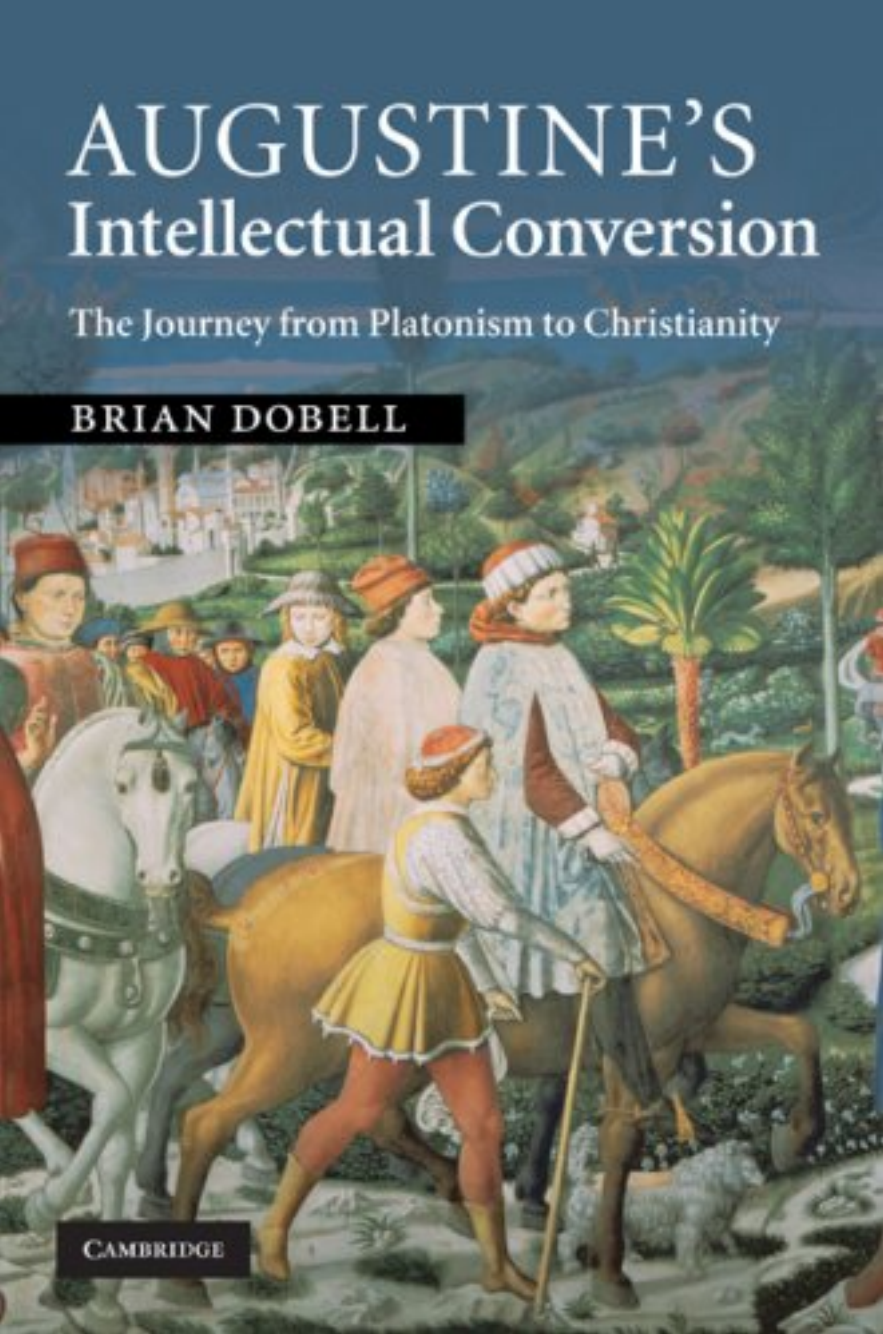
AUGUSTINE'S Intellectual Conversion

The Journey from Platonism to Christianity

BRIAN DOBELL



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AUGUSTINE'S INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

This book examines Augustine's intellectual conversion from Platonism to Christianity, as described at *Confessions* 7.9.13–7.21.27. It is widely assumed that this occurred in the summer of 386, shortly before Augustine's volitional conversion in the garden at Milan. Brian Dobell argues, however, that Augustine's intellectual conversion did not occur until the mid-390s, and develops this claim by comparing *Confessions* 7.9.13–7.21.27 with a number of important passages and themes from Augustine's early writings. He thus invites the reader to consider anew the problem of Augustine's conversion in 386: was it to Platonism or Christianity? His original and important study will be of interest to a wide range of readers in the history of philosophy and the history of theology.

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Preface

This book examines what is typically characterized as Augustine's 'intellectual conversion': his discovery of the difference between Platonism and Christianity, as described in the second half of *Confessions* 7. My primary aim is to show that *Confessions* 7.9.13–7.21.27 is best understood as a description of Augustine's intellectual development from 386 to *c.* 395. I therefore offer a close reading not only of this central section of the *Confessions* but also of a number of important passages and themes in Augustine's early writings. This reading will, I hope, be of value for general readers and specialists alike. For general readers it may serve as an introduction to Augustine's early thought and to the development of his philosophical and theological ideas until the *Confessions*. Specialists will find in it a challenge to the prevailing assumption that the second half of *Confessions* 7 is an account of Augustine's insights and experiences during the summer of 386, prior to the time of his conversion in the Milanese garden. My book invites the reader to consider afresh the unjustly maligned problem of Augustine's conversion in 386: was it to Platonism or to Christianity? I must confess that I am not entirely sure how to answer that question. But I am convinced, as against the legions of modern scholars who have taken their cue from Pierre Courcelle's *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (1950), that the question itself is a legitimate one. It is legitimate precisely because it is Augustine himself who poses the problem for his readers, as he recounts the story of his conversion in the *Confessions*. The present book is offered in support of this claim.

It is a great pleasure to recognize those who have inspired and encouraged me in the development of this book. My greatest academic debts are to the Faculty of the Collaborative Programme in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy at the University of Toronto. I owe a tremendous amount to Peter King and John Magee, without whom this book could not have been written, as well as to Deborah L. Black, Lloyd P. Gerson and Martin Pickavé, who have provided me with invaluable feedback at various stages

along the way. Having the benefit of such sage counsel has made me acutely aware that any shortcomings in this book can only be my own responsibility. I also appreciate the encouragement I have received from Gareth B. Matthews. Turning to the more distant past, I would like to thank Graeme Nicholson, who first stirred my interest in Augustine, as well as Martha Husain and Murray Miles for turning me on to the history of philosophy.

I am grateful to Hilary Gaskin at Cambridge University Press for her interest in the book, as well as Gillian Dadd, Joanna Garbutt, Christina Sarigiannidou and Hilary Scannell, all of whom provided expert assistance at various stages in the production process. I would also like to thank Roland J. Teske, S. J. and an anonymous reader for Cambridge University Press. I believe that this is a better book because of their helpful comments and criticism. I have also profited from a number of discussions with Michael Siebert, who read and commented upon an earlier version of this book.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my parents, Mark and Anita Dobell, who have been a constant source of support and encouragement.

I would like to dedicate this book to the many friends with whom I have been privileged to share the joys and travails of life in Lebanon.

Note on translations and references

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Augustine are my own, from the editions listed below (pp. xii–xvi). I have profited from consulting other translations, particularly F. J. Sheed's rendition of *Confessiones*: my debt to this translation will be especially apparent in some of the more poetic passages. References to the text of Augustine are given, where applicable, according to book, chapter and paragraph number. Where I reproduce the Latin text, I also cite the line number(s). Translations of other authors are noted where cited. While I have noted many of Augustine's scriptural quotations or allusions, I have made no effort to be comprehensive.

Chronological table of Augustine's writings

The argument of this book is rooted in chronological considerations. For this reason, I provide here a chronological table of the writings to which I make reference. Dates are approximate, and based upon O'Donnell (1992), vol. 1, pp. lxvi–lxix.[1]

386	*Contra Academicos*
	De beata vita
	De ordine
386–430	*Epistolae*
386/7	*Soliloquia*
387	*De immortalitate animae*
387–91?	*Disciplinarum libri*
	De grammatica (completed, not extant)
	De dialectica (incomplete, status uncertain)
	De rhetorica (incomplete, not extant)
	De musica (completed six books on rhythm, extant)
	De geometria (incomplete, not extant)
	De arithmetica (incomplete, not extant)
	De philosophia (incomplete, not extant)
387/8	*De quantitate animae*
387/8–91/5	*De libero arbitrio*
388	*De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*
388/90	*De Genesi contra Manichaeos*
388/96	*De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*
389/90	*De magistro*
390/1	*De vera religione*
391/2	*De utilitate credendi*
	De duabus animabus contra Manichaeos

[1] For literature on the chronology of Augustine's writings, see O'Donnell 1992, vol. 1, p. lxv, n. 132.

392	*Acta contra Fortunatum Manichaeum*
392/417	*Enarrationes in Psalmos*
392–430	*Sermones*
393	*De fide et symbolo*
393/4	*Contra Adimantum Manichaei discipulum*
393/6	*De sermone Domini in monte*
394	*Expositio quarumdam propositionum ex Epistola ad Romanos*
394/5	*Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*
	Expositio epistolae ad Galatas
396	*De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*
	Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti
	De agone christiano
	De doctrina christiana (completed in 427)
397/401	*Confessiones*
397/9	*Contra Faustum Manichaeum*
398	*De natura boni*
399/400–?	*De consensu evangelistarum*
399–422/6	*De Trinitate*
400/1	*De baptismo contra donatistas*
401/15	*De Genesi ad litteram*
404	*Contra Felicem Manichaeum*
406/7	*Tractatus in epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos*
406–21?	*In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus*
413–26/7	*De civitate Dei*
421/2	*Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*
422	*Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide et spe et caritate*
426/7	*De correptione et gratia*
	Retractationes
428	*De haeresibus*
428/9	*De praedestinatione sanctorum*
	De dono perseverantiae

Abbreviations and texts

EDITIONS

AT	*Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. C. Adam and P. Tannery, 11 vols. Paris: Vrin, 1974–83.
BA	*Bibliothèque Augustinienne: œuvres de saint Augustin*. Tourain: Desclée de Brouwer, 1947–.
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–.
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866–.
PL	Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*. Paris, 1841.

WORKS OF AUGUSTINE

Conf.	*Confessiones* (*Confessions*), ed. M. Skutella. Leipzig, 1934, repr. Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1969.
C. Acad.	*Contra Academicos* (*Against the Academics*), *CCSL* 29, ed. W. M. Green, 1970.
C. Adim.	*Contra Adimantum Manichaei discipulum* (*Against Adimantus*), *CSEL* 25.1, ed. J. Zycha. Milan: Vlricvs Hoeplivs, 1891.
C. ep. fund.	*Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti (Against the Basic Letter of the Manichaeans*), *CSEL* 25.1, ed. J. Zycha. Milan: Vlricvs Hoeplivs, 1891.
C. Faust.	*Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (*Against Faustus the Manichaean*), *CSEL* 25.1, ed. J. Zycha. Milan: Vlricvs Hoeplivs, 1891.

C. Felic.	*Contra Felicem Manichaeum* (*Against Felix the Manichaean*), *CSEL* 25.2, ed. J. Zycha. Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1892, repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1972.
C. Fort.	*Acta contra Fortunatum Manichaeum* (*Debate with Fortunatus the Manichaean*), *CSEL* 25.1, ed. J. Zycha. Milan: Vlricvs Hoeplivs, 1891.
C. Iul. imp. op.	*Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* (*Incomplete work Against Julian*), *CSEL* 85.1, 85.2, ed. E. Kalinka and M. Zelzer. Vienna: Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky, 1974, 2004.
De ag. Chr.	*De agone christiano* (*The Christian Struggle*), *CSEL* 41, ed. J. Zycha. Prague: F. Tempsky, 1900.
De bapt.	*De baptismo contra donatistas* (*On Baptism*), *CSEL* 51, ed. M. Petschenig. Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1908–10.
De beat. vit.	*De beata vita* (*The Blessed Life*), *CCSL* 29, ed. W. M. Green, 1970.
De civ. Dei	*De civitate Dei* (*The City of God*), *CCSL* 47, 48, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, 1955.
De cons. evang.	*De consensu evangelistarum* (*The Agreement of the Evangelists*), *CSEL* 43, ed. F. Weihrich. Vienna, Prague: F. Tempsky; Lipsiae: G. Freytag, 1904.
De corrept. et gratia	*De correptione et gratia* (*On Correction and Grace*), *PL* 44.
De div. q. 83	*De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (*Eighty-three Different Questions*), *CCSL* 44A, ed. A. Mutzenbecher, 1975.
De div. q. ad Simpl.	*De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* (*To Simplicianus, On Different Questions*), *CCSL* 44, ed. A. Mutzenbecher, 1970.
De doct. Christ.	*De doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*), *CCSL* 32, ed. J. Martin, 1962, repr. 1996.
De dono persev.	*De dono perseverantiae* (*On The Gift of Perseverance*), *PL* 45.

De duab. anim.	*De duabus animabus contra Manichaeos* (*On Two Souls Against the Manichaeans*), *CSEL* 25.1, ed. J. Zycha. Milan: Vlricvs Hoeplivs, 1891.
De fid. et sym.	*De fide et symbolo* (*On Faith and the Creed*), *CSEL* 41, ed. J. Zycha. Prague: F. Tempsky, 1900.
De Gen. ad litt.	*De Genesi ad litteram* (*On the Interpretation of Genesis to the Letter*), *BA* 48–9, ed. P. Agaësse and A. Solignac, 1972.
De Gen. c. Man.	*De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (*On Genesis, Against the Manichaeans*), *CSEL* 91, ed. D. Weber. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998.
De haer.	*De haeresibus* (*On Heresies*), *CCSL* 46, ed. R. Vander Plaetse and C. Beukers, 1969.
De immor. anim.	*De immortalitate animae* (*The Immortality of the Soul*), *CSEL* 89, ed. W. Hörmann. Vienna: Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky, 1986.
De lib. arb.	*De libero arbitrio* (*On Free Choice of the Will*), *CCSL* 29, ed. W. M. Green, 1970.
De mag.	*De magistro* (*On the Teacher*), *CCSL* 29, ed. K. D. Daur, 1970.
De mor. ecc. Cath.	*De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* (*On The Morals of the Catholic Church and the Morals of the Manichaeans*), *CSEL* 90, ed. J. B. Bauer. Vienna: Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky, 1992.
De mus.	*De musica* (*On Music*), ed. (book 6) Jacobsson, 2002 (see bibliography for publication details).
De nat. boni	*De natura boni* (*On the Nature of the Good*), *CSEL* 25.2, ed. J. Zycha. Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1892, repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1972.
De ord.	*De ordine* (*On Order*), *CCSL* 29, ed. W. M. Green, 1970.
De praed. sanct.	*De praedestinatione sanctorum* (*The Predestination of the Saints*), *PL* 44.

De quant. anim.	*De quantitate animae* (*The Magnitude of the Soul*), *CSEL* 89, ed. W. Hörmann. Vienna: Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky, 1986.
De serm. dom. in monte	*De sermone Domini in monte* (*The Sermon on the Mount*), *CCSL* 35, ed. A. Mutzenbecher, 1967.
De Trin.	*De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*), *CCSL* 50, 50A, ed. W. J. Mountain and F. Glorie, 1968, repr. 2001.
De util. cred.	*De utilitate credendi* (*The Usefulness of Believing*), *CSEL* 25.1, ed. J. Zycha. Milan: Vlricvs Hoeplivs, 1891.
De vera relig.	*De vera religione* (*On True Religion*), *CCSL* 32, ed. K. D. Daur, 1962, repr. 1996.
Ench.	*Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide et spe et caritate* (*Handbook for Laurentius on Faith, Hope and Love*), *CCSL* 46, ed. R. Vander. Plaetse and C. Beukers, 1969.
En. in Ps.	*Enarrationes in Psalmos* (*Expositions on the Psalms*), *CCSL* 38, 39, 40, ed. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipoint, 1956, 2nd edn 1990.
Ep.	*Epistolae* (*Letters*), *CSEL* 34, 44, 57, ed. A. Goldbacher. Prague: F. Tempsky; Lipsiae: G. Freytag, 1895–1923.
Exp. Gal.	*Expositio epistolae ad Galatas* (*Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians*), *CSEL* 84, ed. I. Divjak. Vienna: Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky, 1971.
Exp. prop.	*Expositio quarumdam propositionum ex Epistola ad Romanos* (*Commentary on Certain Passages from the Letter to the Romans*), *CSEL* 84, ed. I. Divjak. Vienna: Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky, 1971.
In Io. ev. tr.	*In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus* (*Tractates on the Gospel of John*), *CCSL* 36, ed. D. R. Willems, 1954.
Inch. exp.	*Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio* (*Unfinished Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*), *CSEL* 84, ed. I. Divjak. Vienna: Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky, 1971.

Retract.	*Retractationes* (*Retractations*), *CCSL* 57, ed. A. Mutzenbecher, 1984, repr. 2003.
Sec.	*Secundini Manichaei ad sanctum Augustinum epistola* (*The Letter of Secundinus the Manichaean to Saint Augustine*), *CSEL* 25.2, ed. J. Zycha. Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1892, repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1972.
Serm.	*Sermones* (*Sermons*), *PL* 38, 39.
Sol.	*Soliloquia* (*Soliloquies*), *CSEL* 89, ed. W. Hörmann. Vienna: Hoelder, Pichler, Tempsky, 1986.
Tract. in ep. Io	*Tractatus in epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos* (*Tractates on the First Epistle of John*), *PL* 35.

OTHER ANCIENT SOURCES

Acad.	*Academica* (Cicero)
Ad Luc. ep. mor.	*Ad Lucilium epistulae morales* (Seneca)
Ad Marc.	*Ad Marcellam* (Porphyry)
Adv. Prax.	*Adversus Praxean* (Tertullian)
Cat.	*Categoriae* (Aristotle)
Crat.	*Cratylus* (Plato)
Cur Deus homo	*Cur Deus homo* (Anselm)
De invent.	*De inventione* (Cicero)
De off.	*De officiis* (Cicero)
De vir. ill.	*De viris illustribus* (Jerome)
Enn.	*Enneads* (Plotinus)
Exp. ev. sec. Luc.	*Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* (Ambrose)
Inst.	*Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum* (Cassiodorus)
Men.	*Meno* (Plato)
Phaed.	*Phaedo* (Plato)
Phaedr.	*Phaedrus* (Plato)
Rep.	*Republic* (Plato)
Sent.	*Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes* (Porphyry)
Top.	*Topica* (Cicero)
Tusc. disp.	*Tusculanae disputationes* (Cicero)
Vit.	*Vita sancti Augustini episcopi* (Possidius)
Vit. soph.	*Vitae sophistarum* (Eunapius)

Vit. phil.	*Vitae philosophorum* (Diogenes Laertius)
Vit. Plot.	*Vita Plotini* (Porphyry)

BIBLICAL REFERENCES

Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Col.	Colossians
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Ecclus.	Ecclesiasticus
Eph.	Ephesians
Ex.	Exodus
Gal.	Galatians
Isa.	Isaiah
Mtt.	Matthew
Phil.	Philippians
Prov.	Proverbs
Ps.	Psalms
Rom.	Romans
1 Tim.	1 Timothy

Introduction: Augustine's conversion to Christianity

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) was not only concerned with his own self-promotion but also eminently endowed with the rhetorical skills to convey the desired image of himself. For evidence of this we need look no further than his *Confessions*,[1] in which the newly appointed bishop provides us with his version of events leading up to his conversion to Christianity in 386. While debates have arisen over the truth of the story – it has even been argued that Augustine was converted in 386 not to Christianity but to Neoplatonism[2] – the narrator's account has set the terms of the debate so completely that his readers have accepted his judgement that the defining moment of his life was his conversion in 386 (whether it was to Christianity or Neoplatonism or some mixture of the two). O'Donnell sounds a cautionary note here:

> It remains the assumption, in short, of all modern biographers – hostile, friendly, and merely attentive – that a "conversion" in Milan, on *or about* the time of 386, is the central and most powerful explanatory fact about Augustine's life. Augustine would be pleased that we agree with him so readily.
>
> But perhaps we should not. Perhaps Augustine, in telling this story about himself, had interests and purposes he could not avow. Perhaps this retrospective story, which first appears almost a decade later in something like its *Confessions* form, is creating a structure for the past that is not irrefutable.[3]

We would do well to heed O'Donnell's caution. It is true, of course, that the *Confessions* is a great boon to our understanding of Augustine. Moreover, I believe that the narrator is a great deal more accurate, and more literal, in his retelling of the events than is generally appreciated. But however accurate the detail, every story is told (and heard) from one perspective or another.

[1] But further evidence may be drawn from *Retractationes*, written near the end of his life, in which Augustine does us the service of arranging his voluminous corpus, correcting and (re)interpreting his writings where he sees fit.

[2] See below, p. 20.

[3] O'Donnell 2005b, p. 214.

And such is the force of the personality narrating the *Confessions* that, unless we are very much on our guard, his perspective will become ours as well. And this may keep us from an adequate understanding of Augustine. Again – the point bears repeating – this is certainly not to cast aspersions upon Augustine's honesty. It is only to say that there is more to Augustine than what he tells us about himself directly. And no one is more sensitive to this fact than the narrator of the *Confessions* himself, who recognizes that man is not entirely transparent even to himself, but only to God, his Creator.[4]

Now that we have signalled the danger of leaning too heavily upon the official story of Augustine's conversion, let us review the main elements of this story.[5]

EARLY LIFE

Aurelius Augustinus was a North African, probably of Berber stock, and spent the bulk of his life in what is today Algeria. He was born on 13 November[6] in 354 CE, in the town of Tagaste[7] (modern Souk Ahras, Algeria), which was situated in the north-eastern part of the Roman province of Numidia, near the modern Algerian-Tunisian border. His mother Monica was Christian while his father Patricius may have been pagan,[8] although he would be baptized late in life.[9] Augustine was raised with the religion of his mother,[10] and seems to have believed, to the best of his ability, in what was being instilled in him at this tender age. As he recalls in the *Confessions*, 'While still a boy I was hearing about an eternal life

[4] *Conf.* 10.5.7.

[5] *Confessions* is our primary source for details of Augustine's life prior to his conversion. All of his extant writings postdate his conversion. He did compose a two- or three-volume work *c.* 380, entitled 'On the beautiful and the fitting' (*De pulchro et apto*), but it is lost and had already been lost in Augustine's own lifetime (*Conf.* 4.13.20); cf. Solignac, *BA* 13, 1962, pp. 670–3.

[6] *De beat. vit.* 1.6. [7] *Vit.* 1.1.1.

[8] This is a common view, but has been challenged by Fredriksen 2008, p. 3 and p. 379, n. 1.

[9] *Conf.* 9.9.22.

[10] Cf. *C. Acad.* 2.2.5; *De duab. anim.* 1.1. Monica's religious background is bound up with that of the turbulent North African church of the fourth century, which was divided into Donatists and Caecilianists (or Catholics), who received the support of Rome. The theological faultline was the issue of the *traditores* (traitors), those clerics who had 'handed over' the Scriptures to be burned by the imperial authorities in times of persecution. The Donatists insisted that the sin of the *traditores* was so grave that the sacraments they administered were ineffective; the Caecilianists, on the other hand, insisted upon the absolute efficacy of the sacraments. Augustine's hometown of Tagaste had once been Donatist but was officially converted to Caecilianism, along with the rest of Donatist Africa, by imperial decree in the late 340s. The conflict would continue, however, and eventually Augustine himself would play an important role in promoting the Caecilianists, or what he would call the 'Catholic Church'. See O'Donnell 2005a, pp. 209–43.

promised to us through the humility of the Lord our God, who had come down to our pride … I then believed, along with my mother and the entire household, except my father.'[11] Following the example of those he observed praying to God, he diligently beseeched this great invisible being, as he imagined him, to spare him from beatings in school.[12]

At school Augustine studied classical literature, which had the effect of undermining his Christian morality. The lustful characters depicted so eloquently in the pagan myths were glorified by Augustine's teachers, who were more concerned to educate their pupils in grammar than in morality.[13] Augustine began to develop some vices of his own: he disobeyed his parents and teachers,[14] told 'countless lies', stole food from home, cheated at games and was furious when others did the same.[15] One night he and a band of hooligans stole a large quantity of pears from a tree, not because they wanted to eat the fruit, but simply because the action was prohibited.[16] Delighting in his sinful ways not only for their own sake but also for the praise and prestige that he received from such acts, Augustine felt such shame at participating less in wickedness than his peers that he even fabricated stories of his vile doings, fearing to be regarded as more innocent and chaste than the others.[17] (There may be a subtext here, as O'Meara has pointed out, which is that the boy Augustine was not really as bad as the narrator of the *Confessions* makes him sound, for he actually 'had to make an effort to keep up with his companions'.[18]) Augustine's parents did little to restrain their son.[19] Monica did counsel him to chastity – and Augustine derided her counsel as 'womanish' – but Patricius was only too pleased to see the signs of his son's physical maturity and to think of the grandchildren who could not be far off.[20]

Although he was a landowner of modest means, Patricius scraped together enough money to send Augustine to study in the nearby town of Madauros (modern Mdaourouch, Algeria) and then, in 371, to Carthage (near Tunis), the main centre of Roman Africa. The big city left its mark upon the seventeen-year-old, as the narrator of the *Confessions* vividly recalls: 'I came to Carthage [*Karthago*], where a cauldron [*sartago*] of shameful loves boiled all around me.'[21] Augustine was strongly attracted by sex, and took up residence with a certain woman (whom he never identifies) who would give birth to his only son, Adeodatus. Their common-law arrangement, which would last some fifteen years, was a perfectly normal

[11] *Conf.* 1.11.17. [12] *Conf.* 1.9.14. [13] *Conf.* 1.16.26–1.19.30. [14] *Conf.* 1.10.16.
[15] *Conf.* 1.19.30. [16] *Conf.* 2.4.9. [17] *Conf.* 2.3.7. [18] O'Meara 2001, p. 32.
[19] *Conf.* 2.3.8. [20] *Conf.* 2.3.6. [21] *Conf.* 3.1.1.

one in Roman society, but Augustine would later denigrate it as 'the bargain of a lustful love'.[22]

The year 373 was a pivotal one for Augustine. In that year the nineteen-year-old read Cicero's *Hortensius* – essentially an introduction to philosophy – in the ordinary course of his studies. This book, of which only fragments survive today, inflamed him with the desire to attain wisdom.[23] Unfortunately, his knowledge of the Greek language was minimal,[24] which effectively precluded him from any serious study of the classical philosophical tradition until he encountered some 'books of the Platonists' in Latin translation thirteen years later (we will examine this development shortly). Moroever, he could not be satisfied with a wisdom that was purely pagan, as he was convinced that wisdom must have something to do with 'the name of Christ' (the religion of his mother had instilled this much in him).[25] And so he turned to the Christian Scriptures, apparently the first time he had paid them any serious attention. Unfortunately, he was quickly repulsed by the simplicity of their style, which paled in comparison with Cicero's eloquence.[26] He turned next to the Manichaeans, who receive this unflattering introduction in the *Confessions*:

> I fell in with men blabbering arrogantly, excessively carnal and talkative men. The snares of the devil were in their mouths, and a bird-lime made from a mixture of the syllables of Your Name and of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Paraclete our Comforter, the Holy Spirit. These names did not leave their lips, but only as a sound and a noise of the tongue, while their heart was empty of the truth.[27]

This does not, of course, reflect Augustine's attitude to the Manichaeans in 373. Nevertheless, the passage does allow us to see why the nineteen-year-old would have been attracted to the sect: like Cicero, they spoke eloquently; and like Augustine's childhood religion, they had 'the name of Christ' (and of the Father and Holy Spirit).

MANICHAEISM

Manichaeism was a remarkably successful gnostic religion that began in Persia with the prophet Mani (216–*c.* 277) and had by Augustine's time reached the height of its influence in the Roman Empire (it would later extend east as far as China).[28] It was a dualistic religion, telling the story of a cosmic struggle between two opposed principles or 'kingdoms': Light and Darkness. The kingdom of Light was governed by God and the kingdom of

[22] *Conf.* 4.2.2. [23] *Conf.* 3.4.7–8. [24] Cf. Courcelle 1969, pp. 149–65.
[25] *Conf.* 3.4.8. [26] *Conf.* 3.5.9. [27] *Conf.* 3.6.10.
[28] On Manichaeism at the time of Augustine, see Van Oort *et al.* 2001; Decret 1995a; Lieu 1985.

Darkness by *Hyle* (Matter), or Satan, the 'Prince of Darkness'.[29] The two kingdoms were originally separate, but the kingdom of Light was later attacked by the kingdom of Darkness, and in the ensuing conflict particles of Light became imprisoned within the realm of Darkness. Manichaeans believed that this was the present condition of the universe. All that was in the universe, including humankind, was a mixture of Light and Darkness. The soul, an emanation from God, was presently trapped within the body, a product of the evil Darkness. Thus each person was a battleground in the struggle between Light and Darkness, or Good and Evil. The apostle Paul often refers to this struggle, as at Rom. 7:23: 'But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members.'[30] The struggle against Evil is a struggle against an alien entity (the body), for humans are essentially identified with their souls. Humans will only achieve salvation by separating themselves, through an ascetic lifestyle, from the particles of Darkness that have infiltrated their nature. (In practice, however, Manichaeans were divided into two classes: the 'elect', who were required to adopt lives of poverty, vegetarianism and chastity,[31] and the 'hearers', who were able to admire the ascetic life from a safe distance.)

The Father of Light had sent many messengers, including Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus and, finally, Mani (the 'seal of the prophets'), to teach this way of salvation. The Manichaeans regarded Jesus as the divine Son of God, but not as the Word made flesh in whom the Catholics believed. He was not 'born, according to the flesh, of the seed of David'.[32] Because 'flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor. 15:50),[33] Jesus instead had to be a 'spiritual Saviour'.[34] He took on the appearance (but not the reality) of a physical body, and his suffering and death were therefore only an appearance.[35] As for Mani, he was identified with the Paraclete promised by Jesus (John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7), whom the Catholics erroneously believed to have been sent at Pentecost (Acts 2).[36]

Modern scholars have debated the religious origin of Manichaeism: was it rooted in Christianity or did it spring from Persian (Zoroastrian) stock and subsequently take on a Christian veneer in order to facilitate its spread westward?[37] The nineteen-year-old Augustine, for his part, would have been

[29] *C. Faust.* 20.3, 21.1, 21.14. [30] Cf. *C. Fort.* 21.
[31] See, for example, *C. Faust.* 5.1. The extent to which these requirements were actually followed is, of course, another matter altogether (cf. *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 2.19.68–72).
[32] *C. Fort.* 19. [33] Cf. *C. Fort.* 19. [34] *Sec.* 4, p. 897, l.18: 'spiritalem secuti sumus saluatorem'.
[35] *C. Faust.* 29.1. [36] *C. ep. fund.* 6.7–9.10; *C. Faust.* 13.17; *C. Felic.* 1.9; *De haer.* 46.16.
[37] See Franzmann 2003, pp. 3–7, especially p. 7.

most surprised by the suggestion that Manichaeism was not Christian. He was drawn to it because it had 'the name of Christ', and even after he left the sect, he continued to believe that its appeal was restricted to those who have 'in some way already submitted to the name of Christ'.[38] The Manichaeans of Augustine's acquaintance regarded themselves as authentic Christians, followers of the New Testament alone, and vilified the Catholics as 'semi-Christians', almost Jews.[39] Because they continued to accept the authority of the Old Testament, the Catholics are likened to those who would foolishly pour two different substances into the same vessel, thinking that the one will complete the other, when the result is in fact the corruption of both.[40] For the Manichaeans, the teaching of Jesus is utterly opposed to that of Moses,[41] as is clearly evidenced by the blasphemous words of the latter: 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' (Deut. 21:23).[42] This shows that the New Testament must not be mixed with the Old, just as 'no one sews a new cloth onto an old garment, otherwise the split becomes worse' (Matt. 9:16).[43] In worshipping the God of the Hebrews, the Catholic Church is like a bride who is faithless to her bridegroom, Christ, and desires the favours of an inferior lover.[44]

The Catholics believed that the Old Testament must be retained because it prophesied the coming of Christ. But the leading Manichaean teacher of Augustine's time – Faustus of Milevis (modern Mila, Algeria) – said that he could find no such prophecies, and that, even if they were there, they must be of interest only for the Jews and not for those (like himself) who had converted to Christianity from paganism.[45] Faustus also rejected the Old Testament on moral grounds, seeing much that was objectionable in the lives of the patriarchs and prophets. He catalogued the following offences: Abraham slept with a mistress, and twice gave his wife to foreign kings for their gratification, saying that she was his sister; Lot committed incest with his two daughters; Isaac did the same as his father Abraham, calling his wife Rebecca his sister; Jacob's four wives fought with each other for the right to sleep with him at night; Judah slept with his daughter-in-law, who was disguised as a prostitute; David seduced the wife of his soldier Uriah, whom he then had killed in battle; Solomon had countless wives, concubines and princesses; Hosea married a prostitute, supposedly at the command of God; Moses committed murder, plundered Egypt, waged wars and committed

As we move into the early years of the twenty-first century, the current general consensus is that Manichaeism has its origin in one stream of early Jewish Christianity, no matter to what extent its further development was influenced by Iranian elements, and that the figure of Jesus is of central or at least great significance to the Manichaean system.

[38] *C. Faust.* 13.17. [39] *C. Faust.* 1.2. [40] *C. Faust.* 15.1. [41] *C. Faust.* 16.6. [42] *C. Faust.* 14.1. [43] *C. Faust.* 8.1. [44] *C. Faust.* 15.1. [45] *C. Faust.* 12.1; 13.1.

atrocities. Either these stories were forgeries, Faustus claimed, or the patriarchs really were sinners.[46] In either case the Old Testament should be rejected, certainly an attractive conclusion for the young Augustine, who was also troubled by what he found in the Hebrew Scriptures.[47]

The Manichaeans also rejected as spurious parts of the New Testament. They did not accept the Acts of the Apostles;[48] indeed, this is a book, says Augustine, that the Manichaeans 'dare not even name',[49] apparently because the coming of the Paraclete (whom the Manichaeans identify with Mani) is described in it. They did accept the other New Testament books, but saw many interpolations, errors and contradictions in them,[50] attributing all of this to unknown people who aimed to Judaize the Christian faith. Augustine grew sceptical of this claim while he was still a Manichaean,[51] and after he left the sect he insinuated, not without some justification, that the Manichaeans accepted passages as genuine simply because they supported their doctrine, and rejected passages as spurious simply because they did not.[52] He criticized his former co-religionists for divesting Scripture of all authority, and making each person's mind the sole judge of which passages were genuine, and which were not.[53]

This rational, critical approach to the study of the Scriptures had, however, been very attractive to Augustine as a nineteen-year-old. Indeed, it seems to have been precisely what led him to join the sect:

> You know, Honoratus, that we fell in with such men for no other reason than that they were claiming that, apart from frightful authority, by pure and simple reason, they would lead to God, and liberate from all error those who were willing to hear them. For what else compelled me, for nearly nine years, having spurned the religion that had been implanted in me from boyhood by my parents, to follow and hear those men diligently, except that they said that we are frightened by superstition, and that faith is imposed upon us before reason, while they urge no one to faith, unless the truth is first discussed and elucidated?[54]

The Manichaeans had offered Augustine a 'religion of reason', thereby setting themselves apart from the Catholics, who insisted upon the importance of faith. It proved to be an irresistible lure for the young Augustine. This proud and intelligent young man, who had no time for 'old wives' tales',[55] promptly rejected the religion of his mother and joined the Manichaeans, during his first stay in Carthage, at the age of nineteen.

[46] *C. Faust.* 22.5; cf. 32.4. [47] *Conf.* 3.7.13. [48] Decret 1995b, pp. 78–9; cf. *De util. cred.* 7; *Ep.* 237.2.
[49] *C. Faust.* 32.15. [50] *C. Faust.* 18.3; 33.3. [51] *Conf.* 5.11.21; cf. *De util. cred.* 7. [52] *C. Faust.* 22.15.
[53] *C. Faust.* 32.19. [54] *De util. cred.* 1.2. [55] *De util. cred.* 1.2.

Augustine was actively involved with the Manichaeans for nine years, until the age of twenty-eight. He accepted their explanation of evil, convinced that 'it was not we that sinned, but some other nature sinning in us'.[56] He debated and proselytized on behalf of the sect,[57] and dutifully brought food to the elect for their ritual use.[58] He remained all the while at the level of a hearer; as such, his access to the writings of Mani and his participation in worship would have been limited, as only the elect were fully initiated into the mysteries of the religion.[59] He was, however, troubled by some aspects of Manichaean doctrine, and hoped to receive further clarification.[60] Most significantly, he was perplexed by Mani's astronomical writings, which seemed to be confounded by the accurate predictions of 'the philosophers'.[61] Those Manichaeans with whom he discussed these difficulties were unable to provide him with solutions, but assured him that his questions would be answered by Faustus upon the arrival of this esteemed bishop in Carthage.[62] For almost nine years Augustine eagerly waited for this encounter, but when Faustus finally did arrive (in 382 or 383),[63] he proved unable to assuage Augustine's concerns about Manichaean cosmology. Indeed, he readily confessed his ignorance on such matters, impressing Augustine with his honesty but not his intellect.[64] Augustine grew increasingly disenchanted with the Manichaeans after this disappointing meeting, which marked the end of his active involvement with the sect. Their promise of a rational approach to the truth now seemed to be a siren song, and Augustine began to fear that his search for wisdom itself might end in failure.[65]

SCEPTICISM AND THE PREACHING OF AMBROSE

Perhaps as an expression of his disillusionment, Augustine became attracted at this time to the sceptical stance of the New Academy. This school, under the leadership of Carneades in the second century BCE, attacked the views of the Stoics. The Stoics were confident that it was possible for a human to attain knowledge of the world, and to live in accordance with that knowledge. The Academy rejected such 'dogmatism', however, arguing that it was impossible to attain knowledge, and that the *sapiens*, or wise man, should

[56] *Conf.* 5.10.18. [57] *De duab. anim.* 9.11; *C. ep. fund.* 3.3; *De dono persev.* 20.53.
[58] *Conf.* 4.1.1. [59] Cf. *C. Fort.* 3.
[60] Cf. *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 2.17.64; *De beat. vit.* 1.4, ll.86–7: 'Non adsentiebar sed putabam eos magnum aliquid tegere illis inuolucris, quod essent aliquando aperturi.'
[61] *Conf.* 5.3.3. On the identity of these 'philosophers', see O'Loughlin 1992 and Solignac 1958.
[62] *Conf.* 5.6.10. [63] That is, in Augustine's twenty-ninth year (*Conf.* 5.3.3).
[64] *Conf.* 5.7.12. [65] *Conf.* 5.3.3–5.7.13.

therefore withhold all assent in order to avoid error.[66] This claim resonated with Augustine, who now felt that he had been rash in his enthusiasm for Manichaeism and was determined not to repeat the mistake.

But Augustine could not be satisfied for long with a thoroughgoing scepticism. For him, wisdom had to involve 'the name of Christ', and this was not something he could find with the Academics, or with 'the philosophers' whose accurate astronomical predictions had eroded his confidence in Manichaean cosmology.[67] And so the disgruntled Manichaean hearer was now willing to reexamine the faith he had so quickly dismissed as a nineteen-year-old. There seemed little reason for optimism, however, as Augustine still felt that the Manichaean criticisms of Catholicism were decisive. He supposed, under the influence of the Manichaeans, that Catholics believed God to be a corporeal substance contained within a human form. This conception of God led him to regard the doctrine of the Word made flesh as utterly repugnant, for it seemed to entail evil, which at that time he identified with matter, somehow being a part of God's nature.[68] Moreover, he still did not think that the Manichaean criticisms of the Scriptures could be answered. Nevertheless, he did at least desire to discuss the difficulties afresh with some learned man free from the prejudices of the Manichaeans.[69]

Despite his increasing scepticism towards Manichaean doctrine, Augustine continued to network within the Manichaean community. In fact, he spent a considerable amount of time with Faustus when he was in Carthage. The two men found a common interest in literature, and read a number of books together (apparently the bishop's ignorance of cosmology was not too offputting for Augustine).[70] In 383, in search of better students than could be found at Carthage,[71] Augustine set sail for Rome, where he became violently ill and recovered in the house of a Manichaean hearer. He also established contacts with the Manichaean elect residing in that city.[72] Augustine's connections paid dividends the following year, as he managed to secure, with the assistance of some Manichaeans, a prestigious appointment as professor of rhetoric at Milan.[73]

Augustine arrived at Milan in the autumn of 384, outwardly successful but a deeply disillusioned man. He began attending the Catholic church, not because he expected to discover the truth there, but only to catch a

[66] *Conf.* 5.10.19; cf. 5.14.25. Augustine's knowledge of scepticism derived primarily from *Acad.* See Hagendahl 1967, pp. 498–510.
[67] *Conf.* 5.3.5. [68] *Conf.* 5.10.20. On Manichaean Christology, see Franzmann 2003.
[69] *Conf.* 5.11.21. [70] *Conf.* 5.7.13. [71] *Conf.* 5.8.14. [72] *Conf.* 5.10.18. [73] *Conf.* 5.13.23.

glimpse of the famous Ambrose and to judge the quality of his oratory. (He was impressed, but judged it inferior to that of Faustus.)[74] He may also have been under some pressure to attend because his mother was making arrangements for his marriage[75] (arrangements which necessitated a painful break-up with his long-time concubine).[76] But whatever his motivations, the content of Ambrose's sermons nevertheless affected Augustine, as he began to see that it was possible to mount a rational defence of the Catholic faith.[77] Augustine discovered that Catholics regarded God as spirit, and not as a corporeal substance confined to human form, as the Manichaeans had led him to suppose. At this point Augustine did not much understand what a spiritual substance was (he conceived of spirit as a more rarefied body, and God as an infinite being containing and penetrating his creation like an infinite sea containing and penetrating an immense but finite sponge);[78] nevertheless, he was impressed (and ashamed) to learn that Catholic beliefs were not what he had thought.[79] He was also impressed by Ambrose's use of the spirit/flesh distinction in scriptural exegesis. Basing himself upon 2 Cor. 3:6 ('The letter kills, but the spirit gives life'), Ambrose was able to respond to Manichaean objections to the Old Testament by explaining the spiritual meaning of passages that, if taken literally, would seem false.[80]

Augustine listened to all of this with great interest, but it was not enough for him. Because he had resolved to doubt all things, 'in the manner of the Academics', he could not accept the Catholic faith simply because it was possible for Ambrose to make a plausible case for its truth. In fact, what Ambrose had done for Augustine was only to show him that Manichaeism and Catholicism were equally defensible.[81] But Augustine was determined not to fall in with the Catholics as he had with the Manichaeans; he would not assent to the Catholic faith until it could be demonstrated with certainty.[82] In the meantime he resolved to make a clear break with the Manichaeans, since their views seemed less probable than those of 'the philosophers'. He did desire further instruction in the Catholic Church, however, and so he decided to become a catechumen.[83] (Of course, his impending marriage may also have had something to do with this decision.)

Augustine had little direct contact with Ambrose at this time. Ambrose did greet him warmly upon his arrival in Milan,[84] but Augustine found him too busy to hear his concerns at length.[85] Augustine encountered the bishop, for the most part, only as a congregant listening to his preaching.

[74] *Conf.* 5.13.23. [75] *Conf.* 6.13.23. [76] *Conf.* 6.15.25. [77] *Conf.* 5.14.24. [78] *Conf.* 7.5.7.
[79] *Conf.* 6.3.4; cf. *De beat. vit.* 1.4. [80] *Conf.* 6.4.6, 5.14.24. [81] *Conf.* 5.14.24. [82] *Conf.* 6.4.6.
[83] *Conf.* 5.14.25; cf. *De util. cred.* 8.20. [84] *Conf.* 5.13.23. [85] *Conf.* 6.3.3–4.

Meanwhile Augustine made the acquaintance of a group of intellectuals who were devoted to Platonic philosophy. They are not mentioned in the *Confessions*, but their names are recorded in Augustine's writings and correspondence from 386. There we find Augustine soliciting the opinion of a certain Hermogenianus regarding the conclusion of Augustine's newly completed treatment of Academic scepticism (*Against the Academics*),[86] and addressing his works *The Blessed Life* and *On Order* to Manlius Theodorus and Zenobius respectively.[87] These men seem to have served as intellectual mentors for Augustine during the time when he was pondering Ambrose's sermons, and was unable to receive assistance from the bishop himself. They had been discussing some of the same issues that Augustine was hearing about in Ambrose's sermons, such as the idea of spiritual reality:

> Often I have noticed in the words of our priest [i.e. Ambrose], and sometimes in yours [i.e. Manlius Theodorus], that, when considering God, nothing at all of the body should be thought, nor when considering the soul, for of all things that is the one that is nearest to God.[88]

It is not surprising that Ambrose and Theodorus could be found speaking with one voice, for they were inspired by a common source: the pagan philosopher Plotinus (d. 270), who was born in Egypt and wrote in Greek. Scholars today generally label Plotinus the founder of 'Neoplatonism', but for the intellectuals at Milan the movement was simply Platonism. These intellectuals saw a basic harmony between the wisdom of the pagan Platonists and the truth of Christianity. In this context Ambrose could draw freely upon Plotinus in his sermons in order to illuminate the truths of the Christian faith.[89] The respect went the other way as well: there was a 'certain Platonist', as Augustine was later to learn, who said that the opening verses of John's Gospel should be inscribed in gold and hung from the heights in every church.[90] In this milieu Augustine would have had few, if any, misgivings about relying upon pagan philosophers to aid him in his search for wisdom. This attitude stands in marked contrast to that of the nineteen-year-old Augustine, who was inflamed by Cicero's *Hortensius* but

[86] *Ep.* 1.3.
[87] *De ord.* 1.1.1, 1.2.4; *De beat. vit.* 1.1, 1.4. Augustine also wrote a letter to Zenobius at this time (*Ep.* 2) and elsewhere indicates that Theodorus is a man known to his mother Monica (*De ord.* 1.11.31).
[88] *De beat. vit.* 1.4.
[89] Cf. Courcelle 1950, pp. 93–132. Theodorus is described as a diligent student of Plotinus at *De beat. vit.* 1.4.
[90] *De civ. Dei* 10.29. Augustine would have learned this from Simplicianus in 386 (*Conf.* 8.2.3); see also below, p. 105.

promptly turned to the Manichaeans because they, unlike Cicero, had 'the name of Christ'.

Platonism permeated the intellectual circles of Milan in the mid-380s. Augustine was being initiated into this exciting new world, a world in which the doctrines of his boyhood religion could somehow converge with the most sophisticated pagan philosophy. It was a heady time, and Augustine's exuberance would soon reach fever pitch with his discovery of 'certain books of the Platonists'.

PLATONISM AND 'THE FALSITY OF PHOTINUS'

> You [i.e. God] brought for me, through a certain man (puffed up with an immense pride), certain books of the Platonists [*quosdam Platonicorum libros*] translated from Greek into Latin.[91]

Augustine's discovery of these books in the spring or early summer of 386 is quite literally at the centre of the *Confessions*.[92] He tells us that Marius Victorinus had made the translation,[93] but he does not identify the proud man through whom he obtained the books.[94] Nor does he say anything directly about their authors or contents. Augustine's silence on this matter has given rise to a considerable amount of scholarly debate, with these 'books of the Platonists' representing a Holy Grail of sorts for scholars.[95]

[91] *Conf.* 7.9.13; cf. *C. Acad.* 2.2.5; *De beat. vit.* 1.4.

[92] O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 413. [93] *Conf.* 8.2.3.

[94] Courcelle 1969, pp. 138–40 has argued that this is Manlius Theodorus, described in such unflattering terms here because Augustine had grown to disapprove of him. While plausible, there are some difficulties with this identification, on which see O'Meara 2001, p. 120. O'Meara believes that Porphyry is the individual in question (p. 150). Other candidates have also been suggested; for an overview of the matter, see O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, pp. 419–20.

[95] TeSelle 1970, pp. 43–55, provides a good overview of the problem and various positions. Scholars have investigated Augustine's Neoplatonic sources by tracing textual and doctrinal parallels. On the use and abuse of these methods, see Courcelle 1969, pp. 5ff. and O'Connell 1991, pp. 129–31. Augustine himself provides little information about his sources directly. At *De civ. Dei* 8.12, Augustine identifies four prominent Platonists: Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry and Apuleius, and at *De beat. vit.* 1.4, ll.98–9 he indicates that he had read Plotinus in 386 ('Lectis autem *Plotini* paucissimis libris', and cf. the analysis of Henry 1934, pp. 82–9, showing that the correct reading is *Plotini* and not *Platonis*). Because Augustine says *libri Platonicorum*, it is reasonable to suppose that Plotinus was not the sole author of these books, and one naturally looks to Porphyry, Plotinus' student and editor of the *Enneads*. However, Augustine does not mention Porphyry by name until *c.* 400 (*De cons. evang.* 1.15.23). Consideration must also be made for the fact that Augustine says *paucissimis libris* (although there is also disagreement over the significance of this expression: cf. O'Connell 1991, pp. 127–9). Although little can be known for sure about Augustine's readings in 386, it is commonly accepted that some writings of both Plotinus and Porphyry were involved. As for the specific writings in question, a number of possibilities have been suggested. TeSelle 1970, pp. 43–4, for example, judges that the inclusion of six treatises from Plotinus' *Enneads* (1.6, 3.2–3, 4.3–4, 5.1, 5.5, 6.4–5) is demonstrable, and the inclusion of another ten is either possible or probable. A variety of writings of Porphyry have also been suggested, most plausibly *De regressu animae* (Courcelle 1950, pp. 133–6 and 1969, p. 180),

Here it will be sufficient to note that many scholars believe that these books were composed of some writings of Plotinus as well as his student Porphyry (233–*c.* 309), who arranged his master's writings into six groups of nine, the *Enneads*. What is certainly clear is that the 'books of the Platonists' were penned by pagans rather than Christians. And yet Augustine found much in them that was similar to orthodox Christian doctrine. In fact, the author of the *Confessions* employs a series of scriptural quotations to summarize what he read in these books:

> In these books I read [*ibi legi*], though not in the same words, yet the same thing being shown with a variety of arguments, that 'in the beginning [*in principio*] was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God; the Word was in the beginning with God; all things were made by Him and without Him nothing was made that has been made; in Him was life and the life was the light of men, and the light shines in darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it' [John 1:1–5]. And I read that the soul of man, though 'it presents testimony concerning the light, is not itself the light', but the Word, God, 'is the true light that illuminates every man coming into this world, and that He was in this world and the world was made by Him, and the world did not recognize Him' [John 1:7–10] … Again I read in them that the Word, God, was 'born not of flesh or blood, nor from the will of man or the will of the flesh, but of God' [John 1:13] … And I discovered in these writings, stated differently and in many ways, that the Son 'is in the form of the Father, and He judged it not robbery to be equal with God' [Phil. 2:6], because He is the Self-same [*id ipsum*] by nature … And I read there that Your only begotten Son abides in immutable co-eternity with You, before all times and beyond all times, and that 'souls partake of His fullness' [John 1:16] in order that they may be blessed, and that they are renewed by participation in that wisdom that abides in itself in order that they may be wise … Then I also read there that 'the glory of Your incorruption was changed into idols and various images, into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man and of flying creatures, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things' [Rom. 1:23] … But I paid no heed to the idols of the Egyptians which they served from the gold that was Yours, those who have 'changed the truth of God into a lie and have worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator' [Rom. 1:25].[96]

These books, as Augustine read them, taught the natural equality and co-eternity of the Father and his only begotten Son (or Word of God), through whom all things had been created.[97] Interestingly, no mention is

Sententiae (Solignac 1957, pp. 455–65) and *Philosophy from Oracles* (O'Meara 1959 and 1969). An argument has even been made for *Against the Christians* (Beatrice 1989, pp. 258–61). Controversy on the composition of the *libri Platonicorum* appears likely to continue.

[96] *Conf.* 7.9.13–15.

[97] It is difficult, at least on the face of it, to see how Augustine could have discovered the doctrine of the substantial equality of the Father and the Son in Plotinus, since this philosopher subordinated Intellect (νοῦς) to the One (τὸ ἕν). On this problem, and for a suggestion as to how Augustine might

made of the Holy Spirit.[98] As for human souls, they receive enlightenment from the Son, and become wise through participation in wisdom, but they are distinct from the light and wisdom that is the Son. (These books also contained idolatry, the worship of the creature rather than the creator, but Augustine ignored that.) The effect of Augustine's discovery was nothing short of revolutionary. The 'books of the Platonists' taught him to seek wisdom by turning inward, and, under the influence of these books, Augustine would attempt at least two separate ascents of the soul to God.[99] These attempts were successful in that Augustine was able to catch a glimpse of the unchangeable light of God above his mind. However, their success was limited: Augustine was too weak to maintain the vision. And so he continued seeking a way to gain the strength for 'enjoying' (*fruendum*) God. But, as the narrator of the *Confessions* tells us in retrospect: 'I did not find the way until I embraced the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ' (1 Tim. 2:5).[100] Because Augustine had attempted to reach God without the assistance of the Mediator, his fleeting vision of God could not satisfy his desire to attain and hold wisdom. The Platonists had shown him wisdom as if from a distance, but they were unable to show him the way to this wisdom.

Augustine also employs a series of Scripture quotations to summarize what he did not read in the 'books of the Platonists'. We are specifically told that Augustine did not discover the doctrine of the Incarnation in these books:

> But I did not read in those books [*non ibi legi*] that 'He came unto His own, and they did not receive Him, but to all who received Him He gave power to be made the sons of God, for believing in His name' [John 1:11–12] … I did not read that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' [John 1:14] …. These books did not suppose that 'He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found as a man in habit, that He humbled himself, obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross; for which reason God exalted Him from the dead and gave Him a name that is above all names, that in the name of Jesus all those in heaven, on earth and under the earth should bow the knee, and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord in the glory of God the Father' [Phil. 2:7–11] … I did not read there that 'at the right time He died for

have understood Plotinus' principles in Trinitarian terms, see King 2005. By the time of *De lib. arb.* (387/8), however, Augustine seems to be aware of a view (probably that of Plotinus) according to which the principles are ordered hierarchically. See below, pp. 187–9.

[98] This omission may be suggestive of Porphyry; cf. *De civ. Dei* 10.23, ll.11–12: 'de Spiritu autem Sancto aut nihil aut non aperte aliquid dicit' and O'Meara 1959, pp. 161–2.

[99] *Conf.* 7.10.16, 7.17.23. These ascents will be the focus of part II.

[100] *Conf.* 7.18.24.

the ungodly' [Rom. 5:6], and that 'You did not spare Your only Son but gave Him up for us all.' [Rom. 8:32][101]

Augustine did not find that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. These books did not mention that the Son of God by nature became a man in habit, that he died and was resurrected, and that sinners who believe in the name of Jesus, the Son of God by nature, are empowered to become the sons of God. This does not mean that Augustine noted the absence of the Incarnation at the time when he first read these books. At the time, Augustine was thoroughly inspired by these 'Incarnation-less' books, and he attempted to ascend to God without the aid of the Mediator. It seems that the absence of the Incarnation – or at least the significance of its absence – became evident to Augustine only in retrospect. In fact, the narrator of the *Confessions* admits that his younger self had been very confused about Christology:

> But I held a different view. I thought of Christ my Lord as of a man of excellent wisdom, whom no other could possibly equal; especially because, having been miraculously born of a virgin – in order to provide an example of condemning temporal things for the sake of immortality – by divine care for us, he seemed to have merited so much authority as our teacher. But of the mystery contained in the Word made flesh, I had not the slightest idea. From what was reported in writing about him – that he ate and drank, slept, walked, was happy, was sad, conversed – I recognized this much: his flesh did not adhere to Your Word except with a human mind and soul. This anyone knows who knows the immutability of Your Word, which I knew at that time to the extent of my ability. In no way did I have any doubts about this. After all, to move the bodily limbs by the will at one time, and not to move them at another; to be affected by some feeling at one time, and to be unaffected at another; to express wisdom at one time, to be silent at another – all these things are characteristics of a mutable soul and mind. If these things that were written about Christ were false, then everything would be in danger of being a sham, and there would be no sound faith for humanity in these writings. And so because the things that are written are true, I acknowledged a complete man [*totum hominem*] in Christ: not the body of a man only, or an embodied soul without a mind, but a man himself; and I judged him to be preferred to others not as the person of Truth [*persona veritatis*] but because of a certain great excellence of his human nature and his more perfect participation in wisdom. Alypius, however, thought that Catholics believed that God took on flesh in such a way that there was nothing in Christ other than God and flesh. He did not realize that they attributed to him the soul and mind of a human. And since he was completely convinced that those things that had been recorded about Christ could have been done only by a living, rational creature, he moved rather slowly towards the Christian faith itself.

[101] *Conf.* 7.9.13–14.

But afterwards [*postea*], he discovered that this was the error of the Apollinarian heretics, and he was pleased with the Catholic faith and accepted it. But I admit that it was only some time later [*aliquanto posterius*] that I learned how, in that the Word was made flesh, Catholic truth is distinguished from the falsity of Photinus.[102]

The charges here are serious. At the time of his enthusiasm with the 'books of the Platonists', Augustine regarded Christ as a wise man of the most excellent wisdom, who wielded complete authority as our teacher, rather than as 'the person of Truth'. He considered Christ to have provided us, in the miracle of the virgin birth, with an example that immortality was to be attained by shunning temporal things. The narrator makes it abundantly clear that this understanding of Christ was inadequate, if not completely mistaken, as at that time, he says, 'I had not the slightest idea … of the mystery contained in the Word made flesh'. True, he had recognized from his reading of the Scriptures that the Word made flesh meant not just the conjunction of Word and flesh. He had recognized that Jesus Christ was a 'complete man' – body, soul and mind – and that this man was conjoined to the Word as an integral whole. (By contrast, the 'Apollinarian heretics' held that Christ was only God and flesh, a view that Alypius temporarily mistook for the Catholic position.[103]) This much, we are told, is known by anyone who knows the immutability of the Word. But this does not suffice for an adequate understanding of the Word made flesh. In fact, it is not even sufficient for distinguishing 'Catholic truth' from 'the falsity of Photinus'. And it was only 'some time later' that Augustine learned how to draw this distinction.

Of the historical Photinus (d. 376) relatively little is known.[104] He was a bishop of Sirmium, whose teachings were condemned several times (at Antioch in 344, Milan in 345 and 347 and Sirmium in 348) before he was deposed in 351. He returned to his see upon the accession of Julian the Apostate in 361, but was exiled again in 364, by Valentinian I. Apparently he wrote 'numerous volumes', most significantly *Against the Gentiles* and *To Valentinian*,[105] but none of his writings is extant. The nature of his heresy may, however, be gleaned from the testimony of other ancient writers.

[102] *Conf.* 7.19.25.

[103] Note that Alypius had not himself been Apollinarian; rather, he was objecting to what he thought were Apollinarian tendencies in Catholic teaching (cf. O'Connell 1967). Alypius accepted Catholicism after discovering that he had mistaken the Catholic teaching for Apollinarianism.

[104] On the life and doctrine of Photinus (including references to the ancient sources), see Hanson 1988, pp. 235–8; Zeiller 1967, pp. 259–70.

[105] *De vir. ill.* 107.

Photinus, like Marcellus before him, was an adoptionist. He taught that Christ was not the Son of God by nature, but rather a man who became divine because of his outstanding holiness. He did not exist prior to his miraculous birth from the womb of the virgin.

This is consistent with Augustine's description of Photinus' views. While the narrator of the *Confessions* is not explicit about what he means by 'the falsity of Photinus', many passages from Augustine's other writings make the point abundantly clear. In these writings, Augustine invokes Photinus as a figurehead for the heretical view that Jesus Christ is only a man and not also God.[106] It is not difficult to see how this applies to the Christology described at *Confessions* 7.19.25. Augustine had emphasized Christ as 'complete man', pre-eminent because of the 'great excellence of his human nature and his more perfect participation in wisdom' rather than as 'the person of Truth'. In this way, Augustine had effectively fallen into Photinian error, in the sense that he had held Jesus Christ to be only a wise man, and not also the eternal Word of God.[107] Thus Augustine's Christology had undergone a complete turnaround: as a Manichaean, Augustine had believed that Christ was divine and only appeared to become human, but now Augustine believed that Christ was nothing but a human. His views had swung from one heretical extreme to the other.

It is highly unlikely that Augustine's Photinianism derived from a direct knowledge of Photinus' writings. (In his work *On Heresies*, Augustine has to rely upon the earlier haeresiologies of Epiphanius and Philastrius for his information on Photinus.)[108] It is also unlikely that it derived from contact with Photinians living in Milan.[109] After all, Ambrose regularly denounced the Photinians by name in his sermons and writings,[110] and Augustine was quite familiar with this.[111] It would be most surprising, then, if Augustine were to be accepting Christological instruction from members of this sect. Courcelle has suggested that Augustine was aware of his Photinianism as incompatible with the Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation,[112] but this seems to me inconsistent with the testimony of *Confessions* 7. In this book, the narrator is painting a clear picture of his younger self as someone

[106] For a survey of texts, see Madec 1970, pp. 113–15.

[107] Madec 1970, p. 117 suggests that Augustine's Photinianism was the result of his attempt to reconcile the immutability of the Word with the full humanity of Christ: '[Augustin] cherche à comprendre comment ce Verbe a pu s'unir à l'homme Jésus; et il le fait dans un sens "adoptianiste" qu'il taxera plus tard de photinien.'

[108] *De haer*. 44–5; cf. *Ep*. 222. Augustine tells us that he saw Philastrius with Ambrose at Milan (*Ep*. 222.2).

[109] *Pace* Solignac, *BA* 13, 1962, p. 694.

[110] For a list of passages, see O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 469.

[111] Cf. *Ep*. 147.7.19; see below, p. 68.

[112] Courcelle 1963, p. 60.

who, while making mistakes on fundamental doctrinal matters, was only too willing to receive instruction, and correction, from the Catholic Church.[113] It is difficult to imagine such a person consciously rejecting Catholic teaching. It is most unlikely that Augustine was ever an avowed Photinian. Probably Augustine imbibed his Photinianism indirectly.

When exactly did Augustine clarify his Christological confusion and accept the Catholic teaching of the Word made flesh? *Confessions* 7.19.25 is none too helpful on this point; it says only that the clarification came 'afterwards' in the case of Alypius, and 'some time later' (than Alypius?) in the case of Augustine. However, we are given some important clues near the end of *Confessions* 7. There the narrator recalls his 'seizing upon' the Scriptures, especially the writings of St Paul, and discovering that the apostle expressed the same truth as did the Platonists but 'with praise of [God's] grace'. Augustine's discovery of grace was a monumental one; it was nothing less than a discovery of the path to salvation, the path to the 'land of peace' that the Platonists had glimpsed from afar but could not attain.[114] Grace was the dividing line between 'presumption' (*praesumptio*) and 'confession' (*confessio*), that is to say between those who 'see the goal but do not see the way' (i.e. the Platonists) and those who see 'the way leading to the country of blessedness, which we are meant not only to perceive but also to dwell in' (i.e. the Christians, living under grace).[115] Of course the crucial difference between Platonism and Christianity, as is clear from Augustine's summary of the 'books of the Platonists' at 7.9.13–14, is the Incarnation. Despite being in substantial agreement with the Christians on the matter of the relationship between the Father and the Son, the Platonists had failed to recognize the Incarnation. The Augustine described at 7.19.25 had also failed to recognize the Incarnation – or at least its significance – in so far as he had fallen into 'the falsity of Photinus'. If – as the narrator of the *Confessions* seems to be suggesting – it was Augustine's reading of St Paul that had led him to the incarnate Christ, then it seems quite likely that Augustine's Christological error would have been corrected through the same reading of the apostle.

CONVERSION

This takes us to the end of *Confessions* 7, at which point the story of Augustine's 'intellectual conversion' is complete. The intellectual conversion was, however, not sufficient for his conversion to Christianity itself

[113] Cf. *Conf.* 7.5.7. [114] *Conf.* 7.21.27. [115] *Conf.* 7.20.26; see below, pp. 102–3 and 208–9.

(arguably, it was not even necessary[116]). And so *Confessions* 8 tells the story of Augustine's 'volitional conversion'. For Augustine, the main obstacle to this conversion was his inability to commit to a celibate life. Although the Catholic Church did not require celibacy of its members, Augustine felt acutely that this must be a condition of his own conversion.[117] He had long regarded chastity as the ideal state, at least since his time with the Manichaeans, but he was unable to accept that life for himself. His conflicting impulses on this issue are memorably expressed in his famous prayer, compelling in its absurdity: 'Give me chastity and continence, but not yet!'[118] Although growing in his appreciation for the Christian faith while at Milan, Augustine was still held tight by the pleasures of the flesh. In fact, he became involved with another woman at this time, unable to bear the thought of waiting two years until his arranged marriage.[119]

After hearing from Simplicianus about the conversion of Marius Victorinus,[120] and from Ponticianus about the conversion of two of his acquaintances,[121] Augustine became increasingly agitated by his own inability to adopt the Christian life that he desired. An internal crisis ensued, and reached a head as Augustine sought the privacy of a garden in order to struggle with his conflicting impulses. He threw himself down under a fig tree, where he lay weeping until he suddenly heard a voice call out: 'take and read, take and read' (*tolle lege*, *tolle lege*). Interpreting this as a divine command, he opened his book of Scripture at random and found the following verse: 'Not in gluttony and drunkenness, not in chambering and incontinence, not in contention and envy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and give no thought to the flesh in its desires' (Rom. 13:13–14). Immediately Augustine's struggle ended; he says: 'it was as if a light of utter confidence poured into my heart, and all the darkness of doubt vanished away'.[122] Augustine thereupon adopted a life of celibacy, abandoned his prestigious career (citing health reasons),[123] and resolved to join the Catholic Church (he was baptized in the spring of 387).[124] The rest, as they say, is history. Augustine's experience in the Milanese garden would be celebrated as one of the watershed moments in the history of Christianity, perhaps surpassed in importance only by Paul's vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus.

[116] Indeed, if the argument I will present in this book is correct, then, if Augustine's intellectual conversion were necessary for his conversion to Christianity, he would not have converted to Christianity until *c.* 395, shortly before beginning the *Confessions*. See below, pp. 23ff.
[117] On the significance of celibacy for Augustine, see O'Donnell 1992, vol. III, pp. 7–10.
[118] *Conf.* 8.7.17. [119] *Conf.* 6.15.25. [120] *Conf.* 8.2.3ff.
[121] *Conf.* 8.6.13ff. [122] *Conf.* 8.12.29.
[123] *Conf.* 9.2.4, 9.5.13; cf. *De beat. vit.* 1.4; *C. Acad.* 1.1.3; *De ord.* 1.2.5. [124] *Conf.* 9.6.14.

THE PROBLEM OF AUGUSTINE'S CONVERSION

But is this really what happened? Was Augustine really converted to Christianity in 386? The historicity of the story has been challenged by some scholars, who have found the conversion story in the *Confessions* wanting when tested against the evidence of Augustine's early writings. They have been particularly interested in the Cassiciacum writings (386–7), which were composed shortly after Augustine resigned his teaching post. Augustine had then retired to a country estate owned by his colleague Verecundus,[125] where he stayed for several months, along with a rather odd assortment of individuals: his mother Monica, his friend Alypius, his brother Navigius, his promising young son Adeodatus, two students (Trygetius and Licentius) and two uneducated relatives (Lartidianus and Rusticus). While at Cassiciacum, Augustine and the members of his company discussed a variety of philosophical questions. Their discussions were recorded, and form the basis of Augustine's earliest extant writings: *Against the Academics*, *The Blessed Life*, *On Order* and *Soliloquies*. These writings present a significant challenge to anyone who wishes to take the conversion account in the *Confessions* seriously. Not only are these writings completely silent on the garden experience (as are all of Augustine's writings prior to the *Confessions*), but they also serve up generous portions of Platonic philosophy with barely a smattering of what is distinctively Christian. Even the narrator of the *Confessions* is uncomfortable with the Cassiciacum works, admitting that they still bear witness to 'the school of pride' (*superbiae schola*).[126]

Prosper Alfaric was so impressed by the Platonic character of the early writings that he boldly argued, in his *L'évolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin* (1918),[127] that it was actually to Neoplatonism rather than to Christianity that Augustine was converted in 386,[128] that he only later became a Christian,[129] and that the bishop writing the *Confessions* is playing fast and loose with the facts in an attempt to conceal what really happened in that fateful summer.[130] A number of scholars, beginning with Charles Boyer (1920) and effectively

[125] *Conf.* 9.3.5. [126] *Conf.* 9.4.7; cf. *Retract.* pr. 3.

[127] On critical scholarship before Alfaric, see O'Meara 1992a, p. 121 and O'Donnell 1992, vol. 1, p. xx, n. 6.

[128] Alfaric 1918, p. 399: 'Moralement comme intellectuellement c'est au Néoplatonisme qu'il s'est converti, plutôt qu'à l'Evangile.'

[129] Alfaric 1918, p. 381: 'Il inclinait … à se faire Chrétien. Mais il ne l'est devenu définitivement que parce qu'il a cru rester ainsi un pur Platonicien. Même dans la suite, il a tenu quelque temps à la doctrine de Plotin bien plus qu'au dogme catholique.'

