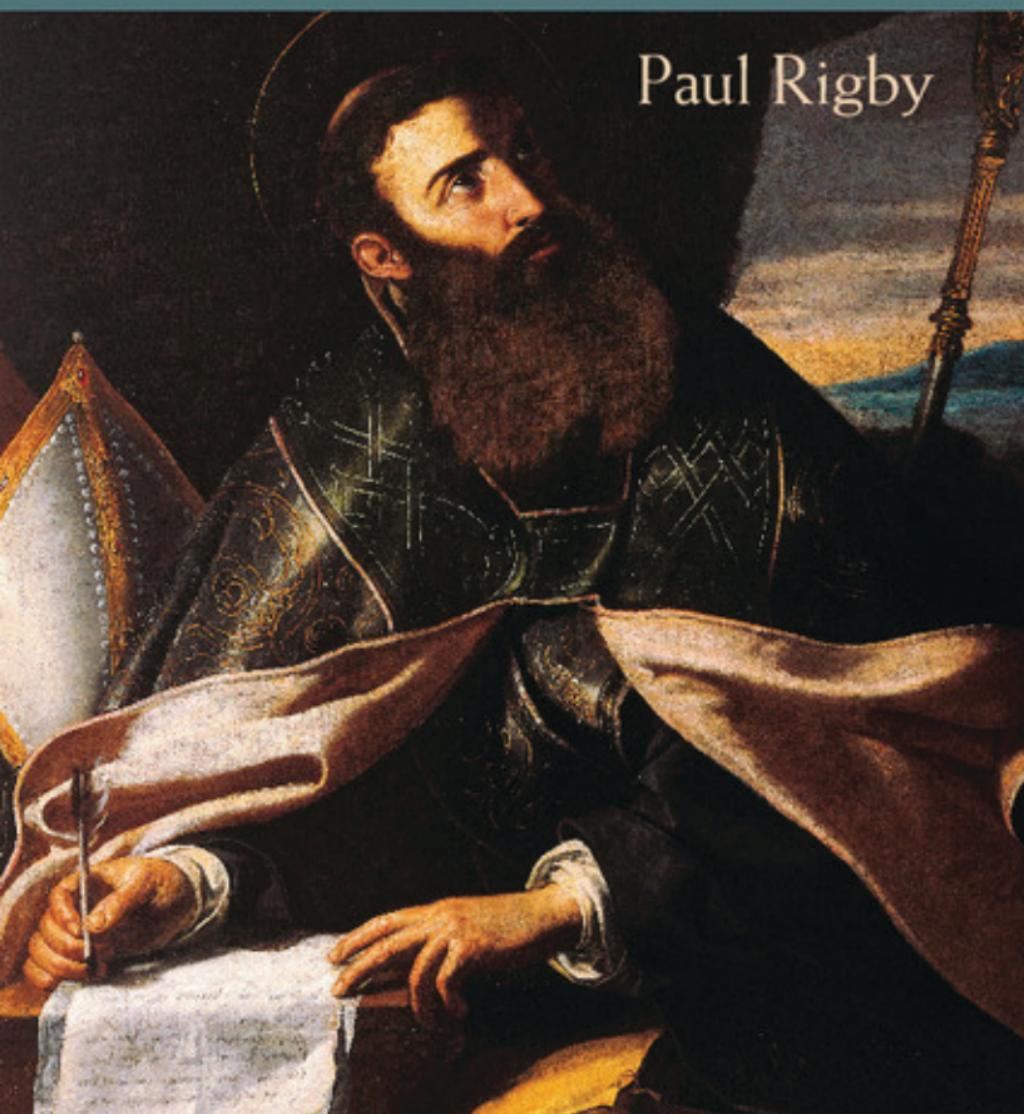


The Theology of AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS

Paul Rigby



THE THEOLOGY OF AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS

This study of the *Confessions* engages with contemporary philosophers and psychologists antagonistic to religion and demonstrates the enduring value of Augustine's journey for those struggling with theistic incredulity and religious narcissism. Paul Rigby draws on current Augustinian scholarship and the works of Paul Ricoeur to cross-examine Augustine's testimony. This analysis reveals the sophistication of Augustine's confessional text, which anticipates the analytical mind-set of his critics. Augustine presents a coherent, defensible response to three age-old problems: free will and grace; goodness, innocent suffering, and radical evil; and freedom and predestination. *The Theology of Augustine's Confessions* moves beyond commentary and allows present-day readers to understand the *Confessions* as its original readers experienced it, bridging the divide introduced by Kant, Hegel, Freud, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and their descendants.

PAUL RIGBY is a professor in the Faculty of Human Sciences at Saint Paul University. He is the author of *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions*.

The Theology of Augustine's *Confessions*

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To Maria

Peter, Jamie, Mireille, and Matthew



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Preface

Augustine's *Confessions* is my "magic book," a friend of mine remarked many years ago. I have been immersed in Augustine's *Confessions* for more than forty years. My interest in human time and the use of the confessional medium to regain time go back to 1969 and my reading of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* and a complementary interest in Husserl's *Lectures on Internal Time Consciousness*. On the opening page of his influential lectures, Husserl says that Book 11 of the *Confessions* is the only serious reflection on the topic. I turned aside and read Augustine and have been reading him ever since. At the time I did not intend to study Augustine, but what in the long run held my interest was not only his ability to raise in an original way questions of contemporary interest but the reverse – the surplus latent in his strangeness.

In the intervening years, I have written a master's thesis and a doctoral thesis on the *Confessions*. I recall that at that time, on my way to the library, the theologian Bernard Lonergan announced to me in his apodictic and stentorian voice: "Remember, all a doctoral student must prove is that he can read one text." I have been trying to read that one text ever since. My 1987 book *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions*¹ is the culmination of this earlier work, and its finding on dualism and original sin still finds an important place in [Chapters 4, 5, and 6](#) of the present work. Indeed, the present book can be read as a companion to and continuation of the earlier work. Note especially section 2 of chapter 1 of the 1987 book on "The Role of Theology in the *Confessions*".

An important advance over the earlier work has been the philosophical scaffolding and site, even a witness stand, provided by Paul Ricoeur for reinterpreting, interrogating, and cross-examining Augustine's "strange" testimony. My first attempt to deconstruct and recuperate Augustine's witness – "Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's *Confessions*,"² – took advantage

of the many Freudian analyses of the *Confessions* to offer a non-reductionist reading – see Chapter 2 of the present book. At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, I published an encyclopedia entry and two articles³ – see some sections of Chapters 4–9 of the present book. They are the result of my struggle to understand what I regard as the foundational theology of the *Confessions* – the incarnation, original sin, electing grace, and predestination – using Ricoeur’s theory of narrative universals.

But it was not until quite recently that the present book came together. Back in 1985, Donald Capps responded to my Freudian article with the claim that the Augustine of the *Confessions* is a narcissist.⁴ Although I could respond to his challenge in terms of the *Confessions*, it was only with the article published in 2013⁵ – see Chapter 3 – that the picture became clear and that the present book was conceived. I had long believed that Augustine discovered in Paul – *Ad Simplicianum*, written shortly before the *Confessions* – a bewildering ethics, in which one establishes one’s own standard of judgment only to have it blown away in the scorn of divine laughter. I also knew that this anti-voluntaristic ethics is the pivotal theological insight of the *Confessions*. What I had not realized till now is that Augustine had heard the same divine laughter at his press-ganged ordination, and that this insight into the divine scorn lay behind his claim in the *Confessions*, which claim Capps had called into narcissistic question:

Terrified by my sins and the mass of my misery, I had pondered in my heart and thought of flight to the desert; but you did forbid me and strengthen me, saying: “And Christ died for all: that they also who live, may now not live to themselves but with him who died for them.” (10.43.70)⁶

The people of Hippo literally stopped Augustine in his tracks. His confession, his bearing witness to his summons, his coerced call to responsibility “for all,” is the testimony of his *Confessions*. What is striking is that coercion subserves freedom, freedom to serve all. Why the coercion then? Augustine recalls in the first eight books of the *Confessions* and the first twenty-three chapters of Book 10 the futile years of restless search for true happiness, only to discover that he had always been ineluctably bound in a fundamental hatred of the truth that could enlighten him and that only the divine laughter could set him free.

As the many intimate passages of the *Confessions* amply attest, divine derision is the gateway to freedom, to an amorous delight, to an irresistible joy that Augustine makes his own. But Augustine insists on the anti-voluntaristic nature of this preventient call. Grace always goes before; it is coercive for its joy is awesome, and its irresistible delight is a *tremendum* leading him where

he would rather not go, whether it is to the continence of Book 8 or the ordination of Book 9.

Augustine uses the image of the song and the canticle to understand the prevenient and coercive force of this grace. In Book 12 of the *Confessions*, he says that the matter out of which God created was not prior in time or value to form but only in origin, in lowness, as sound is to a song. So his free will is not prior in time or value. As sound is to song, so free will's current lowness, its ethical bondage, is to the amorous delight in true happiness that sets it free. To the extent that the will is bound, the call to love must be a command. Ineluctable bondage requires coercive, irresistible delight. The song, recall, is awesome, a *tremendum*; as such it is a coercive force leading Augustine to unanticipated freedom in an ever deeper unknowing, an enlightened unknowing, a *docta ignorantia*.⁷ The song can never be anticipated or preknown; it can only be an amorous delight in which the song has already moved on beyond its appropriation. The attempt to reify or to manipulate the song leaves only an involuntary trace in the divine laughter. The song's coercive power draws Augustine where he would not go.

The song is, of course, the Canticle of Book 11, Ambrose's *Deus Creator Omnium* timing the flux (11.27.35 and 11.31.41); it is the song of degrees, where "my love is my weight: wherever I go my love is what brings me there. By your gift [the Holy Spirit] we are on fire and borne upwards: we flame and we ascend. 'In our heart we ascend and *sing the song of degrees*'. It is by your fire, your beneficent fire, that we burn and we rise, rise towards the peace of Jerusalem" (13.9.10). It is the "songs of love" (12.16.23). In a remarkable passage, Augustine first evokes the formless earth to personify those, like his youthful self, who refuse to listen to his testimony.

If they refuse and repulse me ... let me leave them outside breathing into the dust and filling their eyes with earth, and let me 'enter into my own chamber' and *sing my songs of love* to You, groaning with inexpressible groaning in my pilgrimage, and remembering Jerusalem with my heart stretching upwards in longing for it: Jerusalem my Fatherland, Jerusalem which is my mother. (12.16.23; emphasis added)

But, finally, the respite, the interlude in his chamber, is only a temporary pause on his pilgrim way in his testimony to the Manicheans and the Donatists, for the song goes before, it is an awesome joy, a *tremendum*, an amorous delight in which "Christ died for all."

Magic books give pleasure and we would not return to them again and again unless they did so. Augustine says in his *Retractatio*:

My Confessions ... are meant to excite men's minds and affections toward [God]. At least as far as I am concerned, this is what they did for me when they were being written and they still do this when read. What some people think of them is their own affair; but I do know that they have given *pleasure* to many of my brethren and still do.⁸

The *Confessions* must give pleasure. I adopt as my own what Charles Rosen says of music in general to describe my approach to Augustine's confessional song: “Without pleasure, there is no understanding.... You cannot make sense of ... [Augustine's songs of love] ... without advocacy, and not to make sense of it is to condemn.”⁹ This book is my attempt to stand among the “brethren” and to hear what they heard in all its freshness and immediacy.

Talk of gratitude makes me turn first to the journals and their editors, especially Allan Fitzgerald at *Augustinian Studies*, and their anonymous reviewers, who, by publishing my first attempts to understand what I wanted to say, gave me the courage to proceed. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press, who gave me a renewed belief in what I was trying to say. The Press's two editors, Laura Morris and Alexandra Poreda, have been consistently knowledgeable, helpful, and enthusiastic. I am especially grateful to my friend and one-time mentor Herbert Richardson.

I have spent most of my academic life in the Faculty of Human Sciences, at Saint Paul University, Ottawa. I am grateful to the university for giving me generous sabbatical leaves for what T. S. Eliot calls “the necessary leisure for creativity” and, above all, for surrounding me with colleagues whose company I enjoy and whose standards I share: John van den Hengel and Paul O’Grady – we worked together on Paul Ricoeur’s narrative theory – Gilles Fortin, Manal Guirguis-Younger, and the late Arthur Lacerte and Kevin Coyle.

My wife Maria and our four adult children, Peter, Jamie, Mireille, and Matthew, to whom I dedicate this book, are the blessing of my life.

Abbreviations, Primary Sources and Translations

ABBREVIATIONS: GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ACW *Ancient Christian Writers*, J. Quasten and J. C. Plumpe (eds.) (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1946)
- AttA *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Allan Fitzgerald (ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999)
- BA *Bibliothèque Augustinienne: Œuvres de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Desclée, De Brouwer, 1949)
- CCL *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina* (Turnhout, Brepols, 1953)
- CI Ricoeur, Paul, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Don Ihde (ed.) (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974)
- CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna: Tempesky, 1865)
- FC *The Fathers of the Church*, R. J. Deferrari (ed.) (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947)
- LCC *Library of Christian Classics*, J. Baille, J. T. McNeill, and H. P. van Dusen (London: SCM Press, 1953–66)
- LF *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church*, E. Pusey (ed.), 24, 25, 30, 32, 37, 39 (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1838–58)
- NPNF *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Oxford; repr.: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994)
- PL *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina*, J.-P. Migne (ed.) (Paris, 1844–64)

- WSA *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, J. E. Rotelle (ed.) (New York: New City Press, 1990–)

AUGUSTINE'S WORKS (ABBREVIATIONS, TITLES,
AND TRANSLATIONS)

- civ. Dei* *De civitate Dei*, PL41, CSEL 40, CCL 47–48; *The City of God*, Henry Bettenson (trans.) (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972)
- conf.* *Sancti Augustini Confessionum libri XIII*, PL 32, CSEL 33, CCL 27: *Confessions Books I–XIII*, Frank J. Sheed (trans.) (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1943/1993)
- corrept.* *De correptione et gratia*, PL 44; *A Treatise on Rebuke and Grace*. Peter Holmes, Robert Wallis, and Benjamin Warfield (trans.), *Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, NPNF (1956), 5:467–91
- doc. Chr.* *De doctrina Christiana*, PL 34, CSEL 80, CCL 32; *On Christian Doctrine in Four Books*, J. F. Shaw (trans), *Saint Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, NPNF, 2:512–97
- en. Ps.* *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, PL 36–37, CCL 38–40: *Exposition of the Psalms* 73–79, Maria Boulding (trans.), WSA 3/18:372–408; and *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, LF, Members of the English Church (trans.)
- ep.* *Epistulae*, PL 33, CSEL 34, 44, 57, 58, 88, FC: *Letters 1–99*, Roland Teske (trans.) 2/1 WSA (1990); and *Saint Augustine Letters* Wilfred Parsons (trans.), FC 32
- Gn.* *Litt De Genesi ad litteram*, CSEL 28.1; *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, John Taylor (trans.), 41 and 42 ACW
- gr. et lib. arb.,* *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, PL 44
- c. Jul. imp.* *Contra Julianum opus imperfectum*, PL 45, CSEL. 85.1; *Against Julian, an Unfinished Book*, WSA (1999), 1.25
- Jo. ev. tr.* *Johannis Evangelium tractatus*, PL 35, CCL 36, *Homilies on the Gospel According to St. John and His First Epistle*, 26 and 29 LF. Members of the English Church (trans.)
- lib. arb.* *De libero arbitrio*, PL 32, CSEL 74, CCL 29; *On Free Will*, WSA

- Persev.* *De dono perseverantiae*, PL 45; *A Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance*. Peter Holmes, Robert Wallis, and Benjamin Warfield (trans.), *Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, NPNF, 5:521–52
- praed. sanct.* *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, PL 44; *A Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints*, Peter Holmes, Robert Wallis, and Benjamin Warfield (trans.), *Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, NPNF, 5:493–519
- retr.* *Retractationes*, PL 32, CSEL 36, CCL 57: *The Retractations, Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion*, Albert Outler (trans. and ed.) FC 7 (London: SCM Press)
- s.* *Sermones*, PL 38, 39, PLS 2, Dolbeau (1996), CCL 41
- Simpl.* *Ad Simplicianum*, PL 40, CCL 44; *To Simplician: On Various Questions, Book 1*, J. H. S. Burleigh (trans. and ed.), LCC (1953), 6:370–406.
- Trin.* *De Trinitate*. PL 42, CCL 50/50a; *The Trinity*. Stephen McKenna (trans.), 45 (1962)
- vera rel.* *De vera religione*, PL 34, CSEL 77, CCL 32

For citations from the *Confessions*, I have used Frank Sheed's translation. I agree with Peter Brown: "There are innumerable translations, but the best is" Sheed's (*Augustine of Hippo* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967/2000] p. 185). Sheed's translation was reissued in 1993. On the back cover, Brown says that Sheed's translation has for three generations of students and readers given an appreciation of "the beauty and urgency" of the *Confessions*. This is so largely because Sheed has "caught not only the meaning ... but a large measure of its poetry. It makes Latin sing in English." He adds that Sheed's version is "not only modern: it is a faithful echo ... of its author's original passion and disquiet." On the same back cover, Alasdair MacIntyre says that, unlike most translations, Sheed's "still shows no sign of dating. It captures Augustine's extraordinary combination of precise statement and poetic evocation as does no other." James O'Donnell adds that "Augustine's sublime *Confessions* fairly sing with the music of a baroque eloquence, lavish and stately. Sheed's ear for that music makes this translation a memorable opportunity to hear Augustine's voice resonating down the years." In his introduction to Sheed's translation, Brown says, "It is a singular merit of this translation that Frank Sheed strove to retain the oratorical, even 'oratorio-like,' quality of Augustine's Latin by dictating his translation by word of mouth" (Peter Brown, "Introduction," *Confessions*, p. xii).

Introduction

Augustine's *confessio* brings "an invisible God almost unbearably close."¹ God's presence gives his testimony the urgency and earnestness of an eye-witness recounting under oath what God has done with him. His theology has an existential feel so much so that Karl Jaspers says that Augustine thinks with his "blood."² He witnesses to the values and beliefs that created him and that he lived to the full. The immediacy and intensity of his witness still commands a hearing, so that the *Confessions* are still read by an audience wider than patristic scholars, philologists, historians, philosophers, and theologians. Other than the Scriptures, and liturgical, devotional, and mystical writings (whose genres the *Confessions* in part share), they are, perhaps, the only pre-Reformation Christian texts from the Latin West read by anyone other than these specialists.

The *Confessions* hold our attention even though what Augustine confesses is alien to our secular world. Viewing Augustine as a confessor, as a witness telling the story of his life, does not mean bringing him closer to us but, as Walter Benjamin says of the storyteller, "increases our distance from him. Viewed from a certain distance, the ... outlines which define the storyteller stand out ... just as in a rock a human head or an animal's body may appear to an observer at the proper distance and angle of vision."³ Distance makes the traditional outline of a confessor visible in Augustine. In the main stream of our culture, we rarely meet people with the ability to confess. Fundamentalist subcultures cherish the ability but are unable to witness outside of the circle of their in-group. When they do, their testimony is received with general embarrassment and growing incomprehension. The ability to exchange religious experience, which was a secure possession for Augustine and his contemporaries, has been lost. With less and less experience to communicate to our culture, the religious world grows silent.

In the silence, we hear Augustine witnessing. His alien voice can still speak to us, but we miss the freshness with which it spoke to his contemporaries. His *Confessions* resonate with reasons of the heart, disciplined thought, a community lovingly participating in ideas, and a tradition of rhetoric deriving from the Latin classics, Platonism, and the Psalms. In his great work of art, Augustine testifies with learned self-consciousness, gives counsel, and tells the story in which he won his wisdom. We are still drawn to Augustine the storyteller:

The storyteller joins the ranks of the teachers and sages. He has counsel – not for a few situations, as the proverb does, but for many, like the sage. For it is granted to him to reach back to a whole lifetime (a life, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but no little of the experience of others ...). His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to tell his entire life. The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story. This is the basis of the incomparable aura about the storyteller ... The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself.⁴

The righteousness we encounter in Augustine is strange, his counsel alien. His teachings on original sin, grace, election and predestination, and authority are all alien to the ethos of the modern university. Its strangeness could be its attraction. But his testimony has been drowned in cultural noise so that even his confessional voice begins to fade. The Enlightenment and its modern and late modern heirs have interposed themselves between him and us, making his voice alien but not exotic, stale as belonging to last year's speech.

I have searched for ways to bring him closer, to bridge the gap, so that I could hear his *Confessions* with the same shocking freshness it had for his contemporaries. I thought that if I had the means to cross-examine his testimony, to call him as a witness before the bar of modernity and our late modernity, I could see why for more than a thousand years his *Confessions* were the high watermark of a self-conscious and dominant confessional tradition. Why for the medievals Augustine is simply the Master: “Magister dixit ...”⁵ Why, down through the ages, his “brethren” believed that he, above all others, speaks rightly of God.

I turned to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Although critical in particulars, Ricoeur has sympathy for Augustine's thought. If Ricoeur is close to any theological tradition, that tradition must surely be Augustine's.⁶ But it is also true that Ricoeur identifies himself as a philosopher and not as a theologian. So I turned to Ricoeur primarily for philosophical aid. I thought Ricoeur's philosophy might provide the witness stand on which I might conduct a theological cross-examination of Augustine's testimony.

In common with all testimony, Augustine's is defeasible. Defeasibility makes Augustine's testimony amenable to cross-examination and contestation. If we are to hear Augustine witness today with the freshness that it had for his contemporaries, it must undergo the crisis of false testimony. To expose any falsity I introduce, following Ricoeur, the critical methods and philosophical insights of Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and their descendants, plus the internal critique of demythologization. The two critiques clear a common ground and open up a shared interval of interrogation, where, I hope, Augustine may share his experience of God with us as he did with his contemporaries.

It may be helpful to identify my approach by way of a contrast. Imagine a community of scholarly contemporary Augustinian Christians who have grown weary of antiquarian attachment to the lost Augustinian consensus and the doomed attempt to answer the secular critique with a revamped Augustinianism. What then would be their approach to Augustine, and who is their audience? I imagine that, as a community of fellow seekers, they would examine the history of their current religious attachments, their heritage, handed down in the Augustinian language that 'spoke them before they spoke it.' Though certainly not a "view from nowhere," their authorial identity would not help their modern readers to understand the "where" of their Augustinian identity and so to understand the criteria for deciding what they would retain of Augustine's thought for their current Augustinian identity. They would have difficulty explaining on what grounds they decide to include, reject, or perhaps even exclude from consideration certain, though infrequent, parts of Augustine's thought. For example, as professors, they might wisely heed their own and, among others, their female students' indignation at Augustine's attitude to women and his treatment of his mistress. They would make expert appeal to the best exegetical, sociological, and historical methods. Their response, mind, would owe nothing to secularism – they are faithful to their Augustinianism. In this book, I do exactly the reverse. I use, in so far as I am able, the same methods, but, additionally, by identifying Ricoeur's theory of marriage and sexuality, for example, I examine Augustine's attitude to marriage and treatment of his mistress. I rely on Ricoeur's philosophy to identify "where" I stand when I call Augustine and his witness for cross-examination by modern and late modern thinkers – Freud, Nietzsche, and their heirs – to indict and to exculpate, to deconstruct and to reappropriate. But, and this is the main difference between my putative Augustinian teachers and myself, I am not declaring for or against "an Augustinian Christian" identity. I am claiming as my authorial identity, and here I am proud to be in their company, that of an Augustinian scholar – a much less existential

and, possibly, less interesting identity. I am writing for those, including my fellow scholars, and building on their cumulative erudition, who are trying to understand how Augustine's original readers – his “brethren” (along with the word's gender chauvinism) – received Augustine's shocking new testimony, which superseded the religious attachments and heritage of Augustine's own contemporaries. If my work also resonates with modern Augustinian Christians, I will be doubly grateful.

Although this book introduces alien categories to Augustine's thought, I respect the integrity of Augustine's experience by examining the texts in which his theology is documented in ways that are faithful, in so far as I am able, to the best exegetical and historical traditions of Augustinian studies. I try to follow Ricoeur's interpretive maxim which aims not at “an interpretation *of* the text or an interpretation *about* the text, but an interpretation *in* the text and *through* the text.”⁷ Only then will I introduce such deconstructive and recuperative methods as Freudian and Nietzschean suspicion, Hegelian phenomenology, or Kantian dialectic. My purpose has been to create a common ground where Augustine may speak. My hope is that the reader will have the same reaction as one anonymous reviewer who thought that my “use of Ricoeur appears as more instrumental, than categorical.”

I identify five sets of problems where Augustine's testimony has become incredible for the modern reader. The idea of testimony itself is the first casualty ([Chapter 1](#)). Augustine believes that his *Confessions* can yield an experience of God if his hearers are willing to accept testimony as evidence (10.3.3–4), but “we immediately see the enormity of the paradox that the philosophy of testimony evokes. ‘Does one have the right … to invest with an absolute character a moment of history [such as Augustine's conversion narrative]?’”⁸ Modernity's scientific rigor and our historical and cultural pluralism have rendered us ever less willing to accept such evidence. Reliance on the self-sufficiency of reason – autarky – still characterizes modern and late modern philosophy despite the trenchant critique of the self-founding claims of reflexive or positivist philosophies.

Disbelief – where Augustine's “available believable” (*croyable disponible*) has become our “unavailable believable,” so to speak; where his “natural believable” has become our unnatural, discredited believable in “the *false scandal* of a cultural vehicle which is no longer ours”⁹ – also clusters around the content of Augustine's testimony. His testimony to a rewarding and punishing father God with its penal view of salvation is discredited as religious neurosis. This is the subject of [Chapter 2](#). Religious narcissism coupled with pessimism, ascetical detachment, and salvation, with its consoling sense of an ending, form a third node of incredulity – the subject of [Chapter 3](#). The

doctrines of original sin, election, and predestination constitute Augustine's response to the problems of evil and suffering. These doctrines have been largely discredited and discarded, and along with them his theodicy – [Chapters 4–9](#). Finally, on Augustine's resurrection ideal of a celibate, male community – marriage versus celibacy – along with the Christian sense of an ending with its consoling plot which acts as a vital lie, see [Chapters 10](#) and [11](#). The eleven chapters of this book correspond to eleven specific places where the culturally incredible has made it difficult and, for many, even impossible to hear his testimony. By clearing these obstacles, these chapters aim to reconnect the narrative of his testimony and make it possible to follow his confessional story as his first readers followed along. By renewing the connections, I hope to present Augustine the storyteller and his righteousness to an age in which confessing is largely discredited.



Confessio

THE LYRICAL LIFE

Augustine's *confessio* draws on several genres: praise, hymn, lyric, lamentation, and repentance. It unites speculation with scriptural exegesis and exhortation with testimony, soliloquy with wisdom. *Confessio* culminates in the self-portrait of Augustine the bishop, seeker after wisdom, exegete, philosopher-theologian, seated in his study at Hippo Regius, immersed in these diverse genres as he writes his *Confessions* within the narrative of salvation history. When these *Confessions* are read aloud, as at Paulinus of Nola's dinner table or by the brethren at Hippo, they advance that history by creating the confessing community.

Confessio unites existentially the speculative and reflexive thought of the philosophers with the testimony of scripture to create a new rhetoric.¹ For ten books, Augustine's testimony recalls a moral and intellectual asceticism elevating the soul to affirm and to touch the immutable God. His ascetical ascent retraces the steps he had learned in Milan from Ambrose and his circle, but his ascent prompts an affirmation that cannot sustain itself as a purely internal act of the soul. Ineffable, the affirmation cannot be expressed externally; transcendent, the affirmation cannot be maintained internally. The affirmation can only be avowed inasmuch as the ascent becomes an

In this chapter, I examine Augustine's use of *confessio* in the light of Ricoeur's concept of testimony in Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan (trans.), Lewis S. Mudge (ed.), *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 119–54); Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself As Another*, Kathleen Blamey (trans.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Paul Ricoeur, "Emmanuel Levinas, Thinker of Testimony," *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 108–26. To my knowledge, Ricoeur has not applied his concept of testimony to the *Confessions* or any other work of Augustine.

incarnational descent: “weary at last [of trying to ascend to the One] they [the proud Platonists of Book 7] might cast themselves down upon His [Christ’s] humanity and rise again in its rising” (7.18.24).²

What sort of an affirmation is in play? Is this a mystical experience? Or is Augustine a failed mystic? John Kenney distinguishes between what contemporary phenomenologists of mysticism, following William James, are looking for and what Augustine seeks. The phenomenologists want to know “what was actually experienced by the mystic.”³ Kenney says that “focusing only on the episodic aspects is an act of distortion. To understand why any of this mattered to Augustine, indeed to comprehend what meaning these visions had, one must place the theology of the accounts at the center of one’s efforts.”⁴

Augustine uses the mystical ascents recounted in Book 7 to make two theological points. First, Augustine is advancing an epistemic argument against the Manicheans. He has been in debate with the Manicheans since Book 4 and will continue this debate on into Book 9 and beyond. In Book 7, Augustine tells how he frees himself from Manichean materialism. Materialism, Augustine says, was the chief cause of his theological errors concerning the nature of God and evil. The two Plotinian ascents of Book 7 (7.10.16 and 7.20.26) are an “epistemic success,” “introduced as a conclusive antidote to Manichean materialism.... Platonic transcendentalism receives more than just notional assent; it is discovered by the contemplative soul to be true, and Manichaeism to be false.”⁵ *Confessions* 7.10.16 is not “an abortive effort at ecstatic union with the One, but rather ... a prolonged meditation of the incipience of transcendence in the soul, the quiet dawning of spiritual latency.”⁶

In Book 7, Augustine discovers that the absolute affirmation of God as truth is an experience mediated by finite judgment: “Enquiring then what was the source of my judgment, when I did so judge [“things mutable”] I had discovered the immutable and true eternity of truth above my changing mind” (7.17.23). Augustine’s discovery of the source of judgment mediates the absolute:

Thus in a thrust of a trembling glance my mind arrived at that which Is.⁷ Then indeed 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 so that I returned to my old habit, bearing nothing with me but a memory of delight. (7.17.23)

Mutable things, external things are just that; they mediate “That which Is” in hope of something better, something immutable. Augustine’s experience of the absolute conveys delight and desire: “I returned ... bearing nothing with

me but a memory of delight [*amantem memoriam*] and a desire as for something of which I had caught the fragrance but which I had not yet the strength to eat" (7.17.23).

Second, with his claim that he "had not yet the strength to eat," Augustine is making a moral point against the Neoplatonists. James O'Donnell says, "It is not that he discovered that the Plotinian method did not work (that is Courcelle's position in essence); he discovered that it did work, and that it was not enough."⁸ It fell short on two counts, one moral and the other salvific: "If Plotinian ascent is disappointing, how then is God to be reached? The moral renovation of the individual through direct contact with Christ (in the garden scene at 8.12.29 and in baptism at 9.6.14), prepares the way for a more fully satisfactory ascent – fleeting and frustrating but full of hope of permanence beyond."⁹ Plotinian ecstasy "allowed the pilgrim soul to encounter the transcendent world," but despite the Plotinian "doctrine of the soul's undescended aspect," the soul's moral weakness meant that Plotinian ecstasy failed salvifically, offering only "perception without access, vision without restoration, presumption without confession."¹⁰

The mystical ascent in Book 9, at Ostia, makes an additional two very different theological points. The first of these (my third theological theme overall) is already hinted at by O'Donnell when he describes the visions of Book 7 as "fleeting and frustrating but full of hope of permanence beyond."¹¹ The ascents in Book 7 are ineffectual¹² inasmuch as they cannot give him the strength to eat: "Eucharist is 'the food that I was incapable of taking' – as clear an indication as one could want that Augustine sees his problem at this moment in his life as arising from his inability to participate in Christian liturgical worship."¹³ "So," Augustine says, "I set about finding a way to gain the strength that was necessary for enjoying You" (7.18.24). He finds the strength in external testimony, in the reading of Scripture in the garden at Milan, in baptism, and in liturgical worship.¹⁴ As a result, Augustine with Monica can, at Ostia, make the same ascent from the mutable to the immutable. Again, the experience of Wisdom is in the comparison and the judgment: "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 this wisdom ... we did for one instant attain to touch it" (9.10.24).¹⁵

At post-baptismal Ostia, real progress is possible; ten years later, Augustine the bishop makes the same ascetical ascent as often as he has the time: "And all this I do often; for it gives me pleasure and whenever I can relax from the duties necessity lays upon me, I have recourse to this same pleasure" (10.40.65).¹⁶ In his search for God, Augustine ascends via the testimony of created things. He interrogates "the whole frame of the universe ...

and it answered . . . ‘I am not He but He made me’” (10.6.9). Nor can he, by turning inward, find God in his memory as the Neoplatonists claimed, in the “innermost seat of my mind” because memory too “suffers change.” He asks God “In what place then did I find You to learn of You? For You were not in my memory, before I learned of You. Where then did I find you to learn of You save in Yourself, above myself?” God dwells in himself as truth: “You, who are Truth, reside everywhere to answer all . . . and in one act reply” (10.26.37); “You are that unfailing Light which I consulted upon all these things [that he remembers], as to whether they are, and what they are and what they are worth” (10.40.65). As truth, he says to God, “I trusted You. . . . You did touch me, and I have burned for Your peace” (10.27.38). Whenever, he can relax from his duties, he has “recourse to this same pleasure” (10.40.65), to “this true happiness” (10.23.33) so that “all that is scattered in me is brought into one” (10.40.65). The joy can be very intense: “And sometimes you admit me to a state of mind that I am not ordinarily in, a kind of delight which could it ever be made permanent in me would be hard to distinguish from the life to come” (10.40.65). All this is “full of hope of permanence beyond.”¹⁷ Augustine uses “a different theistic grammar than that of Plotinus”¹⁸ to describe the Vision of Ostia. At Ostia, Platonic metaphysics is used to describe Christian contemplation, but God is “distinct from the soul . . . not the reassuring discovery of the presence of the One at the depth of the soul . . . instead profoundly disquieting, exhibiting the soul’s state as a contingent and fallen being.” However, there is Christian “reassurance . . . as the soul discerns the voice of God calling at its depth. The God who calls from afar is also attentive to the soul’s plight. . . . Augustine succeeds in discovering a God of Being and of Love, whose existence he will never be able thereafter to doubt.”¹⁹

Although we call the ascent at Ostia the Vision of Ostia, Augustine himself uses the metaphor of “touch” – the Touch of Ostia. McGinn observes that despite the visual context, “what is remarkable in the two parallel descriptions” of ascent in Book 7 also “is the way in which he piles up metaphors taken from the senses of touch and of hearing rather than that of seeing to try to describe what took place.”²⁰ At Ostia, Augustine says that while he and his mother were talking about the eternal Wisdom, “we did for one instant attain to touch it” (9.10.24). Augustine immediately adds that the “weight” of his “imperfections” makes his happiness temporary: “I am swallowed up by things customary: I am bound, and I weep bitterly, but I am bitterly bound” (10.40.65). Here are two important caveats: this bondage, and the stripping away that it requires, plus “touching” rather than “seeing,” are together the second theological theme of the Vision of Ostia – together they are my fourth

theological theme. Commenting on Psalm 99, McGinn, paraphrasing Augustine, says that “we, like blind persons, do not have the eyes to see him.... Augustine’s language here abandons the spiritual sense of sight to emphasize the other spiritual senses. Only such experiential contact with God can produce the higher form of knowledge that perceives that we can really say nothing about him.”²¹

The “touch” affirming the absolute, the “delight” mediated in judgment, strips away so that “all other visions so different [are] quite taken away,”²² and this one [of the eternal Wisdom] 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” (9.10.25). Monica’s question, which concludes the scene at Ostia – “What then am I doing here?” (9.10.26) – flows quite naturally from the experience of being stripped away from passing things and anticipates her imminent death. The absolute affirmation of true happiness in mediated immediacy constitutes a stripping away, but this stripping has taken the form of a long journey. On the first step in his itinerary, Augustine, the seeker, must, with St. Paul, ethically “put off” the old nature and speculatively renounce the unaided search for mystical ecstasy. Christian worship is the necessary aid for, unlike Plotinus, Augustine needs a savior.

This first stripping away anticipates a second divestment. Augustine claims to touch God and not to see God. If by seeing we mean understanding, then we must heed van Bavel’s caution. Augustine, van Bavel says, excludes the possibility of a positive apprehension of God: “The word *apprehensio*, which means ‘to grasp’ or ‘to understand,’ seems to me inappropriate in this context, for Augustine always denies that we can apprehend God.”²³ What kind of understanding is achieved through the sense of “touch”? Van Bavel replies that Augustine “uses the term *attingere* (to touch, or to come in contact with), which expresses, rather, a real relationship between the human person and God.”²⁴

Augustine uses all his considerable rhetorical resources with the aim of revealing the God who is beyond our knowledge, “a revealed Unknowable,” in which “the order of positive language has to be changed into a positivity of ignorance. God has the initiative in a knowledge of which the human being is not the master. What does matter is to learn how one does not know.”²⁵ The “emptying out of every kind of representation” means that our seeking intellect knows God only by “*attingere*,” by touching and coming into contact; by “*conjiciens*, i.e., seeing by conjecturing;” and as “*palpans*, i.e., seeking one’s way by touch,” seeking “gropingly without seeing.”²⁶ These three ways of knowing are the way of *learned unknowing* (*docta ignorantia*).²⁷

Van Bavel's *docta ignorantia* clears the way for the fifth and final theological theme of Augustine's ascents. Touching (*attingere*), conjecturing (*conjiciens*), and groping (*palpans*) are the way of *learned unknowing* (*docta ignorantia*); there, stripping away is decisive. This triple divestment, in which knowledge of God is no longer grasping, no longer *apprehensio* but knowledge of the heart, opens Augustine to the lyric life of love and teaches the wisdom of the heart.²⁸ It must be so for in the lyric life, God is “more inward than the most inward place of my heart and loftier than the highest” (3.6.11).

At his baptism, Augustine captures the effusiveness of the lyric life. He says, “the truth streamed into my heart: so that my feeling of devotion overflowed, and the tears ran from my eyes, and I was happy in them” (9.6.14). And again:

See where He is, wherever there is a savour of truth: He is in the most secret place of the heart, yet the heart has strayed from Him. O sinners, return to your own heart and abide in Him that made you.... The good that you love is from Him and insofar as it is likewise for Him it is good and lovely; but it will rightly be turned into bitterness, if it is unrightly loved and He deserted by whom it is.... You seek happiness of life in the land of death, and it is not there. For how shall there be happiness in life where there is no life? (4.12.18)
 [Christ] withdrew from our eyes, that we might return to our own heart and find Him. (4.12.19)

And I marveled to find that at last I loved You and not some phantasm instead of You; yet I did not stably enjoy my God, but was ravished by You by Your beauty, yet soon was torn away from You again by my own weight, and fell again with torment to lower things. Carnal habit was that weight.... I returned to my old habits, bearing nothing with me but a memory of delight [*amantem memoriam*] and a desire as for something of which I had caught the fragrance but which I had not yet the strength to eat. (7.17.23)

Amantem memoriam,²⁹ loving memory, amorous memory, the lyric life is the controlling theological discourse of the *Confessions*, and, therefore, of my whole book. It is the discourse to which Augustine must appeal if his confession is to be credible to his brethren. “Nothing is more surely heard by You than a heart that confesses You” (2.3.5). Augustine lays bare his heart before God: “Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart” (2.4.9). God indwells the hearts of those who confess: “Behold You are there in their hearts, in the hearts of those who confess” (5.2.2). In the lyric economy, Augustine “does truth” in the “heart” “before many witnesses” (10.1.1) and the witnesses believe his testimony because they “have their ear at my heart, where I am what I am” (10.3.4). His *Confessions* cry aloud “in my heart [*clamat affectu*]” (10.2.2) and they “stir up the hearts” of the brethren (10.3.4), which swells to a whole chorus of confessors, a “hymn of praise and the weeping ... from

Your censers which are the hearts of my brethren" (10.4.5). McGinn says that according to Augustine:

The love with which God first loved us (1 John 4:14) enters into our *hearts* and gives us both a new, if obscure, knowledge of God in faith and a new kind of *desiderium*, or longing for God, that functions as a new eye of the soul, the source of the ray of light that seeks out its ineffable object. This new way of seeing is in us, but not of us; it requires our cooperation, but its cooperation is from God himself.³⁰

Where McGinn says that the heart, in its longing for God, "functions as a new eye of the soul, the source of the ray of light that seeks out its ineffable object," he is drawing on Margaret Miles's discussion of Augustine's Platonic concept of seeing. According to Plato, "a ray of light, energized and projected by the mind toward an object, actually *touches* its object, thereby connecting viewer and object. By the vehicle of the visual ray, the object is not only 'touched' by the viewer, but also the object is 'printed' on the soul of the viewer."³¹ Accordingly, for Augustine, the heart's seeing is the most intimate form of "touching," yielding, as a "print," an "*amantem memoriam*."³²

The way of the heart, the *via amoris*, with its visual touching (at the correctly named Vision of Ostia), is the way or the medium for knowing God. What is the content? What is the truth retained in the "print," in the *amantem memoriam*? How best to characterize the economy of the heart and its lyric theology, which subsumes all other theologies? Ricoeur reveals its scope:

"Love me!" The commandment that precedes every law is the word that the lover addresses to the beloved: Love me! This unexpected distinction between commandment and law makes sense only if we admit that the commandment to love is love itself, commanding itself, as though the genitive in the 'commandment of love' were subjective and objective at the same time. Or, to put it another way, this is a commandment that contains the conditions for its being obeyed in the very tenderness of its objurgation: Love me!"³³

Here we have what Ricoeur calls, "a poetic use of the imperative. This poetic use of the imperative has its own connotations within the broad range of expressions extending from the amorous invitation, through pressing supplication, to the summons, to the sharp command accompanied by the threat of punishment."³⁴ Now the command to love is an exception to Kant's moral rule, for it is not formal but includes human inclinations, which Kant would exclude from morality: "It is irreducible, in its ethical overtones, to the moral imperative."³⁵ The effusive love songs of the lyrical life are in part what still attract readers. Augustine harnesses the erotic tones of the lyric discourse

to exploit “the real analogy between feelings and the power of *eros* to signify *agape* and to put it into words.”³⁶ Augustine’s confession reveals the lyrical beauty and tender engagement of his whole self as the truth streams into his heart (9.6.14). He uses erotic imagery to testify to the possibility of spiritual joy, to “the desire of the other’s desire.”³⁷ Augustine says to God that he

was ravished by You by Your beauty. [And again that on returning to himself after contact with God, he brought] a memory of delight and a desire as for something of which I had caught the fragrance but which I had not yet the strength to eat. (7.17.23)

Late have I loved You, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved You! For behold You were within me, and I outside; and I sought You outside and in my loveliness fell upon those lovely things that You have made. You were with me and I was not with You. I was kept from You by those things, yet had they not been in You, they would not have been at all. You did call and cry to me and break upon my deafness; and You did send forth Your beams and shine upon me, and I drew my breath and do now pant for You: I tasted You, and now hunger and thirst for You: You did touch me, and I have burned for You. (10.27.38)³⁸

In Book 10, Augustine sublimates genital desire as “tenderness beyond sex,” while at the same time, “the desire for recognition, in embodying itself in tenderness, takes on a sexual coloring.”³⁹ As a result, the entire person with its vital and sensual and spiritual desires – the dual heart – is engaged in an intense and intimate love that can never pass away. Such is the surprising abundance, the joyous wisdom of the lyrical life⁴⁰:

But what is it that I love when I love You? Not the beauty of any bodily thing, nor the order of seasons, nor the brightness of light that rejoices the eye, nor the sweet melodies of all songs, nor the sweet fragrance of flowers and ointments and spices: not manna nor honey, not the limbs that carnal love embraces. None of these things do I love in loving my God. Yet in a sense I do love light and melody and fragrance and food and embrace when I love my God – the light and the voice and the fragrance and the food and embrace in the soul, when that light shines upon my soul which no place can contain, that voice sounds which no time can take from me. I breathe that fragrance which no wind scatters, I eat the food which is not lessened by eating, and I lie in the embrace which satiety never comes to sunder. This it is that I love, when I love my God. (10.6.8)⁴¹

Augustine’s God, known in loving memory, is more intimate to him than he is to himself (3.6.11). This *amantem memoriam* is a memory of a recent event, not Platonic reminiscence. This intimate memory, registered in the restless heart’s searching, testifies to the priority of the lyric economy, of the heart’s desire for

true happiness, over that of duty. At the same time, this creaturely inwardness is wounded by an ancient insufficiency that requires a stripping away and a commensurate education in Wisdom. This insufficiency, this incompleteness, this non-mastery is momentarily matched in touching (*attingere*), conjecturing (*conjiciens*), and groping (*palpans*). The culmination of Augustine's search for Wisdom may only be this momentary matching. Nevertheless, as McGinn affirms, Augustine's "negative theology" in *On Christian Doctrine* 1.6.6. and his "experience of the divine inexpressibility" in *Hom. on Ps. 99.6* "does not reduce the grateful soul to silence, but rather to the expression of the *jubilation* to which the psalmist invites us."⁴²

Augustine narrates his life, gives himself an emplotted identity, a destiny, which he hazards on the basis of *attingere*, *conjiciens*, and *palpans*, whose permanence is only a "print,"⁴³ only an "*amantem memoriam*." Alongside the narration of this loving memory and the lyric life to which it testifies exists its exact contrary lodged in the mystery of the origin of evil with its commensurate hatred of the very love that can set it free.⁴⁴

Augustine learns to narrate his life. He recalls how as a boy he learned to speak correctly, and as a youthful rhetorician he learned to express his emotions, his thoughts, and to narrate his actions. But in none of this training does he acquire the power to take an ethical stand. Moral and ethical non-mastery are the pernicious effects of his upbringing and of an ancient inheritance, an original incapacity. The power to live well and wisely, to search so as to find true happiness, are not within his power. The pre-conversion self, known and appropriated in the gift of freedom that is the *Confessions*, is ineluctably bound in hatred of the love that can set him free. The summons to love transforms the original hatred. The song takes the sound of freedom's unfreedom and recreates its triple hatred of himself, truth, and God into an inverse triple power freely to love. The song recounts the confessional story, the emplotted identity in which Augustine recognizes himself. The love song recalls the ineluctable bondage and the unjustifiable and celebrates with lyrical delight his journey to an unknown destiny.⁴⁵ The song is a *docta ignorantia*. Because the song cannot be mastered, freedom can be only a gratuitous gift. True, the gift of freedom once received can be appropriated. Augustine can own the gift of freedom but the summons is a hidden depth, a *docta ignorantia*, a gift into a future that cannot be possessed or manipulated.

To his Neoplatonic astonishment, Augustine discovers that his *amantem memoriam* is not propaedeutic. *Attingere*, *conjiciens*, and *palpans*, prepared him not for a union with God in which the well trained soul of *Letter 10* would suffer no recidivism. Instead, he must learn to love God across an ineluctable triple hatred. Augustine is forced to lay aside the hope of immediate

knowledge of union with God. In its place, the song prepares him to discover another source of strength. To his own bewilderment, he finds in Book 8 that he is being steadied for an experience of God in testimony – the testimony of the incarnate Christ, the testimony of Scripture⁴⁶ and liturgical worship/sacraments, and the testimony of others.⁴⁷ This triple testimony prepares him to experience God. Surprisingly, the triune God is *not* known by the analogy of memory, understanding, and will, but the reverse – Augustine knows the powers of his soul by knowing the Trinity.⁴⁸ Self-knowledge is an *analogia fidei*. In a comparable reversal, this triple testimony is the song, the lyrical canticle composed ever anew composing on the meaningless sound, the formless matter, so to speak, of the lost years of Augustine's wandering.⁴⁹ The three witnesses – Christ, Scripture/liturgical worship/sacraments, other confessors – teach the soul to sing the confessional song. Augustine transcribes the song by touching (*attingere*), conjecturing (*conjiciens*), and seeking gropingly without seeing (*palpans*). The song's touching, conjecturing, groping is the necessary Wisdom for travelling ever deeper into *learned unknowing*. On the way, Augustine will appropriate what he has learned but only so that he may be steadied for a call into a deeper not-knowing and from whence he can bring back only an *amantem memoriam*. The *Confessions* emplot Augustine's character, and this character becomes ever and again the formless matter, the sound that Augustine will use to recognize retrospectively and to transcribe the song of his confessional journey into infinite mystery. The song in its gravity always goes before; the lyric can never be mastered; it is the love songs of Books 11–13: "Love me!"

CONFESSIO INVESTS A MOMENT IN HISTORY WITH AN ABSOLUTE CHARACTER

The *Confessions* will yield an experience of God only if Augustine's readers are willing to accept testimony as evidence: "We immediately see the enormity of the paradox that the philosophy of testimony evokes. 'Does one have the right?' Nabert asks us ... 'to invest with an absolute character a moment of history?'"⁵⁰ The scandal given by investing a moment of history with an absolute character opens an irreconcilable divide between, as we have just seen, the interiority of God, for which reflective consciousness provides the criteria, and the exteriority of acts, which claim to give testimony to God. Augustine reconciles testimony and the soul in such a way that the signs of God's self-disclosure in testimony are the very signs in which the soul searching for itself recognizes itself.⁵¹ To seek to know God and the soul in reflection was to follow the well-worn path of the ascent of the soul.⁵² What was

scandalous was the way in which Christianity made the inward journey via the descent of external testimony. As a youthful Plotinian seeker following the way of inward ascent to God, Augustine was just as scandalized as modern philosophers:

The first words of this paragraph [7.9.13] ... summarize the rest of Bk. 7. . . . God resists the proud when he refuses illumination to those who grasp at it through pride of intellect; and he gives grace to the humble when he allows the least sinner access through the *way* that is the incarnate Christ. . . . What he is attempting to describe is an encounter between his haughty intellect and the humbling grace of God.⁵³

By the end of Book 8, he was willing to join inward ascent and outward descent into testimony. Why the change of heart?

As a manifestation, testimony has content. The eternal reveals itself here and now as origin. Manifestation puts an end to Augustine's endless search in the *Confessions*. For eight books, Augustine recalls thirty-one years of wandering and a decade of moral and intellectual investigations only to be brought abruptly face-to-face with an external sign of God:

And suddenly I heard a voice from some nearby house, a boy's voice or a girl's voice, I do not know: but it was a sort of sing-song repeated again and again, "Take and read, take and read." I ceased weeping and immediately began to search my mind most carefully as to whether children were accustomed to chant these words in any kind of game, and I could not remember that I had ever heard any such thing. Damning back the flood of my tears I arose, interpreting the incident as quite certainly a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the passage at which I should open. (8.12.29)

A remarkable manifestation: a childlike voice is interpreted as a divine command to interpret scripture. The manifestation of God is the command to read scripture. The command is Augustine's testimony. There is no going behind his testimony. The absolute is an experience.⁵⁴ From that original command, Augustine's interpretation will arise. Without the experience, we are condemned to an infinite regress, but with the experience, interpretation will forever be an interpretation of interpretation. Augustine will always return to the word of Scripture, to the beginning. Interpreting the opening verses of the book of *Genesis*, "In the beginning," will occupy him for the last three books of the *Confessions*: "That eternal reason is Your Word, 'the Beginning Who also speaks unto us'" (11.8.10). O'Donnell gives an instructive counterexample:

Socrates tells of his own non-conversion by the book. He heard a man reading from a book of Anaxagoras; thinking to find wisdom there, he made the

same gesture that Augustine makes here [of taking up and reading].... But he [Socrates] was disappointed (no conversion, no submission to the content of the books occurred), and went away resolved on the more characteristically autarkical mode of wisdom espoused by the western philosophical tradition ever since.⁵⁵

Reliance on the self characterizes ancient Stoicism. For Augustine, “the lie” in ancient Stoic wisdom “is that he is most himself when he is nearest a self-contained intelligence.”⁵⁶ Unlike Socrates, the command to read gives Augustine something to interpret. His testimony as a manifest command is also an interpretation: “I arose, interpreting [*interpretans*] the incident as quite certainly a divine command” (8.12.29). While it is not possible to go behind his interpretation as a testimony, still testimony as interpretation reveals itself as calling for interpretation – in Augustine’s case, ten years later, his testimony will become a vocation to interpretation as a bishop. Such is the dialectic of meaning and event.

Confessio is a complex dialectic that need not be a vicious circle. It is not necessarily vicious because *confessio* consists of complimentary but independent acts of knowledge. In one kind of knowledge, historical understanding interprets the exterior signs of God. This hermeneutics of testimony is the focus of the present chapter. In the other kind of knowledge, reflection develops a criteriology of the divine to judge whether or not consciousness is testifying to the true God or some phantasm of the divine. The *Confessions* as testimony combine exterior signs with these interior criteria for judging. Ricoeur says that we need “a criteriology of the divine that would ... relentlessly pursue the critique of false absolutes, or let us say of false divine names,” that can be joined to “those acts and beings that, *outside of reflection*, in the actual experience of history ‘testify to the divine’” to conclude that a “criteriology of the divine and a ‘hermeneutics of testimony’ ... are in truth ... inseparable.”⁵⁷ I make a first cross-examination, using a modern criteriology, of Augustine’s relationship to God in [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#), but not until [Chapter 4](#) will I be in a position to watch Augustine develop his own criteriology of the divine and report his interior rules for judging. For the remainder of this present chapter, I will continue to focus on the hermeneutics of testimony.

Augustine’s use of an abundance of genres in his *Confessions* results in a profusion of contingent signs. He does not restrict his witness to God to exemplary actions and moral lives. Augustine wants to testify, to confess. His life is a personal witness to God, not an example of a moral rule or a law.⁵⁸ Even the examples Augustine gives exemplify witness. The first example of conversion in Book 8 relates Victorinus’ story as a conversion from false testimony to true. Augustine says, “Now when ... Simplicianus, had told me of

Victorinus, I was on fire to imitate him: which indeed was why he had told me” (8.5.10).

Victorinus’ conversion has a juridical staging. Pre-conversion Victorinus championed the Roman nobility’s enthusiasm for “the worship of idols” (8.2.3). Post-conversion Victorinus overcame his fear “to offend these friends” (8.2.4). For a while, he had believed in Christ in private; he excused himself from public profession because, as he said to Simplicianus, “with some faint mockery: ‘Then is it the walls that make Christians?’” (8.2.4) On the occasion of his baptismal profession of faith, the priests offered to permit him to step down from the public platform and make his profession of faith in private, lest he “find the ordeal embarrassing. But he preferred to make profession of salvation in the sight of the congregation in church. For there had been no salvation in the Rhetoric he had taught, yet he had professed it publicly” (8.2.5). The reason for his decision places his trial within the eschatological trial in which Christ is the true witness: “He grew afraid that Christ might deny him before the angels if he were ashamed to confess Christ before men” (8.2.4). His declaration in favor of Christ forces a judgment as in a trial between, on the one side, “vanities and lying follies” (8.2.4) and, on the other, truth. The “meek flock,” who divested themselves morally and intellectually so that they might hear “the lowliness of Your Word,” took him “to their heart” and the “proud saw it and were enraged, ground their teeth and were livid with envy” (8.2.4).

Victorinus encounter with evil forced him to testify that he could not justify himself.⁵⁹ He chose God’s “word” in exchange for “his own”; Augustine asks: “by what means did You find Your way into that breast? He read, so Simplicianus said, Holy Scripture” (8.2.4). Victorinus draws on the testimony of others to witness to God: “he thought it no shame to be the child of your Christ, an infant at your font, bending his neck under the yoke of humility and his forehead to the ignominy of the Cross” (8.2.3).

Moral impotence renders self-regeneration impossible. Prior to his conversion, recounted in Book 8, Augustine thought of Christ as a moral exemplar, “a man of marvelous wisdom,” the Incarnation as an “example … that temporal things are to be despised for the sake of immortality” (7.19.25). He comments that “the mystery contained in the truth that the Word was made flesh, [because of the incarnation Christ is called ‘the Mediator’ in 10:42–43] I could not even faintly glimpse” (7.19.25). Victorinus’ testimony, its origin, content, and the efficacy, do not belong to him.

The transcendent origin of Victorinus’ testimony does not mean that testifying is simply an external act of public reporting. His courage gave force to his speech: “Victorinus had obeyed the law [prohibiting Christians from teaching Literature and Rhetoric] preferring to give up his own school of

words [his career] rather than Your word” (8.5.10). “Enmity” (8.2.4) for the truth, hatred of the truth (10.23.33), persecution even to death belong “to the tragic destiny of truth.”⁶⁰

Victorinus obeyed the law, gave up his career, stood on the platform, and witnessed to Christ. Simplicianus witnessed before Augustine, and, in his turn, Augustine witnessed before his readers, his “brethren” (10.4.5–6). However, Victorinus’ testimony was not solely a confession of faith. Simplicianus tells a conversion story that simultaneously tells of Victorinus’ newfound beliefs and the ardor of his interior commitment.⁶¹ The strength of his devotion, witnessed in the happiness it brings and especially in suffering born, establishes his credentials as a true witness.

Examples cannot give an experience of God, no more can symbols. Again, the historical dimension of an individual life is missing.⁶² The presence of the historical factor distinguishes testimony from the rich profusion of symbols in the *Confessions* and makes the symbols subordinate. Nevertheless, unlike moral exemplars, symbolic richness is an indispensable component of testimony. We cannot discover the richer possibilities of life without symbols and the meanings they evoke. At the same time, only testimony, which combines symbol with the historical dimension of an individual life, can confer an experience of God. The source of the perennial force of Augustine’s *Confessions* is their ability to render to each generation of readers not just a thought about God but an experience.⁶³

As for Victorinus so now for Augustine, testimony fuses confession of faith to narrative, meaning to event.⁶⁴ The event points to the narrative dimension of meaning in testimony. The eyewitness quality of testimony anchors it in the empirical sphere. But testimony is not a perception; testimony is a story, the narration of the event. Things seen become things said, and the one who receives the testimony believes in the reality of the facts by hearing not seeing.⁶⁵ Further, the statement and the story are the basis on which the hearer judges the meaning of what is being recounted. The recounting of the facts serves to prove that the statement is believable.⁶⁶

If Augustine’s testimony had been restricted to the divine command to read scripture, his testimony would have been a confession of faith. The narrative of Book 8 would have culminated in a confession of faith, not a testimony. Testimony preserves a strict union of narrative and confession of faith. Augustine confesses concerning God by relating the facts of deliverance. On receiving the command he says,

I was moved to return to the place where Alypius was sitting, for I had put down the Apostle’s book there when I arose. I snatched it up, opened it and

in silence read the passage upon which my eyes first fell.... I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant [*Statim quippe*] with the very ending of the sentence, it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away.... I closed the book and in complete calm told the whole thing to Alypius. (8.12.30)

The genre of confessional narrative in which a history of liberation is related, as Augustine has just done for Alypius and for the proceeding eight books, is governed by the faith of Israel.⁶⁷ The same elements are in tension here: the judgment of the hearer (in this instance Alypius) “who decides without having seen” “and the narration of the witness” (in this instance Augustine) “who has seen.”⁶⁸

TESTIMONY AS AN INTERNAL ACT

The union of meaning and event in Augustine’s confessional narrative reveals a dialectical split between the event and its interpretation.⁶⁹ Interpretation, which enters through the “gap,” “mediates the relationship” by means of another testimony.⁷⁰ Between the divine command to take up and read and the act, Augustine inserts the testimony of Antony. Antony’s story had been the catalyst in the conversion of the two state officials in Pontianus’ testimony, which in turn was the supplementary witness to Simplicianus’ story of Victorinus. “It was part of what I had been told about Antony, that from the Gospel which he happened to be reading he had felt that he was being admonished as though what he read was spoken directly to himself.... By this experience he had been in that instant converted to You. So I was moved” (8.12.29). In both instances, the reading of the Scriptural passage permits the reader to carry out the Scriptural command: for Antony: “Go, sell what you have and give to the poor ... and come follow me”; for Augustine: “‘put you on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences’” (8.12.29). Not only is the deliverance an action, but deliverance permits the reader to perform previously impossible actions. The actions “following” and “putting on,” which are similar, will be understood differently: by Antony in the monastic way of life and by Augustine, ultimately, in the episcopal.

Within the genre of a confessional-narrative, interpretation is not only a mediation of testimony via meaning but also via a new testimony. The possibility of interpreting testimony via testimony derives from and reveals the initial dialectic structure of meaning and narrative. Augustine introduces a Plotinian plot⁷¹ into the narrative of the Prodigal Son with the latter’s details of chariots, ships, and feet, thereby making the story his own: “The way was

not by ship or chariot or on foot.... I had but to will to go, in order not merely to go but to arrive: ... to will powerfully and wholly, not to turn and twist a will half-wounded" (8.8.19). The interpretation of meaning and event via new meanings and events shows that interpretation is not external to testimony but implied by testimony's initial dialectical structure.⁷²

The use Augustine makes of the parable of the Prodigal Son alerts us to the fact that the confession of faith constitutes testimony par excellence. Here, narrative gives ground to confession via the Plotinian internalization of the meaning: "It is not on our feet or by movement in space that we go from You.... Your prodigal son did not charter horses or chariots or ships, or fly with wings or journey on his two feet.... To be lustful, that is darkened, in heart, is to be far from Your face" (1.18.28). The darkness of the heart is contrasted to seeing God's face: "Your face, Lord, will I still seek" (1.18.28). For Augustine, the face is the light that enlightens the heart so that the heart may see the face:

"The light of Your countenance is sealed upon us," O Lord. For we are not "the Light that enlightens every man" but we are enlightened by You that "as we were heretofore darkness we are now light in You." If they [the Manicheans] could but see the Light interior and eternal: for now that I had known it, I was frantic that I could not make them see it. (9.4.10)

Augustine, the "frantic" witness, is testifying less to the historic narrative of his own life than to the theological sense of witness to the light of truth, to the "*selfsame*" (9.4.11),⁷³ which he has experienced within. Augustine the eyewitness looks within and can only see God if God becomes "clear to the gaze of my soul" (7.8.12).⁷⁴

Although Augustine testifies in agreement with the Christian rereading of Plotinus that "the Word, God Himself, is 'the true light,'" he also confesses, contrary to Plotinus, that we can be enlightened only by the "'Word become flesh' ... [who] 'in due time ... died for the ungodly'" (7.9.14). He testifies to the work of the Word in time. Nevertheless, to judge by the "*Tolle Lege*" scene, historical signs are nothing without an interior word that speaks the meaning. Possibly Alypius, Augustine's companion at the time, though some distance off, could also have heard the child's voice, but, if so, unlike Augustine, he does not arise "interpreting the incident as quite certainly a divine command" (8.12.29). The ordinary notion of the eyewitness is overthrown in the manifestation of the Word as light and by the testimony of the inward gaze to that light. In its turn, the gaze is made manifest in the "Scriptures ... all luminous with Your light" (9.4.11).

The concept of witness has reached an impasse. Witness surely has annulled itself in an entirely internal idea of seeing. Testimony to light divorced from

events is closer to mysticism and Gnosticism than the confessional-narrative genre of the scriptures. Augustine himself sees the difficulty. His ambition is to witness: “he that does the truth comes to the light? I wish to do it in confession, in my heart before You, in my writing before many witnesses” (10.1.1). But, he continues, the problem is that, “when they [the witnesses] hear me confessing of myself, how do they know whether I speak the truth, since ‘no man knows the things of a man but the spirit of a man that is in him?’”⁷⁵ (10.3.3) And more problematic still, as we will see presently, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud and their descendants will convict this “spirit of a man that is in him” of false consciousness. Here, Augustine bears witness to himself. To corroborate his testimony, he turns to the Holy Spirit (charity), “a notion,” says Ricoeur, “that indicates the extreme point of the internalization of testimony”⁷⁶: “But,” responds Augustine, “because charity believes all things – that is all things spoken by those whom it binds to itself and makes one – I, O Lord, confess to You that men may hear, for though I cannot prove to them that my confession is true, yet those will believe me whose ears charity has opened to me” (10.3.3). Augustine’s testimony, entirely internalized, seems to lose all reference to eyewitness testimony. Such is not the case. Augustine will continue to tie his experience of the inner light to events and actions:

but the mind of my brethren who rejoice for what they see good in me and are grieved for what they see ill, but whether they see good or ill still love me. To such I shall show myself: let their breath come faster for my good deeds [*in bonis meis*]; let them sigh for my ill. For my good deeds are Your act and Your gift, my ill deeds are my own faults and Your punishments. (10.4.5)

Testimony is not an idea or something atemporal but a life story.⁷⁷ We are brought back to the freedom of Book 8: “For in that instance … it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart” (8.12.29). The “run-away liberty” (3.3.5), the “arrogance of sham liberty” (3.8.16), the Prodigal’s liberty “that I labored so to have so great a part of my substance in my own power, and preserved my strength but not for you, going from you into a far country to waste my substance upon loves that were only harlots” (4.16.30), was overturned in a moment as he subsequently narrated first to Alypius, and “then we went into my mother and told her” (8.12.30), and finally to his contemporaries, “those who are to come after … my brethren” (10.4.6). The confession, which is tied to time, remains a narrative: Book 9 begins, “But where in all that long time [‘*tam annoso tempore*’] was my free will, and from what deep sunken hiding-place was it suddenly summoned forth in the moment [‘*in momento*’] in which I bowed my neck to Your easy yoke … ?

How lovely I suddenly found it to be free” (9.1.1).⁷⁸ In fact, he was baptized, he did become a bishop who wrote his *Confessions*, and yet his life as a confessional narrative remains his testimony to his inward interpretation of his experience of God. The proof is circular but is it viciously circular? Augustine believes that charity can resolve the circularity of his witness: “The charity by which they are good, tells them that in my confession I do not lie about myself: and this charity in them believes me” (10.3.4). Augustine believes that the spirit of charity that informs his account of his life with God can be recognized by his readers as the spirit of goodness, which fills them with the same charity. When born along on the mutual recognition of the experience of charity, his readers can credit his account: “the signs of the absolute’s self-disclosure [in Augustine’s story] are at the same time signs in which [his readers] consciousness recognizes itself.”⁷⁹ Sharing in the lyrical life is everything. In [Chapter 4](#), I will examine further the dynamic circularity of absolute reflection and testimony, but first I will turn aside to examine the species of proof to which testimony belongs.

THE TRIAL OF TESTIMONY

The status of testimony as proof will become clearer, if I highlight the adversarial dimension of Augustine’s testimony as I did for the adversarial dimension of Victorinus’ testimony. Victorinus witnesses not only for Christ but against the traditional Roman religion. Augustine witnesses not only to his own conversion experience to Christ but also against, among other things, his pre-conversion adherence to pagan Latin culture (1.16.25–26), magic (4.2.3), astrology (4.3.4–6; 7.6.8), Academic philosophy (5.14.25), Platonic pride (7.20.26), and, above all, Manichaeism. These are as the false testimonies in the dispute between Catholic Christianity and the various cultural and religious institutions of Augustine’s world. For Augustine, the stake in these debates was his, and, by extension, everyman’s, immortal soul.

Manichaeism is false witness par excellence. Manichaeism plays the role of false witness throughout the bulk of Books 3–8.⁸⁰ The Manichean claim to truth attracted the youthful Augustine. Manichean testimony and the testimony of Catholic Christianity were opposed proofs in a dispute that called for a decision. As such, testimony is a proof. In the [first section](#), we have seen and, in [Chapter 4](#), we will see again that Augustine advances philosophical proofs against Manichaeism (7.2.3).

Philosophical proofs are necessary; testimony’s proofs are only probable.⁸¹ Since testimony is a relation to facts seen by another, any judgment based on testimony is exterior to the testimony and to the facts. Testimony’s purpose

is “to accuse and defend before a court, to advise a meeting, to praise or blame.”⁸² The techniques of persuasion are not restricted to proof; they seek to arouse passions and dispositions.⁸³ Because of the external nature of the proof, philosophers consider the experience of God afforded by testimony to be an alienation of meaning.

Testimony is at one and the same time a manifestation and a crisis of appearances. Testimony forces a choice between the false and the faithful witness. The judicial trial is the circumstance where one gives and listens to testimony. Legal discourse serves as a model for any debate or confrontation between adverse opinions and conflicting views. Anytime we are unable to achieve certainty or call upon a necessary proof, we must rely on a probable proof arrived at through a struggle of opinions. The judgment that “condemns or acquits, confers or recognizes a right, decides between two claims”⁸⁴ is necessarily defeasible. The judgment can, therefore, be contested and even invalidated “either by denying alleged facts or by invoking circumstances which can weaken, alternate, even annul.”⁸⁵ Legal reasoning and judgment receive from defeasibility their “decisional, active and voluntary aspect.”⁸⁶ The fact that the judgment is defeasible and voluntary opens Augustine’s testimony to counter-arguments.⁸⁷ Augustine wanted to witness to his “brethren” (10.4.5–6). His choice of the confessional-narrative genre of testimony authorizes his summons and proclaims his willingness to take the witness stand.

The trial motif – attestation and contestation, true and false testimony, Catholic Christianity versus Manichaeism – structures the confessional narrative from Books 3 to 9. Augustine’s life as a young adult is a trial in which he, the false witness, is transformed over time into the true witness. The concluding summary and exemplary testimony to the Manicheans in Book 9:4 envisages Augustine’s historical trial as part of the great trial in which Christ at God’s “right hand … intercedes with You for us … against the day of wrath and of the revelation of the just judgment of God” (9.4.10). At the eschatological trial, Satan is the “cunning accuser” who “contradicted” and “confuted” all testimony except Christ’s (9.13.36).⁸⁸ These passages reveal the importance for the *Confessions* of the trial with the trial’s “entire cycle of concepts”: witness, testify, testimony, testifying under oath, judge, judgment, accuser, conviction, decree, counselor.⁸⁹ Reflecting on the theology of justification, Ricoeur comments that, traditionally, justification has been placed in the context of the Pauline problematic of justification by faith to the neglect of “this other kind of ‘juridical’ thought, this other problem of justification which derives its coherence from this horizon of the great trial on which all theology of testimony is projected.”⁹⁰

The judicial perspective enables us to capture the sense of Augustine's testimony as proof. In *Confessions* Book 9:4, Augustine is intent on making the Manicheans realize that he is a faithful witness. He has withdrawn from his chair of rhetoric; like Victorinus he has sacrificed a very promising career and retired for the vintage vacation to Cassiciacum with his friends. There, he recalls reading the Psalms: "What cries did I utter to you in those Psalms and how was I inflamed towards You by them, and on fire to set them sounding through all the world? ... I thought of the Manicheans with indignation and a burning anguish of sorrow" (9.4.8). The solemnity and truthfulness of the testimony is enhanced and sanctified by the disingenuous means of recalling his thoughts on reciting the Psalms alone and before God while the Manicheans eavesdrop.

With credentials of the witness established – an oath sworn before God – Augustine tells his story: "I cried out many things strongly and earnestly in the grief I felt at what I remembered" (9.4.9). The story, he remembers, began when he was eighteen. On fire for wisdom, he read the Scriptures, but "they seemed to me unworthy to be compared with the majesty of Cicero. My conceit was repelled by their simplicity" (3.5.9). Consequently, he "fell in with a sect of men [the Manicheans] talking high sounding nonsense.... They cried out 'Truth, truth; they were forever uttering the word to me, but the thing was nowhere in them'" (3.6.10). Augustine, as a result of their false testimony, was "scandalized" by Scripture (3.7.13). Worse still, Augustine, the true witness, had not only been deceived but was a false witness himself: "I had been a scourge, a blind raging snarler against the Scriptures" (9.4.11). The recoil effect gives his present testimony, like that of his predecessor Paul the Pharisee,⁹¹ more weight.

He traced the great trial in his own life. Throughout his young adulthood, he bore false witness against Scripture: "Throughout that nine-year period from my nineteenth year to my twenty-eighth, I was astray and led others astray, was deceived and deceived others in various forms of self-assertion" (4.1.1). The true witnesses begin to build their case. At first, the true witness is Monica and her tears, dreams and an ex-Manichean Catholic bishop, whose witness, she claimed, "sounded from heaven" (3.12.21). The astronomical speculations of Manes were refuted in the liberal sciences and Faustus, the greatest witness for the Manicheans, "who had been a snare that brought death to many, did [by his ignorance of the liberal sciences] without his knowledge or will begin to unbind the snare that held me" (5.7.13). Above all, "the bishop and devout servant of God, Ambrose, famed among the best men of the whole world, whose eloquence [though 'not so pleasing and captivating as that of Faustus' – Ambrose's persuasiveness is not a rhetorical trick!] did then most powerfully minister to 'Thy people'" (5.13.23), and the important

but ambiguous witness of Academic skepticism and Platonism led him to the truth. They put an end to his “wandering in my sacrilegious superstition through the base ways of the Manicheans: not indeed that I was [ever] sure they [the Manicheans] were right but that I preferred them to the Christians, whom I did not inquire about in the spirit of religion but simply opposed through malice” (8.7.17).

Nevertheless, he did not immediately become a witness; he apostrophized himself:

Why is my voice not heard? Surely you are the man who used to say that you could not cast off vanity's baggage for an uncertain truth. Very well: now the truth is certain, yet you are still carrying the load. Here are men [Victorinus as witnessed to by Simplicianus, Antony and the civil servants as witnessed to by Ponticianus] who have been given wings to free their shoulders from the load, though they did not wear themselves out in searching nor spend ten years or more thinking about it. (8.7.18)

The verse “Be angry and sin not” (9.4.10) brings him in remembrance to the final stages of the trial of testimonies in Book 8. There, he recalls how he “learned to be angry with myself for the past” (9.4.10). Anger enabled his troubled conscience to forgo the soothing morality of Manichean dualism. Augustine comments: “to be angry with good reason, because it was not some other nature of the race of darkness that had sinned in me, as the Manicheans say: and they are not angry at themselves, but treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath” (9.4.10).

The trial of testimonies in Book 8 grows more inward. Extreme internalization of testimony results from the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, “the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth” (9.4.9). The Spirit convicts Manichean Augustine of seeking after lies. For Augustine, the fallacy of the Manicheans is the exteriority of their search and the materialistic *phantasma* by which they conceive of God. Augustine, “frantic” to make them see Christ, “the Light interior and eternal,”⁹² acknowledges his own inability to make them do so: “For the heart they would bring me would be in their eyes, eyes that looked everywhere but at You” (9.4.10). Only the efficacious witness of the Paraclete can warm the heart:

But there, where I had been angry with myself, in my own room where I had been pierced, where I had offered my sacrifice, slaying the self that I had been and, in the newly-taken purpose of newness of life, hoping in You [the story of the first eleven chapters of Book 8] – there you began to make me feel Your love and to give “gladness in my heart.” I cried out as I read this aloud and realized it within. (9.4.10)

In Book 8, Augustine recalls his existential conflict over freedom as a trial of the heart.

The final witnesses summoned are, on the one side, the false witness of his “one-time mistresses” and, on the other, “Continen^tce . . . but not evilly, honorably soliciting me. . . . With her I saw such hosts of young men and maidens, a multitude of youth and of every age, grey widows and woman grown old in virginity, and in them all Continen^tce herself, not barren but the fruitful mother of children, her joy, by You, Lord, her Spouse” (8.11.27). The great trial summoning up a host of witnesses has become an existential decision: “This was the controversy raging in my heart, a controversy about myself against myself” (8.11.27), so that Book 9.4 concludes “with a deep cry of my heart,” for “You Lord, alone have ‘made me dwell in hope.’ All these things [in Scripture] I read and was on fire” (9.4.11). Nevertheless, the controversy, the trial continues to the end of time, till “the revelation of the just judgment of God,” for Augustine the bishop, become another Ambrose, stands helpless before the Manicheans; they will not listen: “what could be done with those deaf dead, of whom indeed I had myself been one . . . and now I was fretting my heart out over the enemies of these same Scriptures” (9.4.11).

In a trial, testimony is offered as proof. Testimony forces us “to choose between the false witness and the true witness,”⁹³ to decide who sides with the false accuser and who with the Holy Spirit, between lies and faithful witness. Testimony sets in motion a juridical process in which probable external proofs of narrated events and defeasible confessional meaning are open to judgment. The story told by Augustine forces his contemporaries to make up their minds on the basis of hearing, not seeing – “*Fides ex auditu.*”⁹⁴ In his story, the “absolute itself is on trial.”⁹⁵ And, in so far as the contemporaries too are encompassed by the eschatological trial, their own testimony is *sub judice*. “The trial is unavoidable. . . . Only a trial can decide between Yahweh and the ‘idols of nothing.’”⁹⁶ The story of the trial that Augustine relates gives “so many bits of evidence and means of proof in the grand trial of the absolute.”⁹⁷ Since there can be no manifestation of God without the crisis of false testimony and a judicial decision, we cannot see the force of Augustine’s testimony for his contemporaries unless we bring it into focus, unless we reinterpret his story by cross-examining his evidence using our investigative techniques. It is my hope in the remainder of this book that, if I do him that justice, I may understand what must seem strange to us but persuasive to his brethren, his experience of God across the sixteen centuries between us and late Roman North Africa.

TESTIMONY AND THE “RECTIFIED HEART”

What sort of certainty does testimony afford? Augustine says in Book 6 of the *Confessions* that God “worked upon my heart and rectified” its understanding of the nature of certainty (6.5.1). Up till then, he says, “I wanted to be as certain of things unseen as that seven and three make ten” (6.4.2). His rectified heart recognizes that most things in this world are believed as true on trust: “I began to consider the countless things I believed which I had not seen … unless we accepted these things, we should do nothing at all in this life” (6.5.1). What brought about this change of heart? Augustine has been listening to Ambrose. Ambrose’s spiritual interpretation of the Bible showed Augustine that Manichean literalism was false and its mockery misplaced. This coupled with the failure of Faustus to present proofs for Manichean teachings of the seven-plus-three-make-ten variety, disabused Augustine. Let us be clear here. Augustine’s appeal to Ambrose’s testimony, to attestation and the veritative mode of truth, does not mean that Augustine is opposed to the criterion of verification practiced in the liberal sciences, “verification is included in the process of reflection as a necessary epistemic [and probative] moment.”⁹⁸ This is readily apparent, for example, in Augustine’s debunking of astrology and his repudiation of Faustus.

However, Augustine recognizes that the truths that concern us most intimately cannot have the character of an “ultimate and self-founding knowledge.”⁹⁹ Attestation, testimony, veritative truth is not doxic ‘belief that,’ but ‘belief in,’ in a person giving testimony – credence.¹⁰⁰ Now this presents Augustine with a dilemma: Augustine thinks that Ambrose is the true witness and Faustus the false. “Nothing of what he [Ambrose] said struck me as false, although I did not as yet know whether what he said is true. I held back my heart from accepting anything, fearing that I might fall once more.... I wanted to be as certain of things unseen as that seven and three make ten” (6.4.2). Augustine is trapped. On the one hand, he affirms that “by believing I might have been cured” (6.4.2). On the other hand, “the man who has tried a bad doctor [Faustus] is afraid to trust even a good one [Ambrose]” (6.4.2). If there is no seven-plus-three-make-ten certainty available, what is Augustine to do? He is caught in a conflict of interpretations between true and false testimony, in which suspicion constantly accompanies and undermines attestation. Augustine refuses to escape from the dilemma by becoming a skeptic. He regards this ruse as a kind of “madness” (6.4.2). Instead, he agrees to live within the dilemma of attestation and suspicion, for, he says, if we cannot trust anyone, if we become skeptics, “we should do nothing at all in this life” (6.5.1). He accepts the fact that suspicion is the necessary companion of

attestation, as in true and false testimony, but his “rectified” heart recognizes that inertia, that “hanging in suspense was more deadly” (6.4.2).

But how will he test for the veracity or falsity of testimony, of Faustus versus Ambrose, of Manichaeism versus Catholic Christianity, Manichean Scriptures versus the Bible, with its much ridiculed Old Testament? He says that he will see which one works: Faustus, with his “impossible promises,” versus Ambrose, who “acted more modestly and honestly” (6.5.1). He will try Ambrose, for “by believing I might have been cured” (6.4.2). And what will count as a cure? Faustus’ testimony has failed. The Manicheans “derided credulity and made impossible promises of certain knowledge, and then called upon men to believe so many utterly fabulous and absurd things because they could not be demonstrated” (6.5.1). Augustine says that Ambrose’s testimony will be vindicated if, by trusting his witness, “the eye of my mind … [becoming] clearer … might in some way have been directed towards Your [God’s] truth which abides forever and knows no defect” (6.4.2).

Does Ambrose’s witness work where Faustus’ has failed? First, Augustine accepts that “there is no recourse against false testimony than another that is more credible; and there is no recourse against suspicion but a more reliable attestation.”¹⁰¹ Second, Augustine distrusts anyone who trusts himself, who trusts his own self-attestation, who believes that one can respond to one’s call to oneself to live well. Instead, he believes that an efficacious and free willing can only be a gift, a call to the lyrical life that comes from the other. John Rist says that, for Augustine,

our mind-set or *voluntas* – cannot depend on mere cognitive acts. That is not the kind of beings we are; such are not the motives which drive us. To be able to believe in God, to have faith in him, is to have something of the love of God (itself a gift of God) – that loving belief being the prerequisite to further moral and theological understanding. There can be no merely rational substitutes. If we are to understand that belief is thinking with assent, Augustine holds that we must know in the case of each belief the conditions under which such assent can be secured. In religion (widely conceived) thinking the truth cannot be separated from loving the truth, and in our present world loving the truth cannot be separated from faith.¹⁰²

What Ricoeur calls “the ‘mandated self’” which “involves the notion of response, this is placed over and against the notion of call, not that of question [as is the case with philosophy]. It is one thing to answer a question, in the sense of solving a problem that is posed; it is quite another to respond to a call.... Biblical *agape* belongs to an economy of the gift ... in which love is tied to the ‘naming of God’ ”¹⁰³ and, reciprocally the naming of God is known in agapic living. But this reciprocal testimony – agapic living

tied to the criteriology of the divine – because it is defeasible cannot offer the foundational certainty where speculation and reflection have failed.¹⁰⁴ Ricoeur cautions biblical faith lest it surreptitiously attempt to supply the ultimate foundation that philosophy lacks.

The reference of biblical faith to a culturally contingent symbolic network requires that this faith assume its own insecurity, which makes it a chance happening transformed into a destiny by means of a choice constantly renewed, in the scrupulous respect of different choices. The dependence of the self on a word that strips it of its glory, all the while comforting its courage to be, delivers biblical faith from the temptation, which I am here calling cryptophilosophical, of taking over the henceforth vacant role of ultimate foundation. In turn, a faith that knows itself to be without guarantee ... can help philosophical hermeneutics to protect itself from the hubris that would set it up as the heir to the philosophies of the *cogito* and continuing their self-foundational claim.¹⁰⁵

The problem with testimony is compounded by what Ricoeur, citing Nabert, calls the “unjustified” and what Augustine will identify as inherited evil and living malice. Augustine recognizes that he has no alternative but to turn to the testimony of agapic living if he is to purify his reflexive criteriology of the divine. He must appeal to

an exterior witness outside of his own reflection.... The discernment of false absolutes [of false divine names] requires a divestment of the self via ... the testimony of certain acts, certain lives that, despite their radical contingency, their plain historicity, speak in the name of the absolute.... We have no other resource than the judgment applied to those determinations and objectifications coming from the history of thought and to the testimony of certain acts, certain lives, certain sacrifices.¹⁰⁶

Augustine endorsed the criterion of verification available in the liberal sciences. It was of this set of criterion that Faustus ran afoul and was discredited. The proof available to testimony is not comparably apodictic. One believes “in the speech of the one giving testimony.”¹⁰⁷ One finds the witness credible. Suspicion and the possibility of false testimony always accompany credence and trust, so that testimony offers only “credence without any guarantee, but also trust greater than any suspicion.”¹⁰⁸ Augustine trusts in Ambrose’s spiritual interpretation of a “chance happening,” – the Bible stories – which belong to a “culturally contingent symbolic network.”¹⁰⁹ As a result, Augustine’s belief in Ambrose’s testimony must “assume its own insecurity” because suspicion accompanies it. Ambrose’s testimony becomes Augustine’s “destiny by means of a choice constantly renewed, in the scrupulous respect of

different choices.”¹¹⁰ This “respect,” this not-knowing, this humility, founded on the impossibility of finding any foundations, convicts Augustine’s youthful intransigence in Manichaeism and the inevitable hubris coupled with the hatred of truth that Augustine discovered flows from original sin. Humility, understood in this way, “rectified” his heart. Humility is the medium of the lyrical life.

FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

Augustine believes that his brethren find him a credible witness: He asks, “when they hear me confessing of myself, how do they know whether I speak the truth, since ‘no man knows the things of a man but the spirit of a man that is in him?’” (10.3.3) He replies that they find him credible because they “have their ear at my heart, where I am what I am” (10.3.4). However, this does not mean that Augustine, unlike, for example, Plotinus,¹¹¹ was unaware that his memory was so vast and mysterious that he could not know himself. Augustine believes that reflection fails to grasp itself intellectually. He says that he “was overcome with wonder and almost stupor” (10.8.15) at “the power of memory in me [that] I do not understand, though without memory I could not even name myself” (10.16.25). More distressing still, reflection also fails to grasp itself practically and ethically: “I do not know which temptations I myself can resist and which I cannot” (10.5.7).¹¹² Augustine did not have the benefit of our modern techniques for delving into the vast “storehouse of memory” (10.8.14). Heirs of the Enlightenment, we have inherited from Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and their descendants the means to interrogate self-reports of our inner life. We can push our inquiry into “the things of a man” beyond what is known by relying only on Augustine’s introspective “spirit of a man that is in him” (10.3.3). Believing with Augustine that “there is no recourse against suspicion but a more reliable attestation”¹¹³ and, therefore, that a reliable Augustinian attestation – one that would permit us to understand why Augustine’s contemporaries trusted him – must undergo a trial at the bar of modernity and late modernity using the same investigative techniques we habitually use to examine ourselves. Gillian Clark rightly comments that

once it is accepted that there are connections patterns and levels of meaning that may not have been apparent to the author, then the author cannot determine how the text is read. So Augustine, who in book thirteen interprets Moses as conveying truths about the Trinity and the Christian Church, is left without defense against a Freudian reading of his own text.¹¹⁴

I believe that Augustine, if not all of his followers, would welcome a Freudian reading.

What are the specific forms of false consciousness endemic to testimony, to *confessio*? How, for example, would Augustine's testimony respond to contemporary moral situationalism? Heidegger, in the tradition of the Academic skepticism known to Augustine, faced with our non-mastery of our own affections, says we must call ourselves to authentic resoluteness in our lot in life, in the face of nothingness and, in bearing anxiety. For Heidegger, bad conscience is merely reactive remorse and repentance, part of our inauthentic inherited lot in life, and good conscience is hypocritical, for there are no theoretical or moral or other-oriented grounds for moral action. Heidegger's authenticity and resoluteness can only justify moral situationalism?¹¹⁵

Moral relativism did not serve Heidegger well in 1930s Germany and has not served us well since. In our times, we have had to face instances of evil, such as genocidal civil wars, that cannot be accounted for by the failure of the victims to obey their inherited or cultural moral norms and that cannot be rectified simply by adherence to these same or rewritten sets of moral norms. Faced with genocidal wars, not to mention our own failings, we know that regeneration is beyond our power. The experience of a passivity that on reflection equals fault, failure, solitude, and, above all, the unjustifiable whose justification surpasses our own resources sets us “on the way of the testimony rendered by others, better than us, as the possibility of a justification that exceeds our own resources.... In order to render the very idea of justification credible, Nabert calls on a ‘gratuitously willed suffering to restore the last chances of a spiritual universe.’”¹¹⁶ Nabert, adds “Whether it be a question of a misfortune or of guilt, evil is doubled unless, at the proper moment, the gratuitous act of another conscience occurs, a source of appeasement and a promise of justification: evil lies in the will, but also lies in the wrongs man inflicts on man.”¹¹⁷

Augustine would readily agree to this appeal to a “gratuitously willed suffering,” and “the gratuitous act of another conscience,” but this appeal must first come to terms with Hegel’s critique. Hegel says that, since the inner self is the sole arbiter of its own inner heart, it cannot know if it is choosing the good as an absolutely universal principle or evil as private self-will.¹¹⁸ As Augustine himself was first to show, and as Hegel reiterates, “it is in the very inwardness of the will that evil lies.”¹¹⁹ Nietzsche’s archeological critique takes Hegel a step further. Nietzsche’s critique in terms of resentment undermines the rationality of our spontaneous assessment of good and evil. But in its turn, one has to ask Nietzsche and, by extension, Augustine, how do we escape

from the vicious circle of indignation and self-justification¹²⁰ so dramatically instantiated in Augustine's confrontation with the Manicheans and later with the Donatists? Faced with this vicious circle, Nabert acknowledges that the call for justification "surpasses the resources of the good will least satisfied with itself"¹²¹ because of our inability to assure ourselves that our actions are "'exempt from some secret self-complaisance.'"¹²²

In [Chapter 3](#), "Narcissism and Narrative's Vital Lie," I will try to cross-examine Augustine's "secret self-complaisance." In [Chapters 4, 5, 6](#), and [7](#), "Evil, Suffering, and Dualistic Wisdom," "Original Sin: An Ineluctable Triple Hatred," "Original Sin and the Human Tragic," and "The Platitudes of Ethical Monotheism," I will try to show how Augustine identifies and responds to this same vicious circle of indignation and self-justification. But, before taking up these questions, I will try to show, in [Chapter 2](#), that Freud's neurotic phantasm of a punishing and rewarding Father God is transformed by Augustine into a Father hidden in mystery behind the lyrical symbol of a "'gratuitously willed suffering'" that "'restores the last chances of a spiritual universe.'" The remaining chapters of this book, eight through eleven, will try to follow Augustine as he testifies to the lyrical life lived in the gift economy. Here, Augustine responds to the call: "Love me!" but which, because "violence taints all the relations of interaction," becomes "Thou shalt not kill!" and in its wake follow debt, the court, the verdict, the problem of good and bad conscience, and the menace of Hegel's, Nietzsche's, and Heidegger's subjective morality with its tragic choices.¹²³



Fatherhood: From Neurotic Phantasm to Compassionate Symbol

The extreme internalization of the great trial of testimonies in Book 8 of the Confessions has become an existential decision: “a controversy about myself against myself” (8.11.27). Book 9 involves a comparable internalization. There, Augustine convicts the Manicheans of seeking after lies with an appeal to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. These internalizations must sound to us as cases of special pleading. Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and their descendants have taught us not to trust self-reports of internal states and have given us the means for cross-examining them.

Augustine himself was attentive to false consciousness in its many guises. Augustine’s self-examination, in the second half of Book 10, is acutely sensitive to, even scrupulously aware of, bad faith and all forms of self-deception. Throughout his writings, he treats various forms of “*libido*,” not just “*libido carnalis*,” but also, “*libido ulciscendi*,” “*libido habendi pecuniam*,” “*libido glo-riandi*,” and, above all, “*libido dominandi*.¹ I believe that Augustine would welcome any method that could help identify libido’s many guises. He would relish the prospect of a trial before modernity.

Given our techniques for cross-examining witnesses, Augustine’s reflective and historical knowledge must seem at first sight naive. By introducing these modern methods I hope to measure the depth of Augustine’s testimony and its surplus. Augustine’s intimate, developmental self-portrayal of his *Confessions* must be read by Freud, one of modernity’s masters of the psyche, if we are to listen to his testimony with the freshness that his contemporaries listened and understand the alacrity with which they adopted his confessional theology.

The title is, in part, borrowed from Paul Ricoeur’s essay: “Fatherhood: From Phantasm to Symbol,” Robert Sweeney (trans.), in *CI*, pp. 468–97. Chapter 2 is a revised version for this book of my article “Freudianism, and Augustine’s *Confessions*,” pp. 93–114.

