Reason, Authority, and the Healing of Desire in the Writings of Augustine

Mark J. Boone

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Contents

Abbreviations

c. Acad.	Augustine's *Against the Academics* (*Contra Academicos*)
Civ. Dei	Augustine's *The City of God* (*de Civitate Dei*)
Conf.	Augustine's *The Confessions* (*Confessiones*)
b. Coniug.	Augustine's *On the Good of Marriage* (*de Bono Coniugali*)
Doct.	Augustine's *On Teaching Christianity* (*de Doctrina Christiana*)
Ench.	Augustine's *Enchiridion* (*Enchiridion*)
Lib. Arb.	Augustine's *On the Free Choice of the Will* (*de Libero Arbitrio*)
Mag.	Augustine's *On the Teacher* (*de Magistro*)
Nat. b.	Augustine's *On the Nature of Good* (*de Natura Boni*)
Ord.	Augustine's *On Order* (*de Ordine*)
Retr.	Augustine's *Reconsiderations* (*Retractiones*)
Sol.	Augustine's *Soliloquies* (*Soliloquia*)
Trin.	Augustine's *On the Trinity* (*de Trinitate*)
Util. Cred.	Augustine's *The Usefulness of Believing* (*de Utilitate Credendi*)
vera Rel.	Augustine's *On the True Religion* (*de Vera Religione*)
b. Vita	Augustine's *On the Happy Life* (*de Beata Vita*)

Introduction

Two Ways of Discovering a Good Theology of Desire

Do we really need another book on Augustine? From one perspective, the only sensible answer is no. We have the books *of* Augustine, and that should be enough. We can even imagine Augustine claiming that the *Bible* should be enough; what, next to the Word of God, are the musings of some bishop from Thagaste?

At the same time, Augustine understood that we need other books than the Bible, which is why he wrote so many himself. The Bible alone is not always easy to understand. The truths of the faith were not written in Scripture that they might just sit there until some Christian goes looking for them from time to time. Teachers were appointed, Paul says in Eph. 4. Even *Sola Scriptura* Reformation Christians (including myself) recognize the importance of exegetical sermons, biblical commentaries, and systematic theologies. There is also a place for apologetics, devotional material, and careful studies of particular theological topics.

So there was a need for Augustine's books after all. There is also a place for books *about* an important theologian's books—for commentaries, systematic overviews, and studies of particular theological topics. Augustine is, as McDermott says, "the most influential theologian ever,"[1] and, as Trapè says, "undoubtedly the greatest of the Fathers and one of the great geniuses of humanity, whose influence on posterity has been continuous and profound."[2] He may be simultaneously considered the most important of the church fathers, a notable ancient philosopher, and the founder of medieval philosophy. His writings influenced theologians from Thomas Aquinas to Martin Luther and John Calvin, and philosophers from Boethius to Ludwig Wittgenstein. He is the most influential figure in the shift from ancient to medieval culture, which his books shaped for about twelve centuries to a degree rivaled by few books other than the Bible itself.[3]

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But there are many books about Augustine, and many are very good. Do we really need *another* one? In a word, yes.

Not everything that needs saying about Augustine has yet been said, and some things have been said incorrectly. Some errors revolve around his relationship with neo-Platonism, a philosophical and cultural product of late antiquity rooted in Plato's philosophy. Plato had taught that not all reality is physical. Non-physical reality is superior to physical, and more worth loving. Our minds, attuned as they are to physicality, need training in order to understand non-physical reality. Plotinus and his follower and biographer Porphyry had powerfully developed Plato's legacy. Plotinus' *Enneads* had been of great help to young Augustine, as he describes in *Confessions* VII.[4]

To return to our question and to generalize a bit, Augustine is often taken to be more of a Platonist—and sometimes less of a Christian—than in fact he is. This mistake may take more than one form. Some read Augustine as initially a Platonist and not a Christian until later, and others say that he is always fully Platonist and fully Christian. (We will consider this matter in more detail later.) His thought *is* shaped by neo-Platonism—emphatic of its central teachings, organized around them, interested in similar topics, and so on. Yet it is also shaped by Christianity—emphatic of the Incarnation and the Trinity, organized around the Nicene Creed, and responsive to Scripture and the church as sources of knowledge. His writings are filled with prayer and biblical quotations. His masterpiece the *Confessions* is written in the form of a prayer and imitates the Psalms.

These are both aspects of Augustine's thought, and he has sometimes been interpreted wrongly as a result of overestimating the importance of the neo-Platonic aspect. He wrote very early in *Soliloquies*: *Deum et animan scire cupio*: I yearn to know God and the soul. If we assume that neo-Platonism dominates, we may presume that Augustine has learned its central doctrines—such as that God and the soul are non-physical realities—and is seeking knowledge of them for neo-Platonic ends. Finding him using Christian terminology and concepts and appealing to Christian theology in the early writings (as in *Contra Academicos* 3.19.42), we might then think that Christian theology emerges only to satisfy these neo-Platonic goals. If, however, we assume that Christianity dominates, we may presume that his ends are more like those of a lost sheep returning to the Christian fold—to understand how his soul might be reconciled to God and to overcome the confusions that had long haunted him (as described in the earlier books of the *Confessions*). Finding him using neo-Platonic terminology and appealing to Platonic doctrines in the early writings, we might then think that neo-Platonism appears to satisfy these Christian ends. I think this strategy is closer to the truth: "I yearn to know God and the soul" is a Christian end, and neo-Platonism's metaphysical insights are a means.

As for what has not yet been said, I think Augustine's theology of desire tends to be a bit underappreciated. It is central to his thought, yet is sometimes neglected in favor of more popular topics such as the disputes with the Manicheans, Donatists, and Pelagians; the influence on Western Trinitarianism; the doctrine of original sin; predestination; and so on. Nor has it been considered in many of the exciting books where it may be found.

In short, I think Augustine is not sufficiently understood as a theologian of desire, and that his theology is sometimes oversimplified as a function of Christianized neo-Platonism. This book may be taken as a topical study in Augustine, focused on his theology of desire. It may, however, be taken as an argument that, in the complex interplay of (or the fruitful tension between) neo-Platonism and Christianity, Christianity is dominant. Alternatively, it may be taken as an argument for the importance of Augustine as a theologian of desire and for the importance of desire in his theology. Desire has a central place there and may be traced to all the other theological topics.

That tracing is the business of this book, which studies texts occupying the intersections of two ways Augustine uses to think through things and four topics close to his heart. As I shall show, in each of these texts, theology of desire plays an important role. Moreover, that theology is consistently and distinctively Christian and guided by Christian theology, although it also makes use of neo-Platonic doctrines and themes.[5]

In the remainder of this introduction I shall, first, review some of the relevant territory relating to a theology or a spirituality of desire. Second, I shall review Augustine's two methods of theological investigation, reason and authority. Third, I shall briefly explain the importance of my analysis in the broader scholarly discussion. Finally, I shall summarize the rest of this book.

DESIRE

As Rowan Williams says, an aspect of being human is "that central impulse in human nature which Augustine defined as the unquenchable desire for God and his truth."[6] Or, as Rist says, "we are not what we believe (perhaps the original Stoic view), nor what we want (perhaps the supplementary view of Seneca), but what we love . . . ."[7] Van Bavel says: "Human beings are creatures of longing. . . . Living is longing. It is typical that our earth-bound longings for riches, honor, sensual pleasure, or health, cannot ultimately satisfy us, because they are of a temporal and transitory nature. Human longing grasps higher."[8] Clair, similarly, refers to "the important role of desire in the life of virtue."[9] This a topic on which I find other scholars often touch but rarely study in much exegetical detail.

It is not simply neglected. Scholars sometimes read Bochet's *Saint Augustin et le désir de Dieu*.[10] Nygren's *Agape and Eros* (from the 1930s) covers Augustine and has received much attention,[11] including Burnaby's response in *Amor Dei* (1938).[12] There is also Arendt's *Love and Saint Augustine*.[13] Jeanrond devotes chapter 3 of *A Theology of Love* to Augustine,[14] and chapter 11 of Rowan Williams' *On Augustine* responds to Arendt and Jeanrond.[15] O'Donovan's famous article on *De Doctrina Christiania* spurred conversation with its thesis that Augustine in this text tries to resolve "an outstanding tension" between the command to love both God and neighbor and "the monist principle that God alone is to be loved."[16] More recently, Lombardi's *The Syntax of Desire* considers Augustine's views on desire and its connections to philosophy of language and Augustine's theology of creation. Margaret Miles reconsiders the *Confessions* as a text concerned with love and desire in her *Desire and Delight: a New Reading of Augustine's* Confessions. Van Bavel's *The Longing of the Heart: Augustine's Doctrine on Prayer* considers Augustine's theology of prayer with attention to love and desire. Byassee comments on Augustine's sermons and the desire for and delight in the truths of the Bible.[17] Cristaudo comments on love and desire with a pastoral care for how our loves affect our daily lives.[18] In *Power, Love, and Evil*, Cristaudo applies the Augustinian idea of evil as rooted in disordered love to contemporary social and philosophical problems.[19] Byassee also considers Augustine's theology of love and desire in *Confessions*.[20] Byers considers Augustine's moral psychology in his books and sermons in *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine*.[21] Joseph Clair is beautifully attentive to disordered desires and the means of healing them in the sermons and letters, explaining how Augustine weighs competing goods—but ultimately develops an integrated account of goods.[22] Similarly, Naugle and Smith develop Augustinian theological ethics of love.[23]

This is all well and good, but it seems something is lacking. Nygren's is one of those books telling a grand story of the history of thought and only looks at Augustine to see where he fits into the story. Burnaby focuses on recovering Augustine from the sort of reading employed by Nygren, and indeed rather a lot of scholarship gets involved with this sort of thing.[24] Arendt focuses on a particular political question with a twentieth-century flavor and zooms in on *The City of God*. Miles zooms in on the *Confessions*. Van Bavel mostly focuses on the *Confessions* and the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and proceeds topically rather than exegetically. Lombardi's is another topical study, and considers Augustine in relation to other medieval thinkers. Byers', Byassee's, Cristaudo's, Smith's, Naugle's, and Clair's good work still leaves an enormous swath of the Augustinian corpus without a close exegesis attentive to the central theme of desire. And so on. Sustained exegesis of Augustine's

many wonderful writings which also focuses on desire is surprisingly rare, and what there is has left out most of the books.[25]

Not that there is anything wrong with considering the Augustinian perspective on this or that topic, or comparing his view to that of other thinkers or traditions. And it is important to recover a proper reading of Augustine not subject to the peculiar presumptions of our age. But the texts have their own voice, and we could do with a few more books of the sort that allow them to speak for themselves on love and desire, a central topic for the entire Augustinian corpus—the early as well as the late texts, the lesser-read as well as the most famous.

Hence the need for one or two more books like this one![26] The literature could do with a cross-section of the Augustinian corpus considered through the lens of desire. In order properly to prepare for the endeavor, we should consider Augustine's vocabulary, the problem that motivates his theology of desire, the major concepts of moral thought, and Augustine's place in the broader Western tradition of reflection on desire.

Augustine's Language and the Problem of Desire

Bourke is helpful on Augustine's vocabulary:

> His love terminology is quite complex. *Amor* is the broad generic term that he uses for love: it signifies almost any sort of attraction, psychic or physical. *Dilectio* is less broad: it usually means a high-minded love of intelligible or spiritual objects. *Caritas* names the highest kind of spiritual love, a love of God and of other realities as creatures of God. *Voluptas* is used for any kind of pleasure but it frequently signifies lower sensual satisfaction. *Libido* or *cupiditas* designate lustful craving for sexual and other attractions of bodies. Finally, the term *delectatio* means any kind of psychic delight, ranging from sexual pleasure to joy in the supreme good . . . .[27]

Rist further points out that "Augustine uses the word and concept '*voluntas*' not only to point to beliefs and wants, but to do some of the work of the word and concept '*eros*'—the love of the good and the Beautiful, and the perversions of that love—in the Platonic tradition . . . *voluntas* is often interchangeable with *amor* . . . ."[28]

Nor do our own concepts admit of simple categorizations. We may provide working definitions of some interrelated terms as follows. *Love* (relating to the Latin nouns *amor* and *caritas* and the verb *amo*) is an attachment to an object perceived as having immense worth. Love generally takes one of two forms.[29] *Desire* (relating to the nouns *libido*, *cupiditas*, and *concupiscentia* as well as the verb *concupio*)[30] is the longing to have and enjoy the loved

object, which necessarily occurs only in the *absence* of having. Another form is *enjoyment* or *delight* (relating to the nouns *dilectio*, *voluptas*, and *delectatio* and to the verbs *diligo* and *delecto*), the happy state of having it. The human *will* (*voluntas*) is our faculty of preferring that which we take to be good; when we use it, we *will* (the verb *volo*).[31] *Will* may be a choice or a decision—an act of reason. Alternatively, *will* may be a felt preference, virtually synonymous with *wish* or *desire*. In either case, it is closely related to *seeking* (the verb *quaero*).

For example, consider these uses of the language of desire and love from the texts considered in this volume:

- In *Lib. Arb.* 1.3 Augustine suggests that "what makes adultery evil is inordinate desire (*libido*)," and in 1.4 he reminds Evodius that "inordinate desire is also called 'cupidity' (*cupiditas*) . . . ."[32]
- In *Lib. Arb.* 2.20 Augustine says, "Let us . . . desire (*desidero*) him [Christ] with ardent charity (*caritas*)."
- In *Lib. Arb.* 1.15: "So the eternal law demands that we purify our love (*amor*) by turning it away from temporal things and toward what is eternal."
- In *Mag.* 11.38, Augustine speaking: "To know and love (*diligo*) Him is the happy life which all proclaim they seek (*quaero*)."[33]
- Again, *Mag.* 11:38, Adeodatus speaking: "Christ . . . is disclosed to anyone, to the extent that he can apprehend it, according to his good or evil will (*voluntas*)."
- In *Mag.* 13.46: "With His help, I shall love (*diligo*) Him the more ardently the more I advance in learning."
- In *Ver. Rel.* 45.83: "It is shameful to wallow in the love (*dilectio*) of this last and lowest of good things when you have been granted the privilege of cleaving to and enjoying the first and highest."[34]
- In *Conf.* 1.1.1: "And man desires (*volo*) to praise you."[35]
- *Conf.* 2.1.1: "I propose now to set down my past wickedness and the carnal corruptions of my soul, not for love of them but that I may love (*amo*) Thee O my God. I do it for love (*amor*) of Thy love (*amor*) . . . ."
- *Conf.* 1.2.2: "My one delight (from the verb *delecto*) was to love (*amo*) and to be loved (*amo*)."
- *Conf.* 2.6.12: "The pears were beautiful but it was not pears that my empty soul desired (*concupio*)."
- *Conf.* 13.38.53: "Of You we must ask, in You we must seek (*quaero*), at You we must knock."
- *Ench.* 1.3: "If I answer that God is to be worshipped with faith, hope and love (*caritas*) . . . ."[36]
- *Ench.* 8.24: "Then there came even upon those who did not wish it ignorance of what should be done and desire (*concupiscentia*) for harmful things . . . ."

By means of this rich vocabulary, Augustine is showing us that love as a desire for that which does not satisfy is bad; that love as a desire for that which *would* satisfy, God, is good; and that the *best* state is *having* God and delighting in his goodness. All desire is love, and some desire is better than other desire. Not all love is desire, and some love is better than desire.

We have already begun to explore the difficulty that afflicts human desire. It is one of the most ancient insights that we are not as happy as we would like to be because our desires are too strong for their objects. We want what we cannot be confident of keeping in the future, cannot keep at all, or cannot even get in the first place!

What is it that we want? The usual: money, power, fame, and physical pleasures without limit. We want health, long life, and avoidance of death for ourselves and our loved ones. We want to be widely loved and respected. Yet these are things we cannot get and keep securely because they are largely outside our control. So there is a problem: Desire and the world don't match; they don't fit. Our desires are always running ahead of the world, and the world isn't even trying to keep up.

Great thinkers have tried to solve the problem by making desire and its object fit. Let us consider these strategies, overview the major moral concepts employed by these and other ethicists, and look at Augustine's place in the history of thought on desire.

We might try to modify the world to bring it in line with desire. This is, unquestionably, the right approach with respect to certain of our desires. We desire no more deaths from polio, and we modify the world accordingly using vaccines. Alternatively, we might try modifying desire. This, also, is unquestionably the right approach with respect to certain desires. A baby desires to have his meal *right this instant*, and screams until he gets it. An adult learns to modify her desires to fit within the bounds of the circumstances under which meals are prepared.

An ethics will typically emphasize one of these approaches. In the modern era, René Descartes and Francis Bacon advocate changing the world using science and technology. Machiavelli does the same, only using politics.[37] As a general rule, at the heart of ancient and medieval philosophy is the alternative approach of modifying desire. In traditions including ancient Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Buddhism, this means reducing desire, cutting it down to size—desiring less until our desires fit this world. Desire is too strong, and the way to escape disappointment, achieve satisfaction, and find happiness is to weaken it. Other traditions do not consider the strength of desire a problem (unless perhaps it is too *weak*[38]), but its *direction*. We do not love too strongly, but we love the wrong things. We should desire God rather than the things of this world, or at least desire God *more* than those things, for the problem is that we love things of this world with the love due to God.

This latter approach is taken by Hinduism in the *Bhagavad Gita* as well as by medieval Islamic Sufism, such as in *The Improvement of Human Reason* by Ibn Tufail. More importantly for our purposes, this is the approach of ancient Platonism and of medieval Christianity. Augustine, of course, is central in this tradition.

Moral Concepts and Traditions

There are different moral concepts involved in the study of ethics. Moral philosophers consider happiness, the proper functioning of the human person, moral obligation, the results of our actions, character, our motivations, and the commands of God—to name only some! Different courses in the study of ethics may be charted by choosing or emphasizing some of these concepts rather than others, or simply by selecting one in particular as a starting point. Generalizing somewhat, the history of Western moral philosophy has three traditions which may be understood by considering three pairs of concepts. The first of each pair is what the tradition uses as the starting point for moral investigation; the second of each pair is the fundamental moral concept for that tradition and is also what the tradition aims at. The Aristotelian tradition, which is also the natural law tradition and includes Thomas Aquinas, emphasizes character formation and aims to achieve a way of living consistent with the proper functioning of the human being, which is determined by human nature. The utilitarian or consequentialist tradition, exemplified by John Stuart Mill, emphasizes the consequences or the results of our decisions, and it aims simply at happiness. The deontological tradition, exemplified by Immanuel Kant, emphasizes the motivations or intentions behind our actions, and it aims at satisfying the obligations of moral law.

We should not make too much of these distinctions. That an ethicist emphasizes one moral concept does not mean he has no room for others. Kant and Mill intentionally make room for Aristotelian moral psychology and character formation; Aristotle and Aquinas are ultimately interested in happiness, and so on.[39] Moreover, these are merely different ways of *investigating* right and wrong and do not necessarily lead to different conclusions as to what *is* right or wrong. Confucius, whom I classify as a natural law ethicist, and Mill both agree on the importance of the Golden Rule.[40] (And I myself think that both a Kantian and a Millian method, when properly applied, lead to the same practical conclusion in nearly all circumstances.) Yet these differences are interesting and important, and understanding them can help us understand an ethicist.

So what moral concepts guide Augustine's theology of desire? It falls within the natural law tradition. His ethics is shaped in large measure by his account of the nature of human beings and of reality. The proper function of

humans—and indeed of everything—is central to his ethics. There is, unsurprisingly and like Aristotle himself, a strong emphasis on the importance of habit (for example, in book VIII of the *Confessions*). The goal of achieving happiness is very prominent. Finally, there are frequent references to the commands of God, and, if I am not mistaken, attending them is also a concept of moral obligation.[41]

This makes Augustine's a rich (and complicated) ethics. I have not quite answered my own question: Is Augustine's ethics guided by notions of what is natural and proper or by God's commands? Does his analysis of desire aim at happiness for humans or at satisfying our obligation to obey God? Yes. He takes *both* approaches, just as he employs both reason and authority.[42] There may even be some ambiguity or confusion here—some muddling of moral concepts, a failure to distinguish whether what is right is right because of God's commands or because it is our proper function.[43] It is possible that Augustine simply did not care about this particular question in metaethics; he thought that natural law and God's commands are not in any conflict or competition (resembling in this respect Aquinas after him).

It helps to keep these different concepts in mind while studying Augustine, and to be aware that there are other approaches to a theology or a philosophy of desire. Aquinas is an Augustinian. So is Calvin, who in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book III, chapters 6–10) writes on the importance of having our desires purified and brought in line with God's laws. He stresses the superiority of Christian teaching to philosophical reflection. His only interest in this passage is, so far as I can tell, not our happiness, but simply our obligations to obey God.

Augustine and Desire in the Western Tradition

A number of interesting theologies or philosophies (or both) of desire are linked to Augustine's. Some are tributaries to the Augustinian stream, and some flow from it. Here I shall briefly review the ancient philosophical schools, a few church fathers, Augustine's Cassiciacum dialogues and *Confessions*, and some Christian philosophers who read Augustine.

The schools of ancient Western philosophy developed fascinating therapies for desire. For a more detailed summary, I recommend the primary sources in the ancient philosophers themselves,[44] the more detailed account in the first chapter of my *Conversion and Therapy of Desire*, and two particularly good books on ancient philosophy: Martha Nussbaum's *The Therapy of Desire* and Pierre Hadot's *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*[45]

The Epicurean tradition, since it is known for focusing on physical pleasure, may be mistaken for a defense of the unbridled pursuit of physical pleasures. It is actually their *bridled* pursuit. The virtues were known to be necessary

for achieving happiness. Epicurus recognized that the pursuit of physical pleasures requires moderation. If I attempt to maximize my physical pleasures today by eating three gallons of ice cream, I will end up with considerable pain later.[46] It is necessary to pursue physical pleasures within natural limits.[47] Epicureanism's key insight is that desire must be limited. We can achieve only so much pleasure in this life, and we should desire no more. Desire must be cut down to size. Epicurus in his *Letter to Menoeceus*: "So when we say that pleasure is the goal we do not mean the pleasures of the profligate or the pleasures of consumption . . . but rather the lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul. For it is not drinking bouts and continuous partying and enjoying boys and women, or consuming fish and other dainties of an extravagant table, which produce the pleasant life, but sober calculation."[48] Epicureanism practiced various therapies for healing our souls by thus reordering our desires.[49]

Stoicism, likewise, seeks to place desire within proper limits. Whereas Epicureanism locates happiness in the goods of the body and makes virtue necessary for achieving them, Stoicism locates happiness in the good of the soul, which is virtue. Stoicism teaches that virtue is the only good we need and instructs us to desire no other. Epictetus tells us this in the opening words of his *Enchiridion* or *Handbook* of Stoic doctrine, explaining that our beliefs and desires are within our own power and belong to us. Things like money, power, fame, and physical pleasure are not ours and are outside of our control; we must not desire or pursue them. Stoicism, like other ancient philosophies, consists of a set of practices as much as a set of theories.[50] Their purpose is to reorder desire and bring it within proper limits.[51]

Neo-Platonic philosophy emphasizes the higher, immaterial world. This is metaphysics and also ethics. Immateriality is greater in order of being and also in order of goodness, more worth knowing and having than physical reality. So it is better to *seek*, to desire, to love. Neo-Platonic philosophical therapy redirects our desires toward this higher reality. Naturally, there is an emphasis on asceticism.[52] We might call this the negative aspect of neo-Platonic therapy. Its positive aspect includes its emphasis on virtue[53] as well as its teachings and its program, based in a liberal arts education, for training the mind to recognize and understand immaterial reality.[54] These elements may be distinguished but not separated. (The intellectual, educational, character-building, and affective aspects of ancient or medieval philosophical therapy never *are* separate.) Nor should we presume that the physical is simply evil. Insofar as it is less real than the immaterial, it is evil.[55] However, insofar as it *is*, it is good. One can even find in the Platonic tradition an emphasis on caring for the physical world.[56]

Various church fathers also wrote on desire, including those whom Augustine read or by whom he was otherwise influenced. Here is a short sample from Athanasius, Lactantius, and Ambrose.[57]

Augustine tells us he had heard the tale of the desert monk Antony (*Conf.* 8.6.14-15). This story was also a book by Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*. Although Augustine had not read it (it was written in Greek, which he little liked and poorly understood at the time), hearing the story helped move him to repentance, to the conversion of his heart to God and the reordering of his loves (*Conf.* 8.12.29). Athanasius relates how Antony abandoned worldly pursuits to devote his life to God. He also tells us of Antony's encounter with some Greek philosophers, whom he was able to outdo at their own game through his superior theology and piety.[58] That game: overcoming carnal desires.

Lactantius, one of the great early Latin fathers and like Augustine and Ambrose a great reader of Cicero, wrote *The Divine Institutes*. This book is a systematic theology (or something very similar), well informed of pagan philosophy and redolent of themes we now tend to associate with Augustine. A number of these concern desire. For example, one intriguing passage contains a sentence in which I was originally interested due to its use of a term I had seen in Boethius: *hic terram triumphabit, hic erit consimilis deo, qui virtutem dei cepit*,[59] which could be translated as "This man shall triumph over earth; this man shall be the very likeness of God, who has taken hold of the virtue of God." This is in Book VI, chapter 23 of the *Divine Institutes*, where Lactantius explains that God ordained sexuality for the propagation of the human race; however, Satan corrupts our desires and turns them to the bad and perverse. We must resist sexual sins with "the greatest virtue" and, if we have sex, follow God's "divine law" for it—marriage. It is a high calling for human beings, which makes us the *consimilis deo* or the very likeness of God reigning over earth, to achieve continence and control over sexual desire.

When explaining the meaning of the sacraments to newly baptized Christians (a message Augustine would have received at his baptism), Ambrose tells them that their renunciation of sin includes a renunciation of worldly pleasures: "You renounced the devil and his works, the world with its luxury and pleasures."[60] Then, while commenting on the Song of Solomon, he says of the church that, "renouncing the world, she passed through things temporal and passed on to Christ."[61] The church is redeemed by Christ and now "longs to . . . consecrate all her affections to Christ."[62]

From this glimpse at patristic sources (whose theology of desire is worth several books of its own), a few key themes emerge. We are called to love God rather than the things of this world. This is the requirement of reason, but more importantly the command of God. The things of this world are not necessarily bad, but our God-given interest in them is corrupted into sinful lusts. God's laws and a heroic effort at virtue help to heal us. Christ also heals, for which reason he descended, died, and was raised again; in response, we must love Christ more and more.

As the fathers wrote, so wrote Augustine. The theology of desire is central in the Cassiciacum dialogues, his first writings after he committed his life to Christ (and his earliest surviving writings).[63] *Contra Academicos*, *Against the Academics*, defends the Christian faith against skepticism. It is an account and criticism of the skeptical tradition of the ancient Academics, a school of philosophy rooted in the disputes between Platonism and Stoicism and claiming the loyalty of Cicero himself, who claimed on its behalf that we must seek wisdom and can be happy in the search itself—desiring but not *having* wisdom.[64] Augustine argues that happiness requires the satisfaction of this desire, and that this satisfaction is possible. He even reveals that they were secretly Platonists—they believed in immaterial reality and were skeptical only about knowledge of the *physical* world. The most important objection to skepticism comes near the triumphant end of the dialogue when Augustine proclaims that Christ has made the wisdom we seek attainable for all. Desire not only *needs* to be satisfied if we are to be happy; it also *can* be satisfied.

De Beata Vita, *On the Happy Life*, is Augustine's first classic work of ethics. It is a delightful little dialogue in which his mother and some other relations play important roles. Its theme is that we must desire God, since happiness requires satisfaction of desire and since only God is a good stable enough perpetually to satisfy. The dialogue has some important generally Christian and specifically Augustinian themes, such as that pride is the greatest impediment to happiness and that desire's redirection toward God requires the theological virtues and also prayer.

De Ordine, *On Order*, is a work of metaphysics. It is also Augustine's first sustained attempt to grapple with the problem of evil.[65] Its theme is order. Order is sometimes complex. God can make a good ordered whole out of parts not good in themselves. Order is a metaphysical concept, an insight into the nature of reality; we need education to understand it. At the same time, only an ordered soul can understand order, and so we need virtue. Order, then, is found in both the branch and the root of desire: We should desire to understand order, and we must have ordered desires in order to do so.

Soliloquia, *Soliloquies*, is an investigation of God and the soul in which Augustine converses with his own Reason. Reason raises interesting questions about the relationship of God and the soul, to explore which is precisely the point of *Sol*. God and the soul are also the answer to the question what we should desire—we should desire to know them.[66] This refers to not only one's own soul but also the souls of others—an important step toward Augustine developing his ethic of the overriding importance of the love of God and neighbor.

We will see the same ethic in other texts covered in this book. And, of course, it is developed in Augustine's other books—most notably *De Doctrina Christiana* (*Teaching Christianity*) and the *Confessions*. The latter is

the best-known of his works and contains his best-known analysis of desire. Augustine confesses how he sinned, how he sinned some more, and how he is still sinning. He recounts and reinterprets his life as the story of a sinner saved by grace—a wanderer, a prodigal son.[67] He explains that his sin was desire, and that his healing involved a reorientation of his will to God, a conversion of his love to God. He also demonstrates how he is unable to love others without loving God. In the *ordo amoris*, the order of love, we must love God, the greatest good, with the greatest love if we are going to love his creation rightly. To desire created things for their own sake and without reference to God is to court dissatisfaction as well as to abuse and lose the objects of our affections.

Many Christian thinkers have an Augustinian theology or philosophy of desire, such as the early medieval philosopher Boethius, whose literary masterpiece *The Consolation of Philosophy* is a partially fictionalized autobiography. After being exiled on false charges, philosophical insights comforted Boethius. In his dramatic rendering, he presents himself as a character in his own book—miserable. Philosophy appears to him in the form of a woman and comforts him by reminding him of the meaning of life. Money, power, fame, and physical pleasures are not to be desired; virtue and God are. There are insights from Stoicism. Platonism is more important—especially in Boethius' claims regarding a higher world than the physical. Augustine is more important still: God is to be loved most of all. The healing of Boethius' desires consists above all in their redirection toward God.[68]

Anselm's *Proslogion* is a wonderful little book best known for the (in)famous ontological argument for the existence of God, first presented therein. The book culminates in ethics. It is an ascent text, a meditation through which the soul climbs up from the things of this world toward God— whom it learns to love. Toward the end of the book, Anselm summarizes his Augustinian ethics in a note to himself:

> So why are you wandering through many things, you insignificant mortal, seeking the goods of your soul and of your body? Love the one good, in which are all good things, and that is enough. Desire the simple good, which is the complete good, and that is enough. What do you love, O my flesh? What do you long for, O my soul? It is there; whatever you love, whatever you long for, it is there.[69]

C. S. Lewis is the best-known Augustinian of the twentieth century. Books like *Mere Christianity* and *The Abolition of Man* suggest an influence, but probably Lewis' most significant Augustinian text is *The Great Divorce*. Lewis gives us a glimpse—or a vision or, more precisely, a dream—of the afterlife. It is a realm of higher and greater reality, like Aslan's country no less than Plato's higher world.[70] The afterlife is largely populated by souls

with disordered desires—deeply infected with pride, focused on their own selves to the exclusion of God, of others, and indeed of the rest of the universe. They tend to think of reality as a fleet of satellites orbiting their own selves. There are several salient Augustinian themes in *The Great Divorce*: the disorder of our desires, pride, and the notions that reality comes in degrees and that there are higher realities than the affairs of everyday life. There does appear to be one development of Augustine: Lewis emphasizes pride more than Augustine usually does, and places less emphasis on desire for physical things as a disorder of the soul.

This was only a sampling, neglecting various philosophers and church fathers as well as Aquinas, Bonaventure, and others. It is enough to show, I hope, what a rich nexus of traditions is involved in Augustine's writings. His theology of desire is in part a baptism into Christianity of ancient therapies for desire. Church fathers had done similar things before, but Augustine did more. Later his writings shaped Christian ethics. Augustine is more responsible than anyone else for forging medieval civilization; he shaped Western Christianity and Western culture, carrying forward ancient philosophical insights into the future.

Much of this is well known. What is not so well known is that philosophies and theologies of desire are at the heart of Augustine's influence. These were the headwaters of the Augustinian stream, and these are the ocean into which they flow.

THE TWIN METHODS OF REASON AND AUTHORITY

In *c. Acad.* 3.20.43 Augustine (as character in his dialogue) says:

> Moreover, no one doubts that we are urged on to learn by the twin weight of authority and reason. Therefore, I am certain 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].[71]

Again, in *Ord.* 2.5.16 Augustine says:

> Twofold is the path we follow when we are moved by the obscurity of things: either reason, or at least authority. Philosophy promises reason but it barely frees a very few. Nevertheless, it drives them not only *not* to disdain those mysteries, but to understand them alone, as they should be understood.[72]

He goes on to explain what philosophy teaches, most notably the existence of God, and what authority teaches, most notably the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

What exactly do reason and authority mean here? We might, thinking in modern (or postmodern) ways, define reason as rational belief and trust in authority as irrational belief—perhaps as merely having nothing to do with rationality, perhaps as being in tension or conflict with it. This way of thinking has approximately nothing to do with Augustine. Trusting in the testimony of authority, he tells us in *De Utilitate Credendi* (*On the Usefulness of Believing*) as well as in *Conf.* 6.5.7-8, is rational: It is necessary for life, and even those who most protest against trust-based systems of belief readily trust their parents' claim to being their parents, the claims of geographers about distant cities, and the claims of historians about ancient people. We might even go so far as to suggest that reason is merely the operating of our minds in a rational manner in order to know the truth; we could further define trust in authority as one of reason's necessary operations. This is closer to Augustine's way of thinking, but it is still not quite Augustinian. He emphasizes the *distinction* between reason and authority, not their sameness.

So what *are* they? Reason is understanding, while authority is that which we simply trust. To understand and to trust are two complementary ways of believing the truth. Authority gives us access to truth when we are not able to understand it. It gives us the truth that a thing *is* even if we cannot comprehend its *essence*. Reason goes beyond authority in giving us the ability to understand that essence.[73] Let us take one of Augustine's examples, parentage, in light of modern science. By simply trusting his parents, a child may have a true belief about who they are. But through a study of biology and genetics, along with running a DNA test, he may come to *understand* this fact through reason and know it without relying solely on authority.[74]

What are the roles of faith and philosophy in all this? Augustine's remarks suggest that faith accepts the mysteries of Christian theology, while the practices of the philosophers give us a way of growing toward an understanding of God and the soul.

We should not presume that Augustine will write one book in which he relies on authority and another relying on reason. The same spiritual realities are the province of both. When Augustine treats a particular topic, he will employ whichever method seems to him best suited to the topic, to his own abilities, or to the abilities of his audience. It is possible to say that one book relies, for the most part, on reason and another on authority. It is difficult to say more.

The thesis of this book, briefly stated, is that Augustine has a Platonically informed yet distinctively Christian theology of desire both in his texts

relying mainly on reason and in his texts relying mainly on authority. Before going into that thesis in detail, a brief word on its significance.

AUGUSTINE AND HIS MODERN READERS

Augustine scholarship in this age has been the home of a long debate over how to read Augustine. Generalizing and simplifying somewhat, we may identify three major vying scholarly traditions.[75]

The first is the dramatic development thesis: the idea that Augustine's writing career follows a course away from philosophy and toward Christianity. In stronger versions of the thesis, he began as a neo-Platonist philosopher and became a Christian later; some scholars have accused his autobiographical accounts of his commitment to Christianity of being less than fully accurate. In weaker versions, he began as a Christian neo-Platonist philosopher of sorts, but after learning more of the tensions between Christianity and Platonism, he abandoned the one and more thoroughly devoted himself to the other. Some of the names of scholars associated with this tradition are Gaston Boissier, Adolph von Harnack, and Prosper Alfaric.[76]

Largely in response to this way of reading Augustine, a tradition sprang up of reading Augustine as, with considerable consistency throughout his career, both a Christian and a neo-Platonist. He was always as good a Christian as he knew to be, and as good a Platonist, and saw little conflict between the two, finding rather consistency and mutual support. Some of the scholars in this tradition include the trailblazing Pierre Courcelle and Robert J. O'Connell, as well as, more recently, Phillip Cary.[77]

A third way of reading Augustine emphasizes his commitment to Christianity but reconsiders his perspective on Platonism. In this tradition, Augustine is persistently as good a Christian as he knows how to be; as for neo-Platonism, he merely makes use of it when he finds it useful for understanding Christian theology. Among the scholars representing this tradition, we find Carl Vaught,[78] Eugene Kevane,[79] Ernest Fortin,[80] Goulven Madec,[81] and Carol Harrison.[82]

Augustine scholars have largely abandoned the first of these traditions, although it has had an abiding influence. (Harrison credits the first edition of Peter Brown's beloved biography of Augustine with promoting a weaker version of the dramatic development thesis among a whole generation of scholars.[83]) The other two traditions are dominant, with the third one, so far as I can tell, having the upper hand in contemporary scholarship.

This is where my book comes in handy, and in two ways.

First, I develop the Platonically informed Christianity reading by applying it to a crucial topic in a cross-section of Augustine's writings. This

tradition—in which we read Augustine less as a neo-Platonist Christian than merely a Platonically informed Christian—is prominent if not dominant. But it has not been applied very thoroughly to Augustine's corpus, nor to all areas of his thinking; by focusing on desire in this cross-section of his writings—from different times, on different topics, and employing different strategies—I help to fill in a major gap in a contemporary scholarly tradition.

Second, along the way, I provide some modest support for this way of reading Augustine. I give evidence that Augustine's theology of desire is too Christian to be a neo-Platonism as such. This weighs against the dramatic development reading, and (somewhat less heavily) against the Christian neo-Platonist reading. If Augustine is a neo-Platonist at all, his Platonism has been baptized. Or, using his own well-known metaphor, it has been plundered like gold from the idolatrous Egyptians, now to be used in service to the true God.[84] I think Augustine is loyal to the faith and uses Platonism as much as he finds useful in service thereto. It is not neo-Platonism-plus-Christianity so much as a Platonically informed Christianity; in short, I think the third tradition is the right perspective. That this perspective works well for interpreting Augustine's theology of desire is a point in its favor.

It is now time to introduce the books selected for this study and to overview the main points of Augustine's theology of desire.

REASON, AUTHORITY, AND DESIRE

Desire is an important thread woven through the whole Augustinian cloth. In order to get a good view of that cloth, I will look at books representing his analyses according to both reason and authority of the rationality of faith, of ethics, of metaphysics and the problem of evil, and of God and the soul. That makes four topics and two methods: eight texts, one chapter for each. They are *De Vera Religione*, *De Natura Boni*, *De Libero Arbitrio*, *De Magistro*, *De Utilitate Credendi*, *De Bono Coniugali*, *Enchiridion*, and *Confessiones*.

I count myself in the tradition of Augustine scholars like Harrison, Vaught, and Kevane. I consider Augustine's thought to be largely unified (albeit with some development). His thought is characterized by neo-Platonic notions and also by Christian, and I think he aims to subordinate the former to the latter.

In terms of the structure of my reading of Augustine, there is nothing unique or original about this book. What is unique is the *content*—the details built into that structure. Desire—such an important topic to those Augustine read, to Augustine, and to those who read *him*—is frequently noticed but rarely scrutinized. Moreover, most of the texts considered here are among his less-read writings. More generally, there is, as noted before, a bit of a dearth of quality commentaries on Augustine's books (other than *Conf.*, *Doct.*, *Civ.*

Dei, and *Trin.*); seven of eight chapters of this book narrow the gap. Although I draw from—and, at need, correct—previous scholarship, my exegesis aims to explain Augustine on his own terms, to let the texts speak for themselves.

To explain the structure of this volume in more detail: There is a primary division of reason and authority, those twin methods of learning about "life, the universe, and everything."[85] Chapters 1–4 focus on texts in which Augustine primarily relies on reason, and chapters 5–8 on texts in which he relies primarily on authority. The primary division pertains to method, the secondary to content. The secondary division is that of Cassiciacum, the firstfruits of Augustine's Christian literary career and a preview of what was to come. The first text to be considered under each method concerns Christian apologetics, the defense of the faith; the next topic is ethics; the third is the metaphysical analysis of evil; finally, the fourth topic is the relation of God and the soul. Besides the fact that I happen to like them, these texts occupy the intersections of those two methods with those four topics, making them a convenient cross-section of the Augustinian corpus.

Another briefer word on those intersections. Let us modify the metaphor of the Augustinian cloth, viewing the methods and topics (rather than desire) as threads. The vertical threads, the warp, are the Augustinian methods of studying things: reason and authority. The horizontal threads, the woof, are the topics he studies, and we are looking at the four which occupied his early attentions at Cassiciacum: defense of the faith, ethics, metaphysics and the problem of evil, and God and the soul. My thesis is that a distinctively Christian theology of desire with some input from neo-Platonism is found where these four horizontal threads meet both vertical threads.

In short, reason and authority are the two methods Augustine uses to discover a good theology of desire, and he seems to find much the same one no matter what he is talking about or how he is talking about it. Here is an overview of how he goes about it.

De Vera Religione, *On the True Religion*, is one of the early anti-Manichean works; it is addressed to Romanianus, Augustine's former patron (and father of his student Licentius, a major character at Cassiciacum). In *vera Rel.*, Augustine explains that orthodox Christianity completes what Platonism began—the redirection of our desires toward God and away from physicality. This renovation of the heart is accomplished by the Incarnation, the best way for God to heal our hearts. Augustine explains these things, urges Romanianus to follow Christ as well, and leads his readers in some basic steps toward learning to love as we ought.

De Natura Boni, *On the Nature of Good*, is a metaphysical refutation of the Manicheans closely concerned with ethics. Augustine says little here about what corrupts desire, except that bad theology and bad metaphysics can do that. Nor does he say much about the conversion of desire to God,

save that it is by grace and that we should pray for it. Instead, he nicely develops a metaethics of desire; he explains the foundations of ethics, the reasons *why* what is right is right. Goodness, he explains, is built into the structure of reality. Evil is not a thing in itself, but a *lack* in a thing of the goodness it is meant to have. Moreover, there is an order to goodness, a hierarchy of goods—God being the greatest good, rational spirits (such as human souls) having a great deal of goodness, and other things having less goodness. Augustine's theology of desire fits this metaethics: We should love things in proportion to their goodness. Sin is a desire for a lesser good in place of a higher one.

De Libero Arbitrio Voluntatis, *On Free Choice of the Will*, is a justly famous exploration of the problem of evil. Augustine explains how the origin of evil is the misuse of free will by created beings. God is entirely innocent of evil, and, despite evil, still orders the universe in the best way possible. Evil is a desire gone wrong—a desire for lesser goods instead of greater ones. Evil also includes disorder in our desires as a just punishment. Evil is marked by pride, and the healing of our desires requires grace—the Incarnation of Christ, whose humility we must imitate in order to have our loves straightened out.

De Magistro, *On the Teacher*, is a charming little book in which Augustine, conversing with his son Adeodatus, explores the nature and weakness of signs. Signs are important for bringing truths to mind, but they are powerless to *teach* us any of them. For a sign is useless to me, unless I know whatever it signifies. So the soul needs help if we are to know. Christ provides that help. He dwells in the soul, and he is the one who teaches us. To know him should be our greatest desire, and he our greatest love. To know and love him is the happy life.

De Utilitate Credendi, *The Advantage of Believing*, is a short text in which Augustine argues to Honoratus that religious belief, accepting the authority of Christ and his church, is reasonable. There is some interesting epistemological analysis here, in particular the defense of trust in testimony; we all already trust in testimony in our everyday lives, for example accepting who our parents are on the basis of testimony alone. The emphasis on authority is directly relevant to desire: Augustine argues that the authority of Christ is necessary for renovating our desires, for helping us love what we ought.

In *De Bono Coniugali*, *On the Good of Marriage*, Augustine considers the role of marriage in the love of God and souls. The metaethics developed in *Nat. b.* is in the background. God is the greatest good, and created things are (by their very nature) good, but lesser goods and to be loved accordingly. We tend to sin by desiring one particular created good—the bodies of others—without due regard for greater goods. Marriage is a treatment for this spiritual malady, turning it toward good ends. Marriage is a genuine good for various reasons, including procreation, the fidelity and friendship of husband

and wife, and its symbolism of Christ. It is a way of loving God and neighbor, albeit a lesser way than holy celibacy.

In *Enchiridion*, the *Handbook*, Augustine overviews the Christian faith. Among the many theological topics he considers, he explains that evil involves a turning away from God in desire, a love of created realities with the love due to God. The redemption of desire is, to borrow a phrase from Charles Spurgeon, all of grace, and the theology of it is drawn from the Bible. The healing of desire is accomplished by Christ, whose own desires are pure and whose human nature is unsullied by evil desire—a result of his virgin conception. We must pray and look to the church for desire's healing. We look forward to the coming resurrection of the dead when our desires will be fully healed. Right desire conforms to the love of God and neighbor. And so on.

Confessions is the paradigmatic reflection on God and the soul (and an important book on other matters ranging from biblical hermeneutics to the philosophy of time). Augustine's approach here relies on authority, with Scriptural citations in abundance and written in the style of the Psalms. *Confessions* is about the reordering of our loves—from a desire for carnal objects to a desire for, and ultimately a delight in, God. In the final chapter of this book, I will take a look at a few key passages in the *Confessions*, showing how the ideas explored in these other texts are also there. We will see that Augustine's theology of desire is meant to help us love God properly and, in so loving, also restore order to ourselves and to creation by loving things properly as what they are—finite goods created by God.

Augustine's theology of desire may be summarized under the following points.

First, there is the familiar claim from the neo-Platonists that non-physical reality is nobler. *Second*, Augustine teaches that God is the greatest good and rational spirits, including our souls, the second-greatest good. *Third*, our loves and desires should be ordered accordingly;[86] we should love the greatest good the most, and rational spirits more than any good less than they. This love of God and souls is part of Augustine's understanding of the biblical requirement of the love of God and our neighbor. *Fourth*, epistemology and ethics are never separated. Right loving is a necessary condition for right knowing. If we want to know God, we must also love God and our neighbors as we ought to.

We could call these the creational aspects of a theology of desire, but a good theology also needs to say something about sin. The *fifth* point of Augustine's theology of desire is that sin is desiring lesser goods as if they were greater. *Sixth*, our desires are corrupted by pride.

And, of course, a good theology needs an account of redemption—of the healing, overcoming, and forgiveness of sin. Even when Augustine employs

neo-Platonic concepts, such as when he looks in *Mag.* at the sources of knowledge in the soul, no epistemological or metaphysical theory is complete without the name of Christ. (In *Conf.* 3.4.8 he explains that, even from his youth, he had felt that no system of thought could be complete which suffered from this lack.) Neither is any theology of desire complete unless it calls us to love better that same Christ. Here we find some of the most distinctively Christian aspects of Augustine's theology of desire, weighing against the approach of those who have taken Augustine as having an early phase where his thought was not distinctively Christian. A *seventh* lesson is this: Although there are various therapies that can help to heal our desires, they are never enough without grace: We need God to convert our hearts to him.[87] *Eighth*, God's commands and the authority of Christ are necessary for the conversion of our desires to God. *Ninth*, the healing of desire is to be sought through prayer and in the church—in that community and observing its sacramental practices. These last two, of course, we do not find at all in pagan neo-Platonism.

Desire is central in Augustine's systematic theology, and this leads to our next three points. *Tenth*, the Incarnation reconciles man to God in no small part because by it Christ teaches us what we ought to love, and because his humility heals our pride. *Eleventh*, as a result of original sin, human nature is afflicted with problems pertaining to desire. "Ignorance" is our tendency not to understand what is right. "Difficulty" is our tendency to sinful desire even when we know what is right. This corruption of desire in human nature is also passed on through disordered desire: Because of the *concupiscentia*— the concupiscence, or disorderly grasping for physical pleasures unbridled by reason—which takes place in sexual intercourse, the corruption is passed on from parents to infants. *Twelfth*, Jesus Christ is an effective savior of human nature because he bears it but *not* its corruption; his desires are pure. Due to his virgin conception, he did *not* inherit a corrupted human nature via concupiscence; he was not thus conceived, but still inherited a genuine human nature from his mother.

Augustine, *thirteenth*, teaches that God has provided marriage as a treatment for desires that have gone wrong sexually. It treats the symptoms, bringing good rather than harm out of this sin; it helps to heal it, renewing sexual desire as the love of God and neighbor; and it provides for the forgiveness of the sin of not being able to control ourselves.

Fourteenth, we are not told that we must simply love God and cease to desire created things. We must love God more, love created goods only in reference to God, and always subordinate love for creation to love of God. Augustine tells us that when we love God rightly, we are freed to love created goods rightly as well. The love of God anchors the soul when we love these lesser, created goods. When we love God's superior good, that love keeps us

from going astray even when we love finite goods. It ensures that we really desire the goodness and reality in them, rather than desiring and plummeting toward the non-being mixed into them. There is a metaphysical view linked to this ethical view: that creation can neither subsist nor flourish by itself. This is a notion with roots in two traditions: On the Platonic side, there is the notion that physical reality depends on immateriality, and on the Christian side, the notion that the world owes its very being to its creation by God.[88]

All the same, there is something deeply un-Platonic about this aspect of Augustine's theology of desire. In Platonic philosophy, matter is good insofar as it exists at all, but insofar as it is less real than non-physical reality, it is evil. Physical creation is by definition fallen from God, not created good by God as in Christian theology. Augustine finds a place for loving creation under the ordering of our love for God. This is a Christian theology of desire, one less than fully compatible with neo-Platonism.

NOTES

1. Gerald McDermott, *The Great Theologians: A Brief Guide* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), chapter 4.

2. Agostino Trapè, "Chapter VI: Saint Augustine," trans. Rev. Placid Solari, *Patrology*, vol. 4: *The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, introduction by Johannes Quasten, 342–462 (Turin: Marietti, 1978; repr., Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1986), 342.

3. On the influence of Augustine, see M. W. F. Stone, "Augustine and Medieval Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 253–66; Gareth B. Matthews, "Post-medieval Augustinianism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Mark Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine: His Contextual and Pastoral Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 2–5.

4. The interested reader might study Plotinus's *Enneads* or Lloyd Gerson, "Plotinus," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), accessed June 29, 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plotinus/ or Edward Moore, "Neo-Platonism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed June 26, 2019, http://www.iep.utm.edu/neoplato/.

5. I develop much the same thesis with respect to the Cassiciacum dialogues, Augustine's earliest surviving writings, in Mark Boone, *The Conversion and Therapy of Desire: Augustine's Theology of Desire in the Cassiciacum Dialogues* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

6. Rowan Williams, *On Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), Kindle location 2683.

7. John M. Rist, "Faith and Reason," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37.

8. Tarsicius J. van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart: Augustine's Doctrine on Prayer* (Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2009), 45.

9. Joseph Clair, *Discerning the Good in the Letters and Sermons of Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 32.

10. Isabelle Bochet, *Saint Augustin et le désir de Dieu* (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1982). An overview in English of some of her exegesis appears in Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 130–32. Charry notes that Bochet has an "arategenic reading" of Augustine; in other words, she thinks Augustine is interested in the sources of virtue; *By the Renewing*, 130. Charry explains that according to Bochet "Augustine sought to correct and transform human desire," and that this was central to his purpose in the *De Trinitate*.

11. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982; 1st ed. 1932 [part 1], 1938 [part 2, vol. 1], 1938 [part 2, vol. 2], S. P. C. K. House).

12. John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007).

13. Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

14. Werner G. Jeanrond*, A Theology of Love* (London: Continuum, 2010).

15. Williams, *On Augustine*, chapter 6, is a helpful reconsideration of the terms and presuppositions of Arendt's analysis—an effort to get back into Augustine's own head before we evaluate him.

16. Oliver O'Donovan, "*Usus* and *Fruitio* in Augustine, *De Doctrina*, I," *Journal of Theological Studies* 33, no. 2 (1982), 383. Note that according to O'Donovan Augustine's changes his language in later writings.

17. Jason Byassee, "Delight in Scripture," in *Augustine: His Legacy and Relevance*, ed. Wayne Cristaudo and Heung-Wah Wong (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2010), 37–53 and Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 96.

18. Elena Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, the Modistae, Dante* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Margaret R. Miles, *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's* Confessions (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006); Byassee, "Delight in Scripture"; and Wayne Cristaudo, "The Weight of Love and Evil in Augustine," in *Augustine: His Legacy and Relevance*, ed. Wayne Cristaudo and Heung-Wah Wong (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2010), 157–82. (Incidentally, Byassee and Cristaudo and the other contributors to *Augustine: His Legacy and Relevance* are evidence of the relevance of Augustine to contemporary Chinese readers.)

19. Wayne Cristaudo, *Love, Power, and Evil: Contribution to a Philosophy of the Damaged* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007).

20. Jason Byassee, *Reading Augustine: a Guide to the Confessions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006).

21. Sarah Catherine Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

22. Clair, *Discerning the Good*.

23. James Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*; David K. Naugle, *Reordered Loves, Reordered Lives: Discovering the Deep Meaning of Happiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

24. O'Donovan himself suggests that Augustine did not stick with his way of thinking that places love of God and neighbor in tension; see O'Donovan, "*Usus* and *Fruitio* in Augustine"; he himself argues elsewhere that Augustine's view integrates the love of self with the love of God; see Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1980; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980). Clair is excellent on the harmony of the love of God and affirmation of lesser goods, especially people, throughout his book; see, for example, Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 1, 32, 103, 169, and the whole of chapter 5. Rowan Williams' *On Augustine*, chapter 11 is a very insightful commentary on this topic. Stewart-Kroeker is very helpful in Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, "Resisting Idolatry and Instrumentalisation in Loving the Neighbour: The Significance of the Pilgrimage Motif for Augustine's *Usus–Fruitio* Distinction," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 27 (May 2014), 202–21. Also Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine's Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). Mary Clark is also helpful; Mary T. Clark, *Augustine* (London: Continuum, 1994), 44, 122. A fine recent paper (to be published in the *Studia Patristica* series of conference proceedings) is Erika Kidd, "Grief, Memory, and the Order of Love," 18th Oxford Patristics Conference, Oxford, UK August 20, 2019. See also David Worsley, "Augustine on Beatific Enjoyment," *Heythrop Journal* 41, no. 1 (February 2018), accessed March 8, 2018, available at https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/heyj.12929; Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 3–6; Bonnie Kent, "Augustine's Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 205–33; Warren J. Smith, "Loving the Many in the One: Augustine and the Love of Finite Goods," *Religions* 7, no. 11 (November 2016), 1–17; Van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart*, 56; Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 56 and 70; Miles, *Desire and Delight*, 37; John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 165–66; Helmut David Baer, "The Fruit of Charity: Using the Neighbor in *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 47–64; Walter A. Hannam, "*Ad illud ubi permanendum est*: The Metaphysics of St Augustine's *usus-fruitio* Distinction in Relation to Love of Neighbor, *De doctrina Christiana*, I," *Studia Patristica* 38, ed. M. F. Wiles and E. J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 170–71; Perry Cahall, "The Value of Augustine's Use/Enjoyment Distinction to Conjugal Love," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 177–28; and Gerald W. Schlabach, *For the Joy*

Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2001). I consider this topic myself in *Conversion and Therapy*, chapter 6, and the interested reader will find more sources there; see O'Donovan, "*Usus* and *Fruitio* in Augustine," 361–73 for an overview of the scholarly discussion up till that time.

25. For additional sources on Augustine, love, and desire, consider Lombardi's footnote 11; *Syntax of Desire*, 217–18.

26. I have begun to work on a future series on this topic, focusing on Augustine's pastoral writings.

27. Vernon J. Bourke, "Joy in Augustine's Ethics," in *The Saint Augustine Lecture Series: 1978* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1978), 35–36. More succinctly, Rowan Williams refers to "the difficulties causes by his diffuse exposition and reluctance to settle on a single technical vocabulary"; *On Augustine*, Kindle location 3976. See also O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love*, 11.

28. Rist, "Faith and Reason," 36.

29. Cary: "Love not only motivates the seeking but remains to enjoy the finding . . ."; Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28.

30. Van Bavel: "It is not easy to translate the word 'libido': approximately it means 'blind lust'"; "Augustine's View on Women, 33. Bonner states that, "when used to describe sexual desire, . . . the two words [*libido* and *concupiscentia*] are virtually interchangeable; but when any other lust is mentioned, *libido* is the one used, very occasionally supplemented by *cupiditas*"; Gerald Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny: Studies on the Thought of Augustine of Hippo* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987), 304. Bonner's essay "*Libido* and *Concupiscentia* in St. Augustine" reprinted in *God's Decree and Man's Destiny* is recommended for the reader interested in looking at these words more closely, as well as Simon Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will: The Theological and Philosophical Significance of* De Libero Arbitrio (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 54–56 on *libido* in that text and Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 80–81, on *cupiditas* and the verb *concupisco*. We will look at some ways of translating *lidido* and *concupiscentia* in chapter 5.

31. For a more detailed analysis of *voluntas*, see Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, chapter 5.

32. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams; Introduction by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993).

33. Augustine, *The Teacher*, trans. Peter King; in Against the Academicians *and* The Teacher, trans. Peter King (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1995).

34. Augustine, *True Religion*, trans. Edmund Hill; The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I-Books, Vol. 8: *On Christian Belief*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, Introductions by Michael Fiedrowicz (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2005).

35. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed; introduction by Peter Brown; 2d ed. edited and notes by Michael P. Foley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2006).

36. Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity*, trans. Bruce Harbet; The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I-Books, Vol.

8: *On Christian Belief*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, Introductions by Michael Fiedrowicz (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2005).

37. I discuss the modern response to the problem of desire in more detail in Mark Boone, "Introduction: Finding C. S. Lewis in Science Fiction Film and Television," in *Science Fiction and the Abolition of Man: Finding C. S. Lewis in Sci-Fi Film and Television*, ed. Mark J. Boone and Kevin C. Neece (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 3–6.

38. See Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 98.

39. For example, the Preface to Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* acknowledges that we need experience to know how to apply moral law and motivate people towards it; this recognizes the importance of the Aristotelian approach of relying on experience and of forming character. Mill's *Utilitarianism*, chapter 4, gives a largely Aristotelian account of habituation towards virtue. Aristotle in *Nichomachean Ethics* 1.4 states that the highest end of our endeavors is happiness. Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* states that the purpose of human beings is to know and love God, to do which is happiness; *Prima Secundae*, Q1, Articles 7–8.

40. Mill is quite explicit; *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2. For the negative version of the Golden Rule ("Do not do to others what you want them to not do to you") in Confucius, see *Analects* 5.12 and 15.24. For hints of the positive version ("Do to others as you want them to do to you"), see *Analects* 6.30. I also think Kant's ethics promote the Golden Rule, but that is a topic for another time.

41. A fine essay considering the different moral concepts in Augustine's thought is Bernard Roland-Gosselin, "St. Augustine's System of Morals," trans. C. M. Leonard; in *St. Augustine: His Age, Life, and Thought*: 225–48 (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1957). Also Kent, "Augustine's Ethics."

42. There is not a perfect correspondence of natural law thinking to reason and of considering God's commands to authority. It is an Augustinian approach to search the Bible for insight on the natural way to live.

43. Anscombe explains a confusion in modern moral philosophy—trying to construct a notion of moral law or obligation on insufficient grounds. The commands of God would be sufficient, but modern philosophy tried to work without them; absent these commands, moral concepts such as Aristotle employed in his proper functionalist ethic might be explicable, but not moral law! See G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1958), 1–19.

44. For example, Epicurus's *Letter to Menoeceus* or Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*.

45. Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

46. Among other virtues, prudence teaches the link between virtue and a happy life and helps us know what pleasures to avoid, and justice protects us from anxiety associated with the fear of punishment for wrongdoing.

47. Seneca the Stoic philosopher praises Epicurus on this point. Seneca, *On the Happy Life*; in *Seneca: Dialogues and Essays*, trans. John Davie (Oxford, UK: Oxford World's Classics, 2007), 95.

48. Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*; in *The Epicurus Reader*, trans. and ed. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 30–31.

49. The reader interested in Epicureanism might start with, besides Epicurus himself, David Konstan, "Epicurus," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), accessed June 29, 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/epicurus/ or Jeffrey S. Purinton, "Epicurus on the Telos," *Phronesis* 38, no. 3 (1993), 281–320.

50. Hadot is very good on this aspect of ancient philosophy; Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004).

51. Two good places to start for the reader interested in studying more are Dirk Baltzly, "Stoicism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), accessed June 29, 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/stoicism/ and Malcom Schofield, "Stoic Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 233–56.

52. Plato's *Phaedo* is a classic source on this. See also Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 158–59.

53. A good source on this would be the argument for the importance of justice and of the pursuit of wisdom in Plato's *Republic*. See also Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 158.

54. See Book VII of Plato's *Republic*; Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* chapter 5, is also helpful.

55. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.8.1-15 and 3.2.6.

56. For example, *Republic* 372a-d. On how reason should care for the body, see Richard D. Parry, *Plato's Craft of Justice* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 99.

57. A sampling of the secondary sources on the patristic sources for Augustine's writings: Levering, *Theology of Augustine*, xvii, and sources mentioned by Levering; Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 79–80, 151–52; Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57–58; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (new ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967; new ed., 2000), chapter 8; Augustine J. Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of* Contra Academicos (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 27; Ragnar Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1962), 303–28, cited in Frederick E. Van Fleteren, "Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of St. Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 4 (1973), 55, n. 100; John O'Meara, "Plotinus and Augustine: Exegesis of 'Contra Academicos II Point 5," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 24 (1970), 321–37; Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1950); J. Patout Burns, "Ambrose Preaching to Augustine: The Shaping of Faith," in *Augustine: Second Founder of the Faith*; Collectanea Augustiniana 1, ed. J. Schnaubelt and Frederick Van Fleteren (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 373–86; Mary Clark, *Augustine*, 70, 113, and 124; and Goulven Madec, "Connaissance de Dieu et action de graces. Essai sur les citations de l'Epître aux Romains, 1, 18–25," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 2 (1962), 273–309; cited in O'Connell, *Saint Augustine's Platonism: The Saint Augustine Lecture, 1981* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1984), note 24, pages 35–36.

58. *Life of Antony* 214.72-217.80.

59. I noticed that Boethius uses *consimilis Deo* to describe man in *Consolation* 1.4 and 2.5. I wondered, since he was not using the Christian Latin terminology of the *imago dei*, whether there was a precedent for this sort of language in Christian writings. I found one here in Lactantius.

60. Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin and H.T.F. Duckworth; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 10, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1896), 2.5. On the renunciation of worldly pleasures in baptism, see Christopher A. Hall, *Worshipping with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 26; chapter 6 of the same book also makes a helpful introduction to patristic theology of desire.

61. Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, 7.39.

62. Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, 7.40.

63. The interested reader may consult *The Conversion and Therapy of Desire* for more on the Cassiciacum dialogues, and will find invaluable guides as well as a fine new translation in the new volumes by Michael Foley, published by Yale University Press.

64. Kenyon is mistaken that desire first shows up as a topic in *b. Vita*; Erik Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 138.

65. It would be hasty, however, to reduce *Ord.* to this; Kenyon's caution in this regard is well warranted; see *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 114.

