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Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology

An Argument for Continuity

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Abstract: Having been at the centre of a century long debate which cast doubt on the nature of Augustine's conversion, one might assume that Augustine's early works (386-96) have now been rescued and given their rightful place. This book suggests that these are now threatened by an equally destructive trend in Augustine scholarship, which, over the last fifty years, has become an almost unquestioned norm of interpretation. This is the idea, fatefully and poignantly depicted by Peter Brown in the chapter of his seminal biography entitled *The Lost Future*, that the early optimistic and philosophical Augustine was dramatically transformed into the mature, pessimistic theologian of the Fall, original sin, and grace by his reading of Paul in the mid-390s. This interpretation of the first decade of Augustine's life has since become such an *idée fixe* in scholarly as well as popular accounts, leaving two very different Augustines: one, the young convert, fired to pursue Wisdom by an optimistic confidence in the rational disciplines of the liberal arts, human free will, and a glorious ideal of perfection; the other, the older and wiser bishop of Hippo, convinced of human fallenness and of the need for grace to will or to do any good work. This book argues that in order to do justice to Augustine's conversion, to his early theology and understanding of the Christian life, and to the early works themselves, such caricatures must be resisted. It seeks to demonstrate that there is a fundamental continuity in Augustine's thought, which does not undergo any dramatic change when he re-reads Paul in the 390s; that there is only one Augustine, for whom human weakness and divine grace were the central axes of his Christian faith and life from the very beginning.

Keywords: Augustine of Hippo, the Fall, original Sin, grace, continuity, will, conversion

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Part One

1. The Context

This chapter considers the biographical, historical, and theological context of Augustine's early works (386-96). It outlines the way in which these works have been read in scholarly debates over the last hundred years, demonstrating that they have generally been marginalised as the rather obsolete philosophical investigations of a new, somewhat naïve, over-optimistic convert, still entrenched in the classical tradition of belief in human free will and perfectibility. These have generally been contrasted with the later, mature works of Augustine — the pessimistic theologian of the Fall, original sin, and human dependence upon divine grace. It considers Peter Brown's analysis of the revolutionary transformation of the early into the later Augustine following his reading of Paul in the 390s, and sets out the argument of the book: that there is no discontinuity or revolutionary transformation of the early into the later Augustine, but rather a fundamental continuity between the two.

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2. The Revolution of 386

This chapter argues that Augustine's conversion in 386 is not a radically different conversion from the one he recounts in *Confessiones* 8: that if one is to speak of a 'revolution' in his thought, it is not to be found in his reading of Paul in the 390s, but in his reading of the 'books of the Platonists' in 386, and his discovery in them of a doctrine of God's transcendence which freed him from the materialistic philosophies that had hitherto made it impossible for him to embrace the Christian faith to which he had always sought to be reconciled.

[ABSTRACT](#)[FULL TEXT](#)

3. Ascent (and Descent)

The 'revolution' in Augustine's thought effected by his reading of the Platonists in 386 led to two seemingly antithetical emphases: a philosophical emphasis on the immutable, eternal, incorruptible God who must be sought by moving away from bodily, temporal, mutable reality on the one hand; and a thoroughly Christian emphasis on the Creator God who has drawn human beings from nothing, and upon their absolute contingency upon Him on the other. It is argued that Augustine's early thought can only be rightly understood when it is seen within the creative tension set up by these two apparently polarized ideas, and that it is here that his characteristic theology of a transcendent Creator and of fallen humanity's complete and absolute dependence upon Him emerges. This chapter focuses on the 'philosophical emphasis' by elucidating Augustine's early arguments for Christianity as the 'true philosophy', the various ways in which Augustine describes the ascent of the soul to God, the relation between faith (authority) and reason, and by comparing the early Soliloquia and Confessiones 10. It demonstrates that his 'philosophical' reflection is fundamentally and intrinsically Christian.

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4. Creation from Nothing

This chapter examines one of the central features of Augustine's early works which sets them apart from philosophical reflection, and provides the foundation for his early formulation of this 'mature' grasp of the faith: the idea of 'creation from nothing' — *creatio ex nihilo*. It demonstrates that what has been described as Augustine's early 'Christian philosophy' was never less than fully integrated into his faith in a Trinitarian God, who forms human beings from nothing, reforms them through the incarnation, and inspires in them love and delight through the Holy Spirit. It argues that he never shared the classical ideal of human autonomy and self-determination to attain perfection, but that he was always acutely conscious of human beings' created dependence upon God's grace.

[ABSTRACT](#)[FULL TEXT](#)

5. Paul

This chapter argues that Augustine's attempts at interpreting Paul in the mid 390s, culminating in the *Ad Simplicianum*, must not be read as representing a dramatic break with earlier ideas of human autonomy and the ability of the will to freely choose the good without divine help, but as affirming what he had always held: fallen humanity's complete and utter dependence upon God's grace to know, will, and do the good. It demonstrates that his suggestion in the *Propositiones* — that the free choice of faith is to be counted as a merit which is rewarded by grace — is uncharacteristic of either his earlier or later thought. By considering other works written at the same time (such as the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*), it is shown that there is a fundamental continuity in his approach to these difficult questions from the very beginning.

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Part Two

6. The Fall

This chapter examines the various ways in which Augustine talks about human fallenness and sin in the early works, and how these relate both to this understanding of creation from nothing and to the Fall of Adam and Eve. It considers how far 'original sin' can be legitimately spoken of in these works, and concludes that its characteristic features — human solidarity in Adam's sin, ignorance and difficulty in willing, the role of habit, concupiscence and inability to do the good without grace — shape Augustine's understanding from the beginning.

[ABSTRACT](#)[FULL TEXT](#)

7. The Will

This chapter argues against scholars' interpretations of books one to three of Augustine's work, *On Free Will*. Namely, scholars who view book one as revealing Augustine's early, optimistic estimate of the freedom and ability of the will, and books two and three as betraying the later bishop's pessimistic conviction of the fallen will's inability to do anything but sin without grace. It is argued that this work should be read as a unified piece. Book one sets out a theoretical picture of the freedom and ability of the will which was only possessed by Adam, while books two and three reflect on the ignorance and difficulty which characterize its operation after the Fall. Augustine's own later comments on the work, as well as other works written at the same time, are examined in order to support this interpretation.

[ABSTRACT](#)[FULL TEXT](#)

8. Grace

This final chapter draws together the arguments discussed in the preceding chapters to build an overall picture of how Augustine describes the operation of grace in his early works, and to

address some of the more contentious issues which have risen for scholars concerning its mode of operation. It examines Augustine's early teaching on grace in relation to his reflection on divine providence, divine admonition, Christology, the role of delight, and its inspiration by the Holy Spirit, thereby demonstrating that he was always anti-Pelagian and always thoroughly 'Augustinian'.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book has been niggling away at the back of my mind for a long time. The more I read and teach Augustine, the more I am uneasy with the way he is usually presented—through the *Confessions*, and through Peter Brown's biography. Both are, of course, sublimely compelling, seductive masterpieces, and have rightly exercised a magnetic attraction. In this respect, Augustine scholars have been thoroughly spoiled.

But what of Augustine the new convert? This is a question which no Augustine scholar, however much he or she might wish, has been able to avoid over the past century or so, and I have no doubt that it is with a certain relief that, having satisfactorily resolved the questions and doubts which have been raised, the world of Augustine scholarship has moved on, with a collective sigh of relief, to more inviting pastures. It seems that almost everyone is now content to identify the young Augustine as fully Catholic and Christian—albeit a rather naive, optimistic, somewhat intellectual type of Christian—and feels confident that in beginning with the *Confessions* they are beginning with *the* Augustine—the one we all know and identify as Augustine—the Augustine of the Fall, original sin, and grace. I am therefore conscious that in returning to the early works—yet again—this book is going to upset a now well-established, comfortable, and convenient scholarly consensus. My excuse is that, the more I encounter this consensus—and it is everywhere; in almost every book, article, and paper one reads on Augustine—I am more and more persuaded that, as a result of it, the early works have effectively been written off: if the mature Augustine only really emerges in the mid-390s, when his early naivety and optimism were finally flattened by the landslide which his exposure to Pauline theology dramatically precipitated in his thought, then it is inevitably the case that it does not seem worth searching in the rubble that has fallen for anything of value. The early Augustine has been well and truly flattened, demolished, and obliterated by the 'Pauline revolution'. It is this interpretation of the first decade of his work—one which I think is now almost universally followed—which I would like to question. I do not think the Augustine of the early works, even the works he wrote on retreat at Cassiciacum immediately after his conversion, is another, recognizably different and alien person, to the bishop of Hippo. There is a clear continuity between Augustine the new convert and Augustine the new bishop which I think has been ignored and which it is the purpose of this book to identify—not least, I want to question the real

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significance of Augustine's reading of Paul in the mid-390s. In developing my case, I am conscious that—despite the best efforts of those who have read earlier drafts of this book—I may, at times, have overstated it and failed to allow for the new convert to *evolve* into the new bishop; that I may have foisted too much of the later Augustine on the young Augustine's shoulders. It has sometimes been difficult to maintain balance walking the tightrope of Augustine scholarship when it seems always to lead in a direction I do not think it should go! I would therefore ask the gentle reader to allow for these overzealous and overconfident excesses and to try to remain sympathetic to the overall argument.

I am also conscious that, in the course of writing this book, and in the process of arguing against an interpretation that is almost universally accepted, I have trodden on a lot of toes. They are toes which I respect—very distinguished, erudite toes—and this makes it all the worse. I live in the hope that my blundering will be excused and that those who have borne the brunt of my clumsy footwork will not take it personally.

Throughout the work, Bible references are given to the text of the Latin Vulgate. English and French translations of cited works have been consulted, and modified where necessary.

Many colleagues have been a help, an inspiration, and an encouragement. I would like to thank especially Michael Cameron, David Hunter, Mathijs Lamberigts, Andrew Louth (who is also my husband), Robin Lane Fox, Robert Markus, Thomas Martin, and Marlene Verschoren. My thanks are also due to the anonymous reader for OUP who made some very valuable suggestions and saved me from making a big mistake with my dating of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. Lewis Ayres was unmasked as the other reader and with immense patience, learning, and care has commented on each chapter as it has been written. I have greatly appreciated his company along the way and hope he will not be too disappointed that some of his sage words of warning have not been heeded (he will no doubt find them being repeated in the reviews!). Allan Fitzgerald has also been an unfailing source of encouragement and wise criticism ever since this book was first suggested in a small paper for the Oxford Patristics Conference in 1995. He has generously given of his time and learning, lending his valuable support to my application for research leave, and in reading the entire draft manuscript.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Department of Theology and Religion, in Durham, who have taken on the burden of covering for my absence during research leave with tremendously good grace, and who have always been supportive of, and interested in, my work. Thanks too, to Augustine Casiday, for taking over my teaching during this time (it was reassuring and amusing to think that Augustine was taking my Augustine

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and his Age course!). I must also thank my students for making sure my grey cells still function and for being so enthusiastic and appreciative. They have been a constant source of thought-provoking ideas.

My thanks are owed to the Arts and Humanities Research Board for a three-month period of research leave in 2004 which their funding made possible. I also thank the Vatican Museums for their kind permission to use the illustration which appears on the jacket.

Lucy Qureshi, my editor at OUP, has been a wonderful source of advice, encouragement and help, whenever it was needed, and I am deeply grateful to her for this.

Finally, there is one scholar who has blazed the trail which this book attempts to follow, who has been a voice in the wilderness, and who alone has long argued for its central thesis: Goulven Madec. I hope he will not mind that I have invaded his desert island and invited others there too.



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The following table is based on the one which appears in Fitzgerald 1999

Abbrev.	Latin Title	English Title	Latin Editions	Translations
<i>Acad.</i>	<i>Contra Academicos</i>	<i>Against the Academics</i>	PL 32; CSELFC 1; ACW 12; WSA 63; CCL 29 I.3	
<i>b. uita</i>	<i>De beata uita</i>	<i>On the Happy Life</i>	PL 32; CSELFC 1; PS 72; WSA 63; CCL 29 I.3	
<i>cat. Rud.</i>	<i>De catechizandis rudibus</i>	<i>On Teaching the Uninstructed</i>	PL 40; CCL ACW2; NPNF 3; WSA 46	I.10
<i>ciu.</i>	<i>De ciuitate Dei</i>	<i>City of God</i>	PL 41; CSELFC 8.14.24; NPNF 2 40; CCL 47-48	WSA I.1
<i>conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>	<i>Confessions</i>	PL 32; CSELNPNF 1; WSA I.1; 33; CCL 27	Chadwick 1991
<i>diu. qu. 83</i>	<i>De diuersis quaestionibus 83</i>	<i>On Eighty-Three different questions</i>	PL 40; CCL 46	FC 70; WSA I.12
<i>doc. Chr.</i>	<i>De Doctrina Christiana</i>	<i>On Christian Doctrine</i>	PL 34; CSEL 80	WSA I.11
<i>duab. An.</i>	<i>De duabus animabus</i>	<i>On Two Souls</i>	PL 42; CSEL 25	NPNF 4; WSA I.19
<i>en. Ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>	<i>Enarrations on the Psalms</i>	PL 36-37; CCL 38-40	ACW 29-30; NPNF 8 WSA III.14-17
<i>ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>	<i>Letters</i>	PL 33; CSELFC 12, 18, 20, 30, 34, 44, 57, 32; NPNF 1; WSA 58, 88.	II.1-3
<i>ep. Rm. Inch.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio</i>	<i>Unfinished Commentary on Romans</i>	PL 35; CSEL 84	WSA 1.17; Fredriksen-Landes 1982
<i>ex. prop. Rm.</i>	<i>Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula ad Romanos</i>	<i>Commentary on Statements from Romans</i>	PL 35; CSEL 84	WSA I.17
<i>fid. et sym.</i>	<i>De fide et symbolo</i>	<i>On Faith and the Creed</i>	PL 40; CSELFC 27; LCC 6; NPNF 41	3 WSA I.8
<i>ex. Gal.</i>	<i>Expositio Epistulae ad Galatas</i>	<i>Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians</i>	PL 35; CSEL 84	Plumer 2003; WSA I.17
<i>c. Fort</i>	<i>Acta contra Fortunatum</i>	<i>Debate with Fortunatus the Manichee</i>	PL42; CSEL 25.1	NPNF 4; WSA I.19
<i>Gn. Litt</i>	<i>De Genesi ad Litteram</i>	<i>On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis</i>	PL 34; CSELACW 41-42; WSA 28.1	I.23
<i>Gn. litt. Imp.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber</i>	<i>On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis, unfinished</i>	PL 34; CSELFC 84; ACW 41-42 28.1	WSA I.13
<i>Gn. adu. Man.</i>	<i>De Genesi aduersus Manicheos</i>	<i>On Genesis against the Manichees</i>	PL 34; CSEL 91	FC 84; WSA I.13

<i>imm. An.</i>	<i>De immortalitate animae</i>	<i>On the Immortality of the soul</i>	PL32; CSEL 89	FC 2; WSA I.3
<i>Jo. eu. Tr.</i>	<i>In Johannis euangelium Tractatus</i>	<i>Tractates on the Gospel of John</i>	PL35; CCL 36	FC 78, 79, 88, 90, 92; NPNF 4; WSA III.12
<i>c. Jul.</i>	<i>Contra Julianum</i>	<i>Against Julian</i>	PL44	FC 35; WSA I.24
<i>c. Jul. imp.</i>	<i>Contra Julianum opus imperfectum</i>	<i>Against Julian, unfinished</i>	PL 45; CSEL 85.1 PL 32;	WSA I.3
<i>lib. Arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>	<i>On Free Will</i>	CEWL 74; CCL 29	ACW 22; WSA I.3
<i>mag.</i>	<i>De Magistro</i>	<i>The Teacher</i>	PL 32; CSEL 77.1; CCL 29	LCC 6; ACW 9; WSA I.3
<i>mend.</i>	<i>De mendacio</i>	<i>On Lying</i>	PL 40; CSEL 41	FC16; WSA I.10
<i>c. mend.</i>	<i>Contra mendacium</i>	<i>Against Lying</i>	PL 40; CSEL 41	FC 16; NPNF 2; WSA I.10
<i>mor.</i>	<i>De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum</i>	<i>On the Catholic and Manichaeian Ways of Life</i>	PL 32; CSEL 90	FC 56; NPNF 4; WSA I.19
<i>mus.</i>	<i>De musica</i>	<i>On Music</i>	PL32	FC 2; WSA I.3
<i>nat.b.</i>	<i>De natura boni</i>	<i>On the Nature of the Good</i>	PL32; CSEL 25.2	LCC 6; NPNF 4; WSA I.19
<i>ord.</i>	<i>De ordine</i>	<i>On Order</i>	PL32; CSEL 63; CCL 29	FC 1; WSA I.3
<i>praed. Sanct.</i>	<i>De praedestinatione sanctorum</i>	<i>On the Predestination of the Saints</i>	PL44	FC 86; NPNF 5; WSA I.26
<i>quant.</i>	<i>De quantitate animae</i>	<i>On the Greatness of the soul</i>	PL 32; CSEL 89	FC 2; ACW 9; WSA I.4
<i>retr.</i>	<i>Retractationes</i>	<i>Retractations</i>	PL 32; CSEL 36; CCL 57	FC 60; WSA I.2
<i>s.</i>	<i>Sermones</i>	<i>Sermons</i>	PL 38, 39; CCL 41	FC 81; WSA I.1-11
<i>s. Dom. Mon.</i>	<i>De sermone Domini in monte</i>	<i>On the Sermon on the Mount</i>	PL 34; CCL 35	FC 11; ACW 5; NPNF 7 WSA I.16
<i>Simpl.</i>	<i>Ad Simplicianum</i>	<i>To Simplicianus</i>	PL 40; CCL 44	LCC 6; WSA I.12
<i>sol.</i>	<i>Soliloquia</i>	<i>Soliloquies</i>	PL 32; CSEL 89	FC 2; LCC 6; NPNF 7; WSA I.3
<i>trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>	<i>On the Trinity</i>	PL 42; CCL 50/50A	FC 45; NPNF 3; WSA I.5
<i>util. Cred.</i>	<i>De utilitate credendi</i>	<i>On the Usefulness of Belief</i>	PL42; CSEL 25.1	LCC 6; NPNF 3; WSA I.8
<i>uera rel.</i>	<i>De uera religione</i>	<i>On True Religion</i>	PL 34; CSEL 77; CCL 32	LCC 6; WSA I.8

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Abbreviations

- ACW J. Quasten and J. C. Plumpe (eds.), *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1946-).
- BA *Oeuvres of Saint Augustin*, Bibliothèque Augustinienne (Paris: Desclée, De Brouwer, 1949-).
- CCL *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953-).
- CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna: Tempsky, 1865-).
- FC R. J. Deferrari (ed.), *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1947-).
- LCC J. Baillie, J. T. McNeill, and H. P. van Dusen (eds.), *Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia and London, 1953-66).
- NPNF *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Parker; repr. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994).
- PL J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Latina (Paris, 1944-64).
- PS' R. J. Deferrari (ed.), *Patristic Studies* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1922-).
- WSA J. E. Rotelle (ed.), *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New City Press, 1990-).
- Periodicals and Series
- AS *Augustinian Studies*
- JTS *Journal of Theological Studies*
- REA *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*
- Rech. Aug. *Recherches Augustiniennes*
- T&U *Texte und Untersuchungen*

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Part One

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1 The Context

Carol Harrison

Abstract: This chapter considers the biographical, historical, and theological context of Augustine's early works (386-96). It outlines the way in which

these works have been read in scholarly debates over the last hundred years, demonstrating that they have generally been marginalised as the rather obsolete philosophical investigations of a new, somewhat naïve, over-optimistic convert, still entrenched in the classical tradition of belief in human free will and perfectibility. These have generally been contrasted with the later, mature works of Augustine — the pessimistic theologian of the Fall, original sin, and human dependence upon divine grace. It considers Peter Brown's analysis of the revolutionary transformation of the early into the later Augustine following his reading of Paul in the 390s, and sets out the argument of the book: that there is no discontinuity or revolutionary transformation of the early into the later Augustine, but rather a fundamental continuity between the two.

Keywords: context, classical tradition, Peter Brown, discontinuity, continuity, confessiones

When Augustine's name is mentioned, it is probably his *Confessiones* which first spring to mind, both to those who know nothing else about him, and also to the Augustine scholar. They stand among the classics of world literature (Clark 1993) and throughout the ages have exercised a wide-ranging influence, establishing a new literary genre and finding readers well beyond the confines of academic or devotional theology. This is not least because they stand almost alone among the works of late antiquity in revealing the mind of their author, allowing us a startlingly modern insight into the nature of the subconscious mind. Because of this personal quality, and the power of Augustine's insight and language, they are also a very moving, dramatic portrait of intellectual doubt, and ethical wavering and weakness, culminating in one of the most famous conversions in Christian history. In fact, they provide Augustine's only detailed account of his life before conversion, of the stages which led up to it, and of his conversion itself. For these reasons alone, the *Confessiones* are more often than not taken as the starting point for any study of Augustine. The rationale of this starting point is further endorsed for most scholars by the fact that Augustine began to write this work at a point at which they think they can locate the real beginnings of his mature theology, and at a decisive turning point in his career as a Christian theologian—for the *Confessiones* were begun in 396, ten years after his conversion in 386, and in the year when he became bishop of Hippo. For many readers and scholars 396 marks the beginning of Augustine's mature work, and the *Confessiones* represent an excellent starting point to begin to approach them: they summarize his past life, recount his conversion, and above all, embody, by virtue of retrospective reflection over the past ten years, his mature judgement on the theological questions he had tackled during this time (e.g. Fredriksen 1986).

But the fact that the *Confessiones* were written a full ten years after his conversion in Milan in 386, which Augustine describes in book 8 for the first time, should at least make us pause for thought. How much weight can we attach to an account written after such a long gap of time from the actual events it recounts? We should certainly not attempt to use it to obtain an

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accurate insight into Augustine's thoughts, dilemmas, and decisions at this time or for a blow by blow historical account of what actually happened. We

must of course bear in mind that Augustine is writing as a bishop, with contemporary issues and events in mind, as well as what has happened during the past ten years. He has had time to reflect upon his past, to assess its significance, to integrate it into a systematic theology of human sin and divine grace. It is clear to any reader of the *Confessiones* that the work is as much an intellectual biography as a personal biography: the author has an agenda, a set of issues or questions he wishes to tackle, and these determine and inform what he has to say about his past and how he presents it to us. His past life and experiences are used in order to make sense of the present and to resolve the intellectual, theological, and personal problems he has faced.

It should therefore be clear that if we want to establish what Augustine was actually thinking and doing during the ten years between his conversion and the writing of the *Confessiones* then it is to the works written during this period that we must turn. Can one appreciate an author's mature thought without examining his earlier, formative years? Are not mature ideas reached on different subjects at different stages and dates, rather than at the same time in one particular work? Moreover, is it desirable to allow the retrospective interpretation of a mature work to overshadow and dictate how a writer's earlier works are read? The problem with Augustine scholarship is that these questions have seemingly been set aside before the towering genius, the seductive prose, and the un-put-down-able excitement of the *Confessiones*. In this respect Augustine's earliest works have had a rather poor deal and it is one of the aims of this book to reinstate them.

But it is not only the overpowering attraction of the *Confessiones* that has magnetized the field of scholarship away from the early works. Other, rather more subtle, forces have been at play. For most of the last century Augustine's very earliest works, written during the retreat he took at Cassiciacum during the autumn and winter of 386-7, immediately following his conversion, were indeed at the centre of scholarly attention, but in such a way as to confirm in the minds of many their already doubtful significance for appreciating his mature thought. When certain scholars accused the early Augustine of being no more and no less than a philosopher, and claimed that his conversion in 386 was to Neoplatonism, rather than to Christianity, they set the agenda which was to determine the shape of Augustine scholarship for a long time to come.¹

¹ See ACW 12. 19-23; BA 13. 55-84; Kevane 1964: 347-60; and especially Madec 1994: 51-69, for a good concise summary and discussion of the history of this debate.

In retrospect the results, as in most battles, hardly justify the energy and effort expended on both sides. Those who set out to prove that the

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Augustine of the early works was indeed a Christian, albeit one who, like many Christian writers before him, chose philosophical terminology and debate as his means of elucidating, expounding, and teaching the Christian faith, won the day. The identity and nature of the Neoplatonism Augustine encountered and its adoption in a Christian context have, as a result, been given inordinate scholarly attention, and the Christian elements of the early works have been exhaustively excavated and displayed as proof. But the debate was really one which should never have happened. That it did, one suspects, is largely due to the distinction of the proponents of the Neoplatonic view, the cogency and apparent credibility with which they argued, and the publicity their views received, not least in the serious and thoroughgoing attempts of those who sought to rebut and refute them. The earliest works of Augustine have emerged from this battle in a somewhat unfavourable light as rather obsolete philosophical investigations by a new, and somewhat naive, over-optimistic, Christian convert who was unable or unwilling to set aside the tools he had used in his secular career and who only slowly, and falteringly, grasped the fullness of the faith he had embraced. Augustine's early years as a Christian were salvaged, and their genuineness and respectability preserved, but no great weight was attributed to his earliest compositions during this period.

One of the other gravitational fields in scholarship which has drawn attention away from the early works is the off-putting spectrum of problems one encounters in setting the early works alongside the *Confessiones*. Any attempt to compare the two inevitably provokes the rather unsettling suspicion that they do not agree—not just in theological views (though the theories of those who hold that Augustine was converted to Neoplatonism, and of those who, as we shall see below, set a chasm between the early works and the *Confessiones* by adopting theories of a revolution in Augustine's thought in the 390s, contribute greatly to the apparent discrepancy between the two), but also in historical detail. The significant details and emphases one would expect to find in the early works, and which are absolutely central to the *Confessiones*, such as the account of his conversion in the garden at Milan, are simply not there. Why should Augustine fail to describe such a significant event in any of his earliest works, even in passages where he is alluding to his conversion? The obvious answers are disconcerting ones: either he did not think the garden episode significant enough to mention at this early stage, or his account of his conversion in the *Confessiones*, which we have already noted is the only full one he gives, is not entirely historical but, at least in part, literary fiction.²

² Courcelle 1968: 188-202. Courcelle is supported by Ferrari who has argued in a series of works (1980, 1982, 1984) that, since the central text of Augustine's conversion account in *conf.* 8. 12. 29-30—Rom. 13: 13—is not cited or alluded to in any earlier works, and Augustine begins to concentrate on Paul's conversion only in the period he wrote the *Confessiones*, the account is likely to be largely fictional. See Ferrari 1982: 154 n. 13 for further bibliography on this question, though beware his

In making the latter suggestion Pierre Courcelle set the cat

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firmly among the pigeons and initiated an interesting debate on the aims, style, and language of the *Confessiones*, which has led to a greater appreciation of Augustine's preoccupations in writing this work, but has either ignored the early works which gave rise to the problem, or, because they make no mention of Augustine's graced conversion as a result of reading Paul in book 8, has relegated them, once again, to the status of primarily philosophical works which have no real appreciation of the fallenness of humanity or its need for divine grace (Ferrari 1980, 1982, 1984; Fredriksen 1986). At the very least, the *Confessiones* and the early works sit rather awkwardly together and relations between them are full of tensions. Better, it is usually felt, to play safe and opt for the *Confessiones*.

A much stronger and more serious pull away from the early works than either the status of the *Confessiones* and questions of historicity, or doubts cast upon the nature and sincerity of their Christianity, has emerged in the last forty years, in the shape of debates over Augustine's debt to Paul in his early theology. What I am referring to is the so-called 'revolution of the 390s' which has become so defining and characteristic a feature of Augustine scholarship since the 1960s that it is now almost impossible to avoid, even in the shortest article. To understand Augustine, it is now generally agreed that one must appreciate the revolution his thought underwent in the early 390s as a result of his reading and reflection upon the work of Paul, most especially on Romans and Galatians. In a series of works on these Pauline writings, written in the early 390s, it is held, we see Augustine working towards his mature theology of original sin, the Fall, grace, and free will; a mature synthesis which is clearly stated for the first time in the *Ad Simplicianum* of 396. To maintain that Augustine's reflections on these central ideas began to emerge only in the 390s and that they finally took shape in a form resembling his mature works only in 396 is obviously to marginalize the interest, relevance, and indeed orthodoxy of the earliest works for these central aspects of his theology. In fact, it is questioning the nature and importance of his conversion in 386 in a manner just as radical as those who held that Augustine was converted to Neoplatonism, or those who see two rather different Augustines in the early works and the *Confessiones*. An early theology in which original sin, the Fall, and grace are absent is a theology not recognizably Augustinian and one the

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scholar can indeed afford to discount and ignore. But is this really the case? The thesis of this book is that the real revolution in Augustine's thought happened not in 396 but in 386, at his conversion, and that the defining features of his mature theology were in place from this moment onwards. I would like to demonstrate that interpretations of Augustine which centre upon the contrast between the Augustine of the early works and the

Augustine of the *Confessiones*, or upon the importance of the 390s for the shaping of his theology, are obscuring and falsifying its real development. If there is a contrast or turning point to be identified, then I will argue that it centres upon his reading of the Neoplatonists and Paul, which precipitated his conversion in 386 and was then the subject of his Christian reflection from this point onwards. In fact, I would like to go further and demonstrate that many of the features which scholars see emerging in the 390s, and most especially in the *Letter to Simplicianus*, such as an awareness of the Fall, original sin, the flawed will of human beings, and their need for divine grace, are in fact present from the very beginning. In other words I will be attempting to reassess the development of Augustine's theology, to question the sharp contrast which has been made between the early works and the *Confessiones* and the accuracy of describing the 390s as a revolutionary turning point, and, above all, to demonstrate a fundamental continuity in Augustine's thought from the very beginning.

This chapter will therefore conclude with two sections mapping out the field we are to explore: a first section on the identity of the works I have been referring to as 'the early works' a second on how these works are now generally viewed by Augustine scholars.

The Early Works

We do not possess any works written prior to Augustine's conversion in 386, although in the *Confessiones* he does describe a piece he no longer possesses, but which he had written in Milan in c.380, on philosophical aesthetics, entitled *De pulchro et apto* (*conf.* 4. 13. 20). The works now extant all date from after his conversion, and for the ten-year period stretching from 386 to 396, they tend to fall into four groups. These groups are generally circumscribed, and given their particular emphases, by the place in which Augustine wrote them and his particular preoccupations at the time: Cassiciacum 386-7; Milan and Rome 387-8; Thagaste 388-91; Hippo 391-6.

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Cassiciacum 386-387

Almost immediately after his conversion in Milan in 386 Augustine retired from his job as municipal rhetor on the grounds of ill health³

³*conf.* 9. 2. 4.

and withdrew to the country estate of a colleague, Verecundus, near Cassiciacum. He was joined by his mother, Monnica, his son Adeodatus, his pupils Licentius (son of his patron, Romanianus) and Trygetius, his uneducated cousins Lartidianus and Rusticus, his brother Nauigius, and his friend Alypius. With Monnica running the household, Augustine (who very much assumes the role of teacher) and his pupils structured their days according to the classical tradition for cultured retreats: they read the classics, discussed philosophical questions, and generally gave their minds and bodies time and space to leave behind everyday concerns in order to find freedom and spiritual nourishment—to be at leisure and see that you

are God'.⁴

⁴ Ibid. quoting Ps. 45: 11.

There is indeed a real sense of unhurried reflection on questions of ultimate importance in these works on the soul and its immortality; the true, the good, the beautiful, and their cultivation and attainment; the ultimate goal of human beings or the happy life. These questions were debated in the classical dialogue form⁵

⁵ De Plinval 1950: 308, 311, comments on Augustine's use of this classical form, 'With Saint Augustine the traditional classical dialogue genre came close to rediscovering the native qualities of spontaneity, versatility and aesthetic value with which it had been originally endowed by Plato...Augustine's dialogues are the swansong of a genre which, throughout the whole of classical literature, was the mode of expression *par excellence* for erudite literary or philosophical doctrines.' Cf. Hoffmann 1966 who concurs with this judgement; Conybeare 2005*b*, part one, who suggests that Augustine exploits the open-ended, flexible, theatrical nature of the dialogue genre—hovering between fiction and reality—as a vehicle to express uncertainty and indeterminacy, and most especially his own—still 'liminal'—state at Cassiciacum.

familiar to Augustine and his pupils from Plato and, most especially, Cicero,⁶

⁶ The influence of Cicero on the Cassiciacum dialogues has been somewhat overlooked and eclipsed by the question of the influence of Neoplatonism on Augustine's thought at this time. It is not, however, inconsiderable: Cicero has a significant impact not only on the literary form of the dialogues but also on their philosophical content—see Foley 1999.

and were then written down (presumably in the form of notes which Augustine then edited).⁷

⁷ The evidence for this is uncertain and has been one of the main features in the debate against the historicity of the dialogues. We must remember, however, that such a procedure was commonplace and was regularly used by public speakers or preachers who employed secretaries or amanuenses for the purpose.

Although doubt has been cast on their authenticity as debates which actually happened, the rich incidental detail and vivid characterization which brings them to life do suggest either a skilled and deliberate attempt to make the reader believe they did happen, or that they are indeed

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authentic.⁸

⁸ See ACW 12. 23-33; Madec 1996; O'Donnell 1992: iii. 86-7; Conybeare 2005, part one, for the debated question of the historicity of the dialogues.

Whatever their status, the reader is given an insight into Augustine's thoughts and feelings at this time which is matched in his works only by the *Confessiones*. On the one hand we have the skilled teacher, eager that his pupils should be led by questioning and discussion to apprehend the truth of the subject in hand, and through the practice of the disciplines which they had acquired and learnt to exercise in a secular context, be able to move 'from the corporeal to incorporeal'—from bodily to spiritual truths.⁹

⁹ Solignac 1958, for possible sources beyond Neoplatonism, esp. Nichomachus of Gerasa.

On the other hand we have the new Christian convert, intent on

understanding, defending and expounding the truths of his faith in this thoroughly classical context. For many subsequent readers of the early works Augustine's aim and method do not sit well together. As Augustine himself puts it: 'they still breathe the spirit of the school of pride, as if they were at the last gasp' (*conf.* 9. 4. 7). Secular learning and debate on what appear to be thoroughly philosophical subjects seem far removed from what they would expect of a new Christian who has just undergone a dramatic conversion. The Christian colouring of the works seems to them to be more in the nature of a background wash than of foreground details. The language is not, as in the later Augustine, steeped in scriptural allusion (although this is not entirely absent),¹⁰

¹⁰ Cooper 1996.

but is altogether classical, philosophical, more at home in the schools than in a Christian house party.

In order not to be misled by the form and language of Augustine's earliest work we must remember that what might seem inappropriate or alien to us might appear differently to someone whose thought and general culture had been shaped by a late antique education. Augustine, his pupils, and his contemporary readers would all share this formation and, like most Christians before them, would naturally understand, defend, and articulate their Christian faith in this context.¹¹

¹¹ See Marrou 1949; 1955; Kaster 1988; C. Harrison 2000: 46-78.

Christianity had, almost from the beginning, been understood as a philosophy, a method of seeking and attaining the truth. Indeed, it was understood by Christians to be *the* true philosophy, superseding all others and providing the summation and culmination of whatever truth the others had grasped and taught. Not only was this sort of understanding a necessary apologetic tool in order to defend and promote Christianity in a secular context, it was also an indispensable means for Christians who were formed by, and unavoidably belonged to, this secular culture, to grasp the truths of their faith. Augustine's earliest work therefore stands in a long line of Christian reflection and apologetic, and articulates his own

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coming to terms with his newly embraced faith. The questions which had troubled and motivated him as a non-Christian—of evil, the soul, the true, good, and beautiful—were also those which directed his Christian reflection and which he found best answered in a Christian context. We must also remember that what had finally reconciled him to Christianity, and enabled him to resolve at least his intellectual doubts, was the revolution (as we shall see in the next chapter) his discovery of Neoplatonic philosophy had worked in his thought. For this reason also it is not at all surprising to find him preoccupied with philosophical questions and using philosophical language and arguments in his first works as a Christian.

Augustine completed four works during the few months of retreat: *Contra Academicos* (an attempt to refute the scepticism of the New Academy which Augustine had flirted with on abandoning Manichaeism); *De beata uita* (on the ultimate good and how it is to be attained); *De ordine* (on the question of evil and providence); *Soliloquia* (a dialogue between Augustine and his reason on Christian life and virtue, which has much in common with *Confessiones*, and a second book on the immortality of the soul). Although the titles and subjects might at first seem wholly philosophical we should also remember that they are generally subjects which were to remain central to Augustine right through to his death; they are the first clear statements of major themes which are to be orchestrated throughout his work.¹²

¹² On the text, date, chronology, historicity, literary background, and questions raised by these works see Doignon 1989; Matthews 1980: 40-1; McWilliam 1990; O'Daly, *Lexicon I* (1992), 771-81; introductions and notes to the BA editions.

When Augustine returned to Milan in 387 it was not to his former co-religionists, the Manichees, or to his secular ambitions and profession, or even to his arranged marriage, but to enrol as a catechumen for baptism at Easter, having been instructed by Ambrose during the season of Lent.

Milan and Rome 387-388

'Et baptizati sunt.' Augustine's only reference to his baptism is in this brief aside in the *Confessiones*. Despite his evident delight in the music and liturgy at Milan¹³

¹³ *conf.* 9. 6. 14.

he soon headed south to the seaport of Ostia, just outside Rome, from where he planned to return to his home town of Thagaste, to take possession of the family property. It was in Ostia that he shared the famous vision with his mother, and where she died and was buried (*conf.* 9. 10. 23-11. 28). His plans to sail to Africa were thwarted by a blockade of the Mediterranean by Maximus, who was attempting to wrest power from the

Emperor Theodosius. As a result, Augustine spent the rest of the year in Rome where he encountered for the first time Egyptian-type monastic houses, the impact of which is evident in his work *De moribus*, written during this enforced exile as the first in a long series of works dissociating himself from the sect which had held him for nine years. Other works from this period are the first book of *De libero arbitrio* (another work against the Manichees, on the question of evil) and two treatises which continue his earlier preoccupation with the nature and capacities of the soul, *De immortalitate animae* and *De quantitate animae*. Also dating from this period is a long investigation of metre, rhythm, and order entitled *De musica*, the first of a projected series of books on the disciplines of the liberal arts, which, as we have seen, he valued above all else as exercising and enabling the mind to move from bodily to spiritual things.¹⁴

¹⁴ *De dialectica*, which was rediscovered last century, is also now thought to date from this period.

Augustine cannot but have been sensitive to his Manichaean past now that he was back where others had known him as an enthusiastic, positively evangelical Manichee. His attempts to distance himself from them, to undermine and refute their lifestyle and doctrines, lend a more obvious 'Christian' colouring to the works of this period which, as we have noted, his readers and critics have found lacking in the works before this date. The emphasis is, however, attributable more to context and the requirements of polemic, than to any change of interest or belief. Indeed, we will increasingly find that from now on Augustine is less in a position to choose what he writes upon and more and more forced to address various topics because of particular circumstances and needs.¹⁵

¹⁵ See *ep.* 101 to Memorius, where Augustine observes in relation to *mus.* that he intended to write another six books on melody, but that the burden of church duties made this impossible. Note that he does not say that it was because of a change of interest at this stage.

Thagaste 389-391

When Augustine finally returned to Thagaste, via Carthage, in early 389 he immediately established a mode of common life which looked back to Cassiciacum and forward to the monastic communities in which he was to remain until his death. In this case it was a community which he refers to as the Servants of God (*serui dei*), a self-sustaining lay community which identified itself with the local church, which held all in common and lived a life of prayer, fasting, good works, study of Scripture, and general devotion. We are given a fascinating insight into the sort of issues which arose within

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the community and which Augustine sought, when questioned, to give answers to, in the *De diuersis quaestionibus* which date through to 396, when Augustine left the *serui dei*/lay monastery in Hippo to establish a clerical monastery in the bishop's house at Hippo. The fact that he had time

to think and write in this context is reflected in the three important works written during this time: *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, the first of five attempts to comment on the book of Genesis. In this instance, Augustine attempts to demonstrate the desirability of allegorical interpretation in order to avoid the sort of objections, difficulties, and absurdities which arose from the Manichees' thoroughgoing literal and fundamentalist approach to the text. The second work, *De magistro*, a dialogue with his clever teenage son, Adeodatus, on the nature and function of language in conveying the truth, is a reminder that Augustine has in no way left behind his earlier preoccupation with the disciplines in the service of Christian truth. The third work, entitled *De uera religione* is almost a short systematic theology aimed to (re)convert Manichee sympathizers, and is a reminder that Augustine's Christian faith in this early period was far from being the naive and somewhat embryonic substance that his critics sometimes maintain, but a mature and reflective grasp of the crucial elements of Christian doctrine. That *De magistro* and *De uera religione* date from the same period is a good indicator of the coexistence and complementarity of these two facets of Augustine's early Christianity.

Hippo 391-396

What he might have gone on to write if he had remained a Servant of God we can only guess. The fact that Augustine tells us that he was careful to avoid visiting places where he knew the church had a bishopric vacant suggests he very much wanted to remain one (*ep.* 355. 2). The seaport of Hippo, which he visited in 391, to talk with a prospective member of the Servants of God, and with a view to setting up a monastery there, seemed a safe enough place, as it already had a bishop, the ageing Greek, Valerius. What Augustine did not know was that Valerius was keen to secure a helper and successor. He was appointed priest at Hippo by popular acclamation, despite his protests, and tears expressing his unworthiness. His works from this point onwards reflect the dramatic change which had taken place in his life.

There was no period of being let in gently. Having moved the Thagaste community to a house in the grounds of the basilica at Hippo, Augustine was looked to very much as a sort of co-adjutor bishop (a position Valerius later—uncanonically—confirmed in order not to lose him). He was expected (again, contrary to church custom) to preach, to address the clergy in council, to take

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up the fight against the entrenched African schismatics, the Donatists, and to take a full role in the onerous administration of the Church and its properties (a burden vastly increased since the Church gained autonomy and civil rights under Constantine). He was, as it were, thrown in at the deep end. The works of this period show that he had no time to tread water but was immediately plunged headlong into the exhausting marathon of priestly/episcopal duties. He began his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, continued his attack on the Manichees in *De utilitate credendi*, engaged in public debate with them in *Contra Fortunatum*, initiated a sustained attack on the Donatists with a popular song (*Psalmus contra partem Donati*), corresponded

with a wide variety of people (Alypius, Nebridius, Paulinus, Jerome, the Donatists...) and addressed the General Council of Africa on the creed (*De fide et symbolo*). His acute sense of his responsibilities and inadequacies as a new priest, and his desire to improve his knowledge of Scripture, so that he might be in a position to do all that he could to assist the salvation of those in his charge, is articulated in a letter sent to Valerius at his ordination, requesting free time to study the Scriptures (*ep.* 21), and is subsequently evidenced in a series of commentaries and sermons on various parts of Scripture which he began at this time: the second of his attempts to interpret Genesis (*De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*), his commentary *De sermone Domini in monte*, a commentary on Galatians (*Expositio Epistolae ad Galatas*), and two works on Romans (*Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula Apostoli ad Romanos*; *Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*).

We must again be aware that the change in subject, tone, and emphasis in these works is more indicative of specific circumstances and practical necessity than of any transformation in Augustine's faith. He tells Valerius in *ep.* 21 that 'I know and hold with firm faith all that is necessary for my own salvation,' but then asks 'But, how am I to make use of this for the salvation of others?' At this point, as we have just noted, the answer seemed to lie in extending his knowledge of the Scriptures. His faith would, of course, continue to grow in understanding and in maturity, especially as he was able to read and study more of them, and as his experience of life in the Church developed, but this should not be used as a reason to write off the works before 391 as the overly philosophical ponderings of an as yet immature, over-optimistic, Christian convert. Even the *Confessiones* are in large part determined by the specific circumstances in which Augustine the bishop found himself from 396 onwards, and the new necessities—self-exoneration and self-justification, a statement of mature theology against heretics, etc.¹⁶

¹⁶ One of the more interesting suggestions is that of R. Lane Fox, who likened them (in conversation) to the work of a scholar who suddenly learns he is to become dean of a faculty; they are a last, desperate, and eloquent swansong of feeling and scholarship before the duties of administration take over completely.

—which he faced.

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'The Lost Future'

When Peter Brown published his *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* in 1967 the world of Augustine scholarship was never to be the same again. It had been immeasurably enriched by a portrayal of Augustine which was to attract generations of scholars to study him (the present author included), which inspired countless other monographs, and still provides an almost definitive account of his life and work. No one reading Augustine can afford to ignore this book if they are either to understand Augustine himself or Augustine scholarship since it was published. As James O'Donnell has aptly observed 'Our Augustine is Brown's'.¹⁷

¹⁷ O'Donnell 1999: 215.

Given how much we Augustine scholars owe to Professor Brown it seems rather ungrateful to mention his magisterial book in a context in which one is simply going to disagree with part of it. Let me first emphasize then, that it is necessary to make such a direct criticism only because it is the single most important book on Augustine of the last century, and the one which has done most to influence how he has been read and interpreted. In almost every respect, this influence has been an enormously positive and fruitful one. With regards to the early works and the 390s, however, I think it has led subsequent scholars astray.

In a brief chapter entitled 'The Lost Future' Peter Brown gave a first, fateful presentation, of the theory that in the 390s Augustine's thought underwent a revolution which left behind his earlier works and established the features now regarded as characteristic of his mature theology. In part this revolution was a personal one; Augustine was reaching middle age, no longer a vigorous young man, optimistic for the future, ardently and confidently seeking the wisdom and perfection which philosophy—Christian philosophy—had seemed to promise, but was rather someone who, through 'hard thought and bitter experience'¹⁸

¹⁸ Brown 1967: 147-8.

had come to terms with the loss of his mother and young son, with the disillusionment of realizing that perfection was beyond his reach, that the attainment of truth and the life of perfect virtue had eluded him, and that he was to spend the rest of his life fighting a losing battle against the forces of habit and temptation, the clouds of ignorance, and the vitiated will which now seemed an inevitable and unavoidable feature of what it was to be a human being:

Augustine, indeed, had decided that he would never reach the fulfillment that he first thought was promised to him by a Christian Platonism: he would never impose a victory of mind over body in himself, he would never achieve the wrapt contemplation of the ideal philosopher. It is the most drastic change that a man may have to

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accept: it involved nothing less than the surrender of the bright future
he thought he had gained at Cassiciacum.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid. 147.

This indeed makes moving and dramatic reading—Augustine the rationalist and perfectionist transformed into Augustine the Romantic; a wanderer, longing, yearning, groaning for a fulfilment which he can never achieve in this life—but it is a caricature of the early Augustine which can only result in a gross distortion of his subsequent development.

The theory of a dramatic turning point or revolution in the 390s rests, however, not so much on personal experiences as on the theological insights which confirmed and interpreted them. It was in the early 390s, as we have seen above, that Augustine began to comment upon St Paul, and to grapple with his theology of the Fall, original sin, free will, grace, and predestination, as set forth in Galatians and Romans. Peter Brown suggests that it was in coming to terms with Pauline theology that Augustine first elaborated his mature understanding of these matters. The *Ad Simplicianum*, in which the doctrines of original sin and the need for grace are set forth uncompromisingly for the first time, is therefore seen as the dramatic conclusion of the earthquake which had precipitated a landslide in Augustine's thought from ideals of perfection to a conviction of universal human sinfulness and the complete inability of human beings to will or to do the good—to even begin to believe—without divine grace: 'Now, he will see in Paul nothing but a single, unresolved tension between "flesh" and "spirit"...Only after this life would tension be resolved... It is a flattened landscape: and in it, the hope of spiritual progress comes increasingly to depend, for Augustine, on the unfathomable will of God.'²⁰

²⁰ Ibid. 151-2

'Two Augustines'

Where does this leave the early works and how are they now generally regarded as a result of this theory? We should note, first of all, that the theory of a revolution in Augustine's thought in the 390s in working out a doctrine of original sin and grace is now almost universally accepted. It is not, I think, an understatement to say that it has become almost canonical in Augustine scholarship. What this means is that the early works have been read as representing an altogether different Augustine from the author of the *Ad Simplicianum* and the *Confessiones*, or from the mature Christian who was consecrated bishop in 396. In a sense, the spectre of the old debate concerning

Augustine's debt to Neoplatonism and the nature of his conversion has been revived in what has been dubbed 'The "two Augustines" controversy',²¹

²¹ O'Connell (1994) refers to it as 'one of those nettling problems in Augustinian scholarship which never seem to go away'. Cf. Cooper (1996). (I am grateful to David Hunter for bringing this article to my attention.)

but in this context the young Augustine is seen as an optimistic devotee of a Christian philosophy which promises the attainment of perfection, moral purity and tranquility, and the contemplation of wisdom. He is regarded as 'more Pelagian than Pelagius',²²

²² Brown 1967: 148.

upholding the absolute freedom of the will, confident in human beings' powers of self-determination, so that nothing can ultimately overcome them. He reads Paul with Platonic spectacles as a proponent of spiritual ascent and renewal towards perfection, and has absolute confidence in the powers of human reason to attain the truth, without any need for the will to be motivated by its pleasing or delightful appearance.

I have singled out Peter Brown as the main proponent of this reading of the early works simply because his book, and especially the chapter entitled 'The Lost Future', has probably been the single, most influential work in giving this reading its almost canonical status in recent scholarship. It is, in fact, much easier to single out the detractors from this view than to provide a list of those who agree with, and follow Brown, in this respect, for the theory has won almost universal acceptance.²³

²³ For examples of how it has been adopted see Flasch (1980) who makes the *Ad Simplicianum* the watershed between Augustine's early and later thought, so that the former is simply written off as 'early'. More recently see Lettieri (2001) who argues that the early Augustine (pre-Simplicianus) is a different, alien Augustine (The *L'altro Agostino* of the title) to the mature, later bishop. Cf. Ferrari (e.g. 1984) who, as we have already seen, argues that the conversion account of *conf. 8* is a literary fiction modelled on Paul's conversion and that its absence in the early works is an indication of how different Augustine's early theological understanding was from that found in *conf.* Fredriksen (1986) rehearses a similar argument and sees Augustine's early theology as a 'progress in philosophy' rather than one based on the Fall and grace.

In the second edition of his biography, however, in what amounts to a very Augustinian *retractatio*, entitled 'New Directions', Peter Brown reflects on his desire, at the time of writing his biography in the early 1960s, to focus on what then seemed a new and exciting way of viewing history: from the inside, from the perspective of the individual and his or her changing thoughts and feelings, rather than simply in terms of 'events'. He writes, 'A sense of human movement in a figure usually identified with all that was most rigid and unmoving in Catholic dogma was what my biography strove to convey.' However, he proceeds to observe that

Such an emphasis on the changes in Augustine's thought and outlook can be challenged. Central elements in Augustine's thought have been shown to be remarkably stable. They seem to bear little trace of discontinuity. Augustine's intellectual life as a

bishop cannot be said to have been lived out entirely in the shadow of a "Lost Future", as I had suggested in the chapter of my book which bears that title. In the same manner, the later decades of Augustine's thought on grace, free will and predestination cannot be lightly dismissed as the departure of a tired old man from the views of an earlier, "better" self. As a thinker, Augustine was, perhaps, more a man *aus einem Guss*, all of a piece, and less riven by fateful discontinuities than I had thought.²⁴

²⁴ Brown 1967 (new edn. 2000): 490.

The following book really amounts to an acceptance of Brown's generous invitation to begin to question the interpretation of the development of Augustine's thought which his work has made almost canonical in Augustine scholarship, to see Augustine 'all of a piece', and to identify those continuities at which he tantalizingly hints.

The main detractor from Brown's views, and the one whom Brown singles out in a note appended to the quotation we have just cited,²⁵

²⁵ Ibid. 516 n. 40, writes: 'Madec, *La Patrie et la Voie*, esp. pp.18-19, is a cogent statement of a view different from my own.'

is Goulven Madec, who has long argued for continuity in Augustine's thought, and for the integrity and full orthodoxy of his Christian faith (measured against his later works), from the very moment of his conversion.²⁶

²⁶ The work of Nello Cipriani, which we will often have occasion to cite, should also be mentioned in this context. And odd though it seems to place O'Connell and Madec in the same context, the article of the former just cited (1994) does offer a short but pregnant argument for elucidating the Christian elements of the early works by 'de-coding' Augustine's philosophical language and classical references to reveal a secure grasp of the Christian faith. It is to be regretted that he was not able to pursue the insights he sets forth here.

He was also the first, so far as I am aware, to express disquiet at theories of a dramatic 'revolution' in the 390s. In two works from 1996,²⁷

²⁷ Madec 1994: 85-9; 1996a: 69-70; 1996b: 137-46.

one of which is a revision of lectures he gave twenty-five years earlier, but which he makes clear he has not needed to change in any substantial detail, he suggests that 'The Lost Future' owes more to the frustrations of a biographer who no longer has the rich material of the *Confessiones* to keep his readers' interest, than to any real revolution in Augustine's own thought. He observes that in studying Romans, as Augustine himself makes clear in the *Retractationes*, Augustine was forced to admit defeat in his battle to retain the free decision of the human will and to submit instead to the absolute primacy of God's grace (*Laboratum est quidem pro libero arbitrio uoluntatis humanae, sed uincit gratia Dei*),²⁸

²⁸ *retr.* 2. 27. 1. 'I, indeed, laboured on behalf of the free choice of the human will; but the grace of God conquered.' See Ch. 7 below on the will.

but Madec regards this as no more than an important 'prise de conscience', and certainly not an overturning and revolution of his entire doctrine, which had been identifiably Pauline from the very beginning. Rather, he cites Gilson on this subject, writing in 1929: 'Saint Augustine underwent a psychological

there were indeed many variations in detail... But we have never been able to find the least change, philosophically speaking, in any of his major ideas. Saint Augustine's central ideas were fixed from the moment of his conversion, even, we would maintain, so far as grace is concerned, and he never relinquished them once established.'²⁹

²⁹ Gilson 1929: 310-11 cited in Madec 1996: 69-70.

Madec supports what we have suggested above in examining the works Augustine composed from 386 to 391—that any differences in subject, style, or language, to the works written after this date should be explained by the dramatic changes in his circumstances and audiences during this time, and the demands they laid upon him, rather than to any great upheaval in this theology.³⁰

³⁰ Ibid. 70.

Is 'The Lost Future' then an accurate portrayal of the development of Augustine's theology? Are there, in fact, two very different Augustines: the Augustine of the early works and the Augustine of the *Ad Simplicianum* and the *Confessiones*? It is the thesis of this book that they are one and the same person. Only a careful reading of the early works themselves, the circumstances in which they were written, and the needs they were addressing, will substantiate this.

In Part One of this book we will therefore attempt to lay to rest the debate which, like a many-headed Hydra, has plagued Augustinian scholarship for over a century, and despite valiant attempts to kill off many of its manifestations, has refused to go away. Although the claim that Augustine was converted to Neoplatonism rather than Christianity has been well and truly dispatched, it has effectively returned in the more multifaceted claims of those who persist in identifying two very different Augustines: on the one hand, the Augustine of the early works, the young devotee of Christian philosophy, naive, optimistic, confident of the power of reason to grasp the truth, and of the powers of the will to attain perfection in this life; on the other, the Augustine of 396, the mature, devout clergyman, whose only certainty is an acute awareness of the Fall, original sin, and humanity's complete dependence upon divine grace to know, will, or do the good.

In the following chapter we will argue that Augustine's conversion in 386 is not a radically different conversion from the one he recounts in *Confessiones* 8, and that if one is to speak of a 'revolution' in his thought it is not to be found in his reading of Paul in the 390s, but in his reading of the Platonists and the discovery of God's transcendence which freed him from the materialistic philosophies which had hitherto made it impossible for him to embrace the Christian faith to which he had always sought to be reconciled. In Chs. 3 and 4 we will demonstrate that this 'revolution' led to two seemingly antithetical emphases in his earliest works: a philosophical emphasis on the

immutable, eternal, incorruptible God who must be sought by moving away from bodily, temporal, mutable reality, on the one hand, and on the other, a thoroughly Christian emphasis on the Creator God who has drawn human beings from nothing and upon their absolute contingency upon him. We will argue that Augustine's early thought can only be rightly understood when it is seen within the creative tension set up by these two apparently polarized ideas, and that it is here that his characteristic theology of a transcendent Creator and of fallen humanity's complete and absolute dependence upon him emerges. We will demonstrate that what has been described as Augustine's early 'Christian philosophy' was never less than fully integrated into his faith in a Trinitarian God, who forms human beings from nothing, reforms them through the incarnation, and inspires in them love and delight through the Holy Spirit: that he never shared the classical ideal of human autonomy and self-determination to attain perfection, but that he was always acutely conscious of human beings' created dependence upon God's grace.

It is against this background that we will argue in Ch. 5 that Augustine's attempts at interpreting Paul, and especially Romans, in the mid-390s, culminating in the *Ad Simplicianum*, must not be read as representing a dramatic break with earlier ideas of human autonomy and the ability of the will freely to choose the good without divine help, but as affirming what he had always held: fallen humanity's complete and utter dependence upon God's grace to know, will, and do the good.

Part Two will take each of the specific emphases of Augustine's theology, which scholars have identified as emerging in a mature synthesis only in 396, in the *Ad Simplicianum*—the Fall and original sin (Ch. 6), the inability of the will to do the good without divine aid (Ch. 7), and the necessity for divine grace to move the will (Ch. 8)—and will attempt to demonstrate that they are all characteristic features of his earliest theology: that Augustine the convert at Cassiciacum in 386 is not a radically different, alien figure to Augustine the bishop, who sat down to write the *Confessiones* in 396, but one and the same.

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2 The Revolution of 386

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Abstract: This chapter argues that Augustine's conversion in 386 is not a radically different conversion from the one he recounts in *Confessiones* 8: that if one is to speak of a 'revolution' in his thought, it is not to be found in his reading of Paul in the 390s, but in his reading of the 'books of the Platonists' in 386, and his discovery in them of a doctrine of God's transcendence which freed him from the materialistic philosophies that had hitherto made it impossible for him to embrace the Christian faith to which he had always sought to be reconciled.

Keywords: conversion, *Confessiones* 8, Platonists, Neoplatonism, Plotinus, transcendence

In the last chapter we suggested that if one is to speak of a revolution in Augustine's thought then one should look for it in 386, at the moment of his conversion, and not in the 390s when his thought is held by many scholars to have undergone a landslide, as a result of reading St Paul, which resulted in the destruction of the positive optimism of the early works and the construction from the rubble of an uncompromising doctrine of original sin, of mankind's inability to know, will, or do the good without grace, and of the predestination of the elect. Is this a misleading overdramatization of a minor tremor in Augustine's thought or an accurate description of the contrasting landscapes before and after the 390s?

In order to answer this question we need to look back to Augustine's conversion in 386 and the works written before the 390s, to try to establish the true nature of his early Christianity. As the last century of scholarly debate on the nature of Augustine's conversion has shown, this is far from being a straightforward matter—indeed, if one was to learn from the past one might well conclude that discussion of Augustine's conversion should best be avoided. The field is strewn with still unresolved questions, which lurk like landmines beneath the surface, ready to explode at any minute in the face of the unsuspecting reader: what were the 'books of the Platonists' which he claims so revolutionized his thought? How indebted was Augustine to them? Was he so indebted that one should speak of a conversion to Neoplatonism rather than to Christianity in 386? How genuine was his conversion? How orthodox was his Christian faith? What is the relation between his early faith and the mature statement of it in the *Confessiones*? Whatever the difficulties I do not think we can entirely avoid these questions, although I think we can take a number of now generally accepted answers as shortcuts through the minefield of what actually happened in 386, to arrive at the relatively uncharted, but much less explosive, territory of the early works themselves. It is in these works that we can avoid the speculative hypotheses which have led so many scholars astray in their attempts to

establish what actually happened in 386, and find solid ground and real evidence. In effect, this is what we will be doing in the rest of this book.

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Let us begin in 386. Augustine gives us three main accounts of his conversion in the autumn of this year. The most obvious and well known is the dramatic account of his early search for truth recounted in books 1-8 of his *Confessiones*, written a full ten years later, culminating in the garden scene at Milan and his reading of Romans 13: 13. As we have noted, much has been made of the fact that the early works are entirely silent concerning this episode. Whatever this might imply about the historicity of the *Confessiones* themselves, our concern here is to counter those scholars who insist on concluding that, because this decisive encounter with the operation of divine grace, and the text of Rom. 13: 13 on human weakness, are nowhere to be found in the early works, that a consciousness of human weakness and the need for divine grace must therefore also be absent from Augustine's early theological reflection.¹

¹ Most notably Ferrari 1984 and Fredriksen 1986.

If treated with due circumspection the *Confessiones* are, in fact, an extremely valuable source: we are allowed to eavesdrop on Augustine the bishop's conversation with God—a rather one-way affair in which God listens and Augustine recounts his past life, the errors of his ways, the providential way in which he sees God's grace has been at work, inexorably leading him through his wrongheaded, proud mistakes and wanderings, towards himself and to conversion. And so we learn of his childhood and the ways in which he exhibited original sin from the very beginning; his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*, aged 19, which first fired his search for inward truth through a love of philosophy; his years as a member of the dualistic Manichaean sect, which for a time seemed to answer his obsession with the question of evil and human destiny, to provide a community and identity as an 'authentic Christian' his ultimate disillusionment with this sect, whose teaching could not stand rigorous, scientific scrutiny and whose attractively strict ethic left much to be desired in the practice of its adherents; his brush with scepticism; his discovery and reading of the 'books of the Platonists', which wholly revolutionized his thought and enabled him to resolve the problems which held him back from Christianity; finally, his reading of Rom. 13: 13 in response to the insistent cry 'Take up and read', and his embracing of Catholic Christianity in the garden at Milan in 386. It is a presentation of the Christian doctrines of the Fall, original sin, the vitiated will, and the indispensability of divine grace, in autobiographical form; a microcosmic portrayal of the macrocosmic act of creation, conversion, and formation, which brings all creation into being;²

² Pizzolato 1968; Vannier 1997.

above all, it is a confession of sin and of praise, a humble admission of human

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frailty and dependence, and an awed acknowledgement of divine transcendence and grace.

It is important to remember that Augustine was not converted from paganism to Christianity. What he recounts in the *Confessiones* is more a reconciliation with the Christian faith in whose shadow he had always lived and thought, than a conversion to a new religion. Christianity was the religion he had drunk in with his mother's milk (*conf.* 3. 4. 8), to which he had been dedicated as a child, in which he had been brought up,³

³*duab. an.* 1, 'For there were many things that I ought to have done to prevent the seeds of the most true religion wholesomely implanted in me since boyhood from being banished from my mind.'

and whose authority and doctrines determined and shaped his doubts and questions as he matured and looked for a truth he could wholeheartedly embrace. It was against the standard of Christianity that he judged whatever other versions of truth he encountered: he found Cicero wanting because the name of Christ was not there and instead turned to read the Christian Scriptures (*conf.* 3. 4. 8); he was attracted to the Manichees as representing an authentic form of Christianity; he rejected the Academics because he 'could not find the saving name of Christ in them' (*conf.* 5. 14. 24); he criticizes the Platonists for their overweening pride in their own reason, which meant they were condemned never fully to grasp the truth, a truth that can only be attained by humbly following Christ, the only Mediator between man and God.⁴

⁴*conf.* 7. 21. 27. See Madec 1994: 73; 1989: 23 for the thesis that Augustine was never not a Christian.

We must also, of course, remember that the *Confessiones* are the product of retrospective interpretation and reflection, a conscious attempt by Augustine to rethink the past and present to support his mature theology and his new position as bishop of Hippo. Whatever the ulterior motives determining the material contained in the *Confessiones*, and despite the fact that we can never establish beyond doubt whether what is recounted actually did indeed happen in quite the way Augustine tells us it did, a reading of the earliest evidence for his life and thought immediately after conversion, does not, I think, undermine their essential veracity. What we find in the early works and what we read in the *Confessiones* is not, in any important way, contradictory (despite what the proponents of a revolution in the 390s, or those who posit two Augustines, have suggested). We will, it is hoped, see this illustrated in more detail in the remaining chapters of this book.

Augustine provides two other accounts of his conversion which, albeit much briefer than the *Confessiones*, were written much nearer to the actual event. The first appears in his first extant work, *Contra Academicos* (2. 2. 5) written at Cassiciacum for his patron Romanianus, who had supported and

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encouraged him in his search for philosophy. Augustine tells him that he had thought he would be consumed with the great fire of his love for the philosophy he had already found until he encountered an even greater one:

But lo! when certain books full to the brim, as Celsinus says, had

wafted to us good things of Arabia, when they had let a very few drops of most precious unguent fall upon that meagre flame, they stirred up an incredible conflagration—incredible Romanianus, incredible, and perhaps beyond even what you would believe of me—what more shall I say?—beyond even what I would believe of myself. What honour, what human pomp, what desire for empty fame, what consolations or attractions of this mortal life could move me then? Swiftly did I begin to return entirely to myself. Actually, all that I did—let me admit it—was to look back from the end of a journey, as it were, to that religion which is implanted in us in our childhood days and bound up in the marrow of our bones. But she indeed was drawing me unknowing to herself. Therefore, stumbling, hastening, yet with hesitation I seized the Apostle Paul. For truly, I say to myself, those men would never have been able to do such great things, nor would they have lived as they evidently did live, if their writings and doctrines were opposed to this so great a good. I read through all of it with the greatest attention and care.

This passage has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. I would simply like to note a few features important for our purposes here. First of all, we can see the obvious parallels with the account of Augustine's discovery of the Neoplatonists in *conf. 7*: the 'certain books' (*libri pleni*) which brought him such precious treasure, and stirred up such a blazing fire for the truth that all earthly ambitions faded into insignificance, are doubtless the same as the 'books of the Platonists' (*platoniorum libros*) of *conf. 7. 9. 13*, which he suggests (in a rather subtler interpretation) God intended him to read before the Scriptures, in order to inculcate humility in contrast to the philosophers' pride. Their immediate effect was also the same: they moved Augustine to 'return entirely' into himself, just as in *conf. 7. 10. 16* he comments that 'By the Platonic books I was admonished to return into myself.'⁵

⁵ Though this interpretation is contested by O'Meara 1954, who identifies the *libri pleni* with Christian works, it is forcefully defended by Madec 1971.

In the *Confessiones* he thereby finds himself in a 'region of dissimilarity' (*regio dissimilitudinis*), ontologically separated from the transcendent creator God and forced to acknowledge his humble dependence upon him, together with the rest of created reality, as created from nothing. Here he simply states the same central truth of the Christian faith in a general way (and confirms what we have noted above about the nature of his conversion as being more a reconciliation than an adoption of a new religion) when he comments that he thereby reached the end of his journey and rediscovered the religion of his

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childhood, 'bound up in the marrow of [his] bones'. One can only presume that the doctrines of God's transcendence and of creation from nothing—a Platonic and a Christian doctrine respectively, which both include the idea of evil as a privation of the good—enabled him to reconcile himself to the religion he had earlier found wholly unsatisfactory in its anthropomorphic, materialistic conception of God, and its inadequate explanation of evil. Certainly, as we shall see, these doctrines form the twin axes around which

the early works revolve.

In both accounts he then proceeds—in very similar language—to describe his reading of Paul. In both cases he turns to Paul in order to confirm the truth he has discovered in the philosophers, by demonstrating their correspondence with Christianity (*conf.* 7. 21. 27), though in the *Confessiones*' very much more extended account, he also compares and contrasts his reading of the Platonic books with the Prologue of St John's Gospel, as well as Paul, and notes that although he found the same doctrine of the Word in the philosophers, they lacked a doctrine of the Word made flesh, crucified, and risen, but rather contained false myths of the pagan gods. Furthermore, they lacked the humility fully to attain the truth because of their proud claim to have done so by their own reason. It is important to note, for future reference, that Augustine makes it quite clear in this, his first work, that he read the whole of Paul through, before his conversion, 'with the greatest attention and care'.

The only other early account Augustine provides of his conversion is in the opening chapters of the second work he composed at Cassiciacum, *De beata uita*, dedicated to the philosopher, Manlius Theodorus (at that time well disposed towards Christianity, whom Augustine had met in Milan, and to whom a treatise on the central, classical philosophical notion of man's ultimate good—in other words, on where he should look for happiness—was wholly appropriate). The account of his conversion here is rather more extended than that of *Contra Academicos*, but still runs to only a few pages. He again describes it in terms of a journey, this time, a voyage across perilous seas to the harbour of philosophy. The stages confirm those of the *Confessiones*: reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, the Manichees, the Academics, Ambrose and Milan, a revised understanding of the incorporeality of God and the spirituality of the soul gained from his sermons, his difficulties in leaving behind women and his ambition for secular honours. His description of his reading of the books of the Platonists⁶

⁶ Some texts of *b. uita* read *Plotini* rather than *Platonis*, suggesting that it was specifically Plotinus and Porphyry that he read.

is very similar to the two accounts we have already discussed: they 'inflamed him' (1. 4); he compared them 'with the authority of those who have given us the tradition of the divine mysteries'

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(presumably John's Prologue and Paul), but as in *Contra Academicos*, he does not tell us the results of his reading except to indicate that his desire to break all anchors, following their inflammatory effect on his thought, was held back 'by the counsel of certain men' (1. 4). Who were these men and how did they hold Augustine back? He has already mentioned 'those who have given us the tradition of the mysteries' so he probably does not mean the doctrines of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the exhortations to humility, contained in John and Paul. *De beata uita* certainly confirms the impression given by the *Confessiones*, and suggested by *Contra Academicos*, that Augustine's reading of the Neoplatonists, however revolutionary and inspiring, was followed by a period of questioning, of comparing them with the Scriptures, of attempting to establish in what respects they possessed the truth and illuminated the faith, and in what ways they diverged from it. What is clear is that they could not be taken over wholesale, but had to be read and judged in the light of the Christian faith, and their deficiencies—most notably their polytheism and pride—noted and rejected. Was 'the counsel of certain men' that of Simplicianus, or Ambrose, or even Manlius Theodorus himself—all learned and respected Christians in Milan, who were already well versed in Neoplatonic philosophy and who had already assimilated and judged it from an orthodox Christian perspective?⁷

⁷ On the so-called Neoplatonic circle at Milan, and especially Ambrose, see C. Harrison 2000: 12 nn. 29-31.

That Augustine mentions Ambrose specifically here, in *De beata uita*, in relation to Neoplatonic insights, and Simplicianus in the *Confessiones*, might suggest as much.

The state of tension and dilemma, having read the Neoplatonic works, is partly resolved in *De beata uita* by what Augustine describes as an 'adverse tempest'—an illness in his chest—which he sees as the work of providence blowing him out of the stormy seas into harbour. It will be remembered from the account in the *Confessiones* that it was for precisely this reason that Augustine retired from his job as municipal rhetor, following his conversion, and quietly, without any drama, retreated to Cassiciacum. The two accounts no doubt refer to the same events, although, as in *Contra Academicos*, no mention is made in this early work of the intervening episode in the garden.

It is interesting to note, however, that both here in *De beata uita*, and in the *Confessiones*, the dramatic events surrounding his reading of the Neoplatonists, his conversion, and subsequent retreat from the world, are but a partial resolution. The harbour of *De beata uita* is still open to storms and buffeting waves; he has not yet decided on which stretch of dry land he will disembark; he is still confronted by the mountain which stands just beyond the harbour, the mountain of 'vainglory', of pride and false security, which 'has a great

glamour and is clothed in an enticing light, so that it not only offers both those that sail in and those not in as yet a domicile with the promise of stilling their desires for the happy life, but it also often extends invitations to people within the port to come out' (1. 3).

This is the situation in which Augustine believes he is at present: 'learn please...[he says to Manlius Theodorus] in what place I believe I am, and what help I confidently expect from you' (1. 3); 'I simply do not know to what part of the land—that part which alone is really happy—I should move and how I should chance to reach it. What firmness do I possess? For, up to now, in my mind even the question of the soul is uncertain and changeable' (1. 4).

These are the first soundings of what will become an unflinchingly honest recognition in *Confessiones* 10 of the vulnerability of human beings, even after conversion, to temptation, and especially pride, and of their inability to grasp fully the truth of the faith without help. In this early work Augustine appeals to a philosopher for help in finally attaining the happy life; in *Contra Academicos* he sees Christian wisdom or *philosophia* drawing him to herself; in the *Confessiones* he turns to Christ, the only mediator between God and man, fully aware that happiness can never be attained in this life. Yes, Augustine is more confident of finding a resolution to his dilemma in this early work, and he turns to a philosopher here, rather than Christ, but he is also singularly aware of the difficulties, both moral and intellectual, which he faces and with which he must do battle. It was the battles of his early years as a Christian convert, which we see recounted in the early works, that gradually convinced him that the homeland cannot be attained in this life, that the mountain of vainglory continues to overshadow any attempt to lead a Christian life, that the tempests and buffetings of temptation continue to trouble mankind, and that help must be sought, not so much from a philosopher, as from the God, the Trinity. *De beata uita* concludes with an assertion that already points in this direction: despite God's help, the participants in the discussion have not yet attained the happy life—'as long as we are still seeking...we must confess that we have not yet reached our measure; therefore, notwithstanding the help of God, we are not yet wise and happy'—but they now know what it is and how it is to be sought: 'this then is the happy life: to recognize piously and completely the one through whom you are led into the truth, the nature of the truth you enjoy, and the bond that connects you with the supreme measure'.⁸

⁸ 4. 35—obviously based on John 14: 6, 'I am the way, the truth and the life'.

It falls to Monnica to identify these philosophical categories with the Divine Trinity, as she cites a phrase of one of Ambrose's hymns, 'Help, O Trinity, those that pray',⁹

⁹ From Ambrose's *Deus creator omnium*.

and observes, 'Indeed,

this is undoubtedly the happy life, that is, the perfect life which we must assume that we can attain soon by a well-founded faith, a joyful hope, and an ardent love.'¹⁰

¹⁰ 4. 35.

Augustine's appeal earlier in this work to Manlius Theodorus has already become one directed to the Divine Trinity. The Augustine of the early works is very much the same Augustine as the bishop of Hippo composing his *Confessiones*; he shares the same dilemmas, temptations, uncertainties, and sense of human frailty. What has changed is the hope of ever resolving these in this life—that was to be worn away with time and more experience of attempting to live the Christian life: faith, hope, and love are to remain the Christian virtues until the life to come. The fact that he concludes this early work with them, and constantly returns to them in the rest of the early works, suggests that (as we will see more clearly in the following chapter) he already, to some extent, realizes this.

Having now compared the two earlier accounts Augustine gives of his conversion with that of the *Confessiones*, I hope that we can see that they do not differ substantially, either in factual, historical detail (even though some crucial episodes are omitted in the early accounts), or, more importantly, in their theological understanding of the human condition, and that judgements such as that of Fredriksen,¹¹

¹¹ 1986.

who suggests that they represent 'two radically different first hand reports, from the same man, of the same event' are fundamentally mistaken.

'The books of the Platonists'

We have seen that Augustine's reading of 'certain books of the Platonists' was a central feature of his conversion, and that their identity, and the effect they had on his thought, has been a major preoccupation of Augustine scholarship in the last century. I do not intend to resurrect the debates here, but I think we can safely conclude that he read some works of Plotinus and Porphyry,¹²

¹² For a summary bibliography see Doignon 1989: 83-6; C. Harrison 1992: 8 n. 32; O'Donnell 1992: ii. 416-18; 421-4; Madec 1996a: 38. There have also been those who would like to identify the *libri pleni* which Augustine mentions in *Acad.* 2. 2. 5 as Christian works read on a different occasion from those of the Platonists. See Madec 1971 against this thesis, and O'Meara 1972 who argues for it.

and that what was illuminating and helpful in them was immediately assimilated by Augustine into the Christian faith he wished to be reconciled to, whereas what was unacceptable and inimical to that faith was immediately rejected. In

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other words, Augustine read, interpreted, and used the works of the philosophers as a Christian and they in turn enhanced his understanding of the Christian faith, a faith which, like his predecessors, he was to be

convinced was the true philosophy.¹³

¹³ In this respect Cooper 1996: 23 n. 8 quotes Mandouze's 1968: 459 comment on the period *before* Augustine's conversion, and notes that it is just as apt in reference to Cassiciacum: 'The long meditation which, from the last quarter of 384 to around mid-summer 386, absorbed his mind, presents a constant theme: the religious element is totally inseparable from the philosophical element.'

In a very real sense he stands within a tradition of Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr, converted to Christianity because of their recognition that it is indeed the true philosophy which supersedes all others, and that the Word of God, the Son, is the full revelation of that truth. He then, like all Christian apologists before him, used the other philosophical schools eclectically to explain, expound, and defend Christianity, both to himself and to those who shared his faith.¹⁴

¹⁴ We should bear in mind that it was not just the Platonists that Augustine read and used in this respect, but a wide range of other philosophers too. See Madec 1996a: 29.

This is certainly the conclusion a careful reading of the early works would suggest, rather than a theory that Augustine was first converted to a Neoplatonic version of the truth and only later came to realize the superiority of Christianity; it is also supported by the rest of his work, where we find his Platonism becoming more sophisticated and judicious as time goes on.¹⁵

¹⁵ Cary 2000: 35.

But we should also beware of underestimating the impact that the discovery of the Neoplatonic works had upon Augustine. As we have seen, in every account of his conversion he presents his reading of them to us as nothing less than a revolution in his thought, a dramatic turning point which irrevocably transformed his previous grasp of the truth and resolved so many of the questions which had for so long haunted him, and to which he had found no satisfactory answers. Without these answers, it is clear, he could not intellectually reconcile himself to the Christian faith with which he had done battle since his adolescence. The Platonists¹⁶

¹⁶ 'Neoplatonism' is, of course, a later, anachronistic term, coined by scholars to identify those philosophers who, from the third century onwards, regarded themselves as disciples and interpreters of Plato. For Augustine they are 'modern' philosophers' (*ciu.* 8. 12) and Plotinus is 'Plato revived' (*Acad.* 3. 18. 41).

provided answers and solutions by offering Augustine a radically new and transforming world-view in which to reconsider his intellectual problems. Until now, he had been restricted by the materialistic philosophy

characteristic of most of the thinkers of his day,¹⁷

¹⁷ Fortin 1959; Holte 1962; Brown 1967: 84.

which lacked any concept of the spiritual or of transcendent reality. It was this materialism the Manichees had embodied, although their dualism allowed them (and Augustine, for a time), to resolve some of the problems it

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inevitably raised, such as the nature of evil and of the soul. But dualism, Augustine increasingly realized, was an equally unacceptable explanation of reality, since it undermined divine omnipotence by teaching that the good

could be attacked, vitiated, and fragmented by the forces of evil, and that there must be two souls, one good and one evil, in man. Once dualism was rejected, the question of evil remained as one of the main objections to belief in the Christian doctrine of a loving and omnipotent deity.

Materialism also inevitably led to an account of the divine as a substance, defined in the only terms possible—corporeal ones—so that God was anthropomorphized, made subject to time, space, and change, or understood as existing everywhere, like water permeating a sponge. Neither portrait of God was one which Augustine could reconcile himself to; for him the divine must be incorporeal, immutable, and incorruptible.¹⁸

¹⁸*conf.* 5. 10. 19; 7. 1. 1-2

It was this materialistic philosophy that the Platonists' teaching on the spiritual nature of reality, and the transcendent nature of the good, completely overturned. The ultimate reality was no longer defined in materialistic, anthropomorphic terms, but was regarded by them as transcending all material categories: it was Being itself,¹⁹

¹⁹ Rist 1994: 257-8 notes that in Neoplatonism God is 'being itself' or 'beyond being'. Augustine does not use the latter, probably because of difficulties in translation; Madec 1994: 71-89.

beyond space, time, and change. Evil was no longer a hostile force, alien to, and actively diminishing the good, but rather, since all reality was given form and order by the good, a privation or absence of the good; it was non-existence.²⁰

²⁰*conf.* 7. 12. 18. BA 13. 687-8; Kirwan 1989: 60-81

The soul, likewise, was conceived of as an eternal, spiritual entity, the part of human beings closest to the divine, the means by which they might attain the transcendent good by leaving behind all things temporal and bodily, and by turning within, by degrees, find the ultimate Good, both as the foundation of themselves, and yet transcending them.²¹

²¹*conf.* 7. 10. 16. Cf. 3. 6. 11 where God is described as being 'interior intimo meo et superior summo meo'.

Such a God, such an understanding of reality and of the self, was precisely what Augustine needed to reconcile him to his Christian faith.

In *conf.* 7. 10. 16-21. 27 we find Augustine taking stock of the dramatic changes in outlook the reading of the Platonists had worked in his understanding of reality. Despite the gap in time between the *Confessiones* and the early works, these chapters in fact provide us with a convenient summary of Augustine's state of mind prior to and immediately following his conversion in 386. We can say this because each of the issues he mentions and describes is

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corroborated by the early works, which are understandably preoccupied with precisely these ideas—so new in the mind they had just overturned, revolutionized, and brought to conversion. We will be considering their role in the early works in the following chapters. In analysing them briefly here, in relation to the *Confessiones*, I think we will see not just how the Platonists reconciled Augustine to the specific features of Christianity he had found offensive, confusing, or unacceptable, but also how his eclectic incorporation of them into his Christian philosophy had much wider, and very serious repercussions on his understanding of Christian life and doctrine in general, which in turn give a first glimpse of his mature theological system. It is this that I have in mind when I refer to 386 as being the moment when, if one is to speak of a revolution in his thought, it is most appropriate to do so.

The Transcendent Creator (*conf.* 7. 10. 16-21. 27)

As we have seen, an intrinsic part of the revolutionizing of Augustine's thought by the Neoplatonists was the ability they gave him to undermine the Manichees who, after his long attachment to them, represented for him, more than any other sect or school, the unacceptable results of the materialistic philosophy of his time. Direct criticisms of them, and attempts to undermine and refute them, are therefore interwoven into his account of the effect of the Neoplatonists, both in the early works and in the *Confessiones*. This is especially the case in the second part of *conf.* 7, which we will consider below.

The fundamental theme which holds together this section of the *Confessiones* is not, in fact, strictly a Platonic one: it is the conviction that God is Being, to whom all other beings owe their existence, and that there is an ontological divide between creation and Creator; creation is brought into being out of nothing and is mutable and temporal, whereas God is the transcendent, eternal and immutable Creator on whom all else depends. This is an idea which Augustine would have derived from Christian tradition, rather than the Platonists (who taught either a doctrine of pre-existent matter, or later, a doctrine of emanation from the One as the origin of lower reality), but it was his discovery of God's transcendence in the Platonists which seems to have prompted his attention to it and enabled him to integrate it into his understanding of the Christian faith for the first time. It forms the axis around which his thought revolves at this time for a number of reasons, which we will return to in more detail in relation to the early works in Ch. 4. Here we might note that it undermines and contradicts Manichaeism

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dualism, and is a thoroughly Christian response to the insight into God's transcendence and spiritual nature, which the Platonically inspired inward turn had brought about.

In fact, as in the early works, and as we would expect given what we have discovered of the nature of Augustine's conversion, Platonic concepts are inseparably interwoven in these chapters into a distinctively Christian web of language and belief. For example, in the opening chapter of this section of the *Confessiones* Augustine states, 'By the Platonic books I was admonished to return into myself'.²²

²² Cf. *Enn.* 5. 1. 1.

In the next sentence he observes in a thoroughly un-Platonic way that God was his guide and that he was given the power to enter inwards because 'you had become my helper' (Ps. 29: 11). What he discovers is the immutable light of the Platonists, beyond all the categories of physical light and transcending his mind.²³

²³ Chadwick 1991: 123 n. 19 gives references to *Enn.* 5. 3. 9. 10 ff.; 5. 3. 12. 40 ff.

But he concludes in the distinctively Christian language of creation that the light 'was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it' (7. 10. 16). This insight into God's spiritual transcendence, identical with his truth and eternity, provokes in Augustine an awe and love, and a sense of unworthiness, weakness, and dissimilarity to it, which echoes the Plotinian response to the sight of the good: but he then proceeds by means of scriptural verses to suggest that God feeds and nurtures human beings (sacramentally?) to transform them into himself; he cries to them from far off to give them assurance of his identity: 'I am who I am' (Exod. 3: 14), the transcendent God who has yet revealed himself as the God of Israel in his providential, historic acts... and so the argument proceeds, juxtaposing Platonic, anti-Manichaean concepts with Christian reflection and interpretation.