Why does our age call for Freudian interpretations of personal documents like the *Confessions*? Freudianism, following in the tradition of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, discovers false consciousness in direct reflective knowledge of the self. Religious uses of direct knowledge render religion suspect. For Freud, religion is merely a projection of an ancient destiny both infantile and ancestral that returns in the conscious life of the individual as the repressed returns in the life of the obsessional neurotic.² Direct knowledge of the self has become incredible. One must make a detour through the unconscious to come to true self-knowledge. I will try to cross-examine Augustine's testimony with Freud's reductionist and, frankly, atheistic reading of religion as the deconstructive moment in the modern appropriation of Augustine's classic religious text. A Freudian reading need not be dismissed as merely reductionist but can be welcomed as a probing analysis of the *Confessions*.

Testimony's defeasible nature justifies, indeed invites, this kind of trial. Testimony's dialectical structure of meaning and event, gives rise to "an open chain of interpretants."³ Freudian interpretations of the *Confessions* were the earliest deconstructive readings. They first appeared in 1925 with B. Legewie's "Augustinus, Eine Psychographie,"⁴ and 1927–28 with E. R. Dodds's "Augustine's *Confessions*: A Study of Spiritual Maladjustment."⁵ In 1962, following P. De Labriolle and M. Zepf, A. Solignac, rejected Legewie's interpretation as superficial and one-sided: "Les *Confessions* sont l'œuvre d'un homme que la grâce a libéré de ses complexes, qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec la concupiscence."⁶ C. Kligerman revived Freudian interpretation of the *Confessions* with his 1957 article "A Psychoanalytic Study of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine,"⁷ and P. Pruyser in 1965–66 edited six articles by distinguished psychologists of religion in the same vein in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.⁸ David Burrell's "Reading The *Confessions* of Augustine: An Exercise in Theological Understanding,"⁹ and other more recent articles¹⁰ have not received the attention they deserve in Augustinian studies, perhaps for the reductionistic tendencies noted by Solignac. It is true that, following Dodds, Brown views the *Confessions* as "an act of therapy,"¹¹ but the main elements of Freudian interpretations do not find a distinctive place in his biography. Ricoeur's hermeneutics, with its symbolic/metaphorical understanding of meaning and truth, offers one possible method for redressing any reductionist tendencies. Ricoeur's literary approach has enabled him to conduct a constructive dialogue between Freudianism and religion. I propose to introduce Augustine into the conversation, using Ricoeur's method as found in his essay, "Fatherhood: From Phantasm to Symbol."¹²

According to Ricoeur, credible self-knowledge requires the conscious step-by-step appropriation of different spheres of meaning. In the process, one

becomes an ethical self. Freudianism serves as the deconstructive moment in each step. Freudianism detects the regressive and repetitious elements. For the constructive moment, Ricoeur turns to Hegel and his philosophical account of the figures by which consciousness appropriates itself as Spirit. The progression of the figures constitutes consciousness. Unlike Hegel, Ricoeur believes that final self-knowledge is never complete. He substitutes eschatological symbolism for Hegel's absolute knowledge. According to Ricoeur, the end is only a hope, promised through the symbols of the sacred. The end is always a task. The end receives its meaning from the figures that lie ahead. The sacred "symbols are the prophecy of consciousness. They manifest the dependence of the self on an absolute source of existence and meaning, on an *eschaton*, an ultimate end toward which all the figures of the Spirit point."¹³

In this chapter, I will read the *Confessions* as an attempt to come to self-knowledge. Progress will be measured in terms of the succession of the Hegelian figures of the Spirit. But first, self-knowledge must be analyzed as nothing more than the tendency toward regression and repetition. The question always arises as to which figures guide growth and maturation. They are ambiguous and equivocal: When are they a prophecy of consciousness, when a return of the repressed? Ricoeur answers, and my examination of the *Confessions* confirms, that they are always both: "The progressive order of symbols is not exterior to the regressive order of fantasies; the plunge into the archaic mythologies of the unconscious brings to the surface new signs of the sacred. The eschatology of consciousness is always a creative repetition of its own archeology."¹⁴

Insofar as the Augustine of the *Confessions* has been the Christian everyman down through the ages, his confrontation with Freud is a personal trial for believers. In the hands of Ricoeur, the question becomes not so much can faith come through unscathed, but what transformation will be worked in faith and theology during the ordeal? An encounter with Freud will reveal two possible views of Augustine and two possible theologies in the *Confessions*: one neurotic, with a theology satisfying wish fulfillment, the other transformed beyond the reach of Freudianism in Hegel's figures of the Spirit. In an appreciative and constructive response to this chapter, Donald Capps says that I make "a solid case for the 'non-neurotic' side of Augustine's resolution of the Oedipal conflict ... but this resolution does not appear to be 'beyond the reach of Freudianism' because Rigby himself accepts the view that this resolution is a 'sublimation of [Augustine's] Oedipal conflict,' and not an unambiguously successful sublimation at that."¹⁵

Capps's comment calls for a threefold response: First, I repeat my original assertion that not all dimensions of Augustine's self and theology are beyond

Freudianism's grasp. Second, it is misleading to imagine that those dimensions that go beyond advance in a manner comparable to Hegel's Absolute Spirit. Hegel's figures of the Spirit might lead one to expect a comparable progression, but, following Ricoeur, I have been careful to substitute eschatological symbolism for Hegel's absolute knowledge. Augustine's self is beyond Freud's reach only in a hope promised through the symbols of the sacred. Finally, the genre of sublimation is metaphorical. The symbols raise themselves up on the literal or, better still, archaic meaning that has been brought to light by Freud's archeological work. Their sublimation can be discovered in the archaic scene. The archaic scene functions as a ruined economy on which a new hope arises.

Ricoeur's method permits me to disentangle two views of Augustine and his theology, one view identified by Freud and the other by Hegel, and to understand them metaphorically as a living dialectic. They reveal the struggle for self-consciousness and truth. An arduous path followed by the individual, the Christian churches, and the culture of Augustine's day. In them, one may recognize a credible fourth century articulation of Christianity through which Augustine engages in dialogue with a God who is more than a necessary illusion.

PATRICIUS AND AUGUSTINE IN AN ECONOMY OF DESIRE

Freudian studies of Augustine place his life within the Oedipal complex. Bakan states: "The Oedipal elements in Augustine are patent. There is a great attachment to the mother. The father is reproached for not being a Christian, for his sexuality, for his anger, etc. His mother's sexual relations with the father are conceived of as a sufferance on her part and impiety on his."¹⁶ Oedipal articulations of Augustine's familial and religious life and their interconnection pose my question concerning the working out of the Oedipus complex in Augustine's adult relations with his father, mother, and God.

Do the *Confessions* present us with a neurotic outcome? In response I will analyze Augustine's life as recorded in the *Confessions* in terms of Ricoeur's interpretation of the Oedipus complex. Then, I will present the necessary processes for non-neurotic resolution of the Oedipus complex and apply them to Augustine. Finally, I will analyze Augustine's relations with God in terms of the Oedipal complex. In the course of the examination, I will raise not only autobiographical questions but also theological issues. Dittes considers that Augustine's persistent adult Oedipal conflict adversely affects his teaching on creation and sovereignty, redemption, church authority, the problem

of evil, grace, original sin, and predestination, the sacraments, and his dealings with the Manicheans, Donatists, and Pelagians. For Dittes, the Oedipal conflict influences every position Augustine holds: “The utter dependence of man on God, his own virtual impotence and ineffectiveness before God – this is the theme on which each of the positions insists. A parallel theme is that of the remoteness, aloofness, absoluteness, impersonality, unapproachability – except in abject humility, of confession – of this controlling God.”¹⁷ Dittes’s view requires us to trace the history of Augustine’s relations with God in terms of the development of his libido.

The first question is one of fact: When Augustine wrote the *Confessions*, was the outcome of his Oedipal relations with his parents neurotic? Ricoeur believes that “the sphere of competence of psychoanalysis is defined by the presence and interplay of life and death instincts.”¹⁸ The field on which these instincts are played out is the Oedipus complex: “The critical point of the Oedipus complex is to be sought for in the initial constitution of desire, namely, its infantile omnipotence. From this proceeds the phantasm of a father who would retain the privileges which the son must seize if he is to be himself.”¹⁹ Augustine identifies the infantile desire for omnipotence in Book 1 of the *Confessions*: “And when I did not get what I wanted … I was in a rage with my parents as though I had a right to their submission, with free human beings as though they had been bound to serve me; and I took my revenge in screams” (1.6.8).²⁰ The Freudian interpreters believe that Augustine did not deal successfully with infantile megalomania. They offer ample evidence, some of the evidence ingenious; the essential thrust is the “great attachment to the mother,”²¹ who is the object of omnipotent infantile desire: “The usual dynamics of the oedipal situation were apparently enhanced in the case of Augustine. Augustine suffered the added misfortune of having ‘won’ the oedipal conflict with his father, sealed by the death of his father when he was sixteen.”²² Dittes offers detailed evidence to support his claim and concludes:

It does not take an esoteric or subtle psychological theory to suppose that a boy raised by such an insistent woman would develop a strong attachment and dependence upon her. Nor does it take sly psychoanalytic sleuthing to find evidence for such dependence in the *Confessions*. Augustine’s attachment to his mother seems clear both in his words about her and in the behavior he reports.²³

Kligerman makes the same point:

We see the impossible position Monica forced on Augustine. Emotionally alienated from her husband, she had grown especially close to her oldest son

and pinned her hopes on him.... Frigid hyper moral women frequently find concealed incestuous gratification in such stormy emotional scenes with their sons. For him it must have been an extremely seductive yet frustrating process, and shed light on the turbulence of his adolescence.²⁴

For these authors, Augustine is neurotic.

I will now reexamine the text of the *Confessions* using Ricoeur's understanding of Freud. A non-neurotic outcome depends on "the replacement of an identification with the father which is literally mortal – and even doubly mortal, since it kills the father by murder and the son by remorse – by a mutual recognition, where difference is compatible with similarity."²⁵ Of course murder here is not real with regard to representation but "is quite real in respect to instinct."²⁶ The successful resolution of the Oedipus complex requires the rectification of desire, the mitigation of "its most profound avowal of omnipotence and immortality."²⁷ For Freud, rectification requires that one accept the father's mortality: "The proof par excellence in this respect is the power to accept the father as mortal and, finally, to accept the death of the father, just as his immortality was only the fantastic projection of the omnipotence of desire."²⁸ Once detached from the actual father, the one who begets, fatherhood becomes a reciprocal designation in which there is no longer antagonism but mutual recognition of father and son.

In the analysis of the *Confessions* that follows I will show that Augustine does recognize his father, accept him as mortal and as actually dead. By so doing, he loosens the blood tie. These findings run counter to the thesis advanced by Dittes, Bakan, and Kligerman.

Does Augustine's severe portrait of his father arise out of an unresolved Oedipus complex? Kligerman thinks it does: "In further describing the father in slighting terms, Augustine would have us believe that only his mother mattered."²⁹ In another place, Kligerman talks of Augustine's "bitterly deprecatory attitude toward his father throughout the work."³⁰ A closer reading of the *Confessions* reveals the reason for Augustine's tone: Patricius' inability to move beyond a representation of fatherhood distinct from physical begetting and simply attached to himself. Augustine draws a contrast between his mother and father:

My father saw me one day in the public baths, now obviously growing towards manhood and showing the turbulent signs of adolescence. The effect upon him was that he already began to look forward to grandchildren, and went home in excitement to tell my mother. He rejoiced indeed, through that intoxication in which the world forgets You its Creator and

loves what You have created instead of You, the intoxication of the invisible wine of a will perverted and turned towards baseness. (2.3.6)³¹

Augustine compares Patricius' reaction with Monica's later in the same passage, but the sharpest contrast occurs at the climax of Augustine's conversion:

For You converted me to Yourself so that I no longer sought a wife nor any of this world's promises, but stood on the same rule of faith [as Monica].... Thus you changed her mourning into joy, a joy far richer than she had thought to wish, a joy much richer and purer than she had thought to find in grandchildren of my flesh. (8.12.30)³²

In so far as Patricius restricts fatherhood to physical begetting and the narcissism of the desire for immortality through grandchildren, Augustine can recognize true fatherhood only by detaching fatherhood from Patricius.³³

Monica herself had formerly looked forward to grandchildren, which in itself is in accord with Augustine's doctrine on the three ends of marriage (*proles, fides, sacramentum*). In the passage just cited, Augustine registers Monica's growth toward a higher spiritual understanding. He presents a parallel advance with regard to her plans for burial (9.11.28)³⁴ and is critical of an element of "too earthly affection" in her attachment to himself (5.8.15).³⁵ At first, Monica is idealized as God's emissary to Augustine. For example, Monica's reaction to Augustine's arrival at puberty is contrasted with Patricius' excitement at the prospect of grandchildren cited earlier:

She was stricken with a holy fear. And though I was not yet baptized, she was in terror of my walking in the crooked ways of those who walk with their backs towards You and not their faces. I have dared to say that You were silent, my God, when I went afar from You. But was it truly so? Whose but Yours were the words you dinned into my ears through the voice of my mother, Your faithful servant? (2.3.6)

After Patricius' baptism, acceptance of Patricius replaces condemnation: "Towards the very end of his life she won her husband to You; and once he was a Christian she no longer had to complain of the things she had to bear with before he was a Christian" (9.9.22). Here I do not wish to raise the question of Augustine's marriage theory or that theory's relationship to paternity. My point is simply that, after Patricius' baptism, Augustine's portrait of his father is no longer antagonistic. Peter Brown notes a complimentary transformation in Augustine's relation with Monica. With Patricius, the move is from rejection to acceptance; with Monica, the move is from idealization to ordinariness.³⁶ The complementary realignment of Augustine's relations with his parents satisfy the two dimensions necessary for the successful resolution

of the Oedipus complex. At the end of Book 9, Augustine recognizes his dead father before God, without antagonism or remorse:

Remember at Your altar Your servant Monica, with Patricius, her husband, by whose bodies You did bring me into this life, though how I know not ... remember these who were my parents in this transitory life, my brethren who serve You as our Father in our Catholic Mother, and those who are to be fellow-citizens with me in the Eternal Jerusalem. (9.13.37)³⁷

Nonetheless, the Oedipus complex is not transcended. The new paths of the Oedipal conflict, with God as Father and the Catholic church as Mother, revive the archaic scene.

“Everything in Freudianism tends to a certain pessimism with respect to the capacity for sublimation,”³⁸ comments Ricoeur. Dodds says that

Augustine’s conversion to Catholicism brought about complete surrender [to Monica] and he could say of her, after her death, “of her life and mine was one life made.” One need not have studied Freud to recognize in Augustine’s exceptional relationship to his mother one of the determining factors in Augustine’s life-history. From this springs his inability to find happiness in the love of women, from this his desperate pursuit – in philosophy, in friendship, at last in religion – of an elusive substitute for that happiness.³⁹

Dittes believes that Augustine’s conversion was an inevitable consequence of Oedipal conflict: “It is even less clear that he was ever free – especially in view of the insistent influence of his mother – to achieve a final resolution except within the limits of a Christian commitment.”⁴⁰ Bakan fancifully summarizes Augustine’s Oedipal repetition at the religious level: “Monica, so to speak, carried him for 9 months in bringing him to his fleshly form, and then he recites for nine books his being borne by his mother until his spiritual rebirth.”⁴¹

Augustine says that Monica “used all her endeavor, O God, that I should hold You for my father rather than [Patricius]” (1.11.17).⁴² We must ask whether or not Augustine’s transfiguration of the father in religion is

the same thing and not the same thing, as the return of the repressed; the same thing in the sense that everything continues to take place in the field of the Oedipal complex; not the same thing to the degree that our desire, by renouncing omnipotence, assents to the representation of a mortal father whom it is no longer necessary to kill but who can be recognized.⁴³

Augustine recognizes Patricius; what of God as father?

AUGUSTINE'S HISTORY OF THE EDUCATION OF DESIRE

An informed discussion of God as father requires understanding of the process by which Augustine came to hold God for his father rather than Patricius. In its turn, the process presupposes knowledge of the internal evolution of fatherhood from a concept of the father tied to physical generation and immortal, omnipotent desire to the loosening of the blood-tie, mortality of desire, and the mutual recognition of father and son. This process is the subject of the present section. I will postpone the question of God's fatherhood to [Section 3](#).

Transformation of fatherhood occurs only by the agency of non-kinship figures. Ricoeur picks out two such figures: Hegel's master-slave dialectic and the contractual relationship. The first enables me to follow Augustine's journey through fourth-century culture from the immediacy of desire to self-consciousness. The second facilitates a similar journey from kinship bond to free will and personhood. Together, they form the thresholds for the non-neurotic outcome of the Oedipus complex.

The immediacy of the father-son relation excludes self-consciousness:

the cycle of birth and death, to which natural fatherhood and sonship belong – begetting and being begotten – is closed on itself: the growth of the children is the death of the parents. In this sense, natural fatherhood and sonship remain caught in the immediacy of life, in what Hegel would call, in his Jena period, “life of the kind that does not yet know itself”.⁴⁴

The struggle for recognition beyond immediacy requires the renunciation of the vital immortality of desire by mastery (sublimation and desexualization) and the shaping of formless desire by the schooling of thingness (the reality principle, delayed gratification). The former is the experience of the master, the latter of the slave. Patricius in his excitement for grandchildren reveals the immediacy of his life. In Book 8 of the *Confessions* Augustine struggles for mastery over the vital immortality of desire; celibacy symbolizes sublimation and desexualization: he “no longer sought a wife” and with Monica rejoiced “in a joy much richer and purer than she had thought to find in grandchildren of my flesh” (8.12.30).⁴⁵

For Augustine, the struggle was not over children and grandchildren but continence: “In fact it was not really marriage that I wanted. I was simply a slave to lust” (6.15.25).⁴⁶ Continence, though closely tied to sexual lust, has a broader domain because continence gives mastery over the *triplex concupiscentia*: “The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (10.29.40–30.42). Augustine's understanding of continence is entirely in

keeping with Ricoeur's thesis: "It is important that the educative dialectic, for Hegel, is not that of father and son but rather of master and slave. It is this which has a future and which – let us say it immediately – gives a future to sexuality.... Fatherhood and sonship enter into the movement of recognition only in the light of the master-slave relation."⁴⁷ What the master does, his great challenge, is "to renounce the vital immortality of desire"⁴⁸ by rising above the immediacy of life. Augustine rose above immediacy in his struggle for continence.

In the second half of Book 10, Augustine describes the ongoing struggle. The work is never complete; the reality principle continues to educate the pleasure principle.⁴⁹ Education of the pleasure principle brings us to the side of the slave:

The slave is raised above formless, unshapen desire by the rude schooling of thingness – in Freudian language, by the reality principle. Whereas extravagant desire would suppress the thing, the slave is rubbed raw by the real ... in "forming" (*bilden*) the thing, the individual is formed himself. "Labour," says Hegel, "is desire restrained, and checked, evanescence delayed and postponed ... labor shapes."⁵⁰

Augustine recalls being "formed." In his boyhood, he was "rubbed raw by the real": "Your ordinance ranges from the master's cane to the torments suffered by the martyrs, and works that mingling of bitter with sweet which brings us back to You from the poison of pleasure that first drew us away from You" (1.14.23). Unable to "suppress the things," extravagant desire is shaped in continence. The studies, which Patricius made his son endure for the sake of fame and fortune, initiated – with the reading of Cicero's Hortensius (3.4.7)⁵¹ – Augustine's journey from immediacy to a spiritual understanding of himself and God. He labored in the hard servitude of Manichean *phantasmata*, academic skepticism, and spiritual Platonism: "I toil with this, toil within myself: I have become to myself a soil laborious and of heavy sweat" (10.16.25).

As "the savage struggle for recognition,"⁵² the master-slave dialectic characterizes Augustine's journey from immediacy to self-consciousness. With the master-slave dialectic, Augustine crosses the first threshold in the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. Freudianism necessarily probes my conclusion; Bakan says Augustine's

severe distinction of lust from affective involvement is in itself indicative of immaturity.... He is critical of his sexual activities because he sees them as expressions of habit, compulsion, flesh, and lust. However, instead of attempting to move in the direction of being able to enlarge his love, he moves, rather, in the reverse direction, of alienating himself from any real love.⁵³

The contractual relationship, by “enlarging” love to include the community, makes possible a second threshold. The master-slave dialectic enables the father-son relation to cross the first threshold, to move beyond simple, natural generation to two self-consciousness. The contractual relationship permits two self-consciousnesses to cross the second threshold, to confront each other as two persons and two free wills. Here the contractual will binds the arbitrary will in juridical, moral, and political rights. By so doing, the contractual will establishes personhood with its field of freedom. I have traced Augustine’s progress from immediacy of desire to self-consciousness; now I will follow him on his journey from arbitrary will to contractual freedom and personhood.

The arbitrary will in childhood prefigures adulthood:

I told endless lies.... I stole.... I tried to win by cheating.... I would fly into a rage rather than give way.... Yet as we leave behind tutors and masters and nuts and balls and birds and come to deal with prefects and kings and the getting of gold and estates and slaves, these are the qualities which pass on with us as the greater punishments of the law take the place of the school-master’s cane. (1.19.30)

In the analysis of the pear theft, he shows the essential morality hidden within the immorality of the arbitrary will.⁵⁴ But Augustine claims that Manichaeism misled him so that he could not grasp the foundations of morality, judicial law, and politics (3.7.12–10.18). Augustine claims that Manichaeism proved morally debilitating for him. Manichaeism’s dualistic doctrine allowed him to exonerate himself from responsibility for sin and evil (5.10.18; 7.3.5).⁵⁵ Evasion relieved his guilt, but, while excusing him from responsibility, it removed his free will. Progress became impossible and he became restless: “I despaired of finding any profit in that false doctrine” (5.10.18). He escaped from Manichean dualism by asserting that we experience ourselves as doing evil and our free will as the cause of evil deeds (7.3.5). In Book 8, he records his struggle to take possession of his body and his servile will in an undivided will: “My two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, one spiritual were in conflict and in their conflict wasted my soul” (8.5.10). Once he has rejected Manichean dualism, he finds freedom in the choice of continence. Continence permits the spirit to take possession of the body (8.10.22–24).⁵⁶ Continence permits Augustine to make what Hegel calls the journey from arbitrary will to contractual freedom and personhood:

My body is mine – that I possess my body – only subsequent to a relation of right, that is, of contract and of property: “as a person, I possess my life and my body, like other things, only in so far as it is my property”; and he adds: “I

possess the members of my body, my life, only as long as I will to possess them. An animal cannot maim or destroy itself but a man can"; to the degree that I can give up my life, it belongs to me. Thus the body is taken into possession, *in Besitz genommen* by the spirit.⁵⁷

Augustine's spiritual will takes possession of his body and his carnal will; freed, he becomes a person respecting juridical, moral, and political rights; previously, he lacked respect for the person and was not yet a person himself.

Again, Freudianism suspects my conclusion. Just as Freudianism claimed that celibacy narrowed, rather than enlarged, Augustine's self-consciousness, so now conversion marks the end of his Manichean days of freedom from his mother: "After years of the most vigorous assertion of his independence, Augustine submitted. He surrendered to his mother and to her church."⁵⁸ Reflecting on Augustine's dealings with the Pelagians, Donatists, and Manicheans, Dittes says,

The potential strength and threat of the independence strivings, and their nearness to the surface of consciousness, can perhaps best be gauged by the severity of Augustine's reactions to subdue such suggestions when advanced by others. It cannot be entirely fortuitous accident that the three "controversies" around which so much of Augustine's career all centered have in common this apparent abhorrence of any assertion of an independent human agency.⁵⁹

Bakan regards Augustine's self-consciousness, freedom, and personhood as narcissistic: "Augustine was one of the vainest of men because he so sought to concern himself only with himself. The narcissistic component in Augustine is revealed in the essentially unentailed quality of his sexual activities."⁶⁰ He concludes, "In the denial of sexuality he [Augustine] seeks to deny mankind obedience to the basic biological and religious imperative, to be bound to past and future generations, and to mankind at large."⁶¹

Ricoeur thinks that in the dialectic advance to ever larger identifications, certain provisional "unentailments" are necessary. For the family to found the ethical life of the concrete community and society requires the non-neurotic resolution of the Oedipal conflict. In its turn, a non-neurotic resolution requires father and son to confront each other as free wills, subject to right, contract, and property – "persons, certainly, but stripped of all concrete bonds."⁶² I left Augustine here:

The point we have reached is what Hegel calls independence: independence with respect to desires and life, independence with respect to the other. Independence with respect to the desires, Hegel calls self-consciousness;

independence with respect to the other, Hegel calls the person. It appears that at this point we have dissolved kinship into non-kinship.⁶³

The dissolution of kinship into non-kinship makes it possible to reinstate true kinship on a new level “beyond the simple continuity of generations.”⁶⁴ The properly familial bond can be reinstated beyond and through abstract right and morality in the ethical life of the concrete community, whose threshold is the family. Here, in the spiritual and living bond of the ethical life, the father is rediscovered. Membership is involuntary. The ethical life is “the individual surmounted in the concrete community”⁶⁵ Caught in a network of “felt, rational, intelligible determinations”⁶⁶ the individual abandons his personality. The father is primarily a member, not an independent person; he is recognized “as spouse of the spouse.”⁶⁷ Here, belonging repeats the immediacy of life, but now the father is recognized with the mother. For the son, “it is to renounce the possessing of one through killing the other. It is to accept the father’s being with the mother and the mother’s being with the father. Thus sexuality is recognized; but it is recognized as the carnal dimension of the institution.”⁶⁸

What is recognized is fatherhood, not the individual father. The representation of fatherhood is extricated from individual fathers and their interests. In the death of actual fathers, fatherhood is set free and, with it, the spirit of the ethical community. The dead father passes into a symbol of the ethical substance of fatherhood and, as the tie before which the actual members are bound, the symbol saves fatherhood from the “contingency and caprice of bodily desire.”⁶⁹ The ethical life of the community transforms the father-son relation “from non-recognized fatherhood, mortal and mortifying for desire, to recognized fatherhood, which has become the tie between love and life.”⁷⁰ Transformation of Augustine’s father-son relation is enacted in a remarkable passage at the end of Book 9 of the *Confessions*. Augustine, having passed by way of self-consciousness (master-slave) and free will and personhood (contract) has been baptized into the bond of the concrete ethical community of the Catholic Church. There, he recognizes the carnal dimension of the institution of marriage, the sexuality of his parents, and the ethical substance in the symbol of fatherhood:

So let her [Monica] rest in peace, together with her husband, for she had no other before or after him, but served him, in patience bringing forth fruit for You, and winning him likewise for You. And inspire, O my Lord my God, inspire Your servants my brethren Your sons my masters ... to remember at Your altar Your servant Monica, with Patricius, her husband, by whose bodies You did bring me into this life, though how I know not ...

remember these who were my parents in this transitory life, my brethren who serve You as our Father in our Catholic Mother and those who are to be fellow-citizens with me in the eternal Jerusalem, which Your people sigh for in their pilgrimage from birth until they come there. (9.13.37)

Augustine recognizes Patricius – the rejected father of capricious bodily desire – primarily as a member of the ethical life of the concrete [Catholic] community. Augustine recognizes his father “as spouse of the spouse.”⁷¹ He accepts the sexuality of his parents and their belonging together: “with Patricius her husband, by whose bodies You did bring me into this life.” What is recognized is not the individual father but fatherhood freed from Patricius. He has become a parent “in this transitory life” and a fellow-citizen for whom one prays. Fatherhood itself is recognized in God as father.

AUGUSTINE AND DIVINE FATHERHOOD

In [Section 1](#), I showed that Augustine’s Oedipal conflict had a non-neurotic outcome. He recognized Patricius as a mortal father whom it was no longer necessary to kill and thereby renounced the megalomania of his own omnipotent desire. In [Section 2](#), I retraced the steps by which Augustine successfully resolved the Oedipal conflict. It was a journey via non-parental figures to self-consciousness, free will, personhood, and, finally, the establishment of fatherhood beyond the individual father in the ethical life of the concrete community. In both sections, transformation was effected in religion with God as father. With their pessimism as regards sublimation, the Freudian interpreters believe the problem has been transferred, not resolved. God’s fatherhood poses the same problem as Patricius’ fatherhood. Can God’s fatherhood be understood as a repetition on a higher plane of the primitive figure of fatherhood transformed by processes analogous to those described in [Section 2](#)? If God’s fatherhood can be so understood, the outcome would be non-neurotic.

The Freudian interpreters argue that Augustine’s Oedipal problems forced him to relate to God in the same passive way that he related to Monica. In symbiotic fusion, he sought from both the satisfaction of his immortal, omnipotent desire:

Even as Augustine found himself nowhere in the Mediterranean world, during or after Monica’s lifetime, able to evade her influence, so are all beings in the world simply emanations of the single Godhead. There is no independent agency or will or responsibility apart from this monistic life-giving principle. Even as Augustine presumably felt despair and emptiness when Monica turned her approval from him, so is evil characterized as the

absence of positive emanations from the Godhead. All invisible phenomena – which seem to be significant, substantial, active in the world – are ultimately swallowed up by the invisible source.⁷²

The issue remains the Oedipus complex: Does Augustine seek from God the satisfaction of his infantile desire? Does he abandon self-consciousness, free will, and personhood in God? Is the spirit of the ethical community of the Catholic Church just the working out of the Oedipal conflict: omnipotent desire, instinctual murder, remorse, and guilt? At stake is Augustine's view of God. What follows is a criteriological analysis of Augustine's relationship to God using Hegel's alienating figures of the Spirit – the master-slave dialectic and the contractual relationship. Here, the ethical life of the concrete community and the theology of the death of God replace the phantasm of the punishing father with a symbol of recognition and compassion.

I will heed Ricoeur's advice not "to proceed directly to a psychoanalysis of the believer without making the detour of an exegesis of the texts in which his faith is documented."⁷³ The discourse of the first ten books of the *Confessions* is first of all narrative. In them, Augustine recounts God's acts of salvation and deliverance. The introductory chapters of Book 1 set the narrative history in a confessional context. "*Confessio laudis et peccati*" is the mode: praise of God maintains us in God's presence and refusal to praise absents us from God. In confessional praise, Augustine stands before God as savior: "Say unto my soul, I am Your salvation. So speak that I may hear, Lord, my heart is listening; open it that it may hear You, say to my soul I am Your salvation" (1.5.5).

The father-son relationship between God and Augustine receives its meaning from the confessional context. In the *Confessions*, Augustine understands his life in the light of God's gratuitous act of liberation, which culminates in the freeing of his servile will in Book 8. Liberation establishes the right order in which Augustine is subject to God and his body subject to his soul in God: "I am subject to You, and You have made subject to me the things below me that You have created. This was the right order and middle way of salvation for me, that I should remain in Your image and so in You should dominate my body" (7.7.11). The image of God in us focuses on ruling and ordering, not begetting, and the act of creation itself is a gratuitous ordering; both are modeled on salvation, which depends on the "weighting" of one's loves. In Books 12 and 13, Augustine treats the creation of spiritual beings. He says their goodness is God's gift by a triple gratuity. First, God created them as spiritual formless matter; the priority here is origin, as in the priority of sound to a song (12.29.49). Second, God formed their matter into the image

of the Word; God drew spiritual being out of the darkness of formlessness. Finally, God must sustain them thus because of their tendency to fall away from God into formlessness (12.9.9–12.15; 14.17; 13.2.2–3; 4.5; 8.9).⁷⁴ Creation itself is original salvation; it has nothing to do with kinship or begetting.

I will examine the numerous occasions Augustine calls God father in the context of God the gracious savior. God's fatherhood in the *Confessions* is modeled on liberation, not begetting. Augustine numbers the years of God's fatherhood from his baptism (9.6.14); the baptized are God's adopted children (9.3.6); texts referring to God as creator employ the doctrine of the triple gratuity (1.6.7; 9.6.14; 9.8.18). God's fatherhood looks to the future and baptism marks its inception. Augustine says of Alypius that, while still a pagan and a slave to the gladiatorial shows, "he was one day to be numbered amongst Your children as a high priest of Your sacrament" (6.7.12). Membership in the church dissolves all natural fatherhood. As children of God, brethren, and fellow-citizens, the faithful sigh as they pilgrim on their way to their eternal home, the eternal Jerusalem (4.16.31; 9.13.37).

God as father is a figure modeled on salvation, on a new creation; he is in the future. He is not an ancestor connected with kinship or begetting; he is not caught in the immediacy of life. He is a figure of transformation offering the possibility of mutual recognition between himself and his children.

The image of God in the *Confessions* is complex. Not only does the image of God combine all the traditional maternal and paternal qualities, but Augustine adds spousal images (1.13.21; 7.17.23): "By means of this strange mutual contamination of two kinship figures, the shell of literality of the image is broken and the symbol liberated. A father who is a spouse is no longer a progenitor (begetter), nor is he any more an enemy to his sons; love, solicitude and pity carry him beyond domination and severity."⁷⁵

With such a concept of God, it is not surprising that, after his conversion, Augustine says to God, "And I talked with You as friends talk (*et garriebam*⁷⁶ *tibi*)" (9.1.1). The possibility of friendship with God had been modeled for him by the two civil servants who chose to be friends of God instead of the emperor,⁷⁷ as recounted by Pontianus in Book 8: "if I should choose to be a friend of God [*amicus autem Dei*], I can become one now" (8.6.15). Converted Augustine begins to talk with God as with a friend. Ten years later, Augustine is still talking, a fact to which the genre of the *Confessions* amply attests. Talking as a friend reveals Augustine's understanding of sonship: A son is one who knows his father, knows what he is about, understands his ways. The first ten books of the *Confessions* recount Augustine's intimate knowledge of God's ways with him: All his good deeds are God's gift; all his evil are used for providential admonition. Ricoeur says of the relationship between Jesus and

his Father, “A unique relation of mutual knowledge of recognition constitutes henceforth true fatherhood and true sonship”⁷⁸ Augustine hopes for a similar relationship. Although God’s ways are often unsearchable (4.4.8), and Augustine’s sins draw him away from the contemplation of eternal truth, yet gathering all past, present, and future into God’s eternal present is the thesis of Book 11 and the activity of the previous ten books: “Addressing God as a father . . . is prophetic, directed toward fulfillment rather than toward origins. It does not look backward, toward a great ancestor, but forward, in the direction of a new intimacy on the model of the knowledge of the son.”⁷⁹

The direction of Augustine’s relationship with God as father may be mutual recognition, knowledge, and intimacy, but omnipotent desire projects an immortal father and requires for its final rectification the acceptance of the father’s mortality. Augustine accepted Patricius’ mortality. To discover whether or not Augustine’s omnipotent desire has been projected upon God as father, his immortal God would have to die. Unless God dies, Augustine’s Freudian critics can receive no definitive answer. For them, Augustine’s Oedipal conflict receives a neurotic outcome in religion.

In an attempt to gain further clarity, I will apply Ricoeur’s version of the death of God to Augustine’s relationship to God. For Ricoeur, the death of Jesus gives a meaning to the death of God, which corresponds at the level of religious representation to the non-neurotic outcome of the Oedipus complex. The death of Jesus must give meaning to the death of God at two levels: in the mutual recognition of the father and son and their acceptance of mortality within the economy of desire (Freud) and the death of the father in the concrete ethical life (Hegel). Here, recognized fatherhood, raised above the contingency of individuals by self-consciousness, free will, and personhood, would become the community’s tie between love and life. The unique relation of mutual knowledge and recognition that exists between Jesus and his father points to an identity of knowledge, recognition, and nature. Ricoeur asks: “Is it not, then, this death of the son which can furnish us the final schema of fatherhood, to the degree that the son is also the father?”⁸⁰ In the death of the son, “dying for” replaces “killed by” so that the meaning of death is reversed:

By becoming “dead for another,” the death of the Just One achieves the metamorphosis of the paternal image in the direction of a figure of kindness and compassion.... It is as an oblation that the Epistle to the Philippians celebrates it in its liturgical hymn: “He humbled himself . . . obedient unto death” (Phil. 2.8). Here is completed the conversion of death as murder into death as offering.⁸¹

As revealed by Jesus, compassion is God's free choice: "For my part," says Ricoeur, "I would believe that the only truly evangelical Christology is one that would take entirely seriously the word of the Johannine Christ: 'No one takes my life. I give it.'"⁸² The death of the son reveals the true nature of fatherhood: kindness and compassion even to the voluntary offering of his life in death.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine appeals to the ransom theory, with that theory's forensic terminology of accusers, debts, and justice (9.13.36 and 4.9.14). The ransom theory belongs to a punitive and penal interpretation of the sacrifice of Christ. Commenting on theories emphasizing reparation and reconciliation (of which the ransom theory is a sub-set for Augustine), Ricoeur says they "make Freud entirely right, so tenacious is the phantasm of the murder of the father and the punishment of the son."⁸³ I will postpone Ricoeur's transformation of the ransom theory beyond the reach of the judicial economy till [Chapter 7](#). For the present, I will limit my analysis of redemption to the incarnate Christ, whose humility renews the inner man.

Augustine gives humility pride of place in the *Confessions*. The incarnation taught him "to discern the difference that there is between presumption and confession, between those [the proud Platonists] who see what the goal is but do not see the way and [those who see] the Way" (7.20.26). Book 8 recalls freedom gained in confession before a merciful and compassionate God. Book 9 concludes,

It would go ill with the most praiseworthy life lived by men, if You were to examine it with Your mercy laid aside! But because You do not enquire too fiercely into our sins, we have hope and confidence of a place with You. Yet if a man reckons up before You the merits he truly has, what is he reckoning except Your own gifts? (9.13.34)

Without the incarnation, God's compassion and mercy would be unknown and Augustine would have despaired:

How much You have loved us, O good Father, "who have spared not even Your own Son." ... How You have loved us, for whom He who "thought it not robbery to be equal with You became obedient even unto the death of the Cross, He who alone was free among the dead, having power to lay down His life and power to take it up again" ... turning us from slaves into Your sons, by being Your son and becoming a slave.⁸⁴ Rightly is my hope strong in Him, who sits at Your right hand and intercedes for us; otherwise I should despair. For many and great are my infirmities.... We might well have thought Your Word remote from union with man and so have despaired of ourselves, if it had not been "made flesh and dwelt among us." (10.43.69)⁸⁵

Jesus, equal to the father and one with him, reveals the father's merciful love and his compassion, which do not spare even his son. The true nature of God's fatherhood is revealed in his "turning us from slaves into Thy sons" by the voluntary "dying for" of Christ's Cross.⁸⁶ In this way Augustine satisfies the main headings of Ricoeur's version of the death of God.

Knowledge of the death of God is won progressively. Progress depends on the fuller recognition between the father and Augustine as son and the gradual understanding of the compassionate self-abandonment of the father in the son. As Augustine learns to talk with God as friends talk and to know God revealed in the humility of the son, so justice, guilt, and punishment give way to mercy, recognition, and self-abandonment. In [Chapter 7](#), I will ask to what degree justice, guilt, and punishment belong to the neurotic outcome of the Oedipus complex and the phantasm of instinctual desire. Here, I have shown that mercy, recognition, and self-abandonment belong to the non-neurotic symbol of fatherhood: "In this sense, we could speak truly of the death of God as the death of the father. And that death would be at the same time murder on the level of phantasm and of the return of the repressed, and a supreme abandonment, a supreme dispossession of self, on the level of the most advanced symbol."⁸⁷ The language of phantasm and symbol, punishment and compassion, guilt and recognition, remain intimately woven in Augustine's image of God and his relations with God. In the [next chapter](#), I will seek to disentangle further these opposed pairs.

Freudian pessimism with respect to Augustine's sublimation of his Oedipal conflict cannot be discounted. It has much textual support and calls for a search for traces not only in Augustine's doctrines of predestination, the damnation of unbaptized infants, and the use of religious coercion but also in his understanding of grace, original sin, and predestination and the image of God as father, which supports them. As formulated by Ricoeur, Freudianism has made it possible for me to start my cross-examination of Augustine. I have begun archeological work in Augustine's autobiography and genealogical work in his theology.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics uncovers the same ambiguous picture in Augustine's daily life, his pastoral practice, and the pastoral-ascetical theology supporting both. Here, Dodds discovers the return of the repressed:

In that moment in the garden – did the old Adam really die? Was the conflict never renewed? The answer is, I think, Yes and No. The immediate consequence of the decision was, so far as we can judge, a sense of happiness and a return to normal mental activity.... Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that the Augustine of later years – the bishop who forbade any woman to set foot in his palace, the theologian who defended the use of coercion in

religious schisms, the moralist who boasted that he had learned to swallow his food as though it were physic – it is difficult to believe that this man had found within the Church a true mental balance which he had failed to achieve outside it. It will be said that these are no more than the ordinary excesses and follies of his age; and there is, of course, some truth in the contention. But the psychologist will read such symptoms, both in the individual and in the age, as evidence of the persistent though hidden activity of the old Adam; the measure of his continued vitality is in the extravagance of the precautions which it rendered necessary.⁸⁸

Dodds concludes, “That happy co-ordination of every faculty and every instinct, remained I believe, for him, as for all men of divided soul, an unattainable idea.”⁸⁹ Augustine was, of course, the first to acknowledge the facts (10:1–43). The important point Dodds makes does not concern the facts but the extravagant defenses Augustine employs. In the course of this book, these and similar questions will send me off in different directions to seek to clarify the archeology of Augustine’s behavior and the genealogy of his texts.⁹⁰

Augustine himself makes compassionate service the cornerstone of his pastoral-ascetical theology. Reflecting on his vocation to service of the Church, he says he learned from the revelation of God’s nature in Christ to overcome his initial spiritual narcissism in compassionate and self-abandoning service: “Terrified by my sins and the mass of my misery, I had pondered in my heart and thought of flight to the desert; but You did forbid me and strengthen me, saying: ‘And Christ died for all: that they also who live, may now not live to themselves but with him who died for them’” (10.43.70).⁹¹ Donald Capps rejects my claim: “With relatively little empathy expressed in the *Confessions*, Rigby’s claim that Augustine overcame his spiritual narcissism in compassionate and self-abandoning service rings a little hollow.”⁹² I will not take up Capps’s important question in the remainder of this chapter. So large and troubling is the concern he raises that I will reserve a full treatment until the next chapter.

To the extent that Augustine’s service surpasses the narcissism of which he stands accused by Capps, his compassion imitates the father’s mercy revealed in Christ. The compassionate service dimension of Augustine’s life could support what Ricoeur calls a theology of the weakness of God: “What is sketched here could be a theology of the weakness of God, like that which Bonhoeffer envisaged when he said: ‘Only a weak God can bring help.’ If this theology were possible.”⁹³ In such a theology, the death of God the father “would no longer be a murder but the most extreme abandonment of self.”⁹⁴ A theology of the weakness of God adumbrates a happy resolution of the tragic impasse.

CONCLUSION

Capps believes that I should not be too concerned

to find support for a “non-neurotic” resolution of Augustine’s Oedipal conflicts. In this desire, Rigby may be rather close to the earlier Freudian studies in their tendency to condemn Augustine for his psychopathology. Why is it so important that we find Augustine to be a psychologically healthy personality? After all, the *Confessions* is an extended prayer through which Augustine chooses to disclose his pathological side to God.⁹⁵

As far as I am aware, I have not condemned Augustine, or, anyone, for their psychopathology – even by implication. While I think Augustine would not have been unsympathetic to Capps’s psychotherapeutic viewpoint, I do not think Augustine’s primary intent is to confess his psychopathologies. Although he would agree that he is ineluctably bound in the consequences of evil, his overriding concern is to confess his willful choice of evil, what he would call his sin. For example, he says he was, in part, freed from Manichaeism by confessing that he was freely responsible for evil (7.3.4–5). However, I believe that much more is at stake in Freudian interpretations of the *Confessions* than a confessional psychotherapy, valuable though this may be (Capps concludes his article with the following admirable claim: “Freudian pessimism concerning Augustine is grounds for Christian optimism for those who find their mirror image in the *Confessions*. For, through the method of self-disclosure, Augustine shows them a way out of their isolation, owing to denied and masked feelings – of burning desire, smoldering rage, and hot shame.”⁹⁶) The larger stake is the nature of reality and of truth and the right stance before them. Freud, along with his fellow masters of suspicion, would condemn Augustine for false consciousness. For them, religion is a necessary illusion and the *Confessions* a vital lie. The extent to which Augustine does not have the opportunity to respond to their critique undermines our perception of his testimony to his brethren.

Since Freud, testimony, which is a direct report of inner experience, the product of direct introspection or reflection, runs the risk of being read as a regressive and repetitious illusion. Ricoeur’s literary hermeneutics allows me to draw up an indirect testimony. In Chapter 1, I showed that direct knowledge of God was unavailable. Knowledge of God can only be mediated indirectly by means of the ethical and speculative divestment of historical signs and a reflective set of criteria. In Chapter 2, I have just shown that affective relations with God must undergo a comparable divestment. The Oedipus complex focused the affective problematic in terms of the infantile wish for

omnipotence and immortality. I uncovered the infantile wish in Augustine's relations to his biological father, Patricius and, by extension, in his relations with God as father. Freud's call for the surrender of infantile desire constitutes an affective divestment. I traced Augustine's affective divestment in his life by means of Hegel's alienating figures of the Spirit – the master-slave dialectic and the contractual relationship. Ricoeur's use of Hegel's dialectics as a criteriology of divinity permitted me to probe Augustine's affective relations with God. The ethical life of the concrete community and the theology of the death of God replace the phantasm of the punishing father with a symbol of recognition and compassion.

In [Chapter 1](#), I showed that the self-manifestation of God implies a judicial process, even an eschatological trial (I will examine the trial motif further in [Chapter 7](#)). The eschatological trial confers absoluteness upon Augustine's finite act of attestation. But the absoluteness of his testimony is relative. Reflective consciousness must search for a mediating sign in the judgments of the list of characteristics of the divine, guided by Hegel's alienating figures of the Spirit. The historical signs, in the life of Augustine the witness, are relative to the analysis of his life in Freudian archeology.

The two trials – Freudian and Hegelian – are a reciprocal divestment. In [Chapter 1](#), I showed that Augustine believes that everyone must descend if they are to make the inward journey to God. The degrees by which consciousness divests itself for an absolute reflexive affirmation of God require a life of inward "suffering" and confession. In [Chapter 2](#), I presented a distinctively modern meaning of divestment, suffering, and confession in Freudian archeology and Hegel's philosophy of the will. Freudian analysis of Augustine's unconscious motivations and an alienating journey through Hegel's non-kinship figures divested Augustine speculatively, morally, and affectively. The inwardness of Augustine's ascent in the soul was captured in Hegel's internal testimony of the spirit in the community. The internal testimony replaced the testimony of external signs. In his journey from phantasm to symbol, fatherhood as recognition, kindness, and compassion replaced guilt, severity, and punishment. However, unlike Hegel's absolute knowledge, Augustine's criteria and historical signs open up before us only an image of the God who is to come.

Using investigative techniques familiar to the modern reader, it is possible to see that Augustine's account of God's fatherhood could be a sign in which the searching soul of his "brethren" recognizes the possibility of liberation. Whether or not the soul does recognize the possibility of liberation here, Augustine knew, faced with the obdurate Manicheans or his confessing "brethren," only the reader as juror can decide.



Narcissism and Narrative's Vital Lie

Terrified by my sins and the mass of my misery, I had pondered in my heart and thought of flight to the desert;¹ but You did forbid me and strengthen me, saying: “And Christ died for all: that they also who live, may now not live to themselves but with him who died for them.” (10.43.70)

In this passage, taken from Book 10 of the *Confessions*, Augustine is reflecting on his coerced ordination² and his ongoing life of service as a bishop in the North African Church. He says he learned from the revelation of God’s nature in Christ to overcome his initial spiritual narcissism.³ Citing this passage, the psychohistorian Donald Capps, along with his self-appointed analysts, reject my claim that here Augustine overcame his narcissism: “With relatively little empathy expressed in the *Confessions*, Rigby’s claim that Augustine overcame his spiritual narcissism in compassionate and self-abandoning service rings a little hollow.”⁴ In support of Augustine’s claim, I appeal to three kinds of evidence: literary, historical, and theological.

Some Augustine scholars distrust psychological assessments like those of Capps. They believe that much of the evidence is far-fetched or based on conjecture. Their unease with psychohistory is not simply because Augustine is far removed from us in time and culture but also because psychoanalysis requires the analyzands “continuous cooperation.”⁵ Volney Gay concedes that Augustine “cannot respond, cannot correct, and cannot deepen the initial interpretation” of his self-appointed analysts.⁶ Nevertheless, Peter Brown, Paula Fredriksen, Paul Archambault and others believe that when dealing with personality and motivation, historians cannot “be innocent of modern knowledge.”⁷ Besides, psychological assessments disturb our reading of

This chapter is taken in large part from the first two parts and the first section of the third part of my article “Is Augustine a Narcissist?” *Augustinian Studies* 44 (2013), pp. 59–91.

the *Confessions*. They arouse our critical selves, making a literal reading of Augustine's witness no longer possible.

Capps and other psychologists of religion have presented readings of Augustine's relations with Monica and with God as narcissistic.⁸ They define narcissism not as abnormal self-love but as the opposite, as a deficit in self-love. They draw on the psychoanalyst Hans Kohut, who maintains that narcissism results from a lack of significant others who can "help hold the self together," who can fight on the side of survival, who can share empathically and validate the feelings of self-worth, wholeness, and power.⁹ Satisfactory parents and mentors provide "the ego functions of synthesis and coherence."¹⁰ Kohut calls satisfactory parents and mentors "self-objects":

With the ending of the symbiotic relation with the mother, the infant establishes a grandiose self, whose central aim is to find significant and powerful people with whom to identify and, as part of them, to be perfect. Optimal growth entails parents who respond to these manoeuvres with a great deal of empathy and who can carefully modulate life's inevitable failures in empathy.¹¹

Kohut has found that narcissists have had only unsympathetic parents and mentors as self-objects and that, as a result, they suffer from a fragmented and uncohesive self. Deprived of the "psychological oxygen" empathic parents would provide and failing to find adequate substitute self-objects as mentors, the narcissist suffers from "fragmentation anxiety" and feelings of worthlessness.¹²

Paula Fredriksen, Donald Capps, Volney Gay, Donald Browning, and many others believe that Augustine the adult related to Monica and to God as self-objects. Browning, who brings together all that he thinks is best in Augustine's analysts, believes that Augustine's desire for praise and his inability to handle the blame that went with his position as a bishop motivated him to write his *Confessions* (10.3, 10.4, 10.37): Augustine's relations with God reveal "a harried and reluctant administrator whose needs for intimacy, praise, and self-cohesion were being systematically denied by his role in life."¹³ Browning concludes that "*Confessions* was written to convince [Augustine] himself that he was on the right course and that God's guiding hand was amidst all the details of his present life."¹⁴ Browning and his fellow psychohistorians believe that Augustine's turning to God and friends in confession reveals "unusual problems with self-cohesion and overdetermined needs to find self-consistency and self-recognition."¹⁵ These "deficiencies in self-regard and self-cohesion" result from "inadequate empathy from the parental figures in Augustine's life."¹⁶

Some of their evidence is forced; some gives pause for thought; it all raises questions about Augustine's relationships. By emphasizing the autobiographical

genre of the *Confessions*, they cast themselves as literary critics. They claim that the *Confessions* functions as literary self-object, mediating consolation by giving coherence and concordance to Augustine's life. Further, by respecting the narrative, textual genre of the *Confessions*, they do not inevitably find, at the end of all their explorations, an Augustine made anew in a Freudian, Feuerbachian, Nietzschean, or Kohutian image and likeness.

The literary turn of these proponents of a narcissistic interpretation of the *Confessions* finds, I believe, a complementary literary form in Frank Kermode's Nietzschean question.¹⁷ Kermode suspects that the hidden purpose of stories is to console the reader. A meaningful ending rescues the reader from the chance flow of human life and from death, which marks life's senseless conclusion. Kermode's suspicion discovers a need for consolation beneath the expectation that narratives make sense. By viewing fiction as a form of trickery, skepticism undermines the reader's trust. The resulting divorce between truthfulness and consolation gives rise to stories of endless crisis. Kermode concludes that stories with an immanent sense of pervading crisis replace traditional stories with their naive belief in the truthfulness of an imminent end. Ricoeur thinks that, as a result of Kermode's suspicion, we oscillate between the corrosive suspicion of stories as consoling lies and "the equally invincible conviction that fictions are not simply arbitrary, inasmuch as they respond to a need over which we are not the masters."¹⁸ Acutely aware of the flux and *aporia* of time, Augustine gave his life coherence and concordance in a conversion story. To what extent is Augustine's story a case of Kermode's consoling plot – what Kermode calls a vital lie – and to what extent is his story a response to a transcendent meaning?

Inasmuch as a vital lie gives one's life coherence, concordance, and consolation, it serves as the textual equivalent of Kohut's self-objects, which deflect fragmentation anxiety. If Kermode's suspicion that the hidden purpose of stories is to console the reader, then we must ask to what extent the purpose, the coherence, and concordance of Augustine's conversion story serves as a vital lie? Viewing a consoling plot as the textual equivalent of Kohut's self-object raises a question concerning Augustine's use of the autobiographical genre. Does his preoccupation with the rehabilitation of an individual's past replace concern for universal redemption – "Christ died for all"? Does an autobiographical resurrection convert a universal hope into a narcissistic project?

In [Section 1](#), Narcissistic Readings of the *Confessions*: A Literary Analysis, I respond to these two questions concerning Augustine's use of the autobiographical genre. I show that Augustine uses the autobiographical genre itself as a medium for advancing universal salvation, not as a way to subvert it to satisfy his narcissistic needs. Hence, confessional narrative becomes an

efficacious medium of universal redemption. In this way, I transform what might appear to be an in-house psychoanalytic discussion of Augustine's narcissism into an inquiry into Augustine's soteriology. That Augustine himself would have seen it this way, is clear from what he says in Letter 21: "I would dare to say that I know and hold with complete faith what pertains to our salvation. But how am I to exercise this ministry for the salvation of others?"¹⁹

In [Section 1](#), then, an in-house psycho-historical analysis of Augustine the narcissist becomes the springboard for a literary analysis of Augustine's *Confessions*. This analysis shows that Augustine uses the confessional medium to establish a novel, even revolutionary way of living the Christian life. Where the confessional medium is non-self-serving, it is not only non-narcissistic but even trans-narcissistic because it would then be beyond the reach of the narcissistic critique. The confessional medium offers Augustine's contemporaries a universal way of Christian salvation.

In [Section 2](#), Coerced Ordination and Narcissism: The Historical Evidence, I confirm and extend the literary-exegetical findings of [Section 1](#) concerning Augustine's use of the autobiographical genre of the *Confessions*. I offer historical-critical evidence to show that his coerced ordination was the formative experience for a non-self-serving, empathic, and, therefore, trans-narcissistic service of the North African Church. It supports Augustine's claim, a claim rejected by Capps at the beginning of this chapter. [Section 2](#) confirms the conclusion of [Section 1](#), by presenting historical evidence from Augustine's "press-ganged" ordination. As we shall see in later chapters, Augustine's trans-narcissistic reading of original sin, election, and predestination grows out of this experience.

In [Section 3](#), Narrative's Vital Lie: A Theological Interpretation, and in the remaining chapters of this book, I respond to Kermode's Nietzschean question: Is the confessional plot a vital lie? Is it possible to offer a trans-narcissistic reading of Augustine's teachings on original sin and grace, election and predestination? Kermode's Nietzschean inspired skepticism raises the question of confidence: Are the *Confessions* a vital lie? Do these doctrines only serve to ground a narcissistically consoling divine plot?

NARCISSISTIC READINGS OF THE CONFESSIONS: A LITERARY ANALYSIS²⁰

Fragmentation Anxiety in Books 1–9 of the Confessions

The validity of the evidence supporting the diagnosis of fragmentation anxiety in the *Confessions* rests on the person and the role of Monica. Browning

speaks for all when he says that “Fredriksen may be correct in arguing that Monica is the principal source of Augustine’s narcissistic wounds.”²¹ Relying on Margaret Mahler’s work on separation and individuation, Fredriksen says, according to Browning, that Monica’s own narcissistic needs led her to use Augustine “to prop up her own sagging sense of self.”²² For example, Monica and Patricius simultaneously dismissed with mockery Augustine’s beatings at school and, at great financial cost, sought the renown that came from their son’s learning.²³ According to Gay, Kohut would regard Augustine’s bitter complaints about these beatings as “a reaction to an injury to his exhibitionistic grandiose self – that is, his need to gain stabilization of the self through admiration, prizing, and praise.”²⁴ This need was reinforced by Monica’s and Augustine’s shared view of the world, in which “forces of evil inhabit everyone, including infants, and these must be met by forces of good. The ego is a weak, lonely hero struggling to align itself with the forces of good against the forces of evil.”²⁵ According to Kohut, mistrust of the child’s internal capacities and frustration of intense needs for nurture would induce fragmentation anxiety. Gay traces an intergenerational sequence of fragmentation anxiety beginning with the dire warnings and harsh training Monica’s nurse meted out to her: “Monica’s addiction to wine and her son’s addiction to hypersexual actions represent their responses to intergenerational failures. Nurse, mother, and son disdain these internal needs and seek to alienate themselves from part of themselves. Augustine calls such needs the product of a ‘despicable fault.’”²⁶ Browning makes a list of the most frequently cited examples of Monica’s failures in empathy:

The famous “wooden ruler” dream of Monica’s which concludes with a voice telling her that “where she was, I was too,” tells ... of Monica’s need for Augustine to support her self-cohesion (3:11).... Her incessant weeping over his move into Manicheanism (3:11), her attempt to follow him to Rome (5:8), her decision eventually to join him in Milan (6:1), her arrangement of his engagement with an upper-class woman, and banishment of his concubine (and mother of his child) back to Africa (6:15) all can be seen as acts designed to complete her own ambitions and confirm her own self needs ... to see her talented and promising Augustine as an extension of herself and to fashion his future on her terms.²⁷

Does examination of Monica’s role in the story confirm Browning’s view? Since these interpreters have underlined the significance of the genre, I will examine Monica’s narrative function. My strategy for examining the questions raised by the psychohistorians at a psychoanalytic level and by Kermode at a narrative level is to focus on Augustine’s use of narrative about Monica in the *Confessions*. I report here the results of a detailed literary and textual

analysis of Monica's changing roles in the narrative so as to discover, in psychoanalytic parlance, the extent to which Monica holds at bay fragmentation anxiety and to what extent she acts as a self-object in the cause of truth. In narratological terms, does she lie when she consoles, or does the coherence she gives to the plot have an eternal meaning?

Narrator Augustine describes himself as the hero of a series of adventures, moving through ordinary lived time toward a future that includes his conversion. His memories are a stream that advances toward a denouement. A second narrative voice, the voice of Augustine as author, surveys these events from above.

At first, the voice of Augustine the author who surveys the events related from above is the only confessional voice in the story. Monica does not first appear in the text as a confessor. Instead, Augustine censors her actions. She deferred Augustine's baptism till he had sown his wild oats. Augustine says in Books 1 and 2 that she left him to drown, like the prodigal son (1.18.28), in the "vast and terrible sea" of classical studies (1.16.25). She did not protect him with marriage from "puberty mists" (2.2.2).

A confessional voice within the story, as distinct from Augustine's authorial confessing voice, makes itself first heard when Monica's confessional tears begin to flow in the eleventh chapter of Book 3. Augustine says, "You ... raised my soul out of that depth of darkness because my mother ... wept to You for me" (3.11.19). Until Book 6, her voice is the only confessional voice within the narrative other than Augustine's authorial voice. She is consoled with eternal knowledge in dreams. She receives a heavenly message from a bishop whom she badgered as she does God (3.12.21). Her weeping is the first "premonitory sign"²⁸ of Augustine's confessional vocation.

Corresponding to the dual narrative voice, Monica weeps two kinds of tears, "tormenting" (5.8.15) tears and confessional tears. The former reveal her wounded narcissism; the latter give hope based on certain knowledge. Tears in confessional time reach the eternal knowledge of what God "had predestined" as Augustine comments in Book 5 (5.9.17). A confessional narrative, with its varied incidents, reversals, and diverse characters is ordered according to an eternal plot – a story certified in Monica's dreams, visions, and authoritative answers. But as the denouement approaches, his life of wandering becomes more distended, unsure, senseless (6.11.18–20). By the end of Book 6, even Monica cannot help. She thinks marriage is the answer, but, concerning this important matter, she had only "vain fantasies," which, according to her, lacked a "certain unanalyzable savor, not to be expressed in words, by which she could distinguish between what You [God] revealed and the dreams of her own spirit" (6.13.23). The mantle of her confessional

vocation has passed to others. Monica will play no further part in Augustine's quest prior to his conversion. This is significant for two reasons: Augustine does not fall apart in fragmentation anxiety, and Monica will rediscover her own non-narcissistic calling to confession only after Augustine has discovered his own.

In the first six books of the *Confessions*, Monica is the sole representative of what will become the confessional viewpoint of Augustine the author. However, when her vision falters, Augustine does not fall apart in fragmentation anxiety. In Book 8, he discovers other resources. Simplicianus, Victorinus, the two Milanese courtiers, and St. Antony assume Monica's mantle as the true confessors. Narcissistic theory rightly views these male confessors as self-objects providing the needed male idealized self that will free the symbol of fatherhood from Patricius, Augustine's biological father, a transition no doubt facilitated by Patricius' death, to mediate a gracious God in the place of Augustine's narcissistically preoccupied parents.

The final witness, immediately preceding Augustine's conversion, is a woman. Continence, as "the fruitful mother of children" (8.11.27), frees the symbol of motherhood from Monica and biological parenting. In Book 8, Continence, not Monica, becomes the true confessor. Augustine contrasts Continence with his "former mistresses" (8.11.26). Both are non-kinship figures: the mistresses represent the lust that, in Book 6 (6.15.25), Augustine deplores in his relations with women. Continence represents the possibility of mutual recognition and respect. As a non-kinship figure, Continence permits Augustine to rise above the biological bond and to conceive of spiritual motherhood. Similarly, the non-kinship figure of Continence as "Spouse" (8. 11.27) transforms the phantasm of God's motherhood, which might require dependence to the point of absorption and the consequent loss of self, to arrive at the symbol of God as hope – the One who is to come.

In Book 9, Monica assumes a spiritualized motherhood in the Catholic community. This is possible because in Book 8 she undergoes a conversion of her own, a conversion to "a joy much dearer and purer than she had thought to find in grand-children of my [Augustine's] flesh" (8.12.30). Here, the roles are reversed, for Monica's vocation is advanced by Augustine's. She resumes her confessional mantel this time in the company of Augustine and Alypius and becomes like the vision of Continence. Book 9 is marked by mutuality, not narcissism, and Monica, a woman, possibly an illiterate woman, takes part in the Cassiciacum dialogues. Peter Brown observes that after his mother's death and his father's baptism, Augustine's portraits of both move in complementary directions. With Patricius, the move is from antagonism to acceptance; with Monica, the move is from idealization to ordinariness: "Monica,

the idealized figure that has haunted Augustine's youth like an oracle of God is subtly transformed, by Augustine's analysis of his present feelings on remembering her death, into an ordinary human being, an object of concern, a sinner like himself, equally in need of mercy.”²⁹

Narcissistic Fusion with God

The psychohistorians call this conclusion into question. They believe that at Ostia, Monica and Augustine undergo a Platonic birth to light eternal (9.10.23–26), so that narcissistic fusion with God becomes the goal of Augustine's search. Even if the attempt at Ostia failed, or was at best a temporary success, the plot's happy ending, its narcissistic plot, is ultimately to be absorbed into God:

Even as Augustine found himself nowhere in the Mediterranean world, during or after Monica's lifetime, able to evade her influence, so are all beings in the world simply emanations of the single Godhead. There is no independent agency or will or responsibility apart from this monistic life-giving principle. Even as Augustine presumably felt despair and emptiness when Monica turned her approval from him, so is evil characterized as the absence of positive emanations from the Godhead. All invisible phenomena – which seem to be significant, substantial, active in the world – are ultimately swallowed up by the invisible source.³⁰

The *Confessions* are more complex. Augustine does not abandon time for eternity. The eternal is “only the first threshold of time regained.”³¹ Extratemporal being does not exhaust the meaning of confession. At the vision of Ostia, Augustine says that eternity is “touched” only for an “instant” (9.10.24). Touching eternity presupposes an inward ascent, which has been recounted for eight books. Certainly, “time with its past and future must be determined by eternity,” as Augustine says (11.11.13) but only so that time is deepened, not abolished. Monica's death gives time a new depth. The final scene in Book 9 should not be read as her final calling beyond confession into the extratemporal. Her contempt of this life and the attraction of death is not because of her rejection of the temporal but, as she says, the result of her belief that “Nothing is far from God, and I have no fear that he will not know at the end of the world from what place He is to raise me up” (9.11.28). Death has lost its sting, not because she can escape time but because confession raises up the body along with her personal history, which Augustine has just narrated. Body – “place” – and personal identity – “raise me up” – along with “those who are to be fellow-citizens with me in the eternal Jerusalem” (9.13.37, emphasis added) are at issue in the resurrection. Her confession of freedom

from the body for the resurrected body completes the symbol of motherhood. The body and Augustine's personal history had been a quest in "lost time."³² Only eternity can give them meaning – a spiritual meaning removed from the immediacy of life. Monica's deeper sense of time enabled her in dreams, visions, and authoritative messages and, since Ostia, in a spiritual ascent, to connect these immediate sensations with their eternal meaning. Monica's ability to use these media to connect with their eternal meaning, to connect the many events recorded in the *Confessions*, events that, from a confessional viewpoint, belong to the lost time of Augustine's wandering, is the art of confession. I will examine Augustine's own practice of this art in the [next section](#).

The Reader as Self-Object

The narcissistic interpretation of the psychohistorians teaches us to see a different connection. Capps, Gay, and Browning interpret Augustine's choice of the confessional medium as a covert way to win readers as self-objects. On such a view, the confessional medium subserves Augustine's narcissism, not the hope of universal salvation.

How does Augustine understand and use the confessional medium? The singular Augustinian confessional creation results from the union of an original event and the confessional memory of the event discerned by means of Monica's way of "savoring" (6.13.23) and the Christian way of "seeing" (7.20.26) Augustine had first encountered in Milan. Augustine combines these alien discourses – Monica's Catholicism and the Plotinian way of inward ascent to God³³ – to create his confessional medium. This creates a new rhetoric forged from the passionate immediacy of the Psalms and the meditative sophistication of the inward ascent. The mutual predication of these discourses creates the confessional medium. They give the *Confessions* their style.

Here is how it works. The confessional medium gives rise to a new form of spirituality and asceticism, one that is communal, not individualistic. Augustine's new confessional asceticism does not require massive Stoic detachment in the face of necessity, nor Plotinian exile in the eternal, but the confessional self-mastery of Book 10. This novel asceticism practiced in common creates a community of confessors. Mourning his mother's death at the end of Book 9 is the first test of Augustine's calling to his new asceticism. In confessional mourning, his loving feelings for his mother are regained in the solace of weeping as his memory of her is regained in the eternal.

At first, Augustine reverts to the old asceticism: "Under the mind's strong constraint ... I stood dry-eyed" (9.12.29), but ascetical self-mastery resolved nothing, so Augustine says that he found "solace in weeping" in God's sight

"both about her and for her, about myself and for myself. I no longer tried to check my tears" (9.12.33). He recovered his former feeling of her, "remembering how loving and devout was her conversation" with God (9.12.33). "I no longer tried to check my tears, but let them flow as they would, making them a pillow for my heart: and it rested upon them, for it was Your ears that heard my weeping" (9.12.33).³⁴ Augustine concludes, "Let him [who considers these tears a sin] not scorn me but rather ... let him weep for my sins [an invitation to join the community of confessors]" (9.12.33).³⁵ The final lines reveal the ascetical revolution involved and calls those who condemn confessional asceticism to practice it. Book 10, recounting his present life as a bishop, continues in the same vein (10.1.1–5, 7). In his *Retractationes*,³⁶ Augustine says the community created by the *Confessions* still flourishes thirty years later. The communal salvific practice justifies the use of the agonistic form of confessional tears, praise, and thanksgiving that Augustine adopts throughout the *Confessions*.³⁷ The theological rationale for the confessional medium I will examine in later chapters. Here I conclude that neither the choice of the confessional genre nor its use by Augustine is a symptom of narcissistic disturbance.

COERCED ORDINATION AND NARCISSISM: THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

In the year 396, in what Augustine claims was a moment of divine revelation,³⁸ he discovered that God's grace is a gratuity so complete that human standards for selecting those worthy of election are meaningless. This insight would occupy Augustine for the remainder of his life, whether in the theory grounding and giving impetus to the *Confessions* or in his controversies with the Donatists, Pelagians, Julian, and the semi-Pelagians. I believe that Augustine's coerced ordination and his wounded narcissism are decisive factors in his formulation of his mature teachings on original sin, election, and predestination. My purpose in [Section 2](#) of this chapter is to examine the historical evidence for this claim.

In the famous letter to his new bishop Valerius, written in 391, Augustine begs for time off from his clerical duties to prepare himself for the onerous tasks involved. He apologizes for the presumptuous folly of his critique of clerics predating his ordination.³⁹ Acknowledging his present ill-preparedness, he asks for time to examine the remedies of the "scriptures and, by praying and reading," that God may grant his "soul health suited for such dangerous tasks."⁴⁰ In this letter it is worth noting again that his motive for studying, his desire, was not concern for his own salvation but to find out how to attend to

the salvation of others: “I would dare to say that I know and hold with complete faith what pertains to our salvation. But how am I to exercise this ministry for the salvation of others?”⁴¹ Ordination has brought about this shift from presumptuous critique to humble request. What happened?

In 388, Augustine returned to Africa a *servus Dei*. With his conversion in Milan two years earlier and his baptism the following year, Augustine had joined a select group of wealthy, highly educated, ascetical Christians intent on an inward ascent to God. The spread of Christianity in the Latin world had created an audience for Augustine’s early writings. The Augustine of the soliloquies and early dialogues spoke to those who belonged to a “new ascetic movement” among laymen like himself.⁴² They were the *servi Dei*. Arrived in Africa, Augustine advocated for and implemented on his inherited portion of the family estate this ascetical and monastic way of life as an embodiment of the Christian ideal.

In retirement (*otium*) on his estate in Thagaste, Augustine writes to his wealthy friend Nebridius, who has, with the same purpose in view, retired to his own family estates. Augustine tells Nebridius that only in retirement can one welcome with equanimity the final journey of death. Administrators seeking “temporal honour,” or the “busy,” cannot achieve this ideal, except for a select few, such as Ambrose. He concludes that only in retirement, in “a certain carefree repose,” by means of “a great withdrawal from the tumult of perishing things” can he be freed from “fear” to “taste and love … that pure good” and “solid joy.” Only then can he be “permitted to become God-like.”⁴³

Augustine’s *Confessions*, written more than seven years later than this letter to Nebridius, had this same audience, the *servi Dei*, in view but a different message. It may be true that the centrality of the *Hortensius* in Book 3 of the *Confessions* would have misled Augustine’s educated contemporaries to expect an inward journey of ascent to God. Cicero followed “almost a consensus in ancient thought, spread throughout the civilized world by the Stoics, which viewed happiness as virtue”⁴⁴ and the ascent to true happiness as virtue’s exercise. Wisdom and virtue gave “equilibrium,” in which the mind was “subject neither to excess nor to defect.”⁴⁵ The mind overcame subjection to fortune in God’s eternal abiding. “Whoever possessed God through knowledge was truly happy.”⁴⁶ In the dialogues written shortly after his conversion, Augustine added the Platonic and the Christian “element of contemplation” to the Ciceronian and Stoic theory of the virtues.⁴⁷ The ideal life is “one in which God is enjoyed through knowledge and humans live virtuously in accordance with the law shining within them.”⁴⁸ In the early 390s, Augustine still believed the “ideal life” was “attainable … after long effort.”⁴⁹

By the time Augustine came to write the *Confessions*, he no longer believed that attaining the ideal life was possible by one's own efforts. It is generally accepted that Augustine's study of the Pauline letters, in *Ad Simplicianum*, led him to this conclusion. From this exegesis came his mature teachings on free will and grace, original sin and predestination. I agree with this assessment, but, to get a more complete picture of the original causes and the novel content, I propose that we need to consider the decisive role played in these mature beliefs by Augustine's forced ordination.

In his letter to Valerius in 391, as we have seen, he regrets his foolish comments on the clergy and confesses his own presumptuousness. He had believed that his own "skill and strength" were of "some value"⁵⁰ and so would have allowed him to avoid or to endure the temptations of administrative glory or busyness. He concludes that the "Lord, however laughed at me and chose to reveal me to myself by this experience."⁵¹ In 396, we find the same derisory laughter in a key text in his revelatory exegesis of the Pauline letters.

Five years before Augustine wrote this Pauline exegesis, he told Valerius that he had heard the derisory laughter. It is in Hippo, on his entry into the clerical way of life, that God had first laughed at him. This divine laughter reveals to Augustine that the *servi Dei*, their ascetical ideal, and their way of life, are presumption. Augustine and his fellow *servi Dei* are Augustine's elect. He says he, Augustine, chose them because of their "greater abilities," their "relative freedom from sin." They were "snared and stained by the most trifling sins." They held "honourable and profitable doctrines." They were of "keen mind," and "cultivated in the liberal arts." He concludes "But if I set up this standard of judgment [God] will laugh me to scorn who has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong, and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." The divine laughter turned him to God so that "looking at him I [am] ashamed."⁵²

In this bewildering ethics, one establishes one's own standard of judgment only to have it blown away in the scorn of divine laughter. Augustine's *Confessions* tells the story in which his own youthful standards, not only before his conversion but also after his conversion, are subverted in an indefinitely extended *peripeteia* of Book 8 of the *Confessions* ("How long, how long shall I go on saying tomorrow and again tomorrow?" (8.12.28) As is well known, Augustine's confessional story subverts the traditional Platonic philosopher's ascent and the Christian saint's life. These portrayed their subjects' lives as an apprenticeship in which questing heroes move inexorably to their vocation.

Suddenly goodness, the ethical life is revealed in coerced ordination. The clerical state awakens Augustine from his Neoplatonic slumber and from his dreams of power and glory. The clerical state is far removed from the

houses of the educated laymen with their great estates, from the monastic *otium* where Augustine had dwelt for some years and where he intended to realize his Christian ideal. Ordination demands of Augustine and his fellow *servi Dei* non-self-serving, trans-narcissistic service. Clerical responsibility was, he says at the end of Book 10 of the *Confessions*, God's gift by which the narcissistic ideal, latent in his following of the Christian ideal as a monk, was abandoned: "Terrified by my sins and the mass of my misery, I had pondered in my heart and thought of flight to the desert; but You did forbid me and strengthen me, saying: 'And Christ died for all: that they also who live, may now not live to themselves but with him who died for them'" (10.43.70). "For all" is the calling of the clerical state and "for all" the source of the divine derision and Augustine's shame.

We see this change in life style in the contrast between Letter 10's superb confidence and the carefully written, difficult Letter 21 to Valerius, in which he has recognized that his learning will not serve. He has had to abandon his preferred audience, whom he has addressed as Christian rhetor to universal acclaim. He had been a rising star among the *servi Dei* and the ascetical movement in the West. This was the group he joined when he was baptized in Milan. His writings had won him recognition and leadership; his way of life, as a monk on his estate at Thagaste, had won him approval from the group which mattered and with which he identified. His renown had won him honor – the temptation identified in the early 390s,⁵³ which still torments him when he writes the *Confessions* (10.37.60–62).

Here, in Letter 21 to Valerius, he confesses that God laughed him to scorn.⁵⁴ He is called to teach those that he would not, and his unpreparedness for this task reduced him, he says, to the famous tears he shed at his ordination.⁵⁵ The task includes not only the people of Hippo but also the clergy with whom he must also identify. He has lost his audience along with his monastic way of life. To compensate for his loss, he carries his monastic identity with him by transferring his budding monastery⁵⁶ from Thagaste to Hippo. However, as F. van der Meer has shown, the priests and deacons, with whom Augustine was forced to identify, were uneducated, even illiterate.⁵⁷ He has to adopt the clerical identity in place of that of the *servi Dei*, and to exchange his chosen audience for the townsfolk of Hippo, who were mostly Donatists.⁵⁸ As a trained rhetor, Augustine knows that he must grow into his new role and take the measure of his new public. It is not surprising that he asks Valerius for time out to adjust his sights.

Immersion in the life of the church will transform his ideal. The monastic ideal is remade by the force of divine laughter into the life of a confessor. The utter gratuity of grace finds its medium in a confessional way that can be

followed by all. Autobiography was a medium peculiarly suited to his times, which had experienced the spread of Christian monasticism in the Latin West, but Augustine's confessional use of autobiography transforms it so that it is no longer the sole preserve of these elite groups. It belongs to the people of Hippo and their priests, deacons, and subdeacons as much as to the *servi Dei*. As a universal way, confession is the property of all Christians irrespective of their education and status.⁵⁹

The distance traveled between Letter 10's presumption and Letter 21's reticence is evidence of a personal, professional, and intellectual upheaval in Augustine's life only hinted at the end of the *Confessions* 10. Augustine's forced ordination halts his "flight to the desert." His new clerical identity, and a new audience, the townsfolk of Hippo, Catholics and Donatists alike, trap Augustine in the service of "all." These events prepared Augustine for the divine revelation⁶⁰ contained in the Pauline letters⁶¹ and led him to adopt the confessional medium to write his *Confessions*. The historical evidence of Letter 21, and its anticipation, even verbal anticipation, of the central insight of the commentary on Paul in *Ad Simplicianum* 1.2.22, shows that it is in his coerced ordination that Augustine discovers the trans-narcissistic confessional voice hidden in divine laughter.

NARRATIVE'S VITAL LIE: A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

I come now to Kermode's larger question. Is confessional time an example of what Kermode calls narrative's vital lie? Is the purpose of Augustine's confessional narrative, of its sense of an ending to use Kermode's phrase, to give his life a consoling meaning and purpose? Is his confessional story only a means of consolation for himself personally and for the community his confessions have created? Are his teachings on original sin, grace, and predestination a series of rationalizations necessary to justify his narcissistic need to give meaning and purpose to his life of youthful wandering? As he ages, does the increasing stridency and acrimony with which he defends these teachings from what his critics see as their internal contradictions betray the narcissistic need to hold on to his confessional story? Does the consoling divine plot he creates for his and his fellow confessors' lives serve a narcissistic end, or is his story a response to a transcendent meaning?

Augustine's plot is an indefinitely extended *peripeteia* running not only from Books 1 through 8 but continuing unabated in Books 9 and 10. Throughout the *Confessions*, ongoing crisis replaces a happy ending. Crisis becomes an endless transition in which finding the eternal meaning of transitory events must be laboriously discerned with confessional savoring and confessional

tears. Book 10's never ending ascetical demand for traversal is a symptom of the breaking of a paradigm.

As I have shown in [Section 2](#), Augustine's story subverts the traditional Platonic philosopher's and Christian saint's life. These portrayed their subjects' lives as an apprenticeship in which the hero's quest moves inexorably to a vocation. In contrast, for Augustine, "apprenticeship"⁶² is time lost. The distance between time and eternity must be endlessly traversed so that they may be connected in a confessional narrative. As he says at the culmination of the inward ascent of Book 10: "There is but a dim light in men: let them walk, let them walk, lest darkness overtake them" (10.23.33).

However, the tripartite confessional configuration of crisis, traversal, connection does not confer the imminent consoling ending of a *bildungsroman*.⁶³ In common with the latter, the *Confessions* develop the hero's character and trace his quest for truth and vocation, but, in the end, they offer a shocking, broken conversion myth and a confessional ending. In Kermode's terms, Augustine offers not an imminent but an immanent ending of ongoing crisis. Augustine's *Confessions* debunk the consoling plot with its naive belief in the reality of an imminent end and its rationalizing power.

If hope is, for Augustine, the authentic confessional stance, then its perversion is not despair but false knowledge, in which, as he affirms at the climax of his ever more inward search for God in Book 10: "truth is loved in such a way that those who love some other thing want it to be the truth [presumption], and precisely because they do not wish to be deceived are unwilling to be convinced they are deceived [rejection of confession]. Thus they hate the truth" (10.23.34). He concludes that the ascent to God can be successful only if God's graciousness saves us from ourselves (10:26.37). Confessional crisis, traversal, connection must stand for synthesis.

Only in the endless traversal of confessional knowledge can Augustine decipher eternal truth. In a confessional economy, the superabundance of God's graciousness can be savored only in daily life and, via memory, in personal and communal history (10.40.65). In spite of narcissism and self-deception, freedom, for Augustine, is confessional freedom. Negatively, it is freedom from bad faith, with its false syntheses, and, positively, it is freedom for hope. A freedom to hope in the sense that Monica's "savoring" of the eternal gave birth to freedom in Augustine.



Evil, Suffering, and Dualistic Wisdom

Interpreting confessional knowledge is “a twofold act.” It is “an act of consciousness of itself,” in which reflection creates for itself a set of criteria for discerning the authentic characteristics of God. It is “an act of historical understanding” of the signs God gives of God’s own self.¹ The historical act calls forth a continuous chain of mutually enlightening interpretations. These two acts, the act of historical signs and their interpretations and the act of reflective consciousness and its criteriology, form a spiral. The historical signs reveal consciousness to itself; “the signs of the absolute’s self-disclosure are at the same time signs in which consciousness recognizes itself.”² Letter 10’s presumption and Letter 21’s reticence reveal the personal, professional, and intellectual upheaval wrought by Augustine’s coerced ordination. Trapped in the service of “all” (10.43.70), he is readied for the divine revelation³ contained in the Pauline letters.⁴ Divine laughter exposes his ethical presumption. Turning away in shame, he finds his voice in the confessional medium.

The probative power of confession derives from the independence of philosophical and theological reflection from historical interpretation. The problem is not to refute the mutual, redundant implications of “a lifeless ‘tautology’”⁵ but to demonstrate correlated judgments and reciprocal acts. In [Chapter 2](#), on the historical side, there is the non-neurotic resolution of Augustine’s relations with his father, Patricius. On the reflexive side, running parallel to Freud’s deconstructive use of a modern criteriology of consciousness, there are Hegel’s ascending figures, which progressively constitute consciousness to arrive at a symbol of God as a paternal figure of kindness and compassion. In [Chapter 3](#), on the historical side, there is the non-narcissistic resolution of his relations with his mother, Monica, and his coerced ordination “for all.” On the reflexive side, again running parallel to Kohut’s use of a modern criteriology of narcissism, there are the signs in which consciousness recognizes itself revealed in the reticence of Letter 21, in the turning away in

shame at the divine laughter and in the recognition of moral presumption. This self-recognition gives rise to and is itself furthered by the criteriology of the divine conceptualized and systematized in Augustine's teaching on original sin, election, and predestination. This reflexive criteriology is the subject of the remaining chapters of this book. Both sets of correlated judgments and reciprocal acts give birth not to a lifeless tautology but what is for Augustine's brethren a credible confessional practice.

[Section 1](#) of the present chapter identifies Augustine's own confessional criteriology of the divine as he journeys intellectually through and beyond Manichean materialism and Academic Skepticism and morally beyond Neoplatonic presumption. Shockingly, this criteriological knowledge proves to be a "learned unknowing," in which Augustine is progressively divested intellectually and morally. Augustine's grace-filled response to this divestment was to become the cultural credible of western Christianity for more than a millennium. [Section 2](#) shows how, in our time, the Augustinian consensus has been discredited and abandoned. According to Augustine's critics, the fatal flaw in the Augustinian consensus is its solution to the problem of evil. Augustine's solution replies to Manichean dualism with the Platonic view of evil as privation to draw the revolutionary conclusion that evil is in the will not in nature. Augustine's critics claim that there is a twofold problem with this solution. Augustine cannot offer a coherent conceptualization of the experience of the ineluctable in evil. Worse still, his solution sanctions a purely penal view of evil with the ruinous consequence of convicting innocent sufferers. In the remainder of this chapter and in [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#), I present what Augustine believes is a coherent account of the ineluctable in evil. His response to the charge of convicting of innocent sufferers must wait until till the final section of [Chapter 6](#) and [Chapters 7, 8, and 9](#). In [Section 3](#) of the present chapter, I follow Augustine as he makes the difficult journey through the trans-ethical world, in which freedom and justice are joined to ineluctable evil and God's "pleasure." I will try to show that the *Confessions* successfully emplots the practical universal for travelling in this mysterious world created in the violent collision of ethical principles and inscrutable wisdom. The resulting trans-ethical narrative retraces Augustine's journey in the *Confessions* through the world created in the violent collision of ethical monotheism with two of dualistic thought's perennial expressions, Manichaeism ([Section 4](#)) and Neoplatonism ([Section 5](#)). Augustine discovers that in some mysterious way even the adoption of Platonism's privation theory of evil cannot exorcise the enduring truth contained in dualism. Anterior, freely chosen evil as inherited spiritual concupiscence binds the will in ineluctable evil. Since involuntary anterior evil cannot be reconciled theoretically with ethical

monotheism,⁶ Augustine must turn to another medium, to the medium of confessional narrative, to find out what God had done with him ([Section 6](#)).

A REFLEXIVE SET OF CONFESSIONAL CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING GOD

Historical exegesis of the external signs of the divine reveals an absolute which puts an end to the infinite regress of reflection. Manifestation is an external proof: Augustine's non-neurotic and non-narcissistic relations with his parents, the Pauline gift of continence in Book 8, his coerced ordination "for all" in Book 9. Reflection develops a complementary measure for gauging the authenticity of any external sign of the divine: the derisory divine laughter, presumption and shame, reticence and universal confessional practice, and the criteriology contained in Augustine's teachings on ineluctable, inherited guilt and the gratuity of grace. Reflection is an internal proof that runs parallel to the process of discernment in revelation. "The double exegesis," arising from the interpretation of historical signs and from the reflective interpretation of the self, "is a double trial" or judgment.⁷

Augustine develops a philosophical and a theological criteriology of the divine to name and to know God. He has no alternative because consciousness cannot grasp itself, much less intuit the absolute. As we saw in [Chapter 1](#), [Section 6](#), Augustine believes that reflection fails to grasp itself intellectually, practically, and morally. Knowledge of the self is limited, fragmented, mediated by experience and, in what concerns it most intimately, by God.⁸

The unitary intuition of the absolute and the self belongs to God alone. Reflective knowledge of God in immediacy is mediated in a judgment of the truth of finite reality. "You did cry to me from afar 'I am who am.' And I heard You as one who hears in the heart.... I would more easily have doubted my own life than have doubted that truth is: which is 'clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made'" (7.10.16). The critical act of judgment permits a fleeting, if indubitable, knowledge of the divine in dispersed predicates of the finite. Since predicates are not characteristics of being-in-itself, the set of criteria to which they belong cannot form a closed system or total knowledge. Augustine's most complete set of such criteria in the *Confessions* appears in Book 1:4. Here he gives a long list of juxtaposed incommensurable predicates:

most merciful and most just, utterly hidden and utterly present ... suffering no change and changing all things: never new, never old, making all things new ... ever in action, ever at rest, gathering all things to You and needing none ... ever seeking though lacking nothing. You love without subjection

to passion, You are jealous but not with fear, You can know repentance but not sorrow, be angry yet unperturbed by anger. (1.4.4)⁹

The list continues for many more lines to conclude, “And with all this, what have I said?” (1.4.4) A list in Book 2, based on thirteen human vices, such as ambition, cruelty, lust, curiosity, envy, and pride, are seen as “perversely imitating” God: “Anger clamors for just vengeance but whose vengeance is so just as Yours?” (2.6.13) Faced with the awesome exercise of God’s justice to the exclusion of God’s mercy, he will fall back, in learned unknowing, on the “abyss of … [God’s] just judgment” (7.6.10).

Augustine constructs his set of criteria of the divine by purifying his thought intellectually and morally. It was an impure set of intellectual criteria that trapped him in Manichaeism: “When I desired to think of my God, I could not think of Him save as a bodily magnitude – for it seemed to me that what was not such was nothing at all: this indeed was the principal and practically the sole cause of my inevitable error” (5.10.19); “If only I had been able to conceive of a substance that was spiritual, all their strong points would have been broken down and cast forth from my mind. But I could not” (5.14.25). Ignorance of the spiritual meant that Augustine could not understand the nature of moral freedom: “I set myself to examine an idea I had heard – namely that our free-will is the cause of our doing evil. . . . I could not clearly discern this, I endeavored to draw the eye of my mind from the pit, but I was again plunged into it; and as often as I tried, so often was I plunged back” (7.3.5).¹⁰ When, finally, he does draw up a more adequate criteriology,¹¹ freedom becomes a realistic possibility.

The force of the criteria comes from desire. Cicero’s *Hortensius* “gave me a new purpose and ambition . . . with an incredible intensity of desire I longed after immortal wisdom. I had begun that journey upwards by which I was to return to You” (3.4.7). Cicero taught him to “love and seek,¹² and win, and hold and embrace . . . Wisdom itself” (3.4.8); “O Truth, Truth, how inwardly did the very marrow of my soul pant for You” (3.6.10). But he could not satisfy his desire because he was “dwelling externally in the eye of my flesh” (3.6.11) and “swollen with pride” (3.5.9): “through my own sharpness that I let myself be taken in by fools” (3.7.12). He captures the complex process in a single image: “I was separated from You by my own swollenness, as though my cheeks had swelled out and closed up my eyes” (7.7.11). A more adequate intellectual and moral set of criteria exposed Manichaeism: “I despaired of finding any profit in that false doctrine” (5.10.18). If God was “corruptible,” then the “freedom and purity and integrity” Augustine sought in God could be “enslaved, contaminated

and corrupted” (7.2.3). He concluded that God must be incorruptible and Manichaeism rejected (7.2.3).

The externality and materiality of his search for understanding of himself (7.1.2), of God (4.16.28–31), and of the origin of evil (7.5.7), had frustrated any real progress, and he began to think that Academic Skepticism had a point (5.14.25). The Platonism he found in Milan set him right: “Being admonished by all this to return to myself, I entered into my own depths, with You as guide” (7.10.16). There he discovered that truth “is not extended.... And You did cry to me from afar; ‘I am who am’” (7.10.16) only to discover that human consciousness cannot give itself freedom, immortality, and gifted existence.¹³ Augustine captures the plight of the ungifted self: “My soul turned and turned again, on back and sides and belly, and the bed was always hard for You alone are her rest” (6.16.26). The mind cannot even will to make the inward ascent. Knowledge of moral servitude completes the criteriological divestment: “to turn and twist a will half-wounded this way and that, with the part that would rise struggling against the part that would keep to the earth” (8.8.19). He evades self-awareness, and when God “turned me back towards myself, taking me from behind my own back where I had put myself ... that I might see how vile I was,” knowledge proved ineffectual: “I saw myself and was horrified ... with what lashes of condemnation did I not scourge my soul to make it follow me now that I wanted to follow You! My soul hung back. It would not follow, yet found no excuse for not following” (8.7.18). After his moral conversion in Book 8, divestment continues unabated. True, his criteriological breakthrough culminates in descriptions of inner spaces of lyric and erotic beauty (10.6.8), yet, inasmuch as unaided consciousness cannot intuit the “embrace in the soul” (10.6.8), the experience of true happiness constitutes a divestment.¹⁴ Augustine’s life has become freedom only in the light of hope¹⁵: “In this life, which is rightly called one continuing trial [suffering as testimony], no man ought to be oversure that though he is capable of becoming better instead of worse, he is not actually becoming worse instead of better. Our one hope, our one confidence, our one firm promise is Your mercy” (10.32.48)¹⁶, “O my God, hear me and look upon me and see me and pity me and heal me. You in whose eyes I have become a question to myself and that is my infirmity” (10.33.50). There is an element in this hope of the laceration of the evil infinity of moral reflection, a rigorism leading to despair: “a man often glories the more vainly for his very contempt of vainglory” (10.38.63). A fourth-century “master of suspicion,”¹⁷ Augustine realizes that he must shift his discourse – from the discourse of justice to that of gift: “You do command continence: grant what You do command and command what You will” (10.29.40).

THE FAILURE OF AUGUSTINIAN THEODICY TO PROVIDE A CREDIBLE CRITERIOLOGY FOR EVIL

This tectonic shift from the discourse of justice to the discourse of gift marks a series of decisive advances in Augustine's reflection on the criteria for testifying before God.