66. A helpful commentary on this theme is Trapè, "Chapter VI," 409–15.

67. Vaught's trilogy is an excellent source on the theme of Augustine as the prodigal son; Carl J. Vaught, *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions: Books X–XIII* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005); Vaught, *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions: Books X–XIII* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003); Carl J. Vaught, *The Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions: Books X–XIII* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003). See also Michael P. Foley, Editor's Preface to *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed; Introduction by Peter Brown; 2d ed., ed. and notes by Michael P. Foley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2006), xii-xiv.

68. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*. On the direct influence of Augustine on the *Consolation*, I recommend Edmund T. Silk, "Boethius' Consolatio Philosophiae as a Sequel to Augustine's Dialogues and Soliloquia," *Harvard Theological Review* 32, no. 1 (January 1939), 19–39. For a helpful commentary on the *Consolation* for the new reader of Boethius, I suggest C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1964), chapter IV, section D.

69. Anselm, *Proslogion: with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, 22.

70. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1946). In *The Last Battle* Professor Kirk remarks that it was in Plato all along that Aslan's country's is the real Narnia; C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 170. I think of this as the most Augustinian *moment* in Lewis.

71. *Against the Academics: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues, Volume 1*, trans. Foley. Augustine later regretting praising Platonic philosophy so highly; see *Retractiones* 1.1.12.

72. Augustine, *On Order: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues, Volume 3*, trans. Michael P. Foley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, Forthcoming).

73. Trapè: "There were, in fact, two ways which led man to a knowledge of the truth: authority and reason. Chronologically, authority came first, i.e., faith; but in order of importance, the first place was occupied by reason, i.e., knowledge"; "Chapter VI," 403. On the methods of reason and authority, see Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. L. E. M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), Part One, Chapter 1; Rist, "Faith and Reason"; Frederick E. Van Fleteren, "Augustine and Philosophy: *Intellectus Fidei*," in *Augustine and Philosophy*, ed. Phillip Cary, John Doody and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010) as well as "Authority and Reason," 33–71; Johannes Brachtendorf, "Augustine on the Glory and the Limits of Philosophy," in *Augustine and Philosophy*, ed. Phillip Cary, John Doody and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 3–21; Scott MacDonald, "The Epistemology of Faith in Augustine and Aquinas," in *Augustine and Philosophy*, ed. Phillip Cary, John Doody and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 167–96; Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1970), 73–77; Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), chapter 2; and Gareth B. Matthews, *Augustine* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), chapter 10.

74. Yet not altogether without authority, as we will see when we return to this theme in chapter 6.

75. For a more detailed look at this topic, see Mark Boone, "The Role of Platonism in Augustine's 386 Conversion to Christianity," *Religion Compass* 9, no. 5 (May 2015), 151–61; Boone, *Conversion and Therapy*, chapter 1; Eugene Kevane, *Augustine the Educator: A Study in the Fundamentals of Christian Formation* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1954), 347–80; James J. O'Donnell, *The Confessions of Augustine: An Electronic Edition*; online edition by Anne Mahoney for The Stoa Consortium (1992), accessed June 26, 2019, http://www.stoa.org/hippo/, commentary on 8.12.28-29; John O'Meara, *Studies in Augustine and Eriugena*, ed. Thomas Halton (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 121–22 and 146; James J. McEvoy, "Neoplatonism and Christianity: Influence, Syncretism or Discernment?" in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, ed. Thomas Flynn and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992), 155–70; Robert Crouse, "*Paucis Mutatis Verbis*: St. Augustine's Platonism," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honor of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000), 37–50; Mary T. Clark, Review of *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A. D. 386–391* and *St. Augustine's "Confessions": The Odyssey of Soul*, by Robert J. O'Connell. *International Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1971), 427–39; Van Fleteren, "Augustine and Philosophy," 23–40; or James J. O'Donnell, "To Make an End Is To Make a Beginning," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994), 234.

76. See Adolph von Harnack, *Augustins Konfessionen* (Geissen: J. Ricker, 1888); Gaston Boissier, "La Conversion de Saint Augustin," *Revue des Deux Mondes* 85 (1888), 43–69; Prosper Alfaric, *L'évolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1918).

77. See Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions* and *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1963); Robert

J. O'Connell, "Enneads VI, 4–5, in the works of St. Augustine," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 9 (1963), 1–39; 160; Robert J. O'Connell, "The Visage of Philosophy at Cassiciacum," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994), 65–76; Robert J. O'Connell, "Augustine's Rejection of the Fall of the Soul," *Augustinian Studies* 4 (1973), 1–32; Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000); Cary, *Inner Grace*; and Cary, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

78. Vaught, *The Journey toward God*, *Access to God*, and *Encounters with God*.

79. Kevane, *Augustine the Educator*.

80. See Ernest L. Fortin, Review of *Saint Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386–391*, by Robert J. O'Connell, in *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity: Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Thought*, ed. J. Brian Benestad, in Ernest Fortin: Collected Essays 1 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 309–11.

81. The English-speaking reader may consult "The Notion of Philosophical Augustinianism"; "ideal Augustinianism is nothing other than Christianity. . . . His entire doctrinal activity consisted in a defense and illustration of Christian truth in its entirety"; Goulven Madec, "The Notion of Philosophical Augustinianism: An Attempt at Clarification," *Mediaevalia* 4 (1978), 126. Other writings from Madec available in French include "Connaissance de Dieu et action de graces," in *Introduction aux 'Révisions' et à la lecture des Œuvres de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1996); and *Saint Augustin et la philosophie* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1996).

82. Harrison, *Rethinking*.

83. See Harrison, *Rethinking*, and Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*.

84. See *Teaching Christianity* 2.40.60.

85. Douglas Adams' fine phrase.

86. Bourke: "Joy in the moral life depends on the Augustinian concept of *ordo*"; "Joy in Augustine's Ethics," 43. Clair: "His all-embracing idea is *the good*, and the moral life is about one big thing: properly ordering one's loves toward the good"; Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 1.

87. Mary Clark: "Augustine taught that the human person reaches union with God with God's help by loving him in response to his love"; *Augustine*, 42. Clair, similarly, is helpful in explaining how the will is key in reorienting desire; however, will is understood in a rich theological context in which grace is central; Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 167.

88. As C. S. Lewis says, "Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in"; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001; 1st ed. 1952, C. S. Lewis Pte. Ltd.), 227. I examine this theme in *Conversion and Therapy*, chapter 6. Rowan Williams in *On Augustine* is a recent Augustine scholar delightfully attentive to this metaphysical aspect of Augustine's ethics.

Part One

REASON

Defense of the Faith according to Reason
De Vera Religione

De Vera Religione—Of True Religion or *On True Religion* or *On the True Religion* or simply *True Religion*—is something of a sequel to Augustine's first Christian work, *Contra Academicos*. This book was a refutation of skepticism, a defense of the possibility of reaching wisdom. Its goal was to show Romanianus, Augustine's old friend and patron,[1] that we need not despair of finding wisdom; this required refuting the Academic philosophers, for they were skeptics. At *c. Acad.* 2.3.8, Augustine had hinted at a later work which would show Romanianus that we also should not be overconfident about having already gained the truth. This requires a refutation of Manicheanism, which is the purpose of *vera Rel.*,[2] which presents orthodox Christianity as a better worldview than Manicheanism. Its method relies to a very large degree on reason, and the text is redolent of neo-Platonic ideas. Christianity, Augustine says, meets the standards of rationality better than Manicheanism. One of the primary goals, by philosophical no less than theological standards, is the renovation of our lives and hearts. A central goal of true philosophy no less than true religion is to help us love what we ought to love, namely the higher and more eternal goods, not physical objects. Christianity succeeds here just where Manicheanism fails. And, of course, Augustine wants Romanianus to become a Christian; this work is apologetical and evangelical.[3]

Some readers may be unclear as to what exactly Manicheanism is, so I shall first introduce this sect (or cult). Then I shall turn to the text of *vera Rel.* to consider how Augustine defends the faith in several ways, yet never far removed from a consideration of the right theology of desire. In the first way, he argues that orthodox Christianity is the right way to wisdom and the good life and that this must be so by the standards of human reason's greatest accomplishment, the Platonist tradition. Christianity outshines Platonism by reordering our desires in ways the Platonists could only dream of. In the

second way, Augustine considers the problem of evil, giving an account in which desire is central. In the third way, Augustine considers the quandary of how we, lacking knowledge of God, might be able to recognize an authority having it and how that authority might be able to communicate with us. In the fourth way, Augustine leads us through a philosophical ascent to immaterial reality, aimed at helping us know God and ourselves and love God and our neighbor, contrasting such reordered loves with three evil desires—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.[4]

MANICHEANISM

As a historical matter, we can trace the origins of Manicheanism to one Mani of Persia, of the third century AD. Mani taught what he claimed to be the completion of Christianity. He believed himself to be, like Jesus, not merely a prophet but truly divine—the Incarnation of the Holy Spirit. The Manicheans believed themselves to be the true follows of Jesus, the true Christians, and by Augustine's day, they were one of the major religious influences in North Africa.

As a theological, philosophical, or cultural matter, the origins of Manicheanism are somewhat more complex. There is some influence of orthodox Christianity, attested by the talk of the Holy Spirit and of Jesus and by the belief that they were the true Christians. They also recognized portions of the New Testament while rejecting other portions along with the entire Old Testament. The influence of orthodox Christianity is partially filtered through heresy; it is likely that Christian influences traveled through Gnosticism to reach the Manicheans. Like Gnosticism, the Manicheans also considered matter to be inherently evil. This, in turn, suggests another influence, perhaps itself also filtered through Gnosticism, neo-Platonism. Neo-Platonism did consider matter to be an evil,[5] but (as with Christianity) the Manicheans did not understand neo-Platonism very well. In neo-Platonism, matter is evil insofar as it is close to non-being; however, insofar as it *exists*, it is also, by definition, *good*.[6] Finally, one very important influence on Manicheanism that shapes its theology perhaps more than any other is Zoroastrianism. This ancient religion considered good and evil as opposing and equally matched forces in the universe.

This, too, was the metaphysics of Manicheanism, which developed its theology in response to the problem of evil. Since God is all good, yet evil persists, the Manicheans presumed that evil was a force opposed to God which God is unable to defeat. Thus, in response to the old Epicurean trilemma—if God is omnipotent and omniscient and entirely good, why evil?—the Manicheans opted to deny God's omnipotence. Evil and God were both posed as substances—the evil one a material substance, the good God not. (However,

ironically for denigrators of matter, they thought of God using only material concepts, as Augustine shows in *Confessions*.) Indeed, the evil substance is identified with the creator God of the Old Testament, who bound us in matter; the good God sent Jesus to liberate us from its control.

Manicheanism's religious epistemology deserves particular attention. They claimed to rely on reason alone and criticized orthodox Christians for believing based on authority. They promised their followers truth known by reason alone, with no authority. (In this, they failed rather spectacularly, as Augustine documents.) We will revisit these matters in later chapters—when we come to Augustine's epistemological refutations of Manicheanism.

The interested reader will find more detailed introductions in various sources. Roland Teske's introduction to Manicheanism in the introductory material to a recent New City Press volume of some anti-Manichean writings is very helpful.[7] Also well worth studying is Henry Chadwick's commentary.[8] Peter Brown provides helpful introductions in *Augustine of Hippo* and *Through the Eye of a Needle*,[9] as do Conybeare in the *Routledge Guidebook to Augustine's* Confessions[10] and François Decret in *Early Christianity in North Africa*.[11] Among helpful online introductions are the articles on Manicheanism in the Catholic Encyclopedia and in Theopedia.[12]

THE PROLOGUE: TRUE RELIGION, THE HAPPY LIFE, AND THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM

In the extended prologue to *vera Rel.*, Augustine explains his purpose to Romanianus—to defend orthodox Christianity from Manichean assaults. Augustine locates the question of the true religion within the context of another question: What is the good and happy life and what way leads to it? The pursuit of wisdom, the business of philosophy, is moreover the same as the pursuit of God. True religion and true philosophy, the true seeking of the true wisdom, are the same practice. In this vein, Augustine makes one of his most striking claims on behalf of Christianity, that it completes Platonism. Christianity achieves what Plato and his followers strove to achieve, and more besides, because it is able to convert to the love of higher, immaterial reality not only a few who are wise by pagan standards, but *anyone* who is willing to accept the authority of Christ. Thus, by the standards of human reason at its best, Christianity is justified.[13] Augustine says:

> Every approach to a good and blessed life is to be found in the true religion, which is the worship of the one God, who is acknowledged by the sincerest piety to be the source of all kinds of being, from which the universe derives its origin, in which it finds its completion, by which it is held together.[14]

Quite the opening sentence! The goal is happiness and the way to it is the *vera religio*. This religion is monotheistic, since only one God created the universe. The universal goal of ancient moral philosophy was this good and blessed life.[15] That Augustine says the only way is the true religion is quite striking. Neo-Platonism is not the same thing as the true religion, since neo-Platonists are not always Christians, nor vice versa. Is it yet the case that *some* neo-Platonists are Christians, including Augustine? Perhaps, but if this is so we still seem to have the recognition that neo-Platonic doctrines and practices are themselves neither necessary nor sufficient for reaching the happy life; only the true religion is.

The "good and blessed life" is indeed the happy one. (The Latin *beatus* can be translated "happy" as easily as "blessed.") This means a life of satisfaction—of no disappointed desires and of the fulfillment of any desires we do have. In order to achieve this satisfaction, the philosophers recommended a modification of desire—in all cases, a cessation or reduction of our desires for money, power, fame, and physical pleasures, and in the case of the neo-Platonists, a redirection of our desires toward the divine. That Augustine begins his book with the claim that only true religion will do shows that he is going to give us a markedly Christian theology of desire.

We should not, however, skip over the Platonic elements. In a recent article on "Loving the Many in the One," Warren Smith explains how *vera Rel.* mirrors Platonism in building an ethics on a metaphysics. Manichean metaphysics fails to understand the unity of God and lacks a coherent understanding of unity anywhere else; it "lacks a principle of unity that is the common source of all things."[16] Manichean ethics follows its metaphysics, leading its followers to desire and love many things without any "principle of unity to order our desires"[17]—without any "governing principle to order our desires rightly."[18] This leads to unhappiness. We end up loving many things but not enjoying any of them because, first, there are too many of them to enjoy any one and, second, because they are fleeting and never last.[19] Satisfaction requires a stable object of desire. Moreover, happiness that involves temporal goods requires that we enjoy them for what they are, not mistaking created finite goodness for ultimate, divine goodness. We suffer from "the distension of desire stretched by the vast variety and abundance of creaturely goods."[20] Augustine's solution is the same as Platonism's: to recognize and love the unity of God and allow God's infinite goodness, known through Christ, to order our desires.[21]

Augustine suspects that the wisest of the pagans, the philosophers, understood the futility of polytheism, since they all publicly worshipped the gods along with everyone else even though it was well known that they disagreed amongst themselves about pretty much everything (*vera Rel.* 1.1). Socrates (as we sometimes notice today from reading Plato) would swear by rocks or

dogs rather than the gods; Augustine's theory is that this was to emphasize the silliness of idol worship, for a real dog or stone is better than a false god, and also the silliness of thinking the world is God, which entails the silly conclusion that a dog or stone is a part of God (2.2).[22] Plato's writings suggest a true God "above our minds" and beyond the physical world, the creator of it and of our souls. Yet neither Socrates nor Plato could "turn the minds of their fellow citizens to the true worship of the true God, away from their superstitious regard for idols and from the vanity of this world."

Augustine is arguing that Christianity supersedes Platonism, getting right what it gets right and going beyond it by making its knowledge available to all. These are the insights that ultimate reality is non-physical and known by the mind rather than the body, that it is an "unchanging form" and a perfect beauty and an "eternal God" who is also the Creator, and that love of physical things keeps us from knowing this God (*vera Rel.* 3.3). The Platonists understood this about what is good. In Augustine's thought, as we shall see repeatedly in the present volume, truths about what is to be desired correspond to truths about what is good. The perfect immaterial beauty of God should be desired, not the imperfect beauty of the things of this physical world. Now in Augustine's day, Christ has come and taught many—so many that in a late Roman context one might generalize their number to include the whole world—to reject earthly pleasures and to seek the immaterial God. Truths that Plato was powerless to communicate to the masses are now preached from scripture (3.4). If a disciple of Plato had described this situation to Plato himself, the latter would have recognized that the one who had done this has "the power and wisdom of God," that he had saved humanity, and that he is "something above all mankind and quite special in himself" (3.3). A true Platonist would recognize these as signs of the great authority of Christ and would go over to orthodox Christianity (3.3-5).[23] Platonism seeks to redirect our desires to God and away from the physical world, yet it fails to do so at least for most people. Platonism failed; the example and authority of Jesus Christ succeed in reforming our desires.[24]

What do we make of all this? To begin with, there is a vivid aspect of neo-Platonism, the twin insights into the immateriality of true goodness and the need to direct our desires thereto. There is also a Christian insight, that Christ makes a big difference—that his coming is necessary for the conversion of desire to God. So Augustine is either a neo-Platonist or else he at least takes Platonist insights very seriously. He is also a Christian. So either readers like Pierre Courcelle and Robert O'Connell are correct or else those like Carol Harrison and Goulven Madec are correct: Augustine is either a neo-Platonist who thinks that Christianity completes what Platonism began and failed to finish or else he is a Christian who thinks that the neo-Platonists got something right which serves as a sign or an indicator of the truth of the

Gospel. If the former, we can take a fairly straightforward reading of this passage: Platonism is correct, and Christianity has the same insights without the disadvantages, so all Platonists should become Christians.[25] If the latter, I think we can also have a reasonably straightforward reading of this passage. Augustine is saying: By the standards of the wisest among the pagans, Christianity supersedes all the other ways of pursuing wisdom; you, Romanianus, desire wisdom; so you should probably become a Christian![26]

This is an important alternative to the Courcelle-O'Connell way of reading this passage. We should keep in mind that Augustine is not writing for Romanianus the Manichean alone, but for anyone else who might come across this text and might be swayed by his arguments. All living Platonists, he says, should follow the example of those who have "in recent times and our own days" (*vera Rel.* 4.7) gone over to Christianity (4.6-7). If Plato could have seen the reformation of the desires of so many, he would have done the same. Christianity succeeds in turning our hearts "away from greed for the abundant good things of the times to the hope of eternal life into the goods of the spirit and the mind" (4.6).

So complete is the triumph of Christianity that we can now observe that there is no distinction between philosophy and religion (*vera Rel.* 5.8). Philosophy is "devotion to wisdom," and religion is the pious worship of God, as Cicero tells us in *De Natura Deorum* 1.117 (although he refers to *gods*). The evidence for the unity of the two is that Christianity (as even the heretics agree) only lets people participate in the *sacramenta*, the "sacraments" or "mysteries" of which religious practice consists, if they accept the right teaching about God. This right teaching is the goal of philosophy—it is, or is a part of, the wisdom we seek. So the pursuit of wisdom and honoring God are not separate practices. Augustine says:

> All this being so, religion is not to be sought in either the confusions of the pagan philosophers or the sweepings of the heretics or the sickness of the schismatics or the blindness of the Jews but among those alone who are called Catholic or Orthodox Christians, that is, keepers of the whole tradition unimpaired and followers of the right path. (*vera Rel.* 5.9)

Augustine praises the true church for how it manages these four groups as well as its own carnal members who cannot understand immaterial reality (5.9-6.10). The pagans are invited in, the heretics are banished, the schismatics[27] are left alone, the Jews are excelled, and all are offered the true doctrines and rites of the universal orthodox Christian church. The main thing is to recognize orthodox Christianity and the Catholic churches as the true religion: "Accordingly, my dearest friend Romanianus, since I promised you a few years ago that I would commit to writing what my thoughts are on true

religion, I have decided that now is the time. . ." (7.12). Romanianus has been channeling a "flood of . . . acute and persistent questions" Augustine's way, and it is time to answer by presenting orthodox Christianity as a replacement for his Manicheanism. "The source of this religion" is in the historical events and prophecies recorded in the Bible (7.13). Its purpose is the "refashioning and preparation once more for eternal life" and for knowing the holy Trinity. This requires a life reformed by God's commandments, which "will purge the mind" for knowing God. Knowing the Trinity, we are freed to recognize that God is the creator of all. What was once a belief by faith alone then becomes an understanding (8.14). This is the old Augustinian doctrine (of which we will see more later on) that we must begin by faith—trust in the reliable testimony of God, of the Bible, and of the church—and later move on to understanding.

Much of this is the familiar Augustinian territory. God is a Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are meant to know God. In order to know God, we must be good; the mind's ability to know God is partly a function of the state of the heart, which cannot be healed without God's commands. These commands, along with the proper worship of the true God, have been revealed by God in human history. The teaching of these truths and the preservation of these practices has been handed down from the Apostles of Christ down to the bishops of the universal and orthodox church—what Augustine calls the Catholic Church.[28]

In short, the matter of the true religion is not only a matter of doctrine, nor of practice and ecclesiology. It is also a matter of moral healing, of fulfilling our human purpose, and of happiness in so doing.[29]

Now this true church, Augustine explains, makes use even of heresies in order that those believers who are carnally minded (which makes it harder to understand good doctrine[30]) might seek to understand the truth, and also that those who *do* understand it will explain those truths more fully (*vera Rel.* 8.14-15). (Later, in *Conf.* 7.19.25, Augustine would state that heresies serve to clarify the truth.) Augustine plans to follow this course here—not to refute the Manicheans, which he has already done in some writings and hopes to do again, but to explain Christian truth to Romanianus a little bit better (9.17). He piously notes that any errors in *vera Rel.* will be his, but any truths entirely from God.

It may appear that he immediately moves to refute Manicheanism with a refutation of idolatry, which makes sense—a swift objection to this error before moving on to bigger things. However, it seems to me that the major point of the immediately following passage is just what he says it is—to review what ought to be a first principle in religion, that error arises from idolatry; Augustine explains why this is by looking at the errors that tend to arise from worshipping created things as God (*vera Rel*. 10.18). Accordingly,

we should "avoid *serving the creature rather than the creator*, and *becoming vain in our thoughts*," for if we do this "religion is all it should be" (10.19). There would, however, have been no escape from idolatry had not God himself in the Incarnation made it possible for human souls to be reminded of their immaterial nature. Christianity is the religion which culminated in this spectacular historical event. He advises Romanianus to accept anything in what follows which seems to be true and attribute it to orthodox Christianity, to reject anything which seems false and attribute it to Augustine, and to tentatively accept whatever he is not sure of until reason or authority makes the matter clearer (10.20).

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: CREATION, SIN, AND REDEMPTION

Augustine swiftly moves on to defend and explain Christianity by considering the problem of evil: If God, being all good, is also omnipotent, how can evil exist? The Manicheans, as Augustine and Romanianus know well, opted to deny the omnipotence of God and, moreover, took quite literally the idea that evil *exists* in the universe as a substance opposed to God. Augustine aims to set Romanianus straight not by refuting this view (although he is fully capable of doing so, as we will see in the next chapter), but by explaining the orthodox view (or, we might say, developing a metaphysics that explains it). Namely, evil originates in free will when it strays away from the pursuit of God's goodness and seeks after lower, physical realities; moreover, evil is not a thing in itself—not a substance or a nature or a reality, but a perversion and corruption of reality.

This, as the seasoned Augustine reader will recognize, is the same sort of thing he usually says about evil in *Confessions*, *The City of God*, and elsewhere,[31] and we will examine it again in this book, especially when we come to *Lib. Arb.* Here I shall be brief on the intricacies of the problem of evil and emphasize his theology of desire as well as the broader narrative which Augustine links to his account of evil.

For, as he explains his views on evil, he touches on other topics. One might suspect that Augustine's is simply a busy mind: While writing about evil, he is reminded to write about the Incarnation, and then he remembers another point about evil. His mind *is* busy, but there is also a method to his manner of exposition. He is considering the problem of evil in relation to the biblical narrative of creation, sin, and redemption, and I will consider the relevant passages of *vera Rel.* under that rubric.[32] We shall see that his account of evil in terms of this biblical narrative gives us a theology of desire according to which desire is an aspect of the free will which was meant to seek God, sins

by pursuing created physical goods instead, and is redeemed and redirected to God not by the reasoning and virtues of the philosophers, but by the grace and mercy and Incarnation of Christ and by the practices of the Christian church.

The Augustinian doctrine of evil presumes his understanding of creation. We might put it this way: We can only hope to understand evil by first under-standing good. The central concept here is the unity of being and goodness. What *is* is good, and what is good *is*. "There is no life which is not from God, because God of course is supremely life and is himself *the fountain of life*; nor is any life, precisely as life, something evil . . ." (*vera Rel.* 11.21). From God "is everything whatever that exists," and "insofar as it exists, whatever exists is good. . . ." Evil is not a substance or a nature or a thing that exists, but a corruption of what exists. Every substance or nature is either God or a creation of God, and God only creates what is good. Whatever is good is from God (19.37). Even the body is made by God (11.21), and every physical object is likewise good (20.40).[33] Even pure matter is good (18.36). Even *the devil* is good "insofar as he is an angel" (13.26). This account of the nature of reality is very different from that of the Manicheans with their view of evil as a substance separate and opposed to God, and in chapter 2, we shall look more closely at this theme in Augustine's refutations of Manichaeism in *Nat. b.*

Now one good thing God created is a faculty for pursuing good which was placed within the control of certain higher created beings. This is free will: "God, you see, decided that his servants would be all the better for serving him freely, which could not possibly be done if they served out of necessity instead of freedom of choice" (*vera Rel.* 14.28). Its misuse is the origin of evil. Of course, in identifying a good faculty as the cause of evil, Augustine is correcting the Manichean idea that evil is a substance in itself. He also corrects them in a neo-Platonic fashion by explaining that evil is not a thing in itself, but a lack of goodness *in* a thing. Evil is not just *any* lack of goodness, since God created the lesser goods as things lacking his *own* infinite degree of goodness; evil is a lack of the goodness a thing is *meant* to have and was *created* to have. "But anything that is less than it was is evil, not insofar as it is but insofar as it is less" (13.26). (In this, I consider Augustine to be depart-ing somewhat from neo-Platonism itself, but we will return to this at a more opportune time, in chapter 3.)

When this will goes astray, instead of pursuing the ultimate good, it pur-sues lesser, created goods. In some cases, as with the devil's primal sin of pride, the lesser good is simply oneself (*vera Rel.* 13.26). In many cases, the free will of man goes wrong in pursuing physical goods rather than God. Necessarily, this pursuit of created goods rather than the much better creator, whom the will is designed to pursue, is a downward motion. It is a movement away from ultimate goodness and toward lesser goodness and, since less goodness means less *being*, toward unreality. The life which "by a willful

defection from the one who made it and whose very being it was enjoying"
pursues lesser goods "tilts towards nothingness" (11.21). "Body therefore
is . . . nearer to nothing. Accordingly, the life which by taking delight in
the enjoyment of body is neglectful of God thereby makes a bow towards
nothingness, and that is wickedness" (11.22). The evil motion of the will is
inherently destructive. Inevitably, the will is left unsatisfied by a lesser degree
of goodness and the soul is left unhappy. Augustine elaborates by explain-
ing how mortality, physical pain, and the spiritual pain of lacking things we
love all follow from this sin of loving created things with the love due to
God (12.23). A thing loved in a sinful fashion "turns into a punishment for
its lovers, involving them in worries and feeding them on deceitful pleasures
which neither abide nor satisfy and which end in painful torment" (20.40).
Referencing Solomon in Ecclesiastes, Augustine explains that these created
goods become vanities (21.41). (The reader familiar with the *Confessions* will
probably recognize some of these ideas, and indeed we will return to them
in chapter 8.)

One aspect of all of this is intriguing. I briefly discussed in the introduction
how moral thinkers use a number of different concepts in analyzing right and
wrong. What Augustine is doing here is within the scope of the natural law
tradition. He is telling us the difference between right and wrong in terms of
the natural and proper function for a human being. In this respect, his ethics
is very much like that of Aristotle, whose fundamental moral concept is the
idea of the natural, proper functioning of the human being. However, Aris-
totle lacks a concept of the commands of God. In Augustine's ethics, God's
commandment is crucial and is perhaps no less fundamental than the notion
of proper function. That sin which is the origin of evil is "the will to do things
which are forbidden by" God (*vera Rel.* 20.38). Evil is found in "the trans-
gression of the divine command." So what is the sin here? Is it disobeying
God's commands or is it an unnatural love for God's creation? Would it even
be sinful to disobey God if it were not unnatural thus to love and would it be
sinful to love unnaturally were it not contrary to God's command?

We might plausibly suggest that Augustine himself is not clear on this.
Alternatively, we might suggest that he himself would have found the ques-
tion a bit obtuse. Why separate God's commands to human souls from the
natural and proper function of the same souls? Not only will they always lead
to the same conclusions, but probably, given the unity of being and goodness,
they *are* the same thing. To consider obedience to the commandment of God
as a source of moral goodness is to recognize the *being of goodness*—to rec-
ognize that God's good commands are real things. To consider the wisdom
of loving according to the natural and proper function of a human being is to
recognize the *goodness of being*—the goodness of that reality which is the
proper function of the human being.

Now this would be an Augustinian way of thinking and seems a reasonable enough way to interpret him. However, I suspect that it is not *quite* the correct way to explain this text. One passage in *vera Rel.* suggests that he himself saw the commandment of God and the anti-natural aspect of our disordered desires as independent concepts. 26.48: "Sin (*peccatum*), after all, is not something simple, not just evil (*malus*) by itself, but involves giving free rein to what is forbidden (*veto*)." This suggests that the disorder of our loves is an evil of sorts and might be an "evil by itself," but is not by itself a *sin* any more than, say, a broken teacup is a sin. What makes evil a sin *as such* is the disobedience to God's commands. Improper use may be a *malus*, but God's forbidding of it makes it the kind of *malus* that is also a *peccatum*. (A distinction in some of the more technical passages in *Lib. Arb.* between things sinful as such and things merely disordered and tending toward sin supports this interpretation, and so does a remark we will consider when we come to *De Bono Coniugali*.)

One final subtopic before considering the problem of evil in relation to redemption. Using imagery derived from the cave analogy in Plato's *Republic* (a strategy he employs from time to time), Augustine explains that lust for created goods leaves us dazzled by the light of God, "the midday sun" (*vera Rel.* 20.39). Evil desires render us unable to know God. Augustine, using neo-Platonism against Manicheanism, references the foolishness of the Manichean worship of physical light rather than the spiritual light of God.

Augustine explains that the soul which fell into sin by its own power is no longer able to rise straight up to God. From where it has fallen, here among carnal things, it needs carnal things as a way to climb back up. "After all, in the spot where a person has fallen, there one has to stoop down to him, so that he may get up again" (*vera Rel.* 24.45). This has some resemblance to Plato, whose writings suggest that the first step in our ascent to knowledge of immaterial reality is to be reminded of it by the traces it leaves in the physical world. Augustine is at least Platonist enough to accept this notion. However, there is more going on here. The grace of God in rescuing sinners, since they are distracted, mind and heart, by carnal things and are only blinded by God's light, will need to reach sinners in a carnal fashion. This is why the Incarnation was necessary, and indeed this is a bit of Augustine's early theology of the atonement. As he says, "God of course makes use of all appropriate means for healing spirits," but none was better than the Incarnation (16.30). Christ demonstrated by the holiness of his life and, note well, *by the holiness of his desires*, how we ought to love (16.30-32).[34] "All the things we learned to have while we were not living decent lives, *he* treated as trash by doing without them" (16.31).[35] He lived a life wholly free of carnal desires, wholly devoted to the love of God, wholly exemplary of the way of life appropriate

to an immaterial soul with a body.[36] His example shows us how we also should live.

Souls thus healed by the grace and authority of Christ are the starting point for the redemption of all creation; "they will begin to possess the world together with their bodies now restored to their pristine firmness, instead of being possessed with the world" (*vera Rel.* 23.44). Augustine explains with a reference to Rev. 21 (23.44). Elsewhere he mentions the resurrection of the body (12.25, 41.77, and 44.82); he explains how the soul, by being submissive to God, will be able properly to govern the body and will confer its own immortality upon it.

The practices of the true religion, those exercised by the orthodox churches, are a factor in the healing of our sinful desires. The conversion and healing of desire is not an automatic and binary change, but happens in the context of and through the process of the practices of the true religion, the life of the community of faith as it was organized by Christ.[37] Augustine wants his friend to convert to this true religion, which means to undergo the first of these practices, baptism.[38] When Christ came, "just a few sacraments of the most salutary kind were instituted" to assist in this healing (*vera Rel.* 17.34). In defense of the Old Testament, which the Manicheans rejected, Augustine points out that it makes sense for God to provide different practices and sacraments at different times, just as a doctor provides different prescriptions for different needs (17.34).

God's gracious work involves both reason and authority, one of which "leads on to understanding and knowledge," while the other "demands faith and paves the way for" reason (*vera Rel.* 24.45). (Augustine notes that this is not an absolute dichotomy, since reason is employed in determining whom to trust, and since "the Truth itself," the object of reason, has authority.) So the healing of our desires requires faith in Christ as well as participation in the sacraments of the true religion.

One thing more must be mentioned. Some effort is required on our part. Virtue is necessary for the healing of our desires:

> If the soul, however, . . . beats those greedy desires it has been cherishing in itself by mortal enjoyments and believes with mind and good will that it has been assisted in beating them by the grace of God, then without a shadow of doubt it will be restored to health and will turn back from the many things that change to the one unchanging good, being reshaped by the Wisdom that was never shaped but gives its shape to all things, and will come to enjoy God through the Holy Spirit, which is the gift of God. (*vera Rel.* 12.24)

Quoting Scripture again, Augustine explains that this leads to loving God with heart, soul, and mind, "and loving your neighbor not in a fleshly manner

but as yourself." We might take this to be a bit more neo-Platonic than Christian: The body is neglected; only the soul matters.[39] We will consider this more carefully in due time. Perhaps more important is that virtue is said to be able to reorder our souls and defeat evil, and it seems to be successful even without a mention of the Incarnation. Even the reference to grace may be read neo-Platonically, for the Platonic tradition recognizes that all good derives from God rather than ourselves.[40] However, I think we might well read 12.24 in light of 24.45 and 16.30. If we do so, it seems we would have to conclude that this virtue is subsumed within Christian practice. There is more here than just the grace a neo-Platonist could recognize. It depends on the Incarnation. It depends on the Holy Spirit. This weighs against any reading of Augustine that would take him as being philosophical in such early writings as *vera Rel.* and not Christian. The Christian neo-Platonist interpretation of Augustine by the Courcelle-O'Connell tradition is also a somewhat insufficient description of what is going on here. Neo-Platonism is not merely supplemented by Christianity, not merely completed; its insights are placed in the service of Christian theology, and we are pointed to the church for the fulfillment of whatever merits decorated pagan philosophy.

In short, in his defense of Christianity with respect to the problem of evil, Augustine provides a theology of desire, including some neo-Platonic notions. Yet these are alongside Christian doctrines, which are served by the neo-Platonic doctrines more than vice versa.

WHEN SOMEONE LACKING WISDOM
MEETS AN AUTHORITY HAVING IT

For a short passage, Augustine defends Christianity by considering yet another topic dealt with in more detail in another text, *De Utilitate Credendi*. Say I lack wisdom and am not even able, in my present state of mind, to understand it. Say, moreover, that you *do* have wisdom, you understand it, and you represent an institution which actually has the *job* of caretaking this wisdom and imparting it to others.

How exactly, in this situation, am I to know that you really are someone with wisdom? After all, any number of people *think* they have it and would gladly share their views with me. How am I to know that *you* really are the one with wisdom, since I, not knowing it, don't even know what wisdom looks like? How are you to share the truth with me even if I come looking for it from you? According to the hypothesis, I am not really able to understand it anyway!

This, Augustine thinks, is precisely the position in which most of us find ourselves in relation to the orthodox church—we lacking wisdom and not

able to understand it and the church possessing true wisdom and not able to share it with us directly. We need a way to recognize that wisdom is with the church, and she needs ways of communicating it to us.

Accordingly, Augustine spends *vera Rel.* 25.46 to 28.51 (more or less) considering this situation and explaining that things are about as we could expect them to be. God has given us miracles as a sign that the truth lies with this church, and God has ordained different ways of getting some of the truth across to us and ways of training our minds to understand it better.

God, Augustine informs us, cares for "the interests of individuals" as well as "those of the whole human race" (*vera Rel.* 25.46). God ordained that what he does for the whole race "should be brought to our attention through history and through prophecy."[41] We, lacking wisdom, need to determine which alleged prophecies are genuine and which historical events correlate with a revelation from God; "it is our business to work out which human beings or books are to be trusted. . . ." Although monotheism is preferable to polytheism, we need a more decisive clue as to which religion is true. God has provided this by working miracles to confirm the truth of those testimonies in the Bible (25.47).[42] These correspond to the founding of the orthodox church and need not continue in the present. If they did, we might have been constantly "looking for visible signs," growing "coldly indifferent" to the marvels and, more importantly, to the truth they signify.[43]

Now how might God communicate the truth to us, as yet unable to understand it? There is a "remedial course through time laid down by divine providence for those who have earned mortality by sin" (*vera Rel.* 26.48). Augustine describes the progression of a life from infancy to elderly maturity, in which we have different foods and rules suited to our changing needs. He uses this as an analogy for spiritual progress: In different times, God's people require different spiritual nourishment (26.49). The most basic spiritual food is the examples of history, and in the latter stages, we move toward a more direct and spiritual understanding of God. A chart of these progressions (from 26.48 to 28.51) would be quite complex, for Augustine will compare at one moment physical life to spiritual life in an individual, at another moment the physical life of an individual to the spiritual life of God's *people*, at another moment the *spiritual* life of an individual to the spiritual life of the people, and finally the physical and spiritual lives of all of these to the meanings of Scripture! For scripture has different layers of meaning suited to our level of spiritual maturity (28.51). There are basic, more historical lessons, and there are deeper, hidden, more spiritual lessons.

Now the Manicheans, including Augustine in earlier days (*Conf.* 3.7.12-14) and perhaps Romanianus still, had not only rejected the Old Testament but also ridiculed it for such matters as the (perceived) immorality of the patriarchs. Augustine hopes that his friend will heed his advice to respect

the authority of these scriptures and of the orthodox Church which expounds them. For the Manicheans only ridicule the results of their failed attempts to understand the historical meanings of the scriptures, and they are wholly lacking in the more spiritual meanings. These lessons are just what the orthodox Church could provide, if Romanianus would heed their authority.

Moreover, the situation is just what we would expect it to be if we were without wisdom and the orthodox Church were just what it claims to be, the institution established by God for safeguarding that wisdom and passing it on to those willing to receive it: There are lessons we are not yet prepared to understand. It would be foolish of us to expect otherwise. The wisest move available for someone who understands that he *lacks* wisdom is to accept the evidence of those miracles and be willing to be taught by the orthodox Church whatever lessons it dispenses. We must begin with authority. Eventually, this will lead to knowing by reason, after a certain ascent of our minds.

THE ASCENT

One of the most venerable traditions in philosophy is that of ascent. This tradition recognizes a higher reality which transcends our everyday experiences and which we need training in order to understand. Although accounts of ascent range from Hinduism's *Bhagavad-Gita* and medieval Sufi literature to Plato's *Republic* and Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, we can identify some typical characteristics. The higher reality is non-physical, and, as a superior reality, it is more worthy of our affections. So ascent is always *metaphysical*, in that it points to an ultimate reality and also *ethical*, in that it points to a reordering of our hearts and lives. Another typical characteristic of ascent literature is the turn inward to the soul followed by an upward turn toward that higher reality.[44] This, also, is both a metaphysical and an ethical approach: Ascent literature typically tells us that the soul and God are real and important realities.

In what is by far the longest way of defending the faith by reason in *vera Rel.*, Augustine leads Romanianus in an ascent to God. Having defended the faith briefly by authority, he will now defend it more extensively by reason. We will see some interesting neo-Platonic ideas employed to defend God's existence and explain the soul as an immaterial reality, yet there is also a salient element from the Bible: the ethics of the love of God and neighbor.[45] Indeed, Augustine stands at a crossroads of the ascent tradition—an heir to the neo-Platonic tradition and himself a direct ancestor of Christian medieval ascent writers such as Boethius and Bonaventure. The essential aspect of his account of ascent in texts such as *vera Rel.* and the final books of the *Confessions* is this: He uses neo-Platonic arguments for the moral truth learned

from the Bible, that we should love God and one another. Along the way, he contrasts the love of God and neighbor with three categories of sinful desires (which we will also consider in the final chapter of the present volume).

Augustine begins by explaining that we need to move from authority to reason. Authority is salutary enough, but its purpose is not merely to fill the gap for those who cannot know the truth by reason. It is also *to prepare the mind to know by reason*. A comparison to science might be helpful. Suppose that Thomas Kuhn's philosophy of science is correct at least to the extent that science employs paradigms.[46] A paradigm shapes the way a scientist views the world, and even how he interprets data. During times of normal science, the paradigm is not challenged or even argued for, but simply accepted and used to set the course of a research program. The physicist, for example, may presume a particular interpretation of quantum mechanics and proceed to work out some puzzle in light of that interpretation and, ultimately, to understand better the theory he started off by believing. Augustinian faith is a bit like that: The content of faith sets the course of a research program. We have some truth by faith and now we proceed to work at understanding that truth better. Schaff's words long ago are not outdated: "Faith is the pioneer of reason, and discovers the territory which reason explores."[47] Augustine says:

> And since we have been talking what seems quite long enough for the moment about the beneficent work of authority, let us now see how far reason can make progress in climbing up from the visible to the invisible and from the temporal to the eternal. (*vera Rel.* 29.52)

We have learned about immaterial reality from the authority of Christ, but we must (if we can) move on toward understanding it by reason. "It is not a matter of indulging idle curiosity, . . . but of setting up a ladder to things that are immortal and last forever"—to immaterial reality.

And so Augustine sets up the ladder, analyzing and ranking different realities. This is a way of thinking a bit unfamiliar to the modern mind, but normal for the ancient and the medieval (and not entirely foreign even to the romantic and Victorian). The idea is that some things are better than others, having a greater degree of goodness and even of reality. As a rule, the better things are the ones that naturally govern the others. As another rule, the better things are the ones more stable or more unified; that which falls apart easily is less real and less valuable than that which does not.

Life, then, is superior to non-life (*vera Rel.* 29.52). And reason, a faculty of some living things, is superior to mere animal life (29.53). And the mind which reasons is more valuable. Yet reason and minds are not the highest; that *by which* the mind reasons is higher still. *Truth* is higher (30.54-56). Truth is above the mind, unchanging and superior to it. We make judgments

by truth, in light of it—yet not *about* it (31.57-58). Truth is not subject to our judgments, for it is that by which we make them.

This is an important point. Augustine wants us to get our ideas in the right order. Some ideas are necessarily asymmetrical. As C. S. Lewis put it in *The Abolition of Man*, we make moral judgments in light of first moral principles and logical judgments in light of the axioms of logic, but we do not make judgments *about* them.[48] The sun provides light for the eyes, and a proper use of it is to look at things in its light. We do not look at *it* in its own light. However, in the ancient medieval way of thinking (with the middle books of Plato's *Republic* as the best-known example and inspiration), we may yet find that looking at the sun (if we could do so) would be enlightening. Yet, we would not look at the sun in order to make judgments about it as we look at other things in its light to make judgments about them. Rather, we look at the sun simply to appreciate the beauty of it in itself. Now the truth is the light of the mind. We consider other things and make judgments about them in its light, but we do not make judgments about it in itself. Yet to look directly at it would be wonderful, and indeed would be the finest thing we could hope to do with our minds. This is what Augustine, of course, is leading up to.[49]

And the *truth* is not the only thing that suggests such an asymmetry. *Unity* also is a real thing; it gives oneness to bodies (*vera Rel.* 32.59-60). A fairly common point in ancient and medieval philosophy is that the physical objects surrounding us are only objects because of their unity. My desk, for example, contains a number of boards, and they contain any number of subatomic particles. But there is only one *desk*. Something unifies those parts in order to make a single object. Without partaking of unity, there would simply be no desk—only a pile of particles. So unity, like truth, is a reality the importance of which we must recognize.

In addition to this particular asymmetry, we must also recognize the imbalance of values between what is lower and what is higher. Ascent involves recognizing higher realities and treating them as such, discarding our old habits of loving lower realities as if they were the highest. "Let us then not seek the highest things among the lowest, and let us not look askance at the lowest either" (*vera Rel.* 34.63). Interestingly, Augustine is not telling us to abandon things at the lower rungs of the latter. We would normally expect a neo-Platonist eventually to kick the ladder out from under himself, abandoning lower realities. There is a bit more nuance to the Platonist tradition on this point than we usually give it credit for. Insofar as those lower realities are real, they *do* benefit from the higher, immaterial reality, which is why they can function as helpful signs of it. Truth is not in them, but they can remind us of it. Augustine, I think, would concur, as we saw when considering 24.45. At that time, however, we also saw that Christ, in the Incarnation, dignified these lower physical realities by taking on flesh and, as we saw when considering

the problem of evil, worked to redeem this creation. These are ideas foreign to neo-Platonism, but well known to the early church.[50] No wonder physical realities are not meant to be written off as valueless! Indeed, the body itself is said to be resurrected with immortality at *vera Rel.* 12.25, 41.77, and 44.82; although neo-Platonism certainly has a concept of life after death, and even of reincarnation,[51] the idea of a permanent bodily resurrection is drawn from the Bible rather than philosophy.[52] So I cannot quite agree with Teske that this passage is about loving the souls of humans to the neglect of bodies.[53] It is about getting our loves right by first getting our estimations of the goodness in things right. Once we get God, the soul, and the body straightened out, we will understand their respective values better and be better able to love the lesser goods in the way they are meant to be loved—which is also the way which is best for them.

Life, reason, truth, unity—we have four rungs on our ladder! It is time for the highest rung—the One.

The discussion of unity leads up to this recognition that the One is the ultimate reality (*vera Rel.* 34.64). Here, again, is a point in common with neo-Platonism.[54] The One is, of course, God (31.57), and is also the same reality as truth and beauty! Moreover, parting ways with the neo-Platonists, Augustine hints at Trinitarian theology. God the Father is the One and the Beginning of all else, and Truth is "the Word in the Beginning, and the Word, God with God" (35.66). (He has already referenced the Trinity in 31.58. Later, in 43.81, he remarks that "the Son is rightly said to be *from* him, everything else to be *through* him." He is, no doubt, thinking of the Nicene Creed and John 1.) And we should set our hearts on the One, on God, rather than on the many things of this world (35.65). To think of created things which are given a degree of goodness or oneness or beauty by God as if they themselves possess true goodness, oneness, or beauty is nothing short of idolatry (36.66-67).

His analysis of idolatry leads Augustine to a consideration of three varieties of evil desires, a list of sin from 1 John 2:16 which is a recurring theme in Augustine's writings (such as in *Conf.* 10.30-38, for example). These are the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. They are desires for idle knowledge, physical pleasures, and worldly glory.[55] (As Michael Foley once pointed out to me and others of his students, these interests are the provinces of the three parts of the soul in Plato's *Republic*. Although Augustine's primary interest is the Bible rather than pagan philosophers, the connection to Plato is likely no accident.[56])

Augustine explains each of these sins as a motive for idolatry, which does not escape sinners even when they pass over from idolatry into outright atheism (*vera Rel.* 38.69). They are "the slaves of a threefold greedy longing—for pleasure or superiority or spectacles." This longing for pleasure (the lust of the flesh) is a desire for "the pleasures of the flesh"; the longing for

superiority (the pride of life) is a desire for "some vain position or power"; and the longing for spectacles (the lust of the eyes) is a desire for "some spectacle," that is, some idle curiosity or vain entertainment. Referencing 1 John 2:15-16, Augustine explains, "Here those three vices are signified, because by the lust of the flesh the lovers of the lowest kind of pleasure are signified, by the lust of the eyes the curious and inquisitive, by worldly ambition the proud." He links these to the temptations conquered by Christ when the devil tempted him with bread (the lust of the flesh), kingdoms (the pride of life), and testing God (the lust of the eyes). Thus, Christ gives us an example of how to overcome sinful desire; accordingly, for the healing of our desires, "Let us follow Christ our head . . ." (41.78).

But how *should* we desire? Or, since desire is a variety of love, what should we love instead? The answer, of course, is God and souls. Since *Sol.*'s "*Deum et animam scire cupio*," Augustine's consistent teaching is that God and souls are the most valuable things and the most worth loving. We have already been told (*vera Rel.* 35.65) that we should love God rather than the things of this world. Now, as to the neighbor, Augustine tells us that "What you are loving is God *with your whole heart and your whole soul and your whole mind, and your neighbor as yourself*" (46.86). What is to be loved in the neighbor is "not what comes under the observation of your eyes or any of the senses of the body," but the soul. It is in the soul that the image of God is found. "Human nature therefore is to be loved without any reference to the flesh," for

> we are all related to each other under one God the Father, all of us who love him and do his will, and we are both fathers to each other when we care for one another and sons when we submit to each other and, above all, brothers, because our one Father is summoning us to take possession of our inheritance by his will and testament. (46.89)

Moreover, to love one's neighbor as oneself means something other than "getting out of him some temporal enjoyment or advantage" (*vera Rel.* 46.87). It means the Golden Rule: "That the good things you want for yourself you also want to come his way, while you do not wish on him the bad things you do not want to happen to yourself." And this is for "all people," including "even our enemies." But what good things do we wish for others? What more than the greatest good? What more than God? As Augustine himself said in *Sol.* and as we shall see later when we come to *Lib. Arb.*, the love of God can be shared with others and is no worse for the sharing. This happiness, unlike the pleasures of this world, is not diminished when shared. As Warren Smith says, the Golden Rule is necessary for interpreting the use of others for my own happiness in *vera Rel.*[57] It shows that the love of neighbor

is bound to seek the neighbor's ultimate happiness as well as my own. More-over, the neighbor's goodness is not a monadic substance existing by itself; his goodness is found in relation to the whole creation and the whole plan of divine redemption.[58] So also his happiness will be found in referring him to the same divine plan.

This passage is rich and complex. The idea that happiness requires the stability of goodness is an old theme with a rich history including the Stoics, the Psalms, and Ambrose. (We will look at this more closely when we come to *Lib. Arb.*) The basic idea is simple enough: In order to have happiness, we must possess stable goods. Otherwise, we will either soon lose enjoyment of what we possess or, if we have any sense, worry that we will lose it. This is a high priority for Augustine: "You are only overcome when what you love is snatched out of your hand . . ." (*vera Rel.* 46.86).[59] God, being the most stable good, cannot be snatched out of our hands. The same is true of the souls of others. If, that is, those others are also virtuous enough to love God as they should, then their own happiness will be stable and so will their own virtue, since virtue consists in the right love of God.[60] So the love of God and neigh-bor is not only God's command but also the surest path to our own happiness by the possession of stable goods.

> Accordingly, why may you not be unbeaten by loving a human being, when there is nothing you love in him but his being human—that is God's creation and one made, what is more, to his image—and when he cannot be lacking the perfect nature which you love, since you have been made perfect yourself? (47.90)

One final note on the ascent. Although Augustine makes generous use of neo-Platonic language and concepts when he describes the ladder, in one passage he describes the ladder of ascent differently: "Let us make use of the steps which divine providence has been good enough to construct for us" (*vera Rel.* 50.98), perhaps referencing Jacob's ladder and certainly refer-encing scripture.[61] He then goes on to explain that we should "pinpoint and not confuse" either the things in which we should *believe* and the things we should *know by reason* or the things we should learn by reading the historical accounts in the Bible and the things we learn by interpreting it allegorically (50.99). He further explains how some allegorical meanings in the Bible point to different things ranging from "visible deeds" to "the law of eternity." He also comments on the passages in the Bible that cannot be interpreted liter-ally, such as the figures of speech which, if taken literally, would anthropo-morphize God. In short, Augustine tells us here that God has himself lowered down from heaven a ladder for our ascent. The twin methods of learning about God, reason and authority, as well as the different passages in and meanings of the Bible, historical and allegorical, are all steps in the ascent to

God—steps fitted for our poor ability to understand God, each step preparing us for the ones that come after.

Augustine concludes his ascent passage with an important exhortation. He charges Romanianus and even himself (and any other readers, including us) to worship God and direct our desires in the same direction. "All that being so," he begins, "I urge you, my dearest friends and neighbors, and along with you I urge myself, to run with all the speed we can manage towards the goal to which God is urging us on through his Wisdom" (*vera Rel.* 55.107). That Wisdom is, of course, Christ, and the goal is the reordering of our desires: "Let us not set our hearts on the world, since *everything that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and worldly ambition*." Augustine exhorts us to avoid these various lusts and to avoid all manner of idolatry (55.108-110). We should worship God (55.111-113). Augustine in his final paragraph explains in a bit more detail, giving us the full doctrine of the Trinity:

> That is why it is incumbent on us to worship and confess the very Gift of God, together with the Father and the Son unchanging—a Trinity of one substance, one God from whom we are, through whom we are, in whom we are, from whom we have departed, whom we have become unlike, by whom we have not been allowed to perish; . . . one God, by whose creating us we live, by whose refashioning of us we live wisely, by loving and enjoying whom we live blessedly; one God, from whom, through whom, in whom are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

As we have seen, Augustine defends the orthodox Christian faith in this passage[62] in a number of ways, and in at least three out of four of them points toward a Christian theology of desire. He justifies it by appealing to the highest standards of human reason, those of the Platonists, which teach us to love God more than physical things; Christianity concurs, and does what Platonism never could, helping many actually *do* it. This is accomplished because of the Incarnation and the authority of Christ. Augustine justifies Christianity by considering the problem of evil, which originates in our sinful desire for created goods instead of their creator—a sinful desire healed through the grace of God and, especially, through the Incarnation. He justifies Christianity by explaining how an institution with wisdom would relate to persons without it. And, finally, he justifies Christianity by helping us ascend to a knowledge of the immaterial God and love God and the immaterial souls of our neighbors. If our desires are to be healed, we must love God and our neighbors as ourselves.

In our next text, *de natura boni*, Augustine will consider ethics by the method of reason and will refute the Manicheans more directly, in the process providing a better theology of desire than theirs.

NOTES

1. For a helpful introduction to Romanianus, the interested reader might consult Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 153–56. Kevane has some kind words for Romanianus in "Christian Philosophy," 48. He also notes that Romanianus eventually himself "embraced the true religion, recognizing . . . that the knowledge and wisdom of the philosopher's search are found in the Person of Jesus Christ"; Eugene Kevane, "Christian Philosophy: The Intellectual Side of Augustine's Conversion," *Augustinian Studies* 17 (1986), 56.

2. Augustine, *True Religion*. It is interesting to see the different scholarly reactions to the text. In footnote 126 to *vera Rel.* 33.61 on page 71, Fiedrowicz states that "Augustine was hardly at his best in this early work of his on *True Religion*." (The notes are by Hill and Fiedrowicz, and I am presuming that notes not directly pertaining to the translation are by Fiedrowicz.) However, Kevane treats the book as "of basic importance" in a large set of Augustine's writings among which it is "the central jewel to which all the others relate." Kevane, "Christian Philosophy," 55.

3. On this purpose of the text, Kevane is very helpful; "Christian Philosophy," 47–83.

4. For a different (but related) division of the text of *vera Rel.*, the interested reader may consult the introduction to the New City Press translation; Edmund Hill, Introduction to *True Religion*, trans. Edmund Hill; The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I-Books, Vol. 8: *On Christian Belief*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, Introductions by Michael Fiedrowicz (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2005), 18–19.

5. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.8.1-15 and 3.2.6.

6. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 1.8.5, where Plotinus explains that not every finite degree of goodness is evil; he then mentions that the stars are gods with physical bodies but without evil. In 1.8.6 he explains that we are not to flee the physical world but to live in it virtuously.

7. Roland Teske, General Introduction to The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I-Books, Vol. 19: *The Manichean Debate*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, Introductions and Notes by Roland Teske (Hyde Park: New City, 2006), 9–12.

8. Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986), 12–15.

9. *Augustine of Hippo*, chapter 5; *Eye of a Needle*, 157–60.

10. Catherine Conybeare, *The Routledge Guidebook to Augustine's* Confessions (New York: Routledge, 2016), 76–82.

11. François Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, trans. Edward L. Smithers (Editions du Seuil, 1996; repr., Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 151–58.

12. J. Arendzen, "Manicheanism," The Catholic Encyclopedia, accessed December 4, 2017, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09591a.htm; "Manicheanism," Theopedia, accessed December 4, 2017, https://www.theopedia.com/manicheanism.

13. Topping: "What is important to see is that *ratio* and *auctoritas* are not opposing alternatives in Augustine's pedagogy"; Ryan S. Topping, *Happiness and Wisdom: Augustine's Early Theology of Education* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 150.

14. Augustine, *True Religion* in *on Christian Belief*, trans. Hill.

15. On this theme, I recommend Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*

16. Smith, "Loving the Many in the One," 5.

17. Smith, "Loving the Many."

18. Smith, "Loving the Many," 6.

19. Smith, "Loving the Many," 5–7.

20. Smith, "Loving the Many," 6.

21. Smith, "Loving the Many," 7–10.

22. Topping's commentary on this passage is helpful; *Happiness and Wisdom*, 76–77.

23. Van Fleteren: "In a preface directed to the conversion of non-Christian Platonists—no doubt Porphyrians—to Christianity as the universal way of salvation, Augustine turns to the relation between Christianity and the ancient wisdom. . . . Religion is not one thing and philosophy another. . . . With the change of a few words and opinions, Platonists would have become Christians. In fact such conversions were occurring during Augustine's lifetime—he may be referring to Milanese Porphyrians of his acquaintance." Van Fleteren, "Augustine and Philosophy," 30–31.

24. TeSelle: "What Augustine treasures most about the true religion is not that it gives a more certain knowledge of God . . . but that in it men have *lived out* their knowledge of God in such a way as to convince others . . . and to inspire them to follow the same way of life"; TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 124. Kolbet: "However noble and true were the ideals of the Greek philosophers, they lacked an effective psychagogy to incarnate those ideals and truly heal the fissures troubling soul and society"; Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 115.

25. Even if this reading of the passage is correct, Pierre Hadot oversimplifies things somewhat when he says, "From this Augustinian point of view, Christianity has the same content as Platonism: the key is to turn away from sensible reality in order to contemplate God and spiritual reality, but only Christianity has been able to make the masses adopt this way of life" (*What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 251–52). Even though *this* much of the content is the same, neo-Platonism does not have the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation nor any of the Bible with its creation-fall-redemption narrative. In any case, Hadot's commentary on this passage and on this theme in Augustine is worth reading; *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 250–52. Cary's commentary, likewise, reads *vera Rel.* in much this way and is well worth reading; Cary, *Inner Grace*, 23–25. Also Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 17. TeSelle notes another weakness of neo-Platonism—that they failed to see the way to God as well as they could see that God is the destination; Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine's Strategy as an Apologist: The Saint Augustine Lecture 1973* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1974), 5–6.

26. Kevane: "Philosophy, while remaining itself, . . . will be regenerated and renewed. Its light will be brighter for the eye of the intelligence and it will enable the human person to ascend to intelligible reality more readily and effectively. It will, in short, be a philosophical thinking which proceeds within the Catholic faith. . . ." Kevane, Christian Philosophy, 53–54. Kolbet: "Christianity has more resources than previous traditions in that it is no mere school of philosophy, but the religion of the Wisdom of God that has become incarnate in human nature and thereby liberated it"; *Augustine and the Cure*, 114–15. Mary Clark likewise does not read *vera Rel.* as being overly friendly to Platonic philosophy; Clark, *Augustine*, 10. Brachtendorf likewise; Brachtendorf, "Augustine on the Glory and the Limits of Philosophy," 12–14. Also TeSelle, nothing that "the best of this philosophy leads properly into Christianity—not easily, by a natural development, since it must be through a sometimes agonizing conversion, and yet appropriately"; TeSelle, *Augustine's Strategy as an Apologist*, 8.

27. Fiedrowicz in the footnote 27 to 5.9 observes that the Donatists are these schismatics, not among the heretics.

28. I set aside, as not falling within the scope of this study, whether Augustine accepts what we now recognize as Roman Catholic theology, namely, if I understand rightly, whether the Roman church is superior over the other churches (distinguishing Roman Catholic theology from Eastern Orthodox) and whether universal church teaching is under certain circumstances infallible (distinguishing Roman Catholic from Reformation theology).

29. Wilken on other writings of Augustine: "The only *telos* that can bring genuine happiness is life with God . . . ;" Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 274.

30. On this theme, see Roland Teske, "Heresy and Imagination in St. Augustine," *Studia Patristica* 27, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 400–4. (Admittedly, he is talking about Augustine vs. the Arians rather than against the Manicheans.)

31. Trapè notes that *vera Rel.* "contains the seeds of many ideas found in *The City of God*"; Trapè, "Chapter VI: Saint Augustine," 342–462, 361.

32. I first learned of this three-point summary of the Christian worldview from Dr. David Naugle of Dallas Baptist University. I once asked him where he had learned it himself, and he attributed it to Augustine as well as Abraham Kuyper and, of course, the Bible!

33. Bourke: "So there is no doubt that the young Augustine regarded human bodies as good parts of creation. To suggest that our bodies are evil is a perversion of Augustinism." Vernon J. Bourke, "The Body-Soul Relation in the Early Augustine," in *Augustine: Second Founder of the Faith*; Collectanea Augustiniana 1, ed. J. Schnaubelt and Frederick Van Fleteren (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 437.

34. Rowan Williams: The Incarnation is "the centrepiece of God's 'rhetoric' in communicating with us, God's persuasion of us, not in argument but in fleshly life"; *On Augustine*, Kindle location 493. Kolbet: "God's providential ordering of creation is most visible in the fleshly rhetoric of the incarnation . . ."; *Augustine and the Cure*, 114. Kent: "Augustine declares Christ's entire life on earth a splendid education in morals"; Kent, "Augustine's Ethics," 217.

35. Augustine is not alone among church fathers in saying that the purpose of the Incarnation was to teach us how to desire. Lactantius says the same thing in *Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, chapter 50.

36. The reader who suspects that Augustine's view of the atonement focuses too much on Christ's role in healing our desires would do well to keep in mind how central the disorder of desire is in his theology of sin; to restore right desire *is* to heal sin. Christians today, even Protestants, are often both familiar and comfortable with the idea that the atonement of Christ involves healing our sins, including our corrupted desires; many of us have read of this in Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 179–80. Of course, this is not to say that this view of the atonement is complete. The reader interested in a broader picture of Augustine's view of the atonement than *vera Rel.* alone provides might consult Trapè, "Chapter VI," 434–35; Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, chapters 3 and 5; and TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 165–76. Also Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 218, 226 on a ransom theory of the atonement.

37. Or *re*organized, since in Augustinian theology (just as in Reformation covenant theology) the people of God in the church are continuous with the people of God in the Old Testament, and their religion likewise continuous. As Fiedrowicz and Hill note, Augustine later explained in *Retr.* that in *vera Rel.* he had understood and had this in mind, though his language may have suggested otherwise; *vera Rel.* 10.19, n. 39.

38. *Conf.* 8.2.3-5 makes this theme pretty clear with reference to the story of the conversion of Victorinus.