It is clear from this passage in the *Confessiones* that the Platonic doctrine that existence is good and that evil is not therefore a substance, but an absence or privation of the good, moving towards nothingness, provided him with a theory that countered the Manichees' dualistic explanation of evil, and which could be combined with the Christian doctrine of creation to argue that all that exists is the good work of a good Creator. It also followed that what might at first militate against a belief in the essential goodness of creation, when taken in isolation, is in fact good in so far as it exists, and, when seen as a whole, comprehended by the divine order. Augustine combines these answers to the question of evil with the Christian doctrine of free will, whereby evil arises as a result of a person's turning away from the good towards inferior, external things, to which, in becoming attached, the human soul is

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diminished and becomes less alive (*conf.* 7. 16. 22). The question of evil was resolved: it is nothing other than non-existence.²⁴

²⁴ *conf.* 7. 12. 18-14. 20. Cf. Ch. 4 below.

The 'inward turn' and ascent of the soul to God, which Augustine then proceeds to describe in this section of the *Confessiones*, is distinctively Platonic in its description of a graded hierarchy of spiritual reality and relative goodness. In this Platonic world-view the body and the senses are placed at the lowest level from the divine. They are simply distractions and temptations away from higher, immutable, spiritual reality. The latter is to be sought by the spiritual nature of humankind, the soul, which, by a process of introversion, of judgement of lower levels of reality, and ascent towards the higher, gradually moves towards the transcendent. *Confessiones* 7. 17. 23 stands apart from Augustine's other descriptions of the ascent of soul towards God because it is the only one he places *before* his conversion. As such, it is regarded by many scholars as an example of his early attempts at a Neoplatonically inspired ascent (albeit couched retrospectively in Christian terminology and enhanced by scriptural quotation) before his conversion. It follows the same pattern as all the other 'post-Christian' ascents however: an intuition and memory of the transcendent which inspires a desire and love for it; an ascent from the body to the soul which animates the body; to the highest part of the soul, to mind or reason, which enables it to judge the lower levels of reality because it is illuminated by the light of truth; finally, above the mind to that which informs it. The final glimpse of the transcendent, which Augustine refers to here as 'That Which Is', is a fleeting, transitory, 'trembling glance', before he falls back to his customary level, pulled down by the weight of his sin, with 'only a loving memory and a desire for that of which I had the aroma but which I had not yet the capacity to eat'.²⁵

²⁵ *conf.* 7. 17. 23.

His inability to retain what he had fleetingly glimpsed, confirmed in Augustine's mind the limited, and ultimately, inadequate doctrine of the Platonists in this respect. He tells us in this section of the *Confessiones* that he was unable to find the strength to enjoy the transcendent God he had discovered in the Platonists until he embraced Christ, 'the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2: 5)—until he acknowledged his weakness and total incapacity to achieve anything of himself, in other words, until he realized his total and absolute dependence upon Christ, and humbly accepted his incarnation, in order to raise him up to his Creator God (7. 18. 24). For a while he had obviously rejoiced in his new-found discovery of the truth, confident that he could attain and retain it: 'I prattled on as if I were an expert ... I began to want to give myself airs as a wise person ... I was puffed up with knowledge' (7. 20. 26). But he soon realized that this was

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impossible without God's grace in his incarnate Son. Thus he saw the Platonists for what they were: those who had seen the truth—God's 'invisible nature understood through the things which are made' (Rom. 1: 20)²⁶

²⁶ A text Augustine uses repeatedly in this context. See Madec 1962.

—but who had failed, in their pride, to acknowledge that it was God, the Father of Jesus Christ. They had seen the goal, but had refused to follow the way that led there—the humble following of Christ (7. 20. 26).

Augustine sees God's providence at work in the fact that he first encountered the Platonists before turning to read the Christian Scriptures. Only so, he realizes, was he able, as he puts it, to 'distinguish the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see what the goal is but not how to get there and those who see the way which leads to the home of bliss, not merely as an end to be perceived but as a realm to live in' (Ibid.). Thus, taking up Paul, he found 'all the truth I read in the Platonists was stated here together with the commendation of your grace' (7. 21. 27). It was in Paul that he found a doctrine of sin and grace which was completely absent from the Platonists, and which made him realize that the only way to attain the truth they revealed was through complete and utter reliance upon God and humble acknowledgement of his own inadequacy and weakness.

'In surprising ways these thoughts had a visceral effect on me as I read "the least" of your apostles. I meditated upon your works and trembled' (ibid.). Thus Augustine concludes this section of the *Confessiones* before proceeding in book 8 to describe the conversion of his will culminating in the conversion in the garden at Milan.

How well does this account fit with that of the early works? Is this really how Augustine saw and understood things in 386 and in the works written between his conversion and the *Confessiones*? Our brief survey of his early conversion accounts in comparison with that of the *Confessiones* suggests that in historical detail and, most importantly in theological understanding and insight, there is no substantial difference. But what of this impact of the Neoplatonists on his thought and his early reading of Paul? The question of Paul will have to be left until later.²⁷

²⁷ Ch. 5 below.

In the following two chapters I would like to turn to the early works to reconsider the two themes which have emerged in this section of the *Confessiones* as the two major insights which revolutionized Augustine's thought following his reading of the Neoplatonists—the Platonic doctrine of God's transcendence expressed in a hierarchy of reality and the ascent of the soul to God, and the Christian doctrine of creation from nothing. By examining the way in which these two central axes of Augustine's thought appear in the early works we should be able to establish whether they

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stand in continuity with the *Confessiones* or whether, as scholars have maintained in different ways for almost the whole of the past century, that they are essentially discontinuous.

First of all we must make a general observation: the ontological divide which the doctrine of creation from nothing places between the Creator and creation seems at first to contradict any idea of an ascending hierarchy by imposing a complete and uncompromising divide between the divine and the rest of created reality: body and soul are both created from nothing and both are therefore on the same level. The philosophical ascensional scheme and the Christian creational scheme are, however, rather disconcertingly, and confusingly, not just placed alongside each other by Augustine, but as we have seen in this section of the *Confessiones*, actually worked together. The resulting theology is not without its tensions and ambiguities, but his general

success in bringing the two together into a coherent system of thought is a measure of the integration and inextricable interrelation of secular philosophy and Christian doctrine in Augustine's Christian philosophy. It is made possible largely because, as we have seen in the closing paragraphs of this section of the *Confessiones*, in his Christian philosophy the Plotinian levels of reality become levels of humanity's closeness to, or distance from, God, determined by its sinfulness or the work of God's grace; and the Plotinian ascent through the hierarchy of reality becomes, not an independent effort of the soul to move from bodily to spiritual things, but the raising up of humanity by the transcendent God, the Creator God, who descends to lift up his creation by the gracious revelation of his Son and the inspiration of his Spirit. Do the two doctrines work together in the same way in the early works?

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3 Ascent (and Descent)

Carol Harrison

Abstract: The 'revolution' in Augustine's thought effected by his reading of the Platonists in 386 led to two seemingly antithetical emphases: a philosophical emphasis on the immutable, eternal, incorruptible God who must be sought by moving away from bodily, temporal, mutable reality on the one hand; and a thoroughly Christian emphasis on the Creator God who has drawn human beings from nothing, and upon their absolute contingency upon Him on the other. It is argued that Augustine's early thought can only be rightly understood when it is seen within the creative tension set up by these two apparently polarized ideas, and that it is here that his characteristic theology of a transcendent Creator and of fallen humanity's complete and absolute dependence upon Him emerges. This chapter focuses on the 'philosophical emphasis' by elucidating Augustine's early arguments for Christianity as the 'true philosophy', the various ways in which Augustine describes the ascent of the soul to God, the relation between faith (authority) and reason, and by comparing the early *Soliloquia* and *Confessiones* 10. It demonstrates that his 'philosophical' reflection is fundamentally and intrinsically Christian.

Keywords: ascent, soul, liberal arts, virtue, true philosophy, faith, authority, reason, *Soliloquia*

In the last chapter we examined a passage from *Confessiones* 7 in which Augustine recounts his pre-conversion attempt(s) at an obviously Neoplatonically inspired ascent towards God. Although it is placed before his conversion and purports to describe a period before the actual moment of his conversion in the garden at Milan, we found that it evidenced a mature, retrospective integration of Neoplatonism into an orthodox Christian philosophy of God, evil, the created status of human beings, and his dependence on grace mediated through the Son. It thus quite obviously betrays the marks of later experience and reflection. What concerns us here, however, is not so much the impossible question which asks at what point this integration took place *before* his actual conversion, but whether it is present from the very beginning of Augustine's works as a Christian. In this chapter we will argue that it is.

In fact, we need only turn to Augustine's first work at Cassiciacum, *Contra Academicos*, to find an uncompromising statement of his position vis-à-vis classical philosophy. The work is written against the New Academy, or Sceptics, to whom he had turned in despair at ever attaining the truth, when he finally left the Manichees. He makes clear the utter absurdity of their teaching that nothing can be known with certainty, and that the wise man should therefore do nothing, unless he acts on the basis of what is 'like the truth' (*verisimilliter*) or what is probable, by demonstrating that even the

latter presupposes (as we shall see when we discuss the text more closely later on) that there is a standard of truth which can be used to determine what is like it, or is probable: 'how can the wise man approve of, or act on, "what-is-like-truth," if he does not know what truth itself is?' (3. 18. 40). Indeed, this is so absurd that Augustine concludes that Cicero, who describes the doctrines of the Academics with approval, and the Academics themselves, must, in fact, have known the truth, but for various reasons (which he suspects were mostly to do with defending their teaching from the Stoics), they did not openly declare it, but kept it secret until a powerful enough authority appeared, under whose protection, as it were, they could openly and unambiguously,

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expound it.¹

¹ *Acad.* 3. 20. 43. Cf. *ep.* 118 which makes the same point, in very much the same language, in relation to the Platonists (see ACW 12. 193 n. 61 for a comparison of *Acad.* 3. 18. 41-20. 43 and *ep.* 118. 17-33 in this respect).

He suggests that the truth they secretly held was the doctrine of Plato, 'which in philosophy is the purest and most clear', and which 'shone forth especially in Plotinus'. Of the latter he says that 'This Platonic philosopher is regarded as being so like Plato, that one would think that they had lived at the same time. The interval of time between them is, however, so great that one should rather think that Plato had come to life again in Plotinus' (3. 18. 41).

But what is the authority which has enabled the truth of Platonism to be openly declared? In this first (extant) work of Augustine's, it is clearly the authority of Christ incarnate, the 'authority of the divine intellect [submitted] even to the human body itself'. It would be worth quoting in full the passage in which this assertion appears, in order to appreciate Augustine's earliest judgement of the relation between Christianity and classical philosophy:

after many generations and many conflicts there is strained out at last, I should say, one system of really true philosophy.²

² Scholars are inevitably divided as to whether the *philosophia verissima* refers to Neoplatonism (e.g. du Roy 1966: 116 f.) or Christianity (e.g. Holte 1962: 7-109).

For that philosophy is not of this world—such a philosophy our sacred mysteries most justly detest—but of the other, intelligible, world. To which intelligible world the most subtle reasoning would never recall souls blinded by the manifold darkness of error and stained deeply by the slime of the body, had not the most high God, because of a certain compassion for the masses, bent and submitted the authority of the divine intellect even to the human body itself. By the precepts as well as deeds of that intellect souls have been awakened, and are able, without the strife of disputation, to return to themselves and see once again their fatherland. (3. 19. 42)³

³ Cf. *ord.* 2. 5. 16 for similar observations on the incarnation. Cipriani 1998: 422-7 for close parallels in Marius Victorinus.

Christianity is presented here as the one 'true philosophy', the philosophy of

the intelligible world—in other words, of the transcendent, spiritual realm of ultimate truth. But there is no question of this world being attained by reason, even the most subtle reasoning, because human beings are blinded by their sins and held down by their created, bodily nature. The only way it can be reached is by following the authority of Christ incarnate, the divine intellect humbly submitted to a human body. Then, 'without the strife of disputation'—in other words, without the need for rational, philosophical argumentation—the soul can discover its true nature and see God. This is all more than clear: it is an uncompromising and explicit statement of the superiority of Christianity over the whole of ancient philosophy; it alone is the true

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philosophy and it alone enables sinful man to attain the truth by embracing its humble incarnation in Christ: God's descent enables humanity's ascent.

What roles, then, do rational argument and reflection have to play? As one might expect, Augustine does not—cannot—relinquish them. Christianity may be the true philosophy which provides a way to truth through a humble following of Christ, rather than through rational exercise and purification, but there is still a role for reason to play—how could there not be for the former rhetor, the intellectual, the seeker after wisdom, the Christian philosopher surrounded by his pupils, for whom his religion *is* a philosophy and who wishes to compare and contrast, and rationally establish, the veracity of Christianity's claim to be the true philosophy in relation to the schools of classical philosophy? And so Augustine remarks in the concluding paragraphs of this work:

I, therefore, am resolved in nothing whatever to depart from the authority of Christ—for I do not find a stronger. But as to that which is sought out by subtle reasoning—for I am so disposed as to be impatient in my desire to apprehend truth not only by faith but also by understanding—I feel sure at the moment that I shall find it with the Platonists, nor will it be at variance with our sacred mysteries. (3. 20. 43)

At this point Augustine obviously thought that Christianity and Platonic (Neoplatonic) philosophy were complementary and ultimately reconcilable; what one believes in Christianity is rationally argued and demonstrated by the Platonists. He suggests in other early texts that if Plato were to come to life again, he would become a Christian, with the change of only a few words or phrases.⁴

⁴*uera rel. 7. Cf. 8.*

This is understandable, given that he thought that what the Platonists knew through rational deduction on the basis of their observation of creation (Rom. 1: 20-1), is the same truth that has been revealed to Christians in the incarnation.⁵

⁵*ciu. 8. 7*—although a later reference, it is unlikely that Augustine would have changed his ideas on this fundamental insight, which is everywhere implied in the early works (e.g. *Acad. 3. 11. 13*) but where there is no need to state it explicitly.

In fact, I do not think we need to argue that Augustine changed his ideas in

this respect—even though he becomes increasingly aware of the irreconcilability of certain specific Platonic doctrines with the Christian faith.⁶

⁶ Most especially the Platonic doctrines of emanation, transmigration of souls, and the eternal duration of the world.

He has already elucidated the fundamental difference between the Platonists and Christians earlier in this work—the need to accept the authority of the incarnate Christ—before making these comments about their complementarity. Humble submission to Christ is an obvious precondition of attaining the truth for Augustine and we are justified, I think, in concluding, that although he allows, and will continue to allow, that philosophers are

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able to grasp the truth independently of Christ, they will never be able to follow the way to it, or retain it, without acknowledging in faith its ultimate source in Christ. There are two ways from the very beginning—reason and authority—but from the beginning too, reason is ultimately inefficacious for salvation if it does not also embrace authority. Similarly, Augustine makes clear in his earliest works that those philosophers who do not convert to Christianity, but who continue to belong to divergent philosophical schools and to practise pagan rites, are unable to attain the unity which only inheres in Christian sacramental worship: true philosophy and true religion are inseparable.⁷

⁷ See most esp. *vera rel.* 1-5; 8.

What Augustine has to say about the Platonists in his survey of ancient philosophy in *De ciuitate Dei* book 8, effectively adds nothing, and detracts nothing, from these early insights.

The fact that Augustine, from the very beginning, was able clearly to articulate the relationship between the 'books of the Platonists' which, as we have seen, so revolutionized his thought, and the Christian faith which they enabled him to embrace intellectually, to a large extent explains the enigmatic status of these books in his early works. Given their role in his conversion, and the impact they had upon the way in which he was henceforth to understand his faith, one would expect them to feature prominently in these early works—for the works of the Platonists to be read and expounded at Cassiciacum, for passages to be cited and discussed—at the very least, for the philosophers and the works involved to be named and listed.⁸

⁸ This point is made well by O'Donnell 1992: ii. 416.

This is certainly what many scholars seem to expect, and in the absence of any help from Augustine, they have attempted to do it themselves. But it does not happen in Augustine—and what we have just discovered of his earliest attitude to the Platonists, months after his first encounter with them, explains why. They have served their purpose: he has assimilated a general world-view in which he can place his Christian faith and make sense of it, without being troubled by irreconcilable difficulties concerning the nature of God, evil, and the soul. What matters now is his faith, for it is only through that faith, through the authority of Christ, that he realizes the transcendent truth can be fully and ultimately grasped. The philosophers are useful—and

he uses them in a general way—to articulate this, but the details and the framework are now irrevocably Christian, for it is the *true* philosophy, the rest are simply tributaries which derive from, and if rightly directed, flow into, the stream of the Christian faith.

What is the general world-view which Augustine derived from the Platonists and which provided a context for his Christian thinking from the moment

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he discovered it? Taking up what we discussed in the previous chapter, I would like to suggest that it is the idea of a transcendent, spiritual reality, beyond temporal, created, mutable existence, in which human beings find their ultimate origin and being, and discover eternal truth. In Neoplatonism this world-view is expressed in the idea of a hierarchy of being and goodness, stretching from the temporal and mutable, upwards to the soul, thence to reason or *nous*, and ultimately, to the One (the Good, the Father, or Fatherland). It is expressed practically in the attempt of human beings to move towards the One by moral and intellectual purification, by introversion and ascent, finally to attain union with the transcendent, simple, immutable One who is beyond space, time, and Being but who is the power behind all things. This is essentially an intellectual programme, an exercise of the reason to put below it the distractions of the senses and the body, to judge them by the highest, spiritual part of itself, and then, if possible, to find within itself the ever-present One from whom it is derived.⁹

⁹ For examples of passages where Plotinus describes such ascents see *Enneads* 1. 6. 7. 1; 1. 6. 7. 5; 1. 6. 9. 3-4; 3. 8. 8. 1; 4. 4. 5. 11; 5. 1. 3. 3; 6. 9. 11. 11.

Augustine was no doubt also inspired by Porphyry in this context—see Madec 1996a: 42-3.

To truly know oneself is to know oneself as a spiritual being derived from the One.

The goal of the ascent, or union with the One, is, however, elusive; Plotinus himself claims to have enjoyed it only four times in his life and suggests that it will only become permanent in the life to come (*Enn.* 6. 9. 11. 45-51). Unlike the early stages of ascent, it is not something human beings can will, strive for, or achieve by their own efforts, but is rather something that they must let happen: it is a matter of self-surrender (*Enn.* 1. 5. 8. 11), of leaping into the unknown (*Enn.* 5. 5. 4. 8), of abandoning oneself (*Enn.* 6. 9. 11. 24). 'We must wait quietly for its appearance and prepare ourselves to contemplate it, as the eye waits for the sunrise' (*Enn.* 5. 5. 8. 3). But this should not be interpreted as meaning that it is the One who acts towards humanity at the end of the ascent: 'The One is always present since it contains no otherness; but we are present only when we rid ourselves of otherness... The One has no desire towards us, to make us its centre; but our desire is towards it, to realise it as our centre' (*Enn.* 6. 9. 8. 33). Human beings must therefore leave behind everything that makes them other than the One—the realm of temporality, mutability, multiplicity—to realize their ever-present kinship and likeness to it.

The transcendent, eternal, immutable, incorporeal nature of God; the spiritual nature of a human being's soul and reason; the profundity of human interiority and the possibility of self-transcendence; the notion that in discovering oneself one encounters God—that God is the Being on whom our

being depends ... these were the insights which revolutionized

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Augustine's thought when he read the books of the Platonists and which provided the crucible in which his Christian faith was transformed.

The *True Philosophy*

We have examined Augustine's general attitude to the Neoplatonists in his first extant work and found that it does not differ widely from his later, mature evaluation of their place in relation to Christianity. We must now demonstrate that there is a continuity in the way they influenced his grasp and presentation of the Christian faith, from the early works through to passages such as *conf.* 7. 10. 16-21. 27.

The emphasis on leaving behind the created, temporal, mutable realm, on turning within oneself, on ascending to God through reason, on avoiding the snares of the senses and the body and seeking higher, spiritual reality, is pervasive in the early works and has often led to them being described as overly rationalistic and negative in their attitude to creation and the body. This is an indication that the early works have been misunderstood. We must bear in mind the motivation for such teaching: it is not so much an exaltation of, or exercise of reason for its own sake, nor is it an attempt to denounce creation; it is, rather, part of an attempt to raise fallen humanity to the transcendent God. The motivation is, in fact, religious and mystical: it is expressed as much in faith, hope, and love, and the exercise of virtue, as it is in reason, and is strikingly positive about the created realm as witnessing to a good Creator and as being the first step in leading humanity to him. As we shall see, authority and reason are inextricably bound up together, and the rational beauty, order, and harmony of creation are key ways in which the divine is revealed to human beings.

The misunderstanding arises if the reasons why Augustine so enthusiastically adopts a Neoplatonic world-view are not taken seriously or if the various elements of it are taken in isolation and not seen as part of an overall programme intended to lead human beings to knowledge of themselves and of their Creator. In fact I hope we will see, as we have already established in relation to *Contra Academicos*, that what might appear as a rational, world-denying emphasis in the early works, has as its primary object the demonstration of the necessity of faith, hope, and love, and the essential role of temporal revelation within the created realm, and most especially of Christ incarnate, in leading human beings to God.

One of the most obvious expressions of Augustine's debt to Neoplatonism, and of his emphasis on reason in his earliest works, is found in his

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descriptions of the attempt by human beings to ascend towards God. The ascents take different forms: through the liberal arts or disciplines; through the levels of the soul; the days of creation or the ages of man; the virtues, and so on. But I think we will see that they all conform to the clear understanding of the relation between philosophy and Christianity which Augustine set forth in his first work, *Contra Academicos*, and thereby endorse our claim that from the very beginning Augustine had integrated philosophy into his faith in a manner continuous with his mature theology and which gives no grounds for considering his earliest work as in any sense immature, overly rationalistic, or misleading in this context.

Let us examine the different types of ascent he describes in more detail in order to demonstrate this.

Ascent through the Liberal Arts

It is in *De ordine*, a work written during a gap in the composition of *Contra Academicos* at Cassiciacum (November 386) that Augustine demonstrates most clearly his enthusiasm for the liberal arts or disciplines. These were the disciplines—grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, music, mathematics, geometry, astrology, or philosophy—which formed the backbone of late antique education and which all cultured people would be familiar with. They had long been regarded as the essential training for the governing elite of the Empire, a marker of social prestige and belonging, as well as a training for the mind, to exercise and strengthen it, so that it might be led from corporeal to incorporeal truth, from the concrete to the abstract, so to speak, in order finally to attain eternal truth. It would be second nature to Augustine to apply them to Christianity, to Christian philosophy, in his enthusiasm for investigating the nature of the faith to which he had so recently been reconciled, both intellectually and in his will. He was convinced that it alone possessed the truth and was eager not only to demonstrate and establish it, but also to grasp and embrace it. As O'Donnell puts it, 'he sees the ascent of the mind to God that these "disciplinae" make possible as closely related to the other union with God that his impending baptism will forge. Cult and culture are drawn intimately together.'¹⁰

¹⁰ O'Donnell 1992: ii. 274-5.

The disciplines, which had made his mind what it was—and which were the tools by which he approached, understood, and articulated the truth—could not be ignored. In fact, he was so convinced at this stage of their usefulness in expounding the Christian faith that he set out, with great ambition, to write a series of works on all the liberal arts (he

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probably completed those on grammar, dialectic, and music before being forced to abandon the project when he was ordained).

Although Augustine later regrets having given so much emphasis to the liberal arts, abandons the series of works on them, and generally uses them in a less abstract manner, or subsumes them into more Christian *disciplinae*,

such as exegesis of Scripture,¹¹

¹¹*doctr. chr.*

his reasons for using them and the manner in which he does so in the early works, are in no way contradictory to his later beliefs and practice. Indeed the method and practice of some of them, most especially rhetoric, and to some extent, number, were to remain of great value to him throughout his life.

Even though they appear as part of an identifiably ascensional scheme in the early works it has been a matter of debate among scholars whether

Augustine's use of them derives from a Neoplatonic source.¹²

¹² Hadot 1984 argues that the ascent through the liberal arts in *ord.* 2. 11. 30 ff. is probably derived from Porphyry's *De regressu animae*. Cipriani 1997 argues convincingly for a Pythagorean source, not least in the light of Augustine's own acknowledgement of Pythagoras in *ord.* 2. 19. 53, and the shared social aspects of their teaching in this context, noted by Verheijen 1980: 216.

As we have noted, they formed part of a common cultural currency shared by all educated people in antiquity, whatever their philosophical leanings, and Augustine's use of them in this way is not uncommon.¹³

¹³ Solignac 1958.

Whatever Augustine's specific source(s), the way in which they appear in *De ordine* is characteristic of the Neoplatonic world-view in which Augustine framed his understanding of the faith.

If we desire any confirmation of this we need only turn, as we did in examining *Contra Academicos*, to consider what Augustine has to say specifically about the relation between reason and authority (or faith) in this work, since it serves to endorse and reconfirm our earlier suggestions concerning his mature integration of philosophy/reason with Christianity, even at Cassiciacum.

Augustine tells his mother Monnica, whom he acknowledges has a direct understanding of the truth by virtue of her faith, regardless of her lack of philosophical training, that 'I unhesitatingly believe and proclaim that God has given me this resolve: to prize nothing more highly than the finding of truth, to wish for, to think of, to love nothing else' (*ord.* 2. 20. 52). Despite the value he places on faith and its acknowledged efficacy in attaining the truth, he cannot himself rest content until he has grasped it by reason. In order to do so he turns to the rational disciplines as the means by which his soul might be led away from temporal distractions, made to realize its own nature, and

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exercised and trained ultimately to know its origin in God. As he puts it uncompromisingly in this work, and in the final work written at Cassiciacum:

'I long to know God, and I long to know my soul.'¹⁴

¹⁴*ord.* 2. 18. 47; *sol.* 2. 1. 1.

This is possible because the disciplines are not arbitrary exercises, but a means of expressing and attaining the truth from which they derive: God is unity, order, harmony, simplicity, the archetype and source of the truth

which informs the disciplines, and to which they lead. Since God is eternal truth, the exercise of reason, the highest part of the soul, is less a matter of rational exercise and argument as a religious and mystical quest for self-knowledge and knowledge of God.

As in the Neoplatonic world-view then, the first step to attaining knowledge of the divine is to turn within, to withdraw from the world and its multiplicity and temporality, and to discover one's true identity as a spiritual being and the source of one's being in God.¹⁵

¹⁵ 'for acquiring this self-knowledge, he needs a constant habit of withdrawing from things of the senses and of concentrating his thought within himself, and holding it there (*ord.* 1. 1. 3).

In *De ordine* Augustine teaches that the liberal arts are useful in effecting this inward turn and ascent, as they facilitate the movement from multiplicity to unity, from temporal fragmentation to eternal simplicity and truth; they 'clear and cultivate the mind' for divine planting;¹⁶

¹⁶*ord.* 1. 1. 3-2.

they 'produce devotees more alert and steadfast and better equipped for embracing truth ... so that they more ardently seek and more consistently pursue and in the end more lovingly cling to that which is called the happy life'.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 1. 8. 24.

In the context of the particular argument of *De ordine* they enable the mind to see the apparent disorder and disharmony of the universe, not as something confusing, offensive, or even evil, but as part of a larger unity and harmony which belongs to God's order and providence.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 1. 1. 2; 2. 5. 14-15. See Ch. 8 below.

Reason, then, is the key here because it is present in its ultimate form in Immortal Reason, or God; it is the highest part of a human being, the apex of the soul, that which distinguishes humankind from the beasts and enables people to judge all reality beneath them, and the way in which it reveals and points towards God in virtue of its rational ordering by him. Human reason must therefore ascend from traces of reason in creation, to self-awareness as a rational, spiritual creature, to Truth itself, the source and origin of reason. The way in which Augustine suggests it might do this is through exercise in the liberal, rational disciplines, which progressively train it to see and judge its presence in created reality, to communicate and express it, to know it in oneself and to apprehend it in God. And so Augustine concludes his description of progress through the liberal arts (2. 11. 31-16. 44) with the observation that, 'If a man ... reduces to a simple, true, and certain unity all the

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things that are scattered far and wide throughout so many branches of study, then he is most deserving of the attribute learned. Then, without being rash, he can search after things divine—not merely as truths to be believed, but also as matters to be contemplated, understood and retained' (2. 16. 44).

But we must not forget that this ascent is not just a rational purification, but also, as in Neoplatonism, a moral one. The two are inextricable: the soul can be in a position to contemplate the truth only if it is pure and virtuous. Progress in the truth is at the same time a purgation of the soul, a training in virtue, away from involvement in temporal, mutable things and towards eternal, immutable truth:

Now this science is the very law of God, which, ever abiding fixed and unshaken with him, is transcribed, so to speak, on the souls of the wise, so that they know they live a better and more sublime life in proportion as they contemplate it more perfectly with their understanding and observe it more diligently in their manner of living. Accordingly, this science imposes a twofold order of procedure on those who desire to know it, of which order one part pertains to the regulating of life, and the other pertains to the directing of studies. (2. 8. 25)

In the remainder of this chapter Augustine sets forth detailed admonitions for the life of virtue which are redolent of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*, before elaborating an order of studies. Like the classical sage, the Christian must observe the truth in a particular mode of life in order to seek it by reason. When Augustine describes the height of the ascent for a second time in *De ordine* it is that which is achieved, not so much by the person who has simply exercised his or her reason in the liberal arts but rather by the one 'who lives well, prays well, studies well'. He comments, 'But when the soul has properly adjusted and disposed itself, and has rendered itself harmonious and beautiful, then it will venture to see God, the very source of all truth and the very Father of Truth' (2. 19. 51).

But words fail him in describing what the purified soul will see: 'Everyday expressions present themselves, but they have been rendered sordid by things of least worth. I shall say no more, except that to us is promised a vision of beauty—the beauty through whose imitation all other things are beautiful, and by comparison with which all other things are unsightly' (ibid.).¹⁹

¹⁹ It was in terms of the beautiful that Plotinus famously described the ascent of the soul to the One in *Enn.* 1. 6. We must remember that for both Augustine and Plotinus beauty is largely a rational entity, consisting of perfect harmony, form, and order. It is simply another way of talking about reason.

And what of faith or authority? Augustine is quite clear in *De ordine* that the way of reason is actually for the very few, for that 'rare class of men' capable of using it and who have not become mired in the realm of the

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senses,²⁰

²⁰ *ord.* 2. 11. 30.

or 'confused by the great obscurity and maze of affairs'.²¹

²¹ *Ibid.* 2. 5. 15.

Even this rare breed have need for faith, hope, and love, expressed in a life of virtue, and must always have God as 'the object of their worship, their thinking and their striving' (2. 8. 25). But for the majority, the only way to grasp the truth is by means of faith in authority, and through the mysteries or sacraments of the faith.

Augustine's emphasis on worship and the sacraments of the Christian faith is not often noted in these early works, and yet the importance and effectiveness of the sacraments, both for those who are able to pursue the way of reason, as well as for those unable to do so—through ignorance, moral weakness, laziness, etc.—is cogently stated. They allow God to draw human beings to himself, to free them from evil, to purify them, to teach the lesson of the Omnipotence of the First Principle, of the Trinity, and of the incarnation and divine condescension, in order to counter their pride.²²

²² *Ibid.* 2. 5. 15-16; 2. 9. 27. On the life of prayer and penitence at Cassiciacum see Marrou 1958: 176-7.

There is obviously a rather odd tension in Augustine's earliest works concerning the relation and relative merits of pursuing the truth through reason, or through faith in authority. First of all they are not mutually exclusive ways, for, as we have seen, the wise person who seeks the truth through reason, and the person unable to do so because of ignorance, weakness, laziness, or mental incapacity, must both live a virtuous life according to Christian faith, hope, and love, subject themselves to Christian authority, and participate in the sacramental worship of the Church. For those unable to undertake the way of reason these are sufficient; for those who are able, they are a necessary prerequisite and accompaniment; they must be instructed by an authority, rely upon and believe Christian teaching, believe, hope for, and love what they cannot yet see, and be sustained by the mysteries of the Church, before they can come by the exercise of reason to self-knowledge, and knowledge of the truth in which they have been instructed and which they have believed (2. 9. 26).

The real difference between the two groups at this stage seems to be that, whereas a few wise people might arrive at the truth and the happy life, in this life, no one who simply relies on faith and authority ever will: 'As to those who are content to follow authority alone and who apply themselves constantly to right living and holy desires, while they make no account of the liberal and fine arts, or are incapable of being instructed in them—I know not how I could call them happy as long as they live among men' (2. 9. 26—see

retr. 1. 3. 2). This seems to be more a statement of personal opinion than anything else:

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how can anyone be content simply to believe, to accept authority, and not desire to know and grasp the truth which they have been taught and which they worship? Augustine the intellectual, and Augustine the former Manichee, would find this incomprehensible. But Augustine the Christian is also bound to acknowledge the pre-eminent authority of the Christian faith—and he does so in the paragraph which immediately follows this statement in *De ordine* (2. 9. 27), just as we have seen him do in his first work *Contra Academicos*, for that authority is the authority of divine truth incarnate, of God made man, who has revealed himself both to those who might be able to grasp the truth through the liberal arts and also those who cannot: 'We must, therefore, accept as divine that Authority which not only exceeds human power in Its outward manifestations, but also, in the very act of leading a man onward, shows him to what extent It has debased Itself for his sake ... it is fitting that by deeds It show Its power; by humility, Its clemency; by commandment, Its nature.' But two other comments in this paragraph betray the evident tensions in Augustine's thought at this stage: the revelation of divine authority, 'bids [people] not to be confined to the senses, to which indeed those things seem wondrous, but to soar upward to the intellect'. For Augustine the intellectual, Christ incarnate is the first step on the way to knowledge of God by reason. But Augustine the devout Christian makes clear that the truth of Christ incarnate is equally available to human beings through the sacramental rites of the Church which effectively dispense with the need for the disciplines: 'And all this is being delivered to us so distinctly and steadily by the sacred rites into which we are now being initiated: therein the life of good men is most easily purified, not indeed by the circumlocution of disputation, but by the authority of the mysteries' (2. 9. 27). And yet he cannot resist concluding the work by outlining a detailed ascent through the liberal arts in 2. 11. 30-16. 44!

What are we to make of these tensions; of what Augustine believes as a Christian and what he longs to know as a philosopher? Perhaps the use of the term 'philosopher' in contrast to the term 'Christian' is a misleading one, for we have seen that Christianity is indeed the true philosophy, that the truth, revealed in the incarnate Christ, is also rational and can be judged and found in the rational aspects of creation—in order, harmony, measure, number, symmetry—in short, in the liberal arts—by the rational aspect of human beings; that philosophy is love of wisdom, which Christ embodies. That reason is the highest part of a human being, that which is closest in men and women to God, encourages Augustine in his quest, as does his newly discovered grasp of God as transcendent, beyond time and space, eternal, immutable, simple. Reason is a religious and mystical concept which lies at the heart of the Christian faith and it is misleading to suggest it is simply the

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preserve of intellectuals. A life of virtue and devotion, based upon the revelation of Supreme Reason, was intrinsic to the Christian life both of the philosopher who attempted to understand this revelation, and the devout believer for whom it is enough simply to believe it.

It seems that Neoplatonism, at a fundamental level, reconciled Augustine to the Christian faith in providing a world-view which overcame all the problems of materialism—the nature of God, evil, etc.—but that the central doctrine of the Christian faith, the incarnate revelation of Wisdom, the Truth, the Son of God, was one that Augustine found impossible to integrate into this world-view. And so, from the very beginning, Neoplatonic ascents are juxtaposed with Christian faith in the authority of the incarnate Christ. The latter is, as we have seen, acknowledged and accepted by Augustine as absolutely central to the Christian faith, and as literally embodying divine wisdom. And yet he cannot relinquish the attempt to know by reason—and never will. At this point, one of the forms this rational search takes is that of ascent through the liberal disciplines—later it will take the form of exegesis of Scripture, attempts to understand the nature of the Trinity, and tightly argued defences of Christianity against heretics. The incarnational, sacramental aspect of the Christian faith was never divorced for Augustine from the search for wisdom; faith was never divorced from reason—what differs is the form this search takes—and we should note that although other methods later predominate, he never actually leaves behind the ascensional schemes of which he is so fond in these early works. In fact, we find them gradually assuming what we might describe as a more recognizably Christian form, and becoming more closely integrated into Christian life and doctrine, as the early works progress. Even the notion of the liberal arts or disciplines is thoroughly Christianized when Augustine describes Christ's incarnate life and teaching in *Epistula* 11, written in 389, to Nebridius, as a sort of *disciplina*, 'by which the mind is formed and ... a certain method of living and example of precept has been conveyed to us'.²³

²³ Similarly, in *ep.* 12, Augustine succinctly states that 'the plan (*disciplina*) and form (*forma*) of God by which all created things are made is called the Son. All that was done by Him in becoming man was done for our enlightenment and instruction.'

Setting this in a Trinitarian context, later on in the letter, he makes clear that understanding proceeds from the Father through the Son, while 'a certain interior and ineffable sweetness and delight in that understanding ... is rightly ascribed to the Holy Spirit as gift and attribute'. The fact that the temporal dispensation of the Son and the inspiration of the Spirit were necessary, he attributes to man's weakness. As in *Contra Academicos* Augustine is clear that it is only through God's descent to fallen human beings that the latter can be raised up to regain the truth and unity they have lost: 'Therefore,

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although all these operations [of the Trinity] occur with the most complete union and inseparability, they nevertheless had to be proved separately, by reason of our weakness through which we have fallen from unity into multiplicity. For, no one raises another to the place where he is, without stooping somewhat to the place where the other is' (*ep.* 11). A mature theology of the Trinity, as well as of the Fall and of the necessity of the incarnation and grace, is therefore explicitly set forth in this early work using

the language and thought world of the liberal arts; secular philosophy and culture are used to understand and expound the central doctrines of the Christian faith.

The pre-eminence of Christ's life and teaching over all the disciplines is also clearly confirmed in *De uera religione* (390), where, having summarized Christ's life and passion, Augustine asserts: 'This natural discipline (*disciplina naturalis*) is worthy of the complete faith of less intelligent Christians, and for intelligent Christians it is free from all error. This method of teaching fulfils the rule of all rational disciplines' (32). Like the disciplines, Christ teaches certain things openly and clearly, and others through what he describes as 'similitudes in word, deed and sacrament'. The clear teaching enables people to search out the hidden mysteries of the faith, to find the truth, and to do so with more delight because they have had to search for it. Thus the soul is both instructed and exercised and led to the truth of Christ himself, through his life and passion. Faith and reason are again inseparable, and the secular liberal disciplines are thoroughly integrated into a Christian framework.²⁴

²⁴ How much of this is inspired by an attempt to buttress the intellectual respectability of Christianity and its Scriptures, both to himself and to pagan intellectuals, is a question which must be borne in mind. For Augustine's final evaluation of the role of secular culture and the liberal arts we must look forward to *De doctrina Christiana* where they are judged, and aspects of them either accepted or rejected, according to their usefulness in interpreting and preaching upon Scripture.

Ascent through the Levels of the Soul

In the years immediately after his conversion Augustine demonstrates a particular interest in the nature of the soul, devoting two works entirely to the subject (*De quantitate animae* and *De immortalitate animae*) and extensive sections of others. Given the intellectual climate of Augustine's day, and longstanding reflection and debate on this subject by philosophers and religious devotees in diverse contexts, it should not surprise us to find Augustine interested in what had always been, and still was, very much a live issue. The origin of the soul, its pre-existence, and the nature of its transmission, were all questions being discussed across the philosophical

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schools and religious cults. Materialistic understandings, such as those of the Stoics and the Manichees, were juxtaposed with spiritual conceptions represented in Platonic and Christian circles. The Neoplatonic doctrine of an immortal, immaterial soul, which derives from the One and thereby enables human beings to return to the unity of the One and realize their true nature, by moral and intellectual purification, lies at the heart of the ascensional schemes which so predominate in the early works. But in this case, as in almost every aspect of Augustine's use of the philosophers, we will, I think, find that the concepts have been thoroughly integrated into a Christian doctrinal scheme and thereby placed in a context which effectively transforms them.

The fundamental difference between Augustine and the Platonists on this subject is his conviction that the soul, along with the body, was created by

God from nothing.²⁵

²⁵ *Gn. litt.* 7. 24. 35.

We will see how far-reaching the repercussions of this belief were to be in the next chapter, but here we might observe the clear anti-Manichaean foundation for such an assertion, in order to counter their teaching that the soul was part of the divine substance, and also its congruity with traditional Christian teaching. We should also note the real difficulties and tensions it creates: belief in the creation of the soul from nothing, on the one hand, and belief in its immortality and therefore essential indestructibility on the other, sit rather awkwardly together, most especially when one takes seriously Augustine's response to the question of evil as a privation of the good—as the movement of created being towards nothingness because of its sinful aversion from its Creator. The difference between the body and the soul seems to be that, although both are created from nothing, the body can die whereas the soul cannot. It is, of its nature, immortal. Why this is and must be so, was a question which genuinely preoccupied Augustine in these early years. He tackles it at length in the second book of the *Soliloquia* written at Cassiciacum, and then seems to have continued these reflections in *De immortalitate animae*, written when he returned to Milan to prepare for baptism. His arguments centre on the conviction that since it is the soul which is able to know and possess truth, then it, like the truth, must be immortal and indestructible. But he obviously finds the subject an extremely difficult one to argue and prove at a rational level, and confesses later, on re-reading *De immortalitate animae*, that he no longer fully understands it. It is well known that Augustine never finally made up his mind on the question of the origin of the human soul.²⁶

²⁶ In *ep.* 166 to Jerome, Augustine admits he cannot decide between the creationist theory (human souls were created by God at the moment of a person's birth, or implanted in the womb at a certain stage) or the traducianist theory (all human souls derive from Adam and are passed on through human generation) of the soul's origin. See Ch. 7 below, on *lib. arb.* 3, which also rehearses these theories.

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Despite these uncertainties there are certain ideas which Augustine was to accept from the very beginning and from which he never diverged. The most important are the creation of the soul from nothing by God, and its immortality. He holds these apparently disparate ideas together by teaching, first, that the soul does not possess immortality from itself, but from God.²⁷

²⁷ *imm. an.* 8. 14; 11. 18.

Like the body, therefore, it is completely contingent upon God, dependent upon him for its being, its knowledge of the truth, and its immortality. Secondly, Augustine teaches that the soul is not immutable: it has free will, and as a result, it can err; it can become attached to lower temporal reality and fail to turn towards the source of truth, life, and knowledge in God, its Creator. It thus abandons its 'middle state' between the body and God, and suffers the ignorance and fragmentation consequent upon alienation from God. But it cannot die, rather, as we will see in all the passages concerning the ascent of the soul which we are about to consider below, the soul's actions are ordered by God's providence; by his just judgement he comprehends the results of its actions, and through punishment and reward, maintains the harmony, unity, and beauty of the created world. Although the soul might abandon reason, reason remains.

In numerous texts throughout the early works, the order of reality presupposed by this belief in the soul's immortality and immateriality, and its ability to know and possess the truth by virtue of its proximity to God in the order of creation, is expressed in passages which set out a hierarchy of reality through which the soul must ascend in order to attain the truth. These passages are essentially statements of a Christian world picture: of belief in God the Creator; of the nature of divine order in creation and its comprehension of evil; of the exercise of human free will, sin, and its results; of the spirituality of human beings and their potential to know and grasp the truth by virtue of the closeness of their minds, and above all, their souls, to God; of God's providence and his gracious presence to the soul. They are therefore not so much arbitrary philosophical exercises as lessons in doctrine, exhortations to right behaviour in the light of knowledge of who one truly is and what one is called to. Created, temporal reality must be judged for what it is—the work of the Supreme Creator, which, in its beauty and order, points beyond itself to him; the body and the senses must be similarly acknowledged to be wholly dependent upon God, and as subject to the ordering and judgement of the soul, if they are not to become alienated from God by attachment to lower reality; the soul itself must judge the traces of reason, order, beauty, and harmony which it discovers in created reality by means of the rules of truth it possesses from God; having done so it must understand that it is able to do this only by virtue

of God's illumination and indwelling, and look within and beyond itself for the source of this truth. Right order, hierarchy, movement towards the spiritual, the Supreme Truth, Goodness, and Beauty which alone give existence and life, and upon which all else, including the soul, is contingent and dependent, are the key features of these ascents.

Let us consider a few examples: in his first systematic treatment of the nature of the soul, *De quantitate animae*, written a year after his conversion, Augustine considers the origin, nature, and magnitude of the soul and its union with the body, and establishes that it originates from God, is characterized by immortality, is without the features which usually define a material body, such as size, shape, or colour, and is responsible for the body's life and sensation. He summarizes this in a description of the seven levels or acts of the soul, which together form an ordered hierarchy leading ultimately to contemplation of God: animation of the body; sensation through the body; engagement in the rational disciplines which represent human art and achievement; battle to achieve virtue in moral and intellectual purification; attainment of purity and yearning to know ultimate truth, goodness, and beauty; finally, rest, peace, enjoyment, and delight in the Supreme God (a stage beyond the experience of all except those 'great souls' whom we believe to have seen these things).²⁸

²⁸*quant.* 70-6. In 76 Augustine lists them as *animatio, sensus, ars, uirtus, tranquillitas, ingressio, contemplatio*. See *uera rel.* 49 for a very similar description of the stages by which a person is transformed from the 'old man' to the 'new man'.

Any progress in the ascent, and the attainment of it by the few 'great souls', is attributed wholly to God, whom Augustine is at pains to stress, in the closing chapters, is alone the creator, sustainer, and orderer of the soul, who will never abandon the soul, or allow it to perish, but providentially orders its freely willed action, for punishment or reward, according to divine law and order (79). God alone is superior to the soul and is to be worshipped by the soul as the One 'from Whom, by Whom, unto Whom' are all things (77 quoting Rom. 11: 36). It is only in service to God that the soul attains true freedom: 'For He whom it is most useful for all to serve, and to delight in whose service is the only perfect freedom, frees from all things'(78). Any assistance the soul is given by other people is to be 'attributed to God acting through us' (78); we come to 'the way that God has laid down for us' only 'by God's Power and Wisdom'. Augustine sums up the work of God's providence and grace in creating, ordering, and sustaining his creation in order to lead human beings back to himself, by describing it as the work of 'true religion': 'For, true religion is that by which the soul is united to God so that it binds itself again by reconciliation to Him from whom it had broken off, as it were,

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by sin. Religion, then, in the third act [of the soul] forms a link with the soul and begins to lead it; in the fourth, it purifies; in the fifth, reforms; in the sixth, it leads into; in the seventh, it feeds' (80). This is not only a thoroughly Christianized use of Neoplatonic hierarchy and teaching on the

soul, in order to expound a Christian world-view, it is also a thoroughly mature presentation of Christian doctrine on creation, the Fall, and the gracious redemption of humanity by God.

A similar ascent is also systematically traced in a slightly later work, *De uera religione*, written in 390, where the emphasis is upon correctly judging and using the traces of reason which appear in temporal, mutable, corporeal reality, so that one does not take them as an ultimate, but judges them by the rules or laws of truth which the higher, spiritual part of a human being possesses from Divine reason. Once again, Augustine is acutely aware of the tendency of human beings to sin, to become attached to lower things, and to take traces of reason in lower, created reality, which undeniably delight and please them, as ultimates in themselves, or to fail to acknowledge that the soul is subject to God, just as the body is subject to the soul. He comments, 'This standard of all the arts is absolutely unchangeable, but the human mind, which is given the power to see the standard, can suffer the mutability of error. Clearly then, the standard which is called the truth is higher than our minds'(56). He makes clear that what is at fault is not created reality itself, but the failure of human beings to correctly judge and assess it in the light of God's truth, and to see and value it for what it is: mutable, temporal, relative evidence of the work of the immutable, eternal, absolute Creator (61-3). His identification of supreme truth and unity with the Word suggests that he has in mind the need for a bodily revelation of divine Wisdom in order to correct this error (66). This is further confirmed when he immediately proceeds to analyse the temptations human beings must face, and their failings and weakness in the face of them, in terms of 1 John 2: 16 (70-113)²⁹

²⁹ Bochet 1997.

—an extended analysis of which follows a similar ascensional scheme in *Confessiones* 10, and concludes with an appeal to Christ as Mediator in the light of our weakness and seeming inability to resist the temptations of 'the lust of flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life'.

Ascent through the Virtues

We have seen how virtue is just as important as reason in any attempt to know the truth; it is only the pure in heart who will see God. Our analysis of the

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various passages which describe an ascent of the soul to God have also cogently stressed the seemingly universal tendency of human beings to err, to sin, to misjudge, and wrongly evaluate the hierarchy and order of creation and their place in it: they take creation as an end in itself and fail to realize their subjection to God.

In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount (*De sermone Domini in monte*), written when he was a priest in 394, Augustine finds the occasion to return to the now familiar stages of the soul's ascent in interpreting the seven beatitudes. Each virtue, recommended by each beatitude, is related to a stage in the soul's ascent. Of particular interest is the fifth stage, of mercy,

where Augustine recommends that a person seek counsel from a superior, for 'unless each one is assisted by a superior, in no way is he fit in his own case to extricate himself from so great entanglements of miseries'. Only then can they proceed, in purity of heart and good conscience, to contemplate the highest God. In order to obtain help Augustine insists that they must assist those weaker than themselves. They will only receive mercy if they show mercy: 'it is a just counsel, that he who wishes to be assisted by a stronger should assist him who is weaker ... therefore blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy'.³⁰

³⁰*s. Dom. mon.* 3. 10. Cf. *uera rel.* 51; *en. Ps.* 37. 24 (Zarb 395*); 54. 10 (Zarb 395*). See Ch. 5 n. 162 for the significance of the asterisks.

This idea of mutual help and assistance in the ascent of the soul to God is not new in the early works. In *De utilitate credendi* (391-2) Augustine makes a similar point concerning the few who are able to attain the truth through reason, and the majority, who can only rely upon faith. The former should also adopt the way of faith, in deference to those for whom this is the only way, so as not to encourage them to attempt something which they cannot do and which will only cause them to fall. If they do not do this, they will never reach their goal, however clever they are, for, as Augustine puts it, 'God is only with those who, seeking him, have also a care for human society. No surer step towards heaven can be found' (24). This reads like an implicit indictment, not only of the Manichees' reliance upon reason, but also of the philosophers, who ignore the plight of their less intellectually able fellow men.

The same idea of helping other human beings in the course of an ascent towards God, also appears in the early *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (388), where, commenting on the seven days of creation in relation to the seven ages of man's life and of reformation, by ascent of the soul, towards God, Augustine likewise suggests that those who have attained the fifth stage should seek to help their fellows: 'he begins on the fifth day to take part in the actions of this very turbulent world, as in the waters of the sea, in order to benefit the society of his brothers' (1. 25. 43). There is a sense of human solidarity and

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communion in these passages which is wholly absent from Neoplatonism, but which is determinative of Augustine's Christian, ecclesial, sacramental vision of mankind in the early works. This is confirmed by those passages in *De moribus* where love of neighbour is described as the 'cradle of our love to God',³¹

³¹*mor.* 1. 26. 48-51.

and those in which he talks about turning inwards and the lifting up of the soul to God as being the place where one can be reunited with absent friends and united with them in God. Responding to Nebridius' complaint that he cannot be with Augustine and the community at Thagaste, Augustine writes, 'Retire into your own mind and lift it up to God as best you can. There you will surely find us, not by means of corporeal images such as our memory is obliged to use, but by that power of thought by which you understand that it is not by place that we are together' (*ep.* 9). It is in the context of such reflections that Augustine's famous shared ascent to God, with his mother

Monnica, at Ostia, described in *conf.* 9, should be read.

Divine Initiative

Having indicated the presence in the early works of a Christian doctrine of creation from nothing, evil as a privation of the good, human beings' contingency upon God, their innate tendency to sin, and their dependence upon grace (we will develop these insights at more length in the next chapter), in schemes which trace the ascent of the soul to God, and having noted Augustine's integration of these ideas with philosophical, and most especially, Neoplatonic influences, we are perhaps in a position to draw some general conclusions, and to proceed to address some of the overarching questions this so-called integration gives rise to.

It should be clear that in many ways Augustine's approach is distinctive and diverges from that of the philosophers. Perhaps the most important feature, in this respect, is what we might call divine initiative. Whereas in Neoplatonism the One is unaware of the ascent of the soul, makes no move towards it, but rather everything depends upon the efforts and initiative of the individual soul, in Augustine's system, by contrast, the soul can make no progress without divine assistance. It is 'true religion' which joins, leads, purifies, reforms and feeds the soul (*quant.* 80); it is the presence and gift of divine reason, the seeds or archetypes of the truth, in the soul, which enable it to judge created reality below it, and to know itself as subject to its Creator, who is immutable truth (the thesis of *De uera religione*); it is the authority of the

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Word, and faith, hope, and love, inspired by God's revelation, which enables the soul to begin, and progress, in its search and ascent; it is the beauty of God's creation which providentially points the soul beyond and above itself to its Creator; above all, as we have seen from Augustine's first extant work onwards, it is God's condescension and descent to weak and sinful humanity which alone makes possible the latter's ascent. Unlike the One of Neoplatonism, Augustine makes clear in the early works that the Christian God takes the initiative and providentially acts, through a temporal dispensation, by means of authority and reason, history and prophecy, and above all in the incarnation, to heal, teach, and reform humankind.³²

³² This is summarized clearly in *uera rel.* 45-9.

He is a divine physician who restores humanity to soundness and health through his healing remedies.³³

³³ *ord.* 1. 8. 24; *sol.* 1. 9. 16; 1. 10. 4.

The love and desire of human beings for the ultimate good is reciprocated by its descent.³⁴

³⁴ *ord.* 2. 27; *Acad.* 3. 19. 42.

Any assistance we are able to offer our fellow human beings is to be attributed to 'God acting through us'.³⁵

³⁵ *quant.* 34. 78.

Soliloquia and *Confessiones* 10: 'Grant what you command and command what you will'

It is certainly true that ascensional schemes become less prominent in Augustine's later works, and schemes centred upon the liberal arts disappear altogether. But ascensional schemes are still present, and appear most notably in three significant passages of the *Confessiones* and some of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. We have already examined the first passage in the *Confessiones* in which Augustine describes an obviously Neoplatonically inspired attempt(s)³⁶

³⁶ Scholars debate whether there are one or two ascents described in this passage. O'Donnell 1992: ii. 434.

at the ascent of the soul to God, in book 7, before his conversion. Whereas for most scholars this passage bears all the marks of what they regard as characteristic of the mature Augustine's later reflection and interpretation, especially as regards his consciousness of mankind's inability to achieve the ascent without God's gracious descent in the incarnation, we have, it is hoped, demonstrated that the ascents he describes in the early works are of a piece with this later account and the doctrinal position it embodies.

We have also seen foreshadowings of the second, post-conversion passage to describe an ascent of the soul in the *Confessiones*—the famous shared ascent with his mother Monnica, at Ostia, in book 9—in those early ascents

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where mercy shown towards one's fellows, and a willingness to help raise them up to God, is presented as the only means for the individual to continue in, and achieve, his or her ascent; and in early letters where individuals find themselves united in soul by turning within themselves and lifting up their soul to God.

By far the most extended description of an ascent of the soul towards God in Augustine's mature work occurs in *conf.* 10, the first half of which is not just a description which the reader observes, but an ascent into which he or she is drawn and cannot but share. In order to advance and confirm our claim that the underlying theology, and attitude to philosophy, embodied in these later ascents is demonstrably the same as those which structure so many of the early works, I would like to compare and contrast Augustine's early *Soliloquia*, composed at Cassiciacum, with *conf.* 10.

Both texts were written in much the same context: the *Soliloquia* in the months immediately following his dramatic conversion in Milan, taking stock of the present and of his progress in the Christian faith; book 10 of the *Confessiones* at the point in the narrative where his account of conversion ends and where he similarly seems to stand in the present, reflecting on his grasp of the faith and his ability to observe its demands. The *Soliloquia* stand apart from the other Cassiciacum works in that they are not presented as a dialogue among the various persons present at the country retreat, but rather take the form of an interior dialogue between Augustine and his own reason—what he describes in *conf.* 9 (4. 8), while remembering the retreat at Cassiciacum, as 'expressing the most intimate feeling of my mind with myself and to myself' (*mecum et mihi coram te*). The revealing nature of this inner dialogue, in which Augustine presents to the reader his deepest thoughts, desires, and conflicts, and allows him or her a glimpse of the workings of his conscious and subconscious mind; the extraordinarily beautiful, rhapsodic prayer which opens the work; the general subject matter of the reflections, make the *Soliloquia* more than simply a foreshadowing of the *Confessiones*. The reader cannot help but think that it was probably a first draft, a first attempt at what will be fully realized ten years later, which Augustine no doubt had on his desk to refer to in writing the *Confessiones*.

Although *conf.* 10 is much more ascensional in structure (the first part is an extended description of an ascent of the soul to God) than the *Soliloquia*, both texts have the same aim and go about attempting to achieve it in very much the same manner. They both open with a statement of this aim:

Augustine desires to know himself and God, his chief good,³⁷

³⁷ 'For many days I had been earnestly seeking to know myself and my chief good' (*sol.* 1. 1); 'May I know you, who know me. May I "know as I also am known" ' (*conf.* 13. 12, quoting 1 Cor. 13: 12).

and proceeds in the

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opening paragraphs to confess his displeasure with himself and his utter dependence on God, both for his being and for any knowledge he has, either of himself, or of divine truth, goodness, or beauty. In both texts he makes clear that even though he knows neither himself nor God at this stage, his desire to know is inspired by his love of God; his desire is, as it were, to fully know what it is that he loves: 'My love for you, Lord, is not an uncertain feeling but a matter of conscious certainty. With your word you pierced my heart, and I loved you.... And what is the object of my love?' (*conf.* 10. 6. 8-9); 'Now you only I love ... I perceive I must return to you ... Teach me how to come to You. I have nothing else but the will to come. I know nothing save that transient dying things are to be spurned, certain and eternal things are to be sought after. This only I know, O Father, but how to come to you I know not' (*sol.* 1. 5). It is this desire which inspires his search or ascent in both texts.

The predominant philosophical influence in both works is quite clearly a Neoplatonic one. The God whom he loves and seeks in both texts is described in unambiguously philosophical language: He is 'Father of Truth, of Wisdom, of the True and Perfect Life, of Beatitude, of the Good and the Beautiful, of the Intelligible Light ... where there is no strife, no confusion, no transition, no lack, no death, but absolute concord, absolute clearness, constancy, plenitude, life, where nothing is lacking, nothing redundant' (*sol.* 1. 3-4); in the *Confessiones* he is 'the Beauty so ancient and so new' (10. 27. 38) to whom Augustine's soul ascends, through the rational interrogation of the hierarchy of reality. And yet these philosophical insights and structures are placed firmly within a distinctively Christian context. In the *Soliloquia* the integration of the two is not as smooth and seamless as in the biblically inspired language of the *Confessiones*, rather, we find overtly philosophical insights and language seemingly randomly juxtaposed, often in the same sentence or paragraph, with thoroughly Christian doctrines such as creation from nothing, humankind's complete dependence upon God's grace and redeeming, reforming actions, God's temporal, historical revelation, and quotations from Scripture. And yet there is no doubt that the transcendent, immutable God of the philosophers is also the loving God of the New Testament who acts to reform sinful and lost human beings so that they might return to him in faith, hope, and love.³⁸

³⁸ See, most esp., the extraordinary juxtaposition of Christian and philosophical terminology in the opening prayer of *sol.* 1. 1-6.

The means of return is likewise both philosophical and distinctively Christian; it is structured around the hierarchy of reality, stretching from creation, inwards and upwards to the soul, the mind, or reason, and within and above them, to God. The thrust of both texts is away from God's admittedly

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beautiful creation to higher, spiritual reality. Progress through these levels, however, is achieved in both texts by the questioning of Augustine's reason and his ultimate realization that without God he could make no progress whatsoever, and that whatever progress he does make is a gradual process

of healing; of faith, hope, and love for what he does not yet possess (and will not possess in this life). In the *Soliloquia* the predominant metaphor is that of sight; of what one can and cannot see, of man's (moral) blindness and his becoming gradually accustomed to gaze upon the truth (e.g. 1. 23). In the *Confessiones* too, the ascent progresses by the bodily eye's investigation of creation, the judgement of the images it transmits by the spiritual eye of the soul, and its highest part, the mind or memory, which in turn realizes it can 'see' or judge the truth within itself, only as it is illuminated by God's truth.

The stages by which the mind comes to this realization are parallel in the two texts, the main difference being that *Soliloquia* is not presented as a description of an ascent, as such, but rather as a desire for Wisdom which, given Augustine's understanding of reality, inevitably follows an ascensional pattern; from outward to inward, bodily to spiritual, soul to mind or reason, mind or reason to God. In other words, *conf.* 10, like the other descriptions of ascent in Augustine's works, might be read as explicitly setting forth what is implicit in everything Augustine has to say, throughout his works, from the very beginning.

The problem in both texts is that Augustine is overwhelmingly aware of his love of God and his desire to know him, but also of the disconcerting fact that he does not know why he loves him, since he does not yet know him. What is it, he asks, that inspires his love and motivates his search, a love and search which can be summed up as a desire for happiness (*sol.* 1. 7; *conf.* 10. 6. 9; 10. 20. 29-31. 31)? His first answer is his realization of the order of reality, which seems to point always beyond and above itself to something higher which has brought it into being, and which gives it coherence and order; following on from this is his awareness that what perceives and transmits knowledge of bodily reality is the soul, that soul is part of the mind and ordered by reason and rules of truth;³⁹

³⁹ Which he identifies, at least in part, with the liberal arts, in both texts, *conf.* 10. 9. 16; *sol.* 1. 8.

that reason or the rules of truth originate in God, who is ultimate truth and Wisdom. That human beings know them at all must be due to God's embodiment of them in creation and his gift of them to the mind. How they are given and present in the mind is a question we must address later.

Thus, the world as Augustine experiences it, and his own body and mind, as they operate and are conscious of themselves, confirm the teaching of the

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Platonists and dictate to Augustine the ascensional scheme he follows in seeking knowledge of God in both texts. This is most especially the case because he is fully aware of the transience and mutability of created reality and the weakness and fallibility of his own mind which is, in fact, a mystery to him. He does not even know himself.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *sol.* 1. 8; *conf.* 10. 5. 7; 10. 8. 15; 10. 16. 25. These insights are buttressed by Augustine's extended analysis of his memory and the awe-inspiring, mysterious depths of his unconscious mind.

Immutability, and certain and eternal truth must therefore be sought not only through them, but beyond and above them.

The soul therefore ascends by judging traces of reason/truth below it, acknowledging their presence in itself, and ultimately, by looking to their source above itself. This is possible because reason/truth is revealed in God's created work, but above all, because the seeds or rules of truth are somehow present to the mind. How they are present is the subject of Augustine's famous, extended analysis of memory in *conf.* 10, but the same insights are present, albeit in a more attenuated form in the *Soliloquia*:⁴¹

⁴¹*sol.* 1. 9-11; *conf.* 10. 8. 12-27. 38.

the memory, or stomach of the mind, contains everything man has ever experienced—everything he has ever seen, heard, felt, or learnt, and much else that he is no longer conscious of, and has forgotten. It also contains the truths of the disciplines, which do not come from outside, from the senses, but are somehow always inherent in it, enabling it to judge and to know reason/truth. It is also the place where human beings remember God, are conscious of him, and seek to know him. If this is the case, Augustine reasons, he must somehow be present to the mind, and yet his presence does not enable them to know him fully but only to seek him; he must therefore also transcend the mind, even though he deigns to dwell in it. How then can he be attained?

This question, posed in both texts near the culmination of the ascent or investigation of creation, soul, mind, and memory, does not so much lead to vision, as, on the one hand, an awareness of what vision would be if only human beings were capable of it, and on the other, of their utter incapacity and their need for healing:

Reason who speaks with you promises to let you see God with your mind as the sun is seen with the eye ... it is God himself who illumines all ... the soul therefore needs three things: eyes which it can use aright, looking and seeing ... The eye of the mind is healthy when it is pure from every taint of the body ... And this, faith alone can give in the first place. It is impossible to show God to a mind vitiated and sick ... But if the mind does not believe that only thus will it attain vision, it will not seek healing ... So to faith must be added hope ... Suppose it believes all this is true and hopes that healing is possible, but does not love and desire the promised light, and thinks it

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must meantime be content with its darkness which through habit has become pleasant, will it not, no less, spurn the physician? ... Therefore a third thing is necessary, love ... Without these three no soul is healed so that it may see, that is, know God ... When its eyes are healed, what next? It must look. ... Right and perfect looking which leads to vision is called virtue ... But even looking cannot turn eyes already healed to the light unless these three things are present: faith that believes that the object to which our looking ought to be directed can, when seen, make us blessed; hope which is assured that vision will follow right looking; love which longs to see and to enjoy. Then looking is followed by the vision of God, its true end in the sense that there is nothing more to look for. ... [because of the difficulties caused by mankind's embodied state, in this life, faith, hope, and love will always be necessary] ... There are three stages in the soul's progress: healing, looking, and seeing. Likewise there are three virtues: faith, hope, and love. For healing and looking, faith and hope are always necessary. For seeing, all three are necessary in this life, but in the life to come love only. (*sol.* 1. 12-14).⁴²

⁴² Cooper 1996: 26-7 notes a number of other allusions to (but no direct quotation of) 1 Cor. 13: 13 throughout the early works, including *b. uita* 4. 34; *ord.* 2. 8. 25, and cogently demonstrates that at a number of levels *sol.* 1 is structured around it. Studer 1990: 202-6 identifies Neoplatonic influences here, as well as Paul.

The measured, systematic presentation of the *Soliloquia* is a world away from Augustine's rhapsodic prayer to the 'Beauty so ancient and so new' which has battered all his senses in order to bring him to itself, and his anguished expression of his awareness of his alienation from God, his sinfulness, and his need for healing in *conf.* 10 (27. 38-28. 39).⁴³

⁴³ Although there are parallels in *sol.* 1 to the famous passage in *conf.* 10. 27. 38, 'You were within and I was in the external world and sought You there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which You made. You were with me, and I was not with You. The lovely things kept me far from You, though if they did not have their existence in You, they had no existence at all,' in *sol.* 1. 5 we read 'Receive me, thy servant, now fleeing from these things, as they formerly received me, a stranger, when I was fleeing from Thee.'

Yet both passages express the same fundamental insight: human beings must be healed by the divine physician (a frequently used image for God in both texts),⁴⁴

⁴⁴ e.g. *sol.* 1. 12; 25-6; *conf.* 10. 28. 39.

they must throw themselves upon his gracious work, in faith, hope, and love, before they can attain God or the happy life. In fact, the calm, measured prose that we have cited from the *Soliloquia* is misleading, for Augustine is here discussing with Reason what must, in theory, be the case. When he

later applies theory to his own practice, and Reason presses him to evaluate just how far he has progressed in the healing process, he is shamefully and agonizingly aware that his optimistic theorizing is wholly undermined by his own personal failings.

The second half of *conf.* 10 consists of an extended analysis of Augustine's present state and, in particular, of his progress, or more precisely lack of

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progress, in overcoming the temptations which beset him. It is structured—as so many similar passages, early and late⁴⁵

⁴⁵ e.g. among early texts: *uera. rel.* 68-107; *en. Ps.* 7. 9; 8. 13; *mus.* 6.

—by a text from the First Epistle of John (1 John 2: 16) which enumerates 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life'. Augustine uses these broad categories to group together the main temptations which challenge human beings, and in this case, his own inability to overcome them. The middle section of *Soliloquia* in which Reason, having elicited an understanding of how human beings can be said to know and see God, calls Augustine to account, and presses him to admit to himself where his weaknesses still lie (1. 16 ff.) is parallel to the second half of book 10. Although it does not follow 1 John 2: 16 as closely as the *Confessiones* many of the failings listed obviously occur in both texts. They differ, however, as Augustine chooses to highlight his real fragility by first giving the reader the impression that he is able to respond to Reason in a positive and optimistic way: in response to Reason's interrogation he confidently asserts that he has made very real progress in the Christian life: he no longer excessively desires riches, honours, marriage, food. He admits, however, that he is affected by fear—fear of losing his friends, of pain, and of death. But having slept on the discussion, Reason awkwardly provokes Augustine into admitting that his high-minded rejection of marriage on the previous day was perhaps more rhetorical than a reflection of the real state of his mind: Reason provokingly observes, 'How sordid, how base, how execrable, how horrible the embrace of a woman seemed to you when we were discussing the desire for marriage! But as you lay awake last night and the same question arose, you found it was very different with you than you had supposed. Imagined fondlings and bitter sweetness tickled your fancy...' Augustine's response is much less assured and controlled than earlier on too: 'Oh, be silent, be silent I beseech you! Why do you torture me? Why do you cut so deep? I am not too hardened for weeping. Now I promise nothing, I presume nothing... You say that he whom I burn to see knows when I am healed. Let him do what he pleases. Let him show himself when he pleases. I commit myself wholly to his care' (1. 25-6).

This precise failing is also the one Augustine singles out in *Conf.* 10 (10. 29. 30): *continentia*—specifically, continence or chastity, or more generally, single-minded and single-hearted devotion to God. And he presents it in precisely the same way as an indicator of his complete helplessness and his acknowledgement of his utter dependence upon God. The passage is the famous one which initiated the Pelagian controversy: 'My entire hope is exclusively in your very great mercy. Grant what you command, and command what you will. ... You command continence; grant what you

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command, and command what you will' (10. 29. 40). But even this famous admission of man's complete dependence upon divine grace has a much earlier counterpart in the great opening prayer of the *Soliloquia*:

Now thee only I love; thee only I follow; thee only I seek; thee only am I ready to serve...*Command, I beseech thee, as thou wilt, but heal and open my ears that I may hear thy voice.*⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Doucet 1990a for an analysis of Augustine's use of this phrase; Hombert 1996: 593-4 for a table which lists where it occurs elsewhere in Augustine's work.

Heal and open my eyes that I may see thy beckoning. Drive madness from me that I may recognize thee. Tell me whither I must go that I may behold thee; and I hope to do all that thou dost command.(1. 5)

Indeed, the whole of the opening prayer of the *Soliloquia* is a highly charged, moving confession of Augustine's weakness and a plea and paeon to God's grace. We cannot quote it in full, but, given its importance in the context of the argument of this book, we refer the reader to it and to our more extended analysis in Ch. 4, and simply quote one passage here, to illustrate what we mean:

Thee I invoke, O God, the Truth, in, by and through whom all truths are true; the Wisdom, in, by and through whom all are wise who are wise...who converts us to yourself... who hears, defends and leads us into all truth... who recalls us to the Way, brings us to the door and causes it to be opened to them that knock; who gives us the Bread of Life... come propitiously to my aid (1. 3)... I come to you, and how to come I ask you again. For if you leave a man he perishes...Every man has rightly sought [you] to whom you have given the power to do so. Make me to seek you...(1. 6)

The image which sums up God's gracious help to sinful human beings in the *Soliloquia* is one we have already come across: that of the divine physician. God alone knows what is wrong with human beings, what they need to be cured, and provides the healing remedies to which they must submit. If someone tries to evade his care, he providentially leads them to recognize their illness and turn to him to be treated. This image, obviously suggested by the Gospels, was one of Augustine's favourite ways of expounding the work of the incarnate Christ, from the very beginning (we have seen it being used in *Acad.* and *ord.*), and it is the one he uses to conclude *conf.* 10; it is Christ, the Word, the one Mediator between God and man in the Eucharist, who is the most powerful medicine provided by God for man's redemption (10. 53. 69).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See Ch. 8 below for further discussion of Augustine's early Christology.

In both of these texts—one from Augustine's earliest works and the other written at the height of his maturity—philosophical insight and personal

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experience of God's transcendence and the hierarchy of reality, make Augustine acutely aware of his own created dependence, frailty, and weakness, without God's gracious sustaining and healing help. Philosophy is thoroughly integrated into a fully developed understanding of Christian life, faith, and doctrine. The standard judgement of the early works, represented in the following quotation from an article of Paula Fredriksen's, simply does not stand up to careful scrutiny: 'This is a different conversion, one viewed not as a struggle of the will, sin and grace, but as progress in philosophy.'⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Fredriksen 1986: 20.

From Attainment of Perfection to Romanticism?

One of the changes which Peter Brown sees taking place in the ten years between Cassiciacum and the *Confessiones* is Augustine's gradual, reluctant abandonment of the idea that human beings can attain perfection in this life; that they can attain the purity needed in order to scale the hierarchy of reality, and see God. Gradually, Augustine came to realize, according to Brown, that 'he would never impose a victory of mind over body in himself, he would never achieve the wrapt contemplation of the ideal philosopher. It is', Brown comments, 'the most drastic change that a man may have to accept: it involved nothing less than the surrender of the bright future he thought he had gained at Cassiciacum.'⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Brown 1967: 147.

Instead,

a new tone has come to suffuse Augustine's life. He is a man who has realized that he was doomed to remain incomplete in his present existence, that what he wished for most ardently would never be more than a hope, postponed to a final resolution of all tensions, far beyond this life...All a man could do was to 'yearn' for this absent perfection, to feel its loss intensely, to pine for it...This marks the end of a long-established classical ideal of perfection. ... If to be a 'Romantic', means to be a man acutely aware of being caught in an existence that denies him the fullness for which he craves, to feel that he is defined by his tension towards something else, by his capacity for faith, for hope, for longing...Then Augustine has imperceptibly become a 'Romantic'.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ibid. 156.

This is wonderful stuff, but is it really a correct reading of the early works? I think that what we have already discovered of them suggests that it is far removed from the truth: it presents an idealistic portrait of the young Augustine which, though it provides a convenient contrast with the mature bishop and keeps the reader's attention with some dramatic changes, in fact, never existed. Did he ever think he could attain fulfilment and perfection in

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this life—the 'wrapt contemplation of the ideal philosopher', transcending the tensions of life in the world, no longer in need of faith or hope, caught up in

a vision of the divine? It is questionable whether even the philosophers, though they maintained the ideal, ever thought it was really attainable in this life (at least in any lasting way);⁵¹

⁵¹ e.g. see the comments above on Plotinus.

Augustine, who also admired the ideal and treated it as a goal, certainly never did. What we will discover of his early reflection on the fallenness of human beings, the incapacity of their will, and their need for divine grace in Part Two of this book, will endorse this conclusion. In this chapter, in the context of examining the relation between Christianity and philosophy in the early works in reference to the idea of ascent, I would simply like to concentrate on the question of whether Augustine ever thought that the ascent of the soul towards God was attainable—and if so, whether it is ever achieved—in this life.

There are a number of passages in the early works which do indeed seem to entertain the possibility of attaining the truth, but they read more like statements of theory and aspiration—describing an ideal for human beings to aim for, or a state from which they fall short⁵²

⁵² e.g. *b. uita* 4. 25; *sol.* 1. 23; *ord.* 2. 19. 50-1; *s. Dom. mon.* 1. 2. 9 (which Brown 1967: 147 seems to read as implying not just an aspiration, but a general truth concerning human ability, because Augustine observes that it has been attained in this life by the Apostles). See Ch. 7 below for a more detailed consideration of this issue.

—than descriptions of actual experience. Augustine himself certainly hasn't experienced this, nor does he think he ever will, but he does allow that a 'few', some 'great souls', might indeed do so: 'What shall I say are the delights, what the enjoyment, of the supreme and true God; what breath of undisturbed peace and eternity? These are the wonders that great souls have declared, so far as they brought themselves to speak of these realities, great souls of incomparable greatness, who, we believe, beheld and now behold these things.'⁵³

⁵³ *quant.* 1. 33. 76; *util. cred.* 24.

Who are these 'great souls' and what sort of vision do they have? Augustine makes no specific identifications but they seem to be those with the requisite intellectual ability to grasp the truth through reason,⁵⁴

⁵⁴ *ord.* 1. 16. 44.

or those figures from Scripture who claim to have had such an experience, such as St Paul, rapt into the third heaven, or those for whom he supposes this must have been the case, such as the Apostles.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ As Dodaro 2004: ch. 3, observes, whereas in his early thought Augustine was reluctant to attribute weakness of any kind to the saints he later concedes, in the context of the Pelagian controversy, that they could have suffered temptation, fear of death, concupiscence, and difficulty in willing, and required grace to overcome them. By describing the saints as clearly inferior to, and dependent upon, Christ, he thereby establishes a radical discontinuity between them. Although this diminished their heroic status, it averted any suggestion that human beings—albeit saintly ones—possessed a Pelagian-type autonomy.

As we have seen, such vision is the aim and goal Augustine sets

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himself, but he acknowledges again and again that it is unlikely to be attained in this life, and if it is, it is certain to be fleeting and transitory; a glimpse of what will be in the life to come. And those who do thus attain it must be careful not to fly ahead, but to also tread the way of faith, hope, and love, so as not to lead less able brethren astray; the surest way to God is through care for human society.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *util. cred.* 24.

And even these very few cannot escape the trials and tribulations of this life.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 23. 36, 'The endurance of troubles must be borne in this life by almost all who make their way toward the tree of life. The fullness of knowledge, however, seems to come to very few, so that not all who arrive at the tree of life come by way of the fullness of knowledge, although all experience the endurance of troubles...'

It seems that it is the striving after the goal, and the way in which it serves to order a person's affections and motivations—subduing the temporal and mutable and seeking the eternal and spiritual—that is important, rather than its actual attainment: 'Yet in this life' he observes in *De sermone Domini in monte*, concerning the resistance of temptation,

so long as we carry our present mortality, into which we were led by the persuasion of the serpent, it is not to be hoped that this can be the case; but yet we are to hope that at some future time it will take place...we should with the most ardent love seek after what we have understood, from the Lord's revealing it... For thus, after the remaining burden of this mortality has been laid down in the act of dying, there shall be perfected in every part of man at the fit time, the blessedness which has been begun in this life, and which we have from time to time strained every nerve to lay hold of and secure. (2. 9. 35)

Throughout the early works, as we have just seen in the *Soliloquia*, wherever Augustine mentions the vision or revelation of truth, he couples it with an exhortation to live by faith, hope, and love in this life. Only so can sinful human beings, who must fight a continuous battle with the distractions of the senses (and it is obvious that Augustine understands all people to be such), be purified: by believing that the truth exists, living in the hope that they will ultimately attain it, and meanwhile yearning in love for it.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Cf. also *b. uita.* 1. 4. 25; 35.

This is no more than saying that faith and reason are interdependent and, as we shall see in the rest of this chapter, that both are necessary in this life.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ I would therefore argue that whereas Augustine seems to suggest in *util. cred.* 11. 25, that there are some who attain blessedness in this life, and later clarifies this observation in *retr.* 1. 14. 2, to allow that even those who attain a degree of

knowledge in this life must not be thought to have attained perfect blessedness, since what they cannot know in this life is 'incomparably greater', he is not retracting an earlier statement as wrong, but simply making absolutely clear to anyone who might misinterpret it, that this is what he meant from the very beginning. All other early texts on this subject would endorse this reading—e.g. *uera rel.* 103 in reference to those who practise virtue 'so far as they can in this life', and who 'taste how sweet is the Lord', Augustine comments, 'They have no doubt as to what will be after this life, and their perfection is nourished by faith, hope and charity. After this life, knowledge will be made perfect. For now we know in part, but when that which is perfect is come, knowledge will not be in part ... What they most love in this life will be made perfect for them after this life' *lib. arb.* 2. 2. 6 'in matters pertaining to divinity, we must first believe before we seek to know ... what we seek at his bidding we shall find, as far as that can be done in this life, and by people such as we are ... we must believe that these things are perceived and possessed by people of superior character even while they dwell on earth, and certainly, more clearly and perfectly, by all the good and pious after this life' *s. Dom. mon.* 2. 17. 58; *diu. qu.* 83 66. 7 (and see other texts cited in Ch. 5 below, which describe the difficulty which human beings continue to experience 'under grace').

Augustine's habit of

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analysing the temptations which continue to beset humankind, after he has described what the vision of God might be, if it could be attained—as we have seen in the case of *Soliloquia* and *De uera religione* (which follows the pattern of 1 John 2: 16)—is a sure indicator of his conviction that, in this life, all human beings stand in need of continual purification, and that it is not a state they will ever achieve, with any degree of permanence, until after death. Indeed, as we have seen, it is the sense of God's transcendence which their attempts at ascent provoke, which makes them ever more aware of their own weakness and impurity.

The fleeting glimpses of truth which sinful human beings do attain, are indeed the inspiration and ground for their faith, hope, and love, but they most definitely never have the quality, in Augustine's work, of the serene and rapt contemplation of the sage. Nor does his thought change on this matter: precisely the same evaluation of the goal and attainment of ascents is presented in *De Trinitate* as in his very earliest works. He writes in this work of intelligible truths: 'And to attain to these with the eye of the mind is the lot of the few; and when they are attained as much as they can be, he himself who attains to them does not abide in them, but is as it were repelled by the rebounding of the eye of the mind, and so there comes to be a transitory thought of a thing not transitory.'⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *trin.* 12. 14. 23. He adds that such an insight can be stored in some way in the memory and evoked again by teaching.

Moreover, Augustine confirms in a number of texts that supreme vision and peaceful contemplation can only be realised after death. Even when he is at his most optimistic concerning the spiritual regeneration of human beings in this life, this is still the case. Thus, describing their reformation from the 'old man' to the 'new man' in *De uera religione*, he observes that 'no one in this life can live as the "new and heavenly man" but must associate with the "old man". For he must begin there, and must so continue till death, though the old grows weaker and the new progresses' (49-50).⁶¹

⁶¹ Cf. 77, where it is clear that he thinks perfection will only be attained 'at the last

trump'. Cf. *mor.* 1. 25. 47; *fid. et sym.* 10. 23.

These insights are confirmed by works written towards the end of this early period, when, for example, he insists in *De mendacio* that the 'highest and inmost truth itself ...

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which to attain to, to remain in, and to cleave to, will not be permitted, except when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality'.⁶²

⁶² *mend.* 40; Cf. *s. Dom. mon.* 2. 9. 35. See n. 55 above.

Faith and Reason

We have seen that it is the weaknesses and failings of humanity which make the attainment of perfection, or the goal of the ascent of the soul, unrealizable for all but a few 'great souls', and that, while Augustine gives a prominent role to reason, he is convinced that faith (as well as hope and love) will always be necessary in this life. In the concluding section of this chapter, therefore, I would like to return to Augustine's early reflection on the roles of faith and of reason,⁶³

⁶³ On this subject, Holte 1962: 73-109, 303-27; van Fleteren 1973: 33-71 (and n. 1 for further bibliography).

since I think it will further illustrate, in relation to the notion of ascent, the mature integration of philosophy and Christianity in Augustine's earliest works, which it has been the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Van Fleteren confirms, in relation to this issue, what has become clear above concerning the divided opinions of scholars on the early works: some, he observes hold that for the early Augustine there is no salvation by reason alone (e.g. Mandouze 1968: 266-71; Holte 1962: 303-28) whereas others think that at least at Cassiciacum, 'reason is so separate from authority that reason constitutes a way of salvation independent of authority (e.g. O'Meara 1951: 342 f.; O'Connell 1968: 236-57).

Augustine, the educated, cultured intellectual was not inclined to rest content solely with faith in the authority of the Christian church. Indeed, it was this aspect of African Christianity which had sent him into the arms of the Manichees, who claimed to have a rational explanation for everything.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ *util. cred.* 2, 'You know, Honoratus, that I fell among these people for no other reason than that they declared that they would put aside all overawing authority, and by pure and simple reason would bring to God those who were willing to listen to them, and so deliver them from all error. What else compelled me for nearly nine years to spurn the religion implanted in me as a boy by my parents, to follow these men and listen diligently to them, than that they said we were overawed by superstition and were bidden to believe rather than to reason, while they pressed no one to believe until the truth had been discussed and elucidated?'

When he returned to the Christian faith, he did so under the influence of Neoplatonically assisted explanations of the central doctrines which had so troubled his youthful self and had held him back from it for so long; the doctrines of God, of creation and evil, and of the image of God in man. In other words, he had to be reconciled to the faith at an intellectual level

before he could accept its authority. He could only believe what he was persuaded, by

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reason, was convincing to his intellect. Hence, his first work on becoming a Christian, was one against those philosophers of the so-called 'New Academy', the Sceptics, who maintained that it was impossible to attain the truth and that one must simply act on the basis of what is 'like the truth' or what is probable.

We have seen that the position of the Sceptics, even though it was advanced by none less than Cicero himself, was so absurd and untenable in Augustine's eyes that he refused to believe they actually maintained it, but rather suggested it was an elaborate front to guard their true Platonic beliefs from the threat of Stoic materialism, until a sufficiently strong authority appeared under whose protection they could reveal their true thought. The latter, he suggests, has presented itself in Christ. Meanwhile, having despaired of ever attaining the truth on abandoning the Manichees, and having flirted with Scepticism before his discovery of the Platonists, Augustine realized the dangers of the Sceptics' position and felt bound, in his first work as a Christian, to take up the case against them. It was unacceptable that they should encourage others to abandon their attempts to search for the truth on the grounds that it could never be found (3. 17. 37-18. 41).