In our time, the criteriological gains arising from this shift have proven to be illusory. Most notably, the theological consensus concerning the problem of evil and suffering articulated within the Augustinian tradition on the basis of this distinction between these two levels of discourse – justice and grace – consolidated by the medievals, and reaffirmed by the reformers, has finally disintegrated. Augustine's theodicy established criteria for reconciling evil and suffering with belief in an all-powerful and all-loving God who orders and guides our lives. Today these criteria are theologically contested and philosophically discredited.¹⁸

Aged thirty and dissatisfied with univocal formulations, Augustine himself had already problematized the question of evil with an appeal to the experience of evil at the origin of dualism. As we saw in [Chapter 2](#), integral to the process of weaning himself morally from Manichaeism was his newfound willingness to take responsibility for his evil acts. To his horror Augustine discovered that this liberating insight was yoked to an ineluctable evil already there in his will:

What I did unwillingly, it still seemed to me that I rather suffered than did.... “Who was it that set and engrafted in me this root of bitterness, since I was wholly made by my most loving God? If the devil is the author, where does the devil come from? ... What was the origin in him of the perverse will by which he became a devil, since by the all good Creator he was made wholly angel?” (7.3.5)

With this question, Augustine sets up in its most acute form the question of the origins of non-voluntary evil only to exclude, by means of a rigorous dialectic, the dualist possibility whether in its Theogenic or Orphic incarnations.

He asks, “Whence then is evil, since God who is good made all things good?” (7.5.7) He dismisses each possible response with the reflection tailored to each: God “would not be omnipotent if He could not create something good without the aid of matter which He had not created” (7.5.7). Monotheism logically excludes dualism only for experience to reaffirm it. Augustine concludes: “Such thoughts I resolved in my unhappy heart, which was further burdened and gnawed at by the fear that I should die without having found the truth” (7.5.7). Ten or more years after posing the question, Augustine first

articulated his influential theological solution in terms of his teachings on grace and freedom, original sin, election and predestination.

Since the Enlightenment, the Augustinian synthesis has been increasingly under attack because it emphasizes God's initiative and goodness at the expense of human freedom and responsibility. In our time, John Hick for example and more recently Process Theists have proposed influential, developmental alternatives. Both leave human freedom intact so that all human beings can develop their full and perfect spiritual potential. They distinguish between the Augustinian God of coercive power, who could have stopped evil but failed to do so, and the God who acts persuasively. They reject determinism – God cannot be held responsible for evil. According to Process Theologians, God “lures” us to higher levels of being and value to overcome the evil involved in remaining content with the triviality of the original chaos. Augustine had already discerned elitism in such views. Contrary to the received view of Augustine, I will show that Augustine thinks such positions placed aesthetics above morality and trivialized the suffering of the many for a select few who have the God-given opportunity to live fully actualized lives. He thinks Hick's kind of ethics betrayed a superficial understanding of freedom and human motivation.

With the collapse of the Augustinian consensus, some have taken refuge in simple trust and faith in God. They spurn theodicy as a fruitless, even impious, intellectual exercise in justifying the ways of God to humans. Augustine is always impatient of obscurantism.¹⁹ The obscurity of a question stimulated a more strenuous intellectual effort. Augustine would not postpone a solution to a future life about which he knew even less. He rejects resignation, fatalism, and inaction, along with theoretical narrowness, dogmatism, and fanaticism. He believes that reflection can deepen faith's potential without sacrificing human integrity. He would have been impatient of answers restricted to an existential, practical level, affirming only an eschatological hope and coping techniques. When he does appeal to God's ineffable judgments, he does not regress to simple faith²⁰ but shifts his enquiry from one level of rational discourse to another no less rational – from a moral discourse belonging to a justice discourse to a gift discourse belonging to a Pauline economy of surplus.

Since the First World War and more insistently since the Holocaust, the perceived failure of God's providence has led some to affirm that God has limited power but not limited goodness. Here God is more a God of compassion than an immutable and all-causative deity. Thereby, God is absolved of responsibility for evil. Augustine would agree with Biblical scholars when they underline God's concern and involvement with the world. But he would

affirm God's self-sufficiency, God's infinite wisdom and power, alongside infinite concern. In [Chapter 2](#), in my effort to arrive at the trans-judicial symbol of fatherhood, I identified the point of tension created by Augustine's double affirmation of God's self-sufficiency and concern. The trans-judicial view is unsurpassable, not as a point of repose but of tension, "for it is not yet apparent how the 'personality' of God who pardons and the 'impersonality' of *Deus sive natura* [of Spinoza] could coincide."²¹ It sets in motion "the dialectic, underlying the whole of Western theology, of 'God' and 'deity'."²² With the whole orthodox tradition, Augustine affirms divine impassibility. Only in Christ does God become a suffering companion of the world's suffering creatures. The question of "godforsakenness" must be resolved, according to the orthodox tradition, in Christ and not by recourse to a finite God. Christ reveals the nature of God's compassion. He suffers for us and along with us. Our history of pain and anguish can be taken up into God only as part of the risen Christ's history of suffering. Augustine's use of the confessional narrative to subsume his own history under Christ's reveals narrative as a decisive, if neglected, medium for approaching suffering and evil.

The not uncommon response to the lost Augustinian consensus in theodicy is the conservative and fundamentalist turn to the faith solution or the liberal and secular resort to agnosticism and versions of Freud's resignation or Heidegger's resoluteness in the face of death. Is the only possible response to reality resignation, whether to impenetrable mystery or ineluctable necessity? What has happened to the grace of imagination and the upsurge of the possible? Some think that they can listen to the Word of Revelation more clearly now than in the unbroken world of Augustinian theodicy. I would suggest that we can hear Augustine better, even hear him with a renewed freshness closer to the way his contemporaries heard him.

As we saw, Augustine's newfound freedom made him willing to take responsibility for his evil acts, but "what I did unwillingly, it still seemed to me that I rather suffered than did" (7.3.5). With this question and its corollary "Why me?" Wisdom responds, by adopting the justice discourse along with its law of retribution. The answer soon breaks down for the punishment fails to fit the crime. As a result, Job must learn to love God for naught. This leaves intact the question of the reality of non-voluntary evil and suffering.

Gnosticism approached the problem in terms of the all-encompassing problematic of "Whence comes evil?"²³ In response and in his effort to ward off the tragic vision, Augustine introduces philosophical categories and, as a result, creates an onto-theology. Following the Platonists, he negates the substantiality of evil and, in keeping with the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, conceives the distance between Creator and creature as an ontic

distance. Creaturely deficiency, fallibility makes it possible for creatures to turn away from God toward lesser beings. As the product of human choice, evil loses all ontological meaning and the new question becomes “Why do we do evil?” Thereby, Augustine shifts the problem of evil into the sphere of action, willing and free-will. Here evil is either sin or punishment. “This purely moral vision of evil leads in turn to a penal vision of history.”²⁴ The “non-voluntary dimension of evil identified in phenomenology, Augustine takes up in the doctrine of original sin. Ricoeur comments:

However this enigma of the power of evil already there is set within the false clarity of an apparently rational explanation. By conjoining within the concept of a sinful nature the two heterogeneous notions of a biological transmission through generation and an individual imputation of guilt, the notion of original sin appears as a quasi-concept that we may assign to an anti-gnostic gnosis. The previous content of this gnosis is denied but the form of its discourse is reconstituted, that of a rationalized myth. As for suffering, which remains the leading thread in my presentation, the failure of this discourse on original sin is a double one. Besides the conceptual inconsistency just referred to, it leaves unanswered the protest of unjust suffering, by condemning it to silence in the name of a massive indictment of the whole of humanity.²⁵

Is Ricoeur’s trenchant criticism justified? I think Ricoeur captures the original sin of the Augustinian consensus and, with this identification in place, can account for the unravelling of that consensus in the twentieth century.²⁶ But is original sin, as Augustine conceived it, rightly categorized as a “rationalized myth”? More damning still, does it leave “unanswered the protest of unjust suffering”?

BEYOND ETHICS

By Book 7 wisdom has taught Augustine to see himself as a guilty victim: “what I did unwillingly, it still seemed to me that I rather suffered than did” (7.3.5). How does he arrive at this conviction?

It was Cicero’s *Hortensius* that inspired eighteen-year-old Augustine to seek wisdom (3.4.7). It would take another twenty years before Augustine would grasp the true nature of wisdom. For a long time, that is, from his first contact with Platonism till some time before he wrote the *Confessions*, he thought wisdom consisted in the contemplation of eternal truth. By the time he wrote the *Confessions*, he had discovered that it was to have some “notion” of “what” God was “to do with” him (3.4.8). Wisdom, as the knowledge of God’s ways with human beings, is the Word made flesh. The *Confessions*

recount Augustine's "journey upwards"; as such, it is a book of wisdom. Out of the otherwise chance circumstances, characters, and episodes of his past, Augustine recounts God's doings with him by constructing a divine plot. The Word made flesh as the "Way"²⁷ marks a new advance in Augustine's Christology. Christ's life becomes the generic plot – a narrative universal – for reordering Augustine's past for the future, not that Augustine's life lacked a plot before his conversion. Aged twenty-nine, he saw life according to the wisdom of an educated fourth-century pagan: "I could at least get a governorship. And then I could marry a wife, with some little money of her own, so that she would not increase my expenditure. And so I should have reached the limit of ambition. Many great men, well worthy of imitation, have given themselves to the pursuit of wisdom even though they had wives" (6.11.19).²⁸ Aged forty, he emplots his life in the *Confessions* using a new standard of wisdom. By this time Augustine has discovered that contemplative knowledge cannot resolve the impenetrable mystery of the origin of evil. He could appeal to ethics to define potential happiness, the conditions of its achievement, and the virtues necessary to attain it. In an attempt to justify the ways of God to humankind, to do theodicy, he could have appealed to the law of retribution to claim that virtue leads to fortune and consolation, vice to misfortune and accusation. But the origins of sin and evil, righteousness and goodness are hidden in trans-ethical mystery: "The closed heart does not close out Your eyes, nor the heart's hardness resist Your hand. For You open it at Your pleasure whether for mercy or for justice" (5.1.1). The shock of the impudent juxtaposition of divine "pleasure" with "justice" destroys the law of retribution, to leave him suspended over "the abyss of [God's] ... just judgment" (7.6.10).²⁹ The *Confessions* emplot the practical wisdom for journeying over the "abyss." It reveals a trans-ethical insight into the intermediate causes of action for a life lived within these mysteries.

Augustine recalls with terror what could have been his fate. He recalls how, aged twenty-eight years and newly arrived in Italy, he fell sick, almost died, and "very nearly went to hell bearing all the weight of deadly sins which I had committed against You and myself and other men over and above the bond of original sin whereby we all die in Adam" (5.9.16). Original sin and personal sin would have combined to carry him "off to perdition. For where should I have gone if I had departed then save to fire and torments such as my deeds deserved in the justice of Your ordinance?" (5.9.16) Augustine always faces up to ethical and trans-ethical evil. On the one hand, he says, "But what I did unwillingly, it still seemed to me that I rather suffered than did, and I judged it to be not my fault but my punishment" (7.3.5). On the other hand, he is not content with tragic wisdom alone and must immediately add, "though as

I hold [God] ... most just, I was quite ready to admit that I was being justly punished" (7.3.5), even though he cannot discover "who was it that set and engrafted in me this root of bitterness" (7.3.5) or what is "the origin of evil" (7.5.7). Such is the mysterious world in which he begins to live: a trans-ethical world in which freedom and justice are joined to ineluctable evil and God's "pleasure."

The *Confessions* emplot the practical universal for travelling in the mysterious world created in the violent collision of ethical principles and inscrutable wisdom. I propose to examine the resulting trans-ethical narrative understanding by retracing Augustine's journey through the world created in the violent collision of Christian ethical monotheism with two of dualistic thought's perennial expressions, Manichaeism and Neoplatonism.

MANICHEAN DUALISM

Manichaeism taught the youthful Augustine to see himself as trapped in unmerited suffering and evil. According to Augustine, the Manicheans believed that evil inhabits the origin of things.³⁰ An original evil, "an imaginary brood of Darkness, which the Manicheans were wont to set up as an opposing substance" to God, resulted in a primordial war, in which "some part or member" of God, "some offspring of" God's "substance," was "mingled with those contrary powers, those natures not created by" God (7.2.3). The offspring of God's substance "was so far corrupted by them and changed for the worse as to be turned from beatitude into misery and to need assistance to deliver it and make it clean. This was the human soul. It was enslaved, contaminated and corrupted" (7.2.3).³¹

Julian was to taunt Augustine many years later, saying that Augustine never repudiated the Manichean teaching on primordial evil.³² It is true that in his maturity Augustine still believes that evil always precedes us; we are caught up in it and discover it already within us and continue it in our free act of committing it. However, Julian misses the radical transformation these beliefs undergo when Augustine invokes the ethical moment. Only an arduous search during his young adulthood brought him to this point. He says that at first Manichaeism attracted him because of his unwillingness to be held responsible: "I preferred to maintain that [God's] ... immutable substance had been constrained to suffer error, rather than admit that my own mutable substance had gone astray through its own fault and fallen into error for its punishment" (4.15.26). As a Manichean, Augustine believed that God was "a luminous immeasurable body and I a kind of particle broken from that body" (4.16.31). This belief exonerated Augustine

from responsibility for evil; he “held the view that it was not we that sinned, but some other nature sinning in us; and it pleased my pride to be beyond fault, and when I did any evil not to confess that I had done it … I very much preferred to excuse myself and accuse some other thing that was in me but was not I” (5.10.18).³³

Augustine claims that “my sin was all the more incurable because I thought I was not a sinner” (5.10.18). He can find two reasons for his belief. First, he “thought corporeally” (7.11.17), and, since the Manicheans “found me dwelling externally in the eye of my flesh,” they “seduced” him (5.11.21). Ignorance of spiritual truth made ethical blindness invincible: “If only I had been able to conceive of a substance that was spiritual, all [the Manichean] … strong points would have been broken down and cast forth from my mind. But I could not” (5.14.25). Second, he blames pride: “I was only swollen with pride but to myself I seemed a very big man” (3.5.9). He could find no alternative to the Manicheans and their “high-sounding nonsense, carnal and wordy men” (3.6.10). Accordingly, “I was striving to be made clean … by bearing food to those who were called elect and holy, that in the factory of their own stomachs they should turn it into angels and deities by whom I was to be set free” (4.1.1).

We must try to look beyond Augustine’s bitter mockery and Julian’s subsequent raillery. Is it possible to recover some sense of the power that the dualistic worldview held for Augustine as for his contemporaries? It is true that the Platonic version of ethical monotheism, which Augustine first encountered in Milan, destroyed for Augustine the Manichean form of the theogonic myth. According to Platonism, evil is a lack in being, a “nothing” created by deficient human willing and God, as the source of all being, is innocent and holy.³⁴

What then are the abiding truths contained in Manichaeism that can account for dualism’s perennial appeal? The Augustine of the *Confessions* believes that the origins of evil willing – how can an evil will issue from a good nature? – is so deeply hidden in mystery that it cannot be discovered (7.3.4–5). An anthropology of evil cannot refute an absolute genesis of being to which evil would belong primordially.

In his maturity, when he no longer thought Manichaeism more reasonable than Christianity, Augustine did not abandon the enduring truths contained in the dualistic worldview. This view holds that “man’s positing of evil discloses another side of evil, a non-posed factor, mingled with man’s positing of evil.”³⁵ Manichaeism’s enduring truths add to moral accusation and guilt the recognition of physical suffering, to spiritual knowledge an awareness of corporeal ignorance, and to ethical reflection on pride a belief in primordial

evil. I propose that Augustine captured these enduring truths in his teachings on original sin and predestination without, on the one hand, hypostatizing this non-human source in an evil principle³⁶ and, on the other hand, and more controversially, without these two doctrines becoming a scandalous theodicy. I will maintain that he was able to do so because he adopted the confessional genre as the medium in which to articulate a wisdom that could encompass the tragic.

In this one word [*confessio*], he [Augustine] had summed up his attitude to the human condition: it was the new key with which he hoped, in middle age, to unlock the riddle of evil. The old key had proved insufficient.... Augustine had hoped that his “well-trained soul” might grasp how evil merged into the harmony of the universe, as black cubes enhance the pattern of a mosaic-pavement.... [In middle age] he had found the problem posed again, in agonizing terms: man was responsible for his action; but, at the same time, he was helpless, dislocated by some ancient fall. How could this state be reconciled with the goodness and the omnipotence of God? A “well-trained soul” could not answer such a question: what Augustine now wanted was a “pious seeker.” For to be “pious” meant refusing to solve the problem simply by removing one of the poles of tension. These poles were now seen as firmly rooted in the awareness of the human condition of a man of religious feeling.... Man’s first awareness, therefore, must be of a need to be healed: but this meant both accepting responsibility for what one is, and at one and the same time, welcoming dependence on a therapy beyond one’s control.³⁷

For the remainder of his life, Augustine will teach that evil always precedes us; the evils we, in our ignorance and pride, commit are already there, binding us primordially. True, Augustine’s ethical posing of the question transforms it beyond the reach of Manichaeism via Academic Skepticism and the Platonism of Milan. His concern for ethics was one of his chief incentives for abandoning Manichaeism, for he found its rituals and teachings could not help him grow morally or intellectually: “I despaired of finding any profit in that false doctrine, I began to hold slackly and carelessly” to its teachings (5.10.18).

Nevertheless, as we retrace his steps, we must place alongside ethical freedom, spiritual knowledge, and ethical pride Manichaeism’s consciousness of physical suffering, corporeal ignorance, and primordial evil. The obscure but dynamic relations between these polar opposites structure Augustine’s account of his life between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight. Knowledge of God’s wisdom will have to penetrate here if it is to lead him on his “journey upwards by which,” he says, “I was to return to” God (3.4.7).

PLATONIC DUALISM

We need look no further than the youthful Augustine to discover the staying power of dualism. Augustine answers Manichean dualism with Platonic dualism.³⁸ Of course, they are very different types of dualism.³⁹ In explanation of suffering and evil, Manichaeism posits a principle of darkness in combat with the principle of light. Platonism rejects the notion of opposed primordial principles. Platonism's transcendentalism integrated into Augustine's Christian monotheism a "privation theory of evil," which rendered superfluous Manichean dualism.

Platonic dualism is a mitigated dualism. Augustine claims that Platonism taught him the precious concept of the immaterial. Platonism explains the existence of suffering and evil in terms of the absence of order in this immaterial reality brought about by the soul's descent into the material. Its dualism is a dualism of body and soul, in which the body is the cause of suffering and evil. But we must be careful to distinguish Platonic body/soul dualism from Manichean body/soul dualism. For the Manicheans, the body was created evil, which, despite its evil origin, has been put to a salvific use by the elect,⁴⁰ whose dietary practices freed particles of light entrapped in matter. Platonists had a far more nuanced approach to the body. They did not believe that it was created evil. They rejected metaphysical dualism. In its place, they discovered an existential dualism.⁴¹ Looking back from the new perspective of Platonism, Augustine says, Mani's corporeal imaginings trapped him because he "did not even know that God is spirit" or the spiritual "principle in us by which we are" (3.7.12). For nine years, he lay "tossing in the mud of that deep pit and the darkness of its falsity" (3.11.20). Here, he casts his soul in the role of the Platonic soul in "exile" (4.15.26), banished into the "mud" of the Manichean body because of the absence of measure or justice in the soul's emotions.⁴² Although the body bewitches the soul and rivets it, the soul makes itself first captive by its own dizziness; the soul's vertigo of desire is alien to the serene contemplation of truth. The soul, which is the principle and promise of knowledge, knows in the body the taste of death. In contemplative purification, the soul is "illumined by another light" (4.15.25); it becomes thought. As such, it is no longer subject to bodily desire. Happiness comes to the "good soul" when knowledge is strong and desire weak. Augustine recalls that, "being admonished by all this [Platonic teaching] to return to myself, I entered into my own depths.... I entered, and with the eye of my soul ... I saw [God's] unchangeable Light shining over that same eye of my soul, over my mind.... He who knows the truth knows that Light, and he who knows the Light knows eternity" (7.10.16). But he could not hold his gaze firmly fixed

on eternal knowledge and was “torn away” from the Light “again by my own weight, and fell again with torment to lower things. Carnal habit was that weight” (7.17.23).

Platonism’s mitigated dualism, as Augustine finds it in Plotinus, is scarcely a dualism at all.⁴³ Plotinus conceives of the soul and body as a continuum stretched out between the One and matter: from audacious descent to contemplative ascent. For “great souls” like Plotinus, it is possible through contemplation, even in this life and while still in the body, to “enjoy” God in a stable state of undisturbed peace.”⁴⁴ The immediately post-conversion Augustine of the *De quantitate animae* (378–88) hopes to arrive at this advanced state even in this life, and, if not here, then “death will afford an escape from the body, easing the path to God and removing ‘a stumbling block to the soul’s complete union with truth itself.’”⁴⁵

As ensouled, the body is beautiful but, and this is the problem, its beauty, along with its desires and the desires of the soul that animates it – for the joys of the flesh, for knowledge, and for power – binds the soul to these pleasures: “the soul is guilty of fornication when she turns from You and seeks from any other source that she will nowhere find pure and without taint unless she returns to You” (2.6.14). Then, Porphyry, Plotinus’s wayward disciple, admonishes with Orphic urgency: “*corpus est omne fugiendum*” [flee the body]. But Plotinus, the master, need not flee. Dwelling in contemplative equanimity, Plotinus awaits “the soul’s complete union with truth itself.”⁴⁶ However, and this is the difference between Plotinus and the Augustine of the *Confessions*, on his return to the One, Plotinus will leave behind his body – Orphism retains its grip. Orphism loses its hold on Augustine not with Plotinian equanimity but with confession. Immersion in time and space, the story of a life, a bodily life, incarnation, is for Augustine the salvific medium.

Of course, Plotinus does not need redeeming. To ascend to the One, dialectic, moderate asceticism and contemplation are all that is called for. In *De quantitate animae* (378–88), written shortly after Augustine’s conversion and already written from a Christian perspective, Augustine still believed, that a program of Plotinian contemplation could lead him into the divine presence: “In *De quantitate*, the three strands of contemplation – the epistemic, moral, and ontological, were correlated and this conducted to direct knowledge of God and the endurance of that sublime condition. Through contemplation the soul comes to ‘a dwelling place’ where it can ‘enjoy’ God in a stable state of undisturbed peace.”⁴⁷ A decade later, Augustine confesses that the brevity of the contemplative act in the ascensions of Book 7 and Ostia, the falling back of the soul into the body, reveals the unbridgeable gap between the God and the soul.⁴⁸ True, the ascents in Book 7 are cognitively successful: they confound

the Manicheans by opening to Augustine a transcendent, spiritual world verified in “the soul’s capacity for a priori judgments regarding necessary truths.”⁴⁹ Here Augustine is claiming that he has reached “the same knowledge of the transcendental and the divine world that the Platonists achieved, while exposing the spiritual limitations of such contemplation from his autobiographical perspective.... [This autobiographical perspective shows] where Platonism succeeds and where it fails, its cognitive value and its salvific inadequacy.”⁵⁰ Platonism did not permit the soul to enjoy God; that humanity is in need of a savior; that sinful descent necessitates a confessional ascent, the story of a life, a bodily resurrection. At Ostia, post-baptismal grace permits Augustine and Monica to touch sapiential wisdom, and fleetingly to enjoy it. But Ostia is not enough. Only their souls ascend; their souls are outside of their bodies and their histories. Ostia is a premonition, a promise.⁵¹ Ostia’s brevity reveals to the soul “the enormity of its spiritual estrangement.”⁵² Contemplation establishes “the certain existence of transcendent Wisdom together with the soul’s tragic loss and fall. Contemplation has thus secured the transcendental hope of the soul at the expense of [Plotinian] equanimity.”⁵³ Kenney acutely observes that, “while in Book Seven there is language of the soul ‘reaching’ the eternal (VII. xvii. 23), the Ostian account emphasizes that contact with wisdom is a matter of the heart, of the moral self.”⁵⁴ At Ostia, Augustine and Monica meet a personal God, their creator, who loves his creatures. He is not the ineffable One, the Alone. Transcendent yes, but, unlike the One, intimately concerned in the details of their personal lives⁵⁵ and restoring a relationship that has been unilaterally broken.⁵⁶

Passivity, seduction, anterior evil, as we find them in Platonism are not the resurgence of primordial chaos but the body’s externality, the body in so far as bodily desires pervert the right order. True, “in some obscure fashion,” this anterior seduction emerges along with “the emergence of all things from the Good” in Plotinus.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Pauline ethics enables Augustine to integrate the mitigated dualism of Platonism into Christian monotheism. It makes it possible for him to see that spiritual concupiscence, not bodily concupiscence, subjects the soul to the body in an involuntary bondage.⁵⁸ Ricoeur cautions against too close an identification of Platonism with Orphism. Plato believed that desire as a disease of the soul is a creation of injustice, not of the body. The feelings are a principle of fallibility, not a principle of evil.⁵⁹ Here, Augustine’s confessional view is very close to Plato’s. But where the body for the Platonists implies everything that resists thought, the flesh in Paul also includes morality and wisdom when they become self-righteousness. When Ricoeur contrasts Paul, who “is more sensible of pride than of concupiscence,” with “a line of force in Greek thought which goes from the Socratics

through Plato to the Stoics, according to which evil is the passivity of desire, rather than active evil will,”⁶⁰ Augustine must be set by the side of Paul.

According to Augustine, Adam fell into pride, not into the body. This fall leads to bodily concupiscence, so Augustine can say, in agreement with Plotinus, that the body itself is neither evil nor inclined to evil.⁶¹ Bodily nature is good. Augustine goes on to say that the body serves the good as long as contemplation wins out over pride. Once subject to pride, a mortal, lusting, raving body controls the soul. The reverse happens at the denouement of his “journey upwards” in Book 8; spiritual continence masters the lust of the flesh (the body), the lust of the eyes (the intellect), and the pride of life (the will).⁶² Sin is self-righteousness, not bodily concupiscence; pride issues in concupiscence. Although time is a trial and a figure of fallibility from which to flee, the soul can escape it – and this is where Augustine parts company with Plotinus and Platonism – only by involving itself more deeply in time according to the paradoxical teaching on *intentio/distentio* of Book 11. The body is a symbol of injustice but not its cause; for Augustine, the myth of the body as a prison becomes a cipher of the unjust soul; injustice results from pride, not a vertigo of desire. Augustine’s ethics comes to him from the Prophets and Paul: self-righteousness not concupiscence, active evil not passive desire, give rise to evil.⁶³ Augustine sees a fundamental ethical flaw in Platonism’s pristine soul. Its insight into God and the soul lead to “presumption” (7.20.26). Its pride, embodied in the “incredibly conceited man” (7.9.13), who introduced him to the Platonic books, symbolizes for Augustine the invincible essence of evil itself as the same pride that Augustine discovers in himself.

Ethics, Judaeo-Christian ethics, gives an anthropological account of the origins of evil in an attempt to exclude all dualism. Augustine cannot sustain the ethical vision. He has journeyed from Manichean corporeality and externality via the dualistically conceived spiritual ascent of Neoplatonism to ethical monotheism. In the end, ethical monotheism cannot exclude dualism. It cannot explain the origin of evil or the lived experience of its anteriority. In debate with Manichaeism, he asks: “Who was it that set and engrafted in me this root of bitterness, since I was wholly made by my most loving God?” (7.3.5) Augustine’s answer subtly transforms the devil, who is the personification of the anteriority of evil in the theogonies, into the origin and agent of Pauline concupiscence:

The enemy held my will and of it made a chain and bound me. Because my will was perverse it changed to lust, and lust yielded to became habit, and habit not resisted became necessity.... My two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, one spiritual were in conflict and in their conflict wasted my soul. Thus with myself as object of the experiment, I came to understand what

I had read, How the “flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.” (8.5.10)⁶⁴

Arrived at Paul, he looks on with horror at his divided mind and wonders why he cannot “wholly” (8.8.19) will continence. He will not, with the Platonist, flee his body even in the minimalist sense involved in Plotinian contemplative equanimity. But he is unable simply to abandon dualism. Horrified at what he sees: “The mind commands the mind to will, the mind is itself, but it does not do it. Why this monstrousness? And what is the root of it?” (8.9.21) He ponders “whether perhaps the answer lies in the mysterious punishment that has come upon men and some deeply hidden damage in the sons of Adam” (8.9.21). He turns to Adam and the concept of inherited evil:

It was I who willed to do it, I who was unwilling.... I strove with myself and was distracted by myself. This distraction happened to me though I did not want it, and it showed me not the presence of some second mind, but the punishment of my own mind. Thus it was not I who caused it but “the sin that dwells in me,” the punishment of a sin freely committed by Adam, whose son I am. (8.10.22)⁶⁵

Augustine believes that ineluctable evil dwells in the soul; it precedes free and evil acts and is discovered in them. He no longer seeks for the origin of evil even in Platonism’s mitigated body-soul dualism and in its stead he discovers spiritual dualism. Inherited and spiritual concupiscence perverts the soul in pride. Pride precedes every evil act and is discovered in their exercise.

For a third time, we arrive at an impasse. The Greek understanding of concupiscence, as whatever resists thought, allows Augustine to move beyond the Manichean concept of evil, in which a primordial power of evil opposes God’s holiness and the good of creation. In its turn, the ethical monotheism of Christian Platonism permits Augustine via the concept of spiritual concupiscence to move beyond Platonic contemplative equanimity with its mitigated body-soul dualism as an explanation of evil. Nevertheless, in some mysterious way, a spiritual concept of evil cannot exorcise dualism. Anterior, freely chosen evil as inherited spiritual concupiscence inevitably draws the will to choose evil in its first exercise of freedom. Since involuntary anterior evil cannot be reconciled theoretically with ethical monotheism,⁶⁶ Augustine must turn to another medium to find out what God had done with him (3.4.8).

CONFESSORIAL CHRISTIANITY

Theoretical coherence is not possible. Augustine uncovers this incoherence in his first mature theoretical treatment of these mysteries in the second answer

to the first question of *Ad Simplicianum*, written in the year 396. There he discovers the impenetrability for speculative understanding of the relation between anterior evil, free will, and prevenient grace. Shortly afterward, he begins to write the *Confessions*. Its confessional plot guides him across the abyss that has opened up beneath ethics. He thinks that confessional Christianity can configure his journey through Manichaeism and Platonism. Confessional Christianity's discovery and adoption is the denouement of Book 8 and of the confessional journey.

Can confession lead him out of the ethical impasse? Can confession "retain its peculiar significance, apart from any legislative and moralistic reduction, except by preserving something of the terrible epic of being?"⁶⁷ Ricoeur captures Augustine's dilemma when he says, "The evil that is *committed* leads to just exile; that is what the figure of Adam represents.... The evil that is *suffered* leads to an unjust deprivation; that is what the figure of Job represents."⁶⁸

Augustine's confessional story retains "the terrible epic of being" as he found it in Manichaeism and Platonism. The theme and thought of Augustine's narrative solution preserves the epic as a fourfold movement from presumption to grace, from pride to humility, from concupiscence to freedom, from the prison of the body to the risen body.

The common pattern in the fourfold movement is Christ's being made flesh for us. The dynamics are to rethink Platonic dualism and its spatial hierarchy by refusing its forgetfulness and remembering the body in time, in a confession as part of a history,⁶⁹ of a narrative patterned on the incarnation.⁷⁰

Augustine's anthropology belongs to the Platonism he encountered in Milan, and he approaches Christ as a Platonist. He interprets Christ's descent into the flesh and ascent into heaven in terms of the Platonic paradigm of the fall of the soul from union with the one into the prison of the flesh and a journey of return by means of an ever more inward spiritual ascent: Christ "withdrew from our eyes, that we might return to our own heart and find Him. For He went away and behold He is still there.... He went back to that place which He had never left" (4.12.19). The risen body is the docile, non-concupiscential body to which Platonic contemplation aspires;⁷¹ Christ called "to us to return to Him into that secret place from which He came forth to us – coming first into the Virgin's womb, where humanity was wedded to Him, our mortal flesh, though not always to be mortal" (4.12.19).⁷²

What is shockingly non-Platonic is that the paradigmatic journey of ascent follows the route of descent – ascension is by means of the flesh. The body, which for the Platonists is the means of descent, serves Augustine as the means of executing a Platonic inner ascent. The goal remains the same, but the soul and body reverse roles. Christ's story, as the new narrative type, calls

“to us by what he said and what he did, calling to us by His death, life, descent and ascension to return to Him” (4.12.19). What is the point of the new narrative? Augustine replies, “First descend that you may ascend, ascend to God. For in mounting up against God you fell.... Tell the souls of men to weep in this valley of tears” (4.12.19). Augustine makes the confessional descent of Book 10 to arrive at those moments of union with God of which he says, “And sometimes You admit me to a state of mind that I am not ordinarily in, a kind of delight which could it ever be made permanent in me would be hard to distinguish from the life to come” (10.40.65). Paradoxical situation: a classical Platonic inward ascent is executed in a weeping descent remembering past events. Time, which is the cause of *distentio*, is drawn together in the paradigmatic *intentio* of Christ’s story. Augustine proposes Christ’s life as a narrative type for journeying across the abyss.

The Manicheans find the incarnation even more shocking than Augustine the youthful Platonist. As a Manichean, Augustine thought of Christ “as brought forth for our salvation from the mass of [God’s] ... most luminous substance” (5.10.20). The Manicheans believe that the body is evil, so it was impossible for them to believe that Jesus was ever truly born or died.⁷³ They could not accept the notion of the incarnation. They believe that Jesus was wholly divine.⁷⁴ As a Manichean, Augustine believes “that such a nature could not possibly be born of the Virgin Mary, unless it were mingled with her flesh. And I could not see how that which I had thus figured to myself could be mingled and not defiled. Thus I feared to believe the Word made flesh lest I should be forced to believe the Word defiled by flesh” (5.10.20). The extreme docetic⁷⁵ Christology of the Manicheans means that the incarnation was the way of defeat in the primordial battle in “the terrible epic of being.”

Platonism, with its mitigated dualism, likewise envisages the epic struggle in terms of the disturbing effects of the en-souled body. Augustine rejected both dualisms. He saw himself, he saw the person, body and soul, as an alienated self, a substantial self, an existential category whose presumptuous, moralizing will boasted of its knowledge of the eternal. Salvation demands two things of the will: humility and a return to the involuntary, to the body in which the soul binds itself. Humility alone possesses the key to the involuntary. Time and space, memory and habit are the media of the body. Confessional humility permits Augustine to reenter these media via a narrative that re-times, remembers, and refigures them. Reordering of the life of the body enables the soul to come to freedom.

As a Platonist, Augustine says that he knew none of this. He knew the eternal Word but not that the Word was made flesh or that his own knew him not. Again, he knew that the Word was equal with God but not that he emptied

himself, dying for the ungodly: “those who wear the high boots of their sublimer doctrine do not hear Him saying: Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart” (7.9.14). Augustine has himself in mind. Of himself as a youthful Platonist, he says: “I was not yet lowly enough to hold the lowly Jesus as my God” (7.18.24).⁷⁶ The prideful will binds itself in the involuntary, so it must return to the involuntary to discover what it has done and to begin to unbind itself. But, since the will cannot understand what it has done, it cannot unbind itself. Augustine comments, “I had read the books of the Platonists and had been set by them towards the search for truth that is incorporeal.... [But] I was at a standstill ... if I had not sought the way to [God] ... in Christ our savior I would have come not to instruction but to destruction. For I had begun to wish to appear wise ... and I did not weep for my state” (7.20.26). In Christ’s incarnation he first learned “to discern the difference that there is between presumption and confession, between those who see what the good is but do not see the way, and [those who see] the Way which leads to that country of blessedness, which we are meant not only to know but to dwell in” (7.20.26).⁷⁷

What is the wisdom of the confessional “Way”? In what does the knowledge of the intermediate causes of action consist? What is the practical knowledge for journeying over the abyss that lies between involuntary evil and ethical monotheism? Augustine claims he discovered the answer in the Pauline letters; there he “found that whatever truth I had read in the Platonists was said here with praise of Your grace: that he who sees should ‘not so glory as if he had not received’ – and received, indeed, not only what he sees but even the power to see, ‘for what has he that he has not received?’” (7.21.27)

Narrative is the medium of this confessional wisdom. Augustine’s confessional autobiography is a literary type belonging to the genre of testimonial to which the life of Christ also belongs. A life lived employing the narrative confessional genre is the Way.⁷⁸ Grace initiates the confessional journey in which he learns to “see” and “to take hold” (7.21.27). Augustine comments that “the writings of the Platonists contain nothing of all this. Their pages show nothing of the face of that love, the tears of confession. Your sacrifice, an afflicted spirit, a contrite and humbled heart” (7.21.27). Four times in Book 8 Augustine narrates the universal confessional wisdom concerning freedom, patterned on Christ’s descent into the involuntary: the story of Victorinus, Anthony, the desert father, the Milanese civil servants, and, finally, the story of Augustine’s and Alypius’ own conversions, the main plot, which the previous three sub-plots facilitate.⁷⁹

The involuntary and inscrutable nature of the origin of evil cannot be resolved theoretically in terms of ethical monotheism. Confessional narrative’s

retrospective solution only affirms a growing and grace-given responsibility. It tells the hearers about the origin only so as to pull them forward by the development of the plot as they respond with expectations about the conclusion. An acceptable outcome must be patterned after the life of Christ. But contingency haunts the whole story. Mastery provided by theoretical knowledge of laws – for example, in the law of retribution – is unavailable. Contingency and obscurity are the price of confessional freedom.

All a man could do was to “yearn” for the absent perfection, to feel its loss intensely, to pine for it.... This marks the end of a long-established classical ideal of perfection: Augustine would never achieve the concentrated tranquility of the supermen that still gaze out at us from some mosaics in Christian churches and from the statues of pagan sages. If to be a “Romantic,” means to be a man acutely aware of being caught in an existence that denies him the fullness for which he craves, to feel that he is defined by his tension towards something else, by his capacity for faith, for hope, for longing, to think of himself as a wanderer seeking a country that is always distant, but ever-present to him by the quality of the love that “groans” for it, then Augustine has imperceptibly become a “Romantic”: and the *Confessions* which he wrote soon after, when he was the Catholic bishop of Hippo, will be a monumental statement of that most rare mood.⁸⁰

The obscurity of the experience of the irresistibility of sin is only matched by the obscurity surrounding the experience of the irresistibility of grace. Both are anti-voluntaristic, and, as such, both are inscrutable to ethical monotheism. Theory, as in theodicy, can exclude the origin of evil from the sphere of the divine only by fiat. Confessional narrative offers a practical understanding. It emplots a temporal, growing, and bodily experience of the gift of freedom on account of God’s pity and generosity.

The enduring influence of Augustine’s *Confessions* derives in part from the power of its confessional narrative to preserve “the terrible epic of being” as Augustine recalls it in his own life-and-death struggle with two of its most powerful expressions: the primordial war of good and evil in the Manichean version of theogony and the mitigated Platonic version of the exiled soul of Orphism. At the same time, the confessional way draws on Christian ethical monotheism to subsume the corporeal fatalism of theogonies and Orphism within a spatio-temporal narrative wisdom of confessional grace beyond ethical monotheism. The doctrines of original sin, election, and predestination cannot be understood in terms of some speculative law, such as the law of retribution, but only as narratives. The doctrine of predestination understood as a type of narrative interprets Augustine’s life; he finds his life, so interpreted,

to be embraced by God. But the negative side of the narration, original sin, can have destructive effects: evil is harder to reflect on than grace.

The success of confessional narrative in guiding Augustine through the ethical impasse created by the existence of suffering and evil can be measured in terms of the following two questions: Can Augustine's confessional narrative reconcile the obscure origin of ineluctable evil with the belief in one's responsibility for that same evil? Does the confession of God as holy have the power to exclude the origin of evil completely from the sphere of the divine? These two questions capture the crisis in identifying the reflexive set of criteria for speaking rightly of God at the heart of Augustine's testimony. The first question identifies the problem of original sin and the human tragic, the second, predestination, inscrutability, and even the possibility of a divine tragic. I will take up the first of these two questions in [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#) and leave the second question to the following chapters. Augustine's encounter with dualism has taught him a number of truths, none of which will he ever forget, that creation is good, evil is in the will, desire is innocent, and he is a "guilty victim."



Original Sin: An Ineluctable Triple Hatred

Augustine's belief in the goodness of creation and the innocence of desire shapes his understanding of evil and original sin. But is desire truly innocent? Recall that false consciousness, that the non-mastery of our own affections unearthed by Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, led to a critique of desire. Desire, they said, could not be presumed to be innocent. Heidegger claimed that bad conscience is merely reactive remorse and repentance, part of our inauthentic inherited lot in life, and good conscience is hypocritical, for there are no theoretical, moral, or other-oriented grounds for moral action. Heidegger's charge of hypocrisy and his moral situationalism grow out of Hegel's observation that the inner self is the sole arbiter of its own inner heart. As a result, the inner self cannot know if it is choosing the good as an absolutely universal principle or evil as private self-will.¹ Nietzsche's archeological critique in terms of resentment takes Hegel a step further and undermines the rationality of our spontaneous assessment of good and evil itself.² Together, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger leave us with the vicious circle of indignation and self-justification and prey to the charge identified by Nabert of "secret self-complaisance."³ Augustine will insist on the innocence of desire. In its place he will locate evil in the will. There, in the will, a "secret self-complaisance" nurtures a vicious circle of indignation and self-justification. Augustine will call this self-complaisance, and its vicious circle original sin.

Augustine developed his teaching on original sin in *Ad Simplicianum* and the *Confessions* to defend the innocence of desire and the culpability of the will. For his defense to succeed, Augustine must answer four sets of questions. A first group of questions, which I began to examine in the [previous chapter](#) in relation to Manichaeism, raise the Gnostic question concerning the origin of evil and its plausible dualism of opposed principles of good and evil. A second group of questions arise out of Augustine's initial response to

Gnosticism: If evil is a “nothing,” a “privation,” as the Neoplatonists claim, how can he account for the power of evil? How can he understand his divided will and his phenomenological experience of himself as a guilty victim? And how can his insight that evil is in the will not in the nature be given conceptual coherence? A third group of questions are specifically theistic: How can he maintain his belief in the goodness of creation and the innocence of desire in the face of unjustifiable suffering and evil? If evil resides in the will, Augustine must show how a good nature can give rise to an evil will? Augustine’s response raises a subgroup of further questions, which will be the subject of the [next chapter](#), concerning the ontological status of original sin: If original sin is not just existential and psychological and not just an allegory of the Pauline “servile will,” what is its ontological status? Is original sin a myth, or does Augustine give it a history?

In its turn, Augustine’s teaching on original sin creates its own set of problems, which were identified by his critics in his own lifetime. Is Augustine’s concept of original sin etiological – an anti-Gnostic gnosis? How can inherited guilt be handed down from generation to generation? How can a just God elect only some human beings to grace without injustice? If salvation is “for all,” why are only “some” graced? Finally, how can Augustine understand and justify the practice of infant baptism? The intractability of these problems has led many commentators throughout the ages to amend, downgrade, or abandon Augustine’s teaching on original sin. His “friendly amenders,” wanting to make his teaching on grace and, possibly, predestination intelligible and credible, seek to relieve these doctrines of what they see in his teaching on original sin as an inessential and embarrassing accretion. Others view original sin as a corollary⁴ – even an optional extra – to his teaching on grace and predestination. Others, again, believe that original sin is a derivative and polemical ancillary teaching developed subsequent to the *Confessions* to defend these teachings against the Pelagians.⁵ It is worth recalling that Augustine singled out the problem of evil as one of the two most pressing theoretical, moral, and salvific questions of the first ten books of the *Confessions*. It is a practical issue: Aged twenty-eight years, Augustine fell sick and almost died and “very nearly went to hell bearing all the weight of deadly sins which I had committed against You and myself and other men over and above the bond of original sin whereby we all die in Adam” (5.9.16). It is also a theoretical issue: Augustine singled out evil as one of the two unresolved questions he pondered in his “unhappy heart, which was further burdened and gnawed at by the fear that I should die without having found the truth” (7.5.7). By amending, downgrading, or excluding original sin, the commentators make it impossible for Augustine to respond to one or more of Augustine’s pressing questions about the problem of evil. By so

doing, they leave important gaps in Augustine's thought, some of which must prove fatal to the foundations of the whole edifice.

In the course of this chapter and the following, I will show that Augustine raises and responds to each and all of these questions in *Ad SimPLICianum* and the *Confessions*. In [Section 2](#) of this chapter, I present Ricoeur's three objections to Augustine's teaching on original sin. In the following three sections, I respond to Ricoeur's first two objections. I respond to the third in the [next chapter](#). In [Section 3](#), I ask: Can original sin explain adequately Augustine's experience of being a guilty victim? This raises the question concerning the conceptual coherence of the doctrine of original sin. By means of this doctrine Augustine tries to anchor the evil of which he accuses himself as author in the obscure origin of evil. In [Section 4](#), I ask: Can the doctrine of original sin account for the malignant force of evil? Given Augustine's Platonic understanding of evil as a privation, can he articulate evil's positive power? But before proceeding to see how Augustine answers these questions, I propose to show in [Section 1](#) how Augustine's answer to the problem of evil is not just a theoretical answer but a testimony, a *confessio*. Augustine uses testimony's narrative medium to give evil and suffering, understood in terms of original sin, a historical status to which his confessional story as testimony responds.

A NARRATIVE RESPONSE TO EVIL AND SUFFERING

Ricoeur's narrative theory of action offers a legitimate and fruitful way of understanding Augustine's confessional response to evil and suffering. I believe that narrative theory can do more justice to Augustine's teaching on original sin than the traditional Augustinian consensus has permitted. Hence the lengthy detour that follows.

Narrative emplotment structures Ricoeur's account of human action. According to narrative theory, plot makes it possible for us to understand the intermediate causes of action by configuring a field of action with its temporal values and cares: "narrative answers the question 'Why?' at the same time that it answers the question 'What?' To tell what has happened is to tell why it happened."⁶ Narrative proposes universal patterns of human probability and necessity. As narrative universals, these patterns order events so that causal connections prevail over pure succession.

Narrative emplotment makes human action and human suffering meaningful. Emplotment occupies an intermediary position and serves a mediating function between the opaque and contingent given of suffering and evil and the execution of the meaningfully human. It mediates by integrating the contingent flow of evil and suffering into an ordering whole.

Plot mediates between individual events or incidents – good and evil – and the story taken as a whole. Events are no longer singular occurrences but are defined by their contribution to the development of the plot. Augustine's *Confessions* does not just enumerate the events in a serial order but also organizes them into an intelligible whole, producing the “thought” of the story: “emplotment is the operation that draws configuration out of a simple succession”⁷ of good and evil events. A story is not a universal in a system. It always views the characters as individuals. The thought of the *Confessions* tells of Augustine's destiny; it does not exemplify some systemic principle. Augustine's non-mythical uses of narrative in the *Confessions* cannot be subsumed into one of theodicy's systems, nor can it be reduced to an allegorical account of the servile will, as we find in the Pauline reading of the Adam and Eve story. Narrative wisdom cannot answer the question of the origin of evil or the question of its universal ethical, dialectic, or aesthetic rational. It does not offer a solution to the aporia of suffering and evil, only a response rendering it productive.

A plot, as in the *Confession's* plot, configures the heterogeneous and discordant factors – good and evil – such as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, and unexpected results, as a “discordant concordance.”⁸ Concordance and meaning in the *Confessions* do not eliminate discordant evil or trivialize it but give it a place within the story. Further, the plot grasps together a manifold of good and evil episodes in the unity of the story's one temporal whole. Ricoeur underlines the kinship between grasping together and Kant's account of judgment. According to Kant, judgment places “an intuitive manifold under the rule of a concept” and reflective judgment extracts “a configuration from a succession.”⁹ Ricoeur compares the configurational act to the schema created by Kant's productive imagination. The productive imagination can schematize the categories of the understanding because it has a synthetic function: “It connects understanding and intuition by engendering syntheses that are intellectual and intuitive at the same time.”¹⁰ Similarly, emplotment engenders a mixed intelligibility between the thought of the story and the intuitive presentation of circumstances, characters, episodes, and changes of fortune.

The figural unity of the *Confessions* makes it possible for the reader to follow the story. One moves forward “in the midst of contingencies and peripateia under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfillment in the ‘conclusion’ of the story.”¹¹ The conclusion is not a logical deduction from premises, nor a Hegelian or Barthian dialectical logic,¹² but an end point providing the point of view from which the story can be seen as forming a whole. Although unforeseeable, the conclusion to the *Confessions* must be acceptable if not to

Pelagius then to Augustine's "brethren." "Followability" solves the paradox of episodic unity, converting it into a living and productive, but non-systemic, dialectic. On the one hand, the narrative episodes belong to the linear representation of time, for they are external ("then and then"), are an open series, and follow one another in accord with the irreversible order of time. On the other hand, the configural unity, as the thought or theme of the *Confessions*, presents not an atemporal point but the time of followability, which imposes "the sense of an ending" on the indefinite succession of incidents. To apprehend the episodes as leading to a particular end, as in retelling a story, reveals a new quality of time. It no longer flows from the past to the future but is read backward, "as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences."¹³ We are turned toward the future, to the ending.

Ricoeur enriches the concept of schema with the complementary concept of tradition. He says that the schematism of the narrative function "is constituted within a history that has all the characteristics of a tradition."¹⁴ A narrative tradition is possible because the schema lends itself to a typology that can encompass the historical interplay of innovation and sedimentation. To this interplay must be referred the paradigms constituting the typology of emplotment. Paradigm encompasses four levels of hierarchical nodes: form, as discordant concordance; genre, such as tragedy, confessional autobiography, novel, and so forth; type as narrative universal, for example, Augustinian or Rousseauian confessions; and individual work engendering types. "To the extent that in the ordering of events the causal connection (one thing as a cause of another) prevails over pure succession (one thing after another), a universal emerges that is, as we have interpreted it, the ordering itself erected as a type."¹⁵ Paradigms are born from the labor of the productive imagination on these four levels.

Innovation has a place within tradition in that creativity produces a singular work, this work. At the same time that paradigms constitute only a grammar governing the composition of new works, innovation remains a form of behavior governed by rules: "It is deployed between the two poles of servile application and calculated deviation, passing through every degree of 'rule-governed deformation.'"¹⁶ In the fourth century, Augustine's *Confessions* was a deviant form of testimony,¹⁷ which led to new types and new genres. Deviation "confers a history on the productive imagination and that in counterpoint to sedimentation, makes a narrative tradition possible."¹⁸

There are at least five elements to the dynamic operations by means of which emplotment gives human action and suffering their meaning. By drawing a configuration out of a succession of events, emplotment endows them with

meaning. The emplotted thought offers a concordance in the heterogeneous, often discordant, and evil factors involved in living. The thought does not abolish the spatial and temporal characteristics of action but configures them as spatio-temporal schemata. The schemata take the form of narrative universals that can guide action. The diversity of these universals arise over time in response to various needs to form a narrative tradition of varying paradigms characterized by processes of sedimentation and innovation.

The narrative text does not have its full meaning within itself. It must be restored to the time of action and suffering. This happens when the “text” intersects the real action and suffering and the specific space and time of the “readers,” along with their experience of suffering and evil. We are entangled in a history of evil and suffering that happens to us before anyone tells it, before the narrator selects from the prehistory and background a beginning and an emerging story. “This background is made up of the ‘living imbrication’ of every lived story with every other such story.”¹⁹ Narrating is a secondary process in which the story becomes known. “We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated.... The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative.”²⁰ Ricoeur discovers a resonance for untold stories in, for example, Mark’s gospel’s or Kafka’s enigmatic power to use secrecy to banish interpreters from their privileged, “insider” positions. As I will show, Augustine abandons theodicy’s aesthetic-ethical-juridical view of evil for the same reason. Narrativity alone can do some justice to lament and to the temporal form inherent in the unique individual and communal experience of evil and suffering. The narrative structure draws on this temporal lament. Inchoate narrativity is a non-projected, non-literary demand for suffering narratives.²¹

The grace-filled confessional story of the *Confessions* liberates Augustine from sin and evil. The autobiographical, historical, and primordial experience of anterior sin and evil Augustine calls original sin. In the doctrine of original sin, Augustine measures the depths of the evil from which he confesses that he has been saved. For Augustine, gratitude is commensurate with the blessing conferred.

RICOEUR’S THREEFOLD CRITIQUE OF AUGUSTINE’S TEACHING ON ORIGINAL SIN

You will recall that I ask three questions concerning Augustine’s doctrine of original sin. Can original sin adequately explain Augustine’s experience of being a guilty victim? Second, can the doctrine of original sin account for the

malignant force and ontological status of evil? Third, can the doctrine of original sin bring to adequate expression the tragic dimensions of life?

Ricoeur believes that Augustine fails on all three counts. Ricoeur's critique of Augustine's doctrine of original sin is well known. He says that Augustine elaborates the concept against Gnosticism, and anti-Gnosticism becomes quasi-Gnosticism. Augustine combines two incompatible discourses of debt and inheritance, of ethics and biology, to form a pseudo-concept. A quasi-juridical knowledge of the guilt of the newborn and a quasi-biological knowledge of the transmission of hereditary taint give a false knowledge of the origin of evil. Any narrative historical claims Augustine makes for such knowledge become a quasi-Gnostic resort to myth in the service of theodicy. Its status as myth rules out in advance my claim that original sin functions as an historical, narrative universal. Ricoeur concedes that false knowledge is a true and rational symbol of the profound meaning of the confession of sins.²² I treat Augustine's doctrine of original sin as a rational symbol that functions as a narrative universal. In Augustine's reflections, the Pauline servile will has not only a symbolic expression in original sin but also a speculative conceptualization set within a historical and ontological discourse. Ricoeur agrees that Augustine's doctrine of original sin is a decisive contribution to the speculative understanding of the symbolism of evil. I think that Ricoeur's analysis of Augustine stops short in two respects. Augustine has the resources to make further advances.

According to Ricoeur, the problem posed by the Pauline doctrine of sin is that "evil is a kind of involuntariness at the heart of the voluntary, no longer facing the voluntary but within the voluntary and it is this which is the servile will."²³ The essential function of the concept of original sin is to preserve the concept that sin is in the will as an antecedent involuntariness, not in the nature. To maintain sin's volitional status Augustine incorporates a quasi-nature of evil in the will, thereby defending the "rational phantom" of a quasi-nature that affects not nature but will. Ricoeur comments, "There is something desperate here from the viewpoint of conceptual representation and something very profound from the metaphysical viewpoint."²⁴

Augustine is striving to express conceptually what the myth of the Fall gives symbolically, namely the original perfection of God and creation (the ontological) and the radical, but nevertheless contingent, wickedness of human beings (the historical).²⁵ The rupture between the ontological and the historical forces Augustine to conceive of a quasi-nature of evil that affects not nature but will. Such a conception satisfies Ricoeur's demand for a hermeneutics that starts from the fullness of language: "an interpretation that respects the original enigma of the symbols, that lets itself be taught by them, but that,

beginning from there, promotes the meaning, forms the meaning in the full responsibility of autonomous thought.”²⁶

Augustine’s interpretation of the Fall lacks many features of modern hermeneutical theory. He does not demythologize the myth but gives it a literal interpretation,²⁷ treats it as history, and by tying it to his doctrine of original sin explains the experience of evil as a “mythico-speculative mass.”²⁸ However, Augustine offers another reading of the myth, which does not require a *sacrificium intellectus* and which permits the myth to awaken believers to their experience of evil. I submit that this alternative interpretation stands up under the scrutiny of modern hermeneutics and reveals Augustine’s own motivation for developing the doctrine of original sin prior to and independently of the Pelagian controversy.²⁹

Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory demands that a reflective-speculative understanding of the symbolism of evil be a “hermeneutic recovery of the enigmas which precede, envelop, and nourish this discourse and also inquiry into the beginning, search for order, desire for system.”³⁰ In the *Symbolism of Evil*, by means of a comparative phenomenology, Ricoeur traces the symbolic movement of evil from defilement through sin to guilt and compares the myths of the origin and destiny of evil (Dualist, Tragic, Orphic and Adamic myths) in a critical exegesis of the individual texts.³¹ A third stage consists of thought starting from symbols and myths in *The Conflict of Interpretations*.³² Its method has a double movement: reflection as demythologizing, speculation as recuperating. This third stage is my present concern.

Ricoeur says that despite his etiological use of the Adamic myth, Augustine’s moral vision of evil enables him, as we saw in the [previous chapter](#), to demythologize the symbolic and mythical world of evil in two ways; “First, it is a radical demythologization of the dualist myths, the tragic and the orphic; second, it is the assimilation of the Adam narrative into an intelligible philosophical theme.”³³ A purely ethical interpretation enables Augustine to reduce the Adamic myth “to a simple allegory of the servile will” in which “evil is as far as possible reset within the context of freedom,”³⁴ so that “it will be necessary to say that evil, as regards substance and nature, is a ‘nothing.’”³⁵ At the same time, Augustine contributes a radical philosophy of freedom by coupling the Platonic “nothing” with Aristotle’s philosophy of the voluntary and involuntary: “Aristotle does not go all the way to a radical philosophy of freedom.... It was Augustine who made evil’s power of *nothing* meet head on with freedom at work in the will and thereby so radicalized reflection upon freedom as to make it into the originary power of saying ‘No’ to being.”³⁶

However, Ricoeur believes that Augustine does not have the conceptual tools to lay out and stabilize his discovery of “the opposition nature/will in

a coherent conception.”³⁷ Ricoeur says that Augustine cannot distinguish the nothing of evil from the *ex nihilo* of the creature and so “oppose evil will and evil nature.”³⁸ He cannot systematically sustain his ethical vision of evil, in which, “as regards substance and nature, evil is a ‘nothing.’”³⁹ Further, this conceptual confusion, coupled with the notion that sin is a turning away, a deficient movement coming from nonbeing, means that Augustine cannot account for the positive power of evil. Such an account would have required a philosophy of contingency and action “in which evil would be said to surge up as an event, as a qualitative leap.”⁴⁰ This is the first point where I must part company with Ricoeur. I will show that Augustine develops just such a philosophy of evil.

But first I will examine the speculative moment of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. Speculative thought seeks to recover what moral reflective thought has excluded. Speculative thought wants to recuperate original sin’s “obscure analogical richness. Its force lies in intentionally referring back to what is most radical in the confession of sins, namely the fact that evil precedes my awareness, that it is pre-given impotence.... Hence the intention of the pseudo-concept of original sin is this: to incorporate in the description of bad will ... the theme of a quasi-nature of evil.”⁴¹ Original sin joins will and nature by linking inheritance with the will’s contingency: “The quasi-nature is in the will itself; evil is a kind of involuntariness at the very heart of the voluntary, no longer over against it but in it.”⁴² Ricoeur concludes, however, that in the metaphysically irreplaceable concept of original sin there is “something of hopelessness from the point of view of conceptual representation.”⁴³ It leaves open the possibility of Gnosticism and it cannot unite in a coherent concept the experience of antecedent evil and moral evil.

Ricoeur leaves Augustine here, and here, for a second time, I must part company with Ricoeur. I propose that Augustine does elaborate a conceptually coherent account of the Pauline servile will. If I am to satisfy Ricoeur’s hermeneutical method, the task is to develop the existential concepts to express “how the quasi-being and quasi-nothingness of human evil are articulated upon the being of man and upon the nothingness of his finitude.”⁴⁴

THE VOLUNTARY INVOLUNTARY AND THE POWER OF EVIL⁴⁵

Ricoeur believes that Augustine does not have the existential concepts to give an ethical interpretation of the experience of evil as “a kind of involuntariness at the very heart of the voluntary.”⁴⁶ I disagree. I think Augustine does have the necessary concepts.

I first wrote my discussion presented here of original sin using only the text of the *Confessions*. The reaction of other scholars is instructive. They think the interpretation is credible but to be fully convinced they would have to see if the same teaching could be found in other mature writings of Augustine. I support my argument drawn originally from the *Confessions* by appealing to other works of Augustine. It will become clear in later chapters that Augustine's teaching on predestination cannot be so fully derived from his use of the doctrine of predestination in the *Confessions*. To fill out my theoretical understanding, I turn to *Ad Simplicianum*, which Peter Brown rightly calls "the intellectual charter of the *Confessions*".⁴⁷ It is here that Augustine first articulated his mature teachings on sin and grace in terms of original sin, election and predestination. These doctrinal innovations made it possible for Augustine to break off writing *De Doctrina Christiana* and to write the *Confessions*. All that I have to say on original sin is contained in *Ad Simplicianum* and the *Confessions*. In this book, I examine the doctrines of original sin and predestination to clarify the workings of sin and grace in the *Confessions*. My understanding of these doctrines is drawn primarily from the *Confessions* and *Ad Simplicianum*. Other works of Augustine are used sparingly. I cite them to show that my understanding of Augustine's use of original sin and predestination in the *Confessions* is consistent across Augustine's mature writings.

Augustine believes that human freedom is bound by a double necessity: first, one can only choose something as good; second, the good chosen is limited to those goods that grow out of the good or bad habits derived from a history of past choices. Existential human nature is the product of personal and corporate history; it is the context within which human freedom can be exercised. The second necessity means that human choices are limited to those goods that are the product of constants, inevitabilities, necessities arising from past decisions and human history. If this second necessity includes God's gift of charity, then one is free both to choose and to do good. If it does not include charity, then all that is left is concupiscence, and the only freedom is freedom to sin. This debility is a problem within the will, arising from the power of custom and affection in the case of personal sin, from concupiscence in the case of original sin. Existential human nature suffers from a threefold inheritance from Adam: ignorance, concupiscence, and death. As a result of death in the soul, one can neither discern the good we should do (inherited ignorance) nor carry it into effect (inherited concupiscence).

In his search for true happiness in the first thirty chapters of Book 10 of the *Confessions*, Augustine shows that the human desire for truth (the good in this instance) binds all in a lie (the product of their history). He explains one paradox with another: they hate the truth because they love it; they love it

in such a way that they love something else besides it and wish that to be the truth that they desire.⁴⁸ Behind his argument lies the fact that human beings exist in a history of partial truths instead of true happiness. Their refusal to acknowledge that they are deceived in the partial truths and passing joys they presently possess, make it impossible to follow the authentic search for true happiness. Rather than have their ersatz truth and happiness exposed, they hate the truth that they desire:

Why does truth call forth hatred? Why is Your servant treated as an enemy by those to whom he preaches the truth, if happiness is loved, which is simply joy in truth? Simply because truth is loved in such a way that those who love some other thing want it to be the truth, and, precisely because they do not wish to be deceived are unwilling to be convinced that they are deceived. Thus they hate the truth for the sake of that other thing which they love because they take it for truth. They love truth when it enlightens them, they hate truth when it accuses them. Because they do not wish to be deceived and do wish to deceive, they love truth when it reveals itself, and hate it when it reveals them. Thus it shall reward them as they deserve: those who do not wish to be revealed by truth, truth will unmask against their will, but it will not reveal itself to them. (10.23.33)⁴⁹

Desire is innocent, so Augustine can affirm that the search for true happiness precedes both temporally and morally the inclination to the lesser, to self-love as perverted self-esteem. From where does the inclination to the lesser come? What is the origin of the perversion that perverts self-esteem? Perversion cannot result from desire. From where then does the inclination, the decided taste for evil come? Augustine comes as close here as he can to identifying the workings of perversion. He says that the ineradicable desire for true happiness is actually in possession only of half-truths, which this admirable desire takes to be the whole truth because of the desire to be in possession of the whole truth. But evil lies not in the desire to be in possession of the whole truth but in the devious consciousness of holding the half-truths as whole truths. The devious consciousness is a sort of half knowledge, a refused acknowledgment of what he calls truth's accusing – “They love truth when it enlightens them, they hate truth when it accuses them” – embodied as hatred. In this hatred, Augustine glimpses the heart as evil. Freedom, as a sort of passivity, as an unwillingness to carry through on the search for true happiness, is trapped in perversion and the taste of evil as hatred. It is in the will, in free choice, not in the innocent desire for true happiness. The chill of evil is the hypocrisy, and this is what he glimpses, the will, the “human heart fooling itself about the true nature of its intentions,” which are simultaneously hidden and laid bare in the hatred: “When evil is lodged in the malice of a human heart that fools

itself about the true nature of its intentions, it appears more devious than if it were simply identified with sensuous nature as such.”⁵⁰

But malicious intent is only half the story. For Augustine, this active hatred is also a passivity, a passivity so complete that he will be reduced to claiming that it is inherited.

He turns to Adam and the concept of inherited evil:

It was I who willed to do it, I who was unwilling.... I strove with myself and was distracted by myself. This distraction happened to me though I did not want it, and it showed me not the presence of some second mind, but the punishment of my own mind. Thus it was not I who caused it but “the sin that dwells in me,” the punishment of a sin freely committed by Adam, whose son I am. (8.10.22)

As a result of Adam’s sin, Augustine believes that he is bound over to the devil, and this spiritual bondage leads in its turn to carnal bondage, from inherited spiritual concupiscence to corporeal concupiscence: “The enemy held my will and of it made a chain and bound me. Because my will was perverse it changed to lust, and lust yielded to became habit, and habit not resisted became necessity” (8.5.10).

Augustine says that human beings are actually in possession of partial truths, and they cling to them because they hate to be unmasked, and they hate to be unmasked because they do not wish to have been deceived. Freedom’s first necessity, here expressed as the choice of the good as true happiness, makes it impossible for them unaided to acknowledge that actually possessed partial truths are not true happiness. Partial truths are the second necessity arising from a history of past choices. It is this history of past choices that nullifies the search for true happiness and so, when combined with the first necessity, inevitably binds the will in inescapable bondage. Malice is simultaneously active and passive: active as hatred, passive as an inherited wound in the will.

Augustine will go to great lengths to show that this malicious inheritance as an inevitable tendency of the will is not natural. God did not create human beings thus. As the inevitable product of past bad choices, malice is not ontological but historical and existential. Malice is contingent, liable to happen because of human fallibility but not certain, yet once it does happen, once the trap is sprung, human beings are ineluctably bound by partial truths and the free search for true happiness trussed up in hatred. Augustine will trace this historical bondage back to Adam and the fallen angels, but, as we shall see, by so doing he will only make it more difficult to understand how a good free will could choose evil in the first place.

What I did unwillingly, it still seemed to me that I rather suffered than did.... Who was it that set and engrafted in me this root of bitterness, since I was wholly made by my most loving God? If the devil is the author, where does the devil come from? ... What was the origin in him of the perverse will by which he became a devil, since by the all good Creator he was made wholly angel? (7.3.5)

Nevertheless, it is this agonizing existential bondage⁵¹ that Augustine recalls in Book 8 of the *Confessions* with its historical depth which he traces back for seven books through his Manichean adulthood and adolescence, back to his schooldays, childhood and even his infancy. And what does he discover? He finds that he is bound in hatred so that he cannot cross over from the partial truths and pursue the authentic search for true happiness. This is why Augustine concludes the search in Book 10 with the confession that freedom to follow the true search is a gift, a grace. Only God can free us from the hatred that nullifies the search for true happiness.⁵²

They love truth when it enlightens them in their search for true happiness, but hate it when it accuses them of self-deception. The wish motivating their paradoxical hatred of truth is their desire that the truths, which they possess, should themselves be true happiness. The positive power of evil as hatred derives its force from being hatred of the truth which could undeceive. In the face of their hatred of being undeceived, the will for truth is impotent to find true happiness. Augustine recalls with horror the ferocity of this hatred of the truth in his own life as a Manichean – “nor could I find what could be done with those deaf dead [the Manicheans], of whom indeed I had myself been one for I had been a scourge, a blind raging snarler against the Scriptures” (9.4.11) – and those “deaf dead” that still will not listen. His past and their present opposition is real, what Ricoeur calls, citing Kant, “a ‘real repugnance,’ ‘a negative magnitude,’ and “it is as such that evil is radical.”⁵³ Kant, in agreement with Augustine, believes that evil, as this real opposition,

reveals something about the ultimate nature of (free) choice. Human (free) choice appears to carry with it an original wound that affects its capacity for determining itself for or against the law; the enigma of the origin of evil is reflected in the enigma that affects the actual exercise of freedom. The fact that this penchant is always already present in every opportunity to choose but that is at the same time a maxim of (free) choice is no less inscrutable than the origin of evil.⁵⁴

The penchant's inscrutable, ever ready presence is what Augustine is trying to capture in his concept of inheritance. I will later examine whether or not he is successful.

Hatred annuls the fundamental wish for true happiness because of that very wish. Hatred is not simply an absence of good, a nothingness, but the force of evil. Augustine's will loves or hates what it pursues. John Rist says "In Augustine's view we do not hold false moral and theological beliefs because of some mere error in our rationality. We do not assent 'weakly' merely after some failure in rational calculation or in our rational habits, but often because we 'love to' hold such and such a belief. Assent is not only a determining judgment, but a determining love."⁵⁵ The will loves or hates the truth and, when the will chooses hatred, Augustine discovers an anterior bondage in this free choice. He does not describe pre-given impotence in terms of quasi-nature or an innate tendency toward evil but presents, in consistent speculative concepts, the Pauline servile will in a "‘manner of being of freedom which comes to it from freedom.’"⁵⁶

We find the same teaching in *De Trinitate*. The second half of *De Trinitate* consists in part of an ascent to God in the reflecting soul, an ascent that has many points in common with the ascent of Book 10 of the *Confessions*. Although, as I will show in the next section, it takes it a step further by developing it in the image of the Trinity. In Book 12, chapters 9 to 11 of *De Trinitate*, Augustine proceeds to discuss the history of evil choices resulting from perverse self-love, which hinder ascent:

For when the soul loves its own power, it slips from the common whole to its own particular part.... But in that apostatizing pride, which is called "the beginning of sin," (Eccl. 10:15) it sought for something more than the whole; and while it struggled to govern by its own laws, it was thrust into caring for a part, since there is nothing more than the whole; and so by desiring something more, it becomes less.⁵⁷

Self-love consists in love of "its own power." The soul mistakes its own particular part for the whole, which is really God, and so it becomes enmeshed in the parts, which are simply images of corporeal and temporal things. The soul is enmeshed because it desires "something more." Again, the "more," which misleads, is freedom's desire for true happiness. For Augustine, the desire for true happiness is, at one and the same time, the essence of freedom and, as the possibility of self-love, the site of fallibility.⁵⁸ Augustine does not here or anywhere try to explain Adam's or the angel's motive for loving their own power; they simply do.

The stages identified in chapter 10 of Book 12 of the *De Trinitate* faithfully trace the growth of Augustine's moral paralysis in his Manichean youth recounted in Books 3 to 5 of the *Confessions*. In chapter 10, he describes how choosing the presently possessed parts as the whole becomes an irreversible

condition of the soul: “While it [the soul] snatches the deceptive images of corporeal things from within and combines them together by empty thought, so that nothing seems to it to be divine unless it be of such a kind as this; covetous of its own selfish possessions it becomes prolific in errors, and prodigal of its own selfish good it is emptied of strength.”⁵⁹ The desire for God as the whole is perverted in an historical process, taking shape gradually: “so the slippery movement of falling away [from the good] takes possession of the careless little by little; and while it begins with the perverse desire of becoming like God, it arrives at the likeness of the beasts.”⁶⁰ Moral impotence is the outcome: “since his own powers have been dissipated and lost, he cannot return except by the grace of his Creator.”⁶¹ The soul’s perverse self-love, driven by its desire for the whole, seeks to be like God, but using corporeal images, it becomes little by little irremediably enmeshed. In the final state of selfishness the dissipated soul is “emptied of strength.”

In *The City of God* Book 14, Augustine returns to the theme of the devil’s perverse self-love and its consequences: “man has become like the Devil ... by living by the rule of self.... For the Devil chose to live by the rule of self when he did not stand fast in the truth, so that the lie that he told was his own lie, not God’s. The Devil is not only a liar; he is ‘the father of lies’. He was, as we know, the first to lie, and falsehood like sin, had its start from him.”⁶² In the [next chapter](#), Augustine combines the primordial themes of selfishness and lying with the search for true happiness. He says that lying is a mistaken search for true happiness by a will *necessarily* seeking its own good. But, since it seeks its own well-being for itself, not God, it lies, and so, without realizing, it increases its own misfortune:

Man has undoubtedly the will to be happy, even when he pursues happiness by living in a way which makes it impossible of attainment. What could be more of a falsehood than a will like that? Hence we can say with meaning that every sin is a falsehood. For sin only happens by an act of will; and our will is for our own welfare, or for the avoidance of misfortune. And hence the falsehood: we commit sin to promote our welfare, and it results instead in our misfortune; or we sin to increase our welfare, and the result is rather to increase our misfortune. What is the reason for this except that well-being can only come to man from God, and not from himself?⁶³

In Johannis evangelium tractatus, 80 to 92, are Augustine’s fullest treatment of the positive power of evil. The final three homilies⁶⁴ take up two questions: How can some people hate the true God even though they do not know that God, and how can they “hate without cause”? Augustine, echoing Book

10 of the *Confessions*, replies that, if they were asked whether they loved God, they would say they loved him,

and that not purposely lying, but of erroneous opinion. For how should they love the Father of Truth, while they hated the Truth? For they would not have their deeds condemned, and Truth carries in Itself the condemning of such deeds: consequently, they hate the Truth in the same proportion as they hate their own punishment which Truth inflicts on such as they.⁶⁵

It is the “proportion” between the two hates – hatred of the truth and of the punishing condemnation truth will inflict if they recognize it – that makes their ignorance of the truth invincible. Augustine concludes that they hate God without knowing God: “Only they do not know this to be the Truth which condemns such men as they are: therefore they hate what they know not; and hating It, assuredly they cannot but hate Him of Whom the Truth is begotten.”⁶⁶

Augustine draws out the argument a second time. Their liking for themselves and their dislike of the truth that condemns constitutes an insurmountable proportion; they would rather that it did not exist than that they should have to change their own way of existing: “O miserable men, who while they would be evil, would not that the Truth should exist, by which the evil are condemned! For they do not like It to be the thing It is, while they ought not to like themselves to be the thing they are; so while It should abide might they be thereby changed, that they be not condemned thereby when It judges.”⁶⁷

The nadir of their hatred is that it operates independently of true advantage or disadvantage. Augustine contrasts gratuitous hate with the equally gratuitous love of the just: “But he that hates gratis, i.e. without a cause, is he who of his hate neither seeks advantage nor shuns disadvantage: so the ungodly hate the Lord, so the just love, gratis, i.e. gratuitously, that other goods besides Him they expect not, since He shall be all in all.”⁶⁸ Hatred “without a cause” is a qualitative leap. It is the power of evil, its positive force: the welling up of nothing as evil and the destructive surging forth of evil as an invincible nothing.

THE POSITIVE POWER OF EVIL IS SELF-HATRED

Hatred of God and of truth Augustine presents in other passages as fundamentally self-hatred. Augustine’s reasoning typically runs as follows: “For it is inherent in the sinful soul to desire above all things, and to claim as due to itself, that which is properly due to God only. Now such love of itself is more correctly called hate.”⁶⁹ For Augustine, self-hatred is poetic justice. The

disruption of the right order between God and the soul carries over into the relations between soul and body: “accordingly the soul becomes weak, and endures much suffering about the mortal body.” Usually this view receives textual support from Psalm 10:6: “He who loves iniquity hates his own soul.”⁷⁰ The soul’s condition is painful because, “however far a man may fall away from the truth, he still continues to love himself, and to love his own body … [the soul] cannot but love both itself and its own body.”⁷¹ The error, then, as it is expressed, for example, in *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1, 22–27, is to “enjoy” what should be “used”; all created things – ourselves, others,⁷² and our bodies – should be used so that we may enjoy God, for to enjoy what should be used “is more correctly called hate.”⁷³

The dynamics of self-hatred are analyzed in the *Confessions*, Books 2 and 3. Here Augustine reflecting on his adolescent peer theft thinks that paradoxically his motive for stealing is not the good contained in partial truths and joys but the desire for evil as nothingness. The only good he can discover is the desire to reject the moral law (2.8.16), the desire for false companionship, and the fear of being “ashamed to be ashamed” for refusing to steal (2.9.17). These desires are an “unanalyzable attraction for the mind”; (2.9.17) the good they contain is so specious that he cannot understand how the will could desire them.

In Book 3, Augustine immediately takes up again the question of false companionship and the motivation it gives for being evil for the sake of nothingness. He recalls that in his adolescence he disliked himself for not feeling the need of love, and explains his coolness as resulting ultimately from the absence of God’s love in his inner self. God’s absence did not make him long for God; the less he had, the less he wanted:

I was not yet in love, but I was in love with love, and from the very depth of my need hated myself for not more keenly feeling the need.... For within I was hungry, all for the want of that spiritual food which is Yourself, My God; yet (though I was hungry for want of it) I did not hunger for it: I had no desire whatever for incorruptible food, not because I had it in abundance but the emptier I was, the more I hated the thought of it. Because of all this my soul was sick, and broke out in sores, whose itch I agonized to scratch with the rub of carnal things. (3.1.1)

Augustine catches here, in the double moral movement of hatred of God and dislike of self, the tragic necessity of the history of evil. His love to love and be loved was fundamentally love and desire for God. Yet he experienced no desire for the love of God, even though he was hungry for want of it: his hunger is a hunger by privation, so that his heart collapsed empty of interior

food.⁷⁴ Being empty, he hated the thought of interior food that could restore his strength. Invincible hatred is his lot.

The dynamics of the soul's collapse I examined in Book 12, chapters 11 and 16, of *De Trinitate* in terms of the soul "emptied of strength." Not until Book 14 of *De Trinitate* does Augustine draw out the implications of the perverse evil and moral impotence, which resulted from the history of the selfish search for the whole as the part. Here, having at last ascended to the Trinity by the work of grace in the memory, understanding, and will of the reflecting soul, and using the same three powers of the soul, he draws a deformed and violent picture of the self-hating soul:

Human nature, therefore, has been so formed that never does it not remember itself, never does it not understand itself, never does it not love itself. But since he who hates someone strives to injure him, the human mind is not undeservedly said to hate itself when it harms itself. For without knowing it, it wills evil to itself, since it does not believe that what it wills is harmful to itself; but yet it wills evil to itself when it wills what is harmful to itself; wherefore it is written: "He that loves iniquity, hates his own soul" (Ps., 11:6). Hence, he who knows how to love himself loves God; on the other hand, he who does not love God, even though he loves himself which is naturally implanted in him, is not unfittingly said to hate himself, since he does that which is opposed to himself, and pursues himself as though he were his own enemy. This is certainly a *tragic* delusion that, though all wish to be useful to themselves, many only do what is most fatal to themselves. When describing a similar sickness among dumb animals, the poet said: "May the gods grant better things to the godly, and that delusion to our foes! They were tearing their own mangled limbs with their naked teeth" (*Georgics*, 3.513–14). Since he was referring here to a disease of the body, why did he call it a delusion, unless it were that though nature inclines every animal to protect itself as much as it can, yet that disease was such that they that desired health tore their own limbs?⁷⁵

Augustine adds that through the "tragic delusion" of self-hatred, the mind

has become so weak and so dark that it has unhappily slipped away even from itself ... through the affections which it cannot control, and the delusions from which it sees no way to return. Therefore, the penitent, who had already experienced the mercy of God, cries out in the Psalms: "My strength has abandoned me, and the light of my eyes is not with me." (Ps. 37:11)⁷⁶

Naturally implanted love of oneself is not sufficient to reverse a history of uncontrolled affections and delusions. Weakened and darkened by a history of unruly choices, human beings are unable to love God and, by failing so to do, they are "not unfittingly said to hate [themselves]." The irreversible power

of self-hatred is brought out most clearly in the image of pursuing oneself as one's enemy and in the self-mutilation of diseased animals. Such violent images underline the tragic power of evil involved in mistaking the part for the whole and in hating oneself by so doing. The self-mutilation does not stop because it is erroneously perceived as the cure for the disease: "though all wish to be useful to themselves" their "*tragic delusion*" is such "that they that desired health tore their own limbs"; the mind "does not believe that what it wills is harmful to itself."

Even in *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De Trinitate*, where Augustine is intent to develop the notion of a natural self-love, the history of evil, the actual sinful condition of human beings, makes it impossible for them to know naturally in what true self-love would consist. It requires the authority of scripture to teach it; it must be learned.⁷⁷

In *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine says that, since the beginning, "ruinous self-love" has exiled all; by isolating them, it has rendered them destitute and miserable, so that their only consolation is to do evil:

When pride raises itself up, it is in fact thrust into narrow straits and destitution, since by this ruinous self-love, it is reduced from the communal to the private.... This [avarice] made the devil himself fall, who certainly did not love money but loved his own power. This perverse love of himself exiled him from the society of the saints, his soul swelled with pride, and his misery appeased now by doing evil.⁷⁸

In *Johannis evangelium tractatus*, 80 to 92 are Augustine's fullest treatment not only of the positive power of evil as hatred but also as self-hatred. In the lengthy commentary on chapter 15 of John's gospel, Augustine introduces the theme of self-hatred in the context of moral impotence, the gratuitous and predestining love of God and, more specifically, of the love commandment:

Where [there is] love of neighbor, there is necessarily love of God likewise. For he that loves not God, how can he love his neighbor as himself, seeing he does not love himself even? For in fact he is ungodly and unrighteous: now "he that loves unrighteousness," does not at all love, but "hates his own soul."⁷⁹

We could not with a true love love one another, except we love God. For one loves his neighbor as himself, if he love God: since if he love not God, he loves not himself.⁸⁰

The remainder of *Homily 87* is an extended commentary on the phrase, "he loves not himself." First he distinguishes the world as the church for which Christ suffered hatred and death from the world that hates the church and that in Adam is destined for perdition. The latter is "that lump that perished, the whole of it, in Adam," "the vessels of wrath wholly made for perdition,"

whose nature “through free will was wholly vitiated at the very root.” Life in the “lump” is characterized by self-hatred. Human nature is irreparably “vitiated” because “it loves the thing that hurts it,” “loves its corruption,” and “loves the unrighteousness by which it is unrighteous.” By so doing “it hates in itself its nature”:

But if it be asked, how the world of perdition loves itself, which hates the world of redemption; why, of course it loves itself with a false, not with a true love. Therefore it falsely loves itself, and truly hates. For “he that loves unrighteousness, hates his own soul.” (Ps.11:5) Howbeit, the world is said to love itself in that it loves the unrighteousness by which it is unrighteous: and again it is said to hate itself, in that it loves the thing that hurts it. Therefore it hates in itself its nature, loves its corruption: hates the thing it was made by the goodness of God, loves the thing that was made in it by free-will.⁸¹

Augustine proceeds to distinguish two attitudes toward the *civitas terrena*: “it is that which mars it that we are forbidden to love, and are bidden to love what it is by nature, while the world loves in itself that which mars it and hates its own nature: so may we both love and hate it in a right manner, while it loves and hates itself in a wrong.”⁸² The “vessels of wrath” are “wholly made for perdition” because their free will chooses only what corrupts their nature with all the force of perverse self-love. Since self-hatred is unacknowledged, it can be turned into authentic self-love only by the gift of grace.

In Book 3 of the *Confessions*, self-hatred and privation form a vicious circle with Augustine’s dislike for his adolescent self and hatred for its desire for fulfillment in God. The consciously experienced self-dislike comes from disappointment in the pursuit of ruinous self-love. Since he is aware only of disappointments, the unconscious self-hatred is rendered invincible.⁸³ The treatment of self-hatred here is not exceptional. Augustine frequently views unconscious self-hatred through the lens of various forms of conscious suffering. In *The City of God*, he says that only if human beings become conscious of selfishness can they pray to be delivered from the misery it brings: “In fact, if he loves himself, a man is given over to himself so that when as a result he had his fill of fears and griefs he may use the words of the psalm (if, that is, he is aware of his plight) and sing, ‘My soul is troubled within me.’”⁸⁴

Adolescent Augustine hates that for want of which he dislikes himself. He is trapped, for he hates God and himself, and the more he hates God the less he has what he wants and consequently the more he dislikes himself. Privation leads to emptiness and emptiness to self-hatred. He has chosen evil and nothingness because he wanted true happiness, which is God. In the triple hatred of the self, truth, and God, systematically conceived in

terms of historical and existential human nature with its double necessity to choose something as good and to choose only those goods that grow out of the good or bad habits derived from a history of past choices, Augustine uncovers the positive power of evil. Triple hatred gives the motive force that made Augustine stand up in arrogance before God in Book 2 of the *Confessions*. Sham omnipotence, friendship unfriendly, shame and fear of exposure, though they are “nothing,” derive their power from the posited choice of triple hatred, which Augustine discovers as already there. Hatred of God is invincible because it is tied to hatred of truth. This double hatred surfaces only as a self-severing exercise that perverts the search for true happiness and issues in self-hatred. Self-hatred itself is recognized consciously only as dissatisfied self-love. This invincible blindness is akin to the “fatal destiny”⁸⁵ of the hero in Greek tragedy.



Original Sin and the Human Tragic

Ricoeur's triple critique of Augustine's teaching on original sin culminates in the charge that Augustine mixes Gnosticism with his Pauline theology and uses the Adamic myth etiologically. Ricoeur rightly insists on the essential obscurity of the origin of evil. Ricoeur claims that Augustine does not:

For Augustine the divine mystery remains total. But this mystery is that of election: no one knows why God gives grace to one person and no grace at all to another. In return, there is no mystery of reprobation: election is by grace, perdition is by law, and it is in order to justify this perdition by law that Augustine has constructed the idea of a natural guilt, inherited from the first man, effective as an act and, as a crime, punishable.¹

Here, all evil is sin or punishment: "This purely moral vision of evil leads in turn to a penal vision of history."² The protest of unjust suffering, which is the leading thread in Ricoeur's presentation, is left unanswered and condemned to silence "in the name of a massive indictment of the whole of humanity."³

I think Ricoeur has subsumed Augustine's concern with an historical ontology under Ricoeur's own justified rejection of theodicy. As I will show in [Section 2](#), Augustine never attempts to explain evil initiative, whether in the angels and Adam or in Adam's descendants. Within the horizon of his historical consciousness and the narrative genre, Augustine too retains the tragic mystery.

I believe that Augustine's profound teaching on original sin reveals a profounder ignorance; it illuminates the history of the experience of our sinful condition, but it does not explain how our sinful condition came to be. In keeping with his historical and existential view of human nature and freedom, Augustine's aim in placing original sin within a history of origins is ontological, not etiological. By locating the mystery more precisely, he aims to heighten the mystery, not to unravel it.

THE HISTORICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF ORIGINAL SIN⁴

Augustine gives a history to the invincible triple hatred of the self, of truth, and of God. Original sin has a threefold anteriority:⁵ Augustine finds it auto-biographically anterior in his own life, historically and corporately anterior as inherited by every member of the human race, and primordially anterior. As the ancient, primitive evil, hatred is anterior both as the first sin and as the fundamental sin. It is fundamental in the double sense that subsequent sins reenact its motive, content, and structure (Augustine only knows the earlier from the later), and each hatred is a new beginning of evil: to begin is to continue. In the threefold anteriority of the triple moral movement of hatred of God, truth, and self, Augustine articulates the tragic necessity of the history of evil (Augustine in the *Confessions* is everyman).

Augustine considers memory as being who we are, our *esse*. It includes the depths of our being, our whole history, and the image of God. Augustine can search for God in memory because memory retains the image of God, however deeply hidden. As we have seen, it is this indelible image bound in inherited spiritual concupiscence that renders the memory impotent to execute successfully its ascent to God as truth and the infant guilty. Therefore, remembering, as modeled by Augustine in the remembered story of the *Confessions*, is the salvific medium. He returns to childhood and infancy autobiographically and experientially. There he finds infant sins – *peccata originalia*⁶ – inherited by way of generation. They are the only existential signs in infants of original sin. They point to the primordial concupiscence and sin inherited from Adam, which is at the root of every personal sin. He uncovers the same root as it grows in boyhood and in the urgent need for baptism. Within adolescent and adult concupiscence and sin lies this experience of anterior bondage. Boyhood and infancy reveal its historical depth. Adam is all men, all men sin in Adam, and in their own sins all men add to Adam.⁷ Augustine's response to the problem of evil is the grace of belief and confession.

By making the threefold anteriority of evil part of history, Augustine can give evil ontological status. Ricoeur is right to claim that Augustine's recourse to the Platonic teaching that evil is a privation meant that “the question *unde malum?* loses all ontological meaning, the question that replaces it – *unde malum faciamus?* ... shifts the problem of evil into the sphere of action, of willing, of free-will.”⁸ This shift became a cornerstone of Augustine's approach and was to be adopted by Kant in his discourse on radical evil. Action, including existential evil action, can achieve ontological status only in an historical narrative. Augustine gives ontological status to the chain of interpretations

and reinterpretations of evil from the symbolic and speculative orders by inserting them into cosmic or physical reality and time.

In volume three of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur treats the relation of phenomenological time to cosmic or physical reality and time in terms of the biological succession of the generations, the materiality of a trace, and the calendar.⁹ By so doing, Ricoeur goes beyond the epistemological question of the meaning of human action to the more radical ontological question of its truth. He can no longer raise the question of truth in terms of reference (analytic philosophy's conceptuality, following Frege) because the schemata of the productive imagination are not literal representations.¹⁰ The transcription of reality presupposes a narrative tradition; servile imitation, even the intimate immediacy of the Pauline servile will, is hermeneutical. Ricoeur subsumes reference within the productive term “refiguration” to raise the fundamental ontological question.¹¹ He asks how narrative time with its schemata refigures our time and milieu of acting and suffering to produce a time of meaningful action. Our time of acting and suffering as experienced has been thematized in phenomenology. Here, the experience of time is brought to consciousness along with the workings of the productive imagination. It is to phenomenology, then, that Ricoeur turns to advance his theory of action. However, phenomenology, with its strategy of the “epoché” and its analysis of pure consciousness, veers toward transcendental idealism.¹² Thereby, it carries with it the narrative schemata of the productive imagination. Ricoeur proposes that narrative configuration does not result from the arbitrary play of consciousness in language but owes an overwhelming debt to reality, for which it is responsible independent of consciousness. He poses the ontological question in terms of the conjoining of what is antithetical: phenomenological or lived time with physical or cosmic time.¹³ In response and with enormous effort, he elaborates a third properly historical time using the biological succession of the generations, the materiality of a trace, and the calendar to mediate dialectically between phenomenological and cosmic time. At the same time, narrative’s imaginative variations on phenomenological time propose a world we might inhabit and wherein we might unfold our own best possibilities for living.

We, who would be masters of the plot, are servants of the memory of past human beings. Our heritage is a debt and a tradition, one, which, via the dialectic of historical time, permits a “fusion of horizons.”¹⁴ Through documents and practices, we are “being-affected-by a past we did not make”¹⁵ in the efficacy of a transmitted tradition. Through these same documents and practices as traces, through the materiality of their mark, they designate the exteriority of the past, that is, the inscription of the past in the time of the

universe.¹⁶ Similarly, the chain of interpretations and reinterpretations in the symbolic order of the network of contemporaries, predecessors, and successors is given a biological basis and a continuity of the living in the concept of the succession of generations.¹⁷ Again, a founding moment as the axial moment of calendar time inscribes our traditions in the time of the universe. These traditions in their turn provide calendar time with the continuity of a temporal distance that is traversed. In so far as the trace, the document, the practice, and the succession of generations express the reinsertion of lived time in the time of the world, calendar time, too, comes into the range of the phenomenon of tradition.¹⁸ Thus, Ricoeur painstakingly reconstructs the reality of the past as an efficacious heritage.