39. Teske: "Augustine interprets loving one's neighbor as oneself not as meaning that one love's one's neighbor as much as oneself, but as meaning that one loves one's neighbor as the sort of reality that one is, namely, a soul"; Roland Teske, *To Know God and the Soul: Essays on the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 75. Also Rist, *Augustine*, 160–61.

40. Cary is helpful on this theme in *Inner Grace*.

41. Augustine is here displaying a characteristic patristic attitude. Wilken explains how the patristics thought that God is known through history, through the history of Israel and through the work of Christ; *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, chapter 1.

42. This is why "philosophy ignores history to its own peril"; Topping, *Happiness and Wisdom*, 171.

43. Which is not to say that miracles do not happen anymore, as Augustine points out in *Retr.*1.13.7, where he mentions a blind man receiving sight next to the bodies of Gervaius and Protasius and states that "many others happen" still, too many to count. In *Conf.* 9.7.16, he recounts the story of the miraculous preservation of Gervasius and Protasius and how Ambrose learned of their location in a vision; Augustine recounts a direct experience with a miracle when his own toothache was healed through prayer; *Conf.* 9.4.12. Augustine recounts a number of miracles in *Civ. Dei*, book XXII; for more on this, see F. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 544–553.

44. Or a motion from the *outer* to the *inner* and then onward to the *upper*. Kenyon is helpful on this aspect of Augustinian ascent and its connection to the pattern of his dialogues in *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 72.

45. van Bavel on the inward turn of ascent: "The goal of turning within oneself is precisely to be able to turn outwards, to ascend above one's own ego, to leave one's ego, to open oneself to God and one's neighbor"; van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart*, 40.

46. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

47. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, CCEL.org, accessed January 22, 2018, http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/About.htm, vol. 3, chapter 10.

48. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), chapter 2.

49. The comparison and contrast of immaterial truth to the physical sun is explicit in *vera Rel.* 39.73, where the light of the mind is identified as Christ. It is explicit again at 49.96-97, where the Manichean theology is directly targeted; here Augustine the rhetorician uses neo-Platonic themes against the Manicheans on behalf of Christianity. Also Augustine the metaphysician and logician, on which see Warren Smith, "Loving the Many."

50. Hall is helpful here; see Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers*, 22–23.

51. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 1.1.11.

52. Or, more generally, it is drawn from Christian sources including the Bible and church tradition; Wilken, although not specifically looking at *vera Rel.*, notes that Augustine's doctrine of the body as part of the human person was influenced by Christian burial customs. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 160.

53. Teske, *To Know God and the Soul*, 72–82. Rist is nearer the mark in noting that in *vera Rel.* Augustine teaches the love of body as an extension of the love of soul; *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, 161.

54. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 6.9.1-11.

55. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 109–11, is a helpful introduction to this theme in Augustine. Bright comments on the link to the same sins in *Conf.* Book X; Pamela Bright, "Book Ten: The Self Seeking the God Who Creates and Heals," in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, ed. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 162.

56. Fiedrowicz and Hill note, citing Willy Theiler, *Porphyrios und Augustin* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1933), 37–43, that "A similar trio of desires is found in Porphyry, on whom Augustine is probably dependent here . . . ." *vera Rel.* 38.69, n. 134.

57. Warren Smith, "Loving the Many," 11.

58. Smith, "Loving the Many," 12.

59. *vera Rel.* 38.69 is another key passage on this theme.

60. Kent: "To put the point another way, we must love people because they belong to God, not because they belong to us"; "Augustine's Ethics," 214.

61. Footnote 193 (page 95), from Fiedrowicz: "Above all in the scriptures, primarily those of the Old Testament; and, as he is just about to mention dreams, Augustine may well have had in mind first and foremost Jacob's ladder, Gn 28:12-13, and the way in which that episode is recalled by Jesus in Jn 1:51." This reading of Jacob's ladder in a Christian neo-Platonic fashion is not original to Augustine; see Gerald Bray,

"The Eastern Tradition: Origen," Church History I, accessed June 26, 2019, *BiblicalTraining.org*; https://www.biblicaltraining.org/eastern-tradition-origen/church-history-i.

62. For more on this topic, see Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 55, 62–63.

Chapter 2

Ethics according to Reason

De Natura Boni

De Natura Boni, *On the Nature of the Good*, is a good example of the fact that authority and reason are not for Augustine separate, or even in all cases *distinct*, ways of studying theology. In paragraph 24, Augustine will explicitly shift from reasoned argument to an appeal to authority, on which he mainly relies until paragraph 41, when he shifts back toward an emphasis on reason. These are complementary ways of knowing God. Still, *Nat. b.* is a superb example of the defense of a Christian ethics based on reason.

It may not appear at first that this is even a text on ethics. It is about metaphysics. To conclude that it is not about ethics is to misunderstand a key truth, perhaps a truth about life but certainly a truth about ancient and medieval thought—that ethics and metaphysics are linked. Let me explain it the way I often do for my students. The pre-Socratic philosophers studied metaphysics: They wanted to know what the universe is made of. Socrates, as Aristotle put it, then brought philosophy into the city, meaning that he turned to a study of ethics. Socrates wanted to know what is the right way to live, what the human and social virtues are, and so on. Socrates, it seems, did not much care whether the universe was made of water, fire, air, atoms, or whatever; why should I care about such things when what really matters is knowing how to live the good life? Then along came Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and dozens of others at least until Aquinas who studied both ethics *and* metaphysics. For, they think, how can we know what the good life for human beings is unless we know what sort of universe we are living in and what sort of beings we are who are living in it?

Nat. b. is a work of *metaethics*—not a direct study of what is right, but of what *makes* it right. Of course, there are immediate implications for what *is* right, and they have much to do with what we should love and desire. Augustine argues against the Manicheans that there is no such thing as an

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evil nature—all natures are good.[1] This is quite the metaphysical insight: Goodness is built into the structure of reality.[2] And, just as reality is hierarchical—with God at the top and matter at the bottom—so what we should love is hierarchical. We should love God above all, and love what is created by God with the love due to it. Created things have a lesser degree of reality, and a lesser degree of goodness, and should be loved less. But they should be loved to an extent, for they possess some goodness; if they did not, they would not exist!

In this chapter, I shall first summarize Augustine's arguments based on reason that whatever is a nature is inherently good—that it has a built-in goodness—yet is less good than God and explain the implications for a theology of desire. Next I shall summarize his appeal to biblical authority on behalf of the same metaethics, and, again, explain the implications for a theology of desire. Finally, I shall examine his refutation of some particularly egregious points of Manichean theology, look at how they corrupt desires, and consider what Augustine says about the healing of desire in *Nat. b.*

THE TESTIMONY OF REASON

The first twenty-three chapters of *Nat. b.* constitute a careful refutation of Manichean metaethics relying on reason. After a brief introduction to the problem of Manichean ethics, I shall summarize these teachings from the first twenty-three chapters of *Nat. b.*

The Manichean Ethics

The Manichean system of belief is a curious one. On the one hand, it denigrates matter as evil. On the other hand, the Manichean metaphysics is a materialism, and their ethics correspond to it. Manicheanism is anti-matter yet tends toward revelry in sensual pleasures. It falls under the Apostle Paul's condemnation in Col. 2:23 of philosophies which are this-worldly and not based on Christ: "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh" (ESV).

These things will become more plain later. Augustine's own descriptions and refutations of Manicheanism in *Confessions* III (chapters 6–10) and V (chapters 3–7) are a good place for the interested reader to study more on them. Also helpful are Teske's comments on the Manicheans and their ethical system.[3]

What a Christian thinker needs is a system of thought based on a true understanding of Christ rather than on this world and which succeeds in

restraining sensual indulgence.[4] Augustine aims to give us this, if only in out-line form, in *Nat. b.* He will need to explain how matter is, by its very nature, good and yet less good than spirit or God, show that the authority of Scripture supports this teaching, and refute the competing Manichean philosophy.

Paragraphs 1–23

In this first section of his book, Augustine explains that goodness is woven into the fabric of reality or—using a different metaphor—built into its structure. His case is based on reason. His reasoning includes some premises which are accepted by the Manicheans, yet it leads to their refutation.

From the first sentence of *Nat. b.* Augustine displays the strategy of his moral reasoning: to move from an understanding of what is real to an understanding of what is good. He says *Summum bonum, quo superius non est, Deus est*: "The highest good, than which there is none higher, is God," he explains, "and for this reason he is the immutable good and therefore truly eternal and truly immortal" (1).[5] An appeal to reason usually means one or both of two things: either a general appeal to right thinking or a use of specific logic and arguments. In this first sentence, Augustine is doing both. The Manicheans and he share a common view which is an important piece of right thinking: God is the greatest good. This is also the fundamental premise of his arguments, and he immediately establishes on this basis that God is also immutable—thus refuting the Manicheans, whose cosmology taught them that God had been affected by his struggle with evil.[6]

Of course, the Manicheans are not his only audience. In the same para-graph, he references "that which he [God] begot of himself" (*Nat. b.*, 1) and he says two paragraphs later that "we Catholic Christians worship God . . ." (*Nat. b.*, 3). Some, perhaps most, of his audience are orthodox Christians. These would benefit from learning the truth a little better and, of course, from the refutation of Manichean heresy, so prominent in North Africa at the time. Even his orthodox readers would have Manichean friends, neighbors, and relations—as Augustine himself had once been to a number of orthodox Christians. These Christians would benefit from having the truth explained to them in a way that might help them in their interactions with lost Manichean sheep.

Augustine wastes no time moving on to additional insights, beginning with a syllogism. He tells us that everything *of* God (Latin *de*) *is* God; moreover, what is made *by* God is *not* God (*Nat. b.*, 1). Accordingly, whatever is a good made by God is made *by* God and not *of* God. With this bit of reason-ing in place, the Manicheans—if they grant the premises—are undone. For they accept that there are good things, such as the human soul, which are not identical to God, yet they think that these things were made *of* God. In the

Manichean cosmology, little bits of God broke off during the conflict with evil, and they were the origins of our souls.

More reasoning: God is omnipotent and can create out of nothing; indeed, God *has* created out of nothing rather than out of himself.[7] What is made of nothing is mutable; therefore, everything created by God is mutable. Another premise, one also accepted by the Manicheans: "all goods . . . can only be made by God." And, finally, another, which is evidently addressed directly to his Christian readers: "Every nature insofar as it is a nature is something good. . . ." The crucial conclusion is that every nature is made by God.

This is an important point, another point contrary to Manichean theology. To make it, Augustine had to rely on the premise that every nature is good—which the Manicheans will not accept. Yet all of this has been an introduction, setting the stage for his defense of it. Before moving on to that defense, Augustine elaborates on what he has already shown: Everything, either spirit or body, is made by God. God is "immutable spirit," and created, mutable spirits are better than bodies. And this, of course, is where Augustine is going: toward ethics. Until this point, it might seem that he is only doing metaphysics and metaethics—studying the necessary dependence of goodness on God—and not presenting any theology of desire. Here, however, the practicality of his metaphysics begins to shine through. For he has explained the hierarchical nature of goodness: God at the top, an infinite goodness; created spirits in the middle, possessing a limited goodness; and bodies, i.e. matter, at the bottom, possessing a still more limited goodness. This tells us what is, and what is good, and, before *Nat. b.* is finished, it will also tell us how we are to love, what we are to desire, and what we are not to desire.

Not everyone understands that natures are inherently good (*Nat. b.*, 2).[8] These, the Manicheans, have been "disturbed" by two things: "the wickedness of the spirit and the mortality of the body." Their problem is the problem of evil: They seek an explanation for the evils of sin and mortality and find it in the notion of an evil nature opposed to God. Augustine thinks he has the resources to correct them. The most important resource is their right-thinking recognition of two fundamental and important premises already explained: that God is the highest good and the source of all good. Augustine says this is enough to correct them, "if they are willing to pay attention."

The premises that God is the supreme good and that goodness comes from God are not by themselves enough to show that every nature is made by God. Augustine needs a separate argument to show that every nature is good. He begins it in earnest in paragraph 3 of *Nat. b.* Goodness, he says, is built into the structure of reality. Every nature has structure, and thus every nature is good! When I say "structure" here I am using the best English word I can think of. I mean it in Wolters' sense: "structure refers to the order of creation, to the constant creational constitution of anything, what makes it the thing or

entity that it is"; it also means "*substance*, *essence*, and *nature*."⁹ The same term is employed in Carl Vaught's trilogy on the *Confessions*.¹⁰ Augustine will sometimes use the word "nature" (*natura*), and he uses three additional words in *Nat. b.* These are *modus*, *species*, and *ordo*—"limit, form, and order" (Teske's translation) or "measure, form, and order" (Newman's translation).¹¹ These are his threefold characterization of whatever is real—whatever is a "nature." Limit, form, and order are necessarily good things (*Nat. b.* 3). They "are like universal goods in the things made by God." The obvious conclusion is what Augustine needs to refute the Manicheans: "Every nature, therefore, is good." God, the greatest nature, is "above every limit of a creature, above every form, above every order." God is not spatially above but above "by his ineffable and singular power"—a greatness not physical but immaterial. In pointing toward immateriality, Augustine is hinting at the metaphysical insight the Manicheans badly need.

Whence, then, if every nature is good, comes evil? This question had greatly vexed Augustine over the years when, while a Manichean, he had pondered the origin of evil (*Conf.* 7.3-7.5). Only the light of the neo-Platonic doctrine of immaterialism had helped him to understand evil (*Conf.* 7.9-7.16).¹² Augustine explains that we must not ask whence evil comes before we understand what it *is* (*Nat. b.* 3). And what is it? It is not a thing in itself, but a *lack*. Strictly speaking, evil is not *real*. It is only a lack of *goodness*. Of course, since the whole point of the metaphysics of *Nat. b.* is to understand that goodness and reality are fundamentally the same, evil can and must also be understood as a lack of *reality*. It is a privation, in fact, of those three things—limit, form, or order. Augustine regularly calls it a "corruption": Evil "is nothing but the corruption of either a natural limit or form or order." Understanding evil, moreover, requires comprehension of this subtlety: "But even a corrupted nature is good insofar as it is a nature, while it is evil insofar as it has been corrupted." Evil depends on the presence of good. More precisely, evil, as an *absence* of good, can only be in a nature when there is still enough limit, form, and order for there still to *be* a nature. Here we have the well-known Augustinian insight: Evil is parasitic on the good.¹³ If limit, form, and order are wholly removed from a nature, it will cease to exist (*Nat. b.* 6), and, thus, so will the evil! Illness is a good example (used by Augustine, for instance in *Ench.* 3.11). Illness is parasitic on health, and a deprivation of it; it depends on there being at least some health in the body. If the illness removes all health, the body ceases to exist as a living body, and the illness likewise ceases.

Four more points regarding evil are particularly salient. First, it is a privation of the good a thing should have, the good it was created to have. By definition, everything created by God lacks God's goodness; but this is no evil, for they are not *meant* to have it. Evil is a deprivation of the degree of limit, form, or order appropriate to a thing's nature.

Second, a corrupted thing may yet have more good than an uncorrupted thing. A corrupted thing with a nature having a high degree of goodness may yet be more good than an uncorrupted thing with a lesser degree of goodness—as corrupted gold is "better than uncorrupted silver" (*Nat. b.* 5). Accordingly, since a "rational spirit" (whether an angelic being or a human soul) has so much goodness, if it is corrupted it still retains more goodness than any non-human soul[14] or any physical thing (5).[15]

Third, "God has granted" to rational spirits that corruption is not possible without their consent (*Nat. b.* 7). From a willing disobedience of God follow two evils: the corruption which is the sin itself and the just punishment of God.

Fourth, among and in things of lesser good than rational spirits, order, beauty, and goodness obtain. Even in their deaths and their ceasing to exist, there is an order obtaining in the whole—"a certain temporal beauty of its own kind" (*Nat. b.* 8). This helps to ground another well-known Augustinian insight: that God can bring good out of evil, making a good, beautiful, and orderly whole that contains bad, ugly, or disorderly elements.[16]

Now, in *Nat. b.* 10, Augustine gives us an apt summary of the metaethics he has developed so far: Corruptible natures are made by God; they "would not be natures at all" otherwise; nor would they be corruptible "if they were made of him"; "And so they exist with whatever limit, whatever form, whatever order they have." Augustine (12) reminds us that the Manicheans grant his key premise that all good natures are made by God, that the reasoning is quite clear, and that this analysis suffices to disprove their view that there is an evil nature in opposition to God. He reinforces his reasoning with a thought experiment: Think of as many good things as possible, then remove them, and, finally, "see whether any nature remains" (13). He asks us to consider these goods: life, health, memory, understanding, tranquility, strength, abundance, awareness, light, pleasantness, measure,[17] beauty, peace, "and anything else of the sort that can come to mind, especially those things that are found in everything, whether spiritual or corporeal, that is, all limit, all form, and all order, both great and small." For each of these goods, he suggests, if we try to imagine a thing without any such qualities, we will be imagining nothing at all; where any nature is, there is goodness; and where any goodness is, God has made it. Another thought experiment is offered in paragraph 15: Imagine that something ugly, perhaps an ape, is made even uglier, or, more generally, that something bad is made worse. What does getting uglier or worse mean but that some beauty or goodness is being diminished? Accordingly, even in ugly and bad things there remain beauty and goodness.

After another reminder that "even these privations" have order and "occur in a fitting manner" (*Nat. b.* 16), Augustine summarizes his metaethics again in paragraph 17. He then explains that even what the pagan philosophers

called prime matter or *hyle* (from a Greek word for matter used by Aristotle and others) is not in fact evil, but is good insofar as it has the potential for receiving form. Prime matter is a bit of a foreign concept for most people these days. The idea is linked to the theory of hylomorphism, which has it that physical things (like stones, bricks, trees, and houses) are not made of matter alone, but of matter and immaterial form combined.[18] Matter by itself is just *stuff*; but a physical thing with a form, essence, or nature is more than stuff; it is made of passive matter organized by an immaterial form or nature which acts on the matter to organize it and make something out of it. Prime matter is wholly unorganized matter. As such, it is lacking in nearly every conceivable good. Yet it is not lacking in good altogether, for, as Augustine says, "the capacity for form is undoubtedly also something good" (18). And prime matter is nothing *but* the capacity for form. Augustine's is a metaphysics in the tradition of neo-Platonism, for Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus were all hylomorphists. (Indeed, hylomorphism was a dominant view in Western metaphysics from Plato to Aquinas; after fading for a few centuries after the Enlightenment, it is often touted today.) Yet Augustine's version seems to me to differ in one respect from that of Plotinus.[19] Plotinus considers prime matter to be evil due to its near-total lack of reality.[20] Augustine pointedly tells us prime matter is *good*.

Continuing his refutation of the Manicheans in paragraph 19, Augustine reminds us again that he is interested in theology no less than metaphysics or ethics. God's "*I am who I am*" in Exodus 3 is appropriate, "For he truly is because he is immutable." As always throughout this text, Augustine is eager to affirm of God what is proper and pious—God's superior mode of being. This is in the interests of helping us love God in a manner appropriate to that affirmation as much as it is in interests of affirming what is true. He shortly reiterates the main syllogism: All natures are good things, and all good things come from God, so all natures come from God.

Augustine is now swiftly moving toward the end of his reason-based objection to Manicheanism. He explains that even pain exists only "in good natures" (*Nat. b.* 20). He cites a verse of which he was quite fond, saying that "God arranged *all things in measure and in number and in weight*" (*Nat. b.* 21). This, from Wis. 11 in the Apocrypha/Deuterocanon (recognized by Augustine as Old Testament scripture), he takes as biblical warrant for his metaphysics.[21]

Augustine must, however, consider how and in what sense we may speak of God and limitations. On the one hand, God must have no limits, but, on the other hand, God is the source of all good, and Augustine has said that limit (*modus*) is good. He concludes that it is probably meaningful and permissible to say simply that God "is the highest limit . . . if we understand the highest good in that which we call the highest limit" (*Nat. b.* 22). Shortly afterward,

with a final summary, he closes both paragraph 23 and his reason-based analysis: Limit, form, and order always accompany a good nature and vice versa.

Presenting an explicit theology of desire will have to wait, but its elements are already in place. There is a hierarchy of goods: God is the *summum bonum*, the greatest good—a good whose goodness cannot be measured, a good we might even say *is* the measure of the goodness of other goods. Below God are the rational spirits, the greatest created goods. God is immutable, but these, created out of nothing, are mutable. Below them are other created goods. Whatever is created by God is good, having a lesser degree of goodness. All is to be loved in an order corresponding to the order of goodness—God above all.[22] To desire a lower thing with the desire appropriate to a higher is to err, to love in a disorderly way. Yet not to love the goods created by God—with the love due to them—is likewise to err.

This will become still clearer after Augustine considers the testimony of authority.

THE TESTIMONY OF AUTHORITY: PARAGRAPHS 24–40

These truths, which our faith contains and reason has to some extent investigated, must be defended by the testimonies of the divine scriptures so that those who cannot attain them because of their weaker intellect may believe in the divine authority and in that way merit to understand. (*Nat. b.* 24)

As for "Those who do understand," they should know that these truths are not a clever invention of our minds but are taught in Scripture. There are two ways of learning the truth, reason and authority. Reason is for those who can. Authority is for those with weaker intellect. But is it *only* for them? I think not. We might posit that reason itself here depends on faith, inasmuch as the truths are from the books and not our own minds. I think this is not quite right either, inasmuch as many of these truths were known by the neo-Platonists through reason (as Augustine had learned earlier; see *Conf.* VII). I think it is better to say that authority is for everyone, and reason is for some. Sometimes reason has the job of finding out some truths, such as the immateriality of God and the soul; other truths, such as the Incarnation according to *c. Acad.* 3.19.42-3 and *Conf.* VII, must be revealed if we are to know them; and in all cases where we know by faith, reason is a good way to move on from *mere* faith into faith accompanied by understanding. As Augustine was fond of saying (drawing from an early Latin translation of Isaiah 7:9), we believe in order that we might understand. Later Anselm, following and quoting Augustine, would use the magnificent phrase *fides quaerens intellectum* to capture the same idea: "faith seeking understanding."[23]

Augustine says that those truths which in the first third or so of *Nat. b.*
he has investigated through reason are found in the Bible, which he goes on
to show with abundant citations. Old Testament wisdom literature and the
letters of Paul are his most frequent sources. For example, he demonstrates
God's immutability from the Psalms, Wis., 1 Tim., and John (*Nat. b.* 24). He
shows from Psalms, 2 Mac., and Rom. that God made things out of nothing
(26). Even the least goods are from God, he demonstrates from 1 Cor. (30).
Sin comes from free will, not from God, and is a *corruption* of nature rather
than *a* nature, as passages in Rom. demonstrate (28). The opposite of God,
that which has no good at all, is not something but simply nothing, a proper
reading of John shows (25).

This last insight is the subject of some careful thought and exegesis.
Augustine has in paragraphs 1, 10, and 25 alluded to the doctrine that Christ,
God the Son, is begotten of God the Father, not made. Now he explains that
what is said to be nothing in John 1 is simply *nothing*, not at all *something*,
although the Manicheans had mistakenly interpreted John 1—when it states
that *nothing* was made without Christ—in this way (25). Moreover, "'From
him' does not mean the same thing as 'of him'" (27). Augustine explains this
difference, illustrating with the idea of a man begetting a son and building a
house.[24] Both are *from* (Latin *ex*) him; but only one is *of* (Latin *de*) him, and
the other is "of earth and wood." The example is well chosen. At least since
Aristotle,[25] hylomorphists had been treating wood and earth as the matter
from which things are made. It's not *nothing*, or even *prime* matter.[26] But, as
matter, it is closer to non-being than is the man's son. The man is to his son
what God the Father is to God the Son, the man is to the house what God the
Trinity is to things created out of the nothing, and the house is to the wood
and earth what things God creates are to nothing. Of course, as Augustine
says at the end of paragraph 27, God does not need matter at all; he creates
ex nihilo (and, more to the point, *de nihilo*).

The heart of *Nat. b.*'s analysis of desire is paragraphs 34–35. Here Augus-
tine's explicit theology of desire fits the metaethics he has developed through
reason and justified through authority, and he develops it with reference to
the biblical doctrine of sin. Sin "is not to desire evil natures but to abandon
better ones" (*Nat. b.* 34). Thus, the Bible says that all creation is good, even
the trees in the Garden of Eden.

No nature is evil; evil is not what *is*, but the corruption of it—the corrup-
tion of good natures. Evil is not in a thing's lacking good *per se*, but in its
lacking the good nature God designed it to have. The root of all sin is not a
love of evil natures, since there are none, but the root of sin has something
to do with love. The root of sin is to *not* love the greater goods as we ought,
especially those rational spirits and, even more so, God. Sin does involve a
desire for lesser goods; however, to desire them does not make them evil any

more than their having less good than God makes them evil. Rather, sin is to desire a lesser good with an ardor fit only for a higher good—such as to love sub-human life with the love due to humans (*Conf.* 3.10.18) or to love humans with a love due to God.

This is the pattern of sin from the first pages of the Bible. The sin of Adam is not to "desire an evil nature" but to abandon a better nature (*Nat. b.* 34). That which was better was God, whom Adam should have loved by obeying his commandments. In desiring the fruit of the tree, Adam sinned by allowing the lesser good to overrule the greater good of God's commands.

Furthermore, God had given this commandment for a reason—"to show that the nature of the rational soul was not in its own power but ought to be subject to God," and that we damage ourselves when we resist this natural ordering (*Nat. b.* 35). We are created with an order appropriate to our natures: Rational spirits are lesser goods than God and greater goods than trees. When we undermine this order, we undermine ourselves. Augustine even suggests that the reason the tree was said to be "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" is that its misuse brought in its wake a knowledge of these consequences borne of experience.

Thus, sin is nothing else but an act of desire—the desire of a finite good in the place of God. Desire in itself is not the problem, because those finite goods *are* appropriate to desire in corresponding measure and because the greatest good, God, is above all to be desired. Desire gone *astray* is the problem.

One final remark before moving on from Augustine's appeal to biblical authority: He clearly has an orthodox audience in mind. For he cites quite a bit from the Old Testament, which the Manicheans do not recognize as authoritative. However, he also appeals to texts recognized by the Manicheans, citing the letters of Paul quite a bit. It seems he is doing several things at once: appealing to the orthodox on the basis of the Old Testament authority which they recognize, appealing to the Manicheans on the basis of New Testament authority which *they* recognize and showing all alike that the testimony of reason is consistent with that of Scripture.[27]

DIALOGUE WITH THE MANICHEANS: PARAGRAPHS 41–48

This third and final section of *Nat. b.* occupies about a third of the text although it has only been divided into eight (somewhat longer) paragraphs. Here Augustine turns to a sort of dialogue with the Manicheans. In the first and second sections of the text he has argued positively, and based on reason and authority, for a good metaethics. Now he will take a more negative approach, directly refuting certain Manichean doctrines.

The transition to this section is in paragraph 40, which also serves as a conclusion to the section appealing to authority and in the beginning of paragraph 41. Paragraph 40 summarizes much of what has come: Orthodoxy and reason show that God can neither be harmed nor cause harm nor "permit anyone to do harm with impunity."[28] He cites Col. 3:25 to further back this up. The Manicheans blaspheme "by introducing two natures," God and evil (41). They attribute goods to evil: "life, power, health, memory, understanding, balance, strength, abundance, awareness, light, pleasantness, measures, numbers, peace, limit, form, and order." They attribute evils to God: "death, sickness, forgetfulness, folly, turmoil, weakness, need, insensitivity, blindness, pain, injustice, disgrace, war, lack of moderation, ugliness, and perversity." This is striking not only for the harsh rhetoric but also for the boldness of the argument. The list of good things is in close (but not perfect) correspondence to paragraph 31's list, and the "great evils" are largely (not entirely) their antonyms. Augustine thinks it perfectly reasonable and correct to suppose that these things are indeed goods and evils. The Manicheans in their foolishness had described the good nature (whom they claimed to follow and whom they recognized as the God of the New Testament) and the evil nature (whom they thought to be the God of the Old Testament) as having these traits—including all the wrong ones! Augustine goes on to demonstrate carefully that they attributed these same goods to the evil nature and the evils to the good nature.[29]

One begins to see from the awkwardness and (if Augustine's criticisms are fair) silliness of Manichean theology how errant is their approach to ethics. They largely separated their ethics from their metaphysics. They considered good and evil to be metaphysically symmetrical—equal in power, neither superior to the other, and with no account given of any relevant differences between the two. The good and evil natures are morally different, but not different in any other relevant respect. Yet a little consideration of those other relevant respects—of the good or bad traits built into the structure of a thing, woven into the fabric of reality—shows that good and evil must be considered to have some relevant metaphysical differences if their moral differences are to mean anything. This, in a nutshell, is Augustine's critique in *Nat. b.*

As for his positive case, it is an alternative account—an asymmetrical metaphysics of good and evil, a holistic approach integrating metaphysics and ethics. What is morally good is what *is*, as is shown by a little consideration of how limit, form, order, and other good traits are built into the structure of a good nature. What is morally bad is not something that *is*, but something that is *not*—a lack or a corruption of the same goodness built into the structure of a basically good nature.

The poor Manichean approach to metaphysics thus makes for a poor ethics—including a poor theology of desire and a life lived according to unruly

desires. Augustine will return to the topic of the healing of desire before *Nat. b.* is complete.

In paragraphs 42–3, he provides us with diverse refutations of Manichean confusions regarding evil as well as of their attributions of evil qualities to the good nature. There are citations to a text of Mani himself, the *Letter of the Foundation*. Methodologically, in these paragraphs we are on familiar territory; recognizing qualities like weakness and ignorance as evils shows the irrationality of the Manichean system, which attributes those qualities to God. Paragraph 43 is particularly salient: If the good nature of which the Manicheans speak was forced to fight evil, then it was weak; if it was not forced, then it *willed* to fight and "to do harm to his own nature," unless it was ignorant of the harm that would result. Whatever the case, Manichean theology requires us to conclude that God is afflicted by some evil: either weakness, or a malevolent will, or ignorance![30]

Paragraph 44 shifts to the consequences of the Manichean view that part of God is in all of life. They say that these bits of God are released from imprisonment in matter by sexual acts. We are not talking about human sexuality here, but about a bizarre cosmic sexual fantasy. It seems Manichean theology posits heavenly beings who are "the females of the nation of darkness" and others who are "the males of the nations of darkness." These are, apparently, demonic or some such beings formed out of the matter of the evil nature. Within them, the Manicheans said, are bits of God which can be freed by sexual release. God arranges for some of his own bits to become attractive males or females who are then presented to these demonic beings in order to bring about that sexual climax and let the trapped bits of God escape. Augustine documents his description of this Manichean sexual theology with an extended quotation from Mani's book *The Treasury*.

The language describing the role of desire in this fantasy is important. The male and female beings formed from God arouse the sexual desires of these "princes and princesses of darkness," whose sexual organs "find relief through that concupiscence" (*Nat. b.* 44). That last word is *concupiscentia*, a standard word used by Augustine in describing the disorder of original sin and the corruption of desire. And the Manicheans say that *God* brings about this disorder in those princes and princesses. (Mani's own words lessen neither the weirdness nor the morally problematic character of this theology.)

One Manichean theory in particular may be familiar to readers of the *Confessions*. The Manicheans also held that bits of God were trapped in food and could be released after being eaten by the Elect, the leaders of their sect, as Augustine tells us in *Conf.* 3.10.18 and here—in *Nat. b.* 45. No doubt he suspects (or recalls from personal experience as a Manichean Hearer, a follower of the Elect) that this doctrine can lead to a bit of gluttony on occasion. But

it gets worse. The Manicheans believe that bits of God are trapped in their snacks of figs and in their own bodies. For the heavenly "princes and princesses of darkness," sexual acts release these divine particles. The conclusion is clear: Manichean theology suggests that Manicheans should follow suit! It makes sense for them to imitate the cosmic sexual indulgence on earth!

After another long quote from Mani's *Letter of the Foundation* to explain the Manichean theology of the creation of man, which trapped divine particles inside human beings (*Nat. b.* 46), Augustine mentions some reports that Manicheans have indeed practiced this sexual indulgence for those same reasons (*Nat. b.* 47). When challenged, they cited the same passage in Mani's *Treasury*. Of course, other Manicheans deny that these were a part of the same sect, but Augustine contends that the logic against the Manichean position is sound. This sort of behavior follows from their books, which it would behoove them to renounce.

Paragraph 48 concludes *Nat. b.* with a prayer evoking the *Confessions*. The prayer points to God's truthfulness, mercy, patience, and justice. The New City Press edition notes nine biblical allusions.[31] Augustine asks for freedom for those captured by "this accursed and extremely horrible error." This, perhaps more than anything else, confirms *Nat. b.*'s missional purpose: Augustine is not only trying to strengthen the orthodox in their faith and to make an academic refutation of a heresy. He is aiming to help the wandering souls of the Manicheans return to truth, to reason, to God, and to healed desires. That healing is a key theme in this passage. It is a conversion to the love of God and is brought about by God—for this is why Augustine is praying for it on their behalf. Augustine prays for the Manicheans, "admonished by your rebukes," to "take refuge in your ineffable goodness and prefer the eternal life of heaven to all the allurements of life in the flesh." This sentence concludes *Nat. b.* and is the final evidence that its metaethics is also a theology of desire. It is an appeal to reason and authority on behalf of Augustine's vision of the order of reality based on the inbuilt hierarchy of goodness. It is also an argument for the ordering of our loves in response to that reality, and a prayer for the healing of our desires when they stray from this order.

The nature of evil as an interruption of that order—and what that interruption has to do with desire—is the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Trapè: *Nat. b.* "shows once again that all things, inasmuch as they exist, are good and that evil is nothing but a privation of good. The Manichean principle of absolute evil is absurd"; Trapè, "Chapter VI: Saint Augustine," 342–462, 382. See also Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, chapter 4.

2. Helpful commentary on this may be found in Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 9–10. A helpful article on the unity of being and goodness in Augustine is Scott MacDonald, "The Divine Nature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 71–90. Also MacDonald, "Augustine's Christian-Platonist Account of Goodness," *The New Scholasticism* 63 (1989), 485–509. Asiedu, however, argues that, in the latter article, MacDonald has been confused on some points pertaining to this topic. His critique of MacDonald includes some good commentary on *Nat. b.*; F. B. A. Asiedu, "Augustine's Christian-Platonist Account of Goodness: a Reconsideration," *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002), 328–43. I think Asiedu is correct on this point; MacDonald suggests that Augustine does not explain the goodness of things; he only "gives an account of the being of things from which it follows that they are good"; MacDonald, "Augustine's Christian-Platonist Account of Goodness," 489. Indeed, the point of *Nat. b.* is precisely to give an account of the goodness of things.

3. Teske, General Introduction to The Works of Saint Augustine, 9–12.

4. Might such a system of thought be a philosophy or might a philosophy of some sort at least contribute to our understanding of it? Paul, of course, in Col. 2:8 prescribes against a certain kind of philosophy. Augustine, as we see in *Conf.* 8.2.3, considers this a ban on this-worldly philosophy; neo-Platonism, not based on this world but on higher, immaterial reality, is another matter. An alternative interpretation is suggested by the title of the journal of the Evangelical Philosophical Society (of which I am a member): *Philosophia Christi*, the philosophy of Christ! Perhaps a Christ-based philosophy is excluded from Paul's condemnation.

5. Augustine, *The Nature of the Good*, trans. Roland Teske; The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I-Books, Vol. 19: *The Manichean Debate*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, Introductions and Notes by Roland Teske (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2006).

6. MacDonald: "The attribute that Augustine links most closely to true being is immutability. He very often discusses them together, and he takes them to be mutually entailing." MacDonald, "The Divine Nature," 84.

7. Augustine, *The Nature of the Good*, 1.

8. Bourke: "No one who has looked at Augustine's treatise *On the Nature of the Good* could doubt that he cherished all of God's creatures, including the human body"; Vernon J. Bourke, *Wisdom from St. Augustine* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1984), 95.

9. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 49.

10. Vaught, *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions*; Vaught, *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions*; Vaught, *The Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions*.

11. Augustine, *On the Nature of Good*, trans. Albert H. Newman; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1887).

12. On this point, Teske is helpful; General Introduction, 11.

13. Trapè offers a useful commentary; "Chapter VI," 417.

14. Animals have souls in Augustinian—as in Aristotelian and neo-Platonic—metaphysics.

15. See Teske on the "soul's mid-rank position"; Roland Teske, "Augustine's Theory of Soul," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 116–17.

16. A theme investigated by Augustine in *Ord.*, Book I. See also Boone, *Conversion and Therapy*, 93–94, 117.

17. Latin *mensura*, also translated "measure" by Newman.

18. I overview the general idea of hylomorphism and some of the reasons a metaphysician might consider it, with reference to both classical and contemporary sources, in an original philosophical dialogue. In keeping with the innovative and weird spirit of our age, it is a YouTube playlist. See Mark Boone, "What Are Things?" accessed June 27, 2019, https://m.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0gapVBX 3Jr8Iz986NLbiLLy5h_OfAACo.

19. TeSelle: Augustine's metaphysics "is undeniably based upon what he learned of Platonist philosophy . . . ; but it is a Platonism that is checked against, and in some important instances modified by, Scripture and the doctrines of the Church"; TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 136.

20. *Enneads* 1.8.1-15.

21. It should be noted that the Latin Wisdom's *in mensura et in numero et pondere* does not correspond precisely to Augustine's *modus, species, et ordo*.

22. "If the good of the human soul is not the good that is the highest good, then the soul desires something that is other than the best it can aspire to"; Asiedu, "Augustine's Christian-Platonist Account of Goodness: a Reconsideration," 332.

23. Anselm, *Proslogion: with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, 2.

24. In our own day, Lewis is similar; Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, chapter 1.

25. A representative passage is Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 7.13-8.5.

26. "Matter" is a relative term in Aristotelian metaphysics. Prime matter is matter in relation to clay, clay is matter to a brick, and bricks are matter to a house. Matter is that out of which a thing is made. On this theme in Aristotle, the interested reader might consult Thomas Ainsworth, "Form vs. Matter," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition), accessed March 27, 2018, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/form-matter/.

27. For a helpful overview of the Manicheans' attitude toward the different parts of the Bible, see Teske, General Introduction, 11–12.

28. Teske helpfully explains the sort of argument Augustine would make against the Manicheans, using the constructive dilemma pattern: Either the Manicheans must say that God is forced to fight with evil, or not. If they say God is forced, then they blaspheme by saying God is weak and vulnerable to the assaults of evil. If they say God is not weak and vulnerable, then they cannot say that God has any reason to fight evil. Either way, they are wrong. Teske, General Introduction, 10. The argument, it seems, originates from Augustine's friend Nebridius; *Conf.* 7.2. Mary Clark's comments on the argument are also helpful; Clark, *Augustine*, 34.

29. Teske: "If the Manicheans were willing to consider these points, they would not in their blasphemy introduce the two natures, one good and the other evil. But

they are so insane that in their myths they locate in the evil nature many great goods, as Augustine amply illustrate by examples, and in the good nature of God they locate many great evils, as Augustine also shows (paragraph 41)"; Roland Teske, Introduction to *The Nature of the Good*, trans. Roland Teske; The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I-Books, Vol. 19: *The Manichean Debate*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, Introductions and Notes by Roland Teske (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2006), 322.

30. Once again, Teske's analysis of Augustine's arguments is helpful; General Introduction, 10–11.

31. Teske, notes 8–14 to *Nat. b.* 48.

Chapter 3

Metaphysics and the Problem of Evil according to Reason

De Libero Arbitrio Voluntatis

De Libero Arbitrio Voluntatis, *On Free Choice of the Will*, was begun very shortly after Cassiciacum, but finished (after a hiatus of several years) after Augustine became a priest.[1] This is an anti-Manichean text in which Augustine investigates the *moral* problem of evil or the question of its origins. Where did evil come from, and how is an omnipotent and good God innocent of it? What we might call the *metaphysical* problem of evil concerns different questions: What *is* evil, and how can it exist in a universe managed by an omnipotent God? The Augustinian answer is that evil does *not* exist and *is nothing*; more precisely, evil is a corruption or loss of being in some beings. *Lib. Arb.* will cover this, but its priority is the moral question. The goal is to explain how evil's origin is neither God nor any substance, but a free choice. Free choice also requires some explaining; it is a good thing, a faculty of certain beings created for good by God.

This, like many of the early writings, is a dialogue. Augustine's conversation partner is Evodius,[2] about whom we can learn from *Confessions* and Augustine's late book of reconsiderations, the *Retractiones*.[3] In *Confessions*, we read that Evodius was "a young man of our own town," Thagaste (*Conf.* 9.8.17). He, like Augustine, had recently abandoned worldly pursuits to follow Christ, and he joined Augustine and his companions. This must have been either at Milan shortly after Augustine's 387 baptism or else in Rome shortly after that. *Retractiones*: "While we were still waiting in Rome, we decided to discuss the origin of evil" (*Retr.* 1.9.1).[4] *Lib. Arb.* grew out of these discussions, which must have also involved Alypius and Adeodatus.[5] Evodius subsequently joined them on the journey to Africa (*Conf.* 9.8.17), and he was with them when Monica died at Ostia (9.12.31). Foley notes that Evodius "went on to become bishop of Uzalis."[6]

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The thesis of *Lib. Arb.* is that God is innocent of evil inasmuch as evil is rooted in (or simply *is*) a misuse of free will, which was a good faculty given by God to some creatures, who alone are to be blamed for its misuse. This will, when it goes astray, is a corrupted desire, captured by such terms as the Latin *libido* and *cupiditas* and the English "desire," "inordinate desire," and "lust." This corruption turns toward lesser goods rather than to God. Its healing requires grace. In what follows, I shall investigate these matters book by book—of which there are three in *Lib. Arb.*

BOOK I: *FREE WILL IS THE CAUSE OF EVIL*

Book I explains evil in terms of desire. Its origin is a misuse of free will, and its essence is the inordinate love of lesser goods. Evodius says, "Please tell me: isn't God the cause of evil?" (1.1).[7] Augustine answers that we must first distinguish between evil *done* and evil *suffered*. Evodius wants "to know about both." Augustine observes that God does no evil. However, this does not mean God is never involved in something we might call "evil." Evil *done* is always sin. Some evil *suffered* is perhaps connected to sin, for example the suffering of an innocent victim. Yet *some* evil suffered is the just punishment of the wicked. God does cause *this* kind of evil. Yet although we call it evil and although it involves a pain or a destruction (of the wicked), it is not an evil in the *moral* sense. As a surgeon harms a patient's skin, and is in no way to be blamed, so God may do harm for which he is not to be blamed.

Evodius asks whence came this strictly moral evil, evil *done*. Augustine answers that moral evil is always caused by someone. But what caused *that person* to do evil? And what cause is behind *that* cause? There are many questions here, some of which Augustine will consider. (To the reader interested in these matters, I recommend not only *Lib. Arb.*, *Conf.*, and other writings of Augustine himself but also *Augustine on Evil* by G. R. Evans.[8] William Mann's article "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin" in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* is a good introduction to the area and includes some helpful commentary on *Lib. Arb.*[9])

Evodius now asks "From whom did we learn to sin?" Augustine explains that no one *learns* to do evil. Education is good, and only good things can be *learned*. Evil is not learned, but rather is the result of *ignorance*.

Whence, then, evil? This question, from Evodius, marks the beginning of the main dialogue (*Lib. Arb.* 1.2). Augustine explains that this is "the very question that worried me greatly when I was still young" and drove him into heresy, Manicheanism. His "love of finding the truth" had "secured divine help" for him—a reminder that right desires and particularly the desire for wisdom can procure divine aid—and he promises to show Evodius the

reasoning which rescued him from his own errors. "God will be with us, and he will make us understand what we believe." There follow characteristic remarks on belief and understanding. We begin by believing and later, God willing, attain to understanding, but we will not get anywhere unless we start by believing. Augustine quotes a favorite verse, a Latin translation from Isaiah: "Unless you believe, you will not understand."[10] We must believe, namely, that there is one God, that he is the origin of all, and that only good comes from him. He elaborates on Evodius' question: If evil comes from our souls and if God created them, how can God be innocent? Evodius recognizes this as exactly what has been bothering him.

Augustine encourages him courageously to pursue the inquiry, and with piety (*Lib. Arb.* 1.2). We must recognize that God is omnipotent, unchangeable, creator of everything good yet more good than they, and able to create out of nothing. What comes from himself, Augustine adds, is fully equal to God: God the Son.

"On that basis let us try, with God's help, to achieve an understanding" (*Lib. Arb.* 1.3). That this theology is the foundation of the investigation shows that even in a philosophical book redolent of neo-Platonism and employing complex arguments there is no strict dichotomy of reason and authority in Augustine.[11] The particulars of this theology also distinguish Augustine from neo-Platonism in at least one respect. Some scholars say that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is such a key factor, although I now disagree.[12] There is one unambiguous difference from Plato here: The being from God the Father is fully *equal* to God the Father. This is quite unlike Plotinus' theology.[13] In addition, there is one notable convergence of Augustine and neo-Platonism. As we saw in *Nat. b.*, Augustine treats goodness and being as one: Whatever exists is good. This, of course, will require some explaining about what evil is—or, rather, *that* it is *not*.

It is necessary first to understand what evildoing consists of (*Lib. Arb.* 1.3). Augustine asks about adultery as an example, and Evodius correctly states that it is illegal because it is wrong, not vice versa. He makes several failed efforts to explain *why*. For example, the Golden Rule does not explain why *all* adultery is wrong, since a man might want to trade marital affairs with another man, thus apparently not violating the Golden Rule. When Evodius runs out of ideas, Augustine suggests that "what makes adultery evil is inordinate desire. . . ."[14] The word here is *libido*, translated "lust" by Benjamin and Hackstaff.[15] Augustine (likely thinking of the Sermon on the Mount) points out that a person who merely intends to commit adultery still sins, and Evodius recognizes that the same sort of analysis would apply to any other sin. Accordingly, all sin is from inordinate desire.

We find some more vocabulary in *Lib. Arb.* 1.4: Inordinate desire "is also called 'cupidity.'" This transliteration of *cupiditas* is translated "desire" by

Benjamin and Hackstaff. So *libido* is inordinate desire or lust, and *cupiditas* is cupidity or desire. These terms center around the concept of inordinate, disorderly, or inappropriate desire. 1.4 considers the nature of this disorder (or, in more Augustinian terms, the *corruption* of desire's nature). We humans naturally desire to be "free from fear." We desire stability or security. We desire to have goodness and to hold it *safely*. We want to possess good things and to neither have them slip out of our hands nor worry they might.[16]

Where did Augustine get this idea of a stable and secure possession of goodness? If we could ask him, he might well reply that it is an obvious truth. Or he might say something like, "Well, of course it is good to have good things, and it is good to have good things in the future, and peace of mind is a good thing, and one thing about which it is possible to have peace of mind is having good things in the future." Fair enough. But there is more. Augustine had concluded that the stability of goodness requires God in the second of the Cassiciacum dialogues, *b. Vita*. The idea of a stable possession of goodness is very common in antiquity. It was the goal of Stoic philosophy, and there are biblical sources such as the parable of the men who built their homes on rock and sand (Matt. 7). Psalms 1 and 15 also speak of the enduring goodness of the righteous man. Augustine was under some biblical influence here as well as Stoic, including probably some primary sources and certainly Cicero. Indeed, the same convergence of philosophical and biblical streams of thought had already taken place on the patristic side of his heritage. Bishop Ambrose comments on the stability of virtue in *On the Duties of the Clergy*.[17] In *Exposition of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke*, Ambrose explains that we can have the stability of Christ if we are built on him.[18]

This, then, is a good desire—natural and healthy. That inordinate desire which is the nature of sin, that *libido* or *cupiditas*, is a corruption of it, a turning toward another, inferior object in which stable goodness cannot be found. We all "desire to live without fear," and the good seek this in reliable goods, but not so the wicked. Evodius summarizes: Cupidity or inordinate desire is "the love of those things that one can lose against one's will."

As the text unfolds, they will talk about various matters relating to the problem of evil. Every area of Augustine's thought connects to every other. The fact that evil comes from the will requires a look at the nature of justice as a penalty for sin—which God can know and punish although *we* may have trouble knowing. This look at societal and divine justice will lead to a look at justice *within* a person, which will lead back to the nature and role of the will.

The discussion of law begins in *Lib. Arb.* 1.5.[19] Human law aims at moral law, but is incomplete. God's justice is complete; no hidden disorderly desire can escape from it. God's law is eternal and orders all things; man's law is temporal and always falls short of it.[20] Unlike God's law, temporal law can change. In order better to serve eternal law, changing circumstances

may require different temporal laws. (Although he does not go into it here, Augustine's response in *Conf.* 2.7.13 to the Manichean criticism of alleged Old Testament immorality, such as polygamy, is based on this notion of law from *Lib. Arb.*)

Before going any deeper, Augustine reminds us of the importance of piety, reason, and prayer (*Lib. Arb.* 1.6).[21] Reason and piety thus secured, Augustine and Evodius conclude that we must keep eternal law by being ordered *ourselves*—a notion Augustine had earlier explored at Cassiciacum, in *Ord.* Order within us requires that reason govern our lives (1.8)—the difference between wisdom and foolishness (1.9).

In *Lib. Arb.* 1.10, Augustine explains that the mind is strong enough to govern desire, and should. A familiar Augustinian claim occurs at the end of 1.10: A rational soul is superior to—that is, a greater good than—anything else save God. However, this is set aside since it is a bit off-topic.

Due to the greatness of the mind, we must conclude that only by our own will's straying does cupidity master reason (*Lib. Arb.* 1.11). Augustine waxes eloquent on the suffering and destruction this involves, citing it as evidence that such a disorder is its own fitting punishment.

This is actually one of Augustine's most Platonic moments. The whole point of Plato's *Republic* is that justice is *worth* it. As a *secondary* argument in Book X of *Republic*, Socrates claims that justice delivers benefits, especially, and with the help of the gods, after death. However, the *primary* argument—from Books I through IX—is that justice is a good *in itself*. The argument relies on the idea that the soul has its own internal structure requiring a certain way of functioning; justice in the soul is this proper arrangement and functioning. *In*justice is the *im*proper arrangement and *im*proper functioning of the soul, guaranteeing that the virtue of justice is its own reward, the vice of injustice its own punishment.[22]

Lib. Arb. 1.12 tells us that the will has power over itself, so if we go wrong, we are indeed at fault. 1.13 borrows another good idea from Augustine's forerunners, the unity of the virtues—the thesis that the virtues can only work when they work together (or, in some stronger versions, the thesis that what we think of as different virtues are really just *one* virtue). Accordingly, he who has one virtue has the others as well. This is also an idea in Plato's *Republic*[23] and in Ambrose.[24] 1.13 explains that the cardinal virtues—wisdom, courage, justice, and moderation—are a unity, since they are all inextricably linked to a good will. Only a person with a good will can have these virtues, and only such a one can be happy.

Toward the end of 1.13, an interesting idea emerges: The good will has a self-referential quality. It loves itself. This is not some perverse form of self-love. The idea that a virtuous soul loves itself appears sometimes in the Stoic philosophers. Their idea is that we should avoid disappointment by desiring

only what is within our control, which apparently leaves the wise person with nothing to desire except his own virtue! It would be reasonable to presume that something like this is going on here, but I think something else is also going on. The wise person is said to love his own mind because he exalts it above his body and his non-rational emotions. Moreover, the idea that a wise man loves his own soul need not preclude that he also loves God and the souls of others. Augustine had already said something rather like this in *Sol.*[25] Moreover, even if one is said to love one's own virtue, this may be a statement of humility rather than pride if virtue depends on God. This seems to be Augustine's view in *b. Vita* 4.25.

Augustine and Evodius continue to explore the connections between goodness, happiness, and law. Although everyone wants to be happy, only some are because happiness requires goodness, and only some are good (*Lib. Arb.* 1.14). In *Lib. Arb.* 1.15, we have an early version of *Civ. Dei*'s doctrine that the city of man uses political power to attempt to build peace on earth, while the city of God seeks peace only in heaven yet allies itself with the city of man in order to attain the greatest possible earthly semblance of peace. *Lib. Arb.* 1.15 informs us that temporal law, always subservient to eternal law, pertains to the just attainment of temporal goods (such as family, freedom, money, and health). This temporal law judges those who seek temporal rather than eternal goods. It is better to live for the greater goods, the eternal ones: "So the eternal law demands that we purify our love by turning it away from temporal things and towards what is eternal."[26] Yet when we love temporal goods with an ardor fit for eternal ones, the fault is in us, not in those goods themselves.

Lib. Arb. 1.16 summarizes Book I and prepares us for Book II. Evil is an act of the will whereby we turn from greater goods to lesser. The greater goods are eternal, are known by the mind, and cannot be lost. The lesser are temporal, are known by the body, and can be lost. Evodius acknowledges that we have answered why we do evil. This leads to the question whether God is not to be blamed in giving us free will. Book II will show that free will is good, and that God is not to be blamed.

BOOK II: *FREE WILL IS A GOOD*

Desire is not bad; Augustine never said it was. This intense yearning we humans have for good things is nothing wrong. What is wrong is mistaking companionship, sex, fame, glory, fortune, riches, reputation, drink, sleep, caffeine, ice cream, and so on for the ultimate good. Hands are not wrong, but it is wrong when a murderer uses his hands to kill. Neither is human desire wrong in its presence or its structure. What is wrong is merely its use or its

direction. It is built for the greatest good, but we aim lower. It is a desire for such goodness and happiness as cannot be found in the lesser goods it now aims at, and thus it leads to misery.

And this is the point of Book II: that the will, when it turns astray in desire for the things of this world and abandons God, is not a bad thing. Its direction away from God and toward destruction is bad, but *it* is a good gift of God.

The main argument in Book II is this: Free will is a good (chapter 18), and all goods are from God (chapters 16–17), so free will is from God. This requires an initial argument for the existence of God (chapters 3–15). There are prominent neo-Platonic themes here. The argument for the existence of God is based on the reality of immaterial truth. The argument for the source of all goodness in God is based on the dependence of lesser goods on immaterial reality. At the same time, there is a distinctive Christian aspect to Book II. The conclusion (chapters 19–20) explains that free will is a greater good than physical goods, a lesser good than God. And then we are told to cling to Christ for the healing of the sinful will.

Chapters 1–2 introduce Book II. Evodius asks why God gave us free will, a necessary condition for sin (*Lib. Arb.* 2.1). The answer is that it is also a necessary condition for moral goodness. This has always been the standard initial answer to the challenge "Why would a good God create free creatures knowing that their freedom might be used for evil?" There is always quite a bit more to say, such as the various questions to be explored here in *Lib. Arb.* and all the other things which contemporary philosophers of religion, philosophical theologians, analytic theologians, and so on are *still* saying. But the first answer is to justify God's allowing the possibility of evil by appealing to free will, and to justify free will by appealing to its necessity for moral goodness. These answers are still being given by contemporary figures such as Alvin Plantinga.[27]

Evodius asks: Could God have given us free will which was not possible to be used to sin (*Lib. Arb.* 2.2)? Now it may be easy to give a satisfactory answer to this question. Perhaps it is simply in the nature of morally significant free will that it includes the possibility of going wrong.[28] Interestingly, Augustine does not answer the question here (if anywhere). Instead, he embarks on Book II's extended defense of free will as a good given by God. This is evidence that there *is* an answer to Evodius' question, whether or not we happen to know what it is. If we can show that free will is a good gift of God, then we will also be able to show that it was rightly given.

Before even beginning the investigation proper, the companions discuss piety, faith, and reason (*Lib. Arb.* 1.2). This is familiar Augustinian territory. We believe by faith, which is trust—Latin *fides*. When we believe by trust alone, we do not *know*. This belief is rational, proper, and useful. It is also epistemically similar to that faith which even those who do not trust Christ

expect in other matters. An honest and fair atheist expects people to believe his own testimony; it is reasonable to accept the testimony of others when they have first-hand knowledge. Christian belief is based on testimony, namely the Gospels (on the basis of which Augustine bases a defense of the faith-first-understanding-later theme at 2.2). We have in the Scriptures the testimony of the witnesses to the works of God and the ministry of the Son of God (1.2). Yet it is best to *know* if we can; with God's help, we must seek to understand. We believe that God exists and is good and does all things rightly. Evodius captures this fairly well when he says, "Although I hold these things with unshaken faith, let's investigate them as if they were all uncertain, since I do not yet *know* them."[29] Augustine presents the ethical imperative at the end of chapter 2—a seeking for wisdom marked by piety and obedience as well as hope and a redirection of our desires from the things of this world toward wisdom: "Therefore, let us diligently obey the Lord's command as we seek," believing that knowledge of the truth is possible not only after death but even before. We must strive for this, and "wholeheartedly desire and love these things and place no value on what is earthly and human."

Augustine outlines his plan of attack—to give evidence for the existence of God, show that all good things are from God, and show that free will is good (*Lib. Arb.* 2.3).[30] The argument for the existence of God begins with an insight later rediscovered by Descartes: Even if I am deceived about everything else, I cannot be deceived about my own existence since I must exist in order to be deceived.[31] Next we build on this sort of everyday and relatively obvious knowledge. Evodius knows he exists, is alive, and understands. We humans have existence, like stones, and also life, like beasts, and much more, since unlike them we also have understanding. There is a gradation or hierarchy of goods in this universe. We have more than one faculty for knowing. With beasts, who also have souls, we share the faculty of sensory perception and the "inner sense" which gives us the ability to interpret sensory data. Unlike beasts, we also have reason, which governs the inner sense and is aware of itself.

A hierarchy of goods within the human person now emerges.[32] Since "the judge is superior to the thing judged" (*Lib. Arb.* 2.5), reason governs the inner sense, the inner sense governs the bodily senses, and the bodily senses govern physical things.

This analysis of hierarchies within the universe is preparation for lifting up our minds to a good above the universe. Order and hierarchy go all the way up.[33] Augustine aims to show that God exists, since God is the *summum bonun*, by definition the greatest and highest good. A hierarchy of goods which goes as high as it possibly can entails the existence of God.

Lib. Arb. 2.6 informs us that *if* there is something greater than reason, which is also eternal and unchangeable, *then* it is God. Or, since Evodius

hesitates at this simple version, *if* it is shown that there is something greater than reason which is eternal and unchangeable, *then* either it is God or else something *else*, greater still, is God.[34]

A conventional Platonic move—the appeal to the objectivity, certainty, universality, and eternality of mathematical truths—takes place in *Lib. Arb.* 2.8. Plato suggests the teaching of mathematics to help the mind ascend to knowledge of immaterial reality in *Republic* VII. Pythagoras before him and various thinkers after him employ the same strategy. In this tradition, Augustine appeals to mathematical truth as evidence of something higher than reason itself, although reason is the highest in us. Wisdom, likewise, is universal and objective (2.9-10). In fact, wisdom and the truths of mathematics are actually the same unchangeable truth (2.11). Both are contained within (or simply *are*) the same unchangeable truth (2.12). This truth is absolute. To be more precise, it is absolved of reference; it is that with reference to which human reason operates and knows things to be true. This "unchangeable truth" is superior to and "more excellent" then our minds. It is superior to the mind in terms of reality and of goodness, and indeed these qualities are the same.[35] This is higher than reason, sublime: "Embrace it, if you can; enjoy it. . . . What more can you desire than happiness," or "what greater happiness" is there than delight in the truth (2.13)? (2.13 has some especially fine language on the joys of knowing the truth.)

This, as usual, is both a metaphysical and epistemological insight, and an ethical insight as well. This highest good should be loved for what it is (*Lib. Arb.* 2.13). This is our happiness; we are free when we submit to truth, who is "is God himself." He is who "frees us . . . from the state of sin," and whom Augustine quotes as Christ from the Gospel of John: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

This is a secure good (*Lib. Arb.* 2.14), superior to all others, able to satisfy our strongest desires. As in *Sol.* 1.13.22, Augustine describes the possession of this truth using sexual imagery, also claiming that it is a good the enjoyment of which by multiple lovers is no less pleasant than by one.[36] In an Augustinian way of thinking, sexual desire is an image of the love for God. It is also, for many a sinner, a corruption of the love we are meant to have for God. Augustine explains that we can all share in the common possession and enjoyment of truth; truth faithfully "welcomes all of its lovers without envy" or any lack.[37] Augustine wants Evodius (and us) to love the truth (i.e., God) above all, to seek satisfaction therein. One almost wonders if free will was only an excuse to talk about higher goods so that we might learn to love them! Did this edification just happen to come up in the course of discussing evil and free will? Most likely, the point of *Lib. Arb.* is *both* to make progress in understanding evil *and* to have our desires reordered; accomplishing the latter is a bit easier if we can accomplish the former as well.

The immediate goal was to show the existence of God, and, this being done, we can consider whether free will is a good gift from him (*Lib. Arb.* 2.15). Although Evodius is "overwhelmed with joy" at this evidence for God and Augustine thinks it sufficient for their purpose, he admits that their evidence makes for an "unerring, although extremely superficial, form of knowledge." (Benjamin and Hackstaff translate this as "a sure though somewhat tenuous form of reasoning.")

So what is going on here? Is this a lousy argument? Does Augustine think so? Probably not. We should avoid making too much of it, but also too little.[38] It is similar to other arguments for the existence of God, arguments for life after death, and other analyses of God and immaterial reality from other texts of Augustine, such as *Sol.* II and *Conf.* VII. He seems to be serious about the argument. At the same time, he suggests that it has been presented awfully quickly and is less than fully trustworthy.[39] In addition, there is the whole theme of ascent, the idea that our minds can be raised to an awareness of higher realities than that with which our everyday doings acquaint us. An argument in a dialogue by an ancient or medieval ascent writer will commonly present an argument worth taking seriously which presents at least a glimmer of the truth, yet which is not meant to be the final word on the matter. I suspect that Augustine, as both author and character, wonders whether there might not be some error in the reasoning and hesitates wholeheartedly to endorse it. The argument proceeds from two principles. One is that existence is hierarchical such that if there is a reality sufficiently good and sublime, it must be divine.[40] The second principle is that there really exists such a reality in the immaterial truth to know which is the business of our minds, for the knowing of which such activities as the study of mathematics and the philosophical pursuit of wisdom are meant to train our minds. I follow Augustine in thinking the argument has potential, yet should not be hastily trusted. My provisional evaluation is that it is probably about as good as neo-Platonic and Augustinian metaphysics.[41] If (and only if) the ideas of immaterial reality, the unity of being and goodness, the eternality and unchangeability of higher reality, and truth as a metaphysical (and not merely epistemological) category are solid notions, then this argument is probably pretty solid.

Yet it does not aim narrowly at logical proof. It is meant to help us get a working understanding of God not hampered by a materialistic mindset. Perhaps, as Teske says, this is the *primary* or even its *only* purpose, and the argument seems to be quite successful here, for it helps Evodius understand the immaterial God better.[42]

However, evaluating the argument's merits is not the primary agenda of Augustine and Evodius. They (and we[43]) must consider whether all goods come from God. The metaphysical and epistemological work they have already done will help. The argument to this effect (chapters 16–17) is

something like the following. All good things derive their goodness from form and number, which come from God. So all good things derive their goodness from God. This analysis is similar to that of *Nat. b.*: Goodness is built into the structure of reality because every real thing is ordered according to good principles which are immaterial realities.