[130] Alfaric 1918, p. 382: 'Aussi devons-nous considérer particulièrement l'évolution qui a suivi et nous la représenter autrement que lui-même ne l'a fait au cours des *Confessions*.'

ending with Pierre Courcelle (1950), subsequently arose to defend the sincerity of Augustine's conversion to Christianity in 386, and the essential truthfulness of the story narrated in the *Confessions*. Courcelle's argument was the most influential. In his landmark *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin*, Courcelle demonstrated that the intellectuals in Milan had forged a synthesis of Neoplatonism and Christianity. Ambrose's sermons, for example, were shot through with Plotinus, even in the form of extended citations.[131] Augustine would have been exposed to this 'Neoplatonic Christianity' in 386. Thus, we are assured, Alfaric was mistaken in claiming that Augustine was converted to Neoplatonism rather than to Christianity in 386. Alfaric's claim presupposes an anachronistic distinction between the two entities; in fact, Augustine would have been converted to both.

Courcelle is thus widely regarded as having effectively ended the debate sparked by Alfaric: 'Was the early Augustine a Neoplatonist or a Christian?'[132] (It should be noted, however, that Courcelle, while upholding the basic fact of Augustine's conversion in 386, does deny the historicity of the garden scene,[133] a point on which he has not been widely followed.)[134] But Courcelle left unresolved an important and delicate question: what was the precise character of Augustine's Christianity in 386? In particular, what exactly was the difference between Neoplatonism and Christianity for the new convert in 386? Of course, it is clear where the difference lies for the narrator of the *Confessions*: namely, the Incarnation. As we have seen, the Platonists 'see the goal but do not see the way', while the Christians see 'the way leading to the country of blessedness, which we are meant not only to perceive but also to dwell in'.[135] The goal, correctly identified by the Platonic books, is the stable enjoyment of God. The way, which is nowhere to be found in these books, is provided by the Word made flesh, the Mediator between God and men. According to the narrator of the *Confessions*, then, there is only one way to the blessed life, and it is not to be found with the Platonists. The Platonists

[131] Cf. Courcelle 1950, pp. 93–132.

[132] For a typical statement, see Madec 1989b, p. 16: 'On reconnaît communément à P. Courcelle le mérite d'avoir mis fin au "faux dilemma" de la conversion soit au néoplatonisme, soit au christianisme, à "l'antithèse christianisme-néoplatonisme"'; cf. Madec 1970, p. 79:

> Depuis la démonstration de P. Courcelle on ne discute plus guère l'authenticité de la conversion chrétienne d'Augustin en 386. Il s'agit maintenant de savoir comment le nouveau converti a combiné la philosophie platonicienne et le dogme chrétien dans l'intelligence de la foi qu'il a voulu élaborer…

> Cf. also Holte 1962, p. 85: 'Enfin Pierre Courcelle a mis radicalement fin à l'antithèse christianisme-néo-platonisme des études antérieures et l'a rejetée comme absolument erronée du point de vue purement historique.'

[133] Courcelle 1950, pp. 188–202. [134] But cf. Ferrari 1984, pp. 51–70.

[135] *Conf.* 7.20.26; see above, p. 18.

may catch a fleeting glimpse of God, but only the Christians are following a path that will take them to their destination.

But is this also how Augustine distinguished between Neoplatonism and Christianity at the time of his conversion in 386? Did he regard Christianity as the only path to the blessed life? Or did he believe, as some scholars have maintained, that Platonism provided a path to salvation through reason, independent of the authority of Christ?[136] This is an important question. If the 'converted' Augustine believed that reason was sufficient for salvation, and that faith in Christ was unnecessary, then he would certainly be a very different man from the one described at *Confessions* 7.21.27, the man whose reading of St Paul had enabled him to see the difference between the 'presumption' of the Platonists and the 'confession' of the Christians. This possibility must be taken seriously. Although the narrator of the *Confessions* has carefully separated the story of his intellectual conversion (book 7) from the story of his volitional conversion (book 8), the real order of events may not have been so neatly demarcated. Why must we suppose that Augustine's intricate ruminations upon the 'books of the Platonists', as recorded in the second half of *Confessions* 7, could only have happened in the several months between his discovery of these books and his conversion in the garden, and no later? Is it not possible that these reflections represent the development of Augustine's thinking over a longer period of time? Indeed, is it not possible that, at the time of his volitional conversion, Augustine had not yet 'learned how, in that the Word was made flesh, Catholic truth is distinguished from the falsity of Photinus'?[137]

Unlike his volitional conversion, which may be dated to August 386,[138] Augustine's intellectual conversion is assigned no specific date by the narrator of the *Confessions*. He does not tell us when his movement away from 'the falsity of Photinus' took place. However, scholars commonly suppose – typically without much, if any, argument – that Augustine's Photinian phase had run its course in 386, whether by the time of the garden scene[139] or Augustine's retreat to Cassiciacum.[140] Relatively few have

[136] On the question of the relationship between authority and reason in Augustine's early thought, see Van Fleteren 1973.

[137] *Conf.* 7.19.25.

[138] It happened with 'a few days remaining until the Vintage Vacation' (*Conf.* 9.2.2), which was between 23 August and 15 October (see O'Donnell 1992, vol. III, pp. 75–7).

[139] Cf. Mandouze 1968, p. 509, n. 4: 'Aussi bien faut-il tenir pour assuré que, au moment de cette scène fameuse, Augustin est débarrassé de son photinianisme tout autant qu'Alypius l'est de son apollinarisme.'

[140] Cf. DuRoy 1966, p. 92, n. 4 from p. 91: 'la Christologie dont temoignent ses écrits [i.e. les écrits de Cassiciacum] d'alors est tout à fait exempte de photinianisme'.

entertained, let alone accepted, the possibility that Augustine's earliest writings could have been written by a man who had not yet abandoned his Photinianism. Van Bavel recognizes that Augustine's early Christology can easily be interpreted in a heterodox sense, but thinks that it is essentially orthodox none the less.[141] Courcelle suggests that Augustine received anti-Photinian instruction from Ambrose as part of his baptismal catechism in the spring of 387,[142] and thinks that Simplicianus would, in any case, already have disabused Augustine of his Photinianism in 386.[143] O'Connell is one of the few scholars to argue that Augustine was still Photinian after 386; indeed, O'Connell finds much Photinianism in Augustine as late as 391.[144] While O'Connell's view has met with opposition[145] and occasional bewilderment,[146] I believe that there is much more to be said for it than has been appreciated.

In fact, I would go even further than O'Connell. In my view, which I will elaborate and defend in this book, it was not until *c.* 395 that Augustine learned how to distinguish between 'Catholic truth' and the 'falsity of Photinus'. This is a significant claim. If it is correct, then Augustine would not have been intellectually converted to Christianity (on the terms set by the narrator of the *Confessions*) until *c.* 395. For about ten years (386–*c.* 395), Augustine would have been following the Platonic path of presumption rather than the Christian path of confession.

This is not to say that Augustine was not a Christian between 386 and 395. My claim is simply that Augustine was not *intellectually* converted to Christianity (as described in *Confessions* 7) until *c.* 395. Of course, the former claim would follow from the latter if the *intellectual* conversion were necessary for Augustine's conversion to Christianity itself. But this is no part of my argument. Whether Augustine could be considered a Christian only after he got straight on Christology, or whether it was enough that he adopted a celibate life and was baptized into the Catholic Church, or whether something else was required – these questions deserve careful consideration. It is not my purpose, however, to resolve them in this book. My argument is fully compatible with the claim that Augustine

[141] Van Bavel 1954, pp. 5–12. [142] Courcelle 1950, pp. 213–14; cf. below, p. 68.

[143] Courcelle 1950, p. 173: 'Par l'exegèse du *Verbe fait chair*, Simplicien révéla à Augustin la doctrine catholique de la double nature du Christ; celui-ci s'aperçut alors avec stupeur qu'il avait, sans s'en doubter, partagé jusque-là les idées de l'hérétique Photin sur le Christ, homme parfait.' Cf. below, pp. 104–6.

[144] O'Connell 1968, pp. 258–78; cf. also König 1970, pp. 126–30.

[145] See the criticisms of Madec 1970, pp. 106–37.

[146] Cf. Mallard 1980, p. 86: 'Oddly O'Connell finds the passages at Cassiciacum continuing the same line of thought as Augustine's previous "Photinianism", described by him in *Confessions* VII, 19, 25 …'

converted to Christianity in August 386, long before the intellectual conversion. Moreover, it is fully compatible with the claim that Augustine believed in the Incarnation in August 386, and that his belief played an important role in his conversion. What I am unwilling to grant, however, is that the converted Augustine must have understood the Incarnation in such a way as to distinguish between 'Catholic truth' and 'the falsity of Photinus'. The 'that' and the 'how' of Augustine's conversion and acceptance of the Incarnation are two distinct issues. Consider the following passage, from the beginning of Mallard's article entitled 'The Incarnation in Augustine's conversion':

> Since the work of P. Courcelle … *the sincerity and reality of Augustine's conversion to Christianity (386) has no longer been really in question* … A critical hinge in Augustine's new-found commitment was the matter of the Incarnation, the Word-made-flesh. *One cannot imagine a genuine move into Christianity apart from an appropriate acceptance of this central doctrine and reality* … Augustine's admission that he held a 'Photinian' view of Christ's person as late as the spring or summer, 386 … has sharpened the interest in his avowal of the Incarnation just a few weeks later.[147] [my italics]

I have highlighted two of Mallard's claims, as follows: (a) that Augustine did convert to Christianity in 386 and (b) that Augustine's conversion to Christianity required an appropriate acceptance of the Incarnation. I am willing to grant both of these claims, provided that an 'appropriate acceptance' of the Incarnation is not understood in such a way as to rule out the possibility that Augustine had not yet recognized the distinction between 'Catholic truth' and 'the falsity of Photinus' in 386. (Should this be supposed impossible, say, because it is contended that Augustine could not have 'appropriately accepted' the Incarnation before he recognized this distinction,[148] then I would be unwilling to grant either that Augustine's conversion to Christianity required an 'appropriate acceptance' of the Incarnation, or that Augustine converted to Christianity in 386.) For his part Mallard correctly notes that the 'that' and the 'how' of Augustine's conversion are two distinct issues; granted the former, questions must still

[147] Mallard 1980, pp. 80–1.

[148] Some support for this view may be garnered from Augustine's judgement, at *Conf.* 7.19.25, that his early Christology was inadequate (see above, p. 16). However, one must be careful to distinguish between 'an appropriate acceptance' of the Incarnation for a convert, and 'an appropriate acceptance' of the Incarnation for, say, a bishop. Although the Christology described at *Conf.* 7.19.25 is inadequate – even entirely mistaken – for the bishop of Hippo, this does not mean that it is inadequate for the convert in 386 (even from the perspective of the bishop of Hippo). Put differently, the bishop of Hippo might recognize in his earlier self (of 386) a sincere convert to Christianity even if that earlier self was confused about Christology in the manner described at *Conf.* 7.19.25.

remain regarding 'how "philosophical" [Augustine's] reading of the Incarnation was, or of possible carry-overs from the Photinian outlook'.[149] But some scholars (Mallard cites O'Meara, Courcelle and Solignac) have nevertheless implied that Augustine had 'a fully Catholic, even Chalcedonian' view of the Incarnation. These scholars are unconcerned with how Augustine understood the Incarnation in 386 except to note that he was no longer Photinian.[150]

Confusing the 'that' and the 'how' of Augustine's acceptance of the Incarnation is highly problematic. This is so because, if regarded from anything like 'a fully Catholic, even Chalcedonian' perspective, it is evident that at *Confessions* 7.19.25 (where he has not yet learned how to distinguish 'Catholic truth' from 'the error of Photinus') Augustine does not have an appropriate acceptance of the Incarnation. And if this observation is coupled with the two claims I have highlighted from the beginning of Mallard's article, one could make the following argument:

1. Augustine converted to Christianity in August 386.
2. Augustine's conversion to Christianity required an appropriate acceptance of the Incarnation.
3. At *Confessions* 7.19.25 (where Augustine has not yet learned how to distinguish 'Catholic truth' from 'the error of Photinus'), Augustine does not yet have an appropriate acceptance of the Incarnation.

∴ By the time of his conversion in August 386, Augustine had learned how to distinguish 'Catholic truth' from 'the error of Photinus'.

But the evidence adduced in this book will, as I believe, show that the conclusion of this argument is highly implausible. If I am correct about this, then at least one of the three premises must be rejected. No one of them needs to be rejected in particular, but only the conjunction of the three.

One more disclaimer is in order before I begin (this is particularly important for those who may fear that I am raising the spectre of Alfaric): I am not arguing, and I certainly do not believe, that the narrator of the *Confessions* is lying to us when he describes the particulars of his conversion to Christianity. I emphatically reject the notion that he is trying to pull the wool over our eyes, making it seem as if he had clarified the distinction between the Catholic and Photinian Christologies at the time of his conversion in 386 when in fact he had done no such thing. Of course, he is highly selective in his presentation of such details as dates and times, and this may at times annoy his readers as the machinations of an obscurantist (witness, for example, the care with which he avoids identifying the authors

[149] Mallard 1980, p. 81. [150] Mallard 1980, pp. 81–2.

or contents of the 'books of the Platonists'). But this is no indication of duplicity. In fact, I believe that a careful reading of what Augustine does say at *Confessions* 7.19.25 (and in the latter half of book 7 more generally), as well as a comparison of all this with his early writings, will reveal a man whose narrative is a great deal more reliable than has been generally appreciated. This man will not come into view, however, if we cling to the standard interpretation of Augustine's intellectual conversion. According to this interpretation, *Confessions* 7.9.13ff. purports to be a play-by-play account of Augustine's intellectual development in the summer of 386. The problem with this interpretation is that it becomes very difficult to take the narrator seriously: there are simply too many anachronisms that begin appearing in the story. The best way of resolving this problem, in my view, is to regard the narrative as the story of Augustine's intellectual development from 386 to *c.* 395. This is the solution that I will be proposing in this book.

O'Connell, for his part, does not think that *Confessions* 7 is intended to be an historical account of Augustine's intellectual development:

> A massive tradition has built up around the loose assumption that Augustine is telling the "story" of the insights which occurred to him when he came fresh from reading those "books of the platonists" in May or June of A.D. 386 … My own persuasion is that the "story" theory of *Confessions* VII founders once its assumptions are tested against the progressive character of Augustine's early works: if we insist that Augustine is telling us the "story" of what occurred in Spring of A.D. 386, we shall quickly discover that he is lying to us![151]

O'Connell is too sympathetic a reader to suppose that the narrator of the *Confessions* is being dishonest. Hence, he takes the 'anachronisms' of *Confessions* 7 as an indication that the narrator's purpose is not to relate history; instead, the narrator is 'outlining a Weltanschauung, presenting a conceptual theory, or drawing a picture of how he imagines reality is structured'.[152] He rejects the 'story theory' because, as he claims, it would make Augustine a liar. But this assumes that if the narrative were relating actual events, then it would be relating events from 386. Notice, however, that we can accept both that the narrative is supposed to be historical and that Augustine is not a liar if we suppose that the narrative is not necessarily restricted to 386. Why not suppose that Augustine *is* relating historical events in *Confessions* 7, and that the events in question correspond to 'the progressive character of Augustine's early works'?

[151] O'Connell 1990, pp. 144–5. [152] O'Connell 1990, p. 145.

In my view, this is precisely what Augustine is doing at *Confessions* 7.9.13–7.21.27. I believe that these paragraphs are describing Augustine's intellectual development from 386 to *c.* 395. In this book I will present the evidence for this claim. My discussion will be divided into two parts, corresponding to two more or less distinct paths to salvation described in Augustine's early writings (386–*c.* 95), which may be called 'the way of authority' (for the many) and 'the way of reason' (for the few). The difference between the two paths may be summarized as follows: the way of authority requires one to imitate the example of the outstanding wise man, Jesus Christ, while the way of reason prescribes an education in the liberal disciplines. Neither way is necessary, and both ways are individually sufficient, for salvation. In part I I will argue that the way of authority involves Augustine's Photinian understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ (as described at *Confessions* 7.19.25), and that Augustine would not reject this Christology until *c.* 395. In part II, I will argue that the way of reason corresponds to the 'Platonic ascents' described at *Confessions* 7.10.16 and 7.17.23, that Augustine was developing this method of ascent from 386 to 391, and would not reject it until *c.* 395. I will conclude with a consideration of Augustine's early thought in light of the philosophy of Porphyry, whose views are presented and strongly condemned in Augustine's later works. I will suggest that the early Augustine has a great deal in common with Porphyry, much more than the later Augustine would care to admit. This complicates the question of just how (or even whether) the convert in the Milanese garden in 386 can be regarded as a convert to Christianity.

PART I

The way of authority and 'the falsity of Photinus'

CHAPTER I

The way of authority

In this chapter I will examine the person and work of Jesus Christ, as expressed in Augustine's early writings (386–91). In these writings Augustine regards Jesus Christ as a wise man who has been inwardly illuminated by the Virtue and Wisdom of God, enabling him to serve as an intermediary between the viciousness and foolishness of man and the Virtue and Wisdom of God. His authority is recognized through the numerous miracles of his life, from his virgin birth to his death and resurrection. These miracles are signs of intelligible realities that the fool is admonished to believe. They also provide examples of virtue, by the imitation of which the soul of the fool may be purified. In this way Jesus Christ provides the masses with a well-defined path to salvation, which may be called 'the way of authority'.

THE PARADOX OF LEARNING

In order to better appreciate the significance of the way of authority, it will be useful to situate our discussion within the context of Augustine's early theory of learning. Our specific point of departure will be Augustine's treatment of the paradox of learning. According to this paradox, first articulated in Plato's *Meno*,[1] learning is impossible. Inquiry into what is known is unnecessary, and inquiry into what is unknown is impossible, since one does not know what to look for. Thus, it seems that nothing can be learned. Plato attempts to resolve the paradox with his theory of recollection. This theory maintains that what appears to be learning is nothing other than a remembrance of knowledge that is already within us, having been impressed upon our souls in a pre-natal existence. In the *Phaedo* Plato indicates that the Forms are the source of this impressed knowledge.[2]

[1] *Men*. 80d–e. [2] *Phaed*. 75c–d.

Although Augustine probably knew the *Meno* only indirectly,[3] he takes the paradox of learning very seriously, as can be seen through a consideration of his philosophy of signs. Augustine distinguishes signs (*signa*) from things (*res*). The proper function of a sign is to point out, or signify (*significare*), a thing,[4] while a thing does not itself signify anything else. Some signs are natural (such as smoke, which signifies fire) and others are conventional (such as language).[5] While nothing is learned without signs, it is important to realize that the sign itself can teach us nothing.[6] Augustine says: 'When a sign is presented to me, if it finds me ignorant of the thing of which it is a sign, it cannot teach me anything; but if it finds me knowing the thing, what do I learn by means of the sign?'[7] The expected answer, of course, is nothing – signs simply cannot teach us anything. To illustrate the point, consider Augustine's example of a person who hears the following two claims: that a man was flying, and that wise men are superior to fools. This person will believe or disbelieve the first claim, but he will not have learned whether the claim itself is true. And while he will indeed know that the second claim is true, he will not have learned this by hearing the claim itself. Instead – and here we catch our first glimpse of Augustine's solution to the paradox – the person has learned this by looking to 'the inner light of truth'. In neither case, therefore, does the person hearing the words learn anything from them.[8] 'The inner light of truth' illuminates those things that are seen with the eye of the mind, just as the external light of the sun illuminates those things that are seen with the bodily eyes.[9] This image suggests that our knowledge derives from first-hand experience with the things themselves, and that such experience is dependent upon some third thing, the source of illumination.

What are the things that we know? Taking our cue from Augustine's discussion in *Against the Academics*, we may distinguish three objects of knowledge: logical truths (e.g. either there is one world or there is not; the number of worlds is either finite or infinite), mathematical truths (e.g. three times three is nine, the square of rational numbers must be true) and truths of immediate sensible experience (e.g. this looks white, this sounds pleasant, this smells good, this tastes sweet, this seems cold).[10] The criterion of truth

[3] Augustine was aware of Socrates' questioning of the slave boy in *Men.*, and the theory of recollection that this is intended to support (cf. *De Trin.* 12.15.24), from Cicero's *Tusc. disp.* (Courcelle 1969, p. 171).

[4] Cf. *De mag.* 4.9. [5] Cf. *De doct. Christ.* 2.1.2–2.2.3.

[6] Cf. Rist 1994, p. 32: 'words (and more generally signs) are a necessary but not sufficient condition of learning'.

[7] *De mag.* 10.33. [8] *De mag.* 12.40. [9] *De mag.* 11.38; cf. *Sol.* 1.6.12; *De div. q. 83* 46.2.

[10] *C. Acad.* 3.10.23–3.11.27; cf. Matthews 2001, p. 172.

is the kataleptic impression, that is, the appearance or presentation (φαντασία/*visum*) that (a) is derived from and in conformity with what is (*id quod est*) and (b) is not of the same form (*eiusdem modi*) as a false appearance, i.e. an appearance that is derived from what is not (*id quod non est*).[11] The three types of objects of knowledge are true because they cannot be confused with that which is false, that is to say, they are indubitable.

The function of signs is not to teach us about any of these true things, but to admonish us to look for them:

> The efficacy of words – and here I attribute to them their maximum value – consists simply in admonishing us to look for things. They do not show the things for us to know.[12]
>
> Concerning everything that we understand, we do not consult a speaker making sounds outside of us. Rather we consult truth that is within us, presiding over the mind itself, although we may have been admonished by words to make such consultation.[13]

'Admonition' (*admonitio*)[14] is for Augustine a semi-technical term, designating an exhortation to turn away from the external, sensible world and toward the internal, intelligible world.[15] Because the person to whom the admonition is directed is focused upon external things, the admonition itself must come from those very external things. Thus, we are admonished about truth through our senses, particularly the eyes and ears.[16] Augustine describes being admonished by natural signs, such as the sound of running water[17] and the fighting of chickens,[18] although the admonition more frequently comes from conventional signs. The words written in the 'books of the Platonists' (which are signs of signs) admonished Augustine to return to himself,[19] and Augustine's writings admonish the fool to pray to God.[20] Jesus Christ admonishes through his miracles[21] and his temporal sacraments.[22] As we will see, he is a particularly important source of admonition, as the salvation of the masses is dependent upon his deeds and teachings. But Augustine thinks that any sensible thing is capable of serving as a sign admonishing us to turn towards the intelligible. Every admonition offers us an occasion for learning from the inner teacher,[23] because all sensible experiences bear traces, or 'signs', of 'the beauty

[11] *Acad.* 2.6.18, 2.24.77; cf. *C. Acad.* 2.5.11. [12] *De mag.* 11.36. [13] *De mag.* 11.38.
[14] Variants of this word are also found, such as *moneo* and *commoneo*. [15] Cf. Madec 1986, pp. 97–9.
[16] Cf. *De Gen. c. Man.* 2.20.30; *Ep.* 13.4. [17] *De ord.* 1.3.7. [18] *De ord.* 1.8.26. [19] *Conf.* 7.10.16.
[20] *De util. cred.* 15.33. [21] Cf. *Serm.* 88.1.1; *In Io. ev. tr.* 24.1. [22] *Serm.* 88.13.12.
[23] Cf. *De mag.* 11.36, 14.46. At *De mag.* 11.38, the inner teacher is identified as Christ, 'the immutable Virtue and eternal Wisdom of God' (cf. Eph. 3:16–17; 1 Cor. 1:24).

of reason, which measures and governs all things, whether knowing or unknowing'.[24]

A sign is only useful if the person who is admonished by it believes what it signifies.[25] This is the point of Augustine's frequent appeal to Isa. 7:9, as translated in the Septuagint: 'Unless you believe, you will not understand.'[26] He also adds the requirements of hope and love to that of belief, and makes the possibility of illumination dependent upon this triad:

> Although the eyes may be healthy, the sight of the soul itself is not able to turn them toward the light unless these three things endure, namely: Faith [*fides*], by which it believes that the thing to which its sight is to be turned is such that when it is seen it will produce blessedness; Hope [*spes*], by which it expects that it will see when it looks properly; Charity [*caritas*], by which it desires to see and to enjoy.[27]

While Augustine has the ultimate 'vision of God' in mind here, his point is applicable to anything that might be known. We will be motivated to search for a thing only if the sign induces us to believe that the thing exists, and to hope that we can discover it, and to desire to discover it.[28] We may illustrate this point with reference to one of Augustine's examples. A person who hears the claim 'a man is flying' will either believe or disbelieve the claim. If he simply does not believe that the claim is true, then he will have no motivation to look into the matter any further, and therefore will not attain any knowledge of it. Similarly, if he believes that there is a flying man, but does not have any hope that he can witness this phenomenon, perhaps because the flying man is geographically or temporally distant, or if he believes that there is a flying man and has hope that he could witness this phenomenon if he so

[24] *De ord*. 1.8.25. [25] *De mag*. 13.41.

[26] Cf. *De mag*. 11.37; *De lib. arb*. 1.2.4, 2.2.6. At *De doct. Christ*. 2.12.17, l.20, Augustine is aware of the alternate rendering of this verse: 'If you will not believe, you shall not continue' (*Nisi credideritis, non permanebitis*), but considers both to be of value.

[27] *Sol*. 1.6.13.

[28] Although 1 Cor. 13:13 is the obvious source for this triad, it is worth noting the similarity that Augustine's interpretation of the triad bears to Porphyry's discussion of the four elements (τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα) of faith (πίστις), truth (ἀλήθεια), love (ἔρως) and hope (ἐλπίς):

> Let four principles in particular be firmly held with regard to God: faith, truth, love, hope. For it is necessary to have faith that conversion toward God is the only salvation; and for the faithful to be as eager as possible to know the truth about Him; and for the knower to love the one who is known; and for the lover to nourish his soul throughout on good hopes … (*Ad Marc.* 24, Wicker, trans.)

> According to Lewy 1978, pp. 144–5, these elements come from the Chaldean Oracles, but some have posited a direct Christian influence upon Porphyry. For an overview of the literature on the issue, see Wicker 1987, p. 110. It might also be noted that Augustine defines faith at *Sol*. 1.7.14 as that 'by which we resist [the senses of the body] and believe something else rather to be true'. This is reminiscent of the *esse ista sensibilia fugienda*, which may be an echo of Porphyry. See below, pp. 123ff. On faith in Neoplatonism, see Rist 1967, pp. 231–46.

desired, but does not in fact desire to do so, then he will not come to know whether or not there is a flying man. The upshot is that a successful admonition must induce all three – faith, hope and love – in the person to whom it is addressed. Otherwise the person will not acquire knowledge.

Augustine distinguishes three kinds of *credibilia* ('objects of belief'):

> There are three kinds of objects of belief. Some objects are always believed and never understood, such as all history, running through temporal and human events. Others are understood as soon as they are believed, such as all human reasonings concerning numbers or concerning each of the disciplines. Third are those objects that are first believed and later on understood; of this sort are those things that cannot be understood about divine matters except by those with a pure heart. This is attained by those who observe the commandments that they have received concerning living well.[29]

The first category involves those things of which we are unable to have first-hand experience. For example, we are unable to have first-hand experience of the fact that Cicero had wicked conspirators put to death; this is something that we can only believe on the testimony of those who (we presume) did have first-hand experience of the events in question.[30] This example might suggest that the distinction between knowledge and belief depends not – as it does for Plato – upon the nature of the objects (intelligible or sensible),[31] but upon the nature of the experience (first hand or otherwise). We would know those things of which we have first-hand experience, and believe (or disbelieve, as the case might be) those things of which we have second- (or other) hand experience, coming from the testimony of another. If first-hand experience of something is impossible for us, as in the case of a historical event, it will fall into this first category. Because we are unable to know such things, this category of objects would be inapplicable to the paradox of learning.

By contrast, the second and third categories clearly involve those things of which first-hand experience, and therefore knowledge and learning, is possible. Objects in the third category are first believed and later on understood, and are understood only by those who have purified themselves through their manner of living. This formula describes the movement towards salvation offered by the way of authority (we will return to this category later[32]). Objects in the second category are understood as soon as they are believed. They include human reasoning about numbers, or about

[29] *De div. q. 83* 48. [30] *De util. cred.* II.25.

[31] Cf. *Rep.* 509d–511e, where cognitive states are distinguished with reference to their respective objects. On this schema, we cannot have knowledge (νόησις) of sensible realities, nor can we have belief (πίστις) of intelligible realities.

[32] See especially pp. 61ff.

the liberal disciplines. Although Augustine does not elaborate on the point, we may understand him in the following way.[33] A necessary condition for believing something to be true is that the meaning of the sign that signifies that thing is understood.[34] The words 'a man is flying' are useless for a person who does not know English, for example. But the realities studied in the liberal disciplines, being eternal and immutable truths, are understood to be true as soon as the meaning of their sign is understood. To take a simple example, we understand that two and two make four as soon as we understand the meaning of the words 'two and two make four'. The objects of arithmetic (and all other objects in the liberal disciplines) are intelligible; they are imprinted upon our souls, and their discovery is productive of rational knowledge, which is certain. So in the liberal disciplines, a necessary condition of believing something to be true (i.e. understanding the meaning of the sign signifying that thing) is also a sufficient condition of understanding that same thing to be true. Thus, belief and understanding occur simultaneously for those who are being instructed in the liberal disciplines. By contrast, we do not understand that a man is flying merely by virtue of the fact that we understand the meaning of the words 'a man is flying'.

It might be tempting to suppose that Augustine is turning knowledge into a type of belief, much in the way that a modern-day epistemologist would describe knowledge as 'justified true belief'.[35] This temptation should be resisted, however. For Augustine, belief is certainly a precondition of knowledge; however, belief is not a component of knowledge. Indeed, Augustine is careful to distinguish between belief and knowledge; he even uses 'opinion' (*opinio*) as a technical term to describe the cognitive state of those who fail to recognize the difference between belief and knowledge. Those who opine are necessarily in error, for they 'think they know what they know not'. This is a particularly grievous error, for 'whoever convinces himself that he already knows cannot learn'.[36] Belief and knowledge may, then, be distinct cognitive states, even if they occur simultaneously, as they do when they pertain to objects studied in the liberal disciplines.

RECOLLECTION AND ILLUMINATION

So far we have (following Augustine) described the process of learning in active terms: one learns by heeding the admonition offered by a sign, by believing (as well as hoping and desiring to find) the thing signified by the

[33] The following interpretation is influenced by Hoitenga 1991, p. 74.
[34] Cf. *Serm.* 43.9. [35] Cf. also *Men.* 86a. [36] *De util. cred.* 11.25.

sign, and finally by discovering that thing itself in 'the inner light of truth'. However, there seems to be a strong sense in which Augustine regarded learning as passive rather than active. This, at any rate, appears to be the sense of the image of being 'illuminated' by 'the inner light of truth'. This image would seem to suggest that it is the truth that reveals things to us, rather than we who make the discoveries.

Indeed, the image of divine illumination is so pervasive in Augustine's epistemology that it has become a kind of cliché that the theory of illumination is Augustine's distinct alternative to the Platonic theory of recollection. Augustine himself is largely responsible for this cliché: in his later writings, he clearly rejects the recollection theory in favour of the illumination theory.[37] However, it is not easy to see just how Augustine's theory is to be distinguished from the one that it is supposed to replace. Both theories agree that when we appear to be learning, we are really discovering knowledge that is already somehow within us. Again, both theories agree that this inner knowledge depends upon the mind's direct connection to the eternal and immutable Forms,[38] those exemplars after which the world of becoming is patterned. It might seem that the only substantive difference between the two theories is that recollection, unlike illumination, presupposes the pre-existence of the soul. The theories are otherwise so similar that Ronald Nash, borrowing the terminology of Étienne Gilson, can call illumination a 'remembering of the *present*', thereby distinguishing it from recollection, a 'remembering of the past'.[39] But even this difference does not go very deep. Although the theory of divine illumination does not presuppose the soul's pre-existence, it is not incompatible with that doctrine.[40]

Interestingly, Augustine considered the pre-existence of the soul to be an open question until at least 395.[41] Indeed, some early passages, if taken literally, might seem to imply an acceptance of the soul's pre-existence. For example, Augustine will speak of the soul's return to heaven, the place of its origin 'as it were',[42] and he will express a view of the soul '*before* it feels with a body, and *before* it is beaten upon by the vain senses'.[43] If Augustine opposed recollection on the grounds that this theory presupposed the

[37] *De Trin.* 12.15.24; *Retract.* 1.4.4. [38] Cf. *De div. q. 83* 46.

[39] Nash 1969, p. 83. For an overview of the issue, including further references, see Teske 1984, especially pp. 220–2.

[40] Cf. O'Daly 1987, p. 200, n. 105.

[41] Cf. *De lib. arb.* 3.21.59ff.; Teske 1984, p. 231: 'What Augustine seems to have held in *Conf.* and even up to the time of *Ep.* CLXVI (415 A.D.) is that the soul pre-existed its incarnation and brought with it into this life a memory of its former happiness and of its God.'

[42] *C. Acad.* 2.9.22. [43] *Ep.* 7.2.5.

pre-existence of the soul, then he would seem to have had no reason to reject the theory until sometime after 395.

In fact a number of early passages might seem to imply that Augustine does accept the recollection theory. These passages are linked with Augustine's discussion of education in the liberal disciplines. Augustine describes 'a certain lofty discipline' (*alta quaedam disciplina*),[44] which is 'the law of God itself … transcribed, as it were, on the souls of the wise'.[45] The process of 'learning' is the process of 'digging up' (*eruere*, *refodere*) those things that are 'buried in forgetfulness' in the mind. Those who are well trained in the liberal disciplines are particularly adept at this task.[46] In perhaps his most explicit use of recollection language, Augustine says to Alypius:

> It seems to you that the soul has brought no art with it; it seems to me, on the other hand, that the soul has brought all the arts [*omnes artes*] with it. For that which is called learning [*discere*] is nothing other than recollection [*reminisci*] and remembrance [*recordari*].[47]

For Augustine education in the liberal disciplines is envisioned as a process of recollecting knowledge that has been transcribed on the mind, or buried deep within the soul. In these disciplines, there shines some degree of the splendour that makes up the 'countenance of truth' (*facies veritatis*).[48]

Of course, it is possible that Augustine is using 'recollection' figuratively in these and other passages. However, I find no evidence in his early writings to support this possibility. On the contrary, I find – in his writings between 386 and 389 at least – good reason to suppose that he accepted a literal theory of recollection at that time. In these writings, as we have just seen, Augustine is quite amenable to the theory of the soul's pre-existence, and he uses without qualification such terms as 'recollection' and 'remembrance' in order to describe the process of learning. I do not insist that the evidence is conclusive. But what is clear, as it seems to me, is that we must refrain from concluding, on the basis of the opposition between recollection and illumination in Augustine's later writings, that recollection must be a figure of speech in his early writings. Consider O'Daly's discussion of the issue.[49] While admitting that 'there is no inconsistency in maintaining simultaneously an "illumination" theory and a "reminiscence/pre-existence" one', he asserts: 'Augustine's illumination theory is an … explicit and unequivocal alternative to pre-existence.'[50] This insistence leads him to dismiss every one of Augustine's descriptions of recollection in his early

[44] *De ord.* 2.7.24. [45] *De ord.* 2.8.25. [46] *Sol.* 2.20.35; cf. *De immor. anim.* 4.6.
[47] *De quant. anim.* 20.34. [48] *Sol.* 2.20.35.
[49] O'Daly 1987, pp. 200–1. [50] O'Daly 1987, p. 200, n. 105.

writings as 'metaphorical' or 'figurative'. To be sure, this is how Augustine himself glosses these passages in his *Retractations*, as we have already noted.[51] But we are treading on thin ice if we believe that this work is a reliable guide to the original meaning of Augustine's writings composed some forty years earlier. Moreover, if we assume that recollection and illumination are competing theories in the early writings, we will be forced to explain why the early Augustine borrows technical terminology from the theory that he rejects (recollection) in order to explain the theory that is supposed to replace it (illumination), yet fails to indicate that the technical terminology is not to be understood in its original sense. But I see no reason to attempt any such explanation, as I find no reason to think that Augustine means to pit recollection against illumination in his early writings. It is most striking that Augustine, in *On the Teacher*, can say in one breath that 'if we know, we recollect [*commemorari*] rather than learn',[52] and in the next that our only teacher is Christ, who inwardly sheds light upon all that we understand, as the sun outwardly sheds light upon all that we see.[53] This shows quite clearly, I think, that Augustine does not view recollection and illumination as competing theories of learning in his early writings. Even if he is employing the term 'recollection' in a figurative manner, it seems clear that he is not bothered by the possibility that it might be interpreted literally. This in turn would suggest that he has no reason to reject a literal theory of recollection, even if he is not necessarily prepared to affirm it either.

If Augustine had no reason to reject the theory of recollection, then he certainly had every reason to consider whether it might be an adequate solution to the paradox of learning. And this is what we find him doing in the *Soliloquies*. He describes recollection as a cognitive state somewhere on the continuum between complete ignorance and perfect knowledge. If something is completely forgotten, then it is impossible ever to come to know that thing. For example, you are not in a position to remember that you laughed a few days after your birth, as this time is 'buried in a most complete forgetfulness [*oblivio*]'. Such a fact cannot be remembered, but at best only believed, on the testimony of a credible witness. By contrast, it is possible to come to know something that is not completely forgotten. Minimally, this involves being able to identify what one is not attempting to remember; maximally, it involves recognizing that we already know something when it is presented to us, without remembering any details of our previous encounter with it. This is analogous to a situation in which we recognize a man without remembering any details of our previous

[51] Cf. *Retract.* 1.7.2. [52] *De mag.* 11.36. [53] *De mag.* 11.38.

encounter with him.[54] It is this latter type of recollection, Augustine thinks, that is at work in those who study the liberal disciplines.[55] These people, who are not yet wise, are able to seek after wisdom precisely because wisdom is not wholly unknown to them. Its light already shines within their soul, although it is at first almost completely buried in forgetfulness. Through an order of learning, or process of 'recollection', the layers of sediment are gradually removed so as to allow increasingly stronger beams of light to infuse the soul, until wisdom is eventually uncovered completely and allowed to illuminate the soul with the fullness of its radiance.

The process of recollection is the process of coming to an awareness of that which is somehow already within us. We cannot be wholly unaware of that which we seek. To begin with, we must be capable of identifying the object of our search, if at first only through a sort of *via negativa*, i.e. by eliminating those things that are *not* objects of our search. 'Such people do not yet see the true; however, they cannot be deceived or misled, and they know sufficiently [*satis*] what they are seeking.'[56] From here we move on to the positive identification of the object. Although we do not remember everything about the object, it is still possible for us to recognize it when it is found. We can know the object well enough to identify it, so that we will seek to discover (or remember) more about it. And once again, we will recognize the truth of what we discover only in so far as our discovery is not of something entirely new, but of something that is already within us. The paradox of learning is therefore defused by our ability to recognize that what we have found is the very same as that which we had set out to find. Of course, part of the paradox retains its force here, given that what we set out to find cannot be wholly unknown (whether it had always been known or had been learned at some point in a previous life). If it could not even be identified in the first place, then it would be impossible to look for it (and therefore impossible to find it).

In the final analysis it remains unclear whether Augustine ever accepted the pre-existence of the soul, and therefore whether he understood recollection literally, as a recovery of buried knowledge that had been implanted within the soul in a pre-natal state, or only metaphorically, so that it was nothing more than illumination by God of the eternal and immutable objects of knowledge which the soul 'remembered' in this life. What is clear, however, is that there is no rejection of the theory of recollection in Augustine's early writings. Recollection and illumination are not yet distinguished at this early stage. Recollection is no less Augustine's early

[54] *Sol.* 2.20.34. [55] *Sol.* 2.20.35. [56] *Sol.* 2.20.34.

solution to the paradox of learning than is illumination. Recollection describes the process of learning that is characteristic of an education in the liberal disciplines. Through recollection, the soul turns its gaze away from sensible things and fixes its attention upon intelligible things.

THE PARADOX OF SALVATION

As we will see,[57] the early Augustine believes that an education in the liberal disciplines provides a path to salvation, or the blessed life. However, only an elite few are fit for such an education,[58] for which reason a different path to salvation has been made available for the masses. In the opening pages of *On True Religion*,[59] Augustine describes 'the obvious salvation and correction of the masses' (*manifestam salutem correctionemque populorum*)[60] that has taken place in Christian times. The uneducated masses have renounced the sensible world and have turned towards the intelligible world. The moral precepts of Christianity are read daily in the churches, and many people have adopted a life of continence and asceticism.[61]

In describing these evident historical facts (as he sees them), Augustine is presenting a challenge to some unidentified 'pagans'.[62] Although he does not put it this way himself, we may understand the challenge as a new version of the paradox of learning, which we will call 'the paradox of salvation'. The argument that produces the paradox may be summarized as follows:

1. Without the capacity for conversion (i.e. turning away from the sensible world and towards the intelligible world), salvation is impossible.
2. Only those who are capable of philosophy (or education in the liberal disciplines) are capable of conversion.
3. The masses are incapable of philosophy (or education in the liberal disciplines).

∴ The masses are incapable of conversion.
∴ The masses are incapable of salvation.

Prior to the advent of Christianity, as Augustine sees it, there would have been no difficulty in accepting the conclusion that the masses were incapable of salvation. But this conclusion must be unacceptable to those living in Christian times, since they are confronted with 'the obvious salvation and

[57] See below, pp. 111ff. [58] Cf. *De ord.* 2.7.24, 2.9.26, 2.16.44; *De mus.* 6.1.1. [59] *De vera relig.* 3.3ff.
[60] *De vera relig.* 4.6. [61] *De vera relig.* 4.5. [62] *De vera relig.* 4.7.

correction of the masses'. This is a conclusion, then, which has become paradoxical as a result of the new historical reality.

Augustine's resolution of the paradox depends upon a rejection of its second premise and the intellectual conception of salvation that this premise implies. He imagines a conversation between Plato and one of his disciples. This disciple first notes that Plato has convinced him that the mind is purified by escaping the sensible world, and that 'the contemplation of (God's) eternity is given to the rational and intellectual soul'.[63] The disciple then envisions a situation in which these truths are recognized not only by himself but also by the masses, who have been persuaded to believe these things by 'some great and divine man'.[64] Plato immediately describes the kind of man who would be necessary to produce this situation:

> This could not be done by a man unless it happened that the very Virtue and Wisdom of God took him up from his natural condition [*ab ipsa rerum natura exceptum*], enlightened him from infancy not with the teaching of men but with inner illumination, honoured him with such grace, strengthened him with such firmness and, finally, brought him up with such majesty that he should condemn all that depraved men desire, endure all that they dread, and do all that they find miraculous, and thus convert the human race to such a healthy faith with the greatest love and authority. There is no reason to inquire into the honours of such a man, as it is easy to see what honours befit the Wisdom of God. This man would be the bearer and governor of the Wisdom of God for the true salvation of the human race, and would therefore merit his own great reward beyond all humanity.[65]

This man would be 'enlightened from infancy … with inner illumination', he would be 'the bearer and governor of the Wisdom of God' and he would 'merit his own great reward beyond all humanity'. By persuading the people to believe Plato's doctrine, this man would convert all of humanity to this faith 'with the greatest love and authority'. It would be only through such a man that the unlearned masses would be capable of attaining salvation. Their salvation would be attained not through reason, but through the authority displayed in this wise man, manifested by his virtuous life and miraculous deeds.

This wise man is, of course, none other than Jesus Christ. But which Christ is this? O'Connell sees a resemblance between Plato's Christ and the Photinian Christ in whom Augustine had once believed, as described at *Confessions* 7.19.25:[66]

[63] *De vera relig.* 3.3. [64] *De vera relig.* 3.3.
[65] *De vera relig.* 3.3. [66] O'Connell 1968, pp. 267–8.

I thought of Christ my Lord as of a man of excellent wisdom, whom no other could possibly equal; especially because, having been miraculously born of a virgin – in order to provide an example of condemning temporal things for the sake of immortality – by divine care for us, he seemed to have merited so much authority as our teacher.

Madec downplays the significance of the similarity, maintaining that it does not reflect any doctrinal deficiency on Augustine's part; instead, it shows that 'Augustine had the skill to attribute to Plato a "rational" conception of Christ … that of a "divine man", favoured with an exceptional participation in the divine'.[67] It is true, of course, that we are not looking directly at Augustine's Christ here; we are looking instead at Augustine's Plato's Christ. But Augustine certainly would have agreed with Plato as far as he went. Underlying Plato's Christ, after all, is Augustine's contention that if Plato and other esteemed ancient philosophers had lived in Christian times they would have recognized that the authority of this Christ has provided a path to salvation for the masses. In other words, they would have become Christians:

So if these men had been able to live this life again with us, they would certainly see by whose authority the interests of men are best taken into account, and, with the change of a few words and sentiments [*paucis mutatis uerbis atque sententiis*], they would become Christians, as many Platonists have done in recent times and in our times.[68]

Obviously, it would make little sense for Augustine to have Plato converting to Christianity without accepting an orthodox Christ. We may safely presume, then, that Plato's Christ is supposed to be an orthodox Christ, such as would have been envisioned by Augustine at the time he wrote *On True Religion*.[69]

It is interesting to note that Augustine has the philosophers converting to Christianity 'with the change of a few words and sentiments'. Clearly, there is no vast expanse separating Platonism and Christianity. In fact Christianity is quite literally 'Platonism for the masses'. The authority of Christ consists not in a novel teaching, but rather a superior power of persuasion. He has accomplished what the ancient philosophers had been unable to do, namely, to persuade the masses of the existence of the intelligible world.[70] This has been done in order that the masses should

[67] Madec 1989a, p. 71. [68] *De vera relig.* 4.7.

[69] This is not to say, of course, that Augustine's understanding of Christ was therefore restricted to what he ascribes to Plato. Whether and to what extent it goes beyond this is another question, one to which we shall return in a moment.

[70] See Lütcke 1968, pp. 65–9.

'at least' (*saltem*) believe what they are not able to comprehend.[71] The ancient philosophers would not have had to renounce their Platonism in order to become Christians; after all, they had already discerned through reason the same truths that this wise man has now presented to the masses by means of his authority. The ancient philosophers would simply have had to acknowledge that the authority borne by this man provided the best path to salvation for the masses. And Augustine is confident that they would have done this without any hesitation, if they had lived in Christian times:

> If those men [i.e. Plato and the other esteemed ancient philosophers], in whose names these men [i.e. philosophers living in Christian times] glory, were to come to life again, and find the churches filled, the temples deserted, and the human race summoned away – and running away – from the desire for temporal and fleeting goods to the hope of eternal life and spiritual and intelligible goods, they might say – if they were indeed as they are remembered to have been – these are the things that we did not dare to urge upon the people. We yielded to their custom rather than lead them in our belief and inclination.[72]

Augustine notes that many recent Platonists have done just what he expects the ancient philosophers would have done. These Platonists have not been too proud to acknowledge that Jesus Christ has succeeded where they have failed, i.e. in converting the masses from the sensible world to the intelligible world. With this acknowledgement, they have become Christians.[73] But there are some who have refused to become Christians – i.e. they have refused to change 'a few words and sentiments' – owing to their 'empty boasting', their 'pride' and 'envy', as well as their 'curiosity in examining demons'.[74] It is not clear that these pagans differed from the 'Christian Platonists' on any matter of doctrine. In fact, these pagans would, like Christ, have brought about the salvation of the masses themselves 'had they been so capable'. However, they were not so capable and so 'they cannot escape the charge of envy'.[75] There is no indication that they remained pagan because they had intellectual objections to Christianity;[76] it appears instead to be a defective character that kept them from converting to Christianity. They were unwilling to change 'a few words and sentiments' because that would have constituted an admission of their own failure to find a way by which the masses might be led to the intelligible world. And they were too proud for such an admission.

[71] *De vera relig.* 3.3. [72] *De vera relig.* 4.6. [73] Cf. the story of Victorinus' conversion (*Conf.* 8.2.3–5).
[74] *De vera relig.* 4.6–7. [75] *De vera relig.* 4.6.
[76] Cf. *C. Acad.* 3.20.43, ll.23–4, where Augustine is confident that he will find no incompatibility between Platonism and Christianity: 'apud Platonicos me interim, quod sacris nostris non repugnet, reperturum esse confido'.

Although Augustine does not mention any names here, it is likely that he has Porphyry in mind. Augustine repeatedly levels the charges of pride and of consorting with demons against Porphyry in *The City of God*.[77] Augustine also says that Porphyry sought unsuccessfully to discover a 'universal way of liberating the soul', a search that is described in his lost work *On the Return of the Soul*:[78]

> And when Porphyry says, near the end of the first book *On the Return of the Soul*, that the universal way of liberating the soul [*via universalis animae liberandae*], has not yet been received by any particular sect, either from the truest philosophy, or from the morals and learning of the Indians, or from the initiation of the Chaldeans, or from any other way, and that this universal way has not yet come to his knowledge from his historical investigations, he undoubtedly admits that there is such a way, but that it has not yet come to his attention … This is not surprising. After all, Porphyry lived at a time when this universal way of liberating the soul, which is nothing other than the Christian religion, was allowed to be persecuted by worshippers of idols and demons and by earthly rulers … And so Porphyry, having seen these things and thinking that these persecutions would quickly put an end to this way, concluded that this was not the universal way of liberating the soul.[79]

Neither the Indians, nor the Chaldeans, nor Porphyry's historical investigations had brought 'the universal way' to his attention. Porphyry also considered 'the Christian religion', but did not think that this could be 'the universal way', since (this is probably Augustine's conjecture) the persecution it was suffering seemed likely to put an end to the movement in short order. It is entirely possible, then, that Augustine's attempt, in *On True Religion*, to validate Christianity through the historical record was an attempt to complete the task that Porphyry had begun, i.e. to find a universal way to salvation through historical investigations.[80] Interestingly, the author of *The City of God* would also have Porphyry and Plato conversing about Christianity, and he was still hopeful that such a conversation might make them both Christians.[81] This suggests the possibility that the unnamed pupil in Plato's Academy (in *On True Religion*) is Porphyry, transported back in time by Augustine, for the rhetorical purpose of being informed by Plato of what he had failed (or had been unwilling) to recognize from his historical research, i.e. that Christianity was in fact 'the universal way'.[82]

[77] Cf. *De civ. Dei* 10 *passim*, especially 10.11, 10.24, 10.26–9.
[78] We know of this work only through Augustine's testimony in *De civ. Dei*.
[79] *De civ. Dei* 10.32.1. [80] Cf. TeSelle 1970, p. 125. [81] *De civ. Dei* 22.27.
[82] It should be noted that at *De civ. Dei* 10.32.1, Augustine glosses 'universal way' (which he identifies, of course, with Christianity) as the way without which no soul can be liberated, i.e. the *only* way.

We have argued that Augustine would have accepted as orthodox the Christ he attributes to Plato in *On True Religion*: a sort of 'Plato for the people', an outstanding wise man who has provided a path to salvation for the uneducated masses. We must, therefore, take seriously O'Connell's observation as to the similarity between this Christ and the Photinian Christ of *Confessions* 7.19.25. Is it possible that Augustine's Christology was still Photinian at the time of *On True Religion*? Of course, we cannot assume that Augustine's early Christology is limited to what he has Plato report in *On True Religion*. Along these lines, Madec has criticized what he sees as a common mistake in studies of Augustine's intellectual development, which is to suppose that Augustine believed nothing more than what he actually stated on any given occasion, 'comme s'il était, dans tous ses ouvrages, en acte de confession permanente sur l'ensemble de ses convictions!'[83]

But, while it would certainly be a mistake to expect a constant iteration of the entirety of Augustine's beliefs, it would also be a mistake to assume that Augustine believed something that he did not iterate. With respect, therefore, to our present task – which is to determine to what extent Augustine's early Christology (386–91) had advanced beyond that which he ascribed to Plato in *On True Religion* – we must be careful to restrict ourselves to the evidence of the early writings themselves. We must be careful not to read Augustine's later views into the early writings, especially since Augustine himself acknowledges that his thought underwent development, and admits that his early writings contain errors.[84] Fortunately, there is no shortage of early passages in which the person and work of Jesus Christ is discussed, and therefore no need, in my view, to venture beyond these writings in order to supplement any perceived gaps or deficiencies. I believe that a fairly clear picture of Augustine's early views on the person and work of Jesus Christ can be discerned from the early writings themselves. Let us now turn directly to the Christology of these writings.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

Augustine's characterization of Jesus Christ as a wise man may be usefully understood within the context of the tradition of the Stoic sage (*sapiens*). The sage attains happiness by living in accordance with nature or

However, this understanding must not be imposed upon the author of *De vera relig.*, whose Plato seems quite capable of reaching the truth without the authority of Christ. At *De civ. Dei* 10.32.2 Augustine also indicates that Christianity is the universal way in the sense that it purifies the whole man (intellect, spirit and body), and not merely a part of man. How Porphyry himself understood 'universal way' is of course another matter, on which see Smith 1974, pp. 136–9.

[83] Madec 1989a, p. 78. [84] *Retract.* pr. 3.

reason: this is virtue.[85] There are four distinct, although interconnected, components of virtue: justice (*iustitia*), fortitude (*fortitudo*), temperance (*temperantia*) and prudence (*prudentia*).[86] The sage is a perfect model (*exemplum*) of these four 'cardinal virtues', although he seems to have been regarded by the Stoics as an unattainable ideal.[87]

Augustine is firmly rooted in this tradition. Consider, for instance, the opening lines of Question 31 of *Eighty-three Different Questions* (the question is a virtually verbatim quotation of Cicero's *De Inventione* 2.53.159–2.55.167): 'Virtue is a habit [*habitus*] of the soul that accords with the way of nature and with reason … Virtue has four parts: prudence, justice, courage, and temperance.'[88] Augustine's concern with the wise man is already evident in his first work, *Against the Academics*. The context of his discussion is the dispute between the Stoics and the Academics regarding the possibility of knowledge, or, more specifically, kataleptic impressions.[89] The Stoic wise man will not err, which is to say that he will withhold his assent from all but kataleptic impressions. But – against the Stoics – the Academics argued that there were no such impressions. For a single error in sense perception or dialectical reasoning is sufficient to cast doubt on all sense perception and dialectical reasoning in general,[90] and many such errors can be pointed out, both with respect to impressions derived from the senses[91] as well as impressions of a logical, or dialectical, nature.[92] For example, the sun appears to be about a foot wide, while mathematicians say that it is nineteen times the size of the earth.[93] Again, every statement must be either true or false, according to dialectical reasoning, but a statement such as 'If you say that you are lying and say it truly, you lie' does not clearly seem to be either.[94] Thus, there is no criterion by which we can reliably distinguish true impressions from false impressions, whether in sense perception or in dialectical reasoning. And since knowledge is dependent upon our ability to distinguish these impressions, according to Stoicism, the Academics conclude that knowledge is impossible. But a wise man will not err, or hold an opinion. Therefore a wise man will always withhold his assent (since he would err by assenting to what might not be true).[95]

[85] Cf. *Vit. phil.* 7.87–9; *Ad Luc. ep. mor.* 76.9–10; *Tusc. disp.* 5.40, 5.81–2; *De off.* 3.3.13. The concern with the sage, or holy man, permeated late antique society. For literature on the subject, see Ashwin-Siejkowski 2004, p. 219, n. 2.

[86] Cf. *Ad Luc. ep. mor.* 120.10–11; *De off.* 1.5.15. [87] Cf. *De off.* 3.4.16.

[88] *De div. q. 83* 31.1; cf. *De invent.* 2.53.159. [89] *Acad.* 2.6.18, 2.24.77; cf. *C. Acad.* 2.5.11; see above, p. 33.

[90] *Acad.* 2.26.84, 2.30.98. [91] *Acad.* 2.25.79–2.28.90. [92] *Acad.* 2.28.91–2.30.98.

[93] *Acad.* 2.26.82. [94] *Acad.* 2.29.95.

[95] A further refinement to the scepticism of the Middle Academy was introduced by Carneades (*c.* 213–129 BCE), whose leadership ushered in the Third or 'New' Academy. He introduced the probability criterion (πιθανόν), translated by Cicero as *probabile* and *veri similis*. Since an absence of

Augustine had been attracted to this sceptical conclusion for a brief period before reading the 'books of the Platonists'.[96] But after reading these books, Augustine would reject this conclusion along with Academic scepticism itself. These books led him to recognize immutable reality,[97] and inspired him to seek truth there, in the 'intelligible world' (*mundus intellegibilis*) rather than in the 'sensible world' (*mundus sensibilis*), which cannot be true but only 'truth-like' (*veri similis*).[98] But if knowledge of the truth is possible – and the 'books of the Platonists' had thoroughly convinced Augustine of this fact – then it is false that a wise man will assent to nothing. For a wise man only withholds his assent from what cannot be understood.[99] Augustine suggests, quite naturally, that the wise man will be found with the Platonists, i.e. with those who maintain that knowledge (*scientia*) is contained in the mind, far removed from the senses.[100] This wise man will look into himself (*in semetipso*) and will find wisdom there.[101] Augustine does not have in mind a mere ideal, but refers to a specific individual near the end of *Against the Academics*:

> it seems to me that, through many centuries and numerous debates, the result of this has been the formation of a single discipline of the truest philosophy [*una uerissimae philosophiae disciplina*].[102] That philosophy is not of this world, which our sacred rites rightly detest, but of the other, intelligible world. Never would the most subtle reason [*ratio subtilissima*] recall to this world souls blinded by the multiform darkness of error and stained with a most profound filth from the body, unless the most high God had, with a certain mercy [*clementia*] for the masses, stooped and submitted the authority of the divine Intellect as far as a human body itself, so that souls would be roused not only by its precepts [*praeceptis*] but also by its deeds [*factis*] to return to themselves and to breathe again the fatherland even without the circumlocutions of arguments [*disputationum concertatio*].[103]

This wise man, the man upon whom the authority of the divine Intellect (= the Son of God) has descended, is not identified by name here, but is clearly none other than Jesus Christ. There is no difficulty in identifying

assent would seem to result in complete inactivity, the wise man will sometimes approve of the probable in order to accomplish certain things in life. However, he will not assent to it as true (*Acad.* 2.19.62, 2.31.98–104; cf. *C. Acad.* 2.5.12).

[96] See above, pp. 8ff. [97] Cf. *Conf.* 7.10.16.

[98] *C. Acad.* 3.17.37ff. The 'truth-likeness' is reminiscent of Carneades' probability criterion; see above, p. 47, n. 95.

[99] Cf. *C. Acad.* 3.14.30, 3.14.32. [100] *C. Acad.* 3.11.26. [101] *C. Acad.* 3.14.31.

[102] It is contentious whether *una uerissimae philosophiae disciplina* refers to Christianity (cf. Harrison 2006, pp. 36–7; Holte 1962, pp. 97–109) or Platonism (cf. DuRoy 1966, pp. 116–19) or whether the distinction is even appropriate here (Madec 1989a, p. 54). This is not the place to resolve the matter, which is in any case inseparable from the larger question of the relationship between Platonism and Christianity in Augustine's early thought. We discuss this discipline below, pp. 114ff.

[103] *C. Acad.* 3.19.42.

him as a Platonist; for Augustine makes clear elsewhere that the injunction against philosophy at Col. 2:8 applies only to 'the philosophers of this world'. But Christ says 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36), thereby indicating that his philosophy pertains to 'another world, far removed from these eyes', that is to say, the intelligible world.[104] His earthly mission, as described at *Against the Academics* 3.19.42, is wholly consistent with what we have already seen in *On True Religion*. He is a wise man of divine authority who provides a path to the intelligible world for the masses; through precepts and deeds, he rouses those who would be unable to return to their 'fatherland' through reason alone.

It must not be supposed that this wise man represents the only way to the fatherland.[105] He has indeed been sent for the masses, blinded as they are by error and contaminated by the body. But this does not preclude the existence of others – however few – who are not so affected and are thus capable of returning to the intelligible world through 'the most subtle reason', independent of the authority of Christ. Indeed, this is clearly implied at *On True Religion* 3.3, as Augustine's Plato had already recognized through reason the truths of which Christ would later persuade the masses through his authority. Reason and authority thus constitute two distinct paths to the same goal of salvation.[106] To be sure, the distinction should not be interpreted too rigidly; authority and reason cannot be completely separated. Augustine makes it clear that no one employs reason without first relying upon the assistance of authority – for everyone begins from a state of ignorance, and stands in need of a teacher[107] – and that belief in an authority presupposes reason in the sense that one must evaluate who is to be believed.[108] Moreover, although he sometimes speaks as if the paths of authority and reason are for two completely different classes of people, he can also treat them as successive stages in the development of the same person.[109] But it is important to realize that Augustine does not say at this early stage that the authority of the incarnate Christ is necessary for salvation (except, perhaps, for the sordid souls described at *Against the Academics* 3.19.42), even if some sort of authority is.

As for Augustine himself, he aims to follow the 'way of reason' represented by Platonism, yet will continue to rely upon the authority of Christ as a yardstick:

[104] *De ord.* 1.11.32; cf. *Retr.* 1.3.2. [105] *Pace* (*inter alios*) Harrison 2006, p. 36.
[106] Cf. *De ord.* 2.5.16, 2.9.26, 2.11.30; *De quant. anim.* 7.12; *De vera relig.* 24.45.
[107] *De ord.* 2.9.26; cf. Lütcke 1968, pp. 80ff. [108] *De vera relig.* 24.45.
[109] Cf. Lütcke 1968, pp. 64–5. See also pp. 182–95 of Lütcke for a good overall assessment of some further issues involved in assessing the relationship between authority and reason in Augustine.

No one doubts that we are impelled toward learning by a twofold force: the force of authority and the force of reason. And I am resolved never to deviate from the authority of Christ in any way, for I do not find a stronger. But as for what is attainable with the most subtle reason [*subtilissima ratione*] (for I am currently so disposed as to long impatiently to lay hold of what is true, not only by believing but also by understanding) I am confident for the time being that I will find with the Platonists what is not in opposition to our sacred rites.[110]

There are other authorities – Augustine refers in 386 to Cicero,[111] the Academics[112] and 'Socrates, Plato and other ancients'[113] – but the authority of Christ is the strongest. In fact, the difference between the authority of Christ and the authority of other wise men is the difference between divine and human authority:

Authority is partly divine, partly human; but the true, solid and highest authority is that which is called divine. In this matter there is to be feared the astonishing deception of ethereal beings that, by certain divinations and some powers of things pertaining to these senses of the body, are accustomed to deceive most easily those souls that are preoccupied with possessions that will pass away or eager for fleeting powers or awed by empty wonders. That authority is to be called divine which not only exceeds all human ability in sensible signs but also, leading a man himself, shows him to what extent it has debased itself for his sake, and orders him not to be detained by the senses, to which these things seem marvellous, but to fly to the intellect: simultaneously showing how much it can do here, and why it does these things, and how little it values them. For it is fitting that by deeds [*factis*] it teach its power; by humility, its mercy [*clementia*]; and by precept [*praeceptione*], its nature. All of this is being passed on to us more secretly and more solidly by the sacred rites into which we are being initiated. In them the life of good men is most easily purified, not by the circumlocutions of arguments [*disputationum ambages*], but by the authority of the mysteries.[114]

While Augustine does not specifically refer to the authority of Christ in this passage, a number of parallels to *Against the Academics* 3.19.42 make it clear that this is what he has in mind by the divine authority 'leading a man himself'. This authority has 'debased itself' in order to lead to 'the intellect' those souls that are entangled with bodily things. Divine authority is once again said to have shown its mercy (*clementia*) by making this path available for earthbound souls. Again, it does this 'by deeds' and 'by precept', providing a path to salvation that avoids 'the circumlocutions of arguments'. 'Deeds' is a reference to the extraordinary 'sensible signs', or miracles, which are intended to catch the attention of souls that are

[110] *C. Acad.* 3.20.43. [111] *C. Acad.* 2.10.24, 3.7.14. [112] *Ep.* 1.1. [113] *C. Acad.* 2.6.14.
[114] *De ord.* 2.9.27; cf. Lütcke 1968, pp. 110–48.

captivated by perishable, vacuous things. Such souls are then taught the insignificance of such signs (especially since even the demons are capable of performing miracles[115]) and are commanded to leave them behind and to turn toward the intellect. As for the 'precept' that teaches the nature of divine authority, this may have to do with the intelligible goal to which the divine authority is leading, as distinct from the 'sensible signs' by which souls are led to this goal.[116]

It is interesting to note that there are no specific references to Jesus Christ at *Against the Academics* 3.19.42 and *On Order* 2.9.27, although the Incarnation is clearly the topic of discussion in these passages. The same observation may be made of *On True Religion* 3.3, and indeed of Augustine's early descriptions of the Incarnation as a whole, which are cast in terms of God's leading (*agere*),[117] bearing (*gerere*, *sustinere*) and assuming or 'taking up' (*assumere*, *suscipere*, *excipere*) a human, or even just a body.[118] There can be no doubt as to the referent of these passages, for the *homo assumptus*/*susceptus* terminology was frequently used in the Christian tradition (including by Ambrose) in order to designate the man who had been assumed by

[115] On Augustine's recognition of the limitations of miracles as a criterion of authority, see Lütcke 1968, pp. 168–9.

[116] Cf. Lütcke 1968, p. 121.

[117] It should be noted that Geerlings 1978, pp. 84–5 thinks that *hominem agere* is not specifically a designation of the Incarnation, although it can have this meaning. By contrast, cf. Van Bavel 1954, p. 6, n. 3.

[118] *De ord*. 2.5.16, ll.55–6: 'corpus … deus adsumere atque agere dignatus est'; *De ord*. 2.9.27, l.37: 'ipsum hominem agens'; *De mus*. 6.4.7, p. 20, l.25 – p. 22, l.2: 'Quam plagam summa Dei Sapientia mirabili et ineffabili sacramento dignata est adsumere, cum hominem sine peccato, non sine peccatoris condicione, suscepit'; *De quant. anim*. 33.76, p. 225, ll.4–5: 'a filio dei potentissimo, aeterno, inconmutabili susceptum hominem'; *De mor. ecc. Cath*. 1.19.36, ll.5–6: 'illum autem quem suscepit in sacramento dei filius ad nos liberandos'; *De Gen. c. Man*. 2.5.6, l.15: 'dominus noster nubilum carnis nostrae dignatus assumere'; *De Gen. c. Man*. 2.24.37, ll.15–21: 'Quod ipsum non commutationem naturae dei significat, sed susceptionem inferioris personae, id est humanae'; *De div. q. 83* 11, ll.2–5: 'Sapientia ergo et uirtus dei, qui dicitur unigenitus filius, homine suscepto liberationem hominis indicauit'; *De div. q. 83* 25, ll.1–2: 'Sapientia dei hominem…suscepit'; *De div. q. 83* 44, ll.20–2: 'A qua ueritate … homo susceptus est'; *Ep*. 11.2, p. 25, l.25 – p. 26, l.1: 'de susceptione hominis mystica'; *Ep*. 12, p. 29, l.28: 'per susceptum illum hominem gestum est'; *Ep*. 14.3, p. 34, ll.6–7: 'homo ille, quem deus suscepit longe aliter quam ceteros sanctos atque sapientes'; *De vera relig*. 3.3, ll.34–5: 'quem … ipsa dei uirtus atque sapientia ab ipsa rerum natura exceptum'; *De vera relig*. 8.14, ll.8–9: 'illa hominis sacrosancta susceptio'; *De vera relig*. 16.30, ll.5–7: 'ipsa dei sapientia, id est unicus filius consubstantialis patri et coaeternus totum hominem suscipere dignatus est'; *De vera relig*. 16.30, l.15: 'virum suscepit'; *De vera relig*. 16.32, ll.43–4: 'hominem, quem suscipere dignatus est'; *De vera relig*. 17.33, ll.14–15: 'ab ipsa dei sapientia homine assumpto'; *De vera relig*. 55.110, ll.62–4: 'naturam humanum ipsa dei uirtus et dei sapientia incommutabilis et consubstantialis patri et coaeterna suscipere dignaretur'; *De util. cred*. 15.33, p. 42, ll.3–7: 'cum igitur et homo esset imitandus et non in homine spes ponenda, quid potuit indulgentius et liberalius diuinitus fieri, quam ut ipsa dei sincera, aeterna, incommutabilisque sapientia, cui nos haerere oportet, suscipere hominem dignaretur?'; *De fid. et sym*. 4.8, p. 11, ll.16–17, 21: 'ab illa incommutabili dei sapientia natura mutabilis nostra suscepta est … totum hominem suscipere dignaretur'.

the Word of God in the singular event of the Incarnation.[119] But things become murkier when Augustine refers to the wise man (*sapiens*) outside obvious incarnational contexts. Because Augustine seldom refers to Jesus Christ by name in his early writings, it is not always clear whether *sapiens* is to be taken in a purely formal sense or with specific reference to Jesus Christ. This ambiguity is compounded by the fact that Latin lacks the definite article. However, this will not prevent us from appreciating the character of Augustine's early Christology, for Augustine certainly regards Jesus Christ as the wise man *par excellence*, which means that descriptions of the ideal wise man will be readily applicable to him.

In *The Usefulness of Believing* Augustine calls wise 'those in whom there is, inasmuch as it can be in man, the certain knowledge of God and of man himself, and a life and habits in accordance with this knowledge'. All others are fools, and are therefore advised to seek out the authority of a wise man and obey his instruction.[120] The wise man is an intermediary (*medium*) between the foolishness of man and the purest truth of God.[121] However great his desire for the vision of God, the fool simply does not have the ability to turn his weak gaze away from sensible things and towards intelligible things. A vivid description of this problem, and the remedy offered by the wise man, is presented in the following passage from *The Morals of the Catholic Church*:

> But how can we follow after Him whom we do not see? Or how can we see Him, we who are not only men but foolish men? For, although He is seen with the mind and not with the eyes, what mind can be found fit, while enveloped in a cloud of ignorance, so that it is strong enough for that light or even to attempt to draw from that light? Therefore we must have recourse to the teachings of those who were probably wise … When [reason] approaches divine things, it turns away unable to see; it trembles, pants, and burns with love, and, driven back from the light of truth, returns, not from choice but from exhaustion, to its familiar darkness … So when we are seeking to flee back into darkness, that shade of authority [*opacitas auctoritatis*] meets us, according to the dispensation of ineffable Wisdom, and it entices us with the wonders of things and the words of books, which are like more moderate signs and shadows of truth.[122]

Here is a colourful depiction of the fool's hopeless struggle to catch a glimpse of 'the light of truth' without relying upon authority. His efforts to attain wisdom result in his mind being 'driven back' from the blazing light of truth.[123] However, his difficulty is overcome by the inviting 'shade

[119] Cf. Diepen 1963, 1964.
[120] *De util. cred.* 12.27.
[121] Cf. *De util. cred.* 15.33.
[122] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.7.11.
[123] Cf. *Sol.* 1.9.16, 1.10.17, 1.13.23; *De quant. anim.* 33.75; *De vera relig.* 20.39.

of authority', which meets him as he returns to his darkness. Authority provides an alternative path to wisdom for the fool: rather than leaving the senses behind and trying to approach the light of truth directly, the fool is encouraged to make use of sensible things, which are 'the signs and shadows of truth'. Those who are 'probably' wise men serve as intermediaries between the fool and that wisdom which he is unable to behold directly.