Contra Academicos reads like a school exercise: all the traditional methods of argument which Augustine would have learnt in the course of his education are used to build up a strong defence against them. Through dialectic their doctrine is first pressed to its logical—and absurd—conclusion: to say that one knows the truth or that it cannot be known is a statement that works on the assumption that truth exists and that it can be identified as present or absent; to assert that those who claim to know the truth are wrong is to claim to possess truth oneself.⁶⁶

⁶⁶*Acad.* 3. 3. 5-6; 9. 21; 14. 31.

The only way the Academics can escape contradiction, therefore, is to admit that their doctrine is not true.

Similarly, their claim to act upon what is like the truth (*verisimilis*) or what is probable, is also to presuppose that one possesses a standard of truth against which likeness and probability can be measured.⁶⁷

⁶⁷*Ibid.* 2. 5. 12; 11. 26; 3. 18. 40.

Augustine buttresses his defence with another classic school argument by rehearsing the theory of disjunctive propositions and hypothetical syllogisms: if one can argue on the basis of either/or, if/then (for example, either there are many worlds or there is one world), one is arguing on the basis that truth exists (3. 2. 26). Likewise, when one states what one feels or senses—this tastes sweet; that sounds discordant, etc.—one is judging according to a commonly agreed understanding of natural truth (3. 11. 24, 26). Simply to say that one exists and thinks (in a foreshadowing of Cartesian logic) is to say something true (3. 9. 19).

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Having established the existence of truth, however, we have seen at the beginning of this chapter that Augustine concludes *Contra Academicos* by asserting that this truth is only accessible to sinful human beings through the descent of God, in Christ, who provides an authority which will lead them back to the truth which they can no longer see or grasp (3. 20. 43). The truth exists, but it is to be attained, not through rational disputation, but by faith. Reason is important in demonstrating the existence of truth; in defending and expounding the truth once it is revealed by authority and accepted in faith; in enabling fallen human beings, through the exercise of their mind, to perceive a hierarchy of reality and therefore what they must subject to themselves and what they must search for. More subtly, it allows one to make sound conjectures on the basis of what it has already demonstrated about something which remains, in part, unknown or unknowable.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ *quant.* 1. 31. 64 (in this case, why the individual pieces of a worm, which has been cut into parts, continue to move, and what this says about the nature of the soul; or why we see a man whom we know to be of good character among thieves. But its relevance to the mysteries of the faith in general is clear).

But there will be no progress, no purification, no attainment of truth, without faith, which in this life is inseparable from hope of ultimately seeing what one believes, and love, which moves one towards it.

'May God grant his aid, and give us to understand what we have first believed' (*lib. arb.* 1. 2. 4)

Augustine sets out clearly the way in which he understands the relation between reason and faith in a number of texts. *De ordine* 2. 5. 16⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the difficulties encountered in translating this text see Ch. 8 below.

is one of the most notable, for here he describes the 'twofold path' of reason and authority, which human beings follow when things perplex them. Whereas reason, operating through philosophy, urges human beings not to scorn the mysteries of the faith, and to understand them as far as they are able, it is Christianity which fulfils the role of true philosophy in teaching and demonstrating the First Principle of all reality and the incarnation of the Word for our salvation. Augustine's language here, as is so often the case in the early works, is purely philosophical, but it is quite clear what he is referring to: 'The philosophy that is true' he comments '... has no other function than to teach the First Principle of all things—Itself without beginning,—and how great an intellect dwells therein, and what has proceeded therefrom for our welfare, but without deterioration of any kind.' Whereas reason 'frees scarcely a few',

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the 'mysteries liberate persons of sincere and firm faith' and, as it were, decipher the teaching of philosophy into Christian doctrine, by teaching that the First Principle is God, the Trinity, and that he has humbly assumed a human body, for our sake. Reason is therefore not so much to be identified with secular philosophy as with the use of philosophical reason in a Christian context; and authority, or faith, is not so much to be identified with Christianity in contradistinction to secular philosophy, as with the mysteries (Scripture and the sacraments) which initiate people into the truth. Thus, although reason and faith are often juxtaposed and used to refer to secular philosophy and Christianity—as we have seen Augustine himself do at the end of *Contra Academicos* in reference to Platonism and Christianity (3. 20. 43)—he is also quite clear that they are both firmly comprehended by Christianity, which is the true philosophy (and a fulfilment of Platonism) and true religion.

Augustine is also aware that, even when exercised in the context of the faith, reason can be a dangerous and ultimately circuitous and exhausting route to truth. It lends itself to pride, far more than humble acceptance of the faith offered by the mysteries; it can mislead the unlearned; it can be a long and hard path, for those endowed with the requisite intellectual powers, to grasp what is directly accessible to the devout faithful.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *quant.* 1. 7. 12; Monnica represented for Augustine the position of faith as a valid—indeed preferable—alternative to philosophy, *b. uita.* 2. 10; *ord.* 1. 2. 32; 2. 1. 1; 2. 17. 45.

And yet it is of value in that it provides a means to understand, articulate, and defend the faith, to avoid error, and to buttress one's faith. It is more than obvious that he himself could not resist this path.

Perhaps the main reason for Augustine's ambiguous attitude towards reason is his awareness, from the very beginning, that it not only requires faith in an authority in order to operate correctly,⁷¹

⁷¹ 'nisi credideritis, non intellegentis' (Isa. 7: 9 LXX) is used for the first time in *lib. arb.* 1. 2. 4; *mag.* 11. 37.

but that the ability of human beings to use it is undermined by their weakness and sin, and most especially, their tendency to take temporal and mutable things as ultimates and to fail to look beyond them to the Supreme Creator and orderer of created reality. In this 'fallen' context, faith, hope, and love, and the grace of the mysteries—of salvation history, the incarnation, Scripture, preaching, and the sacraments—are all the more necessary, indeed, they are indispensable, in order to purify and heal human beings so that they might see the truth—as we saw in the text from *Contra Academicos*, in relation to the incarnation, with which we began this chapter. Augustine stresses this with equal force in another Cassiciacum work, the *De ordine*, when he writes:

We must ... accept as divine that Authority which not only exceeds human power in its outward manifestations, but also, in the very act of leading a man onward, shows him to what extent It has debased Itself for his sake, and bids him not to be confined to the senses ... but to soar upward to the intellect ... it is fitting that by deeds It show Its power; by humility, Its clemency; by commandment, Its nature. And all this is being delivered to us so distinctly and steadily by the sacred rites into which we are now being initiated: therein the life of good men is most easily purified, not indeed by the circumlocution of disputation, but by the authority of the mysteries.⁷²

⁷²*ord. 2. 9. 27. Cf. util. cred. 4; uera rel. 106.*

It is precisely these factors which Augustine emphasizes in *De utilitate credendi*, written in 391 as an attack on the Manichees' insistence on the sufficiency of reason and their criticism of Christian faith as mere credulity (2). Augustine admits, 'I do not deny that there is an ineffable and unique spiritual good visible to the mind, but I confess with weeping and groaning that I am not yet fitted to contemplate it' (4). In other words, the weakened reason of human beings needs the shade of authority before it can begin to look upon the sun of truth;⁷³

⁷³*mor. 1. 2. 3; 7. 11.*

they need the 'temporal medicine' which divine providence provides to bring those who believe, but are caught up in love of temporal things, back to health.⁷⁴

⁷⁴*uera rel. 45. Cf. util. cred. 32 for the same image of temporal medicine in the same context.*

The argument for the necessity of faith is prominent in the early works, then, primarily because of Augustine's conviction of humanity's weakness without divine help, but also because, as we have seen, he felt a clear and cogently argued case for the role of faith was needed in order to refute the Manichees. In *De utilitate credendi* he therefore presents a long series of arguments to demonstrate the way in which authority or faith is an indispensable feature of human life in the world: in education—especially for those without strong intellectual ability (17; 21; 27); in society—where trust is the basis of human relationships (26); in healing the weakened mind so that it might ultimately apprehend the truth it is not yet worthy or able to grasp (21; 31; 35); in revealing the truths of the faith, through miracles, teaching, tradition, and the example of the great saints, martyrs, and ascetics (32; 35).

Augustine's general approach to the question of the relation between faith and reason is best summed up in a passage from *De uera religione* of 390:

The treatment of the soul, which God's providence and ineffable loving kindness administers, is most beautiful in its steps and stages. There are two different methods, authority and reason. Authority demands belief and prepares man for reason. Reason leads to understanding and knowledge. But reason is not entirely absent from authority, for we have got to consider whom we have to believe, and the highest

authority belongs to truth when it is clearly known. But because we dwell among

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temporal things, and love of them is an obstacle to our reaching eternal things, a kind of temporal medicine, calling not those who know but those who believe back to health, has priority by the order, not of nature or its inherent excellence, but of time.(45)

An Integration of Philosophy and Theology?

I hope that what we have discovered of the early works, even when they are at their most philosophical, spiritual, and rational, is a thoroughly Christian foundation, structure, and content. Aspects which have been cited by generations of scholars as detracting from a fully Christianized presentation of Augustine's search for truth in the early works, we have found, on careful investigation, to be fully integrated into a mature grasp of Christian faith and doctrine, characterized by a belief in One Supreme God, who creates human beings out of nothing; the weakness of human beings and their unavoidable tendency to sin; their need for God's help; the descent of God in the incarnation of the Word in order to reform them. These elements are present from Augustine's very first extant work and provide the determining context which shapes everything he has to say about the search for, and attainment of truth, in the early works. Philosophical type ascents, an emphasis upon the superiority of the spiritual, and arguments for the necessity of reason are all presented firmly within this doctrinal context. The distinctive emphases of the early works are, of course, different from subsequent works, but our argument has been that they are determined not so much by changes in Augustine's doctrinal position as by the particular circumstances in which he found himself and the questions and concerns which they inspired. In the early works his enthusiasm for the philosophy which had so recently revolutionized his thought and facilitated his conversion, is understandably very near the surface. The need to distance himself from his former co-religionists, the Manichees, likewise in large part determines his emphasis upon the superiority of the spiritual over against Manichaean materialism. Arguments in favour of reason and the attainment of truth by the intellect, on the other hand, are also to the fore against the Sceptics.

However, if we read the early works, not to buttress a theory of Augustine's conversion to Neoplatonism, or to contrast them with his later, supposedly more mature theology, but rather for what they are, we also find a resounding emphasis upon the need for faith rather than reason against the Manichees, on humility rather than pride against the philosophers, on Christ as truth against the Sceptics, and, in a general way, an insistence upon the

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pre-eminence of Christianity as both the true philosophy, which supersedes all the other schools in its teaching on God as creator, sustainer, and redeemer, and the true religion, whose sacraments, in Scripture, preaching, and the liturgy, reveal the truth to the one who believes, hopes, and loves. Despite their use of philosophy—or perhaps more accurately, because of their distinctive use of ancient philosophy—the early works are most definitely the work of a devout Christian convert. They also, despite the readings of those who would like to trace a dramatic development in Augustine's thought, reveal a 'mature' grasp of human beings' limitations and their need for divine help.

In the next chapter I will examine one of the central features of the early works which sets them apart from philosophical reflection and which, I think, provides the foundation for Augustine's early formulation of this 'mature' grasp of the faith. This is the idea of 'creation from nothing'—*creatio ex nihilo*.

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4 Creation from Nothing

Carol Harrison

Abstract: This chapter examines one of the central features of Augustine's early works which sets them apart from philosophical reflection, and provides the foundation for his early formulation of this 'mature' grasp of the faith: the idea of 'creation from nothing' — *creatio ex nihilo*. It demonstrates that what has been described as Augustine's early 'Christian philosophy' was never less than fully integrated into his faith in a Trinitarian God, who forms human beings from nothing, reforms them through the incarnation, and inspires in them love and delight through the Holy Spirit. It argues that he never shared the classical ideal of human autonomy and self-determination to attain perfection, but that he was always acutely conscious of human beings' created dependence upon God's grace.

Keywords: **creation, evil, good, form, ontological divide, will, grace, Fall, Trinity**

Augustine's earliest theological reflection is highly systematic and coherent. This is largely because, as a new convert, he adopted the distinctively Christian doctrine of creation from nothing as the basis for his reflection upon the central articles of the faith: the nature of God, creation, humankind, sin and evil, grace and redemption. It is this doctrine which gives his earliest thought a uniquely Christian form, distinct from all other types of philosophical and religious reflection on these questions, and which enabled him from the very beginning to articulate his belief in God's transcendence, humanity's fallenness, and the need for divine grace, which form the pivotal axes of his theology from 386 to his death in 430. What I intend to argue in this chapter is that his early adoption of the doctrine of creation from nothing, and the way he employs it in his reflection upon every aspect of his newly adopted faith, means that the central features of his theological system, which are often identified as emerging clearly and fully only in the mid 390s, are in fact present—indeed prominent and determinative—from the outset.

The reasons why Augustine adopted this doctrine as the mould for his Christian faith reveal the various factors which shaped his mind in the years immediately preceding and following his conversion in 386. Prominent among these were his search for Wisdom, his time as a Manichee, his discovery of the books of the Platonists, his encounter with Ambrose, and his exegesis of the Christian Scriptures. In short, they represent the main threads which Augustine describes as holding together the confused tissue of his life before conversion, and which he identifies, in his *Confessiones*, as the deliberate and careful work of God, the pattern of divine Providence, culminating in his conversion.

Let us examine these threads more closely. As we know, the restless search for wisdom which motivated the young Augustine took the form of a number of particularly difficult, because seemingly unanswerable, questions, most especially those which clustered around the nature of the divine and the problem of evil. African Christianity seemed to have little to offer in this respect. Its all too anthropomorphic picture of God, based largely upon the

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Old Testament and philosophical materialism, was far from compelling; likewise, its assertion that this God was a God of love did nothing to address the manifest presence of physical and moral evil in the world he had created and ordered.

Rather than follow the religion of his mother Augustine rebelled, and joined the Manichees, a dualistic, Gnostic sect which claimed to represent authentic Christianity, purged of the faulty metaphysics, theology, and exegesis of Catholic Christianity, and to be able therefore to explain truly the nature of good and evil. The Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness, they maintained, were two quite independent, mutually hostile substances. Evil was wholly attributable to the work of the Kingdom of Darkness, a product of the primordial conflict between the two kingdoms and a prison or trap for fragments of the Kingdom of Light; sin occurs because of the presence of the evil soul within a person which is, like that from which it derives, alien and hostile to the good soul. Augustine summarizes their system succinctly in *De uera religione* (390) as one belonging to

those who think that there are two natures or substances at war with one another, each with its own principle. Some things they like and others they dislike, and they will have God to be the author of the things they like, but not of those they dislike. When they cannot overcome temptation and are snared in carnal traps they think there are two souls in one body, one from God and sharing his nature, the other from the race of darkness which God neither begat, nor made, nor produced, nor cast from him; which has its own independent life, its territory, its offspring and living things, in short its kingdom and unbegotten principle. At a certain time it rebelled against God, and God, having no other means of resisting the enemy, under dire necessity, sent the good soul hither, a particle of his substance. They fondly imagine that the enemy was subdued and the world fabricated by this soul becoming mixed up with the elements of darkness. (16)

The Manichees believed that the trapped particles of divine soul or light could be liberated by an ascetic life, which avoided contact with evil matter as much as possible, prevented its (pro)creation by sexual abstinence, and which observed the 'three seals'.¹

¹ The seals of the mouth, the hand, and the breast, explained in *mor.* 2. 10. 19.

This was the work of their Elect, aided and served by the less rigorous Hearers (to whom Augustine belonged).²

² On Manichaeism, BA 13. 118-38; Brown 1972: 94-118; Lieu 1985: 117-53; Bonner 1963: 157-236; H.-C. Puech 1949; Decret 1978. See Torchia 1999: 86 n. 14 for Manichaean texts. He refers to Maher 1979 for a discussion of Augustine's knowledge of Manichaeism and the possibility that he possessed Latin translations of their writings.

A rational system of cosmic scale which seemed to provide logical answers; a radical dualism which exonerated the good from any involvement in evil and the good soul from sin; ascetic rigour which shunned this evil world;

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Scriptures, purged, by a thoroughgoing literal exegesis, of all contradictions; an impressive cult; a tight-knit, supportive community; a sense of meaning, belonging, and youthful rebellion... all these factors held Augustine as a Manichee for a staggering nine years. If the *Confessiones* are to be believed, however, he was always uneasy with their materialism, was never fully taken in by their claims to Truth, soon realized that there was a wide gap between their ascetic ideal and practice, and was particularly conscious of the fact that, whilst a dualistic explanation of evil meant that the good could not be blamed for evil, it also implied that the good was not omnipotent, but could be attacked, overcome, and diminished by the forces of darkness.³

³*conf.* 3. 6. 10-12. 21; 5. 1.1-8. 14.

Despite all this, he did not finally disassociate himself from them until his encounter with Faustus, one of their leading missionaries, which confirmed for him that they did not indeed have all the answers,⁴

⁴ *Ibid.* 5.1. 1-8. 14.

and that it would be preferable to doubt everything than to hold on to a supposed truth that was so intellectually, metaphysically, and practically flawed.

We have seen in the last chapter how Augustine's encounter with the 'books of the Platonists' revolutionized his thought by providing an escape from the suffocating materialism which the Manichees shared with most of their contemporaries. Their understanding of the divine as the transcendent, eternal, immutable, and incorruptible source of all reality meant that anthropomorphisms, and any suggestion that the divine is subject to time, change, corruption, and evil, could be definitively dismissed. The Neoplatonists' teaching that there is one transcendent divine nature from which all else derives, and that evil is an absence of the good, provided Augustine with the intellectual armour, as it were, to overcome the Manichees, and any other type of philosophical dualism and materialism, once and for all. By revealing to Augustine 'another reality...which truly is', a God, who is 'Spirit',⁵

⁵*conf.* 3. 7. 12, referring to John 4: 24.

they resolved his intellectual doubts and opened up the way for him to embrace Christianity. What they actually did, much more specifically—and it is this which I would like to concentrate on here—is enable him to embrace the Christian doctrine of creation from nothing, both as the basis of his refutation of Manichaeism, and as the belief which provided the foundation for the entire structure of his Christian faith. In this sense, Neoplatonism provided Augustine with the ontological, philosophical framework to move decisively beyond it, and to transform it, in embracing the uniquely Christian doctrine of creation from nothing. If this assertion is correct, then it is clear that Augustine's faith, from the outset, was unquestionably and distinctively Christian; that everything was weighed, judged, used, or rejected, according

to the uniquely Christian doctrine of creation from nothing, and that it was this, more than anything else, which shaped his characteristic understanding of the faith, and not least his reflection on humanity's fallenness, the difficulty which human beings experience in willing and doing the good, and their need for divine grace.

Before we proceed to examine Augustine's earliest works in order to prove this, we need to substantiate our suggestion that Neoplatonism may have laid the groundwork for Augustine's adoption of this doctrine, consider its background and sources in Christian tradition, and examine the possible ways in which this tradition might have been mediated to Augustine before or at his conversion.

Background and Context

Neoplatonism

The Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation, whereby all reality originates in the One, and flows from it in a descending hierarchy of existence, to intellectual reality or *nous*, to spiritual reality or soul, to bodily reality or the world, and finally, at the most remote outworking of the One, to matter (which is effectively evil because it does not exist), seems to have little resemblance to the Christian doctrine of creation from nothing, which maintains that the transcendent God creates matter where previously there was nothing, and brings it into existence by giving it form. The dramatic ontological gap between Creator and creation which characterizes the Christian doctrine is completely lacking in the continuous outflowing, or emanation, of the One in Neoplatonism. In this respect, Christianity diverges in a decisive way from Neoplatonism, or indeed, from any other philosophical account of creation in the ancient world.⁶

⁶ Kevane 1986: 61 observes of Augustine's doctrine of creation, 'This will be the watershed which divides Augustine's new metaphysics from the fundamental thinking of the entire pagan past in philosophy, including Plato and Aristotle as its greatest representatives'. While this is indeed true, I think we need to bear in mind that the 'watershed' and the 'new metaphysics' belong to the Christian tradition from the second century onwards, and are not original or new in Augustine. In this sense, he stands firmly within Christian tradition from the very outset.

The radicality of the belief in creation from nothing can be measured by just how difficult any ancient thinker would have found it to grasp. Plato's teaching in the *Timaeus*, which describes creation in terms of the notion of pre-existent matter or necessity, which the Demiurge or Reason fashions in accordance with the eternal realm of Ideas or Forms, is founded on

the permanence and stability of matter, in contrast to the inherent temporality and mutability of creation from nothing. The same difficulty

would be encountered by fourth century (Neo)Platonists, for whom, like any educated person of the fourth century, emanation was a generally accepted intellectual explanation for the existence of the world—as basic to their thought, as Peter Brown appositely comments 'as is the idea of Evolution to our own [age]'.⁷

⁷ Brown 1967: 98.

Instead, Christians opened up a veritable chasm between divine substance and created substance, as two quite separate, distinct entities, wholly unlike, with different powers and properties. The divine, they believed, is life, truth, goodness, and beauty; created being, on the other hand, *receives* life, truth, goodness, and beauty from the divine, but is, in itself, nothing. All created being, then, is of God; a gift of grace. The whole hierarchy of being is of God, not because it shares the divine Being, but because it is created from nothing by him. Whatever life or form it possesses is not, as in Platonism, an imitation or copy of the realm of Forms imposed by a demiurge upon pre-existent matter, or, as in Neoplatonism, a lower manifestation of the One, but is given by God the Creator to bring it out of nothingness.

Despite these obvious differences, there are also important similarities between the Christian and Neoplatonic view which we should not ignore, and which Augustine, like other Christian theologians, takes over and uses as the basis for his articulation of the doctrine of creation from nothing. The most obvious similarity is the doctrine of God, or the One. Although the One of Neoplatonic philosophy is 'beyond being', whereas the Christian God is most definitely Being itself and the source of being, yet the defining characteristics of the One are also those which Augustine uses to describe, and thereby revolutionize, the nature of God: transcendent, incorporeal, eternal, immutable, incorruptible. For Christians, these became the characteristic features of divine substance as opposed to created substance; they defined the ontological division between Creator and creation. The latter, drawn from nothing, is inherently physical, temporal, mutable, and corruptible.

A further similarity, though a rather more ambiguous one, is the understanding of evil. Neither system is dualistic. In both, the One, or God, is the source of all goodness and order. Evil is not a separate, independent substance, but rather an absence or a diminishment of the good. In this sense, nothing can be wholly evil, or it would cease to be (and it is in this sense that Plotinus' assertion that matter is evil must be understood; it simply does not exist, being so far removed from the One). But in so far as the rational creature loses, or falls from goodness—from where it belongs in the hierarchy of being in the Plotinian system; or by taking creation for the Creator, and in

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preferring that which is below God to God himself, in the Christian scheme—it becomes less good, its being is diminished, it moves towards nothing. So, in both systems, evil is, in a real sense, a privation of the good. There is no doubt that Augustine discovered these ideas in Neoplatonism, although he never takes over the emanational system in which they are framed. They enabled him to understand and elucidate what a Christian response to dualism should be, just as Plotinus had rehearsed these ideas against Gnostic thought before him.

Christian Background

The language of creation from nothing⁸

⁸ For an overall consideration of the background, history, and theology of the question of *creatio ex nihilo* see May 1994.

is present in both the Old and New Testaments, although it is difficult to establish whether expressions such as 'ex ouk onton' are not to be understood figuratively, rather than ontologically; as simply suggesting that something which was not previously in existence is brought into existence (rather as a cake is brought into existence which wasn't there before except as eggs, butter, and sugar), rather than that it is literally brought into existence *from nothing*. The most famous example, in 2 Maccabees 7: 28—where the faithful mother, who has watched seven of her sons being martyred, encourages the remaining one to stand firm and embrace a martyr's death, on the grounds that a God who can bring things into existence from nothing can surely bring about the resurrection of the dead—does tantalizingly suggest the latter.⁹

⁹ Indeed, Origen and Theophilus of Antioch interpreted this passage in this way.

Whatever the case, creation from nothing begins to be clearly used in the strict ontological sense from the second century onwards, by Christian apologists such as Tatian, Theophilus, and Irenaeus, in their attempt to affirm God's transcendence, absolute sovereignty, and freedom, against certain aspects of philosophical reflection, such as Platonic ideas of pre-existent matter, Stoic immanentism, Epicurean notions of chance, and Gnostic dualism. Thereafter it became normative for Christian doctrine, and provided the context in which other aspects of Christian belief were expounded and defended, not least the divinity of Christ as divine substance, begotten from the Father, not created, as against the challenges of Arianism, and the divinity of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father (and Son), against its detractors. Begetting and procession became relations within the divine substance, indeed, they defined what divine substance—the Divine Trinity—is, as opposed to created substance, which is from nothing.

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Augustine would have been familiar with Tertullian's attack on Gnostic dualism, and through Ambrose, would have learned a good deal about philosophical and traditional reflection on the idea of creation from nothing. Indeed, he probably heard Ambrose's *Hexaemeron*, a series of sermons on the days of creation, which were delivered to catechumens during Holy Week, when he was baptized by Ambrose in Milan in 387. In this work Ambrose characteristically draws upon (and plagiarizes) a wide variety of ancient thought, pagan and Christian, in order to interpret the beginning of Genesis in relation to the most important Christian doctrines. He is obviously aware of Basil of Caesarea's *Hexaemeron*, draws upon Origen and Hippolytus, Cicero (and thereby Stoicism), Galen, Virgil, Neoplatonism, and Philo's allegorical exegesis.¹⁰

¹⁰ As Torchia 1999: 35 comments, 'On the basis of this line of influences, Augustine was placed in touch with the dominant interpretations, motifs, and themes, that characterized patristic discussions of Genesis from the first through the fourth centuries.'

This first, formal introduction to the mysteries of the faith, couched in terms of an exegesis of Genesis, and most especially, in terms of an exposition of the Christian doctrine of creation, including the idea of creation from nothing,¹¹

¹¹ e.g. 1. 4. 16.

cannot have been lost on Augustine. Ambrose stands in a long line of early expositors of Genesis, who all turned to this particular work, and especially its opening chapters, to provide a Christian account of the metaphysical questions which philosophers had traditionally expounded in relation to the idea of creation: the nature of the divine, the world, man, the soul, the will, evil, providence, the ultimate good, etc. Augustine was to return to Genesis throughout his life, in five different commentaries, to reflect on precisely the same questions. The first was completed only a couple of years after his baptism, in 388/9, *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos*, and the second, the *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus*, a few years later, in 393.

Augustine's preoccupation with creation and his refutation of Manichaeism are inextricably interlinked in his early works. There is no doubt that the traditional preoccupation of both philosophers and theologians with accounts of creation, as the basis for their reflection on the nature of reality, would have prompted his own early engagement with this question, but the immediate and pressing need he felt to disassociate himself from, and definitively refute, his former co-religionists, meant that the doctrine of creation was a pressing and unavoidable issue in everything he thought and wrote from the moment of his conversion. This was not least because it was precisely in respect of this doctrine that Christianity and Manichaeism decisively and dramatically diverged.

Manichaeism

Having been a member of the Manichaean sect for nine formative years, and having converted a number of his friends to share his new religion, their thought could not then easily be left behind simply as a regrettable part of his past, following his conversion to Christianity, as he might well have wished.¹²

¹² Indeed Plumer 2003: 66 n. 41 points out that Augustine was probably not the only former Manichee in the monastic community at Hippo: Alypius (*conf.* 6. 7. 12) and Profuturus and Fortunatus may also have been.

His friends had to be persuaded of his, and their, error; Augustine had to come to terms with his past and resolve the intellectual arguments which had once so attracted and seduced him but which now struck him as indefensible, irrational, specious, and dangerously misleading; a threatening movement, which had cells in most of the major cities of the Empire, had to be undermined; those who doubted the sincerity of his conversion and accused him of still being a Manichee had to be refuted. For these reasons, and no doubt many others, the first big controversy of Augustine's life was to be one with the Manichees. It is one which presumably began at the moment he began to doubt them, whilst perhaps still a member of the sect. It was rigorously continued, as his *Confessiones* witness, when he abandoned them before his conversion, and is systematically undertaken, in written form, in his first works. From 388 onwards we find a continuous, almost unbroken, series of works directed explicitly against them: *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* (387-8); *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* (388/9); *De uera religione* (390); *De libero arbitrio* (391-95); *De duabus animabus* (392); *Contra Fortunatum Manichaeum* (392); *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus* (393); *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (398); *De natura boni* (399); *Contra Secundinum Manichaeum* (399); *De Genesi ad litteram* (401). In one sense this series of works inevitably ensures a certain continuity in Augustine's theology from the moment of his conversion, through to the early years of his episcopate. Our examination of the doctrine of creation from nothing, which unifies these works, in that it encapsulated, for Augustine, his belief in the One transcendent God, the goodness of creation, the nature of evil as a privation of that good, and the absolute dependence of creation upon its Creator, against Manichaean dualism and materialism, should therefore demonstrate that the characteristic features of Augustine's theology (such as human incapacity and the need for divine grace to do any good action) which are customarily thought to be absent from the early works, are, in fact, central to his arguments against the Manichees from the very beginning. Moreover, they are present in a manner which is very similar to their role in Augustine's

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later controversy with the Pelagians. This is the case, not least because, in both contexts, Augustine was arguing for the omnipotence and freedom of the divine will against systems which threatened to undermine it by emphasizing independent, self-achieved, salvation, and which misunderstood

the nature and effects of human sinfulness and evil. The radical, ontological dualism of creation from nothing, which placed the eternal, immutable, and omnipotent Creator on one side of reality and a finite, mutable, absolutely dependent creation upon the other, served to cut through the substantial dualism of Manichaeism and the ethical dualism of Pelagianism with equal force, by emphasizing the utter contingency of creation upon its Creator.¹³

¹³ A point inspired by Conybeare's (forthcoming 2005a) similar observations in relation to Plotinus and Manichaeism in the early works.

This was also, of course, a central aspect of Augustine's response to what he regarded as the deluded and destructive pride of the Neoplatonists, in their conviction of the individual's capacity for self-motivated and independent striving for reintegration, without any need for divine help or grace. The emphasis upon human incapacity and divine omnipotence and grace, then, is undeniably a central feature of Augustine's earliest theological system.

The First Theological Synthesis

The *Soliloquia*

We need look no further than the great opening prayer of the *Soliloquia*, written at Cassiciacum, before his baptism, to find that the idea of creation from nothing is already an integral part of Augustine's newly adopted Christian faith.¹⁴

¹⁴ For an analysis of this prayer see Doignon 1987a; Doucet 1990b.

The whole prayer, in fact, is written with an acute awareness of the ontological chasm which lies between the omnipotent, transcendent God and the creation he has drawn from nothing—a chasm which can only be bridged by our humble acknowledgement of our contingency and dependence upon him, in other words, of our need for his grace.¹⁵

¹⁵ This is something which Lössl (1997) rightly identifies as Augustine's *intellectus gratiae* from the very beginning.

The prayer opens with an address to, 'God, Creator of the universe ... by whom all things come into existence which by themselves would not exist ... who out of nothing didst create this world ... who showest that evil is nothing ... by whom the universe even with its sinister aspects is perfect; by whom there is no absolute disharmony because bad and good together harmonise' (1. 2). Creation from

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nothing, evil as a privation of the good, divine providence, and an aesthetic justification of evil are all contained in these opening sentences.

Augustine then proceeds, using Romans 11: 36, to emphasize that everything that exists has its source in the Trinitarian God, who is the origin of all life and all perfections: 'Thee I invoke, O God, the Truth, in, by and through whom all truths are true; the Wisdom, in, by and through whom all are wise who are wise; the True and Perfect Life, in, by and through whom live all who live truly and perfectly; the Beatitude, in, by and through whom all the blessed are blessed' (1. 3). Having made clear that God is also the

source of the Truth (illumination), the Good and the Beautiful, Augustine confirms the utter dependence of creation upon God for all that it is in the language of aversion from, and conversion towards God (*aversio/conversio*). In the first soundings of a doctrine which will become central to his theology of creation, he makes it clear that creation receives existence and form, and all its perfections, by turning towards its Creator; in turning away from him, in deluded pride, belief in its own self-sufficiency, or in taking creation for the Creator, it diminishes itself, becomes less, and moves back towards nothing. He addresses God, 'to whom to be turned is to rise; in whom to abide is to stand fast; from whom to depart is to die; to whom to return is to revive; in whom to dwell is to live' (1. 3).

Even the orientation of human beings towards God is wholly God's work, in that it can only be based on God's admonition (a term which we shall see, in the concluding chapter, is characteristic of the way in which Augustine talks of God's grace in the early works). God is one 'whom no man seeks unless he has been admonished ... by whom we are admonished to awake ... who convertest us to thyself' (1. 3). Every good action on the part of human beings is made possible 'by' God: it is God 'by whom we overcome the enemy and are delivered from utter destruction; by whom we distinguish good from evil and shun evil and follow after good ... by whom our better part is not left subject to our lower part' (1. 3). It is the God who works and acts to bring humankind to himself that Augustine calls to his aid: the one 'who recallest us to the Way, bringest us to the Door and causest it to be opened to them that knock; who givest us the Bread of Life and causest us to thirst after that water of which having drunk, we thirst no more ... who purgest us and prearest us for divine rewards' (1. 3).

In the penultimate section of the prayer Augustine identifies the Creator and gracious sustainer of creation as the one, transcendent, omnipotent God. He is described in terms which are the ontological antithesis of created being, a God whom even the philosophers would recognize: 'one substance eternal and true, where there is no strife, no confusion, no transition, no lack, no death, but absolute concord, absolute clearness, constancy, plenitude, life,

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where nothing is lacking, nothing redundant, and where he who begets and he who is begotten [a clear reference to the Word, or Son of God] are one ... above whom is nothing, outside of whom is nothing, without whom is nothing, under whom, in whom and with whom are all things' (1. 4).

He is a God who is Lord not only of the natural, providential order of the created world, but also of what Augustine will later term the voluntary providence¹⁶

¹⁶*Gn. litt.* 8.

which orders human free will and the effects of human sinfulness, in order and justice: 'God whom all serve ... by whose laws the heavens rotate, the stars hold on their courses, the sun rules the day and the moon the night, and the whole world keeps the mighty constancy of things ... God, by whose laws the soul's will is free, and by unalterable necessity rewards are distributed to the good and punishments to the evil' (1. 4).

Having described the transcendent and omnipotent Creator, and his own

complete and absolute dependence upon him, Augustine concludes the prayer by abandoning himself to this God, throwing himself upon him and begging him for his help, confessing his total and utter helplessness without him, for he is fully persuaded that unless divine grace takes hold of him he is lost:

Now thee only I love; thee only I follow; thee only I seek; thee only am I ready to serve. ... Command I beseech thee, as thou wilt, but heal and open my ears that I may hear thy voice. Heal and open my eyes that I may see thy beckoning. Drive madness from me that I may recognise thee. Tell me whither I must go that I may behold thee; and I hope to do all that thou dost command ... Tell me. Show me. Provide for my journey ... Increase in me faith, hope and charity ... (1. 5) Make me to seek thee, Father. Free me from error ... do thou thyself cleanse me and make me fit to see thee ... I beseech thy most excellent clemency to convert me wholly to thyself (1. 6).

We must not forget that these are the words of a Christian who was converted but a few months before, who has not yet even been baptized, and yet the main outlines of his theology are wholly orthodox and utterly characteristic of his mature thought. The awed, humbled, almost abject confession of divine transcendence, and his own complete and utter dependence upon God for all that is good in him, is entirely overwhelming.

If Augustine did hear Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* a few weeks or months later, it would simply resonate with what he had already grasped of the Christian faith. When he subsequently turned, as a new convert, to come to terms with his Manichaean past, to convert his Manichaean friends, and to refute its heretical and harmful doctrines, he was already fully armed, as it were, for the fight. It is no exaggeration to suggest that all Augustine's early work is anti-Manichaean, whether it is implicitly assumed or explicitly refuted: everything

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he writes presupposes or articulates God's transcendence and our contingency and dependence upon him.

Dualism

In many ways, Augustine had been disturbed by materialistic understandings of reality even before he encountered the Manichees,¹⁷

¹⁷ e.g. *conf.* 4. 15. 24, where he reflects on his earliest work, *De pulchro et apto*, and shows how his thought was hindered by a materialistic understanding of reality which obviously gave rise to the same problems as he encountered in Manichaeism. For bibliography on materialism see Harrison 1992: 7 n. 28.

for this was an assumption, as we have seen, which they simply shared with the vast majority of ancient thinkers, both pagan and Christian. In the *Confessiones* Augustine suggests that the unease he felt with the Manichees' teaching was rooted precisely in this issue, for it was the basis on which their dualistic system and their substantial explanation of evil were founded. He describes himself, again and again, as tormented and confused, agonizing and searching for some other way of understanding reality, something that would avoid the wholly unacceptable idea of having to talk of God as possessing a body, hair, and nails, or as being omnipresent like water pervading a sponge; of Christ as emerging from a dazzling body of light; of humankind in the 'image of God' in a physical sense, or of the soul and mind as material; of evil as a power able to detract from and overcome the good.¹⁸

¹⁸ *conf.* 3. 7. 12; 4. 15. 24; 5. 10. 20; 7. 5. 7; 7. 14. 20.

The hurdle of materialism had to be cleared before dualism, which was simply an expression of it, could be refuted. As we have seen, it was the Neoplatonists who revolutionized Augustine's thought with their understanding of spiritual reality, thereby making it possible for him to break with materialism as well as Manichaean dualism: 'I woke up in you', he observes, 'and saw you to be infinite in another sense, and this way of seeing you did not come from the flesh.'¹⁹

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 7. 14. 20.

The key to the solution, however, he locates, not so much with the Neoplatonists, but in the doctrine of creation: 'I had not yet come to see that the hinge of this great subject lies in your creative act, almighty one: you alone do marvellous things. My mind moved within the confines of corporeal forms.'²⁰

²⁰ *Ibid.* 4. 15. 24.

It was the uniquely Christian account of creation which provided the crucible in which materialism and Manichaean dualism were destroyed in Augustine's mind, and Neoplatonic metaphysics were transformed into an understanding

of the transcendent, divine Creator who creates everything that is from nothing. That Augustine should almost immediately turn to Genesis to refute the

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Manichees, and that the doctrine of creation from nothing is a central feature of these commentaries, should not therefore surprise us. Augustine had found the answer, the key which unlocked the prison of materialism, and now the whole of the Christian faith opened up to him in a coherent and compelling way. What better place to start than 'in the beginning'? His constant reversion to Genesis is almost a celebration, a reassurance that this is where the source is to be found and that all else flows from it.

In his earliest commentaries he distinguishes between the creation of unformed, 'corporeal' matter and the subsequent giving of form, order, and unity. Of unformed matter he comments, 'all these expressions, whether heaven and earth, or the earth invisible and without order, and the abyss with darkness, or the water over which was borne the Spirit of God, are names for unformed matter'.²¹

²¹ *Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 7. 12.

Of its formation, he observes ' "Let the water which is below the heaven be gathered into one gathering," these words mean that this corporeal matter is to be formed into the beauty that these visible waters have ... What else should we understand is meant by the words "Let the dry land appear" than that this matter receives the visible form which this earth that we see and touch now has?'²²

²² *Ibid.* 1. 12. 18.

... For we say that these three, the matter of the world, unformed matter, and matter that can be worked upon, are the names of one reality. Heaven and earth is rightly linked to the first of these names; obscurity, confusion, deep, and darkness to the second; and to the third the ease with which it yields as the Spirit of the Maker is borne over it in order to work upon it.'²³

²³ *Gn. litt. imp.* 4. 15.

The main point is obviously that all creation as we now know and experience it is derived from nothing, that any life or reality it has is wholly due to God, who first created matter from nothing, and then brought it into existence by giving it form, order, and unity. The first stage, the creation of unformed matter from nothing, underlines the fact that all that is, is of God, and that having been brought into being it will never again be nothing; the second stage, the giving of form, emphasizes the fact that what enables corporeal or unformed matter to stand out from nothingness is form, order, and unity, and that these are likewise given by God. Thus, in so far as something is, it is of God and will remain in existence, but more importantly, in so far as something possesses form, order, and unity it participates in God's sustaining providence; in so far as it loses form, order, and unity, it will be diminished. The first stage is ontological; the second stage is not just ontological but ethical: it defines not just what the creature is, but what it is in relation to God, and what determines its goodness or lack of goodness. The good consists in form, order, and unity; evil, if we can introduce the word here, comes about because of deformity, disorder, disunity. The

question,

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then, is not *unde malum?* (whence evil?) as the Manichees asked, but *quid malum?* (what is evil?)²⁴

²⁴*mor.* 2. 2. 2.

Evil as a Privation of the Good

It was this question which had fuelled Augustine's search for truth, which had driven him into the hands of the Manichees, and which was only resolved when he discovered the Christian doctrine of creation from nothing. It was inextricably bound up with his attempt to free himself from the complicated web woven by materialism, in which every intellectual problem he faced seemed to become trapped. We have just noted the numerous passages throughout books 1-7 of the *Confessiones* in which he describes the frustration and confusion which a materialistic understanding of reality provoked. These became even more acute when the question of evil was raised. He writes, 'When I wanted to think of my God, I knew of no way of doing so except as a physical mass. Nor did I think anything existed which is not material. That was the principal and almost sole cause of my inevitable error. For the same reason I also believed that evil is a kind of material substance with its own foul and misshapen mass, either solid which they [the Manichees] used to call the earth, or thin and subtle, as is the body of air.'²⁵

²⁵*conf.* 5. 10. 19-20. Cf. 3. 7. 12, 'I did not know that evil has no existence except as a privation of the good' 4. 15. 24, 'I attributed to this evil not only substance but life'.

There seemed no way out: whereas attributing a substantial identity to evil as a force independent of, and hostile to the good, enabled him to exonerate the good from any responsibility for evil, it simultaneously made the good vulnerable to the incursions of evil and made it impossible to attribute omnipotence, immutability, or incorruptibility to it.²⁶

²⁶*Ibid.* 7. 5. 7.

What sort of good was this, and was it one worth having? Augustine thought not, and would not relinquish his search until he discovered a way of embracing the highest, eternal, immutable, incorruptible good; a good which is responsible for the creation of everything that is, is not vulnerable to evil, but which providentially orders and comprehends the corruption and harm which results from the turning away of rational creation from its Creator.

In an attempt to clarify terminology in *De moribus*, written a year after his conversion, he suggests that we should not speak in terms of nature (*natura*), but in terms of essence or substance (*essentia/substantia*): evil is that which 'falls away from essence and tends to non-existence'²⁷

²⁷*mor.* 2. 2. 2.

it is a turning away

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from the source of existence and goodness, and is therefore, by definition, a loss of existence, a diminishment of being, an absence of goodness:

there is one good which is good supremely and in itself, and not by the participation of any good, but by its own nature and essence; and another good which is good by participation and by having something bestowed. Thus it has its being as good from the supreme good, which, however, is still self-contained, and loses nothing. This second kind of good is called a creature, which is liable to hurt through falling away. But of this falling away God is not the author, for He is author of existence and of being. Here we see the proper use of the word evil; for it is correctly applied not to essence, but to negation or loss.²⁸

²⁸ *mor.* 2. 4. 6.

Evil is therefore not a substance but is present only as a corruption of substance: *malum est privatio boni*.²⁹

²⁹ *Ibid.* 2. 5. 7.

On the other hand, it is not absolute non-being, for Augustine is clear that once brought into existence, 'nothing is allowed in the providence of God to go to the length of non-existence'.³⁰

³⁰ *Ibid.* 2. 7. 9.

One of the ways Augustine expresses this is to describe things which are present because of absence: silence is the absence of sound; darkness is the absence of light; a lie is the absence of truth. Silence, darkness, and lies are present, and depend upon that of which they are an absence, or the antithesis, for their existence, but have no existence in themselves. So evil is the absence or antithesis of good.³¹

³¹ *Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 4. 7; *en. Ps.* 5. 7.

The Manichees' evil substance, on the other hand, which contains no good at all, cannot, on this definition, be corrupted, but rather does not exist.³²

³² The basic argument of *mor.* 2. 1. 1-9. 18.

In one of the first works he wrote at Cassiciacum, *De ordine*, Augustine tackled the question of evil from the perspective of order, arguing that it is comprehended by divine providence, such that, if we could see the whole, what now strikes us, from our limited perspective, as evil, would no longer be offensive, but would simply appear as part of the beauty of a harmonious, providentially ordered, beautiful whole; human sinfulness would be seen to be comprehended by God's just judgement and punishment.³³

³³ *ord.* 1. 18; 2. 11.

This is another way of affirming that evil cannot detract from, harm, or corrupt the good but is rather comprehended and ordered by it.³⁴

³⁴ Augustine is probably inspired by Plotinus, *Ennead* 3. 12. 17, *On Providence*, in these texts.

It is sometimes suggested that Augustine discovered the idea of evil as a privation of the good in Plotinus, perhaps through Ambrose's sermons.

Certainly, Ambrose uses Plotinus' method of defining evil as an absence of the good, in a sermon Augustine may well have heard.³⁵

³⁵ e.g. Courcelle 1950: 107, 124-5, who cites *Enn.* 1. 8. 1. 14 alongside Ambrose's *De Isaac* 7. 61.

It is not however clear that Plotinus thought of evil strictly as a privation of the good, so much as a

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total absence of the good, in the sense that what has being is good whereas evil has no being at all; it is nothing. Whereas creation from nothing, and the radical ontological divide between Creator and creation, allows Ambrose and Augustine to attribute all that is to the Creator, and to affirm its goodness in a way that can comprehend evil as a relative absence, a lack, or corruption of the good, for Plotinus, working with an emanational system in which everything that is derives from the One, it is difficult to include evil in the realm of being at all. It is therefore, for Plotinus, 'no longer in matter, but before matter ... in absolute deficiency'.³⁶

³⁶ *Enn.* 1. 8. 5.

Plotinus' understanding of evil as non-being seems to resemble Augustine's understanding of the 'nothing' from which matter is created. Non-being or nothing is evil, not in itself, because it is 'no thing' and does not exist, but rather because it is an absence of being and goodness. The difference lies in the fact that for Plotinus, non-being is the 'last end'³⁷

³⁷ *Ibid.* 1. 8. 7.

of the One's emanations; it is where it ceases to be and simply becomes non-being, whereas for Augustine, non-being is where creation begins, and matter, created from nothing, is not evil because it possesses being, form, order, and unity and is the work of a good Creator. Whereas for Plotinus reality only increases in goodness in so far as it ascends towards the One, for Augustine, it is inherently mutable; it tends towards that from which it was drawn, to non-being, and is only held in being, only 'exists' or stands out from nothing, by God's grace, which providentially sustains, reforms, orders, and reunifies it. Created matter is therefore essentially ambiguous: it is good but this is a goodness which depends upon the Supreme Good to remain so; it possesses form, order, and unity but can be corrupted and become deformed, disordered, and disunified; it is the temporal, mutable, corruptible creation of an eternal, immutable, incorruptible God. It is characterized, therefore, by dependence and contingency upon its Creator.³⁸

³⁸ Though I think it is misleading to characterize this aspect of creation as 'metaphysical evil' in contrast to 'moral evil', which is the result of sin, as does Torchia 1999 (e.g. 245-6). Augustine never speaks of it in these terms.

Rational creation remains good only in so far as it acknowledges this dependence: if it proudly begins to think itself self-sufficient it inevitably diminishes itself by turning away from its source. Its will must be orientated towards its Creator otherwise it becomes disorientated and lost among temporal, mutable things, and itself corrupted. It is sin which is evil. But we are running ahead of ourselves. What we have here, of course, are the central axes of Augustine's theology, based upon the doctrine of creation

from nothing. Having seen how they emerged in the context of his anti-Manichaeism polemic, let us examine their presence in his early works more closely and systematically.

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The Transcendent God

For Augustine the new Christian convert the 'true religion' was summed up by the first article of the Apostle's Creed, belief in One God as Creator: 'The way of the good and blessed life is to be found entirely in the true religion wherein one God is worshipped and acknowledged with purest piety to be the beginning of all existing things, originating, perfecting and containing the universe.'³⁹

³⁹*uera rel.* 1.

The fact that God created everything from nothing set the Christian doctrine apart from all other philosophical and religious accounts of creation in its explicit avoidance of any idea of pre-existent matter, emanation, or dualism. God creates, not like a workman, who first needs material to work upon, but by drawing matter from nothing and then giving it form.⁴⁰

⁴⁰*fid. et sym.* 2. 2. As Athanasius puts it in *De incarnatione* 2, 'God would be merely a craftsman and not the creator of existence, if he fashions underlying matter but is not himself the cause of the matter.'

Created matter is not part of his substance, like the begotten Son,⁴¹

⁴¹ Cf. *sol.* 1. 1. 4 cited above, 'where he who begets and he who is begotten are one' *uera rel.* 28, 'What is begotten of him is equally divine, begotten not made.'

who shares the Father's divinity, rather it is made from nothing:

All the good things that God has made are very good, but they are not good in the same way that God is good, because He is their maker, while they are made. Nor did He give birth to them out of Himself so that they are what He is; rather He made them out of nothing so that they are equal neither to Him by whom they have been made, nor to His Son, through whom they have been made.⁴²

⁴²*Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 2. 4. Cf. 2. 29. 43.

Creation is therefore completely dependent upon its Creator for everything it is: its very life, goodness, form, order, and unity comes from Him, who *is* these things supremely, eternally, and immutably. The early works are therefore studded with references to God's eternity and immutability,⁴³

⁴³*beata u.* 1. 8; *uera rel.* 18; *util. cred.* 36.

and most especially to God as absolute, supreme being; as being itself, true being, the highest essence, he who truly is.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See Zum Brunn 1984: 10 for references (e.g. *uera rel.* 22; 28; *ord.* 2. 2. 6). It is in this context that Augustine talks about the divine Ideas or Forms, which he maintains are part of the divine mind, uncreated and unformed, immutable and eternal (*diu. qu.* 83 46. 2).

Two passages will suffice to illustrate this: the opening chapter of *De moribus* is quite clear:

For that exists in the highest sense of the word which continues always the same, which is throughout like itself, which cannot be corrupted or changed, which is not subject to time, which admits no variation in its present as compared to its former condition. This is existence in its true sense. For in this signification of the word existence there is implied a nature which is self contained, and which continues

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immutably. Such things can be said only of God, to whom there is nothing contrary ... For the contrary of existence is non-existence.⁴⁵

⁴⁵*mor.* 1. 1. 1.

Likewise, in *De uera religione*, 'To ask, therefore, who created matter is to ask for Him who is supreme in the ideal world. For every idea comes from Him. Who is He, then, save the one God, the one truth, the one salvation of all, the first and highest essence from which all that exists derives existence as such?'⁴⁶

⁴⁶*uera rel.* 21.

The ontological divide between God and his creation is therefore absolute. God alone is being; everything else receives being from him. Everything is of grace, both existence and continuance in existence. What sort of creation then is humankind?

Human Dependence: Creation or Fall?

In the midst of recounting how he discovered the transcendence of God in the books of the Platonists, and how he finally resolved the question of evil as a privation of the good, in *conf.* 7, Augustine describes the ascent to God which we have examined in the last two chapters. In it, he encounters the transcendent God, the 'I Am Who I Am' (Exod. 3: 14), and finds himself in a 'region of dissimilarity' (*regio dissimilitudinis*). This is an ontological dissimilarity, or alienation, for it expresses his acute awareness of his own identity as a created being, in contrast to God, who is Being itself. It is an awareness of his mutability, temporality, corruptibility, and weakness, and his absolute dependence upon God his Creator.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ An early sermon (s. 7) makes exactly the same point—BA 13 note compl. 26.

The encounter with divine Being makes human beings, created from nothing, aware of the frightening ontological chasm which separates them from it. This is not, primarily, a gulf opened up by sin, but one that permanently exists at the most basic level of existence itself.

What does this mean? It is disconcertingly clear in Augustine's earliest works that the ontological gulf between Creator and creation means that just as creation does not share in the divine being, so it does not possess its

defining characteristics of eternity, immutability, and incorruptibility. Drawn from nothing, it is defined by temporality, mutability, and corruptibility. These are not the result of sin, but are what define created nature. The tendency which created nature displays to fall short of the good, its incompleteness, its instability and fragility, the difficulty it experiences in holding on to existence, is an inherent part of its nature, not a punishment for some previous sin. So too, when Augustine describes the creature's longing for God,

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its innate orientation towards him, its sense of lack or incompleteness without him, this is not necessarily because it has fallen away from him, but because it is not what he is; it is not Being but created being. It is as if created reality has an inherent tendency to fall away from God, not just ethically, but ontologically. Grace is therefore not something that suddenly becomes necessary because of human sinfulness, but is part of what defines the relation of Creator and creature. Creation is of grace; its continued existence is of grace; the goodness, form, order, and unity it possesses is of grace. Without grace, it is nothing. The Fall is not, therefore, primarily the fall of Adam and Eve but the inherent tendency of created reality to fall away from its Creator and to fall back to the nothingness from which it came.

What Augustine says about creation from nothing in his early works makes this clear. Writing to his friend Zenobius in the year of his conversion he describes 'nothing' not simply as non-being, or the absence of being, but as characteristic of created reality: 'I think' he writes, 'that none of the things which a bodily sense reveals to us can remain unchanged for even an instant, and that everything shifts, flows away, and has no hold on the present, which is to say, in Latin, that it has no being' (*non esse*).⁴⁸

⁴⁸*ep. 2* (386).

The contemporaneous *De beata uita*, written at Cassiciacum, takes up this idea, describing 'nothing' as 'whatever is flowing, dissolving, melting, and so to speak, perpetually perishing'.⁴⁹

⁴⁹*b. uita 8* ' "nihil" est enim omne quod fluit, quod soluitur, quod liquescit et quasi semper perit'.

When Augustine describes the natural hierarchy of body, soul, and God to his friend Caelestius a few years later (390), one therefore wonders what exactly he means by 'inclination' (*inclinatio*) when he writes: 'The highest is Beatitude itself; the lowest can be neither happy nor wretched; but the intermediate lives wretchedly by inclination, blessedly by conversion. He who believes in Christ does not love the lowest, is not proud in the intermediate nature, and thereby becomes fit to cling to the highest.'⁵⁰

⁵⁰*ep. 18* (390).

Does he have in mind the soul's inclination to sin, or simply its natural, created inclination to mutability and corruptibility, which can only be corrected by an acknowledgement of its created dependence upon grace, rather than any mistaken pride in its own self-sufficiency? What he says about the natural mutability of creation from nothing, which inevitably leads to defectiveness, in various texts throughout the early works, suggests that the latter might well be the case. In *De uera religione* 35, he refers to things

created from nothing, and comments, 'But you say, Why do they become defective? Because they are mutable. Why are they mutable? Because they have not supreme existence. And why so? Because they are inferior to Him who made them.' In the

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following chapter he confirms this point: 'The good which cannot be vitiated', he states, 'is God. All other good things are of Him. They can themselves be vitiated because by themselves they are nothing.'⁵¹

⁵¹ Séjourné 1951: 255 describes this as the 'stigma of non-being': 'everything which is created and comes from nothing, is tainted with corruptibility; it is present as the stigma of non-being, as a limitation, or more precisely, as a privation of being'.

Although Augustine probably had no opportunity to read the work of Athanasius, the fourth-century bishop of Alexandria and champion of Nicene orthodoxy against the Arians, his reflections on creation from nothing and the nature of created reality in relation to God, resonate profoundly with those of Athanasius' treatise *De incarnatione*. Athanasius refers to man's 'natural corruption' because he is 'by nature mortal, in that he was created from nothing' (4). This corruption is simply 'the consequence of [his] nature' (5) which is 'weak ... not capable by itself of knowing the Creator ... in that He was uncreated, whereas they had been made from nothing' (11).

The Augustine of the early works, like the Augustine of the *Confessiones*, is quite clearly someone whose main motivation is to seek and to attain the truth. There is, in these early works, the same sense of restless energy, of longing and desire for the truth, which is famously expressed in the opening lines of the *Confessiones*: 'Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.' This experience of incompleteness, of something lacking, of our falling short, our inadequacy apart from God, and of the unease, restlessness, and desire it inspires to seek and attain him, as the only means to attain our true self, is firmly rooted from the beginning for Augustine in the idea of creation from nothing. Not only did this doctrine make Augustine acutely conscious of his complete and utter dependence on God for his very existence, of his nothingness apart from his creative and sustaining work, it also served to interpret his experience of his own essential fragility and impermanence, precariously poised between nothingness and being, and of the crucial importance of his search for truth. The search for and attempt to attain God which defined his religious experience was simultaneously his search for and attempt to hold on to existence itself: without him, he would be nothing. In order to exist, literally to stand out from nothingness, his life must be a continual turning towards the source of his existence, an endless willing of God, in other words, an unceasing search for the truth, obedience to the good, and delight in the beautiful. Only so would he rescue himself from a precipitous descent into non-being, nothingness, the absence of God. Every act, every moral decision, every contact with the beauty of the world was therefore significant, either

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confirming him in being or, if wrongly approached and used, effecting his demise into non-being.⁵²

⁵² *lib. arb.* 3. 7. 21 where Augustine describes humankind's innate desire to exist, the desire for eternal beatitude: 'the more fully you love to have being the more fully will you desire eternal life'.

It is in this context that one can begin to understand the urgency, tenacity, and uncompromising nature of Augustine's quest for truth in the early works and the *Confessiones*: his very being literally depended on it. It is also in this context that one can see the clear outlines of his mature theology of the Fall, original sin, and grace emerging.

Augustine was, of course, not unaware of the account of the Fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis. He refers to it, usually in passing, as an established part of Christian doctrine, and although he examines it in some detail in the second book of *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* (as we will see in Ch. 6), he does not attempt to elaborate on it in anything like the same manner as later on. This does not mean, however, that he is not thoroughly convinced of man's capacity for sin, his pride, his mistaken belief in his own self-sufficiency, and of the effects and punishment of that sin manifest in his ignorance and the difficulty he experiences in willing and doing the good. The language he uses to describe this in the early works, however, is, if we might use the word without anachronism, existential, rather than doctrinal. It is couched in terms of being and of experience, rather than in scriptural or technical, doctrinal terminology. It is almost as if experience here is sufficient authority in itself, without the need for scriptural or doctrinal endorsement.⁵³

⁵³ This is something Pelagius was later to object to, especially in relation to the idea of original sin. Against Pelagius' insistence on the authority of Scripture, Augustine reflects, 'it is not wrong to add something which we do not read. After all, we can, as reliable witnesses, add something that we have experienced, even if we may not read it' (*nat. et gr.* 39. 46).

The doctrine of creation from nothing first of all confirmed for Augustine the precarious nature of humanity's position: created from nothing, poised between existence and nothingness, utterly dependent and contingent upon its Creator. There was no room here for notions of self-sufficiency, of daring to disobey the Creator and turn away from him; this literally amounted to self-destruction.

Augustine's most common way of depicting human life and experience, in the early works and beyond, is therefore of human beings continually poised between two movements: on the one hand turning towards the eternal, immutable truth, goodness, and beauty on which they depend to exist, to draw them from their characteristic temporality and mutability; and on the other hand, their turning away from the source of their existence towards created, temporal, mutable reality and therefore towards non-being

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and nothingness. As we have already seen in the opening prayer of the *Soliloquia*, human beings either convert towards God or avert themselves from him into nothingness. Augustine makes the same point about ontology and ethics in another Cassiciacum work, the *De beata uita*, in developing a series of antitheses related to being (*esse*) and non-being (*non esse*), which describe virtue, wisdom, and beatitude or wickedness, foolishness, and misery respectively.⁵⁴

⁵⁴*b. uita* 8, 29-31.

Augustine constantly emphasizes the need for conversion and a virtuous life not least because, since human beings are created from nothing, they literally tend back to nothing. In *De uera religione* he writes:

There is no life which is not of God, for God is supreme life and the fount of life. No life is evil as life but only as it tends to death. Life knows no death save wickedness (*nequitia*) which derives its name from nothingness (*nequidquam*). For this reason wicked men are called men of no worth. A life, therefore, which by voluntary defect falls away from him who made it ... and ... seeks to enjoy bodily objects which God made to be inferior to it, tends to nothingness.⁵⁵

⁵⁵*uera rel.* 21. Cf. *b. uita*. 8 for a similar play on words and *mor.* 2. 2. 2; *diu. qu.* 83 21; *mus.* 6. 11. 33; 14. 44 for similar reflections. He makes the same point succinctly against Julian, later on: 'everyone that is able to sin ... is made from nothing', *c. Jul. imp.* 5. 39.

It is in the language of aversion, therefore, of turning away from God towards temporal, mutable reality, and especially in taking creation for the Creator,⁵⁶

⁵⁶e.g. *uera rel.* 19; *mor.* 1. 12. 20-1.

that Augustine describes the Fall in his earliest works: 'life which delights in material joys and neglects God tends to nothingness and is thereby iniquity'⁵⁷

⁵⁷*uera rel.* 22.

'the farther, then, the mind departs from God, not in space, but in affection and lust after things below Him, the more it is filled with folly and wretchedness'.⁵⁸

⁵⁸*mor.* 1. 12. 21.

What Adam and Eve did in disobeying God, in proudly presuming upon their own powers, is precisely this aversion from God, and its results are the same: diminishment of being, subjection to temporality, and ultimately death.⁵⁹

⁵⁹*uera rel.* 23, 26. See Zum Brunn (1984) for a general discussion of the relation of

ontology and ethics in reference to the idea of growing or diminishing in being (*magis esse; minus esse*) and esp. p. 59 for a discussion of the Neoplatonic sources of this idea.

The Will

The crucial role of the human will is quite explicit in the early works, as later. As the text I have just cited from *De uera religione* makes clear, the turning of human beings away from God is a 'voluntary' defect; their conversion towards, or aversion from, God is a choice, a free act of will, a moral act. Augustine is insistent upon this fact when, in *De uera religione*, for example, he writes: 'sin is so much a voluntary evil that it is not sin at all unless it is

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voluntary ... if it is not by the exercise of the will that we do wrong, no one at all is to be censured or warned...'.⁶⁰

⁶⁰*uera rel.* 27.

The will only exists, and remains in existence, by acting or choosing: either Being or non-being; good or evil; God or the world. It cannot opt not to choose, but must continually act to confirm or diminish itself by either acknowledging its dependence upon its Creator and doing his will, or, thinking that it possesses power to be self-sufficient and to act independently, to fall away from God and from existence.⁶¹

⁶¹s. 140. 3.

Augustine reiterates this argument time and again in the early works against the Manichees, in order to demonstrate to them that evil is not a substance but an action of the will: 'Vice in the soul arises from its own doing ... That is the sum total of evil. To do and to suffer have nothing to do with substance; hence substance is not evil.'⁶²

⁶²*uera rel.* 39. Cf. *mor.* 2. 2. 2, 'This is evil ... to decline from essence and to tend to that which is not'. In *Gn. litt. imp.* (393) 1. 3, he introduces the later, characteristic terminology of 'use': 'natural things are not evil. Rather whatever is called evil is either sin or the punishment of sin ... [sin] does not lie in the things themselves, but in their illegitimate use.'

What Augustine has to say about the soul in the early works provides the context in which to assess these reflections, for it is in the language of will that he describes the operation of the soul. We have seen that Augustine shared the Late Antique obsession with the nature of the soul; he reverts to it at every turn, and devotes a number of treatises specifically to a consideration of its nature (*De quantitate animae*) and its immortality (*De immortalitate animae* and *Soliloquia*, book 2). It is that in man which is closest to the divine,⁶³

⁶³*quant.* 77, *nihil inter omnia quae creauit, Deo esse propinquius*.

and although created from nothing, it shares many of the characteristics of the divine; it is immaterial, immortal, intelligible, indivisible, inextended, and the animating principle of all corporeal reality. However, it is not immutable or incorruptible, but rather stands at a mid-point⁶⁴

⁶⁴ e.g. *imm. an.* 15. 24; *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 15. 22; 2. 16. 24. For a discussion of the possible sources of this idea see du Roy 1966: 476-8. Madec 1989: 291, thinks Augustine perhaps took it from Porphyry.

between God, its Creator, to whom it must be subject, and the body or corporeal reality, which it must subject to itself. It remains in existence only in so far as it continually wills to maintain this order. If it turns away from God it diminishes itself and becomes less able to master, control, and direct either itself, or the body.⁶⁵

⁶⁵*imm. an.* 7. 12; 12. 19.

We will discuss in subsequent chapters exactly what Augustine means by the freedom of the will. At this stage it is enough to note that in *De uera religione* it is evidently a freedom which was complete and uncompromised only at creation, in paradise, before the will turned from God. Once it has sinned, by turning, in pride, towards itself or lower creation, its being (and I would

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argue, also, its freedom) is corrupted and diminished: 'there would not be such evil' Augustine comments, 'if the soul recognized its Creator, subjected itself to him alone, and understood that other things were made subject to it by Him'.⁶⁶

⁶⁶*uera rel.* 39.

The consequences of the will's aversion, or falling away, from God in the early works are perhaps more immediately comprehensible than in Augustine's description of them in relation to the fall of Adam and Eve, where they tend to appear in a rather legalistic context as somewhat arbitrary punishments imposed by divine justice. Here, they simply sum up human experience of what it is to be subject to, rather than victorious over, the characteristic features of existence: to temporality and mutability. Failing to turn towards God and to acknowledge him as the source of their being, men and women suffer alienation and fragmentation, moral difficulty;⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Ibid. 'Vice in the soul arises from its own doing; and the moral difficulty that ensues from vice is the penalty which it suffers.' Cf. *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 9. 12; 2. 16. 24.

illness;⁶⁸

⁶⁸*uera rel.* 23.

'miseries ... fallacious pleasures ... torturing sorrows ... delusion ... shadowy phantasms ... perversity of soul',⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ibid. 40; *ep.* 18. 2.

need, and want.⁷⁰

⁷⁰*uera rel.* 41.

We are not far, I think, from Augustine's description of mankind subject to original sin. How legitimate it is to speak in these terms in relation to the early works, we will be discussing more fully in another chapter, but we should take note here that what Augustine has to say about creation from nothing, the aversion of human beings from their Creator, and the

consequences of that aversion seems to be no more—and no less—than what he describes as the Fall and original sin, albeit, later, in scriptural imagery and the technical terminology of Latin tradition. The doctrine of original sin expressed the belief that Adam's fall affects his descendants through their inheritance of his sin, its guilt, and its consequences. Augustine used this doctrine to explain the universality of mankind's experience of sinfulness and guilt; that all mankind is implicated in Adam's sin, and therefore constitutes, as it were, a lump of sin (a *massa peccati*). In the early works these ideas are generally expressed in terms which we are now familiar with: those which describe humanity's experience of what it is to be created from nothing, of what it is to be mutable and temporal, contingent and dependent. Of course, we must avoid the suggestion that humanity's position as created from nothing is the same as the position of Adam and Eve *after* the Fall. Rather, it seems that, given humankind's creation from nothing, aversion from God, a falling away from God, is inevitable: human beings are created temporal, mutable, and corruptible, with a tendency to fall, and having fallen, are less and less able to turn towards God: their aversion diminishes their being and fundamentally affects their ability to

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know and to do the good. It is this, I think, that Augustine expresses in the idea of original sin. Adam and Eve were created with the ability to sin. The fact that they did sin at the first opportunity is evidence of the fact that this ability is, in fact, an innate tendency; something inevitable, part of what it is to be a creature drawn from nothing (just as original sin is now an inevitable, innate part of what it is to be a human being after the Fall).

The theory of the Fall and original sin, expounded in relation to Adam and Eve, and the theory of creation from nothing, both inevitably beg the question: why did God create human beings able to sin, indeed, with a seemingly inevitable tendency to sin? When Augustine addresses this question he comes up with the same answers in both contexts: first of all, human beings had to possess will, in order to freely respond to their Creator; but more importantly, he states the obvious fact of experience: we are created from nothing and our will inevitably tends back towards nothing if it does not acknowledge its created dependence. It is this early theory which he reiterates in one of the most important of his later works to consider the Fall, *De ciuitate Dei*, book 14, where he writes of Adam and Eve:

Thus the evil act, the transgression of eating the forbidden fruit, was committed only when those who did it were already evil; that bad fruit could only have come from a bad tree. Further, the badness of the tree came about contrary to nature, because without a fault in the will, which is against nature, it certainly could not have happened. But only a nature created out of nothing could have been distorted by a fault. Consequently, although the will derives its existence, as a nature, from its creation by God, its falling away from its true being is due to its creation out of nothing ... to abandon God and to exist in oneself, that is to please oneself, is not immediately to lose all being; but it is to come nearer to nothingness (14. 13).

The suggestion—Augustine never comes up with a hard and fast theory as to why Adam and Eve fell—is clear: the will inevitably falls away from God and

sins because it is created out of nothing. *Creatio ex nihilo* is the ground for man's fall.⁷¹

⁷¹ Cf. *c. Jul. imp.* 5. 39, where the possibility of sin is based on the fact that human beings are created from nothing.

The universal experience of the inevitability of sin and guilt, moral ignorance and impotence, derive from humankind's creation from nothing, in the same way as they are attributed to the original sin we inherit from Adam and Eve. In other words the inevitability of sin and the inheritance of sin amount to much the same thing and express precisely the same insights. The doctrine of creation from nothing, which forms the basis of Augustine's theology in the early works, is also the basis on which he works out a theology of original sin; they are continuous to such an extent that it is extremely difficult to say when he began to hold the idea of original sin and

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whether he ever thought in any other terms. The language and technical vocabulary change but the basic understanding of the relation of human beings to God and their absolute need for divine grace is constant. We will have more to say about this in Ch. 6.

Grace

In a general way, if human beings are created from nothing, their very existence and continuance in being is a work of creating and continually sustaining grace. But Augustine goes further than this in his later thought—and it is here that scholars locate the dramatic landslide in his thought and its revolutionary change: his experience of attempting to attain and do the good convinced him that without grace human beings cannot even will the good, never mind do it. They rather stand in need of continual, inward, inspiring grace in order to do any good at all; without it they can only sin. It is grace, and only grace, which liberates the will and enables it to will the good. This is what is explicitly stated in the closing chapters of the *Ad Simplicianum* in 396.

We should note, first, that the convictions Augustine states so uncompromisingly in this letter in the language of the Fall, original sin, grace, divine election, and predestination, are based as much upon experience as upon the scriptural text concerning Jacob and Esau, on which Simplicianus had sought clarification, and which seems to push Augustine into stating these ideas with complete clarity. They are based upon his experience of what it is to attempt to will and to do the good; of finding that, of oneself, one is incapable of doing so; that the will is so fundamentally flawed and alienated from itself that, even when the truth is known to it, it cannot find the power to act upon it. Most importantly, he concludes the *Ad Simplicianum* with an insight which could only be based on experience:⁷²

⁷² Though it is obviously also Stoic in inspiration.

that grace only enables the will to act by making what is true and good desirable and delightful to it, and by inspiring within it the love and motivating power to act upon it. It is ultimately only in love of the truth, inspired by its pleasing, delightful, and beautiful revelation, and by the

inward inspiration of grace, that the will is able to turn towards God; 'Who has it in his power' he asks,

to have such a motive present in his mind that the will shall be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? But who has it in his power to ensure that something that will delight him will turn up, or that he will take delight in what turns up? If those things delight us which serve our

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advancement towards God, that is due not to our own whim or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God and to the grace which he bestows.⁷³

⁷³*Simpl.* 1. 2. 21.

Are these experiences, formulated in Augustine's mature theology of grace, really so new, original and revolutionary in this work? We will, of course, be considering this question at length in Ch. 8, which is devoted specifically to the subject of grace, but there is also much in Augustine's early theology, derived directly from the doctrine of creation from nothing, that is relevant to answering it. This is above all the case because Augustine's account of creation from nothing as, so to speak, a work of art—one which is brought into being, and formed and ordered by God; the beauty of which draws (sinful) human beings towards their Creator, converting or turning them towards him, so that they thereby receive existence, form (or reformation), and beauty, is the essential background and context against which the work of divine grace and its relation to the human will must be considered. It is as if all created reality possesses a semiotic, or better, sacramental, structure, which at once expresses, and enables created beings to participate in, their Creator. Creation is both the work of grace and the way in which grace works.

Form

The key term we need to consider in the early works is the word 'form' (Lat. *forma*). It is this word, steeped in philosophical overtones, that Augustine uses to designate and describe what exactly it is that draws things from nothingness and gives them existence, which enables them, as it were, to ex-ist and to stand out from nothingness—in other words, to 'be'. It is in receiving form that formless matter, drawn from nothing, is brought into being. In so far as something possesses form it exists, in so far as it lacks form, or becomes deformed, to that extent it ceases to exist and its being is diminished. As Augustine writes in *De uera religione*:

From what did he [God] make them [creation]? Out of nothing. Whatever is must have some form, and though it be but a minimal good it will be good and will be of God. The highest form is the highest good, and the lowest form is the lowest good. Every good thing is either God or derived from God. Therefore even the lowest form is of God ... That out of which God created all things had neither form nor species, and was simply nothing. That ... which has any form at all, however small and inchoate, is not nothing.(35)

'Form' is therefore an ontological category: it does not just refer to outward shape or appearance, but to existence and being. As Augustine makes clear in *De libero arbitrio*, 'Behold the heaven, the earth, the sea; all that is bright in them or above them; all that creep or fly or swim; all have forms because all have number. Take away number and they will be nothing. From whom have they their being if not from him who has made number? For they exist only in so far as they have number' (2. 16. 41). As this passage suggests, form can also be described as number; in fact, it is described by a wide range of terms, such as measure, weight, unity, harmony, order, peace, and concord, all designating the eternal, transcendent 'forms' or 'ideas' which are found in the divine mind and which constitute the existence of created reality. Using the language of unity, order, and harmony in *De moribus*, therefore, Augustine makes the same point as we have seen him make in relation to form or number:

Now things which tend towards existence tend towards order, and, attaining order they attain existence, as far as that is possible to a creature ... existence is nothing else than being one. Thus, so far as anything acquires unity, so far it exists. For uniformity and harmony are the effects of unity, and by these compound things exist as far as they have existence. ... This arrangement is the cause of existence, disorder of non-existence....⁷⁴

⁷⁴*mor.* 6. 8; *uera rel.* 63 'And yet it would not be a body either if it did not have some unity. Besides it could have no unity unless it derived from supreme unity' *imm. an.* 8. 13.

Likewise in relation to peace and concord in *De uera religione* he writes,

A corporeal object has some concord between its parts, otherwise it could not exist at all. Therefore it was made by Him who is the head of all concord. A corporeal object enjoys a certain degree of peace, due to its having form. Without that it would be nothing. Therefore He is the creator of matter, from whom all peace comes, and who is the uncreated and most perfect form. Matter participates in something belonging to the ideal world, otherwise it would not be matter.⁷⁵

⁷⁵*uera rel.* 21.

One of the most common ways Augustine uses to describe form is derived from Wisdom 11: 21 'You have arranged all things in measure, number and weight' (*Omnia in mensura, et numero, et pondere disposuisti*).⁷⁶

⁷⁶e.g. *Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 16. 26. See Roche 1941; Harrison 1988; du Roy 1966 for further discussion and sources.

These three terms, which Augustine often relates to the members of the Trinity, sum up the ontological, ethical, and aesthetic nature of both the immutable forms, eternally present in the divine mind, and the mutable, created forms, which draw human beings from nothing and enable them to participate in the divine. Measure (*mensura* or *modus*) is that which limits and gives a beginning and end to mutable time and existence so that it is capable of number,

form, or beauty (*numerus, forma, species*), and weight, or order (*pondus, ordo*) is that which draws things towards their appointed end.

Form is, then, received from God, who is eternal and immutable Form; it is lost, or deformed, when human beings fall away from God; it is regained when they convert towards God and are reformed. But form cannot ultimately be lost, or completely destroyed. Once drawn from nothingness by being given form God's providence (of which more anon) will not allow it to return to non-being.⁷⁷

⁷⁷*mor.* 2. 17. 19; *lib. arb.* 2. 17. 45; *imm. an.* 8. 13-15; 11. 18. It is in these terms that Augustine talks about the Platonic ideas in the early works and will later talk about the image of God in man in his mature works.

The danger, for created beings, is that they might fail to realize their dependence upon their Creator, and therefore to look no further than themselves or other created beings. This is especially true of the soul or mind, which, Augustine observes, because it is the higher, intellectual part of a person, and is immortal and invisible, might proudly and presumptuously think itself God, rather than a creature, and fail to realize that it is only its love and subjection to God, its Creator, which allows it to become like him, by being informed and enlightened by him, and that pride, which moves away from him, in 'affection and lust for things below God', can only result in wretchedness and folly.⁷⁸

⁷⁸A summary of *mor.* 1. 12. 20-1.

The highest good, the *summum bonum*, that which will secure happiness, is to be found in loving that which will make us blessed, in other words, in what Augustine describes as 'cleaving to ... God ... in affection, desire and love'.⁷⁹

⁷⁹*mor.* 1. 13. 22.

Augustine is at pains to make clear, however, that it is not creation itself which is at fault here—it is the good creation of a good God—but rather the sinfulness of human beings in 'loving' as he puts it, 'the works of the artificer more than the artificer or his art'.⁸⁰

⁸⁰*uera rel.* 67.

Like any work of art, creation reveals the mind of its Creator, and we fail to appreciate it aright if we simply become caught up in its particular beauty, rather than looking beyond it to its meaning and message, and to its ultimate source in transcendent beauty. As he puts it in *De libero arbitrio*,

an artificer somehow suggests to the spectator of his work, through the very beauty of the work itself, not to be wholly content with that beauty alone, but to let his eye so scan the form of the material thing made that he may remember with affection him who made it. Those who love your creatures in place of you are like men who, listening to an eloquent sage, pay too much attention to the sweetness of his voice and the aptness of his verbal style and miss the meaning of his sentences, of which the words are but the sound signals, as it were.⁸¹

⁸¹*lib. arb.* 2. 16. 43.

He makes the same point in *De uera religione* in relation to poetry: poetry is beautiful, even though it is by definition temporal and mutable, but the art of poetry is to be preferred: 'the verse is beautiful as exhibiting the faint traces of beauty which the art of poetry keeps steadfastly and unchangeably'.⁸²

⁸² *uera rel.* 42.

Or as he comments, in the somewhat more abstract language of number: 'If fleshly pleasure is loved, let it be carefully considered and vestigial traces of number will be recognized in it. We must, then, seek the realm where number exists in complete tranquillity; for there existence is, above all, unity.'⁸³

⁸³ *Ibid.* 79.

Augustine is arguing on at least two fronts here. The essential goodness and beauty of creation, which it owes wholly to its Creator, is an argument he frequently rehearses against the Manichees, for whom the created world was an evil substance, corrupt, disordered, and utterly alien to, and at odds with, the good. The manifest beauty, order, and unity of creation in all its parts, from the lowliest worm⁸⁴

⁸⁴ 'I could speak at great length without any falsehood in praise of the worm. I could point out the brightness of its colouring, the slender rounded shape of its body, the fitness of its parts from front to rear, and their effort to preserve unity as far as is possible for such a lowly creature,' *uera rel.* 77.

to the wisest person, was evidence, for Augustine, of its creation by God and therefore of its essential goodness.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ e.g. among many other similar passages, *uera rel.* 77, 79-80; *lib. arb.* 2. 17. 46; *en. Ps.* 148. 10. The argument is given its fullest development in his later treatise against the Manichees, entitled *De natura boni*.

In arguing that 'All order is of God'⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Rom. 13: 2 cited in *uera rel.* 77.

he is evidently drawing upon well-established philosophical traditions such as Stoicism and Platonism, which identified the beauty and order of the cosmos as the grounds for belief in a divine Mind or Supreme Form, which providentially arranges and sustains it.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Cary 2000: 185, interestingly comments on 'the development from Manichaean optimism about the soul and pessimism about the world, to Augustine's mature pessimism about the corruption of the soul and optimism about the goodness of the created world ... in sum from psychological optimism and cosmological pessimism to the reverse'.

The 'deep ties of nature which are arranged by the unchangeable law of numbers'⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *uera rel.* 79.

are conclusive evidence, for Augustine, against the substantial evil of created matter.

But he emphasizes the manifest beauty of creation for another reason too, for it is the form or beauty of creation which he believes God has providentially provided as a counterweight to the inherent tendency of temporal, mutable, corruptible creation to fall away from him. Creation has two faces, one which seems to inexorably turn away from its Creator and

another which seems to inexorably turn towards him. Created from nothing it seems inevitably to fall back to nothing; brought into existence by being given form,

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order, and unity, it seems to be equally inevitable that it is converted and conformed to its Creator. How does form have this effect?

Form as Relation

We have already mentioned the ontological nature of form. It belongs ultimately and supremely to God, who is Divine Form, Unity, and Order. The creature possesses these things because it is formed, unified, and ordered by him. This does not simply imply the Platonic model of creation as the imposing of form, order, and unity upon pre-existent matter by the demiurge, in imitation of the Divine realm of Forms; nor does it mean, as in emanational systems, that creation is thereby continuous with the divine and shares the divine substance. In Augustine's Christian scheme of creation from nothing there is no pre-existent matter; everything is created by God from nothing. Nor is there any continuity between divine being and created being; they are two totally different substances, separated by a radical ontological gulf. He does, however, share with emanational schemes the idea of the transcendence, eternity, and immutability of the divine, and with Platonic schemes the language of form. In *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83 he discusses the Platonic theory of the Forms and adopts the Middle Platonic/Neoplatonic theory that the Ideas or Forms do not constitute a separate realm but are part of the Divine mind. They are themselves unformed, eternal, and transcendent; the first principles according to which⁸⁹ all created, temporal, mutable beings are formed.

⁸⁹*diu. qu.* 83 46. Meyendorff 1942; Solignac 1954; du Roy 1966: 183-96 for discussion of this passage and Augustine's possible sources.

When he talks about their presence in man he similarly adopts the Platonic language of 'imitation' or 'resemblance'.⁹⁰

⁹⁰e.g. *uera rel.* 61.

It is in virtue of the fact that creation possesses the forms that it exists, is good, and, when rightly judged, points beyond itself to its Divine source. God is Form, Unity and Order ... created reality has form, unity, and order

'bestowed' upon it, and in so far as it 'participates' in God.⁹¹

⁹¹*Gn. litt. imp.* 16. 57; *diu. qu.* 83 23-4. For bibliography on participation see Hombert 1996: 390 n. 11; Meconi 1996.

Augustine puts this succinctly in relation to the idea of the good: 'there is one good which is good supremely and in itself, and not by the participation of any good, but by its own nature and essence; and another good which is good by participation, and by having something bestowed'.⁹²

⁹²*mor.* 2. 4. 6. Cf. *uera rel.* 21, 'Matter participates in something belonging to the ideal world otherwise it would not be matter' s. *Dom. mon.* 2. 4. 16, 'It is a relationship [to call God Father] which can be brought about by no expenditure of ours, but solely by God's goodwill.'

Man's goodness (in other contexts Augustine talks

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about his existence or form) is therefore a gift; it is something bestowed, something he receives by turning towards God: it is not something man achieves but something he receives: 'a thing cannot be good by nature when it is spoken of as being made, which shows that the goodness was

bestowed'.⁹³

⁹³ *mor.* 2. 4. 6.

The idea of participation is a central one. Whilst Augustine shares with the Platonists the idea that God is the divine archetype of any manifestation of form in created reality, he moves beyond the pejorative notions of imitation and resemblance by describing the way in which creation participates in Divine Form as a relation. Of course, the relation between Creator and creation is primarily one of dependence; God gives or bestows form and creation receives it. But for the relation to work rational creation must acknowledge its absolute dependence upon, and subservience to, its Creator, and respond in humility and obedience. It must continually turn towards its Creator in gratitude and love, both to receive existence and form, and to maintain them. It is a relation between a giver and a receiver. If the receiver does not acknowledge the giver, and does not think the gift is necessary, then his or her being is inevitably diminished and he or she becomes deformed.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ It is thus quite different from Plotinian *epistrophe*. As Hombert 1996: 430 writes, 'man has but one choice to make: to consent, or to refuse to consent, to exist by another. The whole of Augustine's spiritual ontology comes down to two attitudes which are required of man: humility and thanksgiving. It is through these that he reaches wholeness. For acknowledging God and glorifying him do not humble man, they lift him up and enable him to participate in God.'