Augustine gives his historical confessional narrative of evil and suffering a biological basis and the continuity of the living in the concept of the succession of the generations: original sin and spiritual concupiscence are handed down from generation to generation by means of propagation. We are “being-affected by a past we did not make.”¹⁹

He searched for historical traces so that through the materiality of a mark he might designate the exteriority of the past and its inscription in the time of the universe. He found in the lust of intercourse the trace he was looking for. It was a decision fraught with consequences for it risked reviving “the ancient associations in archaic consciousness between stain and sexuality.”²⁰ He knew that the instrumental cause is not the carnal begetting but the procreating of a nature lacking integration. Although he habitually distinguished between the good of procreation and the evils of sexual concupiscence and inherited concupiscence, he latched on to the *libido carnalis*. For him, as a trace, sexual lust illustrated the ontological handing down of an unmoulded nature.²¹ The habitual evils of education, so carefully recorded in the *Confessions*, ensured the continuing disintegration of human nature, but the first cause is the propagated disproportion in the delicate balance that should exist between flesh and spirit witnessed in sexual lust and all inordinate desire.²²

How can we recapture in all its revelatory freshness Augustine's insight into evil. Is it to remain irredeemably hostage to the medium of propagation? Propagation, with its ancient and implausible biology²³ and its outmoded view of sexuality and inheritance via a propagated contagion, betray what Ricoeur sees as Augustine's profound insight.²⁴ We inhabit a different world with a very different understanding of propagation. The theory of biological evolution, “natural selection,” and “the survival of the fittest” as in “nature red in tooth and claw” is amoral. Natural desire is innocent of morality, indifferent to guiltlessness. Self-love, Spinoza's *conatus essendi*, Heideggerian conscience, with its impersonal call to itself to survive, might well suggest that moral

education is not ethically significant, just more adaptive than “dog-eat-dog.” Did Lucy, 3.2 million years ago, have a conscience?

The ancient tradition of virtue-based morality (*phronesis*) teaches us that humans are moral by nature. Virtue-based moralists appeal to the natural emotions of “sympathy or benevolence, prudence, self-esteem and the like coupled with the pleasure these arouse, and the capacity for approval and disapproval of one another’s character and actions”²⁵ to conclude that a particular course of action is morally justified or unjustified. These emotions have evolved. We see them in other primates, in the juvenile chimpanzee, possibly more closely related to Lucy than to us, consoling a defeated adult.²⁶

How are we to hear Augustine call his “brethren” to confession above the noise of his pre-evolutionary medium? Morality is natural according to virtue-based morality, and according to Augustine, ethics, the arrival of practical reason, morality, justice, and the innocence of desire should, by means of education, become ours, even for our amoral evolved nature. As a result, we should be able to conduct a successful search for true happiness. That we are unable is our fate. Our amoral biological inheritance, with Lucy as a remote ancestor belonging, no doubt, to a different, possibly even extinct branch, would entail the same triple anteriority identified by Augustine: moral yes, but, because her love would have been confined to her in-group, the group’s moral principles cannot be universalized and must inevitably be arbitrary. As a result, we would be trapped in her version of the same ineluctable triple hatred that Augustine has already identified. The hatred could be vanquished only if the inherited amoral desire could be rendered morally innocent. If that inherited desire cannot be made morally innocent, then we have a choice: either we are ineluctably bound in inherited guilt or, alternatively, we can be dualists, evolutionary dualists.

It is not my goal to propose a new theory but to try to locate Augustine’s. With this in mind, TeSelle can help us to refocus: “What makes [concupiscence for Augustine] ‘sin,’ involving guilt, is not the fact that there is sexual desire … but the fact that there is a privation of something else – there is a loss of the soul’s adherence to God in love and of the proper ordering of the whole man which would have followed from it.”²⁷ TeSelle stresses Augustine’s “respect for the reality of temporal events, their irreversibility, their consequentiality. Men are a fragile balance of vitality and spirit; once the balance is lost, they remain bound together through the natural link of procreation.”²⁸ An ethic of individual responsibility is a far cry from Augustine’s sense of the hidden solidarity of the human race. True, but the stumbling block is the medium – contagion by propagation – that spreads evil and not only as suffering but also as guilt.

Perhaps Augustine's sense of the hidden solidarity of the human race can find contemporary expression, as I have just suggested, in terms of evolutionary biology, and this approach can be extended to include Ricoeur's hermeneutical discussion of traditionality, traditions, and tradition. Here the past acts upon us; we are affected by it, for we all "suffer" history as "victims" or as a result of "the unintended effects of our most calculated enterprises."²⁹ Following Gadamer, Ricoeur calls the action of the past upon us "the efficacy of history,"³⁰ This "notion of effective history, along with its correlate, our being-affected-by this effectiveness,"³¹ can perhaps help us understand what Augustine has in mind. "We are carried along by [history] before we are in a position of judging it, or of condemning it."³² The efficacy of history decenters "constituting consciousness," robbing it of any pretensions to self-transparency or its ambition to be "the master of meaning."³³ Our Western unquestioning belief in autarchy, liberty, individualism, and our "judging consciousness" as "constituting consciousness,"³⁴ conceals from us our shared responsibilities and the voice of communal conscience from the first stirrings of conscience in childhood until our growing awareness in adulthood.³⁵

The dialectical functioning of our receptivity to the efficacy of the past Ricoeur articulates in his triple definition of tradition and his fourfold narrative paradigm, which I described in the [previous chapter](#).³⁶ With these resources to aid me, I can try to build on my evolutionary account of the handing down of original sin, which I hope will allow us to understand how Augustine and his "brethren" first heard it. The concept of the efficacy of the past can, perhaps, capture for us the intimate role played by the biological succession of the generations and the materiality of a trace in Augustine's historical confession and his ontological interpretation of original sin.

Further, the hermeneutical belief that our language speaks us before we speak it³⁷ can help us to understand the intimate efficacy of inherited guilt. We come to personhood, and a growing consciousness of our responsibilities and concomitant guilt, in our inherited language, with its paradigmatic stories of creative engagement, distortion, and malevolence. Recall that evil is in the servile will, not in nature, so that "the question *unde malum?* loses all ontological meaning, the question that replaces it – *unde malum faciamus?* ... shifts the problem of evil into the sphere of action, of willing, of free-will"³⁸ and that the medium of action is narrative with a narrative tradition's sense of an ending. Before we can assume mastery of the plot, we are lived by the choices of past human beings. Through the language they inhabited and their stories with their sense of an ending, which our ancestors bequeathed to us, we are "being-affected-by a past we did not make"³⁹ in the intimate efficacy of a transmitted tradition. Our ancestors paradigmatic sense of an ending

captures Augustine's sense of our "fragile balance of vitality and spirit"⁴⁰; and reflection on the distortions and malevolence enshrined, but not always, nor fully thematized, in their, so to speak, unbaptized sense of an ending captures the experience "once the balance is lost."⁴¹ The felt efficacy of a transmitted tradition in the succession of the generations can help us capture the sense of the infant's being "bound together through the natural link of procreation."⁴² In this way of phrasing inherited guilt, we need no longer get caught up in Augustine's "unintelligent slogging-match"⁴³ with Julian, in which Augustine "rests his case on the hoary stereotypes of popular opinion."⁴⁴ Augustine knows that "What makes [concupiscence] 'sin', involving guilt, is not the fact that there is sexual desire."⁴⁵ What is it then? It is the servile will, which, as a distorted and malevolent inheritance, is handed down, for example, in the intimacy of language to infants as non-thematized malevolence – a process thematized, for example, in boyhood and Augustine's immersion in classical studies with their "woeful ... torrent of established custom" (1.16.25). The intimacy of the institution of language is, perhaps, the closest we can come to understanding what Augustine means when he says that malice is inherited; that infants are alienated from themselves and from God; "the fact that there is a privation of something else – there is a loss of the soul's adherence to God in love and of the proper ordering of the whole man which would have followed from it."⁴⁶ However, the efficacy of the past cannot be limited to language. The psychologist Elizabeth Spelke has shown that, though infants perceive the world as adults do, their thinking is nonverbal for the first years of their life.⁴⁷ When language kicks in, then their thinking takes off.

The working of the "efficacy of the past," infant "alienation," infant "privation, the "loss of the [infant] soul's adherence to God in love" is, Augustine says, not "of their own proper will"⁴⁸ because infants cannot perform meritorious or sinful acts. Unbaptized infants do not merit condemnation, and baptized infants cannot merit praise because, "although as well to the former [unbaptized] infants there is no evil deserving, as to the latter [baptized infants] there is no good, of their own proper will."⁴⁹ What sins not "of their own proper will" are remitted by infant baptism and what does Augustine mean by "proper will"?

Gerald Schlabach offers an arresting image:

The Augustinian will is the integrating orientation of the very self; it is not distinguishable from reason and emotion because it is, as it were, the "subsistent relation" between every part of the integrated self, including reason and emotion. The bad will is not like a ship's captain gone mad – but like a ship's crew stricken with the plague, disintegration and mutinous in its disorientation.⁵⁰

The unbaptized infant is, so to speak, aboard a ship suffering from the plague, aboard a ship the infant never chose. Infants find themselves afloat on a boat in which they too are disoriented, disintegrating, mutinous, in a condition that Augustine will try to identify. In the first pages of the *Confessions*, observing himself as an infant member of the plague-stricken, mutinous crew, Augustine finds illustrative, material traces, which he calls *peccata originalia* (1.7.11). The plague ship symbolizes TeSelle's "lost balance." The metaphor can be extended. The plague ship is also a slave ship and the crew, including the unbaptized infant, has been sold into slavery to the devil as the mutinous captain. This image is alien to us, but to Augustine and his "brethren," slavery was an everyday reality – Augustine's family owned slaves⁵¹ – and so was the devil; "Augustine uses the term 'devil' (*diabolus*) well over 2,300 times, and many more if cognates or synonyms are included."⁵² The devil had to be exorcised in the baptismal rite.⁵³ The devil is the "cunning accuser," "the enemy" who holds "the decree that was contrary" and which has to be "blotted out," so that infants too need to be ransomed in Christ's "innocent blood" (9.13.36). Whatever we may think of the metaphor of the slave ship,⁵⁴ the grip that the devil has on the unbaptized is an important reminder of the tragic and irreversible consequences of Adam's sin. Paying a ransom, says TeSelle,

acknowledge[s] the power of evil and ... recognize[s], in a fashion close to the tragic view of life, that evil does have consequences, which cannot be either ignored or easily overcome. It denies the adequacy of notions that the good can simply drive out the bad; it recognizes instead that evil has irreversible consequences.⁵⁵

Schlabach's plague ship sails on into adulthood. There he says,

[Augustine's] twisting and swelling [will in 7.16.22] can suggest the overall orientation of the self.... [And though Augustine in Book 7 loved God and not some phantasm] 'Yet I was not steadfast in enjoyment of my God.' ... In other words, love for and enjoyment of God has not yet become the integrating force in his personality. Augustine seemed to have the intellectual knowledge he needed to convert, but it was not yet united consistently to the emotive forces of his soul. Old habits had twisted his whole character, his whole psychological complex, and the shape previously imprinted on his psyche still obtained.... Augustine could not yet be steadfast. Augustine's will – arguably, the total shape of his personality – was not yet oriented in any one direction.⁵⁶

The plague ship and the slave ship are vivid metaphors which can, perhaps, convey the extent to which the efficacy of the past alienates infants from themselves and from God. Using Ricoeur's fourfold typology of the narrative

paradigm – narrative form, genre, type of narrative universal, individual work⁵⁷ – I have tried to classify the narrative medium – the hermeneutical ship, so to speak, on which the unbaptized and baptized infants are afloat – to show that the destinies, that of the elect and the reprobate, are equally hidden in the mysterious “form” of a discordant/concordant story. Both belong to the “genre” of autobiography, whose “type” of narrative universal belongs to the confessional sense of an ending and which issues in the *Confessions* as an “individual work.” Augustine’s confessional document and confessional practice takes their place in the succession of Christian documents and practices which, Augustine believes, trace themselves back to an inheritance from Adam. The materiality of the marks left by these documents and baptismal practices, by showing, in TeSelle’s words, Augustine’s “respect for the reality of temporal events, their irreversibility, their consequentiality,”⁵⁸ designate the exteriority of the past, that is, its inscription in the time of the universe.⁵⁹ The chain of interpretations and reinterpretations in the symbolic order of the network of contemporaries, predecessors, and successors is given a biological basis and a continuity of the living in the concept of the succession of generations.⁶⁰ Confessional practice will, in Books 12 and 13, in its turn, trace itself not only backward but also forward, from Moses, through Paul, to Augustine the bishop, to his “brethren” and to those who will come after.

Finally, Augustine anchored the triple hatred of God, self, and truth in calendar time. Adam’s sin, as the founding moment of fallen time, serves as the axial moment of calendar time and inscribes Augustine’s religious traditions in the time of a Christian universe. In their turn, these traditions provide calendar time with the continuity of a temporal distance that is traversed. In so far as the trace and the biological continuity of the generations express the reinsertion of the symbolic and speculative discourse on evil and sin in the time of the world, calendar time, too, comes into the range of the phenomenon of these religious traditions. Thus does Augustine laboriously reconstruct the ontological reality of evil as an efficacious malicious heritage.

THE INSCRUTABLE ORIGIN OF EVIL

Within the horizon of his historical consciousness Augustine retains the essential obscurity of the origin of evil. Ricoeur does not agree. He says that Augustine is trying to write a theodicy. And, according to Ricoeur, this project is impossible because Augustine is trying to create a coherent theodicy out of two incompatible beliefs using a single metaphor and a single narrative: a univocal justice discourse of original sin to indict the whole human race and a mysterious, grace-filled discourse to elect those who are to be saved. In

response to this objection, I will try to show that Augustine is not trying to write a theodicy. He never attempts to explain evil initiative, whether in the angels and Adam or Adam's descendants. Since self-love was "the beginning of sin" and at the heart of all subsequent sin, and since we only know beings who are already bound in self-love, Augustine can analyze the fallibility of Adam and the angels in terms of their creation from nothing⁶¹ but not their evil choice. For Augustine, as for us, an evil initiative without a history is unimaginable. History must be the limit of his knowledge and of his theodicy.

Here Augustine will insist on freedom and justice not because he understands them – he does not – but because he knows that evil cannot result from good. He is not doing theodicy but ontology. He is trying to understand how evil exists even though a good nature, whether divine or human, cannot produce evil:

The evil choice takes its origin not from the fact that man is a natural being, but from the fact that his natural being is created from nothing. For if nature is the cause of the evil will, can we help saying that evil is derived from good, and that good is the cause of evil? This must be so, if the evil will derives from a nature which is good. But how can this be? How can a nature which is good, however changeable, before it has an evil will, be the cause of any evil, the cause, that is, of the evil will itself?⁶²

Since nature cannot give rise to an evil will, Augustine is forced to conclude that the will itself is the source: "when an evil choice happens in any being, then what happens is dependent on the will of that being; the failure is voluntary, not necessary, and the punishment that follows is just."⁶³ Augustine cannot understand how a good nature can have an evil will.

As the limit of his ontology, the existence of an evil will in a good nature marks the limit of his theodicy. He can understand that free will is fallible, but he cannot understand how it actually chooses evil. He says that trying to understand is not simply like looking for something in the dark (that would be a dualistic, Gnostic search for an evil nature) but like trying to see the dark itself, or like trying to hear silence:

The truth is that one should not try to find an efficient cause for a wrong choice. It is not a matter of efficiency, but of deficiency; the evil will itself is not effective but defective. For to defect from him who is the Supreme Existence, to something of less reality, this is to begin to have an evil will. To try to discover the causes of such defection – deficient, not efficient causes – is like trying to see darkness or to hear silence.... No one therefore must try to get to know from me what I know that I do not know, unless, it may be, in order to learn not to know what must be known to be incapable of being known!⁶⁴

Augustine's enduring concern, one Ricoeur shares with him,⁶⁵ is to give the purely negative reality of deficient willing ontological status. He gives evil ontological status by placing deficient willing as a triple hatred within a history of intergenerational disruption, witnessed in carnal lust. At times in debate with Julian, Augustine can seem to explain the mystery of evil by identifying it with the archaic stain and its sexual affinities. However, in Book 2 of the *Confessions*, he had long before concluded his most sustained effort "to see the dark" with the cry that harkens back to the stain but in which the mystery prevails: "Who can unravel that complex twisted knottedness? It is unclean, I hate to think of it or look at it" (2.10.18).

Since first coining the term *peccatum originale* in Book 1, Question 2 of *Ad Simplicianum*, in the year 396,⁶⁶ Augustine had sought to give evil an ontological status without committing the Gnostic error of mingling it with the good of nature. Instead he establishes evil's historical reality. He pushes this ontological-historical inquiry back as far as he can go and discovers at the origin of evil fallibility, as the possibility of evil, and freedom. From the presence of freedom he concludes that human beings are justly held responsible, but this is as far as he can see. He acknowledges that he cannot understand the origin of evil choice. Deficient willing, what he describes as hating "gratis i.e. without a cause,"⁶⁷ is as intellectually opaque as the reasons on the basis of which God chooses to give or withhold the gift of freedom from evil. The gratuitousness with which the unjust hate or the just love are equally impenetrable. Ricoeur sees only the latter. The experience of the already-there of evil confessed in the very instant of avowal, Ricoeur believes, is lost in the pseudo-thought of a first sin and transmitted heritage. The symbolic and dramatic expression of a quasi-nature of an evil already there is lost in the false concept of inheritance.⁶⁸ What Ricoeur does not see is that for Augustine the effort to give expression to a quasi-nature of evil receives a symbolic-dramatic form in Augustine's salvation narrative. Evil had to be historical if it was to have ontological force. It had historical status inasmuch as it belonged to the biological continuity of the generations, had material traces, and by means of the calendar was inserted in the time of the universe. Ricoeur misses the historical dimension of Augustine's concept of freedom and consequently the ontological force of its evil willing, the coherence of its conception, and the mystery of its origin. Nevertheless, Ricoeur captures the essence of Augustine's tragic, historical, and ontological thesis when he says, "the inconceivability consists precisely in this, that evil, which always begins by freedom is always already there for freedom: it is act and habit, arising and antecedence."⁶⁹

Ricoeur adds that moral freedom and tragic necessity must both, in their turn, give way before the Pauline doctrine of superabundance and the lyrical

life. From the viewpoint of the history of salvation, “Original sin is only an antitype. But type and antitype are not only parallel (‘just as … so too’), but there is a movement from one to the other, a ‘how much more’, an ‘all the more’: ‘Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.’”⁷⁰ Christ’s resurrection as *the type* is really the axial moment of history and of all beginnings. Adam’s Fall, as only an antitype of the resurrection, derives its axial significance retrospectively. The superabundance of God’s grace dominates Augustine’s treatment of sin, evil, and suffering.⁷¹ Augustine’s commentary on hatred in *In Johannis evangelium tractatus* is set within the context of God’s preventient love. It concludes: “For He [the Holy Spirit] bearing witness and making most courageous witness, has rid Christ’s friends of their fear, and turned the hate of His enemies into love.”⁷² For Augustine, tragic necessity need not be evaded, nor God’s cause justified in theodicy and in a false knowledge of origins, nor moral freedom reduced to the “pretension of man to be master of his life.”⁷³ The threefold anterior bondage of the will in a “gratuitous” triple hatred is surmounted in the “gratuitous” gift of a triple love. The primordial action of the resurrection, as the love of God, the love of truth and the love of the self, enables the individual to enter into a personal and corporate history of salvation. Being historical, original sin and grace are both ontological.

Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, then, is a saving truth. He did not observe the sufferings of infants in order to condemn them. While it is true, says Burnaby, that, for Augustine, these sufferings demonstrate the inherited guilt of infants, yet this is the occasion for a doctrine of salvation and hope in Christ, not just a theological argument:

There can be no doubt that Augustine offers his doctrine of original sin as the only tenable explanation of the facts of human suffering. Man’s misery proves his guilt. Apart from Scripture and the church’s practice of infant baptism, his argument against Julian rests almost entirely upon the sufferings of children too young “to have sins of their own” … the sufferings of children were to him no mere theological argument but a heartrending fact.⁷⁴

UNBAPTIZED INFANTS AND THE FIGURE OF SUFFERING ITSELF

In our times, we have learned to discover willed ignorance, indifference, even disdain for people’s suffering in the doctrines of original sin, election, and predestination. Is it not the case that a God whose ethical holiness condemns unbaptized infants to eternal damnation on the basis of an inherited sin does so in the name of ethical juggling not a tragic vision? Surely Augustine

is doing theodicy. Further, he cannot surrender the necessity of baptismal regeneration. His refusal is due not simply to theodicy. Surely what is at stake is the coherence of his beliefs and his authority as a bishop? If so, then God must judge in accordance with Augustine's beliefs. Damnation is not inscrutable but the conclusion of an ethical syllogism, which justifies the givens of Augustine's thought world. For Augustine, the moral vision does not shatter on the damnation of children, but the children are shattered on the moral vision. Augustine's counsel is to remain silent, believing that the moral vision is nevertheless intact, that God is at once just and good.

Such self-righteousness, such hubristic goodness in Augustine had already been exposed at his coerced ordination. Coercion as an astonishing, irresistible grace taught Augustine the narrowness of that moral vision. Instead, terror and pity at the fate of unbaptized infants will introduce him to an inscrutable wisdom.

It is not easy for us to follow Augustine here. By follow here, I do not mean agree. I have in mind something more fundamental. We turn away when we hear him say that God's reprobation of infants is just, their perdition is by right; guilt is of nature; it is effective as an act and is punishable as a crime, though inherited as a sickness. What is he thinking? His teaching on the damnation of unbaptized children was to torment many for more than a millennium. Do we even want to understand? The question for Augustine was not whether or not to believe this but how to understand it, for Augustine, along with his fellow North African bishops, following a tradition going back to Cyprian and to "the church's practice of infant baptism [which] had been handed down from Jesus and the apostles (*pecc. mer. 1.26.39*) ... for 'the remission of sin,'"⁷⁵ believed that unbaptized infants are condemned to hell. The fact that they all believed this, that it belonged to the tradition, does not make the belief any less distasteful. Reaching out to Augustine here is a stretch too far, a stretch that we may not want to make, but if we are to come close to Augustine and his "brethren," we must see that the unbaptized infant is not simply another suffering person. Abandoned, solitary, parentless, godless, helpless, and hopeless, consigned to the upper reaches of hell – the unbaptized infant is, for Augustine, "Suffering Itself."⁷⁶

Infant baptism had been an important theme in the development of Augustine's thought from his earliest writings.⁷⁷ In the *Confessions*, he says that physical and moral sufferings are unnatural; infants were made for something better. Their suffering can be understood only as unnatural and due to an inherited guilt. For Augustine, the suffering of infants was not simply a debating point in Augustine's "unintelligent slogging-match"⁷⁸ with Julian but "a heartrending fact."⁷⁹ Both Augustine and Julian of Eclanum

will insist that the desperate problem of suffering was the first issue that a religious thinker had to face. “The most blatant misery of the human race” forces itself to the foreground in Augustine’s later works against Julian. When he rounds on Julian for blandly defining away the extent of human unhappiness, we can at last sense an upsurge of genuine feeling, of moral outrage, a refusal to abandon hopes for something better, to deny unpleasant facts for the sake of intellectual comfort that has flowed towards pessimism in many sensitive thinkers. If Paul had been forced to prove his assertions on original sin, Augustine believed he would have turned his readers’ attention, as Augustine did, to the extent of suffering in this world.⁸⁰

Infant damnation was a “heartrending fact,”⁸¹ not a debating point that will in time find its place in the medieval schools. It is “not a teaching in the most didactic sense of the word, but more closely resembling a conversion of the manner of looking, is sketched out,” one closer to tragic pity and terror, which the gifted life “will work to extend in its own discourse.”⁸² Here, Augustine is strange, even alien. But, if we are to meet him on his way, we must meet him here. What will Augustine do with his horror? We are simply disgusted and disheartened, but there is nothing, other than our incredulity, to suggest that Augustine is simply a polemicist, defending his episcopal authority. He claims to be “exceedingly astonished”⁸³ and rendered “silent”⁸⁴ by this “heartrending fact.”⁸⁵ In his pastoral work, he has had to care for parents whose children had died without baptism.⁸⁶ Augustine can only register his astonishment: “Who would not wonder at this? Who would not be exceedingly astonished at this! … that some children of His friends … departing this life as infants without baptism – although He certainly might provide the grace of this laver if He willed. … He alienates from His kingdom into which He introduces their parents.”⁸⁷ Augustine has nothing but uncomprehending “pity” and “terror”; pity for the fate of the unbaptized infant – an existentially anguishing figure of suffering for Augustine. In his day, he is reduced to silence and uncomprehending pity, as the Greeks were in their day before the fate of Antigone⁸⁸ and as we are before the displaced, the “drowned,” of the refugee camps in our own day. Augustine is reduced to “pity” yes, but also to “terror” before his God, whose ways are “unsearchable” and who “hardens whom He will, even although his merits may have preceded. … As of two twins, of which one is taken and the other left … let us not endeavor to look into that which is inscrutable, nor to trace that which cannot be found out … so that he who thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall.”⁸⁹ Here is an insoluble conflict between the God of justice and the God of arbitrariness that only catharsis can resolve by disorienting Augustine’s gaze. Augustine is caught “between tragic catharsis and moral conviction,”⁹⁰ tormented in his struggle as a bishop between the God of grace

as “formidable” – “oscillating between the admirable and the monstrous”⁹¹ – and free-will in the figure of the youthful Augustine – the “master of thinking justly.”⁹² The tragic problem is that neither party to the moral conflict between Augustine the youthful master and Augustine the distressed bishop can renounce their “partiality.”⁹³ Can confessional wisdom teach Augustine to renounce the partiality of both gazes? Can the gifted life reorient action in response to suffering and evil? Can inscrutable wisdom “shelter moral conviction beyond the ruinous alternative of univocity or arbitrariness”?⁹⁴



“The Platitudes of Ethical Monotheism”

The damnation of unbaptized infants and the fate of baptized adults who have not received the gift of perseverance make God’s love appear arbitrary to Augustine’s commentators, friend and foe alike. Despite much effort by Augustine’s many defenders, none can find a safe passage to shelter God’s electing love from “the ruinous alternative of univocity or arbitrariness.”¹

Shockingly, it would appear that the arbitrariness of Augustine’s God of love cannot escape Hegel’s claim that, when consciousness makes itself the sole arbiter, the inner self, even God’s inner self, cannot know if it is choosing the good as an absolutely universal principle or evil as private self-will.² And, as we saw, where Hegel is condemned to vacillate, Nietzsche decides. He undermines the rationality of the spontaneous assessment of good and evil itself.³

Faced with this appalling prospect, it will come as no surprise in [Section 1](#) of the present chapter to find that Augustine uses the univocal discourse of justice to measure God’s loving response to sin and evil. Augustine will summon Monica to appear before the court. There, God the Judge will examine Monica’s guilt, measure the debt owed, issue a verdict, and satisfy the demand for justice with the ransom paid by Christ. Again in [Section 2](#) we will see that Augustine characterizes predestination as God’s loving response to original sin, evil, and suffering, but the fate of the non-elect forces him to continue to treat predestination according to the logic of equivalence and the law of punishment. The justice focus will have the tragic consequence of making it difficult, if not impossible, for Augustine’s friends to defend Augustine from teaching double predestination.⁴ If this were to prove to be correct, then Augustine’s belief in God’s holiness and religious consciousness would

Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 322.

be corrupted, his understanding of human freedom and justice would be undermined to reveal fatal cracks in the foundations of his theological edifice.

In the face of these perennial objections, Augustine appeals to God's compassionate justice hidden in mystery, but hiding the workings of God's justice in mystery only serves to heighten his critics' suspicion that Augustine is playing with the concept of justice itself. In *Section 3*, I will show that this suspicion has worried recent commentators just as it did Augustine's Pelagian adversaries and his semi-Pelagian fellow seekers. In *Section 4*, I will return to Book 9 of the *Confessions* to see if Augustine confines the legal scene at Monica's trial to the “ruinous alternative of univocity or arbitrariness.”⁵ Or does he see a third possibility, in which justice serves only as a memorial of an economy from which Monica has been saved? Though not without tragic import, this latter interpretation of Monica's trial is a far cry from traditional interpretations of predestination and ransom theory.

MONICA'S TRIAL

At the end of Book 9 of the *Confessions*, Augustine measures the extent of the gratuity of grace conferred on Monica in terms of justice satisfied. Augustine inherited from Ambrose⁶ the view of expiatory sacrifice understood according to the law of retribution. In a penal theology, atonement offers vicarious satisfaction. Christ's death effects a judicial acquittal, in which “‘the handwriting was blotted out of the decree which was contrary to us’” (7.21.27).⁷ Salvation is a judicial act; justification falls within the logic of punishment: “‘You are just,’ O Lord, but ‘we have sinned, we have committed iniquity we have done wickedly’ and Your hand has grown heavy upon us and we are justly delivered over to that first sinner, the ruler of death.... What shall unhappy man do?” (7.21.27). With this cry, we are set before the tribunal and can be rescued from its just judgment only because “the enemy was overcome who, reckoning our sins and seeking what may be laid to our charge, found nothing in Him, in whom we are conquerors. Who shall restore to Him his innocent blood? Who shall give Him back the price by which He purchased us and so take us from Him?” (9.13.36).

Augustine believes that we are all subject to natural/eternal law and its penalties. At the same time, we are bound in invincible but culpable ignorance of and inability to fulfill what we do grasp of that law. From this flows Augustine's harsh judgment of the presumptuous Platonists and the rigorist Donatists⁸ when the latter make a self-righteous appeal to the law.

Augustine moralizes and divinizes his teaching on the natural law. This will have dire consequences for the Donatists and, in their turn, for the Palagians

in terms of civil law and its penalties and religious coercion. R. A. Markus has traced the complex development of Augustine's thought on the relation of civil law to God's eternal law.⁹

Like so many of the Christian Fathers Augustine accepted the substance of this [Cicero's] teaching.... Thus the precepts of the eternal law are "written in the heart of men," or engraved upon it as an "impression" of the eternal law. This, in a somewhat fluctuating terminology, remained Augustine's unchanging teaching on this subject.¹⁰

Following Cicero, Augustine believes that crime belongs to the contractual, social order and occurs when "in complete contempt for the existing order of society they [the lawless] go their own insolent way with private agreements or private feuds according to their personal likes and dislikes" (3.8.16). Punishment "by a person in authority for the sake of correcting the wrong doer" (3.9.17) rightly orders their being,¹¹ by subjecting them to their own right. The contractual, social order belongs to the domain of freewill as realized freedom. Contracts establish relations of reciprocity among independent persons such that the injustice of breaking a contract destroys one's own freewill. Since destroying one's own freewill is self-contradictory, punishment must subject criminals, and by extension schismatics like the Donatists, to their own right. In this way, punishment acknowledges criminals' rationality and reestablishes their freedom.

Again, following Cicero, Augustine views punishment as a form of poetic justice.¹² In the right order, the human soul is in the middle station, obedient to God and the ruler of the body, but pride, which is to love oneself as though one were the center of the universe, leads the soul to seek equality with God, and the soul finds only subservience to its own body.¹³ Crime, for Cicero and Augustine, is an internal contradiction: crime destroys one's own freewill; punishment subjects one to one's own right. Prior to his conversion, Augustine says that God was "mercifully hard" (2.2.4) and the "bitterness" (3.1.1) of punishment was salutary.¹⁴ Punishment acknowledges his rationality by curbing his irrationality. By bringing him to his senses, punishment reestablishes his freedom.

Augustine says that the right ordering, "which is agreed upon by the custom, or decreed by the law, of state or people, is not to be violated at the mere pleasure whether of citizen or alien. For every part is defective that is not in harmony with the whole" (3.8.15). The right order belongs to the larger "whole" of God's law: "As the ruler of all creation," God's "commands are to be obeyed without hesitation. For as among the powers of human society the greater power has a right to the obedience of the lesser, so God to

the obedience of all” (3.8.15). Punishment, as poetic justice, belongs to the broader context: “You punish the sins men commit against themselves, because though their sin is against You God, they are wronging their own souls and their iniquity gives itself the lie” (3.8.16).¹⁵ In this way, Augustine inserts the law of punishment within the sphere of morality and religion.

Augustine’s moralization and divinization of punishment will prove to be irreversibly ruinous for the Donatists and again, in due course, for the Pelagians.

Moralization and divinization transpose the logic of punishment, which has only a juridical meaning, into the sphere of interiority. Here the contingent and subjective will inflicts punishment according to the will’s own justice, separated from universal norms. To be delivered from vengeance, the particular will must win moral certitude from a universal viewpoint. If the will fails, then the will must wrestle with impure intention in an unending struggle against self-deception. The problem for Augustine is that the individual will cannot know the universal will of God, for it cannot “discern the difference that there is between presumption and confession” (7.20.26). Independent moral self-certainty is paradoxical: “reflection is condemned to vacillate on that point where consciousness *of* evil and consciousness *as* evil become indiscernible.”¹⁶ But Augustine does not henceforth exclude the logic of punishment from morality, even though moral certitude is unattainable. Augustine introduces moral punishment because, again following Cicero, the eternal law is “written in the hearts of men” (2.4.9).¹⁷

Although the claim to moral certitude involves presumption, Augustine thinks that moral certitude should not do so. That moral certitude does, that the eternal law has been irreparably obscured, results from the punishment of sin. The separation of the individual, contingent will from the universal, eternal law belongs to the logic of punishment.

Ironically, the poetic justice of punishment renders invincible the individual’s ignorance of the eternal law (10.23.33). Adam’s sin (8.10.22, 5.9.16, and 9.13.34) and original sin become Augustine’s justification for inserting the logic of punishment within the sphere of morality and religion. An astonishing and, for Augustine, shocking result of this insertion, is that punishment, whose justification is to subject criminals to their own true judicial right, invincibly traps sinners in inherited vice – a conclusion that is tantamount to spiritual capital punishment. Since only God can know the eternal law, the divinization of judging consciousness comes to expression as terror before the all-seeing eye: “Let the wicked in their restlessness go from You and flee away. Yet You see them, cleaving through their darkness.... They stumbled against You in their injustice and justly suffered” (5.2.2).

The “all-seeing eye” is not Augustine’s last word. He appeals to electing grace. Augustine distinguishes between those, like the Donatists, who appeal to the legal economy and remain subject to it, and Catholics, like Monica, who appeal to God’s mercy and so are no longer subject to it:

For though she had been made alive in Christ, and while still in the body had so lived that Your name was glorified in her faith and her character, yet I dare not say that from the moment of her regeneration in baptism no word issued from her mouth contrary to Your Command.... It would go ill with the most praiseworthy life lived by men, if You were to examine it with Your mercy laid aside! But because You do not enquire too fiercely into our sins, we have hope and confidence of a place with You. (9.13.34)

Augustine will not make the presumptuous error of appealing to a legal discourse. He asks God to forgive “such trespasses as [Monica] may have been guilty of in all the years since her baptism, forgive them, Lord forgive them, I beseech You: enter not into judgment with her. Let Your mercy be exalted above Your justice” (9.13.35).

But the question remains: As a judicial act, does not her acquittal before a tribunal only serve to set the discourse of grace within the economy of law?

THE LOGIC OF EQUIVALENCE AND THE LAW OF PUNISHMENT

Augustine believes that the fate of the non-elect is just. Their predestination belongs to the law of punishment and obeys the logic of equivalence. Monica’s acquittal as an unmerited exception to this law makes it difficult to see why God justifies some but not all. Why are unbaptized babies among the non-elect? Why does God not give the gift of perseverance to all baptized adults? These questions make it difficult, for many commentators impossible, to defend Augustine from teaching double predestination, even though most concede that he did not positively teach it. If this is correct, then my worry is, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, that Augustine’s belief in God’s holiness and religious consciousness is corrupted, his understanding of human freedom and justice undermined, revealing fatal flaws in his theological criteriology.

Commentators old and new, from Julian of Eclanum to the present, do precisely this. They examine Augustine’s teaching on predestination through the narrow lens of justice, equivalence, retribution, and punishment. By so doing they fall into the trap set by what Ricoeur identifies as “the platitudes of ethical monotheism.” Here, God, as a “Legislator and ... Judge, confront[s] a moral subject who is endowed with complete and unfettered freedom, still

intact after each act.”¹⁸ Many commentators might wish to reject this characterization as a caricature. Yet, when they limit their discussion of Augustine’s doctrine of predestination to a justice discourse, they, perhaps unintentionally, confine Augustine’s God to Julian’s Procrustean bed. If this is true, then Augustine’s commentators will have trapped Augustine’s theology in a justice discourse. In the same vein, in the [previous chapter](#), we saw Ricoeur limit Augustine’s teaching on original sin to a penal discourse. Only in [Section 4](#) of this chapter can I begin to show how Augustine appeals to an alternative discourse to spring the trap.

Augustine believes that salvation is given according to God’s gracious freedom and not human merits. He first states this belief in *Ad SimPLICIANUM* and the *Confessions*, along with his teachings on original sin and predestination. Down through the ages, these teachings have been a source of endless controversy. Some commentators, the heirs of Julian, have sought to discredit Augustine’s teaching; others have sought to defend his teaching, but, even then, opposed interpretations and reactions abound.

For example, at the end of the nineteenth century Odilo Rottmann¹⁹ focuses the deterministic view of predestination. He says that Augustine’s belief in the irresistible efficacy of the divine will made predestination into a doctrine of strict determinism. Other commentators try in various ways to affirm human freedom. Eugéne Portalié,²⁰ in keeping with the *scientia media* of the sixteenth century Molonists, believes Augustine’s God providentially manipulates the environment to determine the dispositions of the elect’s free choices. In opposition to Portalié, A. M. Jacquin,²¹ a follower of Banez, insists that God’s gift of interior graces directly alters human dispositions themselves. Patout Burns concludes that Portalié and Jacquin, for all their differences, along with later commentators like Xavier Léon-Dufour, cannot show that, for Augustine, human freedom has the power to resist God’s will.²² More recently, Eugene TeSelle says that Augustine could never abandon his rigid predestination position because Augustine believes that Paul taught it and because of his belief in the damnation of unbaptized infants. TeSelle does, however, think that Augustine was working toward an alternative doctrine. He was putting greater stress on internal factors in calling and conversion (these internal factors are the subject of Burns’s study²³). It is instructive to see the lengths Augustine would have had to go to escape from the impasse. TeSelle thinks that what he sees as Augustine’s alternative doctrine in the making, if taken to its logical conclusion, would have made it possible for Augustine to adopt a solution similar to Bernard Lonergan and Karl Barth’s.²⁴ But for Augustine to have arrived at their solution, according to TeSelle, Augustine would have had to abandon the traditional belief in

the damnation of unbaptized infants, to have taken more seriously the view that God wills all human beings to be saved, and to have placed external signs and stimuli in a subordinate position. It should be recalled that Augustine had taken great pains to trace the influence of external circumstances throughout the first nine books of the Confessions for external signs belong to his testimony. Even for the later Augustine of the semi-Pelagian writings, the salvation of unbaptized infants entirely apart from their exercise of freedom remains, for Augustine, “a perfect case of the influence of external circumstance upon inward destiny.”²⁵

Determinism in any form raises the question of God’s justice and goodness. The question becomes acute when Augustine treats the damnation of unbaptized infants quite apart from any exercise of their own choice and the lapsing of baptized adults for want of the grace of perseverance. Commentators, friend and foe alike, whose approach to Augustine’s teaching on predestination is restricted to a justice discourse, reach the same impasse. Augustine’s teaching on evil, freewill, grace, viewed in a univocal justice discourse, is incoherent and ethically indefensible. On these terms, Augustine’s critics are right.

Christopher Kirwan, for example, says that Augustine has difficulty in defending freewill and the sovereign power of grace in the case of the damned. He goes still further. He shows that Augustine also has difficulties in defending the freedom of the elect. He says if preventer grace were merely enabling, then the elect would still retain the power of not willing the good. However, since preventer grace is operative, it is difficult for Augustine to explain how a decision can at the same time be free and caused by God:

For without freedom to decide in favour of the sin which grace causes them to decide against, they will lack power to decide in favour of it and so, since sin requires decision of the will, they will lack power to sin; but without the power to sin, they will possess only one half of the two-way power that is needed in order to be free to avoid sin.²⁶

He concludes that “I fear on this difficult matter Augustine was among those ‘theologians [who] are insufficiently reluctant to contradict themselves.’”²⁷

Many commentators sympathetic to Augustine try to make Augustine’s teaching more palatable. Rottmann, for example,²⁸ agrees that, for Augustine, Adam’s inherited guilt meant that without injustice, God’s sovereign and irresistible will infallibly and mercifully elects some members of the human race, but not all, to salvation. In extenuation, he says that Augustine draws this conclusion from the factual observation that not all arrive at beatitude. Rottmann also distinguishes between what he believes is Augustine’s pessimistic

theoretical teaching of a limited salvation, as found in his polemical works, and the optimistic assumption of universal salvation in his pastoral practice, as revealed in his sermons and letters. F. Cayré,²⁹ claims that Augustine's doctrine of predestination is part of Augustine's doctrine of grace and draws the same optimistic conclusion for Augustine's polemical works. H. Rondet³⁰ agrees, for he thinks that for Augustine God's grace more than balances out the force of the tragic effect of the Fall. A. A. Saint-Martin³¹ believes that in his doctrine of predestination Augustine is trying to defend God's sovereign will. In agreement with Portalié, he says that God's sovereignty is the fundamental issue whether as divine foreknowledge or the divine will. F.-J. Thonnard³² integrates the earlier discussion of predestination as foreknowledge and the divine will in the concept of providence to conclude that, for Augustine, providence is salvation history. He draws an optimistic portrait (for the saved!); evil in the universe adds to the beauty of the whole, like the shadings in a picture!³³ C. Boyer³⁴ reaffirmed the traditional theme of the importance for Augustine of God's goodness and justice.

Like more recent commentators, John Rist is less interested in pleading Augustine's cause. He thinks that Augustine and his contemporaries were at ease with harsh punishment as long as the punishments were just, and, since God was the judge, Augustine had no doubts and few qualms.³⁵ In fact Augustine had grave misgivings. He is frequently forced to appeal to God's inscrutable justice in the face of what was for Augustine the agonizing fact that God withheld baptism from dying infants even from the infants of the elect and withheld the grace of perseverance from baptized adults. Burns refers the indictment back to Augustine's first critics. They could not see how Augustine can defend himself from the charge of teaching double predestination:

For all the cogency of his arguments for the predestination of the elect and the working of their salvation, Augustine failed to meet the issue which his opponents were pressing, the implied reprobation of the non-elect.... A premeditated denial of perseverance to those who have responded to God's invitation to faith and are living a Christian life exceeded the bounds of their credulity. If these Christians are condemned for sins which could have been avoided only through a withheld divine assistance, then God cannot escape responsibility for the failure.³⁶

Burns comments:

Augustine implicitly recognized the cogency of the argument by his attempt to *rationalize* God's decision through its good effects among the saints.... [Augustine] did not reject the implied reprobation of those who are never called or who are not given perseverance in Christ. Though he insisted that

God does not cause sinning, Augustine assumed that the creature's failure follows inevitably from the divine decision to withhold necessary assistance.³⁷

In reaction to the suspicion of "bad faith" implicit, for example, in Burns's "rationalize," Basil Studer comes to Augustine's defense. Like M. J. Chéné and sympathetic commentators before him, Studer says that, from the outset, Augustine recognized the problem and stated clearly that he is dealing "with an impenetrable mystery."³⁸ The grace of baptism for infants and the gift of perseverance "are based on an unfathomable but just decision of God."³⁹ Studer concludes that Augustine was forced to discuss the impenetrable mystery of predestination if he was to defend his doctrine of grace:

Even though the depths of the wisdom and love of God cannot be plumbed, we may not be silent about the mystery of divine predestination; otherwise, we run the danger of denying the gratuitousness of divine grace. We must, of course, speak of this mystery in a correct way. Thus, the faithful should pray in fear for perseverance and at the same time set their entire hope on the mercy of God. In any case, Christians may not question the decisions of God.⁴⁰

Burns does not think that the impasse can be resolved by finding "a correct way" of talking. He says that the real problem is Augustine' stubborn refusal "to lessen God's glory in the saints in order to satisfy justice in the condemnation of sinners."⁴¹

Critics are as vehement in their rejection of what they see as Augustine's questionable use of the concept of justice now as they were in Augustine's day. For example, Kirwan says, Augustine's concept of justice "ignores the ... comparative dimension of assessment [though equal in merit, some are granted mercy while others get their just desert due ultimately to original sin] is a defective one."⁴² We are given, he says, some "not very edifying"⁴³ reasons for why God does not have universal mercy. Kirwan concludes: "A part of Julian's complaint about Augustine's use of original sin to justify eternal damnation is essentially of the same kind: that a truly just God would not show favoritism, extending favour (grace) beyond their (alleged) merits to some but not all of those he judges. I side with Julian."⁴⁴ Rist takes a different tack to arrive at the same conclusion. He asks why "the sacrifice of Christ is not enough for everyone, since those for whom it is not enough are no more responsible for their failure than the lucky ones are responsible for their success."⁴⁵ Rist is right to think that salvation understood in these terms is arbitrary and not "for all." Yet in *Chapters 2* and *3*, I have shown that this belief in salvation for all is at the very heart of Augustine's non-narcissistic theology of the *Confessions*. Not

until the end of [Chapter 9](#) will I try to show how predestination, as understood by Augustine and his brethren, if not by his critics, is “for all,” even in his defense of the use of coercion against the Donatists.

Most scholars grant that Augustine did not intend to teach double predestination. Most agree that Augustine’s focus is on the saints brought to glory not the sinners who are condemned. When he does mention the sinners, it is to foster gratitude in the saints. In an attempt to defend this practice, Chéné claims that Augustine distinguishes “causality” from “permission.” When Scripture says that God “inclines” the wicked to evil after their own deserts, Augustine implausibly (“doublespeak!”) softens “inclines” with its tragic connotations by construing it as “permits,” thereby invoking the cause/permission distinction, which was to become so popular among medieval theologians.⁴⁶ In fact, the cause/permission distinction itself is not as successful as was traditionally thought. Kirwan, discussing Augustine’s teaching on cooperative grace points out that, “in general, at least some bad deeds must need outside help to pass from project to reality, if all good deeds are in need of such help.”⁴⁷ He concludes that “it is not possible for Augustine to avoid the embarrassment of charging God with a share in the responsibility for some human sins, namely many of the graver ones which pass beyond sinful intention.”⁴⁸

Augustine himself claims to defend God’s justice. In less difficult cases, he will have recourse to the cause/permission distinction, but his fundamental strategy is to appeal to God’s hidden justice. Julian of Eclanum plausibly complained that Augustine’s concept of inscrutable divine justice is a different kind of thing altogether from human justice, merely being given the same name and that repeated appeals to inscrutable justice only serve to make God appear arbitrary.⁴⁹ Rist seals Julian’s case against Augustine with a rhetorical question: If it makes no difference to God whether God is strictly just or merciful, why did he decide on the incarnation? “Arbitrariness seems to have replaced love in the equation.”⁵⁰ And when Augustine dwells on this *felix culpa* aspect of the Fall, Rist asks: If baptism is necessary for incorporation into Christ, then “why did God not provide for the baptism of all, or at least the opportunity for baptism for all? Certainly he has not done so, and the problem of arbitrariness might thus seem to have been pushed a stage further back rather than resolved.”⁵¹ Kirwan adds that it is not easy to avoid convicting Augustine of teaching double predestination, especially when we recall Augustine’s teaching on the determined number of the saved.⁵² James Wetzel comes to the same conclusion: “It is, of course, contradictory to assert both that redemption is given gratuitously and that God has some reason, albeit unfathomable, for redeeming one person rather than another (e.g.,

Jacob rather than Esau). Augustine is willing to tolerate this contradiction in order to preserve the appearance of God's justice.⁵³ The phrase "in order to preserve the appearance," raises, for a second time, the question of bad faith – "doublespeak" again!

Critics, old and new, unearth what they perceive as the unsound foundations of Augustine's theological criteriology. Others, like Studer, temporize, saying that Augustine can "tolerate such a harsh teaching only because he was convinced that the omnipotent God will somehow, despite everything, carry out the plan of eternal wisdom."⁵⁴ The problem for sympathetic commentators like Studer is that, by admitting that Augustine's teaching on predestination is a flawed attempt to affirm at one and the same time the absolute gratuity of grace, divine foreknowledge, and the irresistibility of the divine will with human freedom and God's justice and goodness, they endanger the whole Augustinian theological criteriology. What they see as flaws are really cracks in the foundations.

S. J. Duffy examines the appeal by Augustine's apologists to God's inscrutable wisdom:

Why of two infants one is chosen and the other not, why of two unbelieving adults one is called to conversion and the other not, why of two believers one is endowed with the gift of final perseverance and the other not, all that remains hidden in the inscrutable mystery of God's justice. Behind the curtain we cannot get. With God there is no injustice; God has the right to treat persons differently.⁵⁵

Duffy comments: "Withholding of the necessary grace of perseverance from those already given the grace of conversion was to prove especially perplexing. The line between necessity and actuality was all too subtle.... It all seemed to less subtle minds to lay responsibility for salvation *and* damnation at heaven's doorstep."⁵⁶ He adds that "while Augustine generally concerned himself with predestination to grace and glory, the darker implications carried in his logic of grace were to provoke strong reactions in the West."⁵⁷ Kurt Flasch belongs within the tradition of strong reactions. He agrees that Augustine's chief aim is to defend God's justice.⁵⁸ However, for Flasch, as for Julian 1,500 years earlier, inasmuch as Augustine introduces the doctrines of original sin and predestination to defend God's justice, Augustine limits God's saving will and, in the process, empties the concept of justice of meaning.⁵⁹ Goulven Madec will have none of this. He rejects Flasch's tyrant God and his "reign of terror" as a "a miserable caricature"⁶⁰ of Augustine's teaching. But Madec adds, "The consequences in the history of the dogmas of original sin, grace, and predestination to put it plainly have been calamitous."⁶¹

Even a sympathetic critic like Studer is forced to agree with Flasch that the issue is the problem of justice and that, in the process, Augustine alters the concept of justice.⁶² In an attempt to escape from the platitudes of ethical monotheism, Studer concedes that for Augustine the divine will is absolutely sovereign, and human freedom is seriously called in question: “Even though it must be admitted that Augustine struggled with this conception more than with his other teachings … he did not succeed in bringing this doctrine into harmony with the Christian faith in its entirety.”⁶³ In extenuation, Studer concludes that “although Augustine did not achieve a true synthesis of grace and freedom … we may not deny him the right, amid this dialectic forced on him by an extremely difficult problem, to take the side of what seemed obvious in light of his knowledge of the Bible and his pastoral experience.”⁶⁴ Studer immediately adds that “in this case, the middle way would of course be preferable.”⁶⁵ I believe that Augustine’s way is not some middle way whatever that might be (Studer does not say). I conclude that the attempt to understand Augustine’s teachings on evil, freewill, sin, grace, election, and predestination in a justice discourse using the logic of equivalence, the logic of righteousness, and the law of punishment has failed. Augustine’s critics conclude that he is unable to affirm at the same time and without contradiction that God is good, all powerful, all knowing, and just and that mankind is free, sinful, and dependent on election and the grace of perseverance to be saved; yet some are damned. The use of a univocal, justice discourse to understand the theology of Augustine’s confessions has resulted in an impasse.

A COMPASSIONATE JUSTICE HIDDEN IN MYSTERY

In the face of these perennial objections, Augustine appeals to mystery. Chéné says that Augustine “did not try to reconcile these two truths [the sovereignty of grace and free will] knowing that their reconciliation is hidden from us. But where he saw a mystery, others believed that they found a contradiction.”⁶⁶ Hiding the workings of God’s justice in mystery only serves to heighten commentators’ suspicion that Augustine is playing with the concept of justice itself. This suspicion has worried recent commentators just as it did Augustine’s Pelagian adversaries and his semi-Pelagian fellow seekers.

Despite the criticism, most commentators can agree that Augustine himself did believe that God is just – hence the theodicy – and again most can agree, friend and foe alike, that Augustine’s supreme interest lies with God’s mercy and compassion. Can some combination of the two, of justice and compassion, a sort of compassionate justice hidden in mystery resolve the impasse?

In *Ad Simplicianum*, when Augustine displays God's mercy with an appeal to the dire consequences of God's justice for the damned, the result can be deeply disturbing. The unjust, like Pharaoh, Judas, and Esau are made by God into “‘vessels unto dishonor’” and “perdition … for the correction of others,” who are “‘vessels of mercy.’”⁶⁷ Augustine concludes:

The hardening of the ungodly demonstrates two things – that a man should fear and turn to God in piety, and that thanks should be given for his mercy to God who shows by the penalty inflicted on some the greatness of his gift to others. If the penalty he exacts from the former is not just, he makes no gifts to those from whom he does not exact it. But because it is just, and there is no unrighteousness with God who punishes, who is sufficient to give thanks to him?⁶⁸

The mixed discourse resulting from the juxtaposition of the economies of justice and mercy in this passage is peculiarly offensive. Is God's arbitrary mercy for Monica and her fellow Catholics, for example, no more than an erratic exception to a very literal and particularly nasty product of a legalism whose sole purpose is to foster gratitude to God among the elect? Even more distressing: Does not God's arbitrariness inevitably imply that Augustine inadvertently reverts behind the discourse of justice and even behind the discourse of vengeance to the anarchy that rules prior to the Law of the Talion, prior to the logic of “like for like,” of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth?

Indeed, one might go further and ask, as Julian did repeatedly,⁶⁹ whether or not the reversion to the economy of vengeance is inadvertent? For Augustine says in *Ad Simplicianum* that God's predestining will “endures” his enemies patiently, to strike them, in due order, with vengeful “wrath.” These he “hates,” “hardens,” and “destroys” to reveal his mercy by reducing the “vessels of honour” to “fear.”⁷⁰

When situated within an ethical discourse, Augustine will try to mitigate these vengeful, arbitrary, even tragic elements. As we saw earlier, in *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, for example, when Scripture says that God “inclines” the wicked to evil after their own deserts, he distorts the obvious meaning of “inclines” by construing it as “permits.”⁷¹ But resort to the cause/permission distinction can only be partially successful: “Even the hardening of a heart must be understood as the withholding of the kind of call which could move a person to faith. The Omnipotent cannot lack the means to persuade anyone he chooses (*Ad Simp.*, 1, 2, 14–15).”⁷² Thus, even in the concluding chapters of *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, in which Augustine is intent to defend God's justice and human freedom, there is still the same commingling of justice and God's arbitrariness – “The Omnipotent cannot lack the means to persuade anyone he chooses” – that his commentators have identified elsewhere. He

says that “it is sufficiently clear that God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills whithersoever He wills, whether to good deeds according to His mercy, or to evil after their own deserts.”⁷³ Here is a clear instance of the mixed discourse of justice and mercy. But the commingling of God’s pleasure – “to incline their wills whithersoever He wills” – with mercy and justice does not add up to compassionate justice hidden in mystery. Already in the *Confessions*, Augustine describes the same commingling with the same shocking result: “The closed heart does not close out Your eyes, nor the heart’s hardness resist Your hand. For You open it at Your pleasure whether for mercy or for justice” (5.1.1). The shock of the impudent juxtaposition of divine “pleasure” with an ethical “justice” that not even the “closed heart” can “close out” destroys the law of retribution, and along with it the justice discourse, to leave Augustine suspended over “the abyss of [God’s] … just judgment” (7.6.10).

Even though Augustine knows that God operates on the human heart to incline the human will whithersoever he, God, pleases, Augustine still thinks that he can show that God is not unjust. The thrust of these final chapters *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, is to defend God’s justice in difficult cases. In the case of adults, in which it is said in Scripture that God deceives a prophet or hardens a person’s heart, Augustine can still resort to the cause/permission distinction to claim that God is never unjust: “believe that, in the case of him whom he permits to be deceived and hardened, his evil deeds have deserved the judgment.”⁷⁴ In cases where the concept of “permission” will not do, Augustine must fall back on God’s hidden justice:

You must refer the matter, then, to the hidden determinations of God, when you see, in one and the same condition, such as all infants unquestionably have, – who derive their hereditary evil from Adam, – that one is assisted so as to be baptized, and another is not assisted, so that he dies in his very bondage; and again, that one baptized person is left and forsaken in his present life, who God foreknew would be ungodly, while another baptized person is taken away from this life, “lest that wickedness should alter his understanding”; and be sure that you do not in such cases ascribe unrighteousness or unwisdom to God, in whom is the very fountain of righteousness and wisdom.⁷⁵

I conclude that the concept of compassionate justice cannot help Augustine to resolve the impasse. All commentators seem to agree that, when all other defenses fail, justice and mercy are reconciled only in mystery and then using an inscrutable discourse. Rist denounces this appeal to mystery as an uncharacteristic failure in intellectual rigor.⁷⁶ He regards Augustine’s appeal to mystery as an attempt to shield from view the arbitrary fate handed out behind the closed doors of God’s court room to the human “puppet.”⁷⁷ Flasch thinks

that an unintended but inevitable consequence of introducing the doctrines of original sin and predestination to defend God's justice is to limit God's saving will and to empty the concept of justice of meaning.⁷⁸ Even Basil Studer admits that Augustine is forced to alter the concept of justice. He says the divine will is absolutely sovereign and human freedom is seriously called into question.⁷⁹ Commentators like Flasch and Rist conclude that Augustine lost his intellectual nerve, compromised his habitual intellectual rigor, surreptitiously manipulated the meaning of the concept of justice to score debating points, and played with superficial verbal ambiguities in the meaning of the word "justice" to resolve the greatest challenge of his intellectual career.

"Platitudes of ethical monotheism" indeed! Are not his critics, all except Julian, too restrained, too respectful? With the "all-seeing eye" commingled with God's "pleasure" has not Augustine reverted to a vengeance discourse antedating justice and ethical monotheism? More troubling still, has he not, along with his capricious God, regressed to a world more primitive even than vengeance, regressed to the anarchy, to the Law of the Jungle, which rules prior to the Law of the Talion?

RANSOM THEORY AS A TRAGIC MEMORIAL

Does Augustine appeal to another discourse beyond the reach of the logic of equivalence and the law of punishment? Let us look again at Book 9 of the *Confessions*. At the end of Section 1, we left Monica's fate hanging, so to speak, with the question: As a judicial act, does not her acquittal before a tribunal only serve to set the discourse of grace within the economy of law? Augustine replies that Monica would not be so foolish as to recreate the legal scene: "She will not answer that she owes nothing," which would be to make a legal appeal based on her own innocence, "lest she should be contradicted and confuted by that cunning accuser: but she will answer that her debts have been remitted by Him, to whom no one can hand back the price which He paid for us, though He owed it not" (9.13.36). The economy of grace is not less than just – it is not simply a return to the law of vengeance. But the phrase "He owed it not" reveals to Augustine God's astonishing generosity. It satisfies the logic of punishment with a logic that is beyond merit or self-righteousness. Theodicy fails, swallowed up in the opacity of God's inscrutable choice. The legal scene serves Monica and her fellow Catholics only as a memorial⁸⁰ of an economy from which they have been saved.

The characterization of the legal scene as a memorial of an economy from which they have been saved is a far cry from the traditional Augustinian view of ransom theory. Robert Dodaro follows the traditional view. He says that

it is generally accepted that, for Augustine, though humans are justly condemned, God's justice is expressed in the will that humans be saved, and, consequently, “divine justice is revealed as merciful.”⁸¹ On Dodaro's view, divine mercy satisfies, by means of the sacrifice of Christ, the demands of justice because God is merciful, and, as a result, the economy of grace is made to stand out more startlingly against the subtext of the economy of justice.

Eugene TeSelle believes that Augustine uses the ransom theory for a more radical purpose. He examines the use of the ransom theory during the Patristic period in the light of Ricoeur's essay “Interpretation of the Myth of Punishment.”⁸² TeSelle says that the fundamental image is ‘of a ransom paid to one [in this case the devil] who holds a slave or a captive as the precondition for being freed.’⁸³ This calls to mind the image of the slave ship in Chapter 5! TeSelle thinks that patristic use of the ransom theory “expresses some pattern of meaning which could not be easily stated in any other way.”⁸⁴ He says that for Hilary, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine, Christ's ransom is “a kind of moral ‘ju-jitsu’ that uses an opponent's strength to defeat him.”⁸⁵ Following Ricoeur, TeSelle understands the ransom paid not as satisfying the old law or logic of legal discourse. To the contrary, “the old law is led to *condemn itself*, the old logic to *refute itself*”⁸⁶ To sustain this counter-intuitive memory of Christ's death requires communities of solidarity such as the early church.⁸⁷ Again, in agreement with Ricoeur, TeSelle points out (and this is at the heart of my contention), that it is not enough to see in the ransom paid the vindication of the logic of punishment even as one moves into a world of mercy and superabundance. I have shown the futility of this enterprise in the preceding sections of this chapter. Instead TeSelle rightly claims that original sin has tragic consequences. Paying a ransom, says TeSelle,

acknowledge[s] the power of evil and … recognize[s], in a fashion close to the tragic view of life, that evil does have consequences, which cannot be either ignored or easily overcome. It denies the adequacy of notions that the good can simply drive out the bad; it recognizes instead that evil has irreversible consequences and that it must be brought to defeat itself.⁸⁸

In *Ad SimPLICIANUM* and the *Confessions*, Augustine identifies evil's “irreversible consequences,” for human motivation by focusing on “delight.” Delight is

the only possible source of action, nothing else can move the will.... [But delight] is not a spontaneous reaction, the natural thrill of the refined soul when confronted with beauty. For it is just this vital capacity to engage one's feelings on a course of action, to take “delight” in it, that escapes our powers of self-determination: the processes that prepare a man's heart to take “delight” in his God are not only hidden, but actually unconscious and beyond control.⁸⁹

Augustine can no longer set himself alongside Plotinus and other “refined souls.” As a casualty of evil, Augustine must replace their classical ideal of equanimity with that of a confessional “wanderer seeking a country that is always distant, but ever-present to him by the quality of the love that ‘groans’ for it.”⁹⁰ The classical ideal is subsequently resurrected by Pelagius⁹¹ and by Julian in the guise of what Ricoeur identifies as the platitudes of ethical monotheism. The classical ideal of autarchic freedom using the same univocal justice discourse and obeying the same logic of equivalence remains, as we have just seen, the measure used by many of Augustine’s modern commentators. Augustine lives elsewhere. He is ransomed certainly, but the irreversible consequences of slavery live on. Evil’s tragic consequences have turned him into

a man who is doomed to remain incomplete in his present existence, that what he wished for most ardently would never be more than a hope, postponed to a final resolution of all tensions, far beyond this life. Anyone who thought otherwise, he felt, was either morally obtuse or a doctrinaire. All a man could do was to “yearn” for the absent perfection, to feel its loss intensely, to pine for it.... This marks the end of a long-established classical ideal of perfection.⁹²



Inscrutable Wisdom

CONFESSITIONAL WISDOM

The contrast between Augustine the bishop and Pelagius or Julian or the pre-ordination Augustine, captures the radical difference between a life lived in a graced economy and one lived in a justice economy. This contrast defines two ways of understanding predestination: a justice discourse, which is the theme of the [previous chapter](#), and a wisdom discourse, which is the theme of this chapter. In a wisdom discourse, the Augustinian interplay between human freedom and God's will and graciousness comes to life in an historical narrative using multiple discourses. Here, human ideas of justice are not sacrificed to an inscrutable divine justice; there is no hint of double predestination; the integrity of human freedom is respected¹; and God's irresistible graciousness is the controlling discourse. In a wisdom narrative, Augustine's appeal to mystery need be neither a convenient escape route nor obscurantism. His use of the discordant discourses of justice, inscrutable mystery, and grace, though clearly contradictory, using univocal language (Kirwan's correct thesis²) makes sense in a narrative discourse using narrative universals.

In his influential essay “The Storyteller,”³ Walter Benjamin tells us that wisdom is the epic side of truth and the storyteller is one who has counsel for his readers. He locates narrative counsel at the level of practical reason: “Counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would first have

Some of the themes developed in [Chapter 8](#) I have presented in abbreviated form in “The Role of God’s Inscrutable Judgments” in Augustine’s Doctrine of Predestination,” *Augustinian Studies*, 33 (2002): 213–22; “Augustine’s Use of Narrative Universals in the Debate Over Predestination,” *Augustinian Studies*, 31 (2000): 181–94; “Original Sin,” *AttA*, pp. 612–13.

to be able to tell the story. (Quite apart from the fact that a man is receptive to counsel only to the extent that he allows his situation to speak.) Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom.”⁴ Augustine makes a narrative response to evil and suffering. Where evil and suffering block his way, confessional wisdom make it possible for Augustine to make “a proposal concerning the continuation of [his] story.”

In Act 1, so to speak, Augustine recounts as his own, as his autobiography, the history of original sin. But, as a narrative response to evil, this history has reached a double impasse. As we have just seen, one obstacle was erected by Augustine’s critics – friend and foe alike – using a univocal discourse in which it is difficult to know if God’s predestining will operates beyond the reach of vengeance and the arbitrary. A second obstacle is thrown up by ransom theory and the irreversible consequences of slavery. Can Augustine continue the story? Can his *Confessions* make a “proposal concerning the continuation of” his story?

Augustine’s solution, his continuation of the story, is more complex and compelling than his commentators give him credit for. He himself believed that his teachings on grace, original sin, and predestination are coherent and part of the tradition that he had received. It is my contention that, if we respect Augustine’s own confessional narrative perspective and give greater weight to the mysterious, awesome, possibly inscrutable dimensions of Augustine’s teaching, these dimensions can mediate between justice and grace. Inscrutable wisdom can mediate in such a way that justice and grace do not lose their integrity. By configuring together justice, inscrutable wisdom, and the gift/grace discourses, Augustine can give a coherent narrative account of original sin, election, predestination, and perseverance. However, inscrutable wisdom cannot so mediate if it belongs to the discourse of vengeance and the Law of the Talion or, more primitive still, to the arbitrary and the anarchic. It is my aim to clarify the status of inscrutable wisdom in the present chapter.

My proposal is that Augustine can “continue the story” because his *Confessions* recount not just one conversion but three conversions. The *Confessions* are a triple conversion story. In the *Confessions*, Augustine recalls how he arrived at three levels of salvific freedom. The first freedom is moral freedom. In [Chapter 2](#), I examined the growth of Augustine to the freedom to take responsibility for the justice of his acts beyond arbitrariness. In [Chapter 4](#), I examined further his growth in moral responsibility beyond Manichean and Platonic dualism and fate. Here, we met the God of justice, beyond the reach of dualism and, for that matter, of the Law of the Talion, of vengeance, of the tribal or national God. This latter God, in its turn, skirts anarchy and holds at bay chaos and the Law of the Jungle.

The second freedom is the freedom to consent to inscrutable wisdom and a learned unknowing. It implies a willingness to live in a world in which the narcissistic dimension of the complaint against suffering and evil remains unsatisfied. Here one abandons the search for a private, finite explanation – “the platitudes of ethical monotheism,”⁵ which we examined in the [previous chapter](#). Wisdom offers only a non-narcissistic reconciliation beyond recrimination and the cycle of retribution. With the learned unknowing of inscrutable wisdom, Augustine says he learns to submit before the *Deus Absconditus*. This second freedom is the subject of the present chapter.

The third freedom is freedom from “the desire to be spared of all suffering.”⁶ It is the freedom to serve and even to suffer for the community bonded together in the friendship, devotion, and intimacy of the resurrection. “Loving participation in ideas,”⁷ which characterizes this third freedom and the lyrical life of surplus, must incorporate the first two freedoms – freedom from arbitrariness and freedom from narcissism – into the freedom for Christ’s selfless service, Pauline *kenosis*; Augustine’s “for all” ([Chapter 3](#)). These three freedoms are the distinguishing marks of membership in the city of God. However, without the God-given delight in this triple freedom, humans inevitably sink back into concupiscential bondage and the irreversible consequences of slavery. The inevitability of sin and evil and the irresistible graciousness of God belong within the same obscure confessional discourse. They are impenetrably hidden; one in the hateful meaninglessness of malice ([Chapter 5](#)), the other in the superabundance of God’s goodness ([Chapter 9](#)). The playing out of divine/human initiative (predestination) and the ineluctability of human bondage in sin and evil (original sin) across the three registers of salvific freedom (justice, wisdom, and *kenosis*) is known only retrospectively. This triple freedom is instantiated for Augustine and his brethren in the narrative universal of Augustinian confession.

NARRATIVE UNIVERSALS REVISITED

Before we proceed, it may be helpful to recall for a moment what I said in [Section 1](#) of [Chapter 5](#) concerning narrative universals: the nature of their narrative reference and what Ricoeur calls the semantic impertinence that characterizes the poetic sphere of metaphor and narrative. Semantic impertinence played an important part in the final section of the [previous chapter](#). There, ransom theory acts as a tragic memorial of the judicial economy from which Monica is saved. In what sense is this tragic memorial a semantic impertinence and to what reality does it refer?

I have just claimed that, in the *Confessions*, Augustine reprises what I am calling his ascending triple conversion as a triple freedom: freedom for a life of justice, inscrutable wisdom, and gift/*kenosis*. Augustine's confessional plot makes his years of fruitless search, of endless wandering, into an apprenticeship, a triple apprenticeship to a triple freedom. This type of plot, in which the hero is "seeking his identity," Ricoeur calls an "emplotment of character."⁸ The events of Augustine's past life are no longer singular occurrences but are defined by their contribution to the emplotment of Augustine's character. Such a story is not a universal in a system. It always views the characters as individuals, which is the distinctive feature of narrative universals. Augustine recounts God's doings with him as a divine emplotment of his calling to a confessional identity.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine's narrative imagination projects a confessional way of inhabiting the world for himself and for his brethren. This type of indirect referencing brings an experience to language by appropriating a "literal" reference. For example, the judicial discourse acts as the "normal" or "literal" reference for Augustine and his brethren and for his critics, old and new.⁹ TeSelle, following Ricoeur, understands the price paid in ransom theory not as satisfying the old law or "literal" logic of legal discourse. To the contrary, "the old law is led to *condemn itself*; the old logic to *refute itself*"¹⁰ in what TeSelle calls a sort of moral jujitsu. Viewing the legal scene as a memorial of an economy from which Monica has been saved turns the generally accepted "normal" or "literal" understanding of ransom theory, in which Christ as victim satisfies Satan's just demands, into the vehicle on which rides an ineluctable, mysterious wisdom with its freedom from narcissism. As a casualty of tragic evil, the classical ideal of equanimity and autarchic freedom, resurrected by Pelagius and Julian and by Augustine's modern critics, serves Augustine as a normal or literal meaning on which to refigure his life as a confessional "wanderer seeking a country that is always distant, but ever-present to him by the quality of the love that 'groans' for it."¹¹ As Augustine's confessional story progresses, equanimity, autarchic freedom, and, in its turn, inscrutable wisdom, serve as the "literal" references upon which rides the lyric/*kenotic* life of all gifts (Chapter 9).

By means of the narrative clash of wisdom with the "literal" judicial, and of the *kenotic* with wisdom as the "literal," Augustine responds to the identical experience: his moral experience of sin, suffering, and salvation, his intellectual struggle with the problem of evil, and his search for true happiness. In these two clashes, the imagination, loosened from its "normal" mode of seeing and through the impertinence or the jolt of the unaccustomed juxtaposition, creates new correlations previously unnoticed. The result is the opening

up of a new domain through the familiar: the inscrutable through the judicial, the lyrical through the tragic. Note, however, the new domain cannot be seen if the “literal” or “normal” meaning is simply discarded. That is why, as we shall see, Augustine, when reflecting on the clash of the inscrutable with the judicial, reiterates that the greatness of God’s gift can be measured by the fate of those who are not chosen. This heartless sounding saying is not meant to teach the elect to scorn the damned – an all too easy misunderstanding – but to teach the elect to submit to the way of a *docta ignorantia*. Without the “literal” or “normal” use of justice or wisdom, the plot’s redescription cannot evince a potential for truth. What a narrative does heuristically is describe one field through another. As we saw, for Aristotle, these creative imitations, which open up a new field, intend not only to refigure reality but also to lay claim to truth. The “is” of the “is refigured” in the narrative plot intends to affirm: things *are* as they are recounted. The narrating of an appropriate plot intends reality and, therefore, imitates nature. But the “is” is not an isomorphic “is.” It is a narrative “is.” In the plot, the new reality – Augustine’s new and evolving confessional identity – and the vehicle it uses are simultaneously joined and different. The simultaneous “is” and “is not” capture the truth contained in conjoining the inscrutable with the judicial and the *kenotic* with the inscrutable and the unbridgeable distance between them. They remain in tension. Literally, their respective truths are not alike (“is not”); narratively, we can insist on the truth of the “is” of both conjoinings,¹² for they are Augustine’s response to the identical reality: sin, suffering, and salvation, the problem of evil, and the search for true happiness. The invention by way of narrative is not capricious. Augustine’s confessional identity is a discovery, not an arbitrary construction, and its credibility, carried in defeasible testimony, is always open to contestation. The freedom with which Christ accepts his fate is not defiant, not hubristic, but freedom for selfless service “for all.”

THE IRREPLACEABLE TRUTHS OF TRAGIC THEOLOGY

Paying a ransom, says TeSelle, “acknowledge[s] the power of evil and … recognize[s], in a fashion close to the tragic view of life … that evil has irreversible consequences.”¹³ How close? Before I try to measure, I would like to recall our earlier discussion. As we have seen, if Augustine is not to fall into moral situationalism – the realm of the arbitrary and Academic Skepticism – or moral self-righteousness – preordination Augustine – which is no less arbitrary, Augustine the guilty victim must confess the ineluctable power of evil as hatred captured in his criteriology of original sin. Here, according to Ricoeur, wisdom’s even, perhaps, tragic wisdom’s “untimely irruption

... [delivers] the shock capable of awakening our mistrust with respect not only to the illusions of the heart but also to the illusions born of the hubris of practical reason itself.¹⁴ The hubris of practical reason is captured in the discourse of those like Julian and his modern heirs, who, playing variations on the theme of “the platitudes of ethical monotheism,” insistently restrict Augustine’s teaching on freedom and grace to a univocal justice discourse that leads inevitably to the traditional versions of Augustinian theodicy and which, in this post-Enlightenment world, must unsurprisingly fail. What follows is my attempt to do some justice to the wisdom discourse, with its tragic tones, ubiquitously and inextricably woven into Augustine’s discussion of grace, original sin, and predestination.

How close does Augustine come to the tragic view of life? Tragedy, with its “*insupportable revelation*” of the man blinded and led to his destruction by the gods, must tie itself to narrative spectacle and not to speculation: “If the secret of tragic anthropology is theological, that theology of making blind is perhaps unavowable, unacceptable for thought.”¹⁵ The dramatic expression of the speculatively “unavowable” is not an “incidental disguise, of a conception of man that could have been expressed otherwise in plain language.”¹⁶ The tragic resists the “transposition from ‘theatre’ to ‘theory.’”¹⁷ Augustine’s choice of the narrative confessional genre for his own theology of sin and suffering permits him to come close to the tragic vision. I will try to discover the irreplaceable truths that tragic theology, with its narrative medium, can sustain, and whether or not these truths find a distinctive place in Augustine’s theology.

The tragic crystallizes when “the theme of predestination to evil ... comes up against the theme of *heroic* greatness; fate must first feel the resistance of freedom, rebound (so to speak) from the hardness of the hero, and finally crush him.”¹⁸ The hero is

not only the accused but the victim. That, too, is why ethical denunciation and reform is not the business of tragedy, as it was to be the business of comedy; the exegesis of moral evil is so much a part of its theological exegesis that the hero is shielded from moral condemnation and offered as an object of pity to the chorus and the spectator.¹⁹

Augustine is torn between these two possibilities in the garden at Milan in Book 8 of the *Confessions*: the ethical, “I was in the grip of the most horrible and confounding shame” (8.7.18); the tragic, “Why this monstrousness? And what is the root of it? The mind gives the body an order, and is obeyed at once: the mind gives itself an order and is resisted” (8.9.21). By combining “shame” and “monstrousness,” he introduces the tragic themes of guilty

victim and unjust suffering.²⁰ Yet, the sense of the scene is finally neither ethical nor tragic; it has neither ethical lucidity nor tragic anguish, terror, and pity. Certainly, the self-assertive freedom of Augustine's Platonic hubris,²¹ what he calls his "presumption," which grew out of Platonic freedom from the body and nature²² – splendid human riches that "might have swept me away" (7.20.26) – delays and complicates his fate in a way that is typically tragic.²³ There is the hard schooling yielding tragic knowledge – "‘Suffering for the sake of understanding’"^{24:} "Thus I was sick at heart and in torment ... twisting and turning in my chain.... But it still held me (8.11.25).... I flung myself down somehow under a certain fig tree and no longer tried to check my tears, which poured forth from my eyes in a flood" (8.12.28). The "chain" is the human tragedy of original sin with its inherited evil and its triple hatred.

The portrait of God likewise has tragic features. In *Ad SimPLICIANUM*, written shortly before the *Confessions*, Augustine conjures up the phantasm of the wicked God,²⁵ who makes those whom he chooses not to justify into "vessels unto dishonor," those whom he "hates" and "hardens," they are the "vessels of perdition" and "of wrath" whom he "blinded."²⁶ And in the *Confessions*, Augustine confesses to God that, "the closed heart does not close out Your eyes, nor the heart's hardness resist Your hand. For You open it at Your pleasure whether for mercy or for justice" (5.1.1). Here God's "all-seeing eye" commingled with God's irresistible "pleasure" inclines the human will whithersoever God wills. The shock of the impertinent juxtaposition of divine "pleasure" with "justice" that not even the "closed heart" can "close out" displaces the law of retribution, and along with it the justice discourse, to leave Augustine suspended over "the abyss of [God's] ... just judgment" (7.6.10).

Despite these many tragic markers, the tears, which poured forth from Augustine's eyes in a flood, announce a non-tragic denouement. The tears are the same as Monica's confessional tears. Augustine has learned "to discern the difference that there is between presumption and confession" (7.20.26). Tragedy does not have the last word. Augustine's tears are confessional tears. These tears dissolve tragedy's hostile fate to "reveal"²⁷ God's graciousness. Paul's *Letter to the Romans* teaches Augustine that there is no transcendental or cosmic tragedy in Christianity.

What then are we to make of the presence of the tragic God in the *Confessions* and in *Ad SimPLICIANUM*? The latter is possibly the most important theological exegesis of Augustine's career? It is striking that two portraits, the tragic and the just God, appear side-by-side in this commentary on Romans and that both are subordinate to the lyric God of all gifts. Down through the ages, theologians, seeing the incompatibility of the tragic and moral discourses have opted for the just God even though Augustine insists

that “through all of this you can hear as an undertone, ‘Who are you that replies against God?’ That must be understood as a recurring refrain.”²⁸ The same tragic refrain recurs throughout the later writings also. Critics old and new heed so as to condemn Augustine’s oft repeated appeal to the justice of God’s condemnation of the non-elect because of original sin but not so as to heed the Pauline “recurring refrain” and its inscrutable message. The seductive clarity of the logic of the law of retribution and the universal need for theodicy has trumped the tragic spectacle and its scandalous theme, which, moreover, resists translation into theory. The drive to satisfy this legal logic also goes some way to explain why commentators, as we saw in the [previous chapter](#), in practice, subordinate grace to justice to satisfy the debt inherited from Adam. Sinful human beings stand accused before God the Judge and are acquitted in a juridical settlement. By restricting Augustine’s response to sin and the problem of evil within the horizon of a justice discourse, these commentators attribute to Augustine the same theodicy that Job’s friends tried to foist on Job. That justice should prevail was made even more likely by the lack of methodological resources for treating the lyric and tragic genre (a lack still only partially filled by recent developments in action theory and narrative theory). I maintain that Augustine’s story is best understood if we preserve the integrity of all three discourses, use none as simply rhetorical devices, and, at the same time, respect Augustine’s goal to set the judicial and the tragic, with its “recurring refrain,” within the horizon of the lyric and the *kenotic*.

The denouement of the scene in the garden in Milan, the vision of Ostia, and the conclusion of Book 13 of the *Confessions* are not tragic. Fate is generous to Augustine; he is given freedom in the light of Christian hope. Nevertheless, justice and inscrutable wisdom contribute an irreplaceable element to his hope. On the one hand, the lyric God of consolation without justice characterizes an arbitrary God alternating between consolation and revenge. Then the God of consolation is “lost in effusiveness or drowned in sentimentality”²⁹; “the ‘good Lord’ is more derisory than the God hidden in anger.”³⁰ On the other hand, without the tragic, the God of gifts simply satisfies the demands of justice in keeping with the platitudes of ethical monotheism. Without the tragic spectacle, we oscillate between God the Judge and the merciful God who shields us from having to face too much reality so that “the spectacle of misfortune calls forth” “only fear” and a sort of “bashful sympathy.”³¹ The tragic medium teaches us to confront evil and suffering. As a member of the tragic chorus, Augustine learns to face evil and suffering as destiny: “Let no man say to You [God]: What is this or why is this? He must not say it, he must not say it. For he is a man” (7.6.10). As a member of the

chorus, Augustine experiences tragic terror “faced with the conjunction of freedom and empirical ruin” and pity, “that merciful gaze which no longer accuses or condemns.”³² Tragic wisdom is coextensive with the tragic spectacle: “Terror and Pity are both modalities of suffering, but of a suffering that may be called suffering in the face of destiny, since it needs the retardation and the acceleration of a hostile fate and the agency of a heroic freedom.”³³ The life of Jesus ends in suffering and death confronted by a hostile fate, but Jesus’s acceptance of his fate is not tragic. Fate will not “first feel the resistance of freedom, rebound (so to speak) from the hardness of the hero, and finally crush him.”³⁴ Instead, Christ accepted his fate in freedom, thereby Christ transforms the tragic spectacle along with its wisdom into a gift narrative within the lyric discourse and its surplus of grace.³⁵ At the denouement of the tragic tale in the garden in Milan, Augustine’s free will is likewise summoned forth from its “shameful” guilt and its “monstrous” inherited bondage to bring about the same lyrical ending:

But You, Lord . . . had regard to the profundity of my death and drew out the abyss of corruption that was in the bottom of my heart. . . . But where in all that long time was my free will, and from what deep sunken hiding-place was it suddenly summoned forth in the moment in which I bowed my neck to Your easy yoke and my shoulders to Your light burden, Christ Jesus, my Helper and my Redeemer? (9.1.1)

Augustine triumphantly exclaims: “How lovely I suddenly found it to be free” (9.1.1). But without the tragic spectacle and its wisdom, and without judicial realism, a hope narrative buoyed up with a “bashful sympathy”³⁶ would only trivialize evil and sentimentalize lamentation to revive the infantile phantasm of the consoling God, a phantasm that I exorcized in [Chapter 2](#). The Confessions tell the story of the Augustine’s apprenticeship to Jesus, the “Master” (12.18.27, 10.31.46), whose story finally is not tragic. The freedom with which Christ accepts his fate is not defiant, not hubristic, but freedom for selfless service “for all.” Selfless freedom turns predestination into a symbol of hope.

“A SCANDALOUS THEOLOGY OF PREDESTINATION TO EVIL”³⁷

Reflecting on tragic theology, Ricoeur says:

Perhaps this is the only theology that cannot be avowed or, at any rate, defended. . . . If, then, the religious consciousness hesitates to formulate the tragic theology, that is because elsewhere it professes “the innocence of God,” to speak in Platonic language, or his “holiness,” in Biblical language. Explicit

formulation of the tragic theology would mean self-destruction for the religious consciousness.³⁸

Need Augustine resolve the dilemma implicit in explicit formulation? Is his teaching on fate and predestination really tragic? And, if so, is his teaching hopelessly fractured with contradictions, or could tragic theology be an extreme case of learned unknowing, of a *docta ignorantia*?

Ricoeur says that tragic theology can only be scandalous theology of predestination to evil: “if the secret of tragic anthropology is theological, that theology … is perhaps unavowable, unacceptable for thought … the tragic cannot tolerate *transcription* into a theory which – let us say it immediately – could only be the scandalous theology of predestination to evil. Perhaps the tragic theology must be rejected as soon as it is thought.”³⁹ Some, thinking to defend God’s innocence and holiness, say that, for Augustine, the tragic mystery is the human and angelic initiative to evil. Predestination is a human tragedy, not divine. Ricoeur is surely right when he says that a tragic anthropology presupposes a tragic theology. I would add that, in their turn, the moral theologies on which Augustine’s critics relied in the [previous chapter](#), if left to themselves, are equally unacceptable to thought. Tragic theology, left to itself, is a scandalous doctrine of predestination to evil; moral theology, left to itself, becomes a search for consistency and the consoling security of living in a just world as we find the world in the theodicies.⁴⁰ I propose, instead, that both theologies, the tragic and the moral, can be “thought” only in the “theatre,” only as narrative. Here Augustine immediately subordinates both tragic destiny and the just logic of the law of retribution to the lyric discourse of grace, as the dominant genre of his confessional narrative. Augustine “rejects” both the tragic and, unlike his critics, the moral theologies as soon as they are thought.

The problem of “transcription,” of transcribing the tragic into theory, into tragic theology, poses the same unresolvable contradiction that the monks of Hadrumetum and Marseille brought to Augustine in the 420s, that Augustine’s reply presented for the second Council of Orange, and that Augustine the reader of *Romans* 9 faced. Augustine posed the question of transcription in its most acute form as early as 396, just before he started writing the *Confessions*. Reflecting with Paul on the verse “Esau have I hated, Jacob have I loved” while still in their mother’s womb, he asks, “How can election be just, indeed how can there be any kind of election, where there is no difference?”⁴¹ And again a little later and more poignantly, he asks, “Why did [God’s] mercy fail in Esau’s case?”⁴² He goes on to wonder whether Esau’s “obstinacy of the will can be such that the mind’s aversion from all modes of calling becomes

hardened ... does not come from some divine penalty, as if God abandons a man by not calling him in the way in which he might be moved to faith.”⁴³ Here – God’s mercy is said to “fail” and God is said to “abandon a man” – Augustine surely is skirting a scandalous theology of predestination to evil.

We should note first that Augustine does not allow this tragic discourse to revert to a discourse of vengeance prior to the discourse of justice. Justice and tragedy are linked in the doctrine of original sin: “election of these who are to be justified, that kind of election is verily hidden, and cannot be known by us who must regard all men as parts of the one lump.”⁴⁴ We should also note that the justice discourse is not allowed to stand alone. It is set within a horizon of a tragic mystery in which God’s mercy is said to fail and God to abandon an infant for an inherited sin whose origin, we saw in Chapter 5, is ultimately impenetrable. Thirty years later, writing to the monks of Hadrumetum and Southern Gaul, Augustine appeals again to God’s “unsearchable” judgments.⁴⁵ He cautions the preacher, saying, “in order that those who little understand these things may be less enraged, he [St. Paul] himself gives a warning when he adds the words ‘And who is sufficient for these things?’ (2 Cor. 2: 16)”⁴⁶

The tragic vision rises to the surface whenever suffering destroys our comprehensive vision in an unresolvable contradiction.⁴⁷ As we have seen, the fateful reverse side of the moral confession of sins, the fateful horizon, points toward a quasi-nature of an evil already there, to which the tragic also adds the origin of evil as non-human.⁴⁸ Non-dialectical contradictions reveal that “the tragic vision always remains possible, resisting any logical, moral or esthetic reconciliation.”⁴⁹ As early as 396, Augustine had discovered that the tragic vision is invincible. This insight was a fundamental motive for elaborating the teaching on original sin and predestination. But by silencing its scandalous message, that the origin of evil is non-human, by hiding it in mystery – “‘who is sufficient for these things?’” – is Augustine doing precisely what his critics, old and new, claim?

THEODICY OR TRAGIC THEOLOGY

Augustine’s critics believe that Augustine justifies predestination in theodicy and, when theodicy fails, he silences and hides predestination in mystery. I claim that Augustine does neither but subsumes both discourses – theodicy with its justice discourse and mystery with its tragic discourse – in a gift discourse. And, indeed, in 396, fifteen years before the apologetic and polemical uses of his teachings on original sin, grace, and predestination against the Pelagians, Augustine had developed just such a gift discourse. He had been deeply impressed by the psychological observation that humans have no

power over delight; of themselves they delight in the less and any morally evil act in commencing evil (contingency) continues evil (necessity).

Free will is most important. It exists, indeed, but of what value is it in those who are sold under sin? ... But who can live righteously and do good works unless he has been justified by faith? ... Who has it in his power to have such a motive present to his mind that his will will be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? But who has it in his power to ensure that something that will delight him will turn up, or that he will take delight in what turns up? If those things delight us which serve our advancement towards God, that is due not to our own whim or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God, and to the grace which he bestows.... Is not our prayer sometimes tepid or rather cold? Does it not sometimes cease altogether, so that we are not even grieved to notice this condition in us.... What does this prove except that he who commands us to ask, seek, and knock himself gives us the will to obey? ... We could neither will nor run unless he stirred us and put the motive and power in us.⁵⁰

Note that the second sentence, “of what value is it [free will] in those who are *sold under sin*?” reminds us that a ransom must be paid to the devil who holds us as “a slave or a captive as the precondition for being freed”⁵¹ and “that evil has irreversible consequences,” which, according to TeSelle, brings Augustine’s view “close to the tragic view of life.”⁵²

These observations were first put to work in his confessional account of his conversion. In Book 8 of the *Confessions*, he recalls his experience of a will that escapes from itself in evil habit and obeys a law other than itself with the result that faith is dependent on the force, on the “delight” in God’s grace of calling. The character of the call determines the belief: the infusion of the love, the *vocatio effectrix*, must be made *congruenter*;⁵³ what occurs must delight the mind and attract the affections, thereby determining what is willed. Those who are called but not chosen are called ineffectually. Those, the ones God does not justify, “he makes ‘vessels unto dishonor.’”⁵⁴ These, Augustine says, conjuring up the phantasm of the tragic God, God “hates” and “hardens”; they are the “vessels of perdition” and “of wrath” whom God “blinded.”⁵⁵ God’s decision to have no mercy upon the blinded retains the same tragic expression thirty years later. They are “the vessels of wrath which are completed for destruction.”⁵⁶ Tyre and Sidon and the Jews who persecuted Jesus were “blinded” by God, who gave them a “hardened” and a “stony heart.”⁵⁷

What has happened to the grace/gift discourse? Has it been subsumed under the satisfying logic of the law retribution and, when this fails, covered

over in tragic mystery? Certainly Augustine highlights both the justice and tragic discourses in *Ad Simplicianum*. Here, Augustine paints the unmistakable portrait of the tragic God, while all the time going to great lengths to make the portrait of the tragic God compatible with the God of justice. Augustine's God is the God of holiness; he must not allow the vengeful and wrathful God to be less than just. He draws an analogy between God's justice and human justice:

There is no unrighteousness with God.... [Yet] God has mercy on whom he will and that whom he will he hardens, that is he has or has not mercy on whom he will. Let us believe that this belongs to a certain hidden equity that cannot be searched out by any human standard of measurement. Unless we had stamped upon these human affairs certain traces of supernal justice our weak minds [would miss.... But even here] no one can be charged with unrighteousness who exacts what is owing to him. This decision does not lie with those who are debtors but with the creditor.... Now all men are a mass of sin, since, as the apostle says, "In Adam all die" (I Cor. 15: 22), and to Adam the entire human race traces the origin of its sin against God. Sinful humanity must pay a debt of punishment to the supreme divine justice. Whether that debt is exacted or remitted there is no unrighteousness.... [For proof, Augustine turns to the parable of the vineyard (Matt. 20:11ff.) and then adds] as if God compelled any man to sin when he simply does not bestow his justifying mercy on some sinners, not because he drives them to sin but because he does not have mercy upon them. He decides who are not to be offered mercy by a standard of equity which is most secret and far removed from human powers of understanding.... He finds fault, therefore, both justly and mercifully.⁵⁸

Augustine seems to be doing theodicy; he is justifying the ways of God to us. He resorts not just to evil habit but to inherited guilt, to a fault anterior to personal fault, a fault deserving of punishment and linked to birth itself: "But carnal concupiscence now reigns as a result of the penalty of sin, and has thrown the whole human race into confusion, making of it one lump in which the original guilt remains throughout."⁵⁹ Since every child, Jacob as well as Esau, is born subject to "original guilt," God's decision not to have mercy is no injustice; he acts in strict justice and refuses to be merciful, according to a hidden equity and as a result of the finite processes of calling. According to the standard interpretation of ransom theory, when the mysterious council of God sometimes chooses to supersede justice with mercy, the grace of mercy serves to satisfy justice by fulfilling it.