In this passage, Augustine's use of the term 'fool' has no obvious tone of moral condemnation. However, the fool is characterized as a person who is moved by the senses rather than the intellect,[124] and Augustine sometimes indicates that this characteristic is a result of original sin. This is his approach in *On Genesis, Against the Manichaeans*, as he distinguishes between the original state of creation and the postlapsarian state:

> After sin man began to labour on the earth and to have those clouds of necessity. But before sin, when God had made the green of the earth and food – we said that this expression signifies the invisible creature [sc. the soul[125]] – He watered it with an interior fountain, speaking to its intellect, so that it did not receive words from an external source, like rain from the aforementioned clouds. It was instead satisfied by its own fountain, that is, by the truth flowing from its interior.[126]

In the original state of creation, the soul was not distracted by anything external but was directly aware of the truth residing within it.[127] This primal tranquillity was disturbed by sin, that is, by the movement from interiority to exteriority. As Plotinus says that the turn from the absolute unity of the One to the multiplicity of Intellect was precipitated by 'audacity' (τόλμα),[128] so too does Augustine say that the soul's loss of the primordial irrigation of truth occurred because it 'thrust away its inmost parts' (*proiecerat intima sua*),[129] and swelling up (*tumescens*) with pride, it went forth into external things.[130] This is the Fall of man, which necessitated his toil upon the earth. The remedy for the Fall came, in part, from those very things that separated man from his source. God made the authority of

[124] *De util. cred.* 15.33.

[125] Cf. *De Gen. c. Man.* 2.4.5, ll.5–6: 'Quia et nunc *viride agri* deus facit, sed pluendo super terram, *id est* facit *animas* revirescere per verbum suum.'

[126] *De Gen. c. Man.* 2.4.5.

[127] Notice that Augustine speaks of the *soul* in the original state of creation, and the *man* after the Fall; cf. O'Connell 1968, p. 158.

[128] Cf. *Enn.* 5.1.1.4. [129] Cf. Ecclus. 9:10.

[130] *De Gen. c. Man.* 2.5.6; cf. *De fid. et sym.* 4.6. Augustine uses the concept of 'pride', derived from the Neoplatonic theory of emanation, as a description of the moral deficiencies of the Neoplatonists themselves (particularly Porphyry). Cf. *Conf.* 7.9.13, p. 137, ll.12–13: 'hominem inmanissimo tyfo turgidum …' For a discussion of the Fall in Augustine with particular reference to the Plotinian background, see O'Connell 1968, pp. 146–83.

divine teaching available through human words and actions, in that he 'deigned to assume the cloud of our flesh'. As rain descends from the clouds in order to irrigate the dessicated land, so too has divine teaching been revealed through a human being (Augustine clearly has Jesus Christ in mind here) in order to 'irrigate' those sinful humans. By following this teaching, fallen man may return to the spring of truth (i.e. the intelligible world).[131]

Here again we see that the wise man is an intermediary between foolishness and wisdom, with foolishness understood here as a moral deficiency. The wise man can serve as a moral intermediary because he is not only wise but also virtuous. In bearing the authority of the divine Intellect[132] (= Christ, the Son of God), Jesus Christ bears 'the Virtue and the Wisdom of God'.[133]

An intermediary between two terms must have something in common with both. What exactly does the wise man have in common with both God and man? Augustine's struggles with this issue are especially palpable in his very early works. Consider Augustine's repeated (and ultimately futile) pleas to Manlius Theodorus for his assistance on 'the question of the soul'.[134] While he has learned from Ambrose and Theodorus that the soul is the closest thing to God, as both are incorporeal,[135] he is still unclear as to what the soul has that allows it to share in both the human and the divine natures:

> From where does the soul take its origin? What is it doing here? To what extent is it distinguished from God? What unique characteristic has it that alternates between both natures [*alternat in utramque naturam*]?[136]

An answer to this last question is necessary if Augustine is to explain just how the wise man serves as an intermediary between the foolishness of man and the wisdom of God. Augustine would attempt his own answer to this question later on in the work. Recalling that 'ancient wise men' have defined man as an animal, both rational and mortal, Augustine would suggest that it is man's reason that he shares in common with God.[137] Five years later Augustine would give much the same answer, saying that the common element was 'the wisdom of man', and that the wise man was 'so closely united to God in mind that nothing intervenes to separate them'.

[131] *De Gen. c. Man.* 2.5.6. [132] *C. Acad.* 3.19.42; see above p. 48.
[133] Augustine frequently refers to the Son of God in this way, citing 1 Cor. 1:24; cf. *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.13.22, 1.16.27, 1.16.28; *De Gen. c. Man.* 2.12.16; *De div. q. 83* 26; *De mag.* 11.38; *De vera relig.* 55.110.
[134] *De beat. vit.* 1.5. See Courcelle 1950, pp. 202–10 for a discussion of Augustine's relationship with Theodorus.
[135] *De beat. vit.* 1.4; see above, p. 11. [136] *De ord.* 2.5.17. [137] *De ord.* 2.11.31; see below, pp. 123ff.

This was the case because 'God is truth and a person certainly cannot be wise if he does not reach truth with his mind'.[138]

In a passage from *The Morals of the Catholic Church* Augustine discusses the problem in terms of virtue. He introduces 'a question requiring many profound words', i.e. the question of whether virtue can exist by itself or only in the soul.[139] He claims that, whatever the answer to this question, the foolish soul (understood as the vicious soul) must follow something else in order to attain virtue, 'for neither by pursuing nothing nor by pursuing foolishness can the soul, as far as I can tell, reach wisdom'.[140] He then concludes that this something else must be either a wise man or God. Although God is the source of virtue and wisdom, Augustine rules out the possibility that the foolish soul can follow God, since he cannot recognize him in the first place. Thus, he must follow the wise man.[141]

It might be objected that positing the virtuous and wise man as an intermediary reinscribes rather than resolves the problem of how the fool can attain salvation. We are told that the fool, to the extent that he lacks virtue or wisdom, is separated from God and requires the assistance of an intermediary. This intermediary is the man who bears the authority of Christ, 'the Virtue and Wisdom of God'. But if this man mediates between the fool and God through his virtue and wisdom, do we not have the same problem? We will need to posit a second intermediary between the fool and the first intermediary, and so on *ad infinitum*. And it is of no help to the fool that he is confronted with a man and not God, as the issue is the fool's ability to recognize, not a man, but a virtuous and wise man. If the fool has nothing in common with the Virtue and Wisdom of God in the first place, then it is not clear how the problem can be resolved.

This objection has some force, and probably Augustine could only respond that the fool was not entirely bereft of virtue and wisdom. Here is what must be conceded to the paradox of learning: it is impossible to seek, let alone discover, that which is completely unknown. Since it is possible for the fool to attain wisdom (this cannot be denied, given 'the obvious salvation of the masses'), the fool must already have wisdom within him to some extent. Apparently, the fool can know enough about wisdom to begin making judgements about who is wise, as Augustine insists: 'In no way is reason entirely absent from authority, since one must consider who is to be believed.'[142] This

[138] *De util. cred.* 15.33. [139] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.6.9.
[140] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.6.9. [141] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.6.10–1.7.11.
[142] *De vera relig.* 24.45; cf. *De praed. sanct.* 2.5, where Augustine defines belief as 'consideration with assent' (*cum assensione cogitare*).

is not to say that the fool's judgement is infallible in this matter. When reason is applied to human things, it is not capable of certainty. But the fool should not reject authority altogether merely on the grounds that it is possible to select a wrong authority: 'It is authority alone that moves fools to hurry on towards wisdom. As long as we cannot understand pure wisdom, it is indeed wretched to be deceived by authority. But surely it is more wretched to be unmoved by authority.'[143] Rather than reject authority, the fool must instead be diligent in selecting his authorities,[144] keeping in mind that he has no other choice than 'to have recourse to the teachings of those who were probably wise'.[145]

So the wise man is probably not an intermediary between two wholly incommensurate terms, even if Augustine sometimes makes it sound as though he is. The fool is not entirely bereft of wisdom, which is why he is capable of discerning authorities to some extent. However, this does not entirely resolve the issue. Augustine is hard pressed to explain how the fool can recognize the wise man. He does note that a legitimate authority, whether human or divine, may be identified by the fact that it teaches man to shun the senses and fly to the intellect.[146] But it is not obvious how this criterion will be able to guide the fool in his search for an authority. As Augustine describes it, most people prior to the advent of Christianity were unaware of the existence of the intelligible world. Even Socrates and Plato were unable to disabuse their contemporaries of their mistaken belief that this visible world was the supreme God.[147] But if most are ignorant of the intelligible world, then how can the fool's recognition of an authority be made to depend upon his realization that he must turn away from the sensible world and towards the intelligible world? Is the way of authority not supposed to provide a path to salvation precisely for those souls who are so attached to the senses that they cannot even see that they must shun the sensible world?

It seems that Augustine is sensitive to this concern, as he acknowledges that intrinsic indicators of authority tend not to have much motive force for the fool. Even if the fool has reason, he is simply not accustomed to using it:

> For the foolish man there is nothing closer than the wise man that he might usefully imitate. And because, as was said, it is not easy to understand with reason, it was appropriate to present certain miracles to these eyes (which the fool uses more easily than his mind) …[148]

[143] *De util. cred.* 16.34. [144] On the ground (or *ratio*) of authority, see Lütcke 1968, pp. 165–82.
[145] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.7.11; see above, p. 52. [146] *De ord.* 2.9.27.
[147] *De vera relig.* 2.2. [148] *De util. cred.* 15.33.

Because the fool cannot be expected to use reason effectively, the wise man (Jesus Christ) has attracted attention to himself by appealing to the senses. He elicits belief by miracles 'so many and so great',[149] such as his 'miraculous birth' and his death and resurrection. The performance of miracles is a means by which the lives of fools may be purified, so that they may be summoned inward and rendered fit for the reception of reason.[150] Of course, only a small number of people would have had direct experience of the miracles of this wise man, but everyone else now has indirect access to them, mediated by the Scriptures and the Catholic Church, whose many followers have recognized this wise man as an authority and put their faith in him.[151] Augustine says that authority moves us in two ways: 'partly by miracles, partly by the multitude of followers'.[152] While the miracles of the wise man have obviously come to an end, these miracles have had the effect of bequeathing yet another miracle to posterity, as we have seen: i.e. the 'obvious salvation and correction of the masses' who have accepted the Gospel. In this way, the authority borne by the wise man is accessible to succeeding generations: 'Through his miracles he recommended authority, with authority he elicited faith, with faith he united the multitude, with the multitude he acquired antiquity, and with antiquity he strengthened religion.'[153]

Is Augustine's emphasis upon the importance of miracles at odds with his claim that the fool's recognition of the wise man is grounded in rational considerations? This would certainly be the case if miracles were deemed an irrational basis for belief. This view would be given its classic formulation in

[149] *De util. cred.* 14.32. [150] *De util. cred.* 15.33.

[151] The precise nature of the relationship between scriptural and ecclesiastical authority in Augustine is a controversial subject, one that divides Catholic and Protestant interpreters of Augustine. These interpreters disagree on the significance of Augustine's famous statement: 'I should not have believed the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church' (*C. ep. fund.* 5, p. 197, ll.22–3: 'ego uero euangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae ecclesiae conmoueret auctoritas'). There is no need for us to wade into this controversy here. See the statement of the problem provided by Warfield 1970, pp. 190–1:

> The precise question that is raised by these divergent interpretations is whether Augustine validated to himself the Scriptures as apostolic in origin and therefore the revealed Word of God by appropriate evidence, more or less fully drawn out and more or less wisely marshaled; or declined all argument and cut the knot by resting on the sheer enactment of the contemporary Church. In the latter case Augustine would appear as the protagonist of the Romish principle of the supreme authority of the Church, subordinating even the Scriptures to their living authority. In the former he would appear as the forerunner of the Protestant doctrine of the supreme authority of Scripture.

Warfield discusses the issue at pp. 178–225; cf. also Lütcke 1968, pp. 128–48.

[152] *De util. cred.* 16.34; on Augustine's appeal to the *consensus gentium* as an argument for authority, see Lütcke 1968, pp. 170–3.

[153] *De util. cred.* 14.32.

Hume's clever essay on miracles,[154] an essay that would do much to render the appeal to miracles an embarrassment rather than an asset in the defence of religious authority. In order to clarify Augustine's somewhat different conception of miracles, we will briefly consider two points supporting Hume's view.

First of all, Hume argues that there can be little or no reason to believe, at least on the basis of testimony, that a miracle has occurred. His argument proceeds roughly as follows. There is reason to believe in the existence of a miracle – that is, a violation of a law of nature – only if the evidence for the miracle is greater than the evidence for the law of nature it purports to violate. But the evidence for a law of nature derives from uniform experience, which provides us with a 'full proof' against the existence of the miracle. Therefore, there is reason to believe in the existence of a miracle only if the evidence for the miracle itself amounts to a full proof, in particular a full proof that is (somehow) more probable than the full proof of the law of nature that the miracle purports to violate. It is difficult to see how this is possible, which is precisely Hume's point. In most, if not all, cases, it would seem more probable that the 'witnesses' of the miracle were in fact delusional, deceitful or simply ignorant, than that the miracle actually happened. And even if, *ex hypothesi*, the evidence for the miracle did amount to a 'full proof', the result would be 'a mutual destruction of arguments'. That is to say, the evidence for the law of nature and the evidence for the miracle would effectively cancel each other out, leaving the existence of the miracle with (at best) a residual degree of plausibility. Since 'a wise man proportions his belief to the evidence', his belief in the existence of the miracle will be in proportion to the residual degree of plausibility accruing to the miracle. Hume's argument ultimately suggests that belief in even the best-documented miracle must be rather tepid. And this certainly weakens the value of any appeal to miracles as a way of vindicating authority. In fact, an authority might seem to become increasingly suspect to the extent that it had to be vindicated through an appeal to miracles.

We note, secondly, that Hume's definition of a miracle as a 'violation of the laws of nature', while obviously entailing nothing about the existence or frequency of miracles, nevertheless invites us to apply what might be called the *reductio ad naturale* explanation to all instances of purported miracles: that is, it invites us to explain all events purporting to require supernatural agency in terms of natural causality. It is a short step (psychologically

[154] *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, book 10.

speaking) from saying that a miracle is a violation of a law of nature to saying that any belief that a miracle has occurred is a reflection of one's ignorance of the laws of nature. However inexplicable an event might be, it might seem prudent to maintain, not that an exception to the laws of nature has occurred, but that our understanding of the relevant laws of nature governing the event remains incomplete. To maintain the former view would be to take refuge in ignorance, and to be under constant threat from the inexorable progress and refinement of scientific knowledge. Applying the results of his discussion to Christianity, Hume concludes his essay with these (perhaps) ironic remarks:

> So that, upon the whole, we may conclude, that the *Christian religion* not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.[155]

On Hume's view, the reasonable person who believes in Christianity is himself something of a miracle. Such a person must violate the laws of his own rational nature in order to believe what is contrary to reason (here, Hume implicitly invites his reader to conclude that whoever believes in Christianity cannot actually be reasonable, at least not on this point).

For Augustine, a miracle is not an objective violation of the laws of nature. Instead, a miracle is 'whatever appears difficult or unusual, beyond the expectation or ability of the one who is amazed by it'.[156] A person who experiences the orderly progression of times and seasons for the first time may regard this as a miracle, while a person who is familiar with these sequences will not. For Augustine, then, there is no objective incompatibility between miracles and laws of nature; the evidence for the former does not conflict with the evidence for the latter. There is certainly a subjective incompatibility between one's classification of an event as 'difficult or unusual' and one's understanding of the inner workings of nature: the former wanes as the latter waxes. This shows, however, not that belief in miracles is irrational, but that such belief is arational. The person who believes in a miracle does not believe contrary to reason, but without reason. The person who regards an event as a miracle is as of yet incapable of comprehending, through reason, the laws that govern this event. But the

[155] Hume, *Enquiry*, §101. [156] *De util. cred.* 16.34.

purpose of such belief is just to lead one to an understanding of how everything (*cuncta*), including those 'miraculous' events in the life of Christ that are at first only believed, is subject to God 'by necessary and unchangeable laws'.[157] We see, then, that there is a sense in which Augustine's explanation of miracles is in line with the *reductio ad naturale* explanation outlined above: our belief in a 'miracle' is a reflection of our inadequate understanding of the relevant laws of nature. However, it is probably more accurate to say that the natural/supernatural distinction, upon which much of the modern discussion concerning miracles is predicated, is not relevant in Augustine's understanding of miracles. The death and resurrection of Christ is no more a supernatural interruption in the natural order than, say, the death and rebirth of nature in the fall and spring. It is true that the former events are much more unusual than the latter; however, it does not follow from this that they are supernatural (much as it would be unusual for a comet to collide with the earth, but it would not on that account be a supernatural event). If we label these events 'supernatural', we do so only because we are ignorant of the relevant laws governing their occurrence.

If, as I have suggested, Augustine regards belief in miracles as arational (as opposed to irrational), then he can avoid Hume's challenge. He can treat 'miracles' and the fool's amazement at them as fully in accord with the rational order of things. But he would not be out of the woods yet. For, as we have seen, he wants to preserve some element of rationality in the actual selection of authorities; he insists that 'in no way is reason entirely absent from authority, since one must consider who is to be believed'. And yet the fool's recognition of the authority of the wise man, in so far as it is grounded in the miracles performed by the wise man, cannot be regarded as a rational process. The basic problem here stems from Augustine's theory of learning. As we have seen, Augustine thinks that nothing is learned without signs, but that the signs themselves teach us nothing. Their purpose is simply to admonish us to seek realities for ourselves. As miracles are a kind of sign,[158] their purpose is also to admonish the fool to seek realities (in particular, intelligible realities), and it is also true that they themselves teach the fool nothing about those realities. So the admonition of a miracle – like the admonition of any sign – is logically prior to learning. The sign itself

[157] *De vera relig*. 8.14.

[158] This is true, at any rate, for Christian miracles. Some miracles are empty wonders, and have no signifying function. For example, a flying man has no significance beyond the sight itself (cf. *De util. cred*. 16.34).

is given in accordance with reason, but the one for whom the sign is intended cannot immediately evaluate the sign in the light of reason. Indeed, it is only after the fool has directed his attention to the thing signified by the sign that he even understands what the sign means. Similarly, the fool cannot rationally evaluate the authority of the wise man until he comes to understand the teaching to which his miracles refer. (And, of course, he has no need of the wise man and his miracles if he already understands the teaching.[159]) But does this not effectively return us to the original problem, which is that the fool *qua* fool seems to have nothing in common either with wisdom or with the wise man? And how can the wise man be an intermediary between foolishness and wisdom if he does not mediate through something that is common to both terms? To the extent that he relies upon miracles as a criterion of authority, Augustine seems to have capitulated to this difficulty.

The miracles performed by the wise man admonish the fool to seek 'another world, far removed from these eyes',[160] i.e. the intelligible world. The search must begin with the belief that this world exists and is the source of blessedness. But this type of belief is not immediately productive of understanding, which distinguishes it from the type of belief that is characteristic of those studying the liberal disciplines. The difference lies in the fact that those studying the liberal disciplines are looking directly at intelligible realities, while those following the wise man are looking at signs of those realities. Belief will lead to understanding only when the soul turns away from the miraculous signs and gazes upon the realities themselves, which the fool can do in this life only with difficulty, if at all.

The fool's movement from belief to understanding describes from the epistemological perspective what the third of the 'objects of belief', or *credibilia* (from question 48 of *Eighty-three Different Questions*),[161] describes from the ontological perspective. This third category refers to what is understood about 'divine things' only after they are believed, and which is understood only by those whose hearts have been purified through their manner of living. The moral requirement is particularly important, and we will return to it shortly. As for the 'divine things' themselves, they undoubtedly refer to what the wise man has persuaded the masses to believe, for example, that the intelligible world exists and can be seen only by the purified soul. But are the particular events of the wise man's life – including his persuasion of the masses – also to be included in this third category? This

[159] On this problem of circularity in grounding the authority, see Lütcke 1968, pp. 177–8.
[160] *De ord.* 1.11.32. [161] See above, p. 35.

might seem counterintuitive, given that Augustine places historical events in the first category, that is, in the category of things that can only be believed and never understood. However, in *On True Religion*, Augustine asserts that all those things that are first believed on authority will be understood, either as 'most certain' or as 'possible and appropriate'.[162] By the 'possible and appropriate', Augustine is referring to the events of God's temporal dispensation, which are frequently mocked by opponents of Christianity:

> that holy assumption [*susceptio*] of humanity, the birth from a virgin, the death of the Son of God for us, his resurrection from the dead, ascent into heaven, and sitting at the right hand of the Father, the forgiveness of sins, the day of judgment, and the resurrection of bodies.[163]

It is quite possible that Augustine's discussion in *On True Religion* reflects his growing appreciation of the importance of salvation history. We have already suggested that the introduction to this work evidences his concern to integrate the historical revelation of Christianity into a Platonic, particularly Porphyrian, context.[164] But Augustine had previously characterized some of the key events in salvation history, including 'the sacrament of the assumption of a man', as '*human* things'. He had noted that we must begin with faith in the 'true religion' that consists of these human things, in order to understand the truth of that which we are seeking,[165] but also claimed that the need for human instruction would eventually pass, so that we would then drink directly from the fountain of truth:

> However, such knowledge will be destroyed. For while seeking our food at present, we see in an enigma, as in a cloud, but then we will see face to face [1 Cor. 13:8–12], when the whole face of our earth will be watered by an interior fountain of bubbling water.[166]

In this passage, God's revelation through 'the cloud of our flesh'[167] appears to be nothing more than a temporary concession to the spiritually immature. Similarly, in another early passage, Augustine praises those things that we are commanded to believe as most excellent and healthful nourishment provided by 'Mother Church' (*mater ecclesia*) but then adds: 'It is very healthy to receive this nourishment [*alimentum*] when being suckled by one's mother, but shameful when one is fully grown.'[168] We are thus urged not to rely for too long upon this 'milk' (*lac*), but to move on to the vision

[162] *De vera relig.* 8.14. [163] *De vera relig.* 8.14. [164] See above, pp. 41–5.
[165] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.7.12. [166] *De Gen. c. Man.* 2.5.6.
[167] *De Gen. c. Man.* 2.5.6; see above, p. 51, n. 118. [168] *De quant. anim.* 33.76.

and contemplation of truth.[169] This passage clearly denigrates the events of salvation history: while belief in such events may serve usefully as 'training wheels' for the beginner, they are to be left behind as soon as possible, lest they become an embarrassment. This is consistent with the task of divine authority as described at *On Order* 2.9.27: having caught the attention of earthbound souls through the performance of miracles, divine authority promptly teaches that such signs are of little value, and commands its audience to 'fly to the intellect'. The point here seems to be that a fixation upon earthly events, including, say, Jesus Christ's virgin birth and even his death on the cross, is ultimately unhealthy and inimical to salvation. This is in keeping with the signifying function of the miracle: like every sign, the miracle is unnecessary for the person who already sees the reality to which the miracle points. On this schema, the miraculous events in the life of Jesus Christ would carry no intrinsic salvific value; their value would consist solely in their admonishing function. They would provide the occasion for the fool to turn to the intelligible world, beginning with belief and then moving on to understanding.

How does belief in intelligible things lead to understanding of those same things? This occurs through the practice of virtue. Just as the eye cannot expect to gaze upon the sun without leaving the darkness and becoming accustomed to light, so too souls that are 'shut up within this cave' that is the body[170] cannot expect to look upon the full radiance of the intelligible world without first removing themselves from the stain of this body. This process of purification requires the cultivation of virtue. Augustine defines virtue as 'the perfect love of God', and goes on to define the four cardinal virtues in relation to this love of God:

> We say that temperance is love for God that preserves itself pure and uncorrupted, fortitude is love that easily endures all things for the sake of God, justice is love that serves God alone and therefore governs well those things that are subjected to man,

[169] *De quant. anim*. 33.76.

[170] *Sol*. 1.14.24. This is reminiscent of the Orphic/Neopythagorean anthropology; cf. *Phaed*. 82e and *Crat*. 400c (C. D. C. Reeve, trans.):

> Thus some people say that the body [σῶμα] is the tomb [σῆμα] of the soul, on the grounds that it is entombed in its present life, while others say that it is correctly called 'a sign' [σῆμα] because the soul signifies whatever it wants to signify by means of the body. I think it is most likely the followers of Orpheus who gave the body its name, with the idea that the soul is being punished for something, and that the body is an enclosure or prison in which the soul is securely kept [σῴζηται] – as the name σῶμα itself suggests – until the penalty is paid; for, on this view, not even a single letter of the word needs to be changed.

and prudence is love that discerns correctly between those things that help us reach God and those things that impede us.[171]

Here we see Augustine adapting the cardinal virtues exhibited by the Stoic sage into a Christian context. Each of these four virtues is exemplified in Jesus Christ, in whom is displayed the very 'Virtue and Wisdom of God'. 'Temperance is love for God that preserves itself pure and uncorrupted …' The purpose of the wise man is to invite us to follow God, our Supreme Good, which can only be done if our love of God is perfect and complete. With his miraculous birth and deeds, the wise man instilled in us this love for God.[172] 'Fortitude is love that easily endures all things for the sake of God …' In order to love God perfectly and completely, there must be no fear of evil and chance occurrences of the body. With his death and resurrection, the wise man removed this fear,[173] providing us with an example of not fearing death, not even the worst kind.[174] In fact, not only is death not to be feared, it is to be 'desired as the greatest gift', for it is nothing other than 'the complete flight and escape from this body'.[175] So the tranquillity that the wise man exhibited even in the face of his horrific death provides us with a vivid example of shunning the sensible world for the sake of the intelligible world. 'Justice is love that serves God alone and therefore governs well those things that are subjected to man …' The resurrection of the wise man shows that all things are dependent upon God; it also shows how easily the body will serve the soul if the soul is subject to God.[176] 'Prudence is love that discerns correctly between those things that help us reach God and those things that impede us.' In order to love God completely, this entire world, that is, all sensible things, are to be condemned.[177] Of course, those whose attention is fixed upon the sensible world can receive this message only through the senses themselves. For this reason, divine authority, 'leading a man himself', reveals the sensible wonders of which it is capable, precisely in order to indicate how unimportant such wonders are.[178]

The whole life of the wise man – from his birth to his death and resurrection – was 'a discipline of morals' (*disciplina morum*).[179] His purpose was to provide the fool with an example of living virtuously. By imitating this example of virtue, the fool may be purified of his attachment to the senses, and strengthened for the vision of intelligible reality, which cannot be seen with the 'eye of the flesh'. Although the moral requirement is mentioned only in connection with the third category of objects of belief,

[171] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.15.25. [172] *De util. cred.* 15.33. [173] *De util. cred.* 15.33.
[174] *De div. q. 83* 25; *De fid. et sym.* 5.11. [175] *De quant. anim.* 33.76. [176] *De vera relig.* 16.32.
[177] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.20.37. [178] *De ord.* 2.9.27; see above, p. 50. [179] *De vera relig.* 16.32.

it is certainly not restricted to this category. Elsewhere Augustine makes it clear that those students who are being trained in the liberal disciplines must also live a virtuous life.[180] Virtue is capable of completely purifying souls, making them fit for the vision of God 'even without the circumlocutions of argument'.[181] But the way of reason prescribes intellectual as well as moral training, while the way of authority requires training only in 'the discipline of morals'.[182] The way of authority, then, is a shortcut to salvation: those who are not suited for instruction in the liberal disciplines are to 'nourish their wings in the nest of the Christian faith, and when they take flight with these wings they may escape the work and the dust of this road, burning with love of the homeland itself rather than these meandering paths'.[183] There can be no doubt as to the efficacy of this abbreviated path to salvation: it is 'a natural discipline [*disciplina naturalis*], worthy of the complete faith of less intelligent Christians, and free from all error for intelligent Christians'.[184] This discipline is 'suitable for the complete instruction and exercise of the soul', as it 'meets the requirements of a rational discipline [*rationalis disciplina*]'.[185]

Augustine implicitly makes reference, in his discussion at *On True Religion* 16.32–17.33, to the three parts of philosophy: ethics (*disciplina morum*), physics (*disciplina naturalis*) and logic (*disciplina rationalis*).[186] He indicates thereby that the way of authority offered through Jesus Christ is an adequate substitute for the philosophical training involved in the way of reason.

CONCLUSION: THE WAY OF AUTHORITY AND *CONFESSIONS* 7.19.25

In this chapter we have examined a certain path to salvation that is elaborated in Augustine's early writings (386–91): the way of authority. The way of authority involves a specific understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. With respect to his person, Christ is an eminent wise man: he has been assumed by the Virtue and Wisdom of God, and he serves

[180] *De ord.* 2.8.25, 2.20.52. [181] *C. Acad.* 3.19.42.

[182] Intellectual training requires moral training because the admonition of signs, upon which the knowledge of things depends, is efficacious only in so far as the person being admonished is willing to submit to authority. In particular, the person being admonished must believe the thing signified, hope to discover the thing signified and desire to discover the thing signified. Unless these virtues are present in the soul, a person will not attain knowledge (see above, p. 34). On the programme of intellectual training, see below, pp. 114–21.

[183] *De mus.* 6.1.1. [184] *De vera relig.* 16.32. [185] *De vera relig.* 17.33.

[186] Cf. *De civ. Dei* 8.6ff.; Madec 1989a, p. 73; Geerlings 1978, p. 90, n. 33.

as an intermediary between the foolishness and viciousness of man and the Virtue and Wisdom of God. With respect to his work, Christ is an outstanding example of virtue: his example is manifest in such miracles as his virgin birth, and his death and resurrection. These miracles attest to his authority, and the soul of the fool may be purified by imitating his example.

All of this bears a striking resemblance to the Christology that is recounted by Augustine at *Confessions* 7.19.25:

> I thought of Christ my Lord as of *a man of excellent wisdom*, whom no other could possibly equal; especially because, having been *miraculously born of a virgin* – in order to provide an *example of condemning temporal things for the sake of immortality* – by divine care for us, he seemed to have merited *so much authority as our teacher*.

Is it possible that in this passage Augustine is summarizing the Christology of his early writings, the Christology of the way of authority? This is an important question. An affirmative answer would disrupt the standard reading of *Confessions* 7, according to which the narrator is recounting events that transpired over the course of a few months in the summer of 386. The ramifications of such a disruption would be significant. Consider, for example, the fact that the Christology that is described at *Confessions* 7.19.25 is linked to Augustine's Photinian error, i.e. his mistaken belief that Jesus Christ is only a wise man and not also God. While emphasizing him as 'complete man', as we have seen, Augustine had failed to recognize him as 'the person of Truth'.[187] Is it possible that this Christological confusion is still at work in Augustine's early writings? Is it possible that Augustine's Photinian error is implicated in the way of authority?

Of course, the mature Augustine would continue to affirm that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he was a wise man, that he performed miracles and that he provided a good example. There is nothing heterodox about any of these claims. But it is significant that these various claims hang together and comprise a specific path to salvation in Augustine's early writings, the way of authority. If – as I have tried to show in this chapter – we can understand the Christology of Augustine's early writings in terms of the Christology of *Confessions* 7.19.25, then we must also consider the possibility that Augustine's Photinian error, with which the Christology of *Confessions* 7.19.25 is linked, might itself be implicated in Augustine's early Christology. In the next chapter, I will argue in support of this possibility, through an examination of some significant changes that occurred in Augustine's understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ *c.* 395.

[187] See above, pp. 15–17.

Before turning to this evidence, I would like to discuss a few points of methodology in order to forestall some possible objections to my claim. First of all, in attempting to come to grips with Augustine's Photinian error, it is important not to conflate it with Arianism. Arianism, first condemned at the Council of Nicaea (325), is the doctrine that the Son is not of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father, i.e. that the Son is not God. 'The falsity of Photinus', by contrast, is the doctrine that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, is not God. Another way of putting the difference is to say that Arianism arises from the issue of the Trinity, while Photinianism arises from the issue of the Incarnation. Obviously, the two issues (and therefore the two heresies) are closely related. However, they must be distinguished; a rejection of Arianism does not entail a rejection of Photinianism. Recall that Augustine had found in the 'books of the Platonists' the doctrine of substantial equality between the Father and the Son (or between their Platonic equivalents, at any rate, if we suppose that Augustine had not yet mapped the Platonic principles onto the Christian Trinity).[188] But at the time of his first encounter with these books, Augustine's rejection (perhaps even adoption?) of Photinianism was still to come. This shows that Augustine could recognize that the Son was equal to the Father before recognizing that the man Jesus was God. In other words, Augustine could reject Arianism without rejecting Photinianism.[189]

Augustine clearly rejects Arianism in autumn 386: at *On Order* 2.5.16, for example, he states that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, indicating that there is no subordination of the Son to the Father.[190] But this remark has to do with the nature of the Trinity, and so it can yield no conclusions about the status of Augustine's Photinianism in autumn 386. For what is at issue in the question of Augustine's Photinianism is his understanding of the Incarnation, that is, his understanding of the relationship between the immutable Word and the mutable flesh, soul and mind of the man Jesus. The issue is how to conceive of the nature of the relationship between the divine and human elements in this man.[191] It is important to

[188] *Conf.* 7.9.13 (see above, p. 13).

[189] The Arian heresy would be a natural temptation for a Christian Neoplatonist seeking to reconcile the hierarchical first principles of Plotinus with the Trinity. Moreover, Arianism would certainly have been at the forefront of Augustine's mind in 386; after all, it had only been a year or so since Ambrose had successfully defended the church at Milan against Justina, who had been 'seduced by the Arians' (*Conf.* 9.7.15).

[190] Cf. *De ord.* 2.5.16.

[191] Cf. O'Connell 1968, p. 260:

> Quite distinct, though ultimately inseparable from the Trinitarian question, was the quarrel on the Incarnation. The focus here was the "man, Jesus of Nazareth": what status was to be accorded him? How was one to understand his relationship to the Eternal Son of God? This question raged for years

bear in mind that it was not until the Council of Chalcedon (451), twenty-one years after Augustine's death, that the doctrine of the hypostatic union would be given its classic formulation. We should not be too surprised, then, if we were to discover the young Augustine – undeniably a theological novice – running into some doctrinal confusion as he reflected on the mystery of the Incarnation.

Courcelle has argued that Augustine prepared for his baptism with the help of Ambrose's *Commentary on the Gospel according to Luke*, a work that expressly criticizes Photinian doctrine.[192] Augustine makes reference to Ambrose's anti-Photinian remarks in a letter from 413 CE:

> Ambrose certainly did not miss the opportunity to refute certain heretics here, namely the Photinians, who claim that the Son of God had His beginning in the womb of the virgin, and refuse to believe that He existed before this.[193]

If Courcelle's argument is correct, one might be tempted to conclude that Augustine's baptism provides us with a secure *terminus ad quem* for his Photinianism.[194] But I believe that this conclusion would be mistaken. It is important to bear in mind that the Photinian charge is a retrospective one, levelled by the narrator of the *Confessions* against his younger self. The 'Photinian Augustine', for his part, may very well have believed in what he took to be the Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation, only to discover later that his understanding of the doctrine was deficient. We may push the point further. The 'Photinian Augustine' may even have been informed to some extent of the nature of the Photinian heresy, without yet recognizing that he had fallen into this error himself. Augustine's Photinianism was an inadvertent error, one that would be recognizable only to a more experienced theologian (such as the author of the *Confessions*). For this reason, we must be very careful not to suppose that whatever knowledge Augustine may have acquired about Photinus while preparing for baptism in early 387 must have cured him of any Photinian tendencies that he may have had at this time. For the same reason, we should not suppose that Augustine must have rejected his Photinian error by the time of *On True Religion* (390/1) simply because he was aware in that work that the doctrinal errors of the Photinians

before it came to settlement at Ephesus and Chalcedon – the former Council one year after Augustine's death, the latter twenty-one years after. We cannot, therefore, assume Augustine capable of the refined statement possible only after Chalcedon.

[192] Courcelle 1950, pp. 212–16. [193] *Ep*. 147.7.19; cf. Ambrose, *Exp. ev. sec. Luc*. 1.25.

[194] It should be noted that Courcelle 1950, p. 214 thinks Augustine was disabused of his Photinianism already in 386, over the course of his meetings with Simplicianus (I will address this claim at pp. 104ff.), which would mean that any baptismal instruction Augustine might have received regarding the difference between Photinian and Catholic doctrine would be more or less a confirmation of what he already knew; cf. DuRoy 1966, p. 91, n. 4.

(as well as the Arians) excluded them from Catholic communion.[195] The point here is that we cannot rule out the possibility that Augustine was Photinian (as described at *Confessions* 7.19.25) even while he had some awareness of the Photinian heresy, including some knowledge of its doctrines.[196]

Some will baulk at the very idea that Augustine's Christology could have been Photinian at the time of his conversion or his baptism (to say nothing of any subsequent years). But by the same token, we might also wonder how Augustine could have had a Photinian Christology after staying in Milan during the mid-380s, since he was at that time listening attentively to Ambrose, who denounced the Photinians regularly in his sermons and writings.[197] Indeed, we might even wonder how Augustine could ever have been confused about the difference between Catholicism and Photinianism: had he not been raised by a Christian mother? Had Augustine not known since boyhood that Christ had descended to the level of sinful humanity?[198] And yet Augustine did become confused about Christology, and he did fall into the Photinian heresy (albeit inadvertently) – this is what he himself tells us at *Confessions* 7.19.25. While enrolled as a catechumen and very possibly considering baptism in the spring of 386,[199] he had still not understood how 'Catholic truth' was distinguished from 'the falsity of Photinus' (or if he did, he would soon be confused on the matter). The possibility that Augustine might have been baptized in his heresy is brought to life by the following thought experiment (*c.* 400):

> Let us consider the two cases as follows. One of them, for the sake of argument, regards Christ in the same way as Photinus, and he is baptized in his heresy outside the communion of the Catholic Church; while the other has the very same view but is baptized in the Catholic Church, supposing that this view is the Catholic faith. I say that the latter is not yet a heretic, unless, when the doctrine of the Catholic Church is made clear to him, he chooses to resist it, and prefers that which he already holds. Before this happens, it is clear that he who is outside the Church is worse.[200]

In this passage, the bishop of Hippo distinguishes between a heretic and a Catholic who unwittingly holds a heretical view, judging the latter more leniently. It is interesting that he should use the heresy of Photinus as his example. Although the example is considered only 'for the sake of

[195] *De vera relig.* 5.9.
[196] It is probable that whatever Augustine knew of Photinianism as a heresy came from the Catholic Church, in particular from Ambrose; see above, p. 17.
[197] See above, p. 17 and n. 110. [198] *Conf.* 1.11.17; see above, pp. 2–3.
[199] Cf. O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 470. [200] *De bapt.* 4.16.23.

argument', it would probably describe Augustine's situation exactly had he elected to receive baptism in the spring of 386. Might this also have described Augustine's situation when he did receive baptism, after returning to Milan from his country retreat in the spring of 387? Or can we be certain that the intervening year had seen Augustine clarify his doctrinal confusion?

I believe that this possibility – and the possibility of an even later movement to orthodoxy – must be taken seriously. Augustine had been confused about Christology in the summer of 386 (at least), and so we must face up squarely to the challenge of understanding just how he had been confused. And we will not succeed in this enterprise if we treat Augustine's confusion as a simple misunderstanding, as if he had just not been exposed to basic Catholic teaching. Augustine certainly had been exposed to basic Catholic teaching; we must, therefore, be prepared to treat Augustine's 'Photinianism' as a sophisticated error.

There are a few passages from Cassiciacum that are all too easily, and in my view erroneously, taken as evidence that Augustine was already clear on the difference between 'Catholic truth' and 'the falsity of Photinus' in his earliest writings. At *Against the Academics* 3.19.42–3.20.43, as we have seen, Augustine states that the most high God – that is, the Father – has in his mercy sent the authority of the divine Intellect 'as far as a human body itself'. This is the most powerful authority, 'the authority of Christ'.[201] And we have seen at *On Order* 2.9.27 that the difference between the authority of Christ and the authority of all others is the difference between divine and human authority.[202] Can we regard this as evidence – decisive or otherwise – that in 386 Augustine already believed that Jesus Christ is God? If Jesus Christ is the unique bearer of divine authority, does this not indicate that he must be God? In fact, I believe that the answer is no. Notice that at *Confessions* 7.19.25 Augustine distinguishes between Jesus and all other men in much the same way as in the passages just cited: Jesus is regarded as 'a man of excellent wisdom, whom *no other could possibly equal*'; he has been conjoined to the immutable Word of God, and, '*by divine care for us*, he seemed to have merited *so much authority* as our teacher'. But if Augustine could regard Jesus as a unique bearer of divine authority even at *Confessions* 7.19.25, where Augustine is confused about the difference between Photinian and Catholic Christologies, we are hardly entitled to regard similar sentiments in *Against the Academics* and *On Order* as evidence for his belief in Catholic Christology. This would be to misunderstand the significance of his confusion.

[201] See above pp. 48, 50. [202] See above, p. 50.

O'Donnell invokes *On Order* 1.10.29 as evidence that Augustine was already 'orthodox on Christology':[203]

> [Licentius] said: '*Do you deny that Christ is God*, Who came to us by order, and says that He was sent by God the Father? If therefore God sent us Christ by order, and *we do not deny that Christ is God*, then God not only governs all things, but is Himself governed by order.'
>
> Then Trygetius, somewhat doubtful, said: 'I know not how I should take that. But when we refer to God, it is not Christ Himself that comes to mind, so to speak, but the Father. However, Christ does come to mind when we refer to the Son of God.'
>
> 'A fine thing you're doing', said Licentius. 'Are we then going to deny that the Son of God is God?'
>
> Here it seemed dangerous for him to answer, but Trygetius composed himself and replied: 'Indeed He is God; but properly speaking, we call the Father "God".'
>
> 'Control yourself better', I say to him, 'for *the Son is not improperly called God*.'

In this passage, Licentius clearly implies that Christ is God, and that Christ was sent to us by the Father. Assuming that Augustine shares Licentius' views on this matter, can we take this as evidence that Augustine believes that Jesus of Nazareth (and not just the Son of God) is God? The crux of the matter, of course, is whether we are entitled to identify Christ with the *man* Jesus here.[204] Naturally, an orthodox Christian would do so, but whether Augustine is one at this point is precisely the question. I believe that caution is in order. Notice, first of all, that in *Against the Academics* Christ is identified with 'the divine Intellect', whose authority has been sent by the Father down to a human body. This appears to be entirely consistent with the present passage. We may, therefore, identify Christ with the Son of God (= the divine Intellect), but whether Christ may be identified with Jesus of Nazareth is a different matter altogether. Consider *On the Teacher* 11.38, where Augustine speaks about Christ – 'that is, the immutable Virtue and eternal Wisdom of God' – dwelling in 'the inner man' of each of us.[205] Whatever Augustine means by this, he surely does not intend an identity between us and Christ. We may be conjoined to Christ in some sense, but not in such a way that we are simply identified with the Christ who dwells in our 'inner man'. And the same is true of the Jesus described at *Confessions* 7.19.25: he has been conjoined to, while remaining distinct from, the

[203] O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 459.

[204] It may be useful to bear in mind that, as a Manichaean, Augustine would not have regarded Christ as a man at all, but rather as a 'spiritual Saviour' who only appeared to be a man (see above, p. 5). Of course, by 386 Augustine was no longer a Manichaean, but this does not mean that his Christology would have become fully orthodox by that time.

[205] Cf. above, p. 33, n. 23 and p. 54, n. 133.

immutable Word of God. Had Augustine rejected this view in 386? *On Order* 1.10.29 simply does not provide us with the evidence to answer this question one way or the other. In fact, we are no more entitled to conclude from *On Order* 1.10.29 that Augustine considers Jesus of Nazareth to be God, than to conclude from *On the Teacher* 11.38 that *we* are God. Conversely, if it be insisted that Jesus is divine by virtue of the fact that Christ, the divine Intellect, has descended upon him, may *we* not likewise be considered divine by virtue of the fact that we, too, have Christ dwelling in our 'inner man'? It may be admitted that we are divine and that Jesus Christ is divine, but the crux of the matter is rather how we are divine and how Jesus is divine, and, if there is a difference, whether it is sufficient to show that Augustine has rejected 'the falsity of Photinus'.

Resolving these questions is complicated by the uncertain status of the soul in Augustine's early thought. In 386 Augustine is manifestly uncertain about what he calls 'the question of the soul', including the extent of the soul's similarity to God.[206] In *Against the Academics*, Augustine speaks of the 'divine mind indwelling in mortals'[207] and the 'divine in you',[208] and Licentius recalls 'living according to that divine part of the mind'.[209] Did Augustine believe at that time that the soul was divine? This must be regarded as a distinct possibility.[210] But if every human can be considered divine in some sense, then this applies to Jesus Christ as well. And to prove that Jesus Christ is divine by virtue of having a human soul is clearly insufficient to show that Augustine has rejected 'the falsity of Photinus'.

On Order 1.10.29 is of little assistance on this issue, for the discussion in this passage has little or nothing to do with the man, Jesus of Nazareth. The issue being discussed is instead the potentially problematic relationship between God the Father and God the Son in light of the latter's 'entry' (however that is to be understood) into the world. If the Son of God is God, and if God the Father has sent God the Son 'by way of order', then God has entered the world and thereby subjected himself to order. Trygetius (but not Licentius) seems to be troubled by this consequence. For him, the dilemma seems to be this: either the Son of God is God, in which case God has subjected himself to order by sending the authority of his Son by way of order, or God is not subject to order, in which case the Son of God cannot be God. Trygetius attempts to solve the dilemma by qualifying the manner in which the Son of God is said to be God. Here Augustine issues his rebuke, insisting that the Son of God is not improperly said to be God. The

[206] See below, p. 146. [207] *C. Acad.* 1.1.1. [208] *C. Acad.* 1.1.3. [209] *C. Acad.* 1.4.11.
[210] Cf. Cary 2000, pp. 95–104; O'Connell 1968, pp. 112–31.

discussion is subsequently cut short by Augustine's condemnation of the disagreeable motivations of the two boys, and the subject is abandoned.[211] In any case, enough has been said by the participants to make it clear that the issue here is the Trinity rather than the Incarnation. As O'Connell remarks:

> When, accordingly, the Augustine of Cassiciacum protests that Christ is God in the "proper sense" (*non improprie*: *Ord* I, 29), it is far more natural to connect that affirmation with his clearly anti-Arian denials of all intra-Trinitarian subordination (*degeneratio*: *Vita* 34; *Ord* II, 16). He is referring to the divine nature in Christ – to Christ inasmuch as, in that divine nature Son of God, He is the "very Wisdom and Power" of the Father (*Acad* II, 1; cf. 1 Cor. 1:24).[212]

Like O'Connell, I submit that we should regard *On Order* 1.10.29 as an affirmation of the substantial equality of the Father and the Son, not as a statement that Jesus is God. In short, this passage is not anti-Photinian but anti-Arian. And it is crucial, as we have seen, that we do not conflate these two heresies.

One final cautionary remark: we must refrain from concluding that Augustine's early Christology is orthodox simply because the expressions he uses to describe the Incarnation have an orthodox pedigree. Take, for example, Augustine's frequent references to Jesus as a *homo assumptus* or *susceptus*: a man who has been 'assumed' by God.[213] While this terminology is certainly found in Ambrose and previous Christian writers, this does not mean that Augustine's interpretation of it would therefore have been sufficiently orthodox in his early writings.[214] We must keep this point in mind if we are to take Augustine's Photinian error seriously. After all, *Confessions* 7.19.25 indicates that there had been a time when Augustine understood *homo assumptus* in the sense of 'a man of outstanding wisdom' rather than as 'the very person of Truth'.[215] We must not rashly assume that Augustine's early writings reflect a more advanced understanding than this.

What I have intended to show with these examples is that a great deal of caution must be exercised in evaluating Augustine's early statements on the Incarnation. We cannot suppose that such statements as 'divine authority

[211] *De ord.* 1.10.29–30. [212] O'Connell 1968, p. 264. [213] See above, p. 51.

[214] This conclusion is, in my view, drawn too hastily by Harrison 2006, p. 259. A useful corrective is offered by König 1970, pp. 126–30; cf. also Diepen 1964, pp. 37–8.

[215] Cf. König 1970, p. 129:

> Aber entscheidend ist, daß er [sc. Augustin] ursprünglich den Satz "sapientia dei hominem suscepit" (den er für wahr hält) nicht in dem gleichen Sinne wie "orthodoxe" christliche Autoren versteht, sondern (wie die "Confessiones" belegen) ihn als sachverhaltsgleich mit "Jesus Christus ist ein Mensch von überragender Weisheit" auffaßt.

has been sent to a human', 'God has assumed a human' or even 'Christ is God' can be regarded, in themselves, as evidence that Augustine has clarified the Christological confusion that is described at *Confessions* 7.19.25. To suppose that these statements are sufficient proof for such a conclusion is, I believe, to fail to appreciate the significance of the confusion in the first place. The task of assigning a *terminus ad quem* to Augustine's Photinianism cannot be separated from the task of understanding the precise character of that heresy in Augustine's thought. We have already observed that the Christology of *Confessions* 7.19.25 bears a striking resemblance to the Christology of the way of authority, as described in Augustine's early writings (386–91). This resemblance requires further exploration. If it is more than coincidental, then we should expect to find Augustine revising (or even rejecting) the Christology of the way of authority, just as he had 'the falsity of Photinus'. Any such changes to the Christology of the way of authority would have occurred at some time after 391 and prior to the *Confessions* (397–401). And we do indeed find Augustine's understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ undergoing some important changes within this period of time. In the next chapter, I will argue that these changes should be identified with Augustine's rejection of the Christology described at *Confessions* 7.19.25.

CHAPTER 2

The development of Augustine's Christology

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

What is the relationship between the divine and human natures in Christ? Augustine's thinking on this essential Christological problem underwent a considerable amount of change. As a Manichaean, he believed that Christ was divine and only appeared to become human. His rejection of Manichaeism then led him in the opposite direction: stressing Christ's humanity, he fell into the Photinian heresy according to which Christ was a pre-eminent wise man, participating perfectly in divine wisdom but ultimately distinct from that wisdom. He eventually rectified this error as well and arrived at his mature understanding of Christ as fully human and fully God: 'True man, true God: God and man the whole Christ. This is the Catholic faith. Whoever denies that Christ is God is Photinian; whoever denies that Christ is man is Manichaean.'[1] When did Augustine arrive at this understanding? In this chapter, I will argue that the evidence points to *c.* 395.

The classic statement on the relationship of the two natures was formulated at the Council of Chalcedon (451): Christ, as to his deity 'consubstantial with the Father', as to his humanity 'consubstantial with us', is one person (*prosōpon*) and one substance (*hypostasis*), uniting the two natures 'without confusion, without change, without division, without separation'. The later Augustine was an important influence upon the Chalcedonian formulation,[2] which is clearly anticipated in such statements as the

[1] *Serm.* 92.3.

[2] Cf. Newton 1971. *Persona* is in the first instance a concept for God, and is only secondarily applied to the individual human (cf. *De Trin.* 7.4.7, ll.74–6: 'nam persona generale nomen est in tantum ut etiam homo possit hoc dici, cum tantum intersit inter hominem et deum' and Drobner 1986, p. 119). Tertullian was the first to speak of Christ as *una persona* (*Adv. Prax.* 27.11: 'videmus duplicem statum, non confusum sed coniunctum, in una persona deum et hominem Iesum'; cf. Drobner 1986, pp. 175ff.; Grillmeier 1975, pp. 123–31; Van Bavel 1954, p. 13. However, this usage seems to have had no influence upon the tradition up to Augustine (cf. Grillmeier 1975, p. 131). For an overview of the classical development of the term *persona*, see Bethune-Baker 1962, pp. 233–4. On *persona* in Augustine, see Drobner 1986.

following: 'the same God who is man, and the same man who is God, not by a confusion of nature but by a unity of person'.[3] But Augustine's Christology was not always so 'Chalcedonian'. Drobner has identified two stages in the development of Augustine's use of the term *persona*, corresponding to two stages in the development of his philosophical anthropology. Prior to 411, he held an accidental union of body and soul in man, while after 411 he taught an essential, personal ('hypostatic') union of the two.[4] That is to say, Augustine began from the view that man is a composite of body and soul, but then moved to the view that man is a unity of body and soul in one person (*una persona*). Letter 137 is the watershed. In this letter, addressed to the pagan Volusian, Augustine endeavours to defend the doctrine of the Incarnation. He claims that 'a mediator between God and men has appeared in such a way as to join both natures in the unity of a person [*in unitate personae copulans utramque naturam*]',[5] and then attempts to disarm the objection that God cannot be united with a human. He does not do this by addressing the mystery of the union directly, but by drawing an analogy to the union of soul and body:

> But certain people demand an explanation of how God was joined to a man so as to produce the one person of Christ [*una … persona Christi*], when it was suitable for this to happen once, as if they themselves are able to explain something that happens every day: how the soul is joined to a body so as to produce the one person of man [*una persona … hominis*]. For just as the soul makes use of the body in a unity of person [*in unitate personae*] so as to make a man, so too God makes use of man in a unity of person so as to make Christ. So in the former person there is a mixture of soul and body; in the latter person a mixture of God and man, if the hearer may disregard the manner of bodies, according to which two liquids are typically mixed in such a way that neither preserves its purity, although even in these bodies light that is mixed with air is incorrupted. Therefore the person of man is a mixture of soul and body, but the person of Christ is a mixture of God and man. For when the Word of God was joined to a soul having a body, He assumed a soul and a body at the same time. The former happens every day in order to produce men; the latter happened once in order to free men. However, the mixture of two incorporeal things ought to be more easily believed than of one incorporeal and another corporeal. For, if the soul is not deceived about its own nature, it understands itself to be incorporeal, but the Word of God is much more incorporeal, and because of this a mixture [*permixtio*] of the Word of God and a soul ought to be more believable than of a soul and a body …[6]

[3] *Serm.* 186.1. Geerlings 1978, p. 120 deems this formula the clearest expression of the doctrine of the two natures before Chalcedon. For further passages, see Geerlings 1978, p. 120, n. 15.
[4] Cf. Drobner 1986, pp. 114–17. [5] *Ep.* 137.3.9. [6] *Ep.* 137.3.11.

As Fortin has shown, Augustine is probably appealing here to a Neoplatonic, specifically a Porphyrian, theory of the union of soul and body.[7] This is the theory of 'the hypostatic union of soul and body … wherein two complete substances, one of which is purely spiritual, are knit together so as to form a single being while remaining unmixed and preserving their identity'.[8] Augustine compares this understanding of the union of soul and body in one person ('the soul is joined to a body so as to produce the one person of man') to the union of God and human in one person ('God was joined to a man so as to produce the one person of Christ'). In neither case are we to understand the union in such a way that the two elements are diluted in the process of being 'mixed' with each other, as in the case of two liquids. Instead, the purity of each element in the union is preserved. But Augustine is not concerned to explain the nature of this 'unconfused union' in detail; his aim is instead to charge its pagan proponents with inconsistency for accepting the unconfused union of body and soul in a human being while rejecting the unconfused union of God and man in Christ. Augustine scoffs at their demand for an explanation of the union involved in the singular event of the Incarnation when they are themselves incapable of explaining the commonplace union of soul and body. He insists, moreover, that the union of the Word of God and the soul should be more believable than the union of body and soul, since it involves two incorporeal things rather than one corporeal and another incorporeal.

According to Drobner, Augustine's Christological formula *una persona – utraque natura* reached its maturity in 411 (with Letter 137).[9] This is not to say, of course, that Augustine's Christology was not orthodox until he arrived at this 'Chalcedonian' position. It would obviously be unfair to gauge Augustine's orthodoxy against the standard set by Chalcedon twenty-one years after his death. Moreover, the benchmark of orthodoxy, for the purposes of our discussion, is not Chalcedon but *Confessions* 7. But it is instructive to consider Augustine's 'road to Chalcedon'. Drobner, in the course of tracing the genesis of *una persona – utraque natura* in Augustine, has identified several earlier expressions that Augustine tried out, with varying degrees of success, in an effort to indicate the unity of the two roles in Christ: *homo dominicus*, *persona sapientiae*, *rex et sacerdos*.[10] Interestingly, these expressions are first attested in the early to mid-390s. How do they fit into the development of Augustine's Christology? Is it possible that the early to mid-390s were a period of growing dissatisfaction

[7] Fortin 1959, pp. 113–28; Fortin 1955, pp. 373–8; cf. Newton 1971, pp. 2–3; Newton 1969, pp. 53ff.
[8] Fortin 1962, p. 493. [9] Drobner 1986, p. 170. [10] Drobner 1986, pp. 153–69.

for Augustine as regards his terminology for – even his understanding of – the Incarnation? This would certainly be consistent with our own observation as to the similarity between Augustine's early Christology (386–91) and the Christology of *Confessions* 7.19.25. Let us examine the matter further.

It is not difficult to find fault with Augustine's earliest formulations of the Incarnation. Grillmeier pulls no punches on this point:

> [Augustine's] original way of expressing the fact of the Incarnation is still so unsatisfactory that an ill-disposed interpretation could read completely opposed christological errors into his writings. To this stage belong such formulas as '*hominem suscipere*, *hominem agere*, *corpus agere*, *susceptio inferioris personae*.'[11]

The last expression is Augustine's earliest use of the term *persona* in an Incarnation context (388/90). He explains that the Word made flesh 'does not show a change in the nature of God, but the assumption of an inferior person [*susceptio inferioris personae*], that is, a human'.[12] Perhaps Augustine is expressing in an inchoate fashion an idea that would be captured in his mature formula: 'equal to the Father according to divinity, but less than the Father according to the flesh'.[13] But the claim that Christ is an inferior person according to his human nature shows just how far Augustine is at this early stage from a Chalcedonian position. According to Van Bavel, Augustine is using the term *persona* here in its classical sense, designating a mask worn by an actor in the theatre. Wisdom has assumed a human 'person' such that the humanity of Christ is the external appearance of Wisdom, the Word of God.[14] Van Bavel claims that this understanding of the Incarnation is that of Augustine's early writings as a whole, and he admits that it could easily be interpreted in a heterodox sense.[15] He adds, however, that 'it would be unfair to claim that the idea of the Incarnation as appearance of divine authority is in no way Christian'.[16]

[11] Grillmeier 1975, p. 407. For a survey of these expressions in Augustine's early writings, see above, p. 51, n. 118.

[12] *De Gen. c. Man*. 2.24.37. [13] E.g. *Ep*. 137.3.12.

[14] Van Bavel 1954, p. 7:

> A cette époque, *persona* pouvait revendiquer les significations les plus différentes. La signification qui s'impose ici [i.e. in *De Gen. c. Man*. 2.24.37] est apparentée à l'usage classique de *persona* dans le sens de masque de théâtre: tenir la place de quelqu'un, être pénétré de celui-ci, en être comme le reflet, la manifestation extérieure, le vêtement, l'aspect, l'apparence. Si la Sagesse a assumé une 'personne' humaine, c'est que l'humanité du Christ est la manifestation extérieure de la Sagesse, Verbe de Dieu. Ce sens concorde parfaitement avec la conception de l'Incarnation chez le jeune Augustin.

[15] Van Bavel 1954, p. 7: 'Il ne serait pas non plus bien difficile d'interpréter plusieurs de ces termes dans un sens hétérodoxe!'

[16] Van Bavel 1954, p. 9: 'En tout état de cause, il serait injuste de prétendre que l'idée de l'Incarnation comme apparition de l'Autorité divine, n'est nullement chrétienne.'

But Van Bavel has conceded too much for this defence of Augustine's early orthodoxy to be convincing. We require more than just a possible story as to how, despite indications to the contrary, Augustine's early Christology may yet be interpreted in a manner consistent with orthodoxy. It is important to bear in mind, after all, that Augustine's movement to orthodoxy is accompanied by a rejection of Photinianism. This means that if (as most scholars assume) Augustine had already emerged in 386 from the Photinian confusion that is described at *Confessions* 7.19.25, then he would be sensitive to the difference between Christ 'the outstanding wise man' and Christ 'the very person of Truth'. And we would naturally expect to see this understanding displayed in his early writings. But Van Bavel seems implicitly to have conceded (as I think a fair-minded reader must) that the early Augustine does not display such an understanding. Augustine's early descriptions of the *homo assumptus* seem wholly consistent with adoptionism. Even if it is possible to extract a more orthodox understanding from the texts, it would seem that such an understanding is not required. And to concede this much is to create a serious problem in the defence of Augustine's early orthodoxy. For an orthodox interpretation is undermined not only by blatantly heterodox statements (which are unlikely to be found in abundance, given that Augustine's Photinianism was an accidental error) but also by ambiguity. Ambiguity on the nature of the *homo assumptus* is itself evidence that the early Augustine had not yet recognized the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, and is consistent with his having not yet learned 'how, in that the Word was made flesh, Catholic truth is distinguished from the falsity of Photinus'.

To be sure, the early Augustine does clearly distinguish Jesus from all other men. In a letter to Nebridius (*c.* 390), Augustine refers to 'that man, whom God assumed [*homo ille, quem deus suscepit*] far differently from other saints and wise men'.[17] But there is no reason to suppose that this Jesus is any different from the Jesus of *Confessions* 7.19.25: a 'complete man', 'to be preferred to others', whom no one could possibly equal, but only a man and not also God. What we need to know is not whether Jesus is a unique *homo assumptus*, but whether that uniqueness consists in his having been assumed in such a manner that he was not simply participating in, but was actually united with, Truth or Wisdom. And this interpretation is not required by the present text, nor is it required, as far as I can see, by any

[17] *Ep.* 14.3.

other text of Augustine's early period. In fact, there is one early text in which Augustine seems to rule out this interpretation in no uncertain terms:

> God alone, who alone is the maker of the soul, is to be worshipped by the soul. But *man, whatever else he is, though he be the most wise and most perfect, or whatever soul is possessed of reason and is most blessed, is only to be loved and imitated*, and it is to be respected in accordance with that merit and order that is appropriate for it. For 'you shall adore the Lord your God, and serve Him alone' [Deut. 6:13; Matt. 4:10].[18]

Augustine's point is clear: no man is to be worshipped as God but is only to be loved, imitated and respected. This applies even to 'the most wise and most perfect' man, who is still only a creature and is not to be put in the place of God. Augustine makes no exception, not even for Jesus.[19] Do these remarks not rule out the possibility that Augustine believes there is a union of God and man in Christ? Augustine seems intent here upon keeping the two natures separate, which is precisely the error of *Confessions* 7.19.25.

We find no clear statement of Christ's union with Wisdom, the eternal Word of God, until Augustine's commentary on Paul's letter to the Galatians (394/5). Consider the following passage, which is identified by Van Bavel as inaugurating a period of Augustine's Christological development (394–7) that is characterized by a concern with the union of Christ's divine and human natures, in contrast with his earlier emphasis upon their distinction:[20]

> He [i.e. Paul] said that all are sons of God through faith, since whoever has been baptized in Christ has put on Christ [Gal. 3:26–7]. … By putting on Christ through faith all are made sons – not by nature, as with the only Son, who is also the Wisdom of God, and not by great power and uniqueness of assumption, so that the person of Wisdom is naturally possessed and carried [*ad habendam naturaliter et agendam personam sapientiae*], as with the Mediator himself who has been made

[18] *De quant. anim.* 34.78.

[19] As O'Connell 1968, p. 270 points out, 'The conclusion is astonishing precisely on account of its universality … Augustine has constructed his phrase to leave no exception, even for Jesus of Nazareth!' Madec 1970, p. 130 misses the point in a rather unfair criticism of O'Connell's remarks:

> Ce qui m'étonne, pour ma part, c'est qu'on croire devoir tirer cette conclusion d'une phrase dans laquelle Augustin invoque l'autorité de Jésus de Nazareth. Fallait-il qu'Augustin fit exception pour l'*homme* Jésus? Faut-il soupçonner qu'il ne croit pas à la divinité de Jésus? Je pense plutôt qu'il ne faut voir dans le point d'exclamation d' O'Connell qu'une nouvelle exagération.

> But it is irrelevant that Augustine is quoting Jesus (who is himself quoting Deut. 6.13), since the issue at hand just is *how* Augustine understands Jesus. How can he understand him as God when he (that is, Augustine) has just claimed that 'man, whatever else he is, though he be the most wise and most perfect, or whatever soul is possessed of reason and is most blessed, is only to be loved and imitated'?

[20] Van Bavel 1954, pp. 13–16.

one [*unum effectus*] with the very Wisdom that assumed him without the interposition of any mediator. Instead, they are made sons by participation in Wisdom, with faith in the Mediator preparing and establishing this.[21]

In this passage, Augustine distinguishes three different ways in which one might be called a son of God. First of all, there are those who are sons of God 'by faith', because they have clothed themselves with Christ in baptism. They become sons of God by participation in the Wisdom of God, which is brought about by faith in the Mediator. Secondly, there is the Son of God 'by nature'; this is the very Wisdom of God. Finally, there is the Son of God by the 'great power and uniqueness of assumption' whereby 'the person of Wisdom is naturally possessed and carried', so that the *homo assumptus* (referred to as the 'Mediator') is made one (*unum effectus*) with the Wisdom that assumed him. There can be no question here about the significance of *personam agere* and *personam habere*. These terms are still reminiscent of the theatre, as Van Bavel notes,[22] but Augustine avoids any heterodox misinterpretations by stating that the person of Wisdom is possessed naturally (*naturaliter*) and that the Mediator is made one (*unum effectus*) with the Wisdom that assumed him. While the actor and his adopted *persona* may be connected in a purely extrinsic, accidental manner, the *persona* of Wisdom is fully identified with the man whom it assumes.[23]

Much the same understanding of the unique *homo assumptus* is elaborated in a passage from *The Christian Struggle* (396), in which Augustine distinguishes between the assumption of Jesus Christ, who 'bears the *persona* of Wisdom', and the assumption of all other men, who become wise through Wisdom:

Let us not listen to those who say that the man, who was born of a virgin, was assumed [*susceptum*] by the Eternal Wisdom in the same way that other men, who are perfectly wise, are made wise by this wisdom. They are ignorant of the unique sacrament of this man [*proprium illius hominis sacramentum*], and they suppose that he was more blessed than the others simply because he was born of a virgin. But if they consider this matter carefully, perhaps they will come to believe that

[21] *Exp. Gal.* 27.3. On this passage, see Drobner 1986, pp. 160–1; Van Bavel 1954, pp. 13–14.
[22] Cf. Van Bavel 1954, p. 14.
[23] Cf. Drobner 1986, p. 161:

> Wesentlich für die Erklärung der Entwicklung des Wortes *persona* zum metaphysischen Einheitsbegriff ist das hier verwendete exegetische Vokabular: *personam agere*, *personam habere*, das nicht nur die äußerliche Übernahme einer Rolle ausdrückt, sondern deren Identifizierung mit ihrem Träger.

he merited this [virgin birth] rather than the others, because this assumption [*susceptio*] also had something unique, different from the others. For it is one thing to become wise through the Wisdom of God [*sapientem tantum fieri per sapientiam dei*], and it is another to bear the very person of the Wisdom of God [*ipsam personam sustinere sapientiae Dei*] … Therefore the Wisdom of God and the Word through whom all things were made in the beginning, did not assume that man as he did the other saints [*non sic adsumpsit illum hominem ut ceteros sanctos*], but in a much more excellent and sublime manner. Just as it was necessary to assume that man alone, in whom Wisdom appeared to men, so too it was fitting for Wisdom to be shown visibly. For this reason those other wise men – whoever they are or have been or will be – are wise differently from that one Mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ. He not only has the benefit of Wisdom Itself [*sapientiae ipsius … non solum beneficium habet*], through which all men become wise, but he also bears the person of Wisdom Itself [*sapientiae ipsius … sed etiam personam gerit*].[24]

We are instructed not to heed those who believe that Christ surpasses all other wise men because of his birth from a virgin; they are 'ignorant of the unique sacrament of this man'. Augustine is clearly criticizing the very same error that he had once held, as described at *Confessions* 7.19.25.[25] He had been ignorant of 'the sacrament contained in the Word made flesh', he tells us, in that 'I thought of Christ my Lord as of a man of excellent wisdom, whom no other could possibly equal; especially because, having been miraculously born of a virgin …' Augustine did not at that time realize that Christ was to be preferred to all others as the very 'person of Truth'. This is precisely the oversight that is being corrected in the present passage, where Christ is clearly distinguished from all other wise men by the manner of his assumption. Christ is assumed (*susceptum*) by the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Wisdom of God, in such a way that he actually 'bears' (*sustinet*/*gerit*) this person (i.e. 'the very person of the Wisdom of God', 'the person of Wisdom itself'). This is the unique sacrament of the Word made flesh, whereby Jesus is not simply participating in the eternal wisdom of God, but actually *is* the eternal wisdom of God. By contrast, all other wise and blessed men are assumed (*susceptum*) by the second person of the Trinity in such a way that they become wise by this person (i.e. they 'become wise through the Wisdom of God', and '[have] the benefit of Wisdom Itself') without themselves becoming this person.