In more detail: All lower, temporal, changeable, physical things receive from immaterial reality such form and beauty as they have (*Lib. Arb.* 2.16). There is such a thing as an ultimate form, eternal and unchangeable, and all temporal things depend on it for their existence. For their existence depends on their own respective forms, which in turn depends on number, which depends on eternal form. This may sound strange to those unschooled in ancient metaphysics, but the basic idea is not difficult. That physical things only exist in virtue of their form is a standard tenet of ancient-medieval hylomorphism. According to hylomorphism, pure physicality cannot make any kind of object, but only *stuff*—matter without nature, essence, or form. Matter without form is just a pile of matter. Matter *with* the form of a table is a table. Matter *with* the form of a tree is a tree. And so on (as we saw in chapter 2 when considering hylomorphism).[44] That form depends on number is, similarly, a familiar notion in ancient-medieval metaphysics. A table cannot have the form of a table unless it is a unity, unless it is one object. The identity of any individual object, and its existence as that object, depends on its having a share of unity or oneness. Hence that an object has a particular form depends on its participation in the number *one*. Hence form depends on number. And, according to chapter 16, number itself depends on the ultimate and eternal form, which is God. This dependence of any object on eternal form is a Platonic idea.

So the existence, nature, structure, and anything else good in any object all depend on God (as in *Nat. b.*). All goodness is from God (*Lib. Arb.* 2.17), and there is a corresponding theology of desire: We must treat a good thing properly, as a reminder of the superior goodness of God, whom we should love and praise.

Is free will one of these goods? Evodius asks, and Augustine says the answer has already been established (*Lib. Arb.* 2.18). This is subtle. He explains by giving an argument from analogy. Free will is, like sight, a faculty; we blame *people* who make use of their sight to do evil rather than blaming sight, and we should not blame free will just because some people make evil use of it. After all, as Augustine keeps reminding us, free will is a necessary condition for doing moral good. Evodius, unconvinced, asks for clearer proof. Augustine gives another argument: That "without which we *cannot* live rightly" is better than that "without which we *can* live rightly." Now as the eyes are things without which we *can* live rightly, free will, without which we *cannot* live rightly, must be a greater good. This is another

argument from analogy. Free will is, like sight, a human faculty. However, it is *unlike* sight in that it is necessary for moral goodness. Since sight is a good thing, free will must even more be a good thing.

Book II may now be brought to a conclusion. It is necessary to explain just what kind of good free will is.[45] Augustine suggests that the virtues, since they cannot be used wrongly, are great goods (*Lib. Arb.* 2.19). Physical strength and beauty are lesser goods since they are compatible with moral badness and are not necessary to live morally well. Free will, since it can be used for evil but is necessary for moral goodness, is an intermediate good. Such can easily go one way or the other, toward God or toward evil. Free will, in the characteristic description, goes wrong when it pursues lesser goods and turns away from God. Augustine adds a new aspect to this familiar schema, stating that it may turn toward lesser goods in several ways. It may turn toward a good less than God but not less than itself when it turns toward *itself*, when it wants autonomy rather than to submit to the greatest good for which it is meant. This, of course, is the sin of pride. It may also turn toward goods *external* to itself—"things that belong to others or have nothing to do with itself. . . ." Or it may turn to goods *lower* when it pursues physical pleasures.[46] The summary of the matters discussed in Book II also summarizes quite a lot of theology of desire. Both free will and the objects of its pursuit are good things; free will is "among the intermediate goods." Evil is "the turning of the will away from the unchangeable good and toward changeable goods," and is "deservedly punished with misery."

Perhaps Evodius will be wondering why the will turns from God and toward lesser goods (*Lib. Arb.* 2.20). The turn is evil and the origin of evil, and neither free will nor those lesser goods themselves are evils. Yet perhaps there is more to say to explain this ill turning of the will. However, at least in one important sense, we can know nothing about it. For this turning is not a thing; it is not *real*. What is not real cannot be known. Every real thing has some goodness, and this turning of the will has no good, so it is not a real thing. Whatever we can say about the turning of the will from God will not be knowledge of a *thing*, but a recognition of nothingness where a thing should be. If I were to say "There is no light in this cave!" I would not be knowing a real thing called darkness, but recognizing that there is not any light there.

In the short term, rather than answering this question, Augustine says that we should look to the more practical need of dealing with our broken will. We have already suffered the loss of a pure will, and we need help. For "we cannot pick ourselves up voluntarily as we fell voluntarily . . ." (*Lib. Arb.* 2.20). Accordingly, "let us hold with confident faith the right hand of God—that is, our Lord Jesus Christ—which has been held out to us from on high. Let us await him with resolute hope and desire him with ardent charity." We must, with our desires having gone wrong, desire Christ for their healing.

BOOK III: *WHENCE THE FREE WILL′S TURNING AWAY FROM GOD?*

Book III considers the problem of evil more thoroughly by tackling various challenges to the free will defense. Evil results from a misuse of free will, which is a good thing from God, who is not to be blamed for giving it. A number of questions about this defense need answering. This makes Book III more difficult to outline than Book II. One almost gets the impression that Augustine asked himself "Now what are some other questions about the problem of evil?" and proceeded to list and answer them! The dramatic organization of an ancient text often eludes the modern mind, and it may be so here; be that as it may, I shall simply consider Book III as a series of questions and responses relating to the problem of evil, interspersed with praise to God (or with little sermonettes on why we should praise God) and commentary on the nature of rightly ordered loves.[47] Book III's thesis is that God is not to be blamed for evil, but rather praised for his creation and ordering of the universe and also loved, since a right love of God orders all of our loves. The questions through which this thesis is developed concern the contingency of the will's turning away, the problem of foreknowledge, the challenge to God's goodness raised by suicide, the compatibility of omnipotence with God's creation of just any kind of world, the causes of the free will turning away from God, the justice of our being punished for the sins of Adam and Eve, and why Adam would sin if he was created wise. Along with an exegesis of the text, I shall summarize its theology of desire.

Before we begin, I must briefly mention what Hackstaff suggests we might call "the eclipse of Evodius,"[48] which begins early on in Book III. In the middle of 3.4, Augustine launches into a long monologue; Evodius does not speak again until 3.16, and his words there and at the beginning of 3.17 are his last. Hackstaff points out that the eclipse "corresponds to a gradual shift of emphasis in the material itself," from philosophy toward theology.[49] Perhaps Augustine was simply in a hurry to finish the book. Perhaps a more theological commentary seemed to Augustine to require a less philosophical mode of exposition—lecture or treatise rather than dialogue. Mourant suggests that the dialogue in *Lib. Arb.*, even in the earlier passages, is "highly artificial and serves merely as a ploy for the development of Augustine's ideas."[50] "Evodius contributes little," he says, and retreats because "philosophical dialectic in the traditional sense is replaced with a dialectic based on faith."[51] Any explanation for the eclipse which presumes that the three books are not all in sync would be undermined somewhat by the argument that *Lib. Arb.* is a unity.[52] Simon Harrison notes some other explanations suggested by scholars.[53] His own position is that Book I was meant "for absolute beginners,"[54] Book II is more advanced, and Book III *quite* advanced; moreover, the advanced lessons

of Book III require the reader to imitate the student character not in asking questions, but in listening to the lesson from the teacher.

Evodius wants to know why the will turns away from God (*Lib. Arb.* 3.1). He is concerned that it might be by its own nature—by necessity. He wants to be sure the turn is rightly blamed; Augustine answers that it surely is. Since the will (as established in 1.10-12) is stronger than those things to which it turns in sin, we know its movement is voluntary; "the movement by which the will turns from enjoying the Creator to enjoying his creatures belongs to the will itself."

In fact, before 3.1 is over, we see Evodius himself produce a new argument that the will's motion away from God is voluntary: If it is not, then it cannot be blamed; it can be blamed; therefore, it is voluntary. It is interesting to see Evodius now arguing from the moral culpability of the will's motion to its freedom. A few moments ago, it seemed that he was interested in arguing from its *lack* of freedom to its *lack* of culpability. Both arguments have premises which guarantee their conclusion, and they employ one of the same premises: *If the motion of the will is involuntary, then it is not morally culpable*. Evodius earlier feared that a *modus ponens* argument might succeed: *If A, then B. A. So B.* Now he himself makes a *modus tollens* argument: *If A, then B. Not B. So not A.* The question is whether, independent of these arguments, it is more likely that the will is involuntary or that sin is morally culpable. Augustine and Evodius think the latter more likely. This is a case of Augustine reasoning to a metaphysical conclusion based, in part, on commonsense moral sentiment. It is not a bad way to reason, if commonsense premises are reasonable. Augustine (like Thomas Reid, G. E. Moore, Alvin Plantinga, and others) thinks commonsense premises are legitimate. Nor is this his first time employing them. In *c. Acad.,* he had argued for the possibility of knowledge based, in part, on the truth of commonsense moral principles.[55] It is, however, helpful to bear in mind that he does not rely on such principles exclusively; they are part of his cumulative case.

Another interesting point about *Lib. Arb.* 3.1 is that Augustine has not yet answered Evodius' initial question: He has not shown us why the will turns from God. He has, however, helped to ensure Evodius' piety. Evodius rightly wants to understand what he believes, but as we go about doing so, it is very important to not say anything inappropriate of God, such as that God punishes wrongdoing that occurred by necessity.

Lib. Arb. 3.2 raises the ancient question of freedom and divine foreknowledge.[56] If God already knows what we are going to decide, how can we decide freely? Before answering, Augustine gives a soliloquy on the importance of asking rightly. Some ask such questions to excuse their sins, thinking necessity gives them a pass. For the pious, however, such questions are edifying; Augustine invokes the mercy of God for those seeking this wisdom.

Augustine begins *Lib. Arb.* 3.3 with a nice summary. What God knows is necessarily true, and so if God knows what I will do with my freedom in the future, then it will necessarily happen. However, since the will is within its own control, God's foreknowledge cannot impose any necessity on it. If it did, it would be within the control of God's foreknowledge, and thus not within its own control, and would thus not be a *will*. So it is not possible for God's foreknowledge to impose necessity on a future act of will. This is nice, but not fully satisfactory. It does not rule out the possibility that God's foreknowledge simply destroys the will. 3.4 helps: The content of God's foreknowledge derives from the details of future events, and never the other way around.[57] The necessity that what God knows is true imposes no necessity on what he knows. Indeed, there is not really even anything special about the fact that it is *God's* knowledge. Any old kind of knowledge will do. What matters is that knowledge is, by definition, true. I never know anything *false*. (Sometimes we think we know a thing which later turns out to be false, but this shows we never really *knew* it in the first place.) So it is necessarily the case that whatever I know is true. If I know that I drank two cups of tea this morning, then it is necessarily the case that that is true. But this does not mean that my decision to drink two cups instead of just one was an act of necessity. As Augustine explains, in my knowledge of some past event, the event determines my knowledge rather than vice versa. It is the same for God's knowledge of the past and for God's knowledge of the future. God's knowledge does not impose any special necessity on future choices. Rather, God's unique powers of knowledge simply give him the ability to know the future as well as the past, whereas we can only know one of the two.[58]

Lib. Arb. 3.5 is a paean to the greatness of God's ordering of creation. Augustine describes creation's metaphysical and moral hierarchy. Above creation is God. At the top of creation are unfallen angels, those who have never misused their free will and never will. Below them is man, who misused his free will yet is capable of repentance. Below man are the fallen angels, who misused their free will and will not repent. The greatness of free will shows that even a sinful being is superior to one without free will. Just as a straying horse is greater than a stone, a sinful human is greater than a horse. Moreover, the human who misuses his free will in pursuing inanimate things, like wine, is greater than that which he pursues. (Here, again, are connections to *Nat. b.*'s doctrine of the goodness built into the structure of reality.) All in all, all things are arranged by God in the greatest possible order.

God's goodness having been praised so highly, Augustine feels he must address the challenge of suicide: What of the person who claims that this universe is not well arranged (*Lib. Arb.* 3.6)? It is miserable enough for him! Augustine has some interesting responses. He claims that a merely suicidal person is dishonest if he claims to be so existence-weary that he would prefer

not to exist, for he has *not* committed suicide in an effort to escape (3.6). Even the one who follows through on suicide does not seek non-existence; he is just a bit confused in seeking what he *really* wants, which is *peace* (3.8). And peace, though the suicide may not know it, requires *existence*. No one really seeks non-existence.[59]

Theology of desire is never far behind. *Lib. Arb.* 3.7 claims that we should *love* existence. This is due to our old friend, the theory of the oneness of goodness and being. Since we must desire goodness, we should also love being. Whatever exists is good. And the more good, the more existence. We should love the greatest existence, because we should love God, and great but lesser existences, because we should love human souls. To desire the finite existence of finite goods as much as we are meant to desire God is to love *non*-existence. We should love existence, which is to "desire eternal life" and to "long to be refashioned so that your affections are no longer temporal. . . ."

Another question in *Lib. Arb.* 3.9: Could not an omnipotent God have arranged his creation in such a way as to make everyone happy? This is tricky. These days theologians and philosophers of religion may well respond—appropriately enough, in my view—in the manner of Alvin Plantinga. We might formulate the question in terms of possible worlds: Isn't there a possible world in which everyone is happy? Then we might reply as Plantinga replied to Leibniz and J. L. Mackie: Even an omnipotent God cannot create *all of* just *any* world all by himself.[60] If a particular possible world involves morally significant free will *and* perfect happiness, then God can create much but *not all* of it—the last parts are left for free creatures to put together by choosing rightly. Augustine himself would endorse this, and indeed he seems to do so here in 3.9, treating sin as a possibility that did not have to take place: God did not opt to add sin and its punishment to the universe. God merely added beings with morally significant free will, as creatures occupying their own place in the goodness of creation. Their choices followed, and punishment followed bad choices. But why cannot an omnipotent God arrange for happiness in his creation even if people misuse their free will and sin? Augustine responds that this would not be just. Again he elaborates on the greatness of God's ordering of creation. God's justice is itself a great good. Once sin enters creation, its punishment orders that creation. That order is a good thing and praiseworthy.

The next question to be considered, in *Lib. Arb.* 3.10, is important, perhaps even obvious: If evil began with the misuse of free will, what caused free will to go bad? It is already well established by Augustine's metaethics that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as the *cause* of a nonentity. Nor is there really such a thing as the cause of a non-event, or the cause of a lack of being in a thing. Strictly speaking, there is no cause for free will going

wrong. However, we can perhaps understand the *occasion* or seek an *explanation*. There is an *occasion* for the free will of humans going astray—the temptation of the devil. This, of course, raises another question: Why did the *devil* sin against God? Again, there is, strictly speaking, no *cause* of this. Since there was no one behind the devil by which he was tempted, we may safely say that no further occasion can be sought. We may still ask for an *explanation*, and the only one left is pride. Pride, thinking of ourselves as goods sufficient in ourselves and not needing God, is the primal sin. (More on the nature of pride shortly, when we come to chapter 24.) Because humans "sinned less by giving their consent than the devil sinned by his evil persuasion" of us, we (but not he) have the possibility of mercy. Mercy comes to us through the Incarnation. Christ's humility is the cure for our sin of pride. This is a characteristic and extremely important Augustinian insight on the healing of desire. The misuse of free will has corrupted our desires. Pride is central in this corruption. In order for our desires to be healed, we must follow Christ. Although the neo-Platonic element, the notion that sin involves a pursuit of lesser goods with a desire fit for greater goods, remains, this is a distinctively Christian theology of desire. It is also a practical and moral theology despite its metaphysical, speculative aspect; the point is to learn humble piety precisely because we have learned this theological insight about pride.[61]

Lib. Arb. 3.11 comments on how the ordering of the universe continues regardless of sin. There is an explicit statement of a key point concerning the problem of evil—if creatures with free will and the ability to commit sin were not created, the universe would be lacking something important. With or without sin, Augustine assures Evodius here and in 3.12, God's good ordering of the universe is not diminished.

Lib. Arb. 3.13 explicitly states the familiar idea of the unity of being and goodness. Everything that is a nature or a substance is inherently good. Evil is found not in its existence but its corruption. Consider the evil of a malfunctioning car. The malfunction is an evil, but the car is good. The malfunction is not itself a thing, but a lack of function in the thing itself—the car. Moreover, as Augustine explains here, it is not possible to say that there is anything wrong with something without affirming the goodness of the thing itself, of its nature and function. The evil is only in the lack of function, or in the failure of the parts of which the thing is made fully to live up to that nature. Any meaningful criticism is, by definition, a praise of the standard by which the criticism is made. Even to condemn an evil is also to praise the good. So we should much more praise God, the creator of these finite goods and himself a good without limit (*Lib. Arb.* 3.15).

Here we again see the central place of neo-Platonic ideas and also Augustine's subtle departure from the neo-Platonists. Being and goodness are the

same, and evil is not a thing but a lack of goodness in a thing. However, whereas Plotinus considers evil simply as a lack of goodness as such, Augustine considers evil as the lack of the goodness appropriate to a thing. In Plotinus, matter as such is evil, as noted earlier in this volume. Moreover, the physical world exists as a result of the fall of souls into matter. In Plotinus, we may think of evil simply as the distance of a thing from God.

Augustine is different. God *created* things to be at a distance from him, possessing a finite degree of goodness. This is their proper nature. They are only infected with evil when they fall away from it. Using some language borrowed from Carl Vaught, we can say that in Augustine there is a distinction between finitude and fallenness.[62] Finitude is simply the quality of a created object's having a limited degree of goodness (whereas God's goodness is without limit). Fallenness is the failure of a created thing to live up to the goodness with which it was created. In Plotinus, all finitude is fallenness; not in Augustine. In Plotinus, the creation of the physical world results from the fall of the soul. In Augustine, to be created is good. We can understand evil in both as a distance from goodness. Evil, in Plotinus, is the distance of a thing from the goodness of God. In Augustine, evil is the distance of a thing from the goodness God created it to have.[63] Things are only "flawed to the extent that they fall away from the design of their maker . . ." (*Lib. Arb.* 3.15).[64] So Augustine's analysis cannot be fully understood from the Christian neo-Platonism paradigm of the Courcelle-O'Connell line of interpretation; Augustine's philosophy, if it is neo-Platonism at all, is neo-Platonism transformed, even to some extent corrected, by Christianity.

Let's take another look at this distinction between the good nature with which a thing is created and the distance it travels from that created goodness—going further away from God than it was supposed to. We have considered the distinction between the *structure* of a created being and its *distance* from God, and we have considered two ways of measuring distance—a creature's distance from God and its distance from the goodness it was designed to have. This latter distinction, we saw, may be used to understand a difference between Augustine and Plotinus. We may also consider this particular difference as a distinction between the *distance* of a created thing from God and its *direction*, whether it is moving toward or away from God; evil is a function of direction, not of distance alone.

All this serves primarily to correct Manicheanism, which considers evil as a reality itself. It fails to understand the inherently good structure of a real being. Augustine's metaphysics also is able to amend neo-Platonism. Neo-Platonism recognizes the goodness of a created structure and recognizes that the evil of a created being is found in its location in relation to God rather than in its structure. But it tends to consider that location merely in terms of distance, thus treating its distance from God as evil. However, in Augustine's

metaphysics, it is not the *distance* from God, but simply the *direction* a created being travels. To be created good is to be at a distance from God. To be evil is to be moving *further* away from that distance.[65]

What has this metaphysics to do with a theology of desire? It seems to me that here we have doctrines which make it easier to integrate a love of God with a love of creation. Creation is by definition good, as the neo-Platonists understood (insofar as it *exists*). However, Plotinus (at least as well as I can understand him) considered the *lack* of unlimited goodness in the things of this physical world to be an evil and the result of the fall of the soul. In Augustine's view, evil is the lack of the good God *intended* for a thing, not the lack of goodness resulting from its creation. To affirm, therefore, a created thing is to affirm the goodness of its creator. So long as we love the greater goodness of God, we are free also to love God by loving his creation. We need only avoid loving created goods as if they were independent of God or as if they had all the goodness of God.

Augustine is now in a position to start drawing the discussion of evil toward a close. He has convinced Evodius that God is innocent of our sin (*Lib. Arb.* 3.16). Evodius still wants to know why anyone sinned in the first place; he seeks "the cause of the will itself" (3.17). Augustine says talking like this will lead to an infinite regress. The will is the cause of sin, and if we ask for the cause of the cause we might as well ask for the cause of *that* cause, and so on. The will is the first cause and needs no cause outside of itself to explain its sin. When we are talking about causes, there are several possible strategies. We might posit an infinite chain of causes. To Augustine's mind, this explains nothing: A caused event requires a *beginning* to explain it. We might say that something caused *itself*, but this is self-contradictory: It would have to exist before it existed in order to be able to cause itself! Or, finally, we might say that there is a first cause, which causes other things but is itself not caused. This is the way of thinking of the great philosophers of the ancient and the medieval worlds. When it comes to explaining sin, Augustine is clearly out to label free will as its *first* cause. It is the end of *that* chain of explanations; however, it is not *itself* an uncaused cause in every sense. Its choice, when it sins, is the uncaused cause of sin. But free will is a faculty created by God. In the chain of causes of sins, the free choice of the will is an uncaused cause; in the chain of *all* causes, the free choice of the will *has* a cause.[66]

A pivotal moment in the last paragraph of *Lib. Arb.* 3.18 may come as a surprise to some, and leads to a major misunderstanding if missed. Augustine says he has not been speaking of *your* and *my* free will, but that of *Adam and Eve*: "But when we speak of free will to act rightly, we mean the will with which human beings were created." True, we all have wills, and they may

have some degree of freedom, and so on. However, only the original humans were able to use their wills freely to choose to act rightly. When we refuse to use freedom well, we justly lose it. Specifically, after the commission of sin, human free will is hampered by "ignorance and difficulty." *Ignorance* inspires us to "to accept falsehoods as truths, thus erring unwillingly." Will is meant to act in response to reason, but ignorance interferes. *Difficulty* is worse: It includes an inability to resist acting on disordered desire.[67] This is a punishment for sin: We lose the ability to choose rightly because our sinful desire (*libido* or *cupiditas*) overpowers us.

An interlude is necessary here. As is well known, one of Augustine's great debates was with Pelagianism. This heresy had it that Adam's sin did not utterly corrupt the rest of us, and that we remain free, able to do good. The defense of freedom in *Lib. Arb.* has been taken, from Augustine's own day right down to ours, as evidence that in his early years he had himself promoted some form of Pelagianism. Vigorously he defended himself in the *Retractiones*.[68] 3.18 is key, and a point scholars sometimes seem to miss.[69] Partly, as a result of this, one of the bigger disputes in the secondary sources concerns whether *Lib. Arb.* is a Pelagian text. As Augustine explains in *Retr.*, his main goal in *Lib. Arb.* was to refute the Manicheans. Naturally, there would be an emphasis on human freedom, and since the problem of Pelagianism had not yet come across his field of theological vision, naturally there would be very little said by way of disclaimer at the time.

Yet 3.18 *was* said, so I side with those who take Augustine not to have been promoting some kind of Pelagianism here.[70]

Returning to the text, Augustine's analysis raises a question—one which some unscrupulous fellows ask in hopes of escaping blame (*Lib. Arb.* 3.19). How can we be justly punished for the sins of our first ancestors? Here we might say that free will is a gift given not to each individual human, but to the human race corporately, to be exercised by its head. We might explain that Adam is the head of the human race, that Adam decides on behalf of humanity as a president makes a decision on behalf of the nation, the human race deciding in Adam and the nation deciding in its president. These answers may serve well, and he may have some of these notions in mind here.[71] However, interestingly, he advises silence; "stop murmuring against God." Christ, the "Victor over error and inordinate desire," is there to help us in our need. Explanations might be given, but the most important thing is to accept that we are justly blamed as sinners and to accept Christ's help for the healing of our corrupted desires and for the restoration of our ability to choose rightly.

And we have sins enough of our own. You can be blamed for rejecting Christ's healing (*Lib. Arb.* 3.19). Were I innocent of blame for sins committed through ignorance and difficulty inherited from Adam, I would remain guilty if I do not seek both wisdom and healing from Christ.

This settled, Augustine can ask how exactly we might have inherited guilt for the sin of Adam or how we might have participated in that sin—or whatever exactly is the reason we are justly punished for Adam's sin.[72] Although he does not simply set aside this question, answering it involves considering whence came our souls. He is not prepared to settle this issue, so neither is he prepared to answer *how* we are punished for Adam's sin. His goal is simply to show that, however our souls came about, we *are* justly punished with ignorance and difficulty for the sin of Adam. He considers (*Lib. Arb.* 3.20-21) four theories on the origin on the soul (two of which are still with us in the musings of theologians).[73] The creationist theory is that God created each of our souls individually. Traducianism has it that God created only the first human soul (or two); we get our souls from our parents, much as we get our bodies from them. These first two theories posit the soul coming into the body at the same time as the body comes into existence. Two other theories involve the existence of the soul before the body. On one the soul is sent into the body by God, and on another it falls into the body through some earlier sin. Augustine tells Evodius that church doctrine has not (that he knows of) yet clarified which theory should be accepted or rejected, so we should be cautious in this matter (3.21).

The fourth theory is Plotinus'. According to Robert O'Connell[74] it was also Augustine's, although scholars have been known to disagree.[75] I am a bit skeptical myself; Augustine himself says "It would be rash to affirm any of these" (*Lib. Arb.* 3.21). At least he does not explicitly commit to the Plotinian view here. Rather, he argues (3.20) that each theory allows for God's justice in our receiving the punishment for Adam's sin. In traducianism our souls, being the offspring of Adam's, were involved in his sin. In the Plotinian view, our souls sinned before we were born. The other two theories are a bit more tricky. If the soul is sent into the body on God's mission, it must be the mission of helping the body (born of sin) to prepare for heavenly redemption, and this involves taking on the body's punishments for sin. (Like souls in the traducian theory, in *this* theory *bodies* come from Adam and *are* punished accordingly. Yet souls are not, strictly speaking, *blamed* given this theory.[76]) On the creationist view, Augustine suggests that it is just for souls born later to only start out at the point to which the earlier soul fell, and to then require virtue or grace to ascend further. (In any case, ignorance and difficulty for such souls are less a punishment than "a spur to progress and a beginning of perfection.")

In seeking answers to such mysteries, we must remain within the bounds of piety (*Lib. Arb.* 3.21). In addition to deference to orthodox commentary on Scripture, we must stick to views that recognize God as the Trinity, creator of all (save himself), and unchangeable. "Indeed, the pious and sober understanding of the Trinity is the focus of all Christian attention and the goal of

all Christian progress," and we should keep in mind this aim, also keeping in mind how we will never fully explain the Trinity. In any case, these details of our spiritual origin matter less than our *destination*; it is more important to understand that our purpose and happiness are to be found in God.[77]

In short, "We should look no further for the cause of sin" than the will (*Lib. Arb.* 3.22). Some other questions come from unscrupulous fellows who bother the less-educated faithful with their slanders (3.23). Augustine offers some answers, but we need not consider them. More salient for understanding Augustine's theology of desire is the question why Adam would sin if he was created wise (3.24). After answering that he was created neither wise nor foolish, Augustine returns to the pride which tempted Adam; what causes sin other than that "someone whose good is God wants to be his own good . . . ?"

In *Lib. Arb.*'s final chapter, we return to the first event in this whole chain of evil: What caused Satan's rebellion (3.25)? Again, the best answer we can give is pride, with which he also tempted and deceived man. Christ is for fallen man the example of humility to replace the devil as an example of pride. Thus we return, at the close, to the cure for pride and for disordered desires, the humility of Christ.

So, before moving on in our next chapter to a more direct investigation of God and the soul according to reason, exactly what have we discovered about Augustine's theology of desire in *Lib. Arb.*? A helpful schemata for overviewing this topic is the old summary of the Christian worldview: creation, fall, and redemption.

Desire is good. God created us as desiring, loving beings so that we would pursue goodness. We should have love without limit for God, and love created goods within the limits of our love for God, especially rational spirits such as human souls (including our own). As long as we lack the object of that love, desire is the motivating power of pursuing it. Yet God also created the original humans with the ability to freely choose God—or not.

Like the villain in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, we chose poorly. And as a result, we are afflicted with ignorance, such that we think a lesser good is a greater. And we are afflicted with the difficulty of severely disordered desires—*libido*, *cupiditas*, lust, cupidity—and it causes us to pursue, irresistibly, lesser goods as if they were greater ones. We need God's grace to overcome this punishment for sin. Our sin is marked by pride, by the tendency to substitute one particular lesser good—ourselves—for the good of God.

That grace comes in a form suited to heal our spiritual illnesses. It is the grace of Christ. His humility in the Incarnation, and in his life and death, is the cure for our sin. In order to be healed of pride, in order to overcome our irresistible cupidity, we must imitate the humility of Christ.

NOTES

1. The Introduction in the Library of Liberal Arts translation is helpful on the themes of *Lib. Arb.*; see Hackstaff, Introduction to Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Anna S. Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff; Introduction by L. H. Hackstaff (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1964), ix–xxix. So also the Introduction to the Cambridge edition; see Peter King, Introduction to *On Free Choice of the Will, On Grace, and Other Writings*, trans. Peter King (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge , ix–xxxii. The Introduction to the Hackett edition is quite helpful on the philosophical ideas in the text; see Thomas Williams, Introduction to *On Free Choice of the Will*, xi–xix.

2. Or so it seems. See Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, chapter 3 for the view that Evodius is not the interlocutor's name.

3. A sorting, introduction to, and short commentary on most of his books, under-taken late in life. The Latin title *Retractiones* is sometimes literally translated as *Retractions* and sometimes as *Reconsiderations*.

4. Augustine, *Reconsiderations*; Book One, Chapter Nine; in *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams; introduction by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 124–29.

5. Simon Harrison notes "the tendency to read the dialogue as a historical record, rather than as a work of art and thought" as a reason for the presumption that Augustine wrote the dialogue with Evodius as his interlocutor; *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 32. However, Harrison also says that, probably, "Augustine composed the three books out of, and in view of, the discussions he had with his circle of friends who were with him in Rome, one of whom was Evodius" (43). He also explains that "Augustine was writing for earnest and serious students," and concludes that "'Evodius' is an entirely appropriate name to use" for such a character. Like Harrison, I follow the convention of calling the interlocutor "Evodius."

6. Augustine, *Confessions*, footnote 90 to *Conf.* 9.8.17. For more on the historical character, see Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 40–43.

7. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*.

8. A helpful commentary on *Lib. Arb.* specifically is G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 112–18. For other helpful commentaries on Augustine on evil, see TeSelle, *Augustine*, chapter 3; Matthews, *Augustine*, chapter 12; and Williams, *On Augustine*, chapter 5. For a recent defense of one of the central points of Augustine's response to evil, see Donald A. Cress, "Augustine's Privation Account of Evil: A Defense," *Augustinian Studies* 20 (1989), 102–28.

9. William E. Mann, "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40–48.

10. Matthews' comments on this theme in relation to this passage are helpful; Matthews, *Augustine*, 87–88.

11. On reason and authority in this passage, see Harrison, *Augustine's Way Into the Will*, 85–87.

12. Some say creation *ex nihilo* is different from Plotinian emanation. For example, Etienne Gilson, *Revue Philosophique*, 503, quoted in Kevane, "Christian Philosophy," 80, cited by Kevane in n. 99; James F. Anderson, *St. Augustine and Being: A Metaphysical Essay* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 61; quoted in Kevane, "Christian Philosophy," 80–81, n. 101; Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, chapter 4; and Clark, *Augustine*, 34–5, 114, and 116; Clark claims that Augustine did not know that Plotinus even taught emanation rather than creation *ex nihilo*. However, various passages in the *Enneads* suggest a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. For example, in the sixth Ennead Plotinus says that when the One creates it is "not giving forth from itself"; Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna; abridged by John Dillon (London: Penguin, 1991), 6.5.3. See also Brandon Zimmerman, "Does Plotinus Present a Philosophical Account of Creation?" *Review of Metaphysics* 67, no. 1 (September 2013), 55–105. I am grateful to Philip Cary for helping me notice this, and it appears that I was mistaken in *Conversion and Therapy*, chapter 1, in considering the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as separating Augustine from Plotinus.

13. See Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, 59. Also Clark, *Augustine*, 52, 111–12. Clark explains elsewhere that Augustine is not neo-Platonic because he is not Arian; Mary T. Clark, "*De Trinitate*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 94.

14. Thomas Williams' note 6 at *Lib. Arb.* 1.3 describes the sense of the Latin and the challenge in translating it just right.

15. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Anna S. Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff; Introduction by L. H. Hackstaff (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1964). Simon Harrison discusses the term in more detail in *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 54–56.

16. On this theme, Kenyon is helpful; see Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 179.

17. Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy* 2.3.8 and 2.2.4-2.4.15.

18. Ambrose, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke, with Fragments on the Prophecy of Isaias*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998), 6.97–98.

19. Daniel Burns argues for the importance of *Lib. Arb.* Book I as a text on political theory; Burns has some helpful commentary on the various questions in political and moral theory posed for Evodius by Augustine; Daniel Burns, "Augustine's Introduction to Political Philosophy: Teaching *De Libero Arbitrio*, Book I," *Religions* 6 (2015), 82–91.

20. On how the imperfect temporal law nonetheless teaches us, and on how it has effected Evodius' own understanding of right and wrong, see Daniel Burns, "Augustine on the Moral Significance of Human Law," *Revue d'etudes augustiniennes et patristiques* 61 (2015), 273–98.

21. Mourant: "Again, the presence of the Christian elements is to be seen not merely in actual theses presented but in the more serious religious tone of many of the dialogues, the use of prayer, and the increasing number of citations from Scripture"; John A. Mourant, "The Emergence of a Christian Philosophy in the Dialogues of Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 1 (1970), 80.

22. For suitable introductions to this perspective in the *Republic*, see Gregory Vlastos, "The Argument in the *Republic* that 'Justice Pays'," *Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 21 (1968), 665–74 or Mark Boone, "The Unity of the Virtues and the Degeneration of Kallipolis," *Apeiron* 44, no. 2 (April 2011), 131–46.

23. Boone, "The Unity of the Virtues and the Degeneration."

24. On Ambrose and the unity of the cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, justice, and moderation, see *On the Duties of the Clergy*, book II, chapter 9.

25. *Sol.* 1.13.22. I discuss this in *Conversion and Therapy*, chapter 6.

26. On eternal law in the writings of Augustine, TeSelle is helpful; TeSelle, *Augustine's Strategy as an Apologist*, 28.

27. We should beware of oversimplifying. Stump warns against viewing Augustine through the lens of contemporary notions of free will; Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124–47. Another warning comes from Couenhoven, who argues that Augustine's free will defense was to be short-lived; indeed, Augustine soon turns against the free will defense; Jesse Couenhoven, "Augustine's Rejection of the Free-Will Defence," *Religious Studies* 43 (2007), 279–98. Also see Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 172–74.

28. In our own era, Mackie asked a similar question: Isn't it possible for God to make only those creatures with morally significant free will who do *not* sin? See J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64, no. 254 (April 1955), 200–12. Alvin Plantinga replies, saying that it is not in fact within the scope of omnipotence to create 100% of just any world—for worlds shaped by the free choices of creatures, *they* have to be involved in the process of bringing such a world to fruition. See Alvin Plantinga, "Which Worlds Could God Have Created?" *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 17 (October 1973), 539–52.

29. Kenyon rightly points out that this strategy "has been an inspiration to rationally minded Christians for centuries" and is the same as Anselm's "faith seeking understanding"; *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 169.

30. Helpful comments on the argument may be found in Mary Clark, *Augustine*, 18–19. Teske examines the argument in detail in Teske, *To Know God and the Soul*, chapter 2. Simon Harrison provides a helpful "map" of the book locating the strategy of Book II in relation to other priorities in *Lib. Arb.*; *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 51. There is a more detailed outline of *Lib. Arb.* in Harrison's book, 153–65.

31. We should not take Augustine's alleged Cartesianism too far. Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, chapter 7, and Williams, *On Augustine*, chapter 9 are good places for the interested reader to start looking into the literature on this.

32. Kenyon aptly describes the argument as "an epic course of self-reflection"; Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 190.

33. On the hierarchical structure of reality, see MacDonald, "The Divine Nature," 71–90. MacDonald includes an extended discussion of the argument in *Lib. Arb.*

34. I think MacDonald makes a little too much of Evodius' hesitation at 2.6, treating it as a weakness in the argument, evidence it fails to prove the existence of God, and even a source of "embarrassment" for Augustine. It seems to me that Augustine (the author, and perhaps also the character in the dialogue) is well aware of the

difference between proving that something is greater than reason and proving that
there is a God. His argument presumes that something greater than reason is great
enough to be considered God *if* it is the greatest, but it also presumes that the great-
est *is* God—whatever great thing turns out to be the *greatest*; see MacDonald, "The
Divine Nature," 78–81.

35. MacDonald: "Ontological ranking and value ranking therefore coincide: the
highest being is the highest good." MacDonald, "The Divine Nature," 79.

36. For more on the sexual imagery employed by Augustine in describing the love
of God, see Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 182. On how different a "shared
love of beauty" is from the "strictly individual affair" that is the Plotinian ascent to
the divine, see Brown, *Eye of a Needle*, 166; see also my *Conversion and Therapy*,
175–76.

37. In Augustine's view, sin characteristically tries to possess something good
privately, abandoning the common good of all. The enjoyment of truth requires no
privatization, unlike that of food or drink. On sin as trying to seize and hold privately
what should be common, see Brown, *Eye of a Needle*, 181.

38. Kenyon's approach is similar: The argument is meant to demonstrate deci-
sively some sort of higher being while only rendering plausible the existence of the
God of the Bible; Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 190–91.

39. After a very clear presentation of the argument, Matthews notes that "Augus-
tine does not return to the project of offering an argument to prove the existence of
God"; Gareth B. Matthews, "Knowledge and Illumination," in *The Cambridge Com-
panion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK:
Cambridge University Press, 2001), 182.

40. The argument, by the way, might work without the hierarchy. It may be that
the hierarchy is not part of the argument proper, but only a sort of training exercise
to help us understand that there is such a sublime reality that we could recognize as
divine.

41. Matthews' assessment of the argument is more negative, although he recog-
nizes its important place at the beginning of the medieval tradition of arguments for
the existence of God; *Augustine*, 90.

42. Teske, *To Know God and the Soul*, chapter 2.

43. Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 49–50 is helpful on the need for the
reader to join Evodius in the process of learning. Similarly, Kenyon, *Augustine and
the Dialogue*, chapter 7.

44. On hylomorphism in *Lib. Arb.*, see TeSelle, *Augustine's Strategy as an Apolo-
gist*, 137.

45. Clair's commentary on the ranking of goods in *Lib. Arb.* is insightful; Clair,
Discerning the Good, 11–15.

46. These sins correspond to the three sins we considered in chapter 1: the pride of
life, the lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh; TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*,
111.

47. Simon Harrison on Book III's strategy: "but now that the overall answer is in
place, other problems can easily be dealt with"; *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 51.

48. Hackstaff, Introduction, ix.

49. Hackstaff, Introduction, ix.

50. Mourant, "The Emergence," 88.

51. Mourant, "The Emergence," 88.

52. Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*.

53. Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 46–50.

54. Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 47.

55. A good study of this and other arguments in *c. Acad.* is Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism.* I cover the same arguments in *Conversion and Therapy*, chapter 2.

56. On the pre-Augustinian sources of the problem, the analysis in *Lib. Arb.*, and its enduring importance, see Matthews, *Augustine*, chapter 11.

57. Kenyon is helpful on the responses to the problem of foreknowledge; see *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 175.

58. As Boethius explains in *Consolation*, Book V. In reading Augustine here as pointing toward Boethius rather than as needing correction from him, I differ from Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 97–98.

59. On this analysis of suicide, we can consult Kent, "Augustine's Ethics," 210–11.

60. Plantinga, "Which Worlds Could God?"

61. Kenyon is helpful; *Augustine and the Dialogue*, 171.

62. Vaught, *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions*; Vaught, *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions*; Vaught, *The Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions*.

63. Why would Augustine make a distinction not made by Plotinus between creation and fallenness? Perhaps Plotinus lacks a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*; since God's own substance streams out from God and becomes the substance of all created things, all created things are by definition fallen from God. As I mentioned, my view is that Plotinus actually *did* believe in creation *ex nihilo* of Nous, Soul, and everything else from the One. Rather, to be created in this lower, physical world is to be fallen in Plotinus' theology because, in his cosmology, things in this world are here because divine realities fell from the immaterial world, as explained in *Enneads* 4.8.1-8. Augustine's doctrine of creation does not have this. Moreover, it is possible that his doctrine of creation ensures that createdness is not fallenness because God's will and wisdom designed created things. The reference to design here in *Lib. Arb.* 3.15 suggests as much.

64. See also Thomas Williams on the difference between depravity and metaphysical distance from God; Thomas Williams, "Augustine and the Platonists," Lecture to the Freshman Program of Christ College, the Honors College, Valparaiso University (23 October 2003), accessed July 8, 2019, http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~thomasw/aug&plat.pdf, 5.

65. At least according to my working understanding. These are subtle matters; Plotinus himself tells us that "Evil is not in any and every lack . . . . What falls in some degree short of the Good is not Evil; considered in its own kind it might even be perfect, . . ."; *Enneads* 1.8.5. Because of the afore-mentioned doctrine that to be created in this physical world is to be fallen, I take it that in this passage Plotinus merely

refers to the inherent finite goodness of the structure of a created thing. If, perhaps, Plotinus considers a created thing's distance from God as a lack of goodness which is not itself an evil, then Plotinus would be more like Augustine than we usually think, Plotinian metaphysics itself could correct the errors of Plotinus as we usually interpret him, and we would need to shift a bit closer to the Christian neo-Platonist interpretation of Augustine.

66. Kent: "The only explanation Augustine can conceive is that their sin arose from an evil will which itself had no prior or external cause. Either the will is the first cause of sin, not merely one more link in a chain of natural efficient causes, or there is no sin"; "Augustine's Ethics," 222.

67. TeSelle: ". . . *willing* without being able to *accomplish* . . ."; *Augustine the Theologian*, 161.

68. *Reconsiderations*, Book One, Chapter Nine, 1.

69. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 282, for example. Evans seems to miss this point as well, at least with respect to the text of *Lib. Arb.*; *Augustine on Evil*, 117–18. However, Evans is sensitive to the fact that Augustine in *Lib. Arb.* had anti-Manichean priorities which required a focus on primal free will rather than our lack of it after the fall of Adam, and our need for grace; *Augustine on Evil*, 148. Wilson argues that 3.18 is inconsistent with both the prior and subsequent text of *Lib. Arb.*; Ken Wilson, *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (Regula Fidei Press, 2019), 47. Couenhoven is very clear that the free will defense in *Lib. Arb.* applies to Adam rather than us, his heirs; "Augustine's Rejection of the Free-Will Defence." Carol Harrison emphasizes the importance of 3.18 and critiques scholars who read *Lib. Arb.* as less than fully coherent, the early passages arguing for free will in current humanity and the latter passages rejecting this doctrine; Harrison, *Rethinking*, chapter 7; also Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*. Kenyon is also a good source on the unity of *Lib. Arb.* in *Augustine and the Dialogue*, chapter 7. Also see Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 74. (This is only a sampling of a complex scholarly discussion!)

70. Harrison, *Rethinking*, chapter 7 lists several scholars who have misread *Lib. Arb.* on this point; Harrison, *Rethinking*, 199–202. Likewise Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, chapter 2. TeSelle concurs that Augustine did not in *Lib. Arb.* promote Pelagianism; *Augustine the Theologian*, 159. Also Mary Clark; *Augustine*, 22–23, 33, and 123. Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, chapter 2 is a valuable analysis of the question. Daniel Burns sides with both Harrisons in resisting the reading of *Lib. Arb.* as itself manifesting dramatic development in Augustine; Burns, "Augustine on the Moral Significance," 277–79.

71. Actually, some of these musings are very Augustinian. I recommend the chapter on Augustine in McDermott, *The Great Theologians*, especially pages 56–57. For example, he explains that in Augustine's theology "the human nature in Adam that became our human nature made that fateful choice" (56) and that "this made a lot of sense" to pre-Enlightenment minds or in places "where the principle of solidarity is still understood" (57). Solidarity, he tells us, "is the idea, familiar to the ancients but foreign to the developed West today, that we can be joined to a person in such a way that whatever happens to that person also happens as a result to us" (36). This seems to me a bit different from Couenhoven, who says, "If all post-lapsarian human beings

are unable to love God properly, the divine gift of self-determination becomes a much less attractive explanation for the problem of evil"; "Augustine's Rejection of the Free-Will Defence," 280. To be precise, there was a gift of self-determination for the human race, not the individual; or, if you will, there was *no* gift of *self*-determination, but the human race was given the freedom to determine its own destiny.

72. The reader interested in this topic might consider reading a detailed study of the origins of the Augustinian theory of original sin: Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources*, trans. Adam Kamesar (Oxford, UK: Oxford University press, 2013). A shorter commentary on the subject is Bourke, "Joy in Augustine's Ethics," *The Saint Augustine Lecture Series: 1978* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1978), 10–28. Chapter 6 of Greenblatt's *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve* might be helpful as well.

73. On the presence of these views in the early church and how common traducianism was and how Ambrose and others favored creationism, see Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin*, 72–73 and 148–49. Teske is helpful on the question of the origin of the soul in various writings of Augustine; Teske, "Augustine's Theory of Soul," 120–22.

74. Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's* Confessions*: The Odyssey of Soul* (New York: Fordham, 1989); Robert J. O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987); and Robert J. O'Connell, *Saint Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386–391* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). In addition, the interested reader might consult a magisterial commentary on Augustine and on O'Connell's interpretation in Ronnie Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul: Beyond O'Connell and His Critics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2006).

75. O'Connor claims, as early as 1921, that Augustine rejected this thesis; William P. O'Connor, "The Concept of the Human Soul According to Saint Augustine" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1921); accessed 12 March, 2018, https://archive.org/details/ConceptOfTheHumanSoul, 69–70. Conybeare claims Augustine never answered this question; Conybeare, *The Routledge Guidebook to Augustine's* Confessions, 113–14. Mary Clark concurs; *Augustine*, 122. And Gilson; Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, 50. So does Carol Harrison, who notes that Augustine often saw in traducianism the advantage of better "explaining the inheritance of original sin and the practice of infant baptism"; Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, 109–10. Also Simo Knuuttila, "Time and Creation in Augustine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104 and n. 13 on page 114. O'Donnell says, "A broader consensus of scholars holds that Augustine's frequent protestations of his inability to determine an answer to the question of the soul's origin can be taken at face value"; James J. O'Donnell, "Augustine: His Time and Lives," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman: 8–25 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22. Thus TeSelle: ". . . Augustine must be taken seriously when he says that he holds the question of the *preexistence* of the soul open"; *Augustine the Theologian*, 192. TeSelle suggests that Augustine was committed to the theory

"in a hypothetical way" and rejected it in 406 A. D.; TeSelle, 70. O'Daly goes a bit further than TeSelle: "Augustine can speak of pre-existence as a hypothetical possibility without in any way implying that he would accept it"; Gerard O'Daly, "Did St. Augustine Ever Believe in the Soul's Pre-existence?" *Augustinian Studies* 5 (1974), 231. However, O'Connell's view is that this remark in *Lib. Arb.* only means that "for the purposes of his argument *here*, Augustine deliberately leaves all four 'hypotheses' open"; "Augustine's Rejection," 9. For more on Augustine's consideration of this question in other writings, see Trapè, "Chapter VI: Saint Augustine," 342–462, 412–13. Rombs in *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul* concurs with O'Connell with respect to the early writings. With respect to the later writings—in which O'Connell thinks Augustine rejects the Plotinian fall of the soul as a historical account but retains a nuanced Plotinian theory of the nature of man—Rombs disagrees with O'Connell.

76. On whether a moral weakness is, strictly speaking, *sin*, and on the way Augustine's language of sin responds to the context in which he is writing, see Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, chapter 5.

77. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, 50 is helpful here.

Chapter 4

God and the Soul according to Reason

De Magistro

De Magistro, or *On the Teacher,* is a study of semiotics, epistemology, philosophy of language, and metaphysics. It teaches us about God and the soul. It is a superb opportunity to see that the same sort of theology of desire with which many of us are familiar from the *Confessions* is ubiquitous in Augustine's writings.

De Magistro contains some important ideas about signs—most importantly, that signs *remind* more than they *teach*, and that *teaching* is done by God. There is a marvelous puzzle in epistemology: If learning is by signs, yet no sign can be understood without knowledge of what it signifies, how can we learn anything? Augustine's solution is that Christ dwells in each soul, teaching us the truth. This is a Christian reworking of the old Platonic doctrine of recollection. It represents one of Augustine's most ambitious attempts to reason through the mysteries of God and the soul.[1] Yet, all this epistemology and philosophy of religion is linked to an ethics and an accompanying theology of desire, for the whole study aims to help us love God as we ought to. For signs are less valuable than knowledge of what they signify, and, ultimately, signs signify God. And this, of course, is a lesson in how we should love and in what we ought to desire. Above all, we must have our desires converted to Christ, whom to know and love is the happy life. This conversion requires God's gracious help, although education and various other therapies for our desires are helpful.

In what follows, I shall first introduce the puzzle of Reason from Augustine's *Soliloquia* and comment on *Sol.* as a sort of prequel to *Mag.* Then I shall expound on *Mag.*'s epistemology, metaphysics, and semiotics—its theory of signs and of knowledge. Finally, I shall explain what this has to do with a theology of desire.

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SOLILOQUIA AND DE MAGISTRO

De Magistro is like a sequel to *Soliloquia*, the *Soliloquies*. This *Sol.* is a remarkable book, Augustine's fourth,[2] dated to 386 A. D. (and perhaps continuing to 387). *Sol.* is a conversation held between Augustine and his own Reason. Augustine introduces his dialogue partner thus:

> For a long time I had been turning over within myself many different things, and for many days I had been assiduously seeking my very self and what was good for me (or, if you will, what evil I should avoid), when suddenly it spoke to me. I know not whether it was I myself or something else outside or inside of me; for this is precisely what I am struggling mightily to know. (1.1.1)[3]

Reason is that faculty of the soul by which it knows the truth. In *Sol.,* Augustine is trying to understand it and learning, among other things, that it is either itself divine or has a special connection to the divine. There is some disagreement as to who exactly Reason is. The different views cover precisely the ambiguity which Augustine gives us in *Sol.*: On the one hand, some say Reason is simply Augustine's own mind or a personification of universal reason.[4] On the other hand, Reason is thought to be either Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit.[5]

That the character Reason is divine is a reasonable interpretation of *Sol.* (although I think it is, strictly speaking, incorrect[6]). Augustine says in the *Confessions*, describing this particular text, that it is a "record . . . of discussions . . . with Yourself when I was alone with you" (*Conf.* 9.4.7).[7] Reason hears from God. God has reason's ear. Yet it seems from the opening of *Sol.* that Augustine himself was not at this time entirely sure what to think about the divine connection of Reason. He would have to think more later. My view is that he did in fact think about this more later, and that *De Magistro* is the result. What he seems to have concluded is that God, specifically Jesus Christ the second member of the Trinity, is in the soul informing reason. God is not the same thing as reason. However, when reason is working properly what it says is what it has heard from God. God is reason's teacher. They are distinct but not separate, for God is within the same space as reason. Given Augustine's list in *Sol.* of three possibilities—that reason is either himself or something else inside him or something else outside of him—we would choose to say that reason is *himself* and hears well from something *else* which is *inside*.

That space is the soul itself, and God is in it as air is in the lungs: God also can, and does, exist outside of it. Similarly, whenever the word *idea* has been used to describe the immaterial Forms in which Plato believed, this was due to the fact that the Forms were thought to be things which could be in the mind when the mind knows them. Yet, they were by no means dependent on

our knowing them; they existed quite independently of us. The mind is made to know them, but the Forms are quite independent of the mind, and, in *Mag.*, Christ is just as independent of reason.

This is why I think of *Mag.* as something like a sequel to *Sol.*[8] Here Augustine revisits the relationship of reason and God, analyzing God and the soul and including some very sophisticated epistemology. Here, as always, Augustine will have something to say about the right ordering of desire. He relies very largely on reason to learn these things—fittingly, since reason is identified as the faculty by which the soul knows God. This is indeed one of Augustine's most philosophical works.[9]

DE MAGISTRO'S EPISTEMOLOGY

De Magistro focuses on semiotics, the study of signs. This connects to ethics because Augustine's semiotics says much about the values of a sign and of what it signifies; this I shall consider in the final section of this chapter. A theory of signs also connects to theology inasmuch as theology is concerned with the signs by which we know God. Semiotics may be theological in other ways, as for example here where knowing by signs relies on God's help. Perhaps most obvious is the connection to epistemology, the study of knowledge. For a series of signs is a theory of knowledge inasmuch as it seems that much of our knowing is by signs. Augustine develops the intriguing theory that all human knowledge relies on God's work within the soul, teaching us. Augustine's theory is similar to Plato's idea of recollection, articulated in his dialogue the *Meno*, and is moreover developed in response to a skeptical puzzle much like that employed in the *Meno* itself.[10] Along the way, there are some very sophisticated analyses of various puzzles and questions relating to signs, yet expressed in the form of a philosophical dialogue; as such, sometimes the exposition is not that of analytic philosophy but is occasionally playful or even silly, and always aimed more at giving us the tools we need to discover the truth than at simply announcing it.

In the ancient philosophical dialogue, there are normally two main characters, teacher and student. Augustine in this text adopts the role of the teacher, while Adeodatus has the role of student. Augustine informs us in *Conf.* 9.6.14 that his son Adeodatus was "more intelligent than many a grave and learned man." He was only sixteen at the time of the conversation on which *De Magistro* is based, yet the ideas in the dialogue "were truly his."

Augustine asks Adeodatus, "When we speak, what does it seem to you we want to accomplish?" (*Mag.* 1.1).[11] Adeodatus replies, "So far as it now strikes me, either to teach or to learn." Apparently, however, even when we speak in order to learn we are also speaking in order to teach—to teach

someone else what we want to learn! Adeodatus resists Augustine's conclu-
sion that "we seek nothing by speaking except to teach" (*Mag.* 1.1). Singing
seems to be a counterexample. Yet, Augustine claims, we sing in order to
remind either ourselves or others, which is a kind of teaching or else very
similar. If the latter, then all speaking is either to teach or to remind. Adeoda-
tus is held back because when we pray to an omniscient God, we are hardly
teaching him (1.2). However, Augustine suggests that true prayer takes place
in "the inner recesses of the mind," and thus is not, strictly speaking, speak-
ing. Augustine asks about the Lord's prayer, suggesting that Jesus taught us
to pray using words; Adeodatus answers that in this way Christ "taught them
not the words but the things themselves by means of the words"—teaching us
some theological points regarding to whom and for what to pray. Agreement
being reached that all speaking is for teaching; they are ready to move on.

We, however, are not. Two observations are necessary. First, the idea has
already been raised that our minds contain recesses—inner spaces or places.
This is an important notion. We will later see Augustine explain the idea that
within the recesses of the mind, not only do we communicate with God but
God also teaches us.[12] Indeed, this is how we get all our knowledge. Second,
the introduction of a possible distinction between teaching and reminding
invites comparison to the Platonic dialogues. In *Meno*, we are told that all
of our knowledge remains eternally in the eternal soul, and that what we
think of as learning in this life is merely recollection of knowledge which
lies dormant. Recollection is aided by reminding. Augustine's use of similar
language of reminding and teaching suggests the major epistemological hinge
of *Mag.*, the shift from the Platonic notion of recollection to a more Christian
idea, Augustine's notion of knowledge by illumination.[13] We know by teach-
ing, not by recollection.[14]

It follows from their reflections thus far that all "words are signs" (*Mag.*
2.3). Therefore, every word signifies something. It can be difficult to say
what exactly each word signifies, as is illustrated by Augustine's attempts to
get Adeodatus to explain each sign in a line of verse from Virgil (2.3-4). The
word "if" may signify doubt, the word "nothing" (Latin *nihil*) may signify the
state of mind of one not finding something, and the preposition "from" (Latin
ex) may signify separation (2.4).

As Augustine points out to Adeodatus, he has "explained words by means
of words," which means that he has also "explained signs by means of signs"
(*Mag.* 2.4). He asks if Adeodatus can show him "the very things" signified.
Adeodatus correctly states that he cannot do this by means of words, since
words are signs (3.5). Augustine grants this, yet keeps pushing his son with
challenges to find ways to teach without using signs (3.5-6). It turns out that
signs operate in a very complex network. One sign signifies another. The
word "sign" is a sign for a sign, which of course is a sign for something else.

To use Augustine's example: We may refer to a wall using the word "wall," but is there a way to refer to a wall *directly*, without using a sign? We might point to it, but this gesture is itself a sign (and the word "gesture" is a sign for that sign). Is there any way out of this network of signs—any way of knowing things themselves and not merely their signs? There ought to be a way out, or at least a way for knowledge of things to get *into* the network.[15] Otherwise, how would we ever know the meaning of *any* sign? Or how would we ever know anything by means of signs? Adeodatus gives up on finding any way of teaching without using a sign, but his father helps him out (3.6). If I (using signs, of course) ask you what the word "walking" means while you are sitting down, you can show me what it means simply by doing it, without resorting to signs at all. A little more analysis leads to the conclusion that teaching without signs is possible under the right conditions—*either* that we are teaching a thing we are not doing, about which we were asked, and which we are able to do *or* that the thing we are teaching is itself a sign which can be exhibited by means of itself, such as speaking (4.7).

This suggests a "threefold classification:" signs which can be taught using signs, things which can be taught directly and without the use of signs and things which can only be taught using signs (4.7). Adeodatus and Augustine will examine each of these classes, one at a time.

The study of signs which can be taught using signs continues from 4.7 until 8.21. There is some sophisticated philosophy of language, producing various insights on signs and words. For example, not all signs are words; gestures and letters are also signs (*Mag.* 4.7). Words, such as Augustine and Adeodatus use and such as you are reading, sometimes designate other signs—such as the word "gestures" in the previous sentence (4.7). There is a big difference between a name and a thing: the difference between a sign and its referent (4.8). The latter are more important. Moreover, a point made briefly in this passage but containing great importance in Augustinian thought is this observation: Some things denoted by signs are physical and some are immaterial, such as virtue (4.8).

Signs work in complex ways. Words, strictly speaking, are spoken and audible. Written words are signs of spoken words—signs of *those* signs (*Mag.* 4.8). There may be many links in a chain of signs. The words written on this page are signs of the same words when spoken, and some of *those* words are signs of *other* signs. Suppose that, in this sentence, I reference the reference, nine sentences ago, to the sentence before *that*, which itself used the word "gestures"; here we have written words (in this sentence) as signs for spoken words as signs for other written words (nine sentences back) including a sign for the word "gestures," which is a sign for the act of gesturing, which is itself a sign for something which is presumably *not* a sign—but not necessarily, inasmuch as a person could gesture to a word on a page!

Semiotics can be complex. Even the simplest use of a written word involves a sign for the spoken word, which is a sign for a thing which is not a sign. Using examples drawn from the text, the word "word" may be used as a sign for the word "name," which may be used as a sign for the word "river," itself a sign for an actual river (4.9).

Some signs signify themselves and other things (*Mag.* 4.10). The words "sign," "word," and "name" refer to themselves as well as to other things. Some signs signify each other as well as other things and even themselves (5.11). Such are the words "name" and "word." What, then, Augustine asks Adeodatus, is the relationship of words and names (4.9)? Adeodatus, thinking that words such as verbs and adverbs surely are not names (the Latin *nomen* may be translated into English either as "noun" or "name"), naturally thinks that "all names are words but not all words are names." Augustine tends to think that the terms "names" and "words" do not mean the same thing. His attempts to lead Adeodatus through this question occupy a fair portion of the text. Along the way, they uncover an insight of which contemporary and twentieth-century philosophers have made much. *Meaning* and *reference* are not necessarily the same; two words, or two terms, may refer to all and only the same things, yet differ in meaning. One classic example from recent times is "creatures with a heart" and "creatures with a kidney." Augustine's example is "everything colored" and "everything visible" (5.12). This shows Adeodatus that even if all words are names and vice versa, it may yet be that "words" and "names" do not mean quite the same thing. Augustine concurs: Words and names are the same thing, but the words "words" and "names" have different meanings. The difference is revealed before Augustine explains to his son how all words, even verbs, can be names. Words are audible (and written words signs for the audible ones), and names are mental attributions; words work on the ears, and names are known by the mind (5.12). From *Mag.* 5.13 to 5.16, we are given evidence that all words are names. It is easy enough to view a pronoun as a watered-down noun, but verbs and other parts of speech present some difficulty. Augustine argues that other parts of speech are names in some such way as this. Suppose that we are discussing science fiction film, and I happen to say that *Star Trek: First Contact* was the best Star Trek film, and you reply, "*Was* is right! *First Contact* was the best Star Trek film until they made *Into Darkness*!" The verb in your remark "*Was* is right!" is "is," and "right" is a predicate adjective. So where is the noun? It seems "*Was*" is the noun! So it seems that all verbs can be described as nouns, and similar exercises could be repeated for any other part of speech. In this way, Augustine argues that nouns are fundamental in speech, and even suggests that all speech consists of nouns. This is an important and influential thesis in the philosophy of language,[16] not without its source material in ancient philosophy.[17] Recent philosophy of language has been unfriendly to it.[18] We

should be careful in critiquing Augustine lest we mistake some simpler theory for his; however, I myself find his argument here unconvincing for reasons which I shall relegate to the footnote at the end of this sentence.[19]

In any case, the case has been made that all words are names, not merely vice-versa. Moreover, names and terms are apparently the same except for how they sound; they have the same reference and also the same meaning (*Mag.* 6.17). So terms, like names, are mental rather than physical attributions. And, it seems, names, terms, and words all refer both to themselves and to each other (6.17-18).

After establishing this, Augustine asks his son to give a summary of all they have accomplished, and Adeodatus does (*Mag.* 7.19-8.21). Augustine, congratulating him on his accuracy and thoroughness, comments on the purpose of this whole discussion. He adds, "However, with so many detours, it's difficult to say at this point where you and I are trying to get to!" (8.21).

Indeed. Whatever is the *point* of all this? Are we only interested in the philosophy of language for its own sake?

Of course, we are not.[20] One important reason is to exercise Adeodatus's intellect. These discussions are for his training, and ours as well. Although it may seem that "we're playing around and diverting the mind from serious matters by some little puzzles that seem childish, or that we are pursuing some result that is only small or modest" (8.21), there is a serious purpose here. These studies are in order "to exercise the mind's strength and sharpness." The purpose is to ascend "by stages that are suitable to our weak steps" toward knowledge. Only with fit minds will we be "able not only to withstand but also to love the heat and light of that region where the happy life is." And this, of course, is the subject of the knowledge we are seeking. We are not merely playing with puzzles in philosophy of language, but we are training to understand the truth about ultimate happiness. Moreover, by learning to understand signs better, it is to be hoped that we will better understand "the things themselves that are signified." A good lesson in chess might conceivably sharpen the mind for knowing lofty truths, but *these* mental exercises have been ideally suited for the study of signs and of what they signify—the realities to which they point, and which are to be desired more than the pointing. Similarly, in a passage in *c. Acad.* 2.9.22, Augustine suggests to Trygetius and Licentius that philosophy has been joking with them, but for a serious purpose—for understanding life, morality, and our souls.