At issue here is the Pauline type and antitype of election and reprobation. By linking predestination and guilt from birth, Augustine ensures that the

tragic element, which has surfaced from the inscrutable mystery of God's judgments, cannot fall back into a discourse of vengeance or arbitrariness prior to justice. Augustine's non-tragic theodicy exonerates God by indicting humanity as a whole. Because sin is always voluntary, our wills must be implicated in Adam's evil will via the vehicle of generative infection. Augustine justifies divine reprobation but only up to a certain point. Since Augustine cannot understand the origins of deficient willing, the problem of evil plunges back into the mystery of election, whose tragic tones we have just heard. Therefore, the second answer to the first question of *Ad Simplicianum* concludes with the statement: "his judgments are inscrutable and his ways past finding out."⁶⁰

God's inscrutability poses a question: Does Augustine successfully articulate a doctrine of predestination that advances beyond the discourse of justice without falling back on the side of vengeance, or does he explicate in his theology of predestination a theodicy that, as Ricoeur believes, he would have done better to have rejected as soon as it was thought? Beginning in Augustine's own lifetime and on down through the ages, critics have claimed that Augustine elaborated a scandalous theodicy. Ricoeur thinks that Augustine failed to distinguish between predestination as a concept within a theoretical system (such as we find in abstract speculation, which became matter for the school debates) and predestination as used by Paul in the *Letter to the Romans*. There, in *Romans*, predestination, embedded in the Kerygma, functions as a true symbol, a rational symbol of what we declare in the confession of faith. In the fullness of Paul's lived religious language, Esau and Jacob serve as mythic symbols for the whole of humankind and its drama. Here Paul explores the dynamics of innocence and guilt and their relation to God's electing and reprobating will. Reprobate Esau and elected Jacob are rational symbols of the antitype and type of Jewish reprobation and Christian election revealing God's freedom, foreknowledge, and fidelity.

Ricoeur sees a decisive difference between this reading of Paul and Augustine's.⁶¹ Ricoeur says that Augustine views Esau and Jacob as historical individuals, not just as symbols or examples. They are no longer simply type and antitype, as in Paul. Ricoeur comments, the mythic dimension is lost, replaced by a "juridical interpretation of individual" destinies explicable in terms of "a biologism of hereditary transmission of guilt."⁶² The mystery of reprobation, the supra-individual, mythic magnitude of all people gathered together as vessels of wrath, is interpreted in terms of the law of retribution. Ricoeur concludes that Augustine's theodicy falls far short of the Pauline dialectic of superabundance or Job's wisdom; it gives an answer at the level of Job's friends.⁶³ Augustine's twofold confession "of the holiness of God and the

sin of man”⁶⁴ makes it impossible for him to think through the tragic vision consistently. According to Ricoeur there can be no tragic deliverance, no suffering for the sake of understanding. Tragic suffering, which makes wise the simple and tragic purification, as we find it in Job, must make way, in Augustine’s thought, for salvation by the holy God, whose merciful and just law has banished primordial sin and evil from his city.

I believe that this, Ricoeur’s critique of Augustine, Augustine explicitly repudiates. Using Ricoeur’s criteria for identifying the irreplaceable dimensions of the tragic vision, I will show that these dimensions of the tragic vision are precisely the dimensions that Augustine defended with greatest tenacity. According to Ricoeur, tragic theology reveals first that, beyond my conscious sense of innocence and guilt, of election and reprobation, is my good or bad faith as a more radical mode of being than individual acts. Second, tragic theology demonstrates my solidarity in larger, metaphysical unities beyond the merely individual or juridical; the human race is subject to a destiny not reducible to multiple acts of the will. Third, human destiny is a power or impotence, a joy or misery, a grace or evil of such a magnitude that it inhabits us, it reigns. Human destiny teaches us,

on the one hand, pity for human beings, who are nevertheless accused by the Prophet; on the other hand, fear and trembling before the abyss, before God whose holiness is nevertheless proclaimed by the Prophet. Perhaps it is necessary that the possibility of the tragic God should never be abolished altogether, so that Biblical theology may be protected from the platitudes of ethical monotheism, with its Legislator and its Judge, confronting a moral subject who is endowed with complete and unfettered freedom, still intact after each act.⁶⁵

The phrase “the platitudes of ethical monotheism, with its Legislator and its Judge, confronting a moral subject who is endowed with complete and unfettered freedom, still intact after each act” faithfully captures the portrait of God Augustine fought against throughout his mature writings. As early as 396, Augustine had repudiated the ethical platitudes and, in a vivid passage, had demolished it. As we saw in [Chapter 3](#), at the end of his treatment of Esau and Jacob, Augustine exclaims,

Election of those who are to be justified, that kind of election is verily hidden and cannot be known by us who must regard all men as parts of the one lump.... If I am allowed speculatively to examine such election of men to saving grace, I have nothing to go by but the greater abilities of some, or their relative freedom from sin, or may I add if you please, their honourable and profitable doctrines. In that case the man would seem to be fit to be elected to grace who was snared and stained by the most trifling sins ... or

who had a keen mind, or was cultivated in the liberal arts. But if I set up this standard of judgment, he will deride me who has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong, and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. Looking at him I should be ashamed.⁶⁶

With a display of tragic derision, God confounds Augustine's sense of what is right. Augustine's God repudiates the concept of merit based on justice with its degrees of "relative freedom from sin." Ethical monotheism, which till now had guaranteed the "honorable and profitable doctrines," yields to a lyric and a tragic God who confounds the wise. The tragic insights play a pivotal role.

Ricoeur immediately adds that "the tragic theology is always possible, although not to be spoken, God is the *Deus Absconditus*".⁶⁷ Here, Ricoeur forbids speech about the tragic God not because it is a bad idea that for the most part should be suppressed – "the possibility of the tragic God should never be abolished altogether"⁶⁸ – but because tragic theology when spoken becomes a doctrine of predestination to evil. In a narrative, tragic theology remains a scandalous idea whose truth reduces us to silence before the *Deus Absconditus*. Tragic theology is a *docta ignorantia*, in which Augustine "speaks" of the tragic God in order to reduce human wisdom to silence. It is the hidden God whose judgments are wrapped in impenetrable mystery, not the just God of the law of retribution, that, finally, mediates the gracious God of all gifts. But predestination gives rise to an aporia: with speech, the tragic becomes a scandalous theology of predestination to evil; without speech, the tragic God cannot protect religion from the totalizing logics of the theodicies. Over the centuries, there has been little or no speech of the tragic God in Christian theological circles. As a result, there has been a series of totalizing theodicies. The tradition of Job's friends, with its "platitudes of ethical monotheism," has persisted down through the ages. There has also been Plotinus' aesthetic of discord, which too easily becomes theodicy's bad faith and Spinoza's conception of evil as an illusion due to ignorance of the whole. Dialectical logics such as Hegel's have given evil a universal function in the surpassing of consciousness and the reconciliation of absolute knowledge. In none of the theodicies is freedom respected, neither divine nor human, much less the appalling experience of the victims of actual suffering and evil. Each in its way makes necessity absolute. True, when "spoken," Augustine's doctrine of election rests on a scandalous doctrine of predestination to evil – "Esau have I hated."

Faced with the tragic aporia, Augustine does not choose a sort of theological tact, which, seeing in reticence the only alternative to blurting out and blazoning the tragic ideas abroad, buries them in silence. Augustine struggles against the instinct to defend the domesticated God of ethical monotheism

and the search for a world secured from the meaninglessness of suffering and evil in the manageable logics of the various theodicies.⁶⁹

Ricoeur faults Augustine for treating Jacob and Esau literally in an individual history instead of symbolically as type and antitype of election and reprobation. But Augustine's confessional history, with its retrospective viewpoint, permits Augustine to make theodicy with its justice discourse an irreplaceable stage but still only a first stage in his journey to grace and calling. To the same admirable end, Augustine also called upon inscrutable wisdom to act as a second stage on his journey. By so doing, he retained the mystery of election and restored the mystery to reprobation.

The point of the first stage of the story is that the discourse of gift supersedes the bad faith of self-forged rules of justice and goodness. If left to themselves, the self-righteousness latent in these rules makes pass for virtue what is virtue's betrayal (monotheism's platitudes). Similarly in the second stage, when left to itself, tragic theology and its scandalous doctrine of predestination to evil corrupts God's holiness. When Augustine introduces inscrutable wisdom as only a second stage on the journey to grace and calling, then the "unspeakable" theology of the tragic God can reduce him to silence before a *Deus Absconditus*.

NARRATIVE WISDOM

As we saw in [Chapter 7](#), the majority of Augustinian scholars agree that, as a speculative concept, Augustine's teaching on predestination is incoherent. They have not considered that predestination might be understood in a temporal perspective in terms of narrative theory. This is the only possible approach to the tragic because, as we have seen, for the Greeks, theater is the medium of the tragic vision. If the speculatively scandalous theology of predestination is to make its irreplaceable contribution, it must use narrative theory.

Benjamin says that narrative counsel derives its authority from death:

It is, however, characteristic that not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life – and this is the stuff that stories are made of – first assume transmissible form at the moment of his death.... As his life comes to an end ... suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story.⁷⁰

Benjamin captures in death the authenticating mark of the truthfulness of the witness. Imminent death functions as an oath at a trial. The story of

Augustine's past life in the *Confessions* does not culminate in his death but in Monica's. As we saw in Chapter 3, Monica's wisdom, her counsel, is the source of the story. Her sense of an ending is authoritative: At the vision at Ostia, just prior to her death, Monica sums up the story, which Augustine has just recounted for nine books:

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? (9.10.26)

Within five days, Monica fell mortally sick and, not long after, Augustine "closed her eyes" (9.11.29).

Augustine located the history of evil and suffering in physical and cosmic time to give this history ontological weight. Benjamin gives narrative wisdom historical weight by invoking death: "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, it is natural history to which his stories refer back."⁷¹ Monica's death turns to Jesus's death to sanction the story. As the final authority, Jesus's death is the final death named in Book 9:

I now pray to You for my mother's sins. Grant my prayer through the true Medicine of our wounds, who hung upon the cross.... For on that day when her death was close, she was not concerned ... [about] her body ... but only desired to be remembered at Your altar ... on which she knew that the holy Victim was offered.... Who shall restore to Him his innocent blood? ... For she will not answer that she owes nothing, lest she should be contradicted ... but she will answer that her debts have been remitted by Him. (9.13.35)

Jesus's death, as a founding moment, is the axial moment in the Christian calendar by which the Christian traditions are inscribed in the time of the universe. In their turn, the Christian traditions provide calendar time with the continuity of a temporal distance that is traversed. By setting his historical ontology within eschatology, Augustine avoids the issues of modern historiography. Instead, in the words of Benjamin, Augustine and his medieval heirs, "by basing their historical tales on a divine plan of salvation – an inscrutable one – have from the very start lifted the burden of demonstrable explanation from their own shoulders. Its place is taken by *interpretation*, which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world."⁷² Monica, as

confessor, is the first “interpreter” in the *Confessions*: she remained in touch with God’s eternal *intentio* by interpreting dreams (3.11.19–20), in weeping and mourning, “in assurance by the mouth of Your priest, a certain bishop” (3.12.21):

You could not despise and withhold Your help from the tears with which she begged of You not gold and silver nor any changing fleeting good, but the salvation of my soul – for it was by Your gift that she was what she was. Rather, Lord, You were ever at hand to hear her and do all in the order that You had *predestined*. It could not be that You should deceive her in those visions and answers, those I have mentioned and others I have not mentioned. She laid them up in her faithful heart and again and again reminded You of them in her prayers, as of things written with Your own hand. Because Your mercy endures forever, You deign when You forgive any soul all its debts, to become Yourself a debtor by Your promises. (5:9; emphasis added)⁷³

As author of the *Confessions*, Augustine, the Catholic bishop, inherits Monica’s mantle and portrays himself as an interpreter of the Scriptures with their “divine plan of salvation … embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world.”⁷⁴ The sequence runs from the eternal Word, in whom all is pre-destined outside of time, to the working out in due time of the eternal order, which is known authoritatively only in time by interpreting life’s fate filled flux in the *intentio* of the Scriptures:

In Your Word, Your only-begotten Son, were “heaven and earth,” signifying the Head and the body of the church, *predestined* before all time, when as yet morning and evening were not. Then You began to work out in time what You had *predestined* outside time, that you might show forth things hidden and bring order to our disorder … and Your good spirit moved over us to raise us up in due time. … And You established the authority of Your Book. (13.34.49; emphasis added)

The Book is the *intentio* that endures, “not by dispersal but by concentration of energy” (11.19.25); the Book preserves from oblivion “the whole life of man of which all man’s actions are parts: and likewise for the whole history of the human race, of which all the lives of all men are parts” (11.28.38). Augustine confesses, “my life is but a scattering,” requiring a work of “mercy,” in which he is “held” up by “the Son of Man who is Mediator in many things and in diverse manners – that I may apprehend by Him in whom I am apprehended and may be set free from what I once was following your Oneness” (11.19.25). He claims that interpretation is the issue because “I am divided up in time, whose order I do not know, and my thoughts and the deepest places of my soul are torn with every kind of tumult” (11.19.25).

In the first nine Books of the Confessions, he interprets his “tumultuous” life in terms of the eschatological vision: “My heart and my memory are open before You, who were then acting in me by the hidden secret of Your Providence, and bringing my shameful errors before my face, that I might see them and hate them” (5.6.11). Since “you Lord who hold the helm of all that You have created, had not forgotten” (6.7.12), confessing consists in interpreting the direction in which the “helm” is turning. He draws an instructive contrast between the high contemplative counsel he and his friends devised and God’s:

The whole plan, which we had built up so neatly, fell to pieces in our hands and was simply dropped. We returned to our old sighing and groaning and treading of this world’s broad and beaten ways: for many thoughts were in our hearts, but “Your counsel stands forever.” And out of Your counsel did You deride ours [again in tragic laughter] and did prepare Your own things for us, meaning to “give us meat in due season and to open Your hands and fill our souls with Your blessing.” (6.14.24)

But even when brought within the orbit of the Book, such an account is still far from God’s vantage point:

Assuredly if there were a mind of such vast knowledge and fore-knowledge that all the past and all the future were as clearly known to it as some familiar canticle is known to me, such a mind would be marvelous beyond measure, would strike us silent with awe. For to such a mind nothing would be hidden of ages past or ages still to come, any more than when I am singing my canticle anything is unknown to me of what I have sung from the beginning, of what remains to me to sing to the end. Yet far from me be it to think that You, O Creator of the Universe, Creator of souls and bodies, had only such knowledge as that of the future and the past. Far more marvelously, far more mysteriously, do You hold Your knowledge. For when a man is singing a song he knows, or hearing a song he knows, his impressions vary and his senses are divided between the expectation of sounds to come and the memory of sounds already uttered. No such thing happens to You, the immutable and eternal, the eternal Creator of minds. In the beginning You knew heaven and earth without any element of change in your knowledge; and similarly in the beginning You created heaven and earth without any element of change in Your action. Let him who understands praise You, and let him who does not understand praise You likewise. You are the highest, and the humble of heart are Your dwelling place. For You “lift up them that are cast down,” and those do not fall who have You for their high place. (11.31.41)

Nevertheless, historical, narrative knowledge known in interpretation is not negligible; narrative knowledge is the sole means by which to approach and

understand how “all the past and all the future are over-towered in Your eternal and changeless abiding” (12.28.38).

Augustine’s mixed confessional genre, by combining an eschatological orientation with autobiography, is able to substitute for the brief moral of a story the unity of his whole life.⁷⁵ The divinatory realization of the meaning of his life is contained in the eschatological interpretation: Augustine derives the meaning of his life from the death of Jesus. As Benjamin remarks: “A man … who died at thirty-five will appear to remembrance at every point in his life as a man who dies at the age of thirty-five.”⁷⁶ Since Augustine has died in Christ, he shares his experience of death.⁷⁷ What Benjamin says of the story, Augustine’s “brethren” could say of his *Confessions*: Augustine’s “fate by virtue of the flame which consumes it yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about.”⁷⁸ But Benjamin’s warm hope must first be exposed to Freud’s cold necessity, and in the process it may be possible to discover a love of life beyond narcissism.

TRAGIC WISDOM

The thought of Augustine’s great narrative works – the *Confessions* and *The City of God* – their theme of election, grace, and sin, their portrait of Augustine or the people of God, arises in a plot configuring contingent events. Configuration gives to these events the mark of necessity. Things had to turn out as they did; the events are contingent-expected, singular-typical, deviant-dependent on Biblical paradigms. The ending in these stories – his vocation to be a bishop and salvation history – are well known to Augustine’s readers and so permit him to tell them as divine necessity. The paradigmatic Pauline rereading of the story of Esau and Jacob in *Romans* 9 embodies hope in the light of necessity as the Christian sense of an ending. The Pauline type of narrative recollection permits the ending to be read in the beginning and the beginning in the ending: “do all in the order that You had predestined” (5.9.17) says Augustine in the middle of the *Confessions*, and his readers, sharing the Pauline sense of an ending, follow along. The *Confessions* makes sense to them. The *Confessions* derive their necessity from the logic proper to narrative universals.

Generation after generation for a millennium followed along. The post-Enlightenment’s new or anyway radically deviant sense of an ending means that it is less and less easy or desirable to follow along. The explicit purpose of my theological reflections has been to make it possible for the modern reader to unblock the seemingly insuperable obstacles to following the story thrown up in

the cross-examination of Augustine's witness by Freud, Nietzsche, and Augustine's most recent prosecutors. The theology of the *Confessions* presented in this book is simply an attempt to reconnect the narrative of the *Confessions* in places where I believe that the narrative has broken down under cross-examination. By so doing, I thought it might be possible for us to hear Augustine testify to his contemporaries about his distinctive experience of Pauline hope as this hope approximates eternal necessity in time: the stability and concentration of the soul in repose, permitting Augustine and his readers to "be cast and set firm in the mould of ... [God's] truth" (11.30.40). The *Confessions'* tensive duration grasps the eternal dignity of temporal things and their essential contingency in the light of the incarnation. The *Confessions'* narrative guards against the totalizing forgetfulness of suffering, death, and evil undergone and gives necessity to individual and communal history in the light of hope.

It is not difficult to discover a narrative kind of necessity and narrative understanding of predestination in these great stories, but what of the texts in which Augustine transcribes these narrative universals into "unspeakable" theory? At the end of *De dono perseverantiae*, Augustine himself lists besides the *Confessions* the exegetical text of *Ad Simplicianum*, the *Letter to Sixtus* (ep. 191) and the *Letter to Paulinus* (ep. 186), and the late polemical writings, *De correptione et gratia* and *De praedestinatione sanctorum*.⁷⁹

We must keep in mind Ricoeur's caution that the theoretical works can offer only a scandalous theodicy. I contend that Augustine guards against this scandal even in the strictly theoretical texts, for even there the narrative viewpoint is always presupposed. Narrative permits Augustine to hold together in a single configuration a triple transformation of predestination's necessity, each transformation at a profounder level. The first marks the ancient and decisive shift from the God of vengeance to the God of justice by means of the ironclad necessity of the law of retribution. The second transformation enriches the configuration. It relativizes the intellectually inconsistent and scandalous theology of justice with its platitudes of ethical monotheism within the wisdom of inscrutable necessity. The final transformation reconfigures this wisdom within a narrative discourse of gift: Jesus the wisdom of God is the servant who "must" suffer. The legal discourse and the wisdom discourse must be remembered as the literal references on which the metaphorical reference to the discourse of gift can be predicated. The logic of punishment and the tragic enactment subsist in the manner of shattered myths, ruined epochs, at the heart of the new logic.⁸⁰ With the discourse of gift we learn to dwell at the point of refutation.

In the first transformation, the God of vengeance gives way before the Augustinian confession of God's holiness and human sinfulness. Pauline

election and reprobation Augustine understands in terms of individual, historical figures caught in a history of evil, handed down as inherited personal guilt juridically meriting death. God's reprobation of infants is just, their perdition is by right; salvation is a gift of mercy. Guilt is effective as an act and is punishable as a crime, though inherited as a sickness.

The second transformation works by metaphorical/narratological predication.⁸¹ It creates a semantic impertinence by placing the discourse of justice within the horizon of inscrutable wisdom. Augustine's God is not simply the God of Job's friends for whom justice, as the highest virtue, reveals God's image in human beings. For Augustine, God is certainly just – hence the theodicy – but Augustine's supreme interest lies with God's mercy and compassion. If we do not constantly remind ourselves of the wisdom dimension, the use of God's justice to display his mercy has disturbing results. The unjust, like Pharaoh, are made by God into “‘vessels unto dishonor’” and “perdition … for the correction of others,” who are “‘vessels of mercy.’”⁸² Augustine concludes,

The hardening of the ungodly demonstrates two things – that a man should fear and turn to God in piety, and that thanks should be given for his mercy to God who shows by the penalty inflicted on some the greatness of his gift to others. If the penalty he exacts from the former is not just, he makes no gifts to those from whom he does not exact it. But because it is just, and there is no unrighteousness with God who punishes, who is sufficient to give thanks to him?⁸³

If we ignore the inscrutable surrounding this passage, the mixed discourse resulting from the discourses of justice and of gift is singularly offensive. As we saw in [Chapter 7](#), without inscrutable wisdom to mediate them, God's arbitrary mercy is no more than an erratic exception to a very literal and particularly nasty product of legalism. However, the passage commences with the avowal that God's ways follow God's “inscrutable judgments.”

Mathijs Lamberigts thinks that Augustine emphasized God's power in his theology of predestination to teach humility:

One does not appreciate the appeal of Augustine on the fate of children as a proof for the truth of predestination. The idea that God wants to show what human beings can do with his help and what they in fact are without this help, suggests that God is more a tyrant than a loving father. Especially in the case of infants, one might ask what kind of God is the one who does not save children, especially in the case where it is the parents who are longing for their baptism.... That human pride must be punished is an idea that can be found in Stoic philosophy. Still, the question remains: why must God use such draconian means in order to realize this.⁸⁴

I do not think that Augustine's or God's aim is to punish pride or to teach humility, though certainly desirable consequences. The disproportionate "draconian means" reveal the problem with the humility explanation. If the aim is not to teach humility, what then is the proportionate aim? Augustine wants to understand his confessional journey, to understand why on his pilgrim way to God, he had to cross a tragic landscape with its "learned unknowing"? Original sin had already sealed off irreversibly all alternative routes. By the end of Book 7 and on into Book 8, Augustine, the apprentice pilgrim, finds, to his horror, that he has reached a dead-end. Only the predestining power of God's salvific love can show him the way out. God's inscrutable wisdom divests him of his presumptuous certainties. Where original sin's triple hatred traps him in moral impotence, God's inscrutable wisdom readies him for a journey in *kenotic* service "for all." Inscrutable wisdom is a weigh station at which Augustine is given a glimpse of the hypocrisy at the root of evil, of the "human heart fooling itself about the true nature of its intentions."⁸⁵ Wisdom makes him aware of the deviousness hidden in the triple hatred and cauterizes the wounded narcissism that continuously reinfests his complicity. Lamberigts concludes: "neither a dogmatic systematization nor a pious 'spiritualisation'" can serve.⁸⁶ I contend that only a narrative unfolding God's wisdom will allow Augustine to continue his story.

The tragic avowal will be Augustine's refrain in his discussion of predestination in all his mature writings. When compared to God's judgments, justice in ethical monotheism appears as the petty recrimination of Job's friends. Armed with a theodicy based on the law of retribution, Job's friends seek "little islands of meaning in the universe"⁸⁷; they demand a finite, private explanation of destiny. When situated within wisdom, mercy becomes a terrible mercy from a hidden God who, though never having recourse to vengeance, shows "his wrath," "endures" patiently, "hates," "hardens," "destroys" in due order and reveals God's mercy by reducing the "vessels of honour" to "fear."⁸⁸

When commentators like Flasch and Rist limit their examination of predestination to a moral discourse, they unsurprisingly find Augustine's appeal to God's inscrutable justice implausible. Wetzel and Kirwan regard it as self-contradictory: "It is, of course, contradictory to assert both that redemption is given gratuitously and that God has some reason, albeit unfathomable, for redeeming one person rather than another (e.g., Jacob rather than Esau)."⁸⁹ More damning still, Wetzel says that Augustine recognized but tolerated the contradiction to defend God's justice: "Augustine is willing to tolerate this contradiction in order to preserve the appearance of God's justice."⁹⁰ Where Wetzel sees Augustine's deliberate – "is willing to tolerate" – and obscurantist defense – "to preserve the appearance" – as bad faith, as "doublespeak,"

others, such as Studer, regard his appeal to inscrutable justice as neutral, as an acknowledgment that we have reached the limits of human knowledge. I believe that we should look for a positive contribution. The question at the heart of my discussion concerns the positive and necessary contribution of God's inscrutable justice to Augustine's teaching on predestination, original sin, grace, and free will.

Unlike Rist, I do not believe that Augustine lost his intellectual nerve, compromised his habitual intellectual rigor, surreptitiously manipulated the meaning of the concept of justice to score debating points, or played with superficial verbal ambiguities in the meaning of the word "justice" to resolve the greatest challenge of his intellectual career. In a sense, I agree with Wetzel: the contradiction is "obvious" to us, and, since it was equally obvious to the Pelagians and the monks at Hadrumetum and Marseille, it must have been, as Wetzel implies, equally obvious to Augustine. What then is Augustine thinking? My contention is that we should see in Augustine's resort to inscrutable mystery a transitional message using a tragic discourse with its narrative medium.

There is abundant evidence in Augustine's writings of the tragic God, and of the tragic message with its narrative medium. Tragic wisdom teaches us painfully, unwillingly, to accept what we do not understand. Learned ignorance – *docta ignorantia* – is the tragic theme but it seems at first sight to justify Augustine's critics, for Augustine claims that the elect "may learn from [the fate of God's enemies] to fear and to correct their ways." But Augustine immediately adds: "Through all of this you can hear as an undertone, 'Who are you that replies against God?' That must be understood as a recurring refrain."⁹¹ As a result, unless we listen to Augustine's admonition, unless we are attentive to the tragic dimensions, all we hear are the incompatible discourses of justice and gift, in which mercy is understood as an arbitrary exception set within the discourse of justice. We are shocked to hear Augustine say that the fact that only some are saved "ought not to disturb the believer" since all are justly condemned in Adam and to conclude: "Whence it is plain that it is a great grace for many to be delivered, and to acknowledge in those that are not delivered what would be due to themselves; so that he that glories may glory not in his own merits ... but in the Lord."⁹² In the next sentences, tragic wisdom comes between justice and gift: "But why he delivers one rather than another, – 'His judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out.' For it is better in this case for us to hear say, 'O man, who are you that replies against God?' than dare to speak as if we could know what He has chosen to be kept secret."⁹³ In what metaphorical/narratological way does tragedy's middle position permit the tragic discourse to mediate between the two, so

that neither the judicial nor the lyric discourses will lose their distinctive rationality and both will make their irreplaceable contribution?

The unbearable nature of God's impenetrable secret reveals the distance of tragic wisdom from theodicy. On the horizon of actual evil is the ineluctable element in freedom, existential not ethical fault, the Esau whom God has hated. We experience the ineluctable element whenever our lives are outside our own responsibility and yet we participate in history's destructive force. Augustine can articulate the experience of losing control for he sees a historical witness where Ricoeur sees only a symbolic meaning. History's destructive force is revealed most acutely for Augustine, given the beliefs of the North African church, in the destructive force of original sin for the unbaptized. The coolness of the just logic of the law of retribution is set within the horizon of the tragic and assumes its poignant tones:

It is indeed, to be wondered at and greatly to be wondered at that [baptized Christians lapse and the wicked are converted] ... who would not wonder at this? Who would not be exceedingly astonished at this! But, moreover, it is no less marvellous, and still true ... that some children of His friends ... departing this life as infants without baptism—although He certainly might provide the grace of this laver if He willed ... He alienates from His kingdom into which He introduces their parents; and some children of His enemies He causes to come into the hands of Christians, and by means of this laver introduces into the kingdom, from which their parents are aliens; although as well to the former infants there is no evil deserving, as to the latter there is no good, of their own proper will. Certainly, in this case the judgments of God, because they are righteous and deep, may neither be blamed nor penetrated.⁹⁴

Justice is so deeply immersed in the tragic in this and similar passages that its workings cannot be discovered. Tragic wisdom reduces Augustine to silence: "Why [baptism] is given to this infant and not given to that since both of them are equally in God's power, and without that sacrament none can enter into the kingdom of God⁹⁵; – to be silent, then on these matters."⁹⁶

Instead of resorting to theodicy, Augustine looks unflinchingly at the fate of the damned, only to be reduced to silence in the presence of a God with many of the attributes of a tragic God:

Therefore the mercy is past finding out by which He has mercy on whom He will, no merits of his own preceding, and the truth is unsearchable by which he hardens whom He will, even although his merits may have preceded.... As of two twins, of which one is taken and the other left, the end is unequal, while the deserts are common ... and let us not endeavor to look into that which is inscrutable, nor to trace that which cannot be found out ... so that

he who thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall, and he who glories may glory not in himself, but in the Lord.⁹⁷

Augustine rejects the tragic vice of hubris and learns its lesson of fear and dependence on tragedy's inscrutable God. God's ways do not follow our common sense notions of fairness, which leads Augustine to reflect ruefully "that there is no acceptance of persons with God; otherwise He would rather deliver the children of His worshippers than the children of His enemies."⁹⁸

Augustine no longer appeals to the law of retribution, for it will not suffice. The mystery is no longer restricted to the question of election, as Ricoeur has affirmed. There is a mystery of damnation as well as of election. Not only is the origin of original sin mysterious and tragic, but God's failure to call the damned is an equally impenetrable mystery. Augustine asks, "Why did [God's] mercy fail in Esau's case?"⁹⁹ He replies that the "standard of equity" God uses to decide both human fates is not ours: "He decides *who are not to be offered mercy* by a standard of equity which is most secret and far removed from human powers of understanding."¹⁰⁰ This answer only raises further questions: "Why however, is it [grace] given to these *rather than to those* – who has known the mind of the Lord? Who is able to look into unsearchable things? Who to trace out things past finding out?"¹⁰¹ God's trans- or post-ethical judgments, whether assigning salvation or damnation, are alike mysterious and belong to tragic discourse. It is no longer a question of justice, as when Augustine, citing the parable of the vineyard (Matt. 20:11ff.¹⁰²), asks who can fault the creditor for forgiving one debtor and not another. Now Augustine examines God's comparative judgment. He wants to understand why God forgives "these rather than those?" Why God "abandons a man by not calling him in the way in which he might be moved to faith?"¹⁰³ Why his mercy "fails?"¹⁰⁴ Why God shows "his wrath," "endures" patiently, "hates," and chooses to "harden," to "blind," and to "destroy" some and not others?¹⁰⁵ These questions do not belong to a justice discourse. God's acts are no longer rationalized legally. God does not "merely" permit evil acts (whatever weight of exculpatory significance that might have in a legal discourse!). No, here God plays an active, sinister, typically tragic role in an individual's life, in "my" life, so that Augustine asks, "Why in the same case will He punish me more than another or deliver him more than me?"¹⁰⁶ Augustine's answer no longer appeals to judicial reasoning. He is reduced to silence and "if you ask wherefore," he replies, "because I confess that I can find no answer to make."¹⁰⁷

Tragic discourse takes Augustine beyond what would become the moral and speculative concepts of the Schools. He searches beyond the moral vision

and finds an unverifiable faith and an agonizing wisdom. Like Job he abandons the arrogance hidden in recrimination and loves God for naught:

Here, if I am asked why God should not have given some perseverance to whom He gave that love by which they might live Christianly, I answer that I do not know. For I do not speak arrogantly, but with acknowledgment of my small measure, [Rom. 9:20] when I hear the Apostle saying, “O man, who are you who replies against God?” and, “O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and his ways untraceable!” [Rom. 11:33] So far, therefore, as He condescends to manifest His judgments to us, let us give thanks, but so far as He thinks fit to conceal them, let us not murmur against His counsel, but believe that this also is the most wholesome for us.¹⁰⁸

Wisdom demands acknowledgment of our small measure. It forces us to confess that God's mercy and justice are far beyond ours: “His ways are unsearchable. Therefore the mercy by which He freely delivers, and the truth by which He righteously judges are equally unsearchable.”¹⁰⁹ Augustine believes that we must renounce our own viewpoint. Renouncing our own viewpoint means that we become aware that, when confronted with the complexity of life, there are inevitable ethical conflicts due to the one-sidedness of the individuals involved and of the principles at stake. According to the tragic vision, the intractable contradictions of ethics and morality are inevitable. But tragedy does not transmit an alternative teaching. Apprenticeship in the agonistic terror and pity of tragic wisdom purifies (catharsis), sears our narcissism, and allows us to recognize hubris filled with illusions in our practical reasoning.¹¹⁰ After an analysis of the twins and the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, having concluded, in keeping with the judicial viewpoint (which even if it is superseded is never abrogated) that “he who is delivered has good ground for thankfulness, he who is condemned has no ground for finding fault,”¹¹¹ Augustine can ask in the next sentence,

“But if” it is said, “it was necessary that, although all were not condemned, He should still show what was due to all, and so should commend His grace more freely to the vessels of mercy; why in the same case will He punish me more than another or deliver him more than me?” I say not this. If you ask wherefore; because I confess that I can find no answer to make. And if you further ask why this is, it is because in this matter, even as His anger is righteous and as His mercy is great, so His judgments are unsearchable.¹¹²

In the final sentence, the three discourses of moral “righteousness,” lyrical “mercy,” and tragic “unsearchable” are configured together.

Wisdom teaches submission before an unverifiable faith:

This is profitable for us both to believe and to say, – this is pious, this is true, that our confession be lowly and submissive, and that all should be given to God.... In respect of what concerns the way of piety and the true worship of God, we are not sufficient to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God. For “our heart and our thoughts are not in our own power.”¹¹³

Augustine’s silence is not an empty agnosticism, nor does he turn to the judicial. His silence belongs to wisdom. In his silence he acknowledges, using words borrowed from *The Book of Wisdom* (11:21) and from Paul in *Romans* (11:33), an inscrutable measure beyond measure:

Only let us believe if we cannot grasp it, that he who made and fashioned the whole creation, spiritual and corporeal, disposes all things by number, weight and measure. But his judgments are inscrutable and his ways past finding out. Let us say Hallelujah and praise him together in song; and let us not say, What is this? or, Why is that? All things have been created each in its own time.¹¹⁴

Predestination as inscrutable necessity demands the abandonment of recrimination and the renunciation of moral narcissism with its interminable project of theodicy. Can one claim that the moral vision shatters on the suffering of children and the innocent, and for Augustine and his contemporaries, on the heartrending fact of their damnation, just as surely as ours has before the untold sufferings of our own violent centuries? What is the relation between evil as scandal and evil as fault? To what extent does the suffering of the world surpass retribution? Can tragic pity lead us beyond theodicy with its ethical rationalization of God’s holiness and its ancestral, communal sins set out before a legislator God? In what sense does Augustine find himself alongside Job contemplating the whole of creation before the *Deus Absconditus*?

Does tragic wisdom, with its inimical necessity for some, merciful necessity for others, destroy the moral vision by surpassing it? Are inimical necessity and merciful necessity to be held in a new tension or balance in which suffering can no longer be simply chastisement? The *Deus Absconditus* of tragic theology permits of pity for justly accused human beings, coupled with fear and trembling at the presence of the ineluctable growing in concrete freedom: “Esau have I hated.” The second configuration, the necessity of wisdom, resists logical, moral, or aesthetic reconciliation; one despairs of meaning, of a world order. Wisdom offers only a non-narcissistic reconciliation beyond recrimination. Here, we abandon our own viewpoint and learn to love the whole of creation as it is and God for naught. Ricoeur describes the ascesis involved in abandoning recrimination as “a renouncement of the

infantile component of the desire for immortality.... To love God for nought is to escape completely the cycle of retribution to which the lamentation still remains captive, so long as the victim bemoans the injustice of his or her fate.”¹¹⁵

Augustine's response to the tragic supposes the full maturity of a moral vision of God. In response, theodicy is born. With the failure of theodicy, he adopts an attitude of submission, for there is no way to reconstruct the problem of evil by means of the moral vision. Augustine wants us to abandon our search for “a private explanation, a finite explanation,”¹¹⁶ made to the measure of our own existence. If this is so, must he identify our freedom with inimical necessity; must he convert freedom and necessity into fate?



The Lyrical Voice

LOVE ME!

Why not make a clean break with the Augustinian tradition and, in particular, with its doctrines of original sin, election, and predestination? The damnation of unbaptized infants tormented many for more than a millennium. This teaching is now largely discredited in the West along with Augustine's predestination defense of religious coercion.¹ Enlightenment thinkers chose to make a break. But in our violent centuries, we, the heirs of the Enlightenment, have suffered the consequences of its forgetfulness and utopianism.² It has been my aim in this book to follow the way of critical remembering using the traditions deriving from the Enlightenment "to meet [Augustine] on his way,"³ so as to listen as one of the brethren, though never with the same immediacy.

The consequences for unbaptized infants of Augustine's teaching on original sin and for his religious enemies of his teaching on predestination and religious coercion are alien and repugnant. Still, we are left with Augustine's evident distress in attempting to handle the repercussions of these beliefs. Augustine's anguish suggests that his approach to these teachings, his way of wrestling with these questions, might have been instructive for his contemporaries.

Augustine resolves his decade-long struggle with dualism by ascribing the ineluctable dimension of evil to freedom – the voluntary-involuntary – not to nature, and, by establishing its historical reality, gives it ontological status. Even so, he must acknowledge that he cannot understand the origin of evil

Some of the themes developed in [Chapter 9](#) I have presented in abbreviated form in "The Role of God's Inscrutable Judgments" in Augustine's Doctrine of Predestination," *Augustinian Studies*, 33 (2002): 213–22; in "Augustine's Use of Narrative Universals in the Debate Over Predestination," *Augustinian Studies*, 31 (2000): 181–94; and in "Original Sin," *AtTA*, pp. 607–14.

choice. Original sin reveals a profounder ignorance. It illuminates the history of the experience of the sinful condition but not its origin.

In our late modern world, we still use variations on tragedy's narrative universals to give voice to our helplessness in the face of the ineluctable and what Nabert calls the "unjustifiable."⁴ In Augustine's day, the "heartrending" fate of unbaptized infants was the figure of "Suffering Itself." In our day, Nabert's "unjustifiable" figure of suffering is trapped in genocidal civil wars and embodied in the drowned of the death camps. The Auschwitz witness, Primo Levi, says: "The experience of the [Auschwitz] Lager with its frightful iniquity confirmed me in my non-belief. It prevented, and still prevents me from conceiving of any form of providence or transcendent justice: Why were the moribund packed in cattle cars? Why were the children sent to the gas?"⁵ Levi raises his voice in lamentation and disgust at the willed ignorance, indifference, and disdain he discovers for people's suffering in providence, election, or theodicy.⁶

Tragedy can make no direct reply. It cannot transmit an alternative teaching. Tragedy addresses itself to deliberation indirectly and then via the emotions "inasmuch as catharsis addresses itself directly to the passions, not only in provoking them but in purifying them as well."⁷ Augustine narrativizes his difficult apprenticeship to inscrutable wisdom with its "speculatively unavowable theology of divine blindness."⁸ He journeys as a guilty victim through the persistent conflict identified in Manichean and Neoplatonic dualisms, by means of the voluntary/judicial and the involuntary/impenetrable mystery of inherited sin, to arrive at tragic self-knowledge. Here he abandons the search for a private, finite explanation with its "platitudes of ethical monotheism."⁹ In their place, tragic wisdom offers him only a non-narcissistic reconciliation beyond recrimination and the cycle of retribution. The learned unknowing of inscrutable wisdom teaches him to submit before the *Deus Absconditus*. He abandons the search for "a private explanation, a finite explanation,"¹⁰ made to the measure of his own existence.

The tragic disorients Augustine's gaze with its vision of a God who "oscillates between the admirable and the monstrous"¹¹ and with ethical "conflicts made insoluble by tragedy."¹² In the present chapter, I will show that the lyric God responds to the tragic with a comparably impenetrable gift of love as suffering. Augustine recalls that, at his coerced ordination, it was divine derision that summoned him to responsibility "for all." Tragedy's derisory laughter jolts him out of his youthful presumptions. Derisory laughter releases him from his own absolutes. Augustine believes that ethically he is always in the grip of God. He is not first free and subsequently freely chose to be responsible ethically. The ethical self arrives too late for that. A coercive ethical call

saved him from his own certainties. Augustine became an ethical self by being called by God “for all.” It was in the person of Christ as the “suffering servant” that Augustine learned to accept suffering without reserve.¹³

At this point, we have entered into the economy of love, of the lyrical life of all gifts, within the discourse of surplus, superabundance, grace. Here, with the command “Love me,” we have what Ricoeur calls “a poetic use of the imperative. This poetic use of the imperative has its own connotations within the broad range of expressions extending from the amorous invitation, through pressing supplication, to the summons, to the sharp command accompanied by the threat of punishment.”¹⁴

We should not confuse the love command with the moral imperative. They belong to different discourses. The confusion resulting from the univocal use of a free will discourse with the love command on the one hand and with the judicial on the other has been the source of endless attempts to square the circle between free will and grace. The amorous essence of the gift economy is what must be excluded from the judicial if justice is to be universal, disinterested, and blind. The circle cannot be squared because grace belongs to the love economy not the justice economy. As we have seen, Augustine only arrives at the love commandment at the end of a long, arduous journey via sequential discourses – from the arbitrary and the anarchic via the Law of the Talion and, then, via justice and tragic wisdom to the love commandment – in a journey that emplots his own character development and his confessional vocation. On this ascending journey, none of the earlier discourses are simply set aside, dispensed with, or abrogated.

What holds us captive in his *Confessions*, what in part has made the *Confessions* my magic book for four decades, is Augustine’s recourse to an amorous discourse to trade on “the real analogy between feelings and the power of *eros* to signify *agape* and to put it into words.”¹⁵ Love does not argue; justice does. Justice relies on an independent judicial structure to hear both sides to a case and, with its monopoly of public power, to impose decisions. True, “Love me” points in the direction of a convergence of love and obligation, but the invocation includes the hyperethical command to love one’s enemies implicit in Christ’s having died “for all.”¹⁶ Even the command “to love one’s enemies is not sufficient by itself.”¹⁷ For Augustine, Christ’s dying for all “is the hyperethical expression of a broader economy of the gift.... This economy of the gift touches every part of ethics, and a whole range of significations confers a specific articulation on it.”¹⁸

Ricoeur identifies the first articulation with creation. As “very good,” creation is not something to be exploited but is “an object of solicitude, of respect and admiration.... To love of one’s enemies, this finds its first link to

the economy of the gift in this hyperethical feeling of the dependence of the human creature, and our relation to the law and to justification stems from this same economy.... Justification ... is also a gift inasmuch as it is a free pardon.”¹⁹ For Augustine, Donatist purity, inasmuch as it is self-righteous, does not know the economy of gift. It lacks this hyperethical feeling and does not offer a free pardon “for all.” I tried to capture this sense of solicitude, of respect and admiration in the preface of this book. There, I said that the many intimate passages of the *Confessions* amply attest to an amorous delight, to an irresistible joy that Augustine makes his own. But Augustine insists on the anti-voluntaristic nature of this preventient call. Grace always goes before, it is coercive, a love commandment, for its joy is awesome and its irresistible delight is a *tremendum* leading him where he would not go, whether to the continence of Book 8 or the ordination “for all” of Book 9.

Augustine uses the image of creation in the creative power of song and canticle – Ambrose’s “*Deus Creator Omnis*” – to understand the preventient and coercive force of grace. In Book 12 of the *Confessions*, he says that the matter out of which God created was not prior in time or value to form but only in origin, in lowness, as sound is to song. So, his free will, when subject to the hyperethical discourse of the gift economy, is not prior in time or value. As sound is to creative song, so free will’s current lowness, its ethical bondage in a judicial economy is to the creative force of amorous delight in true happiness that sets it free. To the extent that the will is bound, the call to love must be a command. Self-righteousness, hatred of the truth, as he found it in his own Manichean youth, trapped him. Ineluctable bondage requires coercive, irresistible delight. The song, recall, is awesome, a *tremendum*; as such its coercive force convicts his “guiltless” Manichean self. The same awesome song led Augustine to unanticipated freedom in an ever deeper unknowing, an enlightened unknowing, a *docta ignorantia*,²⁰ a terrible unknowing, a tragic unknowing of pity and terror. The song can never be anticipated or preknown; it can only be an amorous delight in which the song has already moved on beyond its appropriation. The attempt to reify or to manipulate the song with appeals to one’s own purity or justice leaves only an involuntary trace in tragic divine laughter. The song’s coercive power draws Augustine where he would not go.

The song, as we saw, is, of course, the Canticle of Book 11, Ambrose’s song praises God the creator timing the flux (11.27.35 and 11.31.41); it is the song of degrees, in which “my love is my weight: wherever I go my love is what brings me there. By your gift [the Holy Spirit] we are on fire and borne upwards: we flame and we ascend. ‘In our heart we ascend and sing the song of degrees.’ It is by Your fire, Your beneficent fire, that we burn and we rise, rise towards

the peace of Jerusalem" (13.9.12; emphasis added). It is the "songs of love" (12.16.23). It is the song of degrees, of the triple ascent, of the triple conversion with its triple freedom: judicial, inscrutable wisdom, lyrical *kenosis*. In a remarkable passage, Augustine appeals to the creation story, as Ricoeur had anticipated, to capture the hyperethical economy of gift. Augustine first evokes the formless earth to personify those who refuse to listen to his testimony – the Manicheans and the Donatists. "If they refuse and repulse me ... let me leave them outside breathing into the dust and filling their eyes with earth" (12.6.6). Turning from them, he says, "let me 'enter into my own chamber' and *sing my songs of love* to You, groaning with inexpressible groaning in my pilgrimage, and remembering Jerusalem with my heart stretching upwards in longing for it: Jerusalem my Fatherland, Jerusalem which is my mother" (12.16.23; emphasis added). But, finally, the respite, the interlude in his chamber, is only a temporary pause on his pilgrim way, in his testimony to the Manicheans and the Donatists, for the song goes before, it is an awesome joy, a *tremendum*, an amorous delight in which "Christ died for all."

Groaning in pilgrimage, stretching upward in longing for Jerusalem is Ricoeur's second sign of the hyperethical, of loving one's enemies, of the "for all." Turned no longer to creation but to the final end, there "God appears as the source of unknown possibilities."²¹ The economy of gift plays itself out between these two extremes so that our "relation both to the law and to salvation is shown to belong to this economy by being placed 'between' creation and the eschaton," stretched out between "the God of hope and the God of creation."²² This stretching is the subject of the present chapter and the remaining chapters of this book.

The economy of gift is hyperethical, owing to its imperative "Love me!" but it is also linked to a practice, to an obligation: "'Since it has been given you, give ...'" According to this formula and through the force of the 'since,' the gift turns out to be a source of obligation."²³ It is Augustine's "for all." It is Augustine's narrative response to suffering and evil.

PREACHING PREDESTINATION AND NARRATIVE THEORY

Augustine narrates original sin and predestination in his *Confessions*, and in his theoretical works he reflects on their narrative status. That he should so reflect is to be expected. Given Augustine's views on historical, narrative *intentio* and eternity in Book 11 of his *Confessions* and his confessional practice, one would expect Augustine to underline the narrative nature of his teaching on predestination. He does precisely this when instructing the monks of Hadrumetum on the manner in which predestination should be preached.

Controversy had arisen among the monks as a result of their preaching. Augustine offers a number of samples of what not to say and then demonstrates the model version. First, he says that we should not expound the doctrine of predestination so that predestination might seem to predetermine people's actions. He draws an alternative model from Paul (*1 Cor. 9:24*), who says, “So run that you may lay hold; and thus by your very running you may know yourselves to be foreknown as those who should run lawfully.”²⁴ The signs of being foreknown are the contingent signs of lawful running. Retrospectively, the signs become the necessity of foreknowledge, but they are known only in hope to those that run.

Second, he says that we should not tell some members of the congregation that they belong to the elect and by comparison “seem to do a wrong to the rest.”²⁵ Nor should we say that others have not yet been called: “Neither is what follows by any means to be said – that is, ‘But others of you abide in the delight of sins have not yet risen, because the aid of pitying grace has not yet lifted you up.’”²⁶ Augustine wants to look to the future, so that predestination will mean future action in the trans-narcissistic freedom that comes from inscrutable wisdom. From the viewpoint of the faithful as actor, the necessity of predestination must always be retrospective. To tell someone they are reprobate would be a curse:

When it is said to them, “And if any of you obey, if you are predestined to be rejected, the power of obeying will be withdrawn from you, that you may cease to obey.” For what does saying this seem except to curse, or in a certain way to predict evils? ... [If something must be said of the reprobate then] this should be said, not of them who hear in the congregation, but about others to them ... using the third person of the verb, not the second.... [Use of the second person is] abominable, and it is excessively harsh and hateful to fly as it were in the face of an audience with abuse.... [Use of the third person relates] of others the evil which they [the congregation] hate, and think does not belong to them, by hoping and praying for better things.²⁷

In lived experience, election is a contingent part of the ongoing story for each member of the congregation. To speak otherwise is to “curse” their lives, for it is to “predict evils”; such “abuse” is “abominable,” “excessively harsh and hateful.”²⁸ Reference to evil done should be restricted to third persons such as Esau, Pharaoh, Judas. We would be rightly disturbed if Augustine’s use of “the other” were gratuitous, but he has no desire to displace the angst or the problem of the self onto the other. He concentrates the mind of his congregation by a comparison. In his day, everyone agreed that the fate of Esau, Pharaoh, and Judas was just. Their stories are completed portions of the Christian story in which the congregation is “hoping and praying for better things.” Whatever the historical

justice from our perspective, in the received version, these individuals were portrayed as guilty – though to us the tradition that held Esau “wicked” and “guilty” for selling the right of primogeniture reads like a rationalization from the grey zone. Augustine did not create these stories; he and his contemporaries had no grounds on which to challenge them. In each story, Augustine and his audience had no doubt as to the guilt of Esau, Pharaoh, and Judas.

When the issue is the present unfolding of the Christian story, as it is for the monks of Hadrumetum debating Augustine’s very teaching on predestination, an anonymous “third” person makes an appearance in Augustine’s account, and then only insofar as the third person’s malice advances the salvation story of the addressees. Augustine says: “But that an enemy has striven among you to the subversion of some, has by the mercy of God and His marvellous goodness turning his arts to the advantage of His servants, rather availed to this result, that while none of you were cast down for the worse, some were built up for the better.”²⁹ Augustine proceeds to tie the conflict to the life of Christ and the role Judas played in it.³⁰ The preacher’s confessional narrative acts as a system of rules – “a set of instructions that the individual reader or the reading public executes in a passive or creative way”³¹ – for retelling the congregation’s life story. The story proceeds from untold, distorted, and repressed stories of evil and suffering to actual stories. The confessional sermon captures in predestination, as a narrative universal, the working out of the relation between time and eternity. Monica discerned the difference between, for example, confessional tears and narcissistic tears. Likewise the members of the congregation learn to discern in their own lives so that they too can take up and hold the life of Christ as constitutive of their individual and collective Christian identity. Christ’s life is the Christian’s narrative universal. The eternally predestined story takes them on a paradigmatic journey from just retribution to merciful graciousness via the learned unknowing of inscrutable wisdom before the *Deus absconditus*.³² By taking the confessional journey, the inchoate story of their lives is transformed into a well-articulated story, the latter being the story for which they assume responsibility in freedom as Augustine did in writing his *Confessions*.

Narrative enactment of present evil and unhappiness leaves us neither simply in our misery nor does it allow us to return to an earlier happiness. The medium of narrative enactment and the tragic genre belong to a different discourse from the judicial. The latter’s gains, let it be said, are definitive, but its order is surpassed without being annulled in the learned ignorance and dread³³ of tragic wisdom. However, Augustine will not rest satisfied even here: “hoping and praying for better things” belongs to the Christian story, and the Christian story promises more than tragic wisdom. The anti-positivistic

view of narrative reference³⁴ gives full scope to the subversive thrust, which Augustine's testimony to freedom in the light of hope aims at the moral and social orders of his day. Yet, if the shift to the Pauline discourse of gift via the tragic abrogates the economy of justice, the gift economy falls back on the far side of justice as vengeance and the self-serving logic of the gray zone.

Since there can be no intuitive apprehension of the structure of evil, the phenomenological attempt to make evil appear issues in the insoluble and tragic paradox contained in the experience of ourselves as guilty victims and of collective fault. From this aporia, I derived the thesis adapted from Ricoeur: the poetics of narrativity responds to the aporetics of evil and suffering. An historical narrative theory of evil unfolds on several levels of radicality. Lyric *kenosis* as gift constitutes its most authentic level, but if the gift response to the aporia is to be no more than sentimental arbitrariness, it must be augmented by the less authentic experiences of evil contained in myth, Gnosis, the law of retribution, theodicy, and finally inscrutable wisdom. The originality of Augustine's response to evil – due entirely to its anchorage in a narrative ontology of gift – consists in the hierarchical and metaphorical use of these other forms of discourse. The phenomenological experience of himself as guilty victim finds its first non-mythical expression in morality under the law of retribution. The lament of victims inevitably leads to the failure of the law of retribution and gives rise to inscrutable wisdom. In an attempt to ward off the tragic vision as he found it in Gnostic dualism, Augustine introduced philosophical categories to create an onto-theology. The pure speculation of the resulting theodicies falls under the rubric of “transcendental illusion.” Their failure reveals the rightness of Augustine's original choice of the narrative genre and its confessional response to evil at the level of practical reason. By the same token, the ontological turn finds its true discourse at the level of historical narrative. Where Gnosis discoursed using the form of rationalized myth, Augustine historicized the myth. His purpose was historical and ontological, not etiological; he was always careful not to transgress the limits of knowledge. Augustine was enabled to pass from lament, in Heidegger's terms privatized as “being-towards-death,” via myths, moral wisdom, Gnosis, and theodicy to the public time of history, to cosmic time and to salvation history.

SUFFERING WITHOUT RESERVE

The dichotomous view of evil committed as leading to just exile, and of evil suffered as unjust deprivation gives way before inscrutable wisdom. In its turn, the tragic contemplation of life's contradictions, which descend into the unsearchable depths of the *Deus absconditus*, gives way before grace as gift.

However, if the tragic vision is simply forgotten, then grace itself is made subject to the economy of justice as a particularly offensive example of theodicy, in which God is said to harden the reprobate to use them “as a means of salvation for those on whom he has mercy,” and this is said to “demonstrate two things – that a man should fear and turn to God in piety, and that thanks should be given for his mercy to God who shows by the penalty inflicted on some the greatness of his gift to others.”³⁵ With graciousness and justice as the frames, God’s treatment of the reprobate, outside of the tragic vision, appears here as a piece of arbitrary malice, justified in terms of the law of retribution and the platitudes of ethical monotheism.

Tragic wisdom protects God’s graciousness from such legalism. In controversy, Augustine can at times seem to succumb to petty legalism. More disturbing, he seems to abandon the confessional genre so that we can forget that he speaks as a guilty victim. He appears as an official in an institutional grey zone defending privilege and power.³⁶ When he recalls the Christian story – a story of marginalization and victimization – then he remembers the tragic. Situated within the tragic, God’s graciousness loses the malevolence lent it within the economy of justice, to become a terrible mercy.

Augustine’s fierce lesson drawn from the reprobation of unjust victors and, endlessly repeated from *Ad Simplicianum* through the *Confessions*, *The City of God*, the *In Johannis evangelium tractatus*, the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, to the anti-Pelagian writings – that God alone is to be glorified for his goodness and his gifts – is mediated by inscrutable wisdom. It is in the wisdom economy that we must learn to accept what we do not understand. The unbearableness of God’s unfathomable secrets reveals the distance of God’s wisdom from our sense of justice.³⁷ The ineluctable element in human freedom shades off into God’s impenetrable darkness to reduce Augustine to silence. As a guilty victim, Augustine adopts the tragic virtues of fear and dependence in the place of the tragic vices of recrimination and hubris:

I marvel that men would rather entrust themselves to their own weakness than to the strength of God’s promise. But say you, God’s will concerning myself is to me uncertain? What then? Is thine own will concerning thyself certain to thee? and do you not fear, – “Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”? Since, then both are uncertain, why does not man commit his faith, hope and love to the stronger will, rather than to the weaker.³⁸

These virtues and vices can play a part only in lists drawn up under the guiding principle of the gratuity of God’s grace. We must renounce our own sense of fairness and the logic of the law of retribution in which suffering is seen as chastisement in favor of submission to an unverifiable faith. To anyone

who is scandalized at the commingling of the elect and the reprobate in this life, Augustine replies that the commingling “checks many from mischievous elation”³⁹; “for the reason that we may learn not to mind high things, but to consent to the lowly”⁴⁰; and “that he who thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall, and he who glories may glory not in himself, but in the Lord”⁴¹; “that he who is living faithfully and obediently may not be lifted up by that very obedience, as if by a benefit of his own, not received.”⁴² Beyond our vision of a world order, wisdom offers a non-narcissistic reconciliation in which we learn to love what is in God.

However, the narrative type in which reconciliation takes place is neither that of wisdom, such as we find in Job or Greek tragedy, nor theodicy. The narrative ending is a Christian ending and obeys its logic. Only the Christian sense of an ending can make Augustine’s thought followable or acceptable to his contemporaries. Within the Christian story, the judicial and the tragic faces of God are two existentially anguishing experiences of God revealing the lyric God of all gifts.

The scandal of evil and suffering understood as a law (Job’s friends), as an aesthetic (Plotinus and the youthful Augustine⁴³), as mere appearance (Spinoza), as a logic of being (Hegel), or as wisdom (Job) are surpassed by suffering as gift. Suffering as gift is the point of the Christian story: Christ’s freely given death out of compassion. The freedom in the suffering, this suffering without reserve, is the essence of the lyrical life In the eucharistic final chapters of Books 9 and 10 of the *Confessions*, Augustine appeals to Christ’s voluntary suffering first on behalf of Monica and then for himself. Monica asked to be remembered at the altar. Augustine will not appeal to the goodness of Monica’s life but to his own “tears that flow from a spirit shaken by the thought of the perils there are for every soul that dies in Adam” (9.13.34). Augustine turns to Christ “the holy Victim” whose free offering of himself could not be “handed back” because “He owed it not” (9.13.36). Christ does not satisfy the Devil’s just right; he surpasses the Devil’s right, for his life is lived in the economy of gift, whose meaning belongs at a higher discourse level. And again at the end of Book 10, he will cite Paul to underline the freedom of Christ’s suffering: “He [the Son] who thought it *not robbery to be equal with You [the Father]* became obedient even unto the death of the Cross, He who alone was free among the dead, having power to lay down His life and power to take it up again: for us” (10.43.69).

The eucharistic language with which Bk. 10 closes, together with the liturgical setting of the conclusion of Bk. 9 and the insistence at Bk.10.3.3 that his true readership consists of those who are joined with him in the *caritas* of his

church, compels the hypothesis that A. has presented us here with discourse that does not *represent* liturgical prayer, but rather accompanies or, more venturesomely, embodies it. He will not tell us what it is like to participate in the eucharist; he appears before us as he appears at the altar. In many respects, indeed, we have returned in time to where we began, in 1.1.1. The praise of “magnus es, domine” there can be taken as the praise that arises in the liturgy itself; Bks. 1–10 are a fleeting meditation on past and present, and we thus here return to the original scene, and pick up again the original *confession* at 11.1.1, “ut dicamus omnes.” The future, beyond the eucharist, lies in Bks. 11–13.⁴⁴

This eucharistic celebration concludes, or more correctly, continues with Augustine’s coerced ordination and his call to share in this eucharistic way of life: God forbade him the contemplative life and strengthened him, “saying: *And Christ died for all; that they also who live, may now not live to themselves but with Him who died for them*” (10.43.70). The rite of the eucharist does not silence the complaint against evil and suffering but raises the possibility of living in the world without complaint, the possibility that complaint might be renounced and that the Christian might no longer even “desire to be spared of all suffering”⁴⁵ – Nabert’s “‘gratuitously willed suffering.’”⁴⁶ Augustine identifies this suffering in the normal life of the Christian. Certainly Augustine is thinking of Christ’s crucifixion and knows that Christ replied “To certain disciples who aspired to a place close to him in his heavenly kingdom … ‘Are you able to drink the cup I am to drink?’ (Mt 20:22). Those sufferings of our Lord are our sufferings.”⁴⁷ But then Augustine proceeds to make suffering our everyday affair: “If anyone serves God loyally, keeps faith, pays his debts, and lives justly among his fellow men and women, I should be surprised if he does not suffer, and even suffer what Christ here recounts of his own passion.”⁴⁸

In controversy with the Pelagians, Augustine dwells on the gratuity of Job’s freely accepted suffering. Augustine says that Christ teaches Job to suffer without reserve. This is not an anachronism, for Augustine and his contemporaries believed that Job “foreknew that Christ would come in order to suffer.”⁴⁹ Job asks: “Why after having been admonished, do I still face judgment and hear the Lord’s rebuke?” (Jb 39:33) and Christ replies that Job “should understand how he ought to endure his suffering with equanimity, if Christ did not refuse to be obedient in suffering, for Christ has no sin, though he became man on our account, and as God he had such great power.”⁵⁰ Commenting on this passage, John Burnaby first contrasts correction as poetic justice with correction as an external force. In the latter case, God is a just judge, meting out retribution; the wrath of God is not outraged holiness but the righteous retribution of suffering commended to Job by his friends. Then, Burnaby, by way of contrast, claims that

the “explanation” of suffering must lie not in its beginning [with personal and ancestral sins – the contention of Job’s friends] but in its end.... The love which brings happiness in refusing the pursuit of pleasure can transfigure pain without denying its painfulness or stifling the movement of compassion. Out of that suffering which unites the sufferer to God, the evil has been wrung; yet the sharer in Christ’s Passion will never meet another’s suffering with the bare exhortation to endure.⁵¹

Burnaby adds that Augustine, in parallel to these two views of suffering, identifies two types of fear: fear of force and fear of losing the vision of the beloved, which latter is fear “without self-regard.”⁵² Here, suffering without reserve is the love out of which “the evil has been wrung.” Such love “can transfigure pain without denying its painfulness or stifling the movement of compassion.” “Wrung-out-love” unites the sufferer to God. This love is a love whose only fear is losing the vision of the beloved. Such fear is fear without self-regard and such love is disinterested, interested non-self-serving love.

Disinterestedness, non-self-serving love, living “without self-regard,” to which Augustine was introduced at his coerced ordination, is taken up again in Augustine’s *Expositions of the Psalms*. Burnaby says that this is not unsurprising because there,

the principle of exegesis followed throughout ... the doctrine of Christ’s unity with His members, should not often lead to reflection upon suffering in which the penal conception is almost forgotten, “When the head begins to speak, separate not the Body from Him. If the Head would not separate Himself from the words of the Body, shall the Body dare to separate itself from the suffering of the Head? Suffer in Christ.... As He willed that our sins should be His own for His Body’s sake, so let us will His sufferings to be ours, for the sake of our Head.” (en, in Ps. 37:16)⁵³

In his last years, during the semi-Pelagian controversy, Augustine recalls both the judicial and tragic economies to show how it is that they serve the lyric. He appeals to Paul to claim that the compassionate God and his gift scandalize Jewish legalism and Greek wisdom, “‘the Jews to whom Christ crucified is an offence, and the Gentiles, to whom Christ crucified is foolishness,’ but to the predestined, *who live beyond this law* [the economy of justice] *or this wisdom* [the tragic economy], Paul ‘preached Christ, the wisdom of God and the power of God, to them that were called, Jews as well as Greeks.’”⁵⁴ Christ, the wisdom of God, transvaluates tragic wisdom; suffering’s necessity becomes a compassionate gift freely given in a story lived within an economy of grace. “In the end of” his work *De dono perseverantiae*, Augustine says, “I have chosen to insist upon it [Christ’s predestination]. There is no more eminent instance, I say, of predestination than the Mediator Himself.”⁵⁵ Predestination

of the mediator catches, in a phrase, the point of the Christian story, by placing evil's tragic necessity as suffering freely undergone in the light of the hope of the resurrection. Here Augustine reprises his triple conversion as a triple freedom, which he has already emplotted as the development of his character and his confessional vocation in the *Confessions*.

ABSOLUTE FREEDOM FOR GOODNESS

The leading thread of my discussion has been Benjamin's and Ricoeur's insight that the story told by a witness is persuasive inasmuch as it offers a plausible way to continue a story that is just unfolding. Jesus did not offer another worldly response to suffering. He found freedom within the ever-present suffering in the world. True, for Augustine and the "brethren," final freedom is only a promise. What is left for them to do is to choose to journey with Jesus starting with a just world freed from divine and human vengeance by the law of retribution, through a tragic country of learned unknowing, where they are freed from narcissism, and enter the gifted world of the *Deus absconditus*, where they are free to serve in suffering freely undergone. By reading the *Confessions* and the *City of God*, they enter into Augustine's version of the Christian story with its unique blend of justice, tragedy, and joy, with its plot, characters, and thoughts; pitiable, fearful, and joyful incidents; sudden reversals, recognitions, violent effects. Augustine's version of the Christian story acts as stage directions guiding the brethren. The playing out of the narrative universal is an astonishing mix of freedom, inscrutable ignorance and ineluctable bondage, of irresistible grace, divine providence and unforeseen events, surprising twists, sudden insights, gracious calling – "Love me" – and the gift of perseverance. The whole is known only in the retrospective grasp of the Word made flesh and those contemporary (for fifth century readers) recreations of the Book: the *Confessions* and the *City of God*. Augustine and his "brethren" base their historical tales on an inscrutable plan of salvation known only in interpreting in what ways their lives are "embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world"⁵⁶ recounted in the Scriptures. By living unreservedly in their time and place, guided by Augustine's version, the brethren are caught up in the Christian story with its concordant and discordant interweaving of justice, tragic wisdom, and *kenotic* gift.

How does Augustine's version work? Augustine views free will from the perspective of the life of Christ, the predestined victim, to arrive at what he believes is the acceptable, if paradoxical, resolution of the history of freedom. Acceptable because eternity and time, *Verbum* and *verba*, historical *intentio*

and *distentio* meet in Christ. Paradoxical because, though subject to the absolute necessity of predestination, Christ exercises the most complete freedom; in Christ, freedom and grace are reconciled. Augustine believes that “the most illustrious height of predestination and grace is the Saviour Himself – the Mediator Himself between God and man, the man Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ He exemplifies, in the most perfect way, the gratuity of predestination.

How can Christ’s complete freedom coexist with the ineluctable gratuity of predestination? How does Christ’s freedom work? What is lyrical freedom? Augustine asks whether or not the man Jesus Christ could have merited his predestination and grace for himself? Augustine replies in the negative with a rhetorical question: “Was it not by the act and the assumption of the Word that that man, from the time He began to be began to be the only Son of God?”⁵⁸ Here the temporal story of “that man” is submitted to eternity, for that man is “assumed by the Word co-eternal with the Father into unity of person.”⁵⁹ At the same time and as a result of his assumption, Christ’s contingent, temporal free will “was so much the more free in proportion to the greater impossibility of His becoming the servant of sin.”⁶⁰ The graciousness of God, which founds the ethical life for us, is prior to our freedom. But unlike us, in Christ, the primordial ethical demand to serve the other derives from his freedom. Christ’s assumption by the “Word co-eternal” means that Christ freely chose where we could not choose because of the inherited triple hatred, to respond to the unlimited obedience to give his life for others. This choice constitutes absolute freedom. Absolute freedom allied to goodness reveals the infinite goodness of God. Christ’s freedom from sin is his absolute freedom for goodness.

In Christ’s perfected freedom, which retrospectively coincides with absolute necessity in time, the history of wandering humanity as *distentio animi* is configured in the historical *intentio* of the “Word co-eternal.” The story of *this* man’s assumption by the eternal Word and our consequent redemption were predestined in an absolute sense: “God certainly foreknew that He would do these things. This, therefore, is that same predestination of the Saints which most especially shone forth in the Saint of saints.... [No one] can deny this predestination? For we have learned that the Lord of glory Himself was predestined in so far as the man was made the Son of God.”⁶¹ The necessity in which “Jesus was predestined ... so that He might truly and properly be called at the same time the Son of God and the Son of Man,”⁶² this absolute necessity, becomes for us absolute gift via his freely chosen suffering and death as victim:

Such a transportation of human nature was predestined, so great, so lofty, and so sublime that there was no exalting it more highly, – just as on our behalf that divinity had no possibility of more humbly putting itself off, than

by the assumption of man's nature with the weakness of the flesh even to the death of the cross. As, therefore, that one man was predestined to be our Head, so we being many are predestined to be His members. Here let human merits which have perished through Adam [Augustine recalls the beginning of the story] keep silence, and let that grace of God reign which reigns through Jesus Christ our Lord, the only Son of God, the one Lord.⁶³

Jesus's freely accepted, contingent life, abasement, humiliation, and suffering to death become absolute necessity as gift. Here, tragedy is completed by being surpassed. Suffering as a free gift takes over suffering as scandal, thereby turning suffering and guilt into compassion. Suffering that is not freely offered is tragic. Wisdom has taught us to look beyond a rational or juridical understanding of God's electing or reprobating. Tragic wisdom's gains are definitive. Only the predestined Just One's acceptance in freedom – Was he not "so much the more free"?⁶⁴ – of suffering without reservation can absorb the wrath of God into the love of God.

In Christ's perfected freedom, Augustine learns to see beyond a rational or juridical understanding of God's electing or reprobating will. Justice is surpassed without being annulled (as Julian of Eclanum claimed) in the learned ignorance – the *docta ignorantia*, the stripping away, the divestment – and awe of the *Deus Absconditus*. Likewise wisdom's gains are definitive, but predestination as inscrutable fate becomes for us absolute gift via Christ's freely accepted suffering and death. In absolute freedom, Christ substitutes himself for us even to the point of expiation. Christ's original expiation unites identity and alterity.⁶⁵ Christ's goodness reveals itself in obedience to the *Deus Absconditus*, the hidden Good. Augustine believes that "the most illustrious Light of predestination and grace is the Saviour Himself – the Mediator Himself between God and man, the man Jesus Christ."⁶⁶ He exemplifies, in the most perfect way, the gratuity of predestination. Only the predestined Just One's acceptance of suffering without reserve can absorb the scorn of God's derisory laughter into the love of God.

THE TRAGIC CHORUS

Augustine believes that election as gift serves as the light in which we should see "absolutely *all* things, that even if any of them [the elect] go astray, and break out of the way, even this itself He makes to avail them for good, so that they return more lowly and more instructed."⁶⁷ Augustine configures Peter's denial of Jesus in the same way: "he [Peter] learned not to be confident concerning himself, even this was of excellent profit to him, by His agency who co-works for good all things to those who love Him; because he had been

called according to the purpose, so that no one could pluck him out of the hand of Christ, to whom he had been given.”⁶⁸

The Christian narrative of hope continues till the present. Augustine's model sermon opens as a word of hope uttered in an economy of gift: “You, therefore, ought also to hope for that perseverance in obedience from the Father of Lights, from whom comes down every excellent gift and every perfect gift.”⁶⁹ He goes on to caution his congregation against despair hidden in the curse of self-reliance: “And far be it from you to despair of yourselves, because you are bidden to have your hope in Him, not in yourselves. For cursed is everyone who has their hope in man.”⁷⁰ He then connects hope to tragic fear and trembling, the lesson the reprobate teach and their role in the story: “Holding this hope, serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice unto Him with trembling. Because no one can be certain of the life eternal.”⁷¹

The theme of hope can come to expression as narrative, because the economies of gift and the tragic share the narrative medium. The Christian narrative of hope runs from genesis to apocalypse, from first Adam to second Adam. Within the Christian story, graciousness, as the third configuration of predestination, reveals predestination's full scope. Augustine's version of the Christian story combines justice and tragedy in the service of gift. This version structures the thought of *Ad Simplicianum*. Here, the two Adams determine the fates of Esau and Jacob. Both die in Adam: “to Adam the entire human race traces the origin of its sin against God.”⁷² Appeal to the ineluctable must not be allowed to exonerate Esau.⁷³ Only Jacob was reborn in Christ: the elect “were made unto honour and were already born in Christ.”⁷⁴ Thirty years later, the same narrative structures Augustine's thought. The whole second part of *De correptione et gratia*⁷⁵ relates the history of predestination and perseverance from the angels and Adam to Christ.

In the economy of divine/human justice, humans exercise their freedom of choice. Augustine's version of the Christian story never revokes or in any way diminishes the importance of justice and freedom. The perceived unfairness of innocent suffering, the experiences at the root of the doctrine of original sin, Augustine's shock and horror at the “unfair” fate of baptized Christians who do not persevere in grace to the end, introduces Augustine to another world than that proposed by the just world, presupposed by theodicy and its law of retribution. With the concomitant experience of themselves as guilty victims, Augustine, the pastor and preacher, invites the faithful to take their place alongside him in the tragic chorus. Bearing their injured narcissism, they journey unwillingly in a world of disenchantment in which, with learned unknowing, they learn to believe in God in spite of evil. However, the Christian story does not resolve itself into a

choice between Job's awesome, possibly tragic wisdom and a just world. For when the brethren freely and willingly join their life stories to Jesus, at those times and in those circumstances, with the surprising ending of narcissistic complaint, Jesus's freely accepted suffering transforms the tragic world and God's derisory laughter as Augustine discovered at his ordination. Such a world does not satisfy the complaint but raises the possibility of living in the world without complaint, the possibility that complaint might be renounced and that the Christian might no longer even wish "to be spared of all suffering."⁷⁶

I have tried to clarify the impact of Augustine's teachings of original sin, grace, and predestination on human freedom by examining the narrative function of Augustine's appeal to God's inscrutable justice and wisdom. Augustine's appeal can have only an obscurantist and escapist role if its purpose is to protect Augustine from the otherwise inevitable conclusion to the following hypothetical syllogism concerning human freedom: if divine grace means that the elect cannot choose to sin, they have no freedom to sin, and, if they have no freedom to sin, then they have no religious freedom. In a univocal discourse, this conclusion is inescapable. But ineluctable human subjection to sin and evil plunges the economy of justice with its univocal discourse into an inscrutable economy with its narrative medium. The meaningless obscurity of the origin of sin and evil introduces Augustine to a tragic zone. The freedom of the elect for salvifically significant moral initiative must arise in the same zone. Otherwise, moral initiative cannot respond to the ethical aporia characteristic of the tragic and the moral impotence identified by Augustine's doctrine of original sin. Augustine stages the struggle between bondage in spiritual concupiscence and delight in ethical freedom in Book 8 of the *Confessions*. Here, Augustine traces his moral impotence to its root in original sin. As everyman, he discovers that humans cannot by themselves perform salvific moral acts. They cannot liberate themselves. They are caught up in ineluctable and irreversible sin and evil. Delight in salvific freedom can only result from a divine initiative: "Love me!" Augustine's teachings on original sin and the irresistibility of grace belong to the same level of discourse, that of impenetrable mystery. They are mutually coherent: grace responds to ineluctable evil. The workings of both are inscrutable. Nevertheless, Augustine is certain that if the origin of sin is ineluctable and its pernicious consequences inevitable, then freedom from sin and freedom for salvation can only result from a divine initiative. The presence of concupiscence even in the baptized demonstrates that perseverance is also God's gift. Augustine the bishop's account of his continuing spiritual bondage in the second half of Book 10 of the *Confessions* amply attests to the fact.

The divine initiative results in two specific forms of salvific freedom. The first freedom is the freedom to consent to tragic wisdom. It implies a willingness to live in a world in which the narcissistic dimension of the complaint against suffering and evil remains unsatisfied. Here one abandons the search for a private, finite explanation. Wisdom offers only a non-narcissistic reconciliation beyond recrimination and the cycle of retribution. With the learned unknowing of tragic wisdom, Augustine says we learn to submit before the *Deus absconditus*. The second freedom is freedom from the desire to be spared all suffering. It is the freedom to suffer for the community bonded together in the friendship, devotion, and intimacy in the hope of resurrection. Loving participation in ideas, which characterizes freedom and the lyrical life of surplus, must incorporate the double freedom: freedom from the triple hatred with its insistent, narcissistic complaint and freedom for Christ's selfless, disinterested service. Those who exercise this double freedom belong to the City of God. However, without the God-given delight in this double freedom, humans inevitably sink back into concupiscential bondage. The inevitability of sin and evil and the irresistible graciousness of God belong within the same obscure discourse. They are impenetrably hidden; one in the hateful meaninglessness of malice, the other in the superabundance of God's goodness. The playing out of divine/human initiative (predestination) and the ineluctability of human bondage in sin and evil across the three registers of salvific freedom (justice, tragedy, and lyric) is known only retrospectively. The genre of the Christian narrative is instantiated for Augustine and his brethren in Augustinian confession.

PREDESTINATION, COERCION, AND THE DONATISTS

The confessional way cautions Augustine that if he sets up his own standard of judgment, God, who has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, will laugh him to scorn.⁷⁷ How then can Augustine appeal to his doctrine of predestination to defend the use of statuary religion against the remnant of the Donatist church? Does he not betray his own gift ethic? Peter Brown says that Augustine

is a sensitive and conscientious pastor up to his victory over the Donatists; but, in 420, he can appear, for an instant, as a harsh and cold victor. The whole weight of his doctrine of predestination is turned, with horrible emphasis, on the broken remnants of a great church: the Donatist bishop of Timgad had threatened to burn himself with his flock in his basilica. Augustine can write: "But since God, by an inscrutable yet just disposition of His

will, has predestined some of them to the ultimate penalty, undoubtedly it is better for some of them to perish in their own fires, while an incomparably greater number are rescued and won over from that deadly schism and separation, than that all should equally burn in the eternal fires of hell as a punishment for their accursed dissension.”⁷⁸

Even if Augustine can claim that he had not sought the imperial edict that has broken the Donatists – see *Epistula 185.25* – still he is willing to see it implemented. What is he thinking?

Augustine opposes what he views as the self-righteous appeal by the Donatists to the purity of their remnant church to his inclusive – “for all” – teachings on grace and predestination. The Donatists saw themselves as “the holy assembly of Israel in the midst of her unclean enemies.”⁷⁹ This proved to be “a far more potent self-image for Donatist Christians than that of the church of the martyrs.”⁸⁰ The Donatist church was “the ritually pure assembly of Israel at prayer.”⁸¹ Augustine will make no comparable counter claim for the Catholic Church. Election to grace is “for all.” Peter Brown says that “Augustine brought to the day-to-day workings of grace within the church a basically *unhistrionic* vision.”⁸² In contrast, what Augustine rejects is *histrionic* Donatism. In effect, Augustine says to the Donatist Bishop Petilian that, “rather than advocating sectarian religion which physically separated the good members of the church from sinful persons in this life,” God’s grace provides an efficacious “guide for the individual’s avoidance of sin in daily life” and “for the separation of the good and evil persons [not now, not in ritually pure, sectarian assemblies like the Donatist’s, but only] at the end of the world.”⁸³

Augustine believes that love is preferable, but that does not mean that the coercive fear of suffering should be neglected.⁸⁴ He advocates for leniency in a judge⁸⁵ but acknowledges that enforced behavior – he himself had learned that salvation was “for all” at his coerced ordination – has educative power.⁸⁶ True, Augustine believes that “political authority over others is unnatural, not being derived from the Genesis account of creation but introduced by sin.”⁸⁷ But once introduced, the exercise of political authority is “especially connected to the role of coercion; see also *vera rel.* 55.111.”⁸⁸ Once sin has made obedience to political authority necessary, then, in keeping with *Romans 13.2*, perfect order “exists in society at large when virtuous subjects obey wise rulers who govern in accordance with the divine will.”⁸⁹

Living in a fallen world Augustine places his hope in the incomprehensible but universalist workings of electing grace and predestination. He fears that Gaudentius’s appeal, the Bishop of Timgad’s stubborn appeal to his own justice before the law, will mean that “God, by an inscrutable yet just disposition of His will, has predestined some of” the Donatists “to the ultimate penalty.”

He must learn to accept that “undoubtedly it is better for some of them to perish in their own fires,” because of their self-righteous disobedience to the law made visible as a punishment for sin in the edicts of a “wise” Christian emperor. He must resign himself to this fact so that “an incomparably greater number are rescued and won over from that deadly schism and separation, than that all should equally burn in the eternal fires of hell as a punishment for their accursed dissension.” Augustine is hoping “for all” but accepts that coercive grace will work “for the incomparably greater number,” just as it had worked for him at his ordination.

To our eyes, Augustine’s defense of religious coercion betrays God’s graciousness. We are skeptical of Augustine’s appeal to a “wise” emperor. Again we are left to wonder what Augustine is thinking.⁹⁰ Robert Markus can help us here. He condemns Augustine’s teaching on coercion as “this horrible doctrine, with all its potentialities for being insidiously and cynically generalised.”⁹¹ At the same time, he sets Augustine’s teaching on coercion in the context of Augustine’s reflections on history, society, and the Church. He says:

It is not out of place to describe his mature thought in this sphere [no later than 410⁹²] as a synthesis of three themes: first, the secularisation of history, in the sense that all history outside the scriptural canon was seen as homogeneous and, in terms of ultimate significance, ambivalent … second, the secularisation of the Roman Empire … and of the state and social institutions in general, in the sense that they had no immediate relation to ultimate purposes … third, the secularisation of the Church in the sense that its social existence was conceived in sharp antithesis to an “otherworldly” Church such as was envisaged by a theology of the Donatists type. These three strands together constitute a theology of the *saeclum*.⁹³

Markus wonders how Augustine, given this “pluralistic”⁹⁴ vision, could enlist the state to suppress religious freedom. Markus replies that Augustine writes about “the duties of Christian rulers and about religious coercion by the public authorities long after he had ceased to believe that the state had any religious purpose or function”⁹⁵ because Augustine did not “think in terms of the ‘state’ at all in this context.”⁹⁶ He did not “believe that the state had any religious purpose or function. Neither in his dealings with imperial officials nor in his writings in defense of religious coercion did he ever consider Christian rulers and civil servants as parts of a governmental machinery, of the ‘state.’ He thought of them as members of the Church.”⁹⁷ This kind of “atomistic personalism”⁹⁸ justified his idea of the two cities, by emptying “the ‘state’ of eschatological significance” and replacing it with “a kind of invisible re-grouping of the state’s citizens into the two mutually exclusive bodies of the citizens of the earthly and of the heavenly cities.”⁹⁹ Schlabach objects: “Divided by schism,

North African Christians were not yet what they might be in the eschaton, a community of mutual love. Dogmatic confidence that his church *was* in its primary identity already the City of God both bolstered Augustine's policy and collapsed his eschatology.¹⁰⁰ Schlabach's critique applies to the Donatist, not Augustine. The Donatists explicitly rejected Augustine's "pluralistic," "atomistic" vision of the saeculum. Augustine's secular understanding of the saeculum and of his church in it is precisely what Augustine affirmed and the Donatists rejected. Markus concludes, but without exonerating Augustine, that the fact that Augustine did not think of coercion

in terms of the state, but in terms of individual members of the Church who held secular office, disguised from Augustine the acute tension between his consent to coercion and the implications of his theology of history and society. The "atomistic personalism" bound up with the latter is what, in large part, made it possible for him to elaborate a "theory" of coercion of the type he did.¹⁰¹

So it is that Augustine enlists the emperor, as a member of the Church, to coerce as "an exercise of the *severitas*, as an infliction of *disciplina* for the education and the ultimate benefit of the coerced."¹⁰²

For Augustine, the jolt delivered to the Donatists by the emperor is no different from the jolt the congregation at Hippo delivered to his youthful presumptions at his coerced ordination. The message is the same: Christ died "for all," not for an elite, not for a Donatist church of the "ritually pure."¹⁰³ Tragic divine laughter released him from his own absolutes. Augustine believes that ethically he is always in the grip of God. He is not first free and subsequently freely chose to be responsible ethically. The ethical self arrives too late for that. A coercive ethical call saved him from his own certainties. Augustine became an ethical self by being called by God "for all." At this point, Augustine is speaking from within the economy of love and the gifted life. With the love command, "Love me," we have what Ricoeur calls "a poetic use of the imperative," which can include "the summons" and even "the sharp command accompanied by the threat of punishment."¹⁰⁴

What we find doubly offensive is that Christ's "for all," in what we see as Augustine's cold logic, is perverted to save the many by driving the Bishop of Timgad to threaten to burn himself in his cathedral. This cold logic brings us to what I think is the nub of our objection to Augustine's treatment of the Donatist bishop. Does not Augustine's heartless "utilitarianism" turn the bishop into a scapegoat for the salvation of the many? As with the problem of reconciling free will and grace, so now, by seeing the bishop as a scapegoat for the many, are we not perhaps restricting our viewpoint to the economy of

justice and the principle of reciprocity? From this viewpoint, Herbert Deane offers a well justified critique of Augustine:

More terrible and less easy to understand than his change of attitude is his use of the doctrine of love in defense of the policy of coercion. To defend the Church's appeal to the State to punish heretics and schismatics by imprisonment, fines, and exile as a labor of love toward errant sinners, to argue for this policy on the basis of the analogy with a father's loving correction of his son, to speak of the successful results of the state's coercion as "conquests of the Lord" – all these demonstrate the grim conclusions to which even a very wise man can be led by zeal for the promotion of orthodoxy.¹⁰⁵

Deane's interpretation is confined to a judicial perspective. In this perspective Augustine's appeal to the commandment to love is made to justify "the process of victimization that utilitarianism sanctions when it proposes as its ideal the maximization of the average advantage of the greatest number at the price of the sacrifice of a small number, a sinister implication that utilitarianism tries to conceal."¹⁰⁶

We forget that Augustine is talking from within the gift zone. He is trying to discern "the secret discordance between the logic of superabundance and the logic of equivalence."¹⁰⁷ We see him interpreting an imperial decree in light of the commandment to love. To this end, Augustine calls on predestination because it is not a univocal discourse but interposes the tragic vision into the "secret discordance" between the two logics. The tragic vision asserts the inevitability¹⁰⁸ of the intractable contradictions of ethics and morality.¹⁰⁹ In response to these intractable contradictions, Augustine sets in motion a dialectic of tragic wisdom and practical wisdom for he has known, since his coerced ordination, that the tragic wisdom contained in the divine laughter purifies and allows us to recognize hubris filled with illusions in our practical reasoning. Tragic wisdom, by testing our rationalizations, makes it possible for us to trust practical wisdom in the form of a moral judgment situated in the complexity of our lives.¹¹⁰ Where tragic wisdom creates a gap between its wisdom and practical wisdom and where it disorients by its inability to propose a solution we are condemned to reorient our action at our own risk.¹¹¹ The solutions that Augustine's practical wisdom can bring to these inevitable conflicts draws on ethical reasoning and the hyperethical call to serve all. Thereby tragic wisdom shelters "moral conviction from the ruinous alternative of uniformity or arbitrariness."¹¹² The dialectic of tragic wisdom and practical wisdom makes it possible for Augustine to offer an active, narrative response but not a theoretical answer to suffering and evil.

How does Augustine's appeal to predestination help him think through his response to the bishop of Timgad? Augustine is faced with what he believes

is the bishop's inveterate and self-righteous hatred. Augustine recalls the role played by the coercive power of the divine laughter and the irresistible amorous delight in his own conversion from what he sees as a presumption comparable to the bishop's. He wants to discover a compassionate and generous outcome even in the imperial decree, if not for the bishop then for an "incomparably greater number" of the bishop's flock.¹¹³ Augustine calls on the hyperethical in predestination to suspend the judicial. He has no utilitarian intent. He does not want the bishop as a scapegoat. In his Exegesis of Psalm 37, Augustine says that "those who pray for the death of their enemies [should] listen to the Lord's injunction, *Pray for your enemies.*"¹¹⁴ This hyperethical call belongs to the same lyrical discourse as predestination: "Let them not pray, then, that their enemies may die, but that their enemies be corrected; then their enemies will be dead, because when converted they will no longer exist as enemies."¹¹⁵ He wants all to be saved including the bishop and, if not all, then as many as possible. In such difficult cases, we are, perhaps, reluctant to acknowledge Augustine's use of multiple discourse levels. Where our moral lens picks out a utilitarian scapegoat, Augustine's gift lens sees an inveterate and tragic hatred reprised and possibly rectified in the coerced and grace-filled conversion, if not of all, then, at least, of an "incomparably greater number."



The Life of a Bishop: Reinventing Plato's Celestial Clock, *Confessions* 11–13

My discussion in [Chapter 2](#) arose from Freud's insight that religion is more the art of bearing the hardships of life than an indefinite exorcism of paternal accusation. Freud's insight gave rise to Ricoeur's question, which I adopted as my own, "whether the function of consolation is merely infantile, or whether there is not also what I should now call an epigenesis or ascending dialectic of consolation."¹ The rectification of consolation required a journey by way of tragic wisdom, in which Augustine learned to let go of the law of retribution or, in the language of [Chapter 2](#), learned to do without a father. As Ricoeur says of Job, in return he

receives no explanation of his suffering; he is merely shown something of the grandeur and order of the whole, without any meaning being directly given to the finite point of view of his desire.... A path is thus opened, a path of a non-narcissistic reconciliation: I give up my point of view; I love the whole.... Through the twofold test of commandment and retribution, faith brings about a single and unique suspension of the ethical. By revealing the sin of the just man [for Augustine, this is Pelagianism; for Paul and the Synoptics, it is Pharisaism], the man of belief goes beyond the ethics of righteousness; by losing the immediate consolation of his narcissism, he goes beyond any ethical view of the world.²

Also in [Chapter 2](#), I showed that Augustine overcame the father figure; in losing the father figure as an idol, he discovered it as a symbol. He could discover the father as symbol because "the father symbol is the likeness of the father in accordance with which the giving up of desire is no longer death but love."³ This view is unsurpassable. In [Chapter 9](#), we arrived at the same point, having undergone the ascesis involved when "the 'epigenesis of consolation' according to faith and the 'resignation to Ananke' according to Freudianism confront and challenge one another."⁴ In [Chapter 2](#), Freud taught us to place giving up the father at the heart of the problematic of faith. In [Chapter 9](#),

Augustine taught his contemporaries that reality is, if the reader will forgive the anachronistic adoption of Freud's language, "the world of things and men such as that world would appear to a human desire which has given up the pleasure principle, that is to say, which has subordinated its point of view to the whole."⁵ This subordination led to the question: "Is reality simply necessity offered to my resignation? Is it not also possibility opened to the power of loving?"⁶ For Augustine, we saw that, paradoxically, necessity as election and predestination set within the Christian story becomes the ultimate symbol of possibility, of the possibility of converting original sin's triple hatred into a triple love: hatred of God, self, and truth into love as gratitude, generosity, and the Word made flesh in a life lived for us.

In Augustine's confessional narrative, the gift economy uses the judicial and the tragic economies narratologically and metaphorically to transform a triple hatred into a triple love. Metaphorical and narratological reference use the "literal" or "normal" reference to produce an indirect reference. The use of the literal reference is the negative condition for a reference to those aspects of our-being-in-the-world that cannot be talked about directly. They are intended by means of the new pertinence that the metaphorical/narratological discourse establishes, at the level of sense, on the literal to produce the semantic impertinence. The new "seeing-as" is the ontological correlate of a metaphorical and narratological "being-as." The concepts of horizon and world include these non-descriptive references.⁷ Insofar as the *Confessions* speak to Augustine's "brethren," the *Confessions* become part of their world, and in return they become members of the community to be numbered among the brethren to whom "they have given pleasure."⁸ The *Confessions* can make the brethren's simple environment into a world. Its poetics can enlarge and augment the horizon of their existence. Augustine's impertinent use of the judicial and tragic economies in the service of gift has the power of resignifying the world in its temporal dimension and of proposing a world that they may inhabit and into which they may "project [their] ownmost powers."⁹ Augustine's narrating, telling, reciting invites them to remake their action. His text testifies to a world of generosity in which freedom transforms sin and suffering from a tragic fate into a gift. Freedom is to live with respect and recognition for all in a community of "loving participation in ideas"¹⁰ as an intimation of the immortal community.