(We will see that the language of 'gift' is one of Augustine's preferred ways of referring to the life-giving, forming, and reforming activity of the Holy Spirit). The interrelated ideas that human beings are created 'capable' of receiving God (*capax Dei*), and in the image and likeness (*imago* and *similitudo*) of God, are both used by Augustine in the early works to describe what participation involves, and were to remain his preferred way of articulating this concept, most especially in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity. Human beings are created from nothing as creatures who are capable of receiving divine form, not just at an ontological level, like a piece of clay capable of being shaped by the potter,⁹⁵

⁹⁵ *uera rel.* 36, 'Therefore if the world was made out of some unformed matter, that matter was made out of absolutely nothing. If it was as yet unformed, still it was at least capable of receiving form. By God's goodness it is "formable". ... The author of all good things, who gives form, also gives the capacity for form'. Cf. *trin.* 14. 8. 11 on human beings as *capax Dei*: the image of God in humankind can be deformed but can never be lost or obliterated.

but rather at an ethical and personal level, as rational beings capable of responding to their Creator—especially as he has participated in their

humanity by becoming incarnate—and growing in his

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likeness.⁹⁶

⁹⁶*fid. et sym.* 2. 2, 'the same Being who imparts form to objects, also imparts the capability of being formed ... He Himself is One, who communicates to everything its possibilities, not only that it be beautiful actually, but also that it be capable of being beautiful' *lib. arb.* 2. 17. 45, 'Every mutable thing must also be capable of receiving form ... nothing can form itself ... both body and mind receive form from a form that is unchangeable and eternal. Of this form it is written ... 'She, remaining in herself, reneweth all things' (Wisdom 7: 27). Hence we understand that all things are ruled by providence'. Augustine then continues in this passage to describe the ways in which divine providence acts to recall man to itself. Cf. *diu. qu.* 83 51. 2; *ep.* 18. 2, which outline three levels of participation (in *diu. qu.* 83 these are *esse*, *uiuere*, *intelligere*). See *uera rel.* 66-7; *Gn. litt. imp.* 16. 57-8 on image and likeness in relation to the Christ and humanity's participation in him (though, as Markus 1964 notes, Augustine's thought evolved in this respect). See Bonner (1986) and Wilson-Kastner (1967) on divinization in this context.

Thus human beings are created in the image and likeness of God as a reflection in a mirror, produced by God, and no more than an image or likeness, but this is also the ontological ground of their being, the epistemological ground for their knowledge of truth,⁹⁷

⁹⁷*uera rel.* 82, 'Some things are made conformable to that first form such as rational and intellectual creatures, among whom man is rightly said to be made in the image and likeness of God. Not otherwise could he behold unchangeable truth with his mind.'

and the ethical ground of their relation to God, expressed in their turning towards him (*conversio*) to participate in him and be conformed to him.⁹⁸

⁹⁸*sol.* 1. 4; *diu. qu.* 83 51, 74; *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 16. 24. Illumination—the presence of truth in the soul—is therefore probably best understood as a metaphor for participation.

Form as Beauty

In describing form in terms of beauty in his early works Augustine cogently demonstrates the inherent power of form to effect a relation between Creator and creature in which the creature is inspired and impelled to acknowledge its Creator, to praise and love him, and above all, to acknowledge its dependence and contingency upon him. Thus the giving of form to matter is not only the means by which the Creator gives existence to what was previously nothing, but also the way in which he effects its turning towards him to continue subsequently in existence. It is, as we observed above, both grace and the way in which grace works.

This is based upon a number of characteristic Augustinian presuppositions.

The first is that 'we do not love something unless it delights us'.⁹⁹

⁹⁹*s.* 159. 3.

This is a theme which is sounded in Augustine's thought from the very beginning to the very end and which fashions everything he has to say about the way in which the will of created beings operates. The will is only motivated when something delights it. Discussing the Fall and original sin in

Ad Simplicianum, and the fact that the will is wholly dependent upon grace to do any good

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action, we have seen that Augustine observes rather disconcertingly that this is not a matter of grace giving us knowledge or teaching but of something much more elusive; it is a matter of inspiration and delight: 'The will can have no motive unless something presents itself to delight and stir the mind.' But we do not have to wait until the *Ad Simplicianum* to discover that this is a central feature of Augustine's reflection upon grace; it is present in everything he has to say about the beauty of form in the early works. Form providentially and graciously inspires love and delight, in order to call (or recall) temporal, mutable, corruptible (or corrupted) creation to its Creator, because it *is*, of its very nature, beautiful.

In *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83 46, Augustine identifies the ideas (*ideas*) with form or appearance (*Ideas igitur latine possumus vel formas vel species dicere*). The Latin for form—*forma* or *species*—is derived from the term for beauty—*formosus* or *speciosus*. Augustine makes this clear in *De uera religione* when he refers to God as the 'unformed form and the most beautiful of all' (*forma infabricata atque omnium formosissima*) (21), and comments on creation, 'Every corporeal creature, when possessed of a soul that loves God, is a good of the lowest order, and beautiful in its own way, for it is held together by form and species' (40). It is form and species which make it beautiful. Similarly, in *De libero arbitrio* describing the work of Wisdom, he observes,

Wherever you turn she speaks to you through certain traces of her operations. When you are falling away to external things she recalls you to return within by the very forms of external things. Whatever delights you in corporeal objects and entices you by appeal to the bodily senses, you may see is governed by number [or form], and when you ask how that is so, you will return to your mind within, and know that you could neither approve nor disapprove of sense unless you had within you, as it were, laws of beauty by which you judge all the beautiful things which you perceive in the world. Behold the heaven, the earth, the sea; all that is bright in them or above them; all that creep or fly or swim; all have forms because all have number.... Examine the beauty of bodily form, and you will find that everything is in its place by number. Examine the beauty of bodily motion and you will find everything in its due time by number. ... Take away number and they will be nothing. (2. 16. 41-2)¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *mus.* 6. 17. 57, 'Where ... do these things [creation] come from, if not from the highest and eternal rule of numbers, likeness, equality and order? And if you abstract these things from the earth, it will be nothing. And therefore God Almighty made earth, and earth is made from nothing.'

Thus, existence is constituted by form, and form by beauty. Everything that is, in virtue of its possession of form, is beautiful. The more it turns towards divine form and receives existence or form, the more beautiful it is; the more it turns away from divine form, the more it loses existence and the uglier it is.

As Augustine makes clear in *De immortalitate animae*, 'if not the material mass (*mole*) but its form (*specie*) gives to the body its being.... Then the body is the more perfect, the better formed (*speciosus*) and the more beautiful (*pulchrius*) it is, just as it is so much the less perfect, the uglier and more deformed (*deformius*) it is' (8. 13).¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ As Hans Urs von Balthasar 1984: 115 comments, 'Being inevitably includes being of a certain kind (*species*) or, what comes to the same thing, a form (*forma*), two words which imply both "essence" and "beauty" and are immediately understood by Augustine in this duality (*speciosus* and *formosus*, "beautiful", "well-formed").' Cf. *uera rel.* 35, 'From what did he [God] make them [creation]? Out of nothing. Whatever is must have some form, and though it be but a minimal good it will be good and will be of God. The highest form is the highest good, and the lowest form is the lowest good. Every good thing is either God, or derived from God. Therefore even the lowest form is of God ... That out of which God created all things had neither form or species, and was simply nothing. That ... which has any form at all, however small and inchoate, is not nothing.' This is a Christianized version of Plotinus, who teaches essentially the same thing: 'Beauty without Being could not be, nor Being voided of Beauty: abandoned of Beauty, Being loses something of its essence. Being is desirable because it is identical with Beauty; and Beauty is loved because it is Being' (*Enn.* 5. 8. 9).

In *De uera religione* we read that, 'Things which are made need his good, i.e., the chief good, the supreme essence. They become less when by sin they are less attracted to him ... Movements of the soul are the affections, depending on the will.' We have suggested above that it is the beauty of divine and created form which attracts human beings, which moves their soul and motivates their will, to turn to, love, and serve their Creator, and thereby to confirm their existence. The very mutability of created form or beauty has a positive role in this context; it attracts human beings, but because it is mutable and is evidently not Supreme beauty, it also points them beyond themselves to their Creator.¹⁰²

¹⁰² *uera rel.* 19, 40-2; *diu. qu.* 83 44.

Augustine therefore describes the beauty of created reality as a 'nod',¹⁰³

¹⁰³ *lib. arb.* 2. 10. 43.

or a song of praise¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ *en. Ps.* 148. 15 (Zarb 395*) This passage is very similar to *conf.* 10. In both, Augustine interrogates creation on its beauty and its response is to point to its Creator, thereby providing a first step in the ascent towards him.

towards its Creator. It is the way in which Wisdom recalls human beings, when they are caught up in this world: 'Therefore, he who journeys towards wisdom, beholding and considering the whole created universe, finds wisdom appearing unto him graciously on his way and meeting him in every purpose and providence; and his eagerness to press along that way is all the greater because he sees that the way is rendered beautiful by the wisdom he longs to reach' (2. 17. 45). The 'unchangeable form' which created humankind is therefore also, Augustine concludes in this work, 'a providence' (*ibid.*). Providence, personified as Wisdom, speaks to human beings, recalls them, puts stumbling blocks in their way to attract their attention,¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 94 (Zarb 393-4*).

sends them tribulations, trials, and

temptations in order to send them back to God,¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ This is a frequent theme in many of the early *en. Ps* written between 392 and 395: 37. 23 (Zarb 395*); 52. 2. i. 9 (Zarb 395*); 63. 1 (Zarb 395*); 94. 8 (Zarb 393-4*); 97. 8 (Zarb 393-4*); 100. 1 (Zarb 395*); 101. i. 10 (Zarb 395*), and also in *s. 2. 3* (391); *mor. 17. 55*; *uera rel. 29, 38*.

appears to them graciously, delights, attracts, and inspires their eagerness and love.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ For the same language of divine providence recalling man see *uera rel. 34*, 'divine providence recalls to its true and essential nature whatever manifests defect, that is, tends to nothingness, and so strengthens it'. Cf. also *ord. 1. 8. 25*; *mor. 2. 7. 10*, 'as far as it falls away from being it is not of God, and yet it is always ordered by Divine Providence in agreement with the whole system' *mus. 6. 11. 33*; *6. 13. 38*; *6. 16. 52*.

What else is this but the work of God's grace, described in terms which are characteristic of his mature thought? Not only does this language anticipate the *Ad Simplicianum* but it also closely parallels Augustine's famous description of the way in which divine beauty graciously works to recall fallen man, at the turning point of the argument in book 10 of the *Confessiones*: 'Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new. ... You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours' (10. 27. 38).

The Word as Form

Thus the same train of thought is pursued in the early and later works in the context of describing humanity's experience of divine grace: creation from nothing; form as giving existence to creation; form revealed in beauty; beauty as the way in which God, the uncreated supreme Form, recalls his creation to himself, by inspiring delight and love. Most especially, it is in this context that Augustine places the Incarnation in the early works: the Son is the divine Word, who is properly referred to as Form,¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ *ep. 2. 4* 'Species quae proprie Filio tribuitur ...' Cf. *mus. 6. 17. 56*; *diu. qu. 83* 23.

the most beautiful of all beauty,¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ *diu. qu. 83* 23, 'omne pulchrum pulchritudine'.

begotten not made,¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ e.g. *uera rel. 28*; *fid. et sym. 2. 3*; *4. 5*; *lib. arb. 1. 5*.

'co-eternal and consubstantial'¹¹¹

¹¹¹ *Ibid. 30, 110*.

with Supreme Form, who is therefore able to reveal it unambiguously to man.¹¹²

¹¹² Cf. *uera rel. 66*; *80-2*.

In his first extant sermon Augustine identifies Christ the creative Word as

'the beginning' of Gen. 1: 1 and John 1. 1; as one of the Trinity, 'in, by and through whom', everything was made when God said 'Let *us* make man ...'¹¹³

¹¹³*s.* 1. 5. Cf. *Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 2. 3; *Gn. litt. imp.* 3. 6.

Phillip Cary represents a general judgement on the Christology of the early works when he suggests that Augustine did not appreciate the soteriological

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consequences of his teaching on the Word as Supreme Form until very much later.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Cary 2000: 112.

But the texts give the lie to this misleading assumption. The creator Word is always the crucified, redeeming Word, for Augustine; the Word which gave human beings form is the same Word who, incarnate, reforms them: they 'will be reformed by the Wisdom which is not formed but has formed all things'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ *uera rel.* 24.

In what amounts to a small, early, *De incarnatione* of his own, in *uera rel.* 30-3, Augustine sets out a thoroughly orthodox and coherent doctrine of Christ the incarnate mediator: 'in no way did he [God] show greater loving-kindness in his dealings with the human race for its good, than when the Wisdom of God, his only Son, co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father, deigned to assume human nature; when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... the assuming of our nature was to be also its liberation' (30).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Cf. 110 for almost exactly the same teaching and words, both obviously inspired by the Apostle's Creed.

In a series of early sermons on the Psalms he also seems to have been preoccupied with the idea that the Creator and Recreator of man are one;¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ *en. Ps.* 101. ii. 13 (Zarb 395*).

the 'I Am Who I Am' is also the Word that burst forth from eternity to rescue human frailty;¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 10.

the one who makes man is also the one who remakes him;¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 145. 13 (Zarb 395*).

the one who made him out of nothing is the only-begotten Son who died for him.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 148. 8 (Zarb 395*).

We will examine Augustine's early Christology in relation to his teaching on grace more fully in the final chapter. Here we need simply add, in relation to the idea of creation from nothing, that in his early work he often emphasizes the need for the incarnation in view of the tendency of human beings to take creation as an end in itself and to fail to seek or worship their Creator. In this respect Christ's incarnation demonstrates to human beings the need for humility, and leads them back to God by his example and teaching, and above all, by his revelation of divine beauty, which points towards, and

inspires, humanity's love for it.¹²¹

¹²¹ *en. Ps* 18. 15; *quant.* 33. 76; *vera rel.* 30, 66, 110; *util. cred.* 33; *ep.* 11 among many other texts in the early works.

As Augustine comments in *De moribus*, in reference to Christ's sancification of man: 'for when sanctified we burn with full and perfect love, which is the only security for our not turning away from God, and for our being conformed to him [Christ] rather than the world; for "he has predestined us" ... "that we should be conformed to the image of his Son" ' (1. 13. 22, quoting Rom. 8: 29).¹²²

¹²² In *ex. Gal.* Augustine describes how 'Christ is formed in the inner self of the believer'.

In this, as in so much of his early theology based upon the doctrine of

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creation from nothing, his thought stands extraordinarily close to that of Athanasius.¹²³

¹²³ e.g. *De incarnatione* 11, 'God ... when he made the race of men through the Word, saw that the weakness of their nature was not capable by itself of knowing the Creator or of taking any thought of God, in that he was uncreated, whereas they had been made from nothing. ... There ... he bestowed on them of his own image, our Lord Jesus Christ, and he made them according to his own image and likeness, in order that, understanding through grace the image, I mean the Word of the Father, they might be able to gain some notion about the Father, and recognizing the Maker, might live a happy and truly blessed life.' Cf. 5, 20. We should not forget that it is also close to Ambrose, who probably had a direct and very immediate influence.

The Trinity as Form

The creative and redemptive work of Christ is never understood by Augustine apart from the Divine Trinity. It is the eternal, immutable Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is ultimately responsible for creation, for the form, order, and unity which creation possesses, and also for the reformation of fallen creation by the Word, and its preservation and purification by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Augustine sums this up at the beginning of *De uera religione* as the 'dispensation of divine providence' which is a person's chief concern in following the true religion:

There is one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When this Trinity is known as far as it can be in this life, it is perceived without the slightest doubt that every creature, intellectual, animal and corporeal, derives such existence as it has from the same creative Trinity, has its own form, and is subject to the most perfect order... For every thing, substance, essence or nature, or whatever better word there may be, possesses at once these three qualities: it is a particular thing; it is distinguished from other things by its own proper form; and it does not transgress the order of nature.

It is clear throughout the early works that every aspect of reality is understood by Augustine to possess a trinitarian form, due its creation by the Supreme Trinity, and that this is understood in precisely the same way

as Augustine's general reflections on 'form' in these works: as constituting the very existence, nature, and identity of a person, as the basis for his or her relation to, or participation in, God, and, if rightly understood and willed, in humility and love, as that which brings about the continual conversion and reformation which is necessary for all mutable, temporal reality, created from nothing, to remain in existence.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ This is something which has been analysed comprehensively by du Roy 1966, to which book we refer the reader; O'Connell 1994: 68, appositely observes that '[this] book—on the early Augustine's understanding of Christian faith in the Trinity—is from start to finish one long object-lesson in how many of Augustine's consciously Christian allusions the most conscientious of scholars have simply missed when reading these early dialogues. Nothing, surely could be more specifically Christian than the doctrine of the Trinity, and nothing is more typical of Augustine's "philosophy" than his tenacious attempt to Christianize the so-called "secular" and "pagan" thought of his time by unearthing the trinitarian analogues he finds lurking in their thought.'

As is illustrated in the passage we have just cited from

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De uera religione, Augustine often allocates specific attributes to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, such as existence, form, and order, or measure, number, and weight, respectively, but in doing so he is not dividing up the action of the divine Trinity so much as expressing its continuous and inseparable operation in the creation, formation, and conversion of created reality. There are a number of passages, throughout this work, which describe the saving, reforming, purifying action of the Trinity in relation to fallen humanity, and which all possess some common features: the Trinity which is responsible for creation is described as eternal and immutable, in contrast to temporal and mutable creation; the soul is reformed by 'Wisdom' or the 'immutable truth', identified with the Son, and it is purified, preserved, and enjoys God through his 'gift' or 'loving kindness', which is the Holy Spirit.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ e.g. the soul 'will be re-formed by the Wisdom which is not formed, but has formed all things, and will enjoy God through the Spirit, which is the gift of God' (24); 'the body lives by the soul, and the soul by the immutable truth, who is the only Son of God ... By God's gift, given to the soul, i.e., the Holy Spirit, not only does the soul, which receives it, become sound and peaceful and holy, but the body also will be cleansed' 'God the immutable Trinity, made them through his supreme Wisdom and preserves them by his supreme loving-kindness' (35).

We will have more to say about the Holy Spirit as grace in subsequent chapters, but we should note here how it is clearly identified with the work of divine grace, not only in creating human beings from nothing, but in preserving them in existence, in purifying them from sin, in inspiring in them love for their Creator, and in finally ensuring their ultimate reconciliation to him. The last chapter of *De uera religione* sums this up, as well as the thesis of the work as a whole. It deserves to be cited at length here:

He [God] grudges nothing to any, for he has given to all the possibility to be good, and has given to all the power to abide in the good as far as they would or could. Wherefore it befits us to keep and to worship the Gift [*donum*] of God, equally unchangeable with the Father and the Son, in a Trinity of one substance. We worship one God from

whom, through whom and in whom we have our being, from whom we fell away, being made unlike him, by whom we have not been allowed to perish, the principle to which we have recourse, the form we imitate, the grace whereby we are reconciled. We worship one God by whom we were made, and his likeness by whom we are formed for unity, and his peace whereby we cleave to unity; God who spoke and it was done; and the Word by whom all was made that has substance and nature; and the Gift of his benignity by whom nothing that he made through the Word should perish, but should please and be reconciled to its Creator; one God by whose creative work we live, by whom we are remade so that we may live in wisdom, and by loving and enjoying whom we live in blessedness; one God from whom, through whom, and in whom are all things.(113)

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There is one other passage in which Augustine reflects on the nature of the divine Trinity in the context of creation, conversion, and (re)formation in his early anti-Manichaean works, which complements what we have just discovered in *De uera religione*. It is found in the other work which has proved to be central to this chapter, the earlier *De moribus* (1. 13. 22-14. 24). Here, although the same points are made concerning the absolute dependence of mutable creation upon the immutable Trinity, and the same scriptural passages are cited (especially Rom. 11:36), the emphasis is firmly upon the importance of love and desire as that which effects the conformation and reformation of the soul to God. As we noted above, it is this aspect of the operation of grace which is often identified as emerging only in 396 in the *Ad Simplicianum*, but which we have seen was particularly related by the early Augustine to the beauty of form, and the inherent ability of an otherwise temporal and mutable creation to inspire and convert human beings towards its Creator. Here it is especially linked with the work of the Holy Spirit. The underlying question which Augustine is addressing in this passage is that of the ultimate good, of where humankind can find happiness. He suggests that it is to be found 'in cleaving to God', in other words, in acknowledging our created dependence upon our Creator; we can only do this, he states, by 'affection, desire and love'. What we love, and what we must also observe in seeking to attain happiness, is virtue, wisdom, and truth, all of which belong immutably to Christ. It is in loving Him that we are sanctified, and conformed to God rather than to the world. What inspires that love is the Holy Spirit: 'It is through love then, that we become conformed to God; and by this conformation and configuration, and circumcision from this world we are not confounded with the things which are properly subject to us. And this is done by the Holy Spirit ... for the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us (Rom. 5:5).' Whereas the creature 'has been made subject to vanity' (Rom. 8: 20)—an indication of its created mutability and its tendency to take creation for the Creator—the Holy Spirit, who is eternal and immutable, is able to restore it. We must therefore love the Trinity—'of whom are all things, by whom are all things, in whom are all things... to Him be the glory' (Rom. 11:36)—because it is by giving glory, by praising the Trinity, that our love and affection increases, and 'when this is the case' Augustine observes, 'we cannot but advance with sure and firm step to a life of perfection and bliss'. Once again, we find that everything is of grace: both creation and

recreation are the work of the Trinity. There is no gap between creation and redemption, not least because created reality, which is inherently temporal, mutable, and corruptible, is completely and absolutely dependent upon the eternal and immutable Trinity to remain in existence at all. Without this grace to continually form and reform, call and convert, figure

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and reconfigure, it will lapse back and fall into the nothingness from which it was derived. The eternal gives life to the temporal; the immutable gives form to the mutable; love inspires and directs the will away from creation towards the Creator. It is not just the Fall and original sin which mean that humanity is temporal, mutable, and unable to do the good without divine grace. Human beings are temporal, mutable and unable to do the good without divine grace because they are creatures, created from nothing. Being a creature means being completely and utterly dependent upon grace to be, to exist, and to continue in existence; to resist time, change, and corruption.

Indeed, I would like to suggest that Augustine did not need to read Romans, or be faced with the question of Esau and Jacob, to conclude that everything is of grace and that without it human beings are utterly unable to will or do the good. He was convinced of this from the moment of his conversion. It derived from his own experience and was confirmed by the Christian doctrine of creation from nothing, which he adopted as the central and determining feature of his earliest theological reflection. It is present, as we have seen, as the inspiration for the opening prayer of one of his first works, the *Soliloquia*, where it leads Augustine to praise the Creator and to abjectly confess his complete and absolute dependence upon him for any good action. It was central to his theological refutation of the Manichees, in an extended series of works, which punctuate his early years with almost annual regularity, and was thereby confirmed as the central axis of his increasingly systematic theology. This systematic theology of God, the Trinity, of creation, humankind, sin, incarnation, grace, and redemption is already in place at a surprisingly early date. That it did not essentially change, but was endorsed and confirmed by his reflections in the intervening years, before his ordination as priest in 391, is dramatically demonstrated by the work we have most often had occasion to expound and cite in this chapter, the *De uera religione* of 390. This work, as the reader will by now have established, is a systematic statement of Christian faith which confirms, clarifies, and elucidates the faith to which Augustine was converted in 386, and which establishes the outlines of his mature theology in a way which he will not substantially change from this point onwards. Creation from nothing is the point at which he naturally begins, but it is also that which determines the way in which he subsequently expounds his entire understanding of the faith. The terminology in which he expresses this faith in his early works—especially that of form, order, and unity—might seem technical, overly philosophical, and abstract, but we should not be misled: it is employed to express profoundly theological and doctrinal insights, and is absolutely consistent with the more scriptural and ecclesiastical language of his mature thought.

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5 Paul

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Abstract: This chapter argues that Augustine's attempts at interpreting Paul in the mid 390s, culminating in the *Ad Simplicianum*, must not be read as representing a dramatic break with earlier ideas of human autonomy and the ability of the will to freely choose the good without divine help, but as affirming what he had always held: fallen humanity's complete and utter dependence upon God's grace to know, will, and do the good. It demonstrates that his suggestion in the *Propositiones* — that the free choice of faith is to be counted as a merit which is rewarded by grace — is uncharacteristic of either his earlier or later thought. By considering other works written at the same time (such as the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*), it is shown that there is a fundamental continuity in his approach to these difficult questions from the very beginning.

Keywords: Paul, Romans, Ad Simplicianum, initium fidei, Galatians, Jacob, Esau, free will, grace

Paul was not only in the air, he blew through Western Christianity like a whirlwind, catching up everyone within in his path and exposing them to the conflicting currents of his theological reflection. When the dust settled, their theology was never to be the same again. No other person was as widely read and debated, or exercised such a profound and far-reaching influence on the central issues of the faith, during Augustine's lifetime, as Paul. The question, 'How can we be saved?' was discussed and answered, above all, in reference to Paul's epistles and their distinctive language of works and faith, merit and justification, the law and grace. Scholars have talked about the 'generation of St Paul'

¹ Brown 1967: 151.

or the 'century of St Paul'

² Martin 2001: 4-5.

with good cause, for almost every theologian of Augustine's time was seriously engaged in work on 'the least' of the Apostles.

³ 1 Cor. 15: 9 cited by Augustine in *conf.* 7. 21. 27.

'I meditated upon your works and trembled'

Borrowing from Habakkuk

⁴ Hab. 3: 2 cited in *conf.* 7. 21. 27.

Augustine describes his encounter with the Pauline whirlwind in appropriately

dramatic terms: a mixture of fearful trepidation and urgency which was ultimately—and literally—to blow him off his feet, and cast him down beneath the fig tree of the garden in Milan. Although he certainly already knew Paul, and probably knew him well, both from his recent time as a Manichee, and from the Christian liturgical readings to which he must have been exposed from childhood, he describes his first real encounter with him as one which made him understand the apostle in a wholly new and transforming light. It appears in the first work he wrote as a new Christian convert, to his patron, friend, and former fellow Manichee, Romanianus. In *Contra Academicos* Augustine expresses a distinct sense of

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having come full circle, of looking 'back from the end of a journey' and returning to where he had begun, to 'that religion which is implanted in us in our childhood days and bound up in the marrow of our bones'.⁵

⁵*Acad.* 2. 2. 5.

What had precipitated this return was his reading of the Platonists and St Paul.⁶

⁶ See discussion of the former in Chs. 2 and 3.

Having been inflamed by the Platonists,⁷

⁷ Madec 1971: 322-8 on the Platonist identity of these books, as against O'Meara 1972: 321-37, who argues that they could have been Christian works.

he tells us, he relinquished the ambitions which had so far driven him: 'What honour, what human pomp, what desire for empty fame, what consolations or attractions of this mortal life could move me then?' and 'swiftly', he tells us, 'did I begin to return to myself'. Thus he returned to his childhood faith. But there is more to come: 'Therefore' he continues, 'stumbling, hastening, yet with hesitation I seize the Apostle Paul. For truly, I say to myself, those men would never have been able to do such great things, nor would they have lived as they evidently did live, if their writings and doctrines were opposed to this so great a good.'⁸

⁸*Acad.* 2. 2. 5.

(He is presumably referring to the authors of Scripture as 'those men'.)

We find the same sequence of events in the contemporaneous, but rather more concise description of his storm-tossed journey to the harbour of faith in *De beata uita*,⁹

⁹*beata uita* 1. 4, though the Christian works he goes on to read after encountering the Platonists are here rather more vaguely described as 'the authority of those who have given us the tradition of the divine mysteries' rather than Paul specifically.

in the later, more extended account of *conf.* 7. 21. 27, and, in some respects, in the famous conversion scene in the garden at Milan in *conf.* 8. 12. 29. The verbal parallels between these accounts are striking, in particular the urgency with which Augustine seizes and opens up the work of Paul,¹⁰

¹⁰*Acad.* 2. 2. 5, *Itaque titubans, properans, haesitans arripio apostolum Paulum; conf.* 2. 21. 27, *Itaque avidissime arripui venerabilem stilum spiritus tui et prae ceteris Apostolum Paulum; 8. 12. 29, Itaque concitus redii in eum locum ... ibi enim posueram codicem Apostoli ... Arripui, aperui et legi.*

and the clear sense that it was as a result of reading the Platonists, of acknowledging and relinquishing his worldly ambition, and realizing that he has ended his journey where he began—with the Christian faith—that he therefore—*itaque*—reads Paul. It was to Paul that he turned to somehow reassure himself that Scripture, to which he had evidently always vestigially clung as a paradigm of truth, was not at odds with the new and utterly compelling 'take' on that truth that he had discovered in the Platonists and that had had such a dramatic effect on his life.

Paul—like Christianity in general—was clearly not at *odds* with the Platonists, but while confirming the truths Augustine discovered in them, definitely superseded them, and in a very basic sense, represented a corrective to

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them. This is suggested in a dramatic but general way in *Contra Academicos* when, telling us that he 'read through all of it [Paul] with the greatest attention and care' he comments, 'and then (*tunc*) ... whatever had been the little radiance that had surrounded the face of philosophy before then, she now appeared so great that if I could show it ... he¹¹

¹¹ An unidentified adversary of Romanianus.

... would fly, an impassioned and holy lover, amazed and glowing with excitement, to this beauty of philosophy'.¹²

¹² *Acad.* 2. 2. 6.

The same effect is suggested in *conf.* 7. 21. 27, but in a more detailed and specific way, when Augustine records that 'I began reading and found that all the truth I had read in the Platonists was stated here together with the commendation of your grace'. He realizes—and expresses himself in a catenae of Scriptural quotations—that in contrast to the pride of the philosophers there are no grounds for boasting, for relying upon oneself or for thinking that one can attain the goal unaided, but that everything depends upon God's grace; that we must humbly confess our captivity under sin, our weakness and need for healing, our dependence upon Christ, the saviour and redeemer, who is the only Way to attain our goal. That it was the lesson of humility in contrast to the Platonists' presumption; of confession in contrast to their pride; of an incarnate mediator in contrast to their eternal Logos—in short, the lesson of humankind's need for grace—that Paul taught Augustine in 386 is confirmed not only by the retrospective account of the *Confessiones*, however, but as this book aims to demonstrate, by the works written from this decisive moment onwards.¹³

¹³ For bibliography, and discussion of the role of Simplicianus in introducing Augustine to these aspects of the faith, see Hombert 1996: 39 n. 12.

For the time being we should note that Augustine tells us that in 386 he read the whole of Paul 'with the greatest attention and care'. A number of episodes in the *Confessiones* afford us a glimpse of this early reading. When the African civil servant Ponticianus called on Augustine in Milan, he found a book on top of the gaming table, 'he picked it up, opened it, and discovered, much to his astonishment, that it was the apostle Paul'. Augustine then 'indicated to him that those scriptures were the subject of deep study' for him. ...¹⁴

¹⁴ *conf.* 7. 6. 14.

What follows is also interesting: Ponticianus proceeds to tell Augustine about the *Life of Antony*, the conversion and ascetic renunciation of two other fellow Africans when they first encountered this work, and of monastic houses of which Augustine was hitherto unaware in Milan. The next time Antony is mentioned in the *Confessiones* is in the context of Augustine's own conversion in Milan, where he occurs as a model for conversion on hearing a passage of Scripture. Augustine likewise took up the volume of Paul

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which lay nearby, opened it, and read Romans 13. 13.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Ch. 1 on the absence of the conversion scene recounted in *conf.* 8, in the early works.

The parallels between these two passages—the taking up and reading of Paul, the example of Antony, conversion, and ascetic renunciation—are not often noted but they are not unintended and tell us as much about the nature of Augustine's early reading of Paul as the passages we examined earlier on, following his reading of the Neoplatonists: Augustine evidently read Paul not just as a confirmation and corrective of the Platonists but also in the context of ascetic renunciation and conversion. Part of his correction of the Neoplatonists had been a lesson in human sinfulness and humankind's complete dependence upon divine grace; Antony seems to have provided a paradigm of this, and for the next step—Christian conversion and a life of ascetic renunciation. Thus, we will also see in Augustine's early works not just a Pauline inspired theology of human sinfulness and divine grace, but also a Pauline inspired understanding of conversion and the Christian life.¹⁶

¹⁶ He would, of course, also have in mind Paul's own dramatic conversion, e.g. *conf.* 8. 4. 9.

Itaque ...

Why did Augustine 'therefore' (*itaque*) turn to Paul, of all people, when, having read the Platonists, he wished to confirm the agreement and veracity of their teaching in relation to the faith which he had always held, but not always practised? That he turned to the Christian Scriptures should not surprise us. We have demonstrated below¹⁷

¹⁷ Ch. 2.

that Augustine was arguably never not a Christian. He had measured every new stage and encounter in his search for wisdom against its standard, even though its Scriptures had at first proved a profound disappointment to his cultured tastes and had hastened his attachment to the Manichees.¹⁸

¹⁸ *conf.* 3. 5. 9-6. 10.

What more natural then, than to turn to it at what proved to be one of the most decisive turning points in his journey—his discovery of the books of the Platonists? Whilst *De beata uita* simply refers to 'the authority of those who have given us the tradition of the divine mysteries', *Contra Academicos* clearly identifies this authority as Paul—the *whole* of Paul, read with the

greatest care and attention.

Confessiones 7. 21. 27 provides a clue as to why Augustine chose Paul, in particular. Having told the reader that 'with avid intensity I seized the sacred writings of your Spirit and especially the apostle Paul' he adds that 'Where at one time I used to think he contradicted himself and the text of his words

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disagreed with the testimonies of the law and the prophets, the problems simply vanished.' This suggests that Augustine was already well acquainted with Paul, and points perhaps to his time as a Manichee, for whom, as we shall see below, Paul was an important figure. The problematic and ambiguous Paul of the Manichees—for they not only criticized his work as contradictory, and thought that it contained interpolations, but regarded him as one of the four greatest teachers of the faith—was now replaced in his mind by the Catholic Paul. The transition had been prompted by his reading of the Platonists, who, as we have seen, provided Augustine in more ways than one with the material to overcome the Manichees, and also to reconcile himself to Christianity. In this specific instance, while enabling him to overcome Manichaeism intellectually, they had left open the question—indeed begged the question—of how the truth they had demonstrated was to be ultimately attained. Paul provided the answer: grace. And so he continues, in *conf.* 7. 21. 27, to observe 'I began reading [Paul] and found that all the truth I had read in the Platonists was stated here together with the commendation of your grace ...' Augustine's seemingly instinctive turning to Paul to find the answer to how one lives the truth which the Platonists had enabled him to grasp intellectually, suggests he knew where to look; that having read or heard Paul before, either within the Christian liturgy, or as a Manichee, he knew, or at least suspected, that he would find in his works a confirmation of the Platonists' teaching, and a Catholic Christian approach to attaining and living that truth. This might also explain the very turbulent and mixed feelings he expresses in these texts. On the one hand he felt hesitation: could Paul indeed be read in that way? Had he recollected his teaching correctly? Did he dare reread the Apostle of the Manichees and reclaim and reinterpret him in this new way? But there was also urgency: he was desperate to confirm the insights he had just found in the Platonists against his longstanding standard of truth; eager to apply them and let them take effect in his life and mind. Could he really (re)discover a Catholic Paul, rather than the Manichaean Paul he had known for so long?

Another reason for turning to Paul was suggested at the beginning of this chapter: Augustine was caught up in the Pauline whirlwind along with most other theologians of his time. Why they, like Augustine, turned to Paul, is another question, in answer to which we can only hazard guesses. Obviously, as more and more theologians engaged with Pauline thought, a tradition would gradually be established of reading and reflecting upon him—the whirlwind would become a tornado, increasing in intensity and catching up others in its train. Maybe other writers, like Augustine, turned to Paul to reclaim him from heterodox or heretical sects, in reflecting on the same basic question: how can one live the revealed truth of Christianity? This in turn

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would raise questions of human inadequacy, of sin, free will, the status of the Jewish law, the relative merits of faith and works, suffering, grace, and justification.¹⁹

¹⁹ These suggestions are inspired by Mara 1989: 138.

Paul's engagement with these questions no doubt provided a scriptural authority, a point of focus for these authors, and to an extent, paradigmatic answers. It certainly seems that Paul's Christology proved useful in the fourth-century encounter with the Arians.²⁰

²⁰ Fitzgerald 2004 comments, 'Stimulated by the Arian controversy to explain the Christ's relation to the Father, writers of the fourth century turned quite naturally to Paul whose language about Christ and whose vision of Christ could clarify and solidify the meaning and the truth of the Christ's sonship. That is not a way of saying that Paul was previously neglected, nor is it a suggestion that the process was straightforward. Rather it suggests that, by the time of Ambrose, some passages from Paul's letters had become mainstays of the Christian teaching about Christ. It may also describe something of the process of Ambrose of Milan who, commenting on psalm 118, recognized Paul's emphasis on Jesus Christ as capable of establishing Christ's place in the hearts and minds of his listeners and readers in a dynamic and positive way.'

Whatever the reasons, many of the fathers, in East and West, were caught up in a Pauline matrix of thought through commenting on his letters.²¹

²¹ For the West, Souter 1927. For a thematic approach to East and West, Wiles 1967. In the East, Mara 1989: 125-6 mentions Asterius, Acacius of Caesarea, Eusebius of Emesa, Theodore of Heracleia, Eunomius, Didymus, Apollinarius, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Chrysostom, Severus of Gabbala, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret of Cyrus, Gennadius.

In the West Victorinus became the first Latin commentator on Ephesians, Galatians, and Philipians;²²

²²AD 366. It is almost certain Augustine read and used Victorinus. Plumer 2003: 7-33; Mara 1989: 127-9. Cipriani 1998 convincingly demonstrates clear parallels between the two authors from Augustine's earliest works (*ord.* 2. 5. 15-16; *Acad.* 3. 19. 42, and *ord.* 2. 9. 27; *sol.* 1. 1. 3), which can only reasonably be explained by direct knowledge; Cipriani 1994 also demonstrates close parallels with Victorinus' teaching on the Holy Spirit.

the unidentified Ambrosiaster completed a series of commentaries on all thirteen Pauline letters;²³

²³ Plumer 2003: 54 for Augustine's use of him in the 390s; Cipriani 1994: 13-16 for clear parallels between Ambrosiaster and Augustine, especially concerning original sin, the idea of *massa peccati*, the *initium fidei* as an act of man's will, foreknown by God, which forms the basis for his election; Mara 1989: 129-31; Pincherle n.d.: 126-8.

Jerome composed commentaries on Philemon, Galatians, Ephesians, and Titus, thus mediating Origen's interpretation of him to Western readers;²⁴

²⁴ Mara 1989: 131-2; Plumer 2003: 33-41; Cipriani 1994: 12-13. Although Augustine may have read him by 394/5 his influence in this respect was not great.

Pelagius' earliest work was a series of Expositions of all the Pauline epistles.²⁵

²⁵ AD 395-409. Mara 1989: 134-6. He uses Augustine, rather than vice versa.

Exegesis of Paul also figured in work other than commentaries, such as the correspondence between Augustine and Jerome; Paulinus and Pelagius, Simplicianus and Augustine; Paulinus and Jerome; Rufinus' translation of Origen's commentary on Romans;²⁶

²⁶ Bammel 1992 suggests that Augustine may have read and reacted to this translation by c. 411.

many

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sermons, especially, for Augustine, those of Ambrose;²⁷

²⁷ Pincherle 1974; Martin 2001: 14-16 for Augustine's pre-conversion encounter with Paul through Ambrose.

the Donatist Tyconius' *Liber regularum* 3, *de promissis et lege* which Augustine makes very effective use of in his own early interpretation of Paul.²⁸

²⁸ His use of Tyconius before 396 is demonstrated by Pincherle n.d.: 85-113. Babcock 1982: 1213 suggests that 'Augustine may not ... have been the first to find in Paul's theology of sin and grace the antidote to an elitist version of Christianity [i.e. that no one can merit grace on the basis of observing the law]. He may, in this respect, have been preceded by the Donatist theologian Tyconius.' Tyconius also expresses the idea of *initium fidei*, which we will see Augustine briefly held in his Pauline commentaries of the 390s.

Which Paul?

The attempt to establish what Augustine as a Manichee knew of Paul must proceed indirectly, by inference from Manichaean texts themselves, and from what he writes against them. It was perhaps among the Manichees that the Pauline whirlwind gathered momentum; they regarded him with immense veneration,²⁹

²⁹ As Augustine himself observes in *Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 2. 3 'the Manichees themselves read the Apostle Paul and praise and honour him'.

in the same league as Jesus, the great Manichaean exegete Adimantus, and Mani himself. Indeed, Mani's call, mission, and apostolate were clearly modelled upon those of Paul,³⁰

³⁰ Ries 1989: 7-27.

along with certain central aspects of his teaching and terminology, such as the rejection of legalism, universalism, the Mosaic law, dualism, the Holy Spirit, Christ, and the Church,³¹

³¹ See *ibid.* 2-27; Decret 1989. Mara 1989: 144 notes that recent study of the *Codex Manichaeus Coloniensis* has confirmed the Manichees' extensive use of Paul. She

refers to Betz 1986.

to such an extent that, at least in Africa, Manichaeism has been dubbed as 'almost a Paulinist heresy'.³²

³² Frend 1953: 21 (referred to by Decret 1989: 82 n. 202).

As Ries comments, 'Paul was subjected to a dualist interpretation which allowed the Manichaean Church to claim to be the true Church of Jesus Christ, founded on the Paraclete which had been foretold by Jesus himself, but placed in the tradition of the Pauline churches'.³³

³³ Ries 1989: 27.

The Manichees might therefore well be described, as Peter Brown has done, as 'the most radical and self confident of Paul's expositors'.³⁴

³⁴ Brown 1967: 151.

The centrality of Paul to the Manichees is confirmed by Augustine's own works against them, in particular his general refutation of them in *De moribus*, and his specific attacks on some of their contemporary

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representatives in Africa, such as Faustus, Fortunatus, and Felix.³⁵

³⁵ Decret 1970: 71-2 provides a list of references; Bammel 1995: 16. 1-25 also considers the *c. Adim.* in this context; Mara 1992.

Paul could not fail to represent a rather ambiguous figure for Catholic Christians such as Augustine, who had formerly been Manichees themselves. He certainly could not be ignored or passed over as too tainted by heretical use, for he was just as central to the identity and thought of Catholic Christianity as to their former co-religionists. What, then, were they to make of the Manichaean Paul? How could he be rescued from them and his orthodoxy restored? Augustine's Cassiciacum works seem to use him rather tentatively,³⁶

³⁶ e.g. 1 Cor. 15: 54; Gal. 4: 9 in *sol.* 1. 1. 3; a reading of Phil. 2: 5-11 seems to lie behind Augustine's references to the incarnation in *Acad.* 3. 19. 42; *ord.* 2. 9. 27; 1 Cor. 13: 13 in *b. uita* 4. 35; *ord.* 2. 8. 25; *sol.* 1. 13; 1. 1. 5; 1. 13. 23; 6. 12-7. 14; Rom. 8: 24 in *Sol.* 1. 7. 14; 1 Cor. 1: 24 in *b. uita* 34; *Acad.* 2. 1. 1; 2. 1. 2; Col. 2: 8 in *Acad.* 3. 19. 42; *ord.* 1. 32. See Bammel 1993: 10-25 for further references and comment. Doignon 1989: 74 observes that apart from a single quotation from Genesis and one from the Psalms, all the scriptural citations in the early works are from Paul and John, and concern Christ. This might be an overgeneralization, but it contains a large amount of truth and is an interesting confirmation of Augustine's preoccupation with the central doctrine of Christianity, which set it apart from the Platonists and diverged radically from Manichaean Christology.

though this might simply be because their genre, audience, subject, and style do not lend themselves to direct scriptural quotation (although where Scripture *is* cited, it is most often Paul). Whatever the reason, Paul really begins to figure prominently only in the post-Cassiciacum works directed specifically against the Manichees, such as the *De moribus* (388) and the *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* (389). A spate of Pauline quotations and arguments suddenly begins to flow in these works, and it is one which will continue to gather force throughout the 390s, especially in *Contra Fortunatum*, the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, and the works on Galatians and

Romans, until it breaks the banks in the *Ad Simplicianum*. This should not lead us to conclude that Augustine was simply interested in Paul in the context of anti-Manichaean polemic, however. It is certainly the case that he appears most often in an anti-Manichaean context, and this is no surprise given Augustine's previous encounter with him and the pressing need he evidently felt to refute the Manichees—to use their foremost authority against them, and to reclaim Paul for Catholic Christianity. But Augustine's motivation is more than polemical in these works; it is above all pastoral and apologetic.³⁷

³⁷ For wise comments on the wide range and diversity of Augustine's encounters with Paul, in different places, at different times, with different concerns, questions, readers, and audiences, and the impossibility of generalizing about an Augustinian interpretation of the Apostle see Martin 2001: 16-22. The aspects of his engagement with Paul we have mentioned in this paragraph are an attempt to comprehend the breadth of this range without denying that they appeared at different times and places, depending on Augustine's particular concerns and audiences.

He turns again and again to

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refute the Manichees because their interpretation of Paul undermines the saving doctrine of the Catholic Church which he, his fellow monks, and later his congregation, accepted as the heart of their faith and life. Dualism and determinism were not just philosophical difficulties, but the foundational structure of the Manichaean system, and those aspects of it which threatened to undermine Catholic belief in the One Creator God, the God of the Old and New Testament, whom human beings must humbly acknowledge as the source of their being and of their every good action. This is precisely what Paul, the Catholic Paul, taught, and what Augustine had first discovered when he turned to reread him, with a mixture of trepidation and urgency, after his encounter with the Platonists.

This is clearly demonstrated in his first anti-Manichaean work, written in the year following his baptism, the *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*.³⁸

³⁸ Though we should not forget, as we have seen in the earlier chapters of this book, that Augustine frequently alludes to Paul even before explicitly anti-Manichaean works, in the Cassiciacum dialogues. See Cooper 1996.

It is at once a thorough refutation of Manichaean beliefs, doctrines, and practices, and also a profound exposition of Christian faith, theology, and life. In it, the Manichaean Paul is everywhere implied by Augustine's explicit use of the Catholic Paul as the supreme authority. He is cited at every turn in the argument as definitive proof of Augustine's arguments: 'what does Paul say on this?' 'as Paul says' 'hence Paul adds' 'this is affirmed not by me but by Paul' 'let the same Paul tell us' 'again, as Paul says' 'those are Paul words' 'the truth of the apostle's saying' 'as the apostle says' 'the apostle has added the words' 'the apostle denounces' 'hear also what Paul says' 'which the apostle calls' 'why do you reproach us, Paul allows it' 'in the words of the apostle' 'the apostle says that'...³⁹

³⁹ *mor.* 1. 11. 18; 1. 13. 22-3; 1. 16. 27-9; 1. 19. 35-8; 1. 21. 38; 1. 26. 50; 1. 28. 56; 1. 35. 77-8; 1. 35. 80.

It is as if he is saying to the Manichees: 'you are mistaken, just look at what

your supreme authority really says: he is a Catholic and teaches Catholic faith, doctrine and practice'. What then is it that the apostle teaches? In *De moribus* it is that God is man's ultimate good who is to be sought through love (Rom. 8: 28, 35),⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid. 1. 8. 13.

a love from which nothing can separate us (Rom. 8: 38-9),⁴¹

⁴¹ Ibid. 1. 11. 18.

which is inspired by Christ, the virtue and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1: 23-4)⁴²

⁴² Ibid. 1. 13. 22; 16. 28.

and the Holy Spirit, by whom God has shed abroad his love in our hearts (Rom. 5: 5),⁴³

⁴³ Ibid. 1. 13. 23; 16. 29.

who saves us from being subjected to vanity and conforms us to the image of the Son of

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God (Rom. 8: 29).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *mor.* 1. 13. 23; 16. 29.

Thus, Paul identifies the Christian God as Trinity (Rom. 11: 36).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid. 1. 14. 24; 16. 29.

As well as demonstrating the unity and undivided operation of the Trinity against the Manichees' dualism, Augustine also emphasizes the harmony of the Old and New Testaments, most especially in their teaching on love (Rom. 8: 36).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid. 1. 9. 14. He is always careful to cite an Old Testament passage alongside one from the New Testament when arguing a particular point, in order to demonstrate that it is the teaching of both Testaments.

He is also careful to explain the origin of man's sinfulness, in relation to the Fall, in the first book of *De moribus* (1 Cor. 15. 22)⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Ibid. 1. 19. 35.

and in the second, as we have seen in the last chapter, in relation to man's will and a privative theory of evil based on creation from nothing. Similarly Augustine makes clear that the old and the new man; the earthly and heavenly man to whom Paul refers, and whom the Manichees no doubt interpreted dualistically, refer to humanity's present sinful state, in Adam, and its future redeemed state, in Christ (Col. 3: 9-10; 1 Cor. 15: 47-9; 2 Cor. 4: 16).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid. 1. 19. 36.

In all of this, Augustine's teaching is pre-eminently practical and pastoral: his aim is to correct the Manichees' way of life, which is fundamentally misguided because based upon their mistaken dualism and determinism, by setting before them (and his fellow Christians) a Christian ethic, based upon belief in God the Trinity, the Creator of all things, on mankind's fallenness,

and the grace of Christ and the Holy Spirit, which corrects it. It is, of course, to Paul that he turns to expound this ethic: The 'world', or temporal, sensible things should be left behind (2 Cor. 2: 18; Gal. 1: 10; Col. 2: 8; Rom. 12:

2)⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid. 1. 20. 37-21. 39.

and the virtues of temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence pursued (Rom. 5: 3-4; 1. 25; 1 Cor. 5: 6).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ibid. 1. 23. 42-24. 45.

This is an ethic founded, above all, upon love of God and neighbour (Rom. 13: 10; 8: 28).⁵¹

⁵¹ Ibid. 1. 26. 50.

Only love fulfils the law, not fear of punishment; our efforts are in vain when, as Augustine puts it, 'lust lays waste the mind ... instead of being overborne by love of virtue'.⁵²

⁵² Ibid. 1. 30. 64. He cites 1 Cor. 15: 56.

It is love, too, which determines how we should live both our own Christian lives and in relation to our Christian brethren. Augustine has a great deal to say in this context about Christian asceticism in contrast to that of the Manichees. We have seen how important the example of Christian asceticism, and especially that of Antony, was in his conversion and how this was linked with his reading of Paul. In the *De moribus* it is clear that it was Paul to whom he turned to interpret the forms of Christian ascetic and communal life he

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had encountered since his conversion, in Milan and Rome,⁵³

⁵³ Ibid. 1. 33. 70 where Augustine describes them. Ponticianus had brought the Milan houses to his attention; Augustine would have encountered the Roman ones during his enforced stay there in 388.

and which had, as this work makes clear, made an enormous impression on him. What he has to say in *De moribus* about the practice and inspiration of Christian asceticism is particularly striking for its extraordinarily close parallels with the *Rule* he was to write for his own monastic community in Hippo, and allows us a glimpse of the Augustine whose Christianity and Christian life was always not only fundamentally ascetic but also distinctively and profoundly 'monastic'. That it is also a Pauline inspired monasticism is clearly evident in this text, where everything he has to say is either expressed in Pauline terminology, supported by an allusion to Paul, or set forth in extended quotations from his works. Augustine evidently found precisely what he wanted to say concerning Christian life, and especially Christian communal life, in Paul's letters of advice to Christian communities which were equally exercised about how to live in harmony with each other, in mutual love and respect, seeking the best for each member and for the Church as a whole. He shares Paul's concern that the Christian life is not primarily to do with feats of asceticism, or with the minutiae of ascetic rules such as eating certain foods and not others, but with love, and that it is love which should determine all our actions in relation to our brothers. We should act so that brotherly love is maintained, so that our behaviour does not offend, or put someone off the faith, or place stumbling blocks in the way of those who are perhaps weaker or less experienced than ourselves (1 Cor. 6: 13; 8: 8; 6: 12; Rom. 14: 2-21—indeed Paul proves so appropriate that Augustine quotes this section of Romans at length and then simply tells his reader to 'Read the rest, it is too long to quote it all!').⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ibid. 1. 33. 70-2.

Paul's equally wise words on marriage, accepting it and seeing what is positive in it, while placing it second to the celibate life, are also cited by Augustine against the Manichees' dualistic rejection of it (1 Cor. 6: 11-20; 7: 1-7; 14).

The *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, written a year after *De moribus*, in 389, also demonstrates Augustine's extensive knowledge of Paul at this time, most especially Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians. He frequently cites from the one whom he simply calls 'the apostle', in his attempt to interpret Genesis in a sense which counters the Manichees' criticisms of this text in the light of their thoroughgoing literal, fundamentalist exegesis (and presumably with Mani's use of this title for himself in mind). Thus he resorts to spiritual, allegorical exegesis, and follows Paul's example in interpreting the law spiritually (2 Cor. 3: 3; Rom. 7: 14),⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 12. 17; 2. 19. 29.

and Adam and Eve in relation to Christ and the Church, the Head and Body, and the mystery of marriage (1 Cor. 11: 3; 2 Cor. 11: 2-3;

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Eph. 5: 31-2; Col. 1: 18; 1 Cor. 11: 7-12).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 11. 15-16; 13. 19; 24. 37; 24. 40.

He also expounds a number of Pauline Christological texts against the Manichees (1 Cor. 15: 44-6; Eph. 2: 7; Col. 1: 18; Rom. 1: 3).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 2. 8. 10; 24. 37.

These, then, are the themes which predominate in Augustine's first use of Paul and his first explicitly anti-Manichaean works. Polemical, systematic, and pastoral theology and exegesis are inevitably intertwined, and are based upon the supreme authority of the Christian faith: the Scriptures, and in this case, Paul.

We must also bear in mind that Manichaeism was not the only context in which Augustine had encountered Paul before his conversion. The sermons he had heard during the liturgies of his youth and in particular, those of Ambrose in Milan in the mid-380s, no doubt prompted his reflection upon him, as Augustine's comments in *Confessiones* suggests: 'And I was delighted to hear Ambrose in his sermons to the people saying, as if he were most carefully enunciating a principle of exegesis: "The letter kills, the spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3: 6)'.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *conf.* 6. 4. 6—see Martin 2001: 14.

We have also noted above those Christian commentators who may have had a direct influence on Augustine's early reading and interpretation of Paul through their own involvement in Pauline exegesis. The one suggestion we should resist is the popularly reiterated one that Augustine first read Paul as a Platonist, as a proponent of spiritual ascent, renewal, and inner life, and that he only gradually came to terms with him as a Christian theologian of sin, grace, and redemption by the incarnate Christ.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Brown 1967: 151, 'Previously, he had interpreted Paul as a Platonist: he had seen him as the exponent of a spiritual ascent, of the renewal of the "inner" man, the decay of the "outer" ... Now [394], he will see in Paul nothing but a single, unresolved tension between "flesh" and "spirit" ' Fredriksen 1986: 24, 'The Augustine who stands embroiled in the anti-Manichaean campaigns of the North African Church in the year 400 ... sees the events that reintroduced him to Catholicism quite differently from the way he saw them in 386. He also sees a different Paul—not the Christian philosopher, nor the staunch defender of free will, but the sinner inexplicably redeemed from his former life by the unmerited gift of God's grace.'

The context of his first recorded reading of Paul might indeed follow immediately on the heels of his reading of the Platonists, and he does indeed tell us that he looked to him to confirm the truth he had found in the Platonists, but he also tells us that what he found in Paul went well beyond, and radically revised what he had found in the philosophers: Paul contained all the truth he had found in them, but in praise of God's grace.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *conf.* 7. 21. 27.

The distinctively Christian, polemical, pastoral, and ascetic interpretation of Paul we have identified as characteristic of Augustine's earliest work bears

this out. Paul was never merely a Platonist for Augustine (just as we have seen Augustine

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was never simply a Platonist): he represented a Christian assimilation of the truth they contained, and allowed Augustine, from the very beginning, to read them as a Christian. That this was a Christianity defined from 386 by humble acceptance of human beings' created dependence upon their Creator, their sinfulness and incapacity without God's grace, demonstrated especially in the incarnation and the work of the Trinity, and the need for faith, hope, and especially love, we have attempted to prove in the preceding chapter, have already seen in Augustine's earliest use of Paul, and will continue to demonstrate in the rest of this book.

The 390s: Augustine the Priest (391-396)

We are already very familiar with the much-vaunted theory of a revolution in Augustine's thought in the mid-390s, precipitated by his close reading of Paul during this period, culminating in his response *Ad Simplicianum* in 396. Before we turn to examine Augustine's works in the 390s, and to consider again the value of these theories in the light of the works themselves, we should note that something did indeed change in the 390s which, to an extent, did revolutionize Augustine's life and thought: this was his ordination as priest in 391 and his consecration as bishop in 396. The communal, 'monastic' life he had enjoyed in Cassiciacum and Thagaste was not left behind but was combined with the demanding role of priest and then bishop in one of Africa's major sees. The pastoral, administrative, charitable duties this involved cannot be overestimated, nor could it fail to affect the context, audience, genre, aims, and concerns of his theological reflection and writing. He was now a prominent public figure, an upholder of law and order, preacher, teacher, authority, and example, as well as a monk and theologian. Moreover, he was no ordinary priest, but very much stood in for the ageing bishop of Hippo, Valerius, as a (uncanonical) co-adjutor bishop, who was rather exceptionally expected not only to preach but to address the assembled bishops of Africa on the Catholic faith (*De fide et symbolo*, 393). No wonder his works changed during this period. His obligation to preach, most probably on a daily basis, meant that he not only had to become a master of the sermonic art, but also became much better acquainted with the Scriptures themselves. He no longer had the leisure to pursue his projected series of works on the liberal arts; he was forced effectively to abandon what had become an obsessive attack on the Manichees; instead he had new questions, a new audience, new opponents. The schismatic Donatists had torn the African Catholic Church apart and literally divided it into two roughly

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equal parts. They worshipped within earshot of Augustine's basilica in Hippo

and posed an immediate and pressing threat to the unity and well-being of the Church in Africa. They could not be ignored. Augustine himself could not afford to ignore the scriptural works which made up the liturgical calendar and on which he was expected to preach. That he should gradually turn from anti-Manichaean works (a few remain at the beginning of this period), or wonderfully reflective works on such subjects as the soul, language, the happy life, order, knowledge, scepticism, etc., to anti-Donatist treatises and scriptural commentaries, should not, then, surprise us. The first rumblings of the long and embittered Donatist controversy during this period simply consists of a popular song (the *Psalmus contra partem Donati*, 394), but he began his massive work on the whole of the Psalter during this period (the first thirty-two of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* date from this time), left incomplete a second attempt at Genesis (*De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*), wrote a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount (*De sermone Domini in monte*, 394), collected together eighty-four points which arose from discussion with his brothers in Carthage on Paul's Epistle to the Romans (*Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula ad Romanos*, 394), began a major commentary on Romans, which unfortunately came unstuck very near the beginning over the thorny question of sin against the Holy Spirit, and was never completed (*Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*, 394-5), and composed a commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (*Expositio epistulae ad Galatas*, 394-5), as well as responding to Simplicianus' queries on Scripture (*Ad Simplicianum*, 396). Apart then from a few works against the Manichees, a song, and a short work on the subject of lying (*De mendacio*, 394-5) Augustine was to spend his years as a priest immersed in Scripture, and in particular the Psalms and St Paul.

In examining this period—between his ordination as priest and his consecration as bishop—which has been identified by scholars as perhaps the most decisive and transformative period of his long life—we should not forget that the themes and preoccupations which emerge during these years are in large part determined by the texts he was reading. It is otherwise misleading to identify the presence of ideas such as the Fall, original sin, the law and works, faith and grace, divine election and predestination, as *new* features of his thought, which he suddenly begins to consider and take seriously because he happens to be expounding Paul (or indeed the Psalms). It is part of the aim of this book to demonstrate that these ideas are not entirely absent from, or indeed alien to, Augustine's earlier thought, and that what he has to say about them in the 390s in relation to Paul is based upon his earlier reflection and beliefs, and witnesses to a profound continuity and progressive evolution in his thought, rather than a startlingly new and revolutionary transformation.

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In the preceding chapters we have already attempted to do this in a general way in relation to Augustine's early philosophical and theological reflection; in subsequent chapters we will tackle central ideas, such as the Fall and original sin, the will, and grace. But first, in this chapter, we must examine what precisely he does or does not say, and what does or does not happen, in the mid-390s.

The Mid-390s: Romans

A Manichaean Legacy

Even though in 391 the newly ordained Augustine probably felt that this was the moment to relinquish his preoccupation with the Manichees—one which was beginning to verge on obsession after a continuous stream of works directed against them over the past four years—it seems to have taken another year or so before he finally felt he could concentrate on other things. In fact, they were not to be put behind him so easily. Paul was probably the last bit of Scripture to turn to if one wanted to actually leave the Manichees behind—the Manichaean Paul remained to haunt Augustine in his new encounter with the Apostle's letters to the Romans and the Galatians (*Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula ad Romanos* (394); *Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio* (394-5); *Expositio Epistulae ad Galatas* (394-5)) and, try as he might, he could not read him without being prompted to correct their errors. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, it was precisely to Paul that he had turned to refute them from the very beginning. Their dualism (which rejected the God of the Old Testament and the law, as an alien, evil Creator God) and their determinism (which allowed no room for human free will and moral responsibility) both lurked menacingly behind Paul's preoccupations with these very concerns in Romans and Galatians. In attempting to uphold the goodness of the law, and the freedom of man's will under grace in his reflections on these letters in the mid-390s, Augustine was simultaneously expounding Paul as a Catholic and refuting the Manichees.

Against the Manichees' dualism, he therefore emphasizes in his own comments on Romans and Galatians, Paul's teaching that the law had a positive role: inveterate transgression of it convinced human beings of their groundless pride in thinking they could fulfil it by themselves and thereby merit reward; it demonstrated their slavery, impotence, and inability to observe it without the help of grace; it showed that fear of the consequences of disobedience was insufficient motivation to obey it; that they were enslaved to

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sin, and that what was needed to fulfil the law was humility, faith, and love of God, which are a gift of grace.⁶¹

⁶¹*ex. Gal. 24. 14; ex. prop. Rm. 3; 5; 30; 48; 52; Simpl. 1. 1. 6-7.*

Augustine's desire to preserve human freedom, moral autonomy, and responsibility against Manichaean determinism also has far-reaching effects in these commentaries; it inevitably leads him into a somewhat strained exegesis of texts where it is clear that there is very little to suggest them. This was evidently a personal dilemma: one senses that Augustine's sympathies lie with Paul and his belief that fulfilment of the law and any good action comes from the gift of grace to human beings, working in humility, faith, and love, rather than from any independent, self-empowered, or willed action, but that he cannot afford to admit this in the face of Manichaean determinism. He obviously felt constrained to hold on to some element of freedom if their determinism was to be overcome, and some element of merit based on free choice, if God's justice was to be preserved. We therefore find him arguing that free will is present, in the rather limited sense that human beings can indeed sin under the law, but that it is effective to do the good only as a gift of grace, which is given to those who have responded to God's call in faith.

In order to argue this, and in order to make sense of Paul's teaching, in a number of works written throughout this period Augustine introduces a fourfold division which sums up both the movement of salvation history and the journey of each individual Christian life: *ante legem* (before the law) when human beings are simply led by their appetites and are unconscious of any tension or conflict within themselves; *sub lege* (under the law) when they are conscious of sin and transgression but powerless to do anything about it; *sub gratia* (under grace) when, although they still suffer temptation and division they are able to overcome it; *in pace* (in peace) when there will be no more conflict and the body will be perfectly subject to the soul at the resurrection.⁶²

⁶²*en. Ps. 6. 2; ex. prop. Rm. 13-18; ex. Gal. 46; diu. qu. 83 61. 7; 66. 3-7.* For this original schema see Luneau 1964: 357-83; Fredriksen 1988: 90-1; Mara 1989: 147-8. For Augustine's possible sources see Martin 2001: 62 n. 46.

Thus, Augustine expounds Paul's theology of law and grace: the law makes human beings conscious of sin but, rather than enabling them to overcome it, merely increases it: 'Under the law we struggle but are overcome. We admit that we do evil and by that admission, that we really do not want to do it, but because we still lack grace we are overwhelmed ... through the law comes sin, but not the removal of sin, which comes through grace alone.'⁶³

⁶³*ex. prop. Rm. 3; 5.*

Under the law, and subject to original sin, the will is only 'free' to sin.⁶⁴

⁶⁴*Simpl.* 1. 1. 11.

It is in terms of the four stages that Augustine interprets the movement of thought in Rom. 7

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and safeguards human free will against the Manichees. On Paul's tortured cry, 'For I do not want to do what I do; but what I hate, this I do' (7: 15-16), he comments 'But one must take care lest he think that these words deny our free will, for it is not so. The man described here is under the Law, prior to grace ... sin overcomes him when by his own strength he attempts to live righteously without the aid of God's liberating grace.'⁶⁵

⁶⁵*ex. prop. Rm.* 44.

Similarly, in relation to Paul's description of the divided will in Rom. 7: 19: 'For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do' he comments, 'He is still speaking in the person of a man under the law and not yet under grace, who is brought to do wrong by some dominant desire, and by some deceptive sweetness associated with prohibited sin,'⁶⁶

⁶⁶*Simpl.* 1. 1. 9.

and on 7: 21: 'I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members,' Augustine observes 'one understands that the man described here is not yet under grace ... condemnation lies in the fact that we submit to and serve depraved desires'. The desperate cry of the one captive to sin in 7: 24, 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' is therefore not the cry of Paul the convert, but the cry of someone still 'under the law'. 'Under grace' however, things are very different: 'if such desires abide constantly and yet we do not obey them, then we are not captured and we are now under grace. What he [Paul] immediately goes on to say pertains to this stage. "Therefore I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I obey the law of sin" (7: 25).'

⁶⁷*ex. prop. Rm.* 45-6; cf. *diu. qu.* 83 66. 5; *ex. Gal.* 5. 17-18; *Simpl.* 1. 1. 1; 1. 1. 4-14.

Although the effects of original sin therefore still remain in the tensions, temptations, and divisions of concupiscence, 'under grace' human beings do not give in to them, but rather are able to overcome them: 'for even if desires of the flesh exist in this stage of life on account of the body's mortality, still they do not force the mind to consent to sin'⁶⁸

⁶⁸*ex. prop. Rm.* 46. 6.

... we do not obey the desires of sin ... even though we cannot destroy the desires themselves⁶⁹

⁶⁹*ex. prop. Rm.* 47. 5.

... we are no longer overcome by the pleasures of evil habit when it strives to draw us into sin. But, nonetheless, we still suffer from its attempted seductions, although we are not betrayed to it.'⁷⁰

⁷⁰*diu. qu.* 83 66. 3. Augustine is insistent on this point and makes it numerous times

in relation to Rom. 7 e.g. *ex. prop. Rm.* 3; 10; 35-6; 45-6; 53; *diu. qu.* 83 66. 2-3; 6-7; 67. 6; 70; *ep. Rm. inch.* 10; *ex. Gal.* 46. 1.

But is it all so clear-cut and straightforward? Can the Pauline text be so conveniently apportioned to appropriate stages? Can all the tensions, ambiguities, and divisions of original sin be comprehended by grace, such that human beings are never again overcome? Are they now no more of a problem

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to the person 'under grace' than a niggling reminder of the Fall? Does this theory really resonate with the life of the Christian convert? We know, of course, that the answer is no, not least because, as soon as Augustine begins to write on the basis of practice, rather than theory, the schema of four ages, and its neat, problem-solving distinctions, crumble. The glorious and compelling optimism and confidence which pervades the theoretical rehearsal of the schema is wholly absent elsewhere. Nowhere else, other than in these works on Paul in the 390s, does Augustine actually teach that we are unfailingly victorious over concupiscence, even under grace,⁷¹

⁷¹ Though he was only to retract and revise his interpretation of Rom. 7 as referring to human beings 'under the law' a full twenty years later, in the context of the Pelagian controversy: *retr.* 1. 22; 23; 25; 2. 1; *nat. et gr.* 50. 58 (415). In *nupt. et conc.* 1. 27. 30-1; 36 (419) he refers the 'I' of Rom. 7 to Paul himself. Cf. *c. ep. Pel.* 1. 8. 13-12. 25.

indeed, in one significant text on Rom. 7 from this period, which clearly gives the lie to his schematizing, Augustine identifies the anguished cry of the person under captivity to sin ('Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?') as arising within both the body and soul of the person 'under grace', awaiting the final deliverance of the resurrection.⁷²

⁷² *diu. qu.* 83 67. 6. In pointing this out, Martin 2001: 68 suggests that 'his scripturally based discourse is running ahead of his formal exegesis'. I think it is rather more than this.

What status should we attribute, then, to these first attempts to get to grips with the equally troublesome tensions, divisions, ambiguities, and complexities of Pauline theology? In fact, if we look closer, there are irresolvable tensions in Augustine's works on Romans and Galatians themselves, which betray the fact that the formal theory or system they rehearse will not, ultimately, and in practice, be able to bear the burden they are built to support: Paul's thought is not cut and dried; Christian life under grace is not an onward and upward, unfaltering triumph over sin. A decisive refutation of Manichaean determinism and a convincing defence of God's justice necessitated an unhesitating emphasis on human free will under grace, even if what he read in Paul suggested otherwise. But the faultlines begin to appear when Augustine turns his attention away from the Manichees to the perhaps more immediate and pressing question of how to live a Christian life, and most especially, of quite how the sinner moves from being 'under the law' to being 'under grace'.

A Pastoral Reading

As we have already observed, Augustine's reflections on Paul in the 390s took place in the context of his new priestly ministry. Although the Manichees, as

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we have just seen, could still not be ignored, they were no longer the main focus of attention; this had inevitably shifted to more pastoral concerns, to preaching and teaching, and the exegesis of Scripture. Plumer has recently suggested in relation to Augustine's *Expositio Galatas* that,

in interpreting Galatians Augustine has in mind his own monastic community and the ways in which Paul's directions for Christian living can be implemented within it. Paul is not only a source of teaching but also a model of spiritual leadership and authority in the Church ... and Augustine is eager to learn from him how to exercise such leadership and authority himself ... Paul's letters are deeply pastoral, and the pastoral problems with which Paul deals are often of the same kind as those faced by Augustine.⁷³

⁷³ Plumer 2003: 80; 86 establishes some very interesting parallels between this commentary and Augustine's *Regula* in respect of the spiritual life, and especially the issues of fraternal correction and spiritual leadership (71-88). He also notes the commentary's 'intense concentration on the Christ like virtues of humility and love as practised especially in the context of Christian correction' (87). See Ring 1987 on the pastoral intention of *Simpl.*

When read in this light the Pauline works take on a different and rather more subtle colouring, quite different from the stark and inflexible categories of polemic. Augustine's preoccupations during this time obviously resonated deeply with the central concerns of Paul's letters to the Galatians and Romans, and in these epistles Augustine seems to have discovered the theological concepts and vocabulary to articulate and address them: sin and grace had long been the central axes around which his thought had revolved; now he discovered that they were also Paul's, and his thought begins to move and evolve, in relation to his. What results are reflections on the Christian life, theological paradigms, which express his own, his brothers', and his congregation's fallenness, their slavery to sin, their complete and utter dependence upon grace for any good work, the groundlessness of any pride or boasting, and the absolute necessity of faith, hope, and love, which are themselves gifts of grace. These are the lessons he sought to instil: there was no need for fear or despair and no grounds for self-reliance; what was needed was a humble and grateful acknowledgement of God's goodness and grace. Of course, this is really no different from the anti-Manichaean theology, based on a doctrine of creation from nothing, which we examined in the last chapter, and which we saw to be characteristic of Augustine's thought from the very beginning. While Paul provided Augustine with a different language—original sin, works, merit, justification, predestination—different texts, and the example of a consummate theologian at work, the basic thoughts and beliefs remain the same.

As we saw in the last chapter, and as we will see more clearly in the next, the idea of humanity's innate sinfulness is one that is that basic to Augustine's

thought. It appears as an explicit doctrine of original sin in the works we are considering because this is the way Paul described it: we are all 'born fleshly' because we all suffer the 'mortality of the flesh, which we bear from the first sin of the first man'.⁷⁴

⁷⁴*ex. prop. Rm. 10; cf. Simpl. 1. 1. 4.*

We also suffer the concupiscence or lust of the flesh consequent upon the first sin, which remains, even in the saint and martyr, until the life to come.⁷⁵

⁷⁵*ep. Rm. inch. 10; ex. prop. Rm. 13-18.*

Thus, in *Ad Simplicianum* Augustine uncompromisingly states,

If it is asked how he knows that in his flesh dwelleth no good thing, which means that sin dwells there, how but from his inherited mortality and his addiction to pleasure? The former is the penalty of original sin, the latter of repeated sinning ... 'To will is present with me, but to do that which is good I find not' (Rom. 7: 18) ... actual willing is certainly within our power; that it is not in our power to do that which is good is part of the deserts of original sin.⁷⁶

⁷⁶*Simpl. 1. 1. 10-11.*

Following Adam, the whole of humankind is a 'massa peccati',⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Among the Pauline texts which suggested this were Rom. 9: 21; 1 Cor. 15: 22. *diu. qu. 83* 68. 4; *ex. prop. Rm. 62; ex. Gal. 42; Simpl. 1. 2. 16.* See the next chapter for further discussion of Augustine's sources and his use of this idea.

subject to original sin, unable to do the good or to claim any merit for itself. Augustine emphasizes this latter point as repeatedly as Paul, in order to make clear that no one has any cause for pride or boasting but that everything is dependent upon God's mercy and grace. He evidently regards it as the main point of Paul's Epistle to the Romans: 'The letter of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, insofar as one can understand its literal content, poses a question like this: whether the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ came to the Jews alone because of their merits through the works of the Law, or whether the justification of faith which is in Christ Jesus came to all nations, without any preceding merits for works. In this last instance, people would believe not because they were just but, justified through belief, they would then begin to live justly. This, then, is what the Apostle intends to teach: that the grace of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ came to all men. He thereby shows why one calls this "grace", for it was given freely, and not as the repayment of a debt of righteousness.'⁷⁸

⁷⁸*ep. Rm. inch. 1; cf. ex. Gal. 15. 15-17; 21. 4; 24. 11; 42; diu. qu. 83* 76.

Thus, even when Abraham is said to be justified by faith, Augustine emphasizes that his faith was not a meritorious work but a gift of God, that he might thenceforth be righteous and do good works.⁷⁹

⁷⁹*ex. prop. Rm. 20-1.*

Similarly the love with which we love God is itself a gift of God, through the Holy Spirit: 'Paul shows us that all those things which we might attribute to

ourselves ought to be attributed to God, who deigned to give us the Holy Spirit through grace.'

⁸⁰ Ibid. 26.

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Commenting upon Galatians, Augustine emphasized that it is love, God's gift of love, which above all enables us to fulfil the law. Echoing the *da quod iubes et iube quod uis*, he comments 'who can love his neighbour ... as himself, if he does not love God, by whose command and gift he is able to fulfil the love of neighbour?'⁸¹

⁸¹ *ex. Gal. 45. 4.*

Whereas before, the law was obeyed through fear of punishment, now, through grace, it is obeyed in love;⁸²

⁸² *Ibid. 42; 44. 4.*

slaves have become free men.⁸³

⁸³ *ex. prop. Rm. 52.*

Paul's pastoral intention, as well as Augustine's, is manifestly clear: legalism, fear, slavery, pride, and boasting have given way to grace, love, freedom, humility, and thankfulness, in the recognition that *non ex nobis sed Deo*.

Augustine's emphasis in these works on the justice of God's judgement of sinners also has an obvious pastoral inspiration, for how could one worship a God who was unjust, whose demands were arbitrary, and for whom human goodness and sinfulness seemed to be of little account? This was not an easy task: his conviction of original sin suggested that all human beings justly merited damnation, whilst his faith in God's goodness prompted him to believe that he had mercy on the sinner and made possible his or her salvation. The question then was, why did God save some and not others? Why were some seemingly chosen and others left to perish? Why was Jacob chosen but Esau not? Why was Pharaoh's heart hardened so that he was not saved? These are the questions which Paul, and Augustine in his turn, could not avoid in their attempt to justify the ways of God to their hearers and readers. Their reflection bears the marks of the pastor as much as the theologian, for on their answers depended their fellow Christians' faith, hope, and love of God. It has been suggested that it is precisely in Augustine's attempt to answer these questions in the mid-390s, culminating in the *Ad Simplicianum*, that we can locate the revolutionary transformation of this thought in 396, which broke completely with everything he had written up to this point and established the groundwork for his mature theological system. Let us see whether this is indeed the case.

Human Freedom, Divine Justice, and the *initium fidei*

In a general way, during this period Augustine declares a firm belief in God's providence and righteousness, which ensures that everyone receives their due,⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Ibid. 52. 3.

and that the trials and tribulations human beings have to suffer are

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intended for their edification and purification.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ *ep. Rm. inch.* 10.

But these very general, albeit confident, statements of faith, raised far more questions than they answered. In confronting these questions Augustine's response, as we have suggested above, seems to have been determined by at least two concerns: the first was to avoid any hint of determinism and to uphold man's moral autonomy and freedom against those who thought that human free will was threatened; the second was to uphold God's justice against any reproach of arbitrariness or vindictiveness. These two concerns are evidently motivated as much by pastoral as polemical preoccupations, but as we shall see, Augustine's attempts to resolve them create conflicts which run like fissures throughout the works of the mid-390s.

The concept which Paul offered Augustine to reflect on these questions was that of faith. We have already seen that when Paul attempts to convince the Jews that salvation is not a matter of works or of merit based upon observance of the law, he sets the ideal of faith before them as that which God has graciously given to both Jews and Gentiles, who have both been called in the proclamation of the Gospel: human beings are justified not by works but by faith. Augustine, following Paul, is insistent that faith is a *gift*, it is given by God, and as such cannot be described as a work, or held to represent a meritorious action, rather, the gift of faith makes possible righteous action: 'For God gave by grace, since he gave to sinners, so that by faith they might live justly, that is, do good works.'⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *ex. prop. Rm.* 21.

Thus, Abraham believed and 'he was justified not by his own merit as through works, but by the grace of God through faith'.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Ibid. 20.

The law, then, was given 'not' as Augustine puts it 'to bring life, for grace does this through faith. But the law was given to show what great and tight bonds of sin bound those who presumed to attain righteousness by their own strength.'⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Ibid. 30; cf. *ex. Gal.* 24. 11.

Augustine is therefore insistent that it is grace which ensures the freedom of human beings, grace which enables them to believe, grace which effects any good action or work, and that this is the grace of the Gospel, of Christ, who dwells within the believer. As he comments on Gal. 4: 19, 'Now Christ is formed in the inner self of the believer through faith. Such a person is called into the liberty of grace, is gentle and humble of heart, does not boast about the merits of works (which are nothing) but by means of that very grace begins to have some merit.'⁸⁹

⁸⁹ *ex. Gal.* 38. 3.

All, then, is of grace. Or is it? Augustine seems to be acutely aware that in

making this claim, in following Paul, and in being true to his own deepest inclinations, he is simultaneously excluding any meaningful way of attributing a role to human free choice, and is thus in danger of both playing into the

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hands of the Manichees and making it almost impossible to uphold God's justice in a coherent, rationally defensible way. Whether he would have seen the problem in quite this way, and whether he was fully conscious of it and able to articulate it clearly, at this stage, is uncertain. What we do find, however, are passages (alongside those which insist that everything is of grace), which allow some role for the individual person in turning to God, in seeking or asking for his gracious help. Thus, immediately after a passage which insists that God's providence and righteousness gives each person their due, so that those who have pursued worldly goods have received the spirit of slavery, in other words, the 'spirit of him who has the power of death' (the devil), Augustine observes that 'each man *turns himself* (*convertat*) to the aid of the liberator even if the Devil himself, who wants to hold man forever in his power, fights against him'.⁹⁰

⁹⁰*ex. prop. Rm. 52. 3.*

Similarly, commenting on Galatians, his insistence on divine grace as opposed to works is set alongside a clear suggestion that faith is obtained through human effort (in the use of the verb *impetrare*, which implies seeking and asking): 'since faith *obtains* (*impetrat*) the Holy Spirit, through whom the love of God has been poured out in the hearts (Rom. 5: 5) of those who work righteousness, no one should take any pride whatsoever in good works prior to the grace of faith'.⁹¹

⁹¹*ex. Gal. 44. 4.*

The hints and suggestions of independent human effort in these passages are stated clearly in the first book of Augustine's reply to Simplicianus: 'In this mortal life one thing remains for free will, not that a man may fulfil righteousness when he wishes, but that he may turn with suppliant piety to him who can give the power to fulfil it.'⁹²

⁹²*Simpl. 1. 1. 14.*

It is an almost imperceptible movement, this 'turning' or 'supplication' of the sinner, but that it is significant for Augustine is seen in the way he clearly develops it in the idea that the choice, or the beginning of faith (*initium fidei*), is one which is made or initiated *solely* by a person's free will. Although this idea of *initium fidei* seems to be confined purely to the works on Paul written during the mid-390s, and is decisively retracted in the *Ad Simplicianum* in 396, it served Augustine for a time explicitly to uphold human freedom and divine justice. The fact that a person freely chooses to believe in response to God's call means that God's grace is, in a sense, a reward for their faith.⁹³

⁹³ See Cipriani 1994: 12-17 who identifies sources for this idea in Ambrosiaster's *Commentarius in epistula ad Romanos* and Hilary's *Tractatus in Psalmos*, which he suggests Augustine had probably read and where he found the idea in much the same context, addressing very much the same questions.

It is therefore the key to the movement from being *sub lege* to *sub gratia*.

Commenting in *Expositio propositionum* 44 upon Paul's anguished description of his moral impotence in Rom. 7: 15-16—'For I do not want to do what

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I do; but what I hate, this I do'—Augustine is acutely aware that some might think—as he puts it—'that these words deny our free will'. His first response to this accusation is to make clear that these are the words of someone still 'under the law, prior to grace'. But he is obviously uneasily aware that this does not really answer the charge: if a person needs grace to heal his or her divided will and to do any good work, what room is there to talk of free will? He therefore makes a significant concession in adding that 'by his free will man has a means to believe in the liberator and to receive grace'.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ *ex. prop. Rm. 44. 3.*

He is also quick to realize that this concession also allows him to make more sense of divine justice in the face of difficult passages such as Rom. 8: 29-30: 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate ... whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified', or Matt. 22: 14: 'many are called, but few are chosen'. How did God foreknow? Why were they predestined, called, justified, and glorified? Why were others not? In adopting the idea that the *initium fidei*, or beginning of faith, is to be attributed to a person's own will, Augustine has put himself in a position where he can offer an answer based on God's foreknowledge of man's choice of faith: in *Expositio propositionum* 55 he writes, 'Nor did God predestine anyone except him whom he knew would believe and would follow the call.

Paul designates such persons "the elect".⁹⁵

⁹⁵ *Ibid. 55; cf. Augustine offers the same basic interpretation of Romans in ep. Rm. inch. 1.*

The response of human beings to God's call in faith, or at least God's foreknowledge of their choice, provides an explanation as to why someone is elected to receive justifying grace.

The story of Jacob and Esau, who were elected by God in their mother's womb, before they had any chance to merit reward or punishment, election or damnation, is a text which seems to haunt Augustine during the 390s: he encountered it in Paul (Rom. 9: 11-13) and just when he thought he had resolved it, Simplicianus brought it up again. Like the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, which we will come to below, it summed up for Augustine the problems of human freedom and divine equity, and is another text which he realizes 'moves some people to think that the apostle Paul had done away with the freedom of the will, by which we earn the esteem of God by the good of piety, or offend him by the evil of impiety'.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ *ex. prop. Rm. 60. 2.*

But in *Expositio propositionum* 60, on Rom. 9:11-13, on the basis of his theory that the beginning of faith comes about because of the free choice of the individual person, he is again able to argue that this is not the case: God elected one and not the other because he foreknew that one would believe and the other would not. Both Esau and

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Jacob were free to believe, and divine equity is preserved because God's election is based on the merit of Jacob's freely willed faith—*si enim nullo merito, non est electio*.

It is clear, however, that this all too neat and convenient association of merit and faith troubled Augustine, and he is not slow to realize that the language he is using of faith brings him dangerously close to making it a work. He attempts to avoid the connection by making a sharp distinction between freely willed faith on the one hand, and on the other, the *subsequent* works which are a gift of God's grace, and cannot be performed without the gift of the Holy Spirit inspiring man to love of the good: he comments, 'But since he gives the Holy Spirit only to believers, God indeed does not choose works, which he himself bestows, for he gives the Spirit freely so that through love we might do good, but rather he chooses faith.'⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Ibid. 60. 9; cf. 60. 10-12.