Now, as a preview to the discussions of things known without signs and of things known by means of them, we have two lessons on signs (*Mag.* 8.23-9.28). First, we must not confuse a sign with the thing signified. Augustine illustrates with two ridiculous jokes. One he himself plays on Adeodatus (8.22). It initially appears to be a valid categorical syllogism, a bit of logic Adeodatus would have studied. Since Adeodatus is a man and since "man"

(Latin *homo*) is a two-syllable word, Augustine suggests that his son is a two-syllable word! The second joke Augustine recounts from a jokester familiar to him and his son (*Mag.* 8 23). This fellow had extracted from the victim of his joke the concession that "whatever we say comes out of our mouth." Then, when the other used the word "lion," the jokester proclaimed that he had "vomited up a monstrous beast."

These silly jokes depend on mixing up references to things and references to their signs. The same word may be used for either, allowing the possibility for confusions, fallacies of equivocation, and goofy jokes. "The law of reason that is implanted in our minds" (*Mag.* 8.24) avoids such silliness by directing our minds to the correct referent of a term; usually, the correct referent is the thing, but reason knows how to refer us to the sign when necessary, as when we are asked about the word "lion" or "man."

The second lesson here concerns the value of knowledge. Knowledge of things is to be preferred to signs (*Mag.* 9.25-9.28). Things themselves, if they are terrible things such as filth or vice, are not necessarily better than their names. *Knowledge*, however, of the thing is always better than the sign. It is for the sake of knowledge that we *have* the signs. Augustine gives us a rule: "Whatever exists on account of another must be worth less than that on account of which it exists" (9.25).[21] Now this is a rule without exceptions, although it is *not* true that things are always better than their signs. The signs, after all, are for knowledge, not for the things they signify. (There is also some ambiguity as to whether knowledge of things is always to be preferred to knowledge of signs.)

It is now time for Augustine and Adeodatus to examine things which can be demonstrated without the use of signs (*Mag.* 10.28). This analysis moves fairly quickly, and shows that there really are some things that can be taught without signs. Adeodatus, since acknowledging this at 4.7, has grown skeptical: "I still don't find *anything* that can be taught without a sign—except perhaps speaking, and possibly if someone should happen to ask the very question 'What is it to teach?' . . ." (10.29). Their earlier example was walking: If I am sitting and you ask me what the word "walking" means, I can show you by the thing itself just by getting up and *doing* it. Now, however, Adeodatus points out the possibility of misunderstandings: You might think the word "walking" simply means walking a certain distance, for example. How can these misunderstandings be cleared away—except by means of signs? A bit more discussion uncovers the conclusion that both speaking and teaching are things that cannot be taught except by means of signs (10.30). The result: Contrary to their earlier views, "it has been established that nothing is taught without signs . . ." (10.31).

After this dramatic reversal in theory, another reversal is coming! But first there is a necessary lesson in wariness! Augustine asks Adeodatus if he is quite sure about this new conclusion—that nothing can be taught

without signs (*Mag.* 10.31). Adeodatus is cautious, suspecting that in all these subtleties there has been some mistake. Augustine commends this caution; "it bespeaks a circumspect mind, and this is the greatest safeguard of tranquility." He follows with some fine words on epistemic humility, which can protect us from the dangers of hating reason and despairing of rational investigation, into which people tend to fall when they think too much of a conclusion hastily reached which later turns out to be wrong.

After this important advice on *how* to investigate, Augustine resumes the investigation. *Mag.* 10.32 gives us another look at whether things can be taught without the use of signs. Now we learn they *can*: The earlier conclusion (4.7) was correct, and the later conclusion (10.31) incorrect. Augustine illustrates. Say a person having no knowledge of birdcatching spots a birdcatcher on his way to work, follows him, and watches him; the birdcatcher then demonstrates his craft for this audience. Knowledge is gained without the use of signs by the teacher. Adeodatus grants that it is at least *possible* that a person can learn something without signs in this way. Indeed, it can be shown using similar thought experiments that "thousands of things" can be "exhibited through themselves, without any sign being given." Indeed, we learn things without signs all the time: "doesn't God or nature show and display to those paying attention, by themselves, this sun and the light pervading and clothing all things present, the moon and the other stars, the lands and the seas, and the countless things begotten in them?"

This finally leads Augustine and his son to the discussion of things known through signs, which takes them to the end of the dialogue (10.33-13.46). This section is mostly a long monologue by Augustine. He begins with the startling claim that in fact *nothing* is learned through its signs.[22] Although we thought we were learning about things known through signs, in fact what we have to learn about them is that they do not exist! We would do well to revisit 4.7, where this class of things was first introduced. It is not things *learned* through signs, but merely "things that aren't signs" which "may be brought to one's attention" through signs. Signs are not for helping us learn, but for helping us *recognize* or be *reminded* of what we know.

Now we must consider the argument. This, at last, is the skeptical paradox of *Mag.*, a paradox aimed to show the impossibility of learning through signs, but not to promote skepticism as such. The whole point is that we *do* have knowledge and *can* learn; however, we do not learn through signs or through words or through being taught by means of those words. We learn in another way. Here is the argument:

> Nothing is learned through its signs. When a sign is given to me, it can teach me nothing if it finds me ignorant of the thing of which it is the sign; but if I'm not ignorant, what do I learn through the sign? (10.33)

Here, in different words, is the same argument:

> We don't learn anything by these signs called words. As I have stated, we learn
> the meaning—that is, the signification hidden in the sound—once the thing
> signified is itself known, rather than our perceiving it by means of such signi-
> fication. (10.34)

Finally, much the same idea is conveyed in this remark: "Words have force
only to the extent that they remind us to look for things; they don't display
them for us to know" (11.36).

So we cannot know the meaning of a sign without knowing that which
it signifies. Since all words are signs and since the vast majority of formal
teaching employs language and related signs (gestures, illustrations, charts,
etc.), these activities are powerless to teach us. More formally, we can con-
struct this skeptical argument:

1. Most of our teaching is by signs.
2. We cannot know the meaning of a sign without knowing the thing which
   it signifies.
3. So we cannot learn by signs.
4. So most of our teaching is useless.

This skeptical argument is less ambitious than some others, in that it does
not demonstrate that knowledge is impossible, or that learning is impossible,
or even that all teaching is useless. But it is an interesting skeptical argument,
and if it succeeds, it demonstrates the uselessness of very nearly everything
we humans do to try to learn or to teach—not only the work of universities
but also my work writing this book and yours reading it, and most of our
spoken conversations throughout the course of our whole lives!

This argument must be compared and contrasted with the skeptical argu-
ment from Plato's *Meno*, the famous Meno Paradox (*Meno* 80d-e):

1. Either I know something, or I do not know it.
2. If I know it, then I cannot seek knowledge of it.
3. If I do not know it, then I do not know how to investigate it.
4. If I do not know how to investigate it, then I cannot seek knowledge of
   it.
5. So, either way, I cannot seek knowledge of it.
6. So learning is impossible.

In *Meno*, Socrates proposes a solution; very importantly, *his solution
allows the conclusion of the Meno Paradox to stand*! Yet his solution is that

we have knowledge all the same! The solution is that we have knowledge *without learning*: We have knowledge by memory of all of the things we have learned in *past lives* and even *between* lives. Plato ties Socrates's proposed solution to a theory in metaphysics, indeed to a sort of a theology or at least a religious account. The immortality of the soul in the *future* and its having existed eternally in the *past* via reincarnation is the metaphysics making the epistemology possible. The word *meno* in Greek is a verb meaning "to remain," and the idea of the *Meno* is that knowledge remains eternally in the soul. Learning is indeed not possible, but no matter—knowledge remains with us even without needing to learn it! And, of course, what we think of as *learning* in this life is merely *recollection* of that knowledge.[23] We have knowledge, but not by learning. Learning is passing from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge, and since knowledge is with us always, we have it without learning.

We will return to the Meno Paradox and its solution in due time. For now, we must return to Augustine's skeptical argument. The main difference between it and Plato's argument is that Plato's purports to disprove *all* learning and Augustine's only purports to disprove all learning *by signs*.

One major similarity between *Mag.* and *Meno* is that Augustine's solution, like Plato's, allows the argument's skeptical conclusion to stand. Plato has Socrates suggest that we have knowledge that does not rely on learning, and Augustine is going to tell Adeodatus that we have knowledge that does not rely on learning through signs. Through signs we merely have knowledge brought to our attention, awoken, or recalled; we are not taught but reminded. And we have knowledge by God's help. Augustine:

> Regarding each of the things we understand, however, we don't consult a speaker who makes sounds outside us, but the Truth that presides within over the mind itself, though perhaps words prompt us to consult Him. What is more, He Who is consulted, He Who is said to *dwell in the inner man*, does teach: Christ—that is, *the unchangeable power and everlasting wisdom of God*, which every rational soul does consult, but is disclosed to anyone, to the extent that he can apprehend it, according to his good or evil will. (*Mag.* 11.38)

Thus, knowledge comes from Christ. He dwells within the soul and teaches us directly.[24] Thus, as in Plato, knowledge in Augustine's analysis is a profoundly spiritual matter; it is "a mysterious inner episode of awareness."[25] To understand where we get knowledge, we must understand the soul. We also need to understand other spiritual realities. Plato thought that these include higher immaterial realities, in particular the famous Forms, and in *Meno* he has Socrates suggest that this also includes the transmigration of souls. In *Mag.*, however, we are told that the spiritual reality we need to know is

Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity. Also as in Plato's analysis, knowledge comes from the soul rather than from sensory experience, merely human teaching, or anything else. In Plato's analysis, knowledge seems to be built into the soul and is thus always there. In Augustine's analysis, knowledge is *brought* into the soul by Christ who dwells within. In the account from *Meno*, we do not learn, but we do have knowledge, which is always within the soul—needing only to be recollected. In the account in *Mag.*, we have knowledge, and we also *learn*. We do not learn from signs; we have never learned thus, not even from our parents or teachers in school! But we *do* learn.[26] We learn from Christ. His inner teaching is what makes external forms of teaching work.[27]

There is more to say on knowledge, such as Augustine's remarks that we have various faculties for knowing—consulting the senses for our perceptions of the external world, Christ alone for knowledge of immaterial reality and memory for our knowledge of the past (*Mag.* 12.39). Of course, knowledge of immaterial reality is more important, and these are "things that we look upon immediately in the inner light of Truth, in virtue of which the so-called inner man is illuminated and rejoices" (12.40).

Augustine continues, elaborating on the weakness of spoken signs. If one speaks of immaterial realities, his listener may simply fail to understand the meaning of the words; alternatively, if he does understand, it is not in virtue of the words but of his consultation of Christ the inner truth (*Mag.* 13.41). In another scenario, he suggests an Epicurean who disbelieves in the immortality of the soul yet rehearses some good arguments *for* immortality. Perhaps a listener would understand the meaning and the truth of these words, even though the speaker himself does *not*.[28] The upshot: "Words don't even have the minimal function of indicating the speaker's mind . . ." (13.42). In addition, we are familiar with phenomena such as slips of the tongue and things memorized coming out of our mouths at the wrong time.

As the dialogue draws to a close, Augustine offers some words on teaching. Those we consider teachers do not really teach: "Do teachers hold that it is their thoughts that are perceived and grasped rather than the very disciplines they take themselves to pass on by speaking?" (*Mag.* 14.45). Neither the words nor even the thoughts of teachers matter, but the truths behind them. Truths we know by means of the Truth within the soul, on whom we look when we learn. There is no merely human teacher. The only teacher is Christ.

Earlier (*Mag.* 11.37) Augustine had alluded to the propriety of believing on reliable authority—in hopes of later adding *understanding* in order to also *know* what was formerly believed on the basis of trust alone. Now (13.46) he says that we have uncovered that very understanding—in the form of their argument for the need for an inner Teacher—with respect to something they

had formerly believed on faith alone. Namely, they had believed from the Bible that "*there is one in heaven Who is the Teacher of all.*" Christ is "He Who prompts us externally through men by means of signs, so that we are instructed to be inwardly turned toward Him. To know and love Him is the happy life which all proclaim they seek, although there are few who may rejoice in having really found it."

Adeodatus has the last word: "I have learned from the prompting of your words that words do nothing but prompt man to learn" from the inner teacher. Adeodatus has "learned that it is He alone who teaches us whether what is said is true—and, when He spoke externally, he reminded us that He was dwelling within. With his help, I shall love Him the more ardently the more I advance in learning." He explains, further, that as Augustine was speaking "that private Oracle" had told him that what was said by Augustine was true.

DE MAGISTRO'S THEOLOGY OF DESIRE

Questions of value are prominent in *Mag.* We are constantly prompted to consider which of two things is more valuable. A sign or that of which it is a sign? A sign or the knowledge of the sign? The thing signified or the knowledge of the thing signified? As always in Augustinian ethics, a weighing of value parallels a weighing of desire. The right desires are for things of value; for things of greater value we should have stronger desires; desires for things of lesser value are to be subordinated to desires for things of greater value; and we should never desire a thing which is of lesser value with a desire fit for a thing of greater value. Accordingly, *Mag.* is always closely concerned with desire, although not every question about value is explicitly answered. *Some* are. We have been plainly told that knowledge of things is more valuable than knowledge of signs. We should desire this knowledge. It is all too easy to value knowledge of certain signs far more than any of the things we should value. In *Conf.* 1.18.29 Augustine comments on snooty people who value their knowledge of how to pronounce the word "human" (Latin *homo*) without dropping the first letter but do not value actual human beings, who are the things for which the word "human" is a sign.

A more important point is that Christ himself, the inner teacher, is that reality whom we most should love, to know whom should be our great desire. This insight in Augustine's theology of desire parallels his epistemology,[29] which is a distinctively Christian one, like and yet unlike that in Plato's *Meno*.

Let us turn to the major passages in *Mag.* which present us with a theology of desire, and then take a look at the correspondence between the epistemologies and the theologies of desire in Plato and Augustine.

Mag. 8.21:

> Yet if I were to say that there is a happy and everlasting life, and I want us to be
> led there under the guidance of God (namely Truth Himself) by stages that are
> suitable to our weak steps, I'm afraid I might seem laughable for having set out
> on such a long journey by considering signs rather than the things themselves
> that are signified.

> So then, you'll pardon me if I play around with you at first—not for the sake
> of playing around, but to exercise the mind's sharpness, with which we're able
> not only to withstand but also to love the heat and light of that region where the
> happy life is.

This is all about a theology of desire. The destination is happiness.[30] To get
there, we must ascend to God. Yet, even during the ascent, it is God who
leads us—Christ, the truth dwelling within. Most signs are less valuable than
what is signified, and particularly those pointing to the happy life. These real-
ities—those in "that region where the happy life is"—are more to be loved.
The twofold purpose of all the intellectual training in such a text as *Mag.* is
that we be able to handle the knowledge of those realities and that we be able
to love them. Until we get there, until we know them and are able to love by
delighting in *having* them, our business is to desire and seek them.

What is this region, and what are these realities? Augustine does not tell us
much in this particular passage, perhaps because he felt he knew very little
about it himself. At a minimum we can point, based on the text, to Christ as
the most important reality and our souls as the region where he dwells. As
usual, then, the upshot is that we should recognize God and the soul as great
goods and love them accordingly.

Is there anything else to say about this? No doubt there is, but I do not
think we will find much of it here. Perhaps "the City of God" would be a
good name for this region, and Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* would be a good
place to look further. Moreover, since *Mag.* is a study in semiotics and since
semiotics has such a strong moral bent in Augustine's thought, we could not
do better than to study Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, in which he
develops a biblical hermeneutic and moral theology with close attention to
semiotics.[31]

Mag. 11.38: "He Who is said to *dwell in the inner man*, does teach:
Christ—that is, *the unchangeable power and everlasting wisdom of God*,
which . . . is disclosed to anyone, to the extent that he can apprehend it,
according to his good or evil will." Although we learn from the inner teacher,
we do not all learn equally well. A pure will hears from God better. A will
clouded by sinful desires blocks our ability to hear from God.

Mag. 13.46: Christ the inner teacher "prompts us externally through men by means of signs, so that we are instructed to inwardly turn towards him. To know and love Him is the happy life . . . ." This is the clearest statement in *Mag.* of its Christological ethic. To know and love Christ is happiness. To seek him now, and to desire to know him, is the nature of the quest toward the happy life. That, then, and the reordering of our desires toward this end, is our obligation in this life. To desire thus is to have healed desires.

This whole discussion *de magistro* is a therapy for our desires—or a set of therapies. All of the elements of the dialogue—the philosophical conversation, the admitting of our mistakes, the uncovering of an argument for the importance of Christ, the being reminded of Christ, and so on—may be identified as therapies towards this end. Adeodatus in *Mag.* 13.46: "With his help, I shall love Him the more ardently the more I advance in learning." Learning in general, then, is also a therapy for desires. But learning is not enough. We need the gracious help of God to convert our desires to him.

Now we must return to the epistemology that, in this text, motivates the Augustinian theology of desire. A sign is meaningless and thus useless to me unless I already know what it signifies.[32] If I do not know that which is signified, I cannot know what any sign means. So we learn nothing from signs, although signs help us become attentive to what we know by other means. So we must know in some other way, and Christ as the inner teacher is the best explanation. So Christ, dwelling in our souls, is the source of knowledge. Our attentions thus drawn to him,[33] we are reminded to love him and to desire to know him better.

This is like and yet unlike Plato. *Meno* has its own epistemological problem and responds with its own theology. We cannot, the Meno Paradox states, gain knowledge if we have it, nor seek it if we do not, since in that case we do not know what we are looking for. Socrates responds with theology. Knowledge remains eternally in the soul, which exists eternally in both the past and the future. Socrates says these are "divine matters" learned from "priests and priestesses" as well as "the divine among our poets" (*Meno* 81a-b)—the sources of religious doctrine in ancient Greek culture. Socrates as character in the *Meno*, and of course Plato as author, may not think that this is literally true; it may be a picture of a more sophisticated metaphysics such as that which Plotinus articulates in the *Enneads*—the immateriality of the soul, its immortality, the immateriality of ultimate reality, the oneness of it, etc.

To this religious account, Plato attaches a theology—or at least a very spiritual sort of philosophy—of desire. His *Phaedo* is perhaps more helpful than the *Meno*, specifically *Phaedo* 64–69 or so. The idea is purification: To be practicing virtue is to be in the process of purifying one's soul of bodily

influence. This may be asceticism, or simply a refusal to be dominated by bodily desires. This follows from the epistemology: Since knowledge comes from the soul rather than from sensory experience, we should value it more than the body. More importantly, this follows from the metaphysics uncovered by the epistemological investigation of *Meno*: The soul has been found to be a great and eternal reality as well as our own essence, and we should live accordingly.

In short, Plato's *Meno* develops a theology or spirituality of the soul in response to a situation in epistemology. And there is a corresponding philosophy of desire.

Mag. also responds to a situation in epistemology with theology. Here, also, there is a corresponding theology of desire. The theology is different from Plato's. The soul is indeed immaterial and immortal, as Plato says. Although Augustine does not defend life after death here, he does so in *Sol.* and elsewhere, and here in *Mag.* he alludes to the truth of the doctrine and the existence of good reasons for it (*Mag.* 13.41). There is, however, no mention of the soul having existed before this life, and we saw how in *Lib. Arb.* Augustine thought it unnecessary to stake out a position on this particular question. So he fails to affirm this particular view of Plato. More important is this difference: Augustine, unlike Plato, turns to Christ. This is significant for more than one reason. First, there is more in this Augustinian metaphysics than what Socrates in *Meno* was prepared to affirm. This is no mere meditation on the soul, but a meditation on *God and* the soul. Second, it is plain that the soul is not enough. The soul does not exist and function by itself, but it depends on God to complete its most basic function—knowing. Metaphysically, it is weaker than Plato's soul; it is less capable; it is dependent. Third, coupled with the appeals to the authority of Scripture in *Mag.*,[34] we may take the appeal to Christ as evidence that Augustine's metaphysics, the epistemology it comes in to solve, and his theology of desire are intentionally bound to Christian orthodoxy. If this is Platonism at all, it is not mere neo-Platonism but also Christianity, and subservient to Christian theology. And, of course, there is a Christ-based difference in the theology of desire. Christ is epistemologically fundamental, metaphysically central, and central in desire. We must love Christ better than we do. Our greatest desire should be to know him.

If we were to summarize in one sentence the philosophy of desire implied by *Meno*, I think we could say, "Live for the soul, not the body!" If we were to summarize Augustine's theology of desire in *Mag.* in one sentence, I think we could say, "Love Christ better!"

All this by means of an analysis relying mainly on reason. In the following chapters, I shall look at analyses relying mainly on authority.

NOTES

1. Robert Anderson: "By taking philosophical chances and identifying the 'inner light of Truth' with Christ the God-man, Augustine unites faith and reason in a Christian philosophy that shows why some this-worldly mysteries permanently surpass understanding. They are bound up with an incomprehensible wisdom before all ages, with God Himself"; Robert Anderson, "Teaching Augustine's *On the Teacher*," *Religions* 6 (2015), 404–408.

2. Not counting *De Pulchro et Apto*, the lost book written before Augustine's 386 commitment to Christ; see *Conf.* 4.13.20-4.14.23.

3. Augustine, *Soliloquies: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues, Volume 4*, trans. Michael P. Foley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, Forthcoming).

4. On these interpretations, see TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 77, and Catherine Conybeare, *The Irrational Augustine* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 144–50.

5. On these interpretations see Phillip Cary, "What Licentius Learned: A Narrative Reading of the Cassiciacum Dialogues," *Augustinian Studies* 29, no. 1 (1998), 161 and Olivier du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en le Trinité selon saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1966); cited in Frederick E. Van Fleteren, "Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of St. Augustine".

6. I explain why I think so in Boone, *Conversion and Therapy*, chapter 5.

7. Augustine, *Confessions*.

8. The text with the strongest claim to being a sequel to *Sol.* is actually *De Immortalitate Animae*, *On the Immortality of the Soul*, the result of Augustine's promise in *Sol.* 2.19.33 to investigate more carefully an argument for the immortality of the soul. The interested reader might consult Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, chapter 7, on this topic as well as Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue*, chapter 5, and Giovanni Catapano, "Augustine's Treatise *De Immortalitate Animae* and the Proof of the Soul's Immortality in his *Soliloquia*," in *Documenti e Studi Sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 25 (2014), 67–84. Silk has also argued that Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* is a sequel to *Sol.* and the other Cassiciacum dialogues; Silk, "Boethius' Consolatio Philosophiae as a Sequel to Augustine's Dialogues and Soliloquia," 19–39.

9. Philip Burton notes that *Sol.* and *Mag.* are "philosophical dialogues in form," notes the "long history as a technical term of rhetoric and dialectic" of the verb *interrogaro* used by Augustine in *Retr.* to describe this earlier work, and mentions Augustine's early optimism about the use of the liberal arts to ascend to knowledge of God; Philip Burton, "The Vocabulary of the Liberal Arts in Augustine's *Confessions*," in *Augustine and the Disciplines: from Cassiciacum to* Confessions, ed. Karla Pollman and Mark Vessey (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 142. Evans calls it "a 'Cassiciacum' dialogue in spirit, although it was written in Africa"; Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, 54.

10. An interesting study of these themes is Herman J. Cloeren, "St. Augustine's *De Magistro*: A Transcendental Investigation," *Augustinian Studies* 16 (1985), 21–27.

For the classic source in Plato, see Plato, *Meno*, trans. G. M. A. Grube; in *The Complete Works of Plato*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997).

11. Augustine, *The Teacher*. Wetzel sees Trinitarian undertones in the beginning of the text: "The question, raised by a father and asked of a beloved son, has a special resonance. This is not merely some abstract query about language-use. It invites recollection of the Trinitarian bond between Father and Son: a love so intensely generous it seems to add something even to God"; James Wetzel, *Augustine: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2010), 110.

12. A detailed study of this theme is Cary, *Augustine's Invention*.

13. On illumination, see King, Introduction to Against the Academicians *and* The Teacher, xiii–xix. Mary Clark is very helpful; Clark, *Augustine*, 19–25. Also helpful are Trapè, "Chapter VI: Saint Augustine," 342–462, 420–22; Robert Miner, "Augustinian Recollection" *Augustinian Studies* 38.2 (Fall 2007), 435–50; Timothy S. Valentine, "Enlightened and Eloquent: Augustine on Education," *Philosophy of Education* (2001), 385–93; R. H. Nash, "Some Philosophic Sources of Augustine's Illumination Theory," *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971), 46–67; Matthews, "Knowledge and Illumination," 171–85; and TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 103–7.

14. Or at any rate not by recollection in quite the same way Plato describes; some scholars find grounds for applying a looser sense of the term "recollection" to Augustine's epistemology. See Miner, "Augustinian Recollection" and R. H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1969), 83–95.

15. Matthews: "It is well to realize that Augustine's interest in whether what a sign signifies can be pointed to, or somehow demonstrated, is a question about what has come to be called 'ostensive learning.' It is thus a question about how we can make the right connections between language and the world"; "Knowledge and Illumination," 173.

16. A helpful article is Peter King, "Augustine on Language," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 292–310. Kirwan has an extended critical analysis of Augustine's philosophy of language, with reference to other texts including *Doct.*; Kirwan, *Augustine*, chapter 3. Kirwan's remark on page 35 is interesting: "The characterization of language which we find in these three texts is neither original nor profound nor correct. Nevertheless it is appealing, it is bold, and it has had—partly through the wide currency of Augustine's writings—a lasting influence." Markus, however, notes "the originality of Augustine's contribution" to semiotics; R. A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 72.

17. On this see Christopher Kirwan, "Augustine's Philosophy of Language," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 186–204 as well as Markus, *Signs and Meanings*, 72.

18. A brief overview, according to my working understanding of the subject, would be in order. Bertrand Russell considers the nature of language and argues that nouns, by themselves, are powerless to refer to anything. Rather, whole sentences

refer to objects by *describing* them. Russell represents a shift in philosophy of language from considering nouns as units of reference to considering sentences as such. Willard Van Orman Quine argues in a famous article that neither do sentences refer, but rather "the whole of science." Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his later writing, respectfully rejects Augustine's philosophy of language because of its reduction of meaning to referential names. Wittgenstein claims that the meaning of a noun derives from its use, which is determined by the whole of the language in which the word appears. Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," *Mind* 14, no. 56 (October 1905), 479–93; Willard Van Orman Quine, "The Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *The Philosophical Review* 60 (1951), 20–43 (available online at http://www.ditext.com/quine/quine.html); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Malden, MA: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1953; repr., Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009). Among the various sources considering Augustine and Wittgenstein, the interested reader might consider King's defense of Augustine against Wittgenstein in Peter King, "Augustine on the Impossibility of Teaching," *Metaphilosophy* 29, no. 3 (July 1998), 179–95 as well as Vaught, *The Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions*, 37–41; Cloeren, "St. Augustine's *De Magistro*," 21; Kirwan's less optimistic appraisal, *Augustine*, chapter 3; Kirwan, "Augustine's Philosophy of Language," 201–04; Matthews, "Post-medieval Augustinianism," 275–78; or Conybeare's commentary including some suggestions for further reading; Conybeare, *The Routledge Guidebook to Augustine's* Confessions, 40–43. There are sure to be insightful essays in a new collection I have not had the opportunity to study: John Doody, Alexander R. Eodice and Kim Paffenroth, eds., *Augustine and Wittgenstein* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

19. It seems to me that Augustine has made a rudimentary, if understandable, mistake. In your sentence "*Was* is right!" the noun is not the verb "was," but is a quotation. Technically, I misspelled it! The sentence, with everything spelled correctly, is not "*Was* is right!" but "'was' is right!" as shorthand for "Your use of the word 'was' is right!" Augustine's argument confuses the sign with the thing—the quoting of a verb with the verb itself! Systems of writing in Augustine's day were less precise, lacking all of our conventions for commas, italicization, quotation marks, and so on. I am actually friendly to an Augustinian philosophy of language, and would not conclude from the failure of this particular argument that there is no other way to argue that names are the fundamental element of speech. Indeed, Augustine's view may be less extreme than we think. Kirwan notes that his theory is not so simplistic as to entail that each word by itself is a name of something; "Augustine's Philosophy of Language," 189. Similarly, Matthews says that Augustine's philosophy of language is "much more complicated than" some have said; "Post-medieval Augustinianism," 277. See also Vaught, *Journey to God in Augustine's* Confessions, 37–41.

20. Robert Anderson reports that, in teaching *Mag.*, he regularly asks students what Augustine has been trying to show us by means of all these meanderings through philosophy of language; they have suggested several interesting reasons, reported in Anderson, "Teaching Augustine's *On the Teacher*," 405–6.

21. King says we could call this "Augustine's Rule." He cites Wijdeveld as providing some sources behind it. *The Teacher*, 9.25, n. 57; Gerard Wijdeveld, *Aurelius*

Augustinus De magistro, ingeleid, vertaald en toegelicht door (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1937), 163; cited in Augustine, *The Teacher*, 127, no. 57., 163.

22. Evans: "We do not learn anything about things from signs. The best we can say for words and other signs is that they point to things, and suggest we seek them (*De Mag.* xi.36). They do not show us things in such a way that we know them, though they may prompt us to enquire." *Augustine on Evil*, 54.

23. You may notice the flaw in Socrates's suggestion: He allows the conclusion that learning is impossible, yet suggests that all our knowledge comes *from learning* in and between past lives. The solution, I suspect, is to consider Socrates's theology as less than entirely precise: partly an image or metaphor for the immateriality of the soul and its relation to the divine immaterial world. A careful Platonic account might tell us that the soul is immortal and contains the knowledge of the immaterial world; it has this knowledge in virtue of its immateriality—not simply in virtue of its past lives, although it may well have had them. This particular problem in Plato and solution, however, do not come into our analysis of Augustine.

24. At least with respect to knowledge involving signs. As Thomas Williams notes, knowledge gained from my five senses and from memories of my own experience does not fall within the scope of this argument; "Biblical Interpretation," 66. However, Markus claims that the Christ in *Mag.* "is the teacher whose activity is presupposed by *all* learning"; *Signs and Meanings*, 84 (emphasis added). Matthews sides with Markus; "Knowledge and Illumination," 179–83. Matthews notes that the modern philosopher Malebranche, as exegeted by Steven Nadler, takes the same position as Williams; "Post-medieval Augustinianism," 272.

25. King, "Augustine on the Impossibility of Teaching," 194.

26. Elsewhere Augustine explicitly rejects the recollection thesis from *Meno*; see Kirwan, "Augustine's Philosophy of Language," 192. Teske claims that Augustine originally accepted the thesis and later rejected it; Roland Teske, "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 148–50. See Teske's note 3, page 158 for additional sources on the subject.

27. Mourant: "In this dialogue the analysis of language is merely a propadeutic to the role of God in knowledge." Mourant, "The Emergence of a Christian Philosophy," 77.

28. On the significance of the epistemic peculiarities of this case, see Peter King and Nathan Ballantyne, "Augustine on Testimony," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (June 2009), 204–6.

29. On this link, Cary is quite right in Cary, *Inner Grace*, 96–97.

30. Kevane's comments on this passage as one which "reveals the educational aspect of all his thought and activity" are helpful; Kevane, *Augustine the Educator*, 76.

31. See Leithart's shift from comments on *Mag.* to *Doct.* on the grounds that "Augustine gave most direct and sustained attention to signs in *De Doctrina Christiana*"; Peter J. Leithart, "Semiosis and Social Salvation (Mostly) in *De Doctrina Christiana*," in *Augustine: His Legacy and Relevance*, ed. Wayne Cristaudo and Heung-Wah Wong (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2010), 2. Markus, *Signs and Meanings*, chapter 1 is a commentary on Augustinian semiotics happily attentive to *Doct.* as well as to the central Augustinian semiotic concern of biblical interpretation. Thomas

Williams' "Biblical Interpretation" nicely situates the semiotics and epistemology of *Mag.* in the context of Augustine's hermeneutics.

32. Kolbet: "Augustine intended the reader of *De magistro* to perceive the utter futility of all human rhetoric. On its own it never amounts to more than the sound and noise of words"; Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, 111.

33. Kolbet: "Human rhetoric functions properly when it directs attention to the divine rhetoric"; *Augustine and the Cure*, 112.

34. Such as 5.14, 11.37, and 11.38.

Part Two

AUTHORITY

Defense of the Faith
according to Authority
De Utilitate Credendi

De Utilitate Credendi—The Usefulness of Believing or *The Usefulness of Belief* or *The Utility of Belief* or *The Advantage of Believing*—is one of the classic statements of Augustine's view that trust in authority is necessary for life and thus epistemically permissible. Thus, he opposes the Manichean objections to trust and justifies trust in Christian authority—of Christ, the Bible, and the church.[1] My placement of this text in this book—as a defense of the faith according to authority—is not *quite* right. Here Augustine does not defend the faith *based on* an appeal to authority quite so much as defend *that authority*, although this implies a defense of Christianity.[2] *Util. Cred.* is a letter to Honoratus, who like Augustine had been deceived by the Manichean heresy.[3] The point of the text is to liberate him from Manicheanism and free him for a commitment to Christian truth.

Who is Honoratus? Augustine tells us this much:

> After I had become a presbyter at Hippo-Regius I wrote a book entitled *On the Utility of Believing*, addressed to a friend of mine who I knew had been deceived by the Manichees, and was still a victim of that error, and mocked the discipline of the Catholic faith because it bade men believe, and it did not teach them the truth by means of indubitable reason.[4]

In fact Augustine himself had led Honoratus into Manicheanism (*Util. Cred.* 1.2)! Burleigh notes that "Nothing, it seems, is known of Honoratus to whom this tractate is addressed beyond what may be gleaned from the tractate itself."[5] This, perhaps, is quite as much as we need to know.[6]

Augustine had himself discovered the epistemology of *Util. Cred.* sometime earlier, as he explains in *Conf.* 6.5.7-8, and had already written about it at Cassiciacum. In *c. Acad.* 3.15.34 Augustine gives us a very apt illustration.

Two companions are on the road to Alexandria, and, coming to a fork in the road, they are advised which way to go by a scruffy-looking shepherd. One companion, very sophisticated and unwilling to trust this shepherd, disbelieves him and goes the other way. The other trusts the shepherd and proceeds along the way indicated. Sometime later, the one who believed has reached Alexandria and the other is lost in the wilderness. I have modified this for my students when discussing William James' defense of the rationality of faith.[7] I like to suppose that there are *three* companions. One believes, one disbelieves, and one is so afraid of making a mistake that he will have no opinion. He waits at the crossroads indefinitely, perhaps eventually starving to death, although it is virtually certain that at least one of the others reaches his destination. One lesson here is that refusing to believe anything in hopes of avoiding error guarantees that one will never attain to the truth. Another is that believing in an authority which may possibly be in error is a reasonable way of attempting to get to the truth.

In *Util. Cred.,* Augustine will expand on this, showing that belief is necessary and normal and explaining how we ought to interpret this authority and why we should believe that it is a *reliable* authority.[8] All this, as usual, aims at happiness, which involves achieving the object of our desire—above all, wisdom. It also involves recognizing and loving things of true worth, namely God and the soul. Accordingly, this text is also concerned with a theology of desire. Indeed, one of the major points seems to be that right doctrine, right desiring, and right modes of belief tend to go together. It is difficult to know God without desiring God or to know God without believing in the authorities established for knowing that truth. Although they are not all mutually necessary and sufficient conditions for each other, it is difficult to have right doctrine without having the other two.

We will consider this by looking first at Augustine's defense of the Old Testament, and then at his explanation of why Christian faith makes sense.

DEFENSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the first fourteen chapters of *Util. Cred.*, Augustine clears away some of the Manichean confusions and misapprehensions of his old friend, especially concerning the Old Testament. To know the truth and gain the wisdom our souls desire, it is necessary to seek the truth in the right way—by faith. If we read scripture properly, we need not be concerned by Manichean objections to the Old Testament. Even if we lack a correct understanding of some difficult passage in scripture, we still can and should approach it humbly, willing to be instructed. We should be prepared to have faith, which means simply that we should be willing to *trust*; a standard term, the Latin *fides*, carries the

sense of both trust and faith. One salient connection to a theology of desire here is the teaching that satisfaction of our desire for wisdom requires humility and a willingness to have faith. Another is the idea that a healthy desire for truth is necessary for getting to wisdom.

Augustine begins by explaining to Honoratus the difference between a true heretic and someone merely deceived by them. The latter is merely "seduced by a veneer of truth and devotion" (*Util. Cred.* 1.1).[9] The former "is either the author of false and novel views or upholds them for the sake of some temporal gain, especially fame and power. . . ." One is not obligated to rebuke every heretic, as such folk are clearly motivated not by truth but by selfish desires. One merely *deceived* by a heretic has purer desires; he desires to know the truth. Honoratus and Augustine both once followed genuine heretics, the leaders of the Manichean sect. Augustine has now discovered the right way of getting to the truth and feels obligated to inform his friend, who well knows that Augustine has desired truth with a "burning passion since early youth." This truth is "far removed from the thoughts of shallow-minded persons" who are afflicted with materialism. So both a right desire for the truth and a method of pursuing the truth which does not rely on the bodily senses are necessary for reaching the truth.

Now orthodox Christianity aims to help us understand the immaterial truth itself, known by the mind; yet, it also requires us to believe before we can understand (*Util. Cred.* 1.2). Yet, when we "accept the authority of the Catholic faith" and believe, we are "strengthened and prepared" for the intellectual vision of God's truth. The Manicheans, "acting irrationally and sacrilegiously," attack belief. They had promised that they would show their followers the truth itself, which they might know directly and without relying on any authority. They promised reason without faith and criticized Christianity for placing faith before reason. Of course, as we have seen, the Manicheans only offered empty promises and no reason—only their own authoritative instructions to believe various doctrines, some rather silly. Augustine, desirous of the truth, had fallen for this and has now returned to the faith of the church, which he describes using maternal imagery. He is thirstily drinking in the truth from her breast. This is an important point: The satisfaction of our desire for wisdom requires faith.

And faith is enough, at least for a beginning. We do not need perfect certainty with full comprehension to put off our sinful desires; we only need a clear way forward. In earlier days, Augustine had held off on "putting aside the hopes and concerns of this world" because he thought the Manicheans were less than "steadfast and assured in rational support of their own position" (*Util. Cred.* 1.2). This illustrates the connection in Augustine's mind between our epistemological state and the state of our hearts.[10] Lacking certainty, he once clutched his worldly desires. But in *Util. Cred.,* he will argue

that the authority of Christ, the Bible, and the church is solid enough, and we should reorder our desires accordingly.

Now "the Manicheans upset the uneducated by attacking the Catholic faith and especially by criticizing and tearing apart the Old Testament" (*Util. Cred.* 2.4) The Manicheans had a habit of criticizing the Old Testament, especially on the grounds of the (alleged) immorality of Abraham and other Old Testament persons. In *b. Coniug.*, as we shall see in the next chapter, Augustine actually finds grounds on which to defend their morality. Here, however, his emphasis is more hermeneutical: He will explain what sort of meanings we should look for when we interpret the Bible. Before launching into this analysis, he comments on the weakness of his soul's eye. His old errors and his "sins and ingrained habits" have rendered his eyes too weak to see the truth. In our sinful state, "Our eyes are barely open and they still reject the light, blinking at it and turning away from it, even though it is what they want, and most of all if anyone tries to show them the sun itself." The soul's built-in desire is to know God. Yet we are not only unable to do it because of sin; we also seem willfully to turn away, our souls desiring that which is less than God when we should be desiring God. Augustine confesses, "It is like this now with me," yet recognizes that God is there, knowable by him. He desires earnestly to know God. Right loves—desire for truth and love of those souls in his community—help to ensure that this desire will be met. He says:

> I do not deny that there is something words cannot describe, the soul's one and only good, that is visible to the mind, and sighing and lamenting I confess I am not yet fit to gaze on it. He will not desert me because of this, provided I make nothing up, I am led by duty, I have love for the truth, I value friendship, I have great fear of your being deceived.

Knowledge of the truth is prevented by corrupt desires, yet possible by God's mercy if we have an ardent desire to know God. The love of others also finds a lesser place here.

Augustine now moves to explain the different ways of interpreting scripture. The Old Testament "is handed down fourfold" (Cornish's translation[11]), or "is handed down with a four-fold sense" (Burleigh[12]), or "is offered . . . under four aspects" (Kearney) (*Util. Cred.* 3.5). The aspect of *history* is the story of what happened. *Explanation* is "the reasons why something was said or done." *Analogy* concerns the consistency of the Old Testament and the New. *Allegory* is the non-literal, or figurative, meaning of a passage. It would be appropriate to take these aspects as different senses of scripture, different levels of meaning a reader might seek.[13] However, what Augustine is really emphasizing is not senses of the Bible but the different kinds of *teaching* that occur in the church. These are the things taught to "those who seriously wish

to understand" by, for example, a bishop to a parishioner. Augustine is letting Honoratus in on a secret that should never have been kept in the first place: In the orthodox Church, we are taught to read the Old Testament in several ways. The non-historical ways will help to justify the word of God's teaching about, for example, the scandal of Jacob's having four wives.

Augustine, ever the rhetorician, must attend to the needs of his audience. Honoratus remains a Manichean. They do not accept the Old Testament, certain portions of the New, or the teaching of orthodox bishops. Augustine needs to appeal to some premise Honoratus accepts. He recognizes some of the writings of Paul as well as the Gospels, so Augustine shows that each of these four ways of reading the Old Testament is used by these authorities (*Util. Cred.* 3.6-8). The Old Testament, he explains with an appeal to Paul in 2 Cor. 3, was veiled with a "cover that hides the good things" which were included in the Old Testament alongside the historical sense. Christ, whom the Manicheans thought replaced the Old Testament with a better revelation (from a better God), had simply removed the veil.

In *Util. Cred.* 4.10-5.11 Augustine expounds on different errors that may occur while reading. When a reader reads, he may get something true from the text or something false. An author, similarly, may mean something true when he writes a text or something false. So there are four possible scenarios when reading: a true interpretation of a true intent, a false interpretation of a true intent, a true interpretation of a false intent, and a false interpretation of a false intent. In the two scenarios where the reader gets something false out of the reading, the reader errs. He also errs when he gets something true where the author meant something false. This, however, is a good error; the error itself is not a good thing, but nevertheless the results are good. Even when a reader interprets something true from a text where the author means something true, it may be an error if the intended and the interpreted truths are not the same—another happy error with good results. In the ideal reading, a reader will interpret the truth intended by the author, and, moreover, the content "is something very relevant to leading a good life" (5.11). When the content concerns "very obscure matters," this is unusual because it is very difficult, and simply believing these truths without *knowing* them is usually the best we can do.

This, no doubt, is salutary enough. But Augustine has his eye on the prize—leading Honoratus to the truth of orthodox Christianity. He asks (*Util. Cred.* 5.12) which kind of error it is of which the Manicheans accuse the orthodox. If it is the kind of error where a truth unintended by the author of scripture is found, the orthodox are not in any trouble. If, however, it is one of the errors where a reader interprets something false, the Manicheans are easily refuted by the simple point that orthodox Christians do not believe from scripture what the Manicheans think they do.

Augustine explains that he is convinced that "there is nothing wiser or purer or more sacred than" the Old Testament (*Util. Cred.* 6.13). It has the truth in it, "teaching finely adapted to the renewal and restoration of souls." Anyone may learn from this truth if he approaches the Old Testament "in a spirit of devout respect, as true religion requires." To know the truth requires the right attitude, a humble one. To some extent, even critics of the Bible understand this well enough when it comes to other books. People presume that Virgil wrote excellent poetry and, if they have a question about it, they will listen to teachers of Virgil and expect the answer which paints him in the best light as a poet to be the correct answer.[14] (There is more of this theme, with different poets mentioned, in 7.17.). Yet Manichean critics of the Old Testament, such as Augustine and Honoratus had been, would criticize the Old Testament without putting forth the effort necessary to understand it, and would have no interest in hearing it explained by its teachers in the orthodox church, even though these were the very people who put forth the effort to preserve, study, understand, and teach these writings. Tragically, ironically, and foolishly, they had fallen for the Manichean promises of wisdom by reason alone and been led "to accept and cultivate an incredible number of myths." As Fiedrowicz notes, "The Manicheans demanded the very thing for which they criticized the Catholic Church."[15] This is, of course, why Augustine had earlier realized and later wrote in the *Confessions* (6.5.7-8) that Christianity was more reasonable for requiring trust in a few doctrines that could not be demonstrated (at least not to just anyone) than was the Manichean tradition of mocking Christian faith while requiring belief in absurdities.

There is a better way. We need religion for the sake of our immortal souls (7.14). Perhaps it will be found in orthodoxy. If this be the case, we will have to be willing to believe in order to gain that wisdom our souls need. Accordingly, Augustine implores Honoratus, "let us look for the truth together."

WHY BELIEF MAKES SENSE

There is an important question about religious belief. If we do not have the truth, we must presumably get it from someone who does. But how, not knowing it ourselves, are we to know the difference between those who merely *claim* to have it and those who really *do*? Augustine suggests that the answer is found in biblical and church history. The miracles of Christ testify to his authority, and the multitudes who have gone over to his authority further indicate that truth may be found here. The authority of Christ commands a reorientation of our desires. For the healing of our desires, Augustine explains at the end of the text, we should flee to Christ.[16] Authority is not only given for wisdom but also for the healing of our desires.[17] Let us consider

these matters, first by looking at the logic of the question, then by overviewing the logic of the answer, and finally by studying the text.

The Question

An honest seeker of the truth is faced with a question (*Util. Cred.* 7.15-16). Suppose you and I are seeking the truth together. If there be some religious truth, some wisdom that is very good for our souls, clearly we want it. As it happens, however, we are blessed not with one claim to religious truth but with a multitude of alleged religious truths and traditions. Which one shall we follow? It would be nice to point to one in particular and say that, since it is the one teaching the truth, *it* is the correct one. However, this is just what we cannot do, since the whole reason we are seeking the truth in the first place is that we do not know what it is. How can we identify a true tradition by the truth we do *not* know? Alternatively, we might point to a particular religious doctrine and call *it* the truth on the grounds that it is the doctrine taught by the correct religious tradition. Again, however, this is just what we cannot do. We do not know which is the correct religious tradition. How can we know a truth by the religious tradition which we do *not* know to be correct?

More formally, it seems that, if we do not know any religious truth which may be out there to know, then we cannot seek religious truth by following the correct religious tradition, for we cannot know which is the correct religious tradition unless we know some religious truth. Yet it also seems that we cannot come to know a religious truth except by seeking it in the correct religious tradition. This puzzle has the structure of a Meno Paradox: We cannot know unless we first seek, nor seek if we do not already know. Religious truth and the correct religious tradition—these appear to be a virtuous circle into which we cannot get.

However, there may yet be a way in. We might expect Augustine to answer in the way Plato's Socrates answers the original Meno Paradox, the way Augustine himself had answered the Meno-style puzzle in *Mag.*,[18] by stating that we *already* have this truth, and then explaining *how* we have it. His tack is different here. He will suggest that this is a problem we cannot break out of. But God can break in. God can give us this wisdom and has done so through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. This, of course, does not help us epistemologically unless we *also* know that the Incarnation took place. And the problem with which we are dealing here is indeed an epistemological one: How do we know the religious truth? How can we learn the wisdom we seek? If our own resources are powerless to get us to knowledge, God's resources can bring the truth to us. But in order for us to *know* that it is the truth, we need some evidence or warrant or justification of some sort *that* it is the truth.

An Overview of the Answer

Augustine has an answer to this challenge, and we must first examine its epistemically central component—the testimony of church, apostles, Christ, Scripture, and miracles—and then, more briefly, another component—the multitudes who believe.

Actually, we have already seen it in this volume. It is reasonable "to believe that God exists on the authority of the writings of such great men, who left written testimony that they lived with the Son of God, and wrote that they saw things that could not have happened if God did not exist" (*Lib. Arb.* 2.2). We can get religious knowledge from the writings of the apostles. Their authority is established by their having been appointed *as* apostles by the Son of God. That Jesus is indeed the Son of God is established by his miracles, and especially the resurrection. That these miracles happened is established by their written testimony.[19]

We must face a possible, and very serious, objection. Is this not circular reasoning? Are we not saying that the apostles are a source of knowledge because they were appointed by the Son of God, saying that they were thus appointed because the miracles took place, and saying that the miracles took place because the apostles said so and because they are a source of knowledge? This would indeed be circular reasoning, a very serious logical fallacy. Fortunately, Augustine is not reasoning thus. Rather, the reasoning is from the apostles as a source of knowledge and from their testimony of the miracles to the authority of the Son of God and from that to the conclusion that the apostles have divine authority. The premise that they are a source of knowledge stands independently of the argument, and the conclusion about their divine authority is not the same statement as this premise.

In other words, the authority of the apostles is established by the authority of the Son of God, if he does exist and did appoint them. The miracles are good enough evidence for the existence of God and for the claims of Christ about himself.[20] The miracles, of course, also need some evidence. It needs to be good enough evidence, and that means evidence good enough to support the conclusion that these miracles took place. That conclusion is simply a historical claim, so it needs historical evidence. If that evidence comes from the same people as are the subject of the conclusion of such an analysis, so what? As far as the logic is concerned, this is a mere coincidence, which does not affect the reasoning at all.

Or, going the other way, historical evidence is good enough for a historical claim. In this particular case, the historical evidence is the histories compiled by the Apostles, and their claim concerns the miracles of an individual claiming to be the Son of God. The historical evidence is good enough, so the miracles of this particular individual are well enough established. If the

Son of God, known through these miracles, happens to do something else of epistemological significance, well then that is *his* prerogative. If he wants to establish some other truth, we must accept it. As it happens, he did establish another truth—concerning the authority of the Apostles. The Son of God appointed certain individuals as authoritative sources of religious truth, and they happen to be the same as the major historical sources on his miracles. This is, logically speaking, merely a coincidence. As far as the logic is concerned, it makes no difference whether the argument's final conclusion concerns the authority of the Apostles, French literature, advanced mathematics, or fly fishing. It happens that sometimes the conclusion in a chain of reasoning can have some bearing on the premises. I may, for example, reason from my own rudimentary understanding of some principles of economics and from the observation that Professor Smith teaches them rather well to the conclusion that Smith is an authority on economics. By logical coincidence, this conclusion has some support for the economic principles with which I began—since Smith teaches them. Yet those principles are established independently of Smith's authority.

All that remains, then, is to confirm that what we have here really *is* good historical evidence. The point of *Util. Cred.* is that it is. Augustine's is an argument from epistemic parity.[21] We all, critics of Christianity included, accept historical testimony on its own authority. We also accept other things, such as geography, on the basis of the testimony of those who have had the relevant experiences. Epistemologically speaking, the apostolic testimony about the miracles of Jesus is much the same as these other testimonies: In all cases, we accept a claim on the sole basis of someone's testimony. We may consider this as a commonsense argument somewhat like those of Thomas Reid and G. E. Moore: It is just a commonsense truth understood even by the critics that we can rely on testimony as a source of knowledge.[22] The critic, not liking the conclusion commonsense leads to in the case of Christianity, treats it according to a double standard, rejecting the same sort of testimony he accepts all along in matters where the conclusion is more to his liking—geography, other areas of history, and so on.

There is, however, an interesting objection here which may appear to have some merit, and we shall look at it briefly although it does not come into the text of *Util. Cred.* A critic might say that the nature of the argument's final conclusion makes a difference in this way: The claim of the apostles to be themselves the sources of religious truth is a claim in their own advantage. Since their historical testimony leads up to this self-advantageous claim, their historical testimony is suspect. Perhaps there is no circular reasoning, but there *is* a reason to question the foundational step in the process: Witnesses testifying in their own self-interest are suspect. It seems to me that there are two appropriate responses to this objection. First, a self-interested

testimony is not automatically illegitimate. It is merely a bit less persuasive then a disinterested testimony—all else being equal. If the historical evidence is still good enough, then it is still good enough. Second, the notion that the apostolic testimony is self-interested is problematic. These folks risked imprisonment, torture, and death for their testimony, and *were* indeed in most cases executed for it. By most measurements, this seems a testimony rather contrary to self-interest.

Another objection might also be worth a brief look. Perhaps the critic would say that the historical evidence is illegitimate since it involves miracles. When miracles are involved, the testimony for them is not on a par with other testimonial evidence. The critic might take David Hume's approach and argue that the probability against a miracle occurring is based on the evidence for the laws of physics. So it will always be *so* high that it will be *higher* than the probability that the evidence for it is legitimate. My own view is that we should consider the question of miracles empirically, and that Hume fails to do so. The probability of a miracle occurring is not solely a function of the evidence for the laws of physics. To say that it is is to rule out from the start the possibility of a suspension of those laws—which is to rule out a miracle *a priori* rather than empirically. Of course, I agree that the evidence for a miracle ought to be very good. But it need not be higher than the evidence for the laws of physics which a miracle suspends. We can evaluate the evidence for a miracle critically, but we should not rule such evidence out just because it allegedly supports a miracle. Let experience, if we should end up with quite a bit of it and no good evidence of miracles occurring, tell us that there are none. And let experience tell us, if we should find in it good evidence of a miracle, that there are. If an alleged miracle never took place, let its alleged evidence be tried and judged weak rather than condemned without a hearing. (This question has a distinctively modern flavor, and to my knowledge it never arose for Augustine, although my response is broadly Augustinian, in that it looks to historical evidence for God's actions.)

There is another component to Augustine's analysis. In addition to the miracles of Christ, Augustine also points to the multitude who have followed him. These are a sign that Christianity is true. They confirm the authority of this particular religious tradition. This may appear to be a simple case of the fallacy of appealing to the majority, the *ad populum* fallacy against which we were warned in logic class. As I understand it, this is less an appeal to the (unreliable) authority of the masses and more a recognition of the social nature of knowledge and justification.[23] Much of our knowledge is common knowledge and, commonly, is known by the fact that everyone else knows it. This is not to say that these things cannot or should not be known in other ways, by more direct and perhaps more relevant evidence. It is merely to say that much of what we know we picked up from the rational beliefs of others.

This is how we know that polio vaccinations work, that the earth is round, that there are such things as electrons, and so on. In general, I suspect that most of us who rightly trust science as a source of knowledge do so mainly because this is what our society *does*. We have agreed to trust science. There is good evidence that this is a right move, but most of us spend most of our lives oblivious to it and simply going along with our cultural consensus. I think Augustine's appeal to the multitude is similar. There is indeed some good evidence, he thinks, for the truth of Christianity which has nothing to do with the opinions of a multitude. However, and largely *because of* this evidence, a multitude has gone along—a sign of the truth of Christianity, much as the multitude who agree with science are a sign that science is worth taking seriously.[24]

We will return in good time to this response to the Meno-style problem Augustine has raised. Augustine himself takes a little time to get there. Let us return to the text.

Back to the Text

"On this understanding let us proceed now in the way that I said. First we must ask what religion we shall commit our souls to for cleansing and renewal. Without question we must begin with the Catholic Church" (*Util. Cred.* 8.19). For this is the *largest* option—the one with the most adherents. There are more self-labeled Christians, he says, "than even pagans and Jews combined." I leave it to others to evaluate how credible in Augustine's day was this claim on a *global* scale;[25] it seems plausible enough on first glance of the Roman world, although there is room for doubt.[26] (I understand that in our day self-labeled Christians have a larger percentage of the world's population than any other worldview, but not a majority.) In any case, Augustine explains that all of these self-proclaimed Christians agree there is one true church. They call it the Catholic Church, and each group claims to *be* it. However, the various heresies also have other names, whereas only one church, the orthodox one, bears *only* the name Catholic. This is not meant to be a careful and formal argument for the accuracy of orthodox theology—merely an argument that the orthodox Christian church is the natural place to begin, "the most appropriate starting point for our inquiry."

"Having made these points," Augustine overviews for Honoratus "the path I followed when I was searching for the true religion" (*Util. Cred.* 8.20). This story will be familiar territory for many a reader of Augustine. There are references to Faustus the Manichean, to the move to Italy, to the Academic skeptical philosophers, and to bishop Ambrose. Often, he recounts, he would believe that the way to wisdom "had itself to be obtained from some divine authority. It only remained to find out what authority that was . . . ." Under

Ambrose's influence, he had been a catechumen in the orthodox Church and had only lacked a proper teacher. He invites Honoratus to follow the way he had earlier waited to follow, "the path of the Catholic teaching, which has flowed down to us from Christ himself through his apostles . . . ."[27]

That is the claim of the orthodox. Heretics also claim the true spiritual heritage from Christ, but we must consider the results (*Util. Cred.* 9.21). The Manicheans promise no authority, reason, and "a fountain of doctrine" (Kearney translation) or "a fount of teaching" (Cornish) or "the fount of knowledge" (Burleigh). They offered no reason, no credible teaching, and dubious authority. Honoratus can, if he takes Augustine's advice, rest assured that orthodox Christianity has more credible authority, consistent with what the best reason finds, and quite a bit of teaching he has not known of before.

All these benefits depend on authority. "There is no right way of entering into the true religion . . . without submission to a certain weight of authority" (*Util. Cred.* 9.21). "Perhaps you want to be given some proof of this too, to convince you that you do not have to learn by reason before being taught by faith. This is not hard to do . . ." (9.22). It may seem that credulity (*credulitas*) is a fault, along with being too curious (*curiosus*), but, on the other hand, we often praise the quality of being studious (*studiosus*). Both are motivated by the desire for knowledge, which is certainly laudable. There are differences between gullibility and studiousness and between prying curiosity and mere interest. The differences involve the means by which one seeks knowledge, whether prudently and appropriately.

So "believing something is not the same thing as being [unduly] credulous" (*Util. Cred.* 10.23). Still, the objector may ask, believing may yet be a *mistake*. Augustine replies that anyone who would seriously and consistently believe this would not be able to have any friends. For he would never believe anything they told him! Here, again, we see how Augustine's argument is a commonsense argument from epistemic parity. A certain kind of objector to orthodox Christian belief claims that such belief relies on trust, and that one should not believe anything by trust, but only by reason. However, no one consistently accepts this standard. Everyone who has friends or recognizes the value of friendship also recognizes the value of trust.[28] This sort of generalized objection to trust just will not do. Augustine now considers how the objector might try a more specific objection. It might be charged that belief is inappropriate only in matters of *religion*. Augustine offers his own counterargument. Suppose, he suggests, there is a true religion. Probably it has some "holy secrets." Surely such secrets should not be passed on to just anyone, but only to someone worthy. What are the conditions for such worthiness? Surely, one is *sincerity*. The learner, seeking holy secrets from a teacher who knows them, must assure the teacher that he is sincere in his quest for this truth. He expects the teacher to believe *him*. So, of course, he must admit

that it is fair for him to be willing to offer the same trust, and this in matters of religion! So, *if* there are any religious truths, *then* it is likely that trust is called for in matters of religion. Augustine does not make an argument *that* there are any religious truths. Perhaps it could be argued that this possibility is a reasonable presumption,[29] but Augustine has no need, for he is writing to Honoratus, who has long believed in this possibility.

If Augustine's *if-then* proposition is well-established, he has an interesting case for the reasonableness of being willing to believe in matters of religion. It appears the most likely way reasonably to avoid this willingness is to argue that there *are* no religious truths, thus cutting off the *if* clause. If we are not prepared thus to argue, we have no business arguing that we should not even be *willing* to believe religious claims. Of course, none of this suggests that we should be willing to believe just *any* religious claim; doctrines can be examined by reason, the reliability of a witness can be examined, and so on. At this point, Augustine is only arguing that a *willingness* to believe—if a witness seems reliable, if the doctrines survive rational scrutiny, and so on—is appropriate.

But mightn't proof be best? (*Util. Cred.* 10.24). Perhaps, says Augustine. Yet the reasoning that gets us there is difficult and not possible for just anyone. It no doubt involves arguments and analyses and concepts like those employed in Book II of *Lib. Arb*: metaphysics borrowed from neo-Platonism and understood by minds honed by a liberal arts education. Probably, Honoratus is himself not yet prepared. In any case, the immediate priority is to justify *faith—fides*, belief, trust in testimony regarding religious matters. Perhaps the proof and reasoning would be ideal and are available for some, but what about everyone else? How might they ever become acquainted with these holy truths? Their way will be by faith.

And faith involves more than just mental assent. It involves a whole life change, a way of life oriented to the truth about God and the acceptance of it:

> Do you not see, though, that, unless they believe they will achieve what they set out for and come to it with a suppliant mind, purified by a particular way of living in obedience to certain important, essential commandments, there is no other way for them to attain those perfect truths? You surely believe that.

Of course, this purified life will have purified desires. And thus belief is justified, and with it a reorientation of our hearts. At least for some. But what about everyone else? Augustine suspects Honoratus is among those able to know the truth without relying on faith (though perhaps he is not adequately prepared to—yet). Even for such, however, believing the truth on trust first and learning it by reason later does no harm. And most people know not their own capability. Some overestimate themselves, and some underestimate (a

notion Augustine has explored before, in *c. Acad.* 2.3.8). It helps everyone to know and understand as much as they are able if those who can understand by reason "are made to proceed gradually." This is how "the true religion," "the divine command," and "the tradition of our holy ancestors" have taught us to proceed.

A few more considerations precede Augustine's launching into the main argument (*Util. Cred.* 11.25). Believing by authority is not *knowing* as such, since knowing requires understanding and comes from reason. Yet "believing is commendable" in either form. If we understand this, we can see that belief by authority is free from the charge of presumptuous belief, that is, free from the charge of thinking we know what we do not, since belief by authority is not really knowledge anyway. What rightly concerns Honoratus is that we should not think we know more than we do. He need not fear to trust in authority on this account.[30] In *Retr.*, Augustine himself would reconsider this point, distinguishing between the strict sense and a loose sense of the word "know." The strict sense precludes the possibility of knowing without understanding. In the looser sense, which is both an ordinary and a biblical way of speaking, we can actually say that we "know" by faith.[31] Also in the *Confessions* his analysis of belief based on authority expands to recognize the quality of such beliefs as *knowledge*, not merely as *rational* and *useful*.[32]

At last Augustine is prepared to elaborate on his main argument. Though some may protest that belief based on authority is improper, all along they, like everyone else, accept many things on the basis of authority alone, and do so very properly. He begins by emphasizing the importance of trust in family relationships. To a reader, such as Augustine, of moral and social philosophers such as Cicero, it would have seemed perfectly natural to emphasize the moral and social importance of a position in epistemology. Augustine did so in one of his arguments against skepticism in *c. Acad.*[33] Augustine says here, "If it is wrong to believe something we do not know, I should like to know how children can obey their parents and return their love and respect without believing they are their parents. There is no way this can be known by reason" (*Util. Cred.* 12.26). Elaborating, he points out that our paternity is known by trust in our mothers; even our *maternity* is typically known by trust in nurses and midwives, since a baby can be switched at birth without the mother knowing. And, of course, we trust that our parents are telling us the truth as far as they know it, about who *they* are. (Even those whose parents told them they are adopted normally trust their parents that they are *not* their biological children, that they were not stolen but legally adopted, and so on. A child in an orphanage trusts his own caregivers that they are *not* his parents, and so on.) The only way we can know who our parents are is by trusting. This is not only an ordinary and reasonable and commonsensical way of thinking, and one employed by even Manicheans. It is also *morally*

right. Augustine: "Can anyone fail to see that, if this were not so, filial love, humanity's most sacred bond, would be the victim of criminal arrogance?" Society depends on this trust.