Ricoeur proceeds to decipher, as he says "at my own risk,"¹¹ a similar belief in freedom and gift within Freudianism. He believes that Freud identifies "reality with nature and nature with Eros."¹² Ricoeur responds with a question: "Is not this remythicizing a sign that the discipline of reality is nothing without the grace of imagination? that the consideration of necessity is nothing without

the evocation of possibility?”¹³ These questions relate the Freudian hermeneutics to the hermeneutics of the mytho-poetic and its symbolic exploration of the relationship that should exist between beings and Being. Ricoeur concludes: “What carries this mytho-poetic function is another power of language, a power that is no longer the demand of desire, demand for protection, demand for providence, but a call in which I leave off all demands and listen.”¹⁴ Augustine listens to the eternal Word made flesh in a confessional story of intensification, which, if I may adopt Ricoeur’s final words from his *Freud and Philosophy*, can introduce a cleavage “into the heart of the Freudian reality principle, separating mere resignation to Ananke from the love of Creation.”¹⁵ Augustine, in very different words and in a very different time and culture, says much the same at the end of the *Confessions*: “O Lord God, grant us peace, for You have granted us all things, the peace of repose, the peace of Your Sabbath, the peace that has no evening. For this gloriously beautiful order of things that are very good will pass away when it has achieved its end: it will have its morning and its evening” (13.35.50).¹⁶ By emplotting “this gloriously beautiful order of things” in his *Confessions*, Augustine extends a perennial invitation to enact, in the confessing community, “the peace that has no evening.”

How does Augustine emplot “this gloriously beautiful order of things” (13.35.50) in his *Confessions*? And what is it like to live “the peace that has no evening”? (13.35.50) I will respond to the first question, the question of emplotment, in the present chapter and to the second, to the question of the resurrected life, in the concluding chapter, [Chapter 11](#).

In Books 11–13, Augustine gives us an account of his life as a bishop witness. Here, as a Catholic bishop, he emplots for his contemporaries “this gloriously beautiful order of things” (13.35.50) by interpreting the Scriptures in terms of Plato’s celestial clock. Plato envisages the firmament as a “moving likeness of eternity.”¹⁷ In a series of religious, philosophical, and astronomical iconoclasms, Augustine reinvents Plato’s “great celestial clock.”¹⁸ He transfers the ancient religious and astronomical authority of the firmament to the Christian scriptures. Part-by-moving-part, the celestial clock becomes the scriptural narrative timing the Christian story. In the process, time finds its original place in the human soul, not the world soul. Linear time as the time of hope replaces cyclical time as the time of fate. True virtue is no longer detachment and uprooting from passing things but the deepening of time and concentration of life within time. The ethics of consent to the whole and Stoic resoluteness in the face of death give way to hope and the creative imagination of the possible revealed in Scripture.

In Book 7 of the *Confessions*, Augustine recalls how astronomy liberated him from astrological fatalism. In his Manichean youth, Augustine believed

in and practiced astrology.¹⁹ The Manicheans “worshipped the Sun and Moon as divine beings”²⁰ and tried to satisfy Augustine’s hunger for God by serving up “the sun and moon” (3.6.10). The astrologers and the Manicheans believed that the stars “control people’s lives so that free will … [is] only an illusion.”²¹

When Augustine learned to distinguish astronomy from astrology, he rejected astrology and Manichaeism along with it. The liberating insight came from the astronomers. They taught that the stars signify but do not cause a future event.²² It was “the solar eclipses of 378 and 381” that validated this teaching and undermined Augustine’s belief “as a Manichean that the Sun and Moon were divine beings.”²³ Faustus, the Manichean, failed to allay Augustine’s doubts because the astronomers had the advantage that they “could explain celestial phenomena through calculations.”²⁴ As a result, Augustine arrived at “the humbling realization that as a Manichean he had been worshipping heavenly bodies indeed, but bodies which were themselves subservient to the calculations and predictions of the astronomers.”²⁵

Augustine’s contemporary critics and many modern commentators observe that the divergent divine elections of the twins Esau and Jacob (7.6.10) help to wean Augustine from astrology, only for Augustine to replace astrological fatalism with divine fatalism.²⁶ Does astronomy free Augustine from Manichean and astrological fatalism only for Augustine to subject himself to a form of Christian fatalism?

Augustine’s Stoic and Neoplatonic heritage predisposes him to believe that the resurrection exhausts the category of promise by fulfilling it. Religion is a choice for or against life in God. The youthful Augustine adopted Hellenic ethics when he came to Milan. Stoic and Neoplatonic thought liberated him from Manichean rituals, through which, he claimed in retrospect, he could make no progress. As a psychological either/or – an existential decision – the denouement in Book 8 of the *Confessions* would seem to bypass the eschatological. Platonic touching of the eternal present in God precludes temporal experience.

The youthful Augustine, along with educated people of his day, accepts as a matter of course an ethics of the present. Through disciplined detachment, he seeks to touch the eternal. Knowing the eternal wisdom, he consents to an aesthetic worldview, in which the darkness of evil, as a “part,” by contrast highlights the “whole” that is in God. The present is the time of salvation. The past and the future are equally discredited. Hope and fear belong to uncertain opinion with their contingent evils and goods. Disturbances and agitations are the antithesis of consent and detachment. Nothing in Augustine’s philosophical inheritance would prepare him to see in hope an avenue to freedom. Detachment and consent, not hope and the distractions of the imagination,

make up his received philosophy of freedom. Can Augustine think according to hope? Is not his hope swallowed up already in a Hellenistic concept of God eternally present – *nunc stans* – to whom we escape in mysticism and ritual?

TIME'S INTERNAL HIERARCHY

Augustine thinks that we can talk of a personal span of time.²⁷ Isabelle Bochet, in agreement with E. A. Schmidt, commenting on “*uisiones temporales*” of *Confessions* Book 11.18. 23–20.26, says they “are in fact simply the concept of personal time, as defined in Book XI.”²⁸ The soul’s ability to distend itself as memory, attention, and anticipation allows the soul to take a personal measure of the flux, to time the flux.

This concept of personal time does not mean that for Augustine time is subjective or independent of a cosmological reference.²⁹ It does mean that Augustine’s personalization of time will permit him in Book 13, to deepen time, to draw time closer to eternity by replacing the celestial measure with the Bible. In its turn, the Bible will become the firmament. The Bible’s narrative will time the course of human existence from *Genesis* to *Apocalypse*. By usurping the function of the stars, scripture appropriates to itself Plato’s definition in the *Timaeus* of time as “the moving likeness of eternity.”³⁰

The exegeted human present resembles God’s eternal present. Even so, the Bible narrative revealing the eternal Word remains temporal; contemplation cannot free itself from time.³¹ The temporal condition of the soul is eliminated neither by conversion nor the ecstasy of Ostia. “The soul ‘distends’ itself as it ‘engages’ itself – this is the supreme enigma” of Book 11.³²

Eternity does not abolish time; eternity hierarchizes time and, thereby, deepens time. Augustine wonders how to explain the process to unstable minds (11.11.13). He answers that the Bible can hold the mind because in the Bible we can discover the “reason” (11.8.10) of eternity, which “determine[s]” (11.11.13) time. As the archetypal narrative work, the Bible engenders Books 1–9 of the *Confessions*. The deepening of time is unsurpassably temporal; the deepening of time is Pauline hope: “Let them stretch forth to the things that are before,” says Augustine in Book 11.30. 40.³³ The deepening of the irreducibly temporal “true form”³⁴ is the subject of Books 12 and 13.³⁵

TWO LEVELS OF HERMENEUTICS

The exegesis of “created heaven and earth” (12.2.2) in Book 12 entails a complex and detailed exposition of the hierarchy internal to time; the deepening of time is the key to the cosmology and ontology proposed. Book 12 stretches

out time and temporal experience between two poles, neither of which are in time, but both of which are creatures. In the beginning, before God created time, he created two beings, one “the heaven of heaven,” whose form stands so that it is not mutable though not co-eternal with God (12.2.2), the other “formless matter” so utterly formless that it cannot be measured (12.3.3). They are respectively “*intentio*” and “*distentio*” wrought to such an extreme that they break apart (12.9.9).

It is in hope that the soul traverses the levels of temporalization between the poles of the utterly distended and the immutably held. The “formless matter” he conceives as an “enlightened ignorance” (12.5.5) as “mutability … transition … by way of something formless” (12.6.6). Formless matter’s priority is its lowness: formless matter is not prior as a creator or even a priority in time, or in value, only “in origin as a sound is before a song” (12.29.40). The “heaven of heaven” he conceives as an “intellectual heaven, where it is given to the intellect to know in one act, and not part by part … to know in one act without any succession of time” (12.13.16).

Although the “heaven of heaven” fills Augustine with hope for the “reasonable and intellectual mind of Your pure City,” it too is mutable, composed of and drawn from formless matter: “mutability abides in its essence, so that it could fall into darkness and coldness unless it cohered to You in a love so great that Your noonday ever shone upon it and warmed it with its heat” (12.15.20–21). The wisdom belonging to the heaven of heaven is light “only by reflection”; its justice “results from being justified” (12.15.20). He hopes and addresses the heaven of heaven itself: “In my pilgrimage … I ask of Him who made you that He should possess me too in you, because me too He made. … I hope that I may be brought back to You” (12.15.22).³⁶ However, Augustine will never be simply an intellectual mind, for that would dissolve his form.

Stretched out between the horizons of these two vanishing points, these limiting ideas, Augustine unfolds the hierarchy of time, and the lived experience of moving across time’s levels (12.10.10). It is in hope that the soul traverses the levels of temporalization between the poles of the utterly distended and the immutably held (12.6.6).³⁷

Scripture responds to the temporal hierarchy by means of the rich diversity of scripture’s levels. Augustine distinguishes not only a multitude of truths but a hierarchy for their interpretation. The hierarchy of truths corresponds to the temporal hierarchy stretched out between the poles of the heaven of heaven and formless matter. The first level belongs to those with a “material way of thinking” (12.27.37).³⁸ Inasmuch as the Scriptures provide carnal meanings, these people are the “little children of good hope” (12.30.41). The next level, that of spiritual interpretation, presupposes the journey inward of

Book 7, which can be brought to fruition only in the confessional journey of Books 8 and 10. Those whom Scripture has taught to “fly” (11.27.37) can see a diversity of spiritual truths.

In Book 11, Augustine meditates on the conditions of possibility for a hierarchy internal to time.³⁹ In Book 12, the temporal hierarchy determines the two levels of hermeneutics. In Book 13, time’s hierarchy becomes scripture itself. By usurping the function of the stars, scripture appropriates to itself Plato’s definition of time “as a moving likeness of eternity.”

FOURFOLD TYPOLOGY OF HUMANITY

In Book 13, we journey in Augustine’s alien, allegorical world. Here it is possible to be astonished, as with illuminated manuscripts, by the miniature, intricate brilliance of Augustine’s work. He examines the decisive deepening that eternity, as captured in scripture, works upon time. This deepening is the interpretive key to Book 13.⁴⁰ Book 13 amplifies and deepens Augustine’s life by presenting it as an exegeted life. He tells the story of salvation. He conceives the whole of salvation history in the temporal terms of the seven days of creation: from eternity to eternity. The work of time stretched between the two created timelessness of the pure mind of the heaven of heaven as concentration, *intentio*, and formless matter as scattering, *distentio*,⁴¹ moves through the “days” (12.9.9) to the Sabbath rest: “For then also You will rest in us, as You operate in us, so that it will then by Your rest in us as it is now Your work in us” (13.37.52). We should not be misled by the term “rest” into thinking that rest is actionless peace – a sort of repose close to final boredom; for Augustine, repose means perfected action in accordance with our created form.⁴² To reach our place of rest – our true form – requires the “work” of the fire of the Holy Spirit, to whom Augustine sings his beautiful song of degrees. Once arrived at our place of rest, the same fire will be needed to maintain us in our true form:

A body tends by its weight towards the place proper to it.... Fire tends upwards, stone downwards.... It is by their weight that they are moved and seek their proper place. Things out of their place are in motion: they come to their place, and are at rest. My love is my weight: wherever I go my love is what brings me there. By your gift [the Holy Spirit] we are on fire and borne upwards: we flame and we ascend. “In our heart we ascend and sing the song of degrees.” It is by Your fire, Your beneficent fire, that we burn and we rise, rise towards the peace of Jerusalem. (13.9.10)

For Augustine, so noble is the rational creature that “for its repose and beatitude nothing less than You [God] suffices” (13.8.9). Our rational powers even resemble the Trinity (13.11.12).⁴³

Time receives its depth from Augustine's fourfold typology of humanity – recall that timing is a characteristic of the mind. The least are those, such as the Manicheans, who "think ... what is good is evil" (13.31.46). Then there are those who see that what is created is good but "take their joy in it rather than in You [God]" (13.31.46). Finally, there are two levels both of whom refer what is good to God, one whose thinking is material, the other spiritual. The whole dynamic hinges upon these last, the spiritual ones. They interpret scripture spiritually and preach: bishops (but not only bishops and by no means all bishops) and their great ancestors, the disciples, the evangelists, above all Paul, and the prophets, especially Moses.⁴⁴ The hope of humanity lies with them.⁴⁵ They receive, interpret, and speak the creating and redeeming *Vernum*. Their souls are so deepened in their *intentio* that the scattering of time, *distentio*, is concentrated in the temporal *vox*, which, once entrusted to writing, becomes scripture.⁴⁶

So important to Augustine is his charge to interpret scripture spiritually that, in the second chapter of Book 11, Augustine refuses to tell the history of his calling to ministry in the church (11.2.2). Instead, he acts out his present life as a bishop and a believer by meditating on the opening verses of the *Book of Genesis*. Unmediated awareness of God, the goal of his youth, is known now to be transitory and inefficacious. The Bible bridges the gulf. The scriptures now shape every aspect of his life – intellectual, practical, and affective. They have become his autobiography in the double sense that their exegesis tells his story as the salvation of the human race and exegesis is his daily practice.⁴⁷ In these last three books of the *Confessions*, we can watch Augustine exercising his teaching function as a bishop and follow him in the midst of his new quest for wisdom. The wisdom contained therein becomes the narrative of his life. His autobiography is deepened so that the Bible story becomes the confessional story of his own life and the Bible's history becomes the salvation history of the human race. The narrative of Books 1–9 is the history of the quest for the concentration, stability, and coherence the Bible narrative gives his life. It is a passage from the *Epistle to the Romans* that made efficacious his conversion in Book 8. A confessional vocation is an exegetical calling; it is the life of a bishop.

The opening verses of *Genesis* describe the Holy Spirit as "moving over the waters" (13.5.6). The Spirit's movement is a movement of eminence by which we reach our true form (13.9.10).

Having identified the temporal poles, delineated the four levels of humanity, and clarified the dynamics of the Spirit, Augustine proceeds to apply his new insights to the church. The "spiritual" members of the Church hold the key, for they are "moved over" by the Spirit (13.12.13) in such ways that they

have been inspired to write the scriptures. Their “doctrine” is the “light” shining over the “invisible and formless” waters (13.12.13). From the waters, they draw up the “earth,”⁴⁸ namely, the “carnal members of His Church” from the “darkness of ignorance” to “the Kingdom of God” (13.12.13).

THE CELESTIAL CLOCK

The key figure of “heaven” reappears in chapter 14 of Book 13 as the word tied to hope under the form of light and darkness, day and night: “‘Hope in God, Your word is a lamp to my feet.’ Hope and persevere until the night passes” (13.14.15).

“Heaven” receives its definitive form as the remarkable symbol for the scriptures: “who but You, Our God made a firmament of authority over us in Your divine Scripture? For ‘the heavens shall be folded together as a book’⁴⁹ which now are stretched out like a pavilion over us” (13.15.16).⁵⁰ The heavens, as the firmament in which are set the sun, the moon and the stars, and along with them their ancient significance as the measure by means of which we time our lives, are transferred in Augustine’s analogy to the scriptures. The ramifications of the analogy will be developed in subtle figural detail throughout Book 13.⁵¹

The firmament of the scriptures as God’s words was placed over humankind by mortal men, whose testimony was put to the temporal “limiting” test in martyrdom – skin for skin, says Augustine, human skin for the skin of the parchment of the scriptures: “Thus it was as a skin that You stretched out the firmament of Your Book, the firmament of Your words ever in *harmony* which, by the ministry of mortal men, You placed over us” (13.15.16; emphasis added). The “harmony” of the spheres is now scripture. Here, time is not chronological, cosmological time but time tied to the soul, psychological, personal time. The *intentio* of mortal men – Moses, the prophets, the evangelists, Paul – as expressed in the words of the scriptures deepens and hierarchizes time. The scriptures convinced the spiritual kindred souls, among whom Augustine numbers himself as a bishop, to confess (13.15.17).

In what sense can the scriptures, which have been created by the distended souls of mortal men, be called the firmament? The angels, though created, are a limiting idea. They dwell above the firmament and “read without syllables spoken in time what is willed by Your eternal will … and what they read never passes away. Their scroll is not closed, their book is not folded together” (13.15.18). The angelic scroll is the limiting idea for our scriptures. Our scriptures are below and act as our firmament. As scripture, our “heaven remains. The preachers of Your word pass from that life to the next, but Your Scripture

is stretched over the peoples until the end of time" (13.15.18).⁵² The scriptures announce God's mercy. Paraphrasing Paul and at the same time subtly Hellenizing his "now we see through a glass darkly" (1Cor. 13.12), Augustine describes the manner in which we perceive the text of the Scriptures in Platonic terms: "now we see in the darkness of clouds in the *mirror of heaven*, and not as it is" (13.15.18, emphasis added).⁵³

By Hellenizing Paul, Augustine has Hebraicized Plato. Paul's "through a glass darkly" and Plato's "moving likeness of eternity" have become Augustine's "in the darkness of clouds in the mirror of heaven." Augustine had prepared the ground for his new analogy as early as Book 11:23.29–30. By personalizing time, he makes it possible to say that time can be scattered and concentrated in proportion as the human mind becomes shallow or deep. In Paul, Moses, and "spiritual" men such as Augustine, time reaches, with the writing of scripture and its exegesis, a concentration revealed by the Holy Spirit. From the viewpoint of our post-Copernican cosmology, it is difficult to grasp the sheer boldness, not to say religious iconoclasm, of Augustine's personalized time and his substitution of scripture for the firmament.⁵⁴

Augustine's analogical use of ancient cosmology displaces that cosmology term-for-term; the sacred and immobile planetary revolutions become the eternal reasons "mirrored" in the scriptures. Eternal wisdom, "by which the world is governed" (7.6.8), replaces astrology and fate. In the *Timaeus*, "time finds its original place not in the human soul but in the world soul and has as its *ultimate end* the task of making the world 'still more like the original.'"⁵⁵ For Augustine, time is personalized as the present of his past, present, and future. While he presupposes cosmological time, he can take the measure of his life of wandering, of the flux, via the writings, exegesis, and preaching of the most "spiritual" of human souls. There, he discovers time's "ultimate end" in the firmament of scripture and time's "task" of progressively leading humankind to God's mercy and truth. For Plato, time is a "moving likeness of eternity," because "Time ... cannot exist apart from the heavenly clock whose movements are the measure of Time."⁵⁶ The fixed motion of "perpetual return, constitutes the nearest approximation that the world can provide to the perpetual duration of the immutable world."⁵⁷ For Augustine, the scriptural firmament, as "the mirror of heaven," is the "nearest approximation" to the "immutable world." The scriptures have usurped the function of the stars. Thereby, the scriptures, written by "spiritual" men, can deepen the temporal *intentio* to the point where salvation history makes human life more like the original, more like the Eternal Wisdom.⁵⁸ For Plato, time only exists in so far as the "heavenly clock" marks its measure.⁵⁹ For Augustine, the scriptures serve the same function in sacred history. The scriptures are the singular and

inspired time of salvation history. Plato says that the heavens were created as “‘a shrine brought into being for the everlasting gods.’ (*Timaeus* 37d)”⁶⁰ Cornford comments that shrine should be understood here to mean “a living *embodiment*” and that these shrines are “the presence of the divine beings.”⁶¹ Likewise, Augustine believes that the divine Word dwells corporally in the scriptures. What Ricoeur says of Plato and time, can be translated for Augustine and the scriptures: “There are perhaps moments when as discord wins out over concord, our despair finds … a recourse and a rest in Plato’s marvelous certainty that time is the apex of the inhuman order of the celestial bodies.”⁶² The scriptures supply Augustine with a comparable certainty at the apex of the human order.

“A MOVING LIKENESS . . .”

Can the scriptures be said to move? The answer to this question reveals the extent of Augustine’s iconoclasm. The scriptures are written in time, and once written remain fixed, like the God who inspired them. But unlike Plato’s “great celestial clock,” the scriptures do not model “perpetual return.” They are a “moving image” – an incarnation – in so far as they emplot the linear time of hope, in which, following Paul, not Plato, Augustine says: “it has not yet appeared what we shall be” (13.15.18).⁶³ Once personalized, human time can obey the law of linear time, not circular motion. Scripture’s narrative can time the world and guide the world to its destiny.⁶⁴ As narrative, the scriptures can be said to be a moving likeness of eternity in which the eternal Word dwells corporeally.⁶⁵

At the center of the drama are the apostles and their descendants, spiritual people, some preachers and bishops, Augustine.⁶⁶ Everything plays itself out in and is measured – “timed” – by the scriptures. By contemplating them, in preaching them, and by working for mercy and justice (13.17.21), the spiritual ones, once themselves “established [by ‘contemplation’] in the firmament of Your Scripture, shine like lights to the world” (13.18.22). From Scripture, the spiritual ones learn to distinguish between the spiritual and the earthly “as between day and night” (13.18.22). The gifts of the Spirit are “stars” (13.18.23). These Spirit given stars serve the “carnal” members of the church, who “must be content with the light of the moon and the stars” (13.18.23). In chapter after chapter of subtle allegorical detail, Augustine tells the story of salvation in which the spiritual ones “shine in the firmament … [are] lights in the firmament of heaven having the word of life. [They] run over the whole world.... For you [the spiritual ones] are ‘the light of the world’” (13.19.25). Chapters 32–34 offer a summary of the economy and history of salvation as

the working out in time of the “predestined” order of the economy in which all is “subjected” to and “in harmony with the firmament of Your Book” (13.34.49).⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

As the story in time about eternity, the Bible narrative raises time and temporal beings with time from distention to concentration. Concentration allows Augustine to recount his journey through the four levels of human living in Books 1–9 and through the corresponding two levels of hermeneutics. The true opposite of dispersion is not atemporality but concentration. The contemplation of eternity outside of Scripture reveals eternity as a limit idea and a limit experience. Eternity has formed the upper limit of the temporal process of hierarchization. Ricoeur rightly says that, “for the current in Christian tradition that incorporated the teachings of Neoplatonism, time’s approximation of eternity lies in the stability of a soul at rest.”⁶⁸ Although Augustine never abandons Neoplatonic anthropology, his plunge into the Scriptures forced him to exchange hope for resolution. According to Augustine, the created soul must immerse itself in time if the soul hopes to approximate eternity. The incompatibility of the ends and the means gave rise to a paradox – the measure of rest is in direct proportion to the extent of the active immersion – and to a corollary – from a temporal perspective, human rest can only mean acting fully in accordance with our true form.

Augustine must set out again and again on the narrative roads of time to discover the eternal meaning emplotted in scripture’s narrative. In the endless itinerary, the scattered memories are gathered into the “quasi-present” of Scripture that “the imagination projects behind the living present.”⁶⁹ *Intentio* is not a reawakening in which the soul might be held in timeless contemplation. The dialectic of *intentio/distentio* signifies the rule for understanding whether as the recitation of Augustine’s past and present life or as salvation history.

The fleeting happy moments in which Augustine touches eternity and the *amantem memoriam* would be a source of deception and illusion – the fruit of hubris – were they not subordinated to the meditation on the Scriptures and incorporated in the lasting work of confession. The true virtue is not detachment and uprooting from passing things but the deepening of time in an ascending hierarchy and the concentration of life within the narrated, linear time of scripture. Augustine hopes in the face of fear, takes stock of his past life, looks for salvation even there, and searches for renewal in the present for the future. Hope is a passionate, confessional activity. Hope is

temporal. Freedom is turned in hope toward the future promised in the scriptures. Freedom's restless search for the possible opposes necessity. At the same time, consent to fate – assent without reservation to the whole – has been deconstructed along with the stars. The ethics of consent to the whole – *nec spe nec metu* – and of resoluteness in the face of the cycle of birth and death must give way to hope and the “creative imagination of the possible”⁷⁰ timed in the great celestial clock of scripture.



Resurrection and the Restless Heart

The shock of the incarnation and the folly of the cross culminate in the wisdom of the resurrection. This wisdom relies on a fragile testimony that extends from the time of the first disciples with their Gospels, letters, and acts to Augustine's time of bishop-preachers and their way of life as recorded in the *Confessions*. As a result, a paradoxical relation obtains between the kernel of the Gospel and culture. On the one hand, "there is no proof which can support either the experience or the rationale. In this sense the Cross *remains* a folly for the intelligent, a scandal for the wise."¹ On the other hand, the Gospel kernel becomes visible only by becoming itself a fact of culture. With the *Confessions*, the Gospels enter a new genre.² The genre of *confessio* is sufficiently in tune with "the presuppositions of [Augustine's] culture" that Augustine can create a common "interval of interrogation"³ in which to bridge and make productive the cultural distance and estrangement between the world and discourse of classical antiquity and the Bible.

In Augustine's youth, the scandal of Christianity was hidden in an outmoded cultural vehicle inherited from earlier generations so that Cicero's eloquence alienated him from Catholic Christianity (3.5.9). Manichean rationalism taught him to mock the anthropomorphic God of the Pentateuch. It was the Platonic anthropology of Ambrose's spiritual interpretation that opened the Bible to him (6.4.6). Augustine's rhetorical genius lay in his ability to join, in a credible new cultural vehicle of autobiography, Milanese Christian Platonism, as a credible medium of his day, with the Psalms as the false scandal of the Bible and the Pauline resurrection wisdom as the true scandal. The scandal for us in reading Augustine's *Confessions* is their very success. The Augustinian synthesis, which became the accepted believable for ensuing

This chapter follows Ricoeur's *Fallible Man* closely, especially chapter 4, "Affective Fragility," pp. 122–203.

generations of believers, has become for us culturally incredible. We can no longer grasp the force of the scandal caused by and the pleasure given by Augustine's testimony to his contemporaries.

Augustine demystified the anthropomorphic God of the Psalms in terms of the culturally credible Milanese Christian Platonism. Platonism's absolutely other God became the God of "fidelity," "lyricism," and "wrath." Augustine's new discourse performed a sort of rupture in the discourse of classical antiquity and of the Bible. In our turn, we seek to demystify the *Confessions* in terms of the cultural believable of Kant, Hegel, Freud, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and their heirs. Our deconstructive techniques left to themselves reduce the poetic core of living to consent to necessity. Steven Weinberg's ironic nostalgia captures our contemporary approach to necessity. He says that: "Living without God isn't easy. But its very difficulty offers one other consolation – that there is a certain *honor*, or perhaps just grim satisfaction, in facing up to our condition without despair and without wishful thinking – with good humor, but without God."⁴ Weinberg's necessity has become the "honorable," the accepted, even the univocal or literal language in the mainstream of our secular culture. My struggle in this book has been to hear Augustine above the noise of Weinberg's "literal/univocal" language of necessity, so as to hear Augustine as his contemporaries heard him.

Univocal speculation enables Augustine to clarify, posit, and decide; non-univocal discourses encompass univocal speculation. Augustine submits the univocal language of his day to the metaphorical and the narratological language of his *Confessions* to explore with his contemporaries the possibility of living in a lyrical world. I have turned to Ricoeur to introduce into Weinberg's univocal language of "necessity" the overdetermined character of lyric and lament found in Augustine's confessional narrative. By so doing, I hope to understand how Augustine and his readers explored their existential possibilities, their situation. Metaphor and narrative are equivocal not by default but by an excess of meaning. Augustine and his contemporaries cannot dispose of their inexhaustible semantic charge. Instead, their semantic charge disposes of them existentially and ontologically. The generative word of *Romans* in Book 8 of the *Confessions* witnesses to the surging up of possibility, to a restoration of meaning, to the discovery of a confessional way of life. Upon reading the passage from *Romans*, Augustine says: "I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant, with the very ending of the sentence, it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away" (8.12.29).

What happened to his heart? What was the light? Here the heart of existence is revealed in an external word. He knows himself and his humanity not by a word uttered by himself. He cannot set himself free; he cannot ascribe to himself what he sees as belonging to God. Augustine the witness testified that he is established in his true humanity by the word not so much spoken by him but spoken to him. *Romans 13:13* spoke efficaciously to Augustine's heart, the same restless and courageous heart that set out on the quest of the preceding seven books with Augustine's celebrated phrase: "For You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless till they rest in You" (1.1.1).

Christ's being poured out "for all," the *kenotic* essence of the lyrical life, reveals the historical and communitarian significance of the resurrection surplus.⁵ But the *Confessions* does not offer a systematic treatment of the communitarian dimensions of the resurrection such as one finds in the *City of God*.⁶ Instead, the *Confessions* found the resurrection community of which the *City of God* will speak. In this chapter, I will try to discover what sort of community the *Confessions* create and how they do it. The communitarian wisdom of the resurrection must speak to Augustine's heart. The creative word must produce its surplus in his heart or remain Book 7's "flash without a sequel."⁷

FRIENDSHIP AND DEVOTION TO TRUTH

In this chapter, I will follow the vicissitudes of Augustine's heart in the *Confessions* beginning with Book 9. Here, in Book 9, God "delivered" (9.4.7) his heart for friendship. A community of friends is freedom's final form.⁸ Book 9 reads like a homecoming for Augustine and his friends. Augustine's quest has been intensely communitarian throughout the *Confessions*. He is rarely alone. So it is fitting that a community of friends will be the gift of grace.

His "heart" and "tongue" praise God, who "had regard to the profundity of my death and drew out the abyss of corruption that was in the bottom of my heart" (9.1.1). His "free will" was "suddenly summoned forth" "how lovely I suddenly found it to be free.... O true and supreme loveliness.... You who are sweeter than all pleasure.... And I talked [*garriebam*⁹] with You as friends talk" (9.1.1). Friendship with God reveals the fullness of interpersonal relations and constitutes the astonishing surplus of the gift of friendship.¹⁰

After his conversion in Book 8, Augustine and his friends withdrew from their occupations. They did not fear the counter arguments of those who, "with pretended care for our interests, might destroy us saying they loved us as men consume food saying that they love it" (9.2.2). The confidence of

Augustine and his friends rested on their unity of hearts and the witness of Ambrose, Victorinus, the Milanese civil servants, Antony:

You had pierced our hearts with the arrow of Your love, and our minds were pierced with the arrows of Your words. To burn away and utterly consume our slothfulness so that we might no more be sunk in its depths, we had the depths of our thought filled with the examples of Your servants whom You had changed from darkness to light and from death to life; and these inflamed us so powerfully that any false tongue of contradiction did not extinguish our flame but set us blazing more fiercely. (9.2.2)

Together, they retired to Verecundus' "country house at Cassiciacum, where we rested in you from the world's troubles, with the loveliness and eternal freshness of your *paradise*: for you forgave him [Verecundus] his sins upon earth in the mountain abundance, Your mountain, the mountain of richness" (9.3.5 emphasis added).¹¹ There, to Augustine's intense joy, Nebridius joined them, and "from the depths of my heart: 'my heart has said to You: I have sought Your face. Your face, O Lord, will I still seek'" (9.3.6).

Life in this earthly paradise consisted in "discussions either with my friends there present or with Yourself when I was alone with You" (9.4.7). This is the life of superabundance: "What cries did I utter to You, O my God, I but a novice in your true love, a catechumen keeping holiday in a country house with that other catechumen [my heart's brother] Alypius" (9.4.7–8). By way of contrast, Augustine recalls his pre-conversion brethren the Manicheans "with indignation and a burning anguish of sorrow," for in the words of the Psalmist, repeated twice, they remain "dull of heart" (9.4.8–9): "For the heart they would bring me would be in their eyes, eyes that looked everywhere [seeking God in the material universe] but at You" (9.4.10). They could not understand their error because they would not take responsibility for their sins and in confession discover that God dwells within as spirit: "But there where I had been angry with myself [for past sins] ... there you began to make me feel Your love and to give 'gladness in my heart'" (9.4.10). Sorrow, certainly, for the Manicheans too were his heart's brethren, but coupled with indignation, for friendship is a union of love and truth. Truth bonds the community to its goal. Therefore, in the next paragraph, Augustine says that, on the one hand, "it was with a deep cry of [his] ... heart" that he reflected on the resurrection's guarantee in God's immovable fidelity: "You Lord, alone have 'made me dwell in hope'" (9.4.11). On the other hand, he could not "find what could be done with those deaf dead," which leads to anguished reflection: that, as another Ambrose, he was fretting his heart out over the enemies of these same Scriptures (9.4.11). The community of friends is incomplete, the heart cannot be whole.

Augustine, his son Adeodatus, and his friend Alypius were baptized together and spent their days meditating with “wonderful delight” on God’s salvific design and weeping at the beauty of the church’s singing: “Those sounds flowed into my ears, and the truth streamed into my heart: so that my feeling of devotion overflowed, and the tears ran from my eyes, and I was happy in them” (9.6.14). He exults in “the great joy of the brethren singing together with heart and voice” (9.7.15).

Cassiciacum’s “holiday” (9.4.8) in their earthly paradise was productive in written dialogues. And the whole community, held together in the bond of friendship and truth, sought a common goal of service:

You, Lord, who make men of one mind to dwell in one house, brought to our company a young man of our own town, Evodius. He had held office in the civil service, had been converted and baptized before us, had resigned from the state’s service, and given himself to Yours. We kept together, meaning to live together in our devout purpose. We thought deeply as to the place in which we might serve You most usefully. As a result we started back for Africa. (9.8.17)

Drawing together what I have discovered so far, friendship itself – though only male friendship plus Monica, “a woman in sex, with the faith of a man”! (9.4.8) – expresses one dimension of the human heart that finds a resonance in our modernity. The other dimension of devotion to an idea and to truth expresses the other. Together, friendship and devotion to ideas define the human heart for Augustine. Here in the human heart, the resurrection’s wisdom is revealed. The economy of superabundance is an economy of the heart. Augustine discovers here a view into the immutable order of God, into which, as friend, he has already entered. If he is to dwell in the higher order, then he must follow simultaneously the working out of both expressions – truth and friendship.

“LOVING PARTICIPATION IN IDEAS”¹²

Reason as openness to truth engenders feeling as openness to wisdom. In Augustine’s youth, Cicero’s heart – *pectus* (3.4.7)¹³ – inflamed Augustine’s own and transformed his feelings and desires: “Suddenly all the vanity I had hoped in I saw as worthless, and with an incredible intensity of desire I longed after immortal wisdom” (3.4.7). The same wisdom, as true happiness, still structures the central argument in Augustine’s search for God in Book 10. Reason transforms the life of feeling into the desire for joy and happiness in truth. Truth makes the heart restless and stretches desire beyond vital need and the vanity of mere eloquence (3.4.7–8).¹⁴

Feelings of “delight,” “incredible intensity of desire” and “joy” set him off on “the journey upwards” to immortal wisdom (3.4.7). Wisdom becomes progressively more inward. At first, with the Manicheans, his heart dwells in his eyes (9.4.10) but the philosophers teach him that he belongs to the realm of ideas so that he rejects the “horrible sacrilege of heart,” by which the Manicheans hold God to be corruptible (7.2.3); with all his heart, he rejected them and their evil way of enquiring about evil (7.3.4); and evil itself, by which “the heart is driven and tormented” (7.5.7). He says that his “unhappy heart [*pectore*] … was … burdened and gnawed at by the fear that I should die without having found the truth” (7.5.7). The search becomes ever more painful, ever more inward, ever more personal (7.7.11). The Platonists taught him “to return” to himself, and there “with the eye of my soul” he saw the light that is truth (7.10.16). He belongs to truth with the joy of recognition, a joy that stills the restless heart, which was made by God for God: “And You did cry to me from afar: ‘I am who am.’ And I heard You as one hears in the heart; and there was from that moment no ground of doubt in me; I would more easily have doubted my own life than have doubted that truth is” (7.10.16). But for the present, he has not the strength, nor the love to know true happiness; “charity knows it,” and, as he grows in strength, then he too will feed on truth and become truth himself (7.10.16).

Augustine's heart finds itself moving in complementary directions. The mind's demand for the whole truth opens up feeling and desire, transforming them into the restless quest for true happiness. At the same time, the feelings that arise interiorize the mind's quest for complete truth. Inasmuch as true happiness structures the quest of the restless heart, Augustine discovers that he belongs to true happiness not only as a destiny but from his origin. He belongs primordially to true happiness. Even those who do not seek for true happiness “have some sort of knowledge of it” (10.20.29). Augustine wonders whether this knowledge resides in memory “for if it is then we have at some time been happy – whether individually, or in that man who committed the first sin, in whom we all died and of whom we are all in misery descended” (10.20.29). In one of these two ways, his personal being is schematized as the true happiness for which he searches. Although obscured and lost in externality and materiality, dwelling in this schema constitutes him as the being whose mind seeks true happiness. Ricoeur sums up the anthropology I have ascribed to Augustine: “Whatever being may be, feeling attests that we are part of it: it is not the Entirely-Other but the medium or primordial space in which we continue to exist.”¹⁵

In fundamental, ontological feeling, Augustine discovers the restless heart. The heart's rest in God finds expression in feelings of friendship with God and

Augustine's fellow converts. The feeling of belonging to being Augustine experiences as a paradisal dwelling together schematized as the Heavenly Jerusalem and the City of God. At the same time, participation involves a task that made Augustine fret his heart out over the Manicheans and leads his fledgling community back to Africa. The theme of God's salvific design makes community possible by establishing the bond and goal of the community. Schematized as loyalty and devotion to ideas, God's design begins with Augustine's immediate friends and is extended to include the enemies of Scripture – the Manicheans. The folly of Christ's dying "for all" breaks open Augustine's resurrection experience. The inclusion of the Manicheans stretches Ricoeur's phrase "loving participation in ideas,"¹⁶ almost to breaking.

MARRIAGE, CELIBACY, AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Friendship and the quest for true happiness schematize the heart in the *Confessions* to include the Manicheans. There is one shocking exception: women.

For Augustine and his fellow philosophers, in practice, only men seem to be capable of the "loving participation in ideas." That loving participation in ideas is a male domain is the premise of Alypius' argument in favor of celibacy: "It was Alypius indeed who kept me from marrying with his unvarying argument that if I did we could not possibly live together with untroubled leisure in the pursuit of wisdom, as we had so long desired" (6.12.21). The common household plan of Augustine and his nine male Manichean friends was dropped because some were married (6.14.24).¹⁷ Marriage restrained Verecundus' desire for baptism, and Augustine was converted from marriage to continence and celibacy. "Monnica's well-intentioned plan to get Augustine baptized and married has the effect ... of raising the 'issue' of marriage vs. continence in a way that [Augustine] an ex-Manichean reader of Cicero, hearer of Ambrose, and friend of Alypius and Nebridius might not unreasonably resolve in favour of continence."¹⁸

Avril Cameron says that

advocacy of virginity ... [belongs to a wide and] very deeply rooted contemporary discourse.... If in the divine sphere the Incarnation represented the impossible, the negation of nature it might seem that virginity did likewise in the human sphere. It was seen, for example, as overcoming the disadvantages of female gender: ... virginity in human women was represented as a means of transcending the taint of Eve. In real terms, its achievement was a badge denoting the denial of the human condition and the attempt to get back to the "angelic life."¹⁹

Augustine's conventional, unreflective view of women's status in the ancient world becomes an obstacle, sometimes insurmountable, for modern women and men.²⁰ Gillian Clark says that in the Graeco-Roman world,

femaleness, by general consent, was a disadvantage. It was assumed that females were physically weaker than males, were unlikely to be the intellectual equals of males, and had a more difficult time controlling bodily desires and the onslaughts of emotion. This was held to be true even if they escaped some of the dangers of femaleness by choosing virginity, or if they were trained in philosophy and became the respected partners of philosophical men. On this question we do not suffer from the usual shortage of evidence: we are very well informed about the dominant ideology.²¹

My approach to this important matter will be to examine Augustine's understanding of sexuality, marriage, and the status of women. When these clash with our own view, I hope to clarify the difference. Today's readers cannot accept late antique views of sexuality and marriage or the status of women.²² However, I do hope to show where the Augustinian surplus reaches beyond.

Greco-Roman culture accepted a "double standard of sexual morality" so that, for example, "a married woman was an adulteress if she had any male sexual partner other than her husband; whereas a man was an adulterer, whether or not he was himself married, only if his partner was a married woman.... The law was chiefly concerned to ensure that property went to the legitimate heirs."²³ It is true that "the Church made repeated attempts to redefine adultery as infidelity by either spouse."²⁴ It is to Augustine's credit that "Augustine very properly protested against the double standard and, as Bishop of Hippo, exhorted wives to put up with everything but infidelity."²⁵ Clark comments that, in the case of infidelity, Augustine's "mother, who had been a traditional wife ... would probably have told him that his tactics were wrong, and more likely to provoke violence than to bring about reform."²⁶ The extended description in *Confessions* (9.9.19–20), where Augustine commends Monica's submission²⁷ to her hot-tempered husband, is illegal and intolerable today. But, sadly, in Monica's given cultural circumstances, if a wife hoped to avoid beatings, Augustine's running commentary on Monica's forbearance recommended the only safe course of action.

If Augustine's views can be situated in his times without being explained away, then the scandal of his society's beliefs and cultural practices need not always conceal the scandal of the resurrection wisdom. In some passages Augustine's confession can be heard only haltingly and by means of a cultural vehicle whose falsity tends to become the message. Since most readers do not simply stop reading the *Confessions*, clarification remains urgent, though often futile.

In the first seven books and at the denouement of the *Confessions'* story in Book 8, sexual relations are subject to lust and marriage or celibacy are the remedy. Since for Augustine not all pleasure is lust, I will try initially to identify how and when pleasure becomes lust.

Augustine is justly famous for his intimate portrayal of the heart caught in lust as “arrogant, depressed, weary and restless” (2.2.2). The heart’s arrogance aborts the quest for true happiness; weariness and depression bleed off the courage for the quest; and, as we shall see, restlessness reveals the insatiable desire for reciprocity, recognition, and respect, which pleasure cannot satisfy. By contrast, Ambrose was an enigma to the twenty-nine-year old Augustine (6.3.3). His celibacy was unfathomable; only the resurrection’s surplus could introduce Augustine to true happiness beyond pleasure.

In themselves, the body, the feelings, and the affections are all good and the heart’s involvement with them a necessary good; though the heart may use them ill. The body is traversed by affective intentions and desires; they are necessary “to utter the feelings of … [the] heart” (1.8.13). The body is limited to partial views and temporal sequence: “whatever things you perceive by fleshly sense you perceive only in part.... All that goes to make up the whole does not exist at one moment” (4.11.17). The body is a “messenger” for the interior self (10.6.9) and has its own integrity and right self-love. Remembering his boyhood, Augustine portrays the goodness of childhood with its complex mixture of values, beliefs, fears, and prayers. He paints a fine portrait of a natural and inherited way of being simultaneously opening up to and closing off values, beliefs, and happiness (1.20.31).

Practical finitude becomes evil only when the heart uses the body for evil ends: “It is our passions, our loves, the uncleanness of our spirit that bears us downward under the weight of the cares we are so much attracted to” (13.7.8). Augustine’s anti-Manichean polemic, sustained throughout Book 8, rejects the dualism in which the body and its pleasures would be an alien or evil principle at war with the soul. The soul is divided against itself: “It is therefore no monstrousness, partly to will, partly not to will, but a sickness of the soul to be so weighed down by custom that it cannot wholly rise even with the support of truth” (8.9.21). The divided, concupiscent heart, not a body-soul dualism, sins (4.10.15).

The heart interiorizes bodily finitude and the weight of customs and values – good and bad – that go to make an individual person. The same heart interiorizes and makes its own the search for eternal wisdom and true happiness. The self, which comes to consciousness, mediates between the self’s own finitude and an infinitude to which the self belongs primordially. The self mediates a primordial disproportion, in which the self is constituted. On

the one hand, there is vital desire, whose goal is pleasure in isolated, partial acts and processes. As Augustine says, fleshly sense cannot know the whole, cannot hold things transient. On the other hand, there is our total destiny, expressed as “beatitude,” “intellectual love,” or “spiritual joy.”²⁸ The former – vital desire satisfied in pleasure – halts the dynamism of the heart and closes off the affective horizon. Inasmuch as pleasure fulfills the body’s nature, pleasure is the instantaneous perfection of life. Pleasure becomes vice – the living tomb of the soul – only when the soul chooses: “I cried forth in the anguish of my heart … I looking outward” (7.7.11). Caught in the pleasure of corporeal things, the heart cannot realize the search for true happiness: “The things of space neither so received me that I could say ‘It is enough, it is well,’ nor yet allowed me to return where I might find sufficiency and wellbeing” (7.7.11).²⁹ One might imagine that the body here is the origin and source of vice, but Augustine immediately adds that pride destroyed the fragile balance of flesh and spirit (7.7.11). Inherited evil and pride bind the intellect and the will in the finitude of the body’s pleasure and the instantaneous perfection of life. Happiness transcends pleasure, for pleasure, as momentary rest, hinders the search for wisdom. Happiness engenders a quest which hierarchizes human activity in terms of eternal rest³⁰: “By your gift we are on fire and borne upwards: we flame and we ascend. ‘In our heart we ascend and sing the song of degrees’” (13.9.10).

The heart is complex, dual, disproportioned. The heart undergoes all the affectivity making up the transition between the vital and spiritual affections – between living and thinking. The self-conscious self knows that pleasure, though always good, falls short of the self. The self-conscious self knows the incommensurable gap between the finite resolution of pleasure and the infinite quest for happiness. At the same time, the infinite quest can become self-conscious insofar as the quest is schematized in the heart as the intellectual love involved in belonging to a community and to an idea.³¹

Once the difference and otherness of the self becomes self-preference, the lust for honor replaces the reciprocity of respect and recognition, and self-consciousness becomes self-absorption. The self loses itself in vanity and the search for honor and the lusts of curiosity, domination, and possession or a great passion. At the same time, abandoning the quest for true happiness, the self habituates itself to the instantaneous perfection of bodily pleasure. There, the finite, cyclical pattern of sensible appetite satisfies the vital self. But the heart, as disproportioned, remains restless, searching but ignorant, bound in pleasure and dissatisfied. At the end of Book 6, Augustine says, “O tortuous ways! Woe to my soul with its rash hope of finding something better if it forsook You! My soul turned and turned again on back and sides and

belly, and the bed was always hard" (6.16.26). By the beginning of Book 8, the ignorance has lifted, but the bondage in concupiscence remains: "Because my will was perverse it changed to lust, and lust yielded to became habit, and habit not resisted became necessity" (8.5.10).

The problem of a credible medium arises here. I think we can agree with Augustine that "the finite cyclical pattern of the sensible appetite"³² is good. If we are to follow the quest for true happiness, we must break the cycle of the vital pleasure of living and schematize the heart in the interpersonal and the cultural. If, for example, sexuality is reduced to lust, to a need for orgasm, and the partner, an accidental means, then the lack of reciprocity and respect makes us condemn sex as vice; Augustine says the same: "In fact it was not really marriage that I wanted. I was simply a slave to lust. So I took another woman, not of course as a wife; and thus my soul's disease was nourished and kept alive as vigorously as ever" (6.15.25).

Augustine affirms that using the sexual partner as an object of consumption is a sign of regression or immaturity. He acknowledges three ends for marriage: children, fidelity of the partners, and the sacrament. He adds to the passage just cited that his soul's disease was not merely as vigorous as ever but "indeed worse than ever, that it might reach the realm of matrimony in the company of its ancient habit" (6.15.25). Matrimony must be as far as possible beyond lust, but his believable medium becomes problematic not necessarily with his choice of celibacy but with his assessment of matrimony:

But what still held me tight bound was *my need of women*: nor indeed did the apostle forbid me to marry, though he exhorted me to a *better* state, wishing all men to be as he was himself. But I in my weakness was for choosing the *softer* place and this one thing kept me from taking a surer line upon others. I was weary and wasted with cares that were eating into me, all because there were many things which I was unwilling to suffer but had to put up with for the sake of living with a wife, a way of life to which I was utterly bound. (8.1.2; emphases added)

Our approach is different. Although we do not view marriage as necessarily a "softer" option, the difference would at first sight seem to be more significant. I say at first sight, for it is necessary to recall, that in the context of Book 8, Augustine's portrait of marriage must focus on lust, for it is lust, not marriage, from which he will be converted. He is "weary and wasted with cares that were eating into" him, not because of marriage. Augustine says, "It was not really marriage that I wanted. I was simply a slave to lust" (6.15.25).³³ We believe with Augustine that sexuality, which we have in common with animals, "becomes human sexuality in so far as it is traversed, reconstituted and penetrated by the truly human quest."³⁴ The partners, in seeking mutual

recognition, “introduce reciprocity into a relationship which by its biological roots, is fundamentally asymmetrical”³⁵ Augustine projects this ideal of sexual intercourse in marriage back into paradise before the Fall: “The joy and pleasure they [Adam and Eve] would have experienced in intercourse would neither have overwhelmed their minds nor drawn their wills beyond a good and reasonable purpose.”³⁶ For us, the richness of sexuality resides “in this complex interplay of the vital and the human”³⁷ so “that sexual satisfaction can no longer be simply a physical pleasure. The human being, through pleasure, beyond pleasure and sometimes by sacrificing pleasure, pursues the satisfaction of the quests with which ‘instinct’ is overlaid.”³⁸ Where our ideal gives more weight to the vital, Augustine’s ideal hinges on “voluntary control” and “ease.”³⁹

When in Book 8 Augustine talks of the “need of women” where we would talk of “partners” and “friends,” we detect in the change of language a profound shift in understanding. But again, Augustine’s objectifying and manipulative “need of women” in the narrative of Book 8, focuses on the lust from which he is to be saved. In other writings, where marriage, not lust, is the focus even in our fallen condition, “the single most striking feature of Augustine’s view of marriage is his stress on the friendship which marriage promotes.”⁴⁰

We envisage sexuality (even postlapsarian sexuality⁴¹) in marriage as a vital part of a relationship in which women and men are capable of mutual recognition and respect and of conducting together the search for true happiness.⁴² We regard sexuality, itself, as an integral part of the quest for true happiness. For Augustine and his friends in the confessional story, wives are an obstacle; for Verecundus real Christianity is a celibate community of friends. He needed consoling exhortations to fidelity in marriage: “There then we were, consoling the unhappy Verecundus, for our relationship was not impaired by conversion, and exhorting him to fidelity in his state, namely the married life” (9.3.6). For Verecundus, the “real action” was elsewhere, with Augustine and his celibate male community.⁴³ For us, the search for community and friendship in intellectual love usually involves partners from both sexes. Marriage, as the more usual, though not only, institution within which to conduct our search means that both “the wives” and “the husbands” become indispensable partners in the quest for spiritual joy, of which sexuality is an integral part:

Genital desire is sublimated into tenderness beyond sex, whereas the desire for recognition, in embodying itself in tenderness, takes on a sexual coloring. This is why sexuality has an uncommon position in anthropology; it is the area of tenderness, at once deeply instinctive and profoundly human. It realizes in the extreme the desire of the others desire.⁴⁴

“Desire of desire” is Hegel’s phrase for recognition – for loving participation in ideas.⁴⁵

All too often, modern marriage may be no more successful than Augustine’s first attempt to create a community with his university friends (6.14.24). Be that as it may, marriage and sexual intercourse is a credible medium for reaching our ideal. In the mainstream of our culture, Verecundus would no longer be on the outside looking in. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for readers to throw their hearts and minds into Augustine’s account of his search for celibacy and to share in Monica’s “triumphant exultation. . . . For You converted me to Yourself so that I no longer sought a wife” (8.12.30).⁴⁶

The common ground between ourselves and Augustine in the confessional story cannot be looked for in the institutions of marriage and celibacy but in their common meaning and purpose. Their common meaning and purpose are variously called intellectual love, spiritual joy, the desire of desire, and loving participation in ideas. The abundance of the resurrection can be poured into the schematizations of the heart, with their underlying concepts of respect, recognition, reciprocity, the quest for true happiness, and the breaking of the finite cyclical pattern of the sensible appetite. If we can follow Augustine and his quest at the level of these underlying concepts, then, when we see how sex as lust has become for him bondage, not freedom for fellowship, it is possible to rejoice with him in the gift of freedom. Celibacy is his preferred institution of freedom.⁴⁷ In his day, marriage can grant a comparable freedom to the married, but only if, like Augustine’s friend Paulinus of Nola, the partners abstain from sexual intercourse.⁴⁸

“In his early writings on marriage, Augustine devoted significant attention to the bond of marriage as the foundation for friendship and affective union of the spouses. In later works, he specified its purpose as growth in charity, the sanctifying gift of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the *sacramentum* or bond was the religious focus of marriage.”⁴⁹ So much so that John Cavadini says that, for Augustine, “human solidarity is not intrinsically male; instead, it is intrinsically or irreducibly spousal.”⁵⁰ Augustine believed that Christ, as the second Adam, restores this solidarity, which the first Adam had betrayed “by abandoning his wife or disfiguring their spousal companionship by exploiting her [Eve’s] vulnerability and assuming divine vindication in blaming [Eve] the victim.”⁵¹ Augustine makes spousal solidarity a central theme of his *City of God*. So central that spousal solidarity unmasks the lust for domination and exposes the true history of empires, whether Roman or Babylonian: “Christ [as the second Adam and in dramatic contrast to the first], without cause for shame, accepts the shame we [the church as second Eve] deserve out of love and, thus, the weakness he exhibits has a narrative hidden – because it is

'foolishness' – to the imperium, the narrative of the spouse."⁵² Spousal solidarity is the sacrament of Christ's *kenotic* love "for all." Augustine observed the "drive to domination and power"⁵³ in sexual lust. This drive lent weight to his appeal to spousal solidarity to expose the lust for power motivating imperial domination. It is not surprising then that, for Augustine, marriage must be beyond lust and that the ultimate aim of marriage in this postlapsarian world is sexual abstinence. "The ideal practice of Christian marriage merge[s] with the continence of the clergy and the perpetual virginity of the consecrated."⁵⁴ In this way "by restraining and overcoming concupiscence through faithful and forgiving charity, Christian spouses worked toward the victory of friendship over lust and their own growth into that more universal love that had failed to unite humanity in its original condition but that was later to be realized not only eschatologically but also in the earthly church."⁵⁵ Augustine's "view of the unity of married persons and virgins is one of difference with concord, of a variety which is harmonious."⁵⁶

Despite this high doctrine, if we are to get beyond the cultural shock of our different understanding of the place of postlapsarian sex in marriage, we must learn to communicate at a more abstract level. There, we may be able to understand Augustine's testimony to his contemporaries. I propose to follow the route of searching for common concepts. When we run across comments such as: "Many great men, well worthy of our imitation had given themselves to the pursuit of wisdom even though they had wives'" (6.11.19),⁵⁷ either we cease reading or swallow and recall that the institution of marriage and the cultural view of sexuality in late antiquity were not modeled on intellectual love and that a life of celibacy lived in community or spousal friendship coupled with sexual abstinence was.

THE IMPURE HEART AND FINITUDE

Augustine was acutely aware of the illusions of consciousness contained in the self-assertion of consciousness' own integrity. He examines himself most closely for the vices that pervert the community's reciprocity: "You know how my heart has groaned to You about this and the tears my eyes have shed [concerning the lust of vanity and honor].... For in those other kinds of temptation ['the pleasures of the flesh and curiosity for vain knowledge'] I have some power of examining myself but in that almost none" (10.37.60). His confession concludes: "In all these and other similar perils and toils, You see the trembling of my heart: and truly I feel my wounds rather as things ever and again healed by You than as things never inflicted upon me" (10.39.64). Faced with the perils and toils of vanity and the lust for honor, Platonic/monastic

Augustine considers flight, detachment, solitude. But flight, detachment, solitude do not belong for Augustine to the schema of the risen heart's communitarian asceticism. Communitarian asceticism must be endlessly renewed in confession, as he discovered at his coerced ordination (10.43.70).

Augustine's preoccupation with confessional asceticism – his prizing of the "heart" made "chaste in Your faith" (1.11.17), of being "clean of heart" (11.1.1) and his horror of the heart that lacks "purity" (4.2.3) – though using a language made foreign to us by psychoanalytic studies of obsession, has great significance. In our age of suspicion, the unqualified use of such language is no longer possible or desirable. But Augustine's use of this language and his valuing of the "purified," "clean," and "chaste" heart tells us something of importance.

Augustine insists on the purification of the heart precisely because he believes that purification is the prerequisite for the experience of true happiness and its discernment. For him, intellectual and moral purification gives access to a spiritual understanding of God, the soul, and Scripture – freedom from the finite cycle of pleasure and the vicious cycle of lust; freedom for respect, reciprocity, and recognition. For us too, freedom must be dual: intellectual in demystification, demythologization, and a critical hermeneutics of culture; ethical in, for example, the sublimation of sexual desire in tenderness and in the desire for recognition and respect. Our sublimation of sexual desire can encounter Augustine's not only in mystical ascent but also in spousal solidarity.

Augustine's understanding of purification makes freedom capable of loving participation in ideas. The impure heart cannot experience or understand loving participation in ideas. Therefore, Augustine asks: "By whose gift will You enter into my heart and fill it so compellingly that I shall turn no more to my sins but embrace You, my only good?" (1.5.5) The experiences of happiness, beyond lust but incorporating pleasure, assure Augustine that the mind's demand for total happiness is not alien to him but is his primordial destiny. Experiences of pleasure are not an added incentive or consolation for the weak or the over emotional. His *amantem memoriam*, his joyous baptism at Milan, the confessing community at Cassiciacum, as an anticipation of realization, assure Augustine that he is heading in the direction of the understanding's demand. Without these experiences, the idea of infinite happiness would be an interesting theory and a possible destiny. Asceticism's power to mediate these privileged experiences in a confessional narrative shows asceticism's practical utility.

Augustine's asceticism unearths reciprocity as destiny in its perverse denial. His halting progress in the *Confessions* is mirrored in the patronizing praise

of Faustus the Manichean: “He had a heart, which though it was not right toward God, was reasonably cautious in the matter of himself. He was not entirely ignorant of his own ignorance.... Even for this I liked him better: the modesty of a mind admitting incapacity is a finer thing than the knowledge I was in search of” (5.7.12).

Augustine and his friends, while still Manicheans, try to establish a community of mutual respect in “a common household for all of us: so that in the clear trust of friendship, things should not belong to this or that individual, but one thing should be made of all our possessions” (6.14.24). Here, each would treat the other as an existing end, as Augustine says, “truly I loved my friends for their own sake” (6.16.26). Their reciprocity finds expression in the “innocent having” of common property and the freedom devolving from common governance (6.14.24). Even though the spiritual world is there clear for all to see in their reciprocity, they think that they belong exclusively to the material world of sense. Augustine observes that, being only partially self-conscious, they are unable to grasp the spiritual meaning of their mutuality and the symbolic nature of their enterprise. As a result, they cannot make a definitive break with the immediacy of desire and vital living. With their vision restricted to vital living, the nature of the heart, schematized in friendship and eternal wisdom, remains beyond their grasp. Vital affirmation of oneself and simple consciousness cannot understand reciprocity. Augustine expresses astonishment at the fact that he overlooked so crucial an insight. Their attempt to found a community based on recognition fails.⁵⁸ Success must await the communal confessional asceticism of Book 9.

As a work of the heart, Books 9 and 10 witness to the idea of humanity with which his contemporaries can identify. Augustine looks for mutuality in God’s recognition; his confessing heart seeks an immortal esteem and an eternal destiny for the community. These same desires resonate in each of the “brethren.”⁵⁹ Augustine says that “nothing is more surely heard by You than a heart that confesses You” (2.3.5). He lays bare his heart before God: “Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart” (2.4.9).⁶⁰ Confessing leads to recognition: “behold You are there in their hearts, in the hearts of those who confess” (5.2.2). Here one “does truth” in the “heart” so as to come to the light “before many witnesses” (10.1.1). He says his *Confessions* cry out aloud “in my heart [*clamat affectu*]” (10.2.2), and they “stir up the heart[s]” of the brethren (10.3.4) so that he can reveal himself to those who “have their ear at my heart, where I am what I am” (10.3.4). Confessing produces a chorus of confessors, a “hymn of praise and the weeping ... from Your censers which are the hearts of my brethren” (10.4.5).

When Augustine failed to discern the spiritual import of the disinterested happiness, he discovered in the love of “my friends for their own sake” (6.16.26), he was surprised at his own obtuseness. In our turn, we are surprised that he could not grasp the nature of spiritual joy with women. Why, we ask, can he not recognize the true nature of intellectual love in marriage and marry his concubine? The ancient institution of concubinage did not lend itself to such insight: “taking a concubine – a legally recognized relationship – was considered an appropriate measure for a young man not yet able or willing to commit himself in marriage. Since concubines were usually lower-class women, they were not considered suitable marriage partners for young men of upper-class status, or, in Augustine’s case, of ‘upwardly mobile’ status.”⁶¹ Augustine does honor his concubine’s spiritual integrity (6.15.21), and Burns thinks that

Augustine’s observation of the change that birth of children brought upon sexual partners might have been based upon his own appreciation of the mother of his son Adeodatus. His praise of her contrasts with the silence he bestowed on the young heiress for whose sake she was sent away and the woman with whom he tried to replace her. He may have realized with her the same integration of personal affection and sexual practice, as well as the honoring of sexual fidelity, which he later presented as the ideal of Christian marriage in his initial compositions on these topics.⁶²

Outside of his confessional story, Augustine will condemn what he had done. He “told his congregation that it was not acceptable to have a concubine before you married, and argued that a man who dismissed a faithful concubine, *in order to marry*, had committed adultery in his heart – not against his wife, but against the concubine, who was guiltless if she maintained her fidelity.”⁶³ However, within the confessional story Augustine must present himself as “simply a slave of lust” (6.15.21), for it is sexual lust that will come to a crisis at the denouement of Book 8.

At the start of Book 8, Augustine says that the Word of God, though “rooted deep in my heart,” was inefficacious; “my heart had to be purged of the old leaven” of lust (8.1.1). *Romans* 13:13 purged his heart: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put You on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its concupiscence” (8.12.29). *Romans* unbound the heart and set it free for intellectual love, then “a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart” (8.12.29). *Romans* is the denouement of the famous trial with its competing testimonies, a “controversy raging in my heart, a controversy about myself against myself” (8.11.27). On the one side, “my one-time mistress” symbolized his lust and, on the other side, Continence,⁶⁴ who said: “Stop your ears against

your unclean members, that they may be mortified. They tell you of delights, but not such delights as the law of the Lord your God tells'” (8.11.27). The witnesses, his former mistresses and Continence, embody his dilemma as a choice between the delight contained in vital pleasure and the delight involved in friendship and recognition: “The woman Continence thus insisted that he could not embrace her through his own domineering (and thus incontinent) power, but through a power of continence that God alone could give.”⁶⁵ Continence personifies the respectful reciprocity of the law and the intellectual love of God: “And I talked [*garriebam*] with You as friends talk” (9.1.1).⁶⁶

In our secular culture, the greater availability of sex creates problems for sexuality and interpersonal relations parallel to the problems Augustine identifies in Books 1 to 8. In both cultural settings, sex is evaluated on a scale that runs from spousal solidarity at one end to lust as exploitation and manipulation of the partner at the other. In our times, the diminishing of obsession, resulting from the lack of prohibition, has the same unforeseen but comparable and pernicious consequence for spousal solidarity as it had in Augustine’s day. “To the degree that sexuality becomes more available, it loses its value as an expression, as *an engagement of the entire person* … people … suffer from the loss of affectionate contact, from impotence to love or to hate. This sly and diffuse nonsense affects equally our language.”⁶⁷ In his time, Augustine says that married couples could reach the postlapsarian form of spousal solidarity by sexual abstinence. We seek spousal solidarity by sublimating genital desire beyond “this sly and diffuse nonsense” “into tenderness beyond sex” and, at the same time, our “reciprocal desire for recognition, embody[ing] itself in tenderness, takes on a sexual coloring.”⁶⁸ With Augustine, we aim via these different means, to realize “in the extreme the desire of the others desire”⁶⁹ through “loving participation in ideas.”⁷⁰

Augustine believes, again in common with us, that “loving participation in ideas” is more intimately disfigured in the search for honor and glory than in sexual lust. The lust for honor (the *libido glorificandi*)⁷¹ must be distinguished from *libido carnalis*. As a product of vital desire, sexual concupiscence falls short of the spiritual affections because it distorts the community and friendship only from without. The lust for honor perverts friendship and community from within.

Augustine identifies the lust for honor as the essence of vice because it perverts the search for recognition in friendship and community. He interprets the prodigal son’s wanderings in terms of the heart darkened by the lust honor modeled during Augustine’s adolescence by his teachers “who were covered with shame if, in relating some act of theirs in no way evil, they fell into some barbarism or grammatical solecism: yet were praised, and

delighted to be praised, when they told of their lusts, provided they did so in correct words correctly arranged” (1.18.28). The evil in Augustine’s youthful pear theft lies in the rejection of reciprocity (to the owner of the pears) all for the sake of the honor of mock reciprocity within his peer group. Here, the lust for honor perverts recognition and the fear of shame destroys reciprocity: “O friendship unfriendly, unanalysable attraction for the mind, greediness to do damage for the mere sport and jest of it, desire for another’s loss with no gain to oneself or vengeance to be satisfied! Someone cries ‘Come on, let’s do it’ – and we should be ashamed to be ashamed!” (2.9.17) Bad faith is epitomized for Augustine in his study of the law where, he says, “I meant to excel – and the less honest I was, the more famous I should be. The very limit of human blindness is to glory in being blind” (3.3.6).

PASSION

Great passions embody the fallen versions of the risen life. The “transcending intention” of the quest for “infinite happiness” finds a focus in great passions.⁷² Inasmuch as great passions objectify and make practical for the will the whole of happiness, one gladly sacrifices pleasure for them.⁷³ The specific grandeur of passions, their inordinateness, is not a product of the desire to live but of the desire for happiness. The whole heart, with its schemata, finds in them an object into which the heart can put its all: “This ‘all’ is the mark of the desire for happiness: life does not want all; the word ‘all’ has no meaning for life, but only for the mind: the mind wills the ‘all’ and thinks the ‘all’ and will only be at peace in the ‘all.’”⁷⁴

Augustine shared a common goal and a common ideal with the friend of his youth (4.4.7). Their passion for one another derives its force from the conjunction of the vague expectation of true happiness and the unlimited desire for recognition. With the school masters, Augustine observed the conjunction of expectation and desire only in its base forms as the vanity of honor. With this friend, the schema of friendship finds a practical object. In the affective immediacy of their mutual presence resides the “all” of that which is desirable. The restless search for honor finds its object in the friend; the search for true happiness reaches fulfillment. Augustine puts “his whole capacity for happiness”⁷⁵ in one person. The recognition and honor his friend gave to Augustine constitute Augustine’s self: “My soul could not be without him” (4.4.7). On his friend’s death, he says, “I marveled still more that he should be dead and I his other self living still. Rightly has a friend been called ‘the half of my soul.’ For I thought of my soul and his as one soul in two bodies, and my life was a horror to me because I would not live halved” (4.6.11).⁷⁶

Augustine pours all the devotion and abandon reserved for infinite happiness into his friendship. Their mutual love represents the essence of spiritual desire schematized as loving participation in ideas. Augustine gives an engaging, even idyllic, picture of his community of youthful friends (4.8.14).⁷⁷ Here, the heart can abandon itself in the schema of true happiness. The heart can devote itself without reservation. In their mutuality, neither partner treats the other as they would not treat themselves. The picture of mutuality and respect, of recognition and worth acknowledges God's law, where the perverse communities honored that law only in the breach (4.9.14).

Why is the great and impassioned life a grand but still only a perverse imitation of the resurrection friendship? That we can be so mistaken reveals our glory and our tragedy. Glory in the sense that in wanting the all of infinite happiness, we schematize for the practical will an object for our desires. Tragic, for only one who can make such a mistake can suffer thus. By making an object of our desire the absolute, we "forget the symbolic character of the bond between happiness and the object of desire: forgetting this makes the symbol an idol; the impassioned life becomes a passional existence."⁷⁸ Augustine underlines the tragic. He sees himself as setting himself up for new griefs each time he makes a new friend. Death discloses the symbolic nature of friendship. Finitude reveals the impossibility of objectifying infinite happiness. Augustine concludes that "it was all one huge fable, one long lie ... my folly did not die whenever one of my friends died" (4.8.13).

At the center of his passion had been a false idea – a mistaken common meaning and goal – brought abruptly home to the youthful Augustine by the dramatic effects of his Manichean friend's baptism while still unconscious. On his friend becoming conscious, Augustine "began to mock, assuming he would join me in mocking.... But he looked at me as if I had been his deadly enemy.... I was stupefied and deeply perturbed" (4.4.8). Being a *phantasmata*, Augustine's Manichean deity could not reveal the symbolic nature of friendship: "Whither was my heart to flee for refuge from my heart. Whither was I to fly from myself?" (4.7.12); "[my soul] had made for itself a god occupying the infinite measures of all space, and had thought that God to be You [God], and had placed it in its heart, and thus had once again become the temple of its own idol" (7.14.20). With the Manichean God made in his own material image, he says that "I became a great enigma to myself.... If I said 'Trust in God' my soul did not obey – naturally because the man whom she had loved and lost was nobler and more real than the imagined deity in whom I was bidding her trust" (4.4.8).⁷⁹ Augustine reflects that "there is no true friendship unless You weld it between souls that cleave together through that charity which is shed in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us"

(4.4.7); “blessed is the man that loves You, O God, and his friend in You, and his enemy for You. For he alone loses no one that is dear to him, if all are dear in God, who is never lost” (4.9.14). This high doctrine will be sorely tested in Book 9 on the death of Monica. Confessional mourning lies between his first grief and the long inward ascent in search of true wisdom.

Faced with Monica’s death, we meet first the Stoic Augustine. In ascetic contrast to his response at his friend’s death and in keeping with the credible medium of Christian Platonism and monasticism, he forbids tears. Finding tearless asceticism ineffectual, Augustine breaks with the acceptable practice of his new culture, enters his true quest in confessional Christianity, finds the intimate God of friendship and recalls his mother in God’s sight. By so doing, he exchanges the love of fate for intimacy and tenderness. This time, his God is not “error and vain fantasy” (4.7.12). He confides in God by means of confessional tears. Ten years later, these tears create a whole community of confessors: “Your sons my masters, whom I serve with heart and voice and pen … fellow citizens with me in the eternal Jerusalem” (9.13.37). Together, they can share their grief so that even in suffering, under the sign of death, the scandal of the cross freely accepted surpasses the love of fate. Suffering consciousness need no longer isolate itself, retire into itself, and feel denied; its weeping is heard and the tears become a “pillow” (9.12.33) for his heart.

The heart is a dialectic: “the Joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite.”⁸⁰ We are the fragile mediator of ourselves. We remain torn in a “primordial conflict … as the becoming of an opposition,” which is the occasion, the origin, and the capacity (but not the cause) for the positing of vice.⁸¹ The resurrection community of Book 9 symbolizes the victory of that joy over and within that sadness itself. Augustine’s ideal of asceticism changes. He abandons massive detachment in the face of necessity, solitude, and exile in the eternal. In its stead, he adopts confessional self-mastery as communitarian asceticism practiced in confession. The confessional medium creates a community of friends, just as it had, according to Augustine, for Paul. Though a “living soul of self-mastery” Paul had discovered his true joy in community, so that, in time of tribulation, he tells the Philippians that only the news of their renewed good works had “opened my heart [*dilatasti mihi*]” (13.26.40)!

Augustine’s final testimony reveals the lyrical beauty and tender engagement of his whole heart in the intellectual love of God. Here, he testifies to the possibility of spiritual joy, to the desire of the other’s desire:

Late have I loved You, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved You!
For behold You were within me, and I outside; and I sought You outside and
in my loveliness fell upon those lovely things that You have made.... You did
send forth Your beams and shine upon me, and I drew my breath and do

now pant for You: I tasted You, and now hunger and thirst for You: You did touch me, and I have burned for You. (10.27.38)⁸²

In Book 10, he sublimates “genital desire” as “tenderness beyond sex,” at the same time, “the desire for recognition, in embodying itself in tenderness, takes on a sexual coloring”⁸³ incarnated for Augustine as spousal solidarity.⁸⁴ As a result, the entire person, with its dual heart, is engaged in an intense and intimate love that can never pass away. Such is the surprising abundance, the joyous wisdom of the resurrection (10.6.8–10).⁸⁵

FORMLESS ONTOLOGICAL FEELINGS AND THE ANALOGIA FIDEI

Augustine schematizes and stretches these feelings of happiness – ontological feelings – in terms of devotion to ideas and friendship “for all,” including the Manicheans. Despite the very significant reservations, for some insurmountable, I have noted with regard to marriage, celibacy, and ascetical purity, the schema of loving participation in ideas reveals Augustine’s experience of the resurrection’s superabundance, intelligible and credible to our culture.

There is one further group of feelings and experiences that reveal the resurrection. They form the substratum from which the schemata of friendship and community arise and to which they return. As moods, these feelings and experiences are essentially formless: “Through their formless character they denote the fundamental feeling of which the determined feelings [friendship, ideas] are the schemata, namely … [our] very openness to being.”⁸⁶ Vital feelings, such as well-being and uneasiness, are also formless. All feelings, being intentional, can acquire form or return to formlessness. What makes feelings ontological is not their formlessness but the level of activity: “the formless is also hierarchized following the levels of activity that human existence traverses.”⁸⁷ I have tried to follow Augustine as he traces his journey through these levels schematized as a triple freedom in Books 1 to 9 and in his reflexive criteriology as he ascends through them on his journey to true happiness. When these ontological feelings are formless, they are independent of any cultural form. Since they require no believable medium, they are, perhaps, the closest we can come to understanding what Augustine means by the resurrection.

God’s image cannot be known by means of objective determinations – that would be a transcendental illusion. Since God is beyond essence, “it is understandable that the feelings which most radically interiorize the supreme intention of reason might themselves be beyond form.”⁸⁸ Augustine reports the chain of reasoning by which he understood God’s immutability;

he continues, “Then in a thrust of a trembling glance my mind arrived at that which is … but I lacked the strength to hold my gaze fixed … so that I returned to my old habits bearing nothing with me but a memory of delight and a desire as for something of which I had caught the fragrance but which I had not yet the strength to eat” (7.17.23). Here, God is experienced in trembling, delight, and fragrance and known as an *amanatem memoriam*. As immutable, unconditioned, and ontological, God cannot be conceptualized. According to Ricoeur, “the height of the feeling of belonging to being ought to be the feeling in which what is most detached from our vital depth [the cycle of finitude] – what is absolute in the strong sense of the word – becomes the heart of our heart.”⁸⁹ So close is Ricoeur’s description to Augustine’s *via amoris* that one might suspect that Ricoeur had Augustine in mind: “Yet all the time You were more inward than the most inward place of my heart and loftier than the highest (*Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*)” (3.6.11). Augustine concludes his exhaustive search for God in vital living and in memory with the same confession: “In what place then did I find You to learn of You? For You were not in memory, before I learned of You. Where then did I find You to learn of You, save in Yourself, above myself?” (10.26.37) Augustine seems to open out an eternal space within his heart and above his memory, though within both by being through both, where God dwells. God, as the unconditioned who will admit no objective determinations and who is simply demanded by the understanding is known on the *via amoris* as a feeling. The heart’s seeing as touching leaves, in the form of a “print,”⁹⁰ a feeling as a loving memory – an *amantem memoriam* – that is more intimate than we are to ourselves.⁹¹

This ontological feeling reveals the limited nature of our understanding of the resurrection schematized as loving participation in ideas. The schemata of recognition and self-consciousness, reciprocity and respect, cannot be predicated univocally of God, not because God’s love falls short of friendship but because God’s love surpasses friendship: “Augustine regularly insists that friendship may not be predicated of God, since it is an accident.”⁹² The eminence of God’s love is much more intimate than friendship, but, since God’s love creates the economy of superabundance as friendship, “in one passage of *On the Trinity* (7.6.11) he [Augustine] allows for the possibility of conceiving of the Holy Spirit as the friendship of Father and Son.”⁹³

Ontological feeling reveals the ontological depths from which the schema of friendship arises and which it intends, but Augustine must travel further along the *via amoris* to understand the loving memory itself. On this *via*, ontological feeling belongs to the heart and shares the heart’s dialectic. The heart’s finitude experiences awe as a *mysterium tremendum*: “If being is that

which beings are not, anguish is the feeling ‘par excellence’ of ontological difference.”⁹⁴ But “joy attests that we have a part of us linked to this very lack of being in beings [*mysterium fascinans*]. That is why the Spiritual Joy, the Intellectual Love and the Beatitude … designate, under different names and on different philosophical contents the only affective ‘mood’ worthy of being called *ontological*.”⁹⁵ Augustine frequently captures these affective, fundamental moods as a *mysterium tremendum et mysterium fascinans*:

Let me see Your face even if I die, lest I die with longing to see it. (1.5.5)

Let Truth, the light of my heart, speak to me, not my own darkness! I fell away and my sight was darkened; but from that depth, even from that depth, I loved You. I wandered afar, but I remembered You. I heard Your voice behind me calling me to return, but I could scarcely hear it for the tumult of my unquieted passions. And now behold I return to Your fountain panting and with burning thirst. Let none bar my way: I shall drink of it and so I shall live. Let me not be my own life: of myself I lived evilly and to myself I was death. In You I live again. Do you speak to me, do You instruct me. I have trusted Your books and their words are deep mysteries. (12.10.10)

God can touch the non-vital desires: the desire for truth, goodness, and oneness, schematized for Augustine in Christ’s “dying for all.” On the *via amoris*, seeing as touching (*attingere*), conjecturing (*conjiciens*), and groping (*palpans*), leave only the “print” of an *amantem memoriam* apprehended only as an unknowing; its authentication is only a divestment. The knowledge derived from touching, conjecturing, and groping is not an inference, a comparison, or an intuition but a prereflexive “analogizing grasp”⁹⁶ in which God’s feelings and sense of self are known to belong to God, for the same reason that our own feelings and sense of self are known to belong to us. The analogizing grasp, says Ricoeur, who is reflecting here on how we know other people, points to an “enigma”: “the sphere of ownness” is transgressed as a “transfer” of “the sense of the ego” to another heart, which, as heart, “also contains the sense of ego.”⁹⁷ Augustine concludes that God as an alter ego is a second heart or, more properly, for Augustine’s analogy is an *analogia fidei*, the reverse. Here, in the *analogia fidei*, the dissymmetry latent in analogies belonging to God overwhelms the understanding and ever-and-again reduces the self to silence. The analogical grasp in “transgressing” the interiority of the self centered on itself (divestment) confers a specific meaning, namely the admission that I, as God’s other, am not condemned to remain a stranger but can become *God’s counterpart*, that is, someone who, *like God*, says “I.”⁹⁸ But Augustine is careful immediately to divest himself of the positivity of such self-knowledge. The derisory laughter always comes between both the positivity of knowledge and the positivity of freedom. God’s self and

God's freedom are always already "more inward than the most inward place of my heart and loftier than the highest" (3.6.11). The *amantem memoriam* is not a vision of God but recalls a free and solicitous transcendence, a "for all," which awakens the self to a beyond itself within itself in which Augustine acts. "Amorous memory" opens his most intimate self to a free solicitude beyond his elitist, pre-ordination self to include the Manicheans. This solicitude was unrecognizable and its freedom was unavailable, for it was hidden from sight in a triple hatred and ineluctably bound. Ineluctability leaves no room for natural benevolence or a divine instinct.

Inspired by the lyrical momentum of amorous memory, Augustine confesses that he is subjected and elevated, subjected in the triple hatred, in the ever present wound that cannot heal with its *libido habendi*, *libido dominandi*, *libido gloriandi* – awe before the *mysterium tremendum*, the heart's finitude. He is elevated in the non-self-serving goodness of belonging to "all," – the *fascinans*. The decentered self of the *fascinans*, its passivity, its lyric solicitousness, its willingness not "to be spared of all suffering"⁹⁹ – Nabert's "'gratuitously willed suffering'"¹⁰⁰ – testifies to a God decentered in kindness and compassion. The *fascinans* testifies to a God that eludes any analogizing grasp in which God's graciousness would objectify or manipulate Augustine's freedom.¹⁰¹ Lyrical freedom, Paul's great *kenotic* hymn, is a passivity, a "for all," an unlimited freedom that the will can never assume.

What is that light which shines upon me but not continuously, and strikes upon my heart with no wounding? I draw back in terror: I am on fire with longing: terror in so far as I am different from it, longing in the degree of my likeness to it. It is Wisdom, Wisdom Itself. (11.9.11)

Notes

PREFACE

- ¹ Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987).
- ² Paul Rigby, "Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's *Confessions*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985), pp. 93–114; reprinted as "Augustine's *Confessions*: The Recognition of Fatherhood," D. Capps and J. E. Dittes (eds.), *The Hunger of the Heart: Reflections on the Confessions of Augustine* (Purdue University, West Lafayette: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1990), pp. 143–65.
- ³ Paul Rigby, "Original Sin," *AttA*, pp. 607–14. Paul Rigby, "Augustine's Use of Narrative Universals in the Debate over Predestination," *Augustinian Studies* 31(2000), pp. 181–94. Paul Rigby, "The Role of God's 'Inscrutable Judgments' in Augustine's Doctrine of Predestination," *Augustinian Studies* 33 (2002), pp. 213–22.
- ⁴ Donald Capps, "Augustine as Narcissist: Comments on Paul Rigby's 'Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's *Confessions*'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985), pp. 115–27.
- ⁵ Paul Rigby, "Is Augustine a Narcissist?" *Augustinian Studies* 44 (2013), pp. 59–91.
- ⁶ References to the *Confessions* are given in the body of the text and by number only.
- ⁷ T. J. van Bavel says, Augustine does not hesitate to call this kind of ignorance a "*pia ignorantia, docta ignorantia*" ("God in between Affirmation and Negation According to Augustine," Joseph Lienhard, Earl Muller, Roland Teske [eds.], *Collectanea Augustiniana, Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum* [New York: Peter Lang, 1993], p. 80). Bernard McGinn says that Augustine's "Sermon 52 underlines how the inexpressibility of the experience of ecstasy highlights the unknowability of God – a sign of the modest but significant apophatic element in his thought that becomes evident about 400" (*The Foundations of Western Mysticism Vol. I of the Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* [New York, Crossroad, 1992], p. 237).
- ⁸ retr. 2.6; emphasis added.
- ⁹ Charles Rosen, *Freedom and the Arts: Essays on Music and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012, p. 238), cited by Alistair Macaulay, "The Pleasures of Charles Rosen," *New York Review of Books*, 59 no. 9, May 24, 2012, p. 30.

INTRODUCTION

- ¹ Brown, “Introduction” to *Confessions*, p. xii.
- ² Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), p. 190.
- ³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 83.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- ⁵ I do not mean to imply that the medievals necessarily followed along slavishly. I agree with Willemien Otten: “Augustine’s reception is most fruitful and creative where it is accompanied by a realization of the so-called Augustinian surplus. By this I refer to a sense of humility arising from the acknowledgment that, since Augustine’s legacy is strong enough to support itself, the task of transmitting it is not wholly dependent on his interpreters.... Where the desire for completeness makes room for imagination, it seems that the concept of an Augustinian surplus allows for enough self-correction and trust that the Augustinian legacy can somehow come through unscathed” (“Between Praise and Appraisal: Medieval Guidelines for the Assessment of Augustine’s Intellectual Legacy,” *Augustinian Studies* 43 [2013], p. 217).
- ⁶ Isabelle Bochet, *Augustin dans la pensée de Paul Ricoeur* (Paris: Éditions Facultés jésuites de Paris, 2003). David Klemm claims that Ricoeur is not a Barthian: “Ricoeur, Theology, and the Rhetoric of Overturning,” *Journal of Literature and Theology* 3 (1989), pp. 267–84.
- ⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “On the Exegesis of Genesis 1:1–2:4a,” David Pellaur (trans.) Mark I. Wallace (ed.), *Figuring the Sacred* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1995), p. 140.
- ⁸ Jean Nabert, *L’Essai sur le mal* cited by Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan (trans.) Lewis S. Mudge (ed.), *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 122.
- ⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” R. Bradley DeFord (trans.), Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (eds.), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of his Work* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 220.

1 CONFESSIO

- ¹ Augustine’s new rhetoric combined the Psalms with Cicero and the Bible with Virgil (Gillian Clark “Intertexts: Bible, Classical Culture and Philosophy,” *Augustine, The Confessions*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Second edition, Bristol: Phoenix Press, 1994/2005]), pp. 73–81.
- ² References to the *Confessions* are given in the body of the text and by number only. In the infrequent instances where Sheed has used the second-person singular, I have taken the liberty of substituting the second-person plural and adapting the verb form accordingly.
- ³ John Peter Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 144.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 144. “Whatever may be said of this event, it is not a failed attempt at ‘Plotinian ecstasy.’ Nor is this a mystical experience, in the modern Jamesian sense. We are, in fact, told little about the characteristics of this experience but much about the soul’s instability. Augustine’s concern is to underscore the soul’s moral imperfection.... [Augustine] suggests, not that he had failed in his efforts to be a

Platonist, but rather that Platonism had failed him” (*Ibid.*, p. 68). Thus Book 7 does not describe “an experience that is amenable to a primarily psychological analysis. It is an attempt to capture discursively an event in terms that are epistemic and moral” (John Kenney, “St. Augustine and the Invention of Mysticism,” E. Livingstone [ed.], *Studia Partistica XXXIII* [Leuven: Peeters, 1997], p. 128). “As Gerald Bonner has pointed out, in Augustine we can never separate accounts of contemplative vision from theory of knowledge” (“The Spirituality of St. Augustine, and Its Influence on Western Mysticism,” *Sobornost* 4 [1982], 143, cited by McGinn, *Western Mysticism*, p. 234). McGinn adds that “almost all later Western mystics appealed” to Augustine (*Ibid.*, p. 231).

⁵ Kenney, *Mysticism*, pp. 127–28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁷ “Cf. the corresponding element in 7.10.16, ‘et clamasti de longinquō: immo vero ‘ego sum qui sum’’ [*Ex*, 3:14]. The difference is that here the factual indicative says that Augustine not only heard this claim from afar, but arrived at Being itself.... True being is the decisive argument against the Manicheans” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:457). Kenney rightly claims that 7.10.16 is a success, not in the sense that Ostia is a successful, post-baptismal ascent, but in the sense that Manichean materialism and Academic Skepticism are both successfully refuted. “What it [7.10.16] records is a powerful experience of a transcendent God, whose intervention into the life of the soul makes the existence of that God indubitable. It is clearly a successful moment of direct understanding which dispels completely both the Manichean [materialist] view of reality and dissolves any lingering skepticism that Augustine entertained while his convictions as a Manichean were waning” (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 59).

⁸ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:458.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:122.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:127–29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3:122.

¹² See O’Donnell’s summary of the present state of the discussion of the role of mystical ascent in Augustine’s conversion (*Ibid.*, 2:459).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3:461; see also McGinn, *Western Mysticism*, p. 251 and James Wetzel, “Snares of Truth: Augustine on Free Will and Predestination,” Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (eds.), *Augustine and His Critics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 135–36.

¹⁴ Augustine “placed individual mystical fulfillment – that is, the attainment of a partial vision of God in this life – within the context of the life of the church. For him [unlike Plotinus] there was no such thing as a purely private or strictly personal vision. Whatever gift of divine presence we are given here below can be realized only in and through our bond in the Body of Christ” (McGinn, *Western Mysticism*, p. 251). For Augustine there is an “isometry between love of neighbor/love of God ... vision of God/restoration of the image [of the Trinity]” (*Ibid.*, p. 246; see also pp. 243 and 245).

¹⁵ “Both unmediated presence to [Wisdom] and direct association are thus part of the eschatological state of the soul. But neither complete union nor absorption into eternal Wisdom are indicated, only contact with divine Wisdom. The prevailing ontology thus remains strictly monotheistic” (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 116).

¹⁶ “Passages elsewhere in Augustine that broadly parallel the ascent here at Ostia are too numerous to be quoted in full, or even to be catalogued with any confidence of

- comprehensiveness” (O’Donnell *Confessions*, 3:128). O’Donnell proceeds to give a partial list.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 3:122.
 - ¹⁸ Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 60.
 - ¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 59–60.
 - ²⁰ McGinn, *Western Mysticism*, p. 255; see also p. 411, note 37. Augustine’s “mingling of the language of vision and metaphors drawn from all the other spiritual senses creates what may be a deliberate confusion in order to convey something of the obscurity of all such encounters.... Tactile images are omnipresent in his writings, not only the language of touching (*attingere*), but especially that of clinging and cleaving to, embracing and sticking to ... ‘spiritual drunkenness’ ... Augustine never thought that our immediate experience of God in this life could be clearly expressed. The images he used, whether those of vision or of the other spiritual senses, were all strategies meant to suggest and not to circumscribe the inexpressible” (Ibid., p. 253).
 - ²¹ Ibid., p. 240. Willemien Otten says that “for Augustine the mere possession of eyes is not sufficient as long as they are not healed” (“In the Shadow of the Divine: Negative Theology and Negative Anthropology in Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena,” *The Heythrop Journal* 40 [1999], p. 443). “In Augustine all the initiative lies with the divine, whether directly through its self-disclosure or indirectly through faith that heals as the gift that heals human eyes” (Ibid., p. 446). She says that “Augustine ... do[es] engage in negative theology” but, unlike Dionysius, not in negative anthropology “due to the invasiveness of human sin”; instead Augustine “turns to God in prayer” (Ibid., pp. 451–52). Otten compares and contrasts Dionysius’s negative anthropology with Derrida’s “*diffrance*” (Ibid., p. 451).
 - ²² Deidre Carabine says that here Augustine is using “the aphaietic method of Plotinus ... to silence the tumult of the flesh and the images of earth, sea, air and the heavens, whereby through silencing all the works of God including the self, one would be able to hear the voice of God himself” (“Negative Theology in the Thought of Saint Augustine,” *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 59 [1992], 14).
 - ²³ Van Bavel, “God in between,” p. 84.
 - ²⁴ Ibid.
 - ²⁵ Ibid.
 - ²⁶ Ibid., p. 85.
 - ²⁷ Van Bavel says, Augustine does not hesitate to call this kind of ignorance a “*pia ignorantia, docta ignorantia*” (Ibid., p. 80). See also Avril Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 157, 67–68, and 42.
 - ²⁸ Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 135.
 - ²⁹ “The mystical ascents of Bks. 7, 9, and even 10, must be constantly re-enacted, for what remains afterwards is not the vision itself, but only the ‘*amantem memoriam*’” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:189).
 - ³⁰ McGinn, *Western Mysticism*, p. 258, emphasis added.
 - ³¹ Margret Miles, “Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine’s *De trinitate* and *Confessions*,” *The Journal of Religion* 63 [1983], p. 127, emphasis added.
 - ³² Carabine shows that the “apophatic principle exists at the heart of Augustine’s thought” (“Negative Theology,” 8), inasmuch as Augustine’s God is ineffable – “problems

with language” (*Ibid.*, p. 8) – God is unknowable – “problem of thought” (*Ibid.*, p. 12), and approached by the *via remotionis* – “not knowing God” (*Ibid.*, p. 14). But “where the apophatic theologian will have recourse to the *via negativa* as a means of approaching transcendent reality, Augustine chooses another way, the *via amoris*” (Carabine, “Negative Theology,” p. 7). Otten says that Augustine stresses the role of love for seeing God, because in heaven faith and hope have already completed their task; “we will only need love so as to keep growing closer to God” (“In the Shadow of the Divine,” p. 445).