[24] *De ag. Chr.* 20.22. On this passage, see Drobner 1986, pp. 161–2; Diepen 1964, pp. 33f.; Van Bavel 1954, pp. 17ff.

[25] Cf. Diepen 1964, p. 38.

These two passages can leave no doubt as to Augustine's orthodoxy in the mid-390s. Can we press for an earlier date? In his *Expositions on the Psalms* 29.2.2, Augustine clearly distinguishes between those who participate in the Word of God and the one who is the very Word of God, the Word made flesh:

> It was confirmed in the Catholic faith that that man that the Wisdom of God assumed had nothing less than other men with respect to integrity of nature [*integritas naturae*]. As for excellence of person [*excellentia personae*], however, he is different from other men. For other men may be called participants in the Word of God, having the Word of God. However, none of them can be called the Word of God, which he is called when it is written *The Word was made flesh*.[26]

This certainly qualifies as an orthodox expression of the Incarnation, and may therefore allow us to push Augustine's orthodoxy back as far as 392, although this depends upon the dating of *Expositions on the Psalms* 1–32.[27] In any case, I see no reason to defend Augustine's orthodoxy between 386 and 391. Those who are intent upon such a defence are compelled to work in the absence of clear evidence and even, as we have seen, in the face of apparently contradictory evidence. The fact that Augustine does not articulate the union of God and man in Christ until the early to mid-390s gives us, I believe, good presumptive reason to suppose that it was not until about this time that Augustine rejected his Photinian error. It also gives us good presumptive reason to suppose that it was not until about this time that Augustine even recognized his Photinian error. After all, Augustine had not been an avowed Photinian; his rejection of the heresy had arisen along with his awareness of its difference from Catholic doctrine, as indicated at *Confessions* 7.19.25: 'But I admit that it was only some time later that I learned how, in that the Word was made flesh, Catholic truth is distinguished from the falsity of Photinus.'

In the early to mid-390s, we find Augustine qualifying his description of the *homo assumptus* in ways that may be suggestive of a new, more orthodox understanding. In the following passage, for example, he seems to be struggling to reconcile the old theatre terminology, which implies distinction, with the reality of union:

> He assumed humanity in such a way that it was changed into something better, and it was shaped [*formaretur*] by him in some indescribably more excellent and intimate way than is a garment when it is put on by a man … when he

[26] *En. in Ps.* 29.2.2. [27] For references on this issue, see Harrison 2006, p. 156, n. 161.

donned a man [*cum indutus est homine*], whom he united and conformed to himself in some way …[28]

Augustine glosses *homo assumptus* here, as he does not in the early writings, in such a way as to avoid the implication that God is distinct from the man whom he assumes. He also begins employing new modes of expression for the Incarnation at this time. Van Bavel notes some of the new verbs that Augustine began pressing into service in the mid-390s: *unire*, *conformare*, *formari*, *copulari*, *concresci*. New expressions also began to arise to express the union of natures: *homo in Deo*, *Deus in homine*, *Verbum in homine*, *humanitas divinitatis et divinitas humanitatis*.[29] The precise relationship between the eternal Word and the man Jesus, ambiguous at best in the early writings, is now clarified by Augustine's insistence that Christ is both the Son of God and the son of David,[30] both the Word in the beginning and a man: the 'Lord man'.[31]

The curious expression 'Lord man' (*homo dominicus*) appears as a designation of Jesus Christ in the early 390s[32] but vanishes completely after *c.* 395. The precise significance of the term, as well as the reason for its abandonment, is a bit of a mystery. It may have been an early, ultimately unsuccessful, attempt on Augustine's part to give expression to the union of divine and human elements in the Incarnate Christ.[33] Augustine tells us at *Retractations* 1.19.8 that, although he found the term in some commentaries on Scripture, he is dissatisfied with it because 'I do not see whether he who is the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, is rightly called "Lord-man" (since he is certainly the Lord); moreover, who in his holy household cannot be called "Lord-man"?'[34] This comment suggests that Augustine may have rejected the term *homo dominicus* on the grounds that it did not adequately distinguish Jesus Christ from other men. Perhaps Augustine found *homo dominicus* to be too adoptionist in tone.[35]

It is interesting, especially in light of Augustine's comment at *Retractations* 1.19.8, that *homo dominicus* was abandoned around the same

[28] *De div. q. 83* 73.2.
[29] Van Bavel 1954, p. 15. See also the expressions of unity identified by Drobner, p. 77 above.
[30] *En. in Ps.* 9.35. [31] *De div. q. 83* 75.2.
[32] *En. in Ps.* 1.1, 4.1, 4.2, 7.13, 7.20, 8.11, 8.13; *De div. q.83* 36.2, 57.3, 75.2; *De serm. dom. in monte* 2.6.20; *Exp. prop.* 40(48), 6–7.
[33] On Augustine's use of the term, see Drobner 1986, pp. 153–8; Geerlings 1978, pp. 81–2; Grillmeier 1977b, pp. 42–5; Diepen 1964, pp. 34–5; Van Bavel 1954, pp. 15–16.
[34] *Retract.* 1.19.8.
[35] As suggested by Geerlings 1978, p. 82. It is interesting to note that the term originates with Marcellus of Ancyra, an adoptionist and the teacher of Photinus. For further background, see Grillmeier 1977a and 1977b.

time that *mediator* began to be pressed into service. For this latter term helped Augustine immensely in his effort to give expression to the union of the divine and human natures in Christ. As is made clear by the following passage, from Augustine's commentary on Paul's letter to the Galatians, the Mediator is at once the eternal Word of God and 'a man beyond all men':

> For if the Son of God had wished to remain in natural equality with the Father, and did not empty himself, taking the form of a servant, he would not be a Mediator of God and men, because the Trinity itself is one God, and the same in three: in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in an eternity of deity and in constant equality. Therefore *the only Son of God was made Mediator of God and men*, when the Word of God, God with God, both laid down his majesty all the way to the human, and carried human humility all the way to the divine, *so that a man beyond all men should, through God, be a Mediator between God and men*.[36]

The commentary on the Galatians thus contains not only the first clear expression of the union of Christ's human and divine natures but also one of the earliest appearances of the term 'Mediator'.[37] The two themes converge: as we have seen, *mediator* is the very term Augustine uses to designate the *homo assumptus* that is made one with the Wisdom of God that assumed him.[38]

The importance of Augustine's discovery of the *mediator* is also signalled in the *Confessions*. Augustine claims there that he had not found the way to gain the strength for enjoying God until he recognized 'the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ'.[39] Are we entitled to take Augustine literally here? Is it possible that he did not find this way until *c.* 395? Of course, it might be objected that this is to rely too much on a word. In *The Usefulness of Believing* Augustine already refers to the wise man as an intermediary (*medium*) between the truth of God and the ignorance of man.[40] But if the argument I have presented here is substantially correct, this *medium* is not the mediator who unites the divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Augustine describes that *medium* not as 'true man, true God', but rather as 'true man' in whom 'God appeared to men *to a sufficient extent*'.[41] This is a peculiar qualification, which, again, may admit of an orthodox interpretation, but would hardly seem to require it. As I have argued, we simply do not find a clear statement of the 'true man, true God' of the orthodox

[36] *Exp. Gal.* 24.7-8.
[37] On the development of the idea of the Mediator in Augustine's early works, see Remy 1979, vol. 1, pp. 25–56.
[38] *Exp. Gal.* 27.3; see above, pp. 80–1. [39] *Conf.* 7.18.24.
[40] *De util. cred.* 15.33. [41] *De util. cred.* 16.34.

Catholic faith until the mid-390s. On my reading of the early works, Augustine still regards Christ, in accordance with *Confessions* 7.19.25, as a wise man participating in, but ultimately distinct from, the eternal Wisdom of God. I believe that this hypothesis most adequately fits the evidence not only of Augustine's early works, but also of the writings from *c.* 395, where we begin to see a concern with the union of the divine and human natures in the 'Mediator'. I believe, therefore, that we may take Augustine very literally at *Confessions* 7.18.24, as he refers to his discovery of 'the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ'. This discovery may be identified with his discovery of the Mediator in the mid-390s.

Along with this shift in Augustine's understanding of Christ's person *c.* 395 comes a shift in his understanding of Christ's work. As the unique Mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ alone is the source of our hope and salvation. He is our redeemer: those (and only those) are reconciled to God who have faith in him, who saves us through grace rather than according to our own merits.[42] Let us now turn our attention to this important development in Augustine's soteriology.

THE WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

The way of authority as we have seen, emphasizes Jesus's exemplary role in salvation. His whole earthly life (and death and resurrection) is a 'discipline of morals', exemplifying the four cardinal virtues.[43] This provides a path to salvation that is available even for those who are unfit for the liberal disciplines. Such people need only imitate his virtuous example, as 'no sin can be committed except while those things that he condemned are pursued, or those things that he bore are avoided'.[44]

It might seem that an essential component of Christ's salvific work has been overlooked here, i.e. his role as the redeemer of fallen humanity, who has suffered and died on the cross in order to free sinners from their bondage. Did Augustine really believe that salvation could be attained simply by following the example of Jesus? In his later writings Augustine certainly makes it clear that the example is not sufficient for salvation but must be accompanied by the assistance of grace.[45] This point is central to the Pelagian controversy, and is rooted in Augustine's interpretation of original sin, which is attributed to Adam not by way of example

[42] *Exp. Gal.* 24. [43] *De vera relig.* 16.32; see above, p. 64. [44] *De vera relig.* 16.31.
[45] Cf. *C. Iul. imp. op.* 2.146.1–2; cf. Geerlings 1978, pp. 212ff.

(*in exemplo*), but by way of origin (*in origine*).[46] Because sin is rooted in the corrupted human soul that has been inherited from Adam, humanity is incapable of escaping sin through the imitation of a good example. This condition has led humanity into the hands of the devil, and it can only be redeemed from captivity through the blood of Christ, which was graciously poured out for sinners on the cross.[47] Redemption is effected through faith in Christ, which is closely connected to baptism ('the sacrament of faith'),[48] a 'sacred sign' (*sacrum signa*)[49] and a 'likeness' (*similitudo*)[50] of that which it signifies, i.e. the death and resurrection of Christ. In baptism we are 'buried together' with Christ and arise with him to newness of life.[51] The fullness of this new life will be realized, however, only with the future resurrection of the body. For as long as we are in this mortal life, we must 'walk by faith and not by sight', in hope of the future peace that is to come.[52]

This, in broad outline, is how Augustine understands Christ's redemptive work in his later writings. It is considerably different from what we find at *Confessions* 7.19.25, where Christ is depicted as our teacher, providing an 'example of condemning temporal things for the sake of immortality'. Augustine moved beyond a purely pedagogical understanding of Christ's work with his discovery of 'the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ' (*Confessions* 7.18.24). This discovery appears to be linked to Augustine's rereading of Paul (*Confessions* 7.21.27), and his realization that the apostle expressed the same truth as the Platonists but 'with praise of [God's] grace'. At that time he realized that Christ is not simply our teacher but is in fact our redeemer, for it is by his grace that we are freed from 'the body of this death'.

How does this relate to Augustine's early writings? It can hardly be denied that they, like *Confessions* 7.19.25, strongly emphasize the pedagogical character of Jesus Christ's work.[53] Is it possible that these writings belong to Augustine's Photinian period, and were composed prior to his discovery of the grace of God as described at *Confessions* 7.21.27? In my view this is indeed the most plausible explanation. In this chapter, I will support my claim by tracing the development of Augustine's interpretation

[46] *Serm.* 294.15; on the *exemplum* concept in the Pelagian controversy, see Geerlings 1978, pp. 216–19.
[47] Cf. *En. in Ps.* 95.5; *De Trin.* 13.13.17, 13.15.19; *Serm.* 130.2. [48] *Ep.* 98.9.
[49] *De civ. Dei* 10.5. [50] *Ep.* 98.9.
[51] On the salvific importance of the sacrament of baptism, and its relation to the *exemplum*, see Geerlings 1978, pp. 220–2; Studer 1974.
[52] See below, pp. 93–6 and pp. 218–22.
[53] Cf. *Ep.* 11.4, 12.1, p. 29, ll.27–9: 'quicquid autem per susceptum illum hominem gestum est, ad eruditionem informationemque nostram gestum est'. See also Geerlings 1978, pp. 85–91.

of Paul from 386 to 396, paying particular attention to his understanding of Paul's distinction between the law of the flesh and the law of the mind.

Until he began listening to Ambrose preach, Augustine's outlook on Paul, and his outlook on the Scriptures more generally, had been shaped predominantly by the Manichaeans. They read the Scriptures selectively, freely rejecting the Law and the Prophets as incompatible with the Gospels and apostolic writings.[54] They also rejected as spurious a number of passages in the New Testament, including a few from Paul's writings.[55] But Paul himself was held in high regard by the Manichaeans,[56] so much so, in fact, that it has been said that 'African Manichaeism is almost a Paulinist heresy'.[57] The Manichaeans regularly appealed to Paul in support of their claim that the will is not free but determined by the evil substance ruled by the 'Prince of Darkness'. Fortunatus, for example, claims that the soul does not sin voluntarily, but by the compulsion of the evil nature that is opposed to the law of God. This, he believes, is what the apostle was referring to when he saw 'another law in [his] members, warring against the law of [his] mind', and said: 'the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; so that you are not able to do what you want'.[58]

Augustine would undoubtedly have grown familiar with this Manichaean interpretation of Paul during the nine years that he was actively involved with the sect. It is not surprising, then, that he should be very interested to read Paul afresh in 386, after encountering the 'books of the Platonists' and discovering a fundamental continuity between Platonism and his childhood religion. Augustine would reclaim Paul from the Manichaeans at this time. He says: 'I seized [*arripio*] [the writings of] the apostle Paul', one of those authorities transmitting 'the divine mysteries', and notes that he was 'set on fire' after comparing these writings with the Platonic books.[59]

This reading of Paul in 386 is typically (and in my view erroneously) identified with Augustine's reading of Paul as described at *Confessions* 7.21.27, where Augustine recalls: 'I eagerly seized [*arripui*] the venerable writing of Your Spirit, especially the apostle Paul'.[60] The identification might seem plausible on the face of it: in both cases Augustine uses the verb *arripere*, and in both cases his reading of Paul occurs after his reading of the 'books of the Platonists' (or 'certain plenteous books', as they are

[54] Cf. *Retract.* 1.22 (21).1. Also see above, p. 6.
[55] On interpolations found by the Manichaeans in Paul, see Decret 1995b, pp. 69–75.
[56] Cf. *De Gen. c. Man.* 1.2.3. [57] Frend 1953, p. 21.
[58] *C. Fort.* 21 (Fortunatus is quoting Rom. 7:23 and Gal. 5:17). [59] *C. Acad.* 2.2.5; *De beat. vit.* 1.4.
[60] *Conf.* 7.21.27.

described at *Against the Academics* 2.2.5).[61] However, these similarities alone should not convince us that the two passages are therefore describing the same incident. Notice that Augustine also uses the verb *arripere* to describe his reading of Paul at *Confessions* 8.12.29: 'So I was roused to return to the place where Alypius was sitting, for I had placed the book of the apostle there when I arose. I seized [*arripui*] it, opened it and read in silence.'[62] And yet this is not the same reading of Paul as is described at *Confessions* 7.21.27 and *Against the Academics* 2.2.5.[63] Augustine is obviously quite fond of using the verb *arripere* to describe his taking up the writings of Paul. But Augustine returned to the writings of Paul numerous times throughout his life, and so we must be careful to look at the specific understanding of Paul that Augustine achieved at *Confessions* 7.21.27 before judging whether this is the same reading of Paul as in 386. As we will see, the understanding of Paul that is described at *Confessions* 7.21.27 corresponds to the understanding of Paul that Augustine achieved *c.* 395, and bears little resemblance to his understanding of Paul in 386.

In his early writings Augustine believes that Paul's description of the struggle between the law of the flesh and the law of the mind is referring to a brief stage in one's journey from the carnal to the spiritual. For example, in an allegorical interpretation of the days of creation, Augustine considers the struggle between mind and flesh to be characteristic of the 'third day' of man's life, at which time he begins to separate his mind from the temptations of the flesh. On this day, man can say: 'With the mind I obey the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin' (Rom. 7:25). By the time of the 'sixth day', the mind's subjugation of the flesh is complete, so that the mind can look forward to eternal stability and rest, which is the seventh day.[64] Augustine has a similar schema in *On True Religion*, in which he describes in seven stages the transformation of the old man into the new man, that is, his progression from the exterior and earthly to the interior and spiritual.[65] Man begins with the examples provided by history, but leaves them behind in the second stage, as he moves on from authority to reason, and forgets human things in his striving after divine things. By the third stage, he already finds no pleasure in sinning, as he has now 'married carnal appetite with firm reason'; in the fourth, he 'shines forth as the perfect man'; in the fifth, he is living peacefully in the unchangeable realm

[61] On the identification of these books with the 'books of the Platonists', see below, p. 116, n. 37.
[62] *Conf.* 8.12.29.
[63] Cf. O'Meara 1992b, p. 205; Ferrari 1984, pp. 60–3.
[64] *De Gen. c. Man.* 1.25.43.
[65] *De vera relig.* 26.48–27.50. The contrast between the 'old man' and the 'new man' is found at Rom. 6:6; Eph. 2:15, 4:22–4; Col. 3:9–11.

of the supreme and ineffable wisdom; and in the sixth, he prepares to pass into the final rest and perpetual beatitude, which is the seventh stage. In sum, the early Augustine is quite confident that the struggle between the law of the flesh and the law of the mind can be resolved in this life, and that the regenerated man can enter into a state of blessed rest.

This confidence is a reflection of his early understanding of Paul. As Peter Brown has noted, Augustine

> 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' … The idea of the spiritual life as a vertical ascent, as a progress towards a final, highest stage to be reached in this life, had fascinated Augustine in previous years.[66]

Carol Harrison has recently attacked Brown's characterization of the early Augustine's Paul, as she argues that the essentials of Augustine's mature views on human sinfulness and divine grace (including the need for Christ's redemptive work) were in place already in 386.[67] But her argument is problematic. The main difficulty – and this is a criticism that Harrison herself seems to anticipate[68] – is that she tends to interpret Augustine's earlier views in light of his later views, and in so doing does not leave sufficient room for his thought to develop and mature. For instance, she frequently cites Augustine's belief in creation from nothing in 386 as evidence that his mature understanding of human incapacity and divine grace was already in place at that time.[69] Of course, the specific ways in which God's grace is manifested in salvation history cannot be deduced from the doctrine of creation from nothing itself. Grace may have been present from the very beginning of Augustine's career,[70] but there is no reason why Augustine could not have believed both in the need for God's grace and (in accordance with a 'Platonic' reading of Paul) in the possibility of human perfection and salvation independent of Christ's redemptive work on the cross. These are separate issues; however,

[66] Brown 2000, p. 145.

[67] Cf. Harrison 2006, p. 126:

> 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.

[68] Harrison 2006, p. vii.

[69] Harrison 2006, pp. 74, 81, 114 and *passim*.

[70] In fact, it seems to me more accurate to say that grace and human initiative are both present – even if their juxtaposition is an uncomfortable one – at the very beginning. See, for example, Löhrer 1955, pp. 226–41. I am not at all confident that the young Augustine has a clear position on the relationship between grace and human capacity. To appreciate the depth of his confusion on this matter (and others), one should consider his uncertainty regarding 'the question of the soul'. See below, pp. 146–7.

Harrison sometimes seems to conflate them.[71] Despite her protestations, there can be little doubt that the young Augustine did believe in the possibility of human perfection in this life, through the overcoming of the struggle between the law of the flesh and the law of the mind[72] (whether and to what extent he believed that this was possible independent of the grace of Christ's redemptive work is a separate matter). In this sense, I believe that Brown's characterization of the early Augustine's Paul as a Platonist is entirely appropriate.

Augustine began to modify his interpretation of Paul around 389, as he began to take into consideration the effect that habit has upon the soul's capacity to do what it wills, in particular, its capacity to turn from the carnal to the spiritual. The soul is still capable of reaching the state of perfect peace signified by the seventh day, but the weight of past sin now burdens the soul:

> The soul cannot will to end those carnal motions in the same way that it can will to begin them. For the penalty of sin is not in its power as the sin itself … The soul is stronger when it sins, but after the sin it is made weaker in accordance with divine law, and is less capable of desisting from what it has done.[73]

Augustine refers to the delight of sin that is fixed in the memory as 'habit' (*consuetudo*), and identifies this with the 'flesh' (*caro*).[74] The flesh, then, is not simply the body alone but also the soul that is burdened by the force of habit. This means that the struggle for purification does not simply pit soul against body, but also one 'part' of the soul against another. There is a conflict within the soul itself.[75] It is in this context that we are now to understand Paul's words: 'In mind I serve the law of God, but in flesh the law of sin.' The flesh, the compulsive force of habit, makes it difficult for the soul to turn to spiritual things. Nevertheless, Augustine has no doubt that this conversion of the soul is still possible. It is still within the soul's power to succeed in its struggle against habit, against the flesh, so that the mind is fixed firmly upon the spiritual. Having done this, the force

[71] Cf. Harrison 2006, p. 260. It might also be noted, although the context is polemical, that at *De civ. Dei* 10.29 Augustine attributes even to Porphyry the recognition of God's grace: 'You [Porphyry] admit that there is grace, since you indeed say that it has been granted to a few to reach God through the power of intelligence … when you say it has been "granted", you certainly admit the grace of God, not the sufficiency of man.'

[72] In addition to the passages we have discussed, see also *De mor. ecc. Cath*. 1.31.66; *De vera relig*. 12.24, 46.86–7; and Van Fleteren 1976, pp. 481–2.

[73] *De mus*. 6.5.14. [74] *De mus*. 6.11.33; cf. *De fid. et sym*. 10.23.

[75] Cf. O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 479. Notice how adamant Augustine is at *Conf*. 8.10 about the fact – *contra* the Manichaeans – that there are not two souls but rather one conflicted soul.

of habit will be broken and eventually destroyed.[76] The path to perfect peace and beatitude remains open.

This optimism is still present as late as *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* (393/4). In this work, Augustine maintains that one can attain the desired state of blessedness in this life by subjecting one's beastly passions to the rule of reason, which then brings about complete peace in one's soul:

> 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the sons of God' [Matt. 5:7]. Perfection is in peace, where there is no opposition, and so the sons of God are peacemakers, since nothing resists God and sons certainly ought to have the likeness of their father. Those people are peacemakers in themselves who, having organized every motion of their soul in subjection to reason, that is, to the mind and the spirit, and having tamed their carnal desires, become a kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God all things are ordered in such a way that what is distinguished and excellent in man governs without any resistance those other things that are common to us and beasts. Moreover, that which excels in man, that is, the mind or reason, is subjected to the better, which is Truth itself, the only begotten Son of God. For one cannot rule what is inferior unless he is subject to the superior. And this is the peace that is given *on earth* to men of goodwill; *this is the life of the complete and perfect wise man*.[77]

Harrison downplays these and other comments in the early works regarding human perfectibility in this life, saying that they '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 short – than descriptions of actual experience'.[78] But this interpretation is unconvincing. The author of *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* (to restrict ourselves here to this work) is expressly convinced that the perfection of the peacemakers is not only attainable but has also been attained in this life: 'And these things can indeed be fulfilled in this life, as we believe they were fulfilled with the apostles.'[79] To be sure, there is a difference between perfection in this life and perfection in the next life. Augustine is by now convinced that, in this life, there will be no end to the irritations of the mortal, corruptible body; it is only with the future resurrection of the body that the temptations of the body will be removed once and for all.[80] Moreover, he acknowledges that temptations become increasingly difficult to resist after we have consented to them, especially when repeated consent has formed in us a habit (*consuetudo*).[81] The gravity of the difficulty is made abundantly clear as

[76] *De mus.* 6.11.33. [77] *De serm. dom. in monte* 1.2.9; cf. *Retract.* 1.18.1. [78] Harrison 2006, p. 64.
[79] *De serm. dom. in monte* 1.4.12. [80] *De serm. dom. in monte* 2.6.23, 2.9.35.
[81] *De serm. dom. in monte* 1.12.34, 1.18.54.

Augustine poses the rhetorical question: 'What can be said or thought to be more laborious and difficult, when the faithful soul is exerting every ounce of its energy, than the overcoming of a bad habit?'[82] But in spite of the difficulty, Augustine still claims that it is possible for us to overcome the force of habit, to avoid consenting to the temptations of the flesh and to subject the carnal appetite to reason.[83] Harrison, for her part, regards Augustine's invocation of Paul's 'in mind I serve the law of God, but in flesh the law of sin' at *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* 2.6.23 as grounds for her conclusion that Augustine believed (as, indeed, he had ever since 386, on Harrison's view) 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.[84]

But, while it is true that Augustine believes that the weakness of the body will persist until its transformation at the final resurrection, he certainly does not yet believe that the weakness of the mortal body is an insurmountable obstacle to the perfection of the soul, or the will, in this life. He concedes that the flesh serves the law of sin, but notes that 'the will of God is done in the mind, i.e. in the spirit'.[85] This should be understood in light of his interpretation of Matt. 6:10 as a prayer that the saints *here on earth* may have the pure will of the angels, who 'cleave to You [i.e. God] completely and enjoy You fully, with no error obscuring their wisdom, no misery impeding their blessedness', as well as his claim, with reference to Luke 2:14, that 'when our goodwill has preceded, which follows the one calling, the will of God is perfected in us, just as it is in the heavenly angels, so that no adversity opposes our blessedness, which is peace'.[86]

In 394/5, however, Augustine would determine that it was impossible, in this life, to attain the perfect peace of the wise man. This new understanding is expressed in his commentaries on the apostle Paul,[87] as Augustine elaborates a new account of the stages of human development. There are now four:[88] before the law, under the law, under grace and in

[82] *De serm. dom. in monte* 1.18.54. [83] *De serm. dom. in monte* 1.12.34.
[84] Harrison 2006, p. 237. [85] *De serm. dom. in monte* 2.6.23. [86] *De serm. dom. in monte* 2.6.21.
[87] These include two commentaries on Romans (*Exp. prop*. and *Inch. exp*.) and one on Galatians (*Exp. Gal*.), as well as further discussions of passages from Romans 7–9 at *De div. q. 83* 66–8 and *De div. q. ad Simpl*. On the development of Augustine's understanding of Paul, and its sources, see Fredriksen 1988; Babcock 1979.
[88] The seven stages remain, however, even side by side with the four stages; see *De Trin*. 4.4.7.

peace.[89] Before the law, man is ignorant of sin, and follows his carnal desires impulsively. This is the natural condition of fallen man, who is bound by the chains of mortality resulting from the sin of Adam. Under the law, man becomes conscious of his sin and desires to do good, but is unable because he has been overcome by 'the habit of sin',[90] or 'the habits of the flesh'.[91] The habit of sin has such a hold on the soul prior to the reception of grace, that man is unable to free himself from its bondage on his own strength. Of this stage Paul writes: 'I do not do what I want; but what I hate, this I do' (Rom. 7:15) and 'I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind and holding me captive under the law of sin which is in my members' (Rom. 7:23).[92] Man will not be delivered from his bondage until he abandons his futile attempt to fulfil the law on his own strength – this attempt is called 'presumption' (*praesumptio*)[93] – and calls out to Christ his liberator: 'Unhappy man that I am, who will free me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord' (cf. Rom. 7:24–5).[94] At this point, Christ gives to the man of faith the grace to overcome the temptations of the flesh, so that he no longer consents to sin.[95] To this stage, under grace, pertain Paul's words: 'I myself serve the law of God in mind, but in flesh [I serve] the law of sin.'[96] In this stage, man must still struggle with carnal temptation. This is as far as he can go in this life: 'As long as we are in this life, irritations brought about by the mortal flesh and certain titillations of carnal pleasures will not be absent.'[97] The fourth and final stage – in peace – is relegated to the next life. Man can no longer hope to achieve the perfect peace of the wise man in this life, but must await the resurrection of the body.[98] This constitutes an admission – which was not yet present in *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* – that perfection is incompatible with our mortal flesh. Although we are living under grace and no longer consent to the temptations of the flesh, our sinful condition persists:

It is one thing not to sin, another not to have sin. For the person in whom sin does not reign (that is, who does not obey its desires) does not sin. But the person in whom these desires do not exist at all not only does not sin, but does not even

[89] This schema is first presented at *De div. q. 83* 61.7, and is elaborated at 66.3–7 and *Exp. prop.* 12 (13–18). For discussion see Fredriksen 1988, pp. 90–2. Augustine would later present these four stages in terms of man's capacities with respect to sin. In his original state, man was able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) and able to sin (*posse peccare*). But as a result of the Fall, he lost the former ability, so that he is now unable not to sin (*non posse non peccare*). In his resurrected state, man will not be able to sin (*non posse peccare*). Cf. *De corrept. et gratia* 12.33.

[90] *De div. q. 83* 66.3. [91] *De div. q. 83* 66.5. [92] *Exp. prop.* 37 (44).1, 38 (45–6).1.

[93] *Exp. prop.* 12 (13–18).6. [94] *Exp. prop.* 38 (45–6).4–5. [95] *Exp. prop.* 37 (44).3.

[96] *Exp. prop.* 38 (45–6).6. [97] *De div. q. 83* 66.7. [98] Cf. *Exp. prop.* 12 (13–18).10.

have sin. Although in many respects this may be brought about in this life, we must not hope for it in every respect until the resurrection and transformation of the flesh.[99]

The stage of perfect peace must await the next life, in which not only does the will not consent to sin, but neither is there any sinful impulse coming from the body. The vision of God must be delayed until then, for in this life 'we walk by faith and not by sight'.[100] This is our condition for the duration of the third day:

> We now cling to God in spirit through faith … 'We ourselves groan inwardly awaiting adoption, the redemption of our bodies' [Rom. 8:23]. For this adoption, which has already been accomplished in spirit for those who have believed, has not been accomplished in body. For the body itself has not yet been reformed in that heavenly transformation, as the spirit has already been changed by the reconciliation of faith, having turned from errors to God. That manifestation, therefore, still awaited even in those who have believed, will come about at the resurrection of the body. This pertains to that fourth stage, where there will be perfect peace and eternal rest in the whole, with no corruption opposing us or annoyance disturbing us from any quarter.[101]

This account of the four stages signals Augustine's rejection of his Platonic interpretation of Paul. Augustine has not only given up all hope that the conflict between the law in the members and the law of the mind might be fully resolved in this life, but he has also abandoned any aspiration he may still have had to attain 'the life of the complete and perfect wise man'. This new perspective shapes Augustine's understanding of the salvific work of Jesus Christ. Consider Augustine's description of Christ's exemplarity at this time. In question 61 of *Eighty-three Different Questions*,[102] he characterizes Christ as 'our king [*rex*], who has shown us an example of fighting and conquering by taking our sins upon his mortal flesh, and not giving in to the enticing and terrible temptations of the enemy'. Under the leadership of our king 'we are freed from Egypt, from the burdens and labours of this our sojourning, and the sins constantly pursuing us are buried by the sacrament of baptism while we escape'. But our king does not lead us directly to our Promised Land, the heavenly Jerusalem, where we will be protected forever under his guardianship. We must instead live out this life in hope (*in spe*) for the promise that we do not yet see, 'as if we are being led through the desert, with the Word of God in the Holy

[99] *Exp. Gal.* 48.5-6. [100] Cf. *De div. q. 83* 61.7 (Augustine is quoting 2 Cor. 5:7).
[101] *Exp. prop.* 45 (53).18, 19–21.
[102] According to Mosher 1982, pp. 16–17, this question was probably written between 391 and 394/5.

Scriptures comforting us like that manna from heaven'.[103] This 'wandering in the desert' undoubtedly corresponds to the third of the four stages (under grace): our sins have been 'buried by the sacrament of baptism', but we still have need of the example of our king to show us how to resist the temptations of the flesh.

Augustine shows little interest in the 'historical Christ' until he begins to appreciate the depth of the conflict between the law in the members and the law of the mind. It is not surprising that this should be the case. Recall the seven-stage schema of *On True Religion*, which presumes that the transformation of the old man into the new man can be effected in this life. As we saw, the examples of history (including, presumably, the example of Jesus Christ himself) belong to the first stage and are quickly left behind in the second stage, as man passes from human things to divine things. The four-stage schema, on the other hand, recognizes the impossibility of leaving human things behind as long as we remain in this life. This means that we must look to the example of Jesus Christ throughout this period of our sojourning, as we struggle constantly to resist the temptations of the flesh. Moreover, Christ's historical work is not restricted to providing an example for us to imitate. As we have noted, even the man who is conscious of sin (i.e. the man who is under the law) is unable to follow the law (or the example of Christ) until, having recognized his own incapacity, he calls out to Christ the liberator and receives 'grace, which forgives past sins, assists the struggling one, adds charity to justice and removes fear'.[104] The forgiveness of sins is an essential part of Christ's work on the cross, as he is not only our king but also our priest (*sacerdos*), who has 'offered himself as a burnt-offering for our sins and recommended the similitude[105] of his sacrifice to be celebrated in memory of his passion'.[106]

Clearly, we are far removed here from Augustine's early conception of the salvific work of Christ. That Christ was a sort of 'poor man's Plato', sent to provide a path to salvation for the uneducated masses, who would be hopelessly lost in their sin and ignorance were it not for this act of divine mercy. God's grace is certainly exhibited there, in that he has provided the example of the wise man, but such an act of grace is

[103] *De div. q. 83* 61.2. [104] *Exp. prop.* 12 (13–18).7.

[105] I.e. the sacrament. On the relationship between *sacramentum* and *similitudo*, see *Ep.* 98.9.

[106] *De div. q. 83* 61.2; cf. *De civ. Dei* 10.20. It is interesting that Christ's two roles of king and priest are described as *duae personae*. On the significance of this for the development of Augustine's understanding of the relationship of the unity of God and man in the *una persona Christi*, see Drobner 1986, pp. 165–8.

considerably different from what we find in the four-stage schema, wherein 'the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord' is unequivocally the sole path to salvation. By 394/5 Augustine is no longer prepared to give a pass to an elite class of individuals on the grounds that they are capable of attaining the blessed life through reason alone. It is now through faith in Christ that all are saved, including those (such as Abraham) who lived before the Incarnation. The only difference is that those living after the Incarnation believe in something that is partly past (Christ's first coming) and partly future (Christ's second coming), while those living before the Incarnation believed, through revelation, in both comings as future. But it is the same faith for both.[107] Indeed, Augustine now understands the Jewish law as having been given for the sole purpose of inducing humility in a proud people, so that they would seek the grace of Christ, the Mediator:

> The law was ordained, therefore, for a proud people so that they might be humbled by their transgression (since they could not receive the grace of love unless they were humbled, and without this grace they could not fulfill the precepts of the law at all), so that they might seek grace and not assume that they could be saved by their own merits (which is pride), and so that they might be righteous not by their own power and strength, but by the hand of a *mediator* who justifies the impious … The seed was placed by angels in the hand of a *mediator* so that he might liberate from their sins those now forced through transgression of the law to confess that they need the grace and mercy of the Lord, so that their sins might be forgiven and they might be reconciled to God in a new life through him who had poured out his blood for them.[108]

It is interesting to note that Augustine had previously described the law as useful for those who 'were not able to be recalled from sins *by reason*'.[109] Here, however, there is no longer any hint that the law constitutes a second-rate path to salvation. On the contrary, the law is necessary to counter that pride that would bypass the grace of God in Jesus Christ – the only path to salvation – and attempt to become righteous on one's own strength. Again, we see here that the grace of Christ consists in his historical redemptive work on the cross. The shedding of his blood leads to forgiveness of sins for those who, realizing their inability to fulfil the law on their own strength, call upon Christ and confess their need for his grace. This redemptive action is connected here with the concept of the Mediator. Salvation comes from the Mediator, whose blood justifies the impious and reconciles sinners to God through grace rather than according to merit. As we have already noted, Augustine's commentary on Galatians is

[107] *Exp. Gal.* 23.5–6. [108] *Exp. Gal.* 24.14, 24.17. [109] *De util. cred.* 3.9.

one of the first works to refer to the 'one Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ' (1 Tim. 2:5).[110] Again, we should compare this with *Confessions* 7.18.24. There Augustine says that he had not found the way to gain the strength for enjoying God until he recognized 'the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ'. If we take Augustine's claim at face value, it would seem to suggest that he did not find this way until *c*. 395, which is when he begins using the term 'Mediator'.

In the mid-390s, then, we see in Augustine's writings a growing appreciation of the grace of God as consisting not simply in Christ's example, but also (and more fundamentally) in his redemptive work on the cross. Previously, Augustine had depicted the death and resurrection of Christ as little more than an example of fortitude for us to imitate: like Christ, we should not fear death, not even the worst kind. But in the mid-390s, Augustine makes it clear that Christ's death is more than an example of our salvation. It is in fact the locus of our salvation, for it is only through our faith in the crucified Christ that our sins are forgiven and we are enabled to follow the example of Christ in the first place. This is an important development in Augustine's thought: it constitutes a shift from the external operation of grace in the example to the internal operation of grace through faith in the redeemer.

But is this really a substantive change in Augustine's soteriology? Or is it only a shift of emphasis? To be sure, references to the salvific efficacy of baptism are not completely absent from the early writings. Augustine refers already at Cassiciacum to 'the authority of the mysteries', the purifying power of 'the sacred rites into which we are being initiated'.[111] As for the mechanism of Christ's salvific work, Rivière finds in several early references to 'Christ's death for us' some indications (which he admits are very inchoate) of 'une théorie de la substitution'.[112] It also appears as if the young Augustine may have been familiar, at least to some extent, with the 'ransom' theory of atonement. According to this theory, man has fallen into the hands of the devil as a result of sin, and can only be redeemed from his captivity through the blood of Christ. Christ's blood is effectively the 'ransom payment' offered by God to the devil in order to effect the freedom, or salvation, of the 'hostages'.[113] The mature Augustine was certainly a

[110] *Exp. Gal.* 24; see above, p. 85. On Augustine's use of 1 Tim. 2:5, see DuRoy 1966, p. 89, n. 3.
[111] *De ord.* 2.9.27. [112] Rivière 1933, p. 371.
[113] The ransom theory was held by many of the Fathers, including Irenaeus, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Until it was rejected by Anselm (cf. *Cur Deus homo* 1.7), this theory was widely offered as an explanation of Christ's salvific work on the cross. On the doctrine of the Atonement in early Christian thought, see Bethune-Baker 1962, pp. 327–55.

proponent of the ransom theory,[114] and echoes of it may be detected already at *On Music* 6.4.7:

> And the highest Wisdom of God deigned to assume [*adsumere*] this wound [i.e. the corruptible, sinful body] in a wonderful and ineffable sacrament, when he took up [*suscepit*] a man without sin, but not without the condition of the sinner. For he wanted to be humanly born, to suffer, and to die. Not that he deserved any of these things: they occurred through a most excellent goodness, so that we might guard against the pride by which we most deservedly [*dignissime*] fell into these things, rather than to the humiliations he endured unjustly, and with a calm mind we might repay the death owed [*mortem debitam solueremus*], if for our sake [*propter nos*] he was willing to bear [*sustinere*] a death that he did not owe [*indebitam*], and whatever else more secret [*secretius*] and more purifying [*purgatius*] in such a sacrament can be understood by saintly and more holy people.[115]

Humanity has 'deservedly' fallen into the shackles of a corruptible and sinful body, and his freedom requires him to 'repay the death owed', following the example of the man who suffered 'a death that he did not owe'.

Although the terminology here is certainly reminiscent of the ransom theory, the ransom theory itself is not stated. There is no indication that we are unable to pay our debt, and that Jesus will therefore pay it on our behalf. There is no indication that the purpose of Jesus's undeserved suffering and death is to produce a 'ransom payment' for hostages who are unable to free themselves from captivity. To be sure, in choosing to 'assume' a body and 'take up' a man, and to suffer and die unjustly, the Wisdom of God has acted 'for our sake'. But this need not be taken in a redemptive sense, for it is perfectly consistent with the 'discipline of morals' described in Augustine's early Christology. Jesus lived and died as he did in order to set before us a pattern worthy of our imitation. The death of Jesus is a sacrament that reminds us of our own wretched condition in this corruptible body, and serves as an example of the fact that we will only rise above this condition if we, like Jesus, are prepared to face our own mortality with equanimity. By imitating the outstanding example of Christ, we may 'repay the death owed'. Augustine does suggest that the significance of Jesus's death may go beyond this exemplary function; he says that there may be something 'more secret' and 'more purifying' in this sacrament. But he does not address the matter any further, leaving it for 'saintly and more holy people'.

[114] See above, p. 87. [115] *De mus.* 6.4.7.

Van Bavel sees in these final, allusive remarks some support for the possibility that the notion of Christ's redemptive work was not unknown to the young Augustine, but rather taken for granted.[116] This possibility may be accepted, but we would then be left to wonder why he fails to discuss such an important theme throughout his early writings. Why does he not integrate the concept of 'Christ the redeemer' into the structure of his early Christology? Why is it that his sole focus seems to be upon 'Christ the example'? It is especially difficult to account for this on the widely held assumption that Augustine had already rejected his Photinian error in 386. After all, an important part of that error consisted precisely in his regarding Christ as nothing more than 'an example of condemning temporal things for the sake of immortality', who 'merited so much authority as our teacher'. Had Augustine already abandoned his Photinianism in 386, we would naturally expect him to avoid an undue emphasis upon 'Christ the example' at the expense of 'Christ the redeemer'. But this is certainly not the case in his early writings; Augustine does not clearly discuss Christ's redemptive work until the mid-390s. This suggests that Augustine was either ignorant of, or not particularly interested in, the concept of 'Christ the redeemer' until that time. And this gives us good reason, I believe, to conclude that there is indeed a substantive change in Augustine's soteriology in the mid-390s, and not merely a shift in emphasis. This change is closely connected with his recognition that the conflict between the law in the members and the law of the mind is a permanent one, and is elaborated by Augustine in the context of his new four-stage schema of salvation.

It is important to realize that in his commentaries of 394/5, Augustine's growing appreciation of the grace of God is still balanced by a concern to preserve human initiative in the act of faith. The grace of God is given to those (and only those) who freely turn to Christ for assistance. This means that our ability to resist the flesh is a gift of God, while our faith in Christ comes from ourselves.[117] The unaided will of man is not free not to sin, but only to *want* not to sin. But whoever wants not to sin is free to call upon Christ in faith, and thereby become free not to sin with the help of Christ.[118] In this way human initiative is necessary for salvation: the one who believes in Christ the liberator will 'merit being freed'[119] from the clutches of sin by receiving his grace.

[116] Van Bavel 1954, p. 9. [117] Cf. *Exp. prop.* 52 (60).12.
[118] *Exp. prop.* 12 (13–18).12. [119] *De div. q. 83* 66.7.

But Augustine would soon decide that even faith itself must be a gift of God, granted independent of merit. He arrived at this position in his famous response to Simplicianus' queries concerning Rom. 9:10–29. Simplicianus wonders how it is that God could have elected Jacob and rejected Esau even before the twins were born, presumably before they could have merited approval or disapproval. Augustine had previously argued that God's 'election' is to be understood in terms of his foreknowledge. God foreknew that Jacob would turn to him in faith, and that Esau would not.[120] But Augustine firmly rejects this argument in his response to Simplicianus. Faith, too, is now a gift given solely by the grace of God:

> The question is whether even faith can merit the justification of man, whether the merits of faith do not precede the mercy of God. But even faith itself is to be numbered among the gifts of grace … Therefore unless the mercy of God in calling precedes, no one can even believe, and thus begin to be justified and to receive the power of living well. Therefore grace precedes all merit.[121]

Here is the fruit of Augustine's reconsideration of Paul: the complete rejection of the efficacy of human initiative in the process of salvation. Man is utterly unable to know God by his own strength; even the initial stage of faith is possible only by the grace of God. Augustine expresses his new understanding with reference to 1 Cor. 4:7: 'What do you have that you did not receive? But if you received it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?'[122]

On Peter Brown's interpretation, which has been widely accepted, the doctrine of grace expressed in the response to Simplicianus in 396 constitutes a decisive shift in Augustine's thought. Brown deems the early Augustine 'more Pelagian than Pelagius',[123] and judges that it was in his response to Simplicianus that, '[f]or the first time, Augustine came to see man as utterly dependent on God, even for his first initiative of believing in Him'.[124] Carol Harrison, however, believes that this understanding of grace was already present in 386. She claims 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.'[125] Harrison regards Augustine's attempt in 394/5 to credit humans for the 'beginning of faith' (*initium fidei*) as an exception to his otherwise unwavering commitment to the absolute grace of God.[126] But the

[120] *Exp. prop.* 60–1. [121] *De div. q. ad Simpl.* 1.2.7.
[122] *De div. q. ad Simpl.* 1.2.9. [123] Brown 2000, p. 141. [124] Brown 2000, p. 148.
[125] Harrison 2006, p. 114. [126] Harrison 2006, pp. 137, 150–4 and *passim*.

exception (if that is what it is) is quite revealing, for it indicates that Augustine had not fully appreciated, or accepted, the implications of grace in 386. It underlines the fact that it is one thing for Augustine to assent to a doctrine such as creation from nothing, which implies (as Harrison sees it) Augustine's 'Simplicianian' view that everything is of grace, and quite another for him to work through the ramifications of such a doctrine fully. Augustine was always concerned to reconcile God's grace with human freedom (no small task!),[127] and his Pauline commentaries of 394/5 make it abundantly clear that he did not rest content with whatever balance he may have struck on this issue in 386. We must allow, then – as Harrison generally does not – for some confusion (and even heterodoxy) in Augustine's early writings as he struggles to define the relationship between divine grace and human freedom. The seeds of Augustine's later doctrine of grace may have been planted already in 386, but a considerable amount of development was still to come.

Let us now consider that reading of Paul, as described at *Confessions* 7.20.26–7.21.27, which prompted Augustine to recognize the deficiencies of Platonism and the need for the incarnate Christ:

> Where was that love which builds upon the foundation of humility, which is Christ Jesus? Or when would those books [*illi libri*] [i.e. the 'books of the Platonists'] have taught me that? I believe You wanted me to come across these books before I had examined Your Scriptures [*in libris tuis*], so that it might be impressed on my memory how I had been affected by them, and when I was later softened by Your books and my wounds were treated by Your caring fingers, I might be able to discern and to distinguish the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see the goal but do not see the way, and [those who see] the way leading to the country of blessedness, which we are meant not only to perceive but also to dwell in … So I eagerly seized upon the venerable writing of Your Spirit, especially the apostle Paul [*avidissime arripui … apostolum Paulum*] … I found that whatever truth I had read [in the 'books of the Platonists'] was said here with praise of Your grace: that he who sees should *not so glory as if he had not received*, not only what he sees but even the sight itself, *for what does he have that he has not received*? [1 Cor. 4:7] … For even though a man be *delighted with the law of God according to the inward man*, what shall he do about that *other law in his members, fighting against the law of his mind and making him captive to the law of sin that is in his members*? [Rom. 7:22–3] … *what shall this wretched man do? Who shall free him from the body of this death, unless Your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord* [Rom. 7:24–5] … The writings of the Platonists do not have this. Those pages do not have the face of this piety, the tears of confession, Your sacrifice, an afflicted spirit,

[127] For a consideration of the difficult relationship between grace and free will in Augustine, see Stump 2001.

a contrite and humbled heart, the salvation of the masses, the betrothed city, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the chalice of our redemption … It is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded mountaintop, yet not find the way to it and struggle hopelessly far from the way … and quite another to hold to the way that leads there …

In this passage Augustine contrasts 'those books' (i.e. the 'books of the Platonists') with 'Your books' (i.e. the Scriptures, especially the writings of Paul). We are told that upon 'seizing' Paul's writings, Augustine discovered that the truth he had already found with the Platonists was also discussed by the apostle, but 'with praise of (God's) grace'. Foremost among the truths that the Platonists had discovered was that ultimate reality is incorporeal. But if the Platonists had therefore seen the goal ('the country of blessedness', 'the land of peace'), they still could only gaze upon it from afar ('from a wooded mountaintop'), for they had not discovered the way to it. It was Paul's writings that revealed to Augustine the way leading to this goal, i.e. Jesus Christ. But this Christ is altogether different from the Christ that Augustine envisioned at *Confessions* 7.19.25. Paul does not praise the glory of man: his Christ is not simply a marvellous man participating perfectly in wisdom, or a teacher instructing us to follow his example of shunning temporal things in order to attain immortality. Paul instead praises the grace of God: his Christ is God, who freely and gratuitously humbles himself, even to the point of physical death, in order to redeem the masses, who are now hopelessly enslaved by the power of sin ruling their bodies. The difference between the Photinian Christ and the Pauline Christ is the difference between presumption and confession. Put differently, it is the difference between glorying in one's own strength (as Augustine had done, following the lead of the Platonists) and relying upon the grace of God, which is given independent of merit. Salvation is attained only through the grace of God, for not only what is seen but also the very ability to see is a gift of God, delivered through the humility and sacrifice of Christ.

The scriptural texts (Rom. 7:22–3 and 1 Cor. 4:7) are significant. That the conflict between the law of the flesh and the law of the mind cannot be resolved without 'the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord' is, as we have seen, an important component of Augustine's new understanding of Paul in the mid-390s. The citation of 1 Cor. 4:7 indicates that we are not to understand this conflict and its resolution in terms of Augustine's earlier 'Platonic Paul', for, as we have seen, this verse appears in the response to Simplicianus as an expression of Augustine's new insight that even faith is to be numbered among the gifts of grace. Previously Augustine had

believed that human effort (if only the 'effort' to believe) could merit grace, but with the response to Simplicianus he was forced to concede that 'not only what he sees but even the sight itself' is a gift of grace. This important shift is also signalled in the *Retractations*, as Augustine, with over thirty years of hindsight, points to 396 as the time that he had finally arrived at a full understanding of divine grace as expressed by 1 Cor. 4:7. This understanding coincided with the important transformation that occurred in his thinking while he was working out his famous response to Simplicianus regarding Rom. 9:10–29:

> In the solution of this question, I indeed laboured on behalf of the free choice of the human will, but the grace of God conquered, and I could only conclude, as the apostle is understood to have said in the clearest truth: 'For who sets you apart? What do you have that you have not received? And if you have received, why do you glory as if you had not received?' [1 Cor. 4:7][128]

Only in 396 did Augustine fully appreciate that even the free choice of the will was a gift given by the grace of God. This is entirely consonant with the sense of *Confessions* 7.21.27, as Augustine recalls his discovery of the absolute grace of God as expressed at 1 Cor. 4:7.

Consider also the following remarks from *Confessions* 7.18.24, wherein the 'Pauline revolution' described at *Confessions* 7.21.27 is foreshadowed:

> I was looking for a way to acquire the strength that is necessary for enjoying You. And I did not find it until I embraced the *Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* [1 Tim. 2:5], *who is over all things, God blessed forever*. [Rom. 9:5]

Again, as we have seen, it was not until *c.* 395 that Augustine discovered the Mediator.[129] I believe that we may take the narrator of the *Confessions* quite literally when he recalls his discovery of the Mediator here, as well as when he recalls, at 7.21.27, his discovery of the absolute grace of God and of the permanence of the conflict between the law of the flesh and the law of the mind. These discoveries are all part and parcel of Augustine's new understanding of Paul *c.* 395, culminating in the response to Simplicianus in 396. And this understanding of Paul is, I submit, one and the same as that which is recalled at *Confessions* 7.21.27.

Courcelle has argued that Augustine was prompted to turn to the writings of Paul as a result of his discussion(s) with Simplicianus – not in 396, however, but ten years earlier.[130] Their interaction is recounted at

[128] *Retract.* 2.27.1; cf. *De praed. sanct.* 3.7. [129] See above, pp. 85–6 and 97–8.

[130] Courcelle 1950, pp. 168–74. O'Donnell 1992, vol. III, p. 61 considers Courcelle's hypothesis 'compelling'.

Confessions 8.2.3: Augustine mentions his reading of the 'books of the Platonists' to the old man, who then leads the neophyte on to 'the humility of Christ' by pointing to the example of God's grace shown in the conversion of Victorinus, the very translator of those books.[131] While Simplicianus' role, as described in the *Confessions*, seems to be primarily that of a moral guide, Courcelle finds another passage suggesting that he may have offered Augustine intellectual instruction as well: in *The City of God*, Augustine recalls how he 'used to hear' (*solebamus audire*) from Simplicianus about a 'certain Platonist' (*quidam Platonicus*) who said that the opening verses of John's Gospel should be inscribed in gold and hung from the heights in every church.[132] The use of the imperfect (*solebamus*) suggests that Augustine may have received this instruction from the bishop on more than one occasion. On Courcelle's view, it was as a result of these meetings that Augustine began reading Paul in earnest, and thus came to discover the Catholic doctrine of the Word made flesh.

However, there is little if any indication in the text that Augustine's meeting(s) with Simplicianus are in any way related to the reading of Paul described at *Confessions* 7.21.27 (Courcelle does adduce a textual parallel,[133] but it is too slight to be reliable). Courcelle attempts to address this problem by pointing out – quite rightly – that Augustine's focus in book 8 (which contains the meeting(s) with Simplicianus) is upon the conversion of his will, while the focus of book 7 (which contains the reading of Paul) is the conversion of his intellect.[134] He contends that Augustine would therefore have reason to separate these two events in the narrative, even though they were connected in reality. Unfortunately, Courcelle's contention undermines his own emphasis upon the intellectual character of Augustine's discussions with Simplicianus; if Augustine recounted these discussions in book 8, how important could they have been for his intellectual development?

Of course, this is not to deny that Augustine's meetings with Simplicianus may have led him to Paul in 386. Augustine was certainly reading the apostle with great interest at that time. At Cassiciacum, Augustine recalls having 'seized [the writings of] the apostle Paul'.[135] And the significance of his turn to the Scriptures should not be underestimated, as Augustine describes himself as having being 'set on fire' (*exarsi*) only after comparing these writings with the 'books of the Platonists' (i.e. not after reading the Platonists on their own).[136] His zeal

[131] *Conf.* 8.2.3. [132] *De civ. Dei* 10.29. [133] Courcelle 1950, p. 169, n. 3.
[134] Courcelle 1950, p. 169. [135] *C. Acad.* 2.2.5; see above, p. 88. [136] *De beat. vit.* 1.4.

for the 'books of God' is further evidenced by the fact that Ponticianus, while paying a visit to Augustine, discovered one of Paul's books lying on a table. Augustine informed his visitor that he had been studying Paul diligently.[137] Did Simplicianus play a part in turning Augustine towards Paul? It is entirely possible, even likely. But it is clear that Simplicianus did not, in 386, lead Augustine to the understanding of Paul that is described at *Confessions* 7.21.27. Of course, if my argument is correct, he did do so in 396, ten years after the meeting described at *Confessions* 8.2.3, and he did so by prodding Augustine with questions of his own.

CONCLUSION

In part I of this book, I have examined 'the way of authority', a path to salvation that is outlined in Augustine's early writings (386–91). I have focused my attention upon the specific understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ that is involved in this path to salvation. This Christ, like the Christ of *Confessions* 7.19.25, is an eminent wise man and an outstanding example of virtue. It is not until *c.* 395 that Augustine will clearly identify Jesus Christ as the very Word of God, and describe him as the Redeemer of the sins of humanity through his death on the cross. This gives us good reason to believe (a) that the Photinian Christology of *Confessions* 7.19.25 is to be identified with the Christology of Augustine's early writings, and (b) that it was not until *c.* 395 that Augustine learned 'how, in that the Word was made flesh, Catholic truth is distinguished from the falsity of Photinus'.

Confessions 7.19.25 must of course be understood within the context of Augustine's intellectual development as described from *Confessions* 7.9.13 to 7.21.27. The development described in these paragraphs may be summarized as follows. Augustine was inspired by the 'books of the Platonists' to undertake at least two ascents of the soul to God (described at 7.10.16 and 7.17.23). After the first, relatively unsuccessful, ascent, Augustine engaged in some intellectual ruminations (7.11.17–7.16.22) which facilitated the second ascent. While this ascent was more successful than the first, it too was inadequate. The reason for this, as Augustine judges in retrospect, is that he had not yet recognized the true significance of the Word made flesh; he had not yet embraced the way to salvation, characterized as 'the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ' (7.18.24) and 'Christ our Saviour' (7.20.26). He would discover

[137] *Conf.* 8.6.14.

this way only after rereading the writings of St Paul (7.21.27). For some time before this, Augustine regarded Christ in the manner described at 7.19.25.

On the standard picture of Augustine's development, all of this took place within the span of a few months in the summer of 386. But if I am correct in thinking that the Christology of *Confessions* 7.19.25 is to be identified with the Christology of Augustine's early writings, much of the rest of this chronology will have to be revised as well. This task will be undertaken in part II.

PART II

The way of reason and the ascent of the soul

CHAPTER 3

The way of reason

The central claim of this book is that *Confessions* 7.9.13–7.21.27, which tells the story of Augustine's intellectual conversion to Christianity, is a description of Augustine's intellectual development from 386 to *c.* 395. In other words, I contend that Augustine was not intellectually converted to Christianity until *c.* 395. In part I I supported this claim by arguing that the Photinian Christology of *Confessions* 7.19.25 is to be identified with the Christology of 'the way of authority' that is elaborated in Augustine's early writings (386–91) and is not substantially modified until *c.* 395. In part II I will support this claim through an examination of Augustine's 'Platonic ascents', as described at *Confessions* 7.10.16 and especially 7.17.23. In particular, I will argue that 7.17.23 is a summary of a type of ascent of the soul that Augustine describes in the period from 387/8 to *c.* 391, and which formed the basis for his ambitious educational programme in the liberal disciplines. Augustine envisioned this method of ascent as providing a path to salvation through reason, independent of authority, but rejected this approach *c.* 395. Augustine's new attitude, as we will see, is evidenced by a significantly different treatment of the liberal disciplines in *On Christian Doctrine*.

THE LIBERAL DISCIPLINES AT CASSICIACUM

The way of authority is a path to salvation for the masses, providing an alternative to the arduous philosophical curriculum that can only be undertaken by an elite few. The easier path is not to be construed as an inferior path, for Augustine indicates, as we have seen, that it encompasses the three parts of philosophy: ethics, physics and logic.[1] Nevertheless, the clear focus of the way of authority is upon ethical training, as the whole life of Jesus Christ – from his birth to his death and resurrection – was 'a discipline of morals'.[2]

[1] See above, p. 65. [2] *De vera relig.* 16.32.

The other two branches of philosophy are of particular importance for the education of the few, who are to be trained in the liberal disciplines.[3]

What are these disciplines? While it seems that there are seven, roughly corresponding to the future *trivium* (grammar, dialectic, rhetoric) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy), Augustine is not always consistent in his enumeration of them.[4] One difficulty pertains to the fact that arithmetic is not explicitly discussed in *On Order*. (Marrou plays down the significance of this omission, noting that the work is shot through with Pythagoreanism.[5]) Another difficulty is this: in *On Order* Augustine describes 'a certain exalted discipline' – the discipline of philosophy – in addition to the seven other disciplines, including astronomy (*astrologia*), while at *Retractations* 1.6 the list of the seven disciplines includes philosophy but not astronomy. Perhaps this reflects Augustine's growing uneasiness with *astrologia*, about which he was already ambivalent in 386, describing it as 'a great subject for the religious but a torment for the curious'.[6] Augustine began directly opposing what we would now call astrology – as distinct from astronomy – in the mid-390s, first in question 45 of *Eighty-three Different Questions* and then in *On Christian Doctrine* 2.21.32–2.29.46.[7] He refers to the practitioners of this illicit kind of stargazing as *mathematici*,[8] while those involved in the legitimate enterprise of observing the heavens and predicting lunar and solar eclipses are designated 'philosophers' (*philosophi*).[9] It would make sense, then, for the author of the *Retractations* to use the term *philosophia* rather than *astrologia* in order to designate the seventh of the liberal disciplines.[10] By refraining from using the latter term, or any term that was etymologically derived from *aster*, he would be ensuring that his programme in the liberal disciplines was not misunderstood as advocating the illicit kind of stargazing.

[3] Augustine uses the terms *disciplinae* (*C. Acad.* 2.3.8, 2.7.17; *De ord.* 1.7.20, 1.8.24, 2.12.35, 2.16.44) and *disciplinae liberales* (*De ord.* 1.8.24, 2.9.26, 2.13.38) interchangeably. The classic work on the liberal disciplines in Augustine's thought is Marrou 1958. For more recent treatments, see the collection of articles in Pollman and Vessey 2005, and the overview in O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, pp. 269–78. Additional references are provided in subsequent notes.

[4] He provides lists at *De ord.* 2.4.13–2.5.14, 2.12.35–2.16.44, 2.18.47; *De quant. anim.* 23.72; *Conf.* 4.16.30; *Retract.* 1.6. For discussion, see Marrou 1958, pp. 189–93.

[5] Cf. esp. *De ord.* 2.20.53–4 and Marrou 1958, pp. 191–2.

[6] *De ord.* 2.15.42.

[7] On astrology in Augustine, see O'Loughlin 1992. O'Loughlin argues that Augustine had believed in and practised astrology until he met Firminus sometime between 383 and 386 (cf. *Conf.* 7.6.8–10).

[8] Cf. *De div. q. 83* 45; *De doct. Christ.* 2.21.32, 2.22.34; *Conf.* 7.6.8.

[9] *Conf.* 5.3.3.

[10] Cf. also the observation of Marrou 1958, p. 249: 'Presque toutes les allusions que l'on rencontre à l'astronomie traitent de cosmologie, disons, si le terme n'est pas trop ambitieux, d'astronomie physique; mais nous le savons, celle-ci ne concerne pas l'*astronomia*, elle ressort à la *physica*, et comme telle à la philosophie.'

Augustine's first systematic treatment of the disciplines is contained in the second book of *On Order*. There has been some controversy regarding the question of sources. While Varronian influence has been widely accepted,[11] Ilsetraut Hadot has argued that a Neoplatonic source (she suggests Porphyry's *On the Return of the Soul*) lies at the root of Augustine's discussion in *On Order*, and she finds no reason to suppose that Augustine derived his views from Varro's *disciplinarum libri*.[12] Of course, it is important to bear in mind that Augustine's familiarity with the liberal disciplines predates his encounter with the 'books of the Platonists'. Augustine was a professor of rhetoric, after all, and a devotee and teacher of 'so-called liberal learning'.[13] The author of the *Confessions* castigates his former culture as a useless striving after honour and praise: 'I pursued the emptiness of popular glory and the applause of spectators, with competition for prize poems and strife for garlands of straw and the vanity of stage shows and untempered lusts.'[14]

Whatever Augustine's putative sources, it is certainly the case that his views regarding the value of the liberal disciplines underwent some significant changes after his discovery of 'the books of the Platonists'. No longer are the disciplines to be studied for their own sake or for the sake of earning empty praise; they are now a propaedeutic to the philosophical life. Augustine scorns those who would regard someone as ignorant for not knowing that Daedalus flew, or for not knowing the name of Euryalus' mother.[15] A preoccupation with such matters is condemned as curiosity (*curiositas*), and is likened to a physical deformity, such as being born with six fingers.[16] Instruction in the liberal disciplines should instead be modest (*modesta*) and concise (*succincta*).[17] This kind of instruction should

[11] Supporting evidence includes: (a) the similarity between the name of one of Varro's lost works – *disciplinarum libri* (as preserved in Cassiodorus, *Inst*. 2.3.2) – and the name Augustine gives to his own project at *Retract*. 1.6: *disciplinarum libros*; (b) references to Varro at *De ord*. (2.12.35, 2.20.54); (c) Licentius' allusion to Varro in a poem sent to Augustine (*Ep*. 26); (d) Augustine's high praise for Varro's liberal learning at *De civ. Dei* 6.2.

[12] I. Hadot 1984, pp. 156–90. A general consideration that supports Hadot's claim is the fact that Porphyry was well known for his erudition in such subjects as grammar, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry and music (cf. Eunapius, *Vit. soph*. 4.2.2–4, 457). Moreover, Augustine was deeply impressed by Porphyry's learning; even in the polemical *De civ. Dei*, he can refer to Plotinus' student as 'the most learned of philosophers' (*doctissimus philosophorum*) (*De civ. Dei* 19.22, l.18). Hadot's argument has, however, been criticized by Shanzer 2005. For a different perspective altogether on the question of influence, see Solignac 1958.

[13] Cf. *Conf*. 4.1.1.

[14] *Conf*. 4.1.1 (trans. F. J. Sheed). Augustine did not leave rhetoric behind completely, however. In fact, there are many similarities between the function of rhetoric and the function of authority, on which see Lütcke 1968, pp. 76–8.

[15] *De ord*. 2.12.37. [16] *De quant. anim*. 19.33. [17] *De ord*. 1.8.24.

aim at producing philosophers, who are capable of leading themselves and others on to 'the ultimate goal':

> Such learning, if one uses it moderately – and here nothing is to be feared more than excess – nourishes for philosophy a soldier or even a commander of such quality that he flies off [*euolet*] to wherever he wants, arriving at that ultimate goal [*summum modum*], beyond which he neither can go, nor should go nor wants to go, and leads many others to that goal as well.[18]

The 'ultimate goal' is, of course, God, the source of blessedness for the soul.[19] The upshot, then, is that a moderate education in the liberal disciplines provides a path to salvation.

In *On Order*, the seven liberal disciplines comprise 'the order of learning', which, along with 'the order of life', serves as preparation for knowledge of 'a certain lofty discipline [*alta quaedam disciplina*], of which the masses have scarcely the faintest idea'.[20] The solution to the problem of evil is said to depend upon the knowledge of this discipline,[21] which appears to be what Augustine elsewhere calls 'the discipline of philosophy' (*philosophiae disciplina*).[22] This discipline is also mentioned in *Against the Academics*, where it is attributed to 'highly intelligent and clever men':

> As to what pertains to learning and teaching, and to the morals through which the soul is taken into account, given that there has been no lack of highly intelligent and clever men [*acutissimi et solertissimi uiri*] who have taught through their disputations that Aristotle and Plato harmonize with each other in such a way that, to the unskilled and less attentive, they seem to disagree – it seems to me that,

[18] *De ord.* 2.5.14.

[19] At *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.2.5–1.6.10, Augustine presents an argument for the identification of God as the Supreme Good. His argument may be summarized as follows. The supreme good must be something that cannot be lost against the will (*invitus*), for a man cannot be blessed if he is at risk of losing his supreme good. Moreover, because it is supreme, this good must be something than which there is nothing better (1.3.5). Thus, man's supreme good is either man, or something even greater than man. What is man? If man is body, his supreme good nevertheless lies in the soul, which vivifies the body. If man is soul, or the body and soul together, his supreme good is the perfection of the soul. In either case, man's supreme good lies in the soul. No one doubts that the supreme good of the soul is virtue (1.5.7–8). The only question is whether virtue is only in the soul or also outside of the soul, by itself (1.6.9). But whatever the answer to this question, man must nevertheless pursue something external to himself in order to become perfected. He must pursue something, for a soul cannot become virtuous by pursuing nothing. And he must pursue something external to the soul, for even if virtue can only be within the wise soul as a disposition (*habitus*) or quality (*qualitas*), it is nevertheless the case that 'if the soul pursues itself in seeking virtue, it pursues something foolish, since the soul itself is foolish before it has acquired virtue' (1.6.9). What, then, is this something else that man must pursue in order to attain virtue? Augustine presents two possibilities, a wise man or God (Augustine notes that he is addressing those who (a) believe in God's existence, and (b) believe that he cares for humans) (1.6.10). The wise man cannot be our supreme good, since he can be lost against our will. This leaves God, who cannot be lost against our will, as our Supreme Good (1.6.10).

[20] *De ord.* 2.7.24, 2.8.25. [21] Cf. *De ord.* 2.7.24, 2.19.51. [22] *De ord.* 2.18.47.

through many centuries and numerous debates, the result of this has been the formation of a single discipline of the truest philosophy [*una uerissimae philosophiae disciplina*].[23]

These *acutissimi et solertissimi uiri*, who have shown the agreement between Aristotle and Plato (probably the 'Neoplatonists'),[24] are the source of *una uerissimae philosophiae disciplina*. This discipline has a moral as well as an intellectual component; undoubtedly, this corresponds to the order of life and order of learning required by the discipline in *On Order*. As for the discipline itself, it is concerned with only two things: knowledge of the soul and knowledge of God.[25] To know the soul is to know oneself; to know God is to know one's origin, and to attain the blessed life.[26] Augustine lists a series of topics that must be understood before one can investigate the soul, let alone God: the nature of non-being (*nihil*), the various kinds of being (*informis materia*, *formatum exanime*, *corpus*, *species in corpore*), place (*locus*), time (*tempus*), the various types of movement (*motus secundum locum*, *motus non secundum locum*, *stabilis motus*), eternity (*aevum*), what it is to be neither in a place nor nowhere (*quod sit nec in loco esse nec nusquam*), what is beyond time and forever (*quid sit praeter tempus et semper*), what it is to be nowhere and nowhere not to be (*quid sit et nusquam esse et nusquam non esse*), and what it is to be never and never not to be (*et numquam esse et numquam non esse*).[27] To master these topics is no easy matter, but Augustine is confident that those who have the requisite leisure, aptitude and diligence can do so if they follow the order of life and the order of learning, which requires instruction in the seven liberal disciplines. This order is outlined in the second book of *On Order*.[28]

The order of life

A certain degree of moral development is a prerequisite for one's intellectual development, and the former is attained, at first, only by following authority:

Since no one becomes learned except from a state of ignorance, and since no one who is ignorant knows in what way he ought to present himself to instructors

[23] *C. Acad.* 3.19.42.

