. *Enneads* 5.3.4.
29. *Retractations* 1.1.3.
30. See *Confessions* 10.27.38.
31. See Ratzinger’s discussion of this topic in *On the Way*, 39ff. In the *Confessions*, this “ache” is apparent in the famous passage where Augustine addresses God

- as “Beauty ever ancient, ever new.” The effect of this Beauty on Augustine’s soul is to make it “pant,” “hunger and thirst,” and “burn” (10.27.38).
32. *Natural History* 6.4.
 33. See *On Order* 1.3.8. Book one of *One Order* takes place during the week’s hiatus between books one and two of *Against the Academics*.
 34. See the General Introduction to this volume.
 35. We have excerpts of only one poem written approximately nine years later by Licentius, and it is not particularly good (see Augustine, *Epistle* 26). Of course, this does not prove that Licentius was as bad a poet at Cassiciacum as he was later in his life: he may have squandered the promise he once had during the intervening years. However, in 3.4.7 Augustine comments that Mount Helicon, the home of the Muses, has failed to satisfy Licentius’s thirst, which may suggest that they have not inspired him or infused him with talent.
 36. See *On Order* 1.8.24.
 37. Augustine’s exact words are “*Bona ergo fides est ex animi sententia*”: “therefore, it is *bona fides* to my mind’s liking.” His use of the word *animus* here may be a reference back to Alypius’s earlier accusation that Augustine is more interested in acting out of his own design (*animus*) than in achieving victory. If so, Augustine is essentially admitting that Alypius’s accusation is correct.
 38. See *On the Happy Life* 2.16, which would have taken place a week before book two of *Against the Academics*.
 39. See “Academic Skepticism” in the Introduction to *Against the Academics*.
 40. *On the Ends* 1.11.39.
 41. See *Confessions* 3.8.16.
 42. See *On True Religion* 38.71; *Confessions* 1.10.16 and 10.30.41ff.
 43. See Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.4, 4.11, 6.20.
 44. See *Against Verres* 3.9.
 45. *Epistle* 1.
 46. See “Academic Skepticism” in the Introduction to *Against the Academics*.
 47. See 1.3.7.
 48. *On the Ends* 4.3.9.
 49. For a summary of Stoic epistemology, see “Academic Skepticism” in the Introduction to *Against the Academics*.
 50. See *On Order* 2.3.8.
 51. *On Order* 1.4.10.
 52. For a succinct overview of the use and history of the term, see Crosson, “Esoteric Versus Latent Teaching,” especially 76–79; for a more exhaustive

treatment, see Melzer, *Philosophy*, 11–52. Augustine does not use the words “esoteric” and “exoteric,” perhaps because they never caught on as transliterated terms in Latin. Cicero uses *exōterikon* (but not *esōterikon*) in reference to Aristotle’s popular writings rather than to a single composition that contains both exoteric and esoteric levels. Augustine himself once received a letter from a Volusianus who described philosophy as something “which you yourself had become accustomed to cherish in the manner of Aristotle, as if it were esoteric” (Epistle 135.1: *philosophiam . . . quam ipse Aristoteleo more tamquam esotericam fouere consueveras*).

53. See Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.7.
54. Lucian, *The Sale of Lives* 26.
55. The most thorough treatment of esoteric literature to date is Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines*.
56. See 1.3.7–8.
57. See *Confessions* 8.12.30.
58. See *Confessions* 9.6.14.
59. To be fair, Augustine will later defend the Academics from the charge that they are spreading clouds or fog (*nebulæ*), a metaphor for confusion or error (see 3.7.14).
60. See the last two sentences of 3.2.4.
61. See “Cover Letter (1.1.1–4)” above.
62. Compare *Against the Academics* 1.1.3 and *Soliloquies* 2.1.1.
63. See Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica* 3.618.
64. See also *Confessions* 7.10.16ff.
65. *Republic* 507b–9c.
66. *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.1177a15.
67. *On the Laws* 1.7.22.
68. See *Enneads* 4.3.1–8.
69. Lonergan, *Insight*, 684.
70. See “The Threefold End” in the General Introduction.
71. For more on Proteus and the intellect, see “3. Self-Knowledge” in my commentary on *On Order*, vol. 3 of *St. Augustine’s Cassiciacum Dialogues* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming in 2020).
72. I think Boersma goes too far when he states that Proteus is “a philosophical representation of the person of Christ,” but I agree with his formulation that Proteus “poetically attests to the possibility of the Incarnation” (Boersma, *Augustine’s Early Theology*, 177, 181).
73. See 1.13.30.
74. This occurs in *On Order* 1.8.24, which chronologically occurs several days before book three of *Against the Academics*.