³³ Paul Ricoeur, “Love and Justice,” *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 319.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

³⁵ *Ibid.* “There is a form of commandment that is not yet a law: this commandment, if it can be called such, can be heard in the tone of the *Song of Songs*, in the plea that the lover addressed to the beloved: ‘Thou love me!’ It is because violence taints all the relations of interaction, because of the power-over exerted by an agent on the patient of the action, that the commandment becomes law, and the law, prohibition: ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ It is at this point that the sort of short-circuit between conscience and obligation takes place, from which results the reduction of the voice of conscience to the verdict of the court” (Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 351).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

³⁷ Hegel’s phrase, see Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, Charles Kelbley (trans.) (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965), p. 196.

³⁸ “The language at the conclusion suggests the kind of synaesthetic brief experiences of divine presence found in the Milan and Ostia accounts” (McGinn, *Western Mysticism*, p. 236).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 196. “The imagery here is erotic, but much less explicitly so than e.g. *sol. 1.13.22*” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:197).

⁴⁰ For a detailed treatment of the heart and the Resurrection, see [Chapter 11](#).

⁴¹ “The present passage bridges the sexual to the mystical in linking the inner and outer person. Also: 2.2.3, 3.4.8, 5.12.22, 6.2.2, 6.16.26, 8.5.10, 8.11.27, and 13.8.9” (*Ibid.*, p. 168).

⁴² McGinn, *Western Mysticism*, p. 241.

⁴³ Miles, “Vision,” 127.

⁴⁴ “Hated of the very love that can set it free” is the theme of [Chapter 5](#) on original sin.

⁴⁵ Peter Brown captures this delight in his chapter entitled “The Lost Future,” *Augustine* pp. 146–57; see especially pp. 154–57.

⁴⁶ O’Donnell, commenting on 11.2.2, says that in other texts cf. 6.3.3, 13.25.38, and 8.5.10, “the alternative to *actiones necessitates* is *meditatio sacrae scripturae*, suggesting that the ascent to God occurs through the medium of scriptural contemplation” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:240).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴⁸ “[In the] last eight books of *De Trinitate*. The argument is not by way of analogy from the soul to God ... but from God to the soul.... As in the Trinitarian paradigm ... the highest wisdom is a perfect unity of knowledge and love” (Robert Crouse, “Knowledge,” *AttA*, pp. 487–88).

⁴⁹ Formless matter’s priority is its lowness: formless matter is not prior as a creator or even a priority in time, or in value, only “in origin as a sound is before a song” (“*origine, sicut sonus cantum*”) (*conf.* 12.29.40).

- 50** Jean Nabert, *L'Essai sur le mal* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), p. 148, as cited by Ricoeur, “Testimony,” p. 122.
- 51** “The signs of the absolute’s self-disclosure are at the same time signs in which consciousness recognizes itself” (*Ibid.*, p. 143).
- 52** See Frederick Van Fleteren, “Ascent of the Soul,” *AttA*, pp. 63–67, and Anne-Marie Bowery, “Plotinus, the Enneads,” *AttA*, pp. 654–57.
- 53** O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:413.
- 54** O’Donnell says of the historical accuracy of the *Tolle Lege* scene: “There is no convincing reason to doubt the facts of the narrative of this garden scene as Augustine presents them, and so we should depart from Courcelle; but at the same time, we should firmly believe (with Courcelle) that the presentation of those facts is marked by an artistry of selection and arrangement that gives the text here much, surely most, of its unique character and texture.... Augustine is ‘making the truth’ about his life here, earnestly: we would be poltroons not to allow him his truth” (*Ibid.*, 3:60, see also 3:61).
- 55** *Ibid.*, 3:64.
- 56** James Wetzel, *Augustine: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 126.
- 57** Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” pp. 115–16.
- 58** Moral examples cannot manifest the divine. In exemplary actions, the moral norm replaces the individual so that lives become cases exemplifying a moral rule or a law (*Ibid.*, p. 121). “The category of testimony is distinguished from that of the example, which simply illustrates the law, and even from that of the symbol, which acts on the imagination without engaging life in any way. Testimonies are real events whose depth no reflection can plumb” (*Ibid.*, pp. 116–17).
- 59** This is the same Victorinus who, according to Augustine, translated Plotinus’ *Enneads* into Latin! (O’Donnell *Confessions*, p. 14).
- 60** Ricoeur, “Testimony,” p. 129. Ricoeur cautions us: “a cause which has martyrs is not necessarily a just cause” (*Ibid.*, p. 129). If martyrdom flows from and always remains subordinate to testimony – a martyr is a witness not the reverse – then martyrdom cannot be “an argument, even less a proof. It is a test, a limit situation, not an exemplar” (*Ibid.*, p. 129).
- 61** *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 62** Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” pp. 116–17 and 121.
- 63** Garry Wills captures the stance I have taken with regards to the question of the historical accuracy of the *Confessions*. Wills concedes that “people are quite right to see a contrast between Augustine’s self-presentation at the time of his conversion and his description of the same events over a decade later.... He had come to see his early understanding of his conversion as inadequate, one that stood in need of correction. That is why we have the first ten books, whose energy in pursuit of a truth still being absorbed gives them their immediacy” (*St. Augustine, A Penguin Life* [Toronto: Penguin, 1999], pp. 94–95). See also Henry Chadwick, *St Augustine’s Confessions, translated with an introduction and notes* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. xxiii. O’Donnell refers us to “the moderate conclusion of the note at BA 14. 540–49: ‘Nous croirions volontiers qu’il s’agit d’un événement naturel qui, dans les conditions du moment, prend pour celui qui le perçoit une signification providentielle’” (*Confessions*, 3:60, see also 1:xxx and Gillian Clark, *Augustine, the Confessions*, pp. 68–69).

- 64** Here, I am following Ricoeur's ordinary language analysis of testimony in non-religious usage (Ricoeur, "Testimony," p. 123).
- 65** Ibid., p. 123.
- 66** Ibid., pp. 123–24.
- 67** Ricoeur, "Testimony," p. 133.
- 68** Ibid., 133–34. Kenney says of the most interiorized of events, even including Augustine's witness to the contemplation of God at Ostia that "contemplation, far from an end in itself, serves to open the Christian soul to confession. That is just how Augustine's narrative proceeds, by the syncopated rhythm of contemplation and confession" (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 11).
- 69** Ricoeur, "Testimony," p. 144.
- 70** Ibid., p. 145.
- 71** "This paragraph ends with a vivid synthesis of two texts that epitomize Augustine's principal spiritual authorities": Scripture and Plotinus (O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:94).
- 72** One need only turn to Augustine's own exegetical theory and practice in Books 12 and 13 of the *Confessions* for an explicit confirmation of this dialectical structure, see Chapter 10. See also *doc. Chr.* 2 and 3.
- 73** "idipsum: For Augustine, a mystical name for God, equated with Ex. 3:14, 'ego sum qui sum'. Notably so at Ostia" (Ibid., 3:99). Kenney says that it recalls the "auto kath'auto, 'self-sameness,' the classical epithet for the Platonic forms. The Augustinian soul seeks the complete stability of the intelligible and eternal world. This is what the soul had tasted before, in the Book Seven ascension: the 'simplicity of eternity' and freedom from multiplicity, change, and time" (*Mysticism*, p. 77).
- 74** "The disordered use of sight (*curiositas*) leaves him with vision clouded, hankering for a clear vision of God: that is the project of Bk. 7, and it will both succeed and fail" (O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:411–12).
- 75** "The opacity of speaker to hearer and the unabridged distance between them often led Augustine to sober reflection, usually concentrating on the inadequacies of the speaker" (Ibid., 3:157).
- 76** Ricoeur, "Testimony," p. 138.
- 77** "A dialogic structure of testimony is indicated here between testimony as act and testimony as narrative" (Ibid., p. 117).
- 78** Augustine's "discussion of the nature of the *passiones/perturbationes* ... makes it clear that he finds the ideal passionlessness of the philosophers unattainable, and he thinks that the philosopher's version of salvation is only possible for the passionless. He interposes (e.g., at *civ.* 14.6) the role of *voluntas* as an escape: it does not matter whether you suffer *passiones* or not, it matters how you will deal with them. *That* is not Plotinus. The philosophers and the gnostics together share the opinion that right knowledge is the key to salvation; Bk. 8 is Augustine's personal testimony that the will remains to be mastered.... The first concise statement of the responsibility of the will for evil [*lib. arb.*] is juxtaposed with a remarkable and little-attended outline of the contents of *conf.* through Bk. 8.... The narrative pattern that evolves into *conf.* thus emerges side by side with the identification of the *voluntas* as the decisive factor in determining the fate of the individual – an identification that marks a distinct philosophical advance and an important differentiation from neo-Platonism" (O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:31).

- 79 Ricoeur, “Testimony,” p. 143.
- 80 See Annemaré Kotzé, *Augustine’s Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004).
- 81 Ricoeur, “Testimony,” p. 126.
- 82 Ibid., p. 127.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Ibid., p. 125.
- 85 Ibid., p. 126.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Freud, Nietzsche, and their descendants will permit me to “try” Augustine before modernity. I have already attempted to conduct this trial in two articles: “Freudianism, and Augustine’s *Confessions*,” and “Is Augustine a Narcissist?” See Chapters 2 and 3 of the present book respectively.
- 88 I examine the role of Satan in Ransom Theory in Chapter 7, Section 4.
- 89 Ricoeur, “Testimony,” p. 140.
- 90 Ibid., p. 140.
- 91 For the significance of Augustine’s choice to interpret his personal history in light of Paul’s, see Paula Fredriksen, “Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, 37 (1986), 24–25.
- 92 “lumen: = Christ” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:98).
- 93 Ricoeur, “Testimony,” p. 146.
- 94 Ibid., p. 146.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 21.
- 99 Ibid., p. 21.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Ibid., p. 22.
- 102 John Rist, “Faith and Reason,” E. Stump and N. Kretzmann (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 37.
- 103 Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 25.
- 104 Ibid., p. 21 and Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” p. 116.
- 105 Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 25.
- 106 Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” pp. 115–16.
- 107 Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 21.
- 108 Ibid., p. 23.
- 109 Ibid., p. 25.
- 110 Ibid.
- 111 “Several scholars have remarked that there is nothing in Plotinus to match Romans 7, where the ‘alien that besets us here’ is our own fallen will. Plotinus is beset from outside only, fortunate fellow; purification is the stripping away and elimination of that inside us that has got there from outside. Division against himself is division of soul against body, not a lingering division within the soul itself.... This [Plot. 1. 2. 5. 5–9] is the description of the Likeness to which purification will lead; Augustine here sounds like a man who has read this passage and despairs of achieving the

calm it depicts. To him, Paul in Romans has the more compelling description of the state of his soul, and offers help from outside that Plotinus did not have” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:479; see also note 111).

¹¹² “Augustine had inherited from Plotinus a sense of the sheer size and dynamism of the inner world.... For Plotinus, the inner world was a reassuring continuum.... For Augustine, by contrast, the sheer size of the inner world was a source of anxiety quite as much as strength. Where Plotinus is full of quiet confidence, Augustine felt precarious.... The conscious mind was ringed with shadows ... a murmurous region.... It was most unusual to insist, as Augustine does, that no man could ever sufficiently search his own heart, that the ‘spreading, limitless room’ was so complex, so mysterious, that no one could ever know his whole personality; and so, that no one could be certain that all of him would rally to standards, which the conscious mind alone had accepted. Augustine’s sense of the dangers of identifying himself exclusively with his conscious good intentions, underlies the refrain that shocked Pelagius” (Brown, *Augustine*, pp. 178–79).

¹¹³ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 22.

¹¹⁴ Clark, *Augustine, the Confessions*, p. 62.

¹¹⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 351.

¹¹⁶ Nabert, *Essai*, p. 144, as cited by Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” p. 115.

¹¹⁷ Nabert, *Essai*, p. 145, as cited by Ricoeur, *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹¹⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 345.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

¹²¹ Nabert, *Essai*, p. 144, as cited by Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” p. 115.

¹²² “This is why an individual ego is always at the threshold to justification. He cannot break the solidarity by which he participates in the evil that touches his personal destiny, nor can he assure himself that his own action is exempt from some secret self-complaisance, nor can he believe that his repentance is equivalent to annulling his debts, and he lacks that intellectual intuition of an act or a choice that would be the root of his being” (Nabert, *Essai*, p. 139, as cited by Ricoeur, *Ibid.*, p. 115 note 11). And again: “The incertitude, the precariousness of an inner progress, the impatience for a verification or a decisive demonstration regarding the truth or the depth of our regeneration gives birth in our consciousness to the idea of absolute action that would be their own light to themselves” (Nabert, *Essai*, p. 123, as cited by Ricoeur, *Ibid.*, p. 114).

¹²³ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 351. See note 35 for the full citation.

2 FATHERHOOD: FROM NEUROTIC PHANTASM TO COMPASSIONATE SYMBOL

¹ *civ. Dei*, 14.15. Augustine gives so much weight to *libido dominandi* that the phrase is often thought to have been coined by Augustine. Augustine borrowed the phrase “once mentioned in passing by Sallust [*Catilina*, ii, 2, in *De civ. Dei*, III, 14, 50], as an un-Roman vice” (Peter Brown, “Saint Augustine and Political Society,” Dorothy Donnelly [ed.], *The City of God* [New York: Peter Lang, 1995], p. 24).

- ² Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: II,” *CI*, pp. 315–34.
- ³ Ricoeur, “Testimony,” p. 145.
- ⁴ Bernhard Legewie, *Augustinus, Eine Psychographie* (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Weber, 1925).
- ⁵ E. R. Dodds, “Augustine’s Confessions: A Study of Spiritual Maladjustment,” *Hibbert Journal* 26 (1927–28), 459–73. Peter Rudnytsky observes that “as an autobiography, moreover, Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* is itself in the tradition of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*” (*The Psychoanalytic Vocation: Rank, Winnicott, and the Legacy of Freud* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991], p. 117).
- ⁶ Aimé Solignac, “Introduction aux Confessions,” *B.A.*, 13:34.
- ⁷ Charles Kligerman, “A Psychoanalytic Study of the Confessions of St. Augustine,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 5 (1957), pp. 469–84.
- ⁸ Paul Pruyser, “St. Augustine’s Confessions: Perspectives and Inquiries,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5 (1965–66), pp. 130–52; 273–89.
- ⁹ David Burrell, “Reading the Confessions of Augustine: An Exercise in Theological Understanding,” *Journal of Religion* 50 (1970), pp. 327–51.
- ¹⁰ See especially Gillian Clark’s balanced and insightful approach to the use of Freudiansim with which I fully agree (“True Confessions? Narrative and memory,” *Augustine, the Confessions*, pp. 53–60). Not until Chapter 3 will I introduce into my cross-examination of Augustine the more recent narcissistic interpretations (following Kohut) of the *Confessions*.
- ¹¹ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 165.
- ¹² Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” pp. 468–97. Ricoeur has not examined Augustine using the method found in his essay.
- ¹³ Ricoeur, “Philosophical Reflection: II,” p. 333.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 334. Citing Ricoeur and in keeping with my thesis, Paul Archambault asserts that if Augustine’s “faith had not survived” psychoanalysis “it would not have deserved to survive” (“On the Uses and the Limits of Psychobiography,” Joseph Schnaubelt and Frederick van Fleteren [eds.], *Collectanea Augustiniana: Augustine: “Second Founder of the Faith”* [New York: Peter Lang, 1990], p. 95).
- ¹⁵ Donald Capps, “Augustine as Narcissist: Comments on Paul Rigby’s ‘Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine’s Confessions,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985), p. 116.
- ¹⁶ David Bakan, “Some Thoughts on Reading Augustine’s Confessions,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5 (1965), p. 151.
- ¹⁷ James Dittes, “Continuities between the Life and Thought of Augustine,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5 (1965), p. 133.
- ¹⁸ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 470.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 470. Ricoeur comments, “As Freud has said on many occasions: with the Oedipus complex psychoanalysis stands or falls” (Ibid., p. 470). That Freud specifically tied neurosis to the Oedipus complex, as proposed here, is justified by Ricoeur in *Freud and Philosophy*. For example, he cites a footnote added in 1920 to *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*: “It has justly been said that the Oedipus complex is the nuclear complex (*Kernkomplex*) of the neurosis, and constitutes the essential part of their content. It represents the peak of infantile sexuality, which through its after-effects, exercises a decisive influence on the sexuality of adults. Every new

arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis. With the progress of psychoanalytic studies the importance of the Oedipus complex has become more and more clearly evident; its recognition has become the shibboleth that distinguishes the adherents of psychoanalysis from its opponents.’ (GW, J, 127–28; SE, 7, 226)” (*Ibid.*, p. 197). **Chapter 2** offers a reading of the *Confessions* in terms of the Oedipus complex; **Chapter 3**, a narcissistic reading in the tradition of Kohut.

²⁰ See also 1.7.11.

²¹ Bakan, “Some Thoughts,” p. 151.

²² Dittes, “Continuities,” p. 134.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁴ Kligerman, “A Psychoanalytic Study,” p. 474. However, Augustine’s dependence on his mother is not self-evident; see **Chapter 3**.

²⁵ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 471.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Kligerman, “A Psychoanalytic Study,” p. 471.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

³¹ O’Donnell says: “Patricius’ enthusiasm was … perfectly typical of his class and station in life” (*Confessions*, 2:120). Augustine develops the contrast between paganism and Christianity: “[In 2.3.6] we see him through his parent’s eyes, and Augustine contrives to make only the mother’s view (fearing what may come) trustworthy – she is the only one of the three at the time who already has the faith, and the scriptural citation describing Augustine is imposed on her thoughts. The young Augustine did not go to a temple to worship rock and wood, but he put himself in the camp of those who do: this is Augustine’s ‘paganism’ in his own words” (*Ibid.*, 2:119); “father and son are on the side of the idolaters, mother has begun to follow a different path” (*Ibid.*, p. 123). We should, however, note O’Donnell’s earlier comment: “Patricius’ status in a household where women led the way to Christianity was not uncommon (cf. Brown, *JRS* 41 [1961], 1–11), nor was his deathbed baptism (9.9.22); Possidius, who knew *conf.* but was not overly attentive, could say of Augustine (*v. Aug.* 1.1) that he was ‘parentibus honestis et christianis progenitus’. There is no evidence that there was ever anything ‘pagan’ (i.e. devoted to cults other than Christian) about Patricius” (*Ibid.*, 2:69).

³² “gaudens matri indicavit”: the same words at 8.12.30 describe reporting exactly the opposite news (the end of Augustine’ active sexual life) to the same person: ‘Inde ad matrem ingredimur, indicamus: gaudet’” (*Ibid.*, 2:120).

³³ See **Section 2**; O’Donnell commenting on Augustine’s use of the parable of the Prodigal Son says, “Augustine also takes the story back to the garden and asserts that the departure from home is equated with original sin.... By the flexibility of that allegorical reading, the story then becomes the story of Augustine himself, a man whose relationship with his own father was difficult and strained, apparently unmarked by any final reconciliation. When Augustine is baptized (which on the theological level represents a return of the prodigal to the paternal God), he is at the same time being reconciled with Patricius – or at least with Patricius’ own final disposition to accept baptism. Hence the possibility of prayer invoked

for both Monnica and Patricius at 9.13.37” (*Ibid.*, 2:97). O’Donnell’s comment that Augustine’s relations with his father during his adolescence had been “difficult and strained” is surprising. Augustine’s negative assessment of his father is theological (as O’Donnell rightly notes) and made after his father’s death. The only “reconciliation” necessary is theological. Patricius died during Augustine’s adolescence long before Augustine could have offered a theological judgment. Augustine probably shared some of Patricius’ enthusiasm, if not initially, for children (*conf.* 4:2), at least for a sexual partner; he took a concubine probably in the same year as Patricius’ death (“the liaison with the mother of Adeodatus probably began during 370/1, the first year at Carthage” [*Ibid.*, 2:120], and Adeodatus was “born 371/372, when Augustine was perhaps 17” [*Ibid.*, 2:207]). Patricius’ “death is dated at 3.4.7 to 370/1, the year following the episode here [the scene in the public baths recounted in *conf.* 2:3] (esp. if Augustine were at Carthage when his father died, the episode recounted here may be among Augustine’s last strong memories of him)” (*Ibid.*, p. 121). O’Donnell himself cites B. Shaw (*Past and Present*, 115 [1987], pp. 19–28) to the effect that “Augustine’s ‘distant, formal and somewhat fearful’ relations with Patricius as not uncommon in the time and place; ‘his concomitant attachment to his mother, brother and his sister, does] not seem so unusual’” (*Ibid.*, 2:71). Power comments: “Sadly, he [Augustine] discounts all examples of Patricius’ love for him because Patricius loves the ‘creature’ not the ‘creator’” (Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women* [New York: Continuum, 1995], p. 79).

³⁴ See Chapter 3.

³⁵ “Monnica, like Dido, becomes herself the derelict lover, victim of her own inordinate attachment, but the physical circumstances reveal a decisive change – Aeneas leaves Dido to die on her own pyre, Augustine leaves Monnica to pray at a tomb where the power of redemption is specially present. Augustine’s departure, like that of Aeneas, is guided by divine authority, but here guidance is unheard and invisible.... Augustine’s treatment of Monnica here is harsh. He does not stint the pathos in depicting her anguish at seeing her son abandon her ... but his sympathy stops there – her anguish arose from an excess of affection” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:307–08). “Prayer, even Monnica’s prayer, can fall short of God and remain unanswered. This incontrovertible fact is perhaps the source of the confidence with which Augustine rebukes his mother’s carnal affection here; he thinks he sees the good reason God had to ignore her prayer at this moment” (*Ibid.*, 2:309). “In one other text [*ep.* 243, 3–10 to Laetus, encouraging him to set out on the religious life], Augustine is hard on a mother whose natural affection impedes the religious progress of her son. In the strenuousness of his attack on worldly ties, it is impossible to avoid seeing a hostility to *some* of what Monnica stood for” (*Ibid.*, 2:308).

³⁶ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 164. Monica is idealized only when she confesses before God. In Book 2, O’Donnell rightly says “Nothing here indicates great or long-standing piety on Monnica’s part; quite the contrary. In view of the contrast with Patricius in the next line, this may mean only that she had already been baptized. Her actions so far are those of a worldly mother” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:120).

³⁷ “*parentum ... fratrum ... civium*: A potent incantation; it frees Augustine from the parent-child nexus, but it also brings the reader *into* Augustine’s relation with his parents by making Monnica and Patricius the brothers and fellow-citizens of all licit readers of this text” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:149).

- ³⁸ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 472.
- ³⁹ Dodds, “Spiritual Maladjustment,” p. 466.
- ⁴⁰ Dittes, “Continuities,” p. 131.
- ⁴¹ Bakan, “Some Thoughts,” p. 151. Although I cite these Freudian interpretations of the *Confessions*, I do not necessarily agree. I take up the issues raised and subject them to a careful analysis in the text of the *Confessions* using Ricoeur’s literary method.
- ⁴² “We have thus an obscure description of a struggle that may not have been entirely the product of imagination. The tension of the sentence arises from Monnica’s duty to serve her husband, a duty that in some sense she violated in the struggle over Augustine’s paternity. A higher authority is invoked to justify her but if the struggle was more than figurative (quarrel about religion, paternal opposition to distracting the boy with religion, etc.), her part must have seemed at least a daring one” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:70).
- ⁴³ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 473.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 475.
- ⁴⁵ In Chapter 11, I will examine Augustine’s views of celibacy and marriage and the questions these raise for the modern reader.
- ⁴⁶ See also 2:2; 6:3; 8:1.11, and 12. “Everything about *conf.* as literary artifact conspires to emphasize the place of *continentia* in Augustine’s view of life and conversion” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:200). “The issue as he [Augustine], poses it to himself is delivery from *concupiscentia carnis* (mainly, but not exclusively, sexual)” (Ibid., 3:69). “Given Augustine’s self-image of one weak and incontinent and his history of conversions and loquacious dithering, there must have been doubt on all sides whether this new resolve would last” (Ibid., 3:70).
- ⁴⁷ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 475.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 475.
- ⁴⁹ “That life after baptism was a struggle with concupiscence was obvious to Augustine and became over time an increasingly important part of his teaching” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:199). “Augustine himself was aware of what is truer for moderns, that to many each of these vices [*concupiscentia carnis*, *concupiscentia oculorum*, *ambitione saeculi*] seemed a virtue.... [He is not always sensitive] to the way his view of temptation excludes as illicit rich and fruitful – yet perilous – areas of human conduct” (Ibid., 3:203).
- ⁵⁰ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 476.
- ⁵¹ “The *philosophia* with which the *Hortensius* inspired Augustine was a philosophy of the mind’s ascent, shaping his taste when he came to the Platonists years later” (O’Donnell *Confessions* 2:164).
- ⁵² Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 476.
- ⁵³ Bakan, “Some Thoughts,” p. 150.
- ⁵⁴ Latent morality is one of the premises of the discussion of evil in Book 2. For example, Augustine says that not even a thief forgets that it is wrong to steal when he is stolen from (2.4.9).
- ⁵⁵ See Chapter 4.
- ⁵⁶ For Augustine, the problem of continence is not that the body is an alien, sinful principle at war with the soul and dragging the soul down. That view would imply an evil and a good principle at war, as in Manichaeism, a view Augustine painstakingly rejects throughout Book 8. According to Augustine, the body cannot lust

unless the soul lusts in and through it, nor can it be corrupted unless the soul is first corrupted. Then the soul uses the flesh to lust against the spirit and to disregard the things of the spirit. Subsequently, the will itself is bound by misuse of the flesh. In Manichaeism, Augustine claims that he was able to absolve himself from responsibility for his bondage; in Book 8, he recounts his liberation (Solignac, “Introduction aux Confessions,” *BA* 13:541–43; Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions*, pp. 69–83).

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 478.

⁵⁸ Dittes, “Continuities,” p. 137.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 129. I would like to remind the reader again that I do not always subscribe to the reading of the text offered by the Freudian interpreters. It seems to me that here Dittes does not attend to the text. Augustine distinguishes between Plotinian *tolma* and true independence resulting from the action of grace (TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, pp. 289–91).

⁶⁰ Bakan, “Some Thoughts,” p. 150.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 152. In Chapter 3, I take up the question of whether or not Augustine’s religious autobiography turns Christianity’s universal redemptive intention into a narcissistic project.

⁶² Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 478.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 478.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 480.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 481.

⁷¹ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 480.

⁷² Dittes, “Continuities,” p. 138.

⁷³ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 496.

⁷⁴ “The belief that the *conversio* of the fallen creature metaphysically resembles the original *formatio* of the creature from *materia informis* is central to Augustine’s adaptation of Platonism. In both *formatio* and *conversio*, the decisive action is that of the second person of the trinity … but in the case of ‘conversion’ the third person of the trinity plays a part so in unison with the second that the two are almost indistinguishable. Bk. 12 has expounded the primordial *formatio*; the allegorical reading of Gn. proposed in this book [Bk. 13] sketches the corresponding *conversio*” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:347). Note that the Spirit is not a Father. Augustine calls the Spirit *matrem caritatem*: the “‘motherhood of God’” (*Ibid.*, 3:352). “Movement and beauty come through the elevation of formless matter by the imposition of divine resemblance through the polymorphous working of the Word in the world” (*Ibid.*, 3:310). “The history of creation is the history of an ascent” (*Ibid.*, 3:310), as is the history of conversion. “The story of creation as a whole … is precisely that – a *story*, a process. Its goal is certainly something beyond time, though not exactly an eternal stasis; there is still the movement of love, the steady pressure toward God, the *pondus* drawing and holding things in God-centered harmony, in the state represented by the ‘heaven of heavens’” (Rowan Williams, “Creation,” *AttA*, p. 253). For a more detailed treatment, see Chapter 10.

- ⁷⁵ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 489.
- ⁷⁶ O’Donnell suggests that “garriebam” is, perhaps, best translated as “spoke unself-consciously” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:75).
- ⁷⁷ “*amici imperatoris*: A recognized but unofficial term … [possibly limited] to the high office-holders” (*Ibid.*, 3:41).
- ⁷⁸ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 490.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 491.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 493.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 492; Paul’s kenotic hymn (Phil. 2.6–11) is central to Augustine’s thought (see note 84).
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 493.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ “Paul’s kenotic hymn (Phil. 2.6–11) occupies a central place in Augustine’s spirituality, Christology, and soteriology. Elements of the hymn are invariably linked with the Johannine prologue in his reflections on the incarnation and redemption. A pivotal concept in Augustine’s soteriology is Christ’s role as mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). Combining both human and divine attributes, Christ is uniquely suited to be our savior (s. 47.12.21; *conf.* 10.43.68; *ench.* 28.108; *civ Dei* 9.15)” (Finbarr Clancy, “Redemption,” *AttA*, p. 702). “Augustine approached the Christological concept of *kenosis* (‘emptying’ – Phil. 2:7: ‘He emptied himself and took upon him the form of a servant’). He understands by it a self-humiliation of the divine Word coming to the world, not in majesty but in poverty, lest human weakness be overwhelmed. (Cf. *conf.* 7.18.24B: ‘[We see] at [our] feet his divinity, weak by participation in our coats of skin.’) (William Mallard, “Jesus Christ,” *AttA*, p. 469). Commenting on *infiriam divinatem* in *conf.* 7.18.24, O’Donnell says, “The daring terminology underlines the importance of kenosis (from Phil. 2 ...) in Augustine’s Christology” (*Confessions*, 2:453).
- ⁸⁵ “The eucharistic language with which Bk. 10 closes, together with the liturgical setting of the conclusion of Bk. 9 and the insistence at 10.3.3 that his true readership consists of those who are joined with him in the *caritas* of his church, compels the hypothesis that Augustine has presented us here with discourse that does not represent liturgical prayer, but rather accompanies or, more venturesomely, embodies it” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:245).
- ⁸⁶ Augustine “could speak in ways equivalent to the East’s *communicatio idiomatum*, ‘interchange of human properties’ (The human and divine natures so deeply unite that they take on one another’s characteristics; the human becomes exalted, the divine can suffer).... [Augustine] freely used astonishing language to assert their paradoxical unity of person, for example, ‘God crucified,’ ‘the death of God’” (Mallard, “Jesus Christ” *AttA*, p. 467). “In the pastoral-liturgical setting the active uniting subject, the T of Christ’s saving work and story, is the divine Word, not Jesus’ human subjectivity. Augustine vividly presents God active for the people’s salvation in the loving humility of the incarnation. God intimately enters human life, suffers, and redeems” (*Ibid.*, p. 469). Augustine understands the eucharistic sacrifice in terms of compassion: “Starting [in *civ. Dei* 10.6] from the premise that a sacrament is every act which is designed to unite us to God in holy fellowship, he argues that acts of compassion are sacrifices, and immediately applies this conception to the eucharist, in which Christ, the priest, offers his Body, which is at one and the same

- time the human body which suffered on Calvary; the bread and wine on the altar, which are offered by the Faithful; and the Faithful themselves” (Gerald Bonner, “The Doctrine of Sacrifice: Augustine and the Latin Patristic Tradition,” S. W. Sykes [ed.], *Sacrifice and Redemption* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], p. 110).
- ⁸⁷ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 493.
- ⁸⁸ Dodds, “Spiritual Maladjustment,” p. 473.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 473.
- ⁹⁰ Ricoeur uses the term *archeology* to describe Freudian investigation of “the archaic mythologies of the unconscious” (Ricoeur, “Philosophical Reflection: II,” p. 334). Ricoeur uses the term *genealogy* in a Nietzschean way to describe the consoling motivations hidden in texts that make them “a form of trickery” (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellaur [trans.] [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988], 2:26) and not the more literal sense, in which the term could, perhaps, characterize Augustine’s *Retractiones*. In Chapter 3, I introduce the Nietzschean genealogy (as employed by Frank Kermode) to supplement the deconstructive interrogation of the *Confessions*, already begun here in Chapter 2, in terms of the Freudian archeology.
- ⁹¹ Gerald Bonner says that “Augustine believed (*civ. Dei* 10.6) that the eucharistic minister, as consecrated in the name of God, is in himself a sacrifice, inasmuch as he dies to the world so that he may live for God” (“The Doctrine of Sacrifice,” p. 112). Mary T. Clark says that Augustine understood his priestly vocation in terms of the trinitarian missions: “For him [Augustine] life in the Church was a certain reproduction of the missions of the Son and of the Spirit and of their union with the Father. By his faith in the mystery of the kenosis of Christ (as described in Philippians 2:6 and in the Passion) he found the model for the priestly life of humility and charity and for his understanding of the high vocation of all persons as created to the image and likeness of the Trinity to show forth the love that unites Father, Son and Spirit, a love that is shared with human persons through creation and salvation” (“Augustine on Person: Divine and Human,” Joseph Lienhard, Earl Muller, and Roland Teske [eds.], *Presbyter Factus Sum* [New York: Peter Lang, 1993], p. 116).
- ⁹² Capps, “Augustine as Narcissist,” p. 126, see also pp. 117 and 124.
- ⁹³ Ricoeur, “Fatherhood,” p. 495.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Capps, “Augustine as Narcissist,” p. 127.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.

3 NARCISSISM AND NARRATIVE’S VITAL LIE

- ¹ James O’Donnell comments: “It is generally, and probably rightly, assumed that this word [*solitudinem*] refers to a monastic ‘desert’” (*Confessions*, 3:247).
- ² In a sermon preached thirty-five years after his ordination, Augustine tells how he was “‘press-ganged’”: “I came to [Hippo] to see a friend, whom I thought might ... live with us in the monastery. I felt secure, for the place already had a bishop. I was grabbed. I was made a priest” (s. 355.2, cited in Brown, *Augustine*, pp. 138–39).
- ³ Allan Fitzgerald points out that Augustine’s *Letter 21* and this text from the *Confessions* refer to the same incident. He comments that narcissism is overcome in each (“When Augustine was Priest,” *Augustinian Studies* 40 (2009), pp. 37–48).

- ⁴ Capps, “Augustine as Narcissist,” p. 126. See also pp. 117 and 124.
- ⁵ Volney Gay, “Augustine: The Reader as Selfobject,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25 (1986), p. 68.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 68.
- ⁷ Paula Fredriksen, “Augustine and His Analysts: The Possibility of a Psychohistory,” *Soundings* 61 (1978), pp. 223–24.
- ⁸ Fredriksen, “Augustine and His Analysts”; Donald Capps, “Parabolic Events in Augustine’s Autobiography,” *Theology Today* 40 (1983), pp. 260–72; Capps, “Augustine as Narcissist”; Gay, “The Reader as Selfobject”; Donald Browning, “The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*: An Assessment and New Probe,” J. Smith and S. Handleman (eds.), *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 136–59; Margaret Miles, *Desire and Delight. A New Reading of Augustine’s Confessions* (New York: Crossroads, 1991), pp. 81–86; Jacques Chomarat, “Les ‘confession de saint Augustin,’” *Revue française de psychanalyse* 52 (1988), pp. 153–74; Fabio Troncarelli, *Il ricordo della sofferenza. Le Confessioni di Saint’Agostino e la psicoanalisi* (Napoli, 1993), pp. 145 and 166ff.; Kurt Flasch, *Augustin. Einführung in sein Denken* (Stuttgart, 1980), pp. 237 and 245ff.; Brändle, Rudolf and Walter Neidhart (1984), “Lebensgeschichte und Theologie. Ein Beitrag zur psychohistorischen Interpretation Augustins,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 40:157–80.
- ⁹ Gay, “The Reader as Selfobject,” p. 67.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 67.
- ¹¹ Browning, “Psychoanalytic Interpretation,” p. 146.
- ¹² Gay, “The Reader as Selfobject,” p. 67. Gay is citing Kohut.
- ¹³ Browning, “Psychoanalytic Interpretation,” p. 141.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 140.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 143.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).
- ¹⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:26–27.
- ¹⁹ ep. 21.4.
- ²⁰ The theory for my literary analysis of the *Confessions* in **Section 1** of this chapter draws on Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:100–52. Ricoeur’s treatment of Proust has been particularly helpful. This strategy receives some support from Ricoeur’s comment that Proust’s novel, along with the works of Mann and Woolf, “have in common their exploration, within the limits of the fundamental experience of discordant concordance, of the relation of time to eternity, which already in Augustine offered a wide variety of aspects” (Ibid., 2:101).
- ²¹ Browning, “Psychoanalytic Interpretation,” p. 149.
- ²² Ibid., p. 145.
- ²³ Ibid., pp. 148–49.
- ²⁴ Gay, “The Reader as Selfobject,” p. 72.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 72.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 74.
- ²⁷ Browning, “Psychoanalytic Interpretation,” p. 150. Wills presents a very different portrait of Augustine and his mother (see *St. Augustine*, pp. 58–60). See also Alfred

Schindler, who believes that psychohistory and, specifically, Kligerman and those who have followed his lead by tracing parallels between Augustine and Monica and Aeneas and Dido are mistaken (“Verifying or Falsifying Psychohistorical Observation: The Case of Dido’s Suicide in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” E. Livingstone, ed., *Studia Partistica* 33 [Peeters: Leuven, 1997], pp. 239–43). Eric Zolkowski’s “St. Augustine: Aeneas’ Antitype, Monica’s Boy,” *Literature and Theology* 9 (1995), pp. 1–23 thesis that Monica is to Augustine as Virgil’s Venus is to Aeneas must first answer Schindler’s general critique. Power draws on the Dido/Monica parallel only to comment that “here Augustine is contrasting the classical and Christian sentiment” (Power, *Veiled Desire*, p. 85). Her treatment of Monica is closer to Wills’. She agrees that Augustine is not dependent on or dominated by Monica, but, unlike Wills, she is not intent to prove the opposite (*Ibid.*, pp. 71–93).

- ²⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:142.
- ²⁹ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 164. Gillian Clark observes that “Augustine’s obituary for his beloved mother [Book 9] is not the life of a saint” (*Augustine, the Confessions*, p. 45).
- ³⁰ Dittes, “Continuities,” p. 138.
- ³¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:144.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 2:135–41.
- ³³ Kenney says Monica has “no place in an ancient Platonic school like that of Plotinus”; her exclusion is not “so much a matter of gender as caste” (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 111). Some aristocratic women did belong, but Monica “was not from the rarefied aristocratic world where an exceptional daughter might receive an education in the *artes liberales* and in philosophy” (*Ibid.*, p. 111). Indeed she is a “counter-example to the Platonic ideal of transcendence acquired through dialectic and the refined, ascetic life. Augustine accentuates this fact, portraying her instead as an unlearned, married woman of earned and infused wisdom” (*Ibid.*, p. 111). “As Augustine tells the story, hers was a life lived through continual confession – of her faults and of her savior – that led to a moment of total concentration of her heart at Ostia” (*Ibid.*, p. 112).
- ³⁴ “Love of limited aspiration [because of fear] degenerates into no love at all and then into love of nothingness. Unmeasured love weds the soul to an abyss. If it is dangerous to love wholeheartedly in a world where beloveds die, it is no less dangerous to love only a God who is foreign to mortal flesh. The asceticism of bodily hatred is not all that far from the prodigality in sin. Both lack a world in which to love.... Grace conferred by way of incarnation is not some magical recipe for fulfilling the imperatives but the call to love wholeheartedly in the midst of mortality. We are upheld in our ordinary loves, the very ones we thought made us most vulnerable. Love takes its true measure from faith in love’s redemption. Perfect love casts out fear. Then there will be freedom in God” (Wetzel, “Snares of Truth,” p. 137).
- ³⁵ Gian Balsamo’s striking analogies drawn between Augustine and Proust could have been more closely knit if he had not reduced Augustine’s mourning for his mother to dry-eyed asceticism (“The Place of the Soul in Augustine and Proust: Amorous Memory versus Neuroscience,” *The Journal of Religion* 88 [2008], p. 452). Augustine does not “wait submissively” for reunion with his mother in the next life (*Ibid.*, p. 454). Augustine’s asceticism is a confessional shuttling back and forth, not unlike Proust’s (see note 21), between the extratemporal and “amorous memory.”
- ³⁶ *retr.* 2.6.

- ³⁷ There is a broad consensus in Augustine studies that “confessio” involves “confessio peccati et laudis” (Solignac, “Introduction aux *Confessions*,” pp. 9–12).
- ³⁸ *praed. sanct.* 4.8.
- ³⁹ *ep. 21.2*. See also *mor. 1.34.75*.
- ⁴⁰ *ep. 21*.
- ⁴¹ *ep. 21.4*
- ⁴² Brown, *Augustine*, p. 341. See also pp. 132–33 and 160.
- ⁴³ *ep. 10.2*. In *De animae quantitate* (378–88), Augustine’s description of “the achievement of contemplation,” though fundamentally Christian, “proceeds from a program of spiritual perfection and represents its completion. And that fruition is a sustained condition, one that great souls do indeed accomplish in this life, as they come to enjoy the peace of the divine presence. Death will afford an escape from the body, easing the path to God and removing ‘a stumbling block to the soul’s complete union with truth itself.’ Yet some souls accomplish this even in this life. There is nothing episodic about the magnificent condition of these great souls, who know no moral recidivism” (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 92).
- ⁴⁴ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p. 61.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 65.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 66.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 67.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ *ep. 21.2*
- ⁵¹ *ep. 21.2*
- ⁵² *Simpl. 1.2.22*.
- ⁵³ James O’Donnell casts doubt on Augustine’s motive. “There are several odd things about the letter [to Valerius], and a more credible interpretation would be to see it as a piece of politic revisionism. The subtext is this: seized and ordained a priest at Hippo, Augustine’s natural impulse had been to flee, and he followed that impulse back to Thagaste. Once there, regretting his choice, perhaps fearing divine retribution, he wrote the letter to his bishop (to whom he would not have needed to write this request if both were in Hippo, and if there were no reason for a public declaration about his whereabouts and activities), putting a good face on what he has done and thus implicitly promising to return. And return he did, to become the Augustine of history. It could have been otherwise” (“Augustine: His Time and Lives,” *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, p. 19). If O’Donnell’s conjecture is right, this brings into strong relief Augustine’s fear of losing his audience and his way of life.
- ⁵⁴ *ep. 21.2*.
- ⁵⁵ Augustine told Possidius that the Catholics of Hippo, who forced him to accept ordination, believed he wept because he wanted to be ordained a bishop and not a lowly priest. Augustine insisted that his motive was the daunting nature of the task (Possidius, *Vita S. Augustini* 4, see also s. 355.2).
- ⁵⁶ James O’Donnell cautions us concerning the word “monastery”: “Those studies took place in a privileged space that Augustine carved out for himself [at Thagaste]. It is conventional but anachronistic to call it a ‘monastery’; Augustine used the word *monastarium* a few times, specifically to speak of the little community he created in Hippo, but the word was so new and he used it so infrequently that it must have rung

far more strangely on his contemporaries' ears than it does on ours. The word and the thing would have been unfamiliar: a household of men without women, men without social status (or at least without property), dressed in a way that set them apart, pursuing activities of marginal social value – study and prayer. The ethos of the ascetic who separated himself from civil society was still a novelty in Africa, and the choice to set himself apart in *this* way from civil society made Augustine relatively unusual among clergy of the time" ("Augustine: His Time and Lives," p. 16).

⁵⁷ F. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1961), pp. 226–27.

⁵⁸ Fitzgerald, "When Augustine was Priest," pp. 37–48.

⁵⁹ The original readers of his *Confessions* are a diverse "for all" group. As narrator, he talks to God, but in the process he addresses many others: he shares his life with, and asks prayers, not only of the *servi Dei*, such as Paulinus of Nola, the communities of monks, and of his fellow bishops, but also of the clergy and the people of Hippo. He is actively apologetic and polemical with the Manicheans, the members of the Academy, and the Neoplatonists and the Donatists. He involves all in highly sophisticated discussion of impenetrable mysteries, such as the relation of faith and reason, grace and freedom, evil and predestination, the nature of time and memory, creation, true wisdom, and the happy life. All is subordinated to the narrated life (See Clark, *Augustine, the Confessions*, pp. 35–41). Avril Cameron confirms at the rhetorical level my "for all" thesis. She says, "As Augustine knew best of all, it was also one of the greatest strengths of Christian discourse that it could in some sense reach all levels of society and all levels of education – that is, it could form horizontal as well as vertical links in society. This was also one of its greatest advantages over pagan literature, which for the most part was directed at the perpetuation of the elite. Without that capacity, it is doubtful whether Christianization could ever have progressed as far as it did" (*Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 185–86).

⁶⁰ *praed. sanct.* 4.8.

⁶¹ *Simp.* 1.2.22

⁶² Ricoeur *Time and Narrative*, 2:143.

⁶³ For the theory underpinning my response to Kermode, I follow Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:22–28.

4 EVIL, SUFFERING, AND DUALISTIC WISDOM

¹ Ricoeur, "Testimony," p. 143.

² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

³ *praed. sanct.* 4.8.

⁴ *simp.* 1.2.22

⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:76.

⁶ The incompatibility of anterior evil and ethical monotheism is the subject of Chapter 7.

⁷ Ricoeur, "Testimony," p. 143.

⁸ Crouse says that for Augustine true knowledge of the self is a gift of God ("Knowledge," *AttA*, pp. 487–88).

⁹ "One effect of asserting those pairs of opposites is to rule out Manichean criticism of the God of the Old Testament" (O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:23). The anti-Manichean nature of the criteriology places the criteriology in a trial of opposed testimonies.

- 10 My interest in this section is Augustine's characterization of Manichaeism and his account of his dealings with it. I do not try to assess the accuracy of Augustine's account. For some of the most important literature on this topic, see O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:174–75.
- 11 Augustine derives his “inventory” from “Platonic transcendentalism” with “remarkable” “precision” and “generosity.... There are four main elements of Platonic contemplative knowledge: 1) God is not spatial and infinite. 2) God is true being, that which truly is. 3) God is always the same; God is never different in any part or changed. 4) God is the source of all things. This is the positive content of Platonism.... It is depicted as the direct result of Augustine's own efforts at contemplation” (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 69).
- 12 “*quaererem*: The word is a reminder to compare this attempted ascent to ‘Wisdom’ with the pattern prescribed at 1.1.1; the obvious defect here is that there has been no antecedent *praedicatio*, hence no accurate knowledge of what Augustine was seeking. Thus Augustine falls into the trap foretold at 1.1.1: ‘aliud enim pro alio postest invocare nesciens’” (*Ibid.*, p. 169). Testimony is a dialectic of external sign and interior criteriology.
- 13 These are Kant's three postulates. Each one specifies an element in the initiation of the highest good. Since this must remain a speculative antinomy, they postulate a fulfillment only at the practical level.
- 14 “The criteriology of the divine corresponds to the greatest divestment of which human consciousness is capable in order to affirm an order freed from the limitations from which no human existence can deliver itself” (Ricoeur, “Testimony,” p. 147).
- 15 This phrase is taken from Paul Ricoeur's essay “Freedom in the Light of Hope,” Robert Sweeney (trans.), Lewis S. Mudge (ed.), *Essays in Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 155–82. Hope is the theme of [Chapter 9](#).
- 16 *Confessio* “is no mere incident of entertainment or even edification, but is the means by which the ‘self’ of the speaker is constituted, in and of himself. Augustine does not exist: he derives existence not from his own words, which are powerless, but from the creative Word of God, dispensed out of mercy (not justice). We are not who we think we are” (O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:217).
- 17 Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud are Ricoeur's “masters of suspicion” (“The Critique of Religion,” p. 219).
- 18 See Paul Ricoeur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985), pp. 635–48.
- 19 For example, in Book 11 of the *Confessions*, discussing the intractable question of the relation of time to eternity, he says: “I come now to answer the man who says: ‘What was God doing before He made Heaven and earth?’ I do not give the jesting answer – said to have been given by one who sought to evade the force of the question – ‘He was getting Hell ready for people who pry too deep.’ To poke fun at a questioner is not to see the answer. My reply will be different. I would much rather say ‘I don't know,’ when I don't, than hold one up to ridicule who had asked a profound question, and win applause for a worthless answer” (11:12). O'Donnell, says that “at all periods Augustine saw that the boundary between *supersticio* and *vera religione* was not exactly the same as the boundary between Christianity and all that lay beyond. His fastidiousness was, to be sure, greater at Cassiciacum and

- he became more tolerant (perhaps he would have suggested ‘more discriminating’) when he was bishop of a socially diverse church’ (*Confessions*, 2:176).
- ²⁰ Rist, “Faith and Reason,” p. 38.
- ²¹ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 549.
- ²² Ibid., p. 549.
- ²³ Ricoeur, “Evil,” p. 635.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 640.
- ²⁵ Ibid. I will use each of the points Ricoeur makes in this citation to examine Augustine’s teaching on original sin in Chapter 5 and 6.
- ²⁶ Ricoeur shows why the Augustinian consensus along with all theodicies are discredited in the present age. He examines the various levels of discourse that gave birth to theodicy and its mistaken approach to the question of evil. He considers “three stages of discourse – myth, wisdom, and gnosis – as leading to the level of rational theodicies” (Ibid., p. 637). All fail because they are unable to answer the question, “Why me?” Wisdom takes up this question in terms of the law of retribution. The answer soon breaks down, for the punishment fails to fit the crime. Theodicy arises when we seek systematic totalization by using univocal propositions to justify God’s ways in terms of the law of contradiction. Kant dismantled rational theology and, in the process, the onto-theological discourse on which all theodicies are constructed from Augustine to Leibniz. Without ontological support, theodicies fall under the rubric of “transcendental illusion.” Ricoeur draws the important conclusion that the problem of evil, “now refers uniquely to the *practical sphere*, as that which ought not to be and which action must struggle against” (Ibid., p. 642). In Chapter 5, Section 1, I delineate the practical sphere in terms of Kant’s second critique). Ricoeur comments that the failure of pure speculation has “never led to a sheer capitulation of thought, but rather to untiring refinement in speculative logic, under the prodding of the question ‘Why?’ and ‘Why me?’ – raised by the lament of victims.... The initial enigma is elevated to the rank of a terminal aporia by the very work of thinking that finally fails. It is to this aporia that action and the catharsis of feelings and emotions are called upon not to give a solution but a response, a response able to render the aporia productive” (Ibid., p. 644). I will turn to Ricoeur’s own theory of human action in an attempt “to render the aporia productive” (Ibid., p. 645). A turn from theory to practice should not be seen as “a turning away from thought. Instead it is the continuation on another plane of thought’s interminable work” (Ibid., p. 645). Kant treats evil as part of practical reason. In keeping with the phenomenological insight, Kant saw that there is no conceivable ground from which moral evil could have arisen. The practical, like the theoretical, is unable to resolve the aporia; Ricoeur says that “we may nevertheless speak of the response of action to the challenge of evil. For action, evil is above all what ought not to be, but what must be fought against” (Ibid., p. 645). The response of action, which is a response, not a solution, is to act against evil: “Our vision is thus turned toward the future, by the idea of a task to be accomplished, which corresponds to that of an origin to be discovered” (Ibid., p. 645). Ricoeur does not work out the problem of evil within his own theory of action and narrative theory. This has been for me an ongoing task throughout this book.
- ²⁷ O’Donnell comments, “The *viam* is again Christ (7.7.11) and the confidence of the journey toward an invisible goal is a metaphor of faith” (*Confessions*, 2:478). “The

noun *via* occurs 8 X in Bk. 7 and is consistently to be taken as denoting incarnate Logos.... The literal-minded consistency of Augustine's exegesis by the time of his episcopal ordination and ever after makes it probable, therefore, that *via* is to be interpreted in *conf.* as a marker of the incarnate Logos wherever it occurs in a context that does not positively contradict the interpretation" (*Ibid.*, 2:409).

- 28 For Augustine's views on women, marriage, and celibacy, see [Chapter 11, Section 3](#).
- 29 O'Donnell (*Confessions*, 2:408) refers the reader to a parallel text in *Conf Rom.* 4:4. He says that throughout his mature writings, Augustine "frequently" cites 11:13 "in texts dealing with grace and free will as a way of ending inconclusive analysis with avowal of the paradox of grace and freedom.... Here at a moment of obscure turning in his own life, the dynamics of punishment and grace are beyond reach" (*Ibid.*, 2:220).
- 30 Augustine's account of Manichean teaching was "remarkably accurate" (Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, [Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992], p. 10).
- 31 "Augustine did not suspend his critical faculties when he became a Manichean Hearer.... What attracted him most was the Manichean claim to subject faith to the critique of pure reason.... The religion of his mother appeared as little more than superstition" (*Ibid.*, p. 152). "Catholics were semi-Christians because they were completely uncritical in their use of the Bible and had signally failed to separate the truth of Christ from the superstition of the Jews and the lies which the church had perpetuated about Christ. In short, if the Christian scriptures were properly interpreted and purged of fraudulent interpolations, they would be found to be in harmony with the message of Mani.... The Manicheans saw themselves as Christians of the New Covenant only and saw no relevance in much of the Jewish scriptures" (*Ibid.*, p. 155). "Manichaeism... would not have been seen by Augustine as an exotic oriental cult like Mithraism but a higher and purer form of Christianity.... Their Christ was also the personification of the Mind, who was not a degraded, suffering saviour but a Gnostic redeemer who imparted special wisdom to those who had been initiated into the faith" (*Ibid.*, p. 161). Lieu says Manichaeism's appeal was also its sectarianism, aesthetics, asceticism and dualism (*Ibid.*, pp. 151–91).
- 32 For a nuanced contemporary version of Julian's charge in terms of *consuetudo*, see W. S. Babcock, "Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16 (1988), pp. 28–55, and J. van Oort, "Augustine and Mani on *Concupiscencia Sexualis*," J. Den Boeft and J. Van Oort (eds.), *Augustiniana Traiectina* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1987), pp. 137–52; for an alternative reading, see J. Wetzel, "The Recovery of Free Agency in the Theology of St. Augustine," *Harvard Theological Review* 80 (1987), pp. 101–25.
- 33 "Sin from the Manichean point of view, is not an act of one's own volition but a temporary loss of consciousness by the soul and atonement for it is contrition, confession and a renewal of awareness of the soul's divine origins. The ultimate sin, for which there is no repentance, is the refusal to accept the special knowledge imparted by the *Nous* about the primordial existence of the two principles" (Lieu, *Manichaeism*, p. 25). "To say that sin is external and therefore uncontrollable, as did the Manicheans, can leave people feeling powerless to influence their fate or luck" (*Ibid.*, p. 178). "Himself an admirer of the call to the ascetical life, Augustine was deeply aware that his cohabitation with his mistress and his all too apparent worldly

ambitions were preventing him from attaining it. The division of the Manichean sect into two classes offered an escape-route to his conscience as it allowed him to live according to his acquired habits and at the same time through his service to the Elect he was assured of a part of the cosmic redemptive process through their pure living. Augustine was by no means a voluntary and his self-confessed moral short-comings have to be judged against his high standards. The Manichean doctrine of man as a mixture of good and evil offered him much consolation as it assured him that no matter how much he sinned, there always remained in him a good part (soul, nature or substance, whatever one chooses to call it) which was untarnished by evil. This facility to abnegate the responsibility to sin was the umbilical cord which held him to the sect after he had begun to reject intellectually some of its tenets.... This must be construed as Augustine's licence for moral laxity. He valued it because it offered him a theological safety-valve when he was beset by his own sense of failure" (*Ibid.*, p. 184).

- ³⁴ Kenney states that "the Platonism of the Plotinian school was an ally and a resource in Augustine's portrayal of orthodox Christian monotheism. The Platonic theology of Plotinus provided a direct refutation of Manichean dualism. The Plotinian notion of degrees of reality emerging from the One helped Augustine to grasp the insubstantiality of evil. This 'privation theory of evil' held that evil is not a substance or energy separate from the Good.... In this thesis, evil is the result of the audacity of souls who chose to distance themselves from the one. This 'free-will' explanation for evil relies on the primary insight that evil is not a substantial power independent from the Good, but only an epiphenomenon" (*Mysticism*, p. 51).
- ³⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Emerson Buchanan (trans.) (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 327.
- ³⁶ Or with Hegel hypostatizing "this non-human source in an absolute dialectics" (*Ibid.*, p. 328).
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- ³⁸ Carol Harrison says that "to speak of Christian Platonism or Christian Neoplatonism, or indeed, Neoplatonism, in Augustine's time is in reality to speak of something which did not exist. Different people interpreted, used, appropriated or rejected ideas from the Platonists and their 'recent interpreters' in different ways, in relation to the Christian faith. And the Platonists, in their turn, criticized and evaluated Christianity" (*Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], p. 13).
- ³⁹ Ricoeur examines the difference between the tragic, theogonic, and Orphic myths. The tragic interprets the experience of evil already there, "passivity and seduction" (*Symbolism*, p. 331), in terms of divine blinding, which I will explore in [Chapter 8](#). The theogonic myth interprets evil in terms of the resurgence of primordial chaos; Augustine encountered this in Manichaeism. This was the subject of [Section 4](#). The Orphic myth, from which Platonism comes, with its concept of the "body-prison," "develops the apparent externality of the seduction and tries to make it coincide with the 'body,' understood as the unique root of all that is involuntary" (*Ibid.*, p. 331). This is the subject of the present section.
- ⁴⁰ J. K. Coyle, "Healing and the 'Physician' in Manichaeism," J. K. Coyle and S. Muir (eds.) *Healing in Religion and Society: From Hippocrates to the Puritans* 43 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), pp. 140–42.

- 41** “Nowhere in the late classical philosophical attempts to describe the relationship of soul and body do we find the body unambiguously scorned and disparaged. Among both pagans and Christians the clearest thinkers agreed that the body was not of itself evil, that a metaphysical dualism was an inadequate foundation for thought. Yet an irreducible existential dualism remained, and less rigorous thinkers opted for a cosmology and anthroplogy which explained and supported it” (Margret Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979], p. 131).
- 42** “The Neoplatonists rejected Numenius’ formulation of matter as independent of God and identified with absolute evil, but Plotinus retained a modified view of the terrestrial body which was based on this fall of the soul into embodiment.... This is the potential danger of the soul’s close association with a body, the danger that body and soul will become mixed, indistinguishable.... Yet Plotinus, having seen and stated the danger of being in a body, was then free to affirm Plato’s suggestions in the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* that the sensible world is a good and beautiful image of the Intelligible” (Ibid., pp. 48–49). The problem is that, though the perfection of the One necessarily results in emanation and procession, the further the monad’s distance from the One the greater the decline in force, value and unity (A. C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990], pp. 98–122).
- 43** What James Wetzel calls “Plotinian ambiguities of spirit – flesh fleeing and flesh affirming” (*Augustine: A Guide*, p. 83).
- 44** Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 94.
- 45** Ibid., p. 92.
- 46** Ibid. “For Plotinus ... the philosopher’s soul could secure rest in the deeper recesses of its intelligible self, and there await the deepening presence of the One. This entire philosophical process was arduous, lengthy and except for its ultimate stage, largely the product of the inner self’s own efforts. It is a contemplative program whose foundations still rested on the Platonic portrayal of Socrates, especially his representation of moral progress and grounded in intellectual knowledge, and ethical failure in cognitive error” (Ibid., p. 94).
- 47** Ibid., p. 92.
- 48** “In the very process of coming into contact with God, [the soul] recognizes that it is not saved, but fallen.... The soul has slipped away from the source of its existence and embraced a debased condition. Contemplation, far from exhibiting the soul’s fundamental connection with the One, bares instead the deep fissure that obtains between it and God.... Augustine has thus succeeded in making contemplation propaedeutic to confession, to the salvific return of the soul through Christ. That is the nature of contemplation in this present life. Confession, salvation, and contemplation will converge, perhaps after death, certainly at the last day. Augustine uses Paul as a witness to his case at XIII. Xiii. (14). He begins disassociating the salvific path of faith from contemplative sight, using the authority and the figure of Paul. A final state of eschatological vision is hinted at: ‘Nevertheless we still act on faith, not yet on sight, for by hope we have been saved’ (2 Cor. 5:7). ‘Hope which is seen is not hope’ (Rom. 8:24)” (Ibid., p. 103).
- 49** Ibid., p. 82.
- 50** Ibid., p. 78.
- 51** Kenney says that “the major Pauline references in the Ostian narrative are resurrection texts.... These texts juxtapose a model of our final state which is both psychic

and corporeal, over against the merely psychic character of the vision at Ostia. Contemplation at Ostia leaves the body behind, Christian resurrection does not. Thus salvation is once again shown to be distinct from contemplation.... Despite enjoying this vision at Ostia, her [Monica's] soul still is in need of divine absolution. Whatever occurred at Ostia, it was not apotheosis" (*Ibid.*, pp. 84–85).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵³ Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 86. "Contemplation prefigures the final state of Christians, even if a soul who enjoys it is still not yet saved, but prone to the vicissitudes of its fallen state, as Augustine relates so candidly in his own case. It is this careful balance, of cognitive realization over against salvific inadequacy, which is the theological hallmark of contemplation in Augustine's *Confessions*. Contemplation is effective only when it is conjoined to confession. Only then does the soul contact God and grasp the true nature of its present condition. Thus contemplation supports the practice of the Christian religion in the account of the *Confessions*. There its true significance and final purpose emerge. For confession is a distinctively Christian practice – admission of the fallen and culpable state of the soul, recognition of the reality of God's presence, and finally, submission to the saving power of Christ. Contemplation serves to prepare for this practice, giving visionary insight, certitude, and even momentary association. But contemplation is only completed by confession. Contemplation without confession is futile and empty. But with it, contemplation offers the beginning of Christian hope that the soul will find the 'home of bliss'" (*Ibid.*, pp. 108–09).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 125–26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:479.

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 341.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁶¹ Willemien Otten states that "In my opinion, Augustine does not mean to play up his sexual tensions in order to downplay the life of the body as inferior to that of the soul. This leaves undisputed that he may well have employed such a body-soul dualism during the writing of the *Cassiciacum* dialogues, that is, in his earlier Neoplatonic phase. In the *Confessions*, however, Augustine appears to recount his sexual experiences primarily because they allow him to sketch out the sinfulness of human nature as a deep-seated problem with ramifications both intimately personal and recognizably universal" ("Augustine on Marriage, Monasticism, and the Community of the Church," *Theological Studies* 89 [1998], p. 387).

⁶² See Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions*, pp. 78–83. Wetzel says Augustine "differs from most, if not all, of his critics, who allot grace and sin respectively to two contrary worlds of experience, the carnal and the spiritual.... He avoids making an enemy of the flesh, when he looks into sin's heart and finds there not a diversionary love, competing with the love of God, but love of God unknown to itself and directed toward what has no hope of containing it: the flesh that sin, if unchecked, must inevitably destroy" ("Snares of Truth," pp. 132–33).

⁶³ Ricoeur says the Orphic myths have consistently contaminated the Adamic myth because there is an obvious connection between the symbol of Biblical exile attached

to the fall as a curse and the Orphic soul exiled in the body and the return of the soul. While it is true that in Paul the body is a symbol of the alienated self as a whole, it nonetheless prepares the way for all the subsequent contacts between the quite different traditions (*Symbolism*, p. 333).

- 64** “According to Book IV of the *Republic*, the Rational and the Desirous form a pair of contraries in which the second term tends to take up into itself everything that blocks and resists thought. That is why the ‘concupiscent’ in Plato cannot coincide exactly with the ‘flesh’ according to St. Paul, for the latter includes, besides the passions in the Greek sense, morality and wisdom when they become ‘self-righteousness’” (Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, pp. 344–45).
- 65** For a full treatment of inherited concupiscence and original sin in Book 8, see Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions*, pp. 69–83.
- 66** The incompatibility of anterior evil and ethical monotheism is the subject of Chapter 7.
- 67** Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 179.
- 68** Ibid., p. 324.
- 69** “For the hierarchical spatial model of the parts of human beings of Plotinus, he [Augustine] substituted a temporal model; he is now thinking in terms of describing human being in process, itinerant through time” (Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, pp. 22–23). Following Gilson, Miles points out that Augustine does not offer a definition of what belongs to human nature due to metaphysical essence. Augustine’s point of view is historical. Following R. A. Markus, Miles locates this change during the 390s, just prior to writing the *Confessions*, that “we need to see Augustine’s mature and later writings in the light of this development from the metaphysical, from accounting for the human condition by referring it to its construction, to description of our journey through time” (Ibid., p. 31) and a concomitant valuing of memory. No longer a Platonic *sapiens* but a pilgrim, a confessor, “it is no longer for Augustine a simple matter, however difficult in practice, of removing one’s attention from the valueless objects of the life of sensation and of identification with eternal spiritual truth; the spiritual life itself is a process, intimately related to the processes of time, and weaving through time in brief flashes of vision and insight, but never, in this life, to be free of *consuetudo carnalis*, the danger of losing itself in sensation” (Ibid., pp. 34–35).
- 70** “When Augustine actually acquired a correct doctrine is open to discussion ... but incarnation is already central to the very Platonic conclusion to *c. acad.*.... He is also orthodox in Christology at *ord. 1. 10l 29* and *2. 9. 27*.... For the ascent to God hinging on incarnation see already [*conf.*] *4. 12. 18–19*; *doc. Chr. 1. 10. 10–11*.... One early text holding that a correct doctrine of the incarnation is linked to sacramental initiation is *ep. 11.2* (388/391, to Nebridius)” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:459–60).
- 71** Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, p. 82.
- 72** Note, however, that “Christ is central to this passage [4:12:19].... At the nadir of descent, this rhetorically complex passage builds to a climax that presents the full drama of incarnation and redemption in Christ; every major stage of the ascent to follow is measured by its ‘Christ-content’” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:243).
- 73** “Mani’s understanding of the salvific role and nature of the historical Jesus strongly resembles that of Marcion and proceeds from the same theological framework. The Jesus of the Manicheans was never truly born and it was only a semblance or phantasm of him which was crucified” (Lieu, *Manichaeism*, p. 53).

- ⁷⁴ The Manicheans believed that Jesus possessed three separate identities: “Jesus the Luminous” was “the guardian angel of Mani” (*Ibid.*, p. 161). “Jesus the Messiah was a historical being who was the prophet of the Jews and the forerunner of Mani. However, the Manicheans believed that he was wholly divine. He never experienced human birth as the notions of physical conception and birth filled the Manicheans with horror and the Christian doctrine of virgin birth was regarded as equally obscene” (*Ibid.*, p. 161). Finally, there was the Jesus *patibilis*, who symbolized (*mystica cruxifilio*) “the pain suffered by the imprisoned Light-Particles in the whole of the visible universe” (*Ibid.*, p. 162).
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- ⁷⁶ O’Donnell comments “*humilis*: A defining characteristic of the incarnation: 1. 11. 17, ‘per humilitatem domini nostri’, 7. 9. 13, ‘via humilitatis’, 7. 9. 14, ‘humilavit se factus oboediens usque ad mortem’, 7. 20. 26, ‘a fundamento humilitatis, quod est Christus Jesus’, 8. 2. 3, ‘humilitatem Christi’, 8. 2. 4, ‘de sacramentis humilitatis verbi tui’ (hence 9. 6. 4, ‘iam induito humilitate sacramentis tuis congrua’, of readiness for baptism), 10. 43. 68, ‘ut eius exemplo etiam ipsam dicherent humilitatem’ (*Confessions*, 2:462).
- ⁷⁷ O’Donnell gives the gist of this passage by putting the following words into Augustine’s mouth: “‘So in those days, when I had read the books of the Platonists, and been admonished by them to seek bodiless truth, and found therein what Rom. 1:20 tells me I should have expected to find, I was still too weak to enjoy you: *garriebam plane quasi peritus*, to be sure, but had I not gone on to seek Christ, I would have perished. *Caritas* I needed, but found it not there, nor would I, such is the distinction between *praeceptio* (at whose dangerous apex I now stood: so close is terrible failure in this search to complete success) and *confessio* (which is what I learned to do in those days, and what I do now in this book)” (*Ibid.*, 2:471).
- ⁷⁸ See O’Donnell *Confessions*, 2:409.
- ⁷⁹ For a detailed analysis of Book 8 in terms of this confessional wisdom, see my *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions*, pp. 78–83.
- ⁸⁰ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 156.

5 ORIGINAL SIN: AN INELUCTABLE TRIPLE HATRED

- ¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 345.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 348.
- ³ Jean Nabert, *Essai*, p. 139, as cited in Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” p. 115 note 11.
- ⁴ Josef Lossl, “Augustine on Predestination: Consequences for the Reception,” *Augustinianum* 52 (2002), p. 257.
- ⁵ Athanase Sage, “Péché originel: naissance d’un dogme,” *Revue des études augustiniennes* 13 (1967), pp. 211–48.
- ⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:152.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:65.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:69.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:66.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:68.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1:66.

- ¹² Ricoeur shows that Hegelian and Barthian dialectics fail in their attempt to respond to Kant's critique of theodicy ("Evil," pp. 642–44).
- ¹³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:68.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 1:68.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 1:69.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ See Chapter 3, Section 3.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 1:70.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 1:75.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Since human experience is already mediated by symbolic systems, including narratives, Ricoeur's claim that action and suffering seek narration or are a story in its nascent state seems to resolve itself into a vicious circle. In response, Ricoeur appeals to situations that reveal an inchoate, non-projected, non-literary demand for narrative, such as those I have cited in this paragraph. He concludes that "the temporal form inherent in experience and the narrative structure is not a lifeless tautology" (*Ibid.*, 1:76). As I will show, Ricoeur takes great pains to step outside the vicious circle of literary mimesis alone by tying historical narrative, including the history of evil and suffering within this historical narrative, to cosmic reality – see Chapter 6 Section 1.
- ²² Paul Ricoeur, "'Original Sin,'" *CI*, pp. 270–71, and *Symbolism*, p. 84.
- ²³ "Original Sin," p. 286.
- ²⁴ Ibid., pp. 285–86.
- ²⁵ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, pp. 242–43.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 349.
- ²⁷ Ricoeur, "Original Sin," p. 277.
- ²⁸ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 239. See also Ricoeur, "Original Sin," pp. 279–81.
- ²⁹ That Augustine developed his mature doctrine prior to the Pelagian controversy has been disputed. All agree that prior to 396 Augustine held, in keeping with the tradition both in the East and the West, that Adam's punishment is inherited as mortality in the flesh and that the infant's soul is innocent. Until 1967, there was a consensus among Augustine scholars in agreement with Augustine himself that Augustine proposed his mature doctrines of original sin and grace in 396 in *Ad Simplicianum* fifteen years before the Pelagian controversy. Augustine's mature teaching on original sin has four dimensions: (1) Adam's sin and its punishment (concupiscence) are inherited; (2) the infant soul is guilty; (3) infant sins are real (not just sins by analogy), severe, and inherited by way of generation; (4) baptism is the necessary means of salvation for all, including infants. Sage ("Péché original: naissance d'un dogme," 13:211–48) was the first to split off the mature doctrine of original sin from the mature doctrine of grace. He postponed the mature doctrine of original sin until the Pelagian controversy. J. Patout. Burns (*The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*, [Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980]) and others followed him. But TeSelle (*Augustine the Theologian*, p. 265 and p. 316) claimed that the mature doctrine appeared in 406 with the *De Genesi ad litteram*. W. S. Babcock ("Augustine's Interpretation of Romans (A.D. 394–396)," *Augustinian Studies* 10 [1979], pp. 55–74 and "Augustine and Paul: The Case of Romans IX," *Studia Patristica* 16 [1985], pp. 473–79) and T. G. Ring (*Ad Simplicianus, zwei Bücher über verschiedene Fragen*, [Wurzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1991], see also J. Wetzel

“Pelagius Anticipated: Grace and Election in Augustine’s *Ad Simplicianum*,” Joanne McWilliam (ed.), *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, [Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992], pp. 121–32) analyzing *Ad Simplicianum*, V. Grossi, analyzing the anti-Donatist writings (“Il peccato originale nella catechesi di S. Agostino prima della polemica pelagiana,” *Augustinianum* 10 [1970], pp. 325–59, 458–92; see A. de Veer’s criticism in his “Review of V. Grossi, ‘Il peccato originale nella catechesi di S. Agostino prima della polemica pelagiana’” *Augustinianum* 10 [1970]: pp. 325–59, 458–92,” *Bulletin augustinien pour 1970* 17 [1972], pp. 403–04), and my *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions*, reaffirmed the earlier consensus. Gerald Bonner says that “at the end of his life, in the *De Dono Perseverantiae*, he cited the *Ad Simplicianum*, followed by the *Confessions*, as works that had opposed Pelagianism long before Pelagius had written. One can see the *Confessions*, indeed, as the exemplification in Augustine’s own career, up to his baptism, of the message of the illumination of 396” (“Augustine and Pelagianism,” *Augustinian Studies* 24 (1993), p. 36, see also pp. 43–44). Carol Harrison has affirmed the traditional consensus: “the influence that a fully evolved doctrine of the fall had on his subsequent thought cannot, however, be overestimated from 396 onwards it is central, and determinative of practically everything he wrote” (*Christian Truth*, p. 29, see also pp. 86–88). In retrospect, it is surprising that for a time Sage’s developmental thesis was accepted even though Augustine himself explicitly claimed the opposite and because the four main headings of Augustine’s teaching on original sin are already clearly present in the *Confessions* (See my *Original Sin In Augustine’s Confessions* 1987). For an earlier version of this footnote, see my “‘Original Sin,’ AttA, p. 608.

- ³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I,” *CI*, p. 296.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 289–96.
- ³² Paul Ricoeur, “Part IV: The Symbolism of Evil Interpreted,” *CI*, pp. 267–377.
- ³³ Ricoeur, “Philosophical Reflection: I,” p. 301.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 300.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 301.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 302.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 301. See also Ricoeur, “Original Sin,” p. 275.
- ⁴⁰ Ricoeur, “Philosophical Reflection: I,” p. 302.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 306.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ Ricoeur, “Original Sin,” p. 286.
- ⁴⁴ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 357.
- ⁴⁵ An earlier version of [Sections 3](#) and [4](#) has already appeared in my *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions*, pp. 89–111, and my “Original Sin,” *AttA*, pp. 607–14.
- ⁴⁶ Ricoeur, “Philosophical Reflection: I,” p. 306.
- ⁴⁷ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 170.
- ⁴⁸ See also *vera. rel.* 45.44.84.
- ⁴⁹ Schlabach sets the discussion within its Neoplatonic context: “Here Augustine quoted a Roman not a biblical authority – ‘truth begets hatred’ (*Confessions* 10.23.34, quoting Terence, *Andria*, ln. 69)” to show that “the neo-Platonic ascent

not only totters at its very peak, but proves to have been presumptuous all along” (Schlabach, “Hermeneutics of Humility,” pp. 319–20, see also 316).

- ⁵⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 216, note 28.
- ⁵¹ Paula Fredriksen says that Augustine’s existential and historical view perverts Romans 7 for Augustine’s own purposes (“Paul and Augustine,” pp. 26–27).
- ⁵² “To be sure, Kant is careful to distinguish this propensity for evil from the predisposition (*Anlange*) to good, which he holds to be inherent in the condition of a finite will and, consequently, to affirm the contingency of this propensity on the scale of human history. It nevertheless remains that the propensity for evil *affects* the use of freedom, the capacity for acting out of duty – in short, the capacity for actually being autonomous. This is the true problem for us. For this affection of freedom, even if it does not strike the principle of morality, which continues to be autonomy, does put into question the exercise, the realization of freedom. This uncommon situation opens, moreover, a place for religion that is distinct from that of morality – religion, according to Kant, possessing no theme other than the *regeneration* of freedom, that is, restoring to freedom the control over it of the good principle” (Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 216).
- ⁵³ Ibid., p. 217. Ricoeur turns to Jean Nabert to measure the power of radical evil, which Nabert calls the unjustifiable. “The unjustifiable is what cannot be measured by the mere violation of those norms to which the moral conscience equates itself. ‘In the presence of certain acts of cruelty, or of the abasement of certain men, or of the extreme inequality in the conditions of their existence, is it through the idea of a disagreement between these facts and our moral rules that we exhaust the reasons implied in our protest? ... Everything takes place as though, through the feeling of the unjustifiable, a more radical contradiction is laid bare to us, in certain cases, independent of those oppositions outlined by our norms between the givens of human experience and a demand for justification that the mere transgression of these norms does not overthrow, that mere fidelity to these norms does not serve to satisfy’” (Nabert, *Essai*, p. 2, as cited in Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” p. 114). “‘But what is this evil experienced by others, as a consequence of our own acts and faults? Suffering, death, an irreparable damage, the pain of a soul wounded by the betrayal of a friend, lost possibilities due to exhaustion and to work. We could make the list of these consequences of injustice and passion as long as you like. And it is at this point that the examination of evil in a free will and the examination of evil that is unjustifiable in the eyes of those who undergo it cross.’ (Nabert, *Ibid.*, p. 125)” (Ibid., pp. 114–15 note 10).
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 218.
- ⁵⁵ John Rist, “Faith and Reason,” p. 37.
- ⁵⁶ Ricoeur, “Philosophical Reflection: I,” p. 307.
- ⁵⁷ *Trin. 12.9.14.*
- ⁵⁸ Augustine does not wish to distinguish the *ex nihilo* of evil from that of creation. He sees the latter as the possibility of the former, so that fallibility, as the site of evil and sin, derives from the *de nihilo* of creation and not the good of creation, which is *a deo bono*. For Augustine, the latter view would be absurd and blasphemous. He maintains this teaching throughout his life, from the *De Libero Arbitrio*: “*motus ergo ille auersionis, quod fatemur esse peccatum, quoniam defectius motus est, omnis autem defectus ex nihilo est, uide quo pertineat, et ad deum non pertinere ne dubites*”

- (2.20) to the *Contra Iulianum Opus Imperfectum*: “*nec ideo tamen ex bono potuit oriri uoluntas mala, quia bonum factum est a deo bono; sed quia de nihilo factum est, non de deo*” (5.15). Without departing from a fully elaborated Platonic-Christian anthropology, Augustine was able to develop a doctrine of sin and evil that satisfies Ricoeur’s stringent demands.
- ⁵⁹ *Trin.* 12.10. In *Confessions* 10.6–23, the part/whole dialectic is explicitly translated as partial truths and happiness/true happiness.
- ⁶⁰ *Trin.* 12.11.16.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12.11.16.
- ⁶² *civ. Dei.* 14.3.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.4.
- ⁶⁴ I treat the earlier homilies in the next section.
- ⁶⁵ *Jo. ev. tr.* 90.3.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.3.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.3. See also 12.13.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.4.
- ⁶⁹ *doc. Chr.* 1.23.23. See also *Trin.* 8.6.9; *ep.* 155.4.5; *s.* 90.6 and 330.3.
- ⁷⁰ *doc. Chr.* 1.23.23.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.23.22.
- ⁷² “When it [the soul] aspires to lord it even over . . . its fellow-men – that is a reach of arrogance utterly intolerable.” *Ibid.*, 1.23.23.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1.23.23.
- ⁷⁴ John Gibb and William Montgomery, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, pp. 52–53.
- ⁷⁵ *Trin.* 14.14.18; emphasis added.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.14.18.
- ⁷⁷ See Oliver O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*, p. 92. I found O’Donovan’s careful study of the relationship between self-love and self-hate helpful in writing this section.
- ⁷⁸ *Gn. Litt.* 11.15.19.
- ⁷⁹ *Jo. ev. tr.* 83.3.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.1.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 87.4; see also 51.10.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 87.4.
- ⁸³ Aimé Solignac interprets this passage in terms of spiritual inauthenticity and of a self-love which is really self-hatred. He cites many of the passages I, following him, have examined (“Introduction aux *Confessions*,” p. 666).
- ⁸⁴ *civ. Dei.* 13.21.
- ⁸⁵ “The tragic myths . . . show the hero subject to a fatal destiny. According to the tragic schema man falls into fault as he falls into existence; and the god who tempts and misleads him stands for the primordial lack of distinction between good and evil. . . . If its [tragedy’s] theology cannot be thought, if it is, in the proper sense of the term, unavowable, still what it wants to say – and cannot say – continues to be shown in the basic spectacle of the tragic hero, innocent and guilty” (Ricoeur, “Philosophical Reflection: I,” p. 294). Chapter 8 is dedicated to developing a criteriology of this unavowable theology as part of the divestment intrinsic to the wisdom characteristic of a *docta ignorantia*.

6 ORIGINAL SIN AND THE HUMAN TRAGIC

- ¹ Ricoeur, “Original Sin,” p. 280.
- ² Ricoeur, “Evil,” p. 640.
- ³ Ibid., p. 640.
- ⁴ An earlier version of [Sections 1](#) and [2](#) has already appeared in my *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions*, pp. 89–111, and “Original Sin,” *AttA*, pp. 607–14.
- ⁵ I developed the concept of a threefold anteriority, its confessional history, and a detailed account of original sin’s anteriority in Augustine’s own life in chapters 2, 3, and 4 of my book *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions*. See also my “Original Sin,” *AttA*, pp. 610–11.
- ⁶ For a further treatment, see A.-M. Dubarle, “La pluralité des péché héréditaires dans la tradition augustinienne” *Revue des études augustinianes* 3 (1957), pp. 113–36.
- ⁷ *en. Ps.* 132.10.
- ⁸ Ricoeur, “Evil,” p. 639.
- ⁹ *Time and Narrative*, 3:104–26.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 3:5.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 3:4–6.
- ¹² Ibid., 3:23–59.
- ¹³ Ibid., 3:4.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 3:220.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 3:229.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 3:116–26.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 3:109–16.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 3:105–9.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 3:207. For Ricoeur’s discussion of Gadamer’s concepts of the “efficacy of the past” and the “fusion of horizons” and their place in Ricoeur’s concepts of tradition and historical time, see *Ibid.*, 3:216–29.
- ²⁰ Ricoeur, “Original Sin,” p. 280.
- ²¹ Not until the second decade of the Pelagian controversy and Julian’s acute questioning did Augustine begin to work out in detail the problems involved in his belief that original sin and concupiscence are handed down from generation to generation by means of propagation. Aimé Solignac “La condition de l’homme pécheur d’après saint Augustin,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 78 (1956), p. 377, was the first to put order into the confusion of the controversy with Julian. He divided the texts into two overlapping groups: those texts in which the transmission of original sin is physiological (the *semina*); and those in which it is psychological (concupiscence in the act of generation). The physiological unity of the *semina* finds in a realistic fashion the juridical unity – the hereditary law by which all Adam’s descendants are one in his sin. This is not merely some moral union. The psychological unity in the disorder of the concupiscence belonging to Adam and his descendants reveals the ethical character of the disorder. Augustine distinguishes inherited concupiscence from sexual concupiscence. He thinks that, since the Fall, sexual concupiscence necessarily accompanies all acts of procreation, yet it is distinct from the concupiscence that is handed down. Infants from the moment of conception are subject to inherited concupiscence but sexual concupiscence awakens only with puberty.

Inherited concupiscence is the failure to desire the things of the spirit according to the respective capacities of infants and adults. Augustine also distinguishes sexual concupiscence and inherited concupiscence from procreation (Athansie Sage, “Le péché originel dans la pensée de saint Augustin, de 412 à 430,” *Revue des études augustiniennes* 15 [1969], pp. 75–112; David Hunter, “Augustinian Pessimism? A New Look at Augustine’s Teaching on Sex, Marriage, and Celibacy,” *Augustinian Studies* 25 [1994]: 153–77). Procreation is good; before the Fall it would not have propagated original sin, but after the Fall it hands down a nature lacking integration. By distinguishing our God-given nature from concupiscence as a product of sin, Augustine avoids dualism. The instrumental cause of the inheritance of concupiscence is procreation – the *semina* – not sexual concupiscence. For Jesus to be without original sin, his mother must have been freed from all concupiscence, not just sexual concupiscence (s.214,vi; pecc.mer.II,xxiv,38; conl.Max21). Sexual concupiscence is only illustrative (Sage, “Péché originel: naissance d’un dogme,” 247; some think that Augustine believed that sexual concupiscence is causative, see J. Van Oort, “Augustine on Sexual Concupiscence and Original Sin,” E.A. Livingstone [ed.], *Studia Patristica*, 22 [Leuven: Peeters Press 1989], pp. 382–86). Sexual concupiscence is only a sign of the loss of the soul’s adherence to God and the consequent loss of its integrity (For an earlier version of this footnote, see the “Appendix: The Propagation of Concupiscence” in my *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions*, pp. 115–24, and AttA, p. 608–09).

- ²² For a fuller treatment see the “Appendix” in my *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions*, pp. 115–24 and G. W. Schlabach, “Friendship as Adultery: Sexual Reality and Sexual Metaphor in Augustine’s Doctrine of Original Sin,” *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992), pp. 125–47.
- ²³ Gillian Clark says that “there was no doubt in late antiquity (as there had been in classical Athens) that the mother actually contributed to the formation of the child, rather than being as it were the earth in which the seed was sown. Stoics, who held that the soul is material (though a very refined and subtle matter), agreed that the mother contributed elements of soul as well as body.... But the female contribution was not thought to be equal to that of the male, and it seemed obvious that the male seed initiates the process of generation. This belief had an important effect ... on Augustine’s doctrine of original (sexually transmitted) sin. Augustine finds it surprising that Paul says ‘Sin entered the world through one man’ (Rom. 5: 12) rather than through one woman, Eve. He suggests an explanation: it is the vitiated seed of the male, infected by the lust which is biologically necessary for the discharge of semen, which actually generates the child” (*Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Life-styles*, [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993], p. 77).
- ²⁴ Ricoeur, “Original Sin,” pp. 270–71, and *Symbolism*, p. 84.
- ²⁵ John Gray, “Are We Born Moral?” *New York Review of Books*, 54, no. 8, May 10, 2007, p. 28.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p. 317.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 318.
- ²⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:216.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 3:217.
- ³¹ Ibid., 3:224.

- ³² Ibid., 3:223.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Reflecting on Augustine's belief in the solidarity of the human race in Adam, John Burnaby comments: "The moral solidarity of mankind is a far more adequate explanation of the world we know than any ethic of individual responsibility" (*Amor Dei*, p. 192).
- ³⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:207–40.
- ³⁷ "The notion of tradition, taken in the sense of traditions, signifies that we are never in a position of being absolute innovators, but rather are always first of all in the situation of being heirs. This condition essentially stems from the language-like [*langagiere*] structure of communication in general and of the transmission of past contents in particular. For language is the great institution, the institution of institutions, that has preceded each and every one of us. And by language we must here understand not just the system of *langue* in each natural language, but the things already said, understood, and received. Through tradition, therefore, we understand the things already said, insofar as they are transmitted along the chains of interpretation and reinterpretation" (Ibid., 3:221). "The human as moral agent is both *free* and *determined*: free to exercise the autonomy of conscience but delimited since the subject is able to do so only within the confines of the symbolic matrixes that dispose the subject prior to entering consciousness" (Mark Wallace, "Introduction," *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 29).
- ³⁸ Ricoeur, "Evil," p. 639.
- ³⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:229.
- ⁴⁰ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p. 318.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 387.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 389.
- ⁴⁵ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p. 317.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ In a series of experiments Elizabeth Spelke showed that objects in the infant world are the product of inferential process and not only of sense perception ("Where Perceiving Ends and Thinking Begins: The Apprehension of Objects in Infancy," A. Jonas [ed.], *Perceptual Development in Infancy*, [Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1988], p. 214). The distinction between thought and perception allows her to hold simultaneously the thesis that "observing the world is different from theorizing about it, and the thesis that theories about the world determine the objects that are observed to inhabit it" (Ibid., p. 230). See also Elizabeth Spelke, "Perception of Unity, Persistence, and Identity: Thoughts on Infants' Conceptions of Objects." J. Mehler and R. Fox (eds.) *Neonate Cognition: Beyond the Blooming Bussing Confusion* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1985).
- ⁴⁸ *corrept.* 18.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 18.
- ⁵⁰ G. W. Schlabach, "Augustine's Hermeneutics of Humility: An Alternative to Moral Imperialism and Moral Relativism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 22 (1994), 305.
- ⁵¹ Kim Power, "Family, Relatives," *AttA*, p. 353.

- ⁵² Frederick Van Fleteren, “Devil,” *AttA*, p. 268.
- ⁵³ William Harmless, “Baptism,” *AttA*, p. 89.
- ⁵⁴ We may wish to dismiss the metaphor of the slave ship along with the devil. We may prefer to invoke Ockham’s principle of parsimony, his famous razor, *entia non sunt multiplicanda sine necessitate*, for, perhaps, we sense that we do not need the devil to account for human evil – we can unaided do a pretty good job for ourselves, and we note that the devil adds little to Augustine’s own understanding of the origin of evil. The fall of the devil is, for Augustine, even more surprising and mysterious than Adam’s (see Section 2).
- ⁵⁵ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p. 169.
- ⁵⁶ Schlabach, “Hermeneutics of Humility,” 309.
- ⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:207–40.
- ⁵⁸ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p. 318.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 116–26.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 109–16.
- ⁶¹ *civ. Dei* 15.21 and 14.11.
- ⁶² Ibid., 12.6. See also 12.8.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 12.8.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 12.7. See also 12.9. Augustine said the same before he wrote *Ad Simplicianum*, or the *Confessions*, as early as *lib. arb. 2.20.54* “But perhaps you are going to ask: Since the will is moved when it turns away from an immutable good to a mutable good, from whence does this movement arise? It [the movement] is actually evil, even though a free will is to be counted among the good things, since without it no one can live rightly. For if that movement, that is, the will’s turning away from the Lord God, is without doubt a sin, how can we say that God is the author of the sin? Thus that movement will not be from God. From whence then will it come? If I respond this to your query – that I do not know – perhaps you will be disappointed – but nevertheless I would respond truly. For that which is nothing cannot be known” (Cited by William E. Mann, “Augustine on evil and original sin,” *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, p. 45).
- ⁶⁵ See Ricoeur, “Philosophical Reflection: I,” pp. 301–02 and p. 306.
- ⁶⁶ Alfred Vanneste, “L’histoire du dogme du péché originel,” *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 38 (1962), pp. 895–903; “Le décret du Concile de Trente sur le péché originel,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 88 (1966), pp. 581–602. Whether or not Augustine invented the concept of *peccatum originale* along with the term is disputed. Some maintain that Augustine invented the doctrine (J. Turmel, “Le dogme du péché originel dans Saint Augustin,” *Revue d’histoire et de littérature religieuse* 6 (1909), p. 404; Julius Gross, *Entstehungsgeschichte des Erbsündendogmas: Von der Bibel bis Augustinus*, [Munchen: Ernst Reinhardt, 1960], 1:218). Most do not agree, and they affirm the influence of Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and the Greeks (G. Bonner, “Augustine on Romans 5, 12,” *Studia Evangelica* 5 [1968], p. 244; H. Rondet, *Original Sin*, Cajetan Finegan [trans.], [Shannon: Ecclesia Press, 1972], pp. 109–45). Following Buonaiuti and Pincherle, E. TeSelle underlines the influence of Ambrosiaster and especially Tyconius (*Augustine the Theologian*, p. 157). W. S. Babcock questions Tyconius’ influence (“Augustine’s Interpretation of Romans (A.D. 394–396),” *Augustinian Studies* 10 [1979], pp. 55–74; 67–74). R. De Simone (“Modern Research on the Sources of Saint Augustine’s Doctrine of Original Sin,”

Augustinian Studies 11 [1980], pp. 205–27) rejects P.F. Beatrice's thesis (*Tradux peccati. Alle fonti della dottrina agostiniana del peccato originale*, [Milano: Studia Patristica Mediolanensis 8, 1978]) on the influence of Encratist and Messalianist spirituality. Why Augustine should have devoted more time to the inevitability of the human condition than any of his predecessors since Paul was the result not only of the influence of tradition; the importance of scripture and particularly Paul is agreed. The main influence was *Rom* 7 and 9 and 1 *Cor* 15, not the much discussed *Rom* 5:12 (S. Lyonnet, "Romains 5, 12 chez saint Augustin: note sur l'élaboration de la doctrine augustinienne du péché originel," *L'homme devant Dieu: Mélanges Henri de Lubac*, [Aubier: Éditions Montaigne, 1963], pp. 327–29). Two themes from *cultus* were significant: the confession of the virgin birth of Christ and the practice of infant baptism (*in remissionem peccatorum*). It is probably Ambrose who established a firm causal relation between Christ's sinlessness and freedom from the normal mode of conception. Cyprian was the first to correlate the practice of infant baptism with the nascent doctrine of original sin. He claimed that the baptism of infants was urgent and the more readily granted because the sins remitted were not their own but belonged to Adam (Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine. I: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971], 1:288–91). Other influences were Augustine's reflection on his own experience in the light of Paul's writings, the suffering of children, and the years he spent in his youth as a Manichean (This note is compiled from my *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions* and my "Original Sin," *AttA*, pp. 607–08).