[24] In *Ep.* 118.5.33 (*c.* 410), Augustine again refers to *acutissimi et solertissimi uiri*, identifying them as Plotinus' students, some of whom were given over to the depravity of the magical arts, while others became Christians.

[25] *De ord.* 2.18.47; cf. *Sol.* 1.2.7, p. 11, l.15: 'Deum et animam scire cupio.'

[26] *De ord.* 2.18.47.

[27] *De ord.* 2.16.44. According to I. Hadot 1984, p. 127, these topics form a sort of list of chapters of a Neoplatonic ontology treating of the modes of being and non-being.

[28] *De ord.* 2.16.44; cf. 2.5.15.

or by what manner of life he may become teachable, it is the case that authority alone opens the door for all those who desire to learn great and hidden goods.[29]

In this sense, authority is necessary for those seeking their salvation through the liberal disciplines, just as it is for those following the way of authority itself. Even the gifted few, who seek to attain the knowledge of the Trinitarian God in this life, must begin with 'the cradle of authority' (*auctoritatis cunabula*).[30] As we have seen, Augustine distinguishes two kinds of authority: divine and human.[31] By divine authority, Augustine has in mind the authority manifested in the life of Jesus Christ; by human authority, he is referring to those who present 'precepts of living' and live in accordance with these precepts themselves.[32] Human authority is very often deceiving;[33] nevertheless, this appears to be the type of authority recommended for those who desire to know the discipline of philosophy. Consider Augustine's list of some specific moral requirements pertaining to 'the order of life': abstinence or moderation in bodily matters (e.g. sex, food and drink); renunciation of the ambition for honour, power and praise; and desire for tranquillity and an order of studies for oneself and one's friends.[34] These precepts describe the course of life that Augustine began charting after his conversion: he accepted continence, he gave up his chair as professor of rhetoric, and with it his political ambitions, and he sought to enjoy a 'liberal leisure' (*liberale otium*)[35] with his friends at Cassiciacum. These and other 'precepts of living', Augustine tells us, may be found 'in the plenteous books of great and almost divine men'.[36] Augustine is probably referring to the 'books of the Platonists' here.[37] However, one should not expect to find exact parallels, as Augustine notes that he has expressed these precepts in his own words, *pro tempore*.[38]

It appears, then, that Augustine actually favours the human (though 'almost divine') authority of the authors of the 'books of the Platonists' over the divine authority of Christ, at least for those who are to be instructed in the liberal disciplines. Why is this? Perhaps it is because the best human

[29] *De ord.* 2.9.26; cf. Lütcke 1968, pp. 80ff. [30] *De ord.* 2.9.26. [31] See above, p. 50.
[32] *De ord.* 2.9.27. [33] *De ord.* 2.9.27. [34] *De ord.* 2.8.25. [35] *Sol.* 1.9.16. [36] *De ord.* 2.10.28.
[37] At *C. Acad.* 2.2.5, ll.51–3 and 57–60, Augustine also refers to 'certain plenteous books' that induced him to recognize these same precepts of living, and to 'return to himself':

> cum ecce tibi *libri quidam pleni*, ut ait Celsinus, bonas res Arabicas ubi exhalarunt in nos … Quis me tunc *honor*, quae hominum *pompa*, quae inanis *famae* cupiditas, quod denique huius mortalis uitae fomentum atque retinaculum commouebat? *Prorsus totus in me cursim redibam*… (cf. *Conf.* 7.10.16).

It seems likely that these books are to be understood as the *libri Platonicorum* (cf. I. Hadot 1984, p. 102: 'ces "grands hommes" sont sans nul doubte les néoplatoniciens'), but for a different view see O'Meara 1992b.

[38] *De ord.* 2.10.28.

authorities 'give proofs [*indicia*] of their teachings, to the extent that they can be grasped by the understanding of the unlearned'[39] – in doing this, they begin training the intellectual capacities of their followers – whereas divine authority need not have this purpose. Divine authority purifies the lives of its initiates 'not by the circumlocutions of argument [*non disputationum ambagibus*], but by the authority of the mysteries'.[40] Of course, this is not to say that the mysteries are to be avoided by devotees of the liberal disciplines; indeed, Augustine notes: 'we are being initiated into these sacred rites'.[41] However, it appears that the mysteries are not themselves sufficient to lead their initiates to the knowledge of the discipline of philosophy. Such knowledge is available only to those who, by following the twofold order of living and learning prescribed by the discipline, come to learn the reason (*ratio*) involved in the 'precepts of living' that they have been observing.[42] And to the extent that the reason involved in the precepts is understood, the authority issuing the precepts – whether human or divine – becomes unnecessary:

> Indeed *it is not now by faith alone, but by certain reason*, that the soul leads itself by degrees [*gradatim*] to morals and to the perfect life. For to the soul that diligently considers the strength and the power of numbers, it will appear quite unfitting and deplorable that it should, in accordance with its knowledge, compose a beautiful verse and play the lyre in harmony, while its life and its very self – which is the soul – should follow a crooked path and, under the domination of lust, should strike a dissonant note with the most disgraceful clattering of its vices.[43]

Those souls that contemplate 'the strength and the power of numbers' will strive to order themselves in accordance with virtue. They do not need an authority in order to purge themselves of their vices; on the contrary, 'they *know* that they live a better and more sublime life in proportion as they contemplate it [i.e. the *disciplina*] more perfectly with their understanding and observe it more diligently in their manner of living'[44].

Augustine admits that the life which affords 'the leisure to philosophize' (*otium philosophandi*) is the only one that he can imagine as blessed,[45] a sentiment that sits uneasily next to his conviction that salvation is still somehow possible for those following the way of authority:

[39] *De ord.* 2.9.27.

[40] *De ord.* 2.9.27. The phrase *disputationum ambagibus* is reminiscent of the *disputationes* and *multae contentiones* in which the Neoplatonists were engaged, as described at *C. Acad.* 3.19.42. Given that the divine authority of the mysteries is being contrasted with the human authority of those involved in the *disputationum ambages*, we have a further reason for thinking that the human authority in question is that of the Neoplatonists, which is found in the 'books of the Platonists'.

[41] *De ord.* 2.9.27. [42] *De ord.* 2.9.26. [43] *De ord.* 2.19.50. [44] *De ord.* 2.8.25. [45] *C. Acad.* 2.2.4.

But I do not know how I could call those blessed [*beatos*] who, while they live among men, content with authority alone and either despising or unable to be instructed in the liberal disciplines, constantly apply themselves only to good morals and an upright prayer life; nevertheless, I firmly believe that, as soon as they have left this body, they will be freed with ease or with difficulty in proportion as they have lived with greater or less virtue.[46]

Here Augustine comes as close as he ever would to subordinating the way of authority to the way of reason offered by the liberal disciplines. Only by following the latter path, he believes, can a person be considered blessed in this life. But he hastens to add that, in his view, salvation is still possible (even if only in the next life) for those who follow authority.

Augustine's discussion of 'the order of life' is relatively brief (2.8.25–2.10.29). Perhaps he devotes such little attention to the moral requirement of the discipline of philosophy because he supposes that there will be no great difficulty in meeting it. After all, he does not yet regard this life as an endless struggle between the spirit and the flesh.[47]

The order of learning

The remainder of the second book of *On Order* consists of Augustine's description of 'the order of learning', which is constituted by the study of the seven liberal disciplines: grammar (2.12.35–7), dialectic (2.13.38), rhetoric (2.13.38), music (2.14.39–41), geometry (2.15.42), astronomy (2.15.42) and arithmetic. Augustine asserts that only those who are instructed in 'all the disciplines' will be in a position to understand how apparent evil may be reconciled with divine providence.[48] Trying to study the order of the world without having first received this instruction is as absurd as trying to teach the syllables to someone who does not yet know the letters of the alphabet.[49]

It should be noted that Augustine sometimes softens these claims considerably. In the *Soliloquies*, for example, after noting that more than one path leads to wisdom,[50] he says that some people have such healthy 'eyes' that they are immediately capable of gazing upon the sun, that is to say, of contemplating God, the 'light of minds' (*lux mentium*):[51]

There are some eyes that are so healthy and vigorous that as soon as they are opened they can turn themselves toward the sun without any trepidation. The light itself is health for them; they do not need a teacher [*doctor*], but only, perhaps, an admonition [*admonitio*]. It is enough for them to believe, to hope, and to love.[52]

[46] *De ord.* 2.9.26. [47] See above, pp. 89ff. [48] *De ord.* 2.5.15; cf. *De ord.* 2.17.46.
[49] *De ord.* 2.7.24. [50] *Sol.* 1.13.23; cf. *Retract.* 1.4.3. [51] *Sol.* 1.13.23. [52] *Sol.* 1.13.23.

Is Augustine describing a third way to salvation here? It does not seem to be the way of authority that was politely denigrated in *On Order*, yet it also seems distinct from the path of the liberal disciplines.[53] We might call it 'the way of intuition': some people are capable of gazing upon wisdom as soon as the attempt is made, apparently with little or no difficulty. Contrast this with Augustine's first attempt at ascent (*Confessions* 7.10.16), which led to his being beaten back from the light.[54] The difficulty of the ascent led the author of the *Soliloquies* to envision a safer, more gradual process of ascent through the liberal disciplines:

> Others, however, are dazzled by the very light that they so strongly desire to see, and often they gladly return to the darkness without having seen it. Although they may now rightly be called healthy, it is dangerous to want to show them what they are still not strong enough to see. Therefore, they must first be trained, and their love is, quite beneficially, to be restricted and nourished. First, they should be shown certain things that do not shine by themselves, but may be seen by means of light, like clothing or a wall or something of this sort. Then they should be shown something which, although it does not shine by itself, yet glitters more beautifully by means of that light, such as gold, silver and such things, which are yet not so radiant that they harm the eyes. Then, perhaps, this earthly fire should be carefully shown them, then the stars, then the moon, then the light of the dawn and the brightness of the whitening sky. Some will go through these things quicker, and some slower. Some will go through the whole order and some will leave out certain things. But by means of these things everyone – growing accustomed in accordance with his own strength – will see the sun without any trepidation and with great joy. Something like this is what the best teachers do for those who are very intent upon wisdom, and who see it but not clearly. For, it is the task of good education [*disciplina*] to attain wisdom by means of a certain order. Without order, however, it is a matter of chance, which is hardly reliable.[55]

But those who are capable of 'the way of intuition' have no need of a gradual ascent to wisdom, and therefore no need of the liberal disciplines. Augustine does not devote much attention to this better way, however, perhaps because whoever is capable of it has no need of his instruction. Does Monica belong to this group? At Cassiciacum, she seems to be envisaged as a person who does not require formal instruction in the liberal disciplines

[53] DuRoy 1966, p. 169, however, sees in the opposition between *admonitio* and *doctor* an opposition between *ratio* and *auctoritas*, between 'l'Esprit qui illumine le regard intérieur et qui suffit à ramener les plus forts vers le soleil intelligible' and 'l'autorité de cet Intellect incarné qui est venu pour les faibles trop enforcés dans le sensible'.

[54] Echoes of this experience may be found in Augustine's early writings, where a frequent analogy is the eye that attempts to look at the sun; cf. *Sol.* 1.10.17; *De quant. anim.* 33.75; *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.7.11; *De vera relig.* 20.39.

[55] *Sol.* 1.13.23.

in order to acquire knowledge of God. Despite her lack of formal education, she has managed to gain the very 'stronghold of philosophy'.[56] Her natural talents have allowed her to grasp the 'almost divine power and nature of grammar' without the effort that must be expended on this discipline by those whose natural abilities require that they take a slower and more laborious path to contemplation.[57]

In any case, the path to contemplation in this life usually begins with an education in the liberal disciplines. The disciplines train the mind, making fit for contemplation those who would otherwise be overcome by the light of truth, and would return to the darkness.[58] This is difficult training. Augustine says that only an elite few are capable of attaining knowledge of God and the soul through reason: 'Only the rarest class of men, with reason guiding, can use it to understand God or the soul itself (which is either in us or everywhere).'[59] Indeed, he claims that 'what reason itself is and what its qualities are, is completely unknown except by the few'.[60] Again, after noting that the liberal disciplines are learned partly for 'the use of life' (*usus vitae*) and partly for 'the knowledge and contemplation of things' (*cognitio rerum contemplatioque*), he says that 'to attain the use of them is very difficult except for some very gifted person who from very childhood has earnestly and constantly applied himself'.[61]

Prayer

In order to complete our discussion of the discipline of philosophy, we should note that Augustine adds the requirement of prayer to the moral and intellectual requirements of this *disciplina*:[62]

> A vision of beauty is promised to us … and he will see it who *lives well, prays well, studies well* … In order that this be given to us, our greatest efforts should be devoted to the best morals; for otherwise our God will not be able to hear us. However, He will most readily hear those who live well. Therefore let us pray, not that wealth or honours or things of that fleeting sort should come to us, nor mutable things that elude even the one who remains stable. Let us pray instead that those things should come to us that will make us virtuous and blessed.[63]

Again, the requirement of prayer is not unique to the way of reason. Augustine distinguishes those who study the liberal disciplines from those who 'diligently devote themselves only to good morals *and righteous*

[56] *De beat. vit.* 2.10. [57] *De ord.* 2.17.45; and cf. until 2.18.47.
[58] Cf. *De quant. anim.* 15.25; *De mag.* 8.21. [59] *De ord.* 2.11.30. [60] *De ord.* 2.11.30.
[61] *De ord.* 2.16.44; cf. *De ord.* 2.7.24. [62] Cf. Marrou 1958, pp. 175ff. [63] *De ord.* 2.19.51–2.20.52.

prayers'[64]. The latter will certainly be rewarded in the next life for their efforts, but for those who are intent upon reaching the promised vision of God in this life, it is necessary not only to pray and live virtuously, but also to study the liberal disciplines. These are the three requirements of the path to salvation offered by the liberal disciplines.[65]

Conclusion

In 386 an education in the liberal disciplines provided for the gifted few a path to salvation that was relatively independent of the way of authority for the ignorant masses. There are some important similarities between the two paths. Both require a certain degree of moral development: the way of the liberal disciplines prescribes an 'order of life', just as the way of authority prescribes 'a discipline of morals'.[66] Moreover, both depend upon belief in an authority. However, it appears that those following the way of authority will not attain salvation until the next life. By contrast, those who are suitably educated in the liberal disciplines will attain salvation in this life. In this respect, Augustine seems to regard the way of authority as an inferior path to salvation at this early stage. It is possible that he persisted in this opinion for some time after 386; if so, however, he would never again speak his mind so bluntly. In fact, by the time of *On True Religion*, Augustine would refer, as we have seen, to 'the obvious salvation and correction of the masses'.[67] It is not clear whether this is a reflection of the polemical context of that work, or whether Augustine had indeed arrived by that time at a more positive evaluation of the way of authority *vis-à-vis* the way of reason. What is clear, at any rate, is that throughout the period of his early writings (386–91) Augustine conceived of a distinct path to salvation for an elite class of intellectuals, through the study of the liberal disciplines. This path to salvation requires the movement in this life from belief to understanding, from authority to reason. Let us now turn our attention to the nature of this movement towards reason.

[64] *De ord.* 2.9.26.

[65] We see Augustine attempting to follow this path in *Sol.* This work opens with an extended prayer to God, offered by Augustine at the prompting of Reason. The order of life is the main topic of the first book, as Reason discusses the manner of life by which the soul becomes healthy and virtuous. The soul must have no desire for physical and transitory things, such as wealth, honours, marriage and the pleasures of food and drink (*Sol.* 1.10.17–1.11.19; cf. *De ord.* 2.8.25). The need to turn away from all of these sensible things is summarized by the dictum *penitus esse ista sensibilia fugienda* (*Sol.* 1.14.24, p. 37, l.5). The second book is devoted to the order of learning, as Augustine begins his inquiry into God and the soul, the two subjects constituting 'the discipline of philosophy', which may be known only through the seven liberal disciplines.

[66] See above, p. 64. [67] See above, p. 41.

THE RETURN TO THE SELF AND TO REASON

Augustine has inherited in 'reason' (*ratio*) a highly nuanced word, and this is reflected in his own usage. Van Fleteren has distinguished six different meanings of *ratio* in the Cassiciacum writings: rational understanding; the Holy Spirit; the reason principles present in the universe; hypostasized reason; a human faculty; and a gaze of the mind.[68] He notes that, although it is possible to distinguish these different meanings, they frequently flow into one another in a given passage, 'due in part to the full meaning given *ratio* in ancient philosophy and in part to Augustine's lack of certitude concerning the nature, function, and meaning of reason at this early period'.[69] The lack of certitude to which Van Fleteren makes reference is a product of Augustine's uncertainty at Cassiciacum as to the origin and nature of the soul. (We will examine later 'the question of the soul' and Augustine's resolution of it.[70])

Augustine says that all 'true reasons' (*verae rationes*) are in the depths (*in secretis*) of the human soul, 'even though it might seem that the soul, because of ignorance or forgetting, does not have them or has lost them'.[71] By *verae rationes*, Augustine is referring to the disciplines, or the objects of the disciplines:

> Either reasoning with ourselves or being skilfully questioned by another about certain liberal disciplines, we discover that those things we have found are nowhere else but in our mind …[72]

Here the question arises: how exactly is the soul related to the disciplines – that is, the *verae rationes* – that are in it? As we will see, Augustine did not

[68] Van Fleteren 1973, p. 43. We should also note Augustine's distinction between the 'rational' (*rationale*) and the 'reasonable' (*rationabile*). He says that he has borrowed this distinction from 'very learned men' (*doctissimi viri*) and explains what they mean by it as follows:

> They call 'rational' whatever uses reason or is capable of using reason; but they call 'reasonable' whatever has been done or spoken according to reason. Thus, we call these baths or our discourse reasonable; but we call rational the person who made the baths, or we who are speaking. Reason therefore proceeds [*procedit*] from a rational soul into those things that are reasonable, whether they are done or spoken. (*De ord.* 2.11.31)

> Humans possess a faculty of reasoning and are therefore *rationales*. Those things that humans investigate with their rational faculty, however, are *rationabiles*. Augustine distinguishes three kinds of things in which *rationabiles* are found: 'One is in actions directed towards an end; the second, in discourse [*in dicendo*]; the third, in pleasure [*in delectando*] … the first pertains to morals; the other two pertain to those disciplines that we are now considering' (*De ord.* 2.12.35). I. Hadot 1984, p. 108 claims that grammar, dialectic and rhetoric are the disciplines pertaining to discourse, and music, geometry, arithmetic and astronomy are the disciplines pertaining to pleasure.

[69] Van Fleteren 1973, p. 43. [70] See below, pp. 146ff.

[71] *De immor. anim.* 4.6. [72] *De immor. anim.* 4.6.

resolve this matter – which forms part of what he calls 'the question of the soul' – until after *The Immortality of the Soul*.[73] Until that time, Augustine was unclear whether the soul *was* reason or merely used reason. Thus, in *On Order* Augustine notes that 'ancient wise men' have defined man as an animal, both rational and mortal,[74] and points to the following difficulty:

> How is reason immortal, if I am defined as something both rational and mortal at the same time? Perhaps reason is not immortal? But one to two, or two to four, is a most true ratio. That ratio was not truer yesterday than it is today, nor will it be truer tomorrow or a year from now.[75]

How can we reconcile the immortality of the objects of reason (here Augustine is thinking of eternal mathematical truths) with the definition of man as a rational and mortal animal? It seems clear that the objects of reason are immortal, so the solution to the difficulty must be found in the definition of man. Augustine is not sure how to resolve this matter; nevertheless, he continues with what he does know:

> Therefore if reason is immortal, and if I am reason by separating [*discerno*] and connecting [*connecto*] all these things, then that by which I am called mortal is not mine. Or if the soul is not what reason is, yet I use reason, and I am better because of reason, then we ought to flee [*fugiendum est*] from the inferior to the superior, from the mortal to the immortal.[76]

Augustine is at least certain that he is somehow connected to reason, whether he is reason or merely uses reason. After all, he has been reasoning (i.e. 'separating and connecting'), an activity that presupposes the faculty of reason. And because man is connected to reason – in whatever manner – Augustine can be confident about the end of man, even though he remains unclear about the nature of man. If man *is* reason, then he must purge himself of that which is alien to him (i.e. the mortal body) in order to be conjoined to that which is proper to him (i.e. immortal reason). And if man merely *uses* reason, again he must flee from the mortal body and toward immortal reason. In either case, man's destiny is clear. He is to flee all bodily and sensible things into which he has fallen,[77] and to 'return' to reason and become 'divine'.[78]

There is an interesting equivocation in the above passage: 'if *I* am reason … or if *the soul* is not what reason is, yet *I* use reason…' Here Augustine implicitly identifies the self with the soul, an identification that

[73] See below, pp. 161ff.

[74] *De ord*. 2.11.31. Couturier 1954, p. 543 sees Plotinus as the source here (*Enn*. 6.7.4); however, Geerlings 1978, p. 105, n. 9 thinks Cicero or Varro is more likely (cf. *Acad*. 2.7.21).

[75] *De ord*. 2.19.50. [76] *De ord*. 2.19.50. [77] Cf. *Sol*. 1.1.5, 1.14.24. [78] *De ord*. 2.11.31.

he makes explicit elsewhere.[79] Notice that the body does not enter into the nature of the self; the only question is whether the self is to be identified with the soul as a whole or only the best part of the soul (i.e. the rational soul, or the mind).[80] Augustine and Licentius discuss this question at the opening of the second book of *On Order*. There we see Licentius advancing a theory according to which the wise man is identified with the rational part of the soul alone.[81] Licentius likens the relationship between the rational and sensitive parts of the soul to the relationship between a master and his slave. The wise man treats the lower part of the soul like a slave (*quasi servo*), granting to it a certain portion of its property (*peculium*): this is the memory.[82] The memory is necessary for those things that are 'transitory' and 'fleeting'. But the wise man has no need of such things, and therefore no need of memory:

> A wise man embraces God, and enjoys Him who abides forever. There is no need to await His being nor to fear His non-being, because by the very fact that He truly is, He is always present … Therefore, I ask, what need is there of memory for a wise man, since he has all things in front of the interior eyes of the intellect, that is to say, since he gazes fixedly [*fixe*] and immovably [*immobiliter*] upon God Himself, with whom are all the things that the intellect sees and possesses?[83]

On Licentius' view, the intellect of the wise man contains all things and is wholly immutable. The wise man is 'with God completely',[84] which means that his mind resides immovably with God.[85] The wise man has 'withdrawn into himself' (*subtraxit in seipsum*) when he has cleansed himself – that is, his mind – of 'certain filthy garments and residual skins [*exuviae*]':[86] these include the body and the sensitive part of the soul, in which memory resides.

Of course, this theory is presented by Licentius, not Augustine. But notice Augustine's reaction to Licentius' articulation of the theory: 'Considering this statement of his with admiration, I recalled that I had once mentioned the same thing in his hearing.'[87] Winkler sees in this comment an indication that Augustine had identified man with his rational soul in the period preceding the composition of the first dialogues.[88] Augustine may be partial to this theory still. As Winkler notes, he does not yet reject it, although he does have reservations about it.[89] In particular,

[79] *De ord.* 2.19.50, l.43: 'ipsam quae anima est'.
[80] On the parts of the soul in Augustine, see O'Daly 1987, p. 11. [81] *De ord.* 2.2.5–6.
[82] However, as Winkler 1954, p. 512, n. 1 points out, memory is at first identified at *De ord.* 2.2.6 as the *peculium* of the *servus*, while at *De ord.* 2.2.7 it becomes the *servus* itself.
[83] *De ord.* 2.2.6–7. [84] *De ord.* 2.2.5. [85] Cf. *De ord.* 2.5.17. [86] *De ord.* 2.2.6.
[87] *De ord.* 2.2.7. [88] Winkler 1954, p. 511. [89] Cf. Winkler 1954, p. 511.

he is concerned that the wise man might require memory for 'the worthy and necessary disciplines', if only to fulfil his obligation to teach others about wisdom:

> In order to teach properly and to be less unsuited, he often prepares something that he will present and discuss systematically. And unless he commits this to memory, it will certainly be lost.[90]

Licentius responds to Augustine's concern by stating that, although the wise man does make use of the memory, 'he does this, not as if by reasoning [*non quasi ratiocinando*], but by the prescription of that supreme law and supreme order'.[91] This is a rather cryptic remark. Winkler suggests that Licentius is here envisioning some natural process by which memory would come to the aid of the wise man; in saying *non ratiocinando* Licentius probably wants to remove the memory as far as possible from the realm of intelligible objects.[92] But Licentius himself does not clarify the point, and the discussion ends abruptly.[93]

In any case, the self at least includes the rational soul, whether or not the sensitive soul also enters into it in some way. And the body certainly does not enter into it. Augustine understands the present condition of the rational soul – that is, its being shut up in this 'cave' (*cavea*) that is the body[94] – to be a consequence of its primal movement away from reason and towards the senses,[95] and he understands the end of the rational soul to be a return to reason. But since man's best part – if not his only part – is his rational soul, the end of man is also a return to reason. And so Augustine interprets the definition of man provided by 'ancient wise men' (i.e. a rational, mortal animal) in light of the soul's procession from, and return to, reason:

> We see two added differentiae [sc. 'rational' and 'mortal'], by which I believe that man is admonished not only where he ought to return [*quo redeundum esset*] but also what he ought to flee [*unde fugiendum*]. For just as the soul's movement [*progressus animae*] has fallen down [*lapsus est*] to mortal things, so ought its return [*regressus*] be to reason. Its separation from the beasts is indicated by the one word, rational; and its separation from divine things by the one word, mortal. Therefore, unless it clings to the rational, it will be a beast; unless it turns away from the mortal, it will not be divine.[96]

[90] *De ord.* 2.2.7. [91] *De ord.* 2.2.7. [92] Winkler 1954, p. 517.

[93] Conybeare 2005, p. 64 sees the debate with Licentius as a dramatization of Augustine's struggle with his 'Plotinian' views, and claims that 'the new Augustine, the Augustine moving towards baptism and an incarnational theology, has roundly defeated the old Augustine in the person of Licentius'.

[94] *Sol.* 1.14.24. [95] See above, p. 53. [96] *De ord.* 2.11.31.

As Augustine sees it, this definition of man is intended to highlight the soul's precarious position between reason and the senses, between divinity and bestial mortality. The soul is capable of two types of movement: *progressus* and *regressus*. The *progressus animae* is the soul's 'fall' into the transient world of sensible objects, and the *regressus animae* is the soul's 'flight' back to the unchanging world of reason. Even if man in the proper sense is to be identified with the soul in its fallen, mortal state,[97] man still bears the divine spark in his rational soul. Thus, the definition of man serves as an admonition to the fallen soul to flee its mortality and return to reason, its primordial state.

One is reminded here of Porphyry's lost work, *On the Return of the Soul (De regressu animae),*[98] which has as its subject the return of the rational, or intellectual, soul to God. It is interesting to compare Porphyry's views on the destiny of souls, as they are reported in *The City of God*, with Augustine's views on the same subject in 386. Porphyry distinguishes between the intellectual or rational soul (*anima intellectualis*) and the spiritual soul (*anima spiritualis*).[99] The intellectual soul, also called the mind,[100] perceives intelligible things (including God), while the spiritual soul, or the imagination, receives the images of corporeal things. By means of certain theurgical consecrations, called mysteries (*teletai*), the spiritual soul can be rendered fit for the reception of spirits and angels, and for seeing the gods.[101] However, these mysteries are not capable of bestowing immortality and eternity upon the spiritual soul.[102] They can elevate the spiritual soul only as far as the astral gods; they do not provide a means of return to the Father.[103] Hence, it is the lot of these souls to return once again to human bodies.

A complete escape from the body is possible, however, for the philosopher, who has no need of theurgy.[104] Porphyry says: 'God put the soul into the world so that, having come to understand the evil of material

[97] This appears to be how he identifies man in *De Gen. c. Man*. (388/90): see above, p. 53, n. 127.

[98] Our knowledge of this work derives solely from fragments preserved in *De civ. Dei*. O'Meara 1959 has argued that *Philosophy from Oracles* is to be identified with *De regressu animae*. This claim is criticized by P. Hadot 1960a and accepted by TeSelle 1970, p. 50. For an overview of the issue, see Smith 1987, pp. 732–7.

[99] *De civ. Dei* 10.9. [100] *De civ. Dei* 10.27. [101] *De civ. Dei* 10.9. [102] *De civ. Dei* 10.9, 10.27.

[103] *De civ. Dei* 10.9, 10.26, 10.27. At *De civ. Dei* 10.23, ll.8–13, Augustine tells us that Porphyry's three ultimate principles are Father, Paternal Intellect (*paternum intellectum uel paternam mentem*; cf. *De civ. Dei* 10.28, 19: πατρικὸν νοῦν), and something intermediate between them (*horum medium*). Augustine is expressly confused by the nature of this intermediate term. As Lewy 1978 has shown, Porphyry's principles are influenced by the Chaldean Oracles (see especially p. 142, n. 283 and p. 455); cf. P. Hadot 1968, p. 264.

[104] *De civ. Dei* 10.27.

things, it might return [*recurreret*] to the Father, and never again be detained and defiled by contact with such things.'[105] This statement does not entirely satisfy the author of *The City of God*: he points out that the soul is given to the body to do good. But he does credit Porphyry with having corrected the opinion of other Platonists on a matter of great significance, by recognizing that 'the soul that is cleansed of all evil and is established with the Father will never again suffer the evils of this world'.[106] Porphyry rejected the view of those Platonists who maintain that even purified souls, having forgotten their past, will once again desire a return to bodies. He rightly (in Augustine's judgement) saw that the perfect purification of the soul entails an escape from this cycle of blessedness and misery.[107] This is the 'return of the soul' (*regressus animae*) to God, which is summed up with Porphyry's memorable slogan: 'all body is to be fled' (*omne corpus esse fugiendum*).[108]

Although *On the Return of the Soul* is not mentioned in Augustine's early writings, it is entirely possible that it had been included among the 'books of the Platonists'.[109] Indeed, Augustine might seem to be borrowing Porphyry's slogan in the *Soliloquies*, as he has Reason issue the following injunction: 'These sensible things are to be fled entirely.'[110] Even Augustine himself, at least in the *Retractations*, is cognizant of the similarity:

> Regarding what is said there: 'These sensible things are to be fled entirely', caution should have been exercised lest we be supposed to hold that view of Porphyry, the false philosopher, according to which every body must be fled from. However, I did not say '*all* sensible things' but '*these* sensible things', that is, *corruptible* sensible things. It would have been better to say this; in any case, such sensible things will not exist in the new heaven and new earth of the world to come.[111]

Here Augustine is concerned to distance himself from Porphyry's *omne corpus esse fugiendum*. This view is criticized further in *The City of God*, as Augustine says that the blessedness of the soul requires not the flight from every body, but the reception of an incorruptible body.[112] Moreover, Porphyry's view is incompatible with Christianity: it constitutes a denial of the Incarnation of the Word, and therefore the salvific work of Christ's death and resurrection.[113]

[105] *De civ. Dei* 10.30; cf. *De civ. Dei* 10.30, ll.51–3: 'Vidit hoc Porphyrius purgatamque animam ob hoc reuerti dixit ad Patrem, ne aliquando iam malorum polluta contagione teneatur.'
[106] *De civ. Dei* 10.30. [107] *De civ. Dei* 10.30; cf. 22.12, 22.27.
[108] *De civ. Dei* 10.29; cf. *Serm.* 241.7; *De civ. Dei* 12.27, 13.19, 22.12, 22.26. [109] See above, p. 12, n. 95.
[110] *Sol.* 1.14.24. [111] *Retract.* 1.4.3. [112] *De civ. Dei* 22.26.
[113] Cf. *De Trin.* 4.16.21; *De civ. Dei* 10.24, 10.28, 12.27, 13.19, 22.12, 22.25–6.

Augustine's remarks cannot prove that *On the Return of the Soul* was a direct influence upon the sentiment expressed in the *Soliloquies*. After all, Augustine was aware of similar sayings in Plotinus,[114] and Augustine might also have picked up the idea from Ambrose or the circle of Platonists in Milan[115] (to say nothing of Augustine's 'non-Platonic' influences). Nevertheless, Augustine's interpretation of his expression in the *Soliloquies* is interesting. He attempts to salvage his statement, '[t]hese sensible things are to be fled entirely', by pointing out that he did not refer to *all* sensible things – as did Porphyry – but only to *these* sensible things, which he now glosses as *corruptible* sensible things. This is a clever move;[116] however, the bishop seems to be forgetting that he does refer to 'all sensible things' in another early passage: 'The entire world, that is, all sensible things [*omnia sensibilia*], are to be condemned.'[117] It is unlikely that the young Augustine would have appreciated the distinction that the old bishop is attempting to foist upon him, i.e. the distinction between the corruptible and incorruptible body. This is not to say that he denied the resurrection of the body at that time. He first mentions this doctrine in 388,[118] and it is entirely possible that he had already accepted it in 386. But the incorruptible body of the resurrection is simply not Augustine's concern in 386. To be sure, he is expressly convinced that those whom he cannot consider blessed in this life, because they are 'content with authority alone … either despising or unable to be instructed in the liberal disciplines', are nevertheless able to attain blessedness in the next life.[119] The resurrected body may have something to do with this, but Augustine does not pause to explain the matter. In 386 he is focused instead upon the mechanics of salvation in this life, for which the resurrected body is irrelevant.[120] What is relevant is the corruptible body, in that it presents an obstacle to the soul's return to God. The soul that desires to see God in this life must remove itself from the body completely. Indeed, this is

[114] *De civ. Dei* 9.17; for other passages, see DuRoy 1966, p. 132, n. 3 and TeSelle 1970, p. 71.

[115] Cf. Augustine's comments to Manlius Theodorus at *De beat. vit.* 1.4, ll.91–4: 'Animaduerti enim et saepe in sacerdotis nostri et aliquando in sermonibus tuis, cum de deo cogitaretur, *nihil omnino corporis esse cogitandum*, neque cum de anima; nam id est unum in rebus proximum deo.'

[116] Augustine makes a similar move in his criticism of the sensible world/intelligible world dichotomy found at *De ord.* 1.11.32. He says that Christ's words 'My kingdom is not of *this* world' are best understood as a reference to the new heaven and the new earth (*Retract.* 1.3.2).

[117] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 1.20.37. [118] *De quant. anim.* 33.76. [119] *De ord.* 2.9.26. See above, p. 118.

[120] In *Sol.* and *De immor. anim.*, as we will see (pp. 151ff.), Augustine is concerned to find a way to avoid the conclusion that the soul is corruptible (i.e. both true and false, and therefore mortal). But he seems to take for granted that the body is corruptible, and makes no attempt to distinguish different types of bodies (cf. *Sol.* 2.18.32, p. 90, ll.12–13: 'in corpore, quod satis certum est recipere interitum').

Augustine's view even after he clearly affirms the future resurrection of the body, as we will see;[121] hence, we find him issuing exhortations to 'flee the sensible world' until the time of his ordination.[122]

In sum, Augustine's 'way of reason' in 386–7 is constituted by 'the return to the self', that is, the flight from the mortal body to immortal reason, in an attempt to attain the vision of God in this life. This understanding of salvation appears to amount to the Porphyrian *omne corpus esse fugiendum*, which Augustine would censure repeatedly in his later writings. Augustine would also chastise Porphyry for having failed to recognize the Word made flesh; in supposing that salvation could only be attained by the mind that left the body behind as it ascended to God, Porphyry had failed to recognize that God had descended to a body for our salvation. But, as I have argued in part I, the early Augustine also failed to recognize the Word made flesh. Until his 'Pauline revolution' *c.* 395, Augustine did not regard Jesus Christ as the very Word of God, who assumed a human body in order to offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Instead, he saw in Jesus a wise man providing humanity – or, more specifically, the masses – with an outstanding example, especially through his death, of the turn away from the sensible world, i.e. 'the complete flight and escape from this body'.[123] In this Augustine shows himself to be operating with a Porphyrian rather than a Pauline understanding of salvation.

THE RETURN TO THE SELF AND THE ASCENTS OF THE SOUL IN *CONFESSIONS* 7

The return to the self is also an important motif in Augustine's encounter with the 'books of the Platonists', as described at *Confessions* 7.9.13ff. These books taught him to seek wisdom by turning inward, and this inspired him to undertake at least two ascents (or two types of ascent) of the soul, with the aim of attaining union with God. These ascents are described at 7.10.16 and 7.17.23. Because of the central place that these ascents occupy in the story of Augustine's development in the *Confessions*,

[121] Cf. our discussion of the second Platonic ascent, esp. pp. 191, 197–8.

[122] Cf. *C. Acad.* 1.1.3, ll.75–7: 'nihil omnino colendum esse totumque contemni oportere, quicquid mortalibus oculis cernitur, quicquid ullus sensus attingit'; *Sol.* 1.1.5, p. 10, ll.3–4: 'nihil aliud scio nisi fluxa et caduca spernenda esse; certa et aeterna requirenda'; *Ep.* 3.4, p. 8, ll.11–12: 'Resistendum ergo sensibus totis animi. viribus'; *De quant. anim.* 33.76, p. 225, ll.16, 17–18: 'mors … id est ab hoc corpore omnimoda fuga et elapsio'; *De div. q. 83* 36.2, ll.53–4: 'omnia quae in hoc mundo bona putantur et mala penitus contemnenda sunt'; *De vera relig.* 4.6, l.20: 'sensibilem istum mundum contemnere'.

[123] Cf. *De quant. anim.* 33.76.

it is important to consider their relationship to 'the way of reason' outlined in Augustine's early writings. The importance of such an examination has been underlined by Van Fleteren:

> It is somewhat surprising, however, that there has been no extensive attempt to show the relationship between these ascents of the mind and the early works of Saint Augustine. This lacuna is all the more surprising since Augustine recounts these experiences as the apex of his intellectual conversion. I have become convinced that a proper understanding of these passages in the *Confessions* holds the key to understanding the project that Augustine was about in his earliest period prior to his ordination in 391 a.d.[124]

In the next section, I propose to take up this task, but in a significantly different manner from Van Fleteren. Whereas Van Fleteren takes for granted that both of these ascents occurred at Milan in 386, I believe that *Confessions* 7.10.16–7.17.23 is in fact a description of Augustine's intellectual development during the first several years after his conversion. Before considering the evidence for this claim, however, let us examine the ascents as they are described in the *Confessions*.

After reading the 'books of the Platonists', Augustine was 'admonished' by them to 'return to himself',[125] to turn away from the corporeal light seen through the senses, and to seek the immutable light that illuminates 'the eye of the soul', or the mind. Heeding this admonition, Augustine turned away from the sense images of the external world, entered into the depths of his own being, and saw this immutable light above his mind:

> I entered into my own depths … and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, I saw immutable light above that same eye of my soul, above my mind. This was not the ordinary light that is visible to all flesh, nor was it some greater light of the same kind, as if the brightness of this ordinary light were to intensify greatly and fill all things with its greatness. This light was not that, but something different, completely different from all these lights. It was not above my mind as oil is above water, or as the sky is above the earth; it was instead superior because it made me, and I was inferior because made by it. Whoever knows the truth [*veritas*] knows that light, and whoever knows that light knows eternity [*aeternitas*]. Charity [*caritas*] knows it. O eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity![126]

The immutable light discovered by Augustine corresponds to that about which he had read in the 'books of the Platonists': 'And I found in those

[124] Van Fleteren 1974, p. 29.
[125] *Conf.* 7.10.16; cf. *C. Acad.* 2.2.5, ll.59–60: 'Prorsus totus in me cursim redibam.' Regarding *admonitio*, see above, pp. 33ff.
[126] *Conf.* 7.10.16.

same writings that … the Word, God Himself, is the true light which enlightens every man that comes into this world; and that … the world was made by Him.'[127] Let us be clear about the point: Augustine is claiming to have attained a direct apprehension of God. That God is the object of Augustine's intellectual vision is indicated not only by the identification of God with 'the true light', but also by the three terms *aeternitas*, *veritas* and *caritas*, which constitute for him an expression of the triune God.[128]

Augustine's claim is astounding, so much so, in fact, that even a sympathetic commentator like Van Fleteren admits that it is a bit difficult to avoid scepticism:

> Since Plotinus achieved the vision of God only four times while Porphyry was his disciple and Porphyry himself only once in the first sixty-eight years of his life, there has been and should be a certain skepticism about saying that the young Augustine attained a vision of God immediately after reading some of the works of Plotinus and Porphyry. On the other hand, Augustine's account seems to report actual historical events.[129]

While acknowledging that some degree of scepticism is understandable, Van Fleteren nevertheless believes that the historicity of the ascents must be taken seriously. But how? Van Fleteren, for his part, plays down the magnitude of Augustine's experiences by claiming that 'these ascents are not Plotinian ecstasy in any full and technical sense of the term'.[130] Another possibility, however, is suggested by what Augustine says further on at 7.10.16:

> When first I knew You, You lifted me up [*assumsisti*] *so that I might see that there was something to see, but that I was not yet able to see it*. And You beat back [*reverberasti*] the weakness of my gaze, blazing upon me very strongly, and I trembled with love and with dread. And I discovered that I was far from You in the region of unlikeness [*longe … a te in regione dissimilitudinis*]…[131]

Here Augustine is saying that he had initially been unable to see God, which might seem to contradict his prior claim to have seen the immutable light of God. How are we to reconcile these two statements? I would suggest that the earlier claim ('I saw immutable light …') is part of a general summary of the vision he attained under the influence of the 'books of the Platonists', and that the specific circumstances culminating in this vision are subsequently described in detail. Thus, Augustine begins at

[127] *Conf.* 7.9.13. [128] For parallel texts, see O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 440.
[129] Van Fleteren 1974, p. 57. [130] Van Fleteren 1974, pp. 57–8.
[131] *Conf.* 7.10.16. Regarding *in regione dissimilitudinis*, see *Enn.* 1.8.13.17: ἐν τῷ τῆς ἀνομοιότητος τόπῳ, and O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, pp. 443–4.

7.10.16 with his first, relatively unsuccessful attempt at ascent ('when *first* I knew you …'), and continues at 7.17.23 with a more successful – though still inadequate – attempt:

> Now I loved You … yet I did not stably enjoy my God … Then *I saw clearly* Your invisible things which are understood by the things that are made, *but I lacked the strength to hold my gaze fixed*, and my weakness was beaten back again [*repercussa*].

So the first ascent has Augustine unable to see – although he can already see that there is something to see – while the second ascent has him able to see, but unable to maintain his gaze. For this reason, the second ascent, although it still leaves him unsatisfied, does represent an improvement on the first. Finally, I believe that 7.20.26 is a summary of the results attained by the previous two ascents:

> Now, having read these books of the Platonists and having afterwards been admonished by them to seek incorporeal truth, *I saw that Your invisible things are understood through those things that are made. And I was beaten back* [*repulsus*] … *I was too weak to enjoy You*.

On my view, then, there are two distinct Platonic ascents (or types of ascents) described in the *Confessions* narrative: they are detailed in the second half of 7.10.16 and at 7.17.23. The first half of 7.10.16 is an introductory summary, and 7.20.26 a concluding summary, of these two ascents. This interpretation has the advantage of allowing us to accept the historicity of these ascents, while at the same time not forcing us to suppose that Augustine attained the vision of God immediately after reading the 'books of the Platonists' (we will say more about the specific dates of these ascents in a moment).

Courcelle has identified seven specific stages of the ascents described at (a) 7.10.16, (b) 7.17.23, and (c) 7.20.26,[132] which O'Donnell has summarized as follows:

1. reading the *platonicorum libri* (ac),
2. searching for truth and finding it above himself (abc),
3. ascent by degrees (b),
4. Rom. 1.20 (bc),
5. sense of certainty but incapacity (abc),
6. '*faiblesse*' (abc),
7. Rom. 1.20 (a).[133]

[132] Courcelle 1950, pp. 160–4 and especially p. 165 sees a third ascent at 7.20.26. As I have indicated, however, I believe that this passage is best understood as a summary of the other experiences.

[133] O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 435 (the letters in parentheses refer to Courcelle's three citations from *Confessions*).

Courcelle termed Augustine's experiences *vaines tentatives d'extases plotiniennes*, noting that they begin with success (the discovery of truth) and end in failure (*faiblesse* – the inability to maintain the vision of truth).[134] But the term *vaines tentatives* is, as it seems to me, rather unhelpful, even misleading, as a description of Augustine's experiences. After all, his inability to maintain the vision of truth is a feature not only of the *tentatives* described in book 7 but also of the much more successful ascent at Ostia (indeed, Courcelle himself is struck by the similarities between the *tentatives* described in book 7 and the ascent at Ostia).[135] For this reason, it seems to me preferable not to describe Augustine's efforts in book 7 as *vaines*, as if the ephemeral character of these experiences can distinguish them from the experience at Ostia.

Even more importantly, we must avoid the temptation of referring to these ascents as the ascents of *Milan*. Nothing in the text requires this claim (notice that the ascents are not given a specific location and date, unlike the ascent at Ostia).[136] Nevertheless, the assumption that both ascents (and virtually all of *Confessions* 7) occurred at Milan in 386 is, to the best of my knowledge, universally accepted by those – and they form the overwhelming majority – who read the *Confessions* narrative as a fairly straightforward historical account.[137] One indication of just how deeply entrenched this assumption is in Augustinian scholarship can be seen in the title of Van Fleteren's article 'The Early Works of Augustine and His Ascents at Milan' (1977), and the fact that Van Fleteren makes no effort to justify his assumption that both ascents occurred at Milan. It is particularly telling that Van Fleteren presents no argument in support of his view, since he has done more than most to point to the need to consider the relationship between these ascents and Augustine's early writings, as we have noted.[138] Another indication of just how much the 'Milan in 386' assumption holds sway in Augustinian scholarship arises from an interesting dispute between Van Fleteren and O'Connell. The latter scholar is one of the few who have been seriously concerned with the lacuna noted by Van Fleteren regarding the relationship between *Confessions* 7

[134] Courcelle 1950, p. 165: 'L'expérience a donc commence par une réussite; elle se termine sur un douloureux échec.'

[135] Courcelle 1950, pp. 222–4. [136] As has been noted by Courcelle 1950, p. 159.

[137] For a different view, see Marrou 1951, pp. 403–4:

> De meme, j'hésiterai à parler, comme le fait P. Courcelle … des "vaines tentatives d'extase plotiniennes" à Milan vers juin 386, à propos de ce qui, dans le l. VII des *Confessions*, m'apparaît comme une analyse de portée moins biographique que "phénoménologique" des conditions de la contemplation …

[138] See above, p. 130.

and Augustine's early writings. Noting similarities between the ideas described in the *Confessions* narrative and the gradual unfolding of Augustine's intellectual development in his early writings, O'Connell concludes that *Confessions* 7.10.16ff. is not intended as a literal recounting of events that occurred in 386.[139] Van Fleteren claims that O'Connell has denied the historicity of the passage altogether,[140] but O'Connell vehemently denies this:

> The question of historicity – and I understand "historicity" to mean historical "veracity" – is quite irrelevant to my interpretation; my interpretation neither affirms nor denies the "historicity" of this section. And the reason is that historical veracity can become an issue only if it is the author's intention to tell a "story," to recount a series of events, occurrences, happenings. But historical veracity cannot become an issue if the author is outlining a Weltanschauung, presenting a conceptual theory, or drawing a picture of how he imagines reality is structured … I would urge my critic to re-read this section of the *Confessions* carefully and observe how all such time-indications are either absent or bafflingly vague: he "entered into his inmost self, and saw" – Augustine wants us to ask "what" he saw, not to ask "did you, really?" or "when did you?" That is not what he is interested in – at the moment, anyway! To claim, as van Fleteren does, that this sort of interpretation is a "summary of Augustine's thinking … retrojected onto an apparently historical account" is to mix apples with oranges and so miss my point entirely. I am claiming that the "appearance" of historicity is an illusion, period. And van Fleteren's illusion, not mine.[141]

But notice the reason why O'Connell insists on removing Augustine's discussion from the realm of 'historical veracity':

> My own persuasion is that the "story" theory of *Confessions* VII founders once its assumptions are tested against the progressive character of Augustine's early works: if we insist that Augustine is telling us the "story" of what occurred in Spring of A.D. 386, we shall quickly discover that he is lying to us![142]

O'Connell rejects the 'historicity' hypothesis because, as he claims, it would make Augustine a liar. But this assumes that if the narrative were relating actual events, then it would be relating events from 386. Notice, however, that we can accept both that the narrative is supposed to be historical and that Augustine is not a liar if we simply suppose that the

[139] Cf. also DuRoy 1966, p. 82:

> Le développement que nous allons maintenant étudier et dont nous venons de voir le plan d'ensemble, ne traduit sans doute pas exactement ce qui fut, dès le lendemain de sa conversion, la métaphysique d'Augustin. Mais il décrit au moins les grandes structures de la métaphysique qui sortira de cette conversion.

[140] Van Fleteren 1990, p. 130. [141] O'Connell 1990, pp. 144–5. [142] O'Connell 1990, p. 144.

narrative need not be restricted to 386. Perhaps Augustine is relating historical events that occurred over a period of several years, and which correspond to 'the progressive character of Augustine's early works'? The fact that even O'Connell fails to consider this possibility is a rather striking indication of just how deeply entrenched is the assumption that *Confessions* 7 is relating events from Milan in 386.

While it is next to impossible to find a scholar who feels the need to argue in support of the 'Milan in 386' assumption, it is not difficult to imagine what such an argument would look like. Undoubtedly it would go something like this:

1. Augustine's acceptance of 'the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ' is a *terminus ad quem* for the ascents of *Confessions* 7.[143]
2. Augustine accepted the Mediator by the time of his conversion in August 386.

∴ Augustine's conversion in August 386 is a *terminus ad quem* for the ascents of *Confessions* 7.

I have, of course, argued against the second premise of this argument in part 1. In particular, I argued that Augustine did not recognize the Mediator until *c.* 395, with the 'Pauline revolution' recounted at 7.21.27. If this is correct, then we may take *c.* 395 as the *terminus ad quem* for the attempts at ecstasy recounted in *Confessions* 7.[144] However, in the present chapter, I will address the issue of the dating of the Platonic ascents without relying upon the argument of the previous chapter. I will provide independent evidence in support of my claim that the *terminus ad quem* for the Platonic ascents is *c.* 395. While awaiting this evidence, the reader is asked to guard against the temptation of thinking of the experiences described in book 7 as the ascents of Milan. For my part, I will refer to them more neutrally as 'the Platonic ascents'.

As for the first Platonic ascent (described in the second half of 7.10.16), I see no reason to doubt that it occurred relatively soon after Augustine encountered the 'books of the Platonists' at Milan in 386. After all, there are not many months separating Augustine's reception of these books from his earliest writings in the fall of 386, which appear to be the products of a man who has already undergone the revolutionary experience described at *Confessions* 7.10.16. At Cassiciacum, Augustine has taken to

[143] Cf. *Conf.* 7.18.24 and above, p. 14.

[144] It might be supposed that the Ostia ascent, which occurred in 387 and is presented by the narrator of *Conf.* as a successful ascent of the soul, must be the *terminus ad quem* for the failed attempts at ecstasy recounted in *Conf.* 7. I will address this concern at pp. 213ff.

heart the admonition to 'return to the self', and made it the foundation of the way of reason. Moreover, at Cassiciacum Augustine has exorcised the ghosts of Manichaeism and Academic scepticism in that (a) he has a conception of incorporeal reality, and (b) he is completely convinced of the existence of truth. This was the result of his first ascent:

> And I said 'Is truth then nothing, since it is not extended through finite or infinite spaces?' And You called out from afar: 'But I am who am' [Ex. 3:14]. And I heard as one hears in the heart, and there was no basis for doubt whatsoever. I would more easily have doubted that I lived than that truth is, which is clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made [Rom. 1:20].[145]

Augustine's experience with incorporeal reality left him even more certain of truth than of his own life. Interestingly, his certainty did not arise because he *saw* the truth (his citation of Rom. 1:20 notwithstanding);[146] in fact, he only *heard* God speaking to him from afar. The auditory metaphor is significant here, as Augustine has just finished stating that, while he could see that there was something to see, he was not yet capable of seeing it. But if Augustine had not yet seen incorporeal truth, he could no longer doubt its existence. Thus the first ascent represents a victory over both Manichaean corporealism and Academic scepticism, and must have occurred sometime in the summer of 386.

The crucial issue for our purposes, then, is the dating of the second ascent (7.17.23). Here is the full passage in question:

> I was now enquiring after the source of my approval for the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or of earth, and what enabled me to judge correctly about mutable things and to say: 'This ought to be so, that ought not to be so.' And so, enquiring after the source of my judgement when I made such judgements, I discovered the immutable and true eternity of truth above my mutable mind. Thus by steps [*gradatim*] I ascended from bodies to the soul that senses through the body, and from this to the soul's inner power, to which the body's senses present external things – of this much even the beasts are capable – and from there to the reasoning power, to which is referred for judgment what is received from the bodily senses. This also discovered that it was mutable in me, and elevated itself to its own understanding, and took away thinking by habit. It removed itself from the contradictory swirlings of phantasms so that it might discover the light that illuminated it when, without any doubt, it cried aloud that the immutable is to

[145] *Conf.* 7.10.16.

[146] *De vera relig.* contains Augustine's first citations of Rom. 1:20 and Ex. 3:14. For Rom. 1:20, see *De vera relig.* 10.19 and 52.101. Courcelle 1950, p. 177 believes that *De quant. anim.* 33.77 contains the first reference to this verse, but this is doubtful. Augustine's first citation of Ex. 3:14 occurs at *De vera relig.* 49.97. On Augustine's exegesis of this verse, see Zum Brunn 1988, pp. 97–118.

be preferred to the mutable, which enabled it to know the immutable itself (for unless the immutable is known to some extent, it is impossible to prefer it with certainty to the mutable), and in the flash of a trembling gaze it arrived at That Which Is. Then indeed I saw Your invisible things, which are understood by the things that are made. But I was not strong enough to keep my vision fixed, and my weakness was beaten back again [*repercussa*] so that I returned to my accustomed habits, bearing nothing with me but a memory of delight, as if I were desiring something of which I had caught the fragrance but which I was not yet able to eat.[147]

Unlike the rather instantaneous ascent (or 'assumption')[148] described at 7.10.16, the second Platonic ascent proceeds 'by steps'. The ascent begins with created things: first bodies, then the powers of the soul (first sense perception, and then inner sense, both of which are shared with animals), and then arriving at reason or understanding, which judges the beauty of those things received from the senses. But this reason is itself mutable, and in searching for the basis of its judgements, Augustine was led to discover immutable truth itself. This truth, identified with the invisible things of God, is higher than the mutable mind. Again, Augustine emphasizes the certainty of the knowledge that he had attained by means of his vision, as well as his inability to sustain it.

In my view, the ascent described at 7.17.23 should be understood, not as a single experience undertaken by Augustine in 386, but rather as a type of ascent that Augustine was elaborating in the period between (roughly) 387/8 and 391. I will explain and defend this claim over the course of the following two chapters. First, I will present some evidence in support of the possibility that the six paragraphs separating the two Platonic ascents (7.11.17–7.16.22) should be understood as a summary of Augustine's intellectual development from 386 to 387/8. I believe that this evidence will give us good reason to think that 387/8 is the *terminus a quo* for the second Platonic ascent. Secondly, I will turn my attention to the second ascent itself, showing that it bears a close resemblance to the ascents of *On Free Choice of the Will* II (begun in 387/8) and *On True Religion* (390–1).

[147] *Conf.* 7.17.23. [148] Cf. O'Donnell 1992, p. 437.

CHAPTER 4

The problem of evil and the development of Augustine's metaphysics

The first ascent is described in one paragraph (7.10.16), and the second ascent in another (7.17.23). Between these two paragraphs Augustine spends fully *six* paragraphs recounting his reflections upon the nature of being (7.11.17), the relationship between being and goodness (7.12.18), the nature of good and evil (7.12.18–7.13.19), the nature of the true and the false (7.15.21) and the nature of sin (7.16.22). For the most part, scholars seem to regard these six paragraphs as filler, if their almost complete neglect in the literature is any indication (a neglect that is all the more conspicuous given the attention lavished upon the ascents themselves).[1] This is very puzzling. On the face of it, these paragraphs would seem to offer a wealth of important material relating to Augustine's intellectual development. Has this potential treasure chest gone largely untouched because of the widespread assumption that the period of time separating Augustine's discovery of the 'books of the Platonists' (7.9.13) from his 'Pauline revolution' (7.21.27) was no more than a few months? Of course, I argued in part I that this view of Augustine's development must be rejected. We are not relying upon that argument here; nevertheless, it is clear that the significance of these six paragraphs must be examined afresh. Is it possible that the author of the Cassiciacum dialogues is not yet the person who has resolved the issues described in these six paragraphs?

In my view, these paragraphs reflect the results of Augustine's philosophical inquiries from 386 to 387/8. I will provide some support for this claim in this chapter; however, it is not my purpose to undertake an exhaustive analysis of these paragraphs. Instead, I will focus my attention upon Augustine's resolution of the problem of evil as described in these paragraphs. My primary aim will be to show that *Confessions* 7.16.22 reflects

[1] Cf. the remarks of O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 448 on the matter. As O'Donnell notes, one notable exception is the discussion of DuRoy 1966, pp. 82–8. See also O'Connell 1990, p. 143 and p. 152, n. 9.

Augustine's solution to the problem of evil as it is first presented in the first book of *On Free Choice of the Will*.

In order to bring the nature of our task into sharper relief, let us begin by noting the purpose of *On Free Choice of the Will*, as recalled by Augustine in the *Retractations*:

> While we were still in Rome, we wanted to explore and discuss the origin of evil. We discussed the problem in such a way that thorough and considered reasoning might bring us, if possible – in so far as, with God's aid, discussion would allow us – to an understanding of what we already believed on the basis of divine authority. After careful reasoning and debate, we concluded that the sole cause of evil lay in the free choice of the will …[2]

The main conclusion of the dialogue, which the interlocutors want not only to believe but also to understand, is that the sole cause of evil is the free choice of the will. When did Augustine arrive at this insight? He would have been exposed to the view that the will is *a* cause – if not the sole cause – of evil since at least 373, when he read the following lines of Cicero's *Hortensius* (quoted in 386): 'More evil is caused by the depravity of the will than good happens to anyone through fortune.'[3] But Augustine had subsequently sojourned for nine years with the Manichaeans, who held that the cause of evil is a principle distinct from and co-eternal with God (the principle of good). Good and evil are manifestations of these two principles, which are engaged in a cosmic struggle. After Augustine rejected the authority of Manichaeism, he also struggled to overcome its understanding of the origin of evil. His efforts are described at the beginning of *Confessions* 7. Augustine tells us at *Confessions* 7.3.5 that he had been 'hearing' (*audiebam* – from Ambrose's sermons?)[4] that 'free choice of the will is the cause of our doing evil, and Your [i.e. God's] just judgment is the cause of our suffering evil'. However, he adds: 'I was not able to perceive this clearly.'[5]

Augustine distinguishes here between evil that we *commit* and evil that we *suffer* through God's just judgment. (In *Against Adimantus* (393/4) Augustine says that this is the difference between sin (*peccatum*) and punishment (*poena*).)[6] The Manichaeans would absolve man of responsibility even for the former; and at *Confessions* 7.3.5 Augustine describes his rejection of this position. He says: 'I was quite certain that, when I wanted or did not want to do something, it was none other than myself who wanted or did not want, and at last I realized that the cause of my sin lay there.'[7] Augustine had then come to realize that it was his own will (and not the

[2] *Retract.* 1.9 (8).1. [3] *De beat. vit.* 10. [4] Thus O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 400. [5] *Conf.* 7.3.5.
[6] *C. Adim.* 26. [7] *Conf.* 7.3.5.

'Prince of Darkness' posited by the Manichaeans) that was responsible for the sin that he committed. But it seems that Augustine had not yet resolved the question of the cause of the evil that is suffered, although he did believe that it must be the result of the just judgement of God: 'But what I did unwillingly [*invitus*], it seemed to me that I rather suffered than did, and I judged it to be not my fault [*culpa*] but my punishment [*poena*]. Since I considered You just, however, I readily admitted that I was not being punished unjustly.'[8]

When exactly did Augustine come to understand how evil that is suffered is the result of God's just judgement? In the narrative flow of the *Confessions*, this issue is resolved at *Confessions* 7.16.22:

> And I realized with experience that there is nothing astonishing about the same bread being pleasant to a healthy palate and a punishment [*poena*] to an unhealthy, and light being delightful to clear eyes and hateful to sore. *Your justice displeases the wicked*, to say nothing of the viper and the smaller worms: yet these You have created good, and suited to the lower parts of Your creation. The wicked are themselves suited to these lower parts to the extent that they are dissimilar to You, but they are suited to the higher parts to the extent that they become similar to You. And I asked: what is iniquity [*iniquitas*]? And I discovered that it is not a substance but rather a perversity of the will that is turned away from the highest substance [*summa substantia*] – which You, O God, are – and turned towards lower things: so that it throws away its inmost parts and swells out into external things.[9]

Iniquitas – the turning of the will away from the highest substance and towards lower things – is the cause of God's just judgement, displeasing to the wicked. Augustine's insight into the nature of *iniquitas* provides him with an understanding of how, as he had already believed at *Confessions* 7.3.5, God is not the cause even of evil suffered. While such evil is the result of God's justice, its direct cause is instead the perverse will of the soul that sins, by turning away from God and towards lower things. At this point, then, Augustine seems to have understood that the will is the cause of all evil, evil committed as well as evil suffered. Compare this with Augustine's remark in the *Retractations* concerning *On Free Choice of the Will*: 'After careful reasoning and debate, we concluded that the sole cause of evil lay in the free choice of the will.' Is it possible that *Confessions* 7.16.22 reflects the solution to the problem of evil that Augustine attained at the time of *On Free Choice of the Will*?

This possibility must be taken seriously, especially in light of O'Connell's work showing the complexity of Augustine's solution to the problem of evil

[8] *Conf.* 7.3.5. [9] *Conf.* 7.16.22.

in *Confessions* 7. O'Connell says that Augustine's overall solution to this problem required at least the following three insights:

> He [Augustine] needed to reach the conviction that beings were arranged in grades such that each higher grade of good was *eo ipso* a higher grade of beauty, truth and reality; he had to perfect the notion of *dimissio* whereby God's punitive action operated in perfect coincidence with the creature's sinful "weight," *pondus*; and he had to elaborate the insight that a true *omnia* required both spiritual *and corporeal* realities, all *variously* good, in order to constitute the fully deployed array of "all things" which the God of Genesis created as "very good."[10]

O'Connell goes on to claim that

> it can be shown that Augustine came dimly to recognize that he needed something like each of these insights, that he worked restlessly to grasp and articulate them, and that *their first articulation in his early works occurred well after the Cassiciacum dialogues of* A.D. *386*.[11]

In particular, O'Connell contends that Augustine first learned to deploy the 'grades of being' insight in 387, that he first expressed the *dimissio* insight in 388/9, and that he does not fully articulate the *omnia* idea until 395.[12] O'Connell's contentions should give pause to those who, in accordance with the 'standard reading' of *Confessions* 7, believe that the latter half of this book is a simple summary of Augustine's intellectual development over the course of a few months in the summer of 386.

O'Connell's contentions might also seem to conflict with what I will be attempting to prove: if Augustine did not have all of the pieces of the puzzle for his solution to the problem of evil before 395, then does this not rule out the possibility that *Confessions* 7.16.22 reflects Augustine's solution to the problem of evil as attained at the time of *On Free Choice of the Will* (387/8)? In fact, it is not clear to me that O'Connell and I are at odds here. It is important to bear in mind that O'Connell sees in the second half of the *Confessions* not a simple retelling of history, but the presentation of 'a logically connected Weltanschauung moving through the classic metaphysical notions of being, good, truth and … beauty', a Weltanschauung that, 'once fully developed, enabled him to "solve" the various problems which had bothered him in the course of the life he recounts in his *Confessions* – including those two aspects of the problem of evil mentioned above'.[13] This is not to say that O'Connell denies the historicity of the second half of the *Confessions*: as O'Connell himself notes, 'my interpretation neither affirms

[10] O'Connell 1990, p. 143. [11] O'Connell 1990, p. 143 (my italics). [12] O'Connell 1990, p. 152, n. 9.
[13] O'Connell 1990, p. 143; cf. above, p. 26 and p. 134.

nor denies the "historicity" of this section'.[14] But it is to say that his interest in *Confessions* 7 lies, not with the *development* of Augustine's solution to the problem of evil in *Confessions* 7, but with Augustine's *fully developed* solution to the problem, and its articulation in Augustine's early writings. Consequently, O'Connell sees the various insights required for Augustine's solution as insights required for the fully developed solution. However, I am not approaching the text in this way. Because I am reading this text as an historical account, I am interested in the development of Augustine's treatment of the problem of evil in this section, as well as the development of the insights upon which his solution(s) to this problem depend(s). Notice also that my interest in this development ends at 7.16.22, while O'Connell is expressly interested in Augustine's solution to the problem of evil until 7.20.26.[15] But we need not suppose that the solution to the problem of evil that is presented at *Confessions* 7.16.22 represents Augustine's fully developed solution to the problem, even in the *Confessions*.

In what follows I will trace the development of Augustine's ontology from 386 to 387/8, paying particular attention to the nature of evil and to the status of the will. In the course of this examination, we will find Augustine engaged with some issues that are fairly standard in the Platonic tradition, and which have already been treated by his predecessors. I will on occasion make reference to the tradition that may have been informing his work, but it is not my purpose to locate Augustine's sources or to determine the extent of Augustine's originality in his early writings. My purpose is instead to show that the understanding of evil that Augustine achieved at *Confessions* 7.16.22 (whatever the extent of its originality) reflects the solution to the problem of evil that is presented in the first book of *On Free Choice of the Will* (387/8). In doing this, I also aim to suggest that, in the paragraphs separating the two Platonic ascents (*Confessions* 7.11.17–7.16.22), Augustine is recounting his intellectual developments from 386 to 387/8.

'THE QUESTION OF THE SOUL'

At Cassiciacum in 386

Is it possible that Augustine already understood that the will (*voluntas*) is the sole cause of evil in 386? In fact, Augustine has precious little to say about the will at this time. At Cassiciacum, Augustine knows that the choice of the

[14] O'Connell 1990, pp. 144–5. [15] O'Connell 1990, p. 142.

soul is free,[16] and he has read in Cicero that the will is implicated in evil.[17] But these comments can hardly inspire confidence that Augustine's views are in any way similar to those that are articulated at *Confessions* 7.16.22. In fact, in the opening of *The Blessed Life*, Augustine purports to have no clear idea what the relationship is (if any) between the will and evil:

> If the journey to the port of philosophy – from which (and from which alone) one now proceeds into the land of the blessed life – is instituted by reason, and if the will itself leads one along to this port, I do not know, great and noble Theodorus, whether I would be rash in saying that the men who will reach this port must be reckoned as very few indeed, although even now a select few have arrived completely, as we see. For it is as if God or nature or necessity or our own will, or some combination of these things or all of them together – the matter is very obscure, but raised here so that you may shed light on it – tosses us around blindly and indiscriminately in this world just as if we were on some stormy sea. How few, then, would understand whither they are to strive or by what means they are to return, unless at some time a tempest – even one that comes against our will [*inuitos*] and opposes us, a tempest that to fools would seem harmful – should drive those who are ignorant and wandering into the land that is so greatly desired.[18]

In this passage, Augustine supposes that the will plays a role in bringing one to 'the port of philosophy' leading to the blessed life, and he hints at the possibility that the failure of one's will might therefore be responsible in some way for the stormy weather (i.e. the evils that we suffer) that prevents us from reaching this port. But this is raised merely as a possibility; Augustine claims to be no clearer about the role of the will in this matter than he is about the role of God, or of 'nature' or 'necessity'. To what extent is the will responsible for the evils that we suffer? Augustine pleads ignorance, and appeals to Manlius Theodorus for assistance.[19]

Augustine addresses the problem of evil more explicitly in *On Order* – indeed, it is the very issue that motivates the dialogue. How do we account for the apparent presence of evil in a world that is supposed to be governed by divine providence? Again, it is clear that Augustine is thinking of evil that is suffered, as he asks, for example: why does one man desire children and have none while another man has too many?[20] Augustine and his interlocutors discuss the problem of evil at length, but their attempts to resolve it

[16] *Sol.* 1.1.4, p. 8, ll.12–13: '"Deus", cuius legibus arbitrium animae liberum est.'
[17] See above, p. 139. [18] *De beat. vit.* 1.1.
[19] Augustine's questioning in this passage is of course highly stylized. However, I see no reason to doubt that he is in earnest as he queries the relationship between evil and the will. There is a palpable urgency, here and elsewhere, about Augustine's appeals for assistance regarding 'the question of the soul'. See below, pp. 145–7.
[20] *De ord.* 2.19.51.

are ultimately unsuccessful. This, Augustine observes, is owing to the fact that they have not yet attained to the knowledge of 'a certain lofty discipline [*alta quaedam disciplina*], of which the masses have scarcely the faintest idea', and which promises to show how God's providence may be reconciled with apparent evil:

> To souls that are diligent and love only God and souls, it [sc. *alta quaedam disciplina*] promises to show that even all those things that we consider to be evil are in fact not outside the divine order. It promises to show this in such a way that the addition of numbers could not give us more certainty.[21]

This discipline is 'the law of God itself … transcribed, as it were, on the souls of the wise'.[22] Knowledge of this discipline serves as an effective antidote against the impiety and confusion that sometimes arises in reflective people, who, not being able to discern any order in human affairs, are perplexed as to how (or even whether) God exercises providence over the world.[23] As we have seen, those who would know this discipline must prepare themselves by following a twofold order: an order of life and an order of learning.[24] The bulk of the second book of *On Order* is devoted to a discussion of this twofold order that is necessary for resolving the problem of evil, and not to the problem of evil itself.