Augustine is absolutely insistent—no doubt because he is trying to convince himself, as much as the reader—that 'God does not elect anyone's works (which God Himself will grant) by foreknowledge, but rather by foreknowledge he chose faith... Belief is ours, but good deeds are His who gives the Holy Spirit to believers (*quod ergo credimus, nostrum est, quod autem bonum operamur, illius qui credentibus in se dat spiritum sanctum*).'⁹⁸

⁹⁸ ex. prop. Rm. 60. 12.

However, it is clear from the way in which Augustine continues to develop his argument in *Expositio propositionum* 60, that his mind is still full of doubts and that he is casting about for a form of words, and a way of putting things, that is not too much of a hostage to fortune. He realizes that the language of merit is loaded; it was precisely what Paul himself was attempting to reject; nowhere does Paul associate merit with faith; in doing so himself Augustine realizes he is only partly solving one set of problems (related to free will and divine justice) to raise another set (related to original sin and its effects, and divine omnipotence). Instead of dropping the idea of the merit of faith however, he battles on, qualifying what he has said. Thus, he moves divine grace into position even *before* faith, introducing the idea of God's *call* to faith, thereby attempting to restore everything (or almost everything) to grace, and to take account of original sin and its consequences. He writes 'Moreover, the nature of grace is such that the call precedes merit, reaching the sinner when he had deserved only damnation. But if he follows God's call of his own free will, he will merit also the Holy Spirit, through whom he can do good works.'⁹⁹

⁹⁹ We find the same argument in *ep. Rm. inch. 7*; 9.

Augustine summarizes the point he has reached in his argument in the next *Expositio propositionum* (61) on Rom. 9: 11-15, when he writes 'Therefore God did not elect those doing good works, but those who believed, with the

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result that he enabled them to do good works. It is we who believe and will, but He who gives to those believing and willing the ability to do good works through the Holy Spirit.'¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰*ex. prop. Rm. 61. 6-7.*

So far so good, but then he comes face to face with Rom. 9: 15, 'Therefore it depends not on man's willing or running, but on God's mercy.' What was he to make of this? As in *Expositio propositionum* 60, he is determined to cling on to the idea of freely willed faith, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Just as he had attempted to solve the problem by introducing the idea of God's *prior* call to faith in 60, here he reintroduces the idea of God's *subsequent* 'help'. 'Paul does not take away the freedom of the will,' he comments, 'but says our will does not suffice unless God helps us, making us merciful so that we can do good works through the gift of the Holy Spirit. ... For neither can we will unless we are called, nor after our calling, once we have willed, is our willing and running sufficient unless God both gives strength to our running and leads where he calls. Therefore, clearly, we do good deeds not by our own willing or running but by the mercy of God, although our will (which alone can do nothing) is also present.' The free and independent action of the will is being gradually narrowed down until it barely exists and can simply be passed over in the phrase 'once we have willed'. Indeed, Augustine is already suggesting that 'alone it can do nothing'.

And yet although he has argued himself into a position where grace precedes the will in calling it to faith, and follows after faith in effecting good works, he will not relinquish the idea that we are free to will to believe altogether, but immediately goes on in *Expositio propositionum* 62 to use it to tackle the other problematic text we mentioned above, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Paul seems to introduce it in Rom. 9 to illustrate divine freedom: God 'has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he wills he hardens'. But Augustine interprets it to preserve human freedom, as well as divine justice, by suggesting that the hardening of his heart was the just punishment for Pharaoh's freely willed disobedience and failure to believe in God: 'mercy' he comments, 'was given to the preceding merit of faith, and that hardening to preceding impiety so that we work both good deeds through the gift of God and evil through his chastisement. Nevertheless, man's free will remains, whether for belief in God so that mercy follows, or for impiety followed by punishment.'¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 62. 12-13.

We find the same arguments for freely willed faith, in relation to the same texts from Romans, in *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83 68, which no doubt reflects a contemporaneous, or perhaps slightly later, discussion of them between Augustine and his fellow monks at Hippo in 394. The idea of the merit of believing is clearly stated, but Augustine is equally insistent that we

are 'called

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to faith, not by merit, but by grace' and is obviously still very ill at ease with all that it implies, attempting tentatively to qualify the idea of merit with such phrases as, 'the very grace which is given through faith is given prior to any merit that we might have'.¹⁰²

¹⁰²*diu. qu. 83 68. 3.*

But Augustine has qualified his attempt to preserve some element of free will so much that he has arrived at a position in which it is hanging by a very fine thread indeed. The will is only free to choose faith: *before* it can believe it must be called by God; *after* it has believed, it can have no effect and can do no good works without the gift of grace through the Holy Spirit. The will operates freely and alone only in the single moment of faith; a momentary flicker of independent human willing, prepared by grace and only subsequently effective by grace, like a sudden bolt of lightning which suddenly lights up the dark shadows of the landscape of original sin. Why it strikes, where it strikes, how it strikes is not explained, but Augustine is insistent in his *Expositio propositionum* on Romans that it must and does happen, rather than abandon free will and a rational explanation for divine equity.

The all too evident strains and tensions in Augustine's thought had to give way; the fissures inevitably developed into faultlines, and we find this happening even before the *Ad Simplicianum*, the work in which scholars have traditionally located the landslide into the dark depths of an unremitting theology of original sin, human helplessness, divine election, and grace. The landslide had, of course, actually already happened at his conversion. What the works on Romans and Galatians in the mid-390s represent is a brave attempt, prompted by the questions which Paul raised in his mind, and perhaps by his reading of theologians such as Ambrosiaster, Hilary,¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Cipriani 1994.

and Tyconius¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ We know from *ep. 41* that Augustine had read Tyconius' *Liber regularum* before 396. The third rule, *De promissis et lege*, covers the same ground as Augustine's reflections on Paul in the mid-390s, but the precise nature of its influence on his thought is debated (e.g. the differing views of Fredriksen 1990: 239-40 and Babcock 1990: 254-6). Babcock's 1990: 255 summary is useful: '[Augustine] found [in Tyconius] an interpretation of Paul that insisted that no person can meet the demands of the law save through the action of grace and not at all through individual moral effort; he found a discussion of faith, grace and the divine direction of human history and human redemption that put human freedom at risk ... and perhaps most of all, he found an interpretation of Paul that linked the plight and salvation of the human individual to the plight and salvation of humanity at large, spread out across the full canvas of biblical history and, beyond that, to the question of the very reliability of God.'

to retrieve some fragment of human autonomy from the rubble. Whether this was to counter Manichaean determinism, to offer some motive for human effort and striving to his congregation, or to provide them with a rationally defensible answer to divine justice we cannot be certain; it was doubtless a rather unstable mixture of all three, and other motives besides.

What is certain is that it was doomed to failure; not only did it run counter to

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Paul, it ran counter to his own most deeply held faith, to those beliefs which had been simultaneously shaped and confirmed by his experience and reflection since the moment of his conversion in 386. Augustine's retreat from the idea of the merit of faith, rather than his increasingly desperate attempts somehow to qualify and thereby hold on to it, is already clear in 394, in his discussions with his monks in Hippo, well before Simplicianus initiated a complete retraction of it by forcing him once again to engage with Rom. 9 in 396. It is present in the question we have just been considering from *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83 (68) on Rom. 9. It is significant that it is in this text that Augustine not only mentions the *meritum fidei*, or merit of faith, but also the *massa peccati* (the lump of sin to which all human beings belong), for it is his unflinching reflection on what exactly original sin means that will precipitate his final rejection of any idea of merit, whether of faith or anything else. In relation to the question of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, he asserts in question 68 that God is not unjust, and that there must therefore be some difference, 'some hidden merit (*occultissimis meritis*) ... some preceding thing in sinners whereby they are rendered worthy of righteousness'.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ *diu. qu.* 83 68. 4.

One expects him then to suggest that this is indeed the case, and that some have freely responded to God's call in faith, whilst others have freely rejected it, and indeed he does suggest that the answer lies with the will when he observes that 'God, who calls to peace, does not show mercy except the will have preceded'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 68. 5.

However, he significantly does not mention the will to believe, but rather comments 'since no one can will unless urged on and called, whether inside where no man sees, or outside through the sound of the spoken word or through some visible signs, it follows that *God produces in us even the willing itself*'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

It appears that if there is 'some preceding thing' or 'hidden merit' it is not the merit of freely willed faith, but the work of God upon the will itself. We are already standing firmly within the rubble of the landslide of original sin and man's utter helplessness without divine grace, a landscape with which Augustine had become very familiar in the last eight years, and to which he was to return for good a year or so later.

Ad Simplicianum

Augustine was deeply indebted to the Milanese priest Simplicianus. He had consulted the ageing priest at a crucial point in his journey to conversion, and had received wise advice and encouragement, not only to continue his reading

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of the Platonists (because 'God and his Word are everywhere implied in their works'), but also to follow the example of the former rhetor, Victorinus, in his conversion to Christianity.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸*conf.* 8. 2. 3-5. 10.

In the first year of Augustine's episcopate Simplicianus wrote to him to ask for his advice in interpreting two difficult passages of Romans, 7: 7-25 and 9: 10-29. These were, of course, the passages with which Augustine had been preoccupied in the preceding two years, and it appears from the preface that Simplicianus was perhaps already familiar with his work on them, for Augustine comments,

The problems which you have propounded for me to solve from the apostle Paul I had already discussed in writing. But not content with my former inquiry and exposition, in case I might have overlooked anything through negligence, I have investigated with greater care and attention these same apostolic words and the tenor of his sentences. *For you would not have judged that they should be treated again if the understanding of them were easy and ready to hand.*

We have seen that these passages were indeed fraught with difficulties, and that Augustine's first attempts to interpret them, as he himself acknowledges here, had left many tensions, ambiguities, and unanswered problems to be resolved. And so, prompted by Simplicianus, he tackles them again—this time 'with greater care and attention'. This 'care and attention' is most evidently applied to expounding Paul's own intention, as Augustine makes clear, 'First I shall try to grasp the apostle's purpose which runs through the whole Epistle, and I shall seek guidance from it. It is that no man should glory in meritorious works'. In taking this seriously, Augustine, as we shall see, is led to reject decisively the idea of the merit of man's freely willed faith—the idea with which he had battled in the previous two years—and to return to the conviction he had shared with Paul since his conversion in 386: that everything, including the will to believe, is attributable only to God's grace.

Simplicianus' first text, Rom. 7: 7-25, is first of all treated anew, at much greater length than in the earlier *Expositio propositionum*, but whilst reiterating his defence of the Old Testament Law, and his conviction of original sin and the need for grace with great vigour, Augustine adds nothing substantially new to his earlier interpretation (although there are some interesting comments on the role of desire, delight, and love, both in transgressing and in fulfilling the law, which we will return to later). Where things really change is in relation to Simplicianus' second text, Rom. 9: 10-29.

Augustine is clear that Paul's main concern in this chapter is to demonstrate that grace is not a reward for good works and that it cannot be merited: 'The Jews did not understand that evangelical grace, just because of its very

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nature, is not given as a due reward for good works. Otherwise grace is not grace ... works do not precede grace but follow from it.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ *Simpl.* 1. 2. 2.

He initially seems to hark back to his earlier theory that 'a man begins to receive grace from the moment he begins to believe in God'.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

We saw in the *Expositio propositionum* that he placed God's gracious call *before* a person's choice of faith, and his gracious 'help' *after* it, leaving only the moment of faith to their free will. Likewise here, he asserts that 'Grace is ... of him who calls, and the consequent good works are of him who receives grace.'¹¹¹

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 1. 2. 3.

But we have just noted that in *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83 68 he also identified grace at work *within* the will of the one who believes, thereby leaving no moment when grace is not present to the one who believes. Similarly, here, he suggests in reference to Cornelius, that a person is 'moved to faith by some internal or external admonition ... by some secret admonition coming through visions of the mind or spirit, or by more open admonitions reaching him through the bodily senses,'¹¹²

¹¹² *Ibid.* 1. 2. 2.

again effectively leaving no moment when divine grace is not at work, either in calling a person, or admonishing them within, or in effecting good works. That faith is wholly the work of God becomes clear in the following section, where Augustine once again turns to the problems raised by the story of Jacob and Esau.

'Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated.' That this happened 'when they were not yet born and had done neither good or evil'¹¹³

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 1. 2. 4.

raises the obvious question of the justice of God's election of one and not the other: there were no works, no preceding merit, nothing to distinguish one from the other. Returning to his solution to this problem in the *Expositio propositionum*, Augustine asks, 'Could it be ... because God has foreknowledge of all things, and foresaw the faith that was to be in Jacob even before he was born ... so God, foreseeing that Jacob would believe of his own free will, by his foreknowledge elected to justify one not yet born?'¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

But this will not now do, for Augustine finally acknowledges that speaking about foreknowledge of freely willed faith is really no different from speaking about foreknowledge of works. There is no real difference between election on the basis of works, and election on the basis of freely willed faith. Freely willed faith, if indeed it is possible, is no more and no less than a work; something effected by man which merits grace. And so he rejects the explanation from foreknowledge, either of faith or works, which he admits is wholly alien to Paul's intention in this passage. 'When he says "Not of works but of him that calleth" ', Augustine concedes, 'he wants us to understand that it is not by election through merits, but by the

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free gift of God.' It is not man's freely willed faith that concerns Paul but God's freely given election.

Having conceded this, and having relinquished his previous explanations, Augustine is obviously at something of a loss. He returns with desperation to the idea of faith, and attempts to avoid the language of merit or works by once again returning to the suggestion he had made in the *Expositio propositionum*: that God's prior call means that all is of grace, since the 'merits of faith' *follow* his call, and do not precede them. This means that 'grace comes before all merit ... "Jacob have I loved" is true, but it was of God who called and not of Jacob's righteous works. Faith is therefore not a work; it does not merit election, but is a gift of grace.'

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 1. 2. 7.

But 'what then of Esau ... of whom it is written ... "Esau have I hated" ... how could he have merited this by evil deeds of his own doing, since these things were spoken before he was born, and before he had done any good or evil?

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 1. 2. 8.

... why was mercy withheld from Esau, so that he was not called and had not faith inspired in him when called, and was not by faith made compassionate so that he might do good works?'

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 1. 2. 10.

Faced with these questions Augustine realizes that he has no choice but finally to abandon the idea of *initium fidei*—that it is the free will which chooses faith; he now acknowledges that it amounts to no more than a 'work' and that the call to faith, the inspiration of the will to embrace faith, and the subsequent good works of faith are *all* of grace. Now he must face the consequences of this reversal.

Before returning to the question of Jacob and Esau, Augustine is clearly aware that what has changed is the fact that God not only calls human beings prior to faith, and enables good works after faith, but actually works upon the will to bring about faith itself. He therefore stops to reflect on this decisive change a little further, and is prompted to do so by Paul. In response to Paul's assertion that 'it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy' (Rom. 9: 16) he asks, 'Does it mean that we cannot even will unless we are called, and that our willing is of no avail unless God gives us aid to perform it?'

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

He first of all reverts to his previous distinction between God's call and our response, which had left space for our free choice of faith: 'There are two different things that God gives us, the power to will and the thing that we

actually will. The power to will he has willed should be both his and ours, his because he calls us, ours because we follow when called.'¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

However, he finally concedes defeat, and quoting Phil. 2: 12, 13, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure,' he comments, 'There he [Paul]

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clearly shows that the good will itself is wrought in us by the working of God.'¹²⁰

¹²⁰ *Simpl.* 1. 2. 12.

All he can now ask is: how does this happen?

In reflecting on how God works upon the will Augustine continues the line of thought which he had already tentatively introduced in *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83 concerning God bringing about our willing within us, by suggesting that our positive response to God's call, or our rejection of it, depends on whether the call is suitable and fitting. He writes,

For God calls in the way that is suited to those who follow his calling.
... If God wills to have mercy on men, he can call them in a way that is suited to them, so that they will be moved to understand and to follow. It is true therefore that many are called but few are chosen. Those are chosen who are effectually [*congruenter*] called. Those who are not effectually called and do not obey their calling are not chosen
... he calls the man on whom he has mercy in the way he knows will suit him, so that he will not refuse the call.¹²¹

¹²¹ Ibid. 1. 2. 13.

Faith is therefore no longer a matter of merit or of an individual's free choice, but rather a gift of grace given to those whom God has elected.

'What then of Esau?' It is the problem of divine election, of why God chose to call Jacob but not Esau—or now, of why Jacob was called effectually and Esau wasn't—to which Romans keeps returning Augustine: 'We come back to that difficulty' he comments, 'troubled not only by the obscurity of the question but also by our own abundant repetition.'¹²²

¹²² Ibid. 1. 2. 9.

Paul's denial of any merit or works and his absolute, unremitting, and uncompromising insistence on God's grace has provided Augustine with no answers, and having got this far, Augustine finds himself, probably for the first time in his engagement with his thought during the 390s, in complete agreement with him. He is no longer battling with Paul by trying to preserve free will, but completely in accord with his teaching that all is of grace. The rest of his response to Simplicianus is very much the work of someone who has finally admitted defeat, who has, as he puts it later, fought for free will but been conquered by grace.¹²³

¹²³ *retr.* 2. 27. 1.

Now he must face the consequences of his defeat, and it is not easy, for the

problems still remain, and the only answer he can now offer is: grace.

Nor does Paul make life any easier for Augustine. It is as if Rom. 9 constitutes a set of prooftexts for God's sovereignty and omnipotence, expressed in his work of predestination, election, and grace, with no attempt at all actually to justify his ways to human beings. Paul's reference to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, and his observation that 'He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth' only emphasizes the problem of Esau, and Augustine wonders whether the hardening of the heart, like the failure to respond to God's call, does not come from some

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divine penalty, based on a 'certain hidden equity' that we cannot fathom.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ *Simpl.* 1. 2. 15-16.

It soon becomes clear, however, that the 'hidden equity' is in fact based on humanity's universal state of sinfulness and the debt of punishment all human beings owe because of original sin. The real question, then, is not why God does not have mercy on some, but why he has mercy on *anyone*, given that all justly deserve punishment.

The introduction of original sin into the argument at this stage is a crucial turning point. As we have seen, it is no new doctrine to Augustine, but he seems to have been reluctant to use it in earlier attempts to interpret Paul for precisely the same reasons as he found himself battling with him: his desire to preserve human free will and to provide a reasoned defence of God's justice. Having conceded that all is of grace and that human beings can do nothing, of themselves, to merit reward or punishment, he is now freer to acknowledge the reason for this: that 'all men are a mass of sin, since, as the apostle says, "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15: 22).' ¹²⁵

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 1. 2. 16. Cf. 1. 2. 20.

He also finds that he can now address the question of divine equity with far more confidence and cogency than when he attempted to preserve human free will and the merit of faith: subject to, and guilty of original sin, 'sinful humanity', he urges, 'must pay a debt of punishment to the supreme justice.

Whether the debt is exacted or remitted there is no unrighteousness' ¹²⁶

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 1. 2. 16.

...'The former pays back nothing but what he owes, and the latter has nothing that he has not received.' ¹²⁷

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 1. 2. 17.

Why God has mercy on some but not others is not something he can explain, except to say that it is always just, and is according to a 'standard of equity which is most secret and far removed from human powers of understanding'. He can only exclaim, with Paul: 'Inscrutable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out (Rom. 11: 33)' ¹²⁸

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Finally, too, he can answer the question 'What then of Esau?' God hated Esau, not as a good part of his creation, rather he hated his sin, the sin he had inherited from Adam. When God does not have mercy on him, it is for

the correction of others. As Augustine puts it, 'So God, in making vessels of perdition from the lump of the impious, does not hate what he does, that is, the work of ordaining due penalty for those who perish; for thereby those on whom he has mercy may find an opportunity of salvation.'¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Ibid. 1. 2. 18.

One final question remains, and it is the one Augustine has battled with throughout his reflection on Romans in 394-6: the question of free will. In agreeing with Paul that all is of grace, that even the choice of faith is of grace and that all humans are justly subject to original sin, he seems to have finally

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conceded that the will cannot be said to freely choose the good, but rather that without grace it can only be said to be 'free' to sin. At the end of the work he returns to that decisive moment of the choice of faith, the moment at which he had briefly allowed an independent flicker of autonomous human willing, but which he now understands to be wholly determined by God's grace. 'Free will is important' he states, but the will, subject to original sin, is impotent to do the good unless a person is first justified by faith and thereby receives the Holy Spirit which enables them to do good works in love. And he is now absolutely clear that this justification by faith is wholly the work of grace: it is God who first calls to faith; God who then makes possible a response to faith by calling in a way 'congruent' to the will; God who subsequently enables the believer to do the good. He describes in more detail what it is that motivates the will to believe and what makes God's call congruent to it, in the language of delight: 'Who has it in his power to have such a motive present to his mind' he asks,

that his will shall be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? But who has it in his power to ensure that something that will delight him will turn up, or that he will take delight in what turns up? If those things delight us that serve our advancement towards God, that is due not to our whim or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God and to the grace which he bestows. He freely bestows upon us voluntary assent, earnest effort, and the power to perform works of fervent charity ... 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy.' We could neither will nor run unless he stirred us and put the motive power in us.

¹³⁰ *Simpl.* 1. 2. 21. This is the conclusion of sensitive, soul-searching, careful reflection upon Paul in the light of his long-held beliefs, his present context, and ongoing pastoral concern for his monks and congregation, not, as Fredriksen 1988: 102; 1986: 24 suggests, a turn from the Paul of the letters, to the pre-Christian Saul, who was suddenly and irresistibly called by divine grace.

The idea that it is delight that motivates the will is not something new to Augustine's thought, of course. As we saw in the previous chapter, and as we will demonstrate further in the concluding chapters of this book, Augustine uses it to describe how grace inspires and motivates the will, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, from Cassiciacum onwards. It is also

clearly present in his other reflections on Romans in the two years preceding the second book of *Ad Simplicianum*. In the *Expositio propositionum*, commenting on Rom. 8: 26—'the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groans'—he observes that, 'the Spirit groans insofar as it makes us groan, raising in us by love the desire for the future life'.¹³¹

¹³¹*ex. prop. Rm. 54.*

And in reference to Rom. 9: 15—'I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion'—he suggests that any compassion or love we might possess is a gift of God, through the Holy Spirit, who is 'poured forth in

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our hearts, thus making us compassionate' (an obvious allusion to Rom. 5: 5).¹³²

¹³²*Ibid. 61.*

In *De diuersis quaestionibus 83* he claims that the Old Testament Law was not being fulfilled by the Jews because there was not yet any love for righteousness, 'a love', he comments, 'which would possess the mind by an inward delight, lest the mind be drawn to sin by the delight of temporal things'. That God is the source of this love he makes clear in referring to 'those whose spirits have already been offered to God as a sacrifice and have been encompassed (*comprehensi sunt*) by the divine fire of love',¹³³

¹³³*diu. qu. 83 67. 6.*

and also in reference to Rom. 13: 8—'He who loves another fulfils the law'—when he writes of Paul, that 'he confirms that the love which enables us to fulfil the law, and to love God and neighbour, is given by the Holy Spirit'.¹³⁴

¹³⁴*Ibid. 75. 3.*

That the law can only be fulfilled through grace, that is, through the gift of the Holy Spirit which enables human beings to love and delight in it, he also emphasizes in relation to Rom. 7, in the first question of *Ad Simplicianum*: 'The more one delights in it [the Law] the less one is afflicted by its burdensomeness, and the more one is quickened by its light ... when grace forgives sins and infuses a spirit of charity, righteousness ceases to be hard and becomes even pleasant.'¹³⁵

¹³⁵*Simpl. 1. 1. 7.*

In the *Expositio ad Galatas* he further emphasizes the role of delight in doing any good when, referring to the fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5: 22-3), he observes that 'these good things reign [in the spirit] if they so delight us that in the midst of temptations they keep the mind from rashly consenting to sin. For we necessarily act in accordance with what delights us more.'¹³⁶

¹³⁶*ex. Gal. 49. 5-6.*

We can therefore see that what Augustine says about the role of love and delight in motivating the will in the second book of the *Ad Simplicianum* is nothing new in his reflection on Romans and Galatians, except that it is now referred not only to a person's ability to obey the law and to do good works, but also to their choice of faith.

Scholars have debated whether Augustine thinks that grace operates internally or externally at this stage.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Most notably Patout Burns 1980: 37-44. Cf. Marafioti 1981.

This debate is obviously fuelled by a desire, similar to Augustine's in these works, to preserve some meaningful notion of free will. If grace operates only to call a person in a way which will enable them to respond appropriately, in love and delight in the good, then we can still attribute their response to the call to their own will. If, on the other hand, grace operates not only to call a person, but also to effect a response, then there is very little room to talk of an independent, autonomous will. We have traced the subtle and shifting movement of Augustine's thought in this respect, and it has become clear that his final position, and I would argue, his

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starting position, is one that attributes everything to grace. He attempted to preserve human free will and to attribute to it the choice of faith, but eventually had to concede that even that choice was due to grace. We have, I think, seen him come full circle in these works. In them he has fought tenaciously, but finally admits defeat. Those scholars who persist in arguing that at this stage Augustine will allow only for the *external* operation of grace are missing the point and ignoring Augustine's own argument, which is that everything is of grace. The manner in which he describes the operation of grace in first calling a person, effecting their faith, and then enabling their good actions is most certainly not exclusively an external operation. We have seen above that Augustine talks about our being 'moved to faith by some *internal* or external admonition',¹³⁸

¹³⁸*Simpl.* 1. 2. 2; *diu. qu.* 83 68. 4-6.

of God 'bringing about our willing within us',¹³⁹

¹³⁹*diu. qu.* 83 68. 4.

of grace which 'strengthens the mind to resist desire',¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰*Simpl.* 1. 1. 9.

of love 'possessing the mind by an inward delight',¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹*diu. qu.* 83 66. 6.

and 'encompassing' it,¹⁴²

¹⁴²*Ibid.* 67. 6.

of 'God who stirred and put the motive power within us',¹⁴³

¹⁴³*Simpl.* 1. 2. 21.

who 'infuses a spirit of charity',¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.* 1. 1. 7.

and who 'supplies the power to fulfil his commands'.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵*Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 22. 34.

The two scriptural passages to which he continually reverts during this period also confirm the interior operation of grace upon us: 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which he has given us' (Rom. 5: 5) and 'it is neither of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy' (Rom. 9: 16). It is through the action of the Holy Spirit within, enabling human beings to delight in and love the good, that the will responds to God's call and does good works. What else is Augustine's rejection of the *initium fidei* but a clear statement that it is not the person that wills but God; not just in calling, but actually in effecting the choice of faith: 'it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure'?¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Phil. 2: 12-13 quoted in *Simpl.* 1. 2. 12. See also Augustine's use of 1 Cor. 4: 7 and Rom. 9: 16 in 2. 5 to endorse this point.

It is God who 'bestows upon us voluntary assent' (*nutus uoluntatis*).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ *Simpl.* 1. 2. 21.

We will be considering this in more detail in the final chapter.

Revolution or Evolution?

So what has changed? Does the *Ad Simplicianum* represent a watershed in Augustine's theology; a revolution which decisively breaks with his early

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thought; a different Augustine (Lettieri's *altro Agostino*), completely alien to the one we find before 396? Does it mark the beginnings of his mature theology; a firm rejection of any belief in human autonomy; a dramatic break with his own earlier reflection on free will and therefore with the entire tradition of philosophical reflection on this subject? Does it inaugurate a 'reign of terror'?

The short answer to what has changed in relation to Augustine's reflection on Paul in the 390s is: the *initium fidei*—that the choice of faith is a matter of human free will. Whereas between 394 and 396 Augustine had briefly entertained the idea that the choice of faith, and therefore the merit of believing, lay with the individual person, he decisively retracts this in 396, in *Ad Simplicianum*. In doing so Augustine was certainly taking a decisive step; he was bravely, daringly, and unflinchingly looking the facts in the eye and calling a spade a spade. But it is the argument of this book that in so doing, Augustine was simply coming full circle and returning to what he had always, deep down, believed: that without grace a person can do no good work. The *Ad Simplicianum* therefore represents less a revolution in his thought as its natural evolution in the light of Pauline theology. As Hombert comments,

For a long time Augustine had fought against pride and all types of human or Christian complacency. In particular he told Christians that one cannot glory in oneself without risking a return to the pretensions of Judaism. He now takes a further step and affirms that faith itself comes from God. The idea is certainly new. And laden with consequences. But it would appear all the more inexplicable if one ignored all the evidence from earlier works, especially those from his episcopate. For we believe that Augustine corrected his earlier ideas concerning the onset of faith, motivated by an inner conviction which had been calling for complete clarification for a long time: that man possesses no merit from which he might derive glory.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Hombert 1996: 104.

'The verses from 1 Cor. 1: 31 and 1 Cor. 4: 7', Hombert adds, 'summarise everything which Augustine had inwardly held since his conversion, and which he had progressively brought to fruition.'¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 108.

How does Augustine himself look back on this period? In his *Retractationes* he refers to the second question of *Ad Simplicianum* on Rom. 9: 10-29 and comments 'In the solution of this question, I, indeed laboured in defence of the free choice of the human will; but the grace of God conquered, and finally I was able to understand, with full clarity, the meaning of the Apostle: "For who singles thee out? Or what hast thou that thou has not received? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou boast as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4: 7).' And he refers to Cyprian as witness to this interpretation: 'Cyprian, the martyr, too, wishing to show this, embraced all this under the

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heading: "We should glory in nothing since we have nothing in which to glory".¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ *retr.* 2. 27. 1 The quotation is from Cyprian, *Testimoniorum libri III, ad Quirinium*. Gorday 1983: 141 suggests that Victorinus also teaches the completely gratuitous nature of grace in e.g. *In Ep. ad Gal.* 2. 15-16; 2. 21, although he acknowledges there is no evidence for his influence in Augustine's early Pauline commentaries. See Hombert 1996: 101 n. 267 for a discussion of when Augustine might have read Cyprian in this respect and 101-2 for whether Augustine may have been influenced by Tyconius' use of 1 Cor. 4: 7 and his attribution of the *initium fidei* to humankind. On the latter see also Babcock 1979: 67-74; 1982, who acknowledges Augustine would have been acquainted with his ideas at this time but is not convinced that they had any real influence, except perhaps in prompting Augustine to use certain texts of Scripture.

There is no indication of anything either groundbreaking or earth-shattering here. Augustine remains firmly within a familiar landscape. The only point worthy of note is the one we have already clearly identified: that he had attempted to preserve human free will in interpreting Paul in the mid-390s, but could not avoid the conclusion that everything is indeed of grace. This realization is not something new, but a return to, and reaffirmation of, his earlier beliefs which he was now able to understand with 'full clarity'. They were no longer simply assumptions but something he had subjected to intense scrutiny and questioning and had thereby been brought to articulate clearly and appreciate fully. His reading of Paul had prompted an attempt to see if human free will could indeed be upheld, but having tried, Augustine realizes it cannot. It is this which he is acknowledging here, but not any major change in his theology as such. As Madec has observed of *Ad Simplicianum*,

The 'advance' thus attained in understanding Pauline doctrine is assuredly important, but there is nothing to indicate that it had, in Augustine's mind, anything 'dramatic' about it ... There is nothing to indicate that the discovery of the absolute primacy of grace over the free will brought in its wake any overturning of the Christian doctrine which Augustine had professed since his conversion, on God, creator and saviour, on man, created in the image of God, fallen because of the sin of Adam, saved by the mediation of Christ.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Madec 1996a: 144; cf. Drecoll 1999. The reference to 'dramatic' is to Brown 1967: 153. Madec also quotes a very interesting passage from Pincherle n.d., whom he describes as 'the ringleader of those who see a "crisis" in this affair', which perhaps deserves to be repeated here. Pincherle

writes: 'This change, this new spiritual orientation which we see in question 2, and which is so often quoted from the book of Simplicianus [*sic*], need not be as sudden and violent, or appear to Augustine as implying so clear a break with his past, as perhaps he depicts it later on and as we are also far too inclined to presume. This would explain why, in the *De agone christiano*, following his Episcopal ordination, one still finds some of the doctrines expounded in the works prior to the *Ad Simplicianum*, and why this work was published by Augustine taking no account of the difference, which appears so noteworthy to us, between the first and the second questions of the first book. It also explains why Augustine remained faithful to the philosophy he learnt in the books of the Neoplatonists, even when it seems to us modern critics, that the different position he adopted on original sin and the *initium fidei* ought to have led him to completely revise his anthropology, and also a large part of his metaphysics.'

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This interpretation is confirmed by Augustine's much more extensive reflection on the works of this period in *De praedestinatione sanctorum* (3. 7-4. 8), which he wrote in 428-9 in response to those in Gaul who had criticized his teaching on faith, works, and divine grace. Here he refers again to the text from Cyprian's *Testimonia* and his use of 1 Cor. 4: 7 and confirms that it was his testimony, above all, which had made him realize how confused his ideas had been, and his error in attempting to maintain that faith is not a gift of God but our free choice (*non esse donum Dei, sed a nobis esse in nobis*). He refers to the theory of the *initium fidei* (whereby the call to faith and the good works which follow faith are of grace, but the response to the call is wholly a matter of man's free choice), and admits that he had erroneously argued it in a number of 'small' works before his episcopate, including the *Expositio propositionum* (in other words those of 394-6). He also cites at length the passage in the *Retractationes* where he made clear that his suggestion that God's election is based upon his foreknowledge of man's faith, as if faith were a meritorious work, was wholly misguided, and where, in reference to Rom. 11: 5 ('A remnant will be saved by the grace of election'), he reaffirmed what he had taught in *Ad Simplicianum*: that faith is a gift of grace; that election is based wholly upon grace; that the fact that God has mercy on some, but hardens others, is based not upon their previous merits or impiety, but upon God's gracious gift of faith to some, but not to others. He therefore talks about our being 'called so as to believe' (*vocamur ut credamus*) and of God 'preparing the will' (*praeparat uoluntatem*) to believe.

Augustine returns to these issues in the partner work to *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, the *De dono perseueratione* (20. 52-20. 54) (428-9), where he significantly refers to early works in which he 'was destroying the future Pelagian heresy, of which I was ignorant, by teaching of grace, whereby God sets us free from our evil errors and habits, without any preceding merit on our part'. He says that he began to understand this fully at the beginning of his episcopate, in writing the *Ad Simplicianum*, 'when I recognized and affirmed that even the beginning of faith is a gift of grace'.¹⁵²

¹⁵²*praed. sanct.* 20. 52.

His quotation from the *Confessiones* of the text which had so incensed Pelagius clinches the argument: '*da quod iubes et iube quod uis*'. Everything is of grace.

I think that what Augustine has to say in these later works very much confirms our interpretation of the *Ad Simplicianum*. It stands out among the works of this period for him, not because it says anything radically new, but because it corrects the mistakes he had made in trying to interpret Romans in the years 394-6, and represents a confirmation of, and return to, the theology of grace he had always held, and which he can now, after his intense exposure

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to Pauline theology, appreciate and articulate with new clarity and confidence—even though here, significantly, he uses the same words as the *Soliloquia* to express it: '*da quod iubes et iube quod uis*'.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ praed. sanct. 20. 52. (*sol.* 1. 5).

The 'Lost Future' Revisited

In the first chapter we examined the seminal chapter of Peter Brown's biography *Augustine of Hippo*, entitled 'The Lost Future', and observed that it, more than any other work, lay behind what has now become the generally accepted method of interpreting the development of Augustine's theology, and especially the role of the *Ad Simplicianum* in effecting a dramatic departure from Augustine's previous work. In reference to the *Ad Simplicianum* Brown comments, 'for the *first time* Augustine came to see man as wholly dependent on God'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Brown 1967: 154 (my italics).

As we have seen, Brown argues that Augustine had first read Paul as a Platonist; as an exponent of spiritual ascent and the renewal of the inner man, and only in the 390s began to read him as a theologian whose thought was entirely moulded by his conviction of man's complete helplessness without divine grace. He argues that Augustine came to this conclusion by analysing the psychology of delight, an appreciation of which was, he observes 'notably lacking' in his early works, where 'a well trained soul ... would have risen to truth by academic disciplines, supported by sparkling little chains of argument'.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ We will have more to say about the presence of delight in Augustine's early works in the final chapter.

In the *Ad Simplicianum* Augustine makes it quite clear that we attain the good only through the grace of God's inspiration, something which is totally beyond human control: 'feeling' Brown comments 'has taken its rightful place as the ally of the intellect'.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Brown 1967: 155.

Thus, whereas the 'early works are programmes certain of the future ... In the *Confessiones* he is a man who has lost this certain future.' The confident optimism and certainty of the early works in man's ability to know and do the good has been irrevocably lost, and has been transformed into a longing, desire, and yearning for their eschatological realization. 'This marks the end' Brown comments, 'of a long established classical ideal of perfection: Augustine would never achieve the concentrated tranquillity of the supermen

that still gaze out at us from some mosaics in Christian churches and from the statues of pagan sages'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

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As was observed in Ch. 1, there are very few scholars who do not follow Brown's interpretation of this period, and those who do often simply accept it without question as one of the established canons of Augustine scholarship. A few scholars, however, have adopted his ideas and developed them to the point of dangerous caricature. Kurt Flasch's invective against the theories of *Ad Simplicianum*—which he dismisses as a 'Logic of Terror' (*Logik des Schreckens*)—and of everyone who now espouses it, is so polemical and overstated it undermines its own case.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ See Hombert's comments on this, 1996: 97 n. 254, where he notes that Flasch dubs anyone who disagrees with him *die professionellen Abschwächer* and gives examples of some of his attacks on them. For example, Flasch thinks that conservative Catholic theologians have a vested interest in denying what he describes, over and over again, as the 'rupture' in Augustine's thought in 396/7, because 'If one can prove that before 397 Augustine shared the ancient understanding of the Church on the question of grace and the freedom of the will, and that his new theory on original sin, grace and predestination represents a rupture not only with his early works but with the whole of the early tradition, a traditional understanding of the Church will be overturned' (Flasch 1990: 275, cited by Hombert 1996: 97 n. 254). Hombert concludes that '[Kurt Flasch] seems to be incapable of seeing Augustine's point of view, his preoccupations, his religious and pastoral motivation, the very coherence of his thought', 97 n. 254. See Madec's 1982, 1991 reviews of Flasch's work. In the latter he writes, 'I think ... that K.F. is a militant anti-Augustinian. He no doubt has good reasons for this; but I do not know the rules of his game; we are not on the same playing field.' See most especially Ring's 1994: 31-113 trenchant and utterly convincing criticism. We do not judge it necessary to give any more space to refuting Flasch's wholly discredited work here.

More recently Gaetano Lettieri has pushed the 'two Augustines' thesis to its limits, by arguing at exhausting length for *L'altro Agostino*; the 'other', different, alien Augustine of *Ad Simplicianum* 1. 2, in contrast to the Augustine of the early works.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ See Cipriani's 2002 review of this book.

He draws a dramatic portrait of the two different Augustines: one, the early, somewhat naive, not yet fully Christian Augustine of the dialogues, convinced of the ability which human beings possess to will the good independently and freely on the basis of their knowledge of it; the other, a rigorous and unbending theologian of humankind's moral impotence, of irresistible grace and predestination. From what we have already discovered of Augustine's theology, it is quite clear that neither portrait resembles the real Augustine, and that again, we are dealing with a somewhat grotesque caricature of Peter Brown's 'Lost Future'. Indeed, authors such as Flasch and Lettieri begin to make Peter Brown's 'Lost Future' seem wholly reasonable and balanced!

Leaving aside the extremes represented by Flasch and Lettieri, the question that this book is addressing is whether the 'Lost Future', or the 'two Augustines' theory which has grown from it, is indeed a fair evaluation of both the early works and the *Ad Simplicianum*. In asking this question, we

are, of course, confronted with almost half a century of Augustine scholarship which, in following Brown's lead, has answered in the affirmative, and has more

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recently, almost demonized Augustine in the process. In attempting to answer it, as we observed in the Introduction, the only way forward is a careful analysis of the early works themselves. In the first part of this book we have attempted to do this in relation to three main factors which shaped their context and composition: philosophy (Ch. 2 and 3), theology (Ch. 4), and Scripture (Ch. 5). It is our hope that in doing so we have already, to a large extent, shown the flaws and misleading presuppositions of this interpretation of the first decade of Augustine's life and thought. In the second part of this book we will attempt to address more closely the specific issues which we have now seen to lie at the heart of the supposed revolution, or rupture, in his thought: the nature and effects of human sinfulness (Ch. 6), the freedom of the will (ch. 7), the nature and operation of grace (Ch. 8), and show that these are not absent from, or alien to, Augustine's thought from the moment of his conversion in 386. These are, of course, precisely those issues which Augustine's engagement with Paul in the mid-390s brought to the very centre of his thought, and on which he was thereby led to articulate his views clearly. In Part Two, therefore, it will be our task to demonstrate that what we find in Augustine's engagement with Paul in the mid-390s, culminating in the *Ad Simplicianum*, is not a radical, new, and revolutionary departure from his early thought, but rather a reconfirmation of what he had always held, but perhaps not had the stimulus to articulate so clearly, and in precisely the terminology, which his close reading of Paul provided. As Hombert writes in relation to this period, 'Known for a long time past (*depuis des années*), the grace of God was from now on explicitly named and analysed as such ... it was necessary for Augustine to avail himself of theological and scriptural means to better express what he had already experienced.'¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Hombert 1996: 90.

Before we leave the 390s, however, we should perhaps turn to examine the other parts of Scripture which preoccupied Augustine during this time, and which he was reading and reflecting and writing upon, either just before, or concurrently with, the Pauline works we have just examined: the first thirty-two of the Psalms (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*), and Matt. 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount (*De sermone Domini in monte*).

Enarrationes in Psalmos 1-32

The first thirty-two of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (392-5),¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ See the comparative table in Fiedrowicz 1997: 430-39 for different views on the dating of these Psalms. It has been generally assumed that the first thirty-two *Enarrationes* were composed around 392. For an account of earlier views and bibliography see Hombert 1996: 78-9 n. 186. New research for the forthcoming BA edition will argue that they were composed during a relatively brief stretch of time in 395. Where we refer to an Enarration other than 1-32 we have given Zarb's dating (1948), but have indicated with an asterisk where other scholars differ from him

(these differences are noted in Fiedrowicz's table). Where there is more than one homily for the earlier Psalms it is usually from a later period and Zarb's dates have been noted in the same manner.

are works which have been very much neglected by scholars in their examination of

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this period; however, they afford us a rare glimpse of Augustine's theological reflection away from the constraints and tensions which his immediate attempts at interpreting Paul provoked. They should therefore provide an indication of how much of what he says in the Pauline works is of a piece with the rest of his thought at this time and in what respects they diverge from it. This should help us to begin the process which will occupy Part Two of this book, where we will reassess what is indeed new or revolutionary in the *Ad Simplicianum*, and what is in fact continuous with this earlier thought.

It is more than evident in the *Enarrationes* that Augustine has Paul very much on his mind. The problems, questions, and issues which he was tackling in Romans and Galatians also set the agenda for his exegesis of the Psalms: the role of the Law; the claim to merit through works; the fact that fallen man merits nothing but condemnation; the role of faith; the need for God's grace; the nature and operation of grace. The texts we have seen emerging as 'key' interpretative foci in his attempts to interpret Romans reappear here to expound the meaning of the Psalmist. Indeed, it is almost as if Paul takes the Psalms hostage, and they are held to ransom until the interpretative debts Augustine feels he owes him have been paid. The Psalms were another text which had been just as central to his Christian life, both before and after conversion, as Paul. He had sung the Psalms as part of the liturgy, heard Ambrose link Paul and the Psalms,¹⁶²

¹⁶² Martin 2001: 15 who refers to Pizzolato 1978: 156.

and been greatly moved by their message as well as their beauty.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ *conf.* 9. 4. 8; 10. 33. 49-50.

The language in which he was subsequently to express his conversion, both in the early works and the *Confessiones*, owes as much to the Psalms as to Paul. They were recited every day, as part of the office, and as a new priest Augustine would doubtless have felt a more pressing need to study them than perhaps any other part of Scripture. Thus, in the 390s, he began what was to become a massive series of sermons/commentaries on the entire Psalter. For Augustine, the Psalms were the language of the Church, the body of Christ, the voice of the Christian supplicating and praising God. They are also, he seems to imply here, the voice of the Christian we encounter in Romans, sold under the law, meriting only condemnation, with no grounds for pride or boasting, freed only by God's grace and mercy. In the very personal tone of the Psalms and Paul, both

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written, as it were, as one-sided dialogues with either God or the Church,

Augustine seems to have found his own voice.

In commenting on the first thirty-two Psalms Augustine's main preoccupation—expressed in repeated Pauline citations and allusions—seems to be the lesson that no one merits divine grace: we have no merit of our own; the only thing we merit is condemnation; whatever good we do is not a matter of individual effort or will, but is wholly a gift of grace; if we think otherwise and presume upon ourselves, we stumble and fall. As he comments on Psalm 3,¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ I am using the Vulgate numeration.

quoting Rom. 7: 24-5, 'Let no man presume on himself, because it is for the Lord to save from the death of sin; for, *Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord ...* Justly then does the Church say, *Thou art my support, my glory*; for she does not attribute her preeminence to herself, since she understands by whose grace and mercy she is what she is.'¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ *en. Ps. 3. 8-9.*

Augustine is quite clear in these early *Enarrationes in Psalmos* that fallen humanity is like a sick and weak person, groaning and tossing upon his or her bed, unable to rise without help. On Ps. 6: 6, 'I have laboured in my groaning. I will wash my bed with tears every night,' he therefore comments:

That which is here called a bed is where the sick and weak soul rests, that is, in bodily gratification and worldly pleasure. Whoever tries to free himself from that delight washes with tears. For he sees that he already condemns carnal lusts; and yet his weakness is held by the pleasure, and willingly lies down in it. The soul cannot rise from it unless it is healed ... In the pleasure of this world, [the soul] is compelled to suffer as it were days and nights in conflicting emotions: as when Paul says, 'With the mind I serve the law of God ... but with the flesh the law of sin' (Rom. 7: 25).'

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid. 6. 7.*

The one who prays to God in the Psalms is, for Augustine, the voice of the fallen human being who has turned from God and now suffers, as he puts it, 'difficulty and toil ... the darkness of earthly lusts ... the sting of death (1 Cor. 15: 56), the blindness of soul which overtakes and enwraps the sinner',¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid. 6. 5-6.*

and who cannot turn back to God unless God himself first turns to them: '*Turn, O Lord*, that is, make me turn, since the soul in her turning feels difficulty and toil.'¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid. 6. 5.*

He maintains that human beings are now universally implicated in sin and the guilt of disobedience, have no merit of their own, and are completely dependent upon God's mercy. Thus, on the Psalmist's cry to God: 'Make me whole for Your pity's sake,' he observes that, 'He knows that it is not of his own merits that he is healed: for to him sinning, and transgressing a given command, was just condemnation due. Heal me

therefore, he says, not for my merit's sake, but for Your pity's sake.'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 6. 5.

Similarly on Ps. 5: 12, 'For You will bless the just man', he comments,

This is blessing, to glory in God, and to be inhabited by God. Such sanctification belongs to the just. But that they may be justified, the calling goes before: which is not of merit but of the grace of God. 'For all have sinned, and want the glory of God. For whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified' (Rom.3: 23; 8: 30). Since then the calling is not of our merit, but of the goodness and mercy of God, he went on to say, *O Lord, as with the shield of Your good will You have crowned us*. For God's good will precedes our good will, to call sinners to repentance.

There is absolutely no hesitation whatsoever here that it is not human beings who turn to, or choose God, but that it is God, in his grace (and supremely in his incarnation) who must turn to fallen humanity in order to lift it up:

Lord, my helper and redeemer: You are my helper, Lord, as I stretch out toward You, for You were first my redeemer that I might begin to stretch out to You. Keep us in this mind, lest anyone attribute to his own wisdom his act of turning toward You, or to his own strength his attaining to You, and so rather be driven back by You who thwart the proud. ... You redeem us that we may turn to You, and help us that we may reach You.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 18. 15 (Boulding's translation).

The extraordinarily dramatic and vivid way in which Augustine describes the work of grace in these Psalms endorses the impression that everything is of grace and that human beings can do nothing but humbly acknowledge their need and submit to it: grace works upon souls¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 9. 2, where Augustine describes God's 'invisible and far more sublime and marvellous action in souls'.

and providentially sends trials and temptations, so that human beings might throw themselves upon God and acknowledge their need for his help;¹⁷²

¹⁷² Ibid. 9. 1; 9. 10; 9. 20; 32. ii. 16.

it causes them to suffer and to cry out in pain for the help of the divine physician;¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Ibid. 9. 5; 21. ii. 4; 26. ii. 7.

it works not just upon their will but, as we shall see in Ch. 8, against it.

The frequent mention of the 'Glory of the Lord' by the Psalmist obviously reminds Augustine of Rom. 3: 23, 'For all have sinned, and are in need of the glory of God.' He frequently makes the point in these early *Enarrationes* that the 'Glory of the Lord' should be read as meaning that we owe everything to God's glory, and because of it we, like the Prodigal son, are 'made what we were not worthy to be'¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 18. 3.

our glory is of God's glory, in other words, of grace. Indeed, he identifies

God's glory with his grace so often that it becomes an interpretative principle: 'The Church, therefore, has good reason to say to God: "You take me up my glory". Far from attributing any excellence to herself, she realizes that she owes it to His grace and mercy ... "My glory",

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according to the principle which forbids us to ascribe any merit to ourselves.'¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵*en. Ps. 3. 9-10.*

Augustine sums up precisely what he means in his concluding comments on Ps. 29: 12, 'That my glory should sing to You', which he glosses 'And this is my glory, O Lord, my God, that I should confess to You for ever, that nothing I have derives from myself, but that all my good is from You, who are God, all in all.'¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶*Ibid. 29. 13.*

'Nothing I have derives from myself, but ... all my good is from You.' It is not surprising that it is in commenting on God's glory that Augustine cites 1 Cor. 4: 7 in the *Enarrationes*: observing that Christ addresses God in his manhood by calling Him 'My Glory', he claims that this is 'a lesson for the proud, who close their ears when asked: What have you that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why boast as though you had not?'¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷*Ibid. 3. 3; 1 Cor. 4: 7 is also cited in diu. qu. 83 69. 7; ep. 27. 4.*

The other key text for Augustine's understanding of the absolutely gratuitous, unmerited nature of grace, is also present in the *Enarrationes*: 1 Cor. 1: 31, 'He that glories, let him glory in the Lord' which Augustine cites in teaching that human beings have no grounds for boasting in themselves, but should trust wholly in God, the 'King of Glory'.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸*en. Ps. 7. 4; 23. 10. Cf. s. 50. 11.*

De Sermone Domini in Monte

There is one other work we need to consider from this period, the *De sermone Domini in monte*, which was written in 394, at the same time as Augustine began in earnest on Romans. Although it is primarily a pastoral work, intended to admonish, instruct, and inspire his congregation in Christian virtue, we might still ask whether there are any traces of the theology we find in the *Enarrationes*, or whether it betrays anything of the preoccupations we have seen emerging in the works on Romans he composed around the same time. What we find, in fact, is a firm emphasis upon divine grace as a wholly unmerited gift, given by God in the Holy Spirit, to enable human beings to accomplish the Beatitudes. The seven stages of the ascent of the soul described in the Beatitudes are each related to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in Isa. 11: 2,¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹*s. Dom. mon. 1. 3. 10; 2. 4. 11.*

and the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer are each shown to be based on

these gifts, which make possible their fulfilment.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 2. 11. 38.

Augustine therefore uses Rom. 5: 5, 'the grace of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy

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Spirit, which is given to us' to describe the way in which this grace works¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 1. 5. 13.

and emphasizes that it is given freely and not according to our merits. He writes,

And since the fact that we are called to an eternal inheritance, that we might be fellow heirs with Christ and attain to the adoption of sons, is not of our deserts, but of God's grace; we put this very same grace in the beginning of our prayer, when we say 'Our Father' ... how much ... ought we to tremble to call God Father, if there is so great a stain and so much baseness in our character ... [it is therefore] a relationship which can be brought about by no expenditure of ours, but solely by God's goodwill.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Ibid. 2. 4. 16.

He therefore describes prayer in terms redolent of the *da quod iubes et iube quod uis*, as 'a turning of the heart to Him, who is ever ready to give, if we will but take what He Has given'.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Ibid. 2. 3. 14.

Whatever fallen man, 'blinded by passion', knows in his reason, is therefore due not to himself, 'but to the light of truth by which, however faintly, it is according to its capacity illuminated'.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 2. 9. 32.

As in the *Enarrationes*, he describes the operation of grace as the work of God's providence, admonishing human beings through trials and tribulations which prove and exercise them,¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 2. 9. 34; 2. 14. 79.

make them realize their own wretchedness (he cites Rom. 7: 24-5),¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 2. 12. 35.

and move them to throw themselves upon Christ.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

Again, everything is of grace, and the salvation of fallen humankind depends entirely upon God's will and gift.

The *Ad Simplicianum* Revisited

It now becomes more difficult to identify what is in fact 'new' in the *Ad Simplicianum*. We have seen that in the early *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and

the *De sermone Domini in monte*, which Augustine was writing around the same time as the works on Paul in the mid-390s, there is no suggestion whatsoever that the choice of faith might be something that can be attributed to a person's free will. The *initium fidei* is, in fact, wholly and notably absent. Instead, Augustine faces up squarely to the problem of original sin, human helplessness, and divine grace without any attempt to introduce the idea that human beings freely will to believe and that grace is the reward for this. Rather, he unswervingly follows the theology of universal sinfulness, human impotence, and divine grace which he was to set forth subsequently in 396, in the *Ad Simplicianum*.

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Augustine's response to Simplicianus' second question, concerning Rom. 9, has traditionally been identified as a decisive break with his early theology, and most especially with the idea of the *initium fidei*, which he had tentatively introduced in 394-5 in an attempt to preserve some role for human free will and to defend divine justice. It has been interpreted as a first, clear statement that everything, even faith, is a gift of God, and that, in the light of universal human sinfulness, divine election is absolutely just (albeit incomprehensible). But these ideas¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ The idea of election is not prominent in either the *en. Ps.* or the *s. Dom. mon.* but we shall see in Ch. 8 that it is, however, present in other early works preceding the composition of *Ad Simplicianum* in 396.

as we have just seen, are *already* present in the other works Augustine was writing on Scripture at least a year or two earlier, at the same time as the *Expositio propositionum*, *Inchoata expositio*, and *Expositio ad Galatas*.

What are we to make of this? Was Augustine directly contradicting himself in works composed at the same time? It certainly seems to be the case, but why would he do this? The clue perhaps lies in the fact that what he writes in the *Enarrationes* and the *De sermone Domini in monte* have nothing of the tentative, exploratory, questioning, and ultimately ambiguous feel of the works on Romans from this period. They are expositions of Scripture in the light of a surefooted and unwavering understanding of human helplessness without divine grace—a grace which we have no claim to merit but which is given to us absolutely gratuitously. Where did this certainty and confidence come from? I would like to suggest that it derives from a long-established understanding of Christian theology, influenced, among others, by Paul, which Augustine had gradually acquired in the years since his conversion, and which is clearly evident in his teaching on human sinfulness and the need for divine grace throughout the early works up to the 390s. It is also rooted in Augustine's own experience and his deepest convictions—what he describes in *Confessiones* as 'the most intimate feeling of my mind'. Remembering his retreat at Cassiciacum in book 9, and how he had read 'the Psalms of David, songs of faith, utterances of devotion, which allow no pride of spirit to enter in' he tells us that he wished the Manichees could overhear his praying of them, his supplications and admissions of weakness, his acknowledgement of God's help, so that they might see what effect the Psalms had had upon him, and not just think he was saying these things for their sake. But he also realizes that they would not have understood, for, he confesses, 'I was expressing the most intimate feeling of my mind with

myself and for myself.'¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹*conf.* 9. 4. 8.

Although the *Enarrationes* seem to play into the Manichees' hands by allowing no role to human free will, they also, and much more

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importantly, take the ground from under their feet by demonstrating the emptiness and destructiveness of their pride.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ See O'Donnell 1992 iii. 91 f. on the close parallels between *conf.* 9. 4. 8-11 and *en. Ps.* 4.

It is this 'most intimate feeling' which we see being subjected to intense scrutiny in Augustine's tortured attempts at interpreting Romans in the mid-390s, and in particular ch. 9. In these works he obviously felt obliged to address explicitly the nature of human free will in a manner which raised the possibility of its independent action apart from grace. Why he does this can only be guessed. Was he finally confronting an issue which he had avoided because, although it appeared to refute the Manichees' determinism, it also condoned their pride? Had he avoided it because it seemed to contradict his most deeply held beliefs? Was it the work of other theologians whom he was reading at the same time which presented it in a way he could no longer ignore? Or was it simply that he had not fully appreciated or articulated the question up to this point, and had therefore not satisfactorily resolved it in his own mind? Whatever the reason(s), while continuing to express his own deepest convictions to his congregation in the *Enarrationes* and the *De sermone Domini in monte* in terms of his longstanding understanding of Paul, he tentatively investigated new possibilities in the company of his fellow monks at Carthage and Hippo, where hypotheses and open-ended questions would not unduly disturb their faith.

In explicitly rejecting the idea of the *initium fidei* in the light of a theology of the Fall, original sin, and the incapacity of the human free will, and in insisting on the need for God's grace, operating both outwardly and inwardly upon the will, we will argue in Part Two that the *Ad Simplicianum* represents a return to what Augustine had always believed: having battled with new possibilities, and having investigated whether it was indeed possible to retain some degree of human free will, he finally realized, with absolute certainty, that he had in fact been correct all along: everything was, and is, of grace: 'I, indeed, laboured in defence of the free choice of the human will; but the grace of God conquered.'¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹*retr.* 2. 27. 1; *praed. sanct.* 4. 8.

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Part Two

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6 The Fall

Carol Harrison

Abstract: This chapter examines the various ways in which Augustine talks about human fallenness and sin in the early works, and how these relate both to this understanding of creation from nothing and to the Fall of Adam and Eve. It considers how far 'original sin' can be legitimately spoken of in these works, and concludes that its characteristic features — human solidarity in Adam's sin, ignorance and difficulty in willing, the role of habit, concupiscence and inability to do the good without grace — shape Augustine's understanding from the beginning.

Keywords: Fall, original sin, concupiscence, habit, will, ignorance, difficulty, pride, creation, Adam and Eve

The classical ideal of perfection is a glorious vision of men and women as rational beings, possessed of free will, unconstrained and untroubled by necessity, capable not only of attaining the truth intellectually, but of fashioning their life in accordance with it, so that through virtue they attain self-control, autonomy, invulnerability to disturbing passions—in short, perfection and happiness. Such a person, devoted to contemplation and moral and intellectual purification, confident of themselves, their friends, and the future, victorious over their body, could truly aspire to be wise, to grow godlike in retirement from the world—*deificari in otio*, to 'achieve the concentrated tranquillity of the supermen that still gaze out at us from some mosaics in Christian churches and from the statues of pagan sages'.¹

¹ Brown 1967: 156. This concept has been particularly disputed in relation to the nature of Augustine's early Christianity. Folliet 1962 suggested that the expression (which occurs in *ep.*10, to Nebridius), and Augustine's understanding of it, was at this stage wholly Neoplatonic, and specifically Porphyrian, in inspiration, and that it could be attained without grace. For a convincing refutation, which examines Augustine's use of *deificare* in other texts, and its link with scriptural texts in *uera rel.*, see Teske 1992.

This is how many scholars would like to envisage Augustine at Cassiciacum,

and at Thagaste in the year before his ordination. What is commonly described as the early church's 'Christianity of discontinuity'—in reference to the popular belief that devout Christians dramatically left behind their former, sinful life in the waters of baptism and emerged purified and renewed for a life of perfection—was an ideal just as compelling to early Christians as the classical one which, in many ways, provided its philosophical foundation.²

² See Kirk 1932; Brown 1967: 183-207 for this idea. For a discussion of whether it was as widespread in the early church as most scholars would suggest, see the illuminating comments of Burnell 1995 who, having examined the relevant texts in context, concludes that it is clear that 'the Christianity of complete moral discontinuity, though it existed in the minds and words of some Christians, was not the patristic tradition' (59). For the tensions which the classical ideal of *otium honestum*, and the Christian ascetic ideal, create in the Cassiciacum dialogues see Trout 1988.

Did Augustine ever share these ideals? Was he ever, as Brown suggests, 'more Pelagian

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than Pelagius'?³

³ Brown 1967: 148. As Fredriksen 1990: 244 comments, 'The Pelagian reformers stood within this classical tradition of man's moral perfectibility—as, indeed, prior to 396, did Augustine.'

Was this the 'Lost Future' which he reluctantly relinquished? Was this the Christianity to which he was converted, but which, ultimately, 'could not withstand the terrific weight of his own expectations of it'?⁴

⁴ Brown 1967: 147.

These are some of the questions which we will attempt to answer in this chapter on Augustine's early understanding of the Fall.

Whilst most scholars would follow Peter Brown in his assessment of Augustine the new convert, inspired to optimism and certainty by a classical and Christian ideal of perfection, and by the real possibility of attaining it in this life, many are more reluctant than Brown to concede that he began to relinquish it as early as his ordination as priest in 391. This is because they do not believe that Augustine worked out the full implications of the doctrine of the Fall until at least 396, in the *Ad Simplicianum*, or even later, in the context of the Pelagian controversy.⁵

⁵ See the discussion of the views of Sage and Burns below. Fredriksen 1988: 107 writes 'in denying man's ability to do anything toward his own salvation, Augustine broke completely with the idea of virtue so prominent in the classical tradition through which he had been reintroduced to Catholicism back in Milan ... The Pelagian reformers stood within this classical tradition of man's moral perfectibility—as indeed, prior to 396, had Augustine...'

While Augustine was still able to entertain the idea that human beings possess free will, despite the punishment for Adam's sin which they suffer in their mortal body, they argue that some room is still left to talk about human achievement and attainment. The *Ad Simplicianum*, therefore, once again becomes the dramatic turning point in Augustine's thought, since it is in this work, scholars almost unanimously maintain, that Augustine first rehearses an understanding of the Fall which leaves no room to talk of human free will

or merit, in which all human beings are implicated not only in Adam's punishment, but also his guilt, thereby forming a *massa peccati*, for whom everything is determined by the election and grace of God. It represents, once and for all, his abandonment of any ideal of perfection, his admission of defeat in his attempts to preserve free will, and his complete submission to God's grace.

In examining Augustine's early teaching on the Fall, therefore, we have two main questions in mind: first, did Augustine ever hold the classical/Christian ideal of perfection? Second, how much of his 'mature' theory of the Fall (which we will take, for the sake of argument, to be the one outlined in *Ad Simplicianum*) is present in the early works? We will then be in a position to ask, in the next chapter, how his early reflections on the Fall affected his estimate of human free will, and in the final chapter, how it relates to his teaching on grace.

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'Nothing is better known when the preacher declares it; nothing is more secret when we try to understand it' (*mor.* 1.22.40)

What then was Augustine's doctrine of the Fall? To begin with, we should note that although he does talk about the soul's falling away from God, he does not use the word 'Fall' as a technical term,⁶

⁶ Though texts such as *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 6. 7 verge on the technical use: 'We have proof that it [the soul] is subject to change in time from the great variety of its loves and from its fall (*ipso lapsu*) by which it became wretched.'

and generally tends to write in terms of the sin of human beings (*peccatum*) and the punishment of that sin (*poena peccati*). In particular, he has in mind Adam's first sin, or original sin, and the way in which we somehow share, and are implicated in, his sinfulness and the punishment for his sin, so that all humankind together constitutes a 'lump' or 'mass' (*massa*) of sinfulness. In the mid-390s he begins to use the more technical language of *peccatum originale* and *massa peccati/luti* to express these ideas. These characteristic features of Augustine's early reflection are found in both Eastern and Western tradition,⁷

⁷ For bibliography and references see Madec 1996a: 66 n. 33; Bonner 1967, 1970; C. Harrison 2000: 89 n. 18; 109; Rigby in Fitzgerald (ed.) 1999: 607. For its presence in Eastern tradition Delaroche 1996: 321-3, especially his references to Ephrem the Syrian and Cyril of Alexandria, and his insistence that the East did not necessarily interpret the Fall simply in an exemplarist way, as is often supposed.

which generally taught that Adam was created by God with reason and free will; that he turned away from the good in disobeying God's command; that this first sin somehow affects the rest of human beings, who share its consequences and punishment, not only in their mortality, but also in the difficulty which they now experience in both recognizing and doing the good. It is as if human beings somehow inherit from Adam a disease which affects their reason and will, so that they now find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to exercise them in an ordered and harmonious way, in subjection and obedience to their Creator. Rather they find themselves with

a will no longer governed by reason but motivated by a powerful and uncontrollable desire for lower, created reality. It is this which Augustine describes as lust (*cupiditas*) or concupiscence (*concupiscentia*) and later, in the context of the Pelagian controversy, linked most especially with sexual desire, and the way in which it overcomes the body unconstrained by reason. The idea that humankind inherits Adam's guilt (*originalis reatus*), so that even newborn babies are damned without the remission of that guilt by the grace of baptism,⁸

⁸ e.g. *ep.* 217. 5. 16. Bonner 1987 viii. 113 ff. for discussion and references.

and reflection on the inheritance of concupiscence in relation to sexual desire, are also features of Augustine's thought, but they

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only fully emerge later on, in his engagement with Pelagius, and especially with Julian of Eclanum.

We have seen that most scholars identify the *Ad Simplicianum* as the work in which the doctrine of original sin we have just described is fully stated for the first time, along with its dramatic consequences for an understanding of human free will and the operation of divine grace. Before we proceed, however, we should note that some scholars, such as A. Sage⁹

⁹ Sage 1967.

and P. Burns,¹⁰

¹⁰ Burns 1980.

do not think that Augustine held that Adam's sin had any effect directly upon the will of human beings until even later than the *Ad Simplicianum*, and locate this inward effect only in the anti-Pelagian works. In Ch. 8 we will consider Burns' insistence that in *Ad Simplicianum* grace works only exteriorly, or in strengthening the will, rather than within the will itself, in evoking the love and desire for the good which motivates it to act. We will see that this is part of Burns' attempt to preserve the freedom of the will to do good of its own powers, by a congruous external call, even at the point where Augustine seems so explicitly to relinquish it. His reluctance to allow that original sin has any effect upon the will at this stage is part of this argument. Sage, too, distinguishing between what he describes as *péché d'origine* and *péché originel* maintains that the early Augustine describes the effects of Adam's sin not as any sort of inheritance, but simply as a punishment, and that this amounts to no more than the body's mortality, which drags down and weakens the soul. Its effect directly upon the soul itself, however, he only identifies much later in 397-411, in Augustine's teaching on concupiscence. He therefore insists that before this period Augustine regarded sin as an act committed only by the individual but not because he or she is part of the *massa peccati* descended from Adam. Thus, in the face of much evidence to the contrary, which he cites in order to accommodate it to his own theory, Sage also attempts to preserve the freedom of the will to do the good in Augustine's early works, and understands the operation of divine grace only as an external action, in teaching and example, which has no direct effect upon the human soul. In doing so he explicitly runs counter to Augustine's main aims in the early works: to counter Manichaean dualism by locating evil not in the body but in the free will of the rational creature.¹¹

¹¹ He comments, 'À la première étape, il apparaît prisonnier d'une conception dualiste de l'homme, esprit lié à la chair comme le forçat à son boulet, et s'il ne condamne pas la chair, tout le mal cependant de notre condition humaine procède à ses yeux de ce que le poids de la chair a été aggravé par le premier péché de l'homme' (1967: 212).

Both scholars run the risk of making the early Augustine at least as Pelagian

as Pelagius. That they are fundamentally mistaken should become apparent in what follows.

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It was clear in the last chapter that one of the strongest formative influences on Augustine's understanding of original sin was Paul, in particular Rom. 7 and 9. This scriptural witness¹²

¹² Which is otherwise not very strong—Kirwan 1989: 131-2 lists five proof texts which Augustine uses for original sin and concludes that three are mistranslations and two are misconstrued.

would have been confirmed by the presence of the doctrine in African tradition as early as Tertullian and Cyprian, and in his own day, in Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, and possibly Tyconius, as well as in the liturgical practice of infant baptism, and the Church's teaching on the virgin birth. It was therefore an intrinsic part of the African Christianity Augustine was born into, and not something he invented, or arbitrarily imposed, to make sense of his own experience of the divisions, tensions, and the weakness and incapacity of his will—although the latter would no doubt have proved further confirmation of the doctrine.

Why Does Humanity Fall?

Will

When we examined Augustine's reflection on creation from nothing in Ch. 4 we noted his insistence upon the goodness of creation, together with his description of it as unstable, temporal, corruptible, and mutable, with an inherent tendency to fall away from its Creator. We saw that only if human beings constantly convert towards God and participate in him, by the action of their will, can they resist their created tendency to fall away from him. We observed that the way in which Augustine describes created reality has much in common with the way in which he describes the consequences of Adam's fall: both are characterized by time, change, and corruption without the sustaining and redeeming grace of God; in both, it is a defective will which is responsible for humanity's falling away. To 'fall' seems to be part of what it is to be created from nothing, unless one continually turns one's will towards and loves the Creator. We suggested that an understanding of the created dependence of human beings, and the crucial importance of their acknowledgement of their need for divine grace in turning their will towards their Creator, is characteristic of Augustine's thought from the beginning. He is also equally insistent, against Manichaean dualism, that evil is not part of a person's created nature, but is due to the failure of the will to turn towards

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God, to acknowledge its dependence upon him, and to continually affirm, in love, the source of its existence.¹³

¹³ In addition to the texts we examined in Ch. 4 see also *duab. an.* 10-12; *c. Fort.* 21.

In his debate with the Manichee Fortunatus (*Contra Fortunatum*) in 392 Augustine rehearses his arguments against the substantiality of evil, whereupon Fortunatus counters with a series of quotations from Paul which he obviously believes support his dualistic separation of body and soul, and which, by demonstrating that the body is essentially evil, the way in which the good soul is brought to sin involuntarily. Ironically, these are precisely the texts Augustine uses to depict the fallen will, divided against itself, no longer able to will the good: Fortunatus argues 'Therefore it is evident...that the good soul seems to sin not voluntarily, but by the doing of that which is not subject to the law of God. For it likewise follows that 'the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; so that you may not do the things that you will'. Again 'I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and leading me captive in the law of sin and of death. Therefore I am a miserable man; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'¹⁴

¹⁴ Gal. 5: 17; Rom. 7: 23-5 in *c. Fort.* 21.

If there is division and dualism, Augustine maintains that it is within the fractured, fallen will.

Evil, for Augustine, is therefore not an existence, but non-existence; a privation of the good; a defection by the creature which brings about a diminishment of its being. This is the context in which Augustine naturally reflects upon the sinfulness of humanity in the early works. What the created soul does in failing to turn towards its Creator, in thinking it has no need of his sustaining grace, in proudly believing it can be self-sufficient, in turning away from the Creator towards his creation, is precisely what Augustine teaches Adam did in the Fall: it wills, desires, and lusts after something other than God, and thereby suffers the inevitable consequences: 'The farther, then, the mind departs from God, not in space, but in affection and lust after things below Him, the more it is filled with folly and wretchedness.'¹⁵

¹⁵ *mor.* 1. 12. 20.

Although Adam's fall is not always the context in which Augustine expounds these ideas in these early works, the groundwork for his understanding and interpretation of it is firmly laid. Indeed, it seems that it was not so much Adam's fall which provided Augustine with a paradigm by which to interpret humanity's fallenness, but rather that his general reflection on the tendency of created, sinful human beings to fall away from their Creator, informed his reflection on the fall of Adam. At the very least, the two mutually informed each other.

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The fall of Satan likewise provided Augustine with a pattern and precedent for interpreting the fall of Adam and his descendents. Satan, he maintains, was good in so far as he was an angel, but evil in so far as he was perverted by his own will. As he writes in *De uera religione*, 'By willing to love God rather than themselves angels abide firm and stable in Him and enjoy His majesty, being gladly subject to Him alone. The bad angel loved himself more than God, refused to be subject to God, swelled with pride, came short

of supreme being and fell.'¹⁶

¹⁶*uera rel. 26; cf. Gn. adu. Man. 2. 14. 20.*

The presence of evil therefore already casts a dark and menacing shadow over the landscape of Paradise.

Pride

From the very beginning, Augustine identified pride as the root of humanity's fallenness. As we saw in Ch. 4, he understood it primarily as a failure in the creature, drawn from nothing, to acknowledge its absolute dependence upon its Creator for everything that it is, and humbly to subject itself to him as the source of its existence. The creature falls in thinking that it is sufficient to itself and thereby diminishes itself. Far removed from the ideal of perfection and self-determination, this is a central feature of Augustine's early understanding of the Christian life.

Recounting his own journey to conversion in *De beata uita* (386) he vividly warns of the danger of pride in those who think they have almost attained their goal and that the happy life is within their grasp: he likens such self-congratulation to a mountain of vainglory which must be avoided by the traveller, for it is, he warns, 'so empty and groundless inwardly that it submerges and absorbs the conceited through the cracking, fragile ground upon which they presently walk and throws them back into the darkness and snatches away the home, so much desired and almost in sight'.¹⁷

¹⁷*b. uita 1. 3.*

The message is an obvious one: pilgrims will only be on firm ground and reach their goal if they entrust themselves to God.

Reflecting on the fall of Adam and Eve in his early commentary on Genesis, *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* (388/9), Augustine clearly identifies their pride—their desire to be like gods, to know good and evil, to be autonomous rather than subject themselves to God—as the cause of their fall. In thus abandoning their 'middle rank', whereby they were subject to God and held their bodies in subjection, Augustine astutely observes that 'they lost what they had received in wanting to seize what they had not received. For the nature of man did not receive the capability of being happy by its own power

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without God ruling it.'¹⁸

¹⁸*Gn. adu. Man. 2. 15. 22.* Like many early passages on pride (cf. esp. *mor. 1. 12. 20*), this seems to echo Plotinus' description of the soul's *tolma* in *Ennead 5. 1. 1*, a text which Augustine knew well (though the desire to be like gods is absent from this text).

Again, it is the failure of human beings to acknowledge their dependence upon God, and their mistaken belief in their own powers, which causes them to fall away from the source of their existence and to diminish themselves. Commenting on Gen. 2: 6, 'a spring came up from the earth and watered the whole face of the earth', Augustine likens humanity's dependence upon God to a spring upon its source: if human beings turn away from the inner spring of truth which welled up within them, and flow outwards into external things

through pride, they thereby abandon the life-giving source and become dried up; they must now toil upon the earth for sustenance and wait for the rain which falls from the clouds of preaching and teaching to provide for their needs. It is in this context that Augustine quotes for the first time the text from Wisdom which he will henceforth use on almost every occasion he mentions the Fall: 'The beginning of man's pride is to turn away from God' (Eccles. 10: 14).¹⁹

¹⁹*Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 5. 6; cf. 2. 9. 12; *mus.* 6. 13. 40; *lib. arb.* 3. 25. 76; *s. Dom. mon.* 1. 1. 3.

We can therefore see a well-worked-out theory of the fall of Adam and Eve, of why it happened, and of what it tells us about the relation between God and man, as early as 388/9.

In *De uera religione* (390) Augustine offers a concise but cogent description of the nature of pride: it is the misguided search for unity and omnipotence in oneself, or in temporal things, which is doomed to frustration because these are things which can only be found in God and in subjection to him.²⁰

²⁰*uera. rel.* 84.

These insights are developed in more detail in a work which stands out among the early works for its profound analysis of the causes and effects of the Fall, the *De musica* (390). In the final book (6) of what proved to be the last work he was able to complete of his projected series on the different disciplines of the liberal arts, before his ordination and other, more pressing concerns put paid to the project, we find a strikingly mature theological synthesis expounded in the language of the classroom, in terms of a consideration of the various types of rhythm and how they should be categorized and graded. This disconcerting book is a salutary reminder, if one is needed, that the genre and language of the early works should not be allowed to deflect attention from their theological subject and purpose. In book 6, what is described as the desire for unity and omnipotence in *De uera religione* is depicted as the soul's desire for the beautiful: we direct our mind to the things we love most, in other words those things which are beautiful, which please and delight us because they possess unity, number, and equality.²¹

²¹*mus.* 6. 13. 38.

The soul errs because it directs itself to temporal rather than eternal things. This happens, Augustine

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suggests, because in the hierarchy of reality, it is the role of the soul to effect (*agere*) things in bodies, rather than be affected (*patere*) by them.²²

²² e.g. *ibid.* 6. 13. 39 *agere haec animam in corporibus, non a corporibus pati.*

But it is all too easy for the soul to become caught up in what it is necessarily involved in below itself, 'The love of acting on the stream of its bodily passions turns the soul away from contemplation of eternal things, diverting its attention with the care of sensible pleasure...the love of operating on bodies also turns it away and makes it restless...finally love of the vainest knowledge turns it away...and from these is born curiosity.'²³

²³ *Ibid.* 6. 13. 39.

This general movement of the soul away from the eternal is identified as the movement of pride, for in seeking to rule, order, and subject temporal reality according to its own needs and desires the soul is placing itself before God and failing to act in subjection to him: 'the general love of action turning away from the true arises from pride by which vice the soul has preferred imitating God to serving God'.²⁴

²⁴ *Ibid.*

The language Augustine uses to describe the soul's fall in this work is the now familiar language of creation from nothing, failure to acknowledge one's dependence, and of falling back to nothingness. He writes, 'Since the soul is nothing in itself...but whatever it is is from God...so to puff up with pride is to go forth to the outermost, and, we might say, to become empty, that is, to be less and less...what is that but...putting yourself away from God, not in span of places, but in the affect of mind?'²⁵

²⁵ *Ibid.* 6. 13. 40.

In *De musica* Augustine also introduces two ideas which are to be characteristic of his mature thought on the subject of pride. The first is that pride is a turning to one's own private good and a neglecting of the common good: he observes that, 'the soul lapses by pride into certain actions of its own power, and neglecting universal law has fallen into doing certain things private to itself, and this is called turning away from God'.²⁶

²⁶ *Ibid.* 6. 16. 53; cf. *lib. arb.* 2. 18. 53, 'the will which turns from the unchangeable and common good and turns to its own private good or to anything exterior or inferior, sins' *uera rel.* 112. On Augustine's subsequent use of this idea see Rist 1994: 154-5.

The second is his observation that pride is often expressed in the desire to dominate others (*libido dominandi*), when he writes that, 'the appetite of the soul is to have under it other souls...rational ones, that is, your neighbours, fellows and companions...the proud soul desires to operate (*operari*) on them'.²⁷

²⁷ *mus.* 6. 13. 41.

Soon after completing *De musica*, in 391 Augustine was ordained priest. Although many scholars have identified a marked change at this time, not only in Augustine's preoccupations and interests, but also in his estimate of human ability and behaviour, and have attributed this to his exposure to the real-life foibles and failings of the 'man in the pew', there is actually little to

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support this.²⁸

²⁸ e.g. Brown 1967: 148-9; Mara 1989: 161-2; Fredriksen 1990: 238. The latter writes: 'Augustine had broken completely with the classical ideal of virtue by which he had been reintroduced to Catholicism back in Milan. Enmeshed in ecclesiastical responsibilities, struggling almost as much with his own congregation as with schismatics and heretics, aware—through his dream life—of the deeper struggles continually going on within himself, Augustine now found such an ideal dangerous, ridiculous, and puerile.' But as Madec 1998: 79 comments, 'Les travaux rédigés de part et d'autre de la date de l'ordination presbytérale (391) ne manifestent pas de changement d'orientation théologique, encore moins quelque crise intellectuelle ou spirituelle.' Cf. Delaroche 1996: 101 n. 107 for similar comments.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, a more serious engagement with Scripture, and with questions such as church unity, was inevitable at this time, given his obligation to preach, catechize, and defend the Church against the all too pressing threat of the Donatists, but there is little to suggest that his estimate of human nature was in any way transformed. After all, it is not as if he had lived in isolation and solitary splendour before his ordination, away from the mass of sinful humanity; he was a social person, only happy when living in the company of others, and that is how we always find him, as a student, at Cassiciacum, at Thagaste, and then at Hippo—and of course there is nothing like life in community to make one acutely aware of human shortcomings, frailty, and failure. The idea that in relinquishing his hitherto relatively sheltered life and in taking on an intractable congregation, he was led dramatically to abandon his earlier ideal of perfection and any hope for its attainment in this life, has a certain attraction, but it is simply not borne out by the facts. Nor is it convincing to suggest that his engagement with the Manichees, in the period 392-4, suddenly forced him to see the difficulty of achieving an ideal life, and to appreciate the problems raised by his defence of free will, because he was brought face to face at this time with the 'apparent permanence of evil in human actions', and the force of habit which confirmed the compulsive

sinfulness of human beings.²⁹

²⁹ Brown 1967: 148-9.

Augustine's disagreements with the Manichees began even before he left them, and we have already seen, and will continue to see, that he was never serenely confident of the power of free will, and never less than acutely conscious of the permanence of evil or of compulsive habit. It did not take a particular encounter with the Manichees to precipitate his awareness of these fundamental aspects of human nature.

Thus, as we saw in the previous chapter, although the genre of some of the works written during the 390s changes in that many are now specific attempts to interpret Scripture (the works on Romans and Galatians, the first thirty-two Psalms, and the Sermon on the Mount), Augustine clearly continues and confirms his earlier emphasis upon the innate tendency of

human beings to pride—this time in the language of Paul and the Psalmist: they glory in

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themselves, attribute good works to their own credit, and claim merit before the law, rather than giving glory to God by humbly acknowledging their need for God's grace to do any good at all.³⁰

³⁰ e.g. *s. Dom. mon.* 1. 1. 3; 1. 3. 10; *en. Ps.* 1. 4; 7. 4-5; 15. 10; 18. i. 14; 24. 2 as well as those already cited from the Pauline commentaries in Ch. 5.

There is no dramatic change between the pre- and post-ordination works, but a determined, almost dogged, insistence that human beings have no grounds for pride (still less, to aspire to perfection), but must realize that everything is of grace.³¹

³¹ Pride was a feature of Augustine's Christian consciousness from the beginning: it was one of the most obvious failings he identified in the Manichees, as well as in the Donatists and later the Pelagians. It was a constant target for his attacks on these groups, as well as a constant experience in himself and his fellow Christians.

Taking the Creature for the Creator

Augustine's acute consciousness of the permanence of evil in human action is seen nowhere more clearly than in his repeated insistence, from his first works onwards, on the difficulty the soul experiences in maintaining its rightful position between God and the body, subject to God and subjecting and ruling the body. This precarious position, which it maintains only by the constant action of its will, is not one it seems to be able to maintain unaided. Failing to acknowledge its subjection to God it falls in pride; failing to subject temporal, created reality to itself it becomes subject to it. The soul seems to be perpetually suspended between these two possibilities and any failure to maintain the fragile and precarious balance of subjection precipitates its fall. This is, of course, what Augustine means when he talks of free will, which will be the subject of the next chapter.

Once the soul disobeys or turns away from God it diminishes itself and becomes part of the temporal it was created to rule. The consequences are devastating. Augustine sums these up in the third book of *De libero arbitrio* as its ignorance and difficulty.³²

³² *lib. arb.* 3. 51-3.

But we do not have to wait until the mid-390s to encounter this portrait of fallen man. As we shall see below, it is present in Augustine's early obsession with the soul, with its place in the hierarchy of reality, its role in the body, its right use and ordering of what is below it, its ascent to what is above it, and his vivid descriptions of what happens to it if it fails to observe this hierarchy. The soul must ascend or fall, but its feet are, as it were, held fast in the clay of this life by its animation of the body. Its action in sense perception always seems to hold it firmly down to the earth. In an interesting passage in *De moribus* (387-8), he vividly portrays the soul as weighed down by the inheritance of original sin in the body—the 'sin of old

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(*antiquum peccatum*), and man's heaviest bond (*grauissimum uinculum*)—shaken with fear of pain and of death, unthinkingly attached to the body by force of habit (*ui consuetudinis*), ignorant of the divine help which would enable it to use the body wisely, towards its proper subjection, reformation, and resurrection.³³

³³*Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 22. 40, 'But among all the things which are possessed in this life, the body is, by God's most righteous laws, for the sin of old, man's heaviest bond, which is well known as a fact, but most incomprehensible in its mystery. Lest this bond should be shaken and disturbed, the soul is shaken with the fear of toil and pain; lest it should be lost and destroyed, the soul is shaken with the fear of death. For the soul loves it from the force of habit, not knowing that by using it well and wisely its resurrection and reformation will, by the divine help and decree, be without any trouble made subject to its authority.'

Augustine is painfully aware, as we saw in *De musica*, that the soul's necessary involvement in the temporal somehow diminishes it. He laments the fact that 'when it [the soul] adapts itself to the body, it is less with itself, because the body is always less than it is. And so, when the soul is turned from its God to its servant, it is necessarily deficient.'³⁴

³⁴*mus.* 6. 5. 12-13. For the idea that the soul is made less by the body it is attached to, see Plotinus: *Enn.* 3. 2. 4. That this is not just a Platonic insight in Augustine, but that it is based firmly upon the fall of Adam and Eve, is made clear in *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 9. 12, where he reflects on the effects of Adam and Eve's decision to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their pride in so doing, he observes, 'violates and corrupts the ordered integrity of [the soul's] nature'. When Augustine speaks of the soul's relation to created reality he seems always also to have in mind the relation of Adam and Eve to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—in other words, the Fall.

This is above all the case because, as we shall see below when we consider the role of habit (*consuetudo*) in the early works, as the soul becomes habituated to the temporal concerns of the mortal body, it becomes increasingly unable to look beyond them to attain the spiritual which is its true life and sustenance.

Augustine is also uneasily conscious of the inherent ambiguity of the created world: it compels and attracts the soul precisely because it is indeed God's work—it is good and beautiful, a beauty providentially intended to point towards its Creator—but it is often wrongly perceived by the soul, which fails to look beyond it, but becomes trapped and ensnared by it.³⁵

³⁵e.g. the famous allegory of *philocalia* and *philosophia* in *Acad.* 2. 7; *uera rel.* 42-4.

He is also acutely aware, as we have seen, that the soul's preoccupation with the multitudinous concerns of the body inevitably turns it away from contemplation of the truth³⁶

³⁶*mus.* 6. 13. 41.

and that it might easily become so engrossed in them that it fails to look beyond them, but either proudly seeks to dominate them, or becomes trapped by their pleasures and delights, and thereby subject to them. Either way, the soul diminishes itself and its powers, and makes it more difficult to return either to itself or to God.³⁷

³⁷*uera rel.* 22, 'life which delights in material joys and neglects God tends to nothingness and is thereby iniquity'.

As he comments in *De ordine*,

'for anyone who has advanced towards objects of sense, it is difficult to return to himself'.³⁸

³⁸ *Ord.* 1. 11. 30.

It is this which Augustine understands in Paul's assertion that 'the creature has been made subject to vanity' (Rom. 8: 20): the soul, subject to created things, can no longer separate itself from them;³⁹

³⁹ *mor.* 1. 1. 3. 22.

it is like the charioteer, he observes, who has lost control of his horses and is rushed headlong to ruin.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *uera rel.* 83.

The effects of the soul's loss of control over the body are carefully examined in *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* (388-9), in relation to the mortality of the body which is the punishment for Adam and Eve's disobedience. The loss of immortality means that the soul must now suffer a mortal, corruptible body, which weighs it down, distracts it, and makes it difficult for it to know or to do any good. Eve's bodily corruption, and the pain she must now suffer in childbirth, is interpreted as the pain of carnal desire and the bad habits which she must now fight against in order to bring about any good action. Similarly, the labour and sorrow which Adam now experiences in tilling the earth is interpreted as 'difficulty in discovering the truth' the thorns and thistles are the 'prickings of torturous questions' the sweat in order to eat bread is the 'difficulty to resist phantasms which enter the soul through...sense'. These effects are also suffered by Adam and Eve's descendants, who also possess mortal bodies, and who are just as equally prone to the difficulties which this entails. The latter are vividly depicted in *De uera religione* (390) where Augustine makes it clear that the 'moral difficulty'⁴¹

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 39.

the soul now experiences is the result of its own perverse will, most especially in loving the creature rather than its Creator. 'The sin of so loving' he observes,

involves him in miseries, and feeds him with fallacious pleasures which neither abide nor satisfy, but beget torturing sorrows...the thing desired escapes him who loved it. It torments him...and disturbs his mind with errors...it makes him suppose that the material object which the flesh had wrongly delighted in...was the primal form, when in fact it was the lowest form of all; so that when he thinks, he believes he understands, being deluded by shadowy phantasms.⁴²

⁴² *Ibid.* 40.

Thus man falls from unity to multiplicity, abundance to want, integrity to corruption.⁴³

⁴³ *Ibid.* 41.

However, Augustine always takes great pains to stress, especially against the

Manichees, that this is not the fault of creation itself but of the soul, which uses it wrongly, or rather, fails to use it towards God but enjoys it for itself. In *De uera religione* (390) he describes 'the origin of all impiety in sinners...and the sin of the first man who misused his free will' as the wish 'to scrutinize the creation contrary to the commandment of God, and to enjoy it rather than

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God's law and truth'.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *uera rel.* 68. This obviously foreshadows Augustine's full orchestration of the theme of use and enjoyment in book 1 of *doct. chr.*

This 'original sin' is subsequently made worse, he adds, because the soul then lapses into idolatry, worshipping spiritual creatures, animals, the moon, sun, or stars, the elements, or mere images and phantasms.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 68-9.

Even if it refuses to worship anything, he observes that it still cannot free itself from the vices to which everyone is enslaved in their relation to created things. He sums up human sinfulness in this respect in a triad derived from 1

John 2: 16—one which will have a long history in his work:⁴⁶

⁴⁶ *mor.* 1. 20. 37-21. 38; *Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 23. 40; 2. 17. 26-18. 27; *mus.* 6. 14. 45; *uera rel.* 4; 49-113; *lib. arb.* 2. 19. 53. On the origin of Augustine's use of the triad see Verschoren 2002. For an analysis of the way in which the triad structures the second part of *uera rel.* see Bochet 1997. It is subsequently used on innumerable occasions as a sort of typology of human sinfulness, most notably in the second part of *conf.* 10, where it is used to structure Augustine's analysis of his own sinful state even after conversion.

'All that is in this world is the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and ambition of life'. Lust, pride, and curiosity mean that even 'without knowing it, they [human beings] love temporal things and hope for blessedness therefrom. Whether they will or no, human beings are necessarily slaves to the things by means of which they seek to be happy.'⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 69.

Thus the relation of mortal (we might say, fallen) human beings to the created world inevitably causes them to sin, it enslaves them, either by the obvious sin of idolatry, or the more insidious ones of lust, pride, and curiosity.

The 'phantasms', or images and imaginings,⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The Greek for the mental images which the soul's perception of material things through the senses creates in the mind, is *phantasiai*. Inward imaginings on the basis of these images are *phantasmata*. Obviously *phantasiai* are at least one step away from reality itself; *phantasmata* are even further removed. Augustine uses the Greek terms, he tells us, because he cannot find a satisfactory Latin equivalent (*mus.* 6. 11. 32).

which a person's engagement with temporal reality through the senses create in the mind are often evoked by Augustine in the early works as symptomatic of the ignorance and difficulty the soul experiences in attempting to grasp the truth.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ e.g. *mus.* 6. 11. 32.

The soul does indeed seek unity and equality, he observes, but by trying to

find them or construct them in temporal things or images, it errs, since they can be found only in God. 'Why', Augustine asks in *De musica*, 'does it sink from the truest height of equality to these things, and build up earthly machines in its own ruins?' He has no ready answer, but with the difficulties and temptations of rightly using the created world in mind, he quotes the passage from 1 John 2: 16 we have just encountered in *De uera religione*, but this time with the verse that precedes it: 'Do not love the things of this world, because all things in the world are lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and ambition of life.'⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ibid. 6. 14. 44.

Again,

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this should not, of course, be read as an indication of any negative assessment of created reality as such, but rather of Augustine's acute awareness of the dangers it poses for human beings, and of the almost impossible task they face in using it correctly without grace. It is also an indication of his awareness of the fallenness of human beings, not just because they are created, but because they somehow suffer the effects of Adam's fall. It is to this that we must now turn.

Creation or Fall?

We saw in Ch. 4, in relation to the idea of creation from nothing, that the temporal, mutable, corruptible creature, drawn from nothing, seems to have an inherent tendency to fall back into nothingness, and that it is in these terms that Augustine most often describes human sinfulness and the reason for the presence of evil, in the early works. But we have also seen that as early as 388/9 he had also considered the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis. Before we examine the effects of their Fall, we must ask how these two 'falls' are related in the early works. They are of course to some extent inextricable: the doctrine of creation from nothing and the doctrine of the Fall had always been held together by the Church and had presumably always been used to interpret each other. Adam and Eve, like all creatures, had been created from nothing, and the fact that they fell when faced with temptation was partly explained by this fact.

But there is a difference: Adam and Eve were the first to sin. They alone had no experience or example of sin and evil to compromise or influence their choice; no debilitating habit of sinning to obscure the truth or make their choice difficult. Their descendants are not in this position. The question is really how their fall affects the rest of humanity who came after them. In the early works Augustine seems to be clear that human beings would sin, even without the example of Adam and Eve, or any disease or guilt inherited from them, simply because they are creatures, created from nothing. This is demonstrated in the case of Adam and Eve themselves. On the other hand, once someone has fallen, things are very much worse: their knowledge of the good is darkened; their freedom to choose and to do the good is compromised by a will which is weakened and disabled by compulsive habit and lust. This was the experience of Adam and Eve and it is the experience of their descendants, all of whom are now mortal, implicated in sin, and in

some sense subject to original sin (we will investigate this further below), and unable to will or to do the good without divine grace. This is as far as Augustine goes in the early

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works—the questions of seminal identity and the role of sexual concupiscence, as we have noted, were to be worked out later—but for our purposes it is far enough.

Matters are complicated somewhat by a question that haunted the early church. It was one which Augustine himself never fully resolved or laid to rest and which, perhaps as a consequence, has never quite disappeared since, but has persistently returned to divide scholars and confuse debate:

this is the question of the origin of the soul.⁵¹

⁵¹ *Gn. litt.* 7 and 10; *ep.* 166 to Jerome; *ep.* 190. For early awareness of it see *b. uita* 1. 1. 5. For a balanced treatment of the question see O'Daly 1983; White 1990; 48-53 (on *ep.* 166).

Its spectral presence lies behind many of the debates concerning human sinfulness and the nature and transmission of Adam's sin in the early church, precisely because it remained a live question, bequeathed from one generation of Christian theologians to another, lurking unresolved and unanswered among some of the most sensitive issues of the faith. It surfaces in the third book of *De libero arbitrio* (395-6), where Augustine raises it explicitly in relation to what he calls the 'two penal conditions [of] ignorance and difficulty' which all human beings now suffer in attempting to know and to do the good. He is at pains to make clear that these conditions were not part of their original nature, but are a result of the fall: 'To approve falsehood instead of truth so as to err in spite of himself, and not to be able to refrain from works of lust because of the pain involved in breaking away from fleshly bonds: these do not belong to the nature of man as he was created,' he asserts, 'They are the penalty of man as condemned.'⁵²

⁵² *lib. arb.* 3. 18. 52.

He adds that when we speak about human 'nature', the word is being used in a double sense: 'Properly speaking' he observes, 'human nature means the blameless nature with which man was originally created. But we also use it in speaking of the nature with which we are born mortal, ignorant and subject to the flesh, which is really a penalty of sin.'⁵³

⁵³ *Ibid.* 3. 19. 54.

The inevitable question of why Adam and Eve's descendants should suffer the 'darkness of ignorance [and] the toils of difficulties' from the moment of birth, before they have had any occasion to sin themselves, brings Augustine to realize that he is in fact raising the question of the origin of the soul. Undaunted, he proceeds to rehearse four different theories of the soul's origin and attempts to illustrate in relation to each one of them the justice of man's present state. He makes no attempt here to judge between the different theories, but simply demonstrates how they are congruent with his basic conviction that humanity's present penal state is not unjust but part of God's equitable providence.

The first theory (later called the traducianist theory)⁵⁴

⁵⁴ From the Latin *tradere*—to hand on.

is that 'only one soul was originally created, and the souls of all men since born derive their origin

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from it',⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *lib. arb.* 3. 20. 56.

which would obviously mean that we all sinned when the first person sinned and therefore justly deserve to suffer the consequences of that sin. The second (later called the creationist theory) holds that souls are created separately for each individual at birth. Augustine—now clearly experiencing some difficulty—rather awkwardly suggests that if this were the case, it would still not be unreasonable to suppose that the sin of an earlier soul should determine the nature of those which are created afterwards. The later soul still retains its superiority over the body as soul, and with God's help it might regain the state which the earlier one had lost. Its experience of ignorance and difficulty might therefore be regarded positively as the beginnings of the soul's perfection and as providential admonitions to seek God's aid in pursuing virtue.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 3. 20. 56.

The third theory he mentions rehearses the idea that pre-existent souls are sent to vivify and rule bodies, so that although the ignorance and difficulty which the body has inherited from Adam infects the soul, it also acts, by God's grace and gifts, to discipline, subject, and prepare the body for perfection in the life to come.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 3. 20. 57.

The fourth theory is that souls are not sent by God, but 'come of their own accord to inhabit bodies'. This means either that the ignorance and difficulty they suffer is the result of their own choice, or that it comes from the bodies they inhabit. Either way, like souls sent by God, his grace is available to them if they humbly acknowledge their need, although they are justly punished when they do not.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 3. 20. 58. O'Connell persistently argued the case for Augustine's early belief in a theory of the fall of the soul, against many detractors. For a convenient summary of the debate, and for bibliography on both sides of it, see Penaskovic 1986.

Later on in book 3 Augustine returns to the most problematic theory for his argument, the second, so-called 'creationist' theory, and proceeds to develop it in a rather unanticipated way when he suggests that the 'natural' ignorance and difficulty with which we are born is not penal, in the sense that we are held guilty for it, but that we only become guilty if we fail to turn to, and rely upon, the grace God offers us to overcome it. It is like the blameless ignorance of a child, he suggests, which becomes culpable only if he fails to pay attention to his teachers and to allow them to enable him to grow in wisdom.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *lib. arb.* 3. 22. 64.

He therefore suggests that

If ignorance and difficulty are natural to man, it is from that condition that the soul begins to progress and to advance towards knowledge and tranquillity until it reaches the perfection of the happy life. If by its own will it neglects to advance by means of good studies and piety—for the capacity to do so is not denied it—it justly falls into a still graver state of ignorance and struggle, which is now penal, and is ranked among

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inferior creatures according to the appropriate and fitting government
of the universe.⁶⁰

⁶⁰*lib. arb.* 3. 22. 64.

Augustine later makes clear that while he himself believes that humanity's state of ignorance and difficulty is indeed penal, he investigated the possibility of their being part of our natural state here because this is precisely what the Manichees believed, and he wanted to demonstrate that even if the doctrine of original sin is not accepted (the Manichees rejected it along with the Old Testament, in which Augustine believed it was taught)

God's justice can still be defended.⁶¹

⁶¹*retr.* 1. 8. 6, 'This disputation is to be considered as directed against the Manichaeans, who do not accept the Scripture of the Old Testament, where an account of original sin is given'. Augustine is therefore able to argue in *do no persequi* that he was also, in this way, arguing against the Pelagians in advance, who also deny original sin: 'in order to show that the grace of God is not given according to our merits, I believed it better to defend this truth in accordance with both points of view—our own, whereby we say that infants are bound by original sin, and that of the Pelagians, who deny that there is original sin—and yet I cannot for that reason doubt that infants have something which God pardons who saves his people from their sins, so, in the third book of *On Free Choice of the Will*, I opposed the Manichaeans according to both opinions—whether the ignorance and difficulty without which no one is born are punishments or basic elements of our nature—and yet I hold one of these (and this also I expressed in that book): that these things are not part of the nature of man as created, but his punishment, as condemned' (11. 27-12. 29).

In fact, this description of humanity's 'natural' state of ignorance and difficulty, even before a person commits any sin, seems close to what Augustine says elsewhere about human beings created from nothing, poised precariously between good and evil, who are able to do the good only by turning towards God and acknowledging their dependence upon him.

In *De libero arbitrio* Augustine clearly wants to demonstrate that whatever line one takes on the origin of the soul, human beings suffer ignorance and difficulty without the help of divine grace, and are justly punished if they fail to acknowledge this. What we now need to ask is, when did this understanding first emerge? Was it in his abandoning of the idea of perfection following his ordination in 391, when Brown maintains he came up against intractable human sinfulness and the compulsive force of habit? Was it only later, in the *Ad Simplicianum* itself, in 396, in his adoption of a Pauline theology of original sin, universal guilt, and of humanity's complete dependence upon divine grace to will or to do the good? In examining the

way in which Augustine describes the effects of Adam's fall and of the sin of human beings in the early works, we will attempt to demonstrate that an understanding of the Fall and its consequences is not something which revolutionized Augustine's thought in either 391 or 396, but that it was an integral part of his understanding of the Christian faith from the moment of his conversion. We have already seen that the groundwork for this understanding was securely in

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place from the very beginning, in Augustine's teaching on creation from nothing. We have also seen its presence in what Augustine has to say about *why* human beings sin, in particular in relation to the seemingly irresistible tendency they have to fall away from God in pride and to become entrapped by temporal reality.

Original Sin?

Augustine does not tackle the difficult question of precisely *how* we inherit Adam's sin until this problem was raised for him by Julian of Eclanum. What he says in the early works, however, makes it clear that he believed that we are all somehow implicated in his sin and that this compromises our ability to know, will, or do the good. This is suggested, though not explicitly stated, as early as the Cassiciacum works where, in *Contra Academicos*, he tells Romanianus that 'You were born...into this earthly life, abounding as it does in all error.'⁶²

⁶²*Acad.* 1. 1. 1.

In *Soliloquia* he refers to the 'shamefulness', 'wickedness', and 'error' of creatures,⁶³

⁶³*sol.* 1. 2.

and how deeply they are sunk in darkness,⁶⁴

⁶⁴*Ibid.* 1. 25.

and in the *De ordine* he describes 'the movement of the soul [which] has fallen down to the things that are mortal'...to 'the uncleanness of the body and its stains, and...the darkness in which error has involved us'.⁶⁵

⁶⁵*ord.* 1. 8. 23.

We have seen above that he considered the fall of Adam and Eve in terms of general human sinfulness as early as *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* (388/9),⁶⁶

⁶⁶ We should remember that *mor.* underwent various revisions up to 390 (Coyle 1978: 93-8), though this does not in any way affect our argument here.

and it is manifestly clear both in this work, and in the *De uera religione* that the fall which results in our mortality is, in fact, Adam's. As we have seen, Genesis makes clear that, along with the need for toil and the sufferings of childbirth, it is a punishment for Adam and Eve's sin, and it is one which Augustine insists that no one escapes: 'It is certainly clear', he comments, 'that no one escapes this sentence. For anyone born in this life has difficulty in discovering the truth because of the corruptible body. For as Solomon says, "The body which is corrupted weighs down the soul, and the earthly habitation presses down the mind that thinks many thoughts."'⁶⁷

⁶⁷*Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 20. 30; cf. 2. 7. 8 where Augustine states that 'the human body began to waste away and to be fragile and mortal after sin' and refers to 'the mortality which we merited as punishment'.

In *De uera religione* Augustine uncompromisingly refers to 'the death of the body which we owe to the

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primal sin (*primo peccato*)'⁶⁸

⁶⁸*uera rel.* 25; cf. *mus.* 6. 11. 33 where Augustine refers to 'our punishable mortality merited by God's most just law'.

and 'our sin, which our nature committed in the first sinful man'.⁶⁹

⁶⁹*uera rel.* 51.

The link between Adam's sin and human mortality is one which Augustine frequently returns to in the early works, not least when he considers the way in which the body's mortality makes it difficult for the soul to act. The difficulties we noted in *De musica* in relation to the soul's operation within the temporal realm therefore become more readily understandable when we realize that the body itself is weakened by mortality: 'for one now mortal and fragile', Augustine comments in this work, 'it is dominated with great difficulty and attention'.⁷⁰

⁷⁰*mus.* 6. 5. 14.

He observes that, whereas 'the soul used to animate and govern [the body] without trouble and with the greatest ease' the body can now affect the soul, because it has been, as he puts it, 'changed for the worse by the first sin' and is 'subject to death and corruption'. He talks about its 'death and disease' and its 'wound', from which we are redeemed through no merit of ours, but by the grace of God in Christ's incarnation and vicarious suffering.⁷¹

⁷¹*Ibid.* 6. 4. 7.

The body therefore becomes what Augustine describes as 'man's heaviest bond' which weighs down the soul with 'fear, toil and pain'.⁷²

⁷²*mor.* 1. 22. 40; cf. *en. Ps.* 97. 4 (Zarb 393-4; Rondet before 396) where Augustine writes of '...original sin. For we bear about a mortal body (which otherwise would not be mortal), full of temptations, full of anxieties; liable to bodily pains and wants; subject to weariness even when in sound health, because not as yet completely sound, to say the least ... for if you do not eat, hunger disturbs you: that is a kind of natural malady; for, by way of vengeance, punishment has been made our nature. That which was the first man's punishment, is our nature.'

The link between Adam's sin and the punishment for that sin which we now suffer is also clearly evident in Augustine's almost formulaic use of the terms

peccatum and *poena peccatum*.⁷³

⁷³*uera rel.* 23, 44. The reference in 23 to the soul neglecting the precept to 'Eat this and do not eat that' also suggests that what he has to say about the sinful soul and its punishment has in mind Adam's original sin.

But the way in which he explains this in *De uera religione* is very interesting, for it is not just Adam's sin which is punished, it is, he states 'our sin which

our nature committed in the first sinful man'.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Ibid. 51.

The solidarity of the human race in Adam, understood as the 'old and earthly man', is a Pauline metaphor which Augustine frequently uses in the early works, both to demonstrate our full implication in Adam's sin as well as the hope of resurrection in Christ, the 'new and heavenly man'.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Ibid. 50.

For example, in *De moribus* (387-8) he describes covetousness as a 'sin of soul...set forth in the Old Testament in the transgression of Adam in Paradise'. That it is a sin not just of Adam's soul but of *our* soul is suggested in the sentence which immediately follows, in which he quotes one of the texts which will become a

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prooftext of his doctrine of original sin. He writes, 'Thus, as the apostle says, "In Adam we all die, and in Christ we shall all rise again" (1 Cor. 15: 22).' This interpretation is confirmed by his subsequent use of 'old man/new man' imagery: 'Paul then says that covetousness is the root of all evils; and by covetousness the old law also intimates that the first man fell. Paul also tells us to put off the old man and put on the new (Col. 3: 9-10). By the old man he means Adam who sinned, and by the new man him whom the Son of God took to Himself in consecration for our redemption...the first man is of the earth, earthy; and the second man is from heaven, heavenly...as we have borne the image of the earthy, let us also bear the image of the heavenly' (1 Cor. 15: 47-9).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ *mor.* 1. 19. 35-6. Cf *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 21. 32, 'All of us who are born from Adam have begun to owe to nature that death with which God threatened us when he gave the command not to eat the fruit of that tree.'

Augustine uses the same antithesis between Adam and Christ again, in *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* to make the same point: 'Thus, after he sinned by withdrawing from God's commandment and was dismissed from paradise, he remained in such a state that he was animal. And so all of us who were born from him after sin first bear the animal man until we attain the spiritual Adam, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, who committed no sin.'⁷⁷

⁷⁷ *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 8. 10.

If there is still any doubt remaining about Augustine's conviction of human solidarity in Adam we need only turn to his debate with the Manichee Fortunatus in 392. Here, in response to Fortunatus' use of such texts as 'the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh' which, as we have seen above, he was citing in an attempt to prove the dualism between body and soul (*c. Fort.* 21), Augustine observes that the tension between body and soul is one that comes about, not between two warring substances, but within the will, as a result of Adam's Fall. Whereas Adam indeed had free will, and 'voluntarily sinned' he comments, 'we who have descended from his stock were plunged into necessity' (22). As well as using the image of the old, earthly man to describe all those who are now subject to this necessity and cannot do what they will (22), and as well as adducing the prooftext for original sin from 1 Cor. 15: 22, 'As through one man came death, so also through the one man came the resurrection of the dead,' Augustine also introduces another of his favourite prooftexts in this respect, Rom. 5: 19, 'As

through the disobedience of the one the many were constituted sinners; so also through the obedience of the one the many are constituted righteous' (24).⁷⁸

⁷⁸ In *quant.* 36. 80 our inheritance of Adam's sin is perhaps similarly implied in Augustine's mention of the question of infant baptism.

We therefore certainly do not have to wait until the mid-390s to

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discover the idea that all humankind is implicated in Adam's sin and suffers the debilitating effects of that sin, even if it is only at this point that

Augustine begins to use the expression *massa peccati*.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *ex. prop. Rm.* 62; *ex. Gal.* 42. He also uses the expression *massa luti*, e.g. *diu. qu.* 83 68. 3. For the sources for this idea, especially in Ambrosiaster, and for bibliography, see Marafioti 1981: 549 n. 34.

Ignorance and Difficulty

Nor do we have to wait until the mid-390s to find an awareness of the effects of original sin in Augustine's work. These are often summed up by scholars in reference to Augustine's description of fallen humanity's ignorance and difficulty in the third book of *De libero arbitrio* (395-6), which we have already encountered. But we have also discovered many examples of Augustine's acute consciousness of the difficulty the soul experiences in doing the good without grace, well before this date. The same is true of the soul's darkness or ignorance.

Whereas the first human beings saw the truth in the light of God's illumination with their inner eye, Augustine's portrait of humanity's habitual state in the early works is one characterized by obscurity, confusion, ignorance, and blindness. We no longer enjoy the truth which wells up within us and refreshes the soul like an inner spring, but are now dependent on the rain which falls from the dark clouds of human teaching and preaching, or from within the cloud of the incarnate Christ's flesh.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 5. 6.

Light and darkness are one of the most recurrent images in his earliest works, the latter being associated with error,⁸¹

⁸¹ *Acad.* 3. 42.

ignorance,⁸²

⁸² *ord.* 1. 10. 29.

a deluded sense that one can see the truth,⁸³

⁸³ *sol.* 25.

the weakness of the reason,⁸⁴

⁸⁴ *b. uita* 1. 4. 35; *duab. an.* 6; *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 17. 26.

the night of sin and evil habits,⁸⁵

⁸⁵ *mor.* 1. 2. 3; *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 16. 24.

perversity of will,⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Ibid. 1. 1. 1.

and punishment of sin.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ *en. Ps.* 5. 4; 6. 6.

Augustine's sense of the opacity of one person's mind to another, his keen awareness of the sheer difficulty which the soul experiences in using the images derived from sense perception as a basis for knowledge, the empty and misleading imaginings which such 'phantasms' can throw in the way of balanced judgement, and his humble acknowledgement that created human beings cannot begin to gaze upon the light of God's truth without being blinded by its brightness and sent in search of the shade of authority, all suggest that the soul's 'ignorance' and the shadowy, 'phantasmal' manner in which it apprehends truth, is something that Augustine was

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conscious of from the moment of his conversion, and which could not but make it difficult for the will to know the truth, never mind act upon it.

Habit

The darkness of the soul is compounded, for Augustine, by the way in which he experienced the soul's habit of sinning as a force which apparently binds it, and makes its sin, as it were, an 'involuntary' compulsion and necessity. This is an element of his thought which Peter Brown identifies as emerging around 392, after Augustine's ordination, in his debate with the Manichee Fortunatus. That it was present much earlier on is evidenced in at least two works written immediately following his conversion. In *De ordine* (386-7), in an attempt to sober up his two giggly pupils and make them realize the seriousness and difficulties of their task, Augustine asks 'Does not the fact that we are overwhelmed by the weight of perverse habits and encompassed by the obscurities of ignorance trouble you?'⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *ord.* 1. 10. 29.

That he is aware of the nature and force of habit is also evident in his description of the second level of the soul in the *De quantitate animae* (387-8), where he locates it in the memory and identifies it as that which habituates the soul to the body.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ *quant.* 71, 'Through habit it becomes linked to the habitat and environment of the body, and from these it undergoes separation with reluctance as though they were parts of its body; this force of habit is called memory when the link with those places is not severed even by separation and the lapse of time.'

Habit (*consuetudo*) is, in fact, the concept to which Augustine most frequently reverts when he wishes to describe the way in which the soul is weighed down by the body—a body which is now mortal, temporal, and corruptible as a result of its sin. The difficulty which the soul now experiences in knowing or doing the good is attributed to the fact that it is weighed down, distracted, confused, and incapacitated by sinful habit, formed by its necessary attachment to the temporal. We have already seen this forcefully expressed in *De moribus* (387-8), where Augustine referred to

'original sin' (or the *antiquum peccatum*) and the mortal body as the soul's 'heaviest bond'. Although the soul's attachment to the mortal body racks it with fear and pain, Augustine observes that it loves it through force of habit. This is, however, a 'bad habit', habituated to the temporal and mutable, and living in fear of losing them, rather than a 'good habit', which would rely on divine help to love these things well and thereby rule over them.⁹⁰

⁹⁰*mor.* 1. 22. 40.

In the *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* (388-9)

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Augustine therefore portrays Adam and Eve, after the Fall, as doing battle with the force of habit. Adam's power over the beasts is interpreted as the rule of the mind over its affections and emotions: 'If we do not rule these emotions', Augustine observes, 'they burst forth and turn into the foulest habits, carrying us off with all sorts of destructive pleasures and making us like every kind of beast.'⁹¹

⁹¹ *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 20. 30.

The pain Eve suffers in childbirth, is, as we have seen above, similarly interpreted as the difficulty she experiences in doing good actions; she is depicted as painfully struggling with the habit of carnal desire in her attempt to do the good.⁹²

⁹² *Ibid.* 2. 19. 29, 'there is no restraint from carnal desire which does not have pain in the beginning, until habit has been bent toward the better part ... In order that this habit might be born, there was struggle with bad habit.'

Just as Augustine often describes love as a weight which draws human beings towards their object, whether good or bad, so too habit is the action of the will which inexorably drags them towards that on which it focuses its attention. As we have seen above, in reference to *De moribus*, unless human beings acknowledge their need for God's help in loving things well, and thereby form 'good habits', they will be dragged downwards into bad habits. This distinction is clearly made in Augustine's description of Adam's expulsion from Paradise in *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos*: God did not exclude (*exclisit*) Adam from Paradise, He dismissed (*dimisit*) him—in other words, God did not need to throw him out because the weight of his bad habit effectively drew him away from it. Augustine illustrates the distinction thus: 'A bad man generally experiences this when he begins to live among good men, if he is unwilling to change for the better. He is driven from the company of good men by the weight of his bad habit, and they do not exclude him against his will, but dismiss him in accord with his will.'⁹³

⁹³ *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 22. 34.

Augustine frequently reverts to the idea of habit in *De uera religione* (390), where it appears as a way of describing the seemingly unavoidable and inveterate attachment of human beings to the temporal, mutable, corporeal, and carnal aspects of reality, and the way in which they are thereby brought to share its characteristics and distance themselves from the eternal, immutable, incorporeal God: he refers to the 'custom of this life' (*consuetudo huius uitae*) as 'love of things that come to be and pass away'⁹⁴

⁹⁴ *uera rel.* 3.

to 'popular habit' (*consuetudo populorum*) as the 'desire for temporal and transient goods'⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Ibid. 6.

to 'human custom' (*consuetudo hominum*) as attachment to the 'carnal senses...the impressions which they impose on the mind...and human praise'

⁹⁶ Ibid. 64.

to the 'habit of the body' (*consuetudo corporum*) as 'being accustomed to material

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things'

⁹⁷ Ibid. 65.

to 'carnal custom' (*consuetudo carnalis*) as humanity's 'present corrupt state' in contrast to its 'original and perfect state'.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 88. These passages are noted by Lee 1999: 44-5.

As one might expect, Augustine is also prompted to reflect on the influence which habit exercises upon the soul in the *De musica* (390), where, as we have seen, the effect which the body has upon the soul, and its ability to operate freely, is one of the central themes of book 6. Here he refers to what he describes as the 'impetus of carnal occupations (*carnalium negotiorum...inpetus*)', which the soul does not, indeed, cannot restrain, because through 'long habit' and 'turbulent memories' they hinder its conversion to God. Thus, it is clearly habit, present in the soul through memory, which makes it difficult for the soul to overcome its sinful actions at will. Obviously thinking of Adam's sin, and the effects of original sin, Augustine observes that the soul was strong when it first sinned, but having sinned it is made weaker, and is less capable of removing what it has done: 'The soul does not extinguish those carnal motions at will in the same way as it exerts them at will. For the punishment of the sin is not in its power in the same way as the sin. Surely the soul is a great thing, yet it does not remain capable of suppressing its own lascivious motions.' Augustine's quotation of Rom. 7: 24-5 follows naturally in this context.

⁹⁹ *mus.* 6. 5. 14. I have used Jacobsson's translation (2002) here as the clearest and most accurate.

Later in book 6 he observes with characteristic psychological insight that it is the delight of sinning which fixes it in the memory so powerfully, and which leads to its taking hold as habit.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 6. 11. 33. 'For such delight [of the carnal senses] strongly fixes in the memory what it brings from the slippery senses. And this habit of the soul made with flesh, through carnal affection, in the Holy Scriptures is called the flesh. And it is struggling with such a mind in that apostolic sentence: "In mind I serve the law of God, but in flesh the law of sin" (Rom. 7: 25). '

In the debate with Fortunatus, in 392, habitual sin, which wars against the flesh and undermines our free will, rendering us incapable of doing the good even if we will it, is explicitly identified as part of our solidarity in Adam and his fall. In words we have already had occasion to quote in respect of this solidarity Augustine observes that 'after he [Adam] voluntarily sinned, we who have descended from his stock were plunged into necessity...As long...as

we bear the image of the earthly man, that is, as long as we live according to the flesh, which is also called the old man, we have the necessity of our habit, so that we may not do what we will.'¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹*c. Fort. 22.*

Echoing his observations in *De musica*, he locates the hold which habit has on the mind in the 'sweetness and pleasure' it experiences in sinning, so that, as he puts it, 'by its own habit the mind is so implicated that afterwards it cannot conquer what by sinning it has fashioned for itself'. It is therefore a 'habit formed in

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flesh' which wars against the soul, until, as he delightfully puts it, the illumination of grace, like the sun melting the snow, breaks its hold.'¹⁰²

¹⁰²*c. Fort. 22.*

The solidarity of humanity in original sin, in relation to the idea of habit, is also clearly stated, in a rather startling way, in *De fide et symbolo* (392-3), where Augustine asserts that habit has now become part of our nature as a result of our descent from Adam. He writes, 'a certain part [of the flesh] resists the Spirit, not in virtue of nature, but in virtue of the custom of sins (*consuetudo peccatum*), whence it is said, "With the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." And this habit has been turned into a nature (*in naturam uersa*), according to mortal generation, by the sin of the first man.'¹⁰³

¹⁰³*fid. et sym. 10. 23.*

That habit is the result of original sin, and is responsible for the difficulty which we now experience in doing the good, is further confirmed in *De duabus animabus* (391-2), where Augustine comments, 'it has been made difficult for us to abstain from carnal things, since our truest bread is spiritual. For with great labour we now eat this bread. For it is not without punishment for the sin of transgression that we have been changed from immortal into mortal. So it happens, that when we strive after better things, habit formed by connection with the flesh and our sins, in some way militates against us and puts obstacles (*difficultatem*) in our way.'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴*duab. an. 13. 19.*

It is also evident in *De diuersis quaestionibus* where, commenting on 1 Cor. 15: 54-5 Augustine identifies the 'sting of death' as carnal habit and delight which, even under grace, continues to plague human beings: 'if the soul wants to restrain itself, it cannot do so without vexation and anguish...through sin there has come about a delight which can now resist the good will and be kept back [only] with pain. This delighting we rightly call death, because it is the failing of the soul become degenerate...'. Augustine continues that it is only with the help of grace that it does not completely destroy the good will.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵*diu. qu. 83 70.*

The grip which habit has upon the soul is likened to death once again in the *De sermone Domini in monte*. This time it is the death of Lazarus, who had

lain four days in the tomb before being miraculously raised to life by Christ. Our death in Adam and resurrection in Christ is clearly the paradigm for Augustine's teaching here, and his typology of sin is directly related to Adam and Eve's first sin, progressing from suggestion, to delight, to consent.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 14. 21 for the same analysis of the Fall in this distinctively Stoic terminology.

Augustine expounds this as sin in the heart, in deed, and in habit respectively; as death in the home, the dead man carried to the door, the dead body pressed down by a mound of earth and rotting in the grave; as Christ's three raisings

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from the dead saying, 'Girl, arise', 'Young man, I say to you arise', and groaning, weeping and crying in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth'. The gravity of habit as the effect of original sin could hardly be illustrated more effectively.

'Involuntary' Sin

One of the most tangible effects of original sin, according to Augustine, is that it renders human beings incapable of doing the good and of refraining from sinning, even if they will to. Having once used their free will to turn away from God, they are left with a will enslaved to sin and no longer able to operate freely, except to sin further; the will sins, as it were, against its will. This is what, in a number of instances in the early works, Augustine describes as 'necessary' or 'involuntary' sin. It seems to be suggested as early as the *Contra Academicos* where he observes that without the help of 'fortune' (grace), the soul united with the mortal body cannot attain wisdom. He wonders whether this is 'because we have deserved it' or 'because this is necessary by nature' (which he glosses in the *Retractationes* as referring to Adam's fall). Whatever the reason, the suggestion is clear: either because of their own deserts, or because of original sin, human beings are incapable of attaining the truth without grace.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ *Acad.* 1. 1. 1; cf. *b. uita* 1. 1 for the same imagery of a sea journey and the same teaching on necessity or will as making us founder in this world without the help of grace.

This suggestion is soon explicitly articulated in the *De uera religione*, where Augustine states that 'there is no evil except sin and sin's penalty, that is, a voluntary abandonment of highest being, and toil among inferior beings which is not voluntary; in other words, freedom from justice and slavery under sin'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ *uera rel.* 76.

We have already noted references to Adam's voluntary sin plunging his descendants into necessity, and to 'the necessity of habit so that we may not do what we will' in *Contra Fortunatum*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ *c. Fort.* 22.

In *De duabus animabus* Augustine similarly refers to the 'punishment for the sin of transgression [by which] we have been changed from immortal to

mortal' and observes that 'when we strive after better things habit formed by connection with the flesh militates against us and puts obstacles in our way', which means that we 'fluctuate uncertainly' between good and evil; between virtue and the pursuit of pleasure. Here he uses these observations to argue specifically against the Manichaeian doctrine that we possess two souls: the division is *within* the will, not between two separate and warring souls.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ 1 Tim. 6: 10 quoted in *mor.* 1. 19. 35, *radix omnium malorum cupiditas*.

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Concupiscence: 'The root of all evils is lust' (*duab. an.* 13. 19)

When Augustine attempts to describe the way in which original sin vitiates the will so that it no longer acts in subjection to reason, but rather in a violent, disordered, and uncontrolled manner which leads to sin, he more often than not uses the word concupiscence (*concupiscentia*). Whereas in the later Pelagian controversy this term became especially associated with the irrational and overpowering desire which inevitably accompanies the act of procreation¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Van Oort 1987 suggests that Augustine first discovered the idea of *concupiscentia sexualis* in the Manichees.

(which Augustine came to regard as the cardinal symptom of human beings' loss of control over their own desires and actions) in the early works *concupiscentia* has a more general reference and is often expressed in the less technical terminology of lust (*libido*) or cupidity (*cupiditas*). The insights he uses these words to express, however, are the same as those suggested by concupiscence: following the Fall reason no longer rules over the will, the soul can no longer control the body, but, divided against itself and its own highest good, can do nothing but sin. As he writes in *De musica*, 'When the Lord is neglected, intent on its servant with the carnal concupiscence it is seduced by, the soul feels the movements it gives its servant and is less¹¹²

¹¹² *mus.* 6. 5. 13, *Neglecto autem domino intenta in seruum carnali, quae dicitur, concupiscentia sentit motus suos, quos illi exhibit, et minus est.* Cf. *mor.* 1. 30. 64 where he talks about 'lust [which] lays waste the mind'.

...it doesn't remain apt for suppressing its own lascivious movements. For it sins in its strength, and by divine law made weaker after sin it is less able to undo what it has done.'¹¹³

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 6. 5. 14.

This is what we have already seen Augustine refer to elsewhere in *De musica* as the 'habit of the soul made with flesh', whereby the delight the soul takes in carnal things becomes a habit fixed in the memory which then undermines its ability to do the good.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 6. 11. 33.

In *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* Augustine paints a vivid picture of the sinful mind which is no longer ruled by reason: the mind is trapped by 'the foulest habits...destructive pleasures...subject to perturbations, lusts and evil

desires'. The unruly affections of the soul, 'tear the mind apart and dissipate it, making life most miserable' and are only tamed by Christ: 'whether given over to carnal desires (*carnalis concupiscentia*) or blinded by dark curiosity...or puffed up with pride...men might be tamed by Him and grow gentle'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵*Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 23. 40. I owe this reference to Verschoren 2002. For other references to *concupiscentia carnis* see *uera rel.* 48, 69.

We find the same awareness of the effects of the fall upon the

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will in *De vera religione* in relation to one of the other vices Augustine uses to illustrate the nature of concupiscence. Anger, just as much as carnal desire, is a symptom of the soul's loss of control, and of reason's inability to rule over the will. He writes, 'now [after the Fall]...while the woman to whose words we basely consented is subject to the pains of childbirth, we labour on the ground and are disgracefully overcome by anything that can trouble or disturb us. We do not want to be overcome by men, but we cannot overcome anger...'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶*vera rel.* 85.

In the *De sermone Domini in monte* concupiscence and its effects are also evident in what Augustine describes as the soul's 'fornication', by which he understands the soul's habit of abandoning God and delighting in lower things, so that it becomes trapped by them, and unable any longer to operate freely: 'who can doubt that every evil concupiscence' he asks,

may be rightly called fornication? For when the soul disregards the higher law by which it is governed, and prostitutes itself as though for a price, then it corrupts itself through base delight in lower natures. Wherefore, whoever perceives that—because of a sinful habit which will continue to drag him into captivity so long as it remains unchecked—the craving of the flesh is in rebellion against his upright will, let him do his utmost to remind himself of the kind of peace he has lost by committing sin.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷*S. Dom. mon.* 1. 12. 36.

(A quotation from Rom. 7: 24-5 inevitably follows as Augustine urges the sinner to acknowledge his need for God's grace and to call upon his aid.)

Perhaps the most interesting text in the early works in relation to concupiscence is found in *De libero arbitrio*, book 1. As we shall see in the next chapter, this book, written in 388, is usually held to represent an understanding of the freedom of the will at odds with Augustine's dramatic portrait of its ignorance and difficulty in books 2-3, which were completed much later, probably around 395/6. With Manichaean dualism and determinism very much at the forefront of his mind, he is indeed emphatic in book 1 that it is only the mind's free choice which is responsible for sin, and that, 'Nothing makes the mind a companion of cupidity, except its own will and free choice.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸*lib. arb.* 1. 11. 22.

But when the question arises of the penalty of the soul's sin, the reader is forced, along with Augustine's interlocutor, Evodius, to appreciate that any talk about free will and free choice must be understood in reference to humanity *before* the Fall, in other words to the nature of humanity/Adam in paradise, and not to our present state. It is as if after all the easy assertions

concerning free will, and the confident agreement Augustine and Evodius seem to have reached concerning its necessary relation to sin in the first part of their discussion, Augustine senses that the time has come to move beyond the realm of theory to examine our actual experience in the present. Thus,

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when Evodius blithely responds to Augustine's ominous observation that 'the next step is that you must come to see that the soul justly pays the penalty for its sin', by simply stating 'I cannot deny that,' as if it were merely another logical step in the discussion, Augustine responds by forcefully demonstrating that it is far from being an easy or obvious step to take: 'What then?' he asks,

Is it to be regarded as in itself a small penalty that the soul is dominated by lust,¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ The ground for talking about lust has been prepared by such observations as: 'lust alone dominates the whole realm of evil doing' (1. 3. 8), and 'all evil deeds are evil for no other reason than that they are committed from lust, that is, wrongful cupidity' (1. 4. 10).

spoiled of its resources of virtue, drawn hither and thither in abject poverty, now approving falsehood as if it were truth, now acting on the defensive, now rejecting what it had formerly approved but none the less falling into other falsehoods, now holding its assent back, and often fearing the most obvious reasonings, now despairing of ever finding the truth and sticking in the dark pit of folly, now attempting to reach the light of intelligence, and again falling back in sheer weariness? Meantime the cupidities exercise their dominion tyrannically and disturb man's whole mind and life with varying and contrary tempests, fear on one side, longing on the other; here anxiety, there vain and false rejoicing; here torture because something loved has been lost, there eagerness to obtain what it does not possess; here grief for injury suffered, there incitements to revenge. Wherever it turns it can be restricted by pride, tortured by envy, enveloped in sloth, excited by wantonness, afflicted by subjection, suffering all the other countless emotions which inhabit and trouble the realm of lust. Can we think that a condition like that is not penal, when we see that it must be undergone by all who do not cleave to wisdom?

The almost contemporaneous account of the fallen soul in *De moribus*¹²⁰

¹²⁰ *mor.* 2. 11. 22.

confirms the above passage. Here Augustine objects that in making the soul divine the Manichees subject God to its fallenness. In describing what this would mean he gives us a very revealing picture of the fall of the soul: 'Therefore, according to you...God is both corrupted by folly, and is changed by falling, and is injured by the loss of perfection, and is in need of help, and is weakened by disease, and bowed down with misery, and subject to disgraceful bondage.' Written a year or two after his conversion, these passages vividly sum up the universally felt effects of Adam's fall, which vitiate the will through the darkness of ignorance and the dominion of lust, and which throw humanity wholly upon divine grace. There is no room here

for any ideal of perfection in this life, and neither Augustine's ordination in 391, or his teaching in the *Ad Simplicianum*, fundamentally changes his position from this point onwards.¹²¹

¹²¹ With the exception, noted in Ch. 3, of the 'great souls' (probably the saints, apostles, and Paul) whom Augustine first thought might attain beatitude in this life, but later included with the many for whom it was impossible (see Dodaro 2004: Ch. 3).

This is something he clearly states against Julian, who,

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like many contemporary scholars, alleged that in his early works Augustine agreed with the Pelagian position and only later changed his views. Augustine's response should still be heeded:

You say that I also have changed my opinions, and that at the beginning of my conversion I agreed with you. You deceive or are deceived in misrepresenting what I say now, or in not understanding, or worse, not reading what I said then. I have always held from the beginning of my conversion, and I now hold, that through one man sin entered into the world and through sin death, and thus death has passed to all men; in whom all have sinned. There are books extant which I wrote as a layman at the very beginning of my conversion. I was not then as learned in sacred Scripture as later on, yet I held and also said, when there was need to speak, nothing on this matter except what the whole Church has from the earliest times learned and taught; namely, that the human race, as a consequence of original sin, has deservedly fallen into these great and manifest miseries in which man is like to vanity: his days pass away like a shadow; all things are vanity and every man living. He alone can give deliverance who said: 'The truth shall make you free' and 'I am the truth' and 'If the Son makes you free you will be free indeed'. Truth alone frees from vanity, but this is according to grace, not according to debt; through mercy, not merit. As we were made subject to vanity through judgment, so it is through mercy that we are made free by truth, and we confess that our good merits themselves are but the gifts of God.¹²²

¹²² *c. Jul.* 6. 12. 39.

We must now turn, in the next chapter, to ask whether, as most scholars also argue, Augustine attempted to defend the freedom of the will during his first decade as a Christian and only finally relinquished it in 396, or whether, in fact, he ever maintained it at all.

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7 The Will

Carol Harrison

Abstract: This chapter argues against scholars' interpretations of books one to three of Augustine's work, *On Free Will*. Namely, scholars who view book one as revealing Augustine's early, optimistic estimate of the freedom and ability of the will, and books two and three as betraying the later bishop's pessimistic conviction of the fallen will's inability to do anything but sin without grace. It is argued that this work should be read as a unified piece. Book one sets out a theoretical picture of the freedom and ability of the will which was only possessed by Adam, while books two and three reflect on the ignorance and difficulty which characterize its operation after the Fall. Augustine's own later comments on the work, as well as other works written at the same time, are examined in order to support this interpretation.

Keywords: free will, ability, ignorance, difficulty, Retractationes, evil, origin of soul

In the last chapter we argued that an understanding of the Fall is clearly evident in Augustine's early works and that we do not have to wait until the mid-390s to see it emerge in a form characteristic of his mature theology. In this chapter we will argue that the same must be said of the will, for Augustine believed that it was by a freely willed choice that Adam disobeyed God's commandment and turned away from him in pride, and that it is in the ignorance and difficulty which now disable the will that the effects of the Fall are experienced by Adam's descendants.

The idea of the will is at the very heart of Augustine's theological reflection in a way quite new in Western theology¹

¹ For thought-provoking reflections on this see S. Harrison 1999.

and to such an extent that no aspect of his thought can be considered without a prior understanding of its nature and operation. This is the case not only because Augustine's engagement with the Manichees and then the Pelagians brought a consideration of the will to the forefront of his mind, or because he was already well acquainted with philosophical reflection on it,²

² Notably the Stoics' teaching on the dynamics of suggestion, delight, and consent in the operation of the will.

but above all because he found he simply could not understand his Christian faith, and his own experience as a human being, without it.³

³ *conf.* 7. 4. 7 for Augustine's account of his difficulties with the idea; 8. 8. 19-10. 22 for his classic account of the divided will.

The account of the creation and fall of humanity in Genesis, the Church's teaching on creation from nothing, and his own experience of attempting to will and do the good which God commanded, all, as we have seen, inexorably led to an overwhelming sense of his dependence upon his Creator and of his own inability to will or to act without God's inspiration and grace. He realized that to talk about free will was not to talk about an autonomous power to choose between good and evil, but rather to describe the precarious and dangerous tightrope which created human beings must walk, balanced between God and temporal reality, moving towards their

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Creator, and saved from falling into the chasm of non-being only by the

gravity of his grace.⁴

⁴ It was in this context that we examined Augustine's understanding of the will in Ch. 4. We refer the reader back to this chapter for Augustine's general reflections upon the will.

But Augustine's critics, during his own lifetime up to the present day, have accused him of a dramatic *volte face* in his teaching on the will. The Pelagians looked back to Augustine's early works and found there a theologian they could only admire: one who upheld the freedom of the will, unaffected by the Fall and original sin, able to know, will, and perform God's commandments uncompromised and unconstrained, without any compulsion or necessity. They identified a proto-Pelagian, who maintained that sin must be strictly voluntary for it to be justly punished. Why, they asked, was Augustine now accusing them of defending what he himself had argued so forcefully? In response, Augustine was forced to return to the early texts they cited and to argue precisely the case we have been arguing in this book: that he had never held that the will is free to know or to do the good without grace; that he had always taught, from the very beginning, that it is subject to original sin, ignorance, and difficulty, and that any good action is wholly dependent upon God's grace.

Subsequent scholars, however, like the Pelagians of Augustine's own day, have been very reluctant to take Augustine at his word, but have tended to take precisely those texts which the Pelagians cited, in order to endorse their own identification of the early Augustine as, indeed, 'more Pelagian than Pelagius'. However, modern scholars seem to be motivated, not so much by a desire to undermine an opponent, but by a seemingly irresistible urge to tell Augustine's story in the way such stories are conventionally told: the new convert, still holding on to earlier ideas, naive, optimistic, confident, enthusiastic, somewhat doctrinaire, with a tendency to see things in black and white rather than the gloomy, pessimistic, uninspiring grey of middle age. The story can then be developed in a predictable and satisfying way by charting Augustine's growing maturity, his disillusionment and change of heart; and can then be brought to a dramatic conclusion in 396. This might be slightly unfair, but it is certainly how the majority of accounts read.

When examining the notion of the will in his earliest works, for example, scholars normally begin by suggesting that Augustine held fast to the Stoic/Platonic ideal of virtue in order to express his conviction that the ultimate good, the happy life, could be attained here and now by the one who lives in accordance with reason (or Platonic wisdom), and who allows it to determine his desires and actions. The will therefore appears in his earliest works as that

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action of the soul which is free and autonomous because it pursues the good by virtuous action (in moderation, temperance, patience, etc.) on the basis of its knowledge of (or rational insight into) the truth. James Wetzel, one of the most recent scholars to take this line, therefore sums up Augustine's early belief as the 'Stoic ideal of invulnerability in ethics, buttressed with the resources of Platonic metaphysics and epistemology. Stoicism insists on the sufficiency of virtue for happiness, and Platonism supplies virtue with the knowledge needed to complete the equation.'⁵

⁵ Wetzel 1992: 119. Rist 1994: 150 is rather more subtle but makes the same suggestion.

Thus, he writes, Augustine's 'early writings display a Stoic confidence that the war of virtue against all manner of external assaults could be won on the ground of human self-determination'⁶

⁶ Wetzel 1992: 54.

... Beatitude in the mind of the young Augustine remains invulnerable to external challenges of any sort. *De beata uita* and *De libero arbitrio* [book 1] collectively present this very Stoic frame of mind in its least adulterated form ... he tries to describe beatitude in such a way that it remains fully under human control and fully complete.'⁷

⁷ Ibid. 56. Despite these observations, Wetzel's analysis of how Augustine continued to retain other elements of a Stoic/Platonic analysis of the will—most especially the necessary role of assent in willing, and the role of delight in moving that assent—even when he became convinced that human beings can only assent to/delight in evil without divine intervention, is a valuable insight which should be noted here. As will become apparent below, however, I want to argue that Augustine relates these Stoic/Platonic ideas to humanity's fallen state from the very beginning, whereas Wetzel (following the standard interpretation of the development of Augustine's early thought) identifies the debilitating effects of habit and past action upon the will, which necessitate divine help, as something Augustine only acknowledges much later on.

If we now turn to examine the texts on which such observations are based we can begin to appreciate how they have arisen. Augustine's language does indeed seem quite straightforward and clear-cut: in the first book of *De libero arbitrio* he confidently asserts such things as: 'it is in the power of our will to enjoy or to be without so great and so true a good [wisdom]. For what is so completely within the power of the will as the will itself?'⁸

⁸ *lib. arb.* 1. 12. 26.

'whoever wishes to live rightly and honourably, if he prefers that before all fugitive and transient goods, attains his object with perfect ease. In order to attain it he has to do nothing but to will it.'⁹

⁹ Ibid. 1. 13. 29.

What are we to make of such passages, and how are they related to

Augustine's later descriptions of the ignorance and difficulty which hinder the operation of the will in book 3 of the same work? With the exception of two of the more recent editors of *De libero arbitrio*¹⁰

¹⁰ Madec, BA 6; De Capitani 1987.

scholars have tended to separate the work into two very disparate parts: book 1 is read as representing the views of the young, optimistic convert, who

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believed that he had the happy life well within reach so long as he lived virtuously and sought eternal wisdom; books 2 and 3, on the other hand, reveal the disillusioned clergyman who has had his youthful naivety knocked out of him by the hard school of life, and who no longer believes that the ultimate good is quite so easy to attain. The seemingly permanent clouds of ignorance, and the painful difficulty which hinder any act of will have now led him to retreat from, and decisively retract, his early confidence and certainty in its ease of operation and the attainability of perfection. Such was the thesis of Paul Séjourné, in 1951, who separated the work into two parts in order to describe Augustine's 'progressive conversion'. He sums up the general impression given by book 1 thus:

one hears a man, without doubt a Christian in the early days of his faith, but still so enthusiastic about his ascent that he has almost forgotten the difficulties of the way, the emphasis on the Saviour's call, the need for constant prayer: he is in paradise. He comes back down to earth in books II and III of *De libero arbitrio* ... the only thing which makes [his illusions] less offensive is the addition, *in one volume*, of the last two books, six or seven years later: both repentance and retraction at the same time.¹¹

¹¹ Séjourné 1951: 359. He adds a footnote to demonstrate that such methods of working were not unusual in antiquity, before the age of critical editions.

We have already observed the same general interpretation of this period in the chapter of Peter Brown's *Augustine of Hippo* entitled *The Lost Future*. In this chapter he describes the Augustine of *De libero arbitrio* book 1 as, at least on paper, 'more Pelagian than Pelagius', not least because his attempt to undermine Manichaean determinism by a defence of free will led him, in this work, to emphasize the will's 'ease of action' or *facilitas* (1. 13. 29).¹²

¹² Brown 1967: 148-9.

Brown insists that Augustine's teaching in this respect is very much a matter of theory, however, for in practice he was increasingly aware of the complexity, difficulty, and ambiguity of the operation of the will. He therefore suggests that Augustine's adoption of a theory of the self-determination of the will against the Manichees, who buttressed their theory of two souls by an analysis of the conflicts and divisions suffered by the will, was, at the very least, 'a dangerous line of argument'.¹³

¹³ Ibid. 148.

R. J. O'Connell identifies the same emphasis upon the will's self-determination in book 1 of *De libero arbitrio*, and is also aware of a potential conflict between theory and practice. This is because he thinks that in book 1 we find Augustine attempting to use Stoic 'voluntarism' in order to push the arguments he had already rehearsed against Manichaeism in *De ordine* to their logical conclusion: Augustine therefore insists on the free

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choice of the autonomous will, which can acquire the good with perfect ease through its own virtuous action, and which is justly punished when it abandons the rational order of the universe and seeks after objects which can be lost against its will. O'Connell then reads books 2 and 3 as representing Augustine's Neoplatonic, 'intellectualist' 'retractation'¹⁴

¹⁴ O'Connell 1970: 51.

of book 1: in the light of his experience of the will's ignorance and difficulty he insists again on the fall of the soul and identifies humanity's ultimate good with a transcendent truth, in other words, with God.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ibid.

Most recent scholars have also interpreted *De libero arbitrio* as falling into two disparate parts, and have read books 2-3 as representing a radical departure from, and implicit correction, or retractation, of book 1. We have already encountered Wetzel's analysis of book 1. He finds a new conception of the will emerging, however, in what he describes, as the 'hiatus between the composition between the first book and a half of *De libero arbitrio* in Rome in late 388 and the completion of the rest of the work in Hippo Regius sometime before the end of 395'. Agreeing with Peter Brown, and adopting Albrecht Dihle's analysis, he describes this new understanding as one which 'no longer presupposes classical psychology's distinction between the rational decisions of the mind and the irrational impulses of the emotions or appetites' but which includes the possibility that we can have knowledge of the good but be unable to act upon it: 'our power to will the good can be diminished by our indulgence in carnal satisfactions, even to the point where we will have become incapable of acting upon what we know to be good'.¹⁶

¹⁶ Wetzel 1992: 86-7.

Babcock,¹⁷

¹⁷ Babcock 1988: 34-41, though he follows Brown in noting the ambiguity of Augustine's thought in this respect (1990: 258-9).

Fredriksen,¹⁸

¹⁸ Fredriksen 1990: 232-3, 242-3. 'Book I, a synopsis of views Augustine had held at Cassiciacum, had been unblushingly optimistic about the effectiveness of man's will ... toward the end of book II, when Augustine attempts to consider the root cause of the will's uncoerced defection from the good, the tone of his discussion cools considerably ... This gloomy tone continues into Book III. Man sins because his loves are misordered; his desires and affections elude his conscious control ... The penal condition of ignorance and difficulty merited by the sin of the primal parent, retards man's progress. ... The man who, shortly after his conversion, had held that one could obtain the goal of a righteous life with "perfect ease", since it required only an

act of will, now saw his conversion in quite different terms.'

and Cary¹⁹

¹⁹ Cary 2000: 109-10. 'For purposes of understanding Augustine's development, this book [book 1 of *De libero arbitrio*] should be treated as a separate production, for it represents a unique point of view that differs from the later books of the same treatise.' He relates this 'unique point of view' to the dilemma O'Connell identified in Augustine's mind concerning the fall of the soul. Cary identifies it as 'Augustine's first attempt at overhauling the Cassiciacum program. Here he wants to develop the idea of a voluntary Fall, while retaining the Cassiciacum doctrine that part of the soul is divine and immutable. At least [he adds] this is how we must interpret the book if we do not want to make it look wildly self-contradictory.'

take the same general approach.

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Thus, in the division between book 1 and books 2 and 3 of *De libero arbitrio*; in the gulf between the confident, optimistic doctrine of free will and ease of action and the darker, more pessimistic (realistic?) portrait of its ignorance and difficulty, we have in microcosm the two different Augustines which scholars have traditionally identified in the early works: the young, naive, lay convert, full of confidence and hope, and the mature priest, painfully aware of humanity's fallenness and need for grace. It is the difference between Augustine at the time of his conversion, with a bright future ahead of him, and Augustine in the mid-390s with a crushing sense of a future forever lost. The fact that almost no scholar feels able to read *De libero arbitrio* as a unified work, then, is merely an indication of a more widespread refusal to allow any real continuity between the new convert and the later theologian of the Fall, original sin, and grace. Our argument for continuity in *De libero arbitrio* is therefore also, in microcosm, the argument of this book as a whole.

In the *Retractationes* Augustine tells us that he began to write the work in Rome (388) in order to enquire, on the basis of faith, what was the source of evil (*unde malum?*).²⁰

²⁰ Cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 1. 8. 1 on evil, which Augustine had probably read (Solignac, BA 13. 110). As Madec observes (BA 6. 176), Augustine, like Plotinus, realizes that to ask about the source of evil (*unde malum?*) one must first ask what evil is (*quis malum?*).

Having established that the sole source of evil is the free choice of the will (*liberum arbitrium voluntatis*) the three books which the discussion produced were given the title *De libero arbitrio*. He adds that the second and third books were completed later, after he was ordained priest at Hippo Regius, when he found the time to work on them (they were probably completed around 395/6, as Augustine sent the whole treatise to Paulinus at this time).

We have already seen in Ch. 4 that the question of the origin of evil was one that had preoccupied Augustine well before his conversion, not least because it was posed in an acute and pressing manner by the Manichees' dualistic explanation of the universe, which they understood as being constituted by two directly opposed and hostile powers of good and evil. They therefore attributed a substantial identity to evil and regarded it as an independent power, able to oppose, attack, and overcome the good. The repercussions of this view for an understanding of the good were disturbing: either the good was not omnipotent because it could be overcome by the forces of evil, or, if

it was omnipotent but nevertheless allowed evil to triumph, it was somehow responsible for evil and suffering. Neither option was acceptable, and it was only when Augustine discovered a non-materialist understanding of reality, which enabled him to grasp the idea of a transcendent divine substance, that he was truly able to overcome the problem by locating the source of evil in the free choice of the rational creature, created by God from nothing: it was not God who was responsible for evil, but human beings. It is this belief which he

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sets forth in *De libero arbitrio*, a work which from its conception was intended as a refutation of the Manichees. Thus in the *Retractationes* he clearly states that 'the discussion was taken up because of those who deny that the source of evil has its origin in the free choice of the will and who contend that, if this is so, God, the Creator of all natures is to be blamed. In this way ... they wish to introduce a kind of fundamental or natural evil, unchangeable and coeternal with God.'²¹

²¹ *retr.* 1. 8. 2.

Against them Augustine composed a theodicy, a justification of the ways of God which is argued consistently and coherently across the three books. In his edition in Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Madec therefore summarizes the work thus: 'He established that man alone is responsible for moral evil (book 1); that God is the supreme good, creator of all good things (book 2), and that he is worthy of praise in all his works (book 3).'

²² Madec, BA 6. 184.

'When we speak of the freedom of the will to do right, we are speaking of the freedom wherein man was created' (*De libero arbitrio* 3. 18. 52)

Given the way in which scholars have generally interpreted the *De libero arbitrio*, only a detailed reading of the work will suffice either to endorse their arguments or to question them. Before we begin we must remember Augustine's reasons and aims as we found them clearly stated in the *Retractationes*: he wanted to investigate the question of the source of evil in order to refute the Manichees' explanation of it as a primordial substance at odds with the good, and their criticism of the Catholic position as implying that God, in creating rational creatures with free will, was therefore responsible for the evil they commit. In other words he wanted to set forth an explanation of the source of evil against Manichaean dualism and determinism which would thereby establish the fundamental goodness of God, the creator of all that is good, and the origin of evil in the free, responsible, choice of the will of the rational creature.

Book 1

What Is the Source of Evil?

These are the beliefs Augustine is at pains to make clear at the very beginning of book 1 where he clearly states his faith in God as the omnipotent, immutable

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Creator, who, through his only begotten Son, creates all things from nothing, and who is absolutely just and good. This statement of faith provides the basic premises of his argument: it means, first of all, that God cannot do evil: human beings are responsible for doing evil; God, however, is responsible for the evil human beings suffer since it is his just judgement on the evil they have done. If God's judgement is indeed just, the evil that human beings have done must be voluntary. The fact that evil is voluntary leads Augustine's debating partner (probably Evodius)²³

²³ Though he is never named.

to ask why, if we have a choice, do we *do* evil at all? It is this question which, Augustine admits, first drove him into the arms of the Manichees, and motivated every step of his search for the truth he has now embraced in Christianity. He formulates it uncompromisingly: 'The difficulty for the mind is this. If sins originate with souls which God has created, and which therefore have their origin from God, how are sins not to be charged against God at least mediately?' (1. 2. 4). Augustine tells Evodius that in their discussion he proposes to follow the order which led to his own deliverance from this question, in the hope that Evodius will be able to follow him and share it too (1. 1. 1-1. 2. 5).

It is therefore clear from the outset what Augustine believes must be the case, what problems militate against this belief, and that he has already found the answers: he is writing in order to lead Evodius and his reader to grasp them too. The whole work, from basic premises and intermediate questions to final answers, is therefore already germinating in his mind. It simply needs to be allowed to grow.

What Is Evil?

Augustine has already stated what he believes, and Evodius has already raised the central question: why do we do evil (*unde malum*)? The progress towards an answer can now begin. Augustine initiates the discussion by suggesting that they first need to establish what doing evil is (*quis malum?*). Having considered some examples of evil deeds and discussed why they are evil, Augustine and Evodius are led to conclude that what doing evil is, and what is wrong with it, can be summed up as lust (*libido*) or wrongful cupidity (*cupiditas*), which they define as 'love of things which one may lose against one's will' (1. 3. 6-1. 4. 10).

In order to establish what should and should not be loved, and what can and cannot be lost against one's will—in other words what counts as evil/lust and deserves punishment—Augustine introduces a distinction between

temporal law and eternal law. Temporal law is passed to rule states and might justly be altered to suit circumstances; the eternal law, on the other hand, can never be altered: it is the law according to which the temporal law itself is formulated and judged to be either just or unjust; it is the law by which divine Providence imposes order on all things, so that the evil are justly punished and the good rewarded. This eternal law is known to man by reason, which orders his mind, and enables him to know what can and cannot be lost against his will, in other words, what he should seek and desire and what he should not. The wise are therefore 'those in whom the mind rules and all lust is subdued, and who are therefore at peace with themselves'. On the other hand, human beings alone are responsible for losing order, for lust, for desiring what can be lost against their will, and, therefore, for doing evil; nothing above or below them can bring this about: 'Nothing makes the mind a companion of cupidity, except its own will and free choice (*propria voluntas et liberum arbitrium*)' (1. 4. 10-1. 11. 21).

The Punishment of Sin

What we have read thus far does indeed provide rich material for those who would like to interpret Augustine's aim in book 1 as being to expound a Stoic/Platonic-inspired account of the autonomous rational soul, free to attain the happy life through virtuous action, so long as it limits its desires to what it knows through reason and what cannot be lost against its will. But the next step in Augustine's argument is a clear demonstration that he has moved well beyond this approach in his understanding and experience of the Christian life. It might well be used to describe human beings as God created them; the first human couple, Adam and Eve, in Paradise. It might indeed be set forth as a description of God's good creation and of the ideal state of human beings against Manichaean dualism and determinism, and this is what Augustine has done in the opening chapters we have just examined. But he does not—cannot—stop there: 'the next step' he observes, 'is that you must come to see that the soul justly pays the penalty for its sin' (1. 9. 22).

'The next step' is a momentous step; one that leaves behind the wonderfully self-possessed, ordered, rational, *facilitas* of the will, to enter a terrifying world in which the consequences of its sinful actions have left it diminished, weakened, at odds with itself, unable to act independently, at the mercy of illusory phantasms and disabling lust. It is the world of the Fall. We have already cited Augustine's description, in book 1 of *De libero arbitrio*, of the ignorance and difficulty which follows upon the Fall, at the end of the last chapter, but it deserves to be cited again in context: 'What then?' Augustine asks,

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Is it to be regarded as in itself a small penalty that the soul is dominated by lust, spoiled of its resources of virtue, drawn hither and thither in abject poverty, now approving falsehood as if it were truth,

now acting on the defensive, now rejecting what it had formerly approved but none the less falling into other falsehoods, now holding its assent back, and often fearing the most obvious reasonings, now despairing of ever finding the truth and sticking in the dark pit of folly, now attempting to reach the light of intelligence, and again falling back in sheer weariness? Meantime the cupidities exercise their dominion tyrannically and disturb man's whole mind and life with varying and contrary tempests, fear on one side, longing on the other; here anxiety, there vain and false rejoicing; here torture because something loved has been lost, there eagerness to obtain what it does not possess; here grief for injury suffered, there incitements to revenge. Wherever it turns it can be restricted by pride, tortured by envy, enveloped in sloth, excited by wantonness, afflicted by subjection, suffering all the other countless emotions which inhabit and trouble the realm of lust. Can we think that a condition like that is not penal, when we see that it must be undergone by all who do not cleave to wisdom?(1. 11. 22).

What Then?

What then? Of course, things can never be the same again. It falls to Evodius to respond to Augustine's vivid and troubling description of the fallen will and to raise the obvious questions. There are two: he admits the justice of the punishment, 'if' as he puts it 'anybody placed on the height of wisdom should choose to descend and become a servant to lust', but he wants to know how it is possible for anyone to do this—in other words, he wants to know why Adam sinned (1. 11. 23). Secondly, what worries him most is: 'why we have to suffer such bitter penalties, we who certainly are foolish and were never wise. How can we be said to deserve to suffer these things as if we had deserted the fortress of virtue and chosen servitude to lust?'(1. 12. 24). In other words, he wonders why we are punished for Adam's sins, when we have not sinned ourselves, and have never been in Adam's position of complete freedom ('we who certainly are foolish and were never wise').

Augustine seems to ignore Evodius' first question concerning why Adam himself sinned (it will be raised again in books 2 and 3) but responds immediately to the second. He observes that Evodius speaks as if it were crystal clear that we have never been wise, but that in doing so he is ignoring the question of the origin of the soul, and whether our soul might, as he vaguely puts it, have 'lived some kind of life before its association with the body, and whether it then lived with wisdom'. He admits that this is a 'big question, a great mystery, to be considered in its proper place' (1. 12. 24). As we have seen in the previous chapter, Augustine considers the question of the

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origin of the soul in detail in book 3, and he obviously has this in mind as the 'proper place'. It is as if, in formulating his two questions in response to Augustine's devastating description of the consequences of humanity's sin, Evodius has somehow jumped the gun. He has seen the problems but does not yet have the knowledge or understanding to appreciate any answer

Augustine might have to offer at this stage. He, and the reader, still have a long way to go.

Augustine therefore makes a fresh start: he sets out to cover the same ground with his pupil (for the dialogue has begun to read very much like a lesson), but from a different angle. In this way he evidently hopes to enable Evodius to appreciate the full import of what he has just asked, and to begin to work out for himself what the answers might be. *Quid nunc?* After their terrifying insight into the consequences of humanity's sin, Augustine does not try to take the argument further but rather begins again from scratch, using the simplest of terms and a question and answer method. The full horror of the consequences of humanity's fall and the questions it raises have not been forgotten, but they are postponed until they can be better understood and the answers to them can be fully appreciated.

There is perhaps another reason for Augustine's postponement of these difficult questions, and that is his desire to refute the Manichees. His primary aim in this work is to refute their dualistic explanation of the origin of evil and to argue that it originates in the free choice of the will. To attempt to answer Evodius' questions at this point would be to digress, and to wander into a minefield of hidden difficulties which could only hinder, and perhaps even destroy, the advance of his argument against his opponents. The divided, disabled mind which results from sin, and the ignorance and difficulty which undermine and fracture the will, were not subjects that could easily be broached in an anti-Manichaean context without very careful preparation and explanation. They might be regarded as endorsing the Manichees' dualism and all too easily play into their hands.

What Is a Good Will? (1. 12. 25)

At the beginning of book 1 Augustine set aside the question of the source of evil (*unde malum?*) in order to first ask what evil is (*quis malum?*). Having at least provisionally answered the latter by establishing that evil is the lust of the will for things which are less than the eternal, highest good—and having glimpsed the dire consequences of evil—he evidently now feels that this is the moment to return to the beginning and to their original question: what is the source of evil? It is now quite clear that the source of evil is the free choice of the will and it is this which Augustine sets out to investigate further.

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In doing so, he retraces the ground he has just covered, but this time with a different focus: the subject of the first part had been evil itself; the subject of the second part will be the will.

By question and answer he establishes that Evodius has a will, that it is a good will, 'a will to live righteously and honourably and to reach the highest wisdom' that it is in the power of his will to enjoy, embrace, and delight in the good, to preserve itself by the virtues of prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice, to resist anything that is hostile to it or might detract from it, and to attain its object with perfect ease if it wants to (1. 12. 25-1. 13. 28). Poor Evodius' relief is palpable: having been terrified by Augustine's description of the punishment of sin, he can hardly contain

himself now that hope seems to have been restored, the optimism of Stoic/Platonic doctrine revived, and the horrendous spectre of fallen humanity vanquished. He exclaims: 'Truly I can hardly refrain from shouting for joy, when I find I can so quickly and so easily obtain so great a good!' (1. 13. 29). But his joy is to be short-lived. Augustine's encomium on free will had set before him a compelling ideal, embellished with every desirable attribute and endowed with limitless power. There is no suspicion in Evodius' mind that it is, perhaps, all too easy, all too straightforward, all too clear-cut, and that Augustine may have set up this glorious portrait of the will only to knock it down. Thus even when Augustine asks, 'But do you think there is a single man who does not in every possible way will and choose the happy life?' Evodius still does not pick up the seeds of doubt but eagerly responds 'Who doubts that that is what every man wishes.' His eagerness is dented only when Augustine retorts, 'Why, then, do not all obtain it?' (1. 14. 30).

Augustine makes it clear that this fact is a potential blot on the picture of the will he has just drawn: 'Now some opposition has arisen which, unless we examine it closely, threatens to throw our previous argument into confusion, though we thought it strong and well constructed. How has anyone to endure an unhappy life because of the use he has made of his will, when no one at all wills to live unhappily?' he asks (1. 14. 30).

Evodius, carried away by Augustine's ideal portrait of the will, has temporarily forgotten that they are considering the will because they are trying to establish what the source of evil is. Augustine has just set before him the will's perfection and powers in order to demonstrate that it is the good creation of a good Creator, with the capacity for free choice. Only thus can he argue against the Manichees that it is responsible for evil and that God's punishment of it is just. But Evodius must now come to terms with the fact that, despite its original perfection, and despite the fact that all human beings desire to be happy, not all of them have willed the good, some have sinned, some suffer the punishment of sin, some cannot now freely will or do the good. Why?

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The answer is the one they have already identified: lust, or misdirected willing. Augustine reintroduces the question of the two laws, the temporal and the eternal, and observes that some are unhappy because they love temporal things and are therefore judged and punished by the eternal law whilst becoming subject to the temporal law; others are happy because they love eternal things, obey the eternal law, and do not need the temporal law (1. 15. 31-2). Augustine and Evodius are therefore now able to elaborate the answer to the question they set themselves for discussion at the beginning of the work: what doing evil is (*quis malum?*). It is nothing other than 'to neglect eternal things which the mind itself perceives and enjoys and loves and cannot lose, and to pursue, as if they were great and wonderful, temporal things which are perceived by the body, the lowest part of human nature, and can never be possessed with complete certainty' (1. 16. 34). They have also answered the prior question of the source of evil (*unde malum?*): as Evodius comments, 'Unless I am mistaken, reason has demonstrated that we do it by the free choice of our will' (1. 16. 35).

The question of why God gave human beings free will if it is the source of evil, and whether he is not therefore in some way to be blamed for evil, still remains (and so do the questions of why Adam should have chosen to sin in the first place, and how it is just that we should suffer the penalty of his sin, though Augustine does not mention them here). Indeed, Augustine makes quite clear that the first book has really only begun to approach the real questions; it has, as it were, merely knocked upon the door of some important matters. He tells Evodius that when they actually enter into these matters, he will see just how different, how much more advanced, challenging, and superior they are (1. 16. 35).

What Augustine has established in the first book of *De libero arbitrio* is at one level fairly simple and straightforward: evil is lust or desire for temporal rather than eternal things; evil originates in the free choice of the will. This is enough to refute the Manichees, but there are many loose ends and awkward questions which have been postponed: why did Adam sin in the first place? How is it just that we should suffer the punishments of his sin? Why did God give human beings free will which is the source of evil, and why should God not therefore be blamed for the fact that evil occurs? Why do all people desire to be happy but some nevertheless choose what is evil? The question of Adam's sin, of the inheritance of his sin, of how it affects the will of human beings in the present, of the origin of the soul and whether we suffer the effects of the earlier sinfulness of the soul are all present: they have all been tantalizingly—sometimes frighteningly—raised, but only to be put to one side until later. We must therefore not attempt to draw conclusions from book 1, as if it were a work intended to stand alone, but must read it as a very

preliminary, provisional exercise, whose purpose is to clear the ground of the theories and objections of opponents, to define terms, and to give a first outline sketch of the problem in hand and the issues it raises. To do anything else is fundamentally to misinterpret and misjudge Augustine's method and purpose.

In theory, and as created in the beginning, the will is indeed free to pursue the eternal good; in practice, and in present experience, it is disabled by the ignorance and difficulty which are the punishment for past sin. Book 1 is primarily concerned with theory: the theory of the origin and nature of evil in the free choice of the will is cogently rehearsed against the Manichees. As far as practice is concerned: on the few—but significant—occasions when the nature of human beings' actual experience of evil and its effects arise in book 1, the difficult questions raised are, as we have seen, generally set to one side; it is not that Augustine is unaware of them but that he does not judge this the best place to consider them. He has vividly described the experience and effects of the punishment of Adam's sin (1. 11. 22), and has rather dramatically introduced the idea that even though we all wish to be happy we do not all will the good (1. 14. 30). On neither occasion in this book does he go further, however, and investigate what this might imply about our present ability or inability to will the good. Again, it is not the case that he is unaware that Adam's sin, and our own subsequent sins, have a devastating effect on the will, but he does not think this is the appropriate place to consider them. Rather, he is acutely conscious of the fact—not least because Evodius keeps reminding him of it—that he must first establish the supreme goodness of God, of his creation, and of everything he does, before he begins to consider any challenges to it. Why then, did God, the supremely good, omnipotent, Creator God, give human beings free will, and thereby the ability to do evil? It is this question which sets the agenda for the debates of book 2.

Book 2

Is Free Will a Good?

Augustine succinctly sets forth his argument as to why God should have given human beings free will when he writes: 'An action would be neither sinful nor righteous unless it were done voluntarily. For the same reason both punishment and reward would be unjust, if man did not have free will. But in punishing and in reward there must have been justice, since justice is one of the good things which come from God. God, therefore, must have given and

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ought to have given man free will' (2. 2. 3). Thus, the opportunity to be righteous and to be rewarded for that righteousness according to God's justice is the main reason for God having given people free will; the obverse is that sinful actions are justly punished by God's just judgement. These

observations are based on the belief that God exists, that all good things are from God, that free will is a good, and that God was right to give it to us. These are the beliefs, set forth by the authority of Scripture, which Augustine sets out to understand in book 2 by taking each in turn. The first two need not detain us here, but we do need to examine what he and Evodius have to say in their attempt to understand the belief that God's gift of free will is a good and has therefore been rightly given to us.

In their earlier discussion of the belief that all good things are from God, Augustine and Evodius established that the soul is a greater good than the body. Augustine now reasons that 'if we find among the good things of the body some that a man can abuse, and yet cannot on that account say that they ought not to have been given, since we admit that they are good, it should not be a matter for surprise if in the soul too there are some good things which may be abused, but which, because they are good, could only have been given by him from whom all good things come' (2. 18. 48). What he has in mind, of course, is the free will. He therefore proceeds to demonstrate that God has given the body many things which can be wrongly used but which, in themselves, are a great good, such as the eyes, hands, and feet. So, too, then, in the case of free will in the soul, it is a great good because without it 'no one can live aright' even though it can also be badly used. To illustrate and advance his argument he introduces a distinction between things which are necessary for the good life and things which are not necessary: the virtues are necessary and cannot be used badly; the forms of bodies are not necessary and can be badly used (2. 18. 50). There are also intermediate goods, which are necessary but can also be badly used. The free will is just such a *medium bonum*, for without it there would be no happy life, which it attains by turning towards the common good. If, on the other hand it sins, and turns towards its own private good or to exterior, inferior things, it 'becomes proud, inquisitive, licentious, and is taken captive by another kind of life which ... is really death'. The free will's aversion, like its conversion, Augustine insists 'is voluntary and is not coerced. Therefore it is followed by the deserved and just penalty of unhappiness' (1. 19. 53). The free will is therefore a good; the evil which results from its misuse is not to be blamed on God, its Creator, but upon its aversion from him, which God justly punishes.

Book 2 might well end at this point, but Augustine anticipates Evodius' inevitable question. It is one he has asked before, in book 1, and which Augustine then ignored but has obviously not forgotten: 'perhaps you are

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going to ask what the cause of the movement of the will is when it turns from the immutable to the mutable good?' he asks (2. 20. 54). Now he proceeds to give the reason why he cannot answer this question: because evil is a privation of the good, it is a defective movement of the creature which was created from nothing, and in turning away from the source of its existence towards itself or inferior things, it thereby moves closer to nothingness and 'that which is nothing cannot be known' (ibid.). But Augustine nevertheless insists that, even if we cannot explain it, we can be sure that it is voluntary; it was within the will's power to either turn towards its Creator or away from him. Having fallen by free choice of the will, however, humankind cannot now rise by it. Augustine observes that 'since

man cannot rise of his own free will as he fell by his own will spontaneously, let us hold with steadfast faith the right hand of God stretched out to us from above, even our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us wait for him with certain hope, and long for him with burning charity' (ibid.). Book 2 therefore ends on a sombre note: having fallen of their own free will, human beings are now completely dependent on faith in, hope for, and love of God's grace in order to rise again (2. 20. 54).

Book 3

Old Questions Revived

At the end of our analysis of book 1, we observed that many questions had been raised in the course of the discussion, but that they had been either ignored or postponed. One of these questions—whether God should have given us free will since it alone is responsible for evil—was carried over to be discussed and, as we have just seen, resolved, in book 2. We also saw that the question Augustine had ignored in book 1—of the cause of the evil will, or why Adam should have sinned at all—was raised again in book 2, but judged to be unanswerable, so it, too, on Evodius' insistence, is carried over. Book 3 therefore inherits a lot that has been left hanging: the questions can no longer be put off, and having reached this stage in the discussion Augustine seems to be happier about raising them again. The foundations have been laid, the structure is in place, and it is now clear where the questions fit and how they might best be posed. They therefore reappear in a familiar setting. The first half of book 3 goes over the same ground as book 2 and builds on its conclusion that free will is a good gift of God, in order to demonstrate once and for all that God cannot be blamed for evil even though he created human beings with free will. The second half of book 3 goes over the same ground as

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book 1 and builds on its proof that evil is a result of the free choice of the will, in order to consider the further questions which this assertion raised, such as the origin of the evil will; the effects of Adam's fall upon the individual will; the justice of our suffering the penalty of Adam's sin; the origin of the soul; why everyone wishes to be happy but some sin and others don't.

Book 2 Revisited: God is Not Responsible for Evil (3. 1. 1-15. 46)

At the beginning of book 3 Evodius finally admits why he has persisted in raising the problem of the origin of the evil will: it is because he needs to persuade himself that we do not do evil simply because of our nature, and therefore by necessity, for if this were the case, we would be unjustly blamed and punished for our wrongdoing. This leads Augustine to ask (and we can almost hear the sigh): 'Did we achieve anything in our two previous discussions?' Evodius responds (we can almost see the blushing embarrassment): 'I am sure we did.' Augustine patiently summarizes what they *have* established: 'No doubt you remember that in the first discussion

we discovered that the mind can become the slave of lust only by its own will. No superior thing and no equal thing compels it to such dishonour, because that would be unjust. And no inferior thing has the power. It remains that that must be the mind's own motion when it turns its will away from enjoyment of the Creator to enjoyment of the creature. If that motion is accounted blameworthy—and you thought anyone who doubted that deserved to be treated ironically [and we can sense the irony]—it is not natural but voluntary' (1. 1. 2). Evodius agrees, and rather shamefacedly reveals what has really been preying on his mind: 'how it can be that God knows all things beforehand and that, nevertheless, we do not sin by necessity' (3. 2. 4).