67 *Jo. ev. tr.* 91, 4.

68 Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, pp. 311–13.

69 Ricoeur, "Philosophical Reflection: I," p. 308.

70 Ricoeur, "Original Sin," p. 286.

71 In *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions*, I show that, for Augustine, the "gratuity" of evil as inherited sin and of good as prevenient grace are the negative and positive moments of the same discovery.

72 *Jo. ev. tr.* 92, 2.

73 Paul Ricoeur, "Guilt, Ethics, and Religion," *CI*, p. 438. See also Wetzel, "Snares of Truth," pp. 131–32.

74 Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, p. 203.

75 William Harmless, "Baptism," *AttA*, p. 89. Bonner "notes that the idea of the damnation of infants who die without baptism was found not only in Africa, but also in Italy, and perhaps in Gaul and Spain, even before the beginnings of the Pelagian crisis" (*God's Decree and Man's Destiny*, [London: Variorum 1987], p. 113f, as cited in Carol Harrison, *Christian Truth*, p. 109 note 84).

76 In this section, I am drawing on Ricoeur's analysis of Sophocles' *Antigone*. "Finally, the company of the dead will leave her [Antigone] without any fellow citizens, robbed of the help of the gods of the city, without husband and without offspring, and even without friends (LL. 800–82). The figure that walks away into the distance is not simply a person who suffers but Suffering Itself" (LL. 892–928)" (Ricoeur, *Oneself*, pp. 244–45).

77 Eugene Fairweather, "St. Augustine's Interpretation of Infant Baptism," *Augustinus Magister* 2 (1954), p. 897.

- ⁷⁸ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 387.
- ⁷⁹ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, p. 203.
- ⁸⁰ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 394.
- ⁸¹ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, p. 203.
- ⁸² Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 245.
- ⁸³ *corrept.* 18; see also *persev.* 21, where Augustine appeals again to God's "unsearchable" judgments.
- ⁸⁴ *corrept.* 19.
- ⁸⁵ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, p. 203.
- ⁸⁶ Augustine "took the anxiety of mothers who brought their children for baptism and the crying of infants themselves as signs of the inner yearning for their liberation that only Christ could bring (s. 293.10; gr. et lib. arb. 22.24)." William Harmless, "Baptism," *AttA*, p. 90).
- ⁸⁷ *corrept.* 18; see also *persev.* 21.
- ⁸⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 245.
- ⁸⁹ *persev.* 25.
- ⁹⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 249.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., p. 245. "The idea that God wants to show what human beings can do with his help and what they in fact are without this help, suggests that God is more a tyrant than a loving father. Especially in the case of infants, one might ask what kind of God is the one who does not save children, especially in the case where it is the parents who are longing for their baptism" (Mathijs Lamberigts, "Recent Research into Pelagianism with Particular Emphasis on the Role of Julian of Aeclanum," *Augustiniana* 52 [2002], p. 304).
- ⁹² Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 247, note 12.
- ⁹³ Ibid., p. 248.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 249.

7 "THE PLATITUDES OF ETHICAL MONOTHEISM"

- ¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 249.
- ² Ibid., p. 345.
- ³ Ibid., p. 348.
- ⁴ "On rare occasions, *an. et or.* 4.11.16, for example, Augustine will write about predestination to eternal death. There is in his reckoning, however, neither divine will to promote sin, nor to single out and condemn particular individuals. There is instead a lack of divine will to save everyone who needs saving. However tenuous the distinction may prove to be, it was very important to Augustine" (Wetzel, "Snares of Truth," p. 140, note 24).
- ⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 249.
- ⁶ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, pp. 165–76.
- ⁷ At the time of writing the *Confessions* and thereafter, Augustine had a number of theories of salvation. William Mallard says: "Some scholars suggest a mingling of themes, a work of Christ with impact (1) upon humanity, (2) upon the power of evil, and (3) upon God, as occurs in the *Confessions* [10.43.68–70].... In addition to the above, Christ also functions as savior in his role as the Head of the

church, which moves toward God's appointed end of history, the city of God" ("Jesus Christ," *AttA*, p. 465; see also Joanne McWilliam, "The Study of Augustine's Christology in the Twentieth Century," Joanne McWilliam [ed.], *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian* [Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992], pp. 192–96). In *Ad Simplicianum* and *Confessions* 9.13.35 "the idea of redemption from the devil is strong" (Joanne McWilliam Dewart, "Augustine's Developing Use of the Cross: 387–400," *Augustinian Studies* 15 [1984], p. 32) and in 10.43.68 reconciliation with God: Augustine finds in Christ a mediator who has "something in common with God – justice – and with human persons – mortality" (*Ibid.*, p. 33). More recently, TeSelle says that for works later than the *Confessions*: "The two themes of ransom and sacrifice are intertwined in *Trin.* 4.12.15–14.19, written about 406, and *Trin.* 13.10.13–20.26, written about 417–18.... Even when God is ready to take a sinful humanity back into fellowship, the devil has 'just claims' which can be cancelled only through a transaction like that sketched in the ransom narrative" (Eugene TeSelle, "The Cross as Ransom," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 [1996], p. 156).

- ⁸ Maureen Tilley, "Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity: From the Church of the Martyrs to the *Collecta of the Desert*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1997), p. 21.
- ⁹ Markus, *Saeculum*, pp. 87–104.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88. "Augustine defines justice as 'love serving God alone and thus ruling well those things subject to human beings' (*mor.* 1.25)" (Robert Dodaro, "Justice," *AttA*, p. 481).
- ¹¹ "The intent of coercive treatment should primarily be corrective, and gentleness should temper punishment" (Markus, "Ethics: Social Ethics," *AttA*, p. 326).
- ¹² Aimé Solignac, "Introduction aux Confessions," pp. 308–09.
- ¹³ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, pp. 207–08, and Gerald Bonner, "Libido and Concupiscentia in St. Augustine," *Studia Patristica* 6 (1962), p. 213.
- ¹⁴ Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions*, pp. 58–67.
- ¹⁵ See also *conf.* 5.8.15.
- ¹⁶ Ricoeur, "Interpretation of the Myth of Punishment," *CI*, p. 366.
- ¹⁷ Richard Dougherty says: "As a 'rational' law, the natural law is presented as knowable by means of human reason (*ep.* 157.3.15; see *civ. Dei.* 11.27), implanted in the conscience (*conf.* 2.4.9; *Trin.* 12.15.24–25), and distinct from the human or temporal law which is changeable (*conf.* 3.7.13...)" ("Natural Law," *AttA*, p. 583). "Natural law" appears in numerous guises, ranging from something like the eternal law of God, or Providence to physical laws of nature. As the eternal law, it is presented as being 'written in the hearts of the godly' the will of God the Creator, the order of nature, or the law by which God rules all creation (*c. Faust.* 22.27,30,33; *s.* 81.2; *quant.* 36.80; *div. qu.* 53.2)" (*Ibid.*, p. 583).
- ¹⁸ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 322. This blunt characterization of ethical monotheism comes closer to Julian's position than to Pelagius' position. Mathijs Lamberigts says, that "Given the fact the ethical behaviour of the human person is to be situated for Julian precisely on the level of the soul, the notion of inherited sin in newborn infants is for him unthinkable and indeed incomprehensible. Such would imply, as a matter of fact, that God himself as creator would have to be considered responsible for the sin and guilt present in the soul. Rooted in his belief in the personal responsibility for his or her ethical [behavior] of every human being, Julian is unable to accept, in part on account

- of his vision of justice, that everyone since Adam has been born in guilt and that Adam's sin is the sole and exclusive reason for this fact" ("Recent Research," p. 197).
- ¹⁹ Odilo Rottmann, *Der Augustinismus: Eine dogmengeschichtliche Studie* (München: Lentner, 1892). For a very helpful overview of the first half of the twentieth century positions on predestination and freedom in Augustine, see J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980), pp. 9–11. Burns presents the various interpretations of Augustine's teaching by taking one modern representative of each school (see Burns's notes 3–5 for a bibliography of the schools).
- ²⁰ Eugene Portalé, "St. Augustin," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1903), 1:2390–92.
- ²¹ A. M. Jacquin, "La question de la prédestination aux v et vi siècles," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 5 (1904), pp. 727–46.
- ²² Xavier Léon-Dufour, "Grâce et libre arbitre chez saint Augustin à propos de: *Consentire vocationi Dei ... propriae vuluntatis est*," *Recherches de science religieuse* 33 (1946), pp. 129–36. Burns, *Operative Grace*, p. 11.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 11.
- ²⁴ Lonergan and Barth hold the belief that "operating grace infallibly gives the *inclination* to act (so that, if the inclination is consented to, the act is credited to God), can still be resisted or simply go unheeded (so that the failure to act is man's own)" (TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, pp. 330–32).
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 322.
- ²⁶ Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 119. G. Krauss also says that because Augustine believed that God is almighty, he must conclude that not even sin can be committed without God's willing it (*Vorherbestimmung. Traditionelle Pradestinationslehre im Licht gegenwärtiger Theologie* (Freiburg, 1977)).
- ²⁷ Kirwan, *Augustine*, p. 128.
- ²⁸ Rottmann, *Der Augustinismus*. For the review of the first half of the twentieth century literature on predestination and justice, I have consulted Edwin Lee's *Divine Goodness: The Basis of Augustine's View of Predestination* (unpublished thesis project presentation, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, 1993).
- ²⁹ Fulbert Cayré, "La prédestination dans Saint Augustin. Notes générales," *L'Année Théololique* 2 (1941), pp. 42–63; "L'Augustinisme," *L'Année Théololique* 2 (1941), pp. 64–88.
- ³⁰ Rondet, *Gratia Christi*.
- ³¹ A. A. Saint-Martin, *La pensée de saint Augustin sur la prédestination gratuite et infaillible des élus à la gloire, d'après ses derniers écrits (426/7–30)* (Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1930).
- ³² François-Joseph Thonnard, "Bulletin augustinien pour 1954," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 3 1975, pp. 321–22.
- ³³ The aesthetic view of evil does not take seriously individual suffering. When the Fall and the fate of the damned are seen as only stepping stones to greater grace for the elect, Augustine's doctrine of predestination appears as yet another instance of ideological cruelty and indifference to human suffering.
- ³⁴ Charles Boyer, "Jean Calvin et Saint Augustin," *Augustinian Studies* 3 (1972), p. 28.
- ³⁵ John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 273–76.

- ³⁶ Burns, *Operative Grace*, p. 177.
- ³⁷ Ibid., pp. 177–78; emphasis added.
- ³⁸ Basil Studer, *The Grace of Christ and the Grace of God in Augustine of Hippo: Christocentrism or Theocentrism?* M. J. O’Connell (trans.) (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), p. 134.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Burns, *Operative Grace*, p. 180.
- ⁴² Kirwan, *Augustine*, p. 149.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 150. Unless we adopt what I believe is Augustine’s narrative approach with its triple discourse of justice, wisdom, and grace, I too would be forced to side with Kirwan and Julian. I can see no other alternative.
- ⁴⁵ Rist, *Augustine*, p. 275.
- ⁴⁶ M. J. Chéné, *B.A.*, 24:779–81.
- ⁴⁷ Kirwan, *Augustine*, p. 75. Ricoeur says, “That the theology of love cannot become a systematic theology appears evident. Its powerlessness to integrate justice conceptually is nothing compared to its powerlessness to account for the position of evil in the world; the concept of ‘permission’ (God ‘permits’ evil, but does not ‘create’ it) is witness to this failure” (*Symbolism*, p. 326). I am proposing instead a narrative theology of love in which justice and evil are integrated without recourse to the “cause/permission” distinction.
- ⁴⁸ Kirwan, *Augustine*, p. 76.
- ⁴⁹ Rist, *Augustine*, p. 276.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 279.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 282.
- ⁵² Ibid., pp. 144–46.
- ⁵³ Wetzel, “Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge,” *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, p. 58 note 17.
- ⁵⁴ Studer, *The Grace of Christ*, p. 134.
- ⁵⁵ S. J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 105.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 97.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 105.
- ⁵⁸ Kurt Flasch, *Die Logik des Schreckens: Augustinus von Hippo, Die Gnadenlehre von 397* (Mainz: Dietrich, 1990), pp. 187–91.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 70.
- ⁶⁰ “une misérable caricature” (Goulven Madec, *Le Dieu D’Augustin* [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998], p. 165).
- ⁶¹ “Les conséquences, dans l’histoire des ‘dogmes’ du péché originel, de la grâce et de les prédestination, en furent, disons-le tout net, calamiteuses” (Ibid., p. 164).
- ⁶² Studer, *The Grace of Christ*, p. 102.
- ⁶³ Ibid., p. 147.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 103.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ “Il ne cherchait pas à concilier ces deux vérités [la souveraineté de la grâce et le libre arbitre] sachant que la ligne d’accord entre elles nous est cachée. Mais où il voyait

- une incompréhensibilité, on conçoit que certains aient cru découvrir une contradiction” (Chéné, *BA.*, 24:20).
- ⁶⁷ *simp.* 1.2.18.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 1.2.18. Studer thinks that Augustine can tolerate such a harsh teaching only because God will “somehow, despite everything, carry out the plan of eternal wisdom” (*The Grace of Christ*, p. 134).
- ⁶⁹ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 393.
- ⁷⁰ *Simpl.* 1.2.18.
- ⁷¹ Chéné. *B.A.*, 24:779–81. Carol Harrison says that Augustine must appeal to the concept that God “permits evil to happen” to save God’s justice when he judges the damned (*Christian Truth*, p. 113). However, as noted in [Section 1](#), Kirwan shows that the cause/permission distinction is not as successful as has been traditionally thought even on its own terms.
- ⁷² Burns, *Operative Grace*, p. 41.
- ⁷³ *gr. et lib. arb.* 21.43.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 23.45, emphasis added.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., 23.45.
- ⁷⁶ Rist, “Augustine on Free Will and Predestination,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1969), pp. 420–47.
- ⁷⁷ “the puppet-like status of fallen man” (Ibid., p. 437). In response to criticism, Rist talks now of “virtual puppets” (Ibid., p. 133). Rist says that Augustine could and should have spoken as Rist’s critics propose but concludes that this is “not what he [Augustine] actually said” (Ibid., p. 133, note 109). How can one explain Augustine’s ability to engage generation after generation for sixteen hundred years if the human puppet is at the heart of Augustine’s anthropology? James Wetzel says that Augustine’s theory of free will succeeds because it casts “the problem of free will not as the problem of whether we are determined to act, but as the problem of whether we can be said to act intelligibly” (*Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* [London: Cambridge University Press, 1992], p. 231). Augustine believes that “what makes us free is our ability to recognize good reasons for acting” (Ibid., p. 230). To this end, he integrates “valuing and desiring” (Ibid., p. 230) with “the objective order in which agents are situated” (Ibid., p. 230). Since Augustine does not separate the internal from the external, he can claim that “we identify ourselves with what we value and set it in the context of an objective order of values” (Ibid., p. 233). Augustine can conclude that we sin when we sunder ourselves from the objective order. Free will becomes intelligible again only when we reconnect by assuming the perspective of grace (Ibid., p. 235). Carol Harrison appeals to the freedom of perfection within a lyric discourse: “To move man (however this is done) to act in accordance with his own nature, through love, cannot be said to deny him freedom, rather it is his only way of attaining it” (*Christian Truth*, p. 112).
- ⁷⁸ Flasch, *Die Logik des Schreckens*, pp. 65–71.
- ⁷⁹ Studer, *The Grace of Christ*, p. 102.
- ⁸⁰ Ricoeur, “Myth of Punishment,” p. 376.
- ⁸¹ Dodaro, “Jesus Christ,” *AttA*, p. 482.
- ⁸² TeSelle, “The Cross as Ransom,” 147–70. In 1986, I used the same Ricoeurian essay as TeSelle to show, in agreement with Ricoeur and, in retrospect with TeSelle, that it is not enough to see in the ransom paid the vindication of the logic of punishment,

even as one moves into a world of mercy and superabundance. Where TeSelle examined the whole Patristic period, I focused on the *Confessions* to try to understand Augustine's living at the point of refutation (as opposed to merciful satisfaction of) the law of punishment (See my paper, "Redemption and the Logic of Punishment in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione, Roma, 15–20 settembre 1986*).

- ⁸³ TeSelle, "The Cross as Ransom," p. 147. William Harmless says that "Augustine pointed out that infants, like adults, went through the *exsufflatio*, a rite of exorcism normally held during Lent, in which an exorcist breathed on the candidate and uttered a formal imprecation against Satan. This implied that infants, like adults, needed such an exorcism to release them from the devil's power (*pecc. mer. 1.34.63; symb. cat. 1.2; nupt. et conc. 2.29.50*). In other words, Augustine's theology of original sin worked, in part, from the theological principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* (what the church prays is what the church believes); in fact, this principle was formulated by Prosper of Aquitaine precisely to defend Augustine's position on original sin against those who claimed it to be a novelty (Auct. 8; PK 51: 209; see Pelikan 1971, p. 339)" ("Baptism," *AttA*, p. 89).
- ⁸⁴ TeSelle, "The Cross as Ransom," p. 161.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 163.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 164.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 166.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 169.
- ⁸⁹ Brown, *Augustine*, pp. 154–55.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 156.
- ⁹¹ "Pelagius's thought was firmly rooted in the classical tradition of reflection upon man's moral and intellectual autonomy, and of his perfectibility in this life, which Augustine's understanding of the fall completely undermined and invalidated" (Carol Harrison, *Christian Truth*, p. 100).
- ⁹² Brown, *Augustine*, p. 156.

8 INSCRUTABLE WISDOM

- ¹ Gouven Madec, contesting Flasch's deterministic interpretation of Augustine's claim that he struggled to defend free-will but that in the end God's grace was victorious (*retr. 2,1*), says that "this sentence does not mean that grace has defeated freedom, or free-will, but only Augustine in his defense of free will" [cette phrase ne veut pas dire que la grâce a vaincu la liberté, ni même le libre arbitre, mais seulement Augustin dans sa combat en faveur du libre arbitre] (*Le Dieu D'Augustin* [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998].p. 79, note 69; see also *Introduction aux 'Révisions' et à la lecture des Œuvres de saint Augustin* [Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1996], 23: 450–53). James Wetzel identifies this victory: "After *Ad SimPLICianum* this consent [to the divine influence at work within] is never understood by Augustine to be a veto power exercised from outside the redemptive process. In his mature theology of grace, consent emerges as the delicate task of self-integration faced by all those who discover themselves changed by the grace of God. God can guarantee this consent, but he cannot do it for us" ("Pelagius Anticipated: Grace and Election in Augustine's *Ad SimPLICianum*,"

Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian, p. 130). That is why Wetzel affirms that “force implies that the natural or customary determinations of a will are frustrated by external opposition. Conversion, on the other hand, implies that the customary determinations are changed in response to a new object of attraction. It makes no sense, then, to say that a conversion could take place by force.... Human beings do not have to begin to cure themselves in order for God to get involved” (*Ibid.*, p. 126; see also note 137). Thomas Holtzen rightly says that the relation of free will to grace should be understood as a therapy of the free will: “the therapeutic nature of grace heals the will and causes one to love God” (“The Therapeutic Nature of Grace in St. Augustine’s *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*,” *Augustinian Studies* 31 [2000], p. 110). Even here, where he is discussing *libertas*, not predestination, Holtzen, appeals to mystery and justice (*Ibid.*, p. 114). O’Donnell cautions: “The attempt to pin Augustine to a rigidly hypostasized view of ‘justification’ is not likely to succeed. To omit both the multiple roles of Christ (*patria, dux, via*) and the crucial stage of *confessio* in Augustine’s sense produces mere doctrine.... Augustine himself could do what no conciliar doctrine can allow itself to do, hold and cherish two apparently contradictory propositions at once: crudely put, Grace and Free Will. No amount of badgering on his part, or on the part of his most subtle followers, will in itself succeed in enabling any reader to perform the same feat; no amount of badgering on the part of any of his less subtle followers will make either a predestinarian or a semi-Pelagian Augustine credible. We are left watching Augustine perform on the high wire.... Such a balancing act works if the actor remains in motion on the wire; compel him to stop where he is, hold the position, and answer detailed interrogations, and he shortly falls ingloriously to the ground. One of Augustine’s names for the balancing act is *confessio*” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:159). One of the ways in which Augustine “remains in motion” is by using the narrative genre and *confessio*’s narrative universal.

- 2 Using modal logic, Kirwan concludes from his sequence of eight syllogisms that “All who are damned are damned necessarily, QED” (*Augustine*, pp. 145–46).
- 3 Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” pp. 83–109.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- 5 Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 322.
- 6 Ricoeur, “Evil,” p. 647; see also *Symbolism*, p. 326.
- 7 Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 157. I develop this theme of “loving participation in ideas” and the Resurrection in [Chapter 11](#).
- 8 Paul Ricoeur, “Pastoral Praxeology, Hermeneutics, and Identity,” *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 309.
- 9 In a different place and time, judicial discourse itself is an indirect reference which uses the Law of the Talion as its “literal” reference. According to R. A. Markus, Augustine had a “sense of the precariousness of human order secured and maintained in the teeth of chaos and perpetually threatened by deep human forces poised delicately between civilization and savagery – a sense so powerfully explored by William Golding” (R. A. Markus, *Saeculum*, p. 174). And again, “Political arrangements had as their *raison d’être* the safeguarding and fostering of a lowly form of ‘peace’: the public order and security which human sin has made unstable in society.... Politics, in Augustinian terminology, occupy the area in which human contrivance secures a living space for society in the midst of strife and conflict” (*Ibid.*, p. 174).
- 10 TeSelle, “The Cross as Ransom,” 164.

- ¹¹ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 156.
- ¹² Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, Robert Czerny (trans.) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 255.
- ¹³ TeSelle, “The Cross as Ransom,” p. 169.
- ¹⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 241.
- ¹⁵ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 212.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 212.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 213.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 218.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 219.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 225.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 222.
- ²² Ibid., p. 223.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 221.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 229.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 219.
- ²⁶ *Simpl.* 1.2.18. Josef Lossl understands God’s “hatred” and “wrath” in terms of the pastoral distinction: “hate the sin love the sinner” (“Augustine on Predestination,” p. 252). In pastoral practice, this distinction is comparable to the “permission/cause” distinction. Lossl’s interpretation runs aground when God is said to “harden” and “blind” the sinner. This is no longer merely permission. Here God is said to play a more active, sinister, typically tragic role.
- ²⁷ *praed. sanct.* 4.
- ²⁸ *Simpl.* 1.2.18.
- ²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “The Demythization of Accusation,” *CI*, p. 352.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 351.
- ³¹ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 231.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 218.
- ³⁵ For the significance of Christ’s freely accepted death, see [Chapter 2](#). For a detailed treatment of the role of Christ’s freedom in terms of predestination, see [Chapter 9](#).
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 231.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 212.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 226.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 212; emphasis added.
- ⁴⁰ Melvin Lerner, *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion* (New York: Plenum, 1980).
- ⁴¹ *Simpl.* 1.2.4.
- ⁴² Ibid., 1.2.9.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 1.2.14.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 1.2.22.
- ⁴⁵ *persev.* 18.
- ⁴⁶ *praed. sanct.* 41.
- ⁴⁷ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 312.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 323.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.

- ⁵⁰ *Simpl.* 1.2.21.
- ⁵¹ TeSelle, “The Cross as Ransom,” p. 147.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 169.
- ⁵³ *Simpl.* 1.2.13.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 1.2.18.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 1.2.18. Joseph Hallman says that, according to Augustine, it is no more appropriate to say that God loves or has feelings of mercy than that God hates or experiences wrath: “No feeling is appropriate to the divine immutable essence” (“The Emotions of God in the Theology of St. Augustine,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 51 [1984], pp. 5–19). He adds that “Augustine can defend divine emotions by placing them in our perception” (Ibid., p. 19). I maintain that Augustine adopted our narrative perception.
- ⁵⁶ *corrept.* 25.
- ⁵⁷ *persev.* 35.
- ⁵⁸ *Simpl.* 1.2.16.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 1.2.20.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 1.2.22.
- ⁶¹ Ricoeur, “Original Sin,” pp. 269–86.
- ⁶² Ibid., p. 278.
- ⁶³ Ibid., p. 281.
- ⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 311.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 322.
- ⁶⁶ *Simpl.* 1.2.22.
- ⁶⁷ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 322.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 322.
- ⁶⁹ Lerner, *Just World*.
- ⁷⁰ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” p. 94.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., p. 94.
- ⁷² Ibid., p. 96; emphasis added.
- ⁷³ See also 6.1.1.
- ⁷⁴ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” p. 96.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 99.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 100.
- ⁷⁷ “Augustine has died to himself through baptism and ‘seen’ what can be ‘seen’ of God at Ostia. His love for God was first manifest through God’s own call in a garden in Milan. Now he understands his past contemplative ascensions to have been exercised with salvific purpose and to have bound the soul to God” (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 98).
- ⁷⁸ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” p. 100.
- ⁷⁹ *persev.* 52–55.
- ⁸⁰ Paul Ricoeur, “Myth of Punishment,” p. 376.
- ⁸¹ The unifying insight of Ricoeur’s *magnum opus* is the relation between metaphor and narrative, including historical narrative. They “form a pair.... Metaphorical redescription and mimesis [narrative] are closely bound up with each other, to the point that we can exchange the two vocabularies and speak of the mimetic value of poetic discourse and the redcriptive power of narrative fiction. What unfolds, then, is one vast poetic sphere that includes metaphorical utterance and narrative discourse” (*Time and Narrative*, 1:xi). It is this exchange of vocabularies that I have in mind. They form a single poetic sphere but not a single genre.

- ⁸² *Simpl.* 1.2.18.
- ⁸³ Ibid., 1.2.18.
- ⁸⁴ Mathijs Lamberigts, “Augustine on Predestination: Some *quaestiones disputatae* Revisited,” *Augustiniana* 54 (2004), p. 304.
- ⁸⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 216, note 28.
- ⁸⁶ Lamberigts, “Augustine on Predestination,” p. 304.
- ⁸⁷ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 321.
- ⁸⁸ *Simpl.* 1.2.18.
- ⁸⁹ James Wetzel, “Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge,” *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, p. 58 note 17.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 58.
- ⁹¹ *Simpl.* 1.2.18.
- ⁹² *praed. sanct.* 16.
- ⁹³ Ibid., p. 16.
- ⁹⁴ *corrept.* 18; see also *persev.* 21.
- ⁹⁵ The discussion makes no sense unless we recognize that Augustine, along with his fellow North African bishops, following a tradition going back to Cyprian and to “the church’s practice of infant baptism [which] had been handed down from Jesus and the apostles (*pecc. mer.* 1.26.39) … for ‘the remission of sin,’” believed that unbaptized infants are condemned to hell (Harmless, “Baptism,” *AttA*, p. 89).
- ⁹⁶ *corrept.* 19.
- ⁹⁷ *persev.* 25.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 31; see also *praed. sanct.* 26.
- ⁹⁹ *Simpl.* 1.2.9, emphasis added.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1.2.16; emphasis added.
- ¹⁰¹ *persev.* 27, emphasis added.
- ¹⁰² *Simpl.* 1.2.16.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., 1.2.18.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1.2.9.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1.2.18.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁸ *corrept.* 17.
- ¹⁰⁹ *praed. sanct.* 11.
- ¹¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 241.
- ¹¹¹ *persev.* 17.
- ¹¹² Ibid., p. 18.
- ¹¹³ Ibid., p. 33.
- ¹¹⁴ *Simpl.* 1.2.22. Commenting on the use of Rom. 11:33 in *conf.* 4.4.8, O’Donnell says: “The Romans passage is frequently quoted in texts dealing with grace and free will as a way of ending inconclusive analysis with avowal of the paradox of grace and freedom (e.g. *div. qu. Simpl.* 1.2.22, *pecc. mer.* 1.21.29, *spir. et litt.* 34.60, 36.66, *c.ep.pel.* 4.6.16, *gr.et lib. arb.* 22.44, *corrept.* 8.17–19, *praed. sanct.* 2.4, 8.16; *persev.* 12.30, *ss.* 26.12.13, 27.6.66–7.7, and 294.7.7). Here [the efficacious baptism of his unconscious and dying friend] at a moment of obscure turning in his own life, the dynamics of punishment and grace are beyond reach.” (*Confessions*, 2:221)
- ¹¹⁵ Ricoeur, “Evil,” p. 647.
- ¹¹⁶ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 321.

9 THE LYRICAL VOICE

- ¹ Augustine's doctrines of grace and predestination lie behind his defense of religious coercion; see *Section 6*.
- ² Every age must retain the tragic vision, or it will pay the price that we, the heirs of the Enlightenment, continue to pay for forgetting "that a value cannot be realized without the destruction of another value equally positive" or "that the furthering of a value seems to require the destruction of its bearer." By revealing "the indifference of events," "the blind character of necessity" "induces a sort of cosmic sadness" reflecting "a hostile transcendence" (Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 323).
- ³ Emmanuel Levinas, in his tribute to another North African, Jacques Derrida, says that it is not his, Levinas' "ridiculous ambition," "of 'improving' a true philosopher.... To meet him on his way is already very commendable and is probably the very modality of the philosophical encounter" ("Wholly Otherwise," Simon Critchley [trans.], Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley [eds.], *Re-Reading Levinas* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], p. 8).
- ⁴ Nabert, *Essai*, p. 2, as cited in Ricoeur, "Thinker of Testimony," p. 114.
- ⁵ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Raymond Rosenthal (trans.) (New York: Abacus, 1986/1989), p. 117. For a Levinian philosophy and Augustinian theology after Levi's Auschwitz testimony, see my "Levinas and Christian Mysticism after Auschwitz," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011), pp. 309–34.
- ⁶ Levi, *The Drowned*, pp. 24–25.
- ⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 242.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 242.
- ⁹ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 322.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 321.
- ¹¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 245.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 247.
- ¹³ Ricoeur, *Symbolism*, p. 326.
- ¹⁴ Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," p. 320.
- ¹⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 321.
- ¹⁶ Augustine "stresses the inner significance of this [moral purification], the restoration of the 'interior *homo recreates ad imaginem Dei*' through the progress of *caritas*, especially the love of all humans, both good and evil." McGinn, *Western Mysticism*, p. 240.
- ¹⁷ Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," p. 324.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 324.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 325.
- ²⁰ van Bavel says that Augustine does not hesitate to call this kind of ignorance a "*pia ignorantia, docta ignorantia*" ("God in between," p. 80).
- ²¹ Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," p. 325.
- ²² Ibid., p. 324.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 325.
- ²⁴ *persev.* 57.
- ²⁵ Ibid., pp. 58–59.
- ²⁶ Ibid.

- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 61.
- ²⁸ “The Augustinian doctrine of predestination is, first and foremost, a doctrine of confession. I can confess to my own redemption but not to yours, and much less to your damnation. The same goes for the church: its communal confession of salvation has no business doubling as a judgment for or against those on the outside. Confession is always in the first person, always addressed to God, and always a mix of joy and sorrow. When I confess to salvation in God, I do so out of the pain of alienation. I may believe, on the contrary, that I am forever lost and met with a fate I deserve, but I cannot make my despair my confession. These truths all belong to humility” (Wetzel, “Snares of Truth,” p. 138).
- ²⁹ *corrept.* 1.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 14.
- ³¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:77.
- ³² van Bavel underlines the complexity of Augustine’s thought on the ineffability and incomprehensibility of God. He says that, “strictly speaking, we cannot even say that God is ineffable” (“God in between,” p. 77) However, Augustine says we must speak of God even if only *in enigmate*: “which neither reveals nor conceals the truth” (Ibid., p. 81) otherwise we could not avoid false representations of God, correct those in error, praise God or, finally, open ourselves “for the mystery of the radical Other” (Ibid., p. 83). “God reveals Himself precisely as unknowable; therefore, the order of positive language has to be changed into a positivity of ignorance. God has the initiative in a knowledge of which the human being is not the master. What does matter is to learn how one does not know. It is not permitted to let God disappear in our human representation. Augustine wished to do nothing other than to pave the way to the revealed Unknowable, and this requires at the same time an emptying out of every kind of representation” (Ibid., p. 84). He concludes in agreement with R. Lorenz that, for Augustine, “our knowledge also is a divine gift” (Ibid., p. 84). If we should understand in order to believe and believe in order to understand, we should seek in such a way that what matters is “the desire to seek, not the presumption of to know unknown things. Let us, therefore, so seek as about to find, and so find as about to seek” (Ibid., p. 82). This is Ricoeur’s virtuous hermeneutical circle.
- ³³ “*profunditas*: Frightening depth, preponderantly in a bad and dangerous sense in *conf.*, with a few examples applied to God in a way that transfers the sense of awe.... 6.5.8 (‘et secreti sui dignitatem in intellectu profundiore’), 10.17.26 (‘profunda et infinita multiplicitas’), 12.14.17 (‘mira profunditas eloquiorum tuorum ... sed mira profunditas, deus meus, mira profunditas’)” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:139).
- ³⁴ See Chapter 8, Section 2.
- ³⁵ *Simpl.* 1.2.18, *passim*; see also Ibid., 1.2.20.
- ³⁶ For an example, see Section 6.
- ³⁷ Burns says: “In contrast to what had been a consensus among Western Christians, an irreducibly different mind-set had developed in Africa. Augustine insisted and his fellow Christians agreed that God controls the destinies of individual human beings and operates by a justice which not only surpasses but contradicts their own understanding. The Africans knew by experience that God’s ways were mysterious and believed that they were just. The Europeans, in contrast, insisted that God rewards and punishes according to rules which are both clearly announced and reasonably intelligible” (J. Patout Burns, “The Atmosphere of Election: Augustinianism and

Common Sense,” *Journal of Christian Studies* 2 [1994], p. 335). I think that Augustine understood the judicial economy in the same way that Burns’s Europeans did and never rejected or tampered with the integrity of the judicial. What I have argued throughout is that he also appealed, as Burns rightly says, to mystery, which I have characterized as an inscrutable wisdom with tragic overtones.

- ³⁸ *praed. sanct. 21*. As I will show, fear and dependence do not lead to domestication and servility – the “virtues” belonging to the “corporate mentality” of the gray zone – but to freedom for others. The crucifixion embodies the agonistic form of the lyric economy; the resurrection as in the “loving participation in ideas” of Chapter 11 embodies its serene form.
- ³⁹ *persev. 19*.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 41, see also pp. 46 and 51.
- ⁴³ Johannes Brachtendorf observes that classical theodicy generally did not take seriously negativity in creation or human suffering. But in the *City of God*, Augustine recognized that the human need for self-preservation and peace called for a response to evil and suffering, a need not met by the metaphysical view of evil and suffering as privation (“The Goodness of Creation and the Reality of Evil,” *AttA*, pp. 79–92).
- ⁴⁴ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:245–46. “A hint that A. could use the language of doctrine to carry liturgical intimations may be found at *mus. 6.4.7*” (*Ibid.*, 3:246).
- ⁴⁵ Ricoeur, “Evil,” 647.
- ⁴⁶ “Nabert, *Essai*, p. 144,” as cited by Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” p. 115.
- ⁴⁷ *en. Ps. 37.12*.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.12.
- ⁴⁹ *pecc. mer. 2.11.16*.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.11.16.
- ⁵¹ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, p. 205. Burnaby believes that ultimately Augustine does not share Job’s view of suffering but that of Job’s friends. Although he agrees that Augustine cites Job to propose suffering without reserve, he believes that Augustine cannot sustain this vision because Augustine believes that suffering is just retribution. I agree that Burnaby is right to think Augustine holds both views, but I have tried to show that Burnaby does not have to choose between them, that Augustine can hold both views in a narrative perspective. There, the penal view of suffering is never abrogated but is made to subserve the lyrical and not, as Burnaby believes, the reverse. Augustine tells the beginning of the story and the end. Lacking a narrative view, Burnaby cannot entertain this double option. Instead, he claims that Augustine must choose and that Augustine, because of his views and those of his contemporaries on retributive punishment, mistakenly chose the beginning instead of the end. Wetzel would prefer to do the opposite of Burnaby: “Without the spectre of reprobation, Augustine’s predestinarian theology is relieved of its one unforgivable sin: its presumption to limit God’s love” (Wetzel, “Snares of Truth,” p. 137). In a narrative perspective, one need not do away with reprobation in order to speak of God’s limitless love.
- ⁵² Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, p. 215. I agree with Burnaby and add that, in a narrative, Augustine can subordinate the fear of force to fear without self-regard so that both fears still play an important part in the story.

- ⁵³ Ibid., p. 205. But again, Burnaby will subject this lyric view to the judicial.
- ⁵⁴ *praed. sanct.* 32; emphasis added.
- ⁵⁵ *persev.* 67.
- ⁵⁶ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” p. 96.
- ⁵⁷ *praed. sanct.* 30.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 30.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid. “Across the years he [Augustine] employed different images to express this wondrous unity of the eternal and the mortal in Christ” (Mallard, “Jesus Christ,” *AttA*, p. 464). Augustine speaks of humility and adopts a Neoplatonic model. He also speaks “at times of Jesus as a human being under predestining grace, specially elected to be the Christ” (Ibid., p. 464). For a summary of the twentieth century controversy over Augustine’s Christology, see Mallard (Ibid., pp. 466–69).
- ⁶⁰ *praed. sanct.* 30.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., p. 31
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Ibid. “To consider the incarnation was not only to reflect philosophically but also to shake with fear in pondering one’s own relation to God (*conf.* 7.21.27). He looks back in his conversion and declares that only when ‘I embraced the Mediator of God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus [was I able] to gain strength fit for enjoying you [O God]’ (7.18.24). Thus the rightly conceived Mediator, divine and human, was saving Mediator *for him*, a profoundly troubled spirit at risk of his soul (5.9.16)” (Mallard, “Jesus Christ,” *AttA*, p. 464).
- ⁶⁴ *praed. sanct.* 30. This is the theme of [Chapter 2, Section 3](#).
- ⁶⁵ For an interpretation of Christ’s identity and alterity in Augustine in terms of Emmanuel Levinas’ postmodern ethical phenomenology, see Sections 2 and 3 of my “Levinas and Christian Mysticism,” 309–34.
- ⁶⁶ *praed. sanct.* 15.30.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 24.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ *persev.* 62.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² *Simpl.* 1.2.16.
- ⁷³ As I noted earlier, from our perspective the “grey zone” reasoning in the case of Esau is unjustifiable.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 1.2.17.
- ⁷⁵ *corrept.* 26–49.
- ⁷⁶ Ricoeur, “Evil,” p. 647.
- ⁷⁷ *Simpl.* 1.2.22.
- ⁷⁸ Peter Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 277. Brown’s citation from *ep.* 204 gives the Latin only: “sed quoniam deus occulta satis dispositione sed tamen iusta nonnullus eorum poenis praeditinavit extremis, procul dubio melius incomparabili numerositate plurimis ab illa pestifera divisione et dispersione redintegratis atque collectis, quidam suis ignibus pereunt.” See also *c. Gaud.* pp. 25, 28 [53, 226], and especially 89. Schlabach, in agreement with Herbert Deane, R. A. Markus, and John Burnaby, says that here Augustine betrays his own hermeneutic of humility. His treatment of the Donatists

- and the Pagans is no different from “pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism [which] used to deny religious liberty – ‘error has no rights’” (“Hermeneutics of Humility,” p. 324).
- ⁷⁹ Maureen Tilley, “Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity: From the Church of the Martyrs to the *Collecta* of the Desert,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1997), p. 324.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 21.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Brown, *Augustine*, p. 510, emphasis added.
- ⁸³ Tilley, “Anti-Donatist Works,” *AttA*, p. 36.
- ⁸⁴ *ep.* 185.21.
- ⁸⁵ *ep.* 133.2–3.
- ⁸⁶ *ep.* 185.21. Paula Fredriksen claims that “Paul’s conversion serves as Augustine’s paradigm of and for another controversial (and *pace* Augustine, innovative) case he is arguing in highly charged circumstances. To Donatist protests against the policy of coercion which Augustine is instrumental in implementing, he responds: ‘Where is what the Donatists are wont to cry: Man is at liberty to believe or not believe? Towards whom did Christ ever use violence? Whom did he compel? Here they have the Apostle Paul. Let them recognize in his case Christ first compelling, and afterwards teaching...’ *de correctione Donatistarum*, xxi, 6, a reference to Paul’s conversion in Acts 9” (“Paul and Augustine,” 24–25).
- ⁸⁷ Richard Dougherty, “Citizen,” *AttA*, p. 195.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 195.
- ⁸⁹ Ernst Fortin, “Civitate Dei, De,” *AttA*, p. 200.
- ⁹⁰ I should remind the reader that throughout this book I am not trying to defend or justify Augustine’s teachings. In the matter of religious coercion, justification is, I believe, impossible. I am trying to understand his teachings, to meet Augustine on his way as he and his contemporaries – his “brethren” – think through their often tragic choices.
- ⁹¹ Markus, *Saeculum*, p. 142
- ⁹² At the time of writing the *Confessions*, Augustine, with “his theology of the ‘Christian times’ ... possessed a fully-fledged justification for religious coercion. Theodosius and his successors were the instruments of a divine purpose in uprooting the idols and in subjugating their peoples to the worship of Christ.... At this time, however, the Catholic bishops were still seeking peaceful means of converting Donatists” (*Ibid.*, p. 136). Augustine rejected coercion only on the pragmatic grounds that forced conversions would corrupt the church. Looking back, he says that at the time he rejected recourse to the secular power “because I had not yet learnt from my experience either how much wickedness they [the Donatists] could resort to if left unpunished, or how much they could benefit from the application of discipline’ (*Retr.* 2.5)” (*Ibid.*, p. 138).
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

- ¹⁰⁰ Gerald W. Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), p. 231, note 62.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 152.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., p. 144.
- ¹⁰³ Tilley, “Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity,” 21.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ricoeur, “Love and Justice,” p. 320.
- ¹⁰⁵ Herbert Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 220.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur, “Love and Justice,” 329.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 329.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 249
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 247.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 241.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 247.
- ¹¹² Ibid., p. 249.
- ¹¹³ Ricoeur comments that “the commandment to love, as hyperethical, is a way of suspending the ethical, which is reoriented only at the price of a reprise and a rectification of the rule of justice that runs counter to its utilitarian tendency” (Ricoeur, “Love and Justice,” p. 329).
- ¹¹⁴ *en. Ps.* 37.10
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid., 37.10

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- ¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 548.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid., p. 549.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 550.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 550.
- ⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:80.
- ⁸ *retr.* 2.6.
- ⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:81.
- ¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 157.
- ¹¹ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 550.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 550.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 551.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Commenting on *pulchritudo* (13.28.43), O’Donnell says: “Though ‘beauty’ is characteristic of the second person of the trinity ... God the Father approves the goodness of created things for their ‘ordered [spirit] ... beauty [son] ...’ in other words their full realization of the original creative intent. The speaker/reader is joined with God here, seeing the same thing and saying the same thing, brought together in praise (*confessio*) by the beauty of creation, foreshadowing the unanimous chorus of praise at 13.38.53” (*Confessions*, 3:407).

- ¹⁷ F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato translated with a running commentary* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 97.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 97.
- ¹⁹ Leo Ferrari, “Astrology,” *AttA*, p. 77.
- ²⁰ Leo Ferrari, “Augustine and Astrology,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 33 (1977), p. 243.
- ²¹ Bernard Bruning, “De l'astrologie à la grace,” *Augustiniana* (1991), pp. 575–643.
- ²² Ferrari, “Astrology,” p. 77.
- ²³ Ferrari, “Augustine and Astrology,” p. 243.
- ²⁴ Leo Ferrari, “Astronomy and Augustine's Break with the Manicheans,” *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 19 (1973), p. 270.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 271.
- ²⁶ Bruning, “De l'astrologie,” pp. 575–643.
- ²⁷ Ernst Schmidt claims that Augustine talks of “personale Zeit” (*Zeit und Geschichte bei Augustinus* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter – Universitätsverlag, 1985), p. 38).
- ²⁸ “ne sont autres, en effet, que le concept de temps personnel, tel qu'il est défini dans le livre XI, car le présent du passé, c'est-à-dire la mémoire, le présent du présent, c'est-à-dire l'attente, relèvent tous trois de la vision.” Bochet, *Augustin*, p. 47. Goulven Madec similarly designates “distentio animi” as “la manière dont l'âme individuelle vit sa condition temporelle,” *Bulletin Augustinien* (1984), p. 354. See also Goulven Madec, *Saint Augustin et la philosophie* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1996), pp. 94–97.
- ²⁹ Paul Ricoeur mistakenly believes that Augustine's psychological view of time allows Augustine to free time of any cosmological reference. Isabelle Bochet says that Ricoeur goes beyond the evidence: “Augustin, en effet, ne cherche pas à réduire le temps au seul temps intérieur et il prend en compte le temps des créatures, c'est-à-dire, le temps objectif; on peut certes regretter qu'il n'articule pas plus explicitement ces deux dimensions du temps dans le livre XI, mais on ne peut mettre en cause leur distinction, comme P. Ricoeur le concède lui-même” (*Augustin*, p. 46). Bochet contrasts Augustine's and Ricoeur's reasons for examining time. Ricoeur sought a narrative response to a phenomenological view of time (Ibid., p. 45). “De fait, la démarche d'Augustin est inverse: c'est au contraire le récit qui appelle la méditation sur le temps dans les *Confessions*” (Ibid., p. 50).
- ³⁰ Cornford, *Plato*, p. 97.
- ³¹ “Augustine does not abandon the Platonic language but will attack Porphyry's dictum, ‘*corpus est omne fugiendum*'. Against that doctrine Augustine offers the resurrection, exalting the goodness of bodies” (O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:122).
- ³² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1.21.
- ³³ See also *conf.* 11.29.39. As hope for the resurrection of the body, Augustine's true form is for an incorruptible body. The risen body is “a fuller, a better state, incomparably superior to anything we can have known or experienced during our earthly life. Nevertheless, it will be in the same order of reality, although thenceforth possessed of a spiritual quality, our body will yet remain forever our very same body.... Resplendent, yes, but recognizable, it will indeed remain always the same body with all its identifying marks, and first among them sex” (Henri-Iréneé Marrou, *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human Values*, Maria Consolata [trans.], [Villanova: Villanova Press, 1996], pp. 22–26). See also Allan Fitzgerald, “Body,” *AttA*, p. 105; and Roland J. Teske, “Love of Neighbor in St. Augustine,”

- V. Grossi [ed.] *Atti del Congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione, Roma, 15–20 settembre 1986*, 3 vols. [Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1987], 1:106; and Jeffery Russell, “Heaven, Paradise,” *AttA*, p. 420).
- 34** Given the radical mutability of all finite beings, they require divine support to retain their coherence and continuity. Created form specifies the measure for their coherence and continuity. The form is not fluid, but striving after the embodiment of the form and preservation of whatever form has been achieved are fluid (TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p. 118). A creature cannot surpass its God-given form. For the measuring *intentio*, *ordo*, and *pondus* are not arbitrary; *intentio* does not create the beings it measures; *intentio* must respect their created form and measure them in terms of their *species* or *numera*. O’Donnell stresses the analogical relations that exist for Augustine between time, eternity, and the first person of the trinity (*Confessions*, 3:279) Just similarly, Plato had already envisaged Time as the “moving likeness of Eternity” (Cornford, *Plato*, p. 97).
- 35** “Bk 11 balanced the eternity of God and the temporality of humanity, and Bk 12 set[s] the unity and clarity of the Word side by side with the plurality and ambiguity of the words through which we approach the Word – the two together showing God and mankind drawing closer. Bk. 13 therefore embodies the dynamic union with God under the action of the Spirit in the world” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3: 343; see also 3:408).
- 36** The heaven of heaven “is described as an unfallen creature, a collective realm of spirits who have not exercised the option of sin and embraced mutability” (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 115). “Time in the *Confessions* is famously and enigmatically described as the distention of the mind (XI.xxvi [22]). But this is just what the ‘House of God’ is not, for ‘it transcends all distension between past and future and the fleeting transience of time’ (XII.xv (22)” (*Ibid.*, p. 122).
- 37** Books 11–13 are “a turning point. The speaking voice and that of which it speaks become now unequivocally *present*. That present-ness foreshadows eternity, but for fallen creation that present-ness can only be found by reaching into the ‘future’” (*Ibid.*, 3:250). But “the possibility of ascent, as sought and achieved from 1.1.1 to 10.27.38 is here just slightly downgraded: let him who can achieve high knowledge, achieve; but for the most part, humanity does not go so high. The acceptable substitute for hearing the word within is hearing its proclamation without: hence scripture, and hence the bishop’s responsibility to meditate on God’s law day and night” (*Ibid.*, 3:272).
- 38** The confessional journey alone can make spiritual interpretation efficacious. Augustine fears that “if any man, despising as poverty the simplicity of Your words, is so foolish in his pride as to leap from the nest in which you nourish him, the poor wretch, alas will fall: do You, O Lord God, have pity lest those who pass by the way should tread upon that poor unfeathered nestling” (12.27.37). With the humorous image of the nestling, Augustine recalls the motive for his own defection to Manichaeism and captures his subsequent downtrodden experience. So he prays: “send Your angel to put him back in the nest that he may not perish before he has learned to fly” (12.27.37).
- 39** “It is with a note of hope that the Augustinian soul traverses levels of temporalization that are always less ‘distended’ and more ‘firmly held’, bearing witness that eternity can effect the interior of temporal experience, hierarchizing it into levels and

thereby deepening it rather than abolishing it" (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:265). In his otherwise excellent treatment of Augustine on time, O'Daly claims that Augustine's description of time as *distentio animi* can be only a non-explanatory metaphor, not a definition and concludes that the term *distentio* cannot explain how we cognitively measure time (G. J. P. O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* [Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987], p. 153). Quinn will have none of this: "Despite certain commentators, the term '*distentio*' is employed not in a metaphorical but in a properly analogical sense. Augustine would hardly resort to a metaphor in his definition of time. Originally distension has physical reference, but its primary physical sense does not prevent its being psychically conceived to lay hold of the nature of time, any more than the original use of quantity to mean magnitude bars us from speaking of the spiritual quantity or power manifested by the soul (*quant.* 32.69)" (Quinn, "Time," *AttA*, p. 834; see also Quinn's response to Albertus Magnus and B. Russell, *ibid.*, p. 835 and see also O'Donnell *Confessions*, 3:278).

- ⁴⁰ Finitude remains and is only held in check by God's fidelity. Commenting on Book 13, Eugene TeSelle says: "There is also a self-referential aspect of beatitude, for it includes not only an awareness of possessing the highest good but the certitude that this possession will be without end. And the mutability of the finite will may be assumed to present a certain problem even here, for Augustine makes a special point of discussing the divine faithfulness which guarantees the stability of this final state" ("Nature and Grace in Augustine's Expositions on Genesis I, 1–5," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 5 [1968], p. 121). TeSelle compares the relative importance of Neoplatonic and Hebraic thought: "in the midst of the discussion ... which invites his most audacious assertions about the range of the mind's abilities and aspirations, the mercy and faithfulness of the God of covenant finally assume the determinative role." *Ibid.*, p. 137)
- ⁴¹ Gillian Clark says "The experience of time is *distentio animi*, not just an extension of the spirit over remembered past and expected future but a 'distention', a pulling apart, of the soul" (*Augustine, the Confessions*, p. 66).
- ⁴² "Rest is not to be confused with sloth" (George Lawless, "Interior Peace in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 26 [1980], p. 53). "Rest is inseparable from order, whereas unrest is symptomatic of disorder" (*Ibid.*, p. 54). "God meanwhile, is ever at rest because He is rest Himself" (*Ibid.*, p. 55); Augustine's youth is characterized as restlessness (*Ibid.*, pp. 56–58); and "rest is equated with beatitude – *beata vita*" (*Ibid.*, p. 58; see also TeSelle, "Nature and Grace," pp. 121–23).
- ⁴³ Discussing Book 15 of the *De Trinitate*, Rowan Williams says of this resemblance, "We are not here thinking about an image that is simply an aid to more accurate conceptualizing: the realizing of the image is inseparable from the whole process of sanctification. Thus we have another paradox [one which has been central to my discussion of time in Augustine]: we can only 'image' the eternal and changeless God by our movement and change.... It is no accident that the climax of the argument [in *Trin.* 15] is a clarification, unprecedented in the Eastern Fathers, of the Spirit's role as the ground and enabler of the entire process of theologizing and sanctification as they advance together, the efficient cause of our inclusion within the trinitarian life" ("De Trinitate," *AttA*, p. 850; see also O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:360–61).

- 44** Roland Teske rightly observes that qualifying as a “spiritual” is not tied to being a bishop and that the opposite is equally true; only certain bishops would qualify. More controversially, Teske says that the spirituals have two characteristics: they are “regenerated in the church, with the Neoplatonic spiritual knowledge of God” (“*Homo Spiritualis*” in the *Confessions of Saint Augustine*,” *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, p. 73). The Neoplatonic requirement would rule out most Christians and most bishops, including, according to Teske, Paulinus of Nola (*Ibid.*, p. 69) and include “people like Ambrose, Simplicianus and Theodorus and others Augustine met in the church of Milan” (*Ibid.*, p. 70). Teske acknowledges that not all scholars would agree that the spiritual must have Neoplatonic spiritual knowledge of God. It is enough to be an “adult able to take the solid food of wisdom” (*Ibid.*, p. 67). However, the most serious problem with Teske’s thesis, one he raises himself, is to understand how Augustine could have believed that the apostles and the prophets possessed the central insights of Neoplatonism. Teske responds by citing two passages in the *Contra academicos* where Augustine is guilty of the same anachronism (*Ibid.*, p. 71). However, it is important to remember the fact that “Christianity has no secret gnosis remained important for Augustine.... Augustine’s Christianity makes a distinction not between kinds of doctrine but between kinds of believers [based on the distinction between *fides* and *intellegentia*] – those who have penetrated further have themselves changed, but they have been given no essential teaching that was withheld from them before” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:342). At Ostia, Monica’s “success is not a function of her intellectual preparation, nor, given her story of gradual moral development, is it a result of some special sort of ethical insight. It is instead a function of the Spirit within her, whose presence was prepared by her life in the Church.... The Church, as the living soul of the faithful, sets the foundation for a life of grace and the drawing of the soul into the presence of God. Monica’s moment of concentration in love is an ecclesial moment, one that emerged in the schoolhouse of souls that is the Church. For there is no other explanation for Monica at Ostia; hers is an ecclesial soul perfected into the presence of God by the power of the Spirit” (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 112).
- 45** “As Bks. 11 and 12 depicted the distinction between God and mankind in the light of the persons of the father and son, so here the distinction is made in the light of the person of the spirit. The distinction is between the spirit dwelling in the world, i.e. visible in the *spirituales*, and those in the world without the spirit, the *carnales*” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:391).
- 46** “The bishop’s authority [is] derived from the spirit. Augustine’s own words, though temporal in form and content, nevertheless participate in the timelessness of the creator/word/spirit, whose words they really are” (*Ibid.*, 3:408).
- 47** O’Donnell claims that in the activities of the bishop described in *Confessions* 13.23.34, we get “a fuller picture ... of the activities of the bishop than the schematic portrait that cropped up at 6.3 and 11.2.2” (*Ibid.*, 3:398). O’Donnell adds, “Augustine constantly reverts to his own role in these pages without saying as much” (*Ibid.*, 3:398). At the same time, Augustine, by identifying with St. Paul, deepens his understanding of his calling and draws his life toward eternity: “Paul remains the archetype and model of Christian ministry ... and as such he is in a sense Augustine’s idealized version of himself, what Augustine should be or become, everyman or every-bishop, stripped of Augustine’s individuality and capacity for sinfulness. By

filling these pages with Paul's image and words, Augustine presents the better side of himself, renewed in the image and likeness of the trinity. Thus in one sense Bk. 13 is the most personal and immediate of all *conf.*, though to many readers it is just the opposite" (*Ibid.*, 3:402). In agreement with Ricoeur, David Dawson says that "Augustine understands *allegoria*, *figura*, and related terms not simply as ways of describing biblical texts in themselves, but rather as ways of describing a reader's transformative interaction with the *Bible* through various modes of nonliteral reading" ("Figure, Allegory," *AttA*, p. 367). O'Donnell remarks that the "biographical overtones grow stronger [in 13. 26. 39]" as he tries to escape from the impasse posed by the praise he receives from his flock: "This passage resolves that dilemma: he must learn to accept those gifts as Paul did, not for himself, but for the benefit of the faithful who gave them" (*Confessions*, 3:403). To the same end of drawing his life toward eternity Augustine traces his lineage from Moses: "Augustine's concern about just what constitutes a good *minister* is self-referential, placing him in succession from Moses through the apostles" (*Ibid.*, 3:391). Throughout Book 13, there are allusions to his past life with the same goal in mind (see, for example, *Ibid.*, 3:380, 382, 383, 392). G. G. Harpham gives Augustine's textual life a late modern twist. He maintains that, in Book 8, Augustine was converted to an exegetical understanding of himself: "Either Augustine can continue to insist on his own uniqueness, denying that he is in anyway an imitation of his textual and real-life predecessors or accede to ... the conviction that one is and always has been permeable to other textual selves.... It means that one's essential life exists ... in the erased time of textual narrative.... In the last three books Augustine abandons the self as object of study altogether and dedicates himself to Scriptural exegesis as the most perfectly 'converted' mode of writing, even of being" (*The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987], pp. 118–21).

- ⁴⁸ "Terra for morally and physically vulnerable flesh" (O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:363).
- ⁴⁹ "*caelum enim plicabitur* ... The verb is common of unrolling a book, from papyrus use" (*Ibid.*, 3:371).
- ⁵⁰ "*firmamentum*: Here = *scriptura*, therefore 'suspicere firmamentum' = *legere scripturam*" (*Ibid.*, 3:374). O'Donnell adds, "At the extremity of allegorical interpretation, God is a book; at the opposite extreme, the reader himself is to become a book" (*Ibid.*, 3:374).
- ⁵¹ Although Augustine separates psychological and personal from cosmological time, this does not mean that time is subjectivist, or wanting in cosmological reference (see notes 29 and 39). By the same token, the fact that Augustine locates personal time in the soul gives his allegorical treatment of Genesis 1 in Book 13 its ontological and historical seriousness: Augustine "will read Gn. 1 as the adumbration of the story of the Spirit working in the world in Christian times" (*Ibid.*, 3:362) and "the 'church' is the direct object of this allegory" (*Ibid.*, 3:363). O'Donnell says that allegory "clearly denotes for Augustine a type of '*figurata locutio*' (doctr. Chr. 3. 11. 170), but is not always rigorously distinguished from *aenigma*" (*Ibid.*, 3:393). Given allegory's ontological import, it can be no surprise that allegory is a "favoured" (*Ibid.*, 3:401) tool of interpretation; Augustine says "he would have written it [*Genesis*] the way he assumes Moses wrote it" (*Ibid.*, 3:401). Treating *crescite et multiplicamini* (Gn. 1: 22, 28) (a "central" and "difficult" text), Augustine "asserts that the text can

be interpreted allegorically, and that one allegorical meaning of the text is that it can itself be interpreted allegorically” (*Ibid.*, 3:400). He then proceeds to use allegory to give depth to temporal experience. He understands the verse in a “first order allegorical interpretation” as “good works done in the church” (*Ibid.*, 3:400). Next, he offers a “higher-order allegorical interpretation: it applies to the essential business of the church, giving body to the presence of the word of God: in the waters, through the multiplication of signs; in the children of this age, through the multiplication of interpretations” (*Ibid.*, 3:400). The bond between allegory and cosmology and history is underlined in O’Donnell’s comment on the line, *Inspximus etiam propter quorum figuraionem ista vel tali ordine fieri vel tali ordine scribi voluisti* (*conf.* 13. 34. 49): “The *vels* are inclusive: the spirit moves in the world, the spirit moves in the text (both the text of scripture, and the text of *conf.*)” (*Ibid.*, 3:414).

- ⁵² Here time is deepened by an ascent: “*praedicatores*: Begins an ascending sequence (continued in ‘*scriptura … sermones … verbum*’) from the visible present authority (the preacher) to the text, to the multiple ‘words’ contained in the text, to God’s eternal word” (*Ibid.*, 3:375).
- ⁵³ Karla Pollmann says that *1 Cor. 13:12* is the key text grounding Augustine’s hermeneutics: “To him, therefore, the gaining of true knowledge is more important than the correct understanding of the intention of the author, which in some especially difficult passages in the OT or Paul seems to be a hopeless task anyway” (“Hermeneutical Presuppositions,” *AttA*, p. 428). Pollmann proceeds to list seven reasons Augustine gives for this obscurity and concludes, “Behind all this as a theological justification stands the often quoted *1 Corinthians 13:12*” (*Ibid.*, p. 428).
- ⁵⁴ “One must remember the intense religious associations of the night-sky to an ancient man: His was a world of divine intelligence, visible to human eyes” (Brown, *Augustine*, p. 262, note 4).
- ⁵⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:277, note 18, emphasis added. Ricoeur is following Cornford and Luc Brisson, “*Le Même et l’Autre*.” “This entire line of reflecting in Book Thirteen draws together contemplation in all its aspect – contemplation of the created world, of the holy scriptures, of the divine Word, and finally of the Trinity – and nests it within the church. In so doing, Augustine has rejoined contemplation to the path of salvation. Unlike the world soul of the Platonists, ‘the living soul of the faithful’ is not a feature of the natural order, but a function of grace. The recursive contemplation of human souls is catalyzed by the activity of the Trinity, specifically the Spirit which acts through them. Augustine has not only provided, as it were, a field theory of contemplation in response to the Platonists, he has sketched as well a Christian conception of deity in contrast with Neo-Platonism. In the *Confessions*, contemplation is exercised by human souls through the direct intervention of the Spirit of God” (Kenney, *Mysticism*, p. 108).
- ⁵⁶ Cornford, *Plato*, p. 97.
- ⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:278, note 18.
- ⁵⁸ “He [Augustine] was certainly never without a deep sense of God’s ever-present activity in each and every moment of time, as in every part of space. He often thought of the whole vast fabric of human history as a majestically ordered whole, an extended song or symphony, in which each moment has its unique, if impenetrably mysterious significance. In this sense all history displays the working of God’s

providence, but in another sense only ‘sacred history’ tells us what God *really* has done, what meaning events have within the economy of salvation.... Only ‘sacred history’ will furnish the clues to what God has *really* done” (*Markus, Saeculum*, p. 16).

⁵⁹ Cornford, *Plato*, p. 97.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁶² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:278, note 18.

⁶³ Augustine understands the redeemed life as open-ended, rather than as an epiphany of eternity. Augustine appeals to Pauline hope and the scriptural narrative to flesh out that hope, but in the end “it has not yet appeared what we shall be” (13.15.18). And this open-endedness explicitly includes Augustine’s understanding of and attitude toward history: “In his early writings Augustine tended to follow a millenarian tradition.... This millenarian view he discarded by about 400.... Augustine was skeptical about the possibility of interpreting divine purpose in secular history except with the aid of clues furnished by, and within the framework of, the scriptural narrative. The time of the end could not be predicted; nor could the likely course of future history.” (*Markus, “History,” AttA*, p. 433) Augustine restricts scriptural knowledge of the meaning of eschatological hope to the level of a clue: “Within universal history he [Augustine] distinguished a privileged strand which we have called, taking our cue from Augustine, ‘sacred’. This strand was uniquely privileged in virtue of our having been given a clue to its eschatological meaning. The clue was the prophetic vision in which this particular strand of history became a part of the history of God’s saving acts. This was the sense in which Augustine accepted the biblical canon as ‘prophetic’: on its authority the biblical history was uniquely distinguished from all other human history” (*Markus, Saeculum*, p. 158).

⁶⁴ For a narrative understanding of predestination, see [Chapters 7–9](#).

⁶⁵ “In a Judeo-Christian perspective, however, sacred history not only narrates but generally explains the religious past (*agon.* 13.15). History is a drama of salvation with a beginning, the creation and fall; a middle phase, the redemption of fallen humans; and an end, the triumph of the good and the punishment of the wicked on the Day of the Lord. Supernatural faith enables even uneducated Christians to apprehend the rationale of history, while nonbelieving historians cannot scientifically elucidate the what and why of one epoch.... This linear interpretation repudiates the Stoic view of cyclicalism, which, besides, lumping the repetition of particulars with the recurrence of types, cancels the unique particularity of Christ’s absolutely efficacious death (*civ. Dei* 12.14)” (Quinn, “Time,” *AttA*, p. 837). “The dominating ancient view was that man lived like a puppet bound to the wheel of fate. Time was thought to be circular and repetitious.... It meant that mankind and the individual person were doomed to a perpetual recurrence of the same joys, sorrows and trials. Nor real progress was possible.... [Christ’s death] gave mankind a positive goal beyond time and temporal history” (V. Bourke, “The City of God and History,” Dorothy Donnelly [ed.], *The City of God* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984/1995), p. 295). Ernest Fortin rightly points out that “the notion that history takes its course along a straight line can hardly be considered an Augustinian innovation. It underlines the whole of the biblical account of human existence” (“Augustine’s City of God

and the Modern Historical Consciousness,” *The City of God*, p. 314). I think that Augustine’s originality in the *Confessions* lies in explicitly replacing the cyclical time of the firmament with linear time of the scriptures. This linear optimism does not spill over into secular history. However, we should be careful to note that the Greek and Roman historians did not have a circular notion of time, which could be contrasted with Biblical linear time. Arnaldo Momigliano exposed this tenacious myth many years ago (“Time in Ancient Historiography,” *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography*, [Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1977], pp. 184–85).

- ⁶⁶ See note 44. With reference to Augustine’s own membership among the spirituals, Teske says: “Augustine does not, of course, explicitly refer to himself as a spiritual, though I think that the implication is clear” (“*Homo Spiritualis*,” p. 74, note 10).
- ⁶⁷ Augustine develops the same “metaphorical” interpretation (*en. Ps. 93.4, similitudo*) in other passages, though in much less detail. For example, his commentary on *Psalm 93* examines the question of why the evil prosper and the just suffer. He says, “The radiant heavenly bodies are presented to the saints as an image of what they should be: never grumbling though surrounded by a crooked, perverse race” (*en. Ps. 93.3*). He then develops this response in the same way that he does in the *Confessions*. He says “the firmament is to be understood figuratively as the book of the law” (*en. Ps. 93.6, firmamentum, intellegitur per figuram liber legis*), which book, as an “unrolled” parchment “skin,” is “stretched out” (*extenditur sicut pellis, tamquam liber est extensus, ut legatur*) like the firmament to teach us steadfastness (*illis quietem in caelo habentibus*) on our “pilgrimage” (*en. Ps. 93.6, peregrinamur*) “in this our time of hope” (*en. Ps. 93.29, ut fiat nobis Dominus in refugium, et Deus in auxilium spei nostrae*). When we pass from this life of exile to dwell with the angels in the heavenly Jerusalem, then books will be no longer necessary and the “scroll” of the sky will be “rolled up” (*en. Ps. 93.6, Cum autem transeunt tempora necessitates librorum, quid dictum est? Caelum plicabitur ut liber*). But even now, “anyone whose heart is in the firmament of God’s book” is unperturbed that the evil prosper (*en. Ps. 93.5, Cuius ergo cor in firmamento libri Dei est, ista non curat*). If the faithful “dwell in the firmament of God’s scripture” (*mentes fidelium inhaerentes firmamento scripturae Dei*), then “they are like stars shedding radiance over the earth from the firmament” (*en. Ps. 93.29, de firmamento lucet super terram*). Augustine offers the same interpretation for heaven and earth in his commentary on *Psalm 113* verses 15–18.
- ⁶⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:135; see also notes 40 and 42.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., 3.139.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 3.161. As transcendent, the synthesis of happiness and morality is unattainable, necessary yet demanded, expected yet not given. The synthesis belongs to the realm of hope. No one is more acutely aware of their status than Augustine. What Ricoeur says of Kant can equally be said of Augustine: “he has a sense of the transcendent character of this connection [between happiness and morality], and this against the whole of Greek philosophy to which he is directly opposed, rejecting Epicurean and Stoic equally: happiness is not our accomplishment: it is achieved by super-addition, by surplus” (Ibid., 3.172). By means of imaginative variations, confession “articulates this making possible” (Ibid., 3.140) implied in “freedom in the light of hope” (Ricoeur, “Freedom in the Light of Hope,” pp. 155–82) as “the projection of our ownmost possibilities” (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:141).

11 RESURRECTION AND THE RESTLESS HEART

- ¹ Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” p. 220.
- ² Augustine found a way “for reconciling the Christian’s sense of having no abiding city here with some real political participation in and commitment to a city which was far from an abiding one” (*Markus, Saeculum*, p. 75). “The sphere of politics is relative and restricted; within its restricted area it is autonomous; but in its very autonomy it is a matter of deep concern to the citizen of the heavenly city” (*Ibid.*, p. 71). “For the citizen of the heavenly city, concern for the *saeculum* is the temporal dimension of his concern for the eternal city” (*Ibid.*, p. 101).
- ³ Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” p. 227.
- ⁴ Steven Weinberg, “Without God,” *New York Review of Books*, 55 no 14, September 25, 2008, 76, emphasis added.
- ⁵ Ricoeur, “Freedom in the Light of Hope,” pp. 155–64. In this chapter, I will try to flesh out Augustine’s understanding of the freedom and social harmony of the risen life inferable from the good things of this life. Henri-Irénée Marrou says: “But if it is possible to risk sketching a conjectural picture of what such *felicitas* will be, this can only be done by extrapolation from the good things which God has already allowed us to taste during this earthly life” (*The Resurrection*, p. 34).
- ⁶ See *Ibid.*, p. 34. Jeffrey Burton Russell says that “each of the blessed retains his or her own personality, distinct from God and from others: salvation is for the individual. More important, however, it is for the community, the communion of saints, the perfected community (*ecclesia perfecta*), the city of God, the body of Christ” (“Heaven, Paradise,” *AttA*, p. 420).
- ⁷ Ricoeur, “Freedom in the Light of Hope,” p. 165.
- ⁸ There is an extensive secondary literature on Augustine’s concept and practice of friendship. All commentators emphasize Augustine’s capacity for making friends, for keeping them, and for surrounding himself with them and their central importance throughout his life. They pick out the same characteristics that I will emphasize: reciprocity (*redemare*), mutual sympathy, respect, the mutual search for wisdom, joy (*delectatio*), and affection (*amor, caritas, benevolentia*, and *delectio*), personal attraction, which distinguishes friendship from fraternal charity and the desire for physical presence – living together. All must be products of that love which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Particularly illuminating is Joseph Lienhard’s comparison of the first Christian thinkers to reflect seriously on friendship: Paulinus and Augustine (“Friendship in Paulinus of Nola and Augustine,” B. Bruning, M. Lamberigts, and J. van Houtem [eds.], *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T. J. van Bavel* [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990], pp. 279–96). But first, Lienhard compares Augustine with Cicero: “Cicero thought of intellectual agreement; Augustine thinks of agreement in will and in action” (*Ibid.*, p. 293) in terms of the two great commandments. Lienhard compares Augustine and Paulinus: “Passion was very much a part of his [Augustine’s] life. Paulinus was content with a purely spiritual understanding of friendship. Augustine always held on to the human aspect of friendship, to human affection, to the *inclinatio*, to the *delectatio* added to *dilectio*. If friendship has both a metaphysical dimension – relation or reciprocity – and a psychological dimension – affection – then Augustine, in his mature thought, treated *christiana caritas* as the metaphysical dimension of

friendship and equated it with fraternal charity. But he also held on to the affective dimension; he found it easier to bestow his love on some than on others. Augustine never made his ideas simple by ignoring his experience, and his experience taught him that friendship meant a good deal more than fraternal charity” (*Ibid.*, p. 296).

- ⁹ “Speech now mindless but harmless: perhaps best ‘spoke unselfconsciously’” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:75). Burnaby says the graced love of righteousness gives power to the impotent will; dissolves legalism; progressively emancipates men from fear of punishment or hope of reward; though concupiscence remains, freedom is promised and owned, not as autonomy of the will but as a gift, for “we lose it the moment we forget that we have received it”; as joy in the Lord, it is “equally remote from the ‘heteronomy’ whether of desire for pleasure or of desire for personal perfection,” which “enables us to rejoice even in tribulation. It is the heart’s delight in the divine presence ‘as the beloved in the lover’, which finds expression … in the ‘friendship of God’ which sets men free from passion and from fear, and in the mystic rapture of *My beloved is mine and I am His*” (*Amor Dei*, p. 234).
- ¹⁰ Joseph Lienhard says, “In *De Genesi ad Litteram*, ‘friendship with God’ defines Adam’s original state of grace, Adam’s sin caused him to lose God’s friendship, which friendship Augustine understands as ‘trust in God, and free and open conversation with Him’” (“Friendship with God” in St. Augustine,” a paper presented at the North American Patristic Conference, Chicago [1992], 9). Lienhard adds that “friendship with God is equivalent to citizenship in the City of God” (*Ibid.*, p. 9). Friendship with God is open to all (*Ibid.*, p. 5) Like true human friendship, divine friendship is a gift of God, not a product of moral effort, and it consists of sharing in God’s wisdom, of knowing God’s mind. Augustine understands this friendship “as trust in God, and free and open conversation with Him” (*Ibid.*, p. 9).
- ¹¹ “Elsewhere ‘paradise’ is an image of the church. . . . Cassiciacum is similarly duplex in significance, with all the outward forms of paradise, and an inner truth to those forms for Augustine and his friends” (*Ibid.*, p. 9, O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:82).
- ¹² Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 157.
- ¹³ “To admire someone’s *pectus* is then to praise him for sincerity and ingenuousness – for an ability to match words to thoughts truthfully and truly” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:165).
- ¹⁴ In this instance, the vital need finds expression in Book 3’s “pre-eminent sin . . . *curiositas*” (James O’Donnell, *Augustine: a New Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 25).
- ¹⁵ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 156.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- ¹⁷ O’Donnell notes that, “*in principle*, this community admitted women/wives, which is difficult to imagine of a Manichean community. In practice, they were too much of an obstacle, but only in practice” (*Augustine*, 2:380).
- ¹⁸ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:376.
- ¹⁹ Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 173–74.
- ²⁰ For an excellent account for why this is the case and why it need not be, see Willemien Otten, “The Long Shadow of Human Sin: Augustine on Adam and Eve, and the Fall,” B. E. Becking and S. A. Hennecke (eds.), *Out of Paradise: Eve and Adam and Their Interpreters* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), pp. 29–49.
- ²¹ Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, p. 119; see also Harrison, *Christian Truth*, pp. 169–72.

- ²² Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, p. 29.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 39.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 38.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Clark says that “Augustine, and (it seems) his congregation in a small North African town, accepted his mother’s opinion that the marriage contract made wives the slaves of their husbands, and they should accept the fact” (*Women in Late Antiquity*, p. 17). And indeed “the husbands in the congregation cheered when Augustine [in a sermon] reminded them that they were masters of their wives, who were subjected to them” (J. Patout Burns, “Marital Fidelity as a *remedium concupiscentiae*: An Augustinian Proposal,” *Augustinian Studies* 44 [2013], 23, note 112). Otten says that, even “when stressing the importance of friendship in marriage, Augustine likewise maintains that man rules and woman obeys” (“Augustine on Marriage,” p. 405, and see also p. 399). Schlabach says: “Even when Augustine’s intense inner scrutiny led him to analyze sexual pleasure as a phenomenon in its own right, his grounds for suspicion included the domineering violence so often associated with the (male) sex act (*civ. Dei* 6.9); this violence tainted – he believed – even the sexual intercourse of faithful, married Christians (*nupt. Et conc.* 1.8.9)” (“Continence,” *AttA*, p. 236).
- ²⁸ According to Ricoeur, these expressions “by Descartes, Malabranche, Spinoza and Bergson, designate, under different names, and in different philosophical contexts, the only affective ‘mood’ worthy of being called *ontological*” (*Fallible Man*, p. 161).
- ²⁹ “The ‘looking’ here resembles that of 9.10.25 (Ostia), with the difference that there the things of creation shrugged off Augustine’s gaze and passed him along to God. Here he is incapable of seeing into, or through, or beyond them. In terms of Rom. 1.20 ff.... he does not yet see God in the visible things of creation, and to that end this attempt at ‘nature mysticism’ is a failure” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:410).
- ³⁰ See Chapter 10, note 42.
- ³¹ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, pp. 154–59.
- ³² Ibid., p. 168.
- ³³ “Augustine’s elaboration of his difficult inner struggle with his sexual desires suggests that his conversion was as much to continence as it was to Christianity. It is noteworthy that he never seems to have considered that he might become a Christian and also marry; for him baptism entailed a commitment to celibate living. He did not, however, think such a commitment was necessary for *all* Christians: marriage, too, could be a holy state” (O’Donnell, *Augustine*, p. 68).
- ³⁴ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 195.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 12.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 195.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Burns, “Marital Fidelity,” p. 12.
- ⁴⁰ Otten, “Augustine on Marriage,” p. 404.
- ⁴¹ Burns says that Augustine believed that in Paradise marriage “was established as an unending society of friendship that expanded through generation: later it was burdened by the mortality which brought on lust and whose consequences had to be forestalled by generation” (“Marital Fidelity,” 6). However, couples could “anticipate

the heavenly goal by the mutual renunciation of sexual relations, which, in turn, opened their marriage to what Augustine described as the fuller friendship originally intended by God.... Augustine affirmed that affective union of the spouses was the essence of marriage and that generating children expanded that affective union into a society of friends" (*Ibid.*, p. 31; see also Harrison, *Christian Truth*, pp. 162–67, and 174–75).

- ⁴² "The Christian Church as a whole regarded celibacy as a lofty vocation.... Post-marital celibacy ... was a common expectation. Sidonius (Letter 9. 6) rejoices that a young man who had an expensive mistress has now married: it would have been better if he had opted for celibacy, but as he has not, his friends must pray that, after the birth of one or two children (at most), he will abstain from lawful pleasures as he now does from unlawful ones. As the restrained behaviour of the young couple (according to Sidonius) demonstrates the difference between honourable matrimony and lust, celibacy seems a likely outcome" (Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, p. 52).
- ⁴³ "Verecundus' distress ... is evidence for the intensity of the pro-continenence group at Milan, from which Verecundus finds himself barred by his marriage" (O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:80). Hunter comments, "At the time of his baptism in 387, he [Augustine] appears to have viewed sex and marriage essentially as a distraction from the speculative pursuits of the Christian philosopher. In the *Soliloquies*, for example, he writes that 'I have decided that there is nothing I should avoid so much as marriage, I know nothing which brings the manly mind down from the heights more than a woman's caresses and that joining of bodies without which one cannot have a wife' (1.10.17). Such a perspective still dominates the *Confessions*, where Augustine describes marriage primarily as a safe harbor from the shipwrecks caused by youthful sexual desire (2.2.3). Apart from a few comments about the value of procreation (4.2.2; 6.12.22), in the *Confessions*, Augustine says little of a positive nature about marriage" (Hunter, "Marriage," *AttA*, p. 535). Elizabeth Clark says that in 388, "Augustine espouses a principle to which he adhered throughout his later writings: that although asceticism is the highest form of Christian life, conjugal relationship is blessed by God, and many married couples 'use as not using,' that is, abstain from sexual relation within marriage" ("Asceticism," *AttA*, p. 68). He made some new reflections on marriage as a result of Jerome's controversy with Jovinian. Clark says, "Jovinian was not the only Christian who thought Jerome had excessively celebrated virginity to the detriment of marriage.... [In 401 Augustine entered the dispute.] With Jerome he affirmed the superiority of virginity to marriage, but with Jovinian he praised the goodness of marriage.... He begins to develop his understanding of the three 'goods' of marriage: procreation, fidelity, and the sacramental bond.... Although Augustine here praises sexual relations in marriage, it must be noted that he holds a rather 'ascetic' notion of what this might mean: preferably no expression of lustful desire, no intercourse beyond what is necessary for producing children, no contraceptive devices, no sex during pregnancy, no use of organs or performance of sex acts that by definition could not result in conception (i.e., no acts 'against nature')" (*Ibid.*, p. 69).
- ⁴⁴ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 196.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- ⁴⁶ In the same vein, O'Donnell says of Augustine, "His own past, as displayed in Bks. 1–9, shows little that would trouble an enlightened modern for even a moment; and

on the other hand *everything* to which Augustine converted is in some way or other alien to modern sensibilities. Augustine cannot be tamed and domesticated to our purposes; in fundamental ways, he is alien – to put it more gently, he is a challenge – to all of us” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:203–04).

- ⁴⁷ Hunter states that even during the period (401) when Augustine was engaged in making a more positive evaluation of marriage than Jerome, Augustine still says, “If Christians choose to marry … it is only because they lack the self-control for celibacy” (“Marriage,” *AttA*, p. 536).
- ⁴⁸ Augustine believed that “sexual abstinence within marriage, generally after generating children, was a goal to which all Christians should aspire” (Burns, “Marital Fidelity,” p. 3). Otten says “By tackling the problem of human sexuality head on, more specifically by implementing a view of the Church that aims at uniting rather than dividing married people and virgins and/or monks, Augustine begins to transform what seemed a potential liability (sexuality as indicative of human sin) into a concrete asset (marriage and virginity as cornerstones of the Christian community)” (“Augustine on Marriage,” p. 389; see also note 57).
- ⁴⁹ Burns, “Marital Fidelity,” p. 4.
- ⁵⁰ John Cavadini, “Spousal Vision: A Study of Text and History in the Theology of Saint Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies*, 43 (2012), p. 139. See also Otten, “Augustine on Marriage,” p. 398.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 139–40.
- ⁵² Ibid., pp. 140.
- ⁵³ Schlabach says that “not only is sexual lust pleasure illegitimately satisfied but also, and more seriously, it is the drive to domination and power” (*For the Joy Set Before Us*, pp. 95–100).
- ⁵⁴ Burns, “Marital Fidelity,” p. 35.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 32.
- ⁵⁶ Otten, “Augustine on Marriage,” p. 402.
- ⁵⁷ TeSelle says that the “ascetic movement … turned away from interpersonal relationships (since it did not see a central human value in them but viewed them as distracting or misleading) and sought the ‘singleness,’ the simplicity and unrelatedness, of mind, usually conceived as male even with reference to female ascetics” (Eugene TeSelle, “Serpent, Eve, and Adam: Augustine and the Exegetical Tradition,” *Presbyter Factus Sum*, p. 353). TeSelle describes the difference between classical philosophical reflection on friendship between the sexes and our own: “What the ancient trajectory of interpretation seems to have overlooked was a genuinely interpersonal understanding of human life.... Interpersonal and especially sexual love was sublimated by the philosophical tradition, often nobly” (Ibid., p. 354; see also Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1988], pp. 387–427). However, Lienhard shows that despite his emphasis on *caritas* and against the reflections of the whole classical philosophical and Christian tradition, Augustine, even after the *Confessions* “never simply reduced friendship to charity. In *epistula 130.6.13* he explains that what friendship adds to Christian charity is an attraction or liking that we experience more eagerly toward some and rather hesitantly toward others” (“Friendship, Friend,” *AttA*, p. 373).

- 58** The heart is restless, says Ricoeur, because of “its unstable position between the vital and the ‘spiritual.’ Indeed where do the quests for possession, domination and opinion terminate?” (*Fallible Man*, p. 191) As we have just seen, Augustine’s community tried in vain to satisfy these three quests by innocent having, common governance, and recognition. Ricoeur says: “It is noteworthy that the Self is never certain the triple quest in which it seeks itself is ever completed. Whereas pleasure is a kind provisory repose … [the heart] is essentially what is restless in me. When will I have enough? When will my authority be adequately grounded? When will I be sufficiently appreciated and recognized? … Between the finitude of pleasure … with its repose … and the infinitude of happiness, the [heart] … slips a note of indefiniteness and, along with it, the threat which clings to an endless pursuit” (*Ibid.*, p. 192).
- 59** For a complimentary account in terms of self-love and eudemonism, see Oliver O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 137–59.
- 60** See also 6.2 and 6.11.25. “Speech from the heart, relying on divine guidance, is what fills the rest of bk. 2” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:130).
- 61** Elizabeth Clark, “Asceticism,” *AttA*, p. 68. Garry Wills says Augustine could not marry his concubine because “if she was of a lower class than his, an order of Constantine against class mixture forbade that. Besides, he could adopt … [their son *Adeodatus*] and legitimize his birth in a proper marriage. More important, Augustine had, both in his Manichean days and under Cicero’s exhortation in *Hortentius*, felt that a life of continence was the only discipline for a philosopher. Later, as a bishop, he would present laymen with the ideal of marriage where sex was indulged only for the begetting of heirs” (*St. Augustine*, p. 41). Wills is doing his best for Augustine, but even he is forced to admit that “there is no way to excuse Augustine’s treatment of … [his concubine] – as his own later words about his situation show” (*Ibid.*, p. 41). Wills tries anyway: “But can we say that he ‘dismissed’ her? She presumably had some say in the matter, and looked to her son’s prospects as well as her own peace of soul. As a Catholic, she may not have been complacent about the paganism into which Augustine had descended by the time he reached Milan, and court life may not have appealed to her. The woman he lived with for so long presumably had some will of her own.... She would have been in her early forties when Augustine wrote [*The Confessions*], ten years after this breakup, and living in the Catholic community of Africa, very likely in Thagaste, of which Augustine’s friend Alypius was bishop at the time” (*Ibid.*, p. 41). O’Donnell believes that Augustine considered his behavior indefensible; he says that he treated her “shabbily” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:218). Gillian Clark examines the whole question in terms of the normal and distressing course of Roman law and custom (*Augustine, the Confessions*, pp. 59–60). She comments that “attacks on ‘the church’ became attacks on Augustine and *Confessions* can be used to show him up. In the fifth century it was his having a concubine, now it is his sending her away” (*Ibid.*, p. 85).
- 62** Burns, “Marital Fidelity,” 20.
- 63** Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, p. 39, emphasis added.
- 64** *Continentia* in “this retrospective view embraces all three temptations [*concupiscentia carnis, oculorum, ambitio saeculi*]” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:44). “At ep. 22.1.2, Augustine quotes Rom. 13.13, the first occurrence of this text in Augustine’s writing [392/393], and interprets it in … [the same] triadic way” (*Ibid.*, 3:67).

- ⁶⁵ Gerald W. Schlabach, “Continence,” *AttA*, p. 236.
- ⁶⁶ Elizabeth Clark adds: “In his *Confessions* Augustine implies that his conversion to Christianity was long delayed because he assumed (unlike many others) that the only viable Christian commitment for himself would be one that required him to renounce the worlds of secularity and secular career” (“Asceticism, Pre-Augustine,” *AttA*, p. 74).
- ⁶⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “The Language of Faith,” R. Bradley DeFord (trans.), Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (eds.) *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of his Work* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 226, emphasis added.
- ⁶⁸ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 196.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 196.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 184.
- ⁷¹ “Pride in its fundamental sense is to be distinguished from what is sometimes called ‘the pride of the world,’ ‘ambitio saeculi,’ which, with *curiositas* and *concupiscentia carnis* (1 John 2:16), Augustine often takes as a trinitarian summary of all sin. Pride is the origin of this trinity.... Pride is ultimately apostasy, desertion of God” (John , “Pride,” *AttA*, p. 680).
- ⁷² Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 197.
- ⁷³ Ibid., p. 197.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 168. Encountering another person transforms the heart’s involvement in vital life by “break[ing] the finite, cyclical pattern of the sensible appetite” (Ibid., p. 198).
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 199.
- ⁷⁶ “Writing thirty years later [retr. 2.6.2] ... Augustine found that the *conf.* text [*et ideo forte – conf. 4.6.11*] distanced itself too little from the atmosphere of classical sentimentalism about friendship.... Augustine was thus at least as dismayed as Nietzsche with the rhetorical posturing of this passage. But ... the attitude ... was not that of Augustine of 397, but of Augustine of 376, aged 21, a sentimental age” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:227).
- ⁷⁷ Garry Wills comments, “No other aspect of Augustine’s heretical past is recalled with so little censure – and no wonder. Properly Christianized, that Carthaginian circle [“of his graduate school fellows”] would become the model for Augustine’s monastic ideal – a community of friends engaged in mutual intellectual enrichment” (*St. Augustine*, p. 26).
- ⁷⁸ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 200.
- ⁷⁹ “The depiction of grief is almost literally God-less; only in a vain attempt to enjoin hope does God appear here” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 2:221). O’Donnell adds that at that time Augustine did not know how to use “hope and confession, the instruments with which he wrote this book [the *Confessions*] twenty years later” (Ibid., p. 223). The next chapter “marks the entry of Christian hope into the text.... [In] the present passage ... hope become[s] a question and a possibility.... In later books, *spes* becomes a recurring motif: on Bk. 6 a possibility ... and a contrast to secular hopes ... in Bk. 10 a way of going beyond the present remnants of sin ... in Bks. 11–13, a recurrent asseveration” (Ibid., p. 224).
- ⁸⁰ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 215.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 216–17
- ⁸² “The imagery here is erotic, but much less explicitly so than e.g. *sol.* 1.13.22” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, 3:197).

⁸³ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 196.

⁸⁴ Cavadini, “Spousal Vision,” p. 139.

⁸⁵ “The present passage bridges the sexual to the mystical in linking the inner and outer person. Also: 2.2.3, 3.4.8, 5.12.22, 6.2.2, 6.16.26, 8.5.10, 8.11.27, and 13.8.9” (O’Donnell *Confessions*, 3:168).

⁸⁶ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 159.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Miles, “Vision,” p. 127.

⁹¹ “Unless the *mens* is actively participating in the life of God, the image is imperfect (*Trin.* 14.8.11). This implies, of course, that when the mind most fully knows and loves God, it most fully knows and loves itself – a theme familiar from the *Confessions* and elsewhere in Augustine’s writing (*Trin.* 14.14.18). It is set free for the proper and effective love of the neighbor (*Trin.* 14.14.19), and occupies its due place in the universe, its desire being satisfied with the unchanging presence of God, for the enjoyment of which it was made (*Trin.* 14.14.20). The contemplative, sapiential knowledge of God is what is most deeply natural for the *mens*, so that when we come to this perfection and realize what we are made for, the self that self-knowledge and self-love relate to is a self wholly turned *away* from self-preoccupation or self-protection, a self whose object is God in so total a sense that there is no self to be seen or known apart from relation to God. This is our eschatological hope (*Trin.* 14.17.23–14.19.25)” (Rowan Williams, “*Trinitate, De,* *AttA*, p. 849).

⁹² Joseph Lienhard, “Friendship, Friends,” *AttA*, p. 373.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 373.

⁹⁴ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 161.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 161.

⁹⁶ For my interpretation of the concept of “analogizing grasp,” I am indebted to Ricoeur (*Oneself*, pp. 329–35). However, Ricoeur uses the concept with reference to other selves, not, as I use it in relation to God. Lienhard proposes an important part of the thesis I am developing here: “Augustine leaves the way open for considering a kind of analogy of friendship, whereby the relation between two human persons, and a human person and a divine person, illuminate each other” (“Friendship with God,” 12).

⁹⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 334.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 335.

⁹⁹ Ricoeur, “Evil,” p. 647; see also *Symbolism*, p. 325.

¹⁰⁰ “Nabert, *Essai*, p. 144,” as cited by Ricoeur, “Thinker of Testimony,” p. 115.

¹⁰¹ Throughout this book the *analogia fidei* has supplied me with the authentic discourse level for conceptualizing the relation of grace to freedom.

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