However, Augustine does provide the rough outlines of a solution to the problem of evil. He says that the problem is resolved by 'following and maintaining the order of nature that is proper to each thing, and then seeing or revealing the order of the universe by which this world is truly held together and governed'. Augustine further notes that this is 'most difficult and rare for men'.[25] Just as one might overlook the harmonious design of an inlaid pavement by focusing upon the details and losing sight of the whole, so too one might overlook the beauty of the universe by focusing upon only a part of it.[26] However, a 'learned man' will not neglect the whole, and will therefore not be troubled by apparent evils in the world:

> Finally, when will any burdens or dangers, or repulsions or attractions of fortune bother this man? In this sensible world, one must certainly consider what time and place are, so that what delights in a part of place or time may be understood to be far inferior to that whole of which it is a part. Again, it is clear to a learned man that what offends in a part offends for no other reason than because one does not see the whole with which that part harmonizes wonderfully. But in that intelligible world, every part is just as beautiful and perfect as the whole.[27]

[21] *De ord.* 2.7.24; cf. *De ord.* 2.19.51. [22] *De ord.* 2.8.25. [23] *De ord.* 2.5.15. [24] See above, pp. 114ff.
[25] *De ord.* 1.1.1. [26] *De ord.* 1.1.2. [27] *De ord.* 2.19.51.

If considered individually, some parts of the sensible world do seem to be better than others. Some are pleasing, and others are offensive. But the sensible world as a whole is superior to any of its individual parts, and each part harmonizes (*congruit*) with the whole. So whoever considers some part of the sensible world to be evil, does so simply because he does not see the sensible world as a whole. In the intelligible world, this problem does not arise in the first place, since every part there is as perfect as the whole.[28]

In *On Order* the problem of evil is something of a pseudo-problem. Evil arises not from any part of the world, but from the inadequate understanding of the person who looks at the part and loses sight of the whole. The problem of evil, then, needs not so much to be solved as dissolved. This is brought about by means of an education, in particular, an education in the liberal disciplines. Such an education induces man to 'return to himself' and to know himself, which is effected 'by a habit of withdrawing from sensible things and focusing his mind upon itself and holding it there'. Having returned to itself and discovered unity (*unum*) in itself, the mind then understands the beauty of the universe (*universitas*).[29]

Augustine does not, in his summary treatment of evil in *On Order*, consider the possibility that he raised at the beginning of *The Blessed Life*, i.e. that the will might somehow be responsible for the evils that we suffer. His focus is instead upon the misperception of the intellect; in particular, his claim is that things only seem to be evil because we fail to recognize the harmonious ordering of the universe as a whole. Of course, this solution to the problem of evil is not necessarily incompatible with the solution proposed in *The Blessed Life*. Indeed, at *Confessions* 7.16.22 these two solutions appear to be integrated, so that Augustine can understand evil as a deficiency of the will that 'is turned away from the highest substance … and turned towards lower things', without, however, denying the inherent goodness of these lower things, such as 'the viper and the smaller worms'. However, it is not at all clear that, in 386, Augustine has integrated these two solutions to the problem of evil.

In fact, the will plays little or no role in Augustine's explanation of evil at that time. In 386 he readily admits that he is uncertain not only about the function of the will, but also about the nature of the soul in general. At Cassiciacum, he is seeking assistance (which seems never to have come)

[28] Cf. *De ord.* 1.1.1–2; cf. *Conf.* 7.13.19 (discussed below, pp. 180–2).
[29] *De ord.* 1.1.3–1.2.3.

from those who, as he believes, have already resolved 'the question of the soul'.[30] The specifics of this question are enumerated in *On Order*:

> From where does the soul take its origin? What is it doing here?[31] *To what extent is it distinguished from God*? What unique characteristic has it that alternates between both natures? To what extent is it mortal and how is it proved to be immortal?[32]

Augustine must resolve at least some of this before he can hope to understand if and how the will might be the sole cause of evil.[33] (For him, after all, an adequate ethical theory cannot be developed in the absence of a metaphysical theory of the soul, or the will.)[34] Consider, for example, the

[30] As we have already noted, Augustine appeals to Manlius Theodorus directly for assistance on 'the question of the soul' at *De beat. vit*. 1.5 (see above, p. 54). At *Sol*. 2.14.26, Augustine refers obliquely to two others from whom he seeks instruction on this matter. One is praised for his eloquence (probably Ambrose (cf. *Conf*. 5.13.23), although Courcelle 1950, pp. 202–10 argues that this is Theodorus), and the other is supposed to be completing a poem on the soul in his 'transalpine leisure' (this is undoubtedly Zenobius; cf. *De ord*. 1.7.20). One detects a note of cynicism in this passage, as if Augustine is by now beginning to realize that these unnamed men are unlikely to provide him with the assistance he desires.

[31] To understand the significance of the question 'what is it doing here' (*quid hic anima agat*) one might consider *De ord*. 2.4.11.

[32] *De ord*. 2.5.17.

[33] He need not resolve all of this, however; in fact, it appears that Augustine never resolved the issue of the soul's origin; cf. *De lib. arb*. 3.20.56–21.59, where he presents four possible theories of the soul's origin, and *Retract*. 1.1.3, ll.83–4, where he says about the origin of the soul: 'nec tunc [i.e. at the time of *C. Acad*.] sciebam nec adhuc scio'. For an overview of the question in Augustine, see O'Daly 1987, pp. 15–20.

[34] At *De ord*. 2.7.24 (cf. also *De ord*. 2.19.51), Augustine indicates that a solution to the problem of evil will become clear through a knowledge of 'alta quaedam et a multitudinis uel suspicione remotissima disciplina' (see above, pp. 114 and 144). It is not just ethical theory but also the ethical life that he makes dependent upon metaphysical knowledge; cf. *De ord*. 2.18.47, ll.12–16:

> *Cuius* [sc. philosophiae disciplina] *duplex quaestio est: una de anima, altera de Deo*. Prima efficit ut nosmetipsos noverimus, altera, ut originem nostram. Illa nobis dulcior, ista charior, *illa nos dignos beata vita, beatos haec facit*; prima est illa discentibus, ista iam doctis.

In making the good life dependent upon metaphysical knowledge of God and the soul, Augustine is in accord with the Neoplatonic tradition. Consider the following passage from Plotinus, in which living a good life is a matter of living in accordance with intellect, or becoming like God:

> Since the soul is evil when it is thoroughly mixed with the body and shares its experiences and has all the same opinions, it will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same opinions but acts alone – this is intelligence and wisdom – and does not share the body's experiences – this is self-control – and is not afraid of departing from the body – this is courage – and is ruled by reason and intellect, without opposition – and this is justice. One would not be wrong in calling this state of the soul likeness to God, in which its activity is intellectual, and it is free in this way from bodily affections. (*Enn.* 1.2.3, ll.12–21, trans. A. H. Armstrong)

For the Stoics, moreover, ethics is dependent upon physics; the life of virtue just is the life that is lived in accordance with nature (see above, pp. 46–7). The Manichaeans also rooted their ethics in cosmology (see above, pp. 4–5). Augustine's concern to resolve the specific metaphysical issues involved in 'the question of the soul' must be understood in this context. His concern is ultimately a practical one.

question I have highlighted in this passage: to what extent is the soul distinct from God? Augustine believed of course that God was not the cause of evil. But if he is uncertain about the extent to which the soul is distinct from God, must he not likewise be uncertain about the extent to which the will (which is the prerogative of the soul) can be the cause of evil? Our search for the Augustine of *Confessions* 7.16.22 – that is, our search for the Augustine who has understood that the will is the sole cause of all evil – is surely also a search for the Augustine who has resolved at least this much of 'the question of the soul'.

Soliloquies *(386/7)*

The *Soliloquies* represents Augustine's first sustained attempt to clarify 'the question of the soul'. He undertakes this task with some apprehension, as he believes that this question has been treated by others more capable than himself. Nevertheless, his attempts to avail himself of their expertise have proved fruitless for one reason or another, and so he has now resolved to investigate the question for himself.[35] His task, at least, is clear: he desires to know God and the soul, and nothing more.[36] In order to know these things, he determines that it is first necessary to know truth (*veritas*), since truth is that through which everything else is known.[37]

The investigation begins with a distinction between the true (*verum*) and truth (*veritas*). Two different things are signified by these two words, just as two different things are signified by, for example, *castum* ('a chaste thing') and *castitas* ('chastity'). The distinction here appears to be something like the distinction between a Form and what participates in it, with the former serving as the cause of the latter: 'Chastity is not caused by what is chaste, but what is chaste is caused by chastity; in the same way, if anything is true, it is true by truth.'[38] Again, Augustine notes that truth is 'that by which whatever is true, is true'.[39] It seems that Augustine already had some such distinction in mind in *Against the Academics*, as he claimed there that knowledge of the probable, or truth-like (*verisimile*), presupposes knowledge of the truth (*veritas*).[40] Indeed, in that work Augustine seizes upon Carneades' use of the term *verisimile*, taking it as support for his theory that the Academics secretly held to the doctrine of Plato, distinguishing between the sensible world (the world of truth-likeness) and the intelligible world

[35] *Sol.* 2.14.26. [36] *Sol.* 1.2.7. [37] *Sol.* 1.15.27. [38] *Sol.* 1.15.27; cf. *De div. q. 83* 23.
[39] *Sol.* 2.15.29. [40] *C. Acad.* 2.7.16, 2.11.26–2.12.28; cf. *C. Acad.* 3.18.40.

(the world of truth itself).[41] But the *Soliloquies* is the first work in which he devotes serious attention to the nature of the distinction between *verum* and *veritas*.

The distinction initially turns on the fact that some true things are mortal, while truth is immortal. Augustine (or rather Reason, his interlocutor) begins by establishing that some true things are mortal:

A: How does something true [*verum*] perish? I do not see that.
R: I am surprised that you ask that. Do we not see countless things perish before our eyes? Perhaps you think that this tree is a tree but is not true, or that it cannot perish. Although you do not trust the senses, and you might answer that you have no idea whether it is a tree, nevertheless, I think that you will not deny that, if it is a tree, it is a true tree [*vera arbor*]. Indeed this is judged not by sense, but by intellect. For if it is a false tree [*falsa arbor*] it is not a tree; and if it is a tree it must be true.
A: I grant that.
R: What about this further point: Do you not grant that a tree is the sort of thing that is born and dies?
A: I cannot deny it.
R: And so the conclusion is that something that is true, dies.
A: I have no objection.[42]

Reason's use of 'true' here is ambiguous: it seems to pertain both to propositions (i.e. the proposition 'this is a tree', as judged by the intellect) and to reality (i.e. the tree itself). In any case, the point of this passage is that some true things are mortal, since a tree is both true (whether 'true' is understood in propositional or material terms) and mortal. Reason then gets Augustine to agree that truth is immortal: 'Truth does not die when true things die, just as chastity does not die when a chaste man dies.'[43] A distinction has thus been drawn between true things (*vera*) and truth (*veritas*) itself: true things (or at least some of them) are mortal, and truth is immortal.

In the second book of the *Soliloquies*, Reason will offer an argument for the immortality of truth, based upon the principle that whatever is true is true because truth is in it. The argument proceeds as follows: even if truth were to perish, it would still be true (*verum*) that truth has perished. And since there can be nothing true if there is no truth, it follows that truth cannot perish.[44] But this argument is unsatisfactory, since, on the

[41] *C. Acad.* 3.17.37ff. On the ascription of an esoteric Platonism to the ostensibly sceptical Academy, see Boys-Stones 2001, p. 135, n. 14; Glucker 1978, pp. 296–329.
[42] *Sol.* 1.15.28. [43] *Sol.* 1.15.28.
[44] *Sol.* 2.2.2. Strictly speaking, this argument has as its primary aim to establish the imperishability rather than the immortality of *veritas*; nevertheless, the latter obviously follows from the former.

assumption that truth has perished, one might just as well conclude that there is nothing true, since nothing can be true unless truth is in it. Indeed, this is precisely the line of argument employed at the end of the first book, as Reason proves that only immortal things are really true. Reason first points out that something cannot remain if that which it is in perishes. True things perish, yet truth remains. Therefore, truth is not in mortal things. But truth 'is not nowhere' (*non est nusquam*). It follows that there are immortal things (*res immortales*) that truth is in. Reason then concludes that only what is immortal is true [P1], since only that which truth is in can be true, and (as has just been argued) truth is not in mortal things.[45]

This is a puzzling move. If only immortal things are true, then Reason has contradicted her claim that some true things, like the tree, are mortal. Moreover, Reason goes on to argue that only immortal things have real being:

> Any tree which is false is not a tree, false wood is not wood, false money is not money, and, generally, whatever is false is not [P3]. But, whatever is not true is false [P2]. Therefore, nothing is properly said to be except things immortal.[46]

The structure of the argument may be summarized as follows (the square brackets indicate what is left unstated by Augustine):

P1. Only what is immortal is true.
P2. Whatever is not true is false.
[∴Whatever is mortal is false.]
P3. Whatever is false is not.
[∴Whatever is mortal is not.]
∴ Whatever is (properly speaking), is immortal.

From P2 and P3 it follows that something cannot be if it is not true. Strictly speaking, this means that nothing can *be* false; those things that 'are' false (like mortal things) simply are not. But notice the qualification in the conclusion: 'nothing is *properly said* to be except things immortal'. If the argument is to be valid, this qualification must be applicable throughout the argument, so that we may also conclude that whatever is false cannot be *properly said* to be. Of course, this implies that we may speak, if only improperly, of the being of false things. We have, then, a distinction between two kinds of reality, one that is in the proper sense, and one that is only improperly said to be. This distinction corresponds to the intelligible world and the sensible world, respectively. Intelligible, immortal things have real being, while sensible, mortal things do not. But is this not what

[45] *Sol.* 1.15.29. [46] *Sol.* 1.15.29.

motivated the *veritas*/*verum* distinction in the first place? *Veritas* is imperishable, or immortal; *verum* is perishable, or mortal. The qualification in the argument thus allows us to reinscribe the distinction between *veritas* and *verum*. The former refers to the intelligible world, the latter to the sensible world. We seem to have come full circle, although the reason for the roundabout route is unclear.

In any case, this discussion is reminiscent of the following passage from *Confessions* 7.11.17: 'And I looked at other things below You and I saw that they do not have complete being nor do they have complete non-being. Indeed they are because they are from You, and they are not because they are not what You are. For that is truly [*vere est*], which remains immutable.'[47] Here, as in the *Soliloquies*, Augustine says that only immutable (= immortal) things have true being. This was the fundamental insight that had jarred Augustine into Platonism (*Confessions* 7.10.16). But while *Confessions* 7.11.17 describes an Augustine who has determined that mutable things have being in so far as they are from God, the Augustine of the *Soliloquies* still seems unclear to what extent mutable things can be said to have being at all. Indeed, in a very early letter (to Zenobius in 386), Augustine claims that sensible things are in flux (*labi*) and passing away (*effluere*), and have 'non-being' (*non esse*).[48] Augustine says much the same thing at *The Blessed Life* 8. In this passage, we find Augustine attempting to assimilate Platonism into a Ciceronian substructure.[49] Following Cicero's lead,[50] Augustine discusses the etymologies of 'frugality' (*frugalitas*) and 'prodigality' (*nequitia*), seeing in *nequitia* a derivative of 'nothing' (*nequidquam*, *nihil*). Augustine then offers the following characterization of *nihil*: 'All that flows, that is dissolved, that melts away and seems to be constantly perishing is nothing [*nihil est*].'[51] This may be a derivative of Plotinus' claim that matter is μὴ ὄν.[52] As for its opposite, *aliquid*, Augustine says: 'It is something [*est aliquid*], however, if it remains, if it is stable, and if it is always like this.'[53] Perhaps we should not take Augustine too literally when he asserts that mutable things have 'non-being' and are 'nothing'. For Plotinus, at least, the claim that matter is μὴ ὄν is not the claim that matter simply does not exist.[54] Of course we should not expect Augustine to be treating this subject in 386 with the sophistication of a Plotinus, but it is

[47] *Conf.* 7.11.17. [48] *Ep.* 2. [49] Cf. DuRoy 1966, pp. 149ff.; O'Connell 1991, p. 134.
[50] *Tusc. disp.* 3.8.18. [51] *De beat. vit.* 8.
[52] Cf. *Enn.* 2.4.16.3, 3.6.7.11–13. O'Connell 1991, p. 134 claims that it is 'an obvious derivative'.
[53] *De beat. vit.* 8. [54] Cf. O'Brien 1999, pp. 172ff.

clear that the writer of the *Soliloquies* is struggling to understand what sort of ontological status can be attributed to mutable things.

The main difficulty he encounters lies with the principle that whatever is true is true because truth is in it. If mortal (= mutable) things are, then they are true (e.g. if a tree is, it is a true tree), which means that truth is in them. But if truth, which is immortal, is in that which is mortal, then it would seem that truth is in danger of perishing along with that which it is in. So before Augustine can say that mortal (mutable) things are, he must understand how mortal (mutable) things can be dependent upon immortal truth in such a way that the immortality of truth is not threatened thereby. In the *Soliloquies* Augustine understands the dependency relation in terms of truth's being 'in' the true. Of course, to say that truth is 'in' what is true is to speak metaphorically, since truth is incorporeal and cannot literally be in anything. How exactly is it that immortal truth – which is incorporeal yet 'is not nowhere' – is 'in' the (mortal/mutable) true? Already in *On Order* Augustine had signalled the importance of resolving this issue, as he asked 'what it is to be neither in a place nor nowhere' (*quod sit nec in loco esse nec nusquam*).[55] Indeed, he says that this question – along with a number of others – must be resolved before one can begin to investigate even the soul, let alone God. But Augustine has not yet resolved this question in the *Soliloquies*, which is why he is still unclear about the ontological status of mortal (mutable) things.[56]

What exactly is at stake in all of this, for Augustine? We must keep in mind that his discussion of truth and the true is intended to clarify the nature of God and the soul. God is undoubtedly to be identified with truth, so the crucial issue is the classification of the soul. The writer of the *Soliloquies* is still unclear to what extent the soul is distinct from God, or truth. Obviously the soul cannot simply be identified with truth. But neither can the soul be true in the same sense as the tree. The true tree is mortal, but Augustine believes that the soul is immortal (although he is still searching for a satisfactory proof of this). Does the soul, then, belong to the category of 'immortal things', the only things that truly are? This question underlies much of the discussion in the second book of the *Soliloquies*.

[55] *De ord*. 2.16.44.

[56] The nature of the 'inherence relation' between a Form and its particulars is of course a standard difficulty in Platonism. On Augustine and the Platonic theory of Forms, see O'Daly 1987, pp. 189–99.

The beginning of the second book is largely devoted to an examination of the nature of the true and the false.[57] For our purposes, the important point to emerge from this examination is that nothing is simply false, since whatever is false must be to be false and is therefore also true. Thus, Augustine will eventually accept Reason's claim: 'What in no way is cannot be called false, for if it is false, it is; if it is not, it is not false.'[58] Again, Augustine agrees with the following statement of Reason: 'I think it is now sufficiently evident for the present question and cannot be doubted that nothing is false except by some imitation of the true.'[59] But is the opposite also the case, i.e. is it the case that whatever is true is also in some sense false? If so, then we are left with the essential difficulty facing the Stoic criterion of truth, according to the Academics: i.e. that a true thing has no marks that a false thing does not also have.[60] We would therefore have no way of distinguishing between the true and the false, from which it would follow that nothing could be known. This, of course, was the position of the sceptical Academy, and it was also Augustine's position shortly before he read the 'books of the Platonists'. Indeed, scepticism would be the logical conclusion for the writer of the *Soliloquies*, were it not for the fact that he has discovered the 'intelligible world' of the Platonists,[61] a world in which everything is immutably and truly, that is to say, without any admixture of the false. Because Augustine has discovered this world, the intermingling of the true and the false in the mutable sensible world does not lead him into a sceptical despair. Instead, it leads him to issue the following exhortation:

I see nothing worthy of imitation in these examples. In order to be true to our own nature, we should not be false by copying and imitating the nature of another, in the manner of actors or reflections in a mirror or the bronze cow of Myron. We should instead seek that which is true [*verum*] without leading a sort of double life

[57] The examination is summarized in the appendix (pp. 237–8). The discussion is somewhat tedious – we are clearly observing a thinker who is still in his workshop, so to speak – but certainly not without interest. Augustine's attempts to define the nature of the true and false contain the elements of what would eventually comprise his metaphysical explanation of evil. In general, we may say that the proposed definitions identify two possible sources of the true and false: (a) some intrinsic characteristic of being, and (b) the soul's misperception of being. The former entails some sort of link between 'what is true' and 'what is', and 'what is false' and 'what is not'. The latter entails some sort of link between the 'false' and the soul that misperceives (whether because of deception or not).

[58] *Sol.* 2.15.29. [59] *Sol.* 2.16.30.

[60] See above, pp. 32–3 and p. 47. On Augustine's knowledge of Academic scepticism, see above, p. 9, n. 66.

[61] *C. Acad.* 3.19.42; cf. *De civ. Dei* 8.6–7, where Augustine says that the fundamental error of the Stoics and Epicureans consists in the fact that they made the judgement of truth (*iudicium veritatis*) a function of the bodily senses, whereas the Platonists avoid this problem by distinguishing between sensible things, which are perceived by the sight of the body, and intelligible things, which are understood by the vision of the mind.

[*quasi bifronte ratione*] and being self-contradictory, so that it is true on one side, and false on the other.[62]

Two types of things are true: those that are also false (i.e. sensible things) and those that are only true. But we should seek that which is 'more true' (*verius*), i.e. that which has nothing false in it.[63] Augustine has in mind the liberal disciplines, to which he now turns his attention.

Augustine focuses in particular upon grammar and 'the discipline of disputation' (*disciplina disputandi*).[64] The discipline of disputation, which is constituted by 'the principles of definition, division and distinction',[65] is also known as dialectic.[66] Augustine asserts that dialectic is true,[67] and then goes on to argue that every other discipline must also be true: 'The word "discipline" [*disciplina*] is derived from the word "learning" [*discendo*]: for no one who learns and retains his learning can be said not to know, and no one knows something false. Therefore every discipline is true [*vera*].'[68] Augustine is using 'true' in the strong sense here; his claim is that a discipline contains no admixture of the false.[69] At first, there is some question as to whether grammar can be true, since its subject matter includes fables, which are both true and false. For example, it treats the flight of Daedalus, which is a true fable precisely because it is false that Daedalus had flown. However, Augustine argues that it is not grammar that makes these fables false, since grammar treats all spoken words irrespective of their truth or falsity. Grammar is a discipline, and a 'true' discipline, because it contains definitions, and divisions and distinctions of classes and kinds.[70] In other words, grammar is a discipline because it treats its material according to the dialectical method. In fact, no discipline can function without the dialectical method; Augustine states that a discipline is regarded as true (*vera*) because it makes use of 'definitions, divisions and reasonings', the principles of dialectic.[71] Every discipline is thus true through dialectic; hence, Augustine will elsewhere refer to dialectic as the 'discipline of disciplines'.[72] This suggests a parallel between dialectic, through which all the other disciplines are true, and truth, through which all that is true is true. Indeed, Augustine actually identifies dialectic with truth, noting that it is through truth (*per veritatem*) that all the disciplines are true.[73]

[62] *Sol.* 2.10.18. [63] *Sol.* 2.11.19. [64] *Sol.* 2.11.19. [65] *Sol.* 2.11.21.
[66] Cf. *De ord.* 2.13.38, where dialectic is constituted by the activities of defining (*definiendo*), dividing (*distribuendo*) and collecting (*colligendo*); cf. *Top.* 5.28.1–2.
[67] *Sol.* 2.11.19. [68] *Sol.* 2.11.20. [69] Cf. *Sol.* 2.17.31. [70] *Sol.* 2.11.20.
[71] *Sol.* 2.11.20; cf. *Sol.* 2.11.21. [72] *De ord.* 2.11.38. [73] *Sol.* 2.11.21; cf. *Sol.* 2.15.27, 2.18.32.

How does the soul fit into this? In particular, how is the soul related to the disciplines? Augustine attempts to elucidate their relationship through a distinction (perhaps borrowed from Aristotle)[74] between two ways in which something can be in another (*aliquid in aliquo*):

> In the first way, it is so in such a manner that it might be removed and be somewhere else, as, for example, this wood is in this place or as the sun is in the east. In the second way, a thing is in a subject in such a manner that it cannot be separated from it, as the form and appearance which we see in this wood, as light is in the sun, as heat is in fire, as a discipline is in the soul [*animus*][75] and any other things there may be of this kind.[76]

Something can be in another either separably or inseparably. Whatever is in another separably (such as the sun in the east) may be removed from its subject,[77] but whatever is in another inseparably (such as a discipline in the soul) cannot be removed from its subject.

If, as the example suggests, the disciplines are in the soul inseparably, then the soul is true in such a way that the immortality of truth is not thereby threatened. For the disciplines are always true and never false, and so if they are in the soul inseparably, then the soul too must be always true and never false. But if the soul is always true, then immortal truth – which is in everything that is true – is always in the immortal soul. Unlike, say, the true tree – which is sometimes false (i.e. does not have being) – the true soul does not pose a threat to the immortality of truth.

Moreover, if the soul is always true, then the soul is immortal (as are the disciplines). Thus, the immortality of the soul is proven on the assumption that the disciplines are contained inseparably in the soul:

> If whatever is in a subject abides forever, it is necessary that the subject itself should also abide forever. Every discipline is in the soul as in a subject. Therefore it is necessary that the soul should abide forever, if *disciplina* abides forever. But

[74] As a youth, Augustine read and understood the *Categories* (*Conf.* 4.16.28), in which Aristotle writes:

> By being 'present in a subject' I do not mean present as parts are present in a whole, but being incapable of existence apart from the said subject. Some things, again, are present in a subject, but are never predicable of a subject. For instance, a certain point of grammatical knowledge is present in the mind, but is not predicable of any subject … (*Cat.* 2, 1a23–5, trans. E. M. Edghill) Cf. Watson 1990, p. 192.

[75] While *animus* has the meaning of 'mind' (rational soul), Augustine uses it more or less synonymously with *anima* as he seeks to prove the immortality of the soul in *Sol.* and *De immor. anim.* For the sake of clarity, I will render *animus* as 'soul' in my discussion. Cf. O'Daly (1987), p. 7.

[76] *Sol.* 2.12.22.

[77] The possibility of being in another separably would allow Augustine to maintain both of the following claims: (a) a perishable *verum* cannot be unless imperishable *veritas* is in it, and (b) *veritas* continues to be even after a *verum* in which it is perishes. By maintaining both of these claims, he could now safeguard the distinction between *verum* and *veritas* (as he could not yet at *Sol.* 1.15.29).

disciplina is truth, and truth abides forever, as reason showed in the beginning of this book. Therefore, the soul abides forever …[78]

The argument is straightforward: given that the disciplines, which are immortal, are in the soul inseparably, it follows that the soul too must be immortal. It is a bit peculiar that the disciplines should here be identified with truth, given the distinction between immortal true things and immortal truth itself. However, this identification does not affect the argument, since the true disciplines are necessarily accompanied by truth – the 'discipline of disciplines' – that is in them, and through which they are true. Moreover, it appears that there is an important sense in which the disciplines and truth are a unity: Augustine refers to the former as 'great and divine things', and says: 'Truth itself – from which everything that is in any respect designated as "true" gets its name – is made together and, so to speak, united [*quasi conflari*] with these things.'[79]

Has the soul, then, been proved immortal? In fact Augustine is not convinced by the argument, as he has reservations about the claim that the disciplines are indeed inseparably contained in the soul. How can this claim be maintained, he wonders, when only a few are 'acquainted' (*gnari*) with the disciplines, and even the person who does know them would have been 'unlearned' (*indoctus*) for quite some time in his infancy?[80] Of course, the theory of recollection can address this difficulty – and it is probably not accidental that this theory is introduced at the close of the *Soliloquies*[81] – but to the extent that Augustine remains uncertain about this theory, the difficulty itself remains. And it is not clear that Augustine ever accepted this theory unreservedly in its literal sense.

But there is an even more serious difficulty lurking. The difficulty lies with the possibility (or rather, the reality) of deception. Consider first of all Augustine's understanding of the nature of falsity:

> It must be admitted that one who sees something false is not deceived [*falli*], but rather the one who assents to what is false … Therefore, falsity [*falsitas*] is not in things, but in the sense, and he who does not assent to something false is not deceived … But there is no sense without the soul and there is no falsity without sense. Therefore, the soul either engages in, or acquiesces in, falsity.[82]

For Augustine, that soul is deceived which assents to the false. But nothing is false in itself; falsity requires sense perception, and sense perception in turn requires a soul. We are entitled, then, to ask the question (although Augustine himself does not raise it explicitly here): is falsity in the soul? If so,

[78] *Sol.* 2.13.24. [79] *Sol.* 2.10.18. [80] *Sol.* 2.14.25; cf. *Sol.* 2.19.33. [81] *Sol.* 2.20.34–5. [82] *Sol.* 2.3.3.

then the soul is both true (because it is) and false (because falsity is in it). And this would make it seem as if the soul were more like the true tree than like the disciplines. But if the soul is like the true tree, which is perishable, might it then be the case that the soul is also perishable? If the soul can be deceived – that is, if the true soul can receive something false into it – then it might be feared that the soul was in this respect similar to corporeal things. In particular, it might be feared that the soul was mortal.

What Augustine needs is some way of ensuring that deception is powerless to take away the soul's being. Augustine does have a well-known solution to this difficulty, which is summed up in his famous assertion: *si fallor sum* ('if I am deceived, I am'). This is expressed most fully in book 11 of *The City of God*:

> We are and we know that we are, and we love our being and our knowledge. In these three statements that I have made, no falsity that is similar to the true [*ueri similis*] disturbs us. For we do not make contact with these things with any sense of the body, as we do those things that are external to us: thus we sense colours through sight, sounds through hearing, odours through smelling, tastes through tasting, and hard and soft objects through touching. There are also images of these sensible things, similar to them but no longer corporeal, which we cast around in our thinking, and retain in our memory. Through these images we are motivated to desire the sensible things themselves. But it is without any deceptive imaginings of *phantasiae* or *phantasmata*[83] that I am most certain that I am, and that I know that I am, and that I love this being. I fear no arguments of the Academics, who say against these truths: 'What if you are deceived?' For if I am deceived, I am [*si enim fallor, sum*]. For he who is not certainly cannot be deceived, from which it follows that I am if I am deceived. So since I am if I am deceived, how can I be deceived that I am when it is certain that I am if I am deceived? Therefore, because I would have to be were I being deceived, even if I am being deceived, there can be no doubt that I am not deceived in that I know that I am. It follows as well that I would not be deceived in that I know that I know. For just as I know that I am, so too do I know this thing itself: that I know. And when I love these two things, I join this same love as a third thing of no lesser value to those things that I know.[84]

In this passage Augustine concedes to the Academics that it is possible to be deceived about the nature of sensible things, which are only 'similar to the true', and which are represented by images. However, the knowledge we have of our own being (and of our knowledge and love) is not of this sort. Such knowledge is immune to the Academic retort 'what if you are deceived?' since it is impossible to be deceived about the fact that I am (or

[83] The *phantasia/phantasma* distinction corresponds to the reproductive and creative functions of the imagination, respectively. For discussion, see O'Daly 1987, pp. 106–30.

[84] *De civ. Dei* 11.26; cf. *De Trin.* 10.10.13.

know or love). I can only be deceived if I am (or know or love). Augustine's argument thus turns on its head the fear that deception might take away the soul's being. It is not the case that the soul is not if it is being deceived; on the contrary, it must be if it is being deceived!

Augustine's argument, if that is what it is, bears more than a superficial similarity to Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am').[85] The *cogito*, which Descartes insists is not an argument but rather a self-evident mental intuition,[86] furnished the French philosopher with his first Archimedian point, by means of which he was able to escape the whirlpool of radical scepticism.[87] Likewise, the *fallor* provided Augustine with perhaps his definitive response to Academic scepticism. But, interestingly, it is not employed in *Against the Academics*, Augustine's only work devoted entirely to the refutation of scepticism. The closest Augustine comes to the *fallor* in that work is a claim that it is absurd to suppose that a wise man does not know whether he is living:

> How would it not have bothered [Zeno] if nothing like this [sc. a kataleptic impression][88] can be found, and nothing can be perceived unless something is like this? If this were the case, then it would be better to say that wisdom cannot fall to the lot of man, rather than to say that *a wise man does not know* why he lives, how he lives or *whether he lives*, or lastly – and nothing can be said that is more mistaken, crazy and insane – that he is a wise man yet does not know wisdom. For what is harder to maintain: that a man cannot be wise, or that a wise man does not know wisdom?[89]

Clearly, this is a far cry from the *si fallor sum* of *The City of God*. There is no mention of the possibility of deception, nor is the wise man's knowledge that he lives considered to be a refutation of scepticism. Moreover, the wise man's knowledge that he lives is mentioned only in passing. Augustine's primary concern is with the claim (ascribed to the Academics) that someone

[85] This is hardly a novel observation; indeed, it was made already by at least two of Descartes' commentators, Mersenne and Arnauld. Interestingly, Descartes himself denies the parallel. In a letter to Colvius (14 November 1640), Descartes says: 'I do indeed find that he [Augustine] does use it [i.e. the *cogito ergo sum*] to prove the certainty of our existence … I, on the other hand, use the argument to show that this *I* which is thinking is *an immaterial substance* with no bodily element' (trans. Cottingham *et al.*, vol. III, p. 159). The novelty of this claim was, however, called into question already by Arnauld, who points to *De Trin.* 10.10.16, a passage in which Augustine deduces the immateriality of the mind from the fact that the mind knows itself. Arnauld notes that Augustine here says 'almost the same things' as does Descartes in *Meditation* 2 (*AT* V 186 (1648), cited in Menn 1998, p. 67, n. 42 from p. 66). On the relationship between Descartes and Augustine, see Menn 1998, especially p. 66, n. 42; Matthews 1972; Gilson 1967, pp. 190–201.

[86] See Descartes' reply to the second set of objections to his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (*AT* VII 140).

[87] *Meditation* 2 (*AT* VII 24–5).

[88] See above, pp. 33 and 47.

[89] *C. Acad.* 3.9.19.

can be wise yet ignorant of wisdom, which he takes to be the height of absurdity.

Nor is the *fallor* present in the other writings from Cassiciacum. However, the seeds of the argument may already be discerned. In *The Blessed Life*, Augustine induces Navigius, who at first claims to know nothing at all, to agree that he knows that he is alive (*vivere*), or has life (*vitam habere*), and that he has a body (*corpus habere*). Augustine then concludes: 'You have no doubt [*non dubitas*], therefore … that there are these two: the body and the soul. But you are uncertain [*incertus*] whether there is anything else necessary for the completion and perfection of man.'[90] An investigation into this third characteristic is postponed for the time being.[91] Augustine returns to the topic in the *Soliloquies*. He says that he knows that he is and lives, and that he wishes to be (*esse*) in order to live (*vivere*) and to live in order to understand (*intelligere*).[92] In saying this he situates the knowledge of his being within the context of the Neoplatonic triad of being, life and understanding.[93] He does not yet suggest that the knowledge of his being might constitute a response to Academic scepticism. However, the spectre of the Academics is lurking, as Augustine soon turns his attention to the nature of falsity and deception,[94] and considers what appears to be a highly inchoate version of the *fallor*. The argument runs as follows:

> You said that falsity cannot be without the sense, and that falsity is not able not to be; therefore, there is always sense. But there is no sense without the soul; therefore, the soul is eternal. Nor can the soul sense unless it is living; therefore, the soul lives forever.[95]

But Augustine quickly rejects this as a 'weak argument'. Even if its premises are true – and there is some doubt about this – it would follow, not that every soul is immortal, but only that souls are born and die in turn.[96] The argument is particularly interesting, however, in that it represents Augustine's earliest attempt to forge a link between falsity – which, together with the assent of the soul, is the cause of deception – and being (or life). Of course, Augustine is concerned to establish not simply that the soul lives, but that the soul lives forever. Unfortunately, the argument presented here has not been able to demonstrate this. The fact of deception continues to cast doubt upon the immortality of the soul.

[90] *De beat. vit.* 2.7. [91] *De beat. vit.* 2.7. [92] *Sol.* 2.1.1.
[93] On the historical background to this triad, see P. Hadot 1960b. [94] *Sol.* 2.3.3.
[95] *Sol.* 2.3.4. [96] *Sol.* 2.4.5.

Elsewhere in the *Soliloquies* Augustine mentions the Academics directly: he says that he no longer fears them, since they do not want the wise man to err (*errare*), and he adds that he is not wise and therefore unafraid to claim knowledge of those things which he knows.[97] These remarks provide us with a clue as to why Augustine would eventually use *si fallor sum* as his particular anti-sceptical weapon of choice (as opposed to, say, *si memini sum* or *si diligo sum*, which Augustine would consider as certain as *si fallor sum*). It is the Academic concern to avoid erring (*errare*) in making knowledge claims that will become Augustine's point of attack, as he will claim that the fact of being deceived (*falli*) entails the knowledge of certain things, such as one's being and life. But this would be a later development. In his Cassiciacum writings, up to and including the *Soliloquies*, Augustine does not refute the Academics by arguing that the fact of deception proves the being of the soul.

On the contrary, there remains the concern that the fact of deception might serve to limit the being of the soul. If the soul is deceived, then the soul somehow admits what is false into it, which would then make it both true and false. But if the soul is both true and false, then it is in this respect like a body. And notice how the body's relationship to truth is understood near the end of the *Soliloquies*: the body does not have truth in it (since immortal truth cannot be in that which is mortal), but it has in it 'a certain sort of image of truth' (*quasi quaedam imago veritatis*).[98] The body may be true, but 'it is true by a certain imitation [*imitatione aliqua*] and for this reason not completely true'. That is to say, it is true by an 'imitation of truth' (*imitatio veritatis*), and for this reason it is also false.[99] Is this how the soul's relationship to truth is to be understood as well: i.e. does the soul 'imitate' truth and is it therefore both true and false?

This question is not resolved in the *Soliloquies*. But notice what Augustine says about the matter in question 23 of *Eighty-three Different Questions*, titled 'On the Father and the Son' (this question was not composed before 388):

Everything chaste is chaste by Chastity, and everything eternal is eternal by Eternity, and everything beautiful is beautiful by Beauty, and everything good is

[97] *Sol.* 1.4.9.

[98] *Sol.* 2.18.32. *Imago* may be a technical term from the Latin Middle Platonic tradition. Gersh 1986, p. 296 notes that Apuleius employs the term to indicate both the transcendent and the immanent form. At *Ad Luc. ep. mor.* 58.20–1, Seneca distinguishes between immanent form (*eidos*) and transcendent form (*idea*). Augustine famously discusses the *ideae* at *De div. q. 83* 46. See below, p. 166. On images and Forms in Augustine, see O'Daly 1987, pp. 95–102 and 189–99.

[99] *Sol.* 2.18.32.

good by Goodness. As well, therefore, everything wise is wise by Wisdom, and everything alike, alike by Likeness. But there are two ways in which something is said to be chaste by Chastity: in one way, when the chaste thing begets [*gignat*] Chastity so that it is chaste by that Chastity which it begets and for which it is the principle [*principium*] and cause [*causa*] of being; in the other way, when by participation [*participatione*] in Chastity everything is chaste that can at some time not be chaste. We must understand the other examples in the same way. For it is either understood or believed that even the soul attains eternity. However, it becomes eternal by participation in Eternity, and God is not eternal in this way. He is eternal because he is the author of Eternity itself. This may also be understood in the case of Beauty and Goodness. And again, when God is called wise, and is called wise by that Wisdom which it is sacrilegious to believe that he ever lacked or can lack, he is called wise not by participation in Wisdom, as is the soul, which can both be and not be wise. Instead, God is called wise because he himself has begotten that Wisdom by which he is called wise. Again, as we have said, those things that are chaste or eternal or beautiful or good or wise by participation may also not be chaste or eternal or beautiful or good or wise. But Chastity, Eternity, Beauty, Goodness, and Wisdom can in no way admit of corruption or (if I may use the word) temporality or ugliness, or wickedness.[100]

Here, as at *Soliloquies* 1.15.27, Augustine indicates that everything chaste is caused by chastity, everything true is caused by truth (although he does not actually use the latter example here), and so on. But there has been a development in Augustine's understanding of the relationship between true and the truth (to continue with the example relevant to our discussion). Augustine now distinguishes between that which is true by participating in truth and that which is true by begetting truth. It is in the latter sense that the first two persons of the Godhead are related: the *principium* (the Father) is true by begetting truth (the Son). And it is in the former sense that the soul and God are related: the soul is true by participating in truth (the Son).[101] Everything that participates in truth – including the soul – can both be and not be true.

Of course, as we have just seen, the author of the *Soliloquies* considers such participation to be problematic. If the soul merely participates in, or 'imitates', truth, then the soul is both true and false, like the body. And if the soul is both true and false, then – given that Augustine wants to identify 'what is true' and 'what is' – is it not the case that the soul, like the tree, is at one time and is not at another? Is it not the case, in other words, that the soul is mortal? Of course, the author of question 23 would not want to

[100] *De div. q. 83* 23.

[101] Cf. *De div. q. 83* 46.2, where it is through participation in the eternal and immutable Ideas, which are contained in the divine Intellect, that whatever is is in the manner that it is.

accept this consequence. Indeed, he clearly states that the soul becomes (*fit*) eternal. Yet he also states that the soul only participates in Eternity. How can these two claims be reconciled?

The answer, as it seems to me, is that by 388 Augustine has succeeded in his attempt – as he had not yet in the *Soliloquies*[102] – to forge a link between falsity and being. In particular, he has succeeded in showing that falsity entails being. This provides him with the basis for the *si fallor sum* argument, and ensures that the immortality of the soul is not undermined by the fact (if it be a fact) that the soul is both true and false. The foundation for all of this is laid in *The Immortality of the Soul* (387), to which we now turn our attention.

The Immortality of the Soul *(387)*

The Immortality of the Soul constitutes a sort of 'accidental sequel' to the *Soliloquies*. Augustine recalls the circumstances surrounding this work in the *Retractations*:

> After the books of the *Soliloquies*, having at this point returned from the country to Milan, I wrote a book *On the Immortality of the Soul*. I had wanted this to serve as a sort of reminder to myself to complete the *Soliloquies*, which had remained unfinished. However, somehow or other it passed into the hands of men against my will and is listed among my works.[103]

This 'reminder' to finish the *Soliloquies* was not intended for circulation in its present form. It is a terse and unpolished work, a rough draft rather than a finished product. Augustine's intention in this work, as the title indicates, is to prove the immortality of the soul. A host of arguments are offered, not all of which are immediately perspicuous; indeed, the author of the *Retractations* confesses that he himself has a difficult time following his own reasoning.[104] Fortunately, it is not our purpose to catalogue all of the arguments.

The Immortality of the Soul is an important moment in the development of Augustine's metaphysics, for it is in this work that he will lay the foundation that will enable him to resolve 'the question of the soul'. He continues where the *Soliloquies* left off, i.e. with an attempt to determine just how the soul is related to the 'true' disciplines, or 'reason'.[105] Certainly, he is confident that the disciplines are contained in the soul somehow. He

[102] *Sol.* 2.3.4. [103] *Retract.* 1.5.1. [104] *Retract.* 1.5.1.
[105] On the various senses of 'reason' in Augustine's early writings, see p. 122 above and pp. 184–6 below.

says that all 'true reasons' (*verae rationes*) are in the depths (*in secretis*) of the human soul, 'even though it might seem that the soul, because of ignorance or forgetting, does not have them or has lost them'.[106] However, Augustine is not sure just how the disciplines – the 'true reasons' – are contained in the soul. In fact, it appears to be precisely because he remains unclear about this issue that he feels compelled to offer so many different arguments for the immortality of the soul. He states: 'reason is either the soul or in the soul', and – apparently unable to decide which alternative is true – he attempts to show that the soul's immortality follows from both alternatives.[107] He then considers the following three possibilities: (a) reason is in the soul as in a subject; (b) reason is a subject in which the soul inheres; (c) reason is a substance that is connected with the soul as another substance.[108] He briefly indicates how the soul's immortality would follow from the first two possibilities, and then devotes his attention for the remainder of the work to the third possibility.

His task is to show that the soul cannot be separated from reason, for it necessarily lives for as long as it is connected to reason. After establishing that the soul cannot be separated from reason by a corporeal power, or by an animal power, or by a more powerful soul contemplating reason (since reason is accessible to all without diminishment), Augustine concludes that 'either reason itself separates the soul from itself, or the soul itself is separated [from reason] by its own will'. The first possibility is quickly dismissed, since 'there is no trace of envy [*invidentia*] in the nature of reason to prevent it from offering itself to the enjoyment of the soul'. The crucial issue, then, is whether the soul can separate itself from reason by its own will. Augustine claims that, although the soul can turn away from reason and thus tend toward nothing (*tendere ad nihilum*), it cannot actually reach nothing, or non-being. This situation is analogous to that of a body, which becomes less and less through infinite division, but cannot actually be reduced to non-being thereby. In fact, there is even less reason to fear that the soul can reach non-being than the body, for the soul is better than the body.[109] Thus the soul cannot be separated from reason, which is to say that the soul is immortal.

On the face of it, it might seem that Augustine has proved too much here. If it is not possible for something to become nothing – not even a body – then has Augustine not established that everything is immortal? In a sense, this is correct, but it is important to realize that Augustine distinguishes two

[106] *De immor. anim.* 4.6. [107] *De immor. anim.* 2.2. [108] *De immor. anim.* 6.11.
[109] *De immor. anim.* 6.11–7.12.

kinds of 'destruction' (*interitum*). The first kind is that 'by which it happens that what had been something becomes nothing'; the second is that 'by which we call those things "dead" that are without life'.[110] It is true that nothing is destroyed in the former sense; however, things are destroyed in the second sense. Consider the fact that the body receives its being (*esse*), not from its corporeal mass (*moles corporis*) but from its form (*species*),[111] and the soul also receives its unique being from its own form. The body and the soul are more excellent to the extent that they are well formed and beautiful, and less excellent to the extent that they are deformed and ugly. If the body is ensouled – that is, 'animated' (*animatum*) by the soul (*animus*) – then it has life. But if the body is not animated by the soul, though it can be animated, it is dead: that is to say, it is deprived of life.[112] But neither the body nor the soul can be entirely deprived of their form so that they cease to be a body or a soul, respectively.[113] Thus, the first kind of destruction is simply impossible. But when Augustine claims that the soul is immortal, he is claiming not merely that the soul always has being (*esse*) but that it always lives (*vivere*). For the soul is 'a certain life',[114] and so if it were to cease being a soul, it would suffer death in the sense that it would no longer have this life. The claim that the soul is immortal is the claim that the soul is always a soul; it can never be so deprived of its form that it ceases to be a soul.

But how can Augustine be sure about this? The soul is more excellent to the extent that it turns toward and is formed by truth, and less excellent to the extent that it turns away from truth. Augustine must show that the soul is always connected to truth, regardless of how far it deviates from truth. Here is where the fact of deception had previously presented such a formidable challenge to Augustine's attempt to establish the immortality of the soul. But Augustine is now capable of meeting the challenge head on. Indeed, he now turns it on its head. Supposing that the soul does turn itself as far as possible away from truth and towards falsity: to what extent can falsity harm the soul? Here is Augustine's answer:

> But it is clear and beyond doubt to what extent falsity can harm the soul. Can it do more than deceive? But no one is deceived unless he lives [*at nisi qui vivit, fallitur nemo*]. Therefore falsity cannot destroy the soul.[115]

Here is the genesis of the *si fallor sum* (or *si fallor vivo*). No matter how great the deception that is induced by falsity, the soul must continue to live in order to be deceived. Nothing can separate the soul from truth, by which

[110] *De immor. anim.* 9.16. [111] *De immor. anim.* 8.13. [112] *De immor. anim.* 9.16.
[113] *De immor. anim.* 8.13. [114] *De immor. anim.* 9.16. [115] *De immor. anim.* 11.18.

the soul is formed, not even the only thing that might be conceived to be the opposite of truth, namely falsity.[116]

In fact, Augustine now insists that truth – like being – has no opposite. There are degrees of being stretching from the supreme being (i.e. God) to absolute non-being, a lower limit that cannot actually be reached; there are also degrees of truth stretching from truth itself (i.e. God) to falsity, which is again a lower limit that cannot be reached. Being has no opposite, since the only thing that could be conceived of as its opposite is non-being, which is simply nothing. Similarly, truth has no opposite, since the only thing that could be conceived of as its opposite is falsity. But nothing *is* non-being and nothing *is* false. Whatever is has some degree of being and some degree of truth:

> We say that truth is that by which all things are true in so far as they are: and they are only in so far as they are true … Since no essence [*essentia*], in so far as it is an essence, has a contrary, how far less has that first essence [*prima essentia*], called the truth, a contrary in so far as it is an essence. [117]

The Immortality of the Soul constitutes an important moment in the development of Augustine's early metaphysical views. It is in this work that Augustine first elaborates what DuRoy has termed 'une métaphysique des degrés d'être'.[118] DuRoy identifies four essential features of this metaphysics. First, the soul is situated between truth (the highest being) and absolute non-being, and it has being to a greater or lesser extent according to the orientation it takes with respect to these two limits. Second, the extent of the soul's participation in being is a function of the form and beauty that it possesses. Third, this participation is for the body a relation of creation, and for the soul a relation of dependency in being. Fourth, the soul need not fear destruction, even if it has turned away from reason (truth or being), since being has no opposite.[119]

DuRoy claims that the ontology of *The Immortality of the Soul* arises from the influence of Porphyry after Augustine's return from Cassiciacum.[120] He finds the 'Porphyrian' ontology of *The Immortality of the Soul* essentially discontinuous with the 'Plotinian' ontology of the Cassiciacum writings.[121]

[116] It is interesting to note that, at *De vera relig.* 39.73, Augustine would also use the possibility of deception, in conjunction with the principle (articulated in *Sol.*) that a *verum* must have *veritas* (separably) in it, in order to prove the existence of Truth. The argument runs as follows: even if (*ex hypothesi*) one were to doubt whether *veritas* exists, the doubt itself is a *verum* that cannot be doubted. And on the principle that a *verum* cannot exist if *veritas* does not exist, it follows that no one can doubt the existence of *veritas*.

[117] *De immor. anim.* 12.19. [118] DuRoy 1966, p. 83. [119] DuRoy 1966, p. 185.

[120] By contrast, O'Connell 1968, pp. 135ff. sees the influence of *Enn.* 4.7.

[121] DuRoy 1966, pp. 173–206. His views are summarized at p. 82:

All of this is highly contentious,[122] and it may be appropriate to note here that my argument neither requires nor forbids the sort of discontinuity that DuRoy requires in order to divide Augustine's development into a Plotinian and a Porphyrian period. In fact, I see *The Immortality of the Soul* as continuous with certain aspects of the Cassiciacum ontology (particularly the identification of truth with being, and falsity with non-being) and discontinuous with others (particularly the sharp dichotomies: true/false and being/non-being). I do not think that Augustine had a fully formed ontology in 386. For this reason, I find no sharp break in 387. Instead, I find a steady development, from Augustine's first tentative investigations into 'the question of the soul' at Cassiciacum to the more confident articulation of the ontology elaborated in *The Immortality of the Soul*. I am perfectly happy to grant that the seeds of this ontology were already present at Cassiciacum, and that this ontology was borrowed (whether in part or in whole) from the 'books of the Platonists' and from other strands of the Platonic tradition. For all that, however, it is my contention that Augustine was still assimilating this tradition in 386. This should not be too surprising. After all, Augustine had been fed a steady diet of corporealism and dualism for the nine years in which he moved in Manichaean circles. Augustine's rejection of corporealism appears to have been a more or less instantaneous achievement (see *Confessions* 7.10.16); the same cannot be said, however, of his rejection of dualism. There is no question that at Cassiciacum Augustine has a strong tendency to polarize the intelligible and sensible worlds. And we must admit that this is *Augustine's* tendency, as he himself later acknowledges that at Cassiciacum he had advanced the intelligible world/sensible world distinction in the way that he had on his own authority (*persona*) rather than on that of Plato or the Platonists.[123] Old habits die hard: if Augustine was initially given to understanding the concepts of the 'books of the Platonists' in strongly dualist terms, might we not suppose that this is a vestige of a characteristically Manichaean way of thinking?

Be that as it may, it is clear that Augustine has made considerable progress in his understanding of Platonic ontology by the spring of 387, with his

> Le développement que nous allons maintenant étudier et dont nous venons de voir le plan d'ensemble, ne traduit sans doute pas exactement ce que fut, dès le lendemain de sa conversion, la métaphysique d'Augustin. Mais il décrit au moins les grandes structures de la métaphysique qui sortira de cette conversion. Nous pensons d'ailleurs qu'Augustin n'élaborera cette métaphysique qu'un an après sa conversion, sous l'influence d'écrits porphyriens … Les deux versants de sa découverte du néo-platonisme, tels qu'ils apparaissent dans la structure littéraire du livre VII des *Confessions*, correspondraient assez fidèlement à deux périodes successives, caractérisées respectivement par la prédominance de l'anagogie ou d'une métaphysique des degrés d'être.

[122] For criticism, see O'Connell 1991. [123] *Retract.* 1.3.2 (Augustine is referring to *De ord.* 1.11.32 here).

elaboration of 'une métaphysique des degrés d'être'. This is a significant achievement, for this ontology provides Augustine with the foundation for his resolution of 'the question of the soul'. In particular, this ontology allows him to distinguish between God and the soul as well as to prove the immortality of the soul. In order to see how this is so, consider that according to this ontology everything – from mutable and perishable things to God Himself – has some degree of being and truth. God, of course, is the supreme being, truth itself. In question 46 of *Eighty-three Different Questions* (written no earlier than 388),[124] Augustine will say, drawing upon earlier sources,[125] that the objects of reason (*rationes*) – which are identified with the Platonic Ideas (*ideae*), also known as Forms (*formae*) or species (*species*) – are in the Intellect of God, since 'it would be sacrilegious to suppose that [the Creator] was looking at something placed outside himself when he created in accord with it what he did create'. Everything else is a creature, and therefore distinct from God the Creator. Even the rational soul is a creature, albeit the most excellent of creatures and when pure the closest to God.[126] There is not an absolute distinction between Creator and created: as Augustine will indicate in question 51 (probably written between 391 and 394/5),[127] everything that has been created bears some similarity (*similitudo*) to God, more or less depending upon the extent of its participation in the divine *rationes*:

> Things may be said to be similar to God in many ways. Some, created according to virtue and wisdom, [are said to be similar] because uncreated virtue and wisdom are in God; others [are said to be similar] in so far as they simply live, because He lives to the greatest degree and is the source of life; and others [are said to be similar] in so far as they are, because He is to the greatest degree and is the source of being. Therefore whatever things merely are but do not live or know are in His likeness, not completely, but to a slight degree, because even these things are good in their own order [*in ordine suo*], since He is that good beyond all things from whom they are good. However, everything that lives but does not know participates a little more in His likeness. For whatever lives also is, but not everything that is also lives. Moreover, whatever knows is so close to the likeness of God that no creature is closer, for whatever participates in wisdom also lives and is.[128]

The extent of a creature's participation in the divine *rationes* is in accord with its place in the ontological hierarchy. Those creatures that merely are (i.e. bodies) participate to a minimal degree, those that live (i.e. irrational

[124] If we suppose that the questions are arranged chronologically, then question 46 would have been written in 391; see Mosher 1982, p. 20.
[125] On the background to this passage, see Gersh 1986, pp. 403–13.
[126] *De div. q. 83* 46.2.
[127] See Mosher 1982, pp. 16–17.
[128] *De div. q. 83* 51.2.

souls) participate even more, and those that understand (i.e. rational souls) participate to the greatest degree. Here, then, is Augustine's resolution of 'the question of the soul'. The soul is a creature, distinct from God its Creator, yet it participates in the divine *rationes*, and continues to live no matter how far it might deviate from God. Finally, it should be borne in mind that, while the ontology of *The Immortality of the Soul* certainly provides Augustine with the foundation for this resolution of 'the question of the soul', it is not clear that Augustine had fully resolved this question in that work. Notice that he says 'reason is either the soul or in the soul' without venturing to select an alternative,[129] which might seem to suggest (bearing in mind, of course, the hypothetical nature of much of the discussion) that in early 387 he had not yet determined the nature of the distinction between the soul and the divine *rationes*.

We suggested earlier that our search for the Augustine of *Confessions* 7.16.22 – that is, our search for the Augustine who has understood that the will is the sole cause of all evil – is also a search for the Augustine who has resolved at least some of the issues involved in 'the question of the soul', particularly the matter of the distinction between God and the soul. But with the ontology elaborated in *The Immortality of the Soul*, Augustine has the foundation for his resolution of 'the question of the soul'. And so we may now return directly to the problem of evil. In the next section, we will see how his graded ontology enables him to resolve this problem.

THE ONTOLOGY OF DEGREES

The Immortality of the Soul *(387)*

In *The Immortality of the Soul*, Augustine is not directly concerned with the problem of evil, but rather with the immortality of the soul. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see how the ontology of degrees provides him with the basic framework for his solution to this problem. First of all, God is not only the supreme being and the supreme truth, but he is also the supreme good (*summum bonum*), which is indeed how Augustine refers to him on at least two occasions in that work.[130] But if God is the supreme good, then it is surely the case that all other beings have a lesser degree of goodness in accordance with their lesser degree of being. Whatever is would be good to a greater or lesser extent; the extent to which a being is good would depend upon its position in the hierarchy stretching from supreme being to absolute

[129] *De immor. anim.* 2.2. See above, p. 162. [130] *De immor. anim.* 13.22, 15.24.

non-being. Evil, then, would be identified with non-being, and as such, would be simply nothing. Of course, this is also Augustine's point at *Confessions* 7.16.22, as he notes that even the lower parts of creation, such as the viper and the smaller worms, are good, although they are not as good as the higher parts of creation.

Secondly, and more significantly, the *si fallor sum/vivo* argument introduces the possibility that the soul may turn away from truth and towards lower things. This parallels the definition of iniquity at *Confessions* 7.16.22, i.e. the movement of the will away from the highest substance and towards lower things. However, Augustine's discussion in *The Immortality of the Soul* differs importantly from *Confessions* 7.16.22. In *The Immortality of the Soul* the deficient movement of the will is cast primarily in epistemic terms, rather than (as in *Confessions* 7.16.22) in moral terms. In other words, the soul is described as deceived or in error; but not as sinful. To what extent is the soul's turn away from the truth a product of its own volition? This question is certainly on Augustine's radar when writing *The Immortality of the Soul*, as he notes that 'it is no small question whether some of these changes [in the soul] are effected by the soul itself, i.e. so that the soul itself is their cause'.[131] But Augustine makes this remark in passing; he does not investigate the matter. Indeed, in leaving open the possibility that the soul is to be identified with immutable reason (*ratio*)[132] Augustine would appear to be effectively entertaining the possibility that the soul itself is essentially immutable.[133] It seems likely, then, that at the time of *The Immortality of the Soul* Augustine had not yet determined the extent to which (or even whether) the soul's movement away from the highest substance and towards lower things may be understood as a moral defect. He is, however, convinced that even this movement could not separate the soul from truth completely. The soul will continue to live, no matter how far it deviates from truth.

The Magnitude of the Soul *(387/8)*

The next work to be considered is *The Magnitude of the Soul*. In this work, Augustine directly addresses the problem of evil for the first time since *On Order*. His solution to the problem is summarized as follows:

[131] *De immor. anim.* 5.9. [132] Cf. *De immor. anim.* 2.2; see above, p. 162.
[133] Indeed, there is some reason to think that Augustine did hold this view at one time. See above, p. 124.

[God] judged it to be most beautiful that whatever is should be how it is; and thus He ordered nature by grades [*gradibus*], so that when considering the universe no one should be offended by the deformity of any part, and that every punishment and every reward of the soul should always contribute something in accordance with the just beauty and arrangement of all things.[134]

Here – as in *On Order* – the problem of evil is resolved (or dissolved) through a consideration of the universe as a whole instead of focusing upon any part in isolation. Augustine now clarifies this point with reference to his ontology of degrees. The universe is arranged hierarchically. There are grades of being; each type of being has its own mode of being. This means that a consideration of the universe as a whole requires one to recognize the various types of beings of which the universe is constituted. Moreover, Augustine also understands the soul's punishment (i.e. evil that is suffered through God's just judgment) in terms of this graded hierarchy of being.

Augustine indicates the types of beings he has in mind as he describes seven 'grades' (*gradus*) of the soul's ascent to God at 33.70–33.76. These grades are summarized at 35.79 as follows:

Grades of the soul	**Grades of (in)corporeity**	**Grades of beauty**
1. *Animatio*	of the body (*de corpore*)	beautifully of another (*pulchre de alio*)
2. *Sensus*	through the body (*per corpus*)	beautifully through another (*pulchre per aliud*)
3. *Ars*	in connection with the body (*circa corpus*)	beautifully in connection with another (*pulchre circa aliud*)
4. *Virtus*	toward itself (*ad seipsam*)	beautifully toward a beautiful (*pulchre ad pulchrum*)
5. *Tranquillitas*	in itself (*in seipsa*)	beautifully in a beautiful (*pulchre in pulchro*)
6. *Ingressio*	toward God (*ad Deum*)	beautifully toward Beauty (*pulchre ad pulchritudinem*)
7. *Contemplatio*	in the presence of God (*apud Deum*)	beautifully in the presence of Beauty (*pulchre apud pulchritudinem*)

[134] *De quant. anim.* 36.80.

(These grades should not be understood as having been invented by Augustine, nor should they be interpreted too rigidly; Augustine says that there are innumerable ways in which others can (and do) name and classify these realities.[135]) In the first grade, the soul gives life to the body (33.70); in the second, the soul senses through the body (33.71); in the third, the soul employs reason and invents human arts (33.72); in the fourth, the soul begins to purify itself, by separating from the material world (33.73); in the fifth, the soul preserves and strengthens itself in its purity (33.74); in the sixth, the soul begins to turn its eye toward the light of truth (33.75); in the seventh, the soul remains in the vision and contemplation of truth (33.76). The first three grades correspond to three different parts of the soul: (a) the part that animates the body (shared with plants), (b) the part that senses through the body (shared with beasts), and (c) the part that uses reason.[136] The rational part of the soul is what distinguishes men from beasts, and the seven liberal disciplines make their appearance here:

> Rise, now, to the third grade of the soul's power which is now proper to men, and consider … the invention of so many signs in letters, in words, in gesture [= grammar][137] … Consider the power of reason and of thought [= dialectic], the flowing streams of eloquence [= rhetoric], the varieties of poetry, the thousand forms of imitation for play and jest,[138] the art of modulation [= music], the accuracy of measurements [= geometry], the study of numbers [= arithmetic], the speculating on things past and future from the present [= astronomy].[139]

The disciplines mark the crucial transition from the corporeal to the incorporeal, from the body to the soul.[140] The fourth and fifth grades constitute the 'return to the self' and the final two grades constitute the ascent to God.[141]

We need not concern ourselves with all the details of the ascent. For our purposes it is sufficient to note that there is a fixed ontological hierarchy

[135] *De quant. anim.* 35.79. As O'Daly 1987, p. 14 notes, this comment 'should make us cautious about seeking too specific a source for the Augustinian scheme'. O'Daly discusses this scheme at pp. 11–15.

[136] Cf. *De civ. Dei* 7.23. The background to these three levels is ultimately Aristotelian; see O'Daly 1987, p. 11 and n. 32, p. 15 and n. 40.

[137] Cf. Marrou 1958, p. 190.

[138] Marrou 1958, p. 190, n. 5, sees here a possible reference to the theatre, and treats this as a part of the art of grammar.

[139] 'The speculation on things past and future from the present' sounds a bit like what we would now call astrology (note that the early Augustine will sometimes use the term *astrologia* to designate the seventh of the liberal disciplines, as at *De ord.* 2.15.42; see above, p. 112). On astrology in Augustine, see O'Loughlin 1992. The passage is from *De quant. anim.* 33.72.

[140] At *De quant. anim.* 34.78 Augustine singles out the fourth grade as having particular importance in the ascent.

[141] For discussion with relation to the Neoplatonic background, see O'Daly 1987, pp. 14–15.

underlying the ascent, according to which the body is subjected to the soul and the soul is subjected to God:

> Just as it must be acknowledged that the human soul is not what God is, so it must be presumed that nothing is closer to God among all the things He has created [than the human soul] … The soul must consider whatever it worships as God to be better than itself. And it must be believed that the nature of the soul is not surpassed by the earth, the seas, the stars, the moon, the sun, or by anything at all that can be touched or seen with these eyes, or finally by the heaven itself which cannot be seen by us … But if there is something else in nature, aside from those things that are known by the senses and which certainly occupy some extension in space (and we have already said that the human soul is more excellent than all these things), if, then, there is something else among those things that God has created, it is either less excellent than or equal to [the human soul]: less excellent, as in the case of the soul of a beast; equal, as in the case of the soul of an angel. However, there is nothing better than the human soul.[142]

Augustine now presents his solution to the problem of evil in terms of this ontological hierarchy. The problem of evil is resolved (or dissolved) through a consideration of the universe as a whole, with its various grades of being.[143] To be sure, this solution is fully in accord with the general solution that is outlined in *On Order*. Things appear to be evil only when one is focused unduly upon the deficiency of one part of the universe and thus fails to recognize that this part serves to enhance the greater beauty of the universe as a whole. But the presentation of this solution is significantly less refined in *On Order* than it is in *The Magnitude of the Soul*. In the latter work, an appreciation of the 'whole' is understood as an appreciation of the qualitatively different types of beings that God has created, beginning with physical bodies, then moving on to plant life, animal life and finally rational life (these are the first three grades of the soul's ascent). Each of these parts of creation has its own distinct grade of being, which is to say that some are inferior and others superior. But inferiority is only relative to what is superior, and vice versa. Nothing is intrinsically deficient, or evil, in itself. Everything has its own grade of beauty, and the world as a whole is better because there are these different types of beings.

In *The Magnitude of the Soul* we find Augustine's explanation of evil firmly situated within the context of his ontology of degrees. As the soul ascends by degrees towards the Supreme Good, it sees how each part of the universe has a beauty and goodness in accordance with its grade of being. Augustine also begins to discuss the soul's downward movement in moral

[142] *De quant. anim.* 34.77. [143] *De quant. anim.* 36.80.

terms, rather than (as in *The Immortality of the Soul*) in purely epistemic terms. He says that the soul can become worse (*deterior*) as a result of sin (*peccatum*).[144] He notes that true religion unites to God the soul that has been torn away by sin, and that this rupture occurs because the soul has been endowed with free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) – although he is quick to note that free choice does not disrupt the divine order.[145] He also integrates the epistemic and the moral aspects of the soul's downward movement, as he says in one breath: 'we should help souls of our kind that are afflicted with error', and in the next: 'we should not hate those oppressed by vice, but vice [*vitium*] itself, nor should we hate sinners, but the sins [*peccata*] themselves.'[146]

For all this, however, in *The Magnitude of the Soul* Augustine is still not particularly concerned with the movement of the soul away from truth and toward lesser things. It may be a reality, but Augustine remains confident that the soul will easily overcome the impediments of the body through the practice of virtue. Near the end of the work, he quickly dismisses the question of the effect of the soul's interaction with the body: 'Who will think that we should inquire how the soul is affected in this mortal and fragile body, since it is thrust together into death justly because of sin, and by virtue it is capable of being better than the body?'[147] The question would, however, be taken up in his next work, *On Free Choice of the Will*.

On Free Choice of the Will *(begun in 387/8) and* On True Religion *(390/1)*

The next – and, for our purposes, final – stage in the development of Augustine's views on the problem of evil may be found in *On Free Choice of the Will*. The solution that is outlined in that work is more or less equivalent to that which is found in *On True Religion*, and so I will supplement my discussion of the former work with the latter, where appropriate.

On Free Choice of the Will is cast in the form of a dialogue between Augustine and an interlocutor who is not named but is traditionally identified as Evodius. Augustine begins the first book with a distinction between two kinds of evil: evil that is done (*fecisse*) and evil that is suffered

[144] *De quant. anim.* 34.78. [145] *De quant. anim.* 36.80.

[146] *De quant. anim.* 34.78. On the inspiration the early Augustine may have drawn from Plotinus on the fall of the soul, see O'Connell 1968, pp. 146–83. One might also compare Augustine with some of his contemporaries on this point. Gersh 1986, pp. 582–7 has a good discussion of the fall of the soul in Macrobius, with abundant references to the Neoplatonic background of his theory.

[147] *De quant. anim.* 36.81.

(*perpessum*). He says it must be believed (though it may not yet be understood) (a) that God is good and therefore is not responsible for evil, (b) that God is just and therefore rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, and (c) that the world is governed by divine providence, and therefore no one suffers punishment unjustly. Thus, God may not be considered the cause of evil that is done, but he may be considered the cause of evil that is suffered, given that this is nothing other than God's just punishment of the wicked. As for evil that is done, that is the fault of the soul that sins. But after conceding that no one can learn how to do evil, since learning is good, Evodius raises the question: what is the cause of our doing evil? Augustine acknowledges that this is a difficult question; indeed, it is not obvious how God is absolved from responsibility for sin, since he is the cause of everything that is, including the soul that sins.[148] Certainly, it is *believed* that God is good and thus not responsible for sin, but this is not yet *understood*. And so the remainder of book 1 is devoted to reaching an understanding of the question posed by Evodius.