In short, we have here an argument for the unimpeachable practicality of belief—its *utilitas*—but also for its unimpeachable rationality.[34] It is also, as Topping nicely explains, a *moral* argument for belief.[35]

Now Augustine says trust is the *only* way to know our parentage, and I concur. There is one ridiculous exception which probably no one has ever tried. When discussing this particular theme with my students, I have always been attentive to their instinctive appeal to modern science—*No way to know by reason? But now we have DNA tests!*

Indeed. And this is an occasion for bringing in an illustration of Augustine's point of which he himself could not have thought. Science itself depends in no small degree on faith. Suppose I wish to know that my parents are my parents without relying on trust in any authoritative source of knowledge. I might be able to avoid trusting *them* by getting a DNA test, but now I am trusting the people who performed the test! I have only moved the authority one step back. Suppose I perform the DNA test myself. Then I can avoid trusting someone else to do the test. But how am I to know that the science behind DNA tests is legitimate? I am still trusting in the scientists who discovered it all—those who propounded all the various theories and principles, those who performed all the experiments to confirm those theories, and so on. Trust has only moved another step back.

"Aha! But I could perform those experiments myself," says the objector. Too true: A doubter can replicate the experiments that establish the modern science of genetics. But, first, see how far we have already come from good, plain, old commonsense. The ordinary modern person who appreciates science is perfectly content to accept the results of an experiment, and to trust that, not counting the occasional incompetent or charlatan, scientists generally tell the truth about the results of experiments. Most of us, when we rely on science, do so primarily by faith. This is no criticism of science. Rather, it is a presumption that both science and our everyday reliance on it are quite reasonable and appropriate. Of course, it is entirely appropriate to do the occasional experiment, such as when I myself did some DNA-related experiment or other involving gel electrophoresis in high school. But the vast majority of my knowledge of, and reliance on, science has not involved such experiments, and, for those of us who are not professional scientists, what's wrong with that? Second, and more importantly, if it were my goal to understand without relying on trust that the science behind a DNA test is legitimate, just think how many experiments I would have to perform! In order to avoid trust, I would have to perform every single experiment which verifies the relevant areas of the science of genetics. Moreover, I would have

to do it all *myself*. Moreover, since science depends on the repeatability of experimentation, I would have to do each experiment twice. The result is that, if I were so stubborn as to insist on knowing who my parents are without relying on trust in *any* reliable authority, I would have to spend pretty much *my entire life single-handedly reinventing the science of genetics*. And, of course, all of this work would do no good for anyone else, unless others had the sense I lacked and were prepared to trust *me* on at least some of these experiments.

Now I am not saying that science relies on trust *alone*, or denying that the testing of theories is a distinguishing feature of a scientific epistemology. I am only saying something William James said—that science relies in large part on a system of epistemic credit, although the whole system must dip into direct experience from time to time, which is what these repeatable tests are *for*.[36] The upshot is just that science relies in rather large part upon trust. This is also true for scientists, who may repeat each other's experiments from time to time but also nearly always accept each other's testimony about those experiments.

And the upshot of Augustine's remarks about the family is that "nothing in human society would be safe if we decided not to believe anything that we cannot hold as evident" (*Util. Cred.* 12.26). That's family, society, and, with my contemporary addition, science. In *Conf.* 6.5.7-8, Augustine also mentions history and geography. We rely on testimony to know who Caesar, Cicero, and Confucius were. I know from experience that Zimbabwe's Matobo National Park contains some very large rocks (and very good for climbing), but chances are that you will have to take my word for it.

Now how does this relate to religion? Well, Augustine explains, trust in matters of religion is absolutely necessary (*Util. Cred.* 12.27). For either we have wisdom or we do not. If we do not, then we need it. And, in order to get it, we must listen to those who have it. The unwise must learn from the wise. Anyone who would forbid trust in matters of religion would forbid that any unwise people ever become wise, that they ever gain truth. Since, according to Augustine's earlier supposition that both he and Honoratus lack wisdom, their best, indeed their *only*, recourse is to trust the wise—if only they can find them!

The finding poses the problem. Augustine presents the problem to his friend in another version of the Meno Paradox—this one pertaining only to wisdom (*Util. Cred.* 13.28). We need wisdom. The way to get it is to learn it from a wise person. We must find a wise person. In order to find one, we need some sign by which to recognize such a one. But what could be the signs of a wise person, except wisdom? And yet this wisdom is precisely what we do *not* have, which we neither know nor know how to recognize. In short, it seems that we cannot gain wisdom except by seeking it, and we cannot seek

it unless we already have it. Wisdom is necessary for getting wisdom. If we lack wisdom, we will inevitably *continue* to lack it.

This, then, is the human condition—absent wisdom. There is no way for us to get out of this circle. But God can get in; "the cure for this immense problem can only come from God" (*Util. Cred.* 13.29). Indeed, we might as well not even bother trying to gain wisdom "unless we believe both that he exists and that he can be invoked by the human mind." After all, the wisdom we are seeking is the wisdom of God. God, and the truth about him, is our destination. Why bother trying to get there if we do not believe that it exists? "Rightly, therefore, the high authority of the Catholic teaching has made it the rule that, before all else, those coming to religion must be persuaded to have faith." The Manicheans themselves believe in the existence of religious truth and welcome seekers who presume that it exists (14.30). On what grounds can they tell us that faith is illegitimate? Augustine reinforces these considerations with an extended imaginary dialogue with the Manicheans in which he exposes their various confusions and contradictions (14.31). They claim to be Christians, but no one can be a Christian without at least recognizing the authority of Christ (14.32). Why then their blanket rejection of belief by authority? Christ himself, "As we see from the teaching of that historical record, which even they accept," required faith—trust *in* him, trust *to follow* him. And he did so in order to bring those who lack wisdom to wisdom.

Moreover, he gave us a sign that his authority is legitimate (*Util. Cred.* 14.32). Here, at last, Augustine tells us by what means we may know that God has broken past our ignorance and given us the option of getting wisdom from his Son. Augustine: "So he who brought the remedy that would heal corrupted morals established authority with miracles" and "won belief with authority. . . ." Again, "since, as we have said, it is not easy to" recognize who may be a source of wisdom, "certain miracles had to be presented for the eyes to see" (15.33), as a sign to confirm the authority by which minds incapable of knowing God through reason alone would nevertheless be able to reach the truth.

So much for the epistemology. There is an ethics included. The giving of these truths to man requires a certain response. Augustine pleads with his friend, "if your heart is set on a happy life," to heed these things and to pray for deliverance "from the evil of error" (*Util. Cred.* 15.33). We must "give willing obedience to his [Christ's] commandments." Folks who would gain this knowledge of God must "have their lives and conducts purified and in that way grow capable of being given understanding." From epistemology to ethics and back to epistemology. Gaining the truth and accepting it by authority require that we live in light of that truth, living in a godly way consistent with the morals taught by Christ. This way of life, in turn, trains our minds that we may know the truth and understand it better—by reason. Moreover,

this way of life has everything to do with a reorientation of our loves: "No one can acquire the supreme and lasting good without loving it totally and unreservedly. . . ." In short, we can only have right beliefs about God if we seek wisdom in the right way, and if we have right beliefs about God we are required to have right desires and, in general, a right way of life, which helps us to understand better these truths about God.

We must keep in mind how significant is this addition to (or departure from) neo-Platonism. Pagan philosophy could understand much about how our desires should be ordered and can help to clarify much for a Christian. But it lacks authority; it lacks the commands of a revelation from God. If Augustine's theology of desire is a neo-Platonist one, it has not been left untouched by his Christianity; it has been renewed by the doctrine that God has spoken to us; hearing and obeying these commands is a treatment for our desires not found in neo-Platonism.

Augustine climbs to a peak of eloquence in chapter 34, beginning with "Believe me, this authority is what saves us, this prior lifting of our mind from its earthly habitat, this turning from the love of this world to the true God" (*Util. Cred.* 16.34). The authority of Christ converts our desires to God. Here we are also told that Christ's authority has not only the sign of miracles to confirm it but also the sign of the multitude who have gone over to the orthodox church. Although, he says, a wise person would have no need of these signs (since he would already have the wisdom which is their ultimate purpose), the rest of us need help to reach wisdom. Help comes in the form of authority, which "influences us in two ways: in part by miracles, and in part because of its wide acceptance."

Again we are reminded that hearts with pure desires are necessary if our minds are going to be able to know God (*Util. Cred.* 16.34). As always, Augustine's standard for rightly ordered desires is God and the soul: "What defiles the mind . . . is love of anything at all other than the mind itself and God." Once again, what we should love are God and the soul.

The power of disordered, particularly of carnal, desires is strong. At least it is when it has become an "established morality" (Kearney) or "habits" (Cornish) (*Util. Cred.* 17.35). As we are told in *Conf.*, Book VIII, Augustine himself had not so long ago experienced the power of such habits. We may disapprove of them and yet still be under their power. People praise freedom from earthly desires, but "few do these things. . . ." Help "has been brought about by divine providence through" prophets, Christ, apostles, and a chain of bishops succeeding from the first generation to now. Now "his Church" is such that "it occupies the pinnacle of authority, acknowledged by the whole human race." To this church, we should run for receiving the twin blessings of healed desires and knowledge of the truth.

The concluding chapter exhorts Honoratus to convert to orthodox Christianity and—which in Augustine's way of thinking is the same thing—to join the Catholic church (*Util. Cred.* 18.36). With great eloquence, he recommends these things, along with prayer and the theological virtues faith, hope, and love; the last of these is, of course, the Christian's practical application, extending to the love of neighbor, of the principle that we should love God and the soul. He advises abandoning the Manicheans and takes a parting shot at their failures to understand evil and their confusion about the Old Testament. In the final words, he refers to orthodox teachings which they cannot understand. Of course, this includes the immateriality of God. He hints that at another time he might be able to help his friend understand the problem of evil better. For now, he thinks quite enough has been accomplished by making Honoratus' mind "more receptive" and clearing up a few misunderstandings.

Indeed, quite a bit has been accomplished if Augustine's case has been well made here. Moreover, rather a lot follows, in that this is the foundation for much more. We shall continue with what authority teaches us in the way of ethics in the following chapter.

NOTES

1. Trapè says that the "first principle" of the Augustinian method of studying theology is "the strict adherence to the authority of the faith which, one in its origins, the authority of Christ (*C. acad.* 3, 20, 43), is expressed in Scripture, in tradition and in the church"; Trapè, "Chapter VI: Saint Augustine," 342–462, 425.

2. Trapè: *Util. Cred.* "is an acute analysis of the relations between reason and faith and demonstrates the truth of the Catholic faith, which is not a blind faith since it is founded upon indisputable reasons"; "Chapter VI," 362.

3. In my YouTube cartoon based on the book, I present a dialogue between Augustine and Honoratus; Mark Boone, "Augustine's *On the Profit of Believing*," accessed June 27, 2019, https://youtu.be/8dfDDOR717k.

4. Augustine, *Retractions*, I.xiv; in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. John H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1953), 284.

5. John Burleigh, Introduction to *The Usefulness of Belief*; in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. John H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1953), 287.

6. Yet it is still quite a lot. On Honoratus and his relation to Augustine, and the similarity of Romanianus the addressee of *vera Rel.*, see Michael C. McCarthy, "Modalities of Belief in Ancient Christian Debate," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17, no. 4 (Winter 2009), 614–16.

7. On some of the connections, see Mark J. Boone, "Augustine and William James on the Rationality of Faith," *The Heythrop Journal* (forthcoming).

8. A helpful and accessible overview of this theme is Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 162–78.

9. Augustine, *The Advantage of Believing*, trans. Ray Kearney; The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I-Books, Vol. 8: *On Christian Belief*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, Introductions by Michael Fiedrowicz (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2005).

10. Robert Russell comments on this connection with respect to *Conf.* and *Sol.* as well as *Util. Cred.* in Robert P. Russell, "Cicero's Hortensius and the Problem of Riches in Saint Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 7 (1976), 59–69.

11. Augustine, *On the Profit of Believing*, trans. C. L. Cornish. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887).

12. Augustine, *The Usefulness of Belief*, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. John H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1953), 291–323.

13. As Ellingsen takes this passage; Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 18. For a helpful introduction to Augustine's hermeneutics, one could consult Ellingsen, chapter 2. On the different levels of meaning, particularly in *De Doctrina Christiana*, see John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 122–28. Also Thomas Williams, "Biblical Interpretation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 59–70.

14. Simon Harrison is quite right that beginning by trusting Virgil is a requirement of reason; "this 'ought' derives from reason, not arbitrary *fiat*"; Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 85.

15. Fiedrowicz, note 25 to *Util. Cred.* 6.13.

16. Trapè: "Faith is useful for all. . . . It is, in fact, a medicine which heals . . ."; "Chapter VI," 403.

17. Although writing on *ad Simplicianum*, Bourke's remark is appropriate: "Augustine talks about the way in which spiritual delight is given by God through faith"; Bourke, "Joy in Augustine's Ethics," *The Saint Augustine Lecture Series: 1978* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1978), 38.

18. See chapter 4.

19. Kevane: "The first element in this Christian view of earthly reality and of human life and destiny, is the fact that certain striking works of God stand in the world history of the human family as real events. These works of God . . . are real and genuine events, facts established by documentary evidence"; Kevane, *Augustine the Educator*, 228.

20. TeSelle, however, suggests that miracles have the function of "doing good" to believers "and evoking their gratitude"; TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 129.

21. Rist: "He argues first that religious beliefs form part of a much wider set of beliefs which necessarily govern our entire lives; secondly that other, non-religious beliefs also depend on authority"; Rist, *Augustine*, 60.

22. On Augustine's proximity to Reid and his epistemological allies on this question, see King and Ballantyne, "Augustine on Testimony," 212–13.

23. An analysis of Augustine's reasoning from the multitudes similar to TeSelle's analysis; TeSelle, *Augustine's Strategy as an Apologist*, 10–11.

24. For more on the social aspect of belief, see McCarthy, "Modalities of Belief."

25. A good place for the interested reader to start in investigating this question is Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 34.

26. The interested reader might consult Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa* 144–45, on the share of the North African population which Christianity could claim by Augustine's day.

27. As Kolbet points out, "Augustine does not offer himself as a guide who is capable of delivering the Catholic equivalent of the Manichean promise of reason. Instead, he invites Honoratus to join a Christian community engaged in a disciplined seeking after wisdom that remains tempered by its awareness of its continuing weakness"; Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, 122.

28. On this theme in Augustine's *de Fide rerum invisibilium*, see King and Ballantyne, "Augustine on Testimony," 208–12.

29. As, for example, William James in "The Will to Believe."

30. MacDonald: "Consequently, belief is often the appropriate stance to take towards things that fall outside the range of what we can know, properly speaking"; MacDonald, "The Epistemology of Faith in Augustine and Aquinas," 170.

31. Augustine, *Retractions*, I.xiv, 285. Noted by Fiedrowicz in note 48 to *Util. Cred.* 11.25.

32. King and Ballantyne consider this development in "Augustine on Testimony," 198–200.

33. *c. Acad.* 3.16.35-36. A good source on this aspect of *c. Acad.* is Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism*.

34. MacDonald: "Augustine's main argument here may seem to be pragmatic rather than intellectual; but in fact, by pointing out how ubiquitous and necessary belief is in our lives, he further underscores the utter *reasonableness* (that is what he also means by the 'use' or 'advantage') of believing that which we cannot know or 'see' . . ."; "The Epistemology of Faith in Augustine and Aquinas," 171.

35. Topping, *Happiness and Wisdom*, 180–82.

36. James, *Pragmatism*, Lecture VI: Pragmatism's Conception of Truth.

Chapter 6

Ethics according to Authority
De Bono Coniugali

In *De bono coniungali*, *On the Good of Marriage*, or *On the Excellence of Marriage*, Augustine aims to articulate a marital ethics affirming that celibacy is better than sexual activity; that marriage is a good ordained by God; that sexual activity within the context of marriage and for the sake of having children is no sin; and that marital sex for indulging lust is a very minor sin. Augustine is convinced reason must control the body and committed to the biblical doctrine that sex and marriage have a place in God's order. He condemns the raucous disorder of most sexual desire and affirms the goodness of marriage as a gift from the divine physician, a therapy for those same desires, a holy means of their healing. The text also contains some striking evidence for Augustine's high view of the value not only of marriage and sex but also of women and of the friendship of husband and wife.

Although *b. Coniug* stands on its own as an interesting little text on love, marriage, and family, its occasion, and that of its companion *de Sancta Virginitate*, is interesting.[1] A monk named Jovinian had argued that marriage is equal to celibacy. Many had defended the superiority of celibacy, including Jerome.[2] Unfortunately, no one had managed properly to refute Jovinian while also praising marriage. Augustine accepted the challenge—an important goal because the Manichean denigration of marriage was still influential.[3]

Augustine's theology of sex and marriage here tries to put both in their proper place. This requires understanding them as lesser goods and considering physical desires inherently sinful when not subordinated to the love of God. Yet Augustine's ethics, even as it distinguishes between the greatest good and the finite goodness of created things, is an integrated, holistic account. *b. Coniug.* attempts to locate sex and marriage in the love of God and neighbor. It lowers marriage from the pedestal on which Jovinian had placed it (and sex from the pedestal on which Augustine himself had in

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younger days placed it). Yet, in being lowered to their proper place, these things also find their connection to the love of the highest. In being lowered, they are also connected to holiness. The principle of loving God and souls entails that virtuous celibacy, being a direct love of God and souls, is superior. Yet it also entails that marriage has a place in rightly ordered loves, as a way of loving God and neighbor more indirectly.

I shall first explain the very interesting and important first chapter of *b. Coniug.* and its significance for certain negative interpretations of Augustine. Then I shall overview its theology of marriage, considering it under three headings. First, what does Augustine say marriage *is*? Second, what does he say are the goods of marriage? Third, what theology of desire does Augustine give us in this little book, and does it even make sense?

MARRIAGE AND FRIENDSHIP: 1.1

The beginning of *b. Coniug.* must be quoted in full:

> Every human being is part of the human race, and human nature is a social entity, and has naturally the great benefit and power of friendship. For this reason God wished to produce all persons out of one, so that they would be held together in their social relationships not only by similarity of race, but also by the bond of kinship. The first natural bond of human society, therefore, is that of husband and wife. God did not create them as separate individuals and bring them together as persons of a different race, but he created one from the other, making the side, from which the woman was taken and formed, a sign of the strength of their union. For those who walk together, and look ahead together to where they are walking, do so at each other's side. The result is the bonding of society in its children, and this is the one honorable fruit, not of the union of husband and wife, but of their sexual conjunction. For even without that kind of intimacy, there could have been between the two sexes a certain relationship of friendship and kinship where one is in charge and the other compliant. (*b. Coniug.* 1.1)[4]

Augustine considers together sex, procreation, marriage, friendship, society, and God's design and commands. We must add to these man's—and woman's—contemplation of God, the object of that looking and walking together.

Let us examine this in more detail.

Augustine is sometimes taken to be an old-timey thinker at best somewhat condescending toward women and at worst downright misogynistic. As van Bavel says, "In many publications, Augustine is represented as the black sheep or scape-goat in questions of feminism or sexuality. He is held

responsible for the contempt of women and of sexuality, and also for the fear of both in western culture."[5] A brief look at this debate would be in order. There really is quite a lot of this, as one can see by entering a phrase like "Augustine and misogyny" into a search engine. It is largely (not entirely) negative.[6]

Scholars critique Augustine for his alleged misogynistic influence. Thus, Greenblatt, noting that Augustine "did not choose to focus on woman as the primal source of temptation," says he nevertheless "opened the floodgates to a current of misogyny that swirled for centuries around the figure of the first woman."[7] Complementarianism, another bone of contention, is the theory that men and women are equal in God's sight but have different roles such that in the home and in the church a man ought to be in charge. Augustine is blamed for promoting complementarianism[8] and, more generally, the doctrine of female submission.[9]

Critiques are often nuanced.[10] Clack gives Augustine his own chapter in an anthology of *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition*. In its introduction she writes, "It is difficult to form a conclusive understanding of his attitude towards women" and points out that Augustine "frequently challenges the negative attitudes towards women held by some of his contemporaries."[11] She also chides Augustine on the grounds that his analysis of the image of God in (both male and female) human beings leads to "an understanding of reason and rationality as fundamentally masculine attributes."[12] Clack explicitly draws on Power's *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women*, also a bit nuanced.[13] On the one hand, Power argues, Augustine considered women to bear the image of God no less than men. On the other hand, he divides the mind into a dominant masculine and a subordinate feminine function, thus reinforcing female subordination. And then there is Elizabeth Clark, who admires Augustine's "social view of marriage" but argues that in response to various controversies he developed a view less emphatic of friendship—with more "emphasis upon the sexual and reproductive functions of marriage."[14] A magisterial study on the subject is van Bavel's "Augustine's View on Women," a thorough and friendly look at Augustine, yet ready to criticize at need.[15]

A good bit of the literature focuses, like Power, on Augustine's analyses of the image of God in both man and woman, particularly in *de Trinitate*.[16] One little debate illustrates. Ruether claims that Augustine and other patristics "concluded that the woman was not theomorphic; in other words, she could not image God."[17] Elizabeth Clark says of the church fathers (not referencing Augustine specifically) that they interpreted Paul in 1 Cor. as saying "that women lacked some essential qualities males share with the Godhead."[18] Edmund Hill defends Augustine from these interpretations, beginning with a response to Ruether,[19] to which Ruether responds in turn.[20] Hill later delivers

a more detailed response to Clark and Ruether at Cambridge.[21] Hill does not absolve Augustine from the attitudes of his time, but argues that Augustine "treated women with honour and respect" and that he was absolutely committed to the view that women were made in the image of God.

Much literature evaluates Augustine's view of women at least somewhat favorably.[22] Monica is a key focus.[23] There is also Augustine's unnamed mistress or common-law wife, Adeodatus' mother,[24] and also Mary.[25] In addition, his theology of creation and his eschatology provide grounds for a defense of his views.[26] At least one scholar looks at the positive aspects of his correspondences with women.[27]

What do we make of all this in relation to the opening of *b. Coniug.*?[28] Well, the misogynistic reading is at best oversimplified, inasmuch as there is clearly a significant pro-woman streak in Augustine.

The friendship of husband and wife, the "first natural bond" and the foundation of society, is the most salient feature of the marital relation. As van Bavel says, "Both marriage and sexual intercourse are oriented to a higher and greater good, namely friendship between husband and wife."[29] Carol Harrison notes that "it is in the context of friendship, significantly, that in *On the Good of Marriage*, Augustine places the sexual aspect of marriage. . . ."[30] As Hunter puts it, marriage and procreation are "placed from the start squarely into a social framework, that is, the bonding of society (*connexio societatis*) in the natural good of friendship."[31] Or as Clair says, "It is this sociability, or *friendship*, rooted in specifically *human* nature, that forms the primary good of marriage. . . ."[32] This view of marriage is, as Brown says, "magnificently social."[33] Likewise Cahall says: "The essence of the institution of marriage is a unique kind of loving friendship. . . ."[34] And Burt says: "Augustine maintained that the essential characteristic of a valid marriage is that it be a union of friends. . . ."[35] Although Augustine holds that a husband is "in charge" and the wife "compliant," there remains a certain equality in their relationship. This is not a straightforward subordination theory of marriage, treating the wife as naturally inferior. Augustine is a genuine complementarian: Husband and wife are different in role and position, but spiritually equal. A beautiful expression of their equality is drawn from the Torah: The woman was taken from the man's side as a symbol that they walk through life together side by side, looking together toward the destination. Marriage as friendship means that the hierarchy of the two is only part of the picture; they are leveled before God, in loving whom together they are full equals.

But what about Augustine's view that God only created a wife for Adam to help him reproduce? He writes in *de Genesi ad litteram* 9.5.9 that a male companion for Adam would have made a better friend.[36] However, it does not follow that Eve does *not* make a friend. Augustine is saying that the only reason for God to make for Adam a woman *instead of a male companion* is

for procreation—which entails nothing at all about whether the woman is given as a companion. The presumption, in fact, both of *de Genesi ad litteram* 9.5.9 and of the last sentence of *b. Coniug.* 1.1, seems to be that God would have given man a friend of some sort. So *procreation* does not answer the question *What are all the reasons for giving man a woman*? but rather *Why this kind of friend*? Why a sexual partner? Why a wife instead of some other friend?[37] As Burt explains, "Although procreation was the primary reason for the creation of the family, the essential element in the family is something else entirely," friendship.[38]

In order fully to appreciate all this, we must rediscover an Augustinian conception of friendship. They are walking together toward God, and this is what friendship means. A careful study of this topic should not neglect Cicero, who is crucial in the interpretation of *b. Coniug*. His *Laelius* defines friendship "as a complete identity of feeling about all things in heaven and earth: an identity which is strengthened by mutual goodwill and affection."[39] Augustine had affirmed Cicero's definition of friendship in *c. Acad.* 3.6.13.[40] Friendship involves a mutual love of God;[41] it is a holy activity.[42] This exalted view of friendship is typical of ancient moral philosophers, but it is not the sort of thing they say about people who lack virtue or human excellence. Augustine here considers husband and wife as equals in spiritual friendship. It is hard to imagine a more powerful affirmation of the value of sex, marriage, and womanhood coming from a writer of the ancient world. This is rather different from, for example, Aristotle, who considers marital friendship to have its political counterpart in aristocracy; their relationship is "in accordance with virtue" or human excellence, but the wife apparently has a bit less of that than the husband.[43]

Marital sex leading toward procreation is presented in the context of friendship and following after it; "The result is the bonding of society in its children." (Cornish' translation: "Then follows the connection of fellowship in children . . ."); Latin *Consequens est connexio societatis in filiis*.) Brown may be indeed correct that "Augustine never found a way . . . of articulating the possibility that sexual pleasure might, in itself, enrich the relations between husband and wife."[44] However, this is because sexual pleasure, in itself, is only an aspect of the productive union of husband and wife, which is a part of their friendship. If it does not contribute to friendship, that is because it presupposes it. Augustine is sometimes interpreted as one who thinks sex is inherently evil, or merely a lesser good, being a bodily function and, worse, one in which our carnal desires are involved. It is true that what is carnal is inherently inferior—meaning that it is a *lesser* good. But a lesser good is still a good. More importantly, in Augustine's metaphysics lesser goods are not monadic substances maintaining their own goodness independently of the rest of reality. The goodness of the created universe inheres in part in the ordering

of the whole,[45] and the goodness of a created thing derives from the infinite goodness of God. To love the goodness of a created thing in a way which gives both to God and to the created thing the honor due them is to love it no more than its goodness warrants and to love God *more*. When Augustine says a thing is a lesser good, he is telling us to love it less than God but also how the love of it can be a godly activity. He is simultaneously lowering it to its proper place while connecting it to holiness.

We can now see why the interpretation of Augustine as denigrating sex is not correct. Most obviously, there is having children as the "one honorable fruit" (*unus honestus fructus*) of marital intercourse—the only purpose sex alone has. Sex may also have other goals which *other* things *also* have. Very importantly, it has the goal of *friendship*, of which it is a consequence. The reproductive purpose of sex does not simply exist alongside marital friendship—disconnected from it. Augustine's ethics is integrated. A thing's purpose is understood in relation to its proper context, which in this case is marital friendship. Both sex and reproduction are taken up into service of the marital friendship of which they are a part. Although (as we shall see later) Augustine thinks marital celibacy is a higher form of friendship, this only means that marital sexuality is a lesser way of serving that purpose. The love of God and neighbor is the goal of marriage, as healthy walking and running is the goal of feet, and there are good and better ways to serve it. One couple loves each other and God non-sexually due to their self-control, and another loves sexually because that is the best they can do. One year I may run a marathon while another year I may hobble along using insoles due to my plantar fasciitis problem, but at both times I am serving the purposes of my feet as well as I can.

But perhaps "The result is the bonding of society in its children" should be read differently. Perhaps Augustine is saying that the only relevant result (*consequens*) of sex is procreation and the social relations among the human race coming *from* that; in other words, he is not saying anything about the friendship of man and wife.

I think this would be a mistake for several reasons. First of all, "The first natural bond of human society" is explicitly said to be man and wife which, moreover, is precisely because friendship is good. Marriage exists because of "the natural sociability that exists between the different sexes" (*b. Coniug.* 3.3), the friendship between man and woman. Note, second, that the next sentence tells how God did not make them as *alienigenas*—strangers, foreigners to each other, "persons of a different race"—but made one from the other in the creative act described in the Torah signifying "the strength of their union (*coniunctio*)." Third, observe that children are specifically the result of *that* union. Fourth, Augustine is explicit that having babies is the only honorable fruit of their having sex (*concubitus*), and *not* the only honorable fruit of their

union (*coniunctio*). What is that union's *other* fruit? What else—but friendship? Finally, the whole reason Augustine mentions the non-sexual, hierarchical friendship that *might* have obtained between man and woman is to contrast marriage with a possible relationship having all the salient characteristics of marriage except the sexual one. The logic of his last sentence here is to explain why procreation is the only reason we have marital sex; the reason given is that man and woman could possibly have such a friendship without it. And *with* it—with it, it still is that friendship, with sex mixed in so that they would also procreate. It was not merely tacked on, but integrated into that friendly relation.[46]

Since that friendship itself is (at least ideally and among those who love God) a holy activity, sex between husband and wife, as part of that friendship, is also a part of that holy activity, part of their mutual love of God. Augustine also links the friendship of husband and wife to the community of all humans. This communing is a very great good, and God *built it into our history*, bringing us all into existence by means of sexual reproduction from the original pair. Even now our carnal method of reproducing supports human community. It is part of our biological as well as our spiritual nature. All humans are members of the same race and designed for friendship with one another.

This human friendship is a controlling principle in Augustine's theology. It is, as *b. Coniug.* later states, the major reason sexual reproduction is good, for it increases the number of souls available for participation in that community—ideally, in that spiritual friendship, the communal love of God.

This community is valuable because souls are valuable. This, of course, is an insight into the right ordering of desire. A community of human souls with rightly ordered desires is a community loving God and one another together. In *Sol.* 1.2.7 Augustine says, "I yearn to know God and the soul," a motto for the whole of his theology. *Sol.* teaches that what a healthy soul desires is God and the soul—the souls of others as well as one's own.[47] This may be taken as one of the early expressions of the Augustinian ethic of the love of God and neighbor, for a direct statement of which we can consult *Doct.* 1.26.27. We have seen the same thing in chapter 2 of the present volume: *Nat. b.* tells us that God is the greatest good, and worthy of the greatest love, and that rational spirits are the crowning good of creation, to be loved above other created goods. The same thing is going on here. Augustine is locating the good of sex and marriage within the broader ecology of the love of God and neighbor. It is not the greatest good within that whole, but it is a good and important part of it.

In short, it is not the case that in Augustine there is a "radical separation between a theology of love and a theology of sexuality and marriage."[48] It is not the case that "Love does not really enter into Augustine's discourse on marriage and sexuality."[49] Augustine's theology of marriage in *b. Coniug.* is nothing but an ambitious attempt to integrate sexuality, marriage, love, and theology.[50]

And what about the body? Are *souls* all we are to love? I think not. The body is a lower good than the soul, but a good.[51] When Augustine is talking about sex, marriage, and procreation, he includes the love of one's spouse's body, as well as caring for the bodily needs of the ensuing babies. This is related to what Augustine says about the body in *Doct.* 1.26.27—that it is loved in its place for the sake of the soul. To desire bodily things for their own sake is sin, but the body is to be cared for as a part of us or else—if we locate personal identity strictly in the soul[52]—as a thing closely connected to us. Augustine is as strongly opposed to materialism as Plato or Descartes, but this is no body-denying theology. There is a place for self-denial here, but the body must be cared for.

Recall that in *Nat. b.* created goods are good, but less so than God. As such, they are fit objects of desire and enjoyment, as long as we love them within right limits—in proportion to their degree of goodness and in subordination to the love of God. Sin is disordered love, a desire all out of proportion—a love of created things as if they had as much goodness as their Creator. We humans often sin sexually, loving in rebellion against God's laws, loving God with a small love and creation with the love due to *him. b. Coniug.* is, in large part, about this—about the disorders of our desires and how marriage helps to heal them. As we look at the rest of this text it is necessary to bear in mind how good this cure for disordered loves is—even though Augustine tells us there are greater goods.

Now it is true that sexual desire is inherently sinful in Augustine's theology, if by "sexual desire" we mean a mere desire for sexual intercourse in itself, not a desire to cooperate with one's spouse and friend in having children. Indeed, sexual activity even in marriage is difficult or impossible without concupiscence—that disorder in the soul whereby it follows rather than leads the body. In Augustinian theology, original sin is passed on through concupiscence, and Jesus' virgin conception was necessary to preserve him from inheriting any original sin (*Ench*. 13.41).[53] However, there is another aspect to Augustine's theology of sex and marriage in our text. This is not a writing off of sex or marriage as evils. This is a placing of them in the context of the good, the true, the beautiful, the just, and the holy—if only we could learn to use them rightly.

This completes our necessary commentary on the first chapter of *b. Coniug.* (We will be able to traverse the other chapters more quickly!)

WHAT IS MARRIAGE?

An important enough question in its own right. For our purposes, we can ignore it. Augustine views marriage as a union of man and woman instituted

by God for the purpose of having children. We have seen much of this already. In chapter 5, he begins considering the contours of marriage more closely. In which pairings of man and woman can this relationship obtain? For example, "It is often asked whether one should call it a marriage" when a man and woman enter into a monogamous relationship just for the sex (*b. Coniug.* 5.5). Augustine answers affirmatively, provided they are willing to have children and do nothing to prevent it. It seems marriage is possible by means of the ceremonies or rites employed by a society to formalize a marriage, even if the acts or intentions of the partners are not aimed at procreation. Or a marriage can exist absent the formalities, so long as a couple's acts and intentions are consistent with the natural results of their sexual relationship. The idea here is teleological: Marriage has an essential property, its orientation toward procreation.[54] That property can inhere in the sexual relationship itself, as long as the partners do not resist procreation. Alternatively, it could inhere in the institution—presumably even if the partners resist procreation (although Augustine would consider it a poor marriage).

Augustine immediately describes a dubious sort of relationship which he knows all too well, in which "a man makes use of a woman for a time, until he finds someone else more suited" to his goals in life, and in which she consents to this yet "is faithful to him" and remains sexually inactive even after he abandons her (*b. Coniug.* 5.5). She is "unchaste" yet no adulteress. The man is simply an adulterer—a betrayer of this woman (not of his future wife). By our selfish desires, we are condemned. He is very likely thinking of his own relationship with Adeodatus' mother. Perhaps he is justifying it to an extent, although he is likely confessing his sins against God and her as well as her own, much lesser sins.[55]

Another insight comes in chapter 7. Marriage is meant to be permanent. Augustine appeals to the authority of the Bible in Matt. 5:32 where Jesus forbids divorce for any reason save marital unfaithfulness (*b. Coniug.* 7.6). He suggests that, when a man divorces an adulterous wife, the obligations of the original marriage remain: "I should be surprised if this meant it is also lawful to take another wife" (7.7). The permanence of marriage is not overruled by sterility (15.17): "once marriage has been entered into it cannot be dissolved by any means except by the death of one of them." Augustine suspects marital permanence is "a symbol of something greater" (7.7)—a topic to which we will return when we examine marriage as a sacrament. Augustine also explains that concubinage is not proper (14.16). "It is the nature of marriage that has to be considered, not the nature of the persons who get married and make wrong use of the marriage" (14.16). The institution of marriage, like that of property, is a good thing with good goals, to be protected and honored. If a person should violate the institution with good goals (as a charitable thief or a man using a concubine for procreation), his behavior is wrong because it undermines an

institution very useful in supporting the good. A person who misuses the institution (as a stingy rich man or a lascivious spouse) does not corrupt it.

Of course polygamy would have to come up at some point, and that point is chapter 17. Augustine explains that it is possible for a man to have more than one wife, since more than one wife can be submissive to the same husband and reproduce with him, although polyandry makes no sense in either its authoritative or reproductive structure (*b. Coniug.* 17.20). Nevertheless, as the New Testament teaches, monogamy is better; this is because of its symbolism: The Church is meant to be a unity, "people with a single soul and single heart turned to God," one bride of Christ (18.21).

17.19 has a good summary of much of this: "Among all peoples marriage exists for the same purpose, namely to have children, and however they turn out, marriage is instituted for them to be born in a regulated and honorable way. . . ." This essential purpose of marriage is one of its goods, but there are other goods.

THE GOODS OF MARRIAGE

van Bavel: "Augustine has defended always that marriage is something good, especially against Manicheism."[56] Indeed. Marriage is not the greatest good, but it is a real good. A greater good would be the best way to love the greatest good, God, and those great goods which also are meant to love God—the souls of *Sol.*, the rational spirits of *Nat. b.* Holy celibacy is superior to marriage as a way thus to love. Yet marriage is a good in particular because it provides us with three ways of loving God and others: procreation, fidelity, and sacrament. Procreation loves our neighbors by bringing more of them into existence; fidelity is a love of the neighbor who is one's spouse and of God by obedience to God's laws; and sacrament, by proclaiming the Gospel, loves the God who provided this good news and the neighbors who receive it.[57]

In paragraph 8, Augustine explains that marriage is a genuine but lesser good.[58] Citing Heb. 13:4, he explains that it is no lesser evil:

> Therefore marriage and fornication are not two evils, one worse than the other, but marriage and abstinence are two good things, one better than the other. In the same way health and sickness in this life are not two evils, one worse than the other; but health and immortality are two good things, one better than the other. (*b. Coniug.* 8.8)

Marriage as a good involves procreation. Augustine: "So too that procreation of mortal beings, which is the reason why there are marriages, will

be brought to an end; but the freedom from sexual union is both an angelic practice now and will last for eternity" (8.8). This good better than marriage is freedom from sex comparable to that of the angels; this suggests that few may able to attain this greater good. More on that shortly. In the meantime, we must understand the critique of Jovinian. Marriage and procreation "will be brought to an end"—like knowledge, which is good but a lesser good than love, as Augustine says with reference to 1 Cor. 13.

These comparisons are well chosen. Virtuous celibacy is to sexually active marriage what love is to knowledge and immortality to health, an angel-like state in which we partake of eternal love—the love of God and neighbor free from the sins we need marriage to heal. The relation of this loving state to marriage is given two additional comparisons—what Mary or Anna is to Susannah or the other Mary to her sister Martha (*b. Coniug.* 8.8). Susannah is a chaste wife, which is good; but Mary's holy virginity and Anna's holy celibacy, respectively, bring forth and proclaim the Messiah![59] In this particular analogy, we see a hint of the sacramental good of marriage—on which more anon.

Martha and Mary call for a closer look. Martha's *work* is good, Mary's *communion* with the Messiah a greater good. Holy celibacy is good because, as with Mary, it is communion with *God*! With such lofty praise for virtuous celibacy it might seem strange that any praise can be reserved for marriage at all. Yet it is, and that is the point of paragraph 8, and indeed of *b. Coniug.*[60] Marriage, the lesser good, *is* good.[61] The case of Martha and Mary illustrates the fallacy of thinking a thing is not good just because it is not the greatest good. We may again note that Augustine opposes materialism, yet does not call the body evil. Bodily things are lesser goods, but real ones. Such are marriage, marital sex, procreation, and one of their analogues from paragraph 8, health. Indeed, the very bodies of spouses "faithful to each other and to the Lord" are said to be holy in *b. Coniug.* 11.13. The comparison of Martha and Mary to marriage and celibacy is a miniature of Augustine's whole theology of desire. As we saw in *Nat. b.*, God is the greatest good. Mary and the state of holy celibacy correspond to the love of God. As we also saw in *Nat. b.*, created things are by definition genuine yet lesser goods. Martha and the state of marriage correspond to them.[62]

And what a good marriage is! "Marriage, I say, is good, and it can be defended by sound arguments against all the lies about it" (*b. Coniug.* 20.24). In paragraph 9, he lists various goods. He makes a familiar distinction between things good for their own sake "such as wisdom, health, and friendship," and things good as means to other ends (9.9). Learning is good for wisdom, and food and drink are good for health. Marriage is good for "the continuation of the human race" and for friendship. Elizabeth Clark is correct that this passage's appeal to friendship only refers to the production of new people with whom one might be friends.[63] In this passage, Augustine

is listing some external benefits of marriage, not undermining the importance of marital fidelity and friendship.

Clearly we could afford to be a bit more systematic here, and Augustine apparently agrees. Near the end of *b. Coniug.,* he overviews the goods of marriage in a three-part summary which rightly captures the attention of commentators.[64] *b. Coniug.* 24.32: "The value of marriage, therefore, for all races and all people, lies in the objective of procreation and the faithful observance of chastity. For the people of God, however, it lies also in the sanctity of the sacrament." He says, "These things, namely, offspring, fidelity, and the sacrament, are all good, and because of them marriage is good." Procreation, fidelity, and sacrament: We need to look at the major points pertaining to each good before moving on to consider what *b. Coniug.* tells us about Augustine's theology of desire. We must pay particular attention to the threads tying Augustine's theology of marriage to the love of God and neighbor which, as he says in *Doct.* 1.35.39, is the summary both of the Bible and of God's commands.[65] Indeed, in *Ench.* 32.121 he restates this teaching and explicitly connects some points of marital and sexual ethics to the goal of the love of God and neighbor.

Augustine is unsure whether sexual reproduction was a part of God's plan for Adam and Eve.[66] Perhaps, he speculates in *b. Coniug.* 2.2, the command to multiply was "said in a mystical and figurative sense." Or perhaps they could have reproduced some other way. (Here he refers to authority, looking to the virgin birth of Christ, and to reason, pointing out that God made bees to reproduce non-sexually.) Or perhaps they could have reproduced sexually. Although Augustine thinks that sexual reproduction is only for mortals, he speculates that Adam and Eve might have been mortal in that they *could* have died, but would *not* have without sin; thus they could have reproduced sexually, yet might also have attained to the heavenly state Paul mentions in 1 Thes. Whatever the case before the fall, in our current state "the union of man and woman is something of value" (3.3). We are embodied and mortal, and we need procreation, and so we need marriage. "Marriage is instituted" so that children can "be born in a regulated and honorable way" (17.19). Marriage helps us love children by bringing them into existence in the best way—so "that children should be welcomed with love, brought up with kindness, given a religious education. . . ."[67] Whoever denies that procreation for the preservation of a species is a good thing "shows ignorance of the fact that God is the creator of everything good" (19.22)—ignorance of the inherent goodness of what exists (*Nat. b.*). Augustine says "the human seed is created by God, and . . . it will never itself be bad" (16.18).[68] Even sexual pleasure (*delectatio*), "when this is regulated and put to its natural use under the restraint of moderation," is not sinful lust (*libido*).[69] This is how "the fathers of the Old Testament had intercourse" with their wives.

One thing in particular calls for attention. Sexuality and marriage have procreation as their end. Things ought to be used toward their ends; marital sex is sinful if not engaged in with the intention of having children. (If faithful, a very minor sin, on which more anon.) Moreover, it is sinful to use things in ways inconsistent with their ends; sexual acts are sins if not marital coitus. In *b. Coniug.* 10.11 and 11.12, Augustine refers to such practices that do not meet this requirement, explaining that they are sinful even between husband and wife.[70]

The second major good of marriage is fidelity. This includes friendship. Marriage is good "because of the natural sociability that exists between the different sexes" (*b. Coniug.* 3.3). The human species is gregarious. We are built for friendship. Augustine is influenced here by the biblical story of God's design in Genesis 1-2. There are also pagan sources for this idea, which Augustine would have read in Cicero.[71] To some significant extent, the friendship for which we are built is between male and female.

Friendship involves fidelity.[72] This means faithfulness, or trust and trustworthiness. Fidelity is a great spiritual good—trust and trustworthiness between souls. In *b. Coniug.* 4.4, Augustine explains that this spiritual good is important even in lowly material matters. The Latin *fides* means trust, faith, and credit, a nexus of concepts surviving in such modern usage as "the full faith and credit." Economic trustworthiness is a part of fidelity and an apt illustration of this spiritual good's low reach: Even "a tiny straw" may be the occasion of an immensely valuable spiritual good in an economic transaction. The same spiritual good is necessary and immensely valuable in marriage. This is why adultery is so bad (4.4). It is also why, even "in a good marriage" of folk aged past the point of procreation and even sex, "the relationship of love between husband and wife continues strong" (3.3).[73]

This fidelity is a duty of husband to wife and vice versa. Its negative aspect is to avoid adultery (*b. Coniug.* 4.4). The positive is to provide sex to one's spouse at need. Augustine mentions the obligation to assist one's spouse in having children, but he emphasizes the obligation to help him or her avoid the temptation of adultery (6.6). Here Augustine follows the authority of Paul, who had written to the Corinthians that neither spouse should deny sex save by mutual consent (1 Cor. 7:4). According to Augustine's interpretation, it is actually better for them to abstain from sex if they have the self-control. However, if either lacks self-control, it is far better to have sex in order to preserve fidelity, and the one with self-control owes sex to the other: "they owe each other a mutual service to relieve each other's weaknesses, and thereby avoid illicit unions."[74]

The spouse who provides sex in this way does not sin.[75] The one lacking self-control sins in a small way or, if both lack self-control, both sin in a small way. (Indeed, it is a sin for a man to have sex with his wife when she

is pregnant; *b. Coniug.* 6.5.) Augustine says, "because of marital fidelity it is a venial sin" rather than a mortal one (6.6). There is a tradition according to which a mortal spiritual sin may be compared to a mortal physical disease: It takes the life out of the soul. This is a (broadly) Augustinian way of thinking, but I do not notice it in *b. Congiug.*; rather, "a venial sin" is contrasted with "a punishable offense" because the former is forgiven rather than punished (6.7). Adultery is a mortal sin; having sex with one's spouse because one lacks the self-control to have intercourse only when trying to have children is venial.[76] If adultery is like armed bank robbery, this sin is more like stealing a towel from a fancy hotel. Of this minor sin, Augustine says, "Marriage does not make this happen, but it wins forgiveness for it" (10.11).

So marital sex with the aim of having children is good, but abstinence is better. Sex for pleasure is, within marriage, a sin automatically pardoned, and sex provided to a spouse who lacks self-control is not sinful at all.

Fidelity is a way marriage treats lustful disordering of desire.[77] The disorder of lust (*concupiscentia*) is both curbed by a *legitimum vinculum*, a right and proper bond, and turned toward nurturing *societas fidei*, "the union of fidelity" (*b. Congiu.* 5.5). Augustine writes of Christians who marry out of sexual desire (*concupiscentia*) that their marriage may grow, even if not into both of them *controlling* their desire, at least toward *religiosa concordia*, a sacred harmony, a religious friendship (*b. Coniug.* 13.15). Through *fides* and obedience to God's commands, Christian marriage heals our desires, converting fleshly lust into the loving and deepening relationship with the neighbor in one's spouse—a friendship itself religious, involving the joint worship of God.

So fidelity. The third good of marriage is *sacramentum*, by which Augustine does not have in mind a vehicle for grace so much as a *symbol*.[78] As we still hear at Christian weddings, marriage symbolizes the relationship of Christ and the church. On the permanence of marriage as spoken of by Christ, Augustine asks "what is the purpose of having the marriage bond so inflexible" (*b. Coniug.* 7.7). He answers that monogamy is "used as a symbol [*sacramentum*] of something greater." This is a good of marriage "For the people of God," not for others (24.32). This calls Christian marriages to higher standards, including permanence as well as monogamy (18.21). "In the marriages of our women," Augustine says of the church, "the sanctity of the sacrament is worth more than the fecundity of the womb" (18.21), an even greater good than procreation.

The sacramental understanding of marriage helps Augustine with his long-term project of answering Manichean challenges against the morality of Old Testament patriarchs.[79] He specifically addresses their charge that the patriarchs lacked self-control (*b. Coniug.* 25.33). Their polygamy, such as Abraham's taking Hagar as a concubine to beget Ishmael, was not wrong.

Augustine suggests that Abraham was actually capable of abstinence (22.37), but understood the importance of fathering children to extend the people of God in preparation for the coming of the Messiah (19.22). That Abraham was willing to sacrifice his child to God (Gen. 22) shows that he did not value sex and marriage more than God and the kingdom of God, for having children is the reason marriage is valued (18.22, 20.23).[80] The patriarchs "looked to have children from their marriages because of Christ. . . ." Procreation "was a sign of what was to come and was part of the prophetic arrangement" (17.19); their lives and marriages, no less than the promises given them, prophesied Christ. Patriarchal polygamy foretold the coming of diverse peoples into the church (18.21). For Christians, monogamy is best, as a symbol of "the union of all races in submission to" Jesus (18.21). Christ's coming calls for a shift in the sacramental boundaries of marriage.[81]

There are other changes of the times. Augustine (in *his* century!) thought the earth had been populated pretty well. Procreation "is no longer required as a duty to human society" (*b. Coniug.* 13.15). Now God's holiest call, to those who are able, is to the chastity of abstinence rather than the chastity of marital procreation. To the objection that the human race could not survive if everyone were to take this advice, he responds with a bit of eschatology (10.10). If everyone did this *properly*—based on pure love and with complete self-control—it would actually be good. "Then the city of God would reach fulfillment much sooner," and Christ would sooner return! Not everyone will take this advice; sexual desire is too strong, sinfulness too rampant. There will be plenty of children born of desire (9.9). These allow the Christian abundant opportunities for bringing up spiritual rather than biological children; "holy friendships may be fostered." This spiritual parenting, of course, aims at fostering the greatest created good—rational spirits—by growing them into a holy community of them that love God.

So marital sex is no longer the best way to love God and neighbor. However, love was always the point of marriage; "Children have had to be provided for our mother Jerusalem, now spiritually and at that time physically, but always from the same source, love" (*b. Coniug.* 16.18). Even now, when the higher calling is spiritual parentage, marriage as a sacrament conveys Christian doctrine (18.21), the doctrine whose ultimate purpose is the love of God and neighbor (*Doct.* 1.35.39 and *Ench.* 32.121).[82]

MARRIAGE AND AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGY OF DESIRE

Augustine's theology of desire in *b. Coniug.* links a hierarchy of holiness in desires to a hierarchy of goods. God is the greatest good, rational spirits

the greatest created good, and the most holy desires those that free the soul directly to love God and to love humans in holy friendship.[83] Less holy are the desire for God that keeps his commands for sexual intercourse and the desire to love our neighbors by cooperating with one's spouse (and friend) to make *more* of them! Sinful, yet cleansed and turned to good by marriage, is lust kept within the limits of God's commands. Marriage is an institution for the love of God and neighbor whose greatest work is to testify of the love of Christ and the church, yet is also a medicine for the soul corrupted by unruly desires for physical pleasures.

In what follows, I shall first overview some relevant passages from *b. Coniug.* on marriage as a cure for disordered desires. Then I shall consider Augustine's sexual ethics to see if it still makes any kind of sense.

Marriage as a Cure for Disordered Desires

Marriage is a treatment for disordered desires.[84] All too often we desire physical things with an ardor more fit for the love of God and the soul. Commonly—indeed typically—this disorder takes the form of sexual desire. We do not measure up to the holy calling of marriage outlined in *b. Coniug.*'s first paragraph. Marriage acts as a spiritual medicine to treat this spiritual illness. It treats the symptoms, making lust safer. It mitigates the negative effects and brings good out of it; marriage is for "the control and remediation of this chronic disease."[85] It moderates that desire by redirecting it toward having children (on which Augustine also wrote in *Conf.* 2.2.) and faithfulness to one's spouse. Marriage reorders our desires so that we desire not only physical pleasure but also the good of others and to keep the rules of marriage—faithfulness, honor, God's commands against adultery. We read in *b. Coniug.* 1.1 that sex, friendship, procreation, and the love of God are all linked. Marriage links them. I shall now proceed through some key passages of *b. Coniug.* a final time, briefly observing the major points relevant to marriage as a therapy or a cure for disordered desires.

Early in the text is a remarkable passage:

> Marriages also have the benefit that sensual or youthful incontinence (*carnalis vel iuvenilis incontinentia*), even though it is wrong, is redirected to the honorable purpose of having children, and so out of the evil of lust (*libido*) sexual union in marriage achieves something good. Furthermore, parental feeling brings about a moderation in sensual desire (*concupiscentia carnis*), since it is held back and in a certain way burns more modestly. For a certain seriousness attaches to the ardor of pleasure (*fervidae voluptatis*), when in the act whereby man and woman come together with each other, they have the thought of being father and mother. (*b. Coniug.* 3.3)

This incontinence—a lack of self-control—is a spiritual malady, a sickness of the soul. It is a physical desire not controlled by reason. Marriage treats the symptoms of this spiritual malady by replacing the evil effects of riot lust with the beneficial effect of bringing about and bringing up children in an orderly fashion. Marriage also moderates out-of-control desires. In Augustine's mind (shaped, no doubt, by cultural perceptions and expectations of marriage less familiar to us who live after the sexual revolution[86]), marriage has the expectation of children. When acting on lust yet *thinking* of becoming parents, a couple's desires are made more serious and more moderate.[87] In another passage Augustine says, "In itself sensuality has the unbridled weakness of the flesh, but from marriage it has the permanent union of fidelity; in itself it leads to uncontrolled intercourse, but from marriage is has the restraint of chaste child-bearing" (5.5). It is truly a medicine or therapy for the illness of the soul, "a remedy for the sick," a way of "putting straight the crookedness of lust."[88] It adds to our sickness the moderation of expecting children and of fidelity.[89] Marriage treats the symptoms of lust; it does not take away sin, but mitigates its harm. Bad eyes are hard to cure, but eyeglasses make it safe to drive with them. Lust is hard to cure altogether, but marriage makes it safer and turns it to a good end.

How exactly does all this work? Here are some suggestions.[90]

Marriage draws our attentions out of our own self-interest. In a state of lust, the heart seeks physical pleasure, and the mind tends simply to go along. When lust is contained by marriage, the mind is drawn out of its own immediate pleasures. It starts taking an interest in the good of one's spouse, with whom it begins a friendly cooperation in the difficult and noble project of parenting.[91] It also takes an interest in one's children (or possible future children), as well as in the laws of God. Marriage helps a person stop considering his own pleasures in isolation and consider their connections to his beloved, his children, his friends and family, and God—its place in the whole ecology described in the first paragraph of *b. Coniug.* For example, as Burns points out, marriage turns the evil of lust to good due to the spouses "faithfully supporting one another in containing it."[92] In addition, marriage has the effect that, with attention being drawn toward spouse and children, the mind begins to reassert itself. It begins to lead. Reason reasserts its rightful governorship over the bodily appetites.[93]

Augustine explains that marriage helps to give priorities to the soul afflicted with lust. It does not by itself eliminate the replacement of reason with sensuality, but it urges us to seek what is honorable (*b. Coniug.* 10.11). Those spouses who pursue sex because of a lack of self-control rather than in order to have children are "overcome by this kind of sensuality." Yet they tend, "in their intimacy," to "value what is honorable more than what is dishonorable." Married sex is honest sex; a soul corrupted by disorderly desires

for physical pleasures is urged by marriage to prioritize that honesty. Marriage adds a desire for what is right and just.

"Celibacy, to be sure, is a virtue of the mind, not of the body" (*b. Coniug.* 21.25). Obedience, "the mother of all the virtues," heals (23.30). Augustine points out that a virgin may be less virtuous than a wife—if she is less obedient.[94] Obedience is what really matters to holiness. Above all, we must obey God (as Abraham; 23.31). All else being equal, marriage is a lesser good than holy celibacy. But it is a good—a fine context for exercising obedience to God, especially to the biblical command against adultery.

Toward the end of the text Augustine reminds us again that sex, even in marriage, should only be sought for the purpose of procreation (*b. Coniug.* 26.34). He informs us that, toward this end, a soul should resist "those sensual feelings." This, of course, is one of those aspects of Augustine's ethics which seems a bit strange to us. Perhaps, as a brief review, it would be helpful to rank the possible marital behaviors before going on to examine that strangeness. The best marital behavior is actually abstinence! This is a holy friendship, a good pertaining to the soul and, of course, to the love of God, at least in a permanent, Christian, sacramental marriage. The next best marital behavior is faithful sex intended for procreation. The least of the good marital behaviors is providing sex to one's spouse because of the other's weakness.[95] The least of bad marital behaviors is sex not intended for procreation but which is faithful and does not work against procreation and is therefore pardoned.[96] A much greater evil in marriage would be sex which either is unfaithful or is not a use of the reproductive organs in the fashion normally leading to pregnancy.

Various reasons can be identified for these views, especially the authority of the Bible. We can also trace Augustine's sexual ethics to his metaphysics. The *summum bonum* is God, and rational spirits are the greatest created goods. The body is to be cared for, for the sake of souls, souls for the sake of God. A loving marriage without sex and with both partners self-controlled is a direct love of another soul and of God. A chaste marriage producing children is a marriage loving God and neighbor more indirectly. A chaste marriage without self-control is one in which sinful carnal desire is reoriented to the love of God through obedience to the biblical command against adultery; to the love of neighbor in one's children through procreation; and to the love of neighbor in one's spouse through faithfulness.

In short, Augustine views marriage as a God-given institution for the healing of desire and for helping us love God and neighbor as we ought.

One more point relevant to marriage is a major component of Augustine's theology. This is the importance of humility, emphasized in the final paragraph (*b. Coniug.* 26.35). Although holy virginity is superior to marriage, humility is required of all Christians. In *de Sancta Virginitate,* Augustine

would heavily emphasize this humility.[97] This is a call to love and honor God and not make too much of ourselves; pride is one of the paradigmatic corruptions of the heart—a desire for our own glory or an affection for ourselves rather than for God.

Does This Even Make Sense?

I think it does, but only given its premises.

Such a sexual ethics strikes the modern mind as strange, harsh, old-fashioned, and judgmental. It may seem *un*ethical in its traditional account of marital roles; at the same time, it may also seem almost *too* ethical, in that its standards are so high. Does this sort of ethic have a place in the modern world or is it merely a historical artifact? Here I shall try to clarify Augustine's approach, showing that it makes sense on its own terms—that is, given its most important premises. Among these are the importance of reason governing the bodily desires, the purposes built into things, the sinfulness of using things against their purposes, the authority of the Bible,[98] Augustine's theology of creation and eschatology, and the nature of happiness as more than a mental state.

We should keep in mind that this is a theology of sex and marriage more this-wordly, more affirmative of embodiment, more affirmative of the value of sex and marriage, more friendly toward women, and more emphatic of marital friendship than we have been accustomed to expect from a medieval Christian neo-Platonist. Perhaps we have misunderstood the theology of Christian neo-Platonism somewhat, or perhaps Augustine is not all that neo-Platonic. Either way, his theology of desire, when applied to sex and marriage, is distinctively Christian and is not anti-body.

I shall use a question-and-answer format to clarify Augustine's ethics, asking about his view that sex must be for the purpose of procreation, his view that celibacy is a greater good than marriage and his resistance to seeking pleasure for pleasure's sake.

Why is Augustine so convinced that sex not for the purpose of procreation is sinful? A threefold answer is called for. First, sex purely for the sake of lust or for physical pleasure is a failure to be governed by reason. It is an inversion of the natural order, the body taking control of the mind, when we are "no longer ruled by reason but by sensuality" (10.11). It is a common idea in antiquity that it is wrong to be ruled by pleasure rather than reason. Plato's *Republic* treats the governing of the bodily appetites by reason as the very nature of justice.[99] A number of Bible passages teach us not to live for physical pleasures without regard to the consequences or to God's commands, such as Prov. 7, Prov. 23:29-35, and 1 Pet. 4. Ambrose argues "that our passions should obey our reason," citing Old Testament saints as evidence.[100] And so on.

Second, Augustine's ethics is informed by what moral philosophers call "teleology," the notion that things have built-in purposes which determine their proper function. This is associated with Aristotle because he articulates it so well and so influentially in *Nichomachean Ethics*, but the idea is nearly ubiquitous in the natural law tradition from Aristotle and Plato all the way down through Aquinas to Alasdair MacIntyre and other contemporary moralists.[101] The purpose of a kidney is to filter blood, and we can evaluate how good it is by how well it is functioning toward this end. The eye has the function of seeing and can be evaluated similarly. This, of course, is part of what I was talking about when in the introduction to this book I said that there are different concepts involved in moral investigation and that Augustine falls into the natural law tradition. Augustine thinks things have proper functions and purposes—including genitalia, sex, and marriage.

The notion of proper function includes the possibility of value judgments.[102] Natural law philosophers think it conveys a moral requirement: We should act according to *our* own proper functions and use things according to *theirs*. The "should" here might be interpreted rather weakly—say, as good advice for proper living, but not the sort of moral law the violation of which could be condemned as sin. Augustine is also committed to moral obligation in a stronger sense.[103] In *b. Coniug.*, he is explicit about how strongly the "should" of proper function goes:

> Anyone, therefore, who makes use of these benefits, the ones necessary for the sake of something else, for purposes other than those they were established for, commits a sin, sometimes a venial sin, sometimes a mortal sin. On the other hand, whoever makes use of them for the purpose for which they were bestowed does well. (9.9)

It is sin to use things yet not use them according to their purposes (presumably because God requires proper use of things).[104] Procreation is the purpose of sex. So to use sex not for procreation is sin.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, Augustine is following the authority of the Bible. *b. Coniug.* 10.11 is key. Paul had said that it is permitted to marry and, as Augustine reads the passage, he is excusing something. What is excused must *need* excusing, so it must be a sin of some sort.[105] Yet marriage is no sin. Accordingly, "what he allows as excusable is sexual intercourse that occurs because of a lack of self-control, not solely for the purpose of having children and sometimes not for the purpose of having children at all" (10.11).[106]

Why is Augustine so convinced that virtuous celibacy is better than marriage? We can, again, look at three reasons. First, a clue appears in *b. Coniug.* 9.9. Sex and marriage are like food and sleep, in that they are good and are

rightly used if used for their purposes (procreation for the former and health for the latter). But, he also explains, to not use these things because one has no *need* of them is even better! This is a fine example of premodern means-ends reasoning. If X is good for Y, then it is good to use it for Y; but if you can have Y without the use of X, that is even better.

Second, Augustine is again following the authority of Scripture. Paul had said that it is better to be unmarried and thus solely devoted to God in 1 Cor. It is not that a married person cannot be devoted to God; Augustine speaks of spouses devoted to God in *b. Coniug.* 12.14. It is, rather, that a spouse is also devoted to the things of this world. One can, in loving things of this world rightly, also love God; that is good. But this is an indirect love of God. It is better to be Mary than Martha—if you can. And if you cannot, get married (10.10), and love God as you are able.

Third, other areas of Augustine's theology touch on marriage and lead Augustine to believe that procreation is less important than it once was. We have systematic theologies because one branch of theology affects another.[107] The doctrine of the Trinity affects the doctrine of the Incarnation, which affects the doctrine of the Atonement, and so on.[108] Augustine's theology of creation, his ecclesiology, and his eschatology all affect his theology of sex, desire, and marriage.[109] One reason he thinks marital sex is a lesser good than marital abstinence is that he thinks the peopling of the earth is more or less complete and now the more pressing business of the church is to raise spiritual rather than physical children.