75. St. Ambrose, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* 7.11.88.
76. *On the Orator* 2.67.269–70. For a similar use of *urbanitas* by Augustine to suggest duplicity, see 3.7.15.
77. Augustine has a similar critique of Cicero's rejection of the Stoic doctrine of fate as injurious to right action in the central chapters of book five of the *City of God*.
78. Presumably, Augustine would grant that assent should also be given to his various disjunctions as a part of wisdom.
79. It is significant that Augustine's examples of true and certain knowledge, such as his various disjunctions, flow from a certain self-awareness or self-knowledge that is not dependent on sensible experience. Even wisdom itself is located "in one's very self" (see 3.14.31). Formulations or concepts derived from the data of sense, on the other hand, can minimize but never eliminate the element of hypothesis; they remain to some extent affected by the nebulousness of prime matter.
80. What Augustine means by a *ratio* that is "congruent with the age" is made clearer in his letter to Hermogenianus: "For it seems to me to be sufficiently congruent with the times that, assuming that something could pour forth pure from the Platonic fountain, it should be channeled among the shadowy and thorny thickets, preferably into the possession of a very few men, rather than flowing out in the open, where it could not in any way be kept pure and undefiled from the bovine herd (for what is more appropriately called "bovine" than thinking that the soul is a body?). I myself believe that it was against men of this kind that the [New Academy] invented an art and method (*ratio*) for hiding the truth" (*Epistle* 1.1).
81. See "The Threefold End" in the General Introduction.
82. "Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you."
83. *Epistle* 1.1.
84. We do not possess a complete edition of the *Academica* but incomplete copies of the two different editions that Cicero issued. The first edition, now called the *Academica priora*, was divided into two books called the *Catulus* and the *Lucullus*, after its main speakers. The second edition, now called the *Academica posteriora*, was divided into four books. Today, we have only the second book of the first edition and the first book (and some fragments) of the second.
85. *Epistle* 1.
86. *Epistle* 118, especially 118.3.16–118.5.33.
87. See *Confessions* 5.10.19 and 5.14.24.

88. See *City of God* 4.27, 4.30–31, 6.4–5, 6.10, 8.4, 9.4, 9.8, 10.26–27.
89. Plato, *Letter* 7.344c. The authenticity of this letter is disputed in modern scholarship, but its views are representative of a disposition common in antiquity.
90. Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 7.3–5.
91. Lucian, *The Sale of Lives* 26.
92. See note 179 above on Metrodorus (book three, *Against the Academics*).
93. Descartes, *Discourse on Method* 3.29, emphasis added.
94. See *On Order* 2.5.16 and 2.9.26–27.
95. Preface for Christmas, 1962 *Missale Romanum*.
96. See *On Order* 2.9.27.
97. See *On Order* 1.1.3–1.2.3.
98. Boersma, *Augustine's Early Theology*, 177.
99. See *Confessions* 6.3.4.
100. See 4.35.
101. See 2.5.16.
102. See *Confessions* 7.10.16.
103. See *On Order* 2.11.30.
104. See *Against the Academics* 3.20.44; *On the Nature of the Gods* 3.40.94–95; and *On the Ends* 4.28.80.
105. See *Against the Academics* 3.14.30 and *Epistle* 1.1.
106. For more on the difference between the shareable and the unshareable, see “The Love of Beauty” above.
107. See *Confessions* 8.12.30.
108. Another indication of the newness of Augustine’s theory is his eagerness to learn from Hermogenianus what he thinks of the last section of *Against the Academics* in particular, about which he is still somewhat hesitant but to which he is still committed as credible and useful (*Epistle* 1.3). In other words, Augustine is asking Hermogenianus for feedback on a still fresh and perhaps untested hypothesis.

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———. *On the Good of Death* (*De bono mortis*).

———. *On the Mysteries* (*De mysteriis*).

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