Augustine draws a distinction between eternal law (*lex aeterna*) and human or temporal law (*lex temporalis*). The former is immutable and binding on all people at all times, while the latter can vary among different people at different times.[149] Temporal law, however, if it is to be binding, must be derived from the eternal law, for it is from the eternal law that all justice and lawfulness originates.[150] As Augustine notes in *On True Religion*, the good lawgiver frames temporal laws in accordance with the eternal law, and when these laws are instituted 'no judge may judge them but must judge according to them'.[151] The situation is parallel with respect to the eternal law: not even God Himself is able to judge it. For the eternal law is identified with 'the law of all the arts' (*lex omnium artium*) and unchangeable truth, and thus with God Himself.[152] And so 'not even the Father judges of truth, for it is not less than He. What the Father judges he judges according to the truth.'[153]

The eternal law is reminiscent of 'the discipline of disciplines' described in the *Soliloquies*,[154] although the former is a moral and the latter a logical principle. Just as 'the discipline of disciplines' (= dialectic) was identified

[148] *De lib. arb.* 1.1.1–1.2.4.

[149] *De lib. arb.* 1.6.14–15. Moreover, Augustine elsewhere distinguishes natural law (*lex naturalis*), which is in a sense an intermediary between the *lex aeterna* and *lex temporalis*, 'transcribed upon the rational soul' (*De div. q. 83* 53.2). As Chroust 1973, p. 68 explains it, 'the *lex naturalis*, according to St. Augustine, is the conscious participation of rational man in the *lex aeterna* … the *lex naturalis* may also be called the "subjective" or "personalized" manifestation of the *lex aeterna*'.

[150] *De lib. arb.* 1.6.15. [151] *De vera relig.* 31.58. [152] *De vera relig.* 30.56–31.57.

[153] *De vera relig.* 31.58. [154] See above, p. 153.

with truth (*veritas*), which is that through which every other discipline is true (*vera*), so too is the eternal law identified with truth and called 'the law of all the arts'. But while Augustine was not yet clear in the *Soliloquies* (or in *The Immortality of the Soul*, for that matter) about the relationship between the soul and the disciplines, he is now unambiguous about the matter, as he advances the following principle: the mind that judges is superior in nature to that which it judges, but is inferior to that by which it judges.[155] For example, the human mind is superior to a table whose squareness is judged but inferior to the absolute standard of squareness by means of which it judges the table's squareness. The standard of squareness, being immutable, is higher than the mutable intellect which judges according to this standard.[156] The human mind and the disciplines are now clearly distinct. The crucial difference is that the former is mutable and the latter immutable.

Augustine links the eternal law with order and justice, saying it is that law 'by which it is just that everything be most ordered'.[157] The order is hierarchical: the worse is to be subjected to the better. Thus, man is 'most ordered' when that which he shares with plants (nutrition, reproduction, etc.) and with animals (sense perception) is ruled by that which is his particular excellence, i.e. mind (*mens*) or spirit (*spiritus*).[158] Man lives in accordance with the eternal law when his love is turned away (*avertere*) from temporal things and turned towards (*convertere*) eternal things.[159] Thus evil is explained as the soul's violation of the eternal law, by its freely choosing to turn away from eternal things and to turn towards temporal things:

AUG: Let us return, if you please, to the question proposed at the beginning of this discussion and see whether it has been answered. For we resolved to investigate what it is to commit evil [*male facere*], and everything that has been said stems from this. And so we may now turn our attention to consider whether to commit evil is anything other than to neglect eternal things – which the mind enjoys and perceives in itself, and which cannot be lost while they are loved – and to follow temporal things, as if these things, which are perceived by the body (the worst part of man) and cannot be certain, are great and wonderful. As it seems to me, all evil deeds [*malefacta*] – that is to say, sins [*peccata*] – are included in this one category. I am eager to hear what you think.

EV: I agree with your assessment. All sins are included in this one category: when someone turns away [*auertitur*] from divine things that are always true, and towards [*conuertitur*] mutable and uncertain things. Although these things have been rightly placed in their own order and they have a certain beauty of their own; nevertheless, the perverse and disordered soul is reduced to

[155] *De vera relig.* 31.57. [156] *De vera relig.* 30.56. [157] *De lib. arb.* 1.6.15.
[158] *De lib. arb.* 1.8.18. [159] *De lib. arb.* 1.15.32.

> following those things that it should instead be leading in accordance with its own will, as has been established by divine order and law. Now it seems to me that we have also fully answered the issue that we resolved to investigate after the question of what it is to commit evil, namely, why we commit evil [*unde male facimus*]. If I am not mistaken, reason has shown that we commit evil through free choice of the will.[160]

The soul's downward movement must be the result of its own will and free choice. The soul cannot be made to sin by anything inferior to it, for things would not be 'most ordered' if the weaker ruled over the stronger. Nor can the soul be made to sin by anything equal to it, 'not only because the same excellence is in both, but also because the former mind, which attempts to make the other weaker and in doing so becomes weaker itself, falls away from justice and is made worse'. Finally, the soul cannot be made to sin by anything more excellent than it, for such a thing cannot be unjust.[161] Thus, sin that is committed is the fault of the soul alone. Moreover, evil that is suffered is also the fault of the soul alone. There could be no punishment (*poena*), Augustine says, if men did not love what they can lose against their will (i.e. temporal things).[162] But 'love of those things that a person can lose against his will' is the definition of lust (*libido*), which is precisely that desire which motivates all evildoing.[163] And so it is just that the soul be punished for its downward movement, by which it disrupts the divinely appointed order of things.[164] Therefore, the soul alone is responsible for all sin, or evil, whether done or suffered.

I submit that this is the Augustine for whom we have been searching, the Augustine who has resolved the problem of evil in the manner described at *Confessions* 7.16.22. This is the Augustine who has come to understand how the will is the cause of all evil, evil that is committed as well as evil that is suffered. God is the 'cause' of evil only in the sense that he justly punishes those souls which disrupt the hierarchical order of reality by loving temporal things. But just as the executioner is not to be blamed for the death of the murderer, so too God must not be blamed for evil that is suffered by the soul. The soul alone is to be blamed for its perversity in turning away from the eternal and towards the temporal. This is precisely the understanding of evil that is described by Augustine at *Confessions* 7.16.22:

> And I asked: what is iniquity? And I discovered that it is not a substance but rather a perversity of the will that is turned away from the highest substance [*summa*

[160] *De lib. arb.* 1.16.34–35. [161] *De lib. arb.* 1.10.20–1.11.21. [162] *De lib. arb.* 1.15.33.
[163] *De lib. arb.* 1.4.9–10. [164] Cf. *De lib. arb.* 1.11.21–22.

substantia] – which You, O God, are – and turned towards lower things: so that it throws away its inmost parts and swells out into external things.

CONCLUSION: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND *CONFESSIONS* 7.11.17–7.16.22

It may be useful at this point to recapitulate the results of this chapter. My aim has been to show that the understanding of evil that Augustine achieved at *Confessions* 7.16.22 reflects the solution to the problem of evil that is presented in the first book of *On Free Choice of the Will* (387/8). I supported this claim in the following way. I began by pointing out that the will plays little or no role in Augustine's consideration of the problem of evil at Cassiciacum. The author of *The Blessed Life* purports to be unclear whether the will is in any way responsible for the evils that we suffer; moreover, I found no indication in Augustine's brief treatment of the problem of evil in *On Order* that the will is implicated in evil. I then proposed a method for determining just when and how Augustine did integrate the will into his explanation of the problem of evil. Having observed that Augustine could not have determined the relationship between the will and evil until he resolved at least some of the following issues involved in 'the question of the soul':

> From where does the soul take its origin? What is it doing here? To what extent is it distinguished from God? What unique characteristic has it that alternates between both natures? To what extent is it mortal and how is it proved to be immortal?[165]

I then set out to trace the development of Augustine's solution to this 'question of the soul'. I focused in particular upon Augustine's attempts, in *Soliloquies* and *The Immortality of the Soul*, to show that the soul is immortal even though it can be deceived, that is, receive falsity (or 'non-being') into it. Augustine had a difficult time solving this problem in 386, for at that time his tendency was to polarize truth and falsity, and being and non-being. Only that would be true (and have being) which did not admit of falsity (or non-being), and this would of course exclude the deceived soul. I argued that the foundation for Augustine's resolution of this problem was the 'métaphysique des degrés d'être' that he began to elaborate in *The Immortality of the Soul*. This ontology is considerably more sophisticated than the 'two-world' ontology of the Cassiciacum writings. There are now degrees of being and truth stretching from the supreme being and truth

[165] *De ord.* 2.5.17.

(God) to absolute non-being and falsity, a lower limit that cannot actually be reached. The soul, along with all other created things, is distinct from yet participates to some degree in the absolute being and truth of God, its Creator. While the soul can tend toward falsity, it cannot ever reach falsity, for which reason we are now fully assured of the immortality of the soul. The soul will never cease to be a soul: no matter how much it is deceived by what is false, it is clear that the soul cannot be deceived unless it lives (*si fallor vivo*). In this way, having found in Augustine's new ontology the foundation for his resolution of 'the question of the soul', I returned to the problem of evil. I traced the development of Augustine's solution to this problem from *The Immortality of the Soul* to *On Free Choice of the Will* (and *On True Religion*), showing how it was not until the latter work that he would explain how the will is responsible for evil that is suffered. The soul is now responsible for all evil, or sin, not just evil committed but also evil suffered. This, in my view, corresponds to Augustine's discovery, as reported at *Confessions* 7.16.22, that *iniquitas* – the turning of the will away from the highest substance and towards lower things – is the cause of God's just judgement, displeasing to the wicked.[166]

It might be pointed out that I have only shown that the solution to the problem of evil that is described at *Confessions* 7.16.22 is first *articulated* by Augustine in the first book of *On Free Choice of the Will*. But might he not have arrived at this solution for some time already before articulating it?[167]

[166] Cf. O'Connell's claim that 'the notion of *dimissio* whereby God's punitive action operated in perfect coincidence with the creature's sinful "weight," *pondus*' (1990, p. 143) was first expressed in *De Gen. c. Man*. (p. 152, n. 9 and 1968, pp. 169–73).

[167] On the face of it, Augustine might appear to be suggesting as much at *De lib. arb*. 1.2.4, ll.1–10:

> *E.* – Age iam, quoniam satis cogis, ut fatear non nos discere male facere, dic mihi unde male faciamus. *A.* – *Eam quaestionem moues, quae me admodum adulescentem uehementer exercuit* et fatigatum in hereticos impulit atque deiecit. Quo casu ita sum adflictus et tantis obrutus aceruis inanium fabularum, ut, nisi mihi amor inueniendi ueri opem diuinam impetrauisset, emergere inde atque in ipsam primam quaerendi libertatem respirare non possem. Et quoniam mecum sedulo actum est, ut *ista quaestione liberarer*, eo tecum agam ordine, quem secutus euasi.

Is *ista quaestione liberarer* an indication that Augustine had escaped Manichaeism by resolving the *quaestio* posed by Evodius (i.e. *unde male faciamus*)? Augustine says that he will lead Evodius *eo … ordine quem secutus evasi*; does this mean that Augustine will, in *De lib. arb*., be rehearsing the very arguments by which he escaped from Manichaeism? If so, then it would seem that the solution to the problem of evil that is first articulated in *De lib. arb*. must have been in Augustine's mind already in 386, by which time he had rejected Manichaeism. Notice, however, what is meant by the *ordo* in question (*De lib. arb*. 1.2.4, ll.10–18):

> Aderit enim deus et nos intellegere quod credidimus faciet. Praescriptum enim per prophetam gradum, qui ait, *Nisi credideritis, non intellegetis* [Isa. 7:9], tenere nos bene nobis conscii sumus. Credimus autem ex uno deo esse omnia quae sunt et tamen non esse peccatorum auctorem deum. Mouet autem animum, si peccata ex his animabus sunt quas deus creauit, illae autem animae ex deo, quomodo non paruo interuallo peccata referantur in deum.

This is possible, of course, although we can hardly suppose that Augustine could have hit upon this solution before he began developing 'une métaphysique des degrés d'être'. But, again, it might be asked whether Augustine could have had this graded ontology in mind before articulating it in early 387. The *Soliloquies*, after all, is a work that seems primarily concerned with raising problems, perhaps as a series of mental exercises for the reader,[168] rather than with resolving them. Why not suppose that Augustine already had in mind 'une métaphysique des degrés d'être' as the solution to the problems that he was raising in the *Soliloquies*? Again, this is possible, although it is important to realize that Augustine's resolution of 'the question of the soul' – and this resolution is certainly presupposed by *Confessions* 7.16.22 – is dependent upon this graded ontology. And to the extent (which is considerable, even in the *Soliloquies*)[169] that 'the question of the soul' was still a burning one for Augustine in 386, it seems that he must have had very little inkling at that time as to how a graded ontology might help him to resolve it, let alone to develop the understanding of *iniquitas* that is described at *Confessions* 7.16.22.

Augustine's solution to the problem of evil, as described at *Confessions* 7.16.22, is a product of his resolution of a cluster of problems pertaining to the soul that he had not yet resolved in 386, and probably did not resolve until early 387. It is not my claim – and it would be absurd to suppose – that he could not have resolved any of this before the time that we find his solution on paper. What is my claim is that his thinking on the problem of evil, and the cluster of problems surrounding it, developed significantly in the year or two that followed his encounter with the 'books of the Platonists' in 386, and that this development is reflected in his writings from 386 to 387/8. We may allow some 'lag time' between the thinking and the writing; but if the argument I have presented is substantially correct, the period of time would have been fairly brief.

If I am correct in claiming that the understanding of evil that is described at *Confessions* 7.16.22 reflects Augustine's solution to the problem of evil as first presented in *On Free Choice of the Will* I (387/8), then I believe that we

Augustine had escaped Manichaeism by following the method of 'belief seeking understanding' (cf. *Conf.* 6.5.7; *De util. cred.* 1.2; on Augustine's use of Isa. 7:9, see above, p. 34). This suggests that we need not take *ista quaestione liberarer, eo tecum agam ordine quem secutus evasi* as an indication that Augustine's escape from Manichaeism required the solution to the problem of evil that is presented in *De libero arbitrio*. His escape from Manichaeism required only that he had been able to investigate the question *unde male faciamus* with the belief that *ex uno deo omnia esse quae sunt; et tamen non esse peccatorum auctorem Deum*, so that he would no longer be 'driven to the heretics' (*in hereticos impulit*), 'hurled down' (*deiecit*) and 'overwhelmed by such a heap of empty stories' (*tantis obrutus aceruis inanium fabularum*).

[168] Cf. Watson 1990, p. 165. [169] See above, p. 143, n. 19 and p. 146, n. 30.

have good reason to think that the preceding paragraphs of *Confessions* (i.e. 7.11.17–7.15.21) might reflect other aspects of Augustine's intellectual development in the years 386–387/8. It has not been my purpose in this section to undertake a comprehensive analysis of these paragraphs in relation to Augustine's writings from this time period. However, I have already noted a similarity between the first book of the *Soliloquies* and *Confessions* 7.11.17,[170] and it might be appropriate to conclude the discussion here by suggesting a few additional points of similarity. Consider first the following passage, from *Confessions* 7.12.18:

> And it became clear to me that corrupted things are good. They could not be corrupted if they were supremely good [*summa bona*] nor could they be corrupted if they were not good at all: if they were supremely good they would be incorruptible, if they were not good at all there would be nothing in them to corrupt. For corruption harms [*nocet*], and it does not harm unless it diminishes something good … If they were deprived of all goodness, they would be completely nothing: therefore, as long as they are, they are good. Thus, whatever is, is good; and that evil whose cause I sought is not a substance, because if it were a substance it would be good. For either it would be an incorruptible substance, the highest good, or it would be a corruptible substance, which would not be corrupted unless it were good. I saw this and it became evident to me that You have made all things good, and that there are no substances that You have not made. And because You have not made all things equal, all things are good individually and all things are very good together, for our God has made all things very good.[171]

Here Augustine discovers that whatever is, is good. Even corruptible things are good, for they could not be corrupted unless there was something good in them to be corrupted. Of course, to say that corruptible things are good is to say that they are. But, as we have seen, the extent to which corruptible things can be said to be is still very much at issue in the *Soliloquies*.[172] There Augustine is not yet clear on the sort of ontological status that can be attributed to mutable things, which have 'non-being' (*non esse*) and are called 'nothing' (*nihil*).[173] We simply do not find Augustine advancing the claims of *Confessions* 7.12.18 until such works as *On the Morals of the Manichaeans* (388):

> I will ask a third time: 'What is evil?' Perhaps you will answer: 'Corruption.' And who would deny that this is evil in general? For this is against nature; this is what harms [*nocet*]. But corruption has no being in itself but in some substance which it corrupts, for corruption itself is not a substance. Therefore, the thing that

[170] See above, p. 150. [171] *Conf.* 7.12.18. [172] See above, pp. 148ff. [173] See above, pp. 150–1.

corruption corrupts is not evil, for what is corrupted is deprived of integrity and purity. And so that which has no purity of which it can be deprived cannot be corrupted, but that which has purity is indeed good by participation [*participatione*] in Purity.[174]

Notice Augustine's remark here that what is corruptible (i.e. whatever is not the highest substance) is pure through participation in Purity. We have seen that the author of the *Soliloquies* is still unsure what sort of ontological status can be attributed to those things that merely participate in (or 'imitate') their intelligible exemplars. Such things are both true and false, and their duplicitous and self-contradictory appearance calls into question their being (let alone their goodness). Augustine would not have a solid foundation for the claim that corruptible things are good until he began to elaborate the ontology of degrees in *The Immortality of the Soul*. This ontology would allow him to ascribe degrees of goodness to mutable things. In particular, he would be able to say that all mutable things are good by participation in the supreme good (i.e. God), which is good in itself. Nothing is evil, for everything that is participates in the good. Evil is instead a privation of being.[175]

My claim, then, is that *Confessions* 7.12.18 presupposes the graded ontology that is first presented in *The Immortality of the Soul* (387). Let us now consider Augustine's discussion of evil at *Confessions* 7.13.19:

> Evil is nothing at all for You – and not only for You, but also for Your whole creation, because there is nothing outside that could break in or corrupt the order that You have imposed on it. In parts of it, however, some things are considered evil because they do not harmonize with other things; yet these same things do harmonize with still other things and are good; and in themselves they are good. And all those things which do not harmonize with one another, do harmonize with the lower part of things, called the earth, which has its cloudy and windy sky in agreement with it. And God forbid that I should now be saying: 'These things should not be' because even if I had been perceiving only these things, although I would be desiring better things, yet I would now be obliged to praise You even for these things alone … I no longer desired better things, because I had been thinking upon *all* things [*omnia*] and with a saner judgement I considered that while higher things are certainly better than lower things, yet all things [*omnia*] are better than the higher things alone.[176]

In this passage, Augustine recounts his discovery of 'degrees of goodness' and his recognition that there is a particular goodness that accrues to the universe as a whole. He came to realize that the universe is structured

[174] *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 2.5.7.
[175] Cf. *De mor. ecc. Cath.* 2.4.6; *De div. q. 83* 23, 24, 46, 51.
[176] *Conf.* 7.13.19.

hierarchically, ranging from higher things to lower things. While all of them are good in themselves, it might seem that lower things are 'evil' by comparison with higher things. However, the person who appreciates the universe as a whole will recognize that the being of all things (*omnia*) is preferable to the being of only the higher things.

In general terms, this passage bears a close resemblance to Augustine's treatment of evil in *On Order*.[177] In both cases, we are said to perceive 'evil' when we perceive a part of the world without comprehending the whole of which it is a part. It is not clear, however, that the solution to the problem of evil that is described at *Confessions* 7.13.19 had been fully developed by Augustine at the time of *On Order*. The key issue is how 'the whole' is to be understood. In the *Confessions*, 'all things' (*omnia*) encompasses the lower and the higher things of creation. But in *On Order* it is not clear to what extent Augustine understands 'the whole' in terms of a hierarchy, rather than simply a totality. Indeed, it might seem to be the latter possibility that is suggested by Augustine's appeal to an inlaid pavement as an image of the universe as a whole.[178] Moreover, Augustine appears to treat the whole of the sensible world (which includes all the parts of time and place) and the whole of the intelligible world (where every part is as perfect as the whole) separately,[179] rather than treating the two worlds as parts of a greater whole. For these reasons, I believe that we should be cautious about identifying Augustine's understanding of evil at *Confessions* 7.13.19 with his treatment of evil in *On Order*. In fact, O'Connell contends that 'the *Omnia* idea reaches its full articulation only in *De Libero Arbitrio* III (AD 395[])'.[180] I do not think, however, that we need to suppose that at *Confessions* 7.13.19 the narrator is recounting the fullest articulation of his '*Omnia* idea'.[181] But I do think that we need to suppose that the narrator is recounting the state of his '*Omnia* idea' at least roughly as it was at the time he was working through the other metaphysical issues between the first and second Platonic ascents (7.10.16 and 7.17.23), i.e. the nature of being (7.11.17), the relationship between being and goodness (7.12.18), the nature of goodness (7.12.18), the nature of the true and the false (7.15.21) and the nature of sin (7.16.22). These are, after all, an interrelated cluster of issues the resolution of which facilitated Augustine's second Platonic ascent. I have suggested that Augustine's insight into the nature of goodness, as recounted at 7.12.18, should be understood as a product of the graded ontology presented in *The*

[177] See above, pp. 143–5. [178] *De ord.* 1.1.2; see above, p. 144.
[179] *De ord.* 2.19.51; see above, pp. 144–5.
[180] O'Connell 1990, p. 152, n. 9; cf. O'Connell 1987, pp. 20–1 and 143–4. [181] See above, pp. 141–2.

Immortality of the Soul (387); it is in the same way, I would suggest, that Augustine's insight into the nature of evil, as recounted at 7.13.19, should be understood. Obviously, this suggestion requires further development, but I do not propose to pursue the matter further here.

In this chapter I have examined some evidence in support of my claim that the six paragraphs separating the two Platonic ascents (7.11-17–7.16.22) constitute a summary of Augustine's intellectual development from 386 to 387/8. If this claim is correct, one would naturally presume that 387/8 is the earliest date for the second Platonic ascent, as described at *Confessions* 7.17.23. In the next chapter, I will support this possibility through a consideration of the similarities between the Platonic ascent recounted at *Confessions* 7.17.23 and the ascents described in the second book of *On Free Choice of the Will* and *On True Religion*.

CHAPTER 5

The graded ascent

THE GRADED ASCENT FROM 387/8 TO 391

On Free Choice of the Will II

The issue being investigated at the beginning of the second book of *On Free Choice of the Will* is whether free will is a good, given that it is the source of evil. Augustine points out that if God gave free will, then it must be good. But Evodius is not satisfied with this answer, since God's goodness, and indeed his very being, is something in which he believes but does not understand. Evodius thus sets the terms of the following discussion: 'Let us take up our investigation as though everything were uncertain.'[1]

Augustine begins by establishing that the existence of the self is certain:

AUG: To begin with what is most clear, I ask you first of all whether you yourself exist. Perhaps you are afraid that you might be deceived [*fallaris*] by this line of questioning? But if you did not exist, it would be impossible for you to be deceived [*falli*].

EV: Please move on to the other things.

AUG: Since it is clear that you exist [*esse*], and since this would not be clear to you unless you lived, it is also clear that you live [*uiuere*]. Do you understand [*intelligis*] that these two points are most true?

EV: I understand completely.[2]

The *si fallor sum* argument is here situated within the triad of being (*esse*), life (*uiuere*) and understanding (*intelligere*).[3] Augustine gets Evodius to concede that he understands that he exists, for even on the assumption that Evodius is deceived that he exists, he must still exist in order to be deceived. Augustine takes it to be evident that understanding that one exists entails that one also lives (this is because understanding requires a soul, the

[1] *De lib. arb.* 2.2.4–5. [2] *De lib. arb.* 2.3.7.

[3] In this way, Augustine synthesizes *Sol.* 2.1.1 and *De immor. anim.* 11.18.

principle of life).[4] This triad forms a hierarchy, which Augustine illustrates with the following examples: a stone exists, a beast lives and a man understands.[5] Whatever understands must also exist and live; thus man is better than a beast or a stone, in which at least one of these attributes is absent.[6] Everything that is perceived by the senses of the body goes into the first category (being), while to the second (life) belong not only the five senses themselves which perceive corporeal objects but also the inner sense (*sensus interior*) which perceives corporeal objects through the bodily sense.[7] The inner sense is able to determine the proper object of the five senses, or what all or some of these senses have in common with one another.[8] For example, it recognizes colour and sound to be the proper objects of the visual and auditory senses, and it recognizes shape to be an object common to the tactile and visual senses. Inner sense is superior to the various senses that it judges, for what judges is better than what is judged.[9] Even the inner sense is shared with animals, however, and is surpassed by reason (*ratio*), which belongs to the third category (understanding). There is nothing more excellent in man than reason.

At this point, Augustine proposes a method for proving the existence of God. If it can be shown that there is something greater than reason, the best part of the human soul, then this (or something even greater than this, if there is such a thing) will be God.[10] This is an interesting proposal. While Augustine had previously made reference to the 'divine mind indwelling in mortals',[11] he is now clear about the fact that God must be sought as something above rather than in the human soul. The success of this search hinges upon the meaning of reason.

In *The Immortality of the Soul*, Augustine distinguishes the following three meanings of reason:

Reason is (a) the sight of the mind [*aspectus animi*] by means of which it contemplates the true, not through the body but through itself; or (b) the actual

[4] Augustine spells this out in an argument presented at *De immor. anim*. 1.1, which runs as follows. We exist – that is, our soul, which engages in reasoning, exists (*sumus qui ratiocinamur, id est animus noster*) – and since correct reasoning without *disciplina* is impossible, *disciplina* must be in the mind of man. But *disciplina* can only be in that which lives (*vivit*) and always exists (*semper est*). It can only be in that which lives, for nothing that does not live learns (*discere*) anything, and *disciplina* cannot be in something that does not learn. And it can only be in that which always exists, for *disciplina* always exists and that in which there is something that always exists must itself always exist.

[5] Augustine elsewhere mentions that knowing that one is alive is sufficient to establish one's being as a creature endowed with reason (*De lib. arb*. 2.7.16).

[6] *De lib. arb*. 2.3.7. [7] *De lib. arb*. 2.5.11–12. [8] *De lib. arb*. 2.3.8.

[9] *De lib. arb*. 2.5.12. On the background to Augustine's discussion of inner sense in Aristotle, Stoicism and Neoplatonism, see O'Daly 1987, pp. 102–5.

[10] *De lib. arb*. 2.6.14. [11] *C. Acad*. 1.1.1; see above, p. 72.

contemplation of the true, not through the body; or (c) the true itself, which it contemplates.[12]

(c) refers to reason as an object of knowledge (i.e. the true); (a) and (b) refer to the faculty of reason and the process or result of reasoning, respectively,[13] as can be seen by comparing this passage with *The Magnitude of the Soul* 27.52–3. Augustine there distinguishes between reason (*ratio*) and reasoning (*ratiocinatio*), calling the former 'the sight of the mind' (*mentis aspectus*) and the latter 'reason's search' (*rationis inquisitio*), or 'the movement of that sight [of the mind] over those things that are to be seen'. So reasoning is a process that takes place in a mind, which has (or is) the faculty of reason. The faculty of reason is always present in a sane mind (*sana mens*), but the process of reasoning is not. We arrive at the knowledge of the true through those things which are conceded or which are evident, whether we question another or lead ourselves by 'connecting' these things.[14] Reasoning aims at discovering the true by means of analysis and synthesis, or (as Augustine puts it) by distinguishing/separating and connecting:[15]

> Reason is a movement of the mind, which is capable of *distinguishing and connecting* [*distinguendi et conectendi*] those things that are learned.[16]
>
> By some kind of inner and hidden movement of mine, I am able to *separate or connect* [*discernere uel conectere*] the things that ought to be learned; and this power of mine is called reason. What must be separated, except what is supposed to be a unity but is not, or at least is not such a unity as is supposed? Similarly, why must something be connected, unless for the purpose of making it a unity, so far as this is possible? Therefore in separating and in connecting alike, I seek unity and I love unity.[17]

As we have seen, 'distinguishing' and 'connecting' is the activity of the dialectician, who is engaged in defining (*definiendo*), dividing (*distribuendo*) and collecting (*colligendo*).[18] The dialectical method works with definitions; by means of analysis and synthesis of the thing defined, the dialectical method reveals the extent to which the thing is a unity. In analysis, one purges the thing of that which is alien to it (producing a *purgatum*); in synthesis, one conjoins to the thing that which is proper to it (producing an *integrum*).[19] The mind that comes to see reason (the true) through this

[12] *De immor. anim.* 6.10. [13] Cf. O'Daly 1987, p. 187. [14] *De quant. anim.* 27.52–3.

[15] As I. Hadot 1984, p. 105 notes, this meaning of reason is reminiscent of *Phaedr.* 266b, where Socrates describes the two main activities of the dialectician as *diairesis* and *sunagogé*. Hadot suggests that Augustine's definition of reason might be a verbal or quasi-verbal citation in translation of a Greek source.

[16] *De ord.* 2.11.30. [17] *De ord.* 2.18.48.

[18] *De ord.* 2.13.38 (see above, p. 153, n. 66); cf. *Sol.* 2.11.21. [19] *De ord.* 2.18.48.

process of reasoning is said to have knowledge (*scientia*); unknowing (*inscitia*) or ignorance (*ignoratio*) is the outcome if the mind – even though it looks – does not see.[20]

What is the meaning of reason in *On Free Choice of the Will*? Certainly it is not the object of knowledge – 'the true' – for each person has his own mind and his own reason,[21] while the true itself is common to every mind.[22] This suggests that reason is to be understood either as a faculty or as the process of reasoning (*ratiocinatio*). Indeed, Augustine mentions both senses of reason in the following passage, without deciding between them:

> Then we recalled that reason can be called mind or spirit. But if reason (*ratio*) is one thing and mind [*mens*] another, at least we agree that only a mind can use reason. It follows from this that he who has reason cannot be without a mind.[23]

What is clear, at least, is that reason is mutable. Augustine says that reason is that by which we 'hold' (*tenemus*) what we have grasped (*comprehensum*): an object that is held in this way is known.[24] But the hold is tenuous: 'Reason itself is clearly shown to be mutable, since it is now striving to reach the true (*verum*), now ceasing to struggle, sometimes reaching it and sometimes not.'[25] Mutable reason strives to reach such things as numbers and wisdom, which are true (*verum*) and immutably true (*incommutabiliter verum*).[26] These true things are 'common' and 'public', unlike our sensations which are 'individual' and 'private'.[27] From the existence of these true things, Augustine infers the existence of truth (*veritas*): 'Therefore, you will not venture to deny that there is immutable truth, in which are contained all things that are immutably true.'[28] Although truth is one, we see many things in it.[29] Moreover, immutable truth, along with the immutably true objects of reason, must be greater than our minds. It cannot be less than our minds, for then we would make judgements about it (as reason judges the senses), but as it is we simply try to make judgements in accordance with it. Nor can it be equal to our minds, for then it would be subject to change as are our minds. It follows, then, that it is greater than our minds and thus superior to reason.[30] Thus, it has also been shown that God exists.[31]

Augustine's discussion is dialectical, and intended to get Evodius to 'see for himself' that God exists. The argument underlying the dialectical procedure may be summarized as follows. If something better than our mutable reason exists, then God exists. Immutable truths (*vera*), which are

[20] *De quant. anim.* 27.53. [21] Cf. *De lib. arb.* 2.7.15. [22] Cf. *De lib. arb.* 2.10.28.
[23] *De lib. arb.* 1.9.19. [24] *De lib. arb.* 2.3.9. [25] *De lib. arb.* 2.6.14.
[26] *De lib. arb.* 2.11.32. [27] *De lib. arb.* 2.7.19. [28] *De lib. arb.* 2.12.33.
[29] *De lib. arb.* 2.12.34. [30] *De lib. arb.* 2.12.34. [31] *De lib. arb.* 2.15.39.

contained in truth (*veritas*), exist. But the immutable is better than the mutable. Therefore something better than our mutable reason exists. Therefore God exists. Augustine is careful to note that this does not mean that God is necessarily equivalent to truth; it only means that God is either truth or something even greater than truth (if there is such a thing).[32] This is a striking qualification. Why would Augustine hesitate to identify God with truth here?[33]

It is possible that Augustine's qualification is a tacit nod in the direction of Plotinus, for whom truth is located in Intellect, which is composite and therefore subordinate to the One, the absolutely simple first principle. Indeed, Gerson argues that Augustine has 'appropriat[ed] Plotinus's argument for the interiority of intelligibles to Intellect as part of his own argument for the existence of God'.[34] He summarizes Augustine's argument as follows:

1. If truth exists, God exists.
2. Truth exists.
3. Therefore, God exists.

Directing his attention to the first premise, Gerson notes that there must be an argument implicitly supporting Augustine's inference from 'truth exists' to 'God exists': the two are not simply identical.[35] After rejecting Plato, the Philonic strand of the Platonic tradition, and Cicero as possible sources for this inference, Gerson settles on Plotinus.[36] He distinguishes two sorts of argument employed (mainly) in *Ennead* 5.5.1 – ontological and epistemological – and suggests that, while either could serve Augustine's purpose, it is likely the latter argument (which Plotinus calls the 'greatest') that Augustine is relying upon in his inference from the existence of truth to the existence of God. Plotinus' argument is summarized as follows:

> [T]here would be no knowledge of truth if the intelligibles were not in the Intellect. If they were not, the Intellect would only possess an image or representation of the truth, not the truth itself. But since knowledge of eternal truth does exist, the intelligibles cannot exist outside of Intellect. As for our individual intellects, in each of our acts of knowing Intellect is in us, that is, Intellect is eternally able to be actualized in us each time we achieve knowledge. Knowledge of eternal truth is possible for us because eternal truth exists and eternal truth exists because Intellect exists.[37]

Gerson notes that Augustine's argument for the existence of God is similarly concerned with establishing the existence of truth and our

[32] *De lib. arb.* 2.15.39. [33] By contrast, God and truth are identified at *De lib. arb.* 2.13.37.
[34] Gerson 1981, p. 580. [35] Gerson 1981, pp. 573–4. [36] Gerson 1981, pp. 574–7.
[37] Gerson 1981, p. 578.

knowledge of it. He suggests that it is likely that Plotinus' argument for the interiority of intelligibles to Intellect provided Augustine with the support for his inference from 'truth exists' to 'God exists'.[38] Of course, in employing Plotinus' argument, Augustine would have to be mindful of the Plotinian doctrine of the subordination of Intellect to the One. This explains his otherwise puzzling qualification.[39]

Augustine may have been familiar with Plotinus' argument from a direct acquaintance with *Ennead* 5.5.[40] He may also have found the argument in Porphyry's *Sententiae*[41] or in some other work that is now lost to us. However Porphyry may have differed from his master on other matters (such as the relationship between the One and Intellect), we have it from the disciple's own pen that – after some initial opposition – he was won over to Plotinus' doctrine that the objects of thought exist internal to the Intellect.[42] The reason for Porphyry's initial opposition, according to Plotinus' diagnosis, was that 'he does not know what we hold', and so Plotinus commissioned Amelius to compose a lengthy response to Porphyry's difficulties. Porphyry was not immediately convinced by the treatise, but eventually came around to the Plotinian position. He publicly recanted his former opinion, became a disciple of Plotinus, and encouraged the master 'to organize his teaching and write it down more at length'.[43] Naturally, we would expect Porphyry himself to have a particular interest in clarifying and defending the fundamental doctrine of the interiority of the intelligibles to the Intellect, and Augustine may have discovered from him the 'Plotinian' argument in question.

For Plotinus, the subordination of the Intellect to the One is a consequence of the interiority of intelligibles to Intellect (since the One is absolutely simple, and therefore cannot admit of the composition of intelligibles and Intellect). If Augustine were to follow Plotinus on this point, then, by employing the interiority doctrine, he would be committing himself to a subordinationist understanding of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son (the latter being identified with Plotinus' Intellect). Indeed, it might at first seem that Augustine is entertaining this possibility, given his striking qualification: God is either truth or something even greater than truth. Was Augustine really tempted by the Plotinian view that God (or the One) is greater than truth (or Intellect)?

[38] Gerson 1981, p. 578. [39] Gerson 1981, pp. 579–80.
[40] See DuRoy 1966, p. 70; Solignac, *BA* 13, 1962, pp. 110–11.
[41] Cf. *Sent.* 43. Solignac has argued that *Sent.* was included in the *libri Platonicorum*; cf. above, p. 12, n. 95.
[42] *Vit. Plot.* 18; cf. Lloyd 1970, pp. 283–4. [43] *Vit. Plot.* 18.

I believe this possibility must be ruled out, in light of the fact that Augustine's earliest writings contain a number of unequivocal statements regarding the equality of the three first principles.[44] The most likely explanation for this qualification, as it seems to me, is to be found in the condition set by Evodius at the outset: namely, that the inquiry into God's existence should admit nothing that is merely believed, but only what is known, 'as though everything were uncertain'. After the argument has been concluded, Augustine notes:

> Whether or not truth is God, you cannot deny that God exists, which was the question that we agreed to treat and discuss. If it disturbs you that in the sacred teaching of Christ we accept on faith that [God] is the Father of Wisdom, remember that we also accept on faith that Wisdom is equal to the eternal Father, and begotten from the same. We must not now investigate how, but we must maintain this with an unshakeable faith.[45]

Here Augustine indicates that the equality of Father and Son is accepted by Christians on faith. This belief plays no role in the foregoing argument for God's existence. All that can be known from this argument is that God is either equal to truth (that is, Wisdom or the Son) or is something even greater than truth. Of course, Augustine would have his point cut both ways: if the Christian does not know that God is not higher than truth, nor does Plotinus know that God is higher than truth, and identical to the One.

On True Religion *(390/1)*

In *On True Religion* 29.52–31.57, Augustine describes a similar progression of the soul, from visible, temporal things to invisible, eternal things. He begins by noting that, in any act of sensing corporeal things, there must be a living nature (*natura vitalis*) that does the sensing. This living nature is what animates the body, and it is therefore superior to the body. Thus, we have the following law of nature: living substance (*viva substantia*) is better than inanimate substance (*non viva substantia*).[46] There are two kinds of life: sentient life (*sentiens vita*) and rational life (*ratiocinans vita*). The former, common to all animals, involves the perception of sensible objects; while the latter, peculiar to humans, also involves the judgement of sensible objects. The human mind employs reason to judge not only sensible things,

[44] Augustine is already clear about the matter at Cassiciacum (cf. *C. Acad.* 3.19.42 and *De ord.* 2.5.16) and remains clear about it at the time of writing *De lib. arb.* (cf. *De vera relig.* 31.57, which I will examine shortly).

[45] *De lib. arb.* 2.15.39. [46] *De vera relig.* 29.52.

but also the senses themselves. For example, it can provide an explanation as to why our eyes will perceive a straight oar as bent when it is dipped into water. But because that which judges is superior to that which is judged, rational life is superior to merely sentient life.[47] But reason itself is mutable, because it is at one time skilled (*perita*), and at another unskilled (*imperita*). Its skill in judging does not come from itself, but from its participation in some higher immutable standard. Augustine calls this standard art (*ars*), discipline (*disciplina*) or wisdom (*sapientia*), although it is the first term that is most important for the ensuing discussion.

Augustine distinguishes two senses of art. First, in the ordinary (*vulgaris*) sense, art is 'the memory of things we have experienced and found pleasing, by means of a certain employment of the body and connection with the work'. This kind of art relies upon experience and sensation. For example, we may note our dissatisfaction with two windows that have been placed side by side rather than one above the other. In the second sense, art pertains to the power of judging. This kind of art relies upon reason rather than sensation.[48] For example, we may investigate why we are dissatisfied with two windows that have been placed side by side rather than one above the other. We will then discover that it is because of harmony (*conuenientia*) – which seeks 'unity and equality, whether by the resemblance of equal parts, or by the gradation of unlike parts' – that we are able to judge corporeal beauty. But genuine harmony does not exist in what is corporeal, for these things are changeable and composed of parts.[49] Nor does it exist in the mind, which, although incorporeal, is mutable. Thus, it must be higher than the mind: 'Because this law of all the arts [*lex omnium artium*] is completely immutable, while the human mind, which is able to see the law, can suffer the mutability of error, it is sufficiently clear that this law, which is called truth [*veritas*], is above our minds.'[50] Here Augustine identifies the law by participation in which reason is skilled, and the art in accordance with which reason judges corporeal things, with truth.

The ascent described here follows the same course as that described in book two of *On Free Choice of the Will*. Beginning with those things that merely exist (bodies), we move on to sentient life, and then to rational life. Finally, by recognizing the mutability of the rational faculty and the immutability of that which is comprehended by this faculty, we are led to conclude that the former is inferior to the latter. The latter is truth (*veritas*), now clearly identified with God. There is no hint of the curious remark we

[47] *De vera relig.* 29.53. [48] *De vera relig.* 30.54. [49] *De vera relig.* 30.55. [50] *De vera relig.* 30.56.

noted in the previous work, i.e. that God is either truth or something even greater than truth. Instead, the immutable reality above the mind is identified simply as God:

> There is no doubt that that immutable nature, which is above the rational mind, is God, and that the first life and first essence is where the first wisdom is. For this is that immutable truth, which is rightly called the law of all the arts and the art of the omnipotent artificer … Not even the Father judges of truth, for it is not less than He. What the Father judges He judges according to the truth.[51]

Augustine states that truth (= the Son) is not less than the Father. The relationship between the two is not to be understood in terms of Plotinian subordination of the Intellect to the One.

THE GRADED ASCENT AND *CONFESSIONS* 7.17.23

We find a number of important similarities between the ascents described in the second book of *On Free Choice of the Will* and in *On True Religion* and the second Platonic ascent, described at *Confessions* 7.17.23. These similarities are shown in Table 5.1.

The similarities between these three texts are remarkable. There is a graded process of ascent, passing from being (body) and living (senses) to understanding (reason). These grades correspond to the terms of the Neoplatonic triad: *esse*, *vivere* and *intelligere*.[52] The ascent begins with a consideration of the source by which the beauty of bodies (the level of *esse*) is judged. From bodies, Augustine moves on to the powers of the soul (the level of *vivere*): first sense perception, and then inner sense, both of which are shared with the animals. Next, Augustine arrives at reason or understanding (the level of *intelligere*), which judges the beauty of those things received from the senses. At this point, the mind has completed the 'return to itself', as it is now reflecting upon its own nature. But this reflection reveals that the mind itself is mutable, and in searching for the basis for its immutable judgements, Augustine is led to discover immutable truth itself. This truth, identified with the invisible things of God, is higher than the mutable mind. Having arrived at this immutable truth, Augustine says: 'I am far removed from the body.'[53] However, Augustine's vision of immutable truth is only temporary; he finds himself unable to effect a complete escape from the body. Ironically, it is the *mutability* of the mind – the very quality of the mind that enables it to

[51] *De vera relig.* 31.57–58. [52] See above, p. 158. [53] *De lib. arb.* 2.11.30.

Table 5.1 *Similarities in dialectical ascents*

Confessions	*De libero arbitrio*	*De vera religione*
Searching for the source by which the beauty of bodies is judged		
7.17.23 I was now enquiring after the source of my approval for *the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or of earth*, and what enabled me to judge correctly about mutable things [*de mutabilibus*] and to say: '*This ought to be so, that ought not to be so*.' And so, enquiring after the source of my judgement when I made such judgements, I discovered the immutable and true *eternity of truth above my mutable mind*.	2.12.34 Do you think that the truth is more excellent than, equal to, or inferior to our minds? If it were inferior, we would make judgements about it [*de illa*], not according to it [*secundum illam*]. In the same way, *we make judgements about bodies* [*de corporibus*] because they are below us, and we commonly say not only that these things are so or are not so, but also that *they ought to be so, or ought not to be so*. It is the same with our souls: we know not only that the soul is so, but commonly also that *it ought to be so* … And we judge these things according to the inner rules of truth, which we perceive in common. But in no way does anyone make judgements about the rules themselves … If this truth were equal to our minds, it would also be mutable. For our minds see it sometimes more and sometimes less, and in this way show themselves to be mutable. 2.16.41 You may see that whatever in a body delights you, and entices you through the corporeal senses, has number, and you may seek its origin, and return to yourself, and understand that you are not able to approve or disapprove that which you touch with the senses of the body unless	29.52 Let us see how far reason can progress from visible to invisible things, ascending from temporal to eternal things. One should not look vainly and uselessly at *the beauty of heaven, the order of the stars, the brightness of light, the alternations of day and night, the monthly courses of the moon, the fourfold seasons of the year, the agreement of the four elements* … 31.58 *Pure souls may know the eternal law, but they may not judge it*. The difference is this: in order to know, it is enough to see that something is so or not so, but *in order to judge*, we add something with which we indicate that it can be otherwise, as when we say: *it ought to be so, or to have been so, or to be so in the future* …

Table 5.1 (*cont.*)

Confessions	*De libero arbitrio*	*De vera religione*
	you have certain laws of beauty within you, to which you refer whatever beautiful things you sense outside of you.	
Ascent by degrees		
7.17.23 Thus *by steps* [*gradatim*] I ascended *from bodies to the soul that senses through the body*, and from this *to the soul's inner power*, to which the body's senses present external things – of this much even the beasts are capable – and from there *to the reasoning power*, to which is referred for judgement what is received from the bodily senses. This also discovered that it was mutable in me, and elevated itself *to its own understanding*, and took away thinking by habit. It removed itself from the contradictory swirlings of phantasms so that it might discover the light that illuminated it when, without any doubt, it cried aloud that *the immutable is to be preferred to the mutable*, which enabled it to know the immutable itself (for unless the immutable is known to some extent, it is impossible to prefer it with certainty to the mutable), and in the flash of a trembling gaze it arrived at That Which Is. *Then indeed I saw Your invisible things, which are understood by the things that are made*.	2.3.7 Since it is clear that you are, and since this would not be clear to you unless you lived, it is also clear that you are alive. So you understand that these two points are absolutely true … 2.5.11 In your view, to which of these three categories [sc. being, life, understanding] pertains *everything that the senses of the body perceive*? … [Ev.] To that which only is. [Aug.] And what about the *sense itself*? [Ev.] To that which lives. Which of these two do you judge to be the better, the sense or that which the sense perceives? [Ev.] The sense, of course … 2.5.12 [Aug.] What about the *inner sense*, which we previously discovered to be inferior to reason, and still common to us and beasts? … just as the inner sense makes judgements about these corporeal senses, approving their soundness or faulting their deficiency, so too the senses of the body make judgements about corporeal things, accepting what is pleasing about them and rejecting what is not …	29.52 In the consideration of these things … *steps* [*gradus*] should be taken toward things that are immortal and abide permanently. The first thing to notice is that *living nature* which senses all these things: because it gives life to the *body* it is necessarily better than it … For any living substance is by the law of nature preferable to any inanimate substance. 29.53 No one doubts that irrational animals also live and sense. Therefore, that which is most excellent in the human soul is not that which perceives sensible things but that which judges sensible things. After all, beasts perceive bodies more sharply and with other senses that are keener than those that men have. But to judge of bodies belongs not to merely *sentient life*, but to *rational life*. We surpass the animals with that which they lack. Now it is easy to see that what judges is better than that which is judged. And rational life judges not only sensible things but also the senses themselves …

Table 5.1 (*cont.*)

Confessions	*De libero arbitrio*	*De vera religione*
	2.6.13 Therefore, since the nature that only is and does not also live or understand (such as an inanimate body) is surpassed by that nature that not only is, but also lives yet does not understand (such as the soul of beasts), and since this nature is itself surpassed by that which at once is, lives and understands (such as *the rational mind in man*), surely you will not suppose that something may be found in us (that is, in those things with which our nature is perfected so that we are men) that is better than that which we have put in the third place? … 2.6.14 *There is absolutely no doubt that even reason itself is mutable*, since it sometimes strives to reach what is true and sometimes does not, and sometimes reaches it and sometimes does not. *If reason discovers something eternal and immutable* – not with the help of anything bodily, whether through touch, taste, smell, hearing or sight or anything inferior to it, but through itself – *then reason should admit at the same time that this is its God and that it is inferior*.	30.54 And so if *rational life* judges in accordance with itself, then there is no nature that is better. But clearly it *is mutable*, since it is found to be sometimes skilled and at other times unskilled … 30.56 But the equality and unity which are known only by the mind, and according to which the mind judges corporeal beauty through the intermediary of the senses, are not extended in space or unstable in time … Because this law of all the arts is completely immutable, while the human mind, which is able to see the law, can suffer the mutability of error, it is sufficiently clear that *this law, which is called truth, is above our minds*. 31.57 Since the soul realizes that it does not judge the form and movement of bodies in accordance with itself, it should recognize at the same time that its nature surpasses the nature it judges, and is surpassed by that nature in accordance with which it judges and concerning which it can by no means judge … 39.72 Do not go outside; return to yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man. If you find that your nature is mutable, transcend even yourself. And when you do this, remember to transcend yourself as a

Table 5.1 (*cont.*)

Confessions	*De libero arbitrio*	*De vera religione*
		reasoning soul. Make for the place where the very light of reason is kindled. 52.101 *For 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 divinity. This is the return [*regressio*] from temporal things to eternal things …
Weakness of the vision 7.17.23 But *I was not strong enough to keep my vision fixed* [*aciem figere*], *and my weakness was beaten back again* [*repercussa*] so that *I returned* [*redditus*] *to my accustomed habits*, bearing nothing with me but a memory of delight, as if I were desiring something of which I had caught the fragrance but which I was not yet able to eat.	2.11.30 When I consider the immutable truth of numbers in myself, as well as its particular abode – its dwelling-place or sanctuary, so to speak – or whatever other name might better describe the particular dwelling-place or seat of numbers – I am far removed from the body [*longe removeor a corpore*]. Perhaps I find something about which I can think, but I do not find anything that I can put into words. *I return* [*redeo*], *as though exhausted, to the things that are ours*. Then I am able to speak, and I speak about those things that are placed before my eyes, in the way that one normally speaks of such things. This also happens to me when I think as diligently and intently as I can about wisdom … 2.15.39 God exists, and He exists truly and most eminently. Not only are we maintaining	50.98 If we are not yet able to adhere to eternity, we should at least blame our phantasms, and expel their trifling and deceptive games from the vision of our mind. We should employ the steps [*gradibus*] that divine providence has deigned to make for us … 53.103 After this life, knowledge will be made perfect. For now we know in part, but when that which is perfect has come, knowledge will not be in part [1 Cor. 13:9–10]. And there will be perfect peace. Now another law in my members fights against the law of my mind, but the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord will free us from the body of this death [Rom. 7:23–5], since for the most part we follow the antagonist [sc. the law in the members] while we are with him on the journey [*in via*] [Matt. 5:25]. The body will

Table 5.1 (*cont.*)

Confessions	*De libero arbitrio*	*De vera religione*
	[*retinemus*] this indubitable truth by faith, but, *as far as I can tell, we are now also attaining* [*attingimus*] *this truth with a form of cognition that is certain, although still most feeble* [*adhuc tenuissima*] … 2.15.40 *Surely we are not now wise and blessed? Rather, are we not still striving* [*tendimus*] *in order that that goal should appear before us?* 2.16.41 What else do we do, then, when we are eager to be wise, except concentrate our whole soul in a certain manner upon that which we reach with the mind, *placing our soul there and fixing it firmly* [*stabiliter infigamus*], and doing this as quickly as possible … so that the soul, having cast aside all affections of temporal and spatial things, might grasp that which is always one and the same? … For as long as we are doing this, and until we arrive at the goal, we are still on a journey [*in via*]. It has been granted to us to rejoice in these true and certain goods, *however fleeting they may still be while we are on this dark journey* … 2.16.42 Wisdom will shine upon you from its inner abode, from the very shrine of truth, *but if this still beats back* [*reverberat*] *your weak sight*, turn the eye of your mind to	be completely healthy, without lack or weariness, for this corruptible body will put on incorruption in its time and order, when the resurrection of the flesh comes [1 Cor. 15:53–4].

Table 5.1 (*cont.*)

Confessions	*De libero arbitrio*	*De vera religione*
	the road where wisdom had been revealing itself favourably. Remember that you have rightfully postponed [*distulisse*] a vision that you may seek again when you are stronger and healthier.	

recognize the immutable truth above it – which is preventing him from maintaining his vision. At *On True Religion* 53.103, Augustine provides an instructive diagnosis of the reason for the mind's mutability. He says that the mind is mutable at present because 'the law in the members' is at war against it. This is a condition that afflicts the mind only in this life, in which it is attached to a corruptible and sinful body. At the resurrection of the flesh, however, the body will be at peace and will no longer prevent the mind from attaining 'perfect knowledge', or the stable vision of truth. This diagnosis compares favourably with another detail from *Confessions* 7.17.23, which we have not yet examined. Consider the following words of the narrator, which occur prior to his recounting of the ascent itself:

> I was not enjoying my God firmly [*stabam*]. Instead I would be ravished to You by Your beauty, and then torn away from You by my weight [*pondus*], and I would fall into these things with a groan. This weight was carnal habit [*consuetudo carnalis*]. Yet the memory of You remained with me. In no way did I doubt that there was One to whom I should cling, but I was not yet one who was capable of clinging, for the corrupted body weighs down the soul, and the earthly habitation presses down the mind that ruminates on many things.[54]

Here carnal habit, arising from the pernicious influence of the corruptible body, is identified as the force pulling the mind away from the stable enjoyment of God. As we have seen, it was not until about 389 that Augustine would begin considering the manner in which habit compromises the autonomy of the soul.[55] Of course, this is also the approximate date of the ascents described in *On Free Choice of the Will* and *On True Religion*, which provides us with yet another reason for thinking that these ascents are to be identified with the second Platonic ascent described at *Confessions* 7.17.23.

[54] *Conf.* 7.17.23. [55] See above, p. 91.

While recognizing that carnal habit is an obstacle to ascent, Augustine does not think that the obstacle is insurmountable. To be sure, he is probably not surprised by his inability to maintain the vision. After all, according to the logic of the ascent, the mind's arrival at the immutable truth ('in the flash of a trembling gaze it arrived at That Which Is')[56] is dependent upon its recognition of its own mutability, and its mutability is made all the more apparent by the pull of the corruptible body, and the compulsive force of habit. Augustine admits that he is still 'on a journey' (*in via*), and that he has 'postponed a vision'.[57] However, there is no question that he still believes it is possible for the mind to overcome the force of habit, and to reach a permanent vision of God in this life. Thus, he is still 'concentrating' (*colligere*) his soul and 'striving' (*tendere*) towards the goal.

I believe that the similarities between the Platonic ascent recounted at *Confessions* 7.17.23 and the ascents described in the second book of *On Free Choice of the Will* and in *On True Religion* are too significant and too numerous to be coincidental. I submit that the Platonic ascent of *Confessions* 7.17.23 should be understood not as a singular experience, but rather as a type of ascent that Augustine was elaborating in the period between (roughly) 387/8 and 391. This claim must be distinguished from Van Fleteren's claim that the ascent described at 7.17.23 occurred in 386, and served as inspiration for the ascent motif in Augustine's writings through 391.[58] I believe that Van Fleteren is mistaken on this point. It seems to me that it was simply not possible for Augustine to have undertaken the second Platonic ascent in 386. The graded ascent of the soul presupposes Augustine's 'métaphysique des degrés d'être' (387); the distinction between mutable reason and immutable truth presupposes his resolution of 'the question of the soul' (387/8); and the weakness of vision that is induced by carnal habit is a motif that did not appear in Augustine's writings until *c.* 389. For all of these reasons, I conclude that the second Platonic ascent was not quickly undertaken in the wake of the first ascent in 386, and then just as quickly rejected before Augustine's conversion in the late summer of that same year. On the contrary, the second Platonic ascent is to be dated to *c.* 387/8–391; it represents the fruits of Augustine's intellectual labours over the course of the years 386–7/8, as described at 7.11.17–7.16.22.

[56] *Conf.* 7.17.23. [57] *De lib. arb.* 2.16.41–2. [58] Van Fleteren 1977, p. 19.

THE GRADED ASCENT AND THE 'BOOKS OF THE DISCIPLINES'

This conclusion receives further confirmation from an intriguing project that Augustine began in 387, around the same time as he began elaborating his ontology of degrees in *The Immortality of the Soul*. This ambitious and ill-fated project is recalled in the *Retractations*:

> At the same time [sc. as *The Immortality of the Soul*], while I was awaiting baptism in Milan, I also attempted to write books on the disciplines [*disciplinarum libros*]. I questioned those who were with me and who did not recoil from studies of this kind, and I desired *by certain steps*, so to speak [*quasi passibus certis*], *to reach incorporeal things through corporeal things*, and to lead others to them. But I was able to finish only the book *On Grammar* – which I lost later from our library – and six books, *On Music*, pertaining to that part which is called rhythm. But I wrote these six books after I was baptized and had returned to Africa from Italy; indeed, I had only just begun this discipline at Milan. As for the other five disciplines that I began in the same way [*similiter*] at Milan – dialectic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic and philosophy – only the outlines [*principia*] remained, and we lost those as well. However, I think that some people have them.[59]

Augustine had planned to produce a series of 'manuals of ascent', one for each of the seven liberal disciplines. All that definitely survives of the project outlined here are his six books on rhythm, *On Music*, although it is possible that other parts survive in fragmentary form, including an extant version of *De dialectica*, which purports to be written by a certain 'Augustinus'.[60] As for the timeline involved, the only work that Augustine completed while at Milan in 387 was *On Grammar*. The work *On Music* was completed only after he returned to Africa (i.e. late 388). Indeed, the fact that Augustine says that he wrote these six books in Africa and had 'only just begun this discipline at Milan' suggests that much, if not all, of *On Music* was composed no earlier than late 388, which would roughly coincide with the period of the ascents described in the second book of *On Free Choice of the Will* and in *On True Religion*.[61] As for the other five disciplines, Augustine began them at Milan 'in the same way' as he did music; however, they would remain incomplete, a casualty of Augustine's

[59] *Retract*. 1.5 (6). [60] For an overview of the literature on the issue, see O'Donnell 1992, vol. II, p. 275.
[61] There is a peculiar matter relating to the dating of the sixth book of *De mus*. At *Ep*. 101.3–4 (408/9), Augustine tells us that he found a 'revised' (*emendatum*) copy of this book, but does not tell us the nature or date of this revision. The hypothesis of Marrou 1958, pp. 580–3, which has been generally accepted, is that the revision involved the addition of the preface to book 6. For a survey of the issue, see the introduction to Jacobsson 2002.

ordination in 391. In a letter from 408 or 409, Augustine admits that he had intended to supplement his six books on rhythm with another six on harmony, but that he found these 'enticements' (*deliciae*) slip from his hands after 'the burden of ecclesiastical cares' had been imposed on him.[62] This comment suggests that Augustine was still intent upon pursuing his programme when he became a priest in 391, but that his ordination prevented him from doing so.

Notice that the purpose of 'the books of the disciplines' is to help students 'to reach things incorporeal through things corporeal … by certain steps'. This comment is obviously suggestive of the ascent by degrees of the second Platonic ascent. And indeed, the same type of ascent appears to be operative in 'the books of the disciplines' as at *Confessions* 7.17.23 (and, by extension, in the second book of *On Free Choice of the Will* and *On True Religion*). A brief examination of the sixth book of *On Music* should suffice to establish the point. Consider the recitation of a particular verse, for example *Deus creator omnium*. Augustine distinguishes six different types of numbers that are involved in the four iambs and twelve times of this verse. There is first of all the physical sound itself, which is produced by 'corporeal numbers' (*numeri corporeales*). Moreover, when the verse is sung:

> We hear it by those reacting numbers [*numeri occursores*], recognize it by memorial numbers [*numeri recordabiles*], pronounce it by advancing numbers [*numeri progressores*], are delighted by these judicial numbers [*numeri iudiciales*], and appraise it by I know not what other numbers, and in accordance with these more hidden numbers [*numeri latentiores*] we bring another judgement on the delight, which is a sort of judgement of the judicial numbers.[63]

The soul ascends through these six types of number involved in rhythm, from 'corporeal numbers' to the 'hidden numbers', with which we judge by reason that which delights by the sense.[64] This is a gradual movement 'from corporeal to incorporeal things':[65] from the body to the soul and finally to the 'hidden numbers' transcending the soul in their unchangeable eternity.[66] In fact, we are not completely separated from the highest numbers, even 'when we are inclined toward the body'.[67] But this inclination – this 'intention of the mind on something else [*in aliud intentus animus*]'[68] – is something that we have to a great extent in this life, and it hinders us in our efforts to contemplate the eternal and immutable numbers. The delight (*delectatio*) of things perceived through the senses

[62] *Ep.* 101.3. [63] *De mus.* 6.9.23; cf. the lists of numbers provided at 6.2.2, 6.4.5, 6.6.16.
[64] *De mus.* 6.9.23. [65] *De mus.* 6.2.2. [66] *De mus.* 6.11.29.
[67] *De mus.* 6.11.31. [68] *De mus.* 6.13.37.

imprints upon our memory the images of these sensible things (called *phantasiai*), and the memory can fashion further images out of these *phantasiai* (called *phantasmata*).[69] The memory, thus affected by the images of sensible things, is called 'flesh' (*caro*), or 'the habit of the soul made with flesh' (*animae consuetudo facta cum carne*). The flesh struggles against the mind, hindering its efforts to ascend to spiritual things. This is the meaning of the verse: 'In mind I serve the law of God, but in flesh the law of sin' (Rom. 7:25).[70]

As with the second Platonic ascent, the ascent in *On Music* involves (a) a search for the transcendent source by which corporeal things are judged, (b) an ascent by degrees, and (3) a weakness of vision. The third point provides a particularly interesting point of comparison. Here, as at *On True Religion* 53.103, Augustine analyses the weakness of vision in terms of the Pauline opposition between the mind and the flesh, the law of God and the law of sin. And again, Augustine is confident that the weakness can be overcome:

> But when the mind is raised to spiritual things and is fixed there stably, the force of even this habit is broken, and being gradually repressed, is destroyed. For it was greater when we were following it; and when we restrain it, it is not entirely nothing, but it is certainly less. And so by firmly removing [*certis regressibus*] ourselves from every lascivious motion, wherein lies the fault of the soul's essence, and with a restored delight in the numbers of reason, our whole life is turned to God. It gives numbers of health to the body, rather than receiving pleasure from it: this happens when the exterior man is destroyed and the man has changed into something better.[71]

And so the path to blessedness in this life remains open: there is still the possibility of being 'summoned from the delight of the carnal senses'.[72] Indeed, Augustine even goes so far as to suggest that it is *easier* to love God than sensible things, supporting his suggestion with the words of Jesus: 'For my yoke is light' (Matt. 11:30).[73]

It appears, then, that the ascent described in *On Music* 6 and (we may safely presume) the ascents described in or planned for the other textbooks are of substantially the same type as the second Platonic ascent. *Confessions* 7.17.23 is referring not to a single, fleeting experience from the summer of 386, but to a type of ascent that played a central role in Augustine's writings from 387/8 to 391, and provided the *raison d'être* of his ambitious programme in the liberal disciplines. Of course, the narrator of the *Confessions*

[69] *De mus.* 6.11.32; see above, p. 156, n. 83. [70] *De mus.* 6.11.33.
[71] *De mus.* 6.11.33. [72] *De mus.* 6.11.33. [73] *De mus.* 6.14.44.

sees in the second Platonic ascent a misguided attempt to reach God without the assistance of 'the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ' (7.18.24). At that time, Augustine believed in what amounted to a Photinian Christ (7.19.25). Thus, it seems that we must understand 'the books of the disciplines' – like the second Platonic ascent itself – as a relic of Augustine's Photinian period.

When did Augustine abandon the project of the second Platonic ascent? Augustine's attitude to the liberal disciplines should provide us with a reliable indicator in this regard. With this in mind, let us now turn our attention to *On Christian Doctrine* (396), Augustine's next treatment of the liberal disciplines after 391.

CHAPTER 6

The rejection of Platonic ascent

Augustine's concern with Platonic ascent disappears from view after *On True Religion* (390/1). However, this is no indication that he suddenly rejected the project; after all, his literary output as a whole dropped off sharply after 391. O'Donnell sees a 'writer's block' taking hold of Augustine during the period between 391 and the *Confessions*,[1] although it is also important to bear in mind that the practical demands of Augustine's ecclesiastical duties had robbed him of the 'liberal leisure' (*liberale otium*)[2] in which he had once hoped to retire. And on the intellectual side, Augustine was now largely preoccupied with reading Scripture (Augustine readily admitted that his knowledge of Scripure was inadequate)[3] and refuting Manichaeism. That the project of Platonic ascent fell by the wayside after 391 may be attributed to these new (or at least newly pressing) concerns. Augustine's silence is not necessarily an indication that he rejected the project. We must approach the question from a different direction.

In order to resolve this question, I propose to examine Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* (begun in 396). This work exhibits a significantly different attitude to the liberal disciplines from that in Augustine's early writings. It amounts to the first expression of his rejection of Platonic ascent.

ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE (396)

Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* was written in two distinct stages, separated by some thirty years. In 396–7, Augustine wrote the first two books and the bulk of the third book. It was not until 426 that he would complete the third book and write the fourth book.[4] In the meantime, the

[1] O'Donnell 1992, vol. 1, pp. xlii–xliv. [2] *Sol.* 1.9.16.

[3] Upon his ordination in 391, Augustine asked Valerius, then the bishop of Hippo, for some time to study in order to remedy his deficiency in the Scriptures (*Ep.* 21). One of the fruits of his labours was the series of commentaries on Paul that he produced in the mid-390s.

[4] *Retract.* 2.4.1

first two books appear to have been in circulation already.[5] These are the books with which we are primarily concerned.

In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine is effectively 'retracting' his earlier view of the liberal disciplines, particularly as expressed in *On Order*. There is still a sort of 'certain lofty discipline' (cf. *On Order* 2.7.24) to be attained; this is what we are to 'enjoy', i.e. the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[6] And in order to enjoy God, there is still need for a twofold order of learning and morals.[7] Moreover, the order of learning can still make use of the seven liberal disciplines: grammar (discussed in books 2 and 3 *passim*), dialectic (2.31.49–2.35.53), rhetoric (2.36.54, book 4 *passim*), music (2.16.26), geometry (2.38.56), astronomy (2.29.46), arithmetic (2.16.25) and philosophy (2.40.60). But such study is now of use only in so far as it aids in reading, understanding and teaching Scripture.[8] In order to accommodate this new purpose, some of the specific functions of the various disciplines have changed. For example, arithmetic now facilitates allegorical interpretations of Scripture.[9] Some disciplines acquire additional tasks. For example, grammar now includes the study of Greek and Hebrew, the original languages of the Scriptures.[10] Rhetoric is now especially important for the purpose of preaching.[11] Other disciplines will become less useful, even useless. For example, Augustine cautions against astronomy,[12] which, though not harmful in itself, is closely associated with the dangers of astrology.[13] Finally, Augustine adds several new disciplines that are useful for the treatment of Scripture: history (2.28.42–4), geography and natural science (2.16.24, 2.29.45), and the mechanical arts (2.30.47). These disciplines give us a better understanding of dates, events and places recorded in Scripture, and facilitate our interpretation of passages that mention animals, trees, plants, stones, or medicine, agriculture, navigation, dancing, running and wrestling.

Augustine makes it clear that whatever learning does not serve the purpose of illuminating Scripture is of no use for those seeking the blessed life:

> Thus it seems to me beneficial to caution studious and intelligent youths [*studiosis et ingeniosis adulescentibus*], who fear God and seek the blessed life, against applying their efforts to any studies that are beyond the Church of Christ, lest they should

[5] Cf. Kannengiesser 1995, p. 5. [6] *De doct. Christ.* 1.5.5.
[7] *De doct. Christ.* 1.10.10, ll.6–8: 'Non enim ad eum, qui ubique praesens est, locis mouemur, sed *bono studio bonisque moribus*.'
[8] *De doct. Christ.* Pro. 1. [9] *De doct. Christ.* 2.16.25. [10] *De doct. Christ.* 2.11.16.
[11] *De doct. Christ.* 4 as a whole is devoted to this topic. [12] *De doct. Christ.* 2.29.46.
[13] *De doct. Christ.* 2.21.32–2.23.36.

venture to follow them as if such an undertaking provides a safe path to the blessed life. They should instead distinguish between these studies soberly and diligently.[14]

This is in stark contrast with *On Order*, where those studies that are beyond the Church of Christ – i.e. the liberal disciplines – are precisely those that are recommended for 'studious youths' (*adulescentibus studiosis*).[15] In 386, studious youths are led to the blessed life not by 'the authority of the mysteries' alone (if at all), but by understanding the reason contained in the disciplines. Those who are not capable of a classical education can safely rely upon 'the authority of the mysteries', but this is a decidedly second-rate path to salvation, intended for those who, 'content with authority alone and either *despising or unable* to be instructed in the liberal disciplines, constantly apply themselves *only* to good morals and an upright prayer life'.[16]

In *On Christian Doctrine*, however, the intelligent elite no longer have a separate order of study leading to the blessed life. The study of the liberal disciplines no longer represents an independent path to salvation, distinct from 'the way of authority'. On the contrary, the Scriptures provide the foundation of the blessed life for the educated and uneducated alike. If the former may be distinguished from the latter, it is only in the sense that they are particularly skilled in putting the disciplines into the service of elucidating the Scriptures. In doing so, they perform a great service for their fellow Christians. Augustine notes that 'certain men' have translated Hebrew, Syrian and Egyptian names and words appearing in Scripture, and Eusebius has written a history in order to clarify questions arising from the Scriptures. This has been done 'so that it is not necessary for a Christian to labour heavily for the sake of a few things'.[17] And there is still a need, as Augustine sees it, for a compilation of information pertaining to the geography and natural history of the Scriptures, as well as an accessible treatment of arithmetic which would aid in the interpretation of numbers mentioned in Scripture.[18] The production of these handbooks would relieve ordinary Christians of the onerous and ultimately unnecessary task of learning the liberal disciplines for themselves.[19]

What becomes of the ascent to God, now that the order of studies leading to the blessed life is grounded in the Bible rather than in textbooks of the liberal disciplines? At *On Christian Doctrine* 2.7.9–11, Augustine describes

[14] *De doct. Christ.* 2.39.58. [15] *De ord.* 2.8.25, 2.9.26. [16] *De ord.* 2.9.26; see above, p. 118.
[17] *De doct. Christ.* 2.39.59. [18] *De doct. Christ.* 2.39.59.
[19] Marrou 1958, p. 413 sees Augustine's desire for handbooks as a symptom of the growing 'decadence' of his time. Thus *De doct. Christ.*, in recognizing the need for second-hand learning, signals the future compilations of Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville.

seven grades (*gradus*) of the ascent to wisdom, which may be summarized as follows:

1. fear of God (*timor Dei*);
2. piety (*pietas*);
3. knowledge (*scientia*);
4. fortitude (*fortitudo*);
5. counsel of mercy (*consilium misericordiae*);
6. purifying the eye of the heart (*purgare oculum cordis*);
7. wisdom (*sapientia*).[20]

In this ascent, as in the seven-stage ascent of *The Magnitude of the Soul* 33.70–6, the liberal disciplines are introduced at the third stage. But the key difference between the two ascents, as we will see, is that in *On Christian Doctrine* the liberal disciplines are not themselves efficacious in the ascent. They are now mere 'handmaidens' to Scripture. It is the knowledge of Scripture, not the knowledge of the disciplines, that is the catalyst for the ascent.