Augustine's response to the question of God's foreknowledge is the same as the one he has just rehearsed in relation to the question of nature and necessity: he insists on the absolutely free, voluntary, uncoerced, choice of the will, unconstrained by any necessity. The idea, and the language in which he expresses it, is exactly the same as book 1, although those scholars who would like to divide the work into two, and identify Augustine's naive belief in the will's ease of action in book 1, and his mature conviction of its ignorance and difficulty in book 3, seem to have chosen to overlook such assertions in book 3 as: 'there is nothing so much in our power as is the will itself. For as soon as we will immediately will is there,' and 'If we cannot will without willing, those who will have will, and all that is in our power we have by willing. Our will would not be will unless it were in our power. Because it is in our power, it is free' (3. 3. 7-8). Thus, even though God foreknows

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what we will do, he also gives the will the power to act; we do not act of necessity but by free choice of the will.

This leads the discussion back to the territory of book 2: is God then responsible for our future actions since he knows them in advance? Evodius asks. Augustine responds that God is not the agent of evil actions, which are done freely by the creature, but is rather their just punisher and that he subjects them to his order (3. 4. 9-5). Everything is therefore ordered for the good. Augustine holds up the goodness of God's creation in all its pied, dappled beauty as beyond criticism: existence itself is a good, and love of it moves the creature to return to its Creator; even the penalty of sin, evident in the suffering and unhappiness of the sinful creature, is comprehended by God's order and contributes to the perfection of the whole. Part of this divine order is the incarnation of the Son, sent by God to deliver sinful creatures from the devil, and to admonish and persuade them to imitate his humility and to return to Him (3. 5. 12-12. 35). Nothing escapes God's providence: what might seem evil, disordered, or meaningless is comprehended by his goodness, order, and just judgement.

Augustine develops this characteristically anti-Manichaean argument by reflecting on one of the ideas central to his refutation of their dualism: that of evil as a privation of the good. This explanation of evil perfectly supports his argument that God is in no way to be held responsible for evil. Whereas God is the author of existence and goodness, evil is non-existence; it is a defect, vitiation, or corruption of an otherwise perfect nature. Its very existence witnesses to the original state of that nature, just as transience is needed for 'the whole beauty of things in their temporal sequence to be displayed' (3. 15. 42). However, although evil is corruption it is never allowed to corrupt the beauty of the universe; rather, punishment and suffering immediately follow sin, so that its beauty is never 'defiled by having the uncomeliness of sin without the comeliness of penalty' (3. 15. 44). Created human beings who sin are guilty because God has given them existence, knowledge of the unchangeable truth and of what they ought to will, and the power to do it. Moreover, when they do not do it, God does not let them escape but punishes them. God is therefore blameless: our sins are our own and can in no way be ascribed to him (3. 13. 38-15. 46).

Book 1 Revisited: Free Will and the Fall

Why, then, did Adam sin? Why do we sin? Why do some sin and others don't? What is the origin of the evil will? These questions can no longer be avoided. Book 1 provides the basis for an answer; indeed, as we shall shortly see,

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it provides the only answer: we sin by free choice of the will; Adam sinned, we sin, and other people sin by free choice of the will. The question which Evodius, like a tenacious schoolchild, has refused to relinquish is *why?* He formulates it thus: 'What I want to know is *what cause lies behind willing*. There must be some reason why one class [of rational beings] never wills to sin, another never lacks the will to sin, and another sometimes wills to sin and at other times does not so will' (3. 15. 47). Augustine responds that when asked in this way the question is simply unanswerable, for if he replies and says that the cause of evil is an evil will, Evodius will no doubt do what he has done throughout their discussion and ask 'what was the cause of that evil will?' and so on. There will always be a cause which needs to be explained. Augustine tells him in no uncertain terms that he must therefore stop asking this question and simply accept the explanation they have already agreed on in book 1: 'sin is rightly imputed only to that which sins ... voluntarily ... Whatever be the cause of the will, if it cannot be resisted no sin results from yielding to it' (3. 17. 49-18. 51).

Having finally laid to rest the question of why we sin, Augustine and Evodius are now in a position to move beyond theory into practice, and to confront the questions which arose in book 1 (1. 11. 22) when they momentarily considered the consequences of Adam's sin which we now suffer. It is significant, then, that at this point the dialogue becomes a monologue and Evodius, or whoever Augustine's interlocutor was, disappears. He has presumably served his purpose; he has been allowed to ask 'why?' and as a result, some important questions have been answered, terms have been defined, and other questions have been raised which must now be answered. This is something which Augustine, who appears to have known all along where he was leading the discussion, having finally brought it to this point, obviously feels he must do himself.²⁴

²⁴ This is not unusual. In many of the early dialogues Augustine the teacher takes over at the end in order to sum up the discussion, to show its significance, and to draw conclusions.

First he turns to examine our present condition. In his first attempt at describing it in book 1 he vividly, and rather frighteningly, portrayed the moral blindness and weakness which are the just penalty for Adam's sin (1. 11. 22). In book 3 he sums this up in two words: ignorance and difficulty. These are the just penalty of Adam's sin which we now suffer; they are not a description of the nature of human beings as they were first created, but of the penalty of their sin. What it means for us is that we find ourselves doing things in ignorance which we ought not to do, or even if we know what we ought to do, unable to do it. Augustine cites Paul (the very texts which we have seen the

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Manichees used to prove that there are two souls in man)²⁵

²⁵ Chapter 6, in reference to *c. Fort.* 21.

to illustrate the divided will which disables human beings: 'The good that I

would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do', 'To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not (Rom. 7: 18-19)', 'The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would (Gal. 5: 17)' (3. 18. 51).

Augustine's conviction of the solidarity of all human beings in Adam, whereby they inherit his sinful nature (which we examined in the previous chapter), is evidently the reason why he seems to simply assume here that they justly suffer the penalty of Adam's sin; he merely refers to 'carnal custom which ... has grown as strong, almost, as nature, because of the power of mortal succession' (3. 18. 52). The punishment is just because the sin was voluntary: Adam had a full knowledge of good and evil but freely, voluntarily, chose to disobey God's commandment. 'It is the most just penalty of sin' Augustine comments, 'that man should lose what he was unwilling to make a good use of, when he could have done so without difficulty if he had wished. It is just that he who, knowing what is right, does not do it should lose the capacity to know what is right, and that he who had the power to do what is right and would not should lose the power to do it when he is willing' (3. 18. 52). Now, human beings no longer have Adam's knowledge or ability, but are subject to ignorance and difficulty.

This is the moment, Augustine judges, to return to the question: 'If Adam and Eve sinned, what have we miserable creatures done to deserve to be born in the darkness of ignorance and in the toils of difficulty?' (3. 19. 53). He only has one answer to offer: grace. God, in his providence, has provided a remedy for those who suffer the devastating effects of original sin: 'there is One', he comments, 'who ... calls back him who has gone astray, teaches him who believes, comforts him who has hope, exhorts the diligent, helps him who is trying and answers prayer' (3. 19. 53). There is an interesting synergy between grace and human action here which Augustine will continue to emphasize in this treatise and which we will simply note here and return to later: belief, hope, diligence, effort, and prayer are answered by grace. Likewise, Augustine states that 'You are not held guilty because you are ignorant in spite of yourself, but because you neglect to seek the knowledge you do not possess. You are not held guilty because you do not use your wounded members but because you despise him who is willing to heal. These are your personal sins'

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(ibid.).²⁶

²⁶ These passages (3. 18. 51-19. 53) have led to a great deal of misunderstanding on the part of scholars. Alflatt 1974 argued that Augustine taught that sin can be 'involuntary' (because of ignorance and difficulty) but still sinful in the proper sense of the term. He has been followed, to some extent, by Wetzel 1992: 88-98 and Babcock 1988: 40. O'Connell 1991, on the other hand, has convincingly demonstrated that Alflatt's thesis was based on a mistranslation which he then misquotes. Augustine in fact teaches that acts committed because of ignorance and difficulty are sinful because we are ultimately responsible for the ignorance and difficulty, in the sense that we deserve them as a punishment because we are identical with Adam, who sinned voluntarily. Such sins are therefore not strictly 'involuntary' because Adam voluntarily sinned.

In other words human beings are not held guilty for Adam's sin, even though they justly suffer the punishment for it, but they *are* guilty if they fail to

confess their weakness humbly and to acknowledge their absolute helplessness, ignorance, and need for God's healing grace (ibid.). If they turn towards God, and thereby overcome the punishment which was merited for turning away from him, they will receive divine help (3. 20. 55). Humility, confession, and conversion towards God are answered by grace.

It is at this point that Augustine moves on to consider the origin of the soul and to describe the four different theories that we outlined in the previous chapter. This was another question raised in book 1, and once again, Augustine has now clearly reached a point in the work—in discussing the effects of original sin—where he judges it can best be addressed and understood. Having discussed the four theories, however, and having shown that they are all compatible with God's justice, he seems to brush them to one side. He is not prepared to opt for one over the other (and never will be): 'none of these views', he states, 'can be rashly affirmed' (3. 21. 59). Moreover, he does not think they substantially affect the discussion in hand. Better, he thinks, to trust to faith in divine authority and God's temporal revelation, which also serves to strengthen hope and love by reminding us of God's providential care for our salvation (3. 21. 60). We should be more preoccupied with the future, he urges, than with the past (3. 21. 61). Most importantly, whatever conclusion we come to, or fail to come to, about the origin of the soul, the question he has been addressing—how it is just that we should suffer the penalty for Adam's sin—can still be answered: 'by the upright, just, unshaken and changeless majesty and substance of the Creator souls pay the penalty for their own sins. These sins, as we have explained at great length, are to be ascribed to nothing but to their own wills, and no further cause for sins is to be looked for' (3. 22. 63).

It may therefore well be the case that ignorance and difficulty are 'natural' to human beings, since all Adam's descendants suffer the penalty of his sin. But they are not held guilty for this state, rather, Augustine observes, it is from this position that 'the soul begins to progress and to advance towards knowledge and tranquillity until it reaches the perfection of the happy life'

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(3. 22. 64). Augustine evidently believes that human beings have the ability to advance by means of what he describes here as 'good studies and piety' failure to do so will mean that they justly fall into an even worse ignorance and difficulty, and will be ranked among lower, inferior creatures. Augustine summarizes his argument thus: 'Natural ignorance and natural impotence are not reckoned to the soul as guilt. The guilt arises because it does not eagerly pursue knowledge, and does not give adequate attention to acquiring facility in doing right' (ibid.). The ignorance and difficulty which human beings inherit from Adam do not therefore seem to incapacitate them totally: Augustine seems to be suggesting here that they still have the ability, indeed the obligation, to seek the good and find the means to do it.

What are we to make of this? First of all, it sits oddly with Augustine's devastating description of the far-reaching consequences of Adam's fall in book 1, where it is difficult to find any trace at all of ability or power remaining to fallen humankind. It also completely contradicts the way in which most scholars have interpreted *De libero arbitrio*, as moving from a belief in the ease and facility of the will's operation in the first book, to one in

which it is completely disabled by ignorance and difficulty in book 3. And yet Augustine seems to have argued himself into a position where, to defend God's justice and to refute Manichaean determinism, he must leave some room for the free operation of the will even *after* Adam's fall. It is clearly not enough to say that because Adam's first sin was voluntary, human beings, who inherit the punishment for that sin through their solidarity with Adam, justly suffer the penalty of that sin, though in fact this is true enough. He also needs to explain how it is that when we now sin, subject to ignorance and difficulty, we can be justly punished for those sins. He has made it manifestly clear that if we sin simply because we are totally disabled by the effects of Adam's sin and can neither know nor do the good as a result, then our sin is not voluntary and cannot be justly punished. But it is evidently the case, as Evodius observed earlier, that some sin but some do not. It is not the case that all right action is impossible for fallen humanity; some do find it possible to will and to do the good. How?

Augustine seems to have arrived at very much the same difficult position which we have already seen him encounter while trying to interpret Paul in the mid-390s. In fact the works in which he attempts to tackle the difficulties raised by Romans are probably contemporary with the third book of *De libero arbitrio*. Faced with the problem of Adam's sin, the inheritance of original sin and its effects, of foreknowledge, divine justice, and human responsibility and freedom, we saw in Ch. 5 that Augustine found the only way to preserve God's justice and defend free will against Manichaean determinism in his reflections on Romans in the mid-390s, was to allow the will a single, fleeting moment

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of freedom in its choice of faith in response to God's call. In maintaining that even subject to original sin human beings have the ability to believe, hope, diligently make an effort, and pray (3. 19. 53), that they can humbly confess their sin and turn towards God (3. 20. 55), and can advance by 'good studies and piety' (3. 22. 64) in *De libero arbitrio* book 3, it may well appear that Augustine is opting for the same solution, and is suggesting that they can will and do the good autonomously, and are then subsequently rewarded by grace. In fact, he is arguing just the opposite.

Augustine is insistent in book 3 that the 'natural ignorance and difficulty' of human beings and their subjection to original sin, which have been demonstrated by quotations from Paul, render them powerless and incapable of either knowing, willing, or doing the good (3. 18. 51). Their powerlessness and incapacity are overcome only by God's grace, which 'calls ... teaches ... comforts ... enables ... inspires ... and helps' them. Yes, they must respond to this grace—continually respond by willing the good—but Augustine makes it clear that this is a response which is possible only because of the *prior action and gift of grace*. We must remember that when Augustine concluded book 2 with the clear statement that, having fallen by free will, we cannot now rise by free will, he immediately went on to add that we must therefore hold on to God's right hand stretched out to us from above in Christ (2. 20. 54). Similarly, revisiting his demonstration of God's goodness, and the goodness of all that might at first seem like evil, unjust, unmerited suffering in his creation, Augustine stresses the nature of God's order and providence, which comprehend the effects of human sin not just by punishment and suffering, but also by sending his Son to deliver human beings from sin, and to admonish and persuade them to humbly follow his example (3. 5. 12-12. 35). Most significantly, we have just seen that the only answer Augustine has to offer to the question of why we should suffer the penalty of original sin is to point to the action of God's grace. He has no other explanation, but is simply prepared to accept that the ignorance and difficulty which now disable the will and make it impossible for human beings to know, will, or do the good is now their 'natural' state, and that the only way in which it is overcome is by grace: God sends Christ as a remedy for the blindness and weakness which now vitiate our will (3. 19. 53). This emphasis on grace is confirmed when, having stressed the fact that we are not held guilty for the sins we commit because of our 'natural' state of ignorance and difficulty, but only for those which we commit voluntarily, by free choice of the will, Augustine immediately goes on to emphasize that the power to will in the fallen creature is wholly due to God's gift and that, like Adam, we sin because, having been given that power by grace, we refuse humbly to acknowledge our total and utter dependence upon God for all that we are and all that we do, but proudly think ourselves self-sufficient. Augustine therefore writes,

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But his [fallen man's] Creator is to be praised on all counts. He gave him the power to rise from such beginnings [the natural state of ignorance and difficulty stated in the previous paragraph] the ability to attain the chief good. He renders aid as he advances. He completes and perfects his advance. And if he sins, that is, if he refuses to rise from these beginnings to perfection or if he falls back from any progress he may have made, he imposes on him a most just condemnation according to his deserts ... That the soul does not know what it should do is due to its not yet having received that gift. It will receive it if it makes a good use of what it has received. It has received the power to seek diligently and piously if it will. That it cannot instantly fulfil the duty it recognizes as duty, means that that is another gift it has not yet received. Its higher part first perceives the good it ought to do, but the slower and carnal part is not immediately brought over to that opinion. So by that very difficulty it is admonished to implore for its perfecting the aid of him whom it believes is the author of its beginning. Hence He becomes dearer to it, because it has its existence not from its own resources but from His goodness, and by His mercy it is raised to happiness Why should not the Author of the soul be praised with due piety if He has given it so good a start that it may by zeal and progress reach the fruit of wisdom and justice, and has given it so much dignity as to put within its power the capacity to grow towards happiness if it will?(3.22.65)

Thus, by grace, by gift upon gift, human beings who are subject to original sin are empowered and enabled: if they acknowledge this grace and rely on it to advance towards their goal, they will not fall, or sin, or be punished by God; if they fail to acknowledge their need for it, or to rely upon it for everything they do, they will be justly punished. As Augustine observes, a human being is like a child, born ignorant and weak. The child is not blamed for its ignorance and weakness, but must acknowledge its need for a teacher and guide in order to grow in wisdom and virtue. Christ is that teacher: if he is ignored and disobeyed, human beings are justly punished (3. 22. 64).

Grace therefore liberates the will from ignorance and difficulty by making human beings conscious of their need and their dependence upon God, who alone gives the power and ability to seek to know and to will the good which Adam has lost. Referring to souls which are born in ignorance and difficulty, Augustine therefore comments that

It is no small thing to have been given, before there has been any merit gained by any good work [a clear indication that he is not going to opt for the solution to these problems which he proposed in the commentaries on Romans], the natural power to discern that wisdom is to be preferred to error and tranquillity to toil, and to know that these good things are to be reached not simply by being born but by earnestly seeking them. But if the soul will not act in this way it will rightly be held guilty of sin for not making a good use of the power it has received. Though it is born in ignorance and toilsomeness there is no necessity for it to remain in that state.(3. 20. 56)

Referring to the theory of pre-existent souls which are infected by the ignorance and difficulty of the body he similarly observes that

He [God] has given them power to do good in difficult duties and has provided for them the way of faith where oblivion brought blindness. Also and above all, he has given them the insight which every soul possesses; that it must seek to know what to its disadvantage it does not know, and that it must persevere in burdensome duties and strive to overcome the difficulty of well-doing, and implore the Creator's aid in its efforts. (3. 20. 57)

Augustine even begins to suggest how such grace operates: it has both an external and an internal operation, 'by the law without and by direct address to the heart within' (3. 20. 57). He even foreshadows what he has to say about the way in which the will is motivated in the *Ad Simplicianum* when he reflects, near the end of book 3, that 'the will is not enticed to do anything except by something that has been perceived' and that 'it is not within his power to control the things which will affect him when they are perceived ... [man] cannot will unless some hint comes to him from outside through bodily sense, or some thought comes into his mind in some secret way' (3. 25. 74). Augustine therefore suggests that there are two types of experience: one experience comes from the will of another who uses persuasion, as the devil persuaded Adam to sin, the other comes from our environment, both 'mental and spiritual or corporeal and sensational'. The environment of the mind includes the mind itself and its awareness of its own existence, the body which it governs, and above it the unchangeable Trinity (3. 25. 75). If the mind forgets itself in love of God, does not become proud by being conscious of itself and wanting to enjoy its own powers in pride, and does not become engrossed in temporal things, then it will not sin. Even this is made possible only by grace: whereas the devil offered human beings a pattern of pride for imitation, which results in death, Christ offered them a pattern of humility, leading to eternal life (3. 25. 76). Pride, the root of the Fall, is only overcome by our humble acknowledgement of our complete and utter dependence upon God, and even this acknowledgement is made possible only by grace. It is on this note, evidently feeling his way towards the idea of grace which he describes at the end of *Ad Simplicianum*, which affects the operation of the will by inspiring it both inwardly and outwardly, to delight in the good and to act upon it, that Augustine ends *De libero arbitrio*.

The Unity of *De libero arbitrio*

It is our hope that the above analysis of *De libero arbitrio* will have demonstrated the fundamental continuity of the work against those who have

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divided it into two disparate and contradictory parts. We have argued that it is evident that Augustine had the seeds of the *whole* work in his mind from

the very beginning; that his aims and objectives were clearly defined and that he knew what was needed to bring those seeds to fruition. He already knew what was best discussed immediately and what should be left until a more appropriate point later on; which questions needed to be answered before others could be properly tackled; what must be believed; what was the case for Adam and what is the case for us. Above all, he was fully persuaded from the beginning that, if we do not acknowledge our complete and absolute dependence upon God's grace we will be overcome by the ignorance and difficulty which we now suffer, but that, if we humbly accept God's grace, at work both outwardly and inwardly, we will be empowered and enabled to know and to will the good.

The work is therefore not a careless, contradictory composition, the cracks of which Augustine later had to lie to cover up, but a highly structured and carefully argued piece characteristic of Augustine, the consummate teacher, who leads his pupil (and the reader) from the simple to the complex, the plain to the profound, the straightforward to the difficult: from faith to understanding. The work is like a musical composition: the theme is stated, developed, recapitulated, rephrased, and reshaped in subtle variations, slowly and meditatively growing ever more complex, until all is resolved—now with so many resonances for the hearer—in a final coda.

It is clearly misleading to identify book 1 as the place where the young Augustine naively believes that the will is able to know and to do the good, free of any ignorance, necessity, coercion, or difficulty. We have found similar descriptions of the will in all three books when he is describing Adam before the Fall and is rehearsing a formal theory of free will against the Manichees. It is equally misleading to identify books 2 and 3 as the place where Augustine, the more worldly priest, is now persuaded that ignorance and difficulty totally undermine and incapacitate the will. In fact he states this nowhere more clearly than in book 1, in the long description of the penalty of Adam's sin (1. 11. 22) which we have had occasion to refer to a number of times already. Scholars have misread, and therefore misunderstood, his affirmations of the uncompromised freedom of the will, by reading them out of context, and by failing to appreciate or accept that they are theoretical references to humanity before the Fall, and are primarily directed against Manichaean dualism and determinism—even though Augustine himself makes this perfectly clear: 'When we speak of the freedom of the will to do right, we are speaking of the freedom wherein man was created' (3. 18. 52).²⁷

²⁷ As Holte 1990: 77 observes, Augustine is primarily addressing the question of the *origin* of sin in a universe created good, and therefore spends most of the treatise writing in reference to *original* sin, committed with *original* free will.

The fact that he is

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primarily concerned to set forth a theoretical portrait of the *ability* of the free will, as it was created by God in the beginning, in book 1, whilst postponing until later a discussion of the specific questions raised by its actual *action* or practice, subject to original sin, in the present, has been ignored—with dire results. What is worse: those scholars who insist on mutilating *De libero arbitrio*—and there are few who refrain from doing so—are explicitly accusing

Augustine of lying in order to cover up his youthful errors in response to Pelagian taunts later in his career, for Augustine himself categorically denies the interpretation they so confidently foist upon him, in his *Retractationes*. In this work, he was therefore arguing not only against the Manichees but, quite unsuspectingly, against his own future interpreters. It is to this analysis and defence of *De libero arbitrio* that we must now turn.

Retractationes

The entry for *De libero arbitrio* in the *Retractationes* ²⁸

²⁸ Cf. *nat. et gr.* 60. 70-67. 81 where Augustine defends other Latin fathers, such as Lactantius, Jerome, and Ambrose against Pelagian attack concerning the question of whether they taught freely willed perfection, as well as his own comments in *lib. arb.* He similarly makes a distinction between original human nature in Adam, when we were free to will the good, and our nature subject to original sin, in which we are subject to ignorance and difficulty, and cannot will or do the good without the grace of God, through Christ.

is significantly one of the longest Augustine felt it necessary to write. This is because the work had later been taken hostage by the Pelagians and cited by them as proof that he had earlier shared precisely their own views on the will as an autonomous, self-determining power, able to know, will and do the good of itself, and whose meritorious actions were only subsequently rewarded by God's grace. As we have seen, there is indeed much to support this claim in all three books, if the passages in which Augustine argues for the original freedom of the will in human beings as they were first created, for the origin of evil in the free choice of the will, and for the voluntary nature of sin as justifying God's punishment of it, are read as an account of humanity's present state and not—as they were intended—as a theoretical description of Adam before the Fall.

Having made it perfectly clear in the *Retractationes* that the work should be read in context, with an understanding of the circumstances which prompted its composition—in other words in relation to his attempt to refute Manichaeism, their denial of the free will, and the blame they apportioned to the Creator for the presence of evil—Augustine urges that his main

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preoccupation was the question of the origin of evil in the free choice of the will, and that it is therefore totally unreasonable of the Pelagians to criticize him for not having said much about grace when this was neither his subject or purpose: 'Because this was the subject we proposed to debate [the origin of evil in the free choice of the will]', he states 'there is no discussion in these books of the grace of God whereby he has predestined his elect and Himself prepares the wills of those among them who make use of their freedom of choice. But whenever an occasion occurs to make mention of this grace it is mentioned in passing, not laboriously defended as if it were in question' (1. 9. 2).

Augustine proceeds to list those passages in *De libero arbitrio* in which he described the free choice of the will, in order to demonstrate that it is the will, and not an evil substance, that is the source of evil. He observes that he did indeed say, 'much in favour of the free will which was necessary for the purpose I had in view' (1. 9. 3) and that 'in these and similar words of mine no mention is made of the grace of God, because it was not under discussion' (1. 9. 4). The Pelagians should not, however, think that because of this he therefore held their opinion. He makes it absolutely clear that what he was referring to was the operation of the will *before* the Fall; after it, grace is indeed indispensable. He observes that 'Mortals [in other words, those subject to mortality following the Fall] cannot live righteously or piously unless the will itself is liberated by the grace of God from the servitude to sin into which it has fallen, and is aided to overcome its vices. Unless this divine liberating gift preceded the good will, it would not be grace, which is grace precisely because it is freely given' (1. 9. 4).

The question of whether such comments are in fact no more than special pleading, and merely an attempt to foist later beliefs on an early text under the pressure of very embarrassing criticism, as many scholars have suggested, is addressed by Augustine himself. He first of all makes the obvious, but pertinent point (and it is one that anyone reading the early works would do well to remember) that he was writing at a time when he had not yet encountered the Pelagians, and therefore did not have their challenge specifically in mind (1. 9. 4). Even so, he adds, 'I have not been completely silent about the grace of God.' In addition to the numerous passages we have already referred to above in relation to the pre-eminence of grace in response to the fallenness of human beings, and the ignorance and difficulty which disable their will after the Fall, Augustine also cites others, from books 2 and 3, in support of his view that after the Fall, humankind has no good that does not come from God, and is unable to will or to do the good without the gift of his grace.²⁹

²⁹ *lib. arb.* 2. 19. 50; 2. 20. 54; 3. 18. 51; 3. 18. 52.

Those scholars who insist on dividing the work, and who interpret books 2-3 as a retractation of

book 1, rather than paying heed to Augustine's own *Retractationes*, make much of the fact that the passages Augustine cites here in order to support his claim that he already held a secure doctrine of grace well before the Pelagian controversy come from the last two books and not the first. Once again—as should now be quite clear—this is because they choose to ignore the fact that in book 1 Augustine is arguing in a theoretical, formal manner against Manichaeian dualism, and is referring to the operation of the will *before* the Fall. There would therefore be little need for him to refer to grace in this book, whereas in books 2 and 3, where he turns to examine the action of the will *after* the Fall, subject to ignorance and difficulty, grace is naturally indispensable.³⁰

³⁰ Madec (BA 6. 181 n. 77) notes that it was, in fact, in book 3 (18. 50) that Pelagius found a text in favour of his doctrine.

If we are to believe what Augustine tells us in the *Retractationes*, he had always assumed the operation of God's grace, and, contrary to those who would like to dub him 'more Pelagian than Pelagius' at this time, he urges us to 'Observe how long before the Pelagian heresy had come into existence we spoke as though we were already speaking against them ... Because all good things ... come from God, it follows that from God also comes good use of free will ... the grace of God liberates man from the misery inflicted on sinners, because he was able to fall of his own accord, that is, by free will, but was not able to rise of his own accord. To the misery due to just condemnation belong the ignorance and inability which every man suffers from his birth. From that evil no man is delivered save by the grace of God' (1. 9. 6). He was, as we have been arguing throughout this book, anti-Pelagian before Pelagius.³¹

³¹ Cf. *c. Jul.* 6. 12. 39 quoted at the end of the last chapter. It might well be objected that Pelagius also talks about humanity's fallenness in terms of ignorance and difficulty and appears to have much in common with Augustine in this respect. We should be aware, however, that while Augustine's attack on Pelagius can verge on caricature, and that 'Pelagianism' includes a range of ideas not Pelagius' own, Augustine's basic objections are sound, not least concerning Pelagius' teaching on the possibility of autonomous human willing, and on the operation of divine grace as simply something external. It is these basic features which we have in mind when we refer to the early Augustine's, as it were, proto-anti-Pelagianism.

In order to support our interpretation of *De libero arbitrio* it may be useful, at the end of this chapter, to demonstrate how Augustine's reflections on the will in this treatise relate to what he has to say on the same subject in the other works which he composed around the same time (388-394/5).

De beata uita (386-387)

When Wetzel maintains that in his early works Augustine 'embraced the Stoic convergence of virtue, autonomy, and happiness in wisdom', and that 'this set

for him philosophy's ideal'³²

³² Wetzel 1992: 11.

the text on which he makes his claim hang is *De beata uita* 4. 25, where Augustine quotes an aphorism from Terence to provide a definition of the wise man: 'since not all you wish can be done, wish only what can be done'. In emphasizing this text, however, Wetzel not only ignores the actual context of the quotation in *De beata uita*, but also what Augustine has to say about virtue and beatitude in other Cassiciacum dialogues such as *Contra Academicos* and *De ordine*. Instead, he simply links it directly with those texts in *De libero arbitrio* book 1 which seem to suggest a similarly Stoic understanding of the autonomous will. That his reading of *De beata uita* 4. 25 is as misleading as his interpretation of *De libero arbitrio* 1, has been amply demonstrated by Asiedu,³³

³³ Asiedu 1999.

who has shown that when it is read in the context of the work as a whole, in relation to other early works such as the *De moribus* (see below), and as foreshadowing and confirming Augustine's later use of Terence in *De ciuitate Dei* (14. 25) and *De Trinitate* (book 13), it is quite clear that Augustine is simply following ancient philosophical practice in setting up a portrait of the wise man in order subsequently to knock it down. Thus Terence's invulnerable sage functions, not so much as a definitive picture of a wise man, but as a sort of ironic, comic parody—an 'Aunt Sally'—to be toppled. We have already seen Augustine do precisely this in *De libero arbitrio* book 1. In *De beata uita* it falls to Monnica, who evidently represents the voice of wisdom in the dialogue, to take the ground very effectively from under the feet of Terence's wise man, by the simple, direct, and uncompromising observation that, although such a man might, by moderating his desires to what he can possess, be said to lack nothing, by failing to realize that he should fear the loss of what he possesses, he does in fact lack the one thing necessary: wisdom (4. 27). Monnica then proceeds to identify true wisdom with Christ, and therefore with the Trinity, which admonishes, leads, and joins people to itself, which 'help[s] those who pray', and which is not so much possessed in this life, as sought in faith, hope, and love (4. 35). True happiness is therefore not possessed by Terence's self-sufficient 'wise' man, but is found only in possession of God,³⁴

³⁴ Augustine uses the expression *Deum habere* (to have God)—2. 11; 4. 34.

the Trinity; by devotion to, and dependence upon him.³⁵

³⁵ As Asiedu 1999: 232 comments, 'If one still insists on *De beata uita* 4. 25 as an endorsement of the Stoic notion of the self-sufficiency of virtue then it would have to be maintained that Augustine's dialogue presents a blatant inconsistency or at best an ambiguous posture, at once claiming that the virtue of the wise man ensures beatitude, while also insisting that devotion to God, as the Christian religion proposes, and as Monica represents, is the way to happiness. If, on the other hand, the last word belongs to Monica, as Augustine claims at several points in the dialogue, then, the apparent Stoicism of *De beata uita* would have to be considered suspect.'

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De immortalitate animae (387)

Augustine's characteristic teaching that it is the free choice of the will which is the source of evil is suggested for the first time in a work written a year before *De libero arbitrio* was begun, the *De immortalitate animae*. Here Augustine raises the possibility that mind might be separated from reason voluntarily and thereby perish. Although he does not seem to think that this is possible, at this stage, because there can be no separation of things which are not in space, he still allows for the soul's turning away from reason and describes the way in which it thereby diminishes itself, by becoming defective. He writes that 'the mind cannot turn away from reason—in doing so it falls into foolishness—without suffering a defect; for just as the mind enjoys a more perfect being when turned toward reason and adhering to it—because it adheres to something unchangeable which is the truth that is in the highest degree and primordial—so, when turned away from reason, the mind has a less perfect being—and this is a defect' (7. 12). He insists, however, that although the soul might therefore become less, and move towards nothing, it never perishes.³⁶

³⁶ I owe these observations to Cary 2000: 107-9.

De moribus (387-8)

The Stoic sounding emphasis on reason, which, as we have seen, Wetzel locates in *De beata uita* 4. 25, and which many scholars insist remains the context in which Augustine reflects upon the will until as late as the mid-390s, is not just ironically parodied in the *De moribus* (387-8), but is dramatically replaced by the language of love.³⁷

³⁷ As Rist 1994: 188 comments 'in neither Greek nor Latin can current usage account for the special near-identification of will with love, or a set of accepted loves, which is Augustine's powerful and transforming thesis ... we determine on doing things as a result of what we are, and what we are is what we love.'

In this work it is clear that Augustine thinks that it is not by the virtuous operation of the will in accordance with reason that human beings must strive to attain the happy life, but by the virtuous operation of the will in love. The two types of love, whereby one either moves towards the happy life or falls away from it, closely resemble Augustine's description of the operation of the will in relation to the eternal and temporal law in book 1 of *De libero arbitrio*, his definition of the Fall and evil, and his consideration of how they affect the present state of humanity, in books 2-3: *caritas* is love of eternal things, which are immutable, can never be

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taken away, and therefore lead to happiness and freedom; *cupiditas* is love of inferior things, which are mutable, can easily be lost, and which therefore lead to misery and enslavement.³⁸

³⁸ *mor.* 1. 12. 21; cf *sol.* 1. 11. 19; *diu. qu.* 83 35. 2.

The first is founded upon human beings' humility and subjection to God, whereby they acknowledge their creaturely status and dependence upon their Creator, so that they receive his illumination and enlightenment; the

second is founded upon pride, whereby, thinking that they possess the same nature as their Creator, human beings turn to themselves, cut themselves³⁹ off from the truth and become blind.

³⁹ *mor.* 1. 12. 20.

As in books 2 and 3 of *De libero arbitrio*, wisdom and truth are no longer simply identified with the reason which informs the virtuous will and action of human beings before the Fall, but are identified with Christ: it is by love of him that fallen human beings are sanctified, and are able to love in such a way that they are conformed to him rather than to the world. Furthermore, the love which effects this conformation is identified with the Holy Spirit, the love of God shed abroad in the hearts of human beings (Rom. 5: 5).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid. 1. 25. 46-7. These insights support Colish's (1985: 217) interpretation of *mor.*, who claims that the source of the virtues in *mor.* serves as 'a well spring that combines divine initiative with human response' in contrast to Wetzel 1992: 72-3 who observes that 'he [Augustine] has yet to suggest that the ground of the virtues is ultimately God's love for us. The reversal of perspective that introduces divine agency into the very heart of human willing is still years away ... the mere invocation of love does not compromise Stoic autarky with divine initiative ... several years after his conversion, Augustine continues to worship the God of Abraham at the altar of the philosophers.'

The operation of the will is, then, no longer a matter of reason but of love, a love inspired by God's grace, whereby human beings can will/love its source.

The virtues are similarly redefined as different types of love:⁴¹

⁴¹ Ibid. 1. 15. 25; cf 1. 19. 35-24. 45.

virtue leads to happiness, but is not its end; rather it leads to God who is the transcendent source and object of happiness, and who can only be attained⁴² in the life to come.

⁴² Ibid. 25. 47.

Virtuous action is determined not by the temporal order of nature but by God's eternal law. Augustine has not only left behind Stoicism here, but his emphasis, as in *De libero arbitrio*, on the created goodness of the body, the dependence of human beings upon their Creator, and their need for divine assistance and grace, is fundamentally alien to Neoplatonism too.

De Quantitatae Animae (388)

De quantitatae animae is one of the works which represents Augustine's early obsession with the soul. It was written at the same time as *De libero arbitrio*

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book 1 and closely anticipates the arguments for the goodness of free will which Augustine rehearses in book 2 of that work. In 36. 80 Augustine works on the assumption that 'the soul, indeed, is given free choice', but is evidently at pains to make clear that, whatever use the soul makes of its free will, its actions are comprehended by the Creator's just, providential, inviolable, and unchanging law and order, whereby the punishment or reward of the soul 'contributes something corresponding to the measured beauty and arrangement of all things' and is never allowed to disrupt it. Free will is therefore a good which, although it can result in evil, is always comprehended by the universal order of God's providence: 'God does all things justly, wisely and beautifully, no matter what attitude of will His creatures may assume.'

The Years 390-391

In a series of works during the early 390s—the *De uera religione* (390), *De duabus animabus* (391), and *Contra Fortunatum* (392)—Augustine argues precisely the same thesis which we have already analysed in books 1-3 of *De libero arbitrio*. In these anti-Manichaean works he argues for the free choice of the will as the explanation of the origin of evil, against dualistic theories, in language which is identical to that which we have found in book 1 of *De libero arbitrio*. He also defends God's justice in giving human beings free will, and in punishing its misuse, by demonstrating the goodness of creation, of the free will, and of God's providential ordering of sin, against Manichaean attempts to blame God for the existence of evil, in arguments identical to those we have analysed in book 2. Moreover, he addresses the present condition of fallen humanity, subject to ignorance and difficulty, and the questions this raises concerning guilt and the operation of divine grace, against the Manichees' theory of two souls and their attempts to undermine God's justice, in a manner identical to book 3. The presence of exactly the same ideas and arguments in the period between the composition of book 1 in 388 and the completion of the treatise in 394-5, is further evidence that Augustine had the thesis of the work in mind when he began to write, and that it must be read in its entirety if it is not to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Thus, while he rehearses a theory of the free choice of the will, unconstrained by compulsion or necessity before the Fall, it must be understood that he does so only with the intention of then addressing its present, fallen state. In fact, we have already noted that while the emphasis is upon a theoretical state of freedom and ability to will in book 1, this state is also described in books 2 and 3; and while the consequences of the Fall for the will are directly

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addressed in books 2 and 3, they are most vividly depicted in book 1, even though the questions this raises are postponed for later consideration. We will see exactly the same mixture of theory and practice in Augustine's consideration of the operation and freedom of the will, before and after the Fall, in the works of the early 390s and the same preoccupation, in his *Retractationes* on these works, to correct Pelagian misuse and misinterpretation of passages which describe the operation of the free will before the Fall. It is also interesting, but not at all surprising, that the way in which Augustine explains these passages is identical to that which we have already seen him follow in the *Retractationes* on *De libero arbitrio*.

De uera religione (390)

In a passage of *De uera religione* redolent of the confident and uncompromising assertions of the freedom of the will in *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine states that 'Sin is so much voluntary evil, that there would be no such thing as sin unless it were voluntary' (27). It is quite clear that the sin Augustine is referring to is that of Adam (persuaded by Satan, the 'wicked angel'), in contrast to our present sins (which can occur against the will under the compulsion of necessity), when he observes that 'If the defect we call sin overtook a man against his will, like a fever, the penalty which follows the sinner and is called condemnation would rightly seem to be unjust ... Man is said to have been persuaded by the wicked angel, but even so it was his will that consented. If he had consented by necessity, he would have been held guilty of no sin' (27-28). In his comments in the *Retractationes* (1. 12. 5) Augustine points out that the statement that sin must be voluntary to be counted as sin, might at first appear false, but that in fact it is true. What he evidently has in mind is that our present experience of sinning would immediately refute the truth of the statement, since it is so often involuntary, but even on these grounds he argues that it is, in fact, true. He does so by what might well be dismissed as merely a play on words, but which is, in fact, a careful attempt to define terminology. Even 'involuntary' sin is strictly 'voluntary' because it is an act of will: even the sinner who sins through ignorance, sins with his will, and his action is therefore, by definition, 'voluntary' even the one whom Paul describes as overcome by lust ('the flesh lusts against the spirit' Gal. 5: 17), and who lusts against his own will, still voluntarily consents to lust, because he does so with his conquered, vitiated will; even infants, subject to original sin, might strictly be said to have sinned 'voluntarily', because their sin, 'originated in man's first evil will and has become in a

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manner hereditary'. Thus sin committed because of ignorance and difficulty, subject to original sin, against reason, and in a sense, against one's own will, *is* 'voluntary' because it is an act of will. We are not, however, held guilty for it.

In the following chapter of *De uera religione* (29) Augustine responds to the issues which his assertion of the voluntary nature of sin might raise, in the same way as he does in book 2 of *De libero arbitrio*, by demonstrating that

free will is indeed a good, even though it can be misused and is responsible for humanity's present state of weakness and mortality, because God's providential action in punishing sin admonishes human beings to turn from bodily pleasures to eternal truth, to cease to trust proudly in themselves and to submit themselves to be ruled and defended by God alone, so that by grace they might grow in virtue. The conclusion to book 2 of *De libero arbitrio*, where Augustine observes that, whereas we have fallen by free will we cannot rise by free will, but must hold fast to God's right hand stretched out to us in Christ, is set forth here, in *De uera religione*, for the first time:⁴³

⁴³ Although we do not know exactly when book 2 (or book 3, for that matter) was written, except that it was after 388 and before 394/5; the two passages might therefore be contemporaneous, or *lib. arb.* 2 might be earlier.

'To heal souls God adopts all kinds of means suitable to the times which are ordered by his marvellous wisdom ... But in no way did he show greater loving kindness in his dealings with the human race for its good, than when the Wisdom of God, his only Son ... deigned to assume human nature ... thus he showed to carnal people, given over to bodily sense and unable with the mind to behold truth, how lofty a place among creatures belonged to human nature ... The assuming of our nature was to be also its liberation' (30).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Augustine also emphasizes the role of grace in the *Retractationes* on *uera rel.* 27: 'By the grace of God, then, not only is the guilt of all past sins removed in those "who are baptized in Christ" (Rom. 6: 3), for this is accomplished by the spirit of regeneration; but also in adults, "the will" itself is purified and "prepared" by the Lord, which in this case, is accomplished "by the spirit of faith" (2 Cor. 4: 13) and of charity.'

De duabus animabus (391)

As the title suggests, this treatise was written against the Manichees' belief in two souls. Augustine summarizes it in the *Retractationes* thus: 'one [soul] ... they say, is a part of God, but the other from the race of darkness which God did not create and which is coeternal with God; and, in their madness, they say that these two souls—the one good, the other evil—are in each and every man, evidently meaning that the evil soul belongs to the flesh—they also say that this flesh belongs to the race of darkness—but that the good soul is from

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an adventitious part of God which has been in conflict with the race of darkness, and that both commingled. Furthermore, they attribute all good in man to that good soul, but all evil to that evil soul' (1. 14. 1). This was a particularly challenging expression of dualism as it enabled the Manichees to exonerate themselves from evildoing, and to blame sin on their evil soul, whilst still retaining what Peter Brown has described as an 'oasis of perfection'⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Brown 1967: 51.

within themselves. It also, at a more subtle level, allowed them to explain the conflicts which Paul so vividly describes between the flesh and spirit, and which alienate the will from itself, as a battle between the good and evil

⁴⁶ We have already seen Fortunatus doing precisely this in *c. Fort.* 21, in the previous chapter.

Augustine's insistence upon the free choice of the will as the origin of evil, and upon the ignorance and difficulty which disable the will as the punishment of sin, in this treatise, are clearly intended to refute the notion of evil as a nature or substance alien to, and at odds with the good: conflict arises within the will itself, not from something outside it. Thus, as in book 1 of *De libero arbitrio* and *De uera religione*, he emphasizes that 'sin is indeed nowhere but in the will' (10. 12). This was obviously another statement that represented a hostage to fortune following the Pelagian controversy, for in the *Retractationes* (1. 14. 2) Augustine comments that the Pelagians have used it to their advantage by referring it to young children, in order to deny that they are subject to original sin since they have not yet willed good or evil. His response to them is one we have already encountered: all human beings inherit Adam's original, voluntary sin; even the sin which Paul describes when he says that 'Now if I do what I do not wish, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin that dwells in me' (Rom. 7: 20) is a 'voluntary' sin because it is an act of will (as Paul himself indicates when he says that 'I do what I do not wish' and that 'To will is within my power, but I do not find the strength to accomplish what is good' (Rom. 7: 18)).

Similar passages also have to be defended: when Augustine subsequently states that 'will is a movement of the mind, no one compelling, either for not losing or for obtaining something' (10. 14), he once again has to explain, in the *Retractationes*, that he intended it, in context, as a reference to Adam and Eve's sin: 'who, the first in Paradise, were the origin of evil for the human race by sinning under no compulsion, that is, by sinning with free will, because knowingly, indeed, they acted contrary to the command, and that tempter urged but did not compel them to do this' (1. 14. 3). However, if this statement is now interpreted by the Pelagians in reference to our actual experience of willing, he insists that it can still be understood as referring to the

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action of the will subject to ignorance and difficulty, but that in these circumstances, subject to the penalty of the Fall, we will no longer be held guilty for the sin we commit, since we do it either without knowing it, or against our own wishes (1. 14. 3).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Cf. *duab. an.* 12. 17.

Another passage in *De duabus animabus* which Augustine later identified as contentious is his statement that: 'Sin is the will to retain or acquire what justice forbids and from which it is free to abstain'. Again, as in the case of other, similar statements, he explains in *Retractationes* that it refers to sin (in other words, Adam's sin) and not to the penalty of sin (our ignorance and difficulty). He further—and rather interestingly—suggests that when the will sins because it suffers the penalty of original sin, it might more accurately be described as 'passion' (*cupiditas*) rather than will (*voluntas*), since it acts under the domination of lust, rather than its own power, and is only freed from its slavery by acknowledging its need for God's deliverance and praying

for help.⁴⁸

⁴⁸*retr.* 1. 14. 4; cf. *duab. an.* 13. 19 where Augustine describes the divisions which arise *within* the will as a result of the Fall as *consuetudo carnis, difficultas, occulta quaedam suasio*, and describes it as fluctuating uncertainly between two choices: because of the body it is called by pleasure and because of the spirit by virtue.

He concludes, as he does at the end of book 2 of *De libero arbitrio*, and in various passages in book 3, by referring to the grace of God given to us in his Son as the answer to our fallenness: 'passion is not an addition of an extraneous nature, as the Manichaeans in their madness assert, but an imperfection of our nature of which one could not be cured except by "the grace of the Saviour" (Titus 2: 11)' (*Retr.* 1. 14. 4).

Contra Fortunatum (392)

In debate with Fortunatus, the Manichee, Augustine again found himself defending free will as the source of evil, in the same manner as *De libero arbitrio*. Like the numerous passages in book 1 which assert that only voluntary sin can be called evil, he stresses to Fortunatus that when someone sins they do so 'voluntarily', and not by 'nature' or moved by 'the race of darkness' that God 'did not make sin, and our voluntary sin is the only thing that is called evil' (15); that 'he who sins, sins by free will' (17); that 'it is manifest that there is no sin where there is not free exercise of the will' (20); that 'he who sins not voluntarily sins not at all...it is not sin if it is not committed of one's own will' (21).

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He also argues against Fortunatus, in a manner similar to book 2 of *De libero arbitrio*, that free will is a good and was rightly given by God, even though it is responsible for evil: 'Since therefore it behoves us to be good not of necessity but voluntarily, it behoved God to give to the soul free will'(15). Without free will, he adds, 'there could be no just penal judgement, nor merit of righteous conduct, nor divine instruction to repent of sins, nor the forgiveness of sins itself which God has bestowed on us through our Lord Jesus Christ' (20).

But Augustine is also clearly aware of the ignorance and difficulty which now beset the will and characterize human nature after the Fall, and as in book 3 of *De libero arbitrio*, he tackles the questions which this state of affairs provokes in order to answer Fortunatus' criticism. Not least, he makes it clear that human beings do not strictly sin—and are not held guilty—if they sin because of the compulsion of 'contrary nature' (*natura contraria*) (17). Rather, he maintains that, 'if the soul is compelled to do evil, that which it does is not evil' (21). Thus, in reference to Fortunatus' interpretation of those passages in which Paul describes the conflict between flesh and spirit, the law in his members warring against the law of his mind (Gal. 5: 17; Rom.7: 23-5), in a dualistic sense, in reference to two souls, as proof of the battle between the forces of good and evil and of the latter as the source of sin and evil, Augustine responds by describing the creation of Adam, his free will, his fall, his original sin which we all inherit, the necessity and habit which now undermine the action of our will, and finally, our need for grace—for God's illumination—to break our bad habits and instil good ones (22). Augustine's answer to humanity's fallenness is not a dualistic theory of two natures, but Adam's fall and Christ's forgiveness of sin (20), illumination (22), and resurrection: 'As through one man came death, so also through one man came the resurrection of the dead' (25).

These anti-Manichaean works from the early 390s therefore witness to a profound continuity in Augustine's thought, from the period when he wrote book 1 of *De libero arbitrio* through to the composition of books 2 and 3. There are no dramatic changes (with the exception, perhaps, of the identification of will with love in *De moribus*), but a sustained insistence on the free choice of the will as the source of evil, upon the ignorance and difficulty which now hinder its operation, and upon the need for us to acknowledge our complete dependence upon God's grace in order to overcome it. Augustine never taught a theory of the free choice of the will in isolation, or independently of an understanding of its fallen incapacity and need for grace. Scholars who ignore the many passages in *De duabus animabus* and *Contra Fortunatum* which resemble book 1 of *De libero arbitrio* in their insistence on the free choice of the will as the origin of evil, but simply pay attention to those which

describe its present ignorance and difficulty, are therefore wilfully misreading and misinterpreting them when they assert, in reference to the latter passages, that 'a more dramatic departure from book one of *De libero arbitrio* could hardly be imagined'.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Wetzel 1992: 97.

There is absolutely no reason to divide Augustine's early and later anti-Manichean works as if he were arguing different things against them at different stages: the arguments are the same from 388-95, if we are prepared to read works such as the *De libero arbitrio* as a whole, rather than wilfully and groundlessly mutilate them.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Wetzel's 1992 comments, such as, 'His [Augustine's] conception of will emerges out of this psychology [in *duab. an.* and *c. Fort.*], and it departs significantly from his naive conception of the voluntary in his early writings against the Manichees' (98) or, 'Having accepted the phenomenon of involuntary sin as part of human psychology, Augustine found himself in no position to return to the Stoicized will of the first book of *De libero arbitrio*, where he had assumed far too simple a view of how knowledge of the good is appropriated' (98), are therefore profoundly misleading.

The dramatic contrasts are there from the very beginning in Augustine's comparison of our original state *before* the Fall and our subjection to original sin *after* the Fall. They structure everything he writes in this context and together provided him with a sophisticated framework in which to place his arguments for the free choice of the will as the origin of evil against the Manichees, and his 'anti-Pelagian before Pelagius' explanation of humanity's present situation, subject to original sin and wholly dependent on God's grace, from the very beginning.⁵¹

⁵¹ The contrasts build a framework which might be set out thus: Before the Fall: after the Fall; free of concupiscence: subject to concupiscence; sin: penalty of sin; voluntary sin: 'voluntary' sin (Adam's; or with the will) but 'involuntary' because compelled; good will: bad will—passion/lust; knowledge and ability: ignorance and difficulty; sinful: sinful because of penalty of Adam's sin; guilty: not guilty (unless one humbly fails to acknowledge one's need for grace); free will: will freed by baptism, the grace of Christ.

The Years 395-6

Earlier on in this chapter we discussed the relation between Augustine's works on Paul, written in the mid-390s, and *De libero arbitrio*, which was completed around the same time. We found that the *De libero arbitrio*, like the rest of Augustine's early works during this period, directly contradicts Augustine's attribution of free choice to the will in responding in faith to God's call in his works on Romans in the mid-390s, but instead emphasizes that, after the Fall, the will can only humbly acknowledge its complete and utter dependence upon God's gift of grace to know, will, or do the good.

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This is confirmed by other works written during the mid-390s, which similarly insist that human beings, subject to the ignorance and difficulty of original

sin, can merit nothing, but that all is of grace. We have seen this to be the case most especially in the first thirty-two of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and the *De sermone Domini in monte*. Commenting in the latter upon the injunction of the Lord's prayer 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', Augustine suggests that heaven and earth might be understood as spirit and body: whereas Paul makes clear that the spirit is subject to God's will, when he comments 'With my mind I serve the law of God', it is clear that the body is not, for he continues, 'but with my flesh [I serve] the law of sin.' It is therefore clear that in this life we will always be subject to the mortality, weakness, habit, and concupiscence which are the penalty for the Fall, and that only in the resurrection of the body, in the life to come, will the body be subject to the soul and God's will thereby done in it, not, as now, for punishment of our sins, but for the perfect harmony and subjection of body to soul, and both to God.⁵²

⁵²*s. Dom. mon. 2. 6. 23.*

Augustine's reflections on the will in his early works cannot be recounted as a satisfying story of progress from naive, youthful optimism to realistic, mature pessimism. His understanding of the will, in theory and in practice, was present in his mind when he began to write *De libero arbitrio* in 388. He never held the free choice of the will as the origin of evil without also being acutely aware of its fallen ignorance and difficulty and its need for God's grace. While arguing the former against the Manichees, his consciousness of the latter demonstrates that he was also arguing in advance against the Pelagians. His early thought did not need to be revised, corrected, or rejected in order to meet their challenge, it simply needed to be properly understood. This is what a reading of his early works suggests; it is what Augustine tells us in the *Retractationes*: why should we not believe him?

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8 Grace

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Abstract: This final chapter draws together the arguments discussed in the preceding chapters to build an overall picture of how Augustine describes the operation of grace in his early works, and to address some of the more contentious issues which have risen for scholars concerning its mode of operation. It examines Augustine's early teaching on grace in relation to his reflection on divine providence, divine admonition, Christology, the role of delight, and its inspiration by the Holy Spirit, thereby demonstrating that he was always anti-Pelagian and always thoroughly 'Augustinian'.

Keywords: **grace, providence, admonition, Christ, Holy Spirit, delight, Pelagius, love**

Conversion to Grace

When Augustine recounts his conversion in *Confessiones* he gives a dramatic portrayal of the action of grace, leading him inexorably towards conversion. The narrative tension is sustained by the fact he did not, at first, recognize

what lay behind the experiences and events he recounts. Instead of seeing God's hand stretched out towards him, he had believed he was battling forward under his own force, armed only with the powers of his intellect and will, to overcome the suffocating materialism and destructive dualism of the Manichees, the unflinching scepticism of the Academics, and the agonizing alienation and conflict within his own soul. It was only when the intellectual battle seemed to have been won, and he had finally made some headway in discovering God's transcendence and the spiritual nature of reality in the books of the Platonists, that he began to realize that perhaps his own powers were not sufficient for the task: 'the darknesses of my soul would not allow me to contemplate these sublimities ... to enjoy you I was too weak'. He tells us that he proudly boasted of his newly acquired knowledge, and 'prattled on as if I were an expert', but in retrospect, overcome by grace, he admits that 'unless I had sought your way in Christ our Saviour, I would have been not expert but expunged (*non peritus, sed periturus essem*)' (7. 20. 26). The fact that the knowledge of which he was so proud failed to provide the way to God was, he later recognizes, also the work of grace, for by it God allowed him to appreciate the difference between the 'presumption' of the philosophers and his own vain attempts to attain the truth, and the 'confession' of the convert, for whom all progress in the truth is gratefully acknowledged to be the work of grace. Grace then led him to read Paul, where he tells us he 'found that all the truth I had read in the Platonists was stated ... together with commendation of your grace, so that he who sees should "not boast as if he had not received" both what he sees and also the power to see. "For what has he which he has not received?" (1 Cor. 4: 7).' ¹

¹ *conf.* 7. 21. 27.

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From the other side of conversion Augustine could look back on the battle and appreciate where the battle lines really lay and the true nature of his opponent: they lay within, and he had in fact been battling against grace, proudly failing to acknowledge the hand of God and his need for his grace at every step of the way; that victory could only be attained by humbly confessing his absolute dependence upon his Creator and Saviour, and by subjecting himself to him. Book 8 of the *Confessiones* describes the final battle throes, the torments and suffering of Augustine's will, torn apart, alienated, and divided against itself; imprisoned by the chains of habit and unable to will to break free of them until grace claimed a decisive victory and resolved all his weaknesses and doubt by presenting him with the text of Rom. 13: 13, the reading of which finally impelled him to throw himself upon its mercy.

What we have in the *Confessiones* is most definitely a conversion not just to Christian truth or to ascetic self-denial, but to grace—a humble subjection to God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. They were begun, as we know, in 396, around the same time as Augustine composed his reply *Ad Simplicianum*, and the two works now seem to be inextricably linked in scholars' minds. The revolution, or rupture, in Augustine's thinking on grace, which they maintain took place in Augustine's response to Simplicianus, is generally held to be the new theological context in which Augustine the bishop began to reflect upon his conversion in the *Confessiones*, ²

² e.g. Brown 1967: 170 'the austere answer to the *Second Problem* of the *Various Problems for Simplicianus* is the intellectual charter for the *Confessions*' Fredriksen 1990: 241, 'Having made this case exegetically in the *Ad Simplicianum*, Augustine restates it, autobiographically in the *Confessions*.'

and, perhaps for the first time, to interpret it as a demonstration of the work of God's grace, electing fallen human beings and calling them in such a way that they will respond in faith.

What we have attempted to argue in this book is that we do not have to wait until 396 to find an understanding of conversion and the Christian life as wholly the work of God's grace, but that if we are to speak of a 'conversion to grace' we must do so in reference to Augustine's conversion in Milan in 386, and that the works composed in the following ten years provide ample proof of this. Of course, Augustine's thinking on grace evolved during these ten years, especially in the light of his changing circumstances, concerns, and audiences, but there are no grounds at all, we have argued, for identifying a dramatic revolution in the *Ad Simplicianum*, for the idea of a 'Lost Future' or for the language of 'rupture' or 'break' to separate the early Augustine and Augustine the bishop: Augustine the bishop is not a different, alien Augustine to the one who was converted in 386, but recognizably one and the same. Since most scholars have identified Augustine's realization of the inability of human beings to know, will, or do the good without grace, his conviction of

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the absolute necessity of grace, and his appreciation of the way in which grace works, as that which so decisively changed in 396, grace has, in a sense, been the subject of this book: we have argued that it was the understanding of grace and of humanity's complete dependence upon God, that distinguished Augustine's Christian thought from that of the philosophers, even before his conversion (Chs. 2-3); that the centrality of grace in Augustine's earliest theological synthesis is based upon the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* (Ch. 4); that Augustine's Pauline understanding of man's absolute need for grace to know, will, and do the good is evident from his earliest works (Ch. 5); that his conviction that this grace is necessary because of humanity's fallenness is a presupposition of everything he wrote (Ch. 6); that his belief that grace is necessary for the fallen will to operate freely is something he maintained from the very beginning (Ch. 7). In this final chapter, whilst avoiding reiteration of what we have already discussed, I would like to attempt to build up an overall picture of how Augustine describes the operation of grace in his early works. This should provide a context in which we might more fully appreciate the specific instances of the operation of grace we have already considered, and to address some of the more contentious issues which have arisen for scholars concerning its mode of operation.

'The art of God's ineffable healing' (*uera rel.* 51)

Augustine had doubted many things on the way to conversion, but one thing he had never questioned was God's providential care. He makes clear in the *Confessiones* that 'no attacks based on cavilling questions of the kind of which I had read so much in the mutually contradictory philosophers could ever force me not to believe that you are ... or that you exercise a providential care over human affairs ... I always retained belief both that you are and that you care for us'.³

³*conf.* 6. 5. 7-8.

When Augustine mentions 'fortune', 'chance', and what is 'necessary by nature' at the beginning of his first work, *Contra Academicos* (1. 1. 1), he quickly makes clear that what he has in mind is, in fact, divine providence and the order it imposes upon the world. This was a belief which, to a large extent, he shared with Christians and pagans alike, but it was by no means an unproblematic one: things could seem so disordered as to suggest that God (or the gods) had no 'care for human affairs': that divine providence either did not reach to the 'outer limits of things' or that 'all evils are committed by

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the will of God'.⁴

⁴*ord.* 1. 1. 1; see Doignon 1987b: 116 for bibliography on the possible identity of those who raised these objections. The first is probably a reference to Plotinus, the second to the Manichees.

In another Cassiciacum work, *De ordine*, dedicated to precisely these questions, Augustine specifically sets out to refute mistaken or misleading conceptions of providence⁵

⁵e.g. in 1. 1. 1-2 he opposes Epicurean, Stoic, and Neoplatonic ideas. For Plotinian, Porphyrian influence on Augustine's thought here see Solignac 1957. For further bibliography and possible sources see Doignon 1987b: 116.

and to prove that divine providence is universal in scope and comprehends all good and evil.⁶

⁶*retr.* 1. 3. 1.

In doing so, he sets forth a tightly argued defence of divine transcendence and omnipotence—the 'hidden control of divine majesty' (1. 1. 2)—and an impressive theodicy which puts God, and his just judgement and ordering of evil and sin, firmly beyond the reach of such criticisms. He lays any constraint or weakness at the door of sinful human beings who, like pieces in a mosaic, or a statue in the corner of a building, can see and judge only from their own limited perspective.⁷

⁷*ord.* 1. 1. 2; *mus.* 6. 11. 30.

The way in which Augustine describes the work of divine providence in his early works is in fact very close to his later distinction between natural providence (*providentia naturalis*) and voluntary providence (*providentia uoluntaris*) in book 8 of *De Genesi ad litteram* (401-15).⁸

⁸*Gn. litt.* 8. 9. 17-18.

The former refers to God's hidden, inward presence to his world, which he creates, forms, and orders in its natural processes. It is what Augustine evidently has in mind when, in the second book of *De libero arbitrio* he writes, 'If all existing things would cease to be if form were taken from them, the unchangeable form by which all mutable things exist and fulfil their functions ... is to them a providence. If it were not, they would not be,'⁹

⁹*lib. arb.* 2. 17. 45.

and in *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83, where he reflects, 'that good whose participation renders good whatever other things exist, is good not by anything other than itself; and this good we also call Divine Providence' (24). The scope of divine providence, or *providentia naturalis*, therefore extends not just to the *ordering* of created reality, but comprehends its very creation from nothing, its continuance and growth in being, and the creature's participation in divine reality: this is what Augustine means when he talks about 'order', 'form', or 'Providence'. Without it, creation would simply cease to be or to exist.

Providentia uoluntaris, or voluntary providence, on the other hand, is necessary because of the sin of human beings in turning away from their Creator: it refers to the way in which God's action extends, as it were, beyond natural providence, to maintain order despite humanity's destructive sinful actions. Thus, for example, God punishes the evil and rewards the

just; orders

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history; sends prophets and teachers; becomes incarnate; inspires Scripture; bestows the sacraments of the Church. By these means, and above all, by the inward gift and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he operates upon and within the will (*uoluntas*) of fallen human beings, who are otherwise blind to the truth and incapable of acting upon it, to inspire their love and delight in the good. For example, describing how humanity can progress from solidarity with Adam to eternal life with Christ—from the 'old man' to the 'new man'—and how God effects this through the stages of salvation history from Israel to the Church, Augustine observes in *De uera religione*, 'So out of our sin, which our nature committed in the first sinful man, the human race is made the great glory and ornament of the world, and is so properly governed by the provisions of divine providence that the art of God's ineffable healing turns even the foulness of sin into something that has a beauty of its own' (51).

It should be clear by now that when Augustine refers to the work of divine providence, or the 'art of God's ineffable healing' in his early works, he is in fact referring to the work of divine grace. It is this providence or grace, as it acts not only to create, form, and order temporal reality, but also to reform, redeem, and convert fallen wills, that we will be examining in the rest of this chapter. We will see that it is found not only in the 'natural providence' of the Creator, who creates matter from nothing by giving it 'form', or measure, number, and weight, thereby revealing himself and inspiring love (which we discussed in Ch. 4), but that it is also forcefully described by Augustine as dramatically intervening in the course of human history, in what he later terms 'voluntary providence': in the revelation of God in salvation history, Scripture, prophecy and teaching, the incarnation, and the Church and its sacraments. An examination of these aspects of voluntary providence will, it is hoped, provide a context in which we can return to the question of the operation of divine grace upon the will, inspiring love and delight for the good, which scholars generally associate with the 'revolution' they identify as taking place in the *Ad Simplicianum*.

'God ... whom no one seeks unless they are admonished' (*sol.* 1. 1. 3)

In a general sense, the operation of God's grace upon the will of fallen human beings, or 'voluntary providence', is referred to by Augustine as an admonition (*admonitio*), as when he writes 'A certain admonition, flowing from the very fountain of truth, urges us to remember God, to seek Him, and thirst

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after Him tirelessly.'¹⁰

¹⁰ *b. uita* 4. 35.

Admonition is, as it were, the way in which God nudges the soul awake from its fallen stupor, and points or calls it towards the truth.¹¹

¹¹ e.g. *Acad.* 1. 1. 3; 2. 2. 5; 3. 19. 42; *sol.* 1. 1. 2; *quant.* 28. 55. Doignon 1986 notes many parallels in Cicero and Seneca for Augustine's understanding of *admonitio*.

In the *Soliloquia* Augustine prays to God as the 'Father of our awakening and of our illumination, of the sign by which we are admonished to return to thee' (1. 1. 2). His use of the term is often likened by scholars to the Neoplatonic concept of *epistrophe*, or return, whereby the soul, admonished to remember its origin, turns inwards, and by moral and intellectual purification, discovers its true being as spiritual, transcending the body, and that it is in turn transcended by the mind (*nous*), and the mind by the One.¹²

¹² e.g. Smallbrugge 1990: 335-7; Doignon 1986: 31-5.

There are indeed illuminating parallels,¹³

¹³ Especially when Augustine talks in terms of our being admonished to remember God (*b. uita* 4. 35; *quant.* 28. 55).

but it is important to note that for Augustine the conversion of human beings, their turning towards God to realize their true being, subject to and dependent upon their Creator, who dwells within the memory, is not something they initiate but is wholly the work of God: in the *Soliloquia* he prays to 'God ... whom no one seeks unless he is first admonished' (1. 1. 3). He is also quite clear that God's admonition, or his calling of the soul to realize its true identity, works not only externally (as the pagans generally held) but also internally: in a passage we discussed in Ch. 5 from *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83 (68. 5), he writes, 'And since no one can will unless urged on (*admonitus*) and called (*uocatus*), whether inside where no man sees, or outside through the sound of the spoken word or through some visible signs, it follows that God produces in us even the willing itself.'¹⁴

¹⁴ Cipriani 1994: 272 also refers to *lib. arb.* 3. 20. 57 and *Simpl.* 1. 2. 2. He observes that Augustine often uses the expression *quaedam* before *admonitio*, to make clear that he is using it in a new way, to refer to inward as well as external action. See du Roy 1966: 149-71 for a discussion and table of Augustine's use of this term.

As we shall see below, *admonitio* is, significantly, a term often associated by Augustine with the work of the Holy Spirit, especially as it operates within man to inspire love and delight in the truth,¹⁵

¹⁵ See Cipriani 1994 for examples of *admonitio* being used in this sense by Ambrose and Victorinus.

and with the work of the Son, the second person of the Trinity.¹⁶

¹⁶ O'Donnell 1992: ii. 438 suggests that *admonitio* is first of all the work of the Holy Spirit (*b. uita* 4. 35; *sol.* 1. 1. 2) but then this largely shifts to the Son. Cf. Madec, *Lexicon I* (1987), 95-9; du Roy 1966: 161-5.

But it is also used in a much wider sense—and this is something any reader of Augustine's early works cannot fail to note at every turn: it is as if *everything*, formed, ordered, and governed by divine Providence, serves to admonish human beings towards God. The whole of

creation, from the lowliest worm to the highest rational angelic creature, is a 'nod' (*nutus*) in the direction of its Creator:¹⁷

¹⁷ *lib. arb.* 2. 16. 43.

foris admonet intus docet (externally it [truth] suggests, internally it teaches).¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 2. 14. 38. This is, of course, a summary of the teaching of *De magistro* where Augustine teaches that we are admonished outwardly so that we might be taught inwardly; the same teacher, Christ the Word, works both externally and internally to bring us to truth (e.g. 46).

The Temporal Dispensation of Divine Providence

It is precisely this admonitory aspect of reality Augustine has in mind when he observes in *De uera religione* that in following the Christian religion, 'our chief concern is with the prophetic history of the dispensation of divine providence in time—what God has done for the salvation of the human race, renewing and restoring it unto eternal life'. God's admonition, the work of his providence, is above all something that happens in time: because, as Augustine puts it, human beings have fallen 'from paradise into the present world, that is, from eternal things to temporal'.¹⁹

¹⁹ *uera rel.* 38.

God must also act within time, within this present world, within history, in order to lead them back to the eternal: 'God in His ineffable mercy, by a temporal dispensation, has used the mutable creation, obedient however to his eternal laws, to remind the soul of its original and perfect nature.'²⁰

²⁰ *Ibid.* 19. This is similar to his observation in *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 4. 5-5. 6 that, whereas before the Fall human beings enjoyed an inner fountain of truth welling up within them, after the Fall they are dependent upon external teaching; upon the rain that falls from the dark clouds of human teaching and preaching.

He observes that once God's gracious action in time is believed, fallen human beings will begin to be purified, and be enabled to grasp the eternal truth they have lost, most especially the truth of the inseparable operation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in bringing into being everything that exists, and the mutability and dependence of all creation upon him: faith in God's temporal revelation purifies the mind and leads it to understanding.²¹

²¹ *uera rel.* 13-14.

The temporal dispensation of divine providence is therefore the key to the Christian religion: it is the divine 'nod', the way in which grace operates to inspire faith, and lead fallen human beings to an understanding of eternal truth.²²

²² We find this same pattern (faith in divine providence/authority, purification, understanding/reason) throughout Augustine's early works, e.g. *util. cred.* 24, 33; *quant.* 1. 33. 73.

This truth, however, is not so much intellectual or rational as 'existential' and is summed up by Augustine as 'the eternity of the Trinity and

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the mutability of created things': it is an awareness of God's transcendence and our own created dependence. 'When this is known', Augustine comments, 'it will be as clear as it can be to men that all things are subject by necessary, indefeasible and just laws to their Lord God.'²³

²³ *uera rel.* 14.

It is therefore first of all essential that human beings be moved to look beyond temporal things and the 'secular order' to which they have become attached, towards the divine providence which orders and governs them. Augustine likens the person who wishes to hold on to the temporal to someone who fails to look beyond a poem to the art of poetry according to which it was formed, or who wishes to stop a poem in mid-recitation, rather than hear it to the end.²⁴

²⁴ *Ibid.* 43.

Despite humanity's sinful tendency to take creation for the Creator and to fail to look beyond the temporal to its eternal source, which we discussed in Ch. 6, Augustine is at pains to argue that the beauty of the created universe is unaffected by sin. This is because, as he argues most forcibly in *De ordine*, divine providence maintains order by judging sin; by punishing the evil and rewarding the just. As he puts it in *De uera religione*, 'The beauty of the created universe is free from all fault because of these three things—the condemnation of sinners, the proving of the just and the perfecting of the blessed.'²⁵

²⁵ *Ibid.* 44; cf. *ord.* 18 ff. *lib. arb.* 2. 9. 26-8; *mor.* 2. 7. 10.

The beauty and order of the universe having been preserved by God's judgement, despite the Fall, Augustine observes that divine providence works in two main ways to heal the sick soul: 'The treatment of the soul, which God's providence and ineffable loving kindness administers, is most beautiful in its steps and stages. There are two different methods, authority and reason.' We have already had occasion to examine Augustine's reflections on these two aspects of the operation of divine grace, in reference to the relation between Christianity and philosophy in Augustine's early thought, in Ch. 3. In this chapter we need only remind ourselves of what he says here in *De uera religione*, and in the many other texts in the early works in which he returns to this theme:²⁶

²⁶ See esp. *Acad.* 3. 20. 43; *ord.* 2. 9. 26-7; *mor.* 1. 2. 3; *util. cred.* 34-5.

that authority, which demands belief, has temporal priority, because fallen humanity is unable to approach the truth through reason: 'because we dwell among temporal things, and love of them is an obstacle to our reaching eternal things, a kind of temporal medicine, calling not those who know but those who believe back to health, has priority by the order, not of nature or its inherent excellence, but of time. Wherever a man falls, there he must lie

until he is raised up. So we must strive, by means of those carnal forms which detain us, to come to know those of

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which carnal sense can bring us no knowledge.'²⁷

²⁷*uera rel.* 46. This directly contradicts the judgement of Cary 2000: 143-4, and others (see Ch. 3) who maintain that grace is originally connected with reason, not faith; with inward teaching and illumination rather than external things.

It is in this context that Augustine places the various aspects of the temporal dispensation of divine providence. He describes them in *De utilitate credendi* as God's 'gifts', forming a 'ladder of authority' to enable fallen human beings to return to God: miracles, the incarnation and teaching of Christ, prophets, apostles, martyrs, saints, ascetics, the growth and unity of the Church, are all offered as a medicine for fallen human beings, to convert them 'from love of this world to the true God'.²⁸

²⁸*util. cred.* 34.

It is also in terms of an authority which, by inspiring faith, enables sinful humanity to be purified, be freed, and know the omnipotent Trinity, that Augustine talks about the mysteries (*mysteria*) or sacraments (*sacramenta*) of the Church, in the early works. As he writes in *De ordine*, concerning those unpractised in the liberal disciplines,

Let them provide for themselves a stronghold of faith, so that He, who suffers no one who rightly believes in Him through the mysteries to perish, may by this bond draw them to Himself and free them from these dreadful entangling evils ... the venerated mysteries, which liberate persons of sincere and firm faith ... these mysteries teach that this First Principle is a God omnipotent, and that He is tripotent,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit²⁹

²⁹*ord.* 2. 5. 15-16. Cipriani 1998: 417-21 notes Augustine's probable indebtedness to Victorinus' commentary on Ephesians for these insights: 'la struttura concettuale (*fides, mysteria, liberatio*) del *De ordine* appare un indizio sufficientemente chiaro della lettura da parte di Agostino dei commenti esegetici di Mario Vittorino già del ritiro di Cassiciacum' 421.

and in relation to divine authority, which humbled itself for our sakes: 'All this is being delivered to us so distinctly and steadily by the sacred rites into which we are now initiated: therein the life of a good man is most easily purified, not indeed by the circumlocution of disputation, but by the authority of the mysteries'.³⁰

³⁰*ord.* 1. 9. 27; cf. 2. 17. 46.

The dispensation of divine providence works not only at an individual level, however, but also at a public level; it is concerned not only with particular persons but with peoples, and is displayed on the broad canvas of prophecy and history. This is an aspect of Augustine's early works which very much foreshadows one of the main themes of his mature theological reflection as it is orchestrated in the *De ciuitate Dei*.³¹

³¹ See van Oort 1991.

The temporal dispensation of divine providence invites human beings to believe in the authority which naturally inheres in unity and consensus as opposed to multiplicity and

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disagreement—in other words in monotheism rather than polytheism; Christianity rather than paganism; true doctrine rather than heresy; the Catholic Church rather than schism. The latter have all been providentially allowed to arise, however, so that the former might be more fully appreciated, sought after, and preferred.³²

³² *uera rel.* 46-7.

When Augustine turns to consider what he calls 'the tradition concerning God's temporal dispensation and his providential care for those who by sin had become mortal' in *De uera religione* he proceeds to describe the ages of man, from infancy to old age, in terms of human sinfulness, and to set them alongside the history of fallen humanity, which he describes in Pauline terms as the 'old', or 'exterior and earthly man'. He acknowledges that all people belong to the 'earthly city'—by which he seems to mean not the *ciuitas terrena* of the *De ciuitate Dei*, but rather the *saeculum*, or the general context of human life in the world—which retains a measure and peace of its own even if its inhabitants never seek anything other than earthly goods. Some people, however, as well as obeying the laws of the earthly city, might begin to look beyond temporal things, and to move away from belonging to the 'old man' towards the 'new man', by a life of moral and intellectual purification and virtue. Although Augustine describes the ascent of these individuals to divine truth in fulsome and confident terms in *De uera religione*, he immediately acknowledges that no one can in fact achieve it in this life, but must always associate with the 'old man', in other words, as we have seen so often in this book, that perfection is not possible for fallen human beings, who must always remain subject to sin. In language which directly anticipates the *De ciuitate Dei* Augustine observes that there are therefore two classes of people: 'the entire human race, whose life, like the life of an individual from Adam to the end of the world, is so arranged by the laws of divine providence' he writes,

that it appears divided among two classes. In one of these is the multitude of the impious who bear the image of the earthly man from the beginning to the end of the world. In the other is the succession of the people devoted to the one God ... after the judgement ... the pious people will be raised as they transform the remnants of the 'old man' that cling to them into the 'new man'. The impious people who have kept the 'old man' from the beginning to the end, will be raised in order to be precipitated into the second death.³³

³³ Ibid. 50; cf. *diu. qu.* 83 49, 'What develops naturally and by training in an individual properly educated is proportionately effected and brought to completion by Divine Providence in the whole human race' 53, 'subject to the harmonious governance of all things by Divine Providence, the whole series of generations from Adam to the end of the world is administered as if it were the life of a single man who from boyhood to old age marks off the

Augustine's vision of divine providence is thus of a force which is never idle: it not only orders world history, but is present at its every turn, guiding and admonishing the human race, 'showing it what each age required, hinting by prophecy what it was not opportune to show clearly', working through patriarchs, prophets and the 'great and spiritual men'³⁴

³⁴ *uera rel.* 51. As we noted in Ch. 3, it is not quite clear who these people were—most probably the apostles and the saints. Elsewhere Augustine talks about divine providence using good angels or men to assist others (*uera rel.* 20); of God speaking and acting through the agency of his preachers (*en. Ps.* 3. 7); of the 'steps which divine providence has deigned to make for us', teaching through rational angelic creatures (*uera rel.* 98) or divine providence speaking to us through 'human rational corporeal creatures' (*ibid.* 99).

of the Catholic Church to teach and assist both the weak and the strong to know and grasp God's grace.³⁵

³⁵ *Ibid.* 51.

This is a grace which not only creates, forms, and orders every aspect of reality, but as Augustine has demonstrated in *De uera religione*, every age of human life and of human history. Its wonder and beauty far exceeds that of any earthly spectacle: 'What is more wonderful than incorporeal might making and ruling the corporeal world? What more beautiful than its ordering and adorning the material world?' Augustine asks at the end of *De uera religione* (100). If this beautiful and compelling spectacle is rightly perceived by the body and judged by the mind, then, he observes in the words of Paul, 'the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead' (101, quoting Rom. 1: 20). This, he concludes, 'is the return from temporal to eternal things, and the transformation of the old man into the new' (101). Thus, divine providence or grace, magnificently at work in every part of temporal, created reality, at every stage of world history, in every aspect of the Church's teaching and sacraments, admonishing and provoking faith, converts fallen human beings and reforms them towards eternal life.

The Assault of Grace

At the beginning of this chapter we observed that what Augustine dramatically recounts in his *Confessiones* is his battle with divine grace and his final admission of defeat and submission in the garden at Milan. In the second part of book 10 of the same work he acknowledges his complete and utter dependence upon this grace, not only for his conversion but for any subsequent progress in the Christian life. In Ch. 5 we saw a similar battle taking place in his exegesis of Paul in the mid-390s: he fought for human free will in a

series of works on Romans and Galatians, but the grace of God conquered: he finally had to concede what he had known all along, that there was no room to talk about the free operation of the will, either in responding to God's call in faith, or in continuing in faith after his call—all is of grace. That this was indeed something he had held from the moment of his conversion was confirmed by our consideration of Augustine's description of humanity's fallenness in Ch. 6, and our analysis of his understanding of free will in his early works in Ch. 7. Most especially, we demonstrated in relation to the *De libero arbitrio*, that the fallen will's total dependence upon grace to know, will, and do the good was the presupposition of the entire work, from book 1, written in 388, right through to the completion of book 3 in 395.

We have just seen that what Augustine says about the operation of divine admonition and providence in the early works, from Cassiciacum onwards, clearly demonstrates his belief that God's grace is omnipresent, always active, eternally creating and recreating, forming and reforming, ordering and reordering. How grace actually does this he frequently describes in language which leaves no doubt about the total dependence of fallen human beings upon it: it is not the language of response, cooperation, or synergy, but of command, discipline, and coercion. Augustine describes God's grace as assaulting human beings, laying hold upon them and attacking them, causing pain and suffering, disregarding or overriding their wills, purging and cleansing them like a consuming fire, overcoming and conquering their sin, battering them into submission, as it were, so that they might ultimately attain freedom.

When he looks back upon the Cassiciacum retreat in *Confessiones* book 9, Augustine recalls it as a time when God was breaking and taming him, levelling the mountains of his pride and straightening his errant ways.³⁶

³⁶ *conf.* 9. 4. 7.

In the early works themselves the imagery is more elemental: in his first extant work, *Contra Academicos* (1. 1. 3), Augustine describes the harsh buffetings which Romanianus has already endured from the secret work of providence, in order to rouse what he calls the divine element (*quod in te diuinum nescio*) in him from the lethargy of this life, and to bring him to conversion. In his description of his own journey to conversion in his second work, *De beata uita*, he observes, 'how few would perceive where to strive or where to return, unless, at some time, a tempest, against our will and way... should thrust us all unaware, off our faulty course' (1. 1), and in *De musica* he describes how humanity's love of temporal things is taken by storm by the sweetness of eternal things (6. 16). The sea, storms, and tempests are, of course, among Augustine's favourite images to describe Christian life in a fallen world, and the dramatic and forceful way in which human beings are rescued from them:

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they are moved by force, woken up by adversity, carried by elemental forces, against their will, to abandon their sinful habits.

The very nature of reality seems to be part of this dramatic working of divine providence: its temporality and mutability admonish people to look for immutable and eternal truth;³⁷

³⁷*uera rel.* 75.

God orders creation to the benefit of human beings by filling it with stumbling blocks which stop them in their accustomed ways, to exercise and test them, and make them aware of his divine purpose.³⁸

³⁸*en. Ps.* 94. 8 (Zarb 393-4); 9. 20.

These 'stumbling blocks' often take the form of punishments,³⁹

³⁹*diu. qu.* 83 82. 3 'no more probable reason occurs why righteous men so often suffer hardships in this life unless that it be to their advantage ... through punishments used to touch and bring pain to the unhealthy part in which the sickness resides, they are admonished in mercy to become whole through the grace of God by turning to the healing remedy' *uera rel.* 29. 'The beauty of justice is in complete accord with the grace of loving-kindness, seeing that we who were deceived by the sweetness of inferior goods should be taught by the bitterness of penalties.'

tribulations and temptations,⁴⁰

⁴⁰*Ibid. Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 23. 35; *en. Ps.* 54. 9 (Zarb 395*); 63. 1 (Zarb 395*); *s. Dom. mon.* 2. 9. 34, 'Temptations, therefore, take place ... either for the purpose of punishing men for their sins, or of proving and exercising them in accordance with the Lord's compassion.'

afflictions of body and soul,⁴¹

⁴¹*uera rel.* 30-1; *en. Ps.* 9. 1, where Augustine talks about 'the afflictions which God now uses in secret, not to destroy sinners, but either to exercise the faith of those already turned to Him, or to urge others to conversion.'

suffering and illnesses,⁴²

⁴²*diu. qu.* 83 82. 3; *en. Ps.* 9. 10, 'a soul does not turn towards God except when it turns away from this world, and there is nothing better calculated to turn it away than to find its frivolous, harmful, soul-destroying pleasures mingled with toil and suffering' 9. 20, 'Thou dost slight us in due season, in tribulations. You slight us for our advantage and send troubles to stir up our minds with desire for your coming. The more burning the thirst, the more welcome the life-giving fountain' *uera rel.* 38.

scourges of mind and flesh.⁴³

⁴³*en. Ps.* 37. 23 (Zarb 395*); 97. 8 (Zarb 393-4*); 100. 13 (Zarb 395).

We are not far here from Augustine's later justification of his support of coercion against the Donatists: 'whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives'⁴⁴

⁴⁴*en. Ps.* 37. 23 (Zarb 395*); cf. *mor.* 1. 17. 55 which uses the language of coercion.

the chosen are the 'ductile trumpets' of the Psalms, hammered out and beaten until they are the perfect shape to sound God's praise.⁴⁵

⁴⁵*en. Ps.* 97. 8 (Zarb 393-4*).

The image which seems to come most readily to Augustine to express these ideas is that of God, or providence, as a divine Physician,⁴⁶

⁴⁶ A classical, philosophical, and scriptural image, much used by Augustine's predecessors, both pagan and Christian. For bibliography see Doucet 1989: 47-8 and notes.

caring for sinful human beings with remedies appropriate to their illness, and changing prescriptions as their condition improves or deteriorates: 'The art of medicine remains the same and quite unchanged, but it changes its prescriptions for the sick, since the state of their health changes. So divine providence remains entirely without change, but comes to the aid of mutable creatures in various

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ways, and commands or forbids different things at different times according to the different stages of their disease.'⁴⁷

⁴⁷*uera rel.* 34.