A brief interlude before moving on to a third question. Augustine is fallible. We might well look for mistakes. Most obviously, we may reject the premises of his moral philosophy.

Even if we *accept* the premises, we may find grounds for disagreement. But we should be careful. Some challenges are fairly easy to answer given the premises. For example, we might wonder, since marital sex contributes to marital friendship, whether sex *not* intended for procreation yet intended for communion and closeness of husband and wife might not be even a *venial* sin.[110] Friendship and procreation are both important ends of marriage. Presumably, Augustine does not think it is a sin for a husband and wife to have sex for the sake of having babies but *not* for the sake of friendship and closeness. Why not try it the other way around?[111] For this question, at least, there is a ready answer in Augustine's thought: Procreation is "the one honorable fruit" (1.1) of sex, the only purpose which sex as such has, its essential purpose. Even though marriage takes sex up into its calling of friendship, sex still has reproduction as its essential purpose, and things are to be used for their essential purposes or not at all.[112] Again, we might wonder whether, given that the sexual *relationship* of husband and wife has that essential purpose, each specific *act* must have that purpose. Perhaps some sexual acts

may innocently be intended for friendship and closeness, even as wife and husband hope that their relationship will eventually lead to children. Augustine, however, apparently thinks the sexual *organs* and each sexual *act* have essential purposes, not only the *relationship*.

Other challenges may be harder to answer from Augustine's principles. We might, for example, look at 1 Cor. 7 to see whether we think Paul is actually pardoning or excusing anything.[113] Or, if we should have a different theology of creation[114] or ecclesiology, we may reevaluate the importance of procreation. Or perhaps it is only a *general* rule that it is sin to use things in ways inconsistent with their natural ends. Perhaps there are exceptions; a colonoscopy, for example, uses things not for their natural ends, yet is permissible. This would not guaranty that sex without the goal of procreation is ok, but it suggests that unnatural behavior does not automatically count as sin; perhaps Augustine needs an extended analysis of which unnatural acts are or are not permitted. Or, finally, given the seriousness of the sin of lust as taught by Jesus in Matt. 5:27-8, perhaps marriages should protect us from that as well as from adultery. (Augustine is well aware that there are other sexual sins to resist; in *Ench.* 21.78 he lists one, presumably masturbation, alongside adultery.) Perhaps Augustine's theology is pointing us in the wrong direction: toward less marital sex when most marriages need *more*!

So I am certainly not saying Augustine's ethics is right in all its particulars (or even that it is right at *all*). However, it does seem to me to make quite a bit of sense given the contours of Augustine's theology and ethics. We should note that these principles typically are shared by many or most of ancient philosophers or church fathers (and often by many philosophers or theologians of our own era). One principle, however, calls for special attention. Let us consider it after looking at one challenge directly confronting it.

But what's actually wrong *with seeking pleasure? Why can't we just do what makes us happy?* This sort of question is a more direct challenge to Augustine's way of thinking, and we now come to perhaps the biggest gap between the modern mind and Augustine's. We tend to think of happiness simply as a mental state. Naturally, if this is all happiness is, we would have reason to be suspicious of Augustine's ethics. Why impose all these conditions on our pursuit of happiness? Happiness is happiness, so what's the problem? Why not partake of sexual pleasure as we like as long as we are not hurting anyone? (Why not, the churchgoer may add, as long as we do not violate any express commands from God?)

It is possible to respond to these sorts of challenges by expanding on natural law ethics in an Augustinian mode. The circumstances of human nature or the interconnectedness of human community may impose other conditions on the pursuit of happiness; perhaps, for example, some form of harm may be the indirect result of a personal pursuit of sexual pleasure.[115] Such responses

might possibly succeed in demonstrating their conclusions, but I think they will not free us from the natural misunderstanding of an ethics like Augustine's as a result of thinking of happiness primarily as a state of mind.

In the ancient and medieval way of thinking, happiness is *more* than a state of mind. It has an object. It is really a state of *being*. Fine Augustine scholars often remind us of this.[116] Happiness is sometimes described as the possession of the object of desire—now no longer desire, but, in possession, delight. This is the joy of knowing Beauty described in Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium*. Plotinus in *Enneads* 1.6 describes the happiness of knowing the same Beauty, which he also (borrowing from Plato's *Republic*) calls the Good. Augustine in *b. Vita* considers happiness as the state of having God, the perfect good (*b. Vita* 2.11-12). Alternatively, happiness may be considered as an activity. Aristotle: "Since happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue, we must consider the nature of virtue; for perhaps we shall thus see better the nature of happiness."[117] In *Nichomachean Ethics,* Aristotle goes on to explain in great detail the activity which constitutes happiness. The church fathers are similar when they consider the disputations of the philosophers on the greatest good.[118] One philosopher will locate the greatest good in the body, describing it in terms of physical pleasures; another will say it is in the soul and consists of a virtuous life; the Platonists, alone among the philosophers, will say that it is knowing the higher, immaterial, divine reality. Or the philosophers will disagree over whether happiness consists in freedom from pain, knowledge, or virtue; and they will disagree further on whether virtue is a state sufficient unto happiness or whether happiness also requires bodily goods. The fathers, however, will say that happiness lies in the state of immortality, a state attainable only through Christian faith and practice;[119] in the state of eternal life, defined as knowing God;[120] or in knowing the immaterial God, which requires the humility the Platonists lacked.[121] In all of their formulations, these philosophers and theologians agree that happiness is no mere state of mind, but a state of being—a state of *knowing* something good, or of *having* something good, or of *living* in a certain way in harmony with something good.[122]

If happiness is a state of being—an activity or the enjoyment of an object—the questions we looked at three paragraphs back make little sense. Pursuing happiness without paying attention to its object or to the nature of the activity that happiness *is* is a little like drinking from an empty glass. Only confusion in our understanding of happiness makes it seem more than fruitless. Only disordered desire pursues pleasure as an end in itself without considering its object.

This is part of how Augustine's natural law ethics shapes his analysis of sex and marriage.[123] Sexual happiness has a twofold object: the sexual partner's soul and the results of sex. Thus, the only two right and rational motives for

sexual pleasure are those mentioned in passages such as 3.3: marital friendship and procreation. Moreover, since procreation is the only unique purpose of sex, it is always at least a little bit wrong to have it without that goal.

Augustine's theology of desire deserves a critical but fair appraisal. My main point here is academic and historical: Augustine had these views, and they seem to make some sense given the broader contours of his metaethics. But perhaps these contours are worth understanding and considering in their own right. Take the idea that happiness has a proper object or is an activity of a certain type, that it is no mere mental state. This is not merely a premodern view. John Stuart Mill, representing Utilitarianism, tells us that intellectual pleasures are better than physical pleasures.[124] The difference between them apparently consists largely or entirely in a difference in the objects of pleasure—the likes of food, drink, sex, and drugs vs. the likes of art, literature, and knowledge. Immanuel Kant, the great Enlightenment moralist who developed a duty-based account of ethics, tells us that happiness is not the only end of life, nor the most important end; to be moral is more important.[125] Moreover, the pursuit of self-interested happiness tends to fail. Indeed, "a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition of being even worthy of happiness."[126] So Mill says happiness is better if it enjoys finer objects, and Kant says happiness is meant to follow on a disinterested pursuit of moral law. Though they all have their differences, Augustine, Kant, and Mill agree that the mere pursuit of physical pleasures is a wrong way to pursue happiness.

None of this, of course, means that Augustine's ethics is *correct*, but it suggests that it may not be of merely historical interest. We may (and I actually do) disagree with some points. Few indeed would agree that it is sinful for a man to have sex with his wife when she is pregnant, even some conservative Christians reject complementarianism, and so on. Or we may reject one or more of his major principles—that things have built-in orientations toward their purposes, that it is sinful to use them in ways inconsistent with their purposes, that happiness is an activity of delight in having the greatest good, that the greatest good is God, that created things are by their nature genuine and lesser goods, that we should love in proportion to the goodness of what is loved, that sin is desire out of proportion, that we need ways of healing this desire, and so on. But we might as well know what we are rejecting, and, for that matter, if we have identified the principles themselves we may more carefully consider what may be said for or against them—which is, however, outside the scope of this book.

The next chapter will again look at these principles in a text in which Augustine, relying primarily on authority, will do some metaphysics and consider the origins of evil.

NOTES

1. See Augustine, *Retr.* I.xlviii.1. Also Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (New York: Oxford, 2007), especially chapter 7. Also Hunter, Introduction and General Introduction. Also Elizabeth A. Clark, Introduction to "The Ascetic Debates and Augustine's Reponses," trans. Charles T. Wilcox, in *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, ed. Elizabeth Clark (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 42–43 and a more detailed look in Elizabeth A. Clark, "Adam's Only Companion: Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 21 (1986), 143–45.

2. Jerome, *Against Jovinianus*, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W. G. Martley; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 6, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1893). Brown is helpful on Jerome and the ecclesial context in which Augustine is writing; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988; new ed., 2008), 401–2. Also David G. Hunter, "Augustinian Pessimissm? A New Look at Augustine's Teaching on Sex, Marriage, and Celibacy," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994), 157–59. Jerome claims that he is not denigrating marriage; Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.3. However, "Jerome offered different evaluations of marriage in his treatise, and he was not always consistent"; Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 247.

3. Hunter: "Augustine attempted to strike a balance between Jovinian's equation of marriage and celibacy and Jerome's denigration of marriage"; *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 278.

4. Augustine, *The Excellence of Marriage*, trans. Ray Kearney; in The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I-Books, Vol. 9: *Marriage and Virginity*, trans. Ray Kearney; edited with Introductions and Notes by David G. Hunter (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1999).

5. Tarsicius J. van Bavel, "Augustine's View on Women," *Augustiniana* 39 (1989), 5. Again, van Bavel: "More than one author blames Augustine for advocating a dualism between the biological and the social order, between sexuality and love" (38). Similarly, Hunter: "It is frequently said that Augustine is the source of a great streak of pessimism in the Christian tradition regarding sex and marriage. His notion of original sin, and especially his teaching that this sin has affected and infected all sexual relations, has (we have been told) profoundly influenced Western Christianity for the worse"; "Augustinian Pessimism?" 153.

6. A good sample of the negative sorts of things folks say is available on Women Can Be Priests, "Augustine," accessed June 26, 2019, http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/august.asp.

7. Greenblatt, *The Rise and Fall*, 121. Similarly counting Augustine as a key figure in the story of female repression is Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent: Sex and Politics in Early Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1988).

8. Bob Edwards, "Do Men Really Need to 'Govern' Women?" *The Junia Project*, accessed June 27, 2019, http://juniaproject.com/do-men-need-to-govern-women/.

9. See Ruether in Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*; Introductions in Feminist Theology (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), 32–33, although she paints a complex picture of the history of the doctrine.

10. Sometimes they strike the same tone as Ruether: Although Augustine was influenced by the misogyny of his times, and his own influence has caused great harm, we can take the good and filter out the bad. Ruether adds that we must "critique these views, not superficially, but through a deep evaluation of their underlying assumptions, to salvage what is helpful in Augustine's views, freed from the biases that have distorted the humanity of both women and men"; Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Augustine: Sexuality, Gender, and Women," In *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 64. Also E. Ann Matter, "Christ, God, and Woman in the Thought of St. Augustine," In *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honor of Gerald Bonner*, edited by Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000), 164–75. Mary Clark's tone is very similar as she introduces and summarizes van Bavel's work; Clark, *Augustine*, 126; van Bavel, "Augustine's View on Women." For a succinct online overview of Clark and van Bavel, see Dustin Bagby, "Was Augustine Sexist?" *DustinBagby.Wordpress.com*, October 4, 2011, accessed August 21, 2019, https://dustinbagby.wordpress.com/2011/10/04/was-augustine-sexist/.

11. Beverly Clack, ed., *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 59.

12. Clack, *Misogyny*, 59–60.

13. Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women* (London: Continuum, 1996).

14. Clark, "Adam's Only Companion," 139.

15. For example, he says:

The conclusions from the so far quoted texts are:

1) Augustine maintains strongly the social and physical subordination of women.
2) It is very questionable, however, whether he assumes also an intellectual inferiority of women.
3) His appreciation of the moral superiority of women is incontestable. (van Bavel, "Augustine's View on Women," 17–18)

16. For example, see Judith Chelius Stark, "Augustine on Women: In God's Image, But Less So," in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 215–41; Ruether, "Augustine: Sexuality, Gender, and Women," 54–56; van Bavel, "Augustine's View on Women," 18–29; Wetzel, *Augustine: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 87–90; Levering, *Theology of Augustine*, 173–75; Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (London: Metheun & Co., 1984; repr., New York: Routledge, 1993), 28–33; Janet Martin Soskice, "Trinity and Feminism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 141; and Sarah

Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 288–93.

17. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy," *New Blackfriars* 66, no. 781–2 (July–August 1985), 326. Closely related is Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1993), 94–95.

18. Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1983), 16.

19. Edmund Hill, "Response," *New Blackfriars* 66, no. 785 (November 1985), 503–4.

20. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "St. Augustine and R. R. R. on Women," *New Blackfriars* 67, no. 788 (February 1986), 92–93.

21. Edmund Hill, "St. Augustine—A Male Chauvinist?" 22 November 1994, accessed June 26, 2019, https://www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/MALECHA U.HTM.

22. For example, Rist, *Augustine*, 112–21.

23. For example, Marianne Djuth, "Augustine, Monica, and the Love of Wisdom," *Augustinian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2008), 237–52; Margaret More O'Ferrall, "Monica, the Mother of Augustine: A Reconsideration," *Recherches Augustiennes* 10 (1974), 23–43; Ragnar Holte, "Monica, 'the Philosopher'," *Augustinus* (1994), 293–316, accessed June 26, 2019, http://www.invado.se/holte/monica.pdf, 293–316; and Anne-Marie Bowery, "Monica: The Feminine Face of Christ," in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 69–96. For a more thorough look at the life and character of Monica, the interested reader might consult Gillian Clark, *Monica: An Ordinary Saint* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015).

24. F. B. A. Asiedu, "Following the Example of a Woman: Augustine's Conversion to Christianity in 386," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57, no. 3 (August 2003), 276–306. An article studying this woman is Margaret R. Miles, "Not Nameless but Unnamed: The Woman Torn from Augustine's Side," in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, edited by Judith Chelius Stark (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 167–88. See also Wetzel, *Augustine: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 99–101.

25. Johann G. Roten, "Mary and Woman in Augustine," *University of Dayton Review* 22, no. 3 (1994), 31–51.

26. Erika Ahern, "Misogynist? NOT," *The Philosopher Mom*, accessed June 27, 2019, http://philosophermoms.blogspot.com/2012/03/misogynist-not.html?m=1.

27. Naoki Kamimura, "Patrons and Intellectuals: Augustine's Correspondence with Women," in *Contribution of Women to Con-viviality: In/Ad Spiration to Convivials*, ed. H. Miyamoto (Tokyo: Kyôyûsha, 2019).

28. In fact, this is *not* all. For example, see Gillian Clark, "Adam's Engendering: Augustine's Gender and Creation," *Studies in Church History* 34 (1998), 13–22 and Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 273–81, 288–95. Lamberigts is a helpful source focusing on Augustine's debate with the Pelagian, Julian of Eclanum, over original sin and sexuality; Mathijs Lamberigts, "A Critical Evaluation of Critiques of Augustine's View of Sexuality," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honor of Gerald Bonner*,

ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000), 176–97. Matter's "Christ, God, and Woman in the Thought of St. Augustine" is a good overview of the overall discussion. Also Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, chapter 5. Also the more general overview in Elizabeth A. Clark, Introduction to *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, ed. Elizabeth Clark (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 1–12. Philosopher Kings provides a helpful overview of a good chunk of the debate at "Traditional Christian Views," Philosopher Kings, accessed March 5, 2018, http://www.philosopherkings.co.uk/T raditionalviewsonwomen.html. The interested reader might also consult other articles in Judith Chelius Stark, ed. *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2007), or consider the sources in the Select Bibliography on pages 303–11 of that volume.

29. van Bavel, "Augustine's View on Women," 49.

30. *Augustine: Christian Truth*, 163.

31. "Augustinian Pessimism?" 160.

32. Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 49.

33. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 402. Olsen is also very helpful here; see Glenn W. Olsen, *Supper at Emmaus: Great Themes in Western Culture and Intellectual History* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 100, 110–12, and 124–26.

34. Cahall, "The Value of Augustine's Use/Enjoyment Distinction to Conjugal Love," 123. See also Perry Cahall, "The Trinitarian Structure of St. Augustine's Good of Marriage," *Augustinian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2003), 223–32.

35. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 83. For additional commentary see Willemien Otten, "Augustine on Marriage, Monasticism, and the Community of the Church," *Theological Studies* 59 (1998), 398–99, and Augustine Regan, "The Perennial Value of Augustine's Theology of the Good of Marriage," *Studia Moralia* (1983), 355–56.

36. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* in *On Genesis*; trans. and notes by Edmund Hill; ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002).

37. Brown is very helpful; *The Body and Society*, 402–3. Also Olsen, 110–11. Also John R. Connery, "The Role of Love in Christian Marriage: A Historical Overview," *Communio* 11 (1984), 244–45.

38. Burt, *Friendship and Society*, 83.

39. Cicero, *Laelius: On Friendship*; in *On the Good Life*, trans. Michael Grant (London: Penguin, 1971), 187.

40. For more on this, see Boone, *Conversion and Therapy*, 49–50, 173.

41. Around the year A. D. 401, Augustine wrote in *de Genesi ad litteram* that the man and woman were both made in the image of God and for the contemplation of God; *de Genesi ad litteram* 3.22.34. See also van Bavel, "Augustine's View on Women," 39–40, citing *Civ. Dei*.

42. Evans: "Marriage itself is a good. He wrote at length on its benefits in the *De Bono Coniugali*, describing the perfect friendship of two souls looking to the same heavenly end"; Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, 144.

43.   Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 8.11.

44.   Brown, *The Body and Society*, 402. See also Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, 175. Brown cites Fuchs: "Augustine, although he was more sensitive than others to the social dimension of the couple, was unable to conceive of the possibility that sexuality could hold tenderness, friendship, spirituality . . ."; Eric Fuchs, *Sexual Desire and Love: Origins and History of the Christian Ethic of Sexuality and Marriage* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1979), 117; cited by Brown, *The Body and Society*, 402. I think Augustine is here conceiving of precisely that possibility, although sexuality borrows these things from friendship rather than lending them to it.

45.   See Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 56.

46.   Connery: Augustine "did not limit the rule of charity to the non-sexual aspect of marriage"; "The Role of Love," 246.

47.   On this theme, the interested reader might consult Boone, *Conversion and Therapy*, chapters 5–6.

48.   Jeanrond*, A Theology of Love*, 45.

49.   Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, 45.

50.   Cavadini on Augustine's debate with Julian the Pelagian: "All of the things intended by the Creator as part of the structure of marriage, one's body as sexed, one's sexual organs, their arousal, the union that results, and the procreation to which it is ordered, are experienced as part of an economy of gift. All of these are things one did not give oneself, things not achieved but received"; John C. Cavadini, "Reconsidering Augustine on Marriage and Concupiscence," *Augustinian Studies* 48, no. 1–2 (2017), 195.

51.   On Augustine's lifelong project to understand and affirm the value of the human body, see Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (American Academy of Religion, 1979; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009).

52.   As Augustine initially seems to in *Doct.* 1.26.27, although before the paragraph is finished he affirms that personal identity is found in the composite of soul and body.

53.   This topic takes us well outside the bounds of *b. Coniug.*, although we will return to it in chapter 8. The interested reader might consult Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin* or Hunter, "Augustinian Pessimism?" 165–70.

54.   Wilken notes that Augustine's analysis is "an argument from natural law that is also found in the writings of Greek and Roman philosophers," but points out that Augustine also "cites Genesis 1:28" in *b. Coniug.* Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 321.

55.   See *Conf.* 6.15.25; also Asiedu, "Following the Example of a Woman." van Bavel takes the former position; "Augustine's View on Women," 39. Ellingsen simply suggests that Augustine is justifying *her*; *The Richness of Augustine*, 141. The connection is noted by Hunter, apparently taking the latter position; note 10 to *b. Coniug.* 5.5. Brown apparently takes *both* positions, and I tend to agree; *The Body and Society*, 393.

56.   van Bavel, "Augustine's View on Women," 33.

57.   For a fine analysis of marriage and celibacy in the love of neighbor, see Clair, *Discerning the Good*, chapter 2.

58. For an overview of some other texts in which Augustine addresses this idea, see Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 177. Also van Bavel, "Augustine's View on Women." Here is one of Augustine's more striking departures from Jerome, who says that "the word *better* always implies a comparison with something worse, not a thing absolutely good. . . . It is as though he said, it is better to have one eye than neither." He goes on to suggest that marriage is not "a thing absolutely good" but "only the lesser of two evils"; *Against Jovinianus* 1.9. For more on this passage see Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 248. For more on Augustine's affirmation of marriage as a legitimate way of loving God and neighbor despite the superiority of celibacy, see Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 63–64.

59. Jovinian had asked virgins whether they could really fancy themselves better than Susannah or Sarah; see *Retr*. I.xlviii.1.

60. A more thorough analysis of the superiority of celibacy being a goal of his next book, *de Sancta Virginitate*.

61. A claim directed against Jerome as noted by Hunter, note 3 to *b. Coniug.* 8.8. Also see Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 279–80. Jerome had claimed, "there is no opposite to goodness but badness"; *Against Jovinianus* 1.7.

62. On Augustine's work in his sermons and letters to affirm both goods, see Clair, *Discerning the Good*, chapter 2.

63. Elizabeth Clark; "Adam's Only Companion," 153. Although Augustine says that "marriage and sleeping together" "are necessary for friendship" and "also contribute to the continuation of the human race," the Latin *hinc enim* (Cornish: "for hence") does not imply a secondary reason so much as an explanation of the former. Interestingly, although Aristotle had listed life together as a trait of friendship, "sleeping together" (*concubitus*) approximates the contemporary use of the phrase "sleep together" for "have sex with." Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross; in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 8.5. Aristotle is referring less to their sleeping under the same roof than to their "sharing in discussion and thought" (9.9).

64. Hunter: "Augustine's development of the three-fold good of marriage—offspring, fidelity, and sacrament—was to establish ever more securely in the Christian tradition the value and sanctity of Christian marriage"; General Introduction, 32. Elizabeth Clark notes that Augustine's threefold list structured a document by Pope Pius XI in 1930; Clark, Introduction to *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, 1. Haflidson intriguingly links the three goods of marriage to the stages of spiritual ascent—procreation to the *outer*, fidelity to the *inner*, and sacrament to the *upper*; Ron Haflidson, "Outward, Inward, Upward: Why Three Goods of Marriage for Augustine?" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 1 (2016), 51–68. Cahall connects the three goods of marriage to the persons of the Trinity, citing James Mohler; Cahall, "The Trinitarian Structure." Also Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, 48. The interested reader might also consult J. Patout Burns, "Marital Fidelity as a *Remedium Concupiscentiae*: An Augustinian Proposal," *Augustinian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013), 1–35; Hunter, General Introduction; Clark, *Augustine*, 78; Hunter, "Augustinian Pessimism?" 160–65; Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, 159–67; or other sources engaged by Haflidson.

65. Helpful sources on this connection are Cahall, "The Value of Augustine's Use/Enjoyment Distinction" and "The Trinitarian Structure." Also Regan: "Everything is brought back to his beloved *ordo amoris*"; "The Perennial Value of Augustine's," 365.

66. Beatrice provides a helpful overview of the development of Augustine's thoughts on this matter in Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin*, 61–64. Also Hunter, General Introduction, 19–21, and David G. Hunter, "Augustine on the Body," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 353–64.

67. *De Genesi ad litteram* 9.7.12.

68. See also Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 56.

69. In *Retr.* I.xlviii.2 Augustine explains that he had said that properly regulated sexual pleasure is not sinful because it is a good use of a bad thing, and he notes that he has examined the matter more carefully in writings against the Pelagians. This may be taken as a change of his position, a shift from viewing regulated sexual desire as sinless to viewing it as a good ordering of sinful desire; see Hunter, note 31 to *b. Coniug.* 16.18; also Hunter, "Augustinian Pessimism?" note 40, 173. Alternatively, perhaps Augustine is just telling us why he said this in *b. Congiug.*, not correcting it—the bodily desire which escapes the control of reason during sexual intercourse is always evil, but the pleasure of sex is in itself no more evil than the seed created by God, and the decision to have sex for the sake of having children is likewise sinless.

70. There is in 10.11 a reference to a passage in Rom. 1 where Paul appears to be referring to homosexual acts. Yet there is a reference in 11.12 to a man's using a part of his wife's body "that was not given for" procreation; so Augustine must be referring to kinky marital sexual acts not involving coitus; Hunter concurs; "Augustine, Sermon 354A," note 20, 45. Also Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 140. A close look at the surviving *Vetus Latina*, the pre-Vulgate Latin, versions of Rom. might be helpful toward understanding the connections Augustine is making. However, I leave this task to others.

71. In a Ciceronian dialogue, a Stoic and an Aristotelian agree on this. Nature itself suggests "the marriage of men and women" as "a bond of union" which both leads to children and is also "the root from which the friendships between relations sprang"; Cicero, *De Finibus: A Treatise on the Chief Good and Evil*, trans. C. D. Yonge; in *The Academic Questions, Treatise* De Finibus*, and Tusculan Disputations of M. T. Cicero, with a Sketch of the Greek Philosophers Mentioned by Cicero* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1875), 4.7, page 216). These basic forms of human friendship are the root of all social bonds and justice (*De Finibus* 5.23, page 270).

72. Clair: fidelity "forms the basis of the friendship" in marriage; *Discerning the Good*, 49.

73. I agree with Connery that fidelity "is clearly related to marital love," but cannot agree that "Augustine does not make this connection"; Connery, "The Role of Love," 247. See also Regan, "The Perennial Value of Augustine's," 357–58.

74. van Bavel explains how striking in Augustine's culture is his teaching that wives actually have an authority over their husbands in this matter; "Augustine's

View on Women," 35. Burns emphasizes the marital inequality of Roman society, precisely what Augustine was trying to overcome through biblical exhortation: "The wife never had an exclusive claim over her husband's generative faculties similar to the one he exercised over hers"; Burns, "Marital Fidelity as a *Remedium Concupiscentiae*," 2; see also Burns, "Marital Fidelity," 5. See also Roten, "Mary and Woman in Augustine," 41.

75. Hunter has some helpful commentary on this theme in Augustine's sermons in "Augustine, Sermon 354A," 47–50.

76. On the venality of this sin, see van Bavel, "Augustine's View on Women," 34, and Hunter, "Augustine, Sermon 354A," 45–47.

77. On the good marriage brings out of concupiscence, see Regan, "The Perennial Value of Augustine's," 362–63.

78. Olsen is helpful in *Supper at Emmaus*, 126.

79. Helpful commentary may be found in Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 270–72.

80. A more mature Augustine would regret his neglect of Heb. 11:19, stating that it would have been better to profess that Abraham believed sacrificing his son would lead to Isaac's resurrection; *Retr.* I.xlviii.3

81. For helpful commentary, see Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 279.

82. Connery: "The role he gave love is particularly evident in what he and his followers said about marriage as a sacrament. Following St. Paul they present marriage as the sign of Christ's love for the Church and make this love the model for the love of the spouses for each other"; "The Role of Love in Christian Marriage," 256.

83. For more analysis of celibacy as a direct love of God and neighbor, see Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 56–59, 72.

84. Burns: "Marriage also functioned as a remedy for concupiscence. . . . he believed the chronic disease of humanity could be contained and even brought into remission . . ."; "Marital Fidelity," 6.

85. Burns, "Marital Fidelity," 19.

86. To explore this foreign country of the past, one might spend some time in Brown, *The Body and Society*; also Hunter, "Augustine and the Making of Marriage," 63–85, and Olsen, *Supper at Emmaus*, chapter 4.

87. On how this continues well past birth, see Burns, "Marital Fidelity," 20–21.

88. *De Genesi ad litteram* 9.7.12.

89. Cavadini: "Marriage makes it so that concupiscence, which is inherently disordered and without aim or structure, is ordered towards a good of reason and a good of human nature, namely, procreation and faithful partnership of husband and wife"; Cavadini, "Reconsidering Augustine on Marriage and Concupiscence," 192.

90. Burns offers his own fine account, which overlaps on some points with mine; "Marital Fidelity," 19–32.

91. On this theme see Burns, "Marital Fidelity," 22–25.

92. Burns, "Marital Fidelity," 30.

93. See Connery, "The Role of Love," 245, note 5.

94. Clair is helpful on the ranking of goods such as obedience and celibacy; Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 66–74.

95. Or, as this marital behavior is considered in the sermons as analyzed by Hunter, the second-best marital behavior—"not only not sinful, but even . . . an act of holiness"; "an act of charity, mercy, and continence"; "Augustine, Sermon 354A," 50 60.

96. Here I must disagree (a little) with Carol Harrison, who says that Augustine "entertains the idea of the marriage as a sexual relationship, but at the same time, one which exists independently of any desire for procreation" (*Augustine: Christian Truth*, 163). In fact, this scenario is only how marriage heals a corruption of the soul.

97. On how this analysis incorporates some Jovinian insights, see Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, chapter 7.

98. van Bavel: "In the question of subordination of women, Augustine is not only influenced by the social ideas of his time, but also—and perhaps more—by the Bible"; "Augustine's View on Women," 52. Hunter: "Augustine's understanding of marital fidelity developed largely out of his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7 . . ."; "Augustine, Sermon 354A," 45. See also Regan, "The Perennial Value of Augustine's," 358.

99. There are three parts of the soul, the rational part, the spirited or honor-loving part, and the appetitive part which desires physical things. In a well-ordered soul, the rational part governs and persuades the spirited part to enforce its governance; as C. S. Lewis summarizes, "The head rules the belly through the chest"; Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 24.

100. Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy* 1.24.

101. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (2d ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984; 1st ed. 1981. Several ethicists representing this perspective write at Public Discourse, such as Robert George and Patrick Lee; see Ryan S. Anderson, ed., *Public Discourse*, accessed June 26, 2019, http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com.

102. MacIntyre is very helpful in explaining this. See *After Virtue*, 54–61.

103. Roland-Gosselin considers the different moral concepts in Augustinian ethics and the theistic source of his notion of moral obligation, an idea not available to pagan philosophy; Roland-Gosselin, "St. Augustine's System of Morals".

104. See chapter 1, on *vera Rel.* 26.48.

105. Latin *venia*. Cornish's translation here uses "pardon" rather than "excuse." Augustine, *Of the Good of Marriage*, trans. C. L. Cornish; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887).

106. Here Augustine is similar to Jerome: "If a wish be expressed, it confers a right; if a thing is only called pardonable, we are wrong in using it" (*Against Jovinianus* 1.8).

107. Delightfully attentive to this aspect of Augustine's thought, and to how his pastoral work informs his theological speculations, is Williams, *On Augustine*. See also Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 60.

108. One reads, for example, Lewis's chapter on "Good Infection" in *Mere Christianity* and finds the discussion of the Trinity becoming a discussion of the Atonement with no clear transition; one finds the next chapter, "The Obstinate Toy Soldiers," covering both the Incarnation *and* the Atonement. This is very proper, since one

doctrine affects and fades into the other; Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, chapters 4–5. Fitzgerald: "Augustine did not need, nor would he have understood, the way that modern theology develops its ideas in separate tracts (Christology, pneumatology, protology, epistemology, etc.)." Allan Fitzgerald, "Jesus Christ, the Knowledge and Wisdom of God," In *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 108–121, 119.

109. These interconnections of the different areas of theology come across clearly in Hunter, General Introduction and Introduction. Also Regan, "The Perennial Value of Augustine's," 353.

110. A question considered in Gilbert Meilaender, "Sweet Necessities: Food, Sex, and Saint Augustine," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 3–18.

111. Given Augustine's teleological approach, neither action would be right if it *undermines* a purpose of sex by preventing procreation or by mistreating each other in a way that undermines marital friendship.

112. Johnson: "Augustine's epistemology . . . led him to think of such activity as directed toward the good of procreation. To define what is essential about something, Augustine looked for what is distinctive about it as compared to other similar things. In the case of sexual intercourse, the distinctive feature is that, alone among all the forms of human intercourse, it leads to procreation." He adds that according to this way of thinking, sexual activity might well contribute to "other goods"; yet these are not what "perfects the activity in its particular nature;" only the essential property can add that perfection. James Turner Johnson, Comment on Gilbert Meileander, "Sweet Necessities: Food, Sex, and Saint Augustine," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2001), 508. Similarly, Cavadini, "Reconsidering Augustine on Marriage and Concupiscence" helpfully explains that, in Augustine's metaethics, a proper sexual pleasure is one with an object other than itself, namely its natural object, procreation.

113. Lamberigts references Augustine's "defective reading of 1 Cor 7:6" in "A Critical Evaluation of Critiques of Augustine's View of Sexuality," 183. Augustine appears to admit that classifying marital sex for pleasure as sin, given its usefulness in preventing adultery and masturbation, depends on his interpretation of 1 Cor. 7; *Ench.* 21.78.

114. Augustine himself did later; or, at least, he had a different reading of Genesis. See, for example, Hunter, General Introduction, 20 and Elizabeth Clark, "Adam's Only Companion."

115. For an older and Catholic source of such arguments and a more recent source from a Baptist scholar and minister: Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae: Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Paul VI, On the Regulation of Birth*, NewAdvent.org, accessed December 6, 2017, http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_pa06hv.htm and Albert R. Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015).

116. Kolbet on ancient philosophy: "Understanding what is properly ours and seeking a corresponding happiness, is therefore not primarily about measuring a particular psychic state that we identify as 'happy.' It has more to do with engaging

in activities that promote the optimal functioning of one's natural capacities. For any organism, 'happiness' is the word for the condition where it is using its natural faculties as they are meant to be used and realizing, thereby, its potential"; Paul R. Kolbet, "Augustine among the Ancient Therapists," in *Augustine and Psychology*, ed. Sandra Dixon, John Doody and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 95. Mary T. Clark: "Happiness is therefore not to be located in a person's subjective feelings, nor even in the virtues adorning the human being. There is no true human perfection apart from God; the vision of God will be the true fulfillment of the human person"; *Augustine*, 28–29. Gilson: "All men desire happiness. But in what does happiness consist? . . . The problem of happiness, then, amounts to this: to know what one should desire in order to be happy, and to know how to obtain it"; Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, 4. Worsley: "On Augustine's account, joy emerges from the relationship between a person and a thing; joy is a systems-level feature based upon a person's (affective) desire for the object, their intention in having the object (whether it is desired for enjoyment or for use), and, to some extent, their having (or resting in or uniting with or laying hold of) that object"; Worsley, "Augustine on Beatific Enjoyment"; https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.11 11/heyj.12929; accessed March 8, 2018, 1. Kent: Augustine's language concerning happiness denotes "a stable condition open to assessment by objective standards: a condition in many respects analogous to health, not merely the ephemeral, subjective feeling that present-day English speakers often refer to as 'happiness;'" Kent, "Augustine's Ethics," 207.

117. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1.13.

118. Such as Lactantius, *Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, 33; Ambrose, *On the Duties*, 2.2; Augustine, *Letter 118*; and Augustine, *City of God*, 19.1–3.

119. Lactantius, *Epitome*, 35, 52, and 67.

120. Ambrose, *On the Duties*, 2.2; Augustine, *City of God*, 19.4.

121. Augustine, *Letter 118*, 3.17, 3.22, and 4.23.

122. Epicurus might appear to be an exception here; but even he locates happiness in relation to an account of human nature and explains that happiness requires virtue.

123. I am not fully comfortable with Wilken's estimate that natural law is only a "minor tributary" to Augustine; Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 321.

124. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter II.

125. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), First Section.

126. Kant, *Grounding*, 7.

Metaphysics and the Problem of Evil according to Authority

Enchiridion

The *Enchiridion* of Augustine bears the same name as the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus the Stoic, with good reason. *Enchiridion* is a Latin term (and before that a Greek one) which can be translated as "handbook," and these texts are handbooks of theory or doctrine. In English, we could refer to the work as Augustine's *Handbook*, as the *Enchiridion*, or by the fuller title *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity*. Or we could just call it the *Faith, Hope, and Charity*, a name given to it by Augustine himself in its final paragraph (*Ench.* 32.122), as he admits that it may be too long to call it a handbook! We could even call it the *Enchiridion to Laurence*, since it is addressed to a Laurence—rather, a *Laurentius*. Various names have been used by his readers. In any case, it is a handbook on, or a summary of, Christian doctrine and practice as summarized under the rubric of faith, hope, and love.

Ench. covers pretty much the whole range of Augustinian theology in summary form. So, of course, it fits here as the topic of chapter 7 of this book: It covers the theology of desire, and it covers metaphysics and the problem of evil. It relies very much on authority. There are three quotations from the Bible in the first paragraph! Perhaps it is not a *perfect* fit. Theology of desire is the main *point* of the text, if perhaps not its main *focus*. Metaphysics and the problem of evil are neither the main point nor focus. What they *are*, however, is an essential component of the whole structure of Augustinian theology, a structure telling us something about what we should desire. *Ench.* is thus a good illustration of the fact that Augustine's theology is a carefully integrated whole, each part connected to all the others. One may see from *Ench.* how desire, metaphysics, the theology of evil, soteriology, and other topics are all connected. So it fits my thesis perfectly, if perhaps not its placement in this particular chapter!

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Augustine tells us in *Retr.* that Laurentius had written to him asking for a short and portable book summarizing Christian theology. As it happens, "Nothing further is known about the Laurence to whom the book is addressed."[1] We can, however, state that *Ench.* is a pretty late text, from A. D. 421 or somewhen thenabouts.[2]

A few words on the prologue would be in order. Augustine opens by expressing the same desire he had said (way back in *vera Rel.*) was a correct one, the desire that others know and love God. He says, "My dearest son Laurence, it would be impossible to say how much your learning delights me, and how much I desire that you should be wise . . ." (*Ench.* 1.1).[3] He elaborates on how we should understand wisdom—biblically, not according to worldly standards. In fact, "wisdom is the same as piety," and in fact wisdom could even be defined as "worship of God" (1.2). So, since Laurentius had wanted a handbook on wisdom, what he needs is a handbook on how we should worship God! And "God is to be worshiped with faith, hope and love" (1.3). This is the thesis of *Ench.*, and its structure; however, the section on faith will be much longer than those on hope and love.[4]

Those things which we should believe, hope for, and love "are the most important things, or rather the only things," that matter in religion (*Ench.* 1.4). The truths about them should be defended by reason, either by empirical reasoning or by *a priori* reasoning (as we now call these methods of reasoning), and accepted on faith otherwise. Plainly, the theme of rightly ordered loves is central to what Augustine thinks is important in theology. What we should love *and* desire in *seeking*—but merely *love* in having—is, ultimately, God:

> When a mind is filled with the beginning of that faith which works through love, it progresses by a good life even toward that vision, in which holy and perfect hearts know that unspeakable beauty, the full vision of which is the highest happiness. This is without doubt what you are seeking, what we must hold first and last, beginning with faith and ending with vision. (1.5)

This should put an end to any misunderstandings that Augustinian theology is about abandoning ourselves in the love of God or that Augustine wants to get the facts right as an end in and by itself. No doubt it *is* an end in itself to get the facts right, but getting the facts right and loving God as we ought are so intimately connected that we cannot separate them and can barely even distinguish them. Nor do we lose ourselves or our interests in the love of God;[5] rather, we *find* ourselves and our own happiness—as inherently loving beings loving the being who can satisfy all our desires.[6] Augustine writes to Laurentius in order "that your heart be set on fire by with great love" (1.6). This love is inseparable from hope and faith, and they from it and from each other (2.7-8).[7]

Let us consider, then, this overview from Augustine of his own theology, first with a look at the content of faith as it concerns evil and metaphysics, second with a look at the content of faith as it concerns redemption, and finally with a look at hope and love.[8]

Before beginning, we should note how Augustine's dependence on authority in *Ench.* is worked into the structure of the text. At *Ench.* 2.7 he advises Laurentius (and us) to "Think of the creed and the Lord's Prayer." Then he does so himself: The long passage expounding on faith is structured more or less after the same pattern as the Nicene Creed to which it includes the occasional reference; then the short passage on hope is structured by the Lord's Prayer.[9] We might view the *Ench.* as a commentary on these texts just as well as we can view it as a letter. Indeed, it is both of these things. It is a handbook, sent as a letter to a friend, commenting on the Nicene Creed and the Lord's Prayer and thereby summarizing the basics of Christian theology as well as Augustine knows how. It is, perhaps, the only text of its kind; it is the *Enchiridion*.

FAITH: REALITY AND EVIL

In this passage of *Ench.* Augustine will demonstrate (again) that a good response to the problem of evil requires a good account of metaphysics. Evil can only be considered in relation to good. This is not, of course, symmetrical: Good can be considered without relation to evil, since evil depends on good but not vice versa.[10] Moreover, good must be considered as an aspect of *reality*. So understanding evil requires understanding metaphysics.

Here Augustine will do just this, using some new language but presenting an account much like those we have already seen. Evil cannot be understood apart from an understanding of desire. Evil begins when the will goes astray, turning from God. Evil involves the corruption of our desires, our tendency to desire lesser goods rather than God. Evil does not erase our innate desire for happiness in God, although we are confused and hardly know its meaning anymore.[11]

Augustine points out that, for the sake of properly worshiping God, we do not need to know anything in particular about what was studied by "those whom the Greeks call *physikoi*," whom we now call scientists (*Ench.* 2.9). "For a Christian it is enough to believe that the cause of created things" is only the goodness of God, to believe that everything which exists is either God or created by God, and to accept orthodox Trinitarianism. This is a solid foundation for an analysis of metaphysics and evil. Since God is good and creator of all (save himself) and since God is omnipotent, it is guaranteed that

evil is not itself a thing. These pious premises will preserve us from meta-physical error. Augustine:

> By this Trinity, supremely, equally, and unchangeably good, all things have been created: they are not supremely, equally, or unchangeably good, but even when they are considered individually, each one of them is good; and at the same time all things are very good, since in all these things consists the wonderful beauty of the universe. (3.10)

Much of this is familiar territory for us; we saw it in *Nat. b.* and *Lib. Arb.* Here we have another important aspect of Augustine's metaphysics of which little has been made so far in this book: that the order of the whole is a great good. Augustine echoes some words from the creation narrative in Genesis, interpreting them as applying to this same principle: Things God created are, individually, good, and the *whole* is *very* good.

With this foundation laid, it is necessary to consider evil. It is nothing but "a removal of good," a deprivation of the goodness in things created by God (*Ench.* 3.11). God would only allow this if he were able to "bring good even out of evil." The Augustinian analysis of evil is rich and multifaceted, and the doctrine that God brings good out of evil is a crucial component. The enormous importance of the ordered arrangement of the whole helps to explain why this matters so much. God's creativity and omnipotence allow him to bring evil up into an ordered whole, like an artist incorporating a small ugly thing into a big and beautiful work of art.[12]

> So all things are good, since the maker of all things is supremely good. But since they are not supremely and unchangeably good like their creator, in them goodness can be decreased and increased. For good to be decreased is evil, even though, however much of it is decreased, some of it must remain for the thing to exist at all, if it does still exist. (*Ench.* 4.12)

This is typical Augustine. God is supremely good, the greatest good. God's goodness ensures that whatever else exists is good (even apart from the metaphysical argumentation based on limit, form, and order in *Nat. b.*). Yet these other good things are less good than God, such that to them is open the possibility of a loss of their goodness, which would be an evil. Since things cannot exist without good, if evil were to absolutely fill a thing, it would lose its very existence. Just as illness in the body cannot increase to the point where it totally replaces health unless the body thereby ceases to be a body at all, so the increase in evil in a thing guarantees that it will cease to exist. As long as that has not happened, some goodness remains.

"This leads to a surprising conclusion," that "only what is good is bad," since only what has goodness is capable of existence and thus of having

less goodness than it should, i.e. of being evil (*Ench.* 4.13). This is not to say that only goodness is badness—just that only a thing with some good can be bad. Augustine explains that "the rule of the logicians" that "two contraries cannot exist simultaneously in one thing" is false (4.14). Not that Augustine has any problem with logic. Logic got him to this conclusion! What is wrong is a rule certain logicians have taught. It is still a reliable principle based on experience, he explains; but it has at least this exception—that a thing defined by one quality can also be defined by a contrary quality. The devil, for example, is defined by evil, but if we were to give a metaphysical definition of him—such as Augustine hints we can at *vera Rel.* 13.26 when he says the devil is good insofar as he is an angel—we would also define him as good. (All the same, if we take the rule at face value, since evil does *not* exist, two contraries do not necessarily *exist* in a thing at the same time.)

As for evil, it has its origins in the misuse of free will, itself one of the gifts with which God created "the good nature of angels and men" (*Ench.* 4.15). Now it does us no particular good to know the causes of physical things, but "we must know the causes of good and evil things" as much as we are able so as to "avoid those same errors and troubles" (5.16). Here we might have expected Augustine to go into an extended analysis of free will such as in *Lib. Arb.*, or perhaps to look carefully at the historical account of those primal sins of the devil and Adam. Instead, he begins an extended analysis of *error*. Why? Probably there is a simple reason. Evodius (in the text of *Lib. Arb.*) and Augustine (when he was finishing up his time in Italy, a new Christian with many questions and eager to refute the Manicheans) *needed* a close look at the metaphysics. Probably Laurentius had less need for metaphysics or for a careful exegesis of Genesis. Augustine thought his friend would have more need of some guidance on how to think about errors so as to avoid them, along with a bit of advice on the ethics (or lack thereof) of lying. More generally, since he probably knew that Laurentius would not be the only one reading *Ench.*,[13] Augustine probably thought that people wanting a short handbook on Christian doctrine and ethics did not need an extended metaphysical analysis of free will or an extended exegesis of Genesis.

And so Augustine gives them, and us, an analysis of error and lying.[14] For our purposes, we may skim over it. All error is ignorance, but not vice versa, since an ignorant person aware of his ignorance and not presuming to know more than he does is not in error (*Ench.* 5.17). Augustine disagrees with those who say lying is sometimes "a good and religious thing" (6.18). Lying is always sinful, although the motive of a lie makes quite a difference to how much. Words are something of an institution (instituted, no doubt, by God rather than man), and their purpose was to communicate our own thoughts (7.22). Augustine considers it a sin to use things against their purposes (as we

saw in *b. Coniug.* 9.9); hence, he tells us here, lying is always a sin. Perhaps we can sometimes do good by lying. But the same is true of stealing if we take from the rich who won't miss it and give to the poor who need it (or even, conceivably, adultery, if it might perhaps save a life), but that does not make them permissible.

Now "error in itself . . . is always an evil" (*Ench.* 6.19), although errors sometimes have happy results. (Augustine refers at 5.17 to a happy error when he got lost and missed the bit of road occupied by a dangerous band of Circumcellions.[15]) The most important errors detract from "the path we take to God, which is the path of faith working through love" (7.21). So the most important errors are those that lead to bad doctrine or bad loves.

"Having treated these matters with the brevity that a book like this demands," Augustine is ready to move to (or to resume) other matters (*Ench.* 8.23). We need to know what is necessary "to travel along the road that leads to the kingdom where" there is no evil. Knowing requires believing that all good is from God and all evil from "the will of a changeable good falling away from the unchangeable good, first the will of an angel, then the will of a human being." These are doctrines we have seen in *Lib. Arb.*: God is good and the cause of all other good, and evil comes from the will of, first, the devil and, second, Adam. That will's sinfulness was in its turning away from the *summum bonum* and toward lesser good. That is "the first evil," and the second is the ignorance and difficulty considered in *Lib. Arb.*, the just punishment for sin (8.24). This punishment is passed on from Adam and Eve to all their descendants because Adam is the root of the human race and because the passing on of human nature from one generation to the next involves the fundamental disorder in our nature, the conquering of reason by fleshly desire—concupiscence (8.26).

This difficulty, we must remember, is an affliction of our desires, a tendency to desire lesser goods rather than the *summum bonum*. This leads to unhappiness: "when the mind gains the things it desires, however harmful and empty they may be, since it does not realize their true nature because of its error, it is either overcome with a sick pleasure or inflated with an empty joy" (*Ench.* 8.24). These have the nature of "deprivation, from which all the unhappiness of rational nature flows." The same old teaching: Our desires are meant for God, and when they turn towards lesser goods they are never satisfied. Death also follows (8.25). Yet, in the midst of this suffering, we still desire happiness—which can only be found in God, though in our ignorance we fail to recognize this. And, although our punishment is just and God is just, God is also merciful, and brings good out of this evil (8.27). God "judged it better to bring good out of evil than to allow nothing evil to exist."

Thus, we have redemption, which Augustine now considers in detail.

FAITH: REDEMPTION

This theological analysis relying on authority (there are endless references to the letters of Paul) is a wonderful source for Augustine's thoughts on the Incarnation, the possibility of purgatory, and much besides. Augustine considers these matters with a close attention to human nature. As we have already seen in texts such as *Nat. b.* and *Lib. Arb.*, human nature is a desiring one. And redemption involves our desires. Forgiveness of sin requires hearts that are so renewed in the love of God and neighbor that they are beginning to love their enemies. For the healing of our desires we need grace, and we should seek it with prayer and in the context of the church.[16] Of course, the Incarnation is an indispensable act of grace on God's part; Christ is able to redeem us from our corrupted desires because *he* has none. He is free of original sin because of the virgin birth. He has human nature, and thus is able to be an effective savior of humans; but his human nature is uncorrupted because the corruption is passed on through that which his conception lacked—the concupiscence of sexual intercourse.

In order to understand our redemption, we must be clear on why we need it in the first place. We can no longer employ free will to do good (*Ench.* 9.30). We lost that ability when we sinned the first time. One who has killed himself cannot make himself alive again, and a race that corrupted itself through free will loses it. As Phil. 2:13 says, God works in us to enable us even to will to do any good (9.32). God "makes the good will of man ready for his help and helps the will he has made ready." A good will "precedes many of God's gifts," but also "is itself one of the gifts." Our redemption relies on faith, but even faith is a gift from God (9.31).

"So the human race was justly held in condemnation, and all its members were children of wrath" (*Ench.* 10.33). Our condemnation is due to original sin, but becomes worse due to the many sins we add to it. We need "a mediator, that is, a reconciler, to appease this wrath by the offering of a unique sacrifice, of which all the sacrifices of the law and the prophets were shadows." This mediator, Christ, requires much explanation. Augustine quotes John 1:14, adding that we must "believe in the only Son of God the almighty Father, born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary" (10.34). He explains what it means for the Word to take on flesh—not that God was "changed into flesh," but that God took on flesh. The word "flesh" is a metonym, referring to the whole of human nature—both body and soul—and not only to the body. This nature was taken on whole and uncorrupted by sin, for it was taken on when God the Son took to himself a man who was born not through the usual concupiscence—"conceived not by desire but by the faith of his mother." Again, "His begetting or conception, then, was not due to the pleasure of carnal concupiscence, and so he contracted no sin from his origin . . ." (13.41).

Christ "alone was able to be born in such a way that he had no need to be reborn" (14.48).

In remarking that Christ is not conceived by desire, Augustine is no doubt thinking of John's remark that Jesus was not born of a husband's will (John 1:13). This is interesting: Desire occupies a central role in the theology of sin and in the theology of redemption (and that in addition to what we saw in *vera Rel.* when Christ showed us how to love). Original sin, including ignorance and difficulty, is passed on through desire.[17] It is not that desire is itself evil; it is a natural faculty given us by God for the seeking of good, primarily himself. Sin passes on through desire only because it is a desire that has gone wrong—a corrupted desire in which fleshly appetites overrule reason. Original sin is *not* passed on to Christ because he is born free of this.

Now this human nature taken on by God is actually a created being. Not that the divine nature itself becomes a created being in the Incarnation. One of the persons who is God takes on a created human being. Echoing both the Bible and the Creed, Augustine says, "So Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is God and man: God before all worlds, man in our world: God because he is the Word of God—for *the Word was God*—and man because a rational soul and flesh were joined to the Word in one person" (*Ench.* 10.35). Here are satisfied the basic requirements for orthodox Christology: Christ is fully God and fully human, yet is one person. And although this person is not created but was always God, the human being joined to him is a created being. The created human was joined to the Word of God at the very moment he began to exist (12.38, 12.40). Although in his divine nature he is God himself and thus neither has nor needs grace, in his human nature he is full of grace (10.35-36). This Son of God and Man was born of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit, who is fully God just as the Father and the Son (11.37).

Though free from sinful nature through the virgin conception and having committed no sins, Christ is said by Paul to have become sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Augustine explains two reasons why (*Ench.* 13.41). For "he came in the likeness of sinful flesh," and in the Torah "sacrifices for sins were called sins," and Christ "was the true sacrifice for sins. . . ." Christ is a sacrifice for sin able to reconcile man to God. Because in this nature, he also has the likeness of sin yet renounces sin; his sacrifice is relevant to sin. Moreover, his resurrection is a sign of the restoration of our corrupted human nature.

Augustine is talking about the doctrine of the atonement, and much that might be said concerning the atonement is not said here. Well, Augustine is only one theologian, and *Ench.* is a short text. The interested reader might consider some other remarks on the atonement in *vera Rel.* considered in chapter 1, as well as some sources suggested there. In any case, we can note that there seems to be a sense here of the ancient patristic idea that *human nature itself*, and not just individuals, needed saving, and that this is why it was necessary

for God the Son to take on human nature (a conclusion which, as I understand it, arose from early debates about whether Christ had a human soul).

At any rate, this death and resurrection of Christ, and the overcoming of sin and the healing of our nature which accompany them, may be extended to anyone. We partake of this grace through "the great mystery (*sacramentum*) of baptism" (*Ench.* 13.42). This baptism is indeed in Augustine's theology a sacrament, in that grace comes through it. From an infant suffering only from the corruption of our nature inherited from Adam to the adult who has added to this many willful sins, *all* who are baptized die to *all* sin. The death, burial, resurrection, and ascension "are historical facts and not merely mystical utterances" (14.53), and the forgiveness of sin signified by baptism is also real (14.52).

Why is this little ritual so important? It seems to me that Augustine's theology of sin, the Incarnation, the atonement, and even baptism are to be understood in terms of natures. Such things as natures, essences, and substances are real. However, we must not conceive of human nature in physical terms as if it were, say, a poisoned swimming pool which Christ makes clean by jumping into it with an antidote, drowning in the process. Augustine will urge us to not think of these matters in carnal terms.

The whole picture is something like this. Humans were designed with a God-directed nature—we were to love and obey him. Yet we were given free will (exercised by our progenitor, Adam) to *choose* this. We chose poorly, breaking God's command and pursuing lesser goods. The just punishment was the corruption of our nature, so that we tend to desire lesser goods and to mistake them for greater. God the Son mercifully took on this nature. Or at least he took on the body-and-soul human character but (through being conceived by the Holy Spirit and Mary's faith rather than by carnal desire) without its disorder. He lived a totally sinless life, loving as he ought and obeying God perfectly. By his divinity goodness is restored, directly by God, to that specimen of human nature which he bore[18] and by his sinlessness he made himself a worthy sacrifice for sin. By his restoration of human nature in his own person, he made possible the restoration of the same to all others. There ought to be some means by which this restoration is extended to them. This is baptism. Since human nature is not a *physical* thing, we should not presume that it has anything to do with the water as such. What is clear is that in baptism we imitate and follow Christ, and that this is the means ordained by God for a sinner's own instantiation of human nature to receive healing from Christ's human nature. Beyond that, *how* it works is no doubt something of a mystery to Augustine; after all, the Latin noun *sacramentum* is "mystery" no less than "sacrament."

This is my understanding of the creation, sin, and redemption narrative Augustine is talking about, with particular attention to human nature and

its desiderative aspect. (Christian readers uncomfortable with all this but comfortable with C. S. Lewis might recall that he also said something a little like this.[19]) Still, Augustine is not writing the Word of God—just struggling to understand it. Objections to such a theology are certainly possible, such as, perhaps, the Reformation claim that the Bible has a doctrine of sin and forgiveness employing concepts better understood by courtroom metaphors than medical ones.[20]

Moving on through the topics of the Nicene Creed, Augustine turns to the Holy Spirit and the Church. The Holy Spirit is fully God, "to complete that Trinity which is God" (*Ench.* 15.56). And the church is "the rational part of creation which belongs to the free city of Jerusalem," that is, the community of all rational beings who love God. (The seasoned Augustinian will recognize that this is the community described in *Civ. Dei* as "the City of God." Augustine refers to these communities, of those that do and do not love God, as "the two cities" here in *Ench.*, at 29.111.) Deceased saints are part of the church (14.57). It also includes the angels (15.58), who perpetually delight in the goodness of God (16.62). The part of the church we know now, however, sojourns on earth and is composed of humans only. Yet we have hope of knowing the same joy the angels know (16.63). In this community, humans and angels will love each other in their loving of God. As we journey thereto we are not without sin due to our corrupted "human impulses" (17.64). Yet these sins are less serious. And they are treated by the church with penance (17.65), and our "tiny daily sins" are forgiven through regularly saying the Lord's Prayer (19.71). Sins are not forgiven without repentance (18.67), and Augustine elaborates on the good works which accompany saving faith.

Augustine considers these works under the aspect of almsgiving. "And so the Lord's words, *Give alms, and everything is clean for you*, apply to any work of mercy that benefits somebody" (*Ench.* 19.72). This includes, of course, the conventional works of help and charity. But "there are many kinds of alms, and when we do them we receive help for the forgiveness of our sins."[21] There is no greater alm than "forgiving from our heart a sin that somebody has committed against us" (19.73). So also loving our enemies; we should strive for this, but even one "who has not yet progressed so far as to love his enemy nevertheless forgives from his heart," and his desire for forgiveness for himself will be satisfied, when he prays the Lord's Prayer. As we desire God's forgiveness for ourselves, we must also desire good for our enemies and desire to be *able* to love them if we cannot *yet* desire their good, and make the first steps toward this by forgiving. Although he does not say it explicitly, Augustine has shown that Christ's requirements for the forgiveness of our own sins heal our desires in conformity with the Golden Rule.

God, who is truth, does not lie; so it is true when Christ tells us that we cannot be forgiven if we do not forgive others (*Ench.* 20.74). And there is no

forgiveness for those who do not have faith in Christ, as Paul says (20.75). How then is it the case that, as Christ says in Luke 11:14, "*Give alms, and everything is clean for you*?" Augustine posits a plausible solution: that in order really to give alms we must give them *properly* (20.76). And this requires giving alms to *ourselves*. But *this* requires doing what is healthy for our souls, and *this* means loving righteousness rather than wickedness (20.77). We must not love "by the world's standards," but by God's. Thus, in order to have any sins forgiven through almsgiving, we must at least make a beginning of having our loves reordered.

Toward the end of his discussion of the forgiveness of sins, Augustine returns to a familiar topic (*Ench.* 22.81). We sin because of ignorance and difficulty, as we saw in *Lib. Arb.* For the ability to see what is good and the ability to desire it, we must pray for help, for we need grace to overcome these problems. Yet for the forgiveness of sins, we must also look to the church, for no sins are forgiven apart from the church (22.83).

Before wrapping up the content of faith with the Nicene Creed's eschatology, we must consider *Ench.* 18.68-69 on desire. There is an intriguing passage in 1 Cor. 3 in which Paul tells us that some of our works—those made of such as wood or straw—will be burned while others—those of gold and silver and gemstones—will be saved. Paul says that we build on the foundation of Christ. Augustine suggests that "By wood, clay, and straw we can reasonably understand desires for worldly things . . . so strong that they cannot be lost without mental agony" (18.68). Some of our work "is burnt up, since the loss of things we possess with love never happens without pain. . . ." The "agony" of losing what we love "burns us." So the fire is the loss of those goods which are temporal and lesser. The works built on the foundation of Christ are our loves or our desires. Yet one with carnal desires "is saved by fire" if he prefers Christ to what he loses, since he built on the right foundation. Until we learn to love as we ought, we need such purification. Augustine considers the doctrine of purgatory plausible, though he does not affirm it here. It may piously be asked whether "after this life" there might be a time of such a purification of our desires—until such time, however long that may be, as we have learned to love God as we ought (18.69).

The Nicene Creed concludes with eschatology, specifically the resurrection of the dead. Augustine confesses that he cannot properly address the usual questions about this doctrine in a short handbook, but insists that Christians "must in no way doubt" that the bodily resurrection will occur for all humans (*Ench.* 23.84). Yet he addresses some questions all the same, showing as he does that he seeks the redemption of heaven and earth, as scripture and tradition both require, rather than the immortality of a disembodied soul. We will look at some of these questions here. The first question concerns unborn fetuses (23.85).[22] He suspects that an unformed fetus, meaning one in which

there is not yet a soul organizing the fetal body, will merely cease to exist.[23] However, for those fetuses with souls, the resurrection will occur, and any lack of completion in the body-soul arrangement will be completed much as any imperfection in the dead body of an aged, maimed, or infirm adult will be perfected at the resurrection. Augustine does not know when life begins in the womb, although he is quite sure that no one who ever died will "be excluded from the resurrection of the dead" (23.86). Nor will any soul fail to have a complete human body at the resurrection, even in such cases as Siamese twins (23.87).

Now one of the most ancient and persistent questions about the resurrection concerns the destiny of all the different body parts and bits of matter that have at one point or another been a part of someone's body. Augustine looks at this question briefly and gives a hylomorphist response (*Ench.* 23.88-89). Matter by itself does not make a human body, or indeed any kind of thing at all. Matter by itself is just *stuff*, not a rock or a tree or part of the body of a horse or a human. Some immaterial substance is necessary to make a thing out of matter, and in the case of a living body, a *soul* is necessary to make it such. So how will all the different parts of my body be restored at the resurrection, and will God be forced to reconstruct me by reattaching enormous quantities of hair and fingernails? No. In order to reconstruct my particular body-soul arrangement and for me to have the same body, God only needs to reconstitute me using my matter. The matter in a bit of hair, for example, need not be in its original arrangement as hair; it only needs to be arranged by the same soul. Just as a sculptor who melts down his statue and reconstitutes it from the same bronze can complete his tasks without each bit of bronze being restored to its original place, so God can and will rearrange all the bits of matter that go with my body by uniting them to my soul. No more specificity than this is needed. This is why hylomorphism makes such an interesting reflection on the resurrection: It teaches that matter by itself is not specific in the first place![24] This may seem like too much matter, enough to make us all into enormous resurrected giants, since so *much* matter becomes a part of me and then stops being a part of me during my lifetime. The answer is ready to hand: On a sufficiently stringent hylomorphist metaphysics, matter by itself does not even have the property of *size*. Hence, I would be a normal size after the resurrection no matter how much extra matter has at some point been organized by my soul.

And what of the most entertaining way of asking these questions? What of the bits of matter that were in *my* body at death and then became first dirt, then a plant, then part of a cow, and finally part of *another* man's body who then died with them? Who gets *that* bit of matter at the resurrection? Augustine suggests a metaphysical principle that will resolve such cases: A bit of matter belongs to the body which it was *first* a part of. So each bit of matter can be claimed by, at most, one soul.