In *On Christian Doctrine*, the ascent to wisdom begins with the fear of God.[21] Augustine explains the purpose of this fear in the following way: 'This fear is necessary to strike us with the awareness of our mortality and our future death, and to affix every movement of pride to the wood of the cross, nailed there like so much flesh.'[22] The fear motif is certainly not absent from the *Magnitude of the Soul* ascent; in fact, it is the fear of death – glossed as 'the complete flight and escape from the body' – that impedes the soul's full union with truth.[23] In that work, the task of purification just is the task of overcoming the fear of death, which is 'often overwhelming'.[24] This fear wanes as one's trust in divine providence waxes[25] – herein lies the importance of Augustine's solution to the problem of evil – and is fully overcome only when death is not only no longer feared but is actually desired as the greatest gift.[26] But in *On Christian Doctrine*, fear has a significantly different function in the ascent. It is no longer an obstacle to purification; on the contrary, it is a catalyst for purification. It is because of the fear of God that we turn to the knowledge of His will in the first place, and thus become aware of what He commands us to seek and what He commands us to avoid. The thought of God's judgment provokes fear, and we are stricken by the fear of death. Our fear of death then 'crucifies' our

[20] *De doct. Christ.* 2.7.9–11. This ascent is based upon an apparently original fusion of Matt. 5:3–10 and Isa. 11:2–3. See Pollman 2005, p. 227 and *De serm. dom. in monte* 1.3.10.
[21] Cf. Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7, 9:10. [22] *De doct. Christ.* 2.7.9. [23] *De quant. anim.* 33.76.
[24] *De quant. anim.* 33.73. [25] *De quant. anim.* 33.73. [26] *De quant. anim.* 33.76.

pride, so that we are allayed (*mitescere*) by piety, and we will not contradict Scripture. One who is pious 'can do nothing but believe in and yield to the authority of the sacred books'.[27] In this way fear leads us to the second and third stages of the ascent (piety and knowledge), so that we are now prepared to study Scripture (aided by the disciplines to whatever extent they might be useful) with the proper humility. The Scriptures teach us nothing other than the proper order of love. God is to be loved for Himself, one's neighbour is to be loved as oneself, and both are to be loved for the sake of God:

> After these two grades of fear and piety we arrive at the third grade of knowledge, which I now intend to discuss. In this every student of the divine writings exercises himself [*se exercet*], finding in them only this: that God is to be loved for His own sake, and his neighbour is to be loved for the sake of God; and God is to be loved with all his heart and all his soul and all his mind; and his neighbour is to be loved as himself, that is, in such a way that all love for the neighbour should, like all love for ourselves, be referred to God.[28]

As a result of studying the Scriptures, we are led to recognize that we have been loving the world, or temporal things, rather than God and neighbour. This recognition engenders a feeling of incapacity, which causes one to seek divine assistance through lamentation and prayer:

> Then that fear with which he thinks of the judgement of God, and that piety because of which he can do nothing but believe and yield to the authority of the sacred books, will compel him to mourn over himself. For this knowledge of a good hope causes a man to lament rather than to boast. Thus disposed, he implores with regular prayers the consolation of divine assistance lest he be shattered by despair, and he begins the fourth stage of fortitude, in which he hungers and thirsts for justice.[29]

In this way, fear propels us on to the fourth stage of ascent. At this point, love replaces fear as the dominant motif. In the fourth stage, a person begins to purify himself of the love for inferior things and to turn towards the love of eternal things (i.e. the Trinity). However, he is not yet capable of maintaining his vision of the Trinity 'gleaming from afar', and so the fifth stage consists in the strengthening of this vision. This is accomplished when he 'trains himself completely in the love of his neighbour, and is perfected in this'. But it is only when he learns to love his enemy that he ascends to the sixth stage, where the purification is complete and the vision as clear as it will be in this life. And yet the vision is still 'through a glass darkly'. It is only

[27] *De doct. Christ.* 2.7.9–10. [28] *De doct. Christ.* 2.7.10. [29] *De doct. Christ.* 2.7.10.

in the next life that he will attain the peace and tranquillity of wisdom, at which point 'he will not turn away from the truth either in a desire to please men or for the sake of avoiding any kind of adversities to himself which arise in this life'.[30]

And so Augustine now acknowledges that the completion of the ascent is simply not possible in this life. He notes: 'we walk more by faith than by sight while we are travelling in this life'.[31] Here is a clear rejection of the very *raison d'être* of the second Platonic ascent, and the Platonic ascents in general. The Platonic ascents had been attempts to attain a permanent vision of God, the 'complete escape from the body' in this life. This required Augustine to overcome 'the law in the members', and to escape the compulsive force of carnal habit. But his efforts had been unsuccessful. While he did catch a fleeting glimpse of the immutable God above his mutable mind, the force of habit had prevented him from maintaining the vision.

Might not Augustine at least say in retrospect that the second Platonic ascent was a success? After all, this ascent seems to have given him as clear a vision of God as is possible in this life, at least on the schema of the ascent outlined in *On Christian Doctrine*. However, at *Confessions* 7.20.26, a passage that was probably written not long after the ascent described in *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine minimizes the value of the second Platonic ascent:

> But then, having read these books of the Platonists and having afterwards been admonished by them to seek incorporeal truth, I saw that Your invisible things are understood through those things that are made. And I was beaten back [*repulsus*], yet I felt what I was not able to contemplate because of the darkness of my soul. I was certain that You are and that You are infinite, that You are not diffused through finite or infinite space, and that You are truly [*vere esse*], You who are always the same, not different or otherwise in any part or by any motion, while all other things derive their being from You (that they are at all is one evident proof of this). Indeed, I was certain of these things, but I was too weak to enjoy [*fruendum*] You. I chattered away as if I were clever [*peritus*], but if I had not sought Your way, in Christ our Saviour, I would have come not to instruction [*peritus*] but to destruction [*periturus*]. For at that time I had begun to wish to seem wise. This was the fullness of my punishment: rather than lamenting my condition, I was puffed up with knowledge. Where was that love [*caritas*] which builds upon the foundation of

[30] *De doct. Christ.* 2.7.10–11.

[31] *De doct. Christ.* 2.7.11. It is instructive to compare the seven-stage ascent of *De doct. Christ.* with the similar ascent at *De serm. dom. in monte* 1.3.10. One significant difference, however, is that Augustine is still confident in the latter work that the final stage of 'Wisdom' can indeed be attained in this life. See above, pp. 92–3.

humility, which is Christ Jesus? Or when would those books have taught me that? I believe You wanted me to come across these books before I had examined Your Scriptures, so that it might be impressed on my memory how I had been affected by them, and when I was later softened (*mansuefactus*) by Your books and my wounds were treated by Your caring fingers, I might be able to discern and to distinguish the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see the goal but do not see the way, and [those who see] the way leading to the country of blessedness, which we are meant not only to perceive but also to dwell in. If I had first been formed by Your Holy Scriptures and You had grown sweet to me through their familiar use, and had later happened upon those books [of the Platonists], perhaps they would have snatched me away from the solid foundation of piety; or, if I had remained in that healthy disposition which I had acquired, I might have thought that the same disposition could have been acquired from those books if someone studied them alone.[32]

There is a fundamental difference between the Platonic ascents (the method of presumption) and the 'Christian ascent' (the method of confession). The difference is this: the Platonic ascents enable one to see the goal but not the way, while the Christian sees the way and – to the extent that he walks by faith rather than sight – not the goal. It is not merely that the Platonic ascents *lack* the way; it is that they constitute an impediment to the way. They caused Augustine to be 'puffed up with knowledge', a condition that leads to 'destruction' rather than to the blessed life. They offered the false promise of a path to salvation through reason, independent of Christ, when there is in fact only one way to the blessed life: 'Christ our Saviour'. The author of *On Christian Doctrine* realizes this; he notes that we are only able to return to God because 'Wisdom Itself deigned to be fitted even to our infirmity, such as it is, and provided for us an example of living'.[33] Here there can be no suspicion that Augustine has a purely exemplary understanding of Christ, so that his crucifixion is merely an example of overcoming the fear of death.[34] On the contrary, Augustine is clearly referring to the Word made flesh,[35] who makes it possible for us to return to God by forgiving our sins.[36]

As we have noted, Courcelle regards *Confessions* 7.20.26 as a third ascent.[37] However, I believe that it is more naturally understood as a summary of the lessons that Augustine had learned from the 'books of the Platonists', followed by the narrator's commentary. Augustine's certainty that God is and is infinite, not diffused through finite or infinite space, would correspond to 7.10.16 (the first ascent), his knowledge that God is

[32] *Conf.* 7.20.26. [33] *De doct. Christ.* 1.11.11. [34] See above, p. 64. [35] *De doct. Christ.* 1.13.12. [36] *De doct. Christ.* 1.17.16. [37] See above, p. 132.

truly and is always the same would correspond to 7.11.17 (perhaps the *Soliloquies*?), his knowledge that all things derive their being from God would correspond to 7.15.21 (perhaps *The Immortality of the Soul*?), and the weakness preventing him from enjoying God would correspond to 7.17.23 (the second Platonic ascent). Here the narrator begins his commentary, and I believe that he has chosen his words carefully. Notice first of all that the narrator of the *Confessions* chastises his younger self for failing to weep over his wretched condition, and failing to recognize that he was on the path to destruction. This compares favourably with the 'Christian ascent' of *On Christian Doctrine*: this ascent begins with the fear of God and the fear of death, which then compels a person to cry out for divine assistance. Secondly, the narrator of the *Confessions* asks: 'Where was that love [*caritas*] which builds upon the foundation of humility, which is Christ Jesus?' And he expresses his concern that the Platonists might have led him away from the 'solid foundation of piety' had he been exposed to the Scriptures first and the 'books of the Platonists' later. This is again reminiscent of the 'Christian ascent', which begins with the humility of the cross and with piety, before moving on to the love of neighbour, enemy and God. Finally, notice Augustine's comment about being 'softened' (*mansuefactus*) by Scripture and having his wounds healed by God. This again compares favourably with the second stage of the 'Christian ascent', which requires one to be 'allayed' (*mitescere*) by piety in order not to contradict Scripture.

In *On Christian Doctrine*, we are watching Augustine enter into a new world. He now firmly rejects the view that the liberal disciplines provide an independent path to salvation. One of the most prominent features of the new landscape is Augustine's use/enjoyment (*uti*/*frui*) distinction. Augustine would begin employing this distinction around 395,[38] and it would receive its classic presentation at *On Christian Doctrine* 1.4.4:

> To enjoy [*frui*] something is to cling with love to it for its own sake. To use [*uti*] something is to apply the thing in question to the end of obtaining that which you love, if, that is, it is something that ought to be loved. For an illicit use should instead be called a waste or an abuse. Suppose we were wanderers who could not live blessedly outside of our homeland, and being completely miserable in our wandering and longing to put an end to our misery, we desired to return to our homeland. We would need vehicles over land or sea which we could use to arrive at our homeland, which is to be enjoyed. But if the pleasures of the journey and the very movement of the vehicles delighted us, and we began to enjoy those things that we ought to use, we would be unwilling to end our journey quickly, and,

[38] *De div. q. 83* 30. For background and discussion, see Bourke 1979, pp. 30ff.

entangled in a perverse sweetness, we would be alienated from our homeland, whose sweetness would make us blessed. Thus in this mortal life, wandering from God [2 Cor. 5:6], if we desire to return to our homeland where we can be blessed, we should use rather than enjoy this world, so that the invisible things of God may be seen, having been understood through the things that are made [Rom. 1:20], that is, so that we may arrive at eternal and spiritual things by means of corporeal and temporal things.[39]

In distinguishing between the use and the enjoyment of a thing, Augustine is expressing a new understanding of the means by which one returns to 'the homeland', and attains the blessed life. To be sure, the return is still understood as a movement from the corporeal and temporal to the eternal and spiritual. But Augustine had previously sought a 'complete escape from the body' through the Platonic ascents, and had aspired to guide others to this goal through his 'books of the disciplines': now he realizes that such efforts are ultimately futile. There is no point in attempting to escape the sensible world in this life; instead, we must learn how to use this world well, so that we may return to God in the next life. In this life, the corruptible body is our inseparable companion and burden as we journey to our homeland. This point is clearly articulated in 400:

Whoever thinks that it is possible for someone still living in this mortal life to remove and dispel all the darkness of corporeal and carnal sense images, and to attain to the clearest light of immutable truth, and to cling to that light constantly and unchangeably with a mind completely removed from the habit of this life [*a consuetudine uitae huius*]: well, that person does not understand what he seeks, or who he is that seeks.[40]

What caused Augustine to reject his view that the method of Platonic ascent, supported by an education in the liberal disciplines, can provide an elite few with a unique path to salvation? It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the primary cause was Augustine's rereading of Paul in the mid-390s, which led him to realize the profundity of the conflict between the mind and the flesh in this life.[41] This would best explain the fact that Augustine's first disavowal of the project of Platonic ascent comes with *On Christian Doctrine*, which he began immediately after the period of his intense focus upon Paul (394–6). In this chapter, we have presented the

[39] *De doct. Christ.* 1.4.4. [40] *De cons. evang.* 4.10.20.

[41] The same suggestion is made by Van Fleteren 1977, p. 21: 'Augustine's professional duties no doubt took him into the work of refuting the Manicheans more directly and away from the Neo-platonic ascent of the soul. But it was the decisive and thorough readings of Paul in 394-395 that finally convinced him of the impossibility of this project.' An excellent description of the circumstances surrounding Augustine's rereading of Paul may be found in Brown 2000, pp. 139–50.

evidence for this conclusion without making reference to the *Confessions*. However, *Confessions* 7.21.27 clearly confirms this point. There we are told that it was Augustine's rereading of Paul that finally led him to discover the difference between Platonism and Christianity. As I argued in part I, this discovery must be dated to *c.* 395. Augustine's intellectual conversion to Christianity was not complete until this time.

CHAPTER 7

The Ostia ascent

In the previous chapter I argued that the Platonic ascents of *Confessions* 7.10.16 and 7.17.23 are descriptions of the method of ascent that Augustine was developing from 386 to 391, and that Augustine did not reject this method of ascent until 396, in *On Christian Doctrine*. If I am correct about this, then I have provided additional support for the central claim of part I – i.e. that Augustine did not reject his Photinian Christology until *c.* 395 – since the author of the *Confessions* indicates that his rejection of this Christology is linked with his rejection of the 'Platonic ascents'. However, there is a specific consequence of my argument that may seem somewhat problematic. My argument has the Platonic ascents continuing after the famous ascent shared by Augustine and his mother Monica, an ascent that occurred at Ostia in 387, sometime between Augustine's baptism in April and his birthday on 13 November.[1] However, the Ostia experience is clearly presented by the narrator of the *Confessions* as a model of a successful ascent of the soul, in contradistinction to the failed attempts of book 7. What distinguishes the Platonic ascents from the Ostia ascent, as we will see, is that only the latter relies upon the Mediator. Can we really maintain, then, that Augustine continued with his Platonic ascents even after the much more successful experience that he attained at Ostia? Indeed, does the presence of the Mediator at Ostia not suggest that I am mistaken in my claim that Augustine did not recognize the Mediator until the mid-390s? In this chapter I will address these concerns.

The narrator of the *Confessions* situates the Ostia experience within the context of his description of the life of Monica. In fact, the experience is presented as the culmination of her earthly life: she fell ill about five days later and did not recover.[2] Here is the passage, undoubtedly one of the most beautiful moments in Augustine's *oeuvre:*

[1] Augustine tells us at *Conf.* 9.11.28 that Monica died in the thirty-third year of his life, and at *De beat. vit.* 1.6 that his birthday is the Ides of November.

[2] *Conf.* 9.11.27ff.

When the day was approaching on which she was to depart this life – a day that You knew though we did not – it came about, as I believe by Your secret arrangement, that she and I stood alone leaning in a window, which looked inwards to the garden within the house where we were staying, at Ostia on the Tiber; for there we were away from everybody, resting for the sea-voyage from the weariness of our long journey by land. There we talked together, she and I alone, in deep joy, and forgetting the things that were behind and stretching out to those that were before [*praeterita obliviscentes in ea quae ante sunt extenti*] [Phil. 3:13], we were discussing in the presence of Truth, which You are [John 14:6], what the eternal life of the saints could be like, which eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man [1 Cor. 2:9]. But with the mouth of our heart we panted for the high waters of Your fountain, the fountain of the life which is with You: that being sprinkled from that fountain according to our capacity, we might in some sense meditate upon so great a matter. And our conversation had brought us to this point, that any pleasure whatsoever of the bodily senses, in any brightness whatsoever of corporeal light, seemed to us not worthy of comparison with the pleasure of that eternal Light, not worthy even of mention. Rising as our love flamed upward towards that Selfsame [*in id ipsum*] [Ps. 4:9], we passed in review the various levels of bodily things, up to the heavens themselves, whence sun and moon and stars shine upon this earth. And higher still we soared, thinking in our minds and speaking and marvelling at Your works: and so we came to our own souls, and went beyond them to come at last to that region of richness unending, where You feed Israel forever with the food of truth: and there life is that Wisdom by which all things are made, both the things that have been and the things which are yet to be. But this Wisdom itself is not made: it is as it has ever been, and so it shall be forever: indeed "has ever been" and "shall be forever" have no place in it, but it simply is, for it is eternal: whereas "to have been" and "to be going to be" are not eternal. And while we were thus talking of His Wisdom and panting for it, with all the effort of our heart we did for one instant attain to touch it; then sighing, and leaving the first fruits of our spirit [*primitias spiritus*] [Rom. 8:23] bound to it, we returned to the sound of our own tongue, in which a word has both beginning and ending. So we said: If to any man the tumult of the flesh grew silent, silent the images of earth and sea and air: and if the heavens grew silent, and the very soul grew silent to herself and by not thinking of self mounted beyond self: if all dreams and imagined visions grew silent, and every tongue and every sign and whatsoever is transient – for indeed if any man could hear them, he should hear them saying with one voice: We did not make ourselves, but He made us who abides forever: but if, having uttered this and so set us to listening to Him who made them, they all grew silent, and in their silence He alone spoke to us, not by them but by Himself: so that we should hear His word, not by any tongue of flesh nor the voice of an angel nor the sound of thunder nor in the darkness of a parable [1 Cor. 13:12], but that we should hear Himself whom in all these things we love, should hear Himself and not them: just as we two had but now reached forth [*extendimus*] and in a flash of the mind attained to touch the eternal

Wisdom which abides over all: and if this could continue, and all other visions so different be quite taken away, and this one should so ravish and absorb and wrap the beholder in inward joys that his life should eternally be such as that one moment of understanding for which we had been sighing – would not this be: Enter Thou into the joy of Thy Lord [Matt. 25:21]? But when shall it be? Shall it be when we shall all rise again and shall not all be changed [1 Cor. 15:51]? Such thoughts I uttered, though not in that order or in those actual words; but You know, O Lord, that on that day when we talked of these things the world with all its delights seemed cheap to us in comparison with what we talked of. And my mother said: "Son, for my own part I no longer find joy in anything in this world. What I am still to do here and why I am here I know not, now that I no longer hope for anything from this world. One thing there was, for which I desired to remain still a little longer in this life, that I should see you a Catholic Christian before I died. This God has granted me in superabundance, in that I now see you His servant to the contempt of all worldly happiness. What then am I doing here?"[3]

Let us begin by noting just how similar the Ostia ascent is to the Platonic ascents, on the schema identified by Courcelle.[4] At Ostia, Augustine and Monica arrive at the truth above their own souls (cf. 2, from Courcelle's schema); their ascent takes place by degrees, beginning with the things that are made – the various levels of bodily things, including the heavenly bodies, and their own souls – and moving on to the eternal Wisdom that is not made (cf. 3, 4 and 7); and their experience gives them only a fleeting moment of understanding (cf. 5 and 6). Even the 'books of the Platonists' are not far from view (cf. 1). Monica had not read them, of course, but a number of Plotinian echoes have been identified in Augustine's retelling of the experience.[5] By casting his experience in Plotinian terms, the narrator of the *Confessions* is granting to the 'books of the Platonists' an important place in his Ostia ascent.

It would appear, then, that all of the stages of Augustine's Platonic ascents, as identified by Courcelle, have their parallels in the Ostia ascent. How, then, are we to distinguish between them? Notice first of all that this ascent, particularly its culmination at 9.10.25, is described not as a 'vision' but rather (as O'Donnell has noted) as an 'audition'. This is in contrast with the Platonic ascents, in which the verb *vidi* occurs six times.[6] What is the significance of this shift from sight to hearing? It is interesting that a similar shift occurs at *Confessions* 7.10.16, as Augustine recalls that when he first

[3] *Conf.* 9.10.23–6 (trans. F. J. Sheed). [4] See above, pp. 132–3.
[5] Cf. especially Henry 1938; Courcelle 1950. [6] O'Donnell 1992, vol. III, p. 128.

knew God, he could see that there was something to see but that he was not yet able to see it. He could only *hear* God speaking to him from afar. Although this was sufficient to make him certain of the existence of truth, it is clear that this did not satisfy him at the time. He wanted to see rather than simply hear, and the ascent at 7.17.23 indicates the progress he made in this regard: he finally saw the invisible things of God, although only fleetingly. At Ostia, however, he is satisfied to hear and not see. What conclusions may we draw from this fact?

The fact that the Ostia ascent is not an attempt at vision suggests that it is different in kind from the Platonic ascents. The omission of any reference to vision provides us with an interesting clue; might it be the case that the participants in the ascent are 'walking by faith and not by sight'? Consider the following passage, from the fourth book of *On the Trinity*:

> They [sc. certain Platonists] declare that they can purify themselves by their own power, because some of them have been able to impel the vision of their mind beyond all created things and to touch the light of immutable truth, if only to a slight extent. Moreover, they scorn many Christians, who, living at present by faith alone, are not yet capable of this. But what good is it for a man who is proud, and therefore ashamed to ascend the wood, to glimpse from afar his homeland across the sea? And what harm is it if a humble man, who is not able to see his homeland from such a great distance, is yet coming to it on that wood, which the other man deems unworthy to carry him?[7]

In this passage, Augustine contrasts the meagre vision of the Platonists, a vision that has no salvific efficacy, with the saving faith of the (visionless) Christian. The polemic here mirrors that which is found in the *Confessions*. Here Augustine has the Platonists arrogantly claiming that intellectual purification is possible for those who can attain the vision of the unchangeable truth in this life; this is precisely what Augustine was attempting after reading the 'books of the Platonists', the 'books of pride', in 386. Augustine's criticism of this pride here is substantially identical to his criticism in the *Confessions*: 'It is one thing to *see* the land of peace from a wooded mountaintop [= to glimpse from afar one's homeland across the sea], yet not find the way to it and struggle hopelessly far from the way … and quite another to hold to the way that leads there [= to be carried humbly on the wood].'[8] The way, of course, is 'the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ'. The Christian holds to this way by faith, and not by attempting to glimpse the light of truth in the manner of the Platonists.

[7] *De Trin.* 4.15.20. [8] *Conf.* 7.21.27.

Another difference between the Ostia ascent and the Platonic ascents is that Augustine narrates the former – but not the latter – in the first person plural.[9] There is a social aspect to the Ostia ascent,[10] while the Platonic ascents appear to be solitary endeavours. We should not make too much of this point, however. Consider the fact that a conversation between Augustine and Evodius also serves as the occasion for the ascent of the soul in *On Free Choice of the Will*, an ascent that is of the same type as the supposedly solitary ascent that is recounted at *Confessions* 7.17.23. In itself, there appears to be nothing too remarkable about the fact that Augustine has a companion at Ostia. Augustine was never an introverted mystic, seeking 'the flight of the alone to the alone'. What is remarkable, however, is the fact that Augustine's companion at Ostia is not an Evodius, Licentius or Alypius, or any other devotee of philosophy or the liberal disciplines, preparing himself for the knowledge of God and the soul. His companion is instead Monica, an uneducated but eminently faithful Christian. This is significant, for there can be no suspicion that Monica has been compromised by the pride of Platonic philosophy. Since the Ostia experience is hers just as much as, if not more than, it is Augustine's (after all, the experience appears in the narration of her life), we may safely infer that Augustine means to describe a genuinely Christian experience. And if Augustine means to describe a genuinely Christian experience, then we may also infer, taking our cue from the main argument of book 7, that it is attained with the help of the Mediator. The argument of book 7 may be summarized as follows: for as long as Augustine had been attempting to imitate the method of ascent recommended to him by the 'books of the Platonists', he had been following a path that is unable to lead its adherents to salvation. This is the path of presumption (*praesumptio*), which is sharply distinguished from the path of confession (*confessio*), which he discovered only after his revolutionary rereading of Paul (the 'books of God'), described in 7.21.27. Those who follow the path of presumption 'see what the goal is but do not see the way'; by contrast, those who follow the path of confession see 'the way which leads to the country of blessedness, which we are meant not only to know but to dwell in'.[11] The goal, correctly identified by the Platonic books, is the stable enjoyment of God. The way, which is nowhere to be found in these books, is provided by the Incarnation, that is, the Word made flesh, the Mediator between God and men. We must bear this argument in mind when we analyse the Ostia ascent. While Augustine shares in the experience, it appears in the narration of Monica's life, and

[9] Cf. Starnes 1990, p. 262. [10] Cf. Louth 1981, p. 136. [11] *Conf.* 7.20.26.

should therefore be understood in the first instance as the earthly reward that she received for a life of faith and devotion to God. It is a foretaste of heaven that clearly shows that Monica is on the way to 'the country of blessedness'. Can there be any doubt that this is the way that has been provided by the Mediator?

The passage describing the Ostia ascent contains no direct mention of faith in the Mediator. But this theme is certainly present: in fact, the passage is replete with ideas and phrases that derive from the Incarnational theology Augustine began developing in the mid-390s. Consider the following passage:

> For we walk by faith and not by sight [2 Cor. 5:7]. Even the apostle Paul says that he has not yet comprehended the kingdom of God. He says: 'But forgetting those things that are behind, and stretching out [*extentus*] to those things that are before, I follow according to my intention [*intentio*] the prize of the heavenly calling … Nevertheless, what we have attained, let us walk in that' [Phil. 3:13–14, 16], indicating that, by adhering to the Lord on the third day and in being fed by Him, we shall not expire along the way.[12]

Here Augustine links Phil. 3:13 and 2 Cor. 5:7. When Paul says that he is 'forgetting those things that are behind, and stretching out to those things that are before', Augustine takes him to be describing the condition of the Christian who 'walks by faith and not by sight'. Notice that Phil. 3:13 is also the text with which the description of the Ostia ascent begins; Augustine and Monica are 'forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching out to those things that are before', which indicates that they too, like Paul, are still walking by faith and not by sight. This is the condition of the Christian who adheres to and is fed by the Lord 'on the third day'. The third day represents the third of the four stages in the life of the Christian. The four stages, it will be recalled, are: before the law, under the law, under grace and in peace.[13] Before the law, man is ignorant of sin. Under the law, man is conscious of sin but incapable of resisting it. Under grace, man has received a mind that serves the law of God, although he continues to struggle with the law of the flesh for as long as he is in this life. In this stage, a person can say: 'with the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin'. In peace, there is no longer any conflict between the law of the mind and the law of the flesh. At Ostia, Augustine and Monica are in the third stage; they are 'walking by faith and not by sight', they have received a mind that serves the

[12] *De div. q. 83* 61.7.
[13] On these stages, and their development in Augustine's thought, see above, pp. 93ff.

law of God, and they are feeding on 'the food of truth' in 'the region of richness unending'. They can go no further in this life.

However, at Ostia Augustine and Monica are 'stretching forth' (*extenti*) to the things that ahead in the fourth and final stage. In this stage, 'we shall achieve the abundant peace of the heavenly Jerusalem for which all strive [*tendere*] who correctly believe in Christ'.[14] The narrator of the *Confessions* gives us to understand that a foretaste of this heavenly Jerusalem was attained at Ostia, as we can see from a consideration of the unique term used to describe the object of the ascent: the 'Self-same' (*idipsum*).[15] Augustine's use of this term should be understood in the context of his interpretation of Ps. 121:3. Consider the following passage, from the third book of *On the Trinity*:

> Although it is mutable, [the soul] may still participate in that immutable Wisdom, that is, it may participate in the Self-same [*idipsum*], as it is written in the Psalm about all the saints, from whom as from living stones that Jerusalem, our eternal mother in heaven, is built. For so it is sung: 'Jerusalem, which is built as a city, participating in the Self-same' [Ps. 121:3]. Indeed, in this place 'Self-same' is to be understood as that highest and immutable good, which is God, both His wisdom and His will, to whom it is sung in another place: 'You shall change them, and they shall be changed. But You Yourself are the same'. [1 Cor. 15:51; Ps. 101.27-8].[16]

In this passage, the heavenly Jerusalem is understood as a city composed of all the saints, partaking in the Self-same, i.e. the immutable God. Compare this with the Ostia ascent, which begins with Augustine and Monica discussing 'what the eternal life of the saints could be like', and concludes with their having momentarily touched the eternal Wisdom, the Self-same of which the saints partake eternally. Their experience is qualitatively identical to that of the saints; the difference is that the saints partake of the Self-same eternally, while Augustine and Monica have achieved only an ephemeral foretaste of this blessed life. They remain in the third stage, and are still striving towards the heavenly Jerusalem. In order to pass from the third to the fourth stage, as the passage from *On the Trinity* suggests, they must be sanctified and changed by the Self-same ('You shall change them, and they shall be changed'), and thereby made fit to partake in immutable eternity. This is also what is suggested at the conclusion of the Ostia account, as the eternal experience of the saints in heaven is distinguished from the 'one moment of understanding for which [Augustine and Monica] had been sighing'. Augustine and Monica, and all those who have not yet joined the saints in eternity, are still awaiting the transformation that will

[14] *De div. q. 83* 61.7. [15] This term is discussed by Solignac, *BA* 14, pp. 550–2. [16] *De Trin*. 3.2.8.

bring them into the presence of the eternal and immutable Self-same. In particular, they are still awaiting the future resurrection of the body ('Enter Thou into the joy of Thy Lord. But when shall it be? Shall it be when we shall all rise again and shall not all be changed?'). Until this occurs, they are held back from the vision of God, for they have not yet escaped the conflict between the law of the mind and the law of the flesh. This is the condition of the Christian in this life, in which he can only look forward in hope to his future redemption. This anticipatory state is signified by the sighing of Augustine and Monica, which reflects Augustine's interpretation of Rom. 8:19–23:

> [19] For the creation [*creatura*] waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; [20] for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of Him who subjected it in hope; [21] because also creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation [*omnis creatura*] groans and suffers pain up to the present time. [23] And not only this, but we ourselves, having [our] spirits as firstfruits, groan inwardly awaiting adoption and the resurrection of our bodies. [Rom. 8:19-23][17]

Augustine discusses Rom. 8:19–23 most fully in question 67 of *Eighty-three Different Questions* and in *Commentary on Certain Passages from the Letter to the Romans* 45 (53). We need not be detained by all the details of his discussion, such as the various meanings he ascribes to *creatura*.[18] What is of particular interest for our purpose is Augustine's understanding of the distinction between the 'whole creation' and 'we ourselves' who have the *primitiae spiritus*. This distinction is a rather puzzling one, for, as Augustine notes, it would seem to suggest that we are not a part of 'the whole creation'.[19] Augustine understands *omnis creatura* as a reference, not to all of creation in general, but to the human creature in particular. He justifies his interpretation by noting that Paul does not say 'the entire creation' (*tota creatura*) but rather 'the whole creation' (*omnis creatura*).[20] The 'whole creation' that is man is composed of three distinct parts: body (*corpus*), soul (*anima*) and spirit (*spiritus*). Body is extended in space, soul is what gives life to the body, and spirit is what governs the soul and is in turn governed by God.[21] The 'whole creation' – body, soul and spirit – is

[17] Augustine cites this passage on a number of occasions, with some variations in the text. Here I follow Alfeche 1984, p. 6, making a few modifications to the translation.

[18] Briefly, it might be noted that Augustine understands *creatura* in Rom. 8:19–23 to be referring at times to every human being, and at other times only to Christian believers, either those who are presently believers or those who will become believers in the future. For a detailed analysis, see Alfeche 1984.

[19] *De div. q. 83* 67.1. [20] *De div. q. 83* 67.5. [21] *De div. q. 83* 67.5.

pained by the troubles of the body,[22] and looks forward to the coming redemption. But it is not only the 'whole creation' but also 'we ourselves', we who have the *primitiae spiritus*, who await the redemption.

What does Augustine mean by *primitiae spiritus*? Pépin has shown that Augustine understands the expression in a temporal sense, as the first offering of the spirit.[23] The term 'spirit' requires some clarification. As Pépin notes, Augustine frequently uses the term in a psychological or anthropological sense, so as to designate something that is common to all men by nature.[24] Augustine's use of the term in this sense is very broad. He says: 'whatever is not a body, and yet is something, is rightly called spirit'.[25] Thus, *spiritus* can sometimes designate the irrational part of the soul, as distinct from the rational or intellectual part of the soul; at other times it can designate the whole soul.[26] However, *spiritus* is not being used in a psychological or anthropological sense when it forms the expression *primitiae spiritus*. In this expression, *spiritus* refers to the mind that struggles against the habits of the flesh. Consider the following passage:

> When he [Paul] says 'The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh' [Gal. 5:17], you should not suppose this is only a reference to the spirit of man. It is the spirit of God that fights in you against you, against that in you which is against you.[27]

In this passage, *spiritus* refers not to the spirit that is in all men by nature, but rather to the spirit of God that some men have received by grace. This spirit is the mind that serves the law of God, and is engaged in a constant struggle against the flesh that serves the law of sin.[28] As we have seen, this constitutes the third stage in the life of the Christian. In this stage the mind is still anticipating the things that are to come, i.e. the restoration of the flesh (the restoration of the soul that, by habit, lusts after carnal things) and the resurrection of the body.[29] At that time, the 'whole creation' – body, soul and spirit – will be delivered and will cease groaning and suffering pain. But in the meantime, the person who has received 'the mind that serves the law of God' has already offered the 'firstfruits of the spirit' (*primitiae spiritus*) to God in sacrifice:

> Paul has rightly said 'having the firstfruits of the spirit', that is, the spirit of those who have been offered to God as if they are sacrifices and who have been united by the divine fire of love. These are man's firstfruits, because the truth first takes

[22] *De div. q. 83* 61.6.
[23] Pépin 1951, especially p. 190. [24] Pépin 1951, p. 177. [25] *De Gen. ad litt.* 12.7.16.
[26] For passages and discussion, including the Porphyrian background, see Pépin 1951, pp. 177–9.
[27] *Serm.* 128.6.9; cf. *De Trin.* 5.14.15. [28] Cf. *De fid. et sym.* 10.23. [29] Cf. *De fid. et sym.* 10.23.

possession of our spirit so that through our spirit the other things may be united [by the divine fire of love]. Therefore he already has the firstfruits offered to God who says: 'with the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh, the law of sin'. [Rom. 7:25][30]

The *primitiae spiritus* signifies the presence in a person of that faith beyond which one cannot go in this life, and which will be replaced by the beatific vision in the next life:

And if this is accomplished by faith, by which one walks righteously in this life, how much more perfectly and completely will it be accomplished by sight itself, when we will see face to face [1 Cor. 13:12]? For now *we have the firstfruits of the spirit, which is life, on account of the righteousness of faith*; however, the body is still dead on account of sin [Rom. 8:10, 23].[31]

These considerations should suffice to show that the Ostia ascent is described in terms of the Incarnational theology that Augustine began developing in the mid-390s. From the perspective of the narrator of the *Confessions*, the Ostia ascent is made possible by faith in the Mediator. At Ostia, Augustine and Monica are in the third stage of life: they are walking by faith and not by sight, they are striving for the peace of the heavenly Jerusalem, and they are groaning in anticipation of the coming redemption. The 'faithful ascent' culminates with their having attained a brief foretaste of what lies before, and having left 'the firstfruits of their spirit' bound to the Wisdom of God (i.e. Christ). This is as far as the Christian can go in this life: he cannot hope to subdue the flesh completely and to effect a complete escape from this mortal body.

It might be asked why the 'faithful' (i.e. Christian) ascent is superior to the 'rational' (i.e. Platonic) ascent, since both experiences are fleeting. In fact, it might even seem that the latter is superior in that it enables one to catch a glimpse of God with the 'sight' of the mind, rather than to 'touch' God through faith alone. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the goal is not to attain a fleeting glimpse, but to attain a permanent vision. And the Platonic ascents can offer nothing more than fleeting glimpses, which is why they are frustrating for the soul that attempts to attain a stable vision of God. By contrast, the foretaste of the blessed life that is available through the Christian ascent is of value for more than just the fleeting experience itself. Consider the following passage:

The whole life of a good Christian is a holy longing [*sanctum desiderium*]. What you long for you do not yet see, but by longing you are made capacious so that when

[30] *De div. q. 83* 67.6. [31] *Exp. Gal.* 28.2–3.

what you are to see has come, you may be filled. For just as, if you should wish to fill a pocket, and you know how big the object that will be put in is, you stretch the pocket, whether made of sackcloth or leather or any thing – you know how large a thing you will place there, and you see that the pocket is narrow. By stretching [*extendendo*] you make it more capacious. So God, by postponing, stretches the longing, by longing stretches the soul, by stretching makes it capacious [*Deus differendo extendit desiderium, desiderando extendit animum, extendendo facit capacem*] … What then are you doing in this life if you have not yet apprehended? 'But one thing: having forgotten the things that are behind, having stretched to those things that are ahead, in keeping with my aim, I follow on to the prize of the high calling' … This is our life, that we should be trained by longing. But holy longing trains [*exercet*] us to the extent that we have pruned our longings away from the love of this world … let us stretch ourselves to Him so that when He has come, He may fill [us]. For 'we shall be like to Him because we shall see Him as he is'.[32]

Just as one must stretch a pocket to the size that is sufficient to accommodate a given object, so too must the soul be appropriately stretched in order to be filled by the grace of God. It is for this reason that God has 'postponed' (*differre*) the vision. Postponement causes the soul to be stretched (*extentus*) by holy longing. This longing is the permanent condition of the Christian in this life and is precisely that which trains (*exercere*) the soul, drawing it away from love of the world and making it fit to be filled by the grace of God. Contrast this with the Platonic ascent, which requires training in the liberal disciplines in order to purify the mind of its attachment to sensible things. The purpose of this training is to attain the vision of God in this life, which means that any postponement of the ascent (as is described at *On Free Choice of the Will* 2.16.42) can only be regarded as a setback. One must continue striving to overcome this setback through further strengthening of the eye of the mind.

In 387 Augustine would not have seen this difference between the Christian and Platonic ascents. It is the narrator of the *Confessions* who regards the Ostia ascent as an improvement on the Platonic ascents; there is no reason to suppose that this judgement would have been shared by the man who was actually undertaking the ascents. In 387 Augustine undoubtedly regarded the Ostia ascent as inferior to the Platonic ascents that he had been attempting and would continue to attempt. Perhaps he regarded the foretaste of heaven that he had experienced at Ostia as the highest earthly reward for those who, 'content with authority alone and either despising or unable to be instructed in the liberal disciplines, constantly apply themselves only to good morals and an upright prayer life'.[33] But he would not

[32] *Tract. in ep. Io.* 4.6.2. [33] *De ord.* 2.9.26. See above, pp. 118, 205.

have been satisfied with such a fleeting reward for himself. At the time, his goal was to attain a stable vision of Wisdom. He would not have been satisfied with having 'for one instant attained to touch it; then sighing, and leaving "the first fruits of [his] spirit" bound to it'. Augustine would have shared the fleeting experience with Monica, and then returned to his 'books of the disciplines' and to the task of becoming 'a soldier or even a commander of such quality that he flies off to wherever he wants, arriving at that ultimate goal, beyond which he neither can go, nor should go nor wants to go, and leads many others to that goal as well'.[34]

There is one last question to be addressed: how are we to reconcile Augustine's experience in 387 at Ostia, an experience that clearly requires the presence of the Mediator, with our own claim that he did not recognize the Mediator until *c.* 395? This difficulty could be obviated if the Ostia ascent had been Monica's alone, but Augustine's participation in the experience requires us to face up to the difficulty. It might seem that we are caught in a dilemma: either we must deny the presence of the Mediator at Ostia, or we must reject our claim that Augustine did not recognize the Mediator until *c.* 395. Both horns of the dilemma are unacceptable: the latter because it flies in the face of the evidence that we have compiled, and the former because it forces us into a radical revision of a central line of argument in Augustine's autobiography.

In fact the dilemma is not inescapable. Consider the fact that, according to the theology of the narrator of the *Confessions* (and it is of course to this theology that we must turn for a solution, since it is this theology that creates the difficulty in the first place), one may be on the correct path even without a proper understanding of the Mediator. The sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist, are an effective means of conveying grace, irrespective of the condition of the one receiving the sacrament (and, indeed, of the one administering it). In *On Baptism*, composed at more or less the same time as the *Confessions*, Augustine, making appeal to the authority of Cyprian, claims that there is no need for those who had received baptism at the hands of the Donatists to be rebaptized by the Catholics, since

> baptism is to be considered as consecrated through itself, as the Church has received from the words of the gospel. Baptism is not diluted or compromised by any perversity or wickedness, whether of those receiving baptism or those administering baptism.[35]

[34] *De ord.* 2.5.14. See above, p. 114. [35] *De bapt.* 4.10.16.

Again, he insists: 'In the question of baptism we have to consider, not who gives, but what he gives; not who receives, but what he receives; not who has, but what he has.'[36] This is significant for our question. The Ostia vision occurred after Augustine's baptism in the spring of 387, at which time he began to partake of Christ in the Eucharist. This may be the point of the striking images of food and eating that pervade the *Confessions*. Compare the following passages, in which these images are used to describe Augustine's intellectual development:

Confessions 7.10.16

When first I knew You, You lifted me up *so that I might see that there was something to see, but that I was not yet able to see it*. And You beat back the weakness of my gaze, blazing upon me very strongly, and I trembled with love and with dread. And I discovered that I was far from You in the region of unlikeness [*longe … a te in regione dissimilitudinis*], as if I heard Your voice from on high: '*I am the food of grown men: grow and you shall eat Me. And you shall not change Me into yourself like bodily food, but you shall be changed into Me …*'

Confessions 7.17.23

And I was amazed that now I loved You, and not some phantasm in Your place. But I was not enjoying my God firmly. Instead I would be ravished to You by Your beauty, and then torn away from You by my weight, and I would fall into these things with a groan. This weight was carnal habit. Yet the memory of You remained with me. In no way did I doubt that there was One to whom I should cling, but I was not yet one who was capable of clinging, for the corrupted body weighs down the soul, and the earthly habitation presses down the mind that ruminates on many things. *I was altogether certain that Your invisible things are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made … But I was not strong enough*

Confessions 9.10.24

… and so we came to our own souls, and went beyond them to come at last to *that region of richness unending, where You feed Israel forever with the food of truth*: and there life is that Wisdom by which all things are made, both the things that have been and the things which are yet to be.

[36] *De bapt.* 4.10.16.

> *to keep my vision fixed*, and
> my weakness was beaten
> back again so that
> I returned to my
> accustomed habits,
> bearing nothing with me
> but a memory of delight,
> *as if I were desiring*
> *something of which I had*
> *caught the fragrance but*
> *which I was not yet able*
> *to eat*.

At first (7.10.16), Augustine could see that there was something to see, but he was not yet able to see it. This precarious vantage point, at once close to and yet distant from God, is termed 'the region of unlikeness'. Only by 'feeding' on God would it be possible for Augustine to achieve some sort of likeness to God. He would go on to achieve some degree of success in this regard (7.17.23), as he managed to see the invisible things of God. However, he was not able to maintain a fixed gaze. He had now caught the scent of the food that he desired, but he was still not strong enough to 'feed' on God. But at Ostia (9.10.24), Augustine has left 'the region of unlikeness' and entered into 'the region of richness unending', wherein lies 'the food of truth'. Augustine is now strong enough to partake of God.

The image of 'feeding' on God is obviously reminiscent of the Eucharist. Given that Augustine describes his movement towards salvation with images of food and eating, I do not believe it is accidental that he should begin 'feeding' on God only after he was baptized and began to receive the Eucharist. This would be the moment – from the perspective of the narrator of the *Confessions*, of course – that he began to possess the Incarnate Christ.[37] The first ascent occurs prior to his baptism, and so at that point he had not yet fed on God, or even 'caught the fragrance'.

I need not insist on this interpretation, however. Even if this is not the point of the food imagery, it is nevertheless clear that, from the perspective of the narrator of the *Confessions*, there is no difficulty in maintaining both (a) that Augustine had a Photinian view of Jesus until *c.* 395, and (b) that at Ostia Augustine was on the path provided by the Mediator, which leads to

[37] For a reminder of the importance of cult initiation in late antiquity, and its relative importance in Augustine in relation to doctrinal orthodoxy, see O'Donnell 1992, vol. 1, pp. xxviii–xxix.

'the country of blessedness'. One partakes of the Mediator by means of the sacraments, which means that at Ostia the newly baptized Augustine would have been in possession of the Incarnate Christ, even though his Christology remained Photinian. Indeed, to suppose that Augustine could not have received Christ before rejecting Photinianism is to put the cart before the horse. For the author of the *Confessions*, grace is the motive force of the universe; salvation is the prerogative of God. Thus, Augustine did not merit salvation because he corrected his erroneous Christology in the mid-390s; on the contrary, he corrected his erroneous Christology at that time only because he had previously received the grace of God, ensuring that he would be receptive to correction from the Scriptures.

Conclusion: Augustine the Porphyrian

In this book I have advanced a significant new interpretation of *Confessions* 7.9.13–7.21.27. I reject the standard interpretation of this narrative, according to which Augustine is describing events that transpired over the course of a few months in the summer of 386. I also reject O'Connell's view, according to which Augustine is not intending to provide an historical account of his intellectual development in this narrative.[1] My view is that Augustine does mean to recount historical events – moreover, I believe that his recounting is considerably more precise than is generally appreciated – but that the period of time in question extends over roughly ten years (386–*c.* 395). I have supported this contention with two independent, yet complementary, arguments. First, I have argued that the Photinian Christology described at *Confessions* 7.19.25 is to be identified with the Christology of Augustine's early writings (386–*c.* 391), and that Augustine did not reject this Christology until *c.* 395. Second, I have argued that Augustine's 'Platonic ascents' (*Confessions* 7.10.16 and 7.17.23) describe the method of ascent that Augustine was developing from 386 to 391, and that Augustine did not reject this method of ascent until *c.* 395. I believe that this interpretation makes the best sense not only of Augustine's early writings, but also of the narrative in the *Confessions* itself. On the standard reading of this narrative, there are a number of obvious anachronisms that must somehow be accounted for. This problem is of course obviated if one adopts the view that the narrative is not supposed to be read as straight history; however, it seems to me that the best reason to hold this view is to obviate the problem of anachronism. But if my interpretation is adopted, we avoid the problem of anachronism *and* we have no reason to reject the historicity of the narrative. And it seems to me obvious that every reasonable effort should be made to uphold the historical sense of the *Confessions*.

[1] See above, pp. 26, 134.

In my view, the standard reading of *Confessions* 7 has prevented readers of Augustine from adequately appreciating the significance of the developments that transpired in his life and thought in the mid-390s. We may begin to rectify this oversight by reflecting upon the circumstances surrounding the composition of the *Confessions*. Peter Brown has magnificently captured the mood of this time:

> Augustine, indeed, had decided that he would never reach the fulfilment 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 accept: it involved nothing less than the surrender of the bright future he thought he had gained at Cassiciacum … In a decade, hard thought and bitter experience subtly transformed the whole quality of his life; and, in following this deep change, we can appreciate the momentum of the new ideas that had forced themselves upon Augustine as he sat down, around 397, to review and re-interpret his past life in the *Confessions*. For Augustine would pass voraciously from problem to problem: what begins, perhaps, as the dangerous disillusionment of a perfectionist, emerges in the *Confessions* as a new view of man, a reassessment of his potentialities, an exciting and profound discovery of the true sources of his motivation.[2]

The *Confessions* is a remarkable work by any standard of measurement. It is all the more remarkable for having been constructed out of the ruins of Augustine's Platonic period. This work is not the flowering of a project that Augustine had been moulding and crafting for some time. It is instead a sudden, and surprisingly mature, response to what must have been nothing less than a disaster for Augustine. He had just recently come to realize that he – an avowed Christian for about ten years and now a cleric – had failed to appreciate the central doctrine of Christianity: the Incarnation. Along with this came his realization of the utter futility of the project of ascent into which he had poured his efforts. If ever Augustine had reason to be disillusioned, it was while reading Paul in the mid-390s. He says: 'I considered Your works and I trembled.'[3] And yet he did not succumb to despair. In the *Confessions*, Augustine would reinvent himself and reinterpret his past, bequeathing to posterity the official story of his early life leading up to his conversion to Christianity.

Perhaps the most pressing question facing the author of the *Confessions* was the very same question that has preoccupied his modern interpreters: what was the precise significance of his conversion in 386? Augustine the

[2] Brown 2000, pp. 140–1. [3] *Conf.* 7.21.27.

narrator distinguishes his 'intellectual conversion' from his 'volitional conversion' (although these terms, of course, are not his); the former is described in book 7 and the latter in book 8. He does not identify his intellectual conversion with his conversion to Christianity itself; he clearly places the emphasis upon the garden scene. But is this how he viewed matters in 386? It is significant that the early Augustine is silent about his garden experience, thinks that the Platonic philosophers can become Christians merely 'with the change of a few words and sentiments', and attaches very little significance to the struggles of the will. The early Augustine is deeply impressed by the intellectual potential offered by Platonic philosophy, even going so far as to assert: 'I am confident for the time being that I will find with the Platonists what is not in opposition to our sacred rites.'[4]

Augustine was far too optimistic on this point, as he makes abundantly clear with his scathing critique of Porphyry in *The City of God*. It is interesting to consider this critique in light of Augustine's own views from 386 to *c*. 395. Porphyry recognizes that the end of the soul is union with the triune God.[5] He recognizes that only a few are capable of reaching God with their intellects.[6] For those who are not so capable, he recognizes the need for some sort of intermediary between man and God. Most importantly, he fails to recognize the true Mediator, the Word made flesh. All of these descriptions fit the early Augustine just as well as they do Porphyry. Moreover, the main obstacle to Porphyry's acceptance of the Word made flesh is present in Augustine's early writings as well. For Porphyry, salvation requires the 'complete escape from the body', which is of course antithetical to the Word made flesh. This requirement led Porphyry to reject the concept of the Incarnation of the Word, and the death that this entailed,[7] as well as the concept of bodily resurrection.[8] Porphyry even posited the mediation of demons, since demons have aerial rather than corporeal bodies, instead of the Word made flesh. Augustine did not share Porphyry's demonology,[9] but he too had made salvation dependent upon the 'complete escape from the body'. It is not at all surprising, then, that he too should have failed to recognize the Word made flesh. Until Paul's writings opened his eyes to this truth, in the person of the Mediator, he had regarded the death of Jesus as nothing more than an example of the flight from the body. Thus, Augustine's attacks on Porphyry in *The City of*

[4] *C. Acad.* 3.20.43. [5] *De civ. Dei* 10.29. [6] *De civ. Dei* 10.29. [7] *De civ. Dei* 10.24, 10.28.
[8] *De Trin.* 4.16.21; *De civ. Dei* 12.27, 13.19, 22.12, 22.25–6.
[9] But note his 'sacrilegious curiosity' at Carthage; cf. *Conf.* 3.3.5; *De civ. Dei* 2.4, 26.2.

God are entirely of a piece with his complaints about the pride exhibited in the 'books of the Platonists', and with his complaints about his own pride after having read these books. It was only after his 'Pauline revolution' in the mid-390s that all of this became apparent to him.

And so the substance of Augustine's anti-Platonic invective in *The City of God*, while ostensibly directed at Porphyry, is also applicable to his younger self. Like Porphyry, the early Augustine had failed to recognize the Incarnation, including the salvific work of Christ's death and resurrection, precisely because of the doctrine that the salvation of the rational soul requires the complete escape from the body. None of this requires us to suppose that the early Augustine was directly influenced by Porphyry; however, it does suggest that Porphyrian influence upon Augustine's early thought may be more extensive than is generally recognized.

Most scholars are open, at least in principle, to the possibility that Porphyry was an important influence upon Augustine's early thought. But actual estimates of Porphyry's influence tend to be conservative.[10] There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, little of Porphyry's corpus has survived, which means that our knowledge of the philosopher is limited and provisional, to say nothing of our knowledge of his influence upon Augustine. Secondly, Augustine does not mention Porphyry by name until about 400,[11] while Plotinus is named three times already in 386.[12] Henry takes this fact as support for his view that only Plotinus was included in the 'books of the Platonists'.[13] However, it should be borne in mind that Augustine also names Plato (along with Plotinus) twice in 386,[14] despite having minimal acquaintance with Plato's writings.[15] Could it be that Augustine is invoking Plotinus, like Plato, rather more as a figurehead for the philosophy of 'Platonism' than as an actual source of his reading at the time? Another reason for conservatism has to do with the apparently anti-Christian character of (at least some of) Porphyry's writings. It is still widely supposed that Augustine could not have been familiar with such writings as *Philosophy from Oracles* until *c.* 400.[16] Supporting this view is an argument *ex silentio*, which, on the surface, might seem plausible enough. It goes like this. Had Augustine been familiar with the *Philosophy from Oracles* before

[10] The obvious exception is Theiler 1933, who claimed that Augustine never read Plotinus at all, but derived his Platonism solely from Porphyry. But Theiler has not been followed on this point. A more restrained case for Porphyry can be found in the writings of O'Meara.

[11] *De cons. evang.* 1.15.23. [12] *De beat. vit.* 1.4; *C. Acad.* 3.19.41; *Sol.* 1.4.9; cf. Nebridius' remark in *Ep.* 6.

[13] Cf. Henry 1934, pp. 70, 214. [14] *C. Acad.* 3.19.41; *Sol.* 1.4.9.

[15] On Augustine's knowledge of Plato, see Courcelle 1969, pp. 168–71.

[16] A good exponent of this position is TeSelle 1970, pp. 71, 124–5.

400, he surely would have issued a scathing rebuke of the sacrilege contained within. Since he does not issue any such rebuke until 400 (the first time he mentions Porphyry by name, in fact), he must not have encountered the *Philosophy from Oracles* much before this time. Thus, TeSelle, for example, says:

> From what Augustine says about Porphyry in *The City of God* it is evident that he was the cause of this sudden flurry of activity; but how much earlier than 400 his influence was felt is less certain. Since the discovery of the anti-Christian animus of this leader of neo-Platonism brought about some major changes in Augustine's thinking, we must devote some attention to the character of his attacks on the Platonists and ask when and how it was that Porphyry 'cast his shadow between Plotinus and Augustine.'[17]

What, in fact, would Augustine have read in a work like *Philosophy from Oracles*? Because the work is lost, we can only reconstruct its contents indirectly. Courcelle has gathered some evidence from Augustine's testimony,[18] and this evidence paints a very interesting picture of the work. In *The Agreement of the Evangelists* (composed at roughly the same time as the *Confessions*), Augustine attributes especially to the pagans the view that Christ is a man of the most eminent wisdom, the wisest of men, but nevertheless only a man and not also God.[19] He says that 'their more recent Platonic philosophers' have maintained that 'no rational soul can become wise except by participation in [Saturn's] highest and immutable wisdom'.[20] Augustine also indicates, citing Porphyry as his source, that these philosophers had been compelled by their own oracles to praise Christ.[21] These are undoubtedly the oracles preserved in Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles*, and discussed by Augustine at *The City of God* 19.23. He tells us that in *Philosophy from Oracles*, Hecate praises Christ as 'a most pious man, but only a man'. However, she criticizes the Christians, because they believe Christ to be no mere man but God Himself. In Porphyry's words:

> To those who asked whether Christ is God, Hecate said, 'You know that the immortal soul, after it has been separated from the body, always errs if it is cut off from wisdom. Christ's soul is that of a man with the most excellent piety: they worship this soul because they are far from the truth.'[22]

On Hecate's view, the respect accorded by the gods to the memory of Christ, on account of his piety and attainment of immortality, cannot be extended to the Christians. Their worship of Christ as God renders them

[17] TeSelle 1970, pp. 237–8. [18] Courcelle 1954, pp. 66–8. [19] *De cons. evang.* 1.7.11.
[20] *De cons. evang.* 1.23.35. [21] *De cons. evang.* 1.15.23. [22] *De civ. Dei* 19.23.

'defiled, contaminated and implicated in error'.[23] Whoever believes in the kind of Christ praised by Hecate, and by the demons, is explicitly labelled a 'Photinian heretic' by Augustine:

> They [i.e. the demons] praise Christ in such a way that whoever believes in the kind of Christ they proclaim is not a true Christian but a Photinian heretic, recognizing Christ only as a man and not as God also.[24]

The bishop writing *The City of God* disapproves of Hecate's praising Christ as only a man, just as he disapproves of Apollo's condemning Christ as a wicked man who was rightly sentenced to death. Both Hecate and Apollo, Augustine says, are at one in their design to prevent men from being Christians.[25] But how times change! As I have argued in part 1 of this book, Augustine himself had fallen into Photinian error for some time after encountering the 'books of the Platonists' in 386. We cannot be sure that *Philosophy from Oracles* was included among these books, but if it was, it is entirely possible that Augustine's Photinianism had been influenced by this source.[26]

TeSelle is certainly correct when he notes that 'some major changes in Augustine's thinking' ensued from his discovery of '*the anti-Christian animus* of this leader of neo-Platonism'. But if I am correct in claiming that until *c.* 395 Augustine's Christology had been of the Photinian sort described at *Confessions* 7.19.25, then Augustine would also have been discovering *his own* anti-Christian animus *c.* 395! Prior to that time

[23] Cf. *De cons. evang.* 1.15.23. [24] *De civ. Dei* 19.23. [25] *De civ. Dei*. 19.23.

[26] The general sense of the narrative of *Confessions* 7 is certainly consistent with the possibility that the 'books of the Platonists' influenced the development of Augustine's early Christology, and prevented him from recognizing the true significance of the Word made Flesh. Augustine indicates that the promise of reason contained in the 'books of the Platonists' had instilled in him a confidence that quickly slipped into intellectual arrogance. He had become 'puffed up with knowledge', and was 'chattering away as if knowledgeable' (*Conf.* 7.20.26). He supposed that he could reach God with his own strength. This attitude was entirely consonant with what he found in the books themselves, which had been composed by those who were clever enough to see the goal but could not in their pride discern the way. And this pride prevented Augustine from recognizing the divinity of the man Jesus Christ:

> I was not humble enough to hold my humble God Jesus … He built for Himself amongst inferior things a humble house of our mud, so that He might bring down from themselves those who were to be subdued, and bring them up to Himself, healing their pride and nourishing their love. He did this so that their self-confidence would grow no more but would be weakened instead, seeing the deity at their feet in a weakened state because of His participation in our coat of skin, and so they might become exhausted and throw themselves down upon it and it might raise them when it rises. (*Conf.* 7.18.24)

As the narrator of the *Confessions* sees it, he had lacked the humility that was necessary for recognizing the Incarnate Christ during the time that he was enchanted by the 'books of the Platonists', the 'books of pride'.

Augustine's view of Christ would have been more or less congruous with Porphyry's view of Christ, as expressed in the *Philosophy from Oracles*. It was not until *c.* 395 that the anti-Christian character of his own writings – let alone those of Porphyry – would have become apparent to Augustine. Moreover, he would have owed this new insight to his new understanding of Paul, and not to a sudden discovery of the *Philosophy from Oracles*. Of course, it is possible that Augustine discovered this work around the same time that he was grappling with Paul. But that would be nothing more than a coincidence. We can derive no support for this possibility from Augustine's new attitude towards Porphyry, since this attitude is a product of his new understanding of Paul. There is no need to explain Augustine's later hostility towards Platonism by positing his relatively late discovery of this or that blasphemous work of Porphyry, whether *Against the Christians* or *Philosophy from Oracles* (*On the Return of the Soul* seems in general to be allowed an earlier date by scholars, if only because it is presumed neutral towards Christianity). In my view, Augustine's later hostility towards Porphyry is entirely consistent with Porphyry's having exerted (even through his 'anti-Christian' writings) a significant influence upon Augustine's early writings. Augustine's early views are strikingly similar to those of 'Porphyry the non-Christian'. There is no reason, then, to dismiss the possibility that Porphyry influenced Augustine's Photinian Christology. Moreover, it is entirely possible – however paradoxical it might seem – that this ancient nemesis of Christianity actually played a role in inspiring Augustine's conversion in 386.

Porphyry is certainly not an unambiguous figure for Augustine, even in his later writings. In *The City of God*, Porphyry is castigated as a 'false philosopher' because of his *omne corpus esse fugiendum*,[27] and yet he is also praised as a 'noble philosoper',[28] indeed, 'the most learned of philosophers'.[29] And in spite of Porphyry's opposition to Christianity, Augustine cannot have regarded him as too far from the truth, for he surmises that a brief exchange of views between Porphyry and Plato might well have led both men to become Christians.[30] What are we to make of Augustine's ambivalent attitude towards Porphyry? And why does the mature Augustine devote so much attention to this Platonist in the first place? That Porphyry – and not Plotinus – is the Platonist most on Augustine's radar in *The City of God*, and that the Tyrian philosopher is both highly praised and strongly censured in that work, might suggest that it is he who had been the stronger influence upon Augustine's initiation into Platonism in 386,

[27] *Retract.* 1.4.3. [28] *De civ. Dei* 7.25. [29] *De civ. Dei* 19.22. [30] *De civ. Dei* 22.27.

and consequently the first to be assaulted when Augustine turned sour on Platonism. Of course, there is also the fact that Porphyry was a direct threat to Christianity. While Plotinus exhibits no interest in the new cult, Porphyry attacks it head-on: indeed, his lost work *Against the Christians* is regarded as the outstanding pagan critique of Christianity in the ancient world. Can we say, then, that Augustine's focus upon Porphyry is motivated by the fact that the philosopher is actively opposed to Christianity? Probably this enters into the matter, but it is doubtful that it can be the whole story. In fact, it is not clear that Augustine was aware that Porphyry was the author of *Against the Christians*.[31]

I would suggest that there might be something else motivating Augustine's focus upon Porphyry, namely the fact that Porphyry reminds the bishop of Hippo of his earlier self. In his early writings, Augustine had made the mistake of defining Christianity in 'Porphyrian' rather than 'Pauline' terms. This error was finally corrected by the understanding of grace that he achieved through his revolutionary rereading of Paul in the mid-390s. If this makes Augustine's early writings less Christian than has been appreciated, it also brings Porphyry closer to Christianity than has been appreciated, much closer, perhaps, than the author of *The City of God* would care to admit. Or does his extensive critique of Porphyry amount to such an admission already? By offering this critique is Augustine not implicitly admitting that the views of Porphyry are very seductive for an intelligent Christian seeking to understand his faith? This had certainly been Augustine's experience. Whether or not he had been directly influenced by Porphyry between 386 and *c.* 395, the author of *The City of God* undoubtedly sees an important piece of his own convoluted past reflected in this 'false philosopher'. Of Porphyry, Augustine might say quite literally: 'There but for the grace of God go I.'[32]

If my interpretation of *Confessions* 7.9.13–7.21.27 is correct, a thorough reconsideration of the significance of Augustine's conversion to Christianity is in order. There is no reason to doubt his sincerity. Augustine certainly regarded himself as a Christian and was trying to be a Christian from 386 to 395. But sincerity is one thing and orthodoxy another, a fact of which the

[31] Augustine received six questions from Deogratias of Carthage (*c.* 409), who claimed that some of them derived from Porphyry (*Ep.* 102). At the time of *Retract.*, Augustine still did not believe this claim (*Retract.* 2.3:.58). But he was mistaken; they do come from Porphyry's *Against the Christians* (see Courcelle 1969, p. 210, n. 14). It seems, then, that Augustine never read Porphyry's *Against the Christians* (but for a different view, see Beatrice 1989, pp. 258–61).

[32] Augustine was obviously quite capable of hostility towards views to which he once subscribed, as evidenced by his anti-Manichaean writings; cf. *De nat. boni* 44, p. 884, ll.2–4: 'quis hoc ferat? quis hoc credat, non dico, ita esse, sed uel dici potuisse?'

bishop of Hippo was only too aware as he attempted to come to grips with his heterodox past. Augustine's readers must also face up to the problem, which becomes especially acute when considered in relation to his comments at *The City of God* 19.23.3, as he reports that Christ is praised in Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* as 'a most pious man, but only a man'. As we have seen, Augustine labels this view 'Photinian', and claims that whoever believes in the kind of Christ advocated in Porphyry's work becomes '*not a true Christian*, but a heretic like Photinus: one who acknowledges Christ only as a man, not as God also'.[33] Here the author of *The City of God* seems implicitly to indict his earlier self. Had not Augustine himself, before his intellectual conversion to Christianity in the mid-390s, been 'not a true Christian, but a heretic like Photinus'? Augustine had undoubtedly been sincere in his desire to follow the teaching of the Catholic Church, but what does this show except that his heresy was material rather than formal?

Of course, it would be a mistake to define religion in purely dogmatic terms. But to what extent can we permit Augustine to misunderstand the central doctrine of Christianity while still deeming him a Christian? This is an important question, and an adequate response cannot be shaped solely by the contours of the anti-Porphyrian polemic in *The City of God*. As I have tried to show through my discussion of the Ostia ascent, the narrator of the *Confessions* may be able to provide us with the resources for a more generous view of his early Christianity. This is an issue that deserves further consideration.

[33] *De civ. Dei* 19.23.3.

Appendix: true and false in Soliloquies II

Possible definition	Problems
1. A *verum* is **that which is as it seems to be**, and a *falsum* is **that which is otherwise than it seems to be** (*Sol.* 2.4.5; cf. 2.5.8, 2.6.10).	Then an unperceived object (e.g. a stone hidden deep in the earth) cannot be true, since it cannot seem to be anything (*Sol.* 2.4.6–2.5.7; cf. *Sol.* 2.8.15). Then one and the same thing can be both true and false (e.g. the same thing might seem to one person to be a stone, and to another to be a piece of wood) (*Sol.* 2.5.8).
2. A *verum* is **that which is** (*Sol.* 2.5.8).	Then nothing can be false, since whatever is is true (*Sol.* 2.5.8; cf. *Sol.* 2.8.15).
3. A *falsum* is **that which has some similarity to a *verum***, whether the things are: (a) equal (e.g. identical twins or eggs); (b) unequal (e.g. one's reflection in the mirror, or the images of people in our dreams) (*Sol.* 2.6.10–11).	But in both cases, similarity indicates that something is *true*, not that it is false: (a) e.g. each of the two identical eggs are 'true eggs'; (b) e.g. we recognize that people in our dreams are false precisely because of whatever in them is *not* similar to true people; for example, that they cannot be touched, that they make no sound, and that they do not move or live. In fact, if the people in our dreams were so similar to real people that they were wholly indistinguishable from them (as one egg is indistinguishable from another), then they would not be false people in the first place (*Sol.* 2.7.13).
4. A *falsum* is **that which has some dissimilarity to a *verum*** (*Sol.* 2.7.13).	Then everything is false, since everything is dissimilar to something true (*Sol.* 2.8.15).
5. A *falsum* is **that which is both similar and dissimilar to a *verum*** (*Sol.* 2.8.15).	Then everything is false, since everything is similar and dissimilar to everything else (*Sol.* 2.8.15).
6. A *falsum* either: (a) **pretends to be what it is not**, whether: (i) deceitful (*fallax*), i.e. desiring to deceive, which requires a soul, either rational (e.g. human) or not (e.g. a fox); (ii) mendacious (*mendax*), i.e. not necessarily desiring to deceive, e.g. mimes, comedies, poems, jokes or: (b) **tends towards being yet is not**, e.g. the image in a mirror, a portrait, images in dreams, the appearance of the bent oar in the water, shadows (*Sol.* 2.9.16–2.10.18).	'These things are in some respect true precisely because they are in other respects false.' E.g. the image of a man in a mirror is a true *image of a man* precisely because it is a false man; a picture of a horse is a true *picture of a horse* precisely because a false horse is in it (*Sol.* 2.10.18).

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