God is a doctor who ignores the agonized cries of the suffering patient in order to administer the correct treatment, regardless of the pain or discomfort it might cause; he is prepared to override the will of his patients and subject them to intense pain—but always with their best interests and health at heart:

Many cry out in trouble and are not heard: but this is for their well-being and not to show their folly. Paul cried out to be rid of the sting of the flesh, yet he was not set free from it, by way of reply; rather he was told: 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity' (2 Cor. 12: 8-9). So he went unheard, not to manifest his folly but to increase his wisdom, that man may understand that God is a physician, and trouble a saving remedy, not a punishment leading to damnation. Under medical treatment you are cauterized, you are cut, you cry out; the physician does not trouble about your wishes but about restoring your health.⁴⁸

⁴⁸*en. Ps.* 21. ii. 4 (Zarb 395*); 6. 4; 15. 4; *sol.* 1. 6. 12 (see du Roy 1966: 196-206); 1. 14. 24-15. 30; *ord.* 1. 8. 24; *uera rel.* 34; *s.* 2. 3; *mor.* 1. 17. 55; 1. 30. 62; *quant.* 33. 75.

The eternal question of why the righteous suffer (or indeed, why the Donatists should be coerced) is given an answer in this context, where suffering is seen as medicinal and therapeutic and therefore to one's ultimate advantage. As Augustine puts it in *De diuersis quaestionibus*, 'through punishments used to touch and bring pain to the unhealthy part in which the sickness resides, they are admonished in mercy to become whole through the grace of God by turning to the healing remedy' (82. 3). As we have just

seen, the work of providence can therefore be described as the 'art of God's ineffable healing'⁴⁹

⁴⁹ *uera rel.* 51.

it is the 'temporal medicine' by which the soul is treated and healed.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 45.

The assault of words, or what Augustine describes as the frequent and strong arousing of the emotions in rhetoric, in *De ordine*, is also part of the divine physician's care in restraining the unwise from following their own feelings and habits.⁵¹

⁵¹ *ord.* 2. 13. 38; *doct. chr.* book 4.

Human beings must therefore suffer the work of divine grace in order to be healed. This is a process which Augustine rather interestingly describes in *De quantitate animae* thus: 'to me there is no work more laborious, *no activity more like inactivity*, than this renovation of spirit, for the soul has not the strength to begin or complete it, except with the help of Him to whom it turns itself. Hence it comes about that man's reformation must be sought from the mercy of Him whose goodness and power are the cause of man's formation' (28. 55). 'No activity more like inactivity'—human beings must suffer the onslaughts of divine grace or voluntary providence, in order to be liberated

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and reformed: they must allow the goodness and power of divine grace to work upon their souls.

'And the Word was made flesh'

Almost everything Augustine describes as the work of the divine physician, of divine providence, admonition, and authority, is specifically attributed to Christ in the early works. This is not the place to investigate Augustine's early Christology,⁵²

⁵² On this see Solignac, BA 13. 693-8; Mallard 1980; Lods 1976.

but in so far as Christ is the 'sacrament and example'⁵³

⁵³ To use the later terminology of *trin.* 4.

of the work of divine grace in response to humanity's fallenness for Augustine, it is necessary to examine how he understood and described his saving work in the period before the *Confessiones*. A consideration of this aspect of his thought is made all the more pressing for two reasons: first, it has been one of the main targets—and victims—of those scholars who have maintained that his early theological reflection was more Neoplatonic than Christian:⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The usual culprits, from Alfarić to du Roy and O'Connell. In particular, in this context, Lods 1976.

they point to the marked absence of the *nomen Christi*—the name of Christ—in Augustine's earliest works and his predilection for Neoplatonic

concepts and terminology, such as wisdom, reason, truth, order, measure, number, and inner illumination to describe the second member of the divine triad. Secondly, and more importantly, Augustine's early Christological reflection has been taken hostage by those who wish to emphasize his more optimistic estimate of human nature and to minimize his emphasis upon fallen humanity's need for divine grace in his early works. Such scholars point to what they identify as Augustine's early preference for describing Christ as a teacher and example, rather than as a necessary source of salvation, for humankind. Both views are symptomatic of the 'two Augustines' school—the scholarly trend to identify the Augustine of the early works as a figure quite alien to, and at odds with, the one we encounter in the *Confessiones* and the work of the bishop of Hippo. In the following section we will therefore be arguing on two fronts: first, that Augustine's early Christological reflection is fully Christian (and orthodox); secondly, that he is fully convinced of the need for divine grace, working through the incarnate mediator, Jesus Christ, to save and redeem fallen humanity.

As usual, we need to begin with what the *Confessiones* and its account of this early period, always bearing in mind its retrospective nature and the

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varied motives which impelled its composition. Here, of course, we find both the arguments we wish to pursue cogently validated in what Augustine has to say about his life and thought leading up to the garden in Milan in 386. The question is, as ever, can this be taken as an accurate description of what he really held at this time? Having examined the *Confessiones* account, therefore, we will proceed first to examine the works written closest to the period he is describing—his first compositions at Cassiciacum in 386-7—and then those works written in the intervening period, before the composition of the *Confessiones*.

Christ in Augustine's Conversion

The *Confessiones* are punctuated with passages in which Augustine, having made a dramatic discovery in the course of his journey to conversion (Cicero's Hortensius, Scepticism, the *libri Platoniorum*), realizes that he has not yet discovered the truth he is searching for, because whatever 'truth' he found lacked the *nomen Christi*—the name of Christ. At the beginning of this book we referred to these passages, and the compelling suggestion that, at least as far as we can judge from the *Confessiones*, Augustine was never *not* a Christian; he was never without the saving name of Christ on his lips, even though he had not yet discovered the way to embrace him in his heart.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ch. 2. Madec 1989: 23-7.

When he describes his first encounter with the 'books of the Platonists' in *conf.* 7. 9. 13, what he tells us he found is not expressed in Neoplatonic terminology at all, but in terms of the great Christological scriptural texts. He judges the Platonists according to scriptural authority and found much that he could understand 'in entirely the same sense' as these texts, but much that was also all too obviously absent: they contained the whole of the first part of the prologue of John's Gospel, for example, but made no mention of

the word made flesh;⁵⁶

⁵⁶ John's Prologue was evidently central to Augustine's understanding of Christianity at this time. Ferrari 1991: 52 notes that it occurs four times in his accounts of the *libri platoniorum*; thirty-four times in the early works; fifty-two times in the form of other verses of similar import (Rom. 1: 3; Gal. 4: 4; Phil. 2: 7). It is often suggested that this emphasis, and Augustine's judgement of the Neoplatonists in this respect, derives from his conversations with Simplicianus before his conversion (*conf.* 8. 2. 3), but it is only in *ciu.* 10. 29. 2 that specific mention is made of their having discussed John's Prologue in relation to Neoplatonism—see Madec 1975: 81-2; Courcelle 1950: 168-74.

they taught that the Son was 'in the form of God', but not that 'he took on himself the form of a servant and emptied himself ...' (Phil. 2: 6-11); they comprehended the only-begotten Son who immutably abides

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eternal with the Father (John 1: 16), but made no mention of the crucified, humble, meek, compassionate, and forgiving Christ.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Which Augustine illustrates with a catena of scriptural quotations from Rom. 5: 6; 8: 32; Matt. 11: 25-9; Ps. 24: 9; 24: 18.

Augustine sums up their failures of omission, rooted in their inveterate pride and idolatry, in terms of Rom. 1: 21-5.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *conf.* 7. 9. 14-15. Rom. 1: 21-5 was a verse he frequently reverted to in this context: Madec 1962.

Indeed, these failures seem to act as a foil for his own failings at this time: as we saw in Ch. 3, fired by his enthusiasm for their revolutionary teaching on the incorporeal, immutable, eternal truth, he attempted an ascent to this truth only to find that it was tantalizingly and frustratingly beyond his reach. The reason was that, like the Platonists, he lacked the humility to acknowledge his complete dependence upon God's descent, upon the 'mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2: 5), the 'way the truth and the life' (John 14: 6), the 'word made flesh' (John 1. 14) in order to lift him up.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *conf.* 7. 18. 24.

Rather, he realizes that he, and Alypius, had got their Christology wrong: he verged on Photinianism (a sort of adoptionism which included the virgin birth) and Alypius held views dangerously close to what they later realized was Apollinarianism (a heresy which held that Christ did not possess a human mind but that the Logos took its place).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Ibid. 7. 19. 25. See Madec 1989: 46-7 for discussion and bibliography.

But heresy has its place: it is one of the providential admonitions by which God nudges human beings towards the truth.⁶¹

⁶¹ *conf.* 7. 19. 25.

Pride, similarly, was a failing which, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Augustine realized that God allowed him to experience, that he might better appreciate his need for grace: for confession rather than presumption, for the humble way of faith in Christ, the Word made flesh, rather than the proud way of reason which the philosophers pursued to a dead end—for without Christ, who is 'the way, the truth and the life', they

will never attain the homeland.⁶²

⁶² Ibid. 7. 21. 27.

Thus, he was finally led to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 13: 13) in the garden at Milan, and humbly to admit his complete dependence upon him.⁶³

⁶³ Ibid. 8. 12. 29.

Christ at Cassiciacum

How accurately does this represent Augustine's actual thought at this time? As ever, we must now turn to the Cassiciacum works to attempt an answer, but in the case of Christology we encounter even more difficulty than usual.

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A passage in *conf.* 9. 4. 7 gives us a clue as to why—for here, Augustine tells us that although God had brought about Alypius' subjection 'to the name of ... our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (and had therefore presumably cured him of his heretical leanings), Alypius was still 'scornfully critical' of Augustine's use of the name of Christ in his first Christian works, and still preferred philosophical language: 'He wanted them to smell of the "cedars" of the schools "which the Lord had now felled" (Ps. 28: 5) rather than of the healthgiving herbs of the Church which are a remedy against serpents' (9. 4. 7). O'Donnell interestingly observes that 'His [Alypius]' is the attitude that many attribute to Augustine at Cassiciacum: he sees in Christianity a useful type of philosophy, but his principal allegiance is to philosophy and he has a certain disdain ... for popular forms.'⁶⁴

⁶⁴ O'Donnell 1992: iii. 90. It is open to debate whether this suggests a 'limited conversion' on Alypius' part (O'Donnell, *ibid.*), or whether it was because 'he judged that overtly Christian expressions broke with the classical aesthetic of philosophical Dialogues' (Madec 1986: 214, cited by O'Donnell).

While we have, I hope, seen that the 'many' are fundamentally mistaken in this judgement, it is indeed the case that the name of Christ is used sparingly in the Cassiciacum dialogues. But this should not mislead: it is not wholly absent, and although the specific term 'Christus' does not appear often, synonyms abound, and are quite unmistakably a reference not only to the Word of God,⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Augustine does not use 'Word' as a title for the Son of God until *Gn. adu. Man.* The reasons why (which relate to Augustine's understanding of language, and words as external signs of internal thoughts) are discussed by Johnson 1972.

but to the incarnate Son of God, the Word made flesh. One example should suffice here, and that is the striking similarity between the way Augustine speaks of order, and the way he refers to Christ, in the early works. As Doignon has observed, 'one cannot but be struck by the similarity of the features which describe the relation between order and God and those of Christ with God: order proceeds (*découle*) from God (*ord.* 1. 17), it leads to God (1. 27), it has always existed with God (2. 23), expressions which can be placed alongside those which are applied to the Son in *De beata uita* 34'.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Doignon 1989: 71.

We must also, of course, remember the genre of the dialogues, and in this sense Alypius' objections are quite understandable: they are philosophical dialogues following a definite Ciceronian model, in which it is not the absence of Christ's name which is surprising, but the fact that it occurs at all. Whatever terminology is used, we have seen (and generations of Augustine scholars have made it their job to demonstrate) that the dialogues are fully Christian. I would also like to demonstrate briefly that their Christology is fully orthodox and that it is continuous with that aspect of Augustine's theology which it is the purpose of this book to demonstrate is central and

determinative from the very beginning: that fallen humanity is wholly

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dependent upon divine grace. For the sake of brevity I will limit myself to those passages in which he makes specific mention of 'Christ' or the 'Son of God',⁶⁷

⁶⁷*Acad.* 2. 1. 1; 3. 20. 43; *ord.* 1. 8. 21; 1. 10. 29; 1. 11. 32; 2. 5. 16; *b. uita* 4. 34.

although it must be remembered that the insights they demonstrate are understood, and thoroughly developed and confirmed, in those passages where he talks about Christ in terms of 'measure', 'number', 'order', 'truth', 'wisdom', 'happiness', 'light' ... in the early works. The latter should not be read as confirmation that Augustine was still more of a Platonist than a Christian,⁶⁸

⁶⁸ As those scholars in the Alfaric camp have tended to do, e.g. Lods 1976: 33, who sits on the fence as far as the question as a whole is concerned but comes down on Alfaric's side so far as Christology is concerned.

but rather that he was perfectly capable, like generations of Christian theologians before him, of using philosophical terminology to refer to Christian truths.

Although the Cassiciacum dialogues were written before Augustine's baptism at Easter in 387, we noted in Ch. 3 that they betray a profound awareness of the cultic, sacramental aspect of the Christian faith. This is especially the case in those passages in which Augustine mentions Christ, the Son of God, for it is clear that he is encountered and known primarily through the 'mysteries' (*mysteria*). As Augustine comments to his companions in *Contra Academicos*, their first dialogue at Cassiciacum, 'it is to the virtue and wisdom itself of the great God that I pray! For what else is He whom the mysteries present to us as the Son of God?'⁶⁹

⁶⁹*Acad.* 2. 1. 1. 'virtue and wisdom' is clearly an allusion to 1 Cor. 1: 24, a verse which was significant for fourth-century Christological debate, and which demonstrates, here, how deeply Augustine was embedded in this tradition.

The dialogue ends with a passage describing the 'twofold' path of authority and reason—which Augustine seems to identify with Christ and Platonism respectively—in attaining the truth. His observation that he is confident that the Platonists will not 'be at variance with our sacred mysteries' is significant: the mysteries evidently represent a standard or paradigm of Christian truth against which the philosophers are to be measured, and it is one which identifies the virtue and wisdom of God with the Son.

The 'venerated mysteries' reappear in the Cassiciacum dialogues in much the same context in *De ordine*, where Augustine is once again discussing the twofold path of authority and reason, which he again identifies with the mysteries and philosophy. Here, however, he is somewhat less optimistic about the ability of philosophy or reason to provide a way to truth for any but the very few—'Philosophy sends forth reason and it frees scarcely a few'. What it does do, however, is to 'compel these [the few?] not only not to spurn those mysteries [he has just referred to them as an aid to those who are

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unable, for whatever reason, to pursue truth through the liberal arts], but to understand them insofar as they can be understood. The philosophy that is true—the genuine philosophy, so to speak—has no other function than to teach what is the First Principle of all things—Itself without beginning—, and how great an intellect dwells therein, and what has proceeded therefrom for our welfare, but without deterioration of any kind' (*ord.* 2. 5. 16). Is Augustine referring to Platonism or Christianity here? The initial contrast between reason and authority, philosophy and the mysteries, suggests that, as in *Contra Academicos*, he is identifying the former with Platonism and the latter with Christianity. If this is the case, in the passage we have just cited he takes the extraordinary step of suggesting that the Platonists compel their adherents not to spurn the mysteries, and that their philosophy, the 'true philosophy' teaches a doctrine which amounts to nothing short of a description of the Christian Trinity and the incarnation.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Though it is difficult, and disputed, to know whether 'that which has proceeded ... without deterioration of any kind' refers to the Son or the Holy Spirit. Scholars differ—see Madec 1989: 79-80 for discussion and bibliography.

Or could it be that he has already concluded that the only 'true philosophy' is Christianity, since, as he makes clear in *De uera religione*, true philosophy implies true religion, and the Platonists' idolatry and inability to accept the Word made flesh, makes them unacceptable on both counts. If this is the case—and it seems likely—the twofold path is one comprehended entirely by Christianity in its philosophical and cultic aspects: true philosophy (which we might describe as rational reflection on Christian doctrine) must not, then, 'spurn the mysteries', for although it teaches the Trinity and incarnation, it will not thereby liberate any but the few. This is the role of true religion, of authority, or more precisely, the mysteries, 'which liberate persons of sincere and firm faith'. The mysteries identify the philosophical abstractions of true philosophy with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, openly teach the incarnation of the Son, and thereby inculcate humility in human beings' acknowledgement of their need for God's 'clemency', rather than pride in their own reason: 'these mysteries teach that this First Principle is one God omnipotent, and that He is tripotent, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Great, indeed, though it be that so great a God has for our sake deigned to take up and dwell in this body of our own kind, yet, the more lowly it appears, so much the more is it replete with clemency and the farther and wider remote from a certain characteristic pride of ingenious men' (*ord.* 2. 5. 16).⁷¹

⁷¹ The translation of this passage is a vexed question. The Latin reads: *Philosophia rationem promittit et uix paucissimos liberat, quos tamen non modo non contemnere illa mysteria, sed sola intellegere, ut intelligenda sunt, cogit.* Van Fleteren 1973: 47 summarizes the issues well when he observes: 'The translation of this text involves a syntactical problem. If *sola* is made to modify *philosophia* then the text means that *philosophia* alone gives rational insight. [Cf. du Roy 1966: 124] ... However *sola* could also modify *mysteria*. In that case, the passage is concerned with a rational understanding of the Christian mysteries. Since the entire passage is concerned with a rational understanding of the Christian mysteries, this translation and meaning is more likely. [Cf. Madec 1970: 179-86.]'

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Of course, as we have often had occasion to note, Platonism and Christianity were not mutually exclusive for Augustine—far from it—but it seems clear that when he talks about reason or philosophy here, he no longer primarily has the Platonists in mind, as in *Contra Academicos*, but rather a Christian philosophy, which in many respects the Platonists share. In some respects, however, they differed: the stumbling block for the Platonists, and the crucial difference between the two philosophies, is obviously the incarnation of the Son, who is encountered and found at the heart of the Christian mysteries. It is humble acceptance of his clemency, and not reasoned, intellectual understanding, which clearly defines the true religion and the true philosophy for Augustine. This is the case, not least because, as we saw in Ch. 3, despite the rational, philosophical language of the dialogues and their numerous descriptions of various ascents, Augustine is fully convinced of the fallenness of human beings in the early works and their need for God's descent in order to raise them up. This is clearly evident in a passage from *Contra Academicos*, which we examined in Ch. 3, and which directly precedes the one we have just analysed above concerning authority and reason: 'the most subtle reasoning', Augustine asserts, 'would never recall souls blinded by the manifold darkness of error and stained deeply by the slime of the body, had not the most high God, because of a certain compassion for the masses, bent and submitted the authority of the divine intellect even to the human body itself. By the precepts as well as deeds of that intellect souls have been awakened, and are able, without the strife of disputation, to return to themselves and see once again their fatherland' (*Acad.* 3. 19. 42).

Christ in the Creed

It is not difficult to find an explicit statement of a fully Christian (rather than Platonic), orthodox understanding of Christ in the years following the Cassiciacum works. This is because Augustine was clearly very conscious of the need to expound and defend this central element of what he himself terms 'orthodox catholic faith' (*fides sincerissima et catholica*)⁷²

⁷²*en. Ps.* 2. 6.

against its many

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detractors. A number of texts are obviously based, either explicitly (as in the case of *De fide et symbolo*)⁷³

⁷³*fid. et sym.* 3. 3-4. 10.

) or implicitly,⁷⁴

⁷⁴e.g. *Gn. litt. imp.* 1. 4.

upon an exposition of the creed. Others defend the scriptural witness to Christ against misinterpretation.⁷⁵

⁷⁵e.g. *en. Ps.* 2. 9, which emphasizes the need to identify which verses refer to Christ's human nature and which to his divine nature.

But it is in the context of a theology of *creatio ex nihilo*, which we saw in Ch. 4 to be the keystone of Augustine's early systematic theological reflection,

that the belief that Christ is begotten from, consubstantial, coeternal, and coequal with God, was primarily expounded. In contrast to the temporality of created human beings, Augustine emphasized Christ's eternity;⁷⁶

⁷⁶ e.g. *diu. qu.* 83 16, which echoes Origen's assertion that there was never a time when the Father was without his Son; *Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 2. 3, which interprets 'In the beginning' as referring to 'Christ who was the Word with the Father through whom and in whom all things were made'. Du Roy 1966: 270 notes that this is the first instance of Augustine's use of 'Word' in relation to Christ. See Johnson 1972 and *fid. et sym.* 3, where Augustine discusses the use of this term.

in contrast to their creation from nothing, Christ's begetting from the Father;⁷⁷

⁷⁷ e.g. *lib. arb.* 2. 15. 39.

in contrast to their ontological difference and unlikeness, Christ's equality, likeness, and consubstantiality with God.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ e.g. *ep.* 11 (c. 389) which describes the incarnation in the context of the unity and inseparable operation of the Trinity; *diu. qu.* 83 74, where Augustine contrasts man being *in* the image and likeness, to the Son who *is* the image, equality, and likeness of the Father; *diu. qu.* 83 23, '... Son who is of the substance of the Father ... his likeness is not by participation but by substance'.

These characteristic emphases, combined with his frequent use of scriptural texts such as the Prologue of John's Gospel and Philippians 2: 6,⁷⁹

⁷⁹ e.g. *Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 2. 3; 1. 3. 6; 2. 24. 37; *en. Ps.* 18. 3; *uera rel.* 110; *diu. qu.* 83 63.

confirm for Augustine's reader what he himself sought to defend: the fully Christian, orthodox nature of his faith against all its critics.

When it comes to the doctrine of the incarnation, however, Augustine was never forced to be as polemical as his Eastern counterparts, and therefore is rarely as explicit or as technical as they were. Nevertheless, there are no grounds for finding Augustine's early works lacking in this respect: he clearly and cogently teaches a doctrine of the virgin birth;⁸⁰

⁸⁰ e.g. *fid. et sym.* 5. 8; *diu. qu.* 83 11; *quant.* 76.

he describes the incarnation as an assumption of human nature (and states in a manner highly redolent of Alexandrian terminology that 'that assumption has joined in an inexpressible manner the thing assumed to the one assuming it');⁸¹

⁸¹ *diu. qu.* 83 73. 2; cf. *ord.* 2. 5. 16.

he makes clear that Christ possesses full manhood and full Godhead, observing that 'the ineffable and immutable Wisdom of God deigned to assume a whole and

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complete man'.⁸²

⁸² *Gn. litt. imp.* 1. 4. In *en. Ps.* 15. 3 he similarly speaks of 'a God whose manhood enables Him to die, and ... a Man whose Godhead enables Him to rise from the dead'.

The early works are also replete with the paradoxical, antithetical language which can alone express such beliefs.⁸³

⁸³ e.g. *s.* 12. 12; *en. Ps.* 148. 8 (Zarb 395*).

Christ the Saviour

We have taken a little time to establish that Augustine's early Christology is not an embryonic, still largely Neoplatonic understanding of the second hypostasis of the divine triad, but is rather an 'orthodox catholic belief' in the second person of the divine Trinity who became human for our salvation, for a number of reasons: firstly, because to maintain anything else is fundamentally to undermine the integrity of Augustine's early theological reflection and the nature of his conversion; secondly, and most obviously, because this is what the evidence of the early works suggests; thirdly, and most importantly, because unless it is upheld there is no real scope to talk meaningfully about the operation of grace in the early works. 'The unassumed is the unhealed'—a Greek maxim,⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, *ep.* 101. 32.

but one equally applicable to Augustine's Christology: unless Christ became a human being, human beings cannot be saved. But it is precisely this belief that scholars, who suggest that Augustine's early understanding of Christ's work was merely pedagogic rather than salvific, are undermining.

Christ is indeed a teacher, example, and authority for the early Augustine, but he is also, and most importantly, the saviour of fallen humanity through his sacrificial death; the mediator between God and sinful humanity in his humble descent and self-emptying in the incarnation; the one who effects the reformation of the image of God in human beings which has been deformed; and the life-giving source of grace in the mysteries. Those scholars who suggest that the early Augustine maintained that all human beings need is teaching and example⁸⁵

⁸⁵ e.g. du Roy 1966: 97 n. 1; Folliet 1987: 211; Cary 2000: 112; Sage 1967: 215.

seem to be motivated by a vain attempt to preserve human beings' free will, autonomy, and powers of self-determination in the early works, and a fundamentally mistaken understanding of the nature and effects of the Fall, of sin and evil, and of the need for grace. In short, they are once again making the early Augustine a Pelagian before Pelagius. We have already countered this position in relation to the Fall and free will. Let us now examine what Augustine has to say about the need for Christ's saving grace.

In an extraordinary passage in *De diuersis quaestionibus* we can overhear Augustine speaking to his brothers about their common life in a way which reveals as much about his understanding of Christ's incarnation and saving death as it does about his vision of Christian community. It is a much-needed reminder that systematic theology and the living of the Christian life were inseparable for Augustine, and that when he talks about the body of Christ, incarnate and suffering, he also always has in mind the Church as the body of Christ, who is its Head: it is because Christ became a human being and shared our sin and suffering that we can be freed of them by belonging to his body. In question 71, commenting on 'bear one another's burdens', Augustine puts before his brothers the image of a herd of deer, who, in crossing a stream, rest their heads on the back of the ones in front, taking turns to be the one at the head, thus mutually helping each other. This is a lesson for the brothers, who are exhorted to bear the burdens of their fellows in love, whether it be their failings (such as anger, talkativeness, or stubbornness—a good insight into community life, this!) or their suffering and sadness. He writes, 'in respect to such states of mind, you must take on somewhat the very affliction from which you want the other person to be freed through your efforts, and you must take it on in this way for the purpose of being able to help, not to achieve the same degree of misery'. In other words, they must follow the example of Christ's love in condescending to take the form of a servant and to bear another's sin in order to free him or her of it. Christ's incarnation is above all a demonstration of God's love for fallen humanity: 'in no way did he show greater loving-kindness in his dealings with the human race for its good', Augustine writes in *De uera religione*, 'than when the Wisdom of God, his only Son, coeternal and consubstantial with the Father, deigned to assume human nature; when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (30). This revelation of God's love inspires in fallen human beings, 'given over to bodily sense and unable with the mind to behold the truth' a sense of how much God values human nature, since he appeared to them, 'not merely visibly ... but as a true man' (30). Elsewhere Augustine observes that Christ's incarnation not only 'procured our love' but also, 'by dying and rising again ... drove away our fears'. This is a wholly un-Pelagian way of regarding the plight of human beings and their liberation: people do not observe the law, which they know through teaching and example, out of fear, rather they are brought to know the truth and to observe it through love—through Christ's descent in love to participate in our human nature and bear our sin, to thus free us from it: 'no man can obtain the supreme and most certain good unless he fully and perfectly loves it'.⁸⁶

⁸⁶*util. cred.* 15. 33.

These insights are summed up in one of the early

Enarrationes in Psalmos where Augustine is reflecting on Christ as an example of God's love in relation to John 15: 13, 'Greater love hath no man

than that he should lay down his life for his friends.' He comments, 'Let us also do this; because even if we are not what He was, in respect that He created us, what He was nevertheless we are, in respect of that which He was made because of us ... There is present he that furnished the example, to furnish also aid.'⁸⁷

⁸⁷ *en. Ps. 52. 1* (Zarb 395*).

As well as being a demonstration of God's love, Augustine is emphatic that Christ's incarnation and sacrificial death are also, in a distinctly anti-Pelagian sense, the means by which God overcomes that which caused the fall of human beings—their proud belief in their own powers without God's aid. As he comments in *De musica*,

God's highest Wisdom deigned to take upon himself this wound [the corruption and death of the body due to the first sin] through a wonderful and ineffable mystery, when he became man without sin but not without the condition of the sinner. For he wanted to be born and to suffer and die as a man, and none of these things deservedly but through his most excellent goodness, so that we should beware of the pride through which we justly deserved to fall into this.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *mus. 6. 4. 7.*

But it is the incarnate Christ's humility, pre-eminently expressed in Phil. 2: 6-7,⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Verwilghen 1985.

that, above all else, Augustine understood to be the antidote to humanity's pride. Christ's emptying of himself in the 'form of God', and condescension to take the 'form of a servant', is far from being simply an example for humankind to follow, or a convenient lesson in humility; it is the 'healing remedy' without which human beings, who have fallen through pride, cannot be saved. Christ is, as it were, both the doctor (*medicus*) and the medicine (*medicina*):⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Doucet 1989: 460.

'It was because of this vice, because of this enormous sin of pride, that God came in humility. This enormous sin, this monstrous disease of souls, was the very thing which brought the almighty Physician down from heaven, humbled Him even to taking the form of a slave, exposed Him to ignominy, hung Him upon the tree, that by the saving strength of so potent a remedy this tumour might be healed.'⁹¹

⁹¹ *en. Ps. 18. 15.*

Christ's humility is thus the expression and operation of divine 'clemency' or grace in order to save fallen humanity,⁹²

⁹² *ord. 2. 5. 16; Gn. adu. Man. 2. 24. 37.*

for it is only because of God's descent that we are able to ascend. Augustine never seems to have wearied of setting forth this simple but profound lesson of the faith for his congregation. In the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, for example, he explains simply: 'For therefore was the Son of God with us, that we might be with Him. For He who came down from heaven to be with us, makes us ascend to Him, that we may be with Him. Meanwhile He scorned not our

estrangement; for nowhere is He a stranger, Who made all things.'⁹³

⁹³*en. Ps.* 145. 1 (Zarb 395*).

The last phrase of this quotation reminds us of what we established in Ch. 4 in relation to the idea of creation from nothing: that Christ, 'in forma Dei' is the Creator who, having formed human beings, reforms them as the humble, incarnate Christ, 'in forma serui', and by virtue of his participation in human nature, enables us to participate in the divine nature. Augustine's teaching in this respect is therefore not just exemplary or pedagogic, but ontological and salvific. He most often expresses it by speaking of Christ as the mediator between man and God, based upon 1Tim. 2: 5, 'For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and human beings, Jesus Christ, himself a human being.' When he quotes this in his commentary on Galatians, he continues by illustrating it, as he so often does, in terms of Phil. 2: 7:

anyone who was cast down with the proud mediator—the Devil—urging him to pride, is raised up with the humble mediator Christ, urging him to humility. For if the Son of God had wished to remain in natural equality with the Father and had not 'emptied himself, taking the form of a slave' (Phil. 2: 7), he would not be the mediator between God and human beings, because the Trinity itself is one God, with the same eternity and equality of deity remaining without change in three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And so God's only Son became the mediator between God and human beings when the Word of God, God with God, both laid down his own majesty to the level of the human and exalted human lowliness to the level of the divine, in order that he—a human being who through God was beyond human beings—might be the 'mediator between God and human beings'.⁹⁴

⁹⁴*exp. Gal.* 24. It is often supposed (e.g. du Roy 1966: 89 n.3) that the early Augustine did not have an understanding of Christ's mediation, such as 1 Tim. 2: 5 suggests, but this text gives the lie to this.

The humble, incarnate Christ therefore bridges the ontological gulf between God and humankind and becomes the mediator between them.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ This particular theme has a long history in Augustine's thought and is fully developed in *trin.* 4 and 13. See Madec 1975; O'Daly 1987b: 108 'It is, in fact, the *humility* of Christ, the human self-emptying of the eternal Word of God for the sake of sinners, that was, for both the early and the late Augustine, the distinctive element of the Christian Gospel—the truth that lies beyond the reach of the philosophical mind, but that is the first condition of anyone's movement towards God.'

When Augustine talks about human beings 'imitating'⁹⁶

⁹⁶ As in *exp. Gal.* 24.

Christ's humility, he therefore has in mind not just our following of his example, but our abandoning of our pride and mistaken confidence in our own powers, and our acknowledgement that we are completely dependent upon God's grace: humility is our subjection to God, our realization of our wretchedness, weakness, and total and utter dependence upon his grace, upon 'the mediator

between God and man, Jesus Christ' in order to be saved. This is what Augustine so often expresses in terms of Rom. 7: 24-5: 'Let no man presume on himself, seeing that it is of the Lord to save from the death of sin; for "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord." ' ⁹⁷

⁹⁷ e.g. *en. Ps.* 3. 8.

Augustine is thus quite clear that the only merit fallen human beings can boast of is the merit of Christ's saving death: 'what is the merit of the sinner and the ungodly man?' he asks, 'Christ has died for the ungodly and for sinners in order that he might be called to faith, not by merit, but by grace.' ⁹⁸

⁹⁸ *diu. qu.* 83 68. 3.

This is because only the sinless Christ can overcome the penalty of sin, and the debt which humanity owes, by dying as a human being and for human beings. Augustine expresses this succinctly in *De libero arbitrio*: 'In that they suffer temporal death, they pay what they owe. In that they live eternally, they live in him who paid on their behalf what he did not owe'. ⁹⁹

⁹⁹ *lib. arb.* 3. 10. 31; cf. *en. Ps.* 9. 4; *mus.* 6. 4. 7.

It is easy to forget, however, that it was not formal theories of the atonement which preoccupied Augustine, but the living Christ encountered in his body, the Church. We have seen how central the mysteries were in his understanding of the faith from the moment of his conversion. This could only be confirmed by Ambrose's catechetical instruction, ¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Ambrose's catechetical lectures (*De sacramentis*) give us a very clear idea of the sort of instruction Augustine would have received.

his baptism in Milan and his subsequent participation in the eucharist as a member of the Catholic Church; having sought the name of Christ for so many years he now embraced him through sacramental initiation and communion. When he was ordained priest in 391 his life was henceforth literally, as well as spiritually, centred upon the body of Christ. Madec expresses this well when he writes of Augustine and his congregation:

The liturgical assembly was not, for them, one 'theological locus' among others; it was in truth and *par excellence* 'the Christological locus', the centre of everything that happened: the Christological interpretation of the Scriptures, the renewal of the sacrifice of Christ, the actualisation of the Mystery of Christ in the Church, the initiation and participation of Christians, their incorporation into Christ, their spiritual edification (in the strongest sense), the faith and understanding of the faith, in short, theology as Augustine practices it, before labelling it as such, that is to say, before it became fixed and frozen in institutional form. ¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Madec 1989: 91-2.

We see this most clearly in the early *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, where Augustine interprets the Psalms Christologically, hearing in them the voice of the body of Christ: of the mixed body of saints and sinners who make up the Church in the

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present, and of Christ, their Head, who continues to suffer with them until the end of the age, when the wheat and the chaff, the clean and unclean animals, the wine and the grape skins, the good and bad fish, will be separated, and the former share Christ's resurrected life in the kingdom of God.¹⁰²

¹⁰² e.g. *en. Ps.* 8. 13 which, like many of the early *Enarrationes*, is directed against the Donatists. Augustine often quotes 1 Cor. 12: 27, as in *en. Ps.* 3. 9.

His theology of the Church as the mystical body of Christ is primarily Pauline in inspiration: by taking humanity Christ 'takes up' the Church, as he took flesh, to dwell in it, and to save it through his resurrection;¹⁰³

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, quoting John 1: 14 and Eph. 4: 8.

Christ leaves his Father, God, and his mother, the Synagogue, to become one flesh with his wife, the Church;¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 24. 37, quoting Eph. 5: 31-2.

the blood and water which flow from his side on the cross are the sacraments by which he is espoused to his wife, the Church, just as Eve was formed from Adam's rib while he slept;¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Cf. *en. Ps.* 56. 11 (Zarb 395*).

the head and body are inseparably bound together in love;¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ *en. Ps.* 3. 9, quoting Eph. 2: 6, 'In heavenly places hath he made us to sit together with Him.'

by doing the truth in love we increase in stature;¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, quoting Eph. 4: 12-16, 'But doing the truth in love, we may increase in Him in all things, Who is the Head, Christ, from whom the whole body is joined and compacted.'

there are many members, each with their different functions, together forming a single edifice.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 10. 7.

The Church's daily participation in the body and blood of the incarnate and risen Christ, which lay at the heart of Augustine's life and teaching, completely and decisively undermines any suggestion that Augustine's early Christology was primarily pedagogic and exemplarist, rather than salvific. It is a much-needed reminder of how the mediation of God's grace through the sacraments formed the foundation of his theological reflection from the very beginning.

'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy': *Ad Simplicianum* Revisited

In this final chapter on Augustine's early reflection on grace we cannot avoid returning once again to the letter Augustine wrote to Simplicianus in 396, in response to his friend's queries concerning certain passages of Scripture, and in particular, Rom. 9. This text, more than any other, has been the focus of many of the issues we have addressed in this book because it is the place where

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the so-called revolution of the 390s is supposed to have taken place: it is generally regarded as the crucible in which the naive, optimistic, early Augustine was transformed, through a painful exposure to Pauline theology, into the mature doctor of the Fall, original sin, grace, and predestination. Having made a final and definitive attempt to tackle the question of why God loved Jacob but hated Esau, while they were still in their mother's womb, and therefore without any prior merit or sinful action to justify God's choice; having concluded that both belong to the *massa peccati* of fallen humanity which justly deserves damnation, so that God's election of Jacob is purely a matter of unmerited grace and his rejection of Esau a just judgement on his sin, it has become a canon of Augustine scholarship that his early thought thereby underwent such a dramatic transformation that it would never be the same again: he finally abandoned any attempt to preserve the autonomy of the human will, or any hope of being able rationally to justify God's justice, and instead entered a fallen world in which the will is wholly dependent upon divine grace for any good action, and in which God's actions are wholly unfathomable but wholly just.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ For a close analysis of the text see Ch. 5.

For Peter Brown, the *Ad Simplicianum* also marks the first working out of Augustine's new 'psychology of delight', whereby the will is moved to the good only by the gracious action of God in providing it with something which inspires its love and delight. For most interpreters, it is Augustine's first mature statement of the doctrine of original sin, inherited guilt, and universal fallenness, which led him to realize that God must not only call the will, or help its subsequent action, but must actually 'operate' upon it to bring about its conversion and choice of faith. For most scholars, too, it is his first mention of the idea of election or predestination, since everything has now come to depend not upon the action of humanity's free will but upon God's choice. In other words, it is almost universally maintained that in the *Ad Simplicianum* we see the lineaments of Augustine's mature theological system emerging for the first time.

We have, of course, already addressed many of the issues which this scholarly consensus raises for an interpretation of the early works and have hopefully demonstrated that it is largely misleading, and contradicted by the clear evidence of the early works themselves, in which the 'new' ideas which supposedly emerged for the first time in *Ad Simplicianum* are already present—not least the conviction of humanity's fallenness (Ch. 6), and of the fallen will's inability to do the good without divine grace (Chs. 5 and 7). In this chapter I will concentrate on the three areas we have just mentioned which pertain most closely to Augustine's early understanding of grace: Peter

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Brown's theory concerning a new 'psychology of delight' the manner in which grace works to effect the operation of the fallen will; the conclusion that human beings are saved only if they are elected or predestined by God's grace.

From the Disciplines to Delight

The chapter of Peter Brown's *Augustine of Hippo* entitled 'The Lost Future' has the same significance for his biography as its subject, the *Ad Simplicianum*, in Augustine's works. It is where everything irrevocably changes so that scholarship will never be the same again. Reflecting on the 'intricate synthesis of grace, freewill and predestination' which emerges in the response to Simplicianus, Brown concludes that 'For the first time Augustine came to see man as utterly dependent on God, even for his first initiative of believing in Him ... [he] had come to this conclusion through a reassessment of the nature of human motivation. It is this psychological discovery which gives cogency to the interpretation that he placed on Paul. Briefly, Augustine had analysed the psychology of "delight". "Delight" is the only possible source of action, nothing else can move the will.'¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Brown 1967: 154.

What Brown is referring to is Augustine's observation, at the end of the second book of *Ad Simplicianum*, that, since our will is incapable of believing and therefore of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable it to do good works, God 'puts the motive power within us ... [by] giving us the will' (1. 2. 21) and that 'the will can have no motive (*mouer*) unless something presents itself to delight (*delectet*) and stir (*inuitet*) the mind. That this should happen is not within any man's power' (1. 2. 22). Brown insists that this insight is not found in Augustine's earlier work: 'Ten years before, this element had been notably lacking in Augustine's programme for a "well-trained soul": such a soul would have risen to truth by academic disciplines, supported by "sparkling little chains of argument". Now "feeling" has taken its rightful place as the ally of the intellect.'¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Ibid. 155.

We will need to question this conclusion below, but in identifying desire as 'the mainspring of human action' in Augustine's thought, and in noting its essential ambiguity and elusiveness, in that it is beyond our power to determine what will delight us, and whether we will be moved by delight for the good or evil, Brown is absolutely right. The 'psychology of delight' is indeed the place where Augustine locates the 'operation' of grace upon the will: grace presents the errant and disabled will of fallen human beings with what will unfailingly delight it

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and thereby inspire it to the good. (We leave the question of precisely how grace thus operates on the will to the next section.)

But is Peter Brown correct in suggesting that what we have all come to

regard as this characteristically Augustinian 'psychology of delight' is 'notably lacking' in his early thought? The caricature of the early works as a programme in the academic disciplines for the well-trained soul, supported by 'sparkling little chains of argument', is one which I hope we have already done enough to dispel.¹¹²

¹¹² e.g. Chs. 3-4.

The question we must address here is: what role does the divine motivation of the will by delight have to play in these works?

In Ch. 4 we commented on how Augustine's 'psychology of delight' was prompted as much by his own experience as by his exegesis of Paul:¹¹³

¹¹³ Or, indeed, by the Stoics, for whom delight, as we noted in Ch. 7, was a central element of the act of willing.

it was clear to him that the fact that we are moved to act only when something delights us and inspires our love, is an experience which all human beings share. There are many passages in the early works which describe this characteristic and essential feature of human nature: 'physical bodies occupy a given space; the soul's space is its desire'¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ *en. Ps.* 6. 9.

'our affections are our feet ... according as each man has affection, according as each has love, so does he either approach or recede from God'¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 94. 2 (Zarb 393-4). A Plotinian image, e.g. *Enn.* 1. 6. 8. Cf. 8. 1 where the wheat and the chaff, the good and the bad in the Church, are presently separated not by space but by affection.

'Delight is like a weight for the soul; delight orders the soul, for "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also".'¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ *mus.* 6. 11. 29.

The delight which unerringly moves human beings to act, however, can be a delight in what is evil as well as in what is good: thus, whereas 'Eden', man's original state, means 'delights, pleasure, or a feast' and is the place of 'immortal, intelligible delights',¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ *Gn. adu. Man.* 2. 9. 12.

Augustine comments that Satan's deception of Eve was equally a matter of delight: 'Nor can our reason be brought to the consent that is sin, except when delight is aroused in that part of the soul which ought to obey reason as its ruling husband.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 2. 14. 20.

That God works to move human beings to delight in the good, we have seen in Ch. 4, in relation to his creation and formation of all things in 'measure, number, and weight', whereby we are led, by delight in, and love of, the manifest beauty and order of creation, to love the Creator. We observed that in this way God provides, as it were, a counterweight to the inherent tendency of mutable, temporal creation, drawn from nothing, to fall away from him, and enables its conversion and conformation to him. It is in this context, as we also saw, that

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Augustine most often turns to consider the liberal arts: not as rational exercises to train the soul, but as temporal, corporeal demonstrations of God's beauty (revealed in order, rhythm, proportion, design) which delight us and thereby inspire our love for their eternal and incorporeal source. As Augustine observes in *De ordine*, 'There is a delight *of* sense, and a delight *through* sense, whereby what occasions delight is known and judged by the mind.'¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹*ord.* 1. 11. 34. See 1. 11. 30-12. 35 for an extended demonstration of this point.

From the very beginning we see Augustine working on the assumption that we cannot know something unless we love it, and of course, as we have seen above, we do not love something unless it also delights us. Knowledge is therefore never simply a matter of rational deliberation, but is inseparable from delight and love. Thus Augustine asks, 'what else is it to live happily but to possess an eternal object through knowing it? ... whatever is possessed by the mind is had by knowing, and no good is completely known which is not completely loved ... what is eternal, loved in this way, affects the soul with eternity'¹²⁰

¹²⁰*diu. qu.* 83 35. 2.

'No man can obtain the supreme and most certain good unless he fully and perfectly loves it.'¹²¹

¹²¹*util. cred.* 33.

It is love which inspires, moves, directs, and effects our grasp of the eternal truth, and as we shall see, this love is none other than the love of God.

In the course of examining Augustine's early reflection on the Fall in Ch. 6, we noted his acute consciousness of the ambiguity of created reality. On the one hand, as we have just seen, its form, order, and beauty can provide a revelation of its Creator, and inspire our love and delight for him; on the other, it can all too easily be taken as an end in itself and we can fail to move beyond delight *of* sense to delight in God *through* the sense. This is what he refers to elsewhere by using the distinction between 'use' and 'enjoyment': we must 'use' creation towards the 'enjoyment' of God but it must never be taken as an end in itself—if it is, the delight it occasions becomes a trap and the cause for our falling away from God rather than our advancement towards him. In *De musica* therefore, while acknowledging that beauty and delight are needed to call fallen humanity back to God, Augustine distinguishes between delight in the flesh and delight in reason; one destroys the soul whilst the other saves it; however, the first is necessary for fallen human beings to attain the latter. He writes for example, that

It is not the rhythms [i.e. the temporal manifestation of measure, number, weight, and so on], which are inferior to reason and beautiful in their own kind, but the love of inferior beauty that soils the soul. ... But what soils the soul is not something evil, for even the body is a creation of God and adorned by its own form, however low ... whatever rhythms have been produced by the mortality that we have received as

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punishment, let us not deny that they are a creation of divine providence, as they are beautiful in their own kind, but let us not now love them, as if we would be blessed by enjoying such rhythms. For since they are temporal, we will be rid of these rhythms, as of a plank in the waves,¹²²

¹²² An image Augustine elsewhere refers to the wood of the cross, to which the believer must cling in order to cross the sea of this world—*In Johannis euangelium tractatus* 2. 4.

not by throwing them away as a burden, nor by embracing them as something well anchored, but by using them well.¹²³

¹²³ *mus.* 6. 14. 46. The whole of this chapter, especially in what it says about love of God and neighbour in this context, closely foreshadows book 1 of *De doctrina Christiana*, where Augustine rehearses these ideas in a highly formal and systematic manner.

We further observed in Ch. 6 that fallen human beings' unavoidable engagement with temporal reality can lead to a situation in which their habitual sin becomes such a heavy chain that they need more than simply the revelation of divine beauty in creation to enable them to break free and embrace eternal beauty. There are some passages in *De musica* which echo those we cited above, in relation to what we described as the 'assault' of grace, and which seem to suggest that it is not so much a matter of temporal beauty and the delight it inspires to lead us towards eternal beauty, but rather that the latter actually overpowers our attachment to the temporal and drags us away from it by working upon our will, inspiring within us a delight for God which overwhelms us. Augustine writes in *De musica*, that 'the soul with the help of God escapes from the love of the lower beauty, fighting down and killing its own habit which is warring against it'¹²⁴

¹²⁴ *mus.* 6. 15. 50.

... the love of temporal things could only have been *taken by storm* by some sweetness of eternal things' and quoting Ps. 36: 7-9, 'Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures,' he adds: 'it is clear enough how abundant is the overflow of the eternal fountain ... followed even by *something like intoxication*, a wonderful figure for signifying forgetfulness of secular vanities and phantasms'.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 6. 16. 52 (my italics).

In *De moribus*, he similarly describes that way in which, when divine majesty begins to be disclosed 'as far as suffices for man while a dweller on the earth, such *fervent charity* is produced, and such a *flame of divine love* is kindled, that by the *burning out* of all vices, and by the purification and sanctification of the man, it becomes plain how divine are these words, "I am

a consuming fire" and "I have come to send fire upon the earth".¹²⁶

¹²⁶*mor.* 1. 30. 64 (my italics).

In *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83 he refers to 'the love [of righteousness] which would *possess* the mind by an inward delight, lest the mind be drawn to sin by the delight of temporal things' (66. 6). Fallen humanity, imprisoned by the temporal, is thus taken by storm by the sweetness of eternal things, inebriated by the abundant overflow

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of the fountain of divine delight/pleasure, consumed by the fire of divine love, possessed by inward delight. God is not attained by 'sparkling little chains of argument' in the early works but by the revelation of his beauty, and—if we fail to look beyond the delight this temporal revelation inspires—by the dramatic victory of his grace in breaking our attachment to the temporal, overcoming, inebriating, consuming, and possessing us with love and delight in the divine.

What is the source and nature of this love: the love which inspires and directs our love for God; which overwhelms and possesses us with delight for God? Augustine identifies it with the Holy Spirit.

Delight and the Holy Spirit

As with Christology, this book is not the place to examine Augustine's early pneumatology, or, indeed, his Trinitarian theology, but his especial identification of the Holy Spirit as the love of God, and his role in redeeming fallen humanity, means that it cannot be ignored here, for both are manifestations of the grace of God operating upon the will of human beings.

We have already had occasion to refer to *De beata uita* 4. 35, where Augustine refers to an inner admonition flowing from the fountain of truth which urges us to remember, seek, and thirst after God. He identifies this inner admonition with the 'hidden sun'—with God, perfect, entire, and omnipotent—but is aware, even at this early stage, that, having only recently had our eyes opened, we are too weak to gaze at this light; we are still seeking and need rather to recognize, as he puts it, the 'One through whom you are led into the truth, the nature of the truth you enjoy, and the bond that connects you with the supreme measure' which together show us the One God, one Substance. Although Monnica, as we have seen, immediately, and in a wonderfully direct and straightforward way, identifies this God with the Trinity, and describes the happy life as one attained by faith, hope, and love, it is not at all clear precisely which members of the Trinity are to be understood in the various triads which make up this text, and therefore

which role(s) are being specifically assigned to each.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Scholars vary: Cipriani 1994: 281 suggests possible sources in Ambrose and Victorinus for the idea of the Holy Spirit as an inward admonition, and for a similar emphasis on the Spirit's perfect divinity and unity, his immutability and incorruptibility, as the grounds for his sanctification and liberation of creatures subject to mutability and corruption. The convincing parallels he draws between these Christian authors and Augustine's early pneumatology are an important counterweight to du Roy's 'Plotinizing' of Augustine's early Trinitarian theology;

Whatever the case, the lesson is clear:

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because we are too weak to behold God, the divine Trinity, we must recognize, by belief, hope, and love, the one who leads us to the truth (the Son?), what this truth is (God, the Trinity, divine, perfect, entire, omnipotent ... one substance?), and the bond that connects us with it (the Holy Spirit?). Whether our parenthetical suggestions are correct or not, this early text is a valuable witness to Augustine's early belief in an orthodox Trinity, in humanity's weakness, and in the role of the Trinity in leading human beings towards, and incorporating them into, the truth which it is.

These insights are developed much more fully in *De fide et symbolo*, where, commenting upon the creed, Augustine summarizes what tradition teaches or—since he admits it has still not discussed the subject fully—suggests: that the Holy Spirit is the 'Gift of God' (*donum Dei*); that he perhaps constitutes the 'communion of the Father and Son ... as the love and charity subsisting between [them]'

¹²⁸ One wonders who Augustine has in mind when he refers to 'some ... who have gone so far as to believe' that the Holy Spirit is the bond of love which unites Father and Son, as this particular idea is very much his own original contribution to Western theology.

that Rom. 5: 5 identifies him as the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts, since it is through the Holy Spirit, God's gift, that we are reconciled with God, adopted, given confidence, granted enjoyment of God, and sanctified; that 'in Him are all things' in the sense that he 'holds together, that is, unites by connecting'.

¹²⁹ *fid. et sym.* 19.

This is indeed a convenient summary of Augustine's own early teaching, where we find frequent references to the Holy Spirit as the gift of God's love in reference to Rom. 5: 5, a love described as inspiring fallen human beings, who are otherwise incapable of returning to the truth, to love, desire, and delight in God rather than the world; to cleave to God, and thereby to be sanctified by being conformed to him.

¹³⁰ e.g. *uera rel.* 24-5; *mor.* 1. 13. 23-14. 24; 1. 17. 31; 25. 46-7; *ep.* 11; *s. Dom. mon.* 2. 4. 11; *Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 22. 24.

In Ch. 4 we saw that this teaching was fully integrated into a well-developed Trinitarian theology of humanity's creation and recreation, formation and reformation: the work of the Holy Spirit is the work of the divine Trinity; he is the eternal, immutable, incorruptible God, and it is only because of this that he can purify, sanctify, and reconcile temporal, mutable, and corruptible human beings. And it is only because he *is* love that he can inspire in us the desire, delight, and love which enable us to cleave to, and be conformed to God—in short, to participate in the love which is the divine Trinity. A passage from *De moribus*, which we cited in this respect in Ch. 4, brings these ideas together:

It is through love, then, that we become conformed to God; and by this conformation, and circumcision from this world we are not

properly subject to us. And this is done by the Holy Spirit ... for 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which he has given unto us' (Rom. 5: 5) ... But we could not possibly be restored to perfection by the Holy Spirit, unless He Himself continued always perfect and immutable. And this plainly could not be unless He were of the nature and of the very substance of God, who alone is always possessed of immutability and invariableness. 'The creature has been made subject to vanity' (Rom. 8: 20). And what is subject to vanity is unable to separate us from vanity and to unite us to the truth. But the Holy Spirit does this for us. He is therefore no creature.

For whatever is, must be either God or creature¹³¹

¹³¹ *mor.* 1. 13. 23. For other uses of Rom. 5: 5, see e.g. *s. Dom. mon.* 1. 5. 13; 2. 17. 58; *en. Ps.* 4. 2.

... how can anything be man's chief good but that in cleaving to which he is blessed? Now this is nothing but God, to whom we can cleave

only by affection, desire, and love.¹³²

¹³² *Ibid.* 1. 14. 24.

If understanding and reason are associated with the Son in the early works, then love and delight are associated with the Holy Spirit. Reason and delight are as inseparable in these works, however, as the union of the persons of the divine Trinity; we cannot have one without the other, and the latter was by no means a later discovery in Augustine's understanding of human psychology. As he writes in 389: 'there proceeds from the Father Himself, as from the single principle from whom are all things, both understanding through the Son, and a certain interior and ineffable sweetness and delight in that understanding (outlasting and looking down upon all mortal things)

which is rightly ascribed to the Holy Spirit as gift and attribute'.¹³³

¹³³ *ep.* 11.

How Does Grace Operate?

When we turned to re-examine the *Ad Simplicianum* earlier in this chapter we identified a number of issues concerning the operation of grace in relation to fallen humanity which have proved contentious in scholarly discussion. We have hopefully demonstrated that the assertion that our will is influenced to believe only by something that delights it, and that this delight is completely beyond our control, but is due wholly to God's inspiration and grace, does not derive from some newly discovered 'psychology of delight', but is completely continuous with Augustine's early reflection. What we must now ask is precisely how grace works to bring about this delight in the will. Is Augustine suggesting that grace 'operates' upon the will primarily by *external* prompts which the inner work of the Holy Spirit merely strengthens? Is he describing for the first time, the way in which grace works *within* the

its willing? Or is he simply coming to new clarity about, and a new terminology for, what *in nuce* he had always believed: the operation of grace (both inward and outward) which must be at work in order to enable fallen human beings to will and to do the good? The first view is argued by one of the most influential scholars of Augustine's doctrine of grace, Patout Burns; the second represents general scholarly consensus; the third is the argument of this book. In this chapter we need to examine the challenge which Burns' work poses more carefully.

Burns' thesis, that in *Ad Simplicianum* Augustine is referring primarily to the outward, exterior operation of grace, is part of his more general attempt to preserve some degree of human autonomy in Augustine's early work. As we saw in Ch. 5, this is, of course, precisely what Augustine himself was attempting to do in his works on Romans during the 390s, partly to uphold human free will against Manichaean determinism and partly to defend the equity of divine justice. But we also argued that in the *Ad Simplicianum* we see Augustine finally, and conclusively, admitting defeat, and returning with greater understanding and clarity to the position he had always held, even if he had not yet been prompted to articulate it so starkly: that fallen human beings are wholly dependent upon divine grace to will and to do any good work. This is not a position which Burns thinks the early Augustine ever held, however. He refers to the early works as the place where 'Augustine described God's help as provoking and directing human efforts to attain a spiritual beatitude' but that 'The work of divine Wisdom and Love neither supplement nor substitute for human action.'¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Burns 1980: 21.

In contradistinction to what we have just established concerning Augustine's early teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit, he writes,

The Holy Spirit was assigned no significant role in faith and the cleansing of the heart. Charity seems to grow by the person's commitment to the quest for spiritual values rather than by the interior working of the Holy Spirit. Divine assistance comes through exterior teaching which directs and leads to interior illumination¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Ibid. 29.

... In explaining the weakness of the human spirit and the working of God, Augustine was careful to preserve the autonomy of the will and to exclude coercion by either the desires of the flesh or the grace of the Holy Spirit. ... Divine mercy provides the situation in which a person can choose to do the good and helps the person to do the good he has chosen; it does not supply the choice itself. The commitment to preserve human freedom and autonomy even in reliance on divine initiative and assistance is a constitutive element of Augustine's first explanation of a divine grace which causes a person's willing. The assertion of operative grace in *Ad Simplicianum* can be properly interpreted only within this context.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Ibid. 36.

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But even in the *Ad Simplicianum*, where Burns identifies, for the first time in Augustine's thought, what he describes as 'a divine working which achieves its purpose without independent human consent, a grace which causes a person's assent and cooperation, an operative grace' he still insists that Augustine 'evinces the same concern to preserve human autonomy and freedom'.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Ibid. 38.

In arguing this Burns makes much of the passage in the second letter (1. 2. 13) in which Augustine describes God as calling humankind *congruenter*—in a way fitted and designed to call forth their response. Burns describes this as a 'congruent vocation' or a 'persuasive call', since although it determines a person's consent it leaves their autonomous will intact. He writes that 'the persuasive call to believe moves the will by giving knowledge'. Like interior illumination and the law, it is 'effective in gaining the consent of the will, but all three are external to it, located in the intellect'.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Ibid. 44.

What Burns is effectively describing is the Augustine of the mid-390s, the Augustine we found in the *Expositio propositionum*, but he will not allow that this Augustine is unrecognizable as either the Augustine of the early works or, indeed, the Augustine of *Ad Simplicianum*. He presents us with a Pelagian Augustine, one who defended the role of knowledge, the law, and the intellect, as sufficient to motivate the free will of human beings, rather than the Augustine we encounter everywhere but the mid-390s: the Augustine who was utterly convinced that the will is incapable of any action, least of all the choice of faith, without grace; the Augustine who had fought for free will but who had been conquered by the grace of God.

The crux of Burns' interpretation of *Ad Simplicianum*, then, is the idea of 'operative grace'—a grace which operates through what he describes as 'environmental' means, persuasively calling man in a way which will elicit or effect the desired response in his (still) free will, which is subsequently strengthened by the work of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ He writes, 'Through this series of environmental graces, God moves a person to overcome curiosity, reject libido and abandon pride ... although charity influences the spirit directly rather than environmentally, it does not introduce a new orientation or decision into the human will. The Holy Spirit strengthens a person in a free decision which he has already made,' *ibid.* 50.

It hangs on the theory which, as we saw in Ch. 5, Augustine rehearsed towards the middle of the second letter in an attempt to solve the question of why Esau was abandoned by God: he was not called in a congruous way and therefore could not respond in faith. In fact, the idea of 'congruent grace' is no more, and no less, than a theory, for it does not really provide a satisfactory solution to Augustine's dilemma, it is at odds with Romans 9, and having rehearsed it here, Augustine does not

mention it again in this work.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Marafioti 1987; Katayanagi 1990 (for a thorough critique of Burns' theories in this respect). Burns (1980: 155) is only able to defend it by talking about a 'prior good disposition' in the one who is called, but this is clearly not what Augustine has in mind.

What he has to say about the working of grace elsewhere in the same letter is, in fact, directly opposed to Burns' interpretation: Augustine suggests that God effects the choice of the will not only by calling it or subsequently helping it, but by actually working within it to bring about its assent. In Ch. 5 we examined numerous passages, throughout the early works, which illustrate the inward operation of grace. Here, we have simply italicized the key phrases from *Ad Simplicianum*, which militate against Burns's interpretation:

[*Man*] *is moved to faith by some internal or external admonition ... by some secret admonition coming through visions of the mind or spirit, or by more open admonitions reaching him through the bodily sense.* (1. 2. 2)

So then 'it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy.' Does it mean that we cannot even will unless we are called, and that *our willing is of no avail unless God give us aid to perform it?* (1. 2. 10)

'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure' (Phil. 2: 12, 13). There he clearly shows that *the good will itself is wrought in us by the working of God ...* If God has mercy, we also will, *for the power to will is given with the mercy itself.* (1. 2. 12)

Who has it in his power to have such a motive present to his mind that his will shall be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? But who has it in his power to ensure that something that will delight him will turn up, or that he will take delight in what turns up? If those things delight us which serve our advancement towards God, *that is due not to our own assent (nutu) or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God and the grace which he bestows. He freely bestows upon us voluntary assent (nutus voluntatis), earnest effort, and the power to perform works of fervent charity. We are bidden to ask that we may receive, to seek that we may find, and to knock that it may be opened unto us. Is not our prayer sometimes tepid or rather cold? Does it not sometimes cease altogether, so that we are not even grieved to notice this condition in us? For if we are grieved that it should be so, that is already a prayer. What does this prove except that he who commands us to ask, seek and knock, himself gives us the will to obey?* 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy.' *We could neither will nor run unless he stirred us and put the motive-power in us (mouente atque excitante).* (1. 2. 21)

The interior action of grace upon the will which these passages suggest is one which Burns contends Augustine taught only after 418, when he finally abandoned the theory of a 'congruous vocation'.

Most scholars, however, argue that it was in 396 that Augustine's thought on the operation of divine grace was decisively and dramatically changed to

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comprehend not only God's external admonitions, call, and help, but also his inward working upon the will to effect a person's choice of faith, and that it is this which we see clearly stated for the first time in the passages we have just cited above. It has been our purpose throughout this book to demonstrate that, in fact, the conviction of fallen humanity's dependence upon divine grace in order to will or do the good, which these passages from *Ad Simplicianum* express, is a central feature of Augustine's thought from the very beginning. Whether such grace works externally or internally to motivate the will, as if the two were separable entities and operations, is probably a misleading and ultimately unhelpful way of posing the question, for the work of divine grace is never less than both. As we have seen, it is quite clear that, for Augustine, *everything* is strictly of grace: God is the Creator who gives existence and form to what was nothing; he sustains it through his natural providence; when it deforms and diminishes itself by turning away from him, he converts and reforms it towards himself—and this includes the will of the rational creature—by his voluntary providence. There is therefore no dividing line: God is Creator of the soul and the body; the life of the mind and the flesh; the One to whom external things witness and point, who is ultimately found as the inward life and source of the soul; the Triune Creator and the incarnate Mediator. As Augustine puts it in one of his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 'To relate all God's wonders is to reveal God's workings, not only in what is wrought visibly upon the body, but in his invisible and far more sublime and marvellous action in souls.'¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ *en. Ps. 9. 2.*

The distinction between natural providence and voluntary providence, which we outlined at the beginning of this chapter, does in fact seem to me to be a much more satisfactory way of talking about the operation of grace than the one normally conducted in terms of an inward/outward distinction. God's work is always both external and internal, but voluntary providence becomes much more important when he responds to the sin or fall of humanity, and must work through the will of rational creatures to restore order and unity to his creation. As we have now seen, Augustine maintained a doctrine of the Fall from the very beginning, and frequently suggests in these early texts that without divine aid human beings are incapable of knowing, willing, or doing the good. It is in this context that those texts in the early works which suggest what is described by scholars as a doctrine of inward, or 'infused' grace should be read: they are a part of God's providential operation within his rational creation. This is also the context in which we must read those early texts which speak of God operating upon the will, bringing about our willing within us, of grace assaulting and overcoming us, or of the inward inspiration of the Holy Spirit

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moving fallen human beings to love and to do the good. They are an expression of Augustine the convert's belief in humanity's total dependence upon grace: that 'it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy'.

Election

Having answered the question of Jacob and Esau in *Ad Simplicianum* by demonstrating both the solidarity of all human beings as a *massa peccati*, their complete dependence upon God for any good action, and that no one merits God's grace, but that some are saved by God's mercy while others justly suffer the consequences of their sin, Augustine is left, in the last chapter, to wonder at the mysteries of God's grace. He can only speculate as to why some are elected to salvation while others are not and realizes that his all too human criteria—greater ability, degree of sin, effective teaching, intelligence, degree of culture—are not only laughable but completely undermined by a God whose actions stand his inverted snobbery on its head: a God who 'has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong, and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise', who called fishermen rather than orators, inspires harlots and actors to sudden conversion and a life of virtue, takes Christianity's most fierce persecutor and turns him into its most marvellous preacher. This is not a world of carefully balanced merit and reward, but of universal debt and free and undeserved remission. The question is not why God saves some but not others, but why he saves anyone at all: 'Why then does He deal thus with this man and thus with that man? "O Man, who art thou?" If you do not have to pay what you owe, you have something to be grateful for. If you have to pay it you have no reason to complain. Only let us believe if we cannot grasp it, that he who made and fashioned the whole creation, spiritual and corporeal, disposes of all things by number, weight and measure. But his judgements are inscrutable and his ways past finding out.'

¹⁴²*Simpl.* 1. 2. 22.

Is this so very different from Augustine's earliest reflections on the work of divine providence which we considered at the beginning of this chapter? From the very beginning he viewed the world as one ordered by the divine Creator, who not only forms everything in measure, number, and weight, but in response to humanity's fall and weakness, reforms it and maintains it in existence by 'the temporal dispensation of divine providence', admonishing, judging, and saving according to his own purposes. That this involves the

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election of some but not others is clearly suggested in the *Cassiciacum* work where Augustine first tackles these issues: 'To have their minds immersed in darkness' he comments in *De ordine*, '... is the common lot of all the foolish and unlearned; but it is not in one and the same way that wisdom extends a helping hand to the sunken. There are some—believe me—who are called (*vocatur*) to rise high; others are let fall (*laxantur*) to the depths.'

¹⁴³*ord.* 1. 10. 29. Hombert 1996: 46 refers to 'these lines ... of *De ordine*, which demonstrate to what extent Augustine already had a clear understanding of the

gratuitous, and to some extent "elective"—or at least "personalized"—character of the divine graces which deliver man'.

As we have seen, Augustine uses Rom. 11: 33, 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!' to express his reaction to the unfathomable action of divine providence at the end of *Ad Simplicianum*. It is a verse he alludes to in this context as early as the *De moribus* (388), where he asks,

What can be more gracious and bountiful than divine providence, which, when man had fallen from its laws, and, in just retribution for his coveting mortal things, had brought forth a mortal offspring, still did not wholly abandon him? For in this most righteous government, *whose ways are strange and inscrutable*, there is, by means of unknown connections established in the creatures subject to it, both a severity of punishment and a mercifulness of salvation.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴*mor.* 1. 7. 12.

The same sentiments are also expressed in *De diuersis quaestionibus* 83 68. 6, in the mid-390s, in terms which clearly resonate with his description of the temporal dispensation of divine providence in *De uera religione* (390) and foreshadow the argument of the *Ad Simplicianum* (396): he writes in reference to God's calling of man,

Moreover, this calling which works through the opportune circumstances of history, whether this calling be in individual men or in peoples or in mankind itself, springs *from a decree both lofty and profound*. To this pertains the following passage: 'In the womb I have sanctified you' and 'Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated' although this was said before they were born.... Nevertheless one must hold to the following with an absolutely steadfast faith: God does not do anything unjustly, nor is there any nature which does not owe to God what it is.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵*diu. qu.* 83 68. 6.

The idea of election on the basis of God's unfathomable mercy, rather than any merit in fallen humanity, is an integral part of Augustine's understanding of the work of divine providence throughout the early works and not something that suddenly appears at the end of *Ad Simplicianum* in response to what he has concluded concerning the fates of Esau and Jacob: these twins are everyman for Augustine, and simply representative of the fallen humanity which he had always understood was saved only by the work of divine

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providence. Providence and election amount, as it were, to the same thing. That he entertained the idea that fallen human beings might somehow merit God's election in the mid-390s was part of the attempt to understand the work of divine providence which he had begun in *De ordine* and developed on a world-historical scale in *De vera religione*: an attempt to fathom what he had always held was unfathomable and to scrutinize what he was ultimately forced to confirm was indeed, as he had always known, inscrutable.

Conclusion: A Proto-Anti-Pelagian

Augustine: Believe in God who helps us.

Reason: Yes, believe firmly, that that is itself in our power.

*Augustine: He is Himself our power.*¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶*sol. 2. 1. 1.* The word used is *potestas*.

We have seen that in various ways scholars have been all too keen to make the Augustine of the early works appear more Pelagian than Pelagius himself: they have failed to identify anything resembling his later doctrine of the Fall and original sin; they have understood his attack on Manichaean determinism as a defence of human autonomy grounded in a classical ideal of perfection; they have argued that when he speaks of grace he is referring simply to its external operation; that he understood Christ's role as purely pedagogical, not salvific; that divine *admonitio*, including the work of the Holy Spirit, is merely external and didactic rather than internal and therapeutic. Looking back on the early works from the vantage point of the later Pelagian controversy scholars have tended to reduce them to a caricature, which provides a sharp and satisfying contrast with his later views, and which dramatically demonstrates just how far he has advanced from philosophical, classical ideals and a late-antique mindset, to a distinctive and radical interpretation of Christianity.

Whilst Augustine's early attack on Manichaean determinism did indeed lead to conflicting tensions in his work, seen most especially in his reflections on Romans in the mid-390s, where he investigated just how far human autonomy and free will could be upheld, we saw in Ch. 5 that he was ultimately forced to agree with Paul, and to concede what he had long known from his own experience: that the human will is totally helpless and unable to know, will, or do the good without divine grace. As we saw in Ch. 4 this conviction was one he had held from the very beginning in elaborating a

theology based upon belief in *creatio ex nihilo* : against Manichaeism he argued for the radical ontological divide which separates the omnipotent, transcendent Creator and the creation which he draws from nothing and which is therefore wholly contingent and dependent upon him. In the second part of this book we have further argued that Augustine did indeed propound a doctrine of the Fall, original sin, and of human solidarity in Adam in his early works (Ch. 6); that he never espoused an ideal of perfection or human autonomy, but that his understanding of the difficulty and ignorance which characterize a human being's experience of willing without grace was consistent and continuous from 386 to 396 (Ch. 7); that he always maintained that grace operates both externally and internally, in order to save human beings, by inspiring their delight and love (Ch. 8).

In arguing that, for the early Augustine, everything is of grace and that he was therefore fundamentally opposed to the thought which Pelagianism represents, well before he ever encountered it in Pelagius himself, we have, in fact, been taking Augustine at his word. We have seen that in his *Retractationes*, and later anti-Pelagian works such as the *De dono perseueratione*, he adamantly insists that in his early works he was, as it were, arguing against Pelagius in advance: 'observe how long before the Pelagian heresy had come into existence we spoke as though we were already speaking against them'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷*retr.* 1. 9. 6.

... '[I] was destroying the future Pelagian heresy, of which I was ignorant, by teaching of grace, whereby God sets us free from our evil errors and habits, without any preceding merit on our part'¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸*perseu.* 20. 52.

... '[and against Julian] I have always held from the beginning of my conversion ... that ... it is through mercy that we are made free by truth, and we confess that our good merits are but the gifts of God.'¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹*c. Jul.* 6. 12. 39. Fredriksen 1990: 228, along with the majority of scholars who locate a dramatic landslide in Augustine's thought in 396, is therefore prepared to locate 'the beginning' only in 396, rather than 386: 'Augustine's claim to have settled long ago the questions Julian now raised, especially concerning his exegesis of Paul, is substantially legitimate—providing we go back only as far as 396. His stance against "Pelagianism" was indeed a coherent development from positions he had taken earlier, but not until he had written the *Ad Simplicianum* and the *Confessions*.'

Our argument might therefore be said to constitute an enthusiastic acceptance of the invitation which Wetzel obviously feels it incumbent upon the serious scholar to decline, when he writes:

If we allow Augustine the prescience he claims for himself on the matter of grace, then we must grant that neither the pagan attempt to found happiness on virtue nor the Pelagian attempt to found virtue on freedom ever gained a foothold in his thought. Not only would this be a distortion of much of the argument in *De libero arbitrio*, especially in the first book, but it would encourage us to rewrite the history of grace in Augustine's thought as a story of small mistakes marked out along the route of a

fundamental, though sometimes unspoken, truth—that our power of self-determination must have its source in God rather than in ourselves. Augustine's *retractatio* invites us to purge the demons from the inner evolution of his theology by recasting them as the enemies of grace, who have forever stood outside the precincts of truth. This is one invitation, I think, we would do well to decline.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Wetzel 1992: 123.

In accepting this irresistible invitation we have indeed found ourselves arguing precisely what Wetzel evidently finds it quite impossible to contemplate: that the ideal of perfection, and belief in the freedom of the will, never did gain a foothold in Augustine's thought and that book 1 of *De libero arbitrio*, read in the context of the work as a whole, provides solid and irrefutable evidence of precisely this; that the history of grace in Augustine's thought should, and indeed can, be rewritten as a continuous story of fallen human beings' incapacity and their complete and utter dependence upon God's grace. In doing so we have hopefully at least begun the process of purging the many demons we have found lurking, not so much in the evolution of Augustine's thought itself as in scholarly interpretation of that evolution. The invitation which Augustine's own judgement of his early works offers is one that this book has argued is genuine, and which it would be churlish to refuse!

In fact, not all scholars have declined and given their apologies: there is a small, but weighty, consensus that Augustine's anti-Pelagianism was already an essential and intrinsic part of his thought well before he was ever provoked to argue it explicitly against the Pelagians themselves. Some of the greatest Augustinian scholars of our time have argued precisely this: Solignac writes on Augustine's confrontation with the Pelagians: '[He] did nothing but confront them with a theory which was already formed in his mind'¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Solignac 1988: 846.

Hombert observes:

If we were to describe Augustine's doctrine of grace before the Pelagian controversy, we would willingly say that it amounted to a *serene possession* of a doctrine which already included the essential themes which would be developed later on. There is nothing surprising about this, for the *Ad Simplicianum* and the *Confessiones* represented for Augustine the opportunity to undertake a personal synthesis, which had been prepared long before, and which henceforth constituted a firm and ever present foundation of this thought.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Hombert 1998: 244.

Gilson affirms that 'Saint Augustine had fixed his major ideas from the moment of his conversion, even—we believe—on the subject of grace.'¹⁵³

¹⁵³ 'Saint Augustin a fixé ses idées maîtresses dès sa conversion, même, croyons nous, en ce qui concerne la grâtace', Gilson 1929: 310.

Asking, on the other hand, why some of the themes and ideas which surfaced during the Pelagian controversy are *not* mentioned beforehand,

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even if we can confidently suppose they were in Augustine's mind, Hombert makes the eminently sensible and straightforward suggestion that it was simply because the opportunity to expound them did not present itself. He writes:

Augustine was above all a pastor, that is to say, a man whose words and writing responded to the pressures of the moment, to requests which were made to him, to the needs of the faithful, to events taking place, or to the demands of the liturgy. The genius of Augustine the pastor is that of a living pragmatism, alive to events, responsive to circumstances. If Augustine spoke of grace, it was because he experienced it. It is also because Scripture led him to speak of it. But it is perhaps above all because he encountered Caelestius, Pelagius and Julian, who contested it. ... No, Augustine did not say everything there was to say before 412, but already, and for a long time before, he had understood it, and he says this to the faithful'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 244-5.

In this book we have investigated the evidence for Augustine's long-held belief in divine grace, evidenced in his account of his own experience, in explicit statements and arguments, and in the tensions and difficulties posed by Scripture (especially Rom. 9). We have seen that his reflections on grace—or more precisely his complete abandonment to grace—emerged most forcefully precisely in the pressing pastoral context which Hombert so vividly describes: in Augustine's comments face to face with his congregation in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*; in his consideration of free will against the Manichees; in his exegesis of Romans in response to Simplicianus' request. In none of these contexts is his emphasis on fallen humanity's complete dependence upon divine grace simply a case of setting forth an article of faith for the edification of the faithful, rather it emerges in the face of pressing need: the need to persuade his congregation that any claim to merit would be to precipitate themselves into the abyss of pride into which Adam first fell; the need to argue against the Manichees that human beings possessed free will *before* the Fall, and are justly punished for their misuse of it by the ignorance and difficulty which now render their wills impotent without God's grace; the need to justify the equity of God's election and to argue against Manichaean determinism in *Ad Simplicianum*. In fact, as the latter work cogently demonstrates, it is often pressing need that moves Augustine into a position where he is forced to acknowledge that reasoned argument or a rational defence must be abandoned before the grace of God: he attempted to argue the case for free will and human autonomy, but the grace of God conquered. In the end, the only answer was not a brilliant and convincing rational demonstration but a confession of faith in God's grace and in the unfathomable mysteries of his providence. Pushed by necessity, Augustine fell back, not on 'sparkling chains

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of argument', but upon his profound conviction of humanity's complete dependence on divine grace, a conviction which had been the foundation of his own experience and faith ever since his conversion in 386.

By examining the occasions on which Augustine was brought to address explicitly the relation between Christianity and philosophy, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, the nature of the Fall, the question of free will, and the operation of divine grace, we have attempted in this book to demonstrate that this firm 'conviction' is indeed the tacit cornerstone of the early Augustine's faith. But in a sense we have merely been examining the surface of his thought for those erratic and isolated observations which emerge from the depths of his most deeply held beliefs—what he referred to as 'the most intimate feeling of my mind'. It is not surprising, then, that the first, most striking revelation of what Hombert has described as Augustine's 'acute sense of grace' is found in the opening chapters of the *Soliloquia*—a dialogue with himself—where, in a manner highly redolent of the *Confessiones*, he attempts (albeit in terms of a well-defined literary genre) to lay bare his own overwhelming sense of need, articulated in a prayer punctuated by supplications for help and confessions of utter helplessness without divine grace: 'Give what you command and command what you will.'¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ For bibliography and an analysis of this prayer see Ch. 4.

It is clear that prayer, as an expression of humanity's need, and an acknowledgement of God's grace, was a central feature of his early Christian faith. He attributes his resolve to search for truth to a gift of God granted through the prayers of his mother,¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ *ord.* 2. 20. 52.

while his own prayers for God's help in this search punctuate the Cassiciacum dialogues.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ e.g. *Acad.* 2. 1. 1; *ord.* 1. 8. 22; 8. 15; 8. 23; 2. 19. 51; cf. *duab. an.* 6; *en. Ps.* 6. 5.

Prayer was an expression of his deeply felt dependence upon God's grace, but he was also aware that prayer itself was God's gift: 'There is brought about in prayer a turning of the heart to Him, who is ever ready to give, if we will but take what He has given.'¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ *s. Dom. mon.* 2. 3. 14.

One of the things that does reach the surface of Augustine's thought—or was pushed there by necessity—in the early works, is his firm conviction that fallen human beings have no merit of their own to boast of; that of themselves they deserve only condemnation, and that their only hope is in God's mercy and grace: they can 'glory' only in God.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ e.g. Ch. 5 for this teaching in the *en. Ps.*, expressed using 1 Cor. 1: 31; 4: 7, and Rom. 7: 24-5.

As he comments in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 'This is my glory, Lord my God, that forever I may confess to you that nothing I have derives from myself, but that all my good is from You, who are God, all in all.'¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ *en. Ps.* 29. 13; cf. 5. 17.

In our unworthiness, he observes, we should tremble to

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call God 'Father', who, by a wholly unmerited grace, has called us to be
'fellow heirs with Christ and to attain to the adoption of sons'¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹*s. Dom. mon.* 2. 4. 16.

indeed, we are like the Prodigal Son: 'There was nothing in our preceding merits', Augustine comments, 'that would earn anything but condemnation. But He, not because of our own justice, but in accordance with His own mercy, saved us. ... This is the 'Glory of God' ... this glory we do not deserve. The younger son ... acknowledges this unworthiness ... but only when constrained by want. And because through that glory of God we have been made what we were not worthy to be, he says to his father: "I am not worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15: 21).'¹⁶²

¹⁶²*en. Ps.* 18. 2-3.

There are also a number of passages in the early works in which Augustine obviously feels impelled to stress the fact that *all* is of grace—both God's call *and* our response; that every admonition, every movement towards grace originates in God, is guided by God, and is brought about by God. They are passages of urgent and insistent admonition which witness to his acute awareness of the ever-present temptation of pride, both in his opponents, the Manichees, and in the members of his own congregation—a pride which would immediately precipitate them even further into the abyss which already separates them from God. On the subject of assisting other people towards God, in *De quantitate animae*, for example, he urges that, 'This task is to be undertaken with the conviction that its successful issue is to be attributed to God acting through us. Let us not appropriate anything to ourselves, deceived by the desire for vainglory, for by this one vice we are brought down from the heights and sunk in the lowest depths.'¹⁶³

¹⁶³*quant.* 34. 78.

In *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, in a passage closely redolent of his famous avowal of the omnipresent operation of divine grace in *Confessiones* 10. 27, he insists that 'even our good works should be attributed to Him, who calls, who commands, who shows the way of truth, who invites us to will, who supplies the power to fulfil what He commands'.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴*Gn. adu. Man.* 1. 22. 34.

He expresses the same sentiments in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, when he describes how God's unmerited grace calls us, justifies us, and glorifies us, and comments, 'For God's good will goes before our good will to call sinners to repentance.'¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵*en. Ps.* 5. 17.

Elsewhere, as we have just seen above, this insistent, omnipresent operation of divine grace, moving human beings to realize their complete and utter

dependence upon it, is described in terms of the gift of God's love in the Holy Spirit, which is shed abroad in our hearts, by which we are conformed and configured to God,¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶*mor.* 1. 13. 22-3.

and led to the Son, by whom the Father himself is known:¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 1. 17. 31.

'it is love that asks, love that seeks, love that

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knocks, love that reveals, love, too, that gives continuance in what is revealed'.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸*mor.* 1. 17. 30.

Assaulted by divine grace on every side human beings can only abjectly submit to it, acknowledge their defeat, and humble themselves by admitting their complete dependence upon it—only so, Augustine emphasizes, will they attain freedom: 'Do not seek to be your own and under your own jurisdiction,' he writes, 'but profess yourself the servant of the most clement Lord whom it is most advantageous to serve. He will not cease to lift you up to Himself, and will permit nothing to happen to you that will not profit you'.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹*sol.* 1. 15. 30.

'He whom it is most useful of all to serve, and to delight in whose service is the only perfect freedom, frees from all things.'¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰*quant.* 34. 78.

As we saw in our analysis of *De libero arbitrio*, and in the many passages which describe God's gracious action in imagery more appropriate to a steamroller than a sympathetic teacher, there is often little room in Augustine's early doctrine of grace to talk about a 'synergy' between God and human beings: God rather overcomes the fallen will, bends it to his purpose, brings about our willing within us—ignoring our protestations and objections. The will can operate freely only when it is submissive to God: 'Pride seeks nothing but power, which has reference to facility in acting. But power is attained only by the perfect soul which is submissive to God and which with great love turns towards His kingdom.'¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹*uera rel.* 101.

Even the love and delight by which a person turns to God, and attains freedom and 'facility in acting', is also, as we have seen, no other than God's gift of love in the Holy Spirit.

We thus see a thoroughly anti-Pelagian set of antitheses emerging as the structure of Augustine's early thought: he emphasizes authority and faith rather than reason; grace rather than the law; love rather than fear;¹⁷²

¹⁷² This is one we have not developed but it is forcefully argued in Pauline language in the *exp. Gal.*, e.g. 21; 41; 42; 44. 4.

the spirit rather than the letter;¹⁷³

¹⁷³ e.g. *Gn. adu. Man.*

humility rather than pride; dependence rather than autonomy; confession rather than presumption. These characteristically Augustinian antitheses are founded upon 'the most intimate feeling of [his] mind': his conviction of fallen humanity's total helplessness without divine grace. They distinguish his thought not only from 'Pelagianism', but also from Platonism, Stoicism, the Academics, the Manichees and Donatists—in short, from any system which did not have the fallenness and incapacity of humanity, and the humility of the incarnate God, at its heart. Augustine's early thought was not only fully Christian; it was also fully Augustinian. We may

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have to wait until the Pelagian controversy for this thought to crystallize and harden into firm doctrine, but, following the eruption of God's grace in 386, it runs throughout the early works like molten lava, consuming everything in its path with the fire of God's love, and holding everything within the gravity of his grace.

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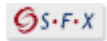
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