I have dwelt on this topic a bit because it is interesting and, frankly, because I like it. The nature of the resurrected body of the redeemed has much more to do with desire. Augustine explains that the spiritual body to which Paul refers in his letters to the Corinthians is very much a physical one (*Ench.* 23.91). It is spiritual because it is fully governed by the spirit. We now refer to a body with a soul *in* it because the body pulls down the soul with its weakness and mortality and its sinful desires. Then we shall have a spiritual body because the soul will lift up the body to immortality and to life with God. Unrighteous desires contrary to our understanding of what is right will be no more.

The resurrection leads Augustine to consider hell and then to reconsider evil in relation to the sovereign will of God. Some questions concerning the resurrection of the wicked to eternal punishment are not really worth the effort (*Ench.* 23.92). The resurrection to punishment only makes suffering worse, since there is corruption yet without the relief of death (23.92-93). And this punishment is just, "for nobody is set free except by an undeserved mercy, and nobody is damned except by a judgement he deserves" (23.93). No one is damned unjustly; punishment is deserved and is a matter of justice. What is undeserved is forgiveness, which is not an injustice but an act of sheer grace. God's will is absolutely sovereign (24.95), and he permits some things evil in themselves in order to create a better whole which incorporates those bad elements (24.96). God wills to turn some wills to good, and others he does not so will; some people are objects of God's mercy, others of just punishment (25.98, 29.112).

The only question is *why* God would select some but not others for mercy. It is not by their works, as evidenced by the choice of Jacob but not Esau before they even had any works of their own (*Ench.* 25.28). In handling this question as he does, Augustine has made himself an ancestor to the theologies of predestination—Calvinism and Jansenism.[25] The only answer seems to be that it is by God's will alone that the selection is made. If we seek further, we seek a mystery to which we simply lack the answer. It is incumbent on us to recognize what we can—that the sinful will of man is turned to God by grace alone, and that punishment for sin is just. This punishment includes the hardening of the wills of sinners, as in the biblical case of Pharaoh. Augustine:

> That is, he has mercy in his great generosity, and he hardens the heart without any unfairness, so that one who has been set free should not boast of his merits, nor should one who has been damned complain, except of his lack of merits. For grace alone distinguishes the redeemed from the lost, who have been formed into one mass of perdition by a cause common to all which they draw from their origin. (25.99)

Things were different for Adam, who had the ability to do either good or evil (28.104-5).[26] The redeemed will be different in another way, for they

will not be able to sin (28.105). Theirs is freedom of a better sort than what Adam had. We currently are worse off than Adam (28.106). Even he would have clung to good only with *some* help from God, but we need *more*. Our wills, sold in slavery to sin, are not at all able to will good without the help of grace. God's first act of grace in us is to heal our wills. And "grace is not grace unless it is free" (28.107). When God gives us eternal life due to the good works accompanying our faith, he is rewarding what he gave us grace to be able to do in the first place. It is "grace given in return for grace."[27]

HOPE AND LOVE

On hope and love, Augustine has much less to say. (Of course, he has already said much about how we should love and for what we should hope.) He transitions to this topic by commenting on the Creed, which is like milk for spiritual infants—faithful believers who yet think carnally—but is like solid food for mature believers, those who understand the immateriality of spiritual realities (*Ench.* 30.114). Hope and love arise from this faith. Yet the Lord's Prayer, he says, summarizes those things for which we should hope.[28] Augustine would have nothing of the modern fashion of love and orthopraxy separated from an orthodoxy safeguarded by detailed statements of faith. As he says here and elsewhere,[29] love comes from an orthodox faith.

Thus, Augustine reviews the seven petitions in the Prayer as related by Matthew (*Ench.* 30.115) and the five petitions as related by Luke (30.116). The shorter version from Luke, he says, contains the same information as the longer one from Matthew and helps us understand what it means. Some of the requests are for temporal goods, since after all there will be no evil in Heaven from which we will need deliverance. Other requests are for eternal goods which begin now; for we want God's will to be done both now and forever.

"Now, as for love, which the apostle says is greater than the other two . . ." (*Ench.* 31.117). Love is the difference between a good and a bad person, "For one who rightly loves without doubt rightly believes and hopes," but without love faith and hope are both useless. Augustine's theology of desire is only an aspect of his theology of love. Love is so central in the thought of Augustine that we may correctly state that it is the only difference between right and wrong. Moreover, the love of God is the cure for sinful desire, and its lack is the cause thereof: "Where the love of God is absent, there the cupidity of the flesh reigns."

Augustine suggests that we can understand (post-fall) human history as progressing through four stages, each of which corresponds to a way of loving (*Ench.* 31.118). In the first stage, we "live according to the flesh." In the second stage, we live under the law as revealed to Moses. Yet here, as Paul

had explained in Romans, sin is in some sense even worse; for here we are aware that our behavior is sin, yet we do it anyway, thus adding the sin of conscious and willful rebellion to the sins of the earlier stage, which were largely done in ignorance. Yet, as Paul himself had said before, Augustine thinks this stage of the law was ordained by God. It shows us how much we need grace. The third stage is grace. We are beginning to be healed. We are forgiven; yet we struggle against sin, we wait for the completion of our redemption, and we live by faith and with hope, learning to love.

This love which we so desperately need honors good things as good and greater goods as greater goods and God as the greatest good; God requires this love, which is also the proper expression of our nature for which we were designed, and which Christ teaches us. This love is summarized in one command. For we should love God and our neighbor, as Jesus said; this summarizes the law and the prophets, as Jesus said; and, Augustine adds, it also summarizes the gospels and the New Testament epistles (*Ench.* 32.121). It is a love to which all the commandments and all the good advice of scripture point. And, finally, it is a love which heals our sinful desires. We might say that it replaces them. However, it would be better to say that our desires are redeemed much as we are. For evil is not a real thing, but only a corruption of a real thing. And our sinful desires are corruptions of the love of God and neighbor which is a central part of the human nature which God gave to us. Thus, our redemption in Christ is to no small degree a redemption of our desires; "As charity grows, cupidity decreases. . . ."

In short, in this little handbook of Christian theology, Augustine analyzes both the problem of evil and the question of desire with attention to metaphysics, relying on the authority of the Bible and the Creed. What is real is, in virtue of its creation by a perfectly good God, good. Evil is a lack of the goodness a thing is meant to have. Evil begins with the misuse of free will in pursuing lesser goods as if they were the greatest good. Evil includes a tendency to desire lesser goods in this way. To cure us of this evil we need grace. To understand grace, Augustine looks to Christian teachings. The Incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as well as our own resurrection are necessary to cure it. Our response must be faith, baptism, prayer, almsgiving, loving our enemies, and penance as regimented by the church. Thus, evil desire is cured. A bit of neo-Platonism, the doctrines of immateriality and the superiority of immaterial things, serve the thoroughly Christian orientation of this handbook. It is, perhaps, something like a Christian neo-Platonism; but it is, at a minimum, one that reorients Platonic ideas to serve Christian ends, perhaps less a Christian neo-Platonism than a Christianity borrowing from Platonism.

We must now see how they serve that thoroughly Christian meditation on God and the soul, the *Confessions*.

NOTES

1. Michael Fiedrowicz, Introduction to *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity*, trans. Bruce Harbet; The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I-Books, Vol. 8: *On Christian Belief*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, Introductions by Michael Fiedrowicz (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2005), 265.

2. Fiedrowicz, Introduction, 266.

3. Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity*.

4. A helpful short commentary is Paul de Vries, "Augustine's *Enchiridion*: a Handbook for Earthy Christian Living," *Christian History Institute Magazine*. https ://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/augustines-enchiridion-a-handbook-f or-earthy-christian-living; accessed 14 March, 2018; first published in *Christianity Today* 15 (1987).

5. Nussbaum: Augustine's ethics has as its "central structural idea" the "idea of the radical independence of true good from human need and desire;" Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 18–19. Elsewhere she claims that the ascent to God in Augustine's thought "strips away and leaves behind the merely human in love;" Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 529. I address Nussbaum on this theme in *Conversion and Therapy*, chapter 6.

6. de Vries: *Ench.* is a "picture of down-to-earth life before God;" de Vries, "Augustine's *Enchiridion*." TeSelle correctly observes that virtue in Augustine involves loving God and that this is "the fulfillment of man's own being"; TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 112.

7. Augustine here is not unlike the other church fathers. Wilken explains that in their work and in their arguments, "Theory was not an end in itself, and concepts and abstraction were always put at the service of deeper immersion in the *res*, the thing itself, the mystery of Christ and of the practice of the Christian life. The goal was not only understanding but love. . . ." Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, xviii. Writing on the *Confessions*, Wilken says: "The goal of human life is not to know something about God, but to know God and be known by God, to delight in the face of God;" *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 311.

8. My own subdivision of the text. The primary division (faith, hope, and love) is given by Augustine himself. A nice alternative subdivision of the faith section appears in the introduction to the New City Press translation; Introduction, 269.

9. See Fiedrowicz, Introduction to *Ench.*, 268.

10. "Evil, writes Augustine, is finally a hopeless parasite;" de Vries, "Augustine's *Enchiridion*."

11. A helpful commentary on the themes in this passage in *Ench.* is Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, 166–69.

12. On this theme in an earlier writing of Augustine, see *Ord.* 1.1.2. Also Boone, *Conversion and Therapy*, chapter 4.

13. Like the New Testament letters (Col 4:16), Augustine may expect the recipient of one letter to read a letter sent to another. See *Ench.* 10.34, where Augustine advises

Laurentius to read a letter sent to Volusianus on the virgin birth of Jesus—Letter 137, as Harbet and Fiedrowicz inform us in note 66.

14. Evans has a helpful overview of the results; *Augustine on Evil*, 71–72.

15. On the Circumcellions, and their association with the Donatists, see Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 108–16.

16. On prayer and the healing of desire (primarily in other texts), see van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart*, chapter 3.

17. See Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 81; Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin*; and Hunter, "Augustinian Pessimism?" 165–70

18. *Ench.* 12.40: "In the assumption of human nature grace itself, which cannot allow any sin, became in some way natural to" him.

19. On how the Incarnation brought the life of God to the whole connected human race, see Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 180–81.

20. For example, Saarnivaara argues that Luther discovered the courtroom conception of justification in Paul and claims that the medieval and Catholic doctrine of justification was confused as a result of Augustine's reliance on the medical analogy of the health of the soul; see Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light Upon Luther's Way From Medieval Catholicism To Evangelical Faith* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1951), chapter 1. This is an interesting and, if correct, important objection to Augustine. A fine recent paper (to be published in the *Studia Patristica* series of conference proceedings) surveying some major sources of this critique, and critiquing it in turn, is Matthew Thomas, "Righteous-ed by Faith: Justification as Factitive in the Pre-Augustinian Tradition," 18th Oxford Patristics Conference, Oxford, UK August 22, 2019. I am no expert in this matter, which in any case is outside the scope of this study.

21. "For Augustine, almsgiving is a multi-faceted virtue;" de Vries, "Augustine's *Enchiridion*."

22. de Vries explains the relevance of this passage to abortion ethics; de Vries, "Augustine's *Enchiridion*."

23. Augustine appears to be the victim of a more primitive medical science, such that he considers that in the early stages of pregnancy there is not an organized body. I suspect that if he knew what we now know about the complexity and organization of fetal life at the cellular and subcellular levels, his hylomorphism would lead him to conclude that the soul is present in the fetus from the very beginning of pregnancy.

24. My own working theory is that even *less* specificity is necessary. In order to unite my soul to my body, God need only give it *some* matter; whether it was originally part of my body or not makes no difference, since its being organized by *my* soul is both the necessary and sufficient condition for its being part of *my* body. See Mark Boone, "What Are Things?" https://m.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0gapVBX 3Jr8Iz986NLbiLLy5h_OfAACo, especially the last video.

25. Calvinism, of course, is that branch of Reformation theology named for John Calvin; it emphasizes predestination and holds that, at least *after* the fall, we lack free will to do any good. Calvin's famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* cites Augustine frequently. Jansenism is (or was) an offshoot of Augustinian theology

within the Catholic church, later condemned by it as a heresy. It purported to be true to Augustine and, like Calvinism, emphasized the depth of human depravity and predestination. We should keep in mind that there is more to Augustine's theology than this; see Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, chapter 6.

26. Insofar as Augustine is like a Calvinist, it seems to me he is closer to the infralapsarian version than to the supralapsarian. That is, he does not think that God ordained the Fall, and he thinks Adam was able to do good. The human inability to do good began only after we misused our free will.

27. On Augustine's views on free will and predestination much has been written. Clark, *Augustine*, chapter 6 is a good place to research this further. Also James Wetzel, "Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Krutzman: 49–58 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); TeSelle, *Augustine*, chapter 5; Phillip Cary, "Augustinian Compatibilism and the Doctrine of Election," in *Augustine and Philosophy*, ed. Phillip Cary, John Doody and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 79–102; Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," 124–47; Couenhoven, "Augustine's Rejection of the Free-Will Defence," 279–98; Wilson, *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism*; and J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1980). A good bit of the discussion focuses on the continuity (or lack thereof) between Augustine's early writings, such as *Lib. Arb.*, and his later ones, such as *Ench.* The interested reader might consider Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology* on the continuity side of the debate or, on the discontinuity side, Eric L. Jenkins, *Free To Say No?: Free Will and Augustine's Evolving Doctrines of Grace and Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

28. For a helpful commentary on the Lord's Prayer in Augustine, see van Bavel, *Longing of the Heart*, 122–27.

29. *Doct.* 2.37.41.

God and the Soul according to Authority

Confessiones

The *Confessions* is a book about which many books have been written. Many helpful commentaries are already in place,[1] and this work will continue long after my time. Here, I shall content myself with accomplishing two goals. One is to offer some evidence from a few choice passages that the same theology of desire we have found in other texts from Augustine is also present here in his most famous work. The second is to look at what *Confessions'* investigations of that crucial Augustinian theme, God and the soul, teach concerning desire. *Conf.* is not simply about loving immaterial reality better than physical; it is about harmonizing our loves by learning to love God and neighbor. *Conf.*, of course, is the paradigmatic Augustinian investigation of God and the soul employing the method of relying on authority. Augustine memorably observes in Book XII that the biblical authors speak with the very authority of God. Of what Moses writes in the Bible God could say, "O man, what my Scripture says, I say" (13.29.44).[2] Various other passages testify to the authority of the Bible, such as 6.5.7, 12.18.27, 12.24.33, 12.30.41, 12.31.42, and 12.32.43.[3] There is also a strong sense in the *Confessions* of ecclesial authority. Knowledge comes through the church.[4]

And, of course, the *Confessions* is about God and the soul. Indeed, it is a *prayer* from one to the other.[5] (It is also about other things.[6]) Augustine wonders in Book I where his soul came from, he spends the entire biographical section describing how his soul wondered away from and ultimately was led back to God, and in the concluding books, he ponders the nature of his soul and how he might know God better by knowing this nature. The guiding theme is, of course, confession—of his sin, of Christian truth, and of God's glory.[7]

The *Confessions* is written for the healing of desire. Miles is correct that it is an exploration of "the mystery of human happiness."[8] Conybeare is on

to something when she says that it is an exercise in "affective mimesis," in helping his readers take on his own emotions[9]—and all this, of course, for the healing of desire. Byassee, similarly, is correct that "Augustine's *Confessions* is a masterful account of human desire."[10] In what follows, I shall first comment on passages showing that the defense of the faith involves the healing of desire, a matter of the heart as well as the mind; that Augustine in *Conf.* is interested in the love of both God *and* creation and that marriage and obedience to God's commands are therapies for healing our desires toward this end; and that an understanding of the problem of evil requires an understanding of what is to be loved. Finally, I shall look at a few choice passages to see what *Conf.* has to say about God and the soul.

APOLOGETICS, ETHICS, METAPHYSICS, AND DESIRE

In a sense, Augustine never left Cassiciacum. The books he read, the questions he explored, and the ideas he developed at that country retreat stayed with him. If there are any entirely original thoughts in the *Confessions*, there are not very many. Cassiciacum's investigations into the defense of the faith, ethics, metaphysics and the problem of evil, and the nature of God and the soul remain. So are the theological principles we have studied elsewhere in this book, and the same major points of his theology of desire.

Defense of the Faith and Desire

Book VI of *Conf.* tells how Augustine came closer to faith in Christ while at Milan. He has recently abandoned the Manicheans, and he is slowly coming to understand both God and himself. This growth in understanding goes hand-in-hand with the dawning realization of non-physical reality, in which the preaching of Bishop Ambrose of Milan is a great help—Ambrose used to say that God and the soul must not be understood according to any physical concepts, and urged that we interpret various difficult passages of Scripture accordingly. Augustine will not fully comprehend non-physical reality until Book VII, when he studies the Platonist philosophers; but in the meantime, he is also learning better how to understand the Bible from Ambrose and learning to take its authority seriously. All these areas of spiritual growth correspond to a better understanding of his need for healed desires. They are not yet healed, but their healing is nigh, and understanding the rationality of faith in Christian authority is a big part of the process. The authority of the Bible is for the healing of our souls. It is given in order that we might seek God, in order that our desires might be redirected Godward. There are at least three ways it contributes to this redirection. First, the rationality of faith gives

us the certainty we need to follow what is right rather than whatever worldly pursuits our hearts desire. Second, authority informs us of what is to be loved. Third, the authoritative command of the Bible has the power to reorient our desires. It is an act of grace.

Chapters 4–6 and 10–11 of Book VI are of particular interest, as well as the famous Book VIII conversion scene.[11]

Augustine at this time is getting closer to the truth. He is learning that Manichean ideas are uncertain, and that Christianity does not teach the foolish doctrines he had thought it did. In particular, he has learned that Christian theology does not have a materialistic notion of God. As he has just explained (in *Conf.* 6.3.4), the doctrine that man is made in the image of God was thought by the Manicheans to be meant in a carnal sense. Thus they considered that, since we have this four-limbed shape, Christianity must have the same idea of God! This idea was rightly lambasted by the Manicheans, but Augustine is now learning (thanks to Ambrose's preaching) that it was *not* rightly attributed to the Christians. The church "had no taste for such puerile nonsense" and taught that God is not contained within space at all (6.4.5). Similarly, other remarks in the Bible that seemed to link God to materialistic concepts were to be taken in a figurative sense. Ambrose would regularly quote Paul on how the letter kills and the spirit gives life; that is, a literal interpretation of the Bible kills the soul, and a spiritual interpretation saves it (6.4.6). This brought joy to young Augustine, who preferred that his mother's ancient faith would be vindicated than that the Manichean critiques would hold.

In short, Ambrose helped Augustine understand how the faith could be defended. But this was not enough by itself. His soul "could not be healed save by believing," and he refused to believe because of his "fear of believing falsehood" (6.4.6).

If anything was worth believing, it seemed to young Augustine that it would be the faith of Monica and Ambrose. But he was afraid to have faith—afraid, that is, to trust authority. The next lesson Augustine recounts deals with precisely this problem. In *Conf.* 6.5.7, he explains that Christianity is better off epistemologically, in that it ordered things hard to understand to be believed on the basis of authority, whereas Manicheanism promised a first-hand knowledge independent of authority and yet ordered belief in various ridiculous doctrines. More importantly, Augustine learned the lesson we have seen in *De Utilitate Credendi*: that trusting authority is rational and useful:

> I began to consider the countless things I believed which I had not seen, or which had happened with me not there—so many things in the history of nations, so many facts about places and cities which I had never seen, so many things told me by friends, by doctors, by this man, by that man: and unless we accepted these things, we should do nothing at all in this life.

Even more salient was the testimony regarding one's own parentage. All this, of course, goes to show that knowledge typically relies on reliable testimony. So no objection to the authority of the Bible based on the illegitimacy of belief by authority can hold water. Without such trust, "we should do nothing at all in this life"!

What was needed was a defense of biblical authority. Augustine had long been firmly convinced of the existence of God and of his power and "government of human affairs" (*Conf.* 6.5.7). So no objections against those truths would convince him. Although in *Util. Cred.* he had pointed to the biblical miracles and to the multitudes as evidence that the Bible is the word of God, here he only mentions the multitudes: "I was coming to believe that You would certainly not have bestowed such eminent authority upon those Scriptures throughout the world, unless it had been Your will that by them men should believe in You and in them seek You" (6.5.8).

Here, then, we have a defense of the authority of the Bible. We also have a reason why it is so important—for the healing of our souls. "Thus, since men had not the strength to discover the truth by pure reason and therefore we needed the authority of Holy Writ," the Scriptures were given (*Conf.* 6.5.8). And they were given "that by them men should believe in You and in them seek You." Believing in Scripture gives us the ability to seek God, whom we should be seeking, to know whom should be our most earnest desire.

Thus, we have a defense of the authority of the Bible. And, as usual, this bit of theology is linked to a theology of desire. We should be pursuing God, and the authority of Scripture tells us to. Yet at this time, not submitting to authority, Augustine was not prepared to pursue God rather than the things of this world. *Conf.* 6.6.9: "I was all hot for honors, money, marriage. In my pursuit of these, I suffered most bitter disappointments, but in this You were good to me since I was thus prevented from taking delight in anything not Yourself." Another reminder that love meant for God cannot satisfy when it, corrupted, takes the form of a desire for created things. Augustine's desires needed the healing of authority. He illustrates his misery with a memorable story. His friends and he saw a drunken beggar. This beggar had easily succeeded in gaining a brief happiness, borne of alcohol, much of the fleeting sort which Augustine and his friends were pursuing with much hard work.

Thus, the misery of unsatisfied desire. Thus, the need for healed desires and for the testimony of authority to heal it. Augustine soon takes another look at the connections between authority and the healing of our desires. At the end of chapter 10, we hear of "three needy souls, bitterly confessing to one another their spiritual poverty" (*Conf.* 6.10.17)—Augustine, Alypius, and Nebridius. A pursuit of God would end their misery. Why did they not change their ways in order to escape this spiritual poverty? Why continue to follow carnal desires? The answer is that they needed certainty: "for all that

we did not give up our worldly ways, because we still saw no certitude which it was worth changing our way of life to grasp." The life-change whereby their desires would turn from money, power, fame, and physical pleasures to God would make happiness possible. The establishment of knowledge would make the life-change possible. The establishment of authority would establish knowledge. Thus, the conversion of desire to God and the happiness following from it required authority.[12]

The drama continues immediately in chapter 11: "I was much exercised in mind as I remembered how long it was since that nineteenth year of my age in which I first felt the passion for true knowledge and resolved that when I found it I would give up all the empty hopes and lying follies of vain desires" (*Conf.* 6.11.18). Augustine had known at least since reading Cicero at the age of 19 (on which see Book III, chapter 4) that the pursuit of money, power, fame, and physical pleasures was vain. He had known that desires for these were futile. He had understood that wisdom was more worth desiring. But he was unwilling to cease the former pursuits and devote himself to the latter—not without the clear way forward for which the establishment of a knowledge-giving authority was necessary. The Manicheans had failed to provide it; the Academic skeptics had provided no certainty; Ambrose was too busy to answer all his questions; and he himself was "too busy to read" enough books. Yet there was a ray of hope: Orthodox Christianity had been cleared of the Manichean charges against it. It continues to tell him what he should do: Pursue God! Augustine recounts the unhappiness of his thoughts in these days:

> It is not for nothing or any mere emptiness that the magnificence of the authority of the Christian faith is spread all over the world. Such great and wonderful things would never have been wrought for us by God, if the life of the soul were ended by the death of the body. Why then do I delay to drop my hopes of this world and give myself wholly to the search for God and true happiness?

There is here another lesson about authority and desire: Authority tells us what to desire. The authority of "the Christian faith" (which in this context includes the Bible, but may also be taken to encompass the teachings of bishops like Ambrose and of creedal statements) tells us to abandon our commitment to the things of this world, live for God and the soul, and desire to know God. If only his lingering questions can be answered and this authority firmly established, Augustine will be free to walk in this way. In this period of his life, he is learning to believe the testimony of Christian authority. He is not ready yet to follow it. For that authority to be established, Augustine will need an understanding of immaterial reality and some answers to the problem of evil—the things about which he will tell us in Book VII and for which the neo-Platonists were so useful.

I will shortly return to these matters. For the moment, let us skip ahead even further—to the pivotal change wrought directly by that authority. For merely intellectual answers were not sufficient. Augustine needed grace for the healing of his desires. As he explains in Book VIII, it came in the form of an authoritative command from God.

What scholars sometimes describe as Augustine's intellectual conversion to Christianity having taken place (in Book VII), the moral conversion is now needed—the conversion of the will. The famous scene in Book VIII shows how this happened, and how it was precisely the authority of Scripture that caused the change.

The prospect of money and fame "no longer inflamed my desire" (*Conf.* 8.1.2), but one desire is unquenchable. To be blunt, Augustine is a sex addict. He knows he should give up sex and follow Christ, but he cannot. His will is divided, as he describes carefully in chapters 8–10. In the pivotal moment, in chapter 12, he hears the voice. *Tolle lege*, it says: "Take and read." Taking this as "a divine command to open my book of Scripture" (8.12.29), he obeys. Like Antony before him, of whom he had heard earlier in Book VIII, the biblical words change his desires. He reads the famous passage in Paul where we are ordered to shun riotous bodily pleasures and instead "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Augustine tells us that "I had no wish to read further, and no need." His desires are healed—by a command of God. The authority of the Bible ends his uncertainty and converts his desire to God.[13] I know no better word to describe this than *grace*, and God's assistance comes in the form of the soul-healing command.

Ethics and Theology of Desire

Augustine's ethics in the *Confessions* is closely related to (or simply *is*) the ethics of *Nat. b.* and *b. Coniug.* Things created by God are, by definition and by nature, good. Their goodness is less than God's. What we love we should love in proportion to its goodness. It is a sin to desire a lesser good as if it were a greater. In addition to being morally wrong, such desiring is a futile means of pursuing happiness: These are desires for more good than these objects possess, and the inevitable result is disappointment. Sexuality is a very common way for our desires to go awry, and God has ordained marriage as a way of healing these desires. In addition, the possibility of pursuing created goods while subordinating our love for them to God (as in marriage) shows that we can love God *and* creation at the same time. Sin results in a conflict between the two, but by the grace of God, restoration is possible.

Let us consider first the analysis of sin which follows the infamous incident with the pears, and then consider Augustine's remarks on marriage in Book II.

Following the infamous pear-stealing episode, Augustine expounds on the nature of sin. But he is also expounding on the nature of reality—its good nature. If I sin by stealing pears, the pears are not to blame; there is nothing in them I desire apart from their goodness. Thus Augustine explained in *Nat. b.*, and thus he says now. "There is an appeal to the eye in beautiful things, in gold and silver and all such; the sense of touch has its own powerful pleasures; and the other senses find qualities in things suited to them" (2.5.10). Even worldly power has some goodness in it, as well as mortal life and friendship. However, "in our quest of all these things, we must not depart from You, Lord, or deviate from Your Law." It is necessary to pursue these created goods with desires proportionate to their own, limited degree of goodness. Sin happens when our desires are out of proportion to their objects: "in the enjoyment of all such things we commit sin if through immoderate inclination to them . . . things higher and better are forgotten."

Desire out of proportion is not only sinful but also fruitless and devastating. It is inherently wrong to love things out of proportion and, because it is a love out of proportion, it leads to suffering. This love is fit for a great good yet directed toward a lesser. This is a desire which seeks more good in created objects than they have to offer; desire is stronger than its object. Such desire inevitably leads to dissatisfaction and emptiness.[14] As Augustine concludes Book II, "I became to myself a barren land" (2.10.18). As Vaught memorably puts it, finite things, which are meant for receiving finite love, "cannot bear the weight of the infinite demands"[15] made upon them when we give to them the love that is due to God. Rowan Williams also puts it well: "our great temptation is 'inhuman' love, loving the finite for what it cannot be. . . ."[16] And van Bavel: Created things "can give no firm and ultimate happiness."[17] Also Mary Clark: "a yearning for a good to satisfy the infinite capacity of the will" is part of human nature.[18]

A passage on Augustine's teenage years illustrates the futility of disordered love and reminds us of the importance of marriage as a therapy for desire. It is one of the best passages pointing to the harmony of the love of God and the love of created things—as long as our desires for the latter are subordinated to our love of the former. Augustine says:

> If only there had been some one then to bring relief to the wretchedness of my state, and turn to account the fleeting beauties of these new temptations and bring within bounds their attractions for me: so that the tides of my youth might have driven in upon the shore of marriage: for then they might have been brought to calm with the having of children as Your law prescribes, O Lord, ... (*Conf.* 2.2.3)

There are two particularly salient lessons here. One fits in perfectly with what we have seen from looking at *Nat. b.*, and the other with what we have seen from looking at *b. Coniug*.

Let us first look at themes from *Nat. b.* A created thing (in this case, the body of one's spouse) is good, but its goodness is finite. God's goodness is infinite. Each should be loved in due measure. God should be loved without limit even as God's goodness is without limit. Or, recalling *Nat. b.* 22, we could say that the love of God should be the limit of all other loves, even as God's goodness is the limit of all goodness. The created thing should be loved within limits.

This is one of the great Augustinian texts on the best way to love, in which we need not choose between the love of created things and the love of God. A created thing is an idol if we love it with the love due to God, but a way of worshipping, honoring, and *loving* God if we love it in proportion. To this metaethical schema, Augustine adds a means by which the love of a created thing is subordinated to the love of God—obeying God's commandments for the love of that created thing. To love created things rightly and to love God rightly at the same time, it is necessary to love created things within the limits set by God, including God's commands and arrangements such as, here in *Conf.* 2.2.3, God's law that sex should be used for having children and, of course, marriage.

Now let us turn to a theme from *b. Coniug*. Marriage is a treatment for unruly desires. It treats the symptoms, limiting their harmful consequences. It brings good (in *Conf.* 2.2.3, offspring) out of the evil of sinful desire. It even helps to cure the disease. We wander through many created things, seeking happiness in them.[19] Marriage prevents us from sexual wandering and brings rest to our spiritual restlessness.[20]

Metaphysics, the Problem of Evil, and Desire

Although nearly able to accept Christianity and having been informed by Ambrose of the spiritual interpretation of various passages in Scripture, Augustine still found himself unable to comprehend a non-physical substance. This prevented him from understanding evil, for he could not understand the notion that evil is a lack of being until he could understand the notion that goodness and being are one. The oneness of goodness and being is an idea that makes no sense in a materialistic metaphysics: Given that all is matter, being is whatever occupies space or whatever is made of matter, and goodness seems to be neither of these things. In addition, it is necessary to recognize free will as the efficient cause of evil.

These matters Augustine learned to understand only after he began reading "some books of the Platonists" (*Conf.* 7.9.13), probably some portions of Plotinus' *Enneads*.[21] *Conf.* VII contains this biographical insight as well as various reflections on these metaphysical matters. Here I shall review Book VII of the *Confessions*, elaborating on his metaphysics and showing how it is

linked to a theology of desire with familiar contours. God is the greatest good, and everything created by God is good—but a lesser good. To desire a lesser good as if it were a greater one is sin; this is the nature of evil. The healing of corrupt desires needs more than neo-Platonism could offer. It needs grace: the Incarnation and the Bible. It needs a humble response from us, following the humble Messiah. Only then may our desires be healed.

Augustine has learned that orthodox Christians do not consider God to have a man-shaped body. Yet he continues to be confused by materialistic concepts of God. He imagines that God is some sort of mass spread throughout the universe (*Conf.* 7.1.1) and presumes that whatever does not exist in space does not exist at all (7.1.2). Happily, the argument of his friend Nebridius (an argument we have already considered in chapter 3 of this volume) has helped to liberate him from Manichean delusions (7.2.3). He is convinced that God is not mutable (7.3.4). Yet he has no understanding of the freedom of the will, which is the necessary solution to the problem of evil; he has heard of this and is trying to understand it (7.3.5). He understands that he has a will which is responsible for his own sin. Yet, whence came the evil of his own will he does not understand. He wonders how God can be innocent of creating a being who has an evil will. If, perhaps, his will is evil due to the influence of Satan, he yet wonders how God is not to be blamed for creating Satan's evil will. "By such thoughts I was cast down again and almost stifled," he tells us; however, he did not fall so far into error as to think that God can be harmed by evil. His firm belief in the immutability of God thus kept his mind from greater harm.

Indeed, such metaphysical insights did him a world of good—which is why he developed them in *Nat. b*! He had learned that God "must be incorruptible" since God is the greatest good and since incorruptibility is better than corruptibility (*Conf.* 7.4.6). Here we see (again) the integral harmony of Augustine's thought—an insight on metaphysics is (as *Nat. b.* emphasized) also an insight on ethics and, moreover, is also instrumental in understanding evil. The same, of course, will be relevant to a theology of desire, as we will shortly see.

Yet the answer eluded him, for when he "sought for the origin of evil" he "sought in an evil manner" (*Conf.* 7.5.7). Young Augustine failed to understand the source of evil, "since God who is good made all things good." He could only conceive of evil as a separate substance from God. His problem is, of course, that he cannot conceive of goodness properly: He fails to understand its substantial nature, and so fails to understand that evil is really a lack of that substance.

Two chapters later, Augustine helps us understand what he meant by saying that he sought evilly for an understanding of evil. The problem is that he was "looking outward" (*Conf.* 7.7.11). The light of truth which he sought was not "in space"; yet he says, "I was intent upon things that are contained in

space, and in them I found no place to rest." This, of course, is meant in an intellectual sense: Spatial, physical things were all he was *thinking* of. But it is also meant in an *affective* sense: Spatial, physical things were the focus of his *desire*. Augustine adds, "They were not good enough for me, I was not good enough for You: You are my true joy . . . ."

Now comes the pivotal moment when he encounters those books of the Platonists. Here, he memorably tells us, he read many things that are also written in Scripture—but not everything. He read of the existence of God, of the distinction between God the Father and the Word of God, of the creation of all things by God, and of the evils of idolatry. He did not read of the Incarnation of the Word, of the humility of Jesus Christ, of his death for sinners, or of Christ-following humility as the way to wisdom. The various things which these best of the pagan philosophers got right Augustine famously compares to Egyptian gold from the book of Exodus: As the Hebrews liberated gold used in Egypt in service of idols, so the church must liberate insights used by pagan philosophers in service of idols (*Conf.* 7.9.13-15).[22] It is well known that Augustine critiqued Porphyry for commending idolatry,[23] thus liberating Platonic insights from the service of false gods.

"Being admonished by all this to return to myself," Augustine now turned inward, examining the truth within his own soul, realizing that it is real despite not existing within space (*Conf.* 7.10.16). He examined other created things and realized that there are gradations of being: They are less real than God, but are real inasmuch as they are creations of God (7.11.17). And, of course, he also began to understand the corresponding truth about gradations of *goodness* (7.12.18). He saw at last that what is corruptible is only such because there was some good in it which could be lost. "Thus whatsoever things are, are good," and everything made by God is good, and every substance is made by God. This is the same metaethics we saw in *Nat. b.*: What is good and what is created has a lesser degree of goodness, not to be desired as if it had all the goodness of God. Evil is, strictly speaking, that which does not exist; "evil utterly is not" (7.13.19). And when there is something which appears to be evil, we can learn that it is part of an ordered whole—another employment of this insight from *Ord.*

Now Augustine was at last able properly to understand evil's nature and origin: "it was not a substance but a swerving of the will which is turned towards lower things and away from You, O God, who are the supreme substance: so that it casts away what is most inward to it and swells greedily for outward things" (*Conf.* 7.16.22). This is, in a nutshell, the now familiar Augustinian theology of desire: God is the greatest good, and the soul is a great good, and sin is a desire on the part of the soul for some created good. Yet Augustine himself was such a sinner. "Carnal habit" weighed him down—his own sinful desire for created goods as if they were the greatest

goods (7.17.23). Even when blessed with the mystical experience of a neo-Platonic ascent to a glimpse of God, he is unable to hold onto it because of his sinful desires.

More was necessary; grace was necessary:

> So I set about finding a way to gain the strength that was necessary for enjoying You. And I could not find it until I embraced the *Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*, . . . who was calling unto me and saying, *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*; and who brought into union with our nature that Food which I lacked the strength to take: for *the Word was made flesh. . . .* (7.18.24)

The Incarnation was necessary for the healing of our desires. Augustine needed the humility to imitate the humility of Christ. The work of Christ is needed for the healing of souls sick with sinful desires, "healing the swollenness of their pride." Augustine, in addition to being hampered by some Christological confusions (7.19.25), was sick indeed with pride (7.20.26). This is yet another familiar piece of the Augustinian theology of desire: Pride is the most serious corruption of our desires, and the healing of our desires requires humility. This is a treatment for our souls that neo-Platonism knew not of, although Augustine now began to read of it in Scripture (7.21.27).

And this, of course, is another hallmark of Augustinian theology of desire: What neo-Platonism gets right, it lacks the power to help us live by, "*For thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to the little ones*" (7.21.27). The Incarnation, the Bible, and humility are necessary means for the healing of our souls.

GOD AND THE SOUL IN *CONFESSIONS*

Frankly, we cannot be thorough here—not unless we made this section of this chapter of this book into a book itself! *Confessions* is an intimate encounter of God and the soul in the present. Yet it is also a reflection on how they have interacted in the *past*. And it is a reflection on how God and *other* souls one has known have interacted. Moreover, it is an impetus to restore a right interaction of God and the soul, both in oneself and in others. Let us look a little more closely at this, focusing on the interesting notion of second-order desire, a desire for a particular kind of desire. Following this, I shall examine the ancient-medieval (and sometimes even modern) idea of ascent, a tradition in which *Confessions* is a key text and which is closely concerned with the reorientation of desire. Next, I shall review the most salient characteristic of reordered desire in the *Confessions*, praise. Finally, it is necessary to consider how all of these aspects of the *Confessions* fit into the Augustinian ethic of

the love of God and neighbor and how, moreover, they relate to other texts we have considered in this book. For the *Confessions* continues the ethics we have examined. There is an ordering of goodness in reality, with God as the greatest good. We must not desire lesser goods as if they were greater; rather, we must love things in proportion to their own goodness. This means that we should love souls, those rational spirits mentioned in *Nat. b.*, more than lesser goods, and love God. The *Confessions*, in its investigation of God and the soul, is a call to love God and our neighbors.

Second-Order Desire

A desire is a desire *for* something: a muffin, a cup of tea, sex, wisdom, God, etc. A first-order desire is a desire for an object which is *not* a desire, such as the aforementioned objects of desire. A second-order desire is a desire whose object is *itself* a desire—or the lack of one.[24] For example, a caffeine addict may desire to be free of the desire for coffee. A person having trouble getting up on time may wish, upon going to bed, that in the morning she will have a desire to wake up. These are second-order desires, and they are very important in the moral life. Augustine gives them a fair amount of attention in the *Confessions*. We have desires to *have* sinful desires, and Augustine confesses that he did. We may also, however, have desires to love God as we ought; Augustine has such desires and writes the *Confessions* under their influence. Let us consider a few key passages.

"And man desires to praise Thee," Augustine writes at the beginning of the book (*Conf.* 1.1.1). To praise God is our natural purpose; it is what we were created to do. This is in part a natural law ethics, an analysis of what is right based on the proper function of human beings. In natural law ethics, we often have the analogy of the health of the body ready-to-hand, and this lends itself to an insight on second-order desires. It is all too common for us to be physically unhealthy because we have unhealthy desires—for ice cream, drugs, sex, or whatever else. We may have desires for our desires—we may, in addition to wishing for sex or for ice cream today, wish to wish for them again tomorrow. If we want to be physically healthy, we may desire to have healthier desires.

It is much the same with the soul. In Book III, Augustine describes a bad second-order desire. Sin, we have seen, is the love of a lesser good with the love due to a greater. Augustine not only had such loves but desired more of them! He tells us of himself at the age of sixteen:

> I came to Carthage, where a cauldron of illicit loves leapt and boiled about me. I was not yet in love, but it was in love with love, and from the very depth of my need hated myself for not feeling more keenly the need. (3.1.1)

This recalls another great moment in moral philosophy. In Book I of Plato's *Republic*, the aged Cephalus speaks of the second-order desires of old men who no longer experience much sexual desire but wish that they did. Cephalus more wisely follows the poet Sophocles, who in his old age was relieved to have escaped from sexual desire. With young Augustine, here it is much like Cephalus' aged friends: He desires to love more than he actually loves. He takes pleasure in the desire for sexual pleasures.

In Books II and XI, however, Augustine describes a better second-order desire. In Book II, he explains why he is confessing his old sins, not out of a love of those sins but out of a desire to love God as he ought: "not for love of them but that I may love Thee, O my God. I do it for love of Thy love. . . ." (*Conf.* 2.1.1). In Book XI, after confessing the old sins, he says, "I excite my own love for You and the love of those who read what I write, that we all may say, *The Lord is great, and exceedingly to be praised*" (11.1.1). Thus, the entire *Confessions* is an exercise in reordering our desires, and it is driven by a second-order desire—the desire to desire God—and also by the desire to praise God. This Augustine seeks for himself and also for us!

In short, the *Confessions* is the expression of the desire to have our desires rightly ordered—both *mine* and *yours*, both Augustine's and his reader's.

Ascent

Ascent (as discussed in chapter 1 of this volume) has long been a central aspect of many of the more religious philosophies and the more philosophical expressions of religion. The general idea of the ascent tradition is that there is a higher reality which we humans need to know, yet do not know, and which we need training in order to know. This training is an ascent of our minds to the higher reality. Along with the intellectual training to *know*, ascent includes an affective change, a correction of our desires for money, power, fame, and physical pleasures—a redirection of desire toward the higher reality. Ascent appears in such diverse texts as books of Plato and Plotinus, Anselm's *Proslogion*, Boethius' Consolation, Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, Hinduism's *Bhagavad-Gita*, Sufism's *The Improvement of Human Reason* by Ibn Tufail, and (as I interpret him) Descartes' *Discourse on Method*.

In ascent literature, there is commonly a progressive focus of reflection on the outer, the inner, and the upper. We reflect on the things of the world, outside the soul, to learn what we may from them—even if it is only that there is nothing in them worth seeking. Then we reflect on the soul and learn what we may from *it*. Then we reflect on the sublime reality *above* the soul. The order of study—world, soul, God—reflects ascent's account of what is good and its parallel account of what should be loved. The conversion of the

mind to this knowledge and of the heart to the love of nobler realities may be described more succinctly as an inward and an upward turn.[25]

Augustine is the founder of Christian medieval ascent literature. The *Confessions* as a whole displays various aspects of the tradition and includes well-known records of ascent in Books VII and IX. Book X contains another major ascent passage, which we will now consider briefly.[26]

It begins at chapter 6. Augustine tells us a lively story of how he looked for God.[27] He says he asked, "what is it that I love when I love You?" (*Conf.* 10.6.8), and "what is this God?" (10.6.9). The beauties and pleasures of created things are not what he loves when he loves God; God has a greater beauty and goodness, and the sounds, smells, tastes, feels, and sights of created things are pale imitations of God's goodness. He asked the created world what God is: "I asked the earth and it answered, 'I am not He'; and all things that are in the earth made the same confession." Again he asked the sea and the things in it and they said "We are not your God; seek higher." The winds and the things in them said also that they were not God, followed by the heavens and their contents. So he asked all of these physical things to tell him of God; "And they cried out in a great voice: 'He made us.'"

Thus, the outer quest. Now Augustine turns inward, asking himself what he is and answering, "A man" (*Conf.* 10.6.9).[28] He observes that he is both body and soul, and that the soul is the better part. It is the soul which knows through the body and which knows of the creator from created things, as Augustine says referencing Rom. 1:20 (10.6.10). But we fail to know when we "love these last too much and become subject to them."

This soul is the life of the body, and God is the life of the soul (*Conf.* 10.6.10). Yet he still asks, "what it is that I love when I love my God?" (10.7.11). He understands that God is "above the topmost point of my soul" and adds that "by that same soul I shall ascend to Him." Specifically, it is neither the soul's power of perception nor its power of giving life to the body that will help Augustine know God. He must, rather, look to "the fields and vast palaces of memory" (10.8.12). Thousands of memories come out of the places where they are stored, each one asking if it is the God he is looking for. None are. The power of memory is a great power, and the mind with that power is likewise great—so great that "the mind is not large enough to contain itself" (10.8.15). We do not understand the power of our own minds: "Great is the power of memory, a thing, O my God, to be in awe of, a profound and immeasurable multiplicity; and this thing is my mind, this thing am I" (10.17.26). This is a great good, worthy of being loved above the objects of the physical world. Yet it is necessary to climb higher "In my ascent by the mind to You who abide above me. . . ."

Thus far the inward look, and, thus, on to the upward turn!

Just as God is "not a corporeal image," so God is "not the mind itself," but is over the changeable mind, himself unchangeable (*Conf.* 10.25.36), and greater than the mind can contain (1.2.2). The eternal and immutable God who created my mind and who is "the Lord God of the mind" is more great, and greatly to be praised. This God we are to love, and Augustine confesses, "Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved Thee!" (10.27.38). Though God was always present to him, he had wooed misery by seeking happiness in created things.

As he draws the ascent passage to a close, Augustine gives us an explicit theology of desire:

> All my hope is naught save in Thy great mercy. Grant what Thou dost command, and command what Thou wilt. Thou dost command continence. And *when I knew*, as it is said, *that no one could be continent unless God gave it, even this was a point of wisdom, to know whose gift it was*. For by continence we are collected and bound up into unity within ourself, whereas we had been scattered abroad in multiplicity. Too little does any man love Thee, who loves some other thing together with Thee, loving it not on account of Thee, O Thou Love, who are ever burning and never extinguished! O Charity, my God, enkindle me! Thou does command continence: Grant what Thou dost command and command what Thou wilt. (*Conf.* 10.29.40)

What is right, which God commands, is self-control. We spill ourselves on created things when we love them but not with reference to their creator. Yet God mercifully grants us to have the desires we ought.

Augustine then proceeds to confess various sins[29] corresponding to that three-fold designation of sins borrowed from the letters of John: "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*" (*Conf.* 10.33.41). (We discussed this classification of sins in chapter 1.) These are now his sins of the present. His lusts of the flesh, carnal and sensory desires, he confesses from 10.30.41 to 10.34.53. His lusts of the eyes, understood as "a certain vain desire and curiosity" (10.35.54), Augustine confesses from 10.35.54-7. His pride of life, the old and tricky sin of thinking too much of ourselves and desiring glory, Augustine confesses from 10.36.59 to 10.38.63. His past and present sins now painfully confessed, he concludes book X by praying for help and reflecting on the Mediator (10.41.66 through 10.43.70). He also references the devil and his primal sin of pride (10.42.67). The solution to this problem has been given to us in the Incarnation. We will escape the devil's influence by imitating the humility of Jesus Christ.

Thus, Augustine's ascent has showed us that God is the greatest good, that our souls are great goods and worthy to be loved (if less than God), that our souls are disordered and do not love as they ought, and that our healing requires God's mercy and our humility in following Christ.[30]

Praise

The restoration of a right desire, of the love of God, involves *praise*: A soul loves God by praising God.[31] We have already seen from *Conf.* 1.1.1 that Augustine considers this praise to be the natural and proper function of a human being. The *Confessions* is an expression of praise to God and a statement of the fact that to love and praise God is the very nature of man. We were created to praise and can only be happy when we do: "Thou does so excite him that to praise Thee is his joy. For Thou has made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee" (1.1.1).

The *Confessions* ends with a reference to the same rest: "Of You we must ask, in You we must seek, at You we must knock. Thus only shall we receive, thus shall we find, thus will it be opened to us. Amen" (13.38.53). As Foley observes in a footnote to the newer edition of the Sheed translation, this is "The rest that man's restless heart seeks and that inaugurates the *Confessions*." Augustine hopes that he and his readers will seek better and find better after going through this book.

This rest eludes Augustine throughout most of his journey. We need hardly choose one particular passage; we can cite most of the book! Merely as an example, let us review the misery and restlessness that attended Augustine's sexual pursuits when he was sixteen: "I wore my chains with bliss but with torment too, for I was scourged with the red hot rods of jealousy, with suspicions and fears and tempers and quarrels" (3.1.1).

Rest is found in desiring God, in loving God, in praising God—in recognizing and proclaiming the infinite goodness of God. From Book V's opening: "But let my soul praise Thee that it may love Thee, and let it tell Thee Thy mercies that it may praise Thee" (5.1.1). Praise is how we love God, and how we find rest in God, the greatest good: "so our soul rises out of its mortal weariness unto Thee, helped upward by the things Thou hast made and passing beyond them unto Thee . . . and there refreshment is and strength unfailing."

Conf. 11.1.1, in which Augustine writes of his desire to love God as he ought, cites the Psalms; so does the first sentence of the book (1.1.1). These, and countless other citations of the Psalms in *Conf.*, are meant to back up these insights—to show that praise is what the soul needs.[32] Indeed, the idea of the soul we get from *Confessions* is that this is also what the soul *is*: She is a loving, desiring, and praising thing! And, of course, this is what Augustine has read in the Psalms. We learn this of God and the soul from the authority of the Bible.

Love of God and Neighbor

In *Sol.*, we recall, Augustine says, "I yearn to know God and the soul," and he identifies these and the knowledge of them as the most fitting objects of

desire. In *Nat. b*, we saw that Augustine considers God the greatest good and rational spirits, including human souls, great goods. Since we should love things in proportion to their goodness, we should love God above *all* and love human souls above all *else*. In *b. Coniug.*, Augustine finds how marriage fits into the economy of the love of God and neighbor, how it helps restore our disordered desires to a proper love of God and neighbor. In *Mag.*, again, we see that the ultimate end of knowledge is that we should love God, and also the souls where God dwells. In *Ench.*, we are told that the healing of sin is one with the growth of the love of God and neighbor. In *Lib. Arb.*, our desires should be directed toward the greatest good, God and created souls. In *vera Rel.*, the Platonic or quasi-Platonic ascent in wisdom is also a learning to love God and neighbor. In *Util. Cred.*, right desire is desire for God, in which the love of one's neighbor has a lesser place.

And this is what we have seen, also, in the *Confessions*. God is to be loved above all, and we sin when we desire created things with the love due to God. There is a place for loving created things as well as God, but we must not idolize them by desiring them as if they possessed all the goodness of God. Marriage, in particular, is a cure for disordered desires that helps us love created things as well as love God as we ought—at the same time! The human being is created to love God and is most satisfied by loving God—an activity marked by praise.[33] It is good for us to ascend to the knowledge of God, and this ascent follows the path of knowing the soul as well as knowing God. These are, after all, the greatest goods we know of. And they are the most worth loving as well as knowing—not only our own souls, but also those of others. In order to have our desires healed and our loves converted to God, various spiritual therapies are helpful. Some of these, such as philosophical ascent's inward and upward turns, are familiar to pagan philosophies, especially to neo-Platonism. Others are the unique province of Christianity. The Incarnation of Christ is necessary for the healing of our souls. Our pride may be cured by the humility of the Incarnation. We must follow the humble way of Christ. The commands of God and the reading of Scripture are necessary ways of converting our hearts to Christ.

In short, the *Confessions* is a book about the love of God and neighbor. It is a book with a distinctive theology of desire. That theology tells of creation, of sin, and of grace. It is a theology of desire which has notable neo-Platonic elements, such as the unity of goodness and being, the account of evil as non-being, and the immateriality of God and the soul. But it is, above all, a Christian theology of desire. And it is the theology of desire we have found in Augustine's other books. It is a Christian one informed by neo-Platonism; if it is even proper to call it a neo-Platonism, it is a neo-Platonism that has been transformed by Christian thought.

Once again, we have seen that Augustine does not think desire is *bad*; he just thinks it has a *function*. Desire is meant for seeking God.[34] Human desire, will, and love are all meant for God, the greatest good. They go astray when they aim at lesser goods, tending toward destruction and inevitably leading to unhappiness since there is just not enough in these lesser goods to satisfy our desires.

And yet . . . and yet desire is *meant* to seek God *through* his creation. We are *meant* to be able to love them for God's sake. And, since this is their nature and purpose, this is not how we abuse creation but how we love it properly—with a view toward its end. The harmony of the love of God and the love of his creation is something which a number (a *growing* number, I hope) of recent scholars are finding.[35] As Augustine puts it, it is only "madness that knows not how to love men as men!" (*Conf.* 4.7.12), but "Blessed is the man that loves Thee, O God, and his friend in Thee, and his enemy for Thee" (4.9.14). When we sever the object of our love from its nature as a finite creature of God owing its goodness and beauty to God, we know not how to love it for what it really is. Yet when our love for creatures is organized by a love for God, we love both God *and* creation. This, once again, is a doctrine consistent with the Christian doctrine of creation by God and unlike the neo-Platonic notion that creation is a falling away from God. Augustine's theology of desire is distinctively Christian and not in all respects consistent with neo-Platonism, and we must read him with this in mind.

Yet we are fallen, and desire is a part of the return to God. TeSelle says, "the movement back toward God is a change not of place but of affection."[36] Indeed. The ascent toward God, the inward and upward way, involves a change of desire—a learning to love souls and God. The way to God is mapped by our desires. And desire motivates us along that way. Desire is not a bad thing to be replaced by submission to God's law or by pure rationality. We are created in a universe of good governed by the greatest good, and our calling is to recognize and honor that good. Part of that calling is to *enjoy* the good, and desire is a God-given gift to help us keep up the pursuit.[37]

NOTES

1. One of the most beloved commentaries is O'Donnell's, available online; O'Donnell, *The Confessions of Augustine*, accessed June 26, 2019, http://www.stoa.org/hippo/. Paffenroth's and Kennedy's *A Reader's Guide to Augustine's* Confessions has one essay on each book of the *Confessions*; Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy, eds., *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's* Confessions (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003). Vaught's trilogy is superb but makes challenging reading; Vaught, *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions*; Vaught, *Encounters*

with God in Augustine's Confessions; Vaught, *The Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions*. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 189–97, is helpful. Likewise Conybeare, *The Routledge Guidebook to Augustine's* Confessions. Rowan Williams' "God in Search: A Sermon," included as an epilogue to his *On Augustine*, is a helpful introduction (or re-introduction) to the *Confessions*. Douglass helpfully explains how *Conf.* invites the reader to participate in the text and be converted along with Augustine; Laurie Douglass, "Voice Re-Cast: Augustine's Use of Conversation in De ordine and the Confessions," *Augustinian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1996), 39–54. Mary Clark informs us of the occasion of the writing of *Conf.* in Clark, *Augustine*, 11. On the structure of *Conf.* and its reflection on Christian sacraments, see Michael P. Foley, "The Sacramental Topography of the *Confessions*," *Antiphon* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 30–65. Another source on the form and organization of the *Confessions* is Robert McMahon, *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the* Confessions (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989). An accessible online commentary on Books I-IX which may be helpful to many readers is William G. Most, "Commentary on St. Augustine," *EWTN.com*, accessed June 26, 2019, https://www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/527AUG1.HTM. A recent commentary closely concerned with love and desire is Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, 1979; repr., (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009). Likewise Byassee, *Reading Augustine: a Guide to the Confessions*.

2. Augustine, *Confessions*.

3. On Augustine's inerrantist view of Scripture in the later books of the *Confessions*, see Mark Boone, "Ancient-Future Hermeneutics: Postmodernism, Biblical Inerrancy, and the Rule of Faith," *Criswell Theological Review* 14, no. 1 (Fall 2016), 35–52. Matthews notes some of the same phenomena, Augustine's reverence for the authority of the Bible and his "tremendous latitude in interpreting scriptural passages"; Matthews, *Augustine*, 92. The interested reader might also consult Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 21.

4. Perhaps the best passage on this theme is 5.13.23, in which Augustine describes how theological truth as well as a better understanding of how to interpret the Bible came through Bishop Ambrose. I set aside, as outside the scope of this study, the question whether there is any inkling here of the Catholic doctrine of magisterial infallibility.

5. Rowan Williams is quite right: "Purely formally, the whole of the *Confessions* is a prayer; to work out who I am, I need to be speaking to and listening to God"; Williams, *On Augustine*, Kindle location 345. Also Bright: "The 'confessions' in their true nature are an intensely personal conversation with God"; Bright, "Book Ten: The Self Seeking the God Who Creates and Heals," 159.

6. Conybeare explains that the *Confessions* is both autobiography and much more than that; *Routledge Guidebook*, 144–47. Rowan Williams likewise; *On Augustine*, Kindle location 1010–1018. Trapè: "These are both an autobiographical composition as well as a work of philosophy, of theology, of mysticism, and of poetry"; Trapè, "Chapter VI: Saint Augustine," 342–462, 343. Stark

> What sort of work is the Confessions? There is no one category into which this book can be placed, since it encompasses elements of Augustine's life story (to age thirty-three and

his return to North Africa); extended philosophical explorations on evildoing, the human will, God's nature, memory, and time; and detailed scriptural interpretation of the opening verses of Genesis. And he wrote all this in the form of an extended prayer to God. (Judith Chelius Stark, Introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, 1–45 [University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2007], 2)

7. On the nature of this confessing, see Conybeare, *Routledge Guidebook*, 1–3 as well as Byassee, *Reading Augustine*, 3.

8. Miles, *Desire and Delight*, 19.

9. Conybeare, *Routledge Guidebook*, 25.

10. Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 97.

11. In using the word "conversion" I do not mean to imply everything that may be connoted by the word, such as a dramatic about-face. It was something like a "conversion back to Christianity"; Burton, "The Vocabulary of the Liberal Arts in Augustine's *Confessions*," 141. Similarly, Conybeare uses the term "(re)conversion" and provides some helpful commentary; Conybeare, *Routledge Guidebook*, 511, 52. For more on the subject, see Boone, *Conversion and Therapy*, 61, including footnote 86.

12. A theme once again reminiscent of earlier texts, especially *Util. Cred.*

13. van Bavel: "Thus, in the final analysis, Augustine's conversion is attributable to the Holy Scriptures . . ."; van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart*, 19.

14. John C. Cavadini, "Book Two: Augustine's Book of Shadows," in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, ed. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy: 25–34 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 26–29.

15. Vaught, *Journey*, 52.

16. Williams, *On Augustine*, Kindle location 401.

17. van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart*, 15. Also see Miles, *Desire and Delight*, 29.

18. Clark, *Augustine*, 43.

19. Anselm is eloquent here: "So why are you wandering through many things, you insignificant mortal, seeking the goods of your soul and of your body? Love the one good, in which are all good things, and that is enough. Desire the simple good, which is the complete good, and that is enough. What do you love, O my flesh? What do you long for, O my soul? It is there; whatever you love, whatever you long for, it is there." Anselm, *Proslogion: with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, 22.

20. I find Conybeare a bit misleading when she says that "sex, for Augustine, is the exact opposite of peace, a restless, unsatisfied, unsatisfying quest"; *Routledge Guidebook*, 72–73. This is the case for sinful sex, but neither for sex as designed by God nor as redeemed by grace and marriage.

21. Some say Porphyry rather than Plotinus. On the side of Porphyry we have Theiler, *Porphyrios und Augustin* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1933) and John O'Meara, *The Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to His Conversion* (Staten Island: St. Paul Publications, 1965). On the side of Plotinus we have Paul Henry, *Plotin et l'Occident* (Leuven: Peeters, 1934) and Robert J. O'Connell, "On Augustine's 'First Conversion': factus erectior (*de beata vita* 4)," *Augustinian Studies* 17 (1986), 15–29 and Robert J. O'Connell, "Enneads VI, 4–5, in the works of St. Augustine," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 9 (1963), 1–39. Also emphasizing Plotinus's books is the helpful discussion in Van Fleteren, "Augustine and Philosophy,"

26–27. O'Connell's view seems to prevail among scholars, though it is not certain that there was no reading of Porphyry. Thus Conybeare says Augustine probably read Plotinus at this stage, but she also mentions the "energetic scholarly debate" and does not deny that he read Porphyry; *Routledge Guidebook*, 82. Similarly, Harrison: "Augustine most probably read some Plotinus . . . and maybe some Porphyry . . ."; Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, 13.

22. The famous Egyptian gold analogy also appears in *Teaching Christianity*, 2.40.60-61. Harrison notes that the use of this analogy predates Augustine; *Augustine: Christian Truth*, 17 n. 55.

23. For example in Book 19 of *City of God*, chapter 23.

24. Harry Frankfurt was helpful in introducing this sort of terminology, as Stump explains; Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," 126–27. She notes that James Wetzel has also employed these distinctions in interpreting Augustine; "Augustine on Free Will," note 11 on page 144.

25. As scholars sometimes describe Augustine; for example, Phillip Cary writes of the "In Then Up" motion of Augustinian ascent; Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, 38; Teske refers to "the typical Augustinian move from the exterior to the interior and from the inferior to the superior"; Teske, "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory," 151.

26. For more detailed studies of Book X, see Vernon J. Bourke, *Augustine's Love of Wisdom: An Introspective Philosophy* (Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1992) and Bright, "Book Ten."

27. Michael Foley made this into an illustrated children's book, *Gus Finds God*!

28. We have already encountered the idea of a space within the mind in which we may meet with God in *Mag.* This passage in *Conf.* may suggest some development in Augustine's thought since the writing of *Mag.*, since Augustine does *not* find God within, but only traces of his work.

29. Jeffrey: "Book 10 of the *Confessions* concludes one of the most ruthless of principled self-examinations, I think, in the history of literature"; David Lyle Jeffrey, *Houses of the Interpreter: Reading Scripture, Reading Culture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 50.

30. Bright's "Book Ten" is a helpful reminder of the different aspects of this ascent passage: thanks and praise, sin and concupiscence, happiness and God.

31. See Van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart*, 72–73 and indeed all of chapter 5, on the connection between praise, on the one hand, and love and desire, on the other. On praise and the reorientation of desire see Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 154–66.

32. On the Psalms in Augustine, see Williams, *On Augustine*, chapter 2. On the Psalms in *Confessions* specifically, see J. Patout Burns, "Augustine's Distinctive Use of the Psalms in the *Confessions*: the Role of Music and Recitation," *Augustinian Studies* 24 (1993), 133–46. Burns' count is striking: *Conf.* contains 222 references to the Psalms versus 287 references to anywhere else in the Old Testament, and Psalmic references outnumber New Testament references in some books.; Burns, "Augustine's Distinctive Use," 133. Burns suggests that Augustine's use of the Psalms is largely taken from memory and shaped by his daily use of the Psalms in singing, prayer, and reflection.

33. On the fact that love of God is what we are *meant* to do, Rowan Williams is helpful: "it is love that draws us back to our proper place, that pulls us back to stability and harmony. And we know ourselves most fully and truthfully . . . when we know both that we are desiring beings and that our desire is ultimately and freely itself when it consciously becomes longing for God"; *On Augustine*, Kindle location 1687–1695.

34. van Bavel: "Whoever loves longs for the beloved. . . . Where God is concerned, we must even say that he, himself, gave us this longing"; *The Longing of the Heart*, 24. See also Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 42. This doctrine is not limited to the ages of Augustine—the patristic and medieval. In the Augustinian tradition of Christian theology aimed at finding happiness in God, see John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Multnomah: Colorado Springs, 1986).

35. Van Bavel: "God does not forbid us to love what has been created, but he does forbid us to love it as if our ultimate happiness resided therein"; *The Longing of the Heart*, 105. Also see above, Introduction, endnote 24.

36. *Augustine the Theologian*, 111.

37. Van Bavel: "Where God is concerned, we must even say that he, himself, gave us this longing"; *The Longing of the Heart*, 